

The transforming power of love

It is said that love heals everything, but there is an even truer and more meaningful statement: **love changes everything**. Love is the most powerful transforming force that exists. Not surprisingly Martin Luther King, champion of the fight against racial discrimination, titled his best-known work “*The Strength of Love*”.

Now, **the love that changes people and relationships** is not just *any love*. The Bible portrays this sort of love with some stories that are as exciting as inspiring. One of the most remarkable is that of Ruth and Naomi. The German writer Goethe referred to it as “*the most beautiful short story in world literature*”. Ruth's love changed Naomi's life and Boaz's love, in turn, changed both of their lives.

The story of Ruth and Naomi shows us the **two pillars** on which this transforming love is supported: **faith** and **fidelity**. Love is born out of faith in a personal God and is nourished by fidelity feeding each other in a divine feedback. Faith in God leads to faithful love, a love that does not crack easily and «never ends» (1 Cor. 13:8 ESV), it never ceases to be. The book of Ecclesiastes refers to it as a «threefold cord» (Eccl. 4:12 ESV).

As we consider the book of Ruth, we soon discover that it moves on **two planes**, there are two stories that overlap: **the story of a family** and **the story of the salvation of human beings**. A simultaneous view of both levels is essential to grasp the full meaning of this story. The book of Ruth is not only a delicious love story, it is also a mirror and a foretaste of the greatest love story that has ever existed: God's love for this world, you and me.

Ruth chapter 3 luminously illustrates this double plane: **Boaz, the redeemer who rescues Ruth, prefigures the Redeemer par excellence, Christ**. The text contains a high *density of love*, it is a model of love in action. Everything that happens that night on the threshing floor is exciting and is narrated with a sober beauty, as is typical of the Word of God.

We observe **three attitudes of love** that precede the **acts** -the works- of love.

- In Naomi, the initiative of love
- In Ruth, the loyalty of love
- In Boaz, the generosity of love

1. Love takes the initiative: Naomi (Ruth 3:1-5)

Love takes the first step. Let us observe the firmness with which Naomi addresses Ruth: «Should I not find a home for you, that it may be well with you?» (Ruth 3:1 NIV). In other words, Naomi is saying: “I want to see you happy”.

Naomi's initiative is an echo of the love of **God** who «**first loved us**» (1 John 4:19 ESV). In all things related to our salvation God took the first step. Love is *proactive*, not merely *reactive*.

Love begins with a look, the look that penetrates the soul of our neighbor and says: “What do you need, what can I do for you?”. It is the deep, empathetic look of Jesus into the eyes of the rich young man when «**looking at him, He loved him**» (Mark 10:21 ESV). Yes, **love is a matter of looks**. It requires stopping looking inside oneself (first step) to look at your neighbor (second step). And doing this requires a third look to Heaven, raising our gaze to «see Him who is invisible» (Heb. 11:27 ESV) and to «fix our eyes on Jesus» (Heb. 12:2 CEB).

Naomi not only has a strong desire to help, but she takes the first step. To this end, she creates a thorough plan, a wise strategy «so that *things go well for you*». What a simple and deep way to describe love: **I am going to do everything possible to make sure things go well for you**. Thus, she gets to work so that Ruth can get married and find her place in life again. Naomi's plan is an admirable combination of courage and prudence, wisdom and sensitivity.

This love that takes the initiative is the love that Jesus refers to in the so-called Golden Rule: «So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them» (Matt. 7:12 ESV). Our natural tendency is just the opposite. Notice the passive and negative emphasis in the popular saying: “don't want for others what you don't want for yourself”.

This kind of love is **incompatible with individualism** because love «does not seek its own things» (1 Cor. 13:5 DNL), its own interests. This is one of the reasons why there are so many broken relationships today: this *agape* love that is nourished by faith and expressed with fidelity, the “divine tripod”, is missing in our society.

2. Love is loyal: Ruth (Ruth 3:6-9)

Ruth embodies the second characteristic of love: loyalty or fidelity. Loyalty is the cement that holds our relationships together, especially the most intimate ones (marriage, family, friends). The disregard for fidelity is one of the greatest tragedies of our world and has generated an epidemic of broken relationships and loneliness.

Ruth had promised fidelity to Naomi in one of the most memorable declarations of love in history:

«Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the Lord do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you» (Ruth 1:16-17 ESV).

Now she is going to confirm her words with concrete actions. In Ruth's loyalty we observe two important features:

Loyalty is ready to listen. Ruth listens to her mother-in-law and follows her advice carefully: «And she replied: all that you say I will do. So she went down to the threshing floor and did just as her mother-in-law had commanded her» (Ruth 3:5-6 ESV). Ruth's **obedience comes from the heart, not from imposition**. It is the obedience to which

the apostle Paul alludes when referring to our relationship with the Lord Jesus: «But thanks be to God, that you... have become obedient from the heart» (Rom. 6:17 ESV).

Loyalty is brave. Naomi's plan had its risks, Ruth's reputation as a woman was at stake. Therefore, Boaz said to her: «And now, my daughter, do not fear. I will do for you all that you request, for all the people of my town know that you are a virtuous woman» (Ruth 3:11 NKJV). **Love is also incompatible with cowardice.**

Ruth's faithfulness is a reminder of the great faithfulness of God, the God of the Covenant «with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning» (Jas. 1:17 NKJV). It is the same fidelity that Jesus had with His apostles and with us: «having loved His own... He loved them to the end» (John 13:1 ESV).

3. Love is generous: Boaz (Ruth 3:6-18)

The third evidence of love, generosity, we see embodied in Boaz. Notice the determination with which he addresses Ruth:

«Remain tonight, and in the morning, if he will redeem you, good; let him do it. But if he is not willing to redeem you, then, as the Lord lives, I will redeem you. Lie down until the morning» (Ruth 3:13 ESV).

Let us observe how Boaz's generosity is associated with **integrity**: «Now it is true that I am a close relative; however, there is a relative closer than I» (Ruth 3:12 ESV). Boaz wants to scrupulously follow the law and do things rightly. **Christian spirituality and ethics go together**, they cannot be split. True spirituality is expressed in righteousness, the right behaviour.

Furthermore, Boaz's generosity includes material **needs**. As we saw before with loyalty, **being generous is not a matter of words but of works**. «These six measures of barley he gave to me, for he said to me: You must not go back empty-handed to your mother-in-law» (Ruth 3:17 ESV).

Generosity is one of the most beautiful expressions of love. The generous person gives and gives in abundance. What a contrast to the selfish person who only demands and never has enough. **The person who loves gives tirelessly, the selfish person asks insatiably.**

At this point someone may feel frustrated: “how difficult it is to love this way!” Totally true, it is very difficult, but we feel relieved when we understand that this sort of love comes from God, it is not something natural but supernatural, it is the fruit of the Spirit. God enables us by His grace to love as He loves. **God has given us a great Redeemer in Christ and a great Transformer in the Holy Spirit.**

Three phrases from Boaz stand out like pearls in the text:

- «Do not fear, I will do for you...» (Ruth 3:11 ESV)
- «Remain... I will redeem you» (Ruth 3:13 ESV)
- «You must not go back empty-handed...» (Ruth 3:17 ESV), I provide.

In these words, we glimpse the core of the Gospel: **Boaz prefigures the great Redeemer, Christ**. In the same way that Boaz changed the lives of Naomi and Ruth, Christ changes our lives in a radical and profound way. The love of God in Christ is the greatest transforming power of people, it transforms our tragedies into meaningful stories. **The central point of Christianity is the love of God that rescues and transforms lives.**

We cannot conclude without recognizing **the providence of God**. The entire book of Ruth is permeated with a strong sense of divine direction. **God knows, God controls, God cares**. God provides the right thing at the right time. God provided a Boaz for Ruth and provided His Son for us «when the times reached their fulfillment» (Eph. 1:10 NIV). A beautiful expression that could also be translated “when the hour struck on God's clock”.

What a comfort to know that **it is God who marks the hours on the clock of our lives**. And His watch shows the perfect time, the *kairos* which is the right time. Thank God that our life, like that of Naomi and Ruth, is not in the hands of blind destiny or any human circumstance, but in the hands of the Almighty and All-loving God. And above all, thank God that in the right time He sent His Son whose perfect love transformed History and our own personal stories.

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The web **Christian Thought** gives information about the literary work of Dr. Pablo Martínez and his father Rev. José M. Martínez. Through this work the Christian thought of the authors flows covering a wide range of subjects; theological, psychological and ethical issues are considered from a biblical perspective with a relevant and practical application to current problems.

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