

SERIES: BOOK OF RUTH
“A New Beginning“
Ruth 1:15-18

We all have a past, a personal history. Some items in our past we wish we could have over and over because they were that good. Other things in that past we may never want to remember or have others ever know. Either way, those things are in our history. Sometimes we are tired of, upset about, or are done with the ways of our past and we crave a new beginning.

The end of one year and the beginning of another always gets me to thinking about new beginnings. I am usually a little disappointed that by January 2 most things, except the changing of the calendar, resume “normal” status. The piles haven’t magically disappeared; all the old projects are not instantly finished, and the slate has not been wiped clean, even though I was hoping January 1 was a new beginning. [It says it is right here on this calendar! It even gives it a new number, 2009! And did you notice you never have to reset your clocks when we change the calendar?]

But, thankfully, there are opportunities when we do get a new beginning. One of the most frequent is Every Morning---we get a new day with its opportunities and possibilities; Every Sunday we get a new week; Every month we get to turn the calendar and may have the option for a new beginning; And of course, at the change of every year we have the possibility of a new beginning. Most of these usually just slide into the normal category and things go on as usual. Outside of a crisis or catastrophe most of our life stays “normal” and there are very few new beginnings.

I have discovered that almost all new beginnings only happen at the moment of a clear, specific, determined, decision. It is only when we are faced with a major change point, such as a death in the family or a loss of our job; or when to continue as usual will have huge detrimental effects; or when not to start again is abhorrent enough to us will there be enough resolve to make the resolution happen. We have a couple of illustrations in the Scriptures.

I like the way the Apostle Paul stated a new beginning in Philippians 3:8-14 (NASB95)
⁸ More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, ... ¹⁰ that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. ¹³ Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of *it* yet; but one thing *I do*: forgetting what *lies* behind and reaching forward to what *lies* ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

God spoke to Isaiah and said, "Behold, I will do something new, Now it will spring forth; Will you not be aware of it? I will even make a roadway in the wilderness, Rivers in the desert." (Isaiah 43:19, NASB95)

In the Book of Ruth, the lady of the hour, Ruth, stated her resolution for a new beginning with enough resolve to make it happen. The first words we hear from Ruth’s lips alone⁷⁶ are among the most memorable in all of Scripture. Few utterances in the Bible match her speech for sheer

⁷⁶ She had spoken earlier in v. 10, but her utterance was in unison with Orpah.

poetic beauty, and the extraordinary courage and spirituality it expresses.¹ In her statement we see the three things that need to happen in order for anyone to have a new beginning.

READ RUTH 1:15-18 In this text we find the Resistance to a new beginning, the Resolution for a new beginning, and the Resolve needed to make a new beginning happen and hold. Let's look at these parts.

I. THE RESISTANCE TO A NEW BEGINNING IS CONSTANT, 15.

Resistance is ever-present. For those of you in the electrical field, resistance is one of your biggest issues. It seems as if every effort in life must overcome resistance. When I was looking for just the right word to us here, I had to choose between three.

Continual implies a close prolonged succession of something [c. showers];

Continuous implies uninterrupted flow [c. rivalry];

Constant implies a uniform or persistent occurrence or presence [c. pain]. Since resistance is often such a pain, I chose constant. Resistance to a new beginning is constant. Let's see how this manifested itself in Ruth's quest for a new beginning.

1. The seed for a new beginning was planted when Ruth met and eventually married Mahlon. At that time it was an accepted custom that the girl leaves her family and move to the boy's family. This set the stage for a new beginning.

Today it is frequently the opposite. Much of the time when Boy meets Girl, it is the girl's world that pulls the boy away from his family, but in this case Ruth either 1) followed the norm without hesitation, or 2) didn't care for what was happening in her family and wanted to get away, or 3) Mahlon was Jewish enough not to be pulled into the Moabite faith system and so she came into his world, or 4) she really liked her mother-in-law and wanted to be near her.

Here is a lesson for those of you not yet married: know for sure and certain that the person you date and get serious about will have an impact on your life. He/She can enhance or destroy your relationship with the Lord Jesus. If you date and get serious about a non-christian know for sure and certain that his/her unbelief will present RESISTANCE, at the least, to your walk with the Lord Jesus. When you begin dating, seek for compatibility in your spirituality.

Now, back to Ruth. She willingly came into this Jewish household and adapted well to it. She was on her way to a new beginning. By the time we get to this part of the story some changes had already happened and she liked them. There had been little resistance to a new beginning to this point. It is at v. 15 that we find the first strong resistance appearing.

2. The new beginning was resisted by non-other than Naomi. When Naomi decided it was time for her to return to Bethlehem in Israel, she tried to dissuade her daughters-in-law from going with her. Four times in their recorded conversation about the trip Naomi said 'Return home girls'. Orpah finally did. It is here that Ruth received her strongest resistance to a new beginning. Naomi flat told her 'go home'. Naomi's words were actually a little softer:

"Behold, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and her gods; return after your sister-in-law." [1:15] Look at that! From the one closest to her, Ruth received the strongest resistance!

Isn't that just like in our lives? When we want to make a change or have a new beginning it is that which is closest to us that provides the most resistance. I'm speaking of our own body first of all. Then it might be our close group of friends or family members who do not

¹Block, Daniel Isaac: *Judges, Ruth*. electronic ed. Nashville : Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001, c1999 (Logos Library System; The New American Commentary 6), S. 640

want us to change. Or, it could be financial debt or obligations that keep us from making a change. Here's the point: a new beginning will always have to overcome resistance, often from what is closest to us. Ruth had to overcome Naomi's resistance.

How did she do it? That takes us to the second part of a new beginning.

II. THE RESOLUTION FOR A NEW BEGINNING MUST BE CLEAR, v. 16a.

In the first part of v. 16 I hear two things in her resolution for a new beginning.

1. **She must overcome the resistance.** "Do not urge me to leave you or turn back..." She refused to listen to her mother-in-law's pleas or follow her sister-in-law's bad example.² She was determined to overcome the resistance to her new beginning with Naomi in Bethlehem.

So much in life is about overcoming resistance. Those who do overcome, succeed; those who don't diminish. History is full of examples. Here are a few:

JOHN KEATS lived just twenty-six years, yet his poetry will live forever, much of it equal to that of Shakespeare. FRANZ SCHUBERT died at thirty-one. In those thirty-one years he wrote more than 110 musical compositions, more than sixty of them lyric songs.

Here is a boy so ugly and ridiculously clothed that he was tormented by his schoolmates. He spent his time reading to forget his misery. At eighteen he worked as a bricklayer. But he finally won the acclaim and esteem of England. He was honored by Queen Elizabeth and decorated by King James. His name was BEN JOHNSON, and he was one of the most brilliant playwrights England ever produced.

Here is a morbid, sensitive son of a poor preacher. He was regarded as a stupid blockhead in the village school. When he finally got a degree from college, he was the lowest on the list. He was rejected for the ministry. He tried law with the same result. He borrowed a suit of clothes to take an examination as a hospital mate, failed, and pawned his clothes. He lived in garrets, failing at everything he tried. Only one thing he wanted to do—write. This he did and rose above the handicaps of illness, poverty, and obscurity to high rank among the greatest writers of all time. His name was OLIVER GOLDSMITH.

THOMAS EDISON lost most of his hearing at about eight years of age, but he gave us the electric light, phonograph, movies and over a hundred other useful inventions.

There was another man who had terrible hemorrhages of the lungs, and he almost died several times from coughing spells. Yet, while he was an invalid, he gave us at least two masterpieces, *Treasure Island* and *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. He was ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

It is wonderful how many of the elect of the human race, the winners of immortal fame entered the contest with a severe handicap. HOMER was a blind minstrel; and MILTON, too was blind. BEETHOVEN was deaf: "Though so deaf he could not hear the thunder for a token, he made music of his soul, the grandest ever spoken." ALEXANDER THE GREAT was a hunchback; and so was ALEXANDER POPE, and a suffering weakling to boot. ST. PAUL was an uncouth manikin, the jest of coarse adversaries (cf. II Cor. 10:1, 10). "Three cubits high," says St. Chrysostom, "yet he touched the stars." And like him for stature were HORATIO NELSON and NAPOLEON. SHAKESPEARE on his own testimony was a cripple; and so were SCOTT, BYRON and KELVIN, to say nothing of EPICETUS.³ Not only must she overcome resistance....

²Wiersbe, W. W. (1996, c1993). *Be committed*. An Old Testament study. Ruth and Esther (Ru 1:6). Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books.

³Tan, P. L. (1996, c1979). *Encyclopedia of 7700 illustrations : A treasury of illustrations, anecdotes, facts and quotations for pastors, teachers and Christian workers*. Garland TX: Bible Communications. #4110, 4111.

2. **She must objectify** [to give expression to (as an abstract notion, feeling, or ideal) in a form that can be experienced by others⁴] **the resolution**. She had to state her resolution in such a way that Naomi would understand it. She put her resolution into two words: “**following you**”. It doesn’t take a dictionary to understand that idea. And yet a dictionary does add color and depth to the statement. To follow means *to come after; to walk or proceed along with another; to act in accordance with; to copy or imitate; to attend closely to another; to attach oneself to*.⁵

To put it positively: “Stop trying to dissuade me, I am following you!” That’s a statement of determination. Paul Speike wrote: **When a man is determined, what can stop him? Cripple him and you have a SIR WALTER SCOTT; put him in a prison cell and you have JOHN BUNYAN; bury him in the snows of Valley Forge and you have a GEORGE WASHINGTON. Have him born in abject poverty and you have a LINCOLN. Load him with bitter racial prejudice and you have a DISRAELI.**

Afflict him with asthma until as a boy he lies choking in his father’s arms and you have a THEODORE ROOSEVELT; stab him with rheumatic pains until for years he cannot sleep without an opiate and you have a STEINMETZ; put him in a grease pit of a locomotive roundhouse and you have a WALTER CHRYSLER; make him a second fiddle in an obscure South American orchestra and you have a TOSCANINI.⁶ [6845 Grateful For Wheelchair

Dr. Hubert Davidson visited the noted poetess, Myra Brooks Welch, who perhaps is best-known for her masterpiece, “The Touch of the Master’s Hand.” As he turned to leave her home, Myra Welch patted the arm of her wheelchair and said, “And I thank God for this.” Imagine being grateful for a wheelchair! But her talent lay undiscovered prior to her wheelchair days. Rather than becoming bitter, she chose a better way, and a wonderful ministry opened new doors of blessings for her. Her poems have blessed the whole world.]

After objectifying her resolution, she gave us some of the most memorable words in Scripture, just so Naomi would understand what that meant. This gives us the third principle in this passage.

III. THE RESOLVE FOR A NEW BEGINNING MUST BE CONCENTRATED, vs 16b-18.

There was no fluffy thinking on Ruth’s part. She did not leave her resolution in the abstract. She did not just wander down the road with Naomi to see what would happen. No, she concentrated her plan into concrete action statements. [These are very similar to the vows in wedding ceremony.]

1. **COMPANIONSHIP**: “**where you go---I go**”. Here was a stirring example of a complete break with the past. Like Abraham Ruth decided to leave her ancestors’ idolatrous land to go to the land of promise. And Ruth did it without the encouragement of a promise. In fact she made her decision despite Naomi’s strenuous encouragement to do otherwise.⁷

2. **COHABITATION**: “**where you lodge---I lodge**”. Here she expresses her willingness to “spend the night” wherever and however Naomi spends it. It doesn’t matter if it is in a tent or a mansion. Ruth is saying she will “abide” or live at whatever economic, social, and cultural level Naomi lives.

⁴Merriam-Webster, Inc: *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*. Eleventh ed. Springfield, Mass. : Merriam-Webster, Inc., 2003

⁵ Ibid.

⁶Tan, P. L. (1996, c1979). *Encyclopedia of 7700 illustrations : A treasury of illustrations, anecdotes, facts and quotations for pastors, teachers and Christian workers*. Garland TX: Bible Communications. #4112

⁷Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (1:421). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

3. COMMUNITY: “your people---are my people”. Ruth is willing to become a member of a new people group. She is willing to be naturalized into a new country and people. She willingly adopts a new country and its ways.

4. CONVERSION: “your God---my God”. Ruth became a believer in the God of the bible. Ruth’s conversion is evidence of the sovereign grace of God, for the only way sinners can be saved is by grace (Eph. 2:8–10). Everything within her and around her presented obstacles to her faith, and yet she trusted the God of Israel. Her background was against her, for she was from Moab where they worshiped the god Chemosh (Num. 21:29; 1 Kings 11:7, 33), who accepted human sacrifices (2 Kings 3:26–27) and encouraged immorality (Num. 25). Her circumstances were against her and could have made her bitter against the God of Israel. First, her father-in-law died, and then her husband and her brother-in-law; and she was left a widow without any support. ... But God intervened and graciously saved Ruth in spite of all these obstacles. “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us” (Titus 3:5.). God delights in showing mercy (Micah 7:18), and often He shows His mercy to the least likely people in the least likely places. This is the sovereign grace of the God “who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4, KJV).⁸

5. COMMITMENT: “where you die---I will die and be buried”. We understand the part of her statement about dying, because she intended to live out her life with Naomi. But we may not understand the part about being buried there. (T)o people in many cultures, this is one of the most important expressions in the entire declaration of Ruth. For the sake of some special advantage people may be willing to go and live among another tribe or people, but they almost always want to be buried in their homeland. Hence, it is this ... statement of Ruth’s which confirms her lasting loyalty⁹

6. COVENANT [formal, solemn, and binding agreement; this is a formula found 12x in the O.T. (1 Sam 3.17; 14.44; 20.13; 25.22; 2 Sam 3.9, 35; 19.13; 1 Kgs 2.23; 2 Kgs 6.31)¹⁰]: “Thus may the LORD do to me, and worse, if anything but death parts you and me.” To show the depth of her commitment to Naomi, Ruth invoked a covenant that called for divine judgment upon herself if she should fail to keep her promises. It was thus that the Hebrews made their most awful appeals to Yahweh. They signified their willingness to suffer some dire calamity if they should either do the evil deed repudiated or fail to do the good deed promised.¹¹

7. CONFIRMATION [the process of supporting a statement by evidence]. She proved her resolution for a new beginning by living the rest of her life with Naomi and fulfilling all the things she said she would do. She never wavered or waffled on all she had determined to do. This was noticed by Boaz. He mentioned this when talking to her. "Boaz replied to her, “All that you have done for your mother-in-law after the death of your husband has been fully

⁸Wiersbe, W. W. (1996, c1993). *Be committed*. An Old Testament study. Ruth and Esther (Ru 1:6). Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books.

⁹Ward, J. d., & Nida, E. A. (1992). *A translator's handbook on the book of Ruth* (2nd ed.) (18). New York: United Bible Societies.

¹⁰Ward, J. d., & Nida, E. A. (1992). *A translator's handbook on the book of Ruth* (2nd ed.) (18). New York: United Bible Societies.

¹¹*The Pulpit Commentary: Ruth*. 2004 (H. D. M. Spence-Jones, Ed.) (19). Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

reported to me, and how you left your father and your mother and the land of your birth, and came to a people that you did not previously know. "“May the Lord reward your work, and your wages be full from the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to seek refuge.”” (Ruth 2:12, NASB95)

8. CONSUMATION: v. 18. **Naomi** then **stopped urging** Ruth to go back to Moab. Since Ruth had invoked God’s name in her commitment (v. 17), Naomi acquiesced. Nothing more could be said. The Book of Ruth says nothing about Naomi welcoming her daughter-in-law to the fold of those who trusted in Israel’s God. **Ruth** had leaped by faith the barriers that had been thrown up before her.¹²

See the power of resolution; it silences temptation. Those that go in religious ways without a steadfast mind, stand like a door half open, which invites a thief; but resolution shuts and bolts the door, resists the devil and forces him to flee.¹³

Ruth overcame resistance to her resolution of a new beginning by her resolve. The rest of her life was proof that new beginnings can happen and be fruitful.

May it be so for you and any new beginning you want to accomplish. Amen.

To young people—

[Cultivate, to the utmost, an affectionate and obedient spirit towards your parents. This is a frame of mind peculiarly pleasing to God. When he enjoined it in the Decalogue, he wrote it with his own finger on a tablet of stone: and it is distinguished above all the other commandments by this, that it was “the first commandment with promise.” The exercise of this spirit pre-eminently characterized our blessed Lord in his early days: “He went down with his parents to Nazareth, and was subject unto them.” This is the best return that you can make to your parents for all the care which they take of you, and all their labours for your good. Especially, if, like Naomi, they be brought into affliction and penury, forsake them not *then*; but rather redouble your attentions to them; and account no sacrifice too great to make, if by any means you may be a comfort to them in their declining years.

At the same time be attentive to the concerns of your souls. Embrace the God of Israel as your God; and worship him, and serve him, and “cleave unto him with full purpose of heart.” And let no hopes of improving your temporal condition, either in marriage or in any other way, draw you aside from him. Renounce all for God; and “count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus your Lord.” If others turn from the Lord, and go back unto the world, do not ye follow them. Even though they be your near relatives, with whom you have been bound in ties of the closest amity, let them not prevail: yea, though *their prudence* be proposed to you as the fittest pattern to follow, and the proposal come from the highest authority, still be faithful to your convictions; and be faithful to your God. This will issue most to your satisfaction; this will bring you peace at the last: for so it is written; “Hearken, O daughter, and incline thine ear: forget, also, thine own people, and thy father’s house: so will the King greatly desire thy beauty; for He is thy Lord; and worship thou him.”]¹⁴

¹²Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (1:421). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

¹³Henry, M., & Scott, T. (1997). *Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary* (Ru 1:15). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems.

¹⁴Simeon, C. (1832-63). *Horae Homileticae Vol. 3: Judges to 2 Kings* (94). London.

It was barley harvest when the two widows arrived in Bethlehem, a time when the community expressed joy and praise to God for His goodness. It was spring, a time of new life and new beginning. Alexander Whyte often told his Edinburgh congregation that the victorious Christian life is “a series of new beginnings,” and he was right. Naomi was about to make a new beginning; for with God, it’s never too late to start over again.

Are you trusting God for *your* new beginning? After all, with God at your side, your resources are far greater than your burdens.

Stop staring at the wall and, by faith, get up and open the door to a brand-new tomorrow.¹⁵

¹⁵Wiersbe, W. W. (1996, c1993). *Be committed*. An Old Testament study. Ruth and Esther (Ru 1:19). Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books.