

Real Love Gives and Guards

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[0:00] Thanks for the really kind words, Alan. Yeah, so my name's Brian, and I love coming to Havelock. And I say that genuinely, and the reason for that is it always feels like a family.

I don't know all of you. I know many of you, but even the ones I don't know, it feels like a family when I come in. And I love that because, yeah, I just want to encourage you with this.

If the church is supposed to do anything, it's supposed to do a lot of things. We're supposed to do a lot of things as a church. But if you had to pick one word, I think being the family of God would be at the top of the list.

And I think you guys do it extraordinarily well. And I know there's blind spots, and there's ways that we miss it. But the greatest two commandments are to love the Lord and to love one another. And when you come into a place like this and you see people loving each other really well, you're arguably doing one of the most important things in the entire world that any of us ever get called to do, and that's to love each other.

And you guys just do a great job. I feel, I mean, I just feel like a sense of joy when I come in. Now, some of that has to do with the fact that Matt Fletcher is here and is the closest thing to Santa Claus that exists.

[1:10] I don't know that you could feel anything other than merriment when you see Matt Fletcher, whether it's Christmas season or not. But it feels like a family.

And even like JD's call to worship this morning, just extraordinary. I was just getting emotional. And so anyways, you guys do a great job being the family, ministering to each other. So it's a privilege for me to be here.

Yeah. So we are going to pivot into the Word of God. So that's one of the, if it's your first time here, I mean, you're probably getting a sense of the fact that we do different things when we're together. Laughing is a big part of what we do.

I love that there's laughter in the room, being together, enjoying one another. There's singing. Worshiping Jesus should feel like a party. In many ways, that's what we're doing. We're celebrating who Jesus is.

We never get tired of doing that. One of the ways that we do that is we look to the Word. And so we've been in this book called Ruth, which is a book in the Old Testament, and trying to learn from it. So that's what we're going to do over the next few moments.

[2:07] And the story of Ruth is a story of, it's a love story. We've been talking about that for the last few weeks. And the word for that, one of the words for that that's in the book of Ruth is this Hebrew word called hesed.

It's God-like love. It's the kind of love that's faithful and sacrificial. And one of the significant aspects of this book is the chasm, the gulf that stands between the characters who love each other.

So there's times in life where loving each other is really easy, and then there's times where loving each other is hard. And we're called to love each other that don't look like us. And this story is a great, it's just a great picture of how God calls us to love each other and demonstrating what it looks like to love the least of these.

I got an email a few weeks ago from somebody saying like, man, he was just talking about how the church, one of the things that we are called to do as a church is to demonstrate the love of God to the widows and the orphans and the people who are overlooked.

I mean, that is something that we're always supposed to do. Jesus said those are the people that he came to give good news to. In the days of the Bible, there's probably nobody more vulnerable than an orphan or a widow.

[3 : 26] They were totally overlooked. Nobody saw them. Oftentimes nobody cared for them. The entire economic system really failed them. But God did see them, and he still does. And so maybe you are a widow.

Maybe you're an orphan or maybe you're not one of those things. But you feel that way overlooked. You feel like the world, no one really sees you.

Nobody really sees the very massive problems that you're dealing with. And if that is you, I am so excited to read and work through this passage with you this morning because this passage today that we're going to read is such an extraordinary story that shows us how God sees and cares for the people that nobody else sees and cares for.

So we're going to pick up the story in Ruth chapter 2, starting in verse 1. And I'm not going to give a whole recap, but just very briefly, you know, this is the story of these two women, Ruth and Naomi. Ruth has volunteered, essentially, to spend the rest of her life with her mother-in-law. They're both widows. They're coming back to Bethlehem, which is where Naomi is from. Ruth is not from Bethlehem.

[4 : 36] She is a Moabite. She is not an Israelite. She is an outsider. But she says she's going to go back to help take care of her mother-in-law. And so we're picking up the story where Ruth basically had told Naomi that she is going to go into the field to try to find food for them to live off of.

Now, Naomi had a relative of her husband's, a worthy man of the clan of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz. And Ruth, the Moabite, said to Naomi, Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain after him in whose sight I shall find favor.

And she said to her, Go, my daughter. I think you guys talked about gleaning a little bit last week. So gleaning is this practice where people who were poor could go into the fields and essentially pick up the scraps of whatever was being harvested that would have been left over.

So she set out and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers, and she happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the clan of Elimelech. And behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem, and he said to the reapers, The Lord be with you.

And they answered, The Lord bless you. Then Boaz said to his young man, who was in charge of the reapers, Whose young woman is this? And the servant who was in charge of the reapers answered, She is the young Moabite woman who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab.

[5 : 53] She said, Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves after the reapers. So she came and she has continued from early morning until now except for a short rest. Now, I want to pause here really quickly because it's very likely when we read this story, there is a lot we're not noticing.

If you had lived in this day, you would have noticed. But there's reasons that are hard to see. One of them in this verse we just read is a cultural problem. And that is that you probably don't know what sheaves are.

So I want to put a picture up. So this is a picture of two guys harvesting barley. This was during the barley harvest. And you can see there's these little bundles on the ground.

That's what a sheave was. So when a reaper would harvest, more than likely what they would do is they might use one arm to kind of hold the stalks. They have a sickle in another hand.

And then they will put them on the ground where they would be tied up and carried off. So what Ruth is doing is she is making an incredibly bold ask. Because she's got to find food not just for herself but for two people.

[7 : 02] And so she asks. She doesn't just want to come glean. She says she wants to do it among the bundles or the sheaves where there would have been more to collect. There would have been more on the ground.

So let's just realize that would have been a bit presumptuous. Okay. So you just appreciate that. Ruth is being a little tenacious. And she's making this very bold request. Now the next thing that we probably miss, we miss not because of a cultural problem but really a textual one.

And the translators have really struggled with the verse. Let's put that verse. Can we go back to that last verse? And put it up on the screen. So it says. Let's see.

Verse. Pull up verse seven. So she came. Yeah, there it is. So she came. And this is the foreman speaking. This young man. He says. So she came and she has continued from early morning until now except for a short rest.

Now your Bible will likely even say. There will probably be a note there that says the Hebrew here is tricky or the Hebrew is uncertain. And translators have wrestled with this. Many translations have put this verse differently.

[8 : 06] They might say she has remained standing or she has remained there. A lot of scholars think that actually what this is saying is that she's made her request. When you read our translation, what it sounds like is she's continued.

The foreman is telling Boaz she came in the morning and she's continued reaping. A lot of translators think that what he's saying is she's come this morning. She's made this request. And she's standing here and waiting. And the reason the foreman is telling this to Boaz is because he needs permission.

Because again, this is not something that would have typically been done. And so we actually can't be certain of what it means. But if that is the case, that Ruth is standing there patiently waiting, honoring, you know, showing honor to some.

She doesn't own this field. She's doing the honorable thing. She's made the bold request. And now she's waiting for permission. That would certainly explain what happens next. Verse 8. Then Boaz said to Ruth, Now listen, my daughter.

Do not go to glean in any other field or leave this one, but keep close to my young women. Let your eyes be on the field that they are reaping and go after them. Have I not charged the young men not to touch you? When you are thirsty, go to the vessels and drink what the young men have drawn.

[9 : 13] Now I'm going to pause here again. It would likely have been that the men would have been doing the reaping and putting them on the ground. And the young women would have been the ones tying them up and preparing them to be taken wherever they're going to go.

So he's essentially giving her a yes. Yeah, I want you to stay with my young women. They're the ones really working among the sheaves. And so he's essentially, if there would have been multiple field on this people gleaning, he's giving Ruth first dibs.

He's putting her at the place where she's likely to get the most. And then he talks about going and getting the water. And this is very interesting because that is a job that typically women would have done.

In fact, you can probably think of stories in the Bible where it's women who were at the well drawing out the water. But what he says is, go to the vessels and drink what my young men have drawn. There's one Old Testament scholar who says that this is really an interesting touch because here you have a foreign woman who customarily would draw water for Israelites.

And she is being welcomed to drink water that has been drawn by Israelites. So you see what the narrator is doing is he's showing you that Ruth's story is beginning to invert.

[10 : 24] It's been bad up to this point. She has lost her husband. She's come to a land that's not her own. She is poverty stricken. But things are starting to change. Verse 10, Ruth is very aware of the extraordinary way in which Boaz is caring for her.

But Boaz answered her, Then she said, Now, again, there's something happening in the Hebrew here.

It says in our translation, it says that Boaz gives to her roasted grain. That word is a bit strange. A lot of translators have said it probably suggests that he heaped roasted grain in front of her.

He didn't just give her some. He poured it out in front of her. And she had leftovers. In a world where we go to Walmart and it's literally wall-to-wall food, it is hard to appreciate the significance of Ruth being a poor woman who owns nothing and nobody in the world owes her anything, being sat down by this very wealthy man and having food heaped in front of her, so much so that she couldn't even finish it and she had leftovers.

It's hard for us, I think, to appreciate how that would have likely made her feel. Furthermore, the fact that Boaz is the one who does this is remarkable because men in Old Testament, men do not serve the food.

[12 : 42] Women serve the food. In fact, there is only two times in the Old Testament where a man serves a meal. The other time is in Genesis 18. Abraham serves a meal. But it is to three divine visitors, God and two angels.

So, you know, bit of a different situation. Ruth is not God nor an angel. She's at the bottom of the pecking order. We're going to come back to that in a minute. But here you have Boaz, a man and a wealthy man.

And he is pouring out the food in front of her. Her fortunes are changing. Verse 15, when she rose to glean, Boaz instructed his young men, saying, let her glean even among the sheaves and do not reproach her.

And also, I love this line, pull out some from the bundles for her. Leave some extra for her to glean and don't rebuke her. You see the extraordinary generosity of Boaz towards this young woman. Last week, we were looking at Ruth's love for Naomi as a picture of God's his said love. Again, when we say that this book is a love story, when we hear a love story, oftentimes we think of romance.

[13:54] And there is some romance in this story that's coming. But this is a love story because there are many people who love each other so well. So last week, we were looking at how Ruth demonstrated her love for Naomi.

This week, it's really about how Boaz is offering that kind of hesed love to Ruth. And the way that Boaz does this demonstrates two things in really exceptional fashion.

The first is that he demonstrates that real love or hesed love guards the vulnerable. So we're told in verse 1 of chapter 2 that Boaz is a worthy man.

Some people think that he very well could have been the clan leader. So there's an Old Testament scholar who has broken out all in ancient Israel, all the different positions, class positions that someone could have been in.

And there's probably 16. He came up with 16 different levels of social position. Clan leader would have been very well near the top. In fact, if you were the clan leader, there would have only been two people in the land who had more honor than you.

[14:59] And that would have been the tribe leader and then the judge if there was a judge at that time. This is before there was kings. So Boaz, whether he's a clan leader or not, he'd have been very near the top of that list of 16.

He'd have been near the top. Ruth, as a foreign woman, is literally at the very bottom. There is nobody in the land of Israel that would have been beneath Ruth.

Nobody. Even servants would have been. I mean, she counts it a matter of honor that Boaz included her with the servants. Nobody would have been beneath a foreign woman, especially as a widow.

And yet Boaz finds her, says, I want you to stay on my fields. You are safe with me and my people. You stay with my women. And when it's time to eat, I want you to come and sit with us.

Sit down and have a meal with us. So he's extending his influence to protect this woman. And he uses what he has for her good. Because I think Boaz knows that if he does not, this woman is in real trouble.

[16:05] And again, we live in a day and age where there is so much opportunity out there. It can be difficult to imagine times and places where it did not matter what kind of work ethic a person had.

There was no changing their situation unless somebody else stepped in for them. That's Ruth's situation right here. He knows that she will be in serious jeopardy unless he steps in for her.

Notice the language of being in the shadow of wings. Boaz says, you know, may you be... He basically commends her worthiness and her honor and talks about how she's chosen to stay under the shadow of God's wings.

Well, later Ruth will explicitly say that to Boaz in a coming text we're going to look at in a few weeks. She basically recognizes that Boaz is representing God in the way that he is caring for her.

And the other thing that probably make... That we probably... It's just so hard for us to appreciate about this story. Is the fact that Ruth is a Moabite.

[17:12] Now, I don't know to what degree Jesse might have highlighted this in previous weeks. But foreigners were looked down on in general.

Moabites in particular. There were actual laws forbidding Moabites from coming into the assembly of the Lord. Deuteronomy 23, verse 3 says, No Ammonite or Moabite may enter the assembly of the Lord.

Even to the 10th generation, none of them may enter the assembly of the Lord forever. Now, there's been a lot of debate. Was Boaz violating Mosaic law by bringing Ruth into his little community like this?

And it's a debate because there's a lot of questions about actually what Deuteronomy 23 meant explicitly. What does it mean to be brought into the assembly of the Lord? But even if it's true that

he was not violating that law, the point is, Boaz would have had every reason in the world not to help this woman.

He sees somebody that I think his friends would have probably encouraged him to ignore. And he actually sees goodness in her.

[18 : 23] He sees how even though she's on the bottom rung, she's a woman of courage. And I think that speaks to Boaz's virtue, that he could see virtue in this woman. And he takes responsibility for her.

And we cannot stress enough that Boaz was not required to do any of this. Beyond just letting her glean in the fields, none of what he did was required. And I think that Boaz would have had some friends who would have argued that it would have been more virtuous not to help her.

Because there's always those kinds of people. You can just imagine what they might have said. She made the choice to come here, Boaz. It was her choice.

You don't owe her anything. She's a Moabite for crying out loud. Now, we don't feel those things when we read the story. We're conditioned to read the story and feel empathy for Ruth.

Because, you know, in our culture, the culture that we live in, man, we love this stuff. A young widow in a foreign land. I mean, this is how romance novels begin, I imagine.

[19 : 26] Because I wouldn't actually know how romance novels begin. I just think that they might begin this way. The question that I think we have to ask, which is maybe a little bit uncomfortable, is who is the equivalent of Ruth in our day?

Who are the vulnerable people, the ones who cannot provide for themselves, who will be totally taken advantage of unless someone else steps in?

We have to be careful that we don't let the narrative of opportunity blind us to the fact that there are people who, if no one steps in and helps them, they're going to be taken advantage of.

And they're going to suffer. One Harbor, our church is part of a conservative evangelical tradition. I think there's some places where we've done a really great job with this. The pro-life movement would be a good example.

In Moorhead, which is where I typically am on Sundays, One Harbor, Moorhead, we just had our friends from the Coastal Pregnancy Center on our stage talking about what they do. Because we rightly, I mean, who is more vulnerable than the unborn?

[20 : 39] Nobody is more vulnerable than the unborn. And so we rightly champion their cause. But I don't think our movement has always gotten it right. Many of us, myself included, we're late to recognize that drug addicts and alcoholics are vulnerable people who need help, not just criminals who need to be punished.

We've let arguments about political issues make us reluctant to help people who are suffering right in front of us. Like, I don't know what the answer is to the immigration issue. I think one thing everybody agrees on is that the system is broken and it needs to be fixed.

But if someone makes a choice to come here, his said love does not find excuses for why we don't need to help those people and serve those people and love those people and guard those people. Boaz did not find loopholes in the Mosaic Law. He took responsibility for the person in front of him. And he used his influence to help her because she was weak.

Now, we can have debates about the big national issues out there. The reality is we live in quiet Carteret County. Who are the vulnerable people that we have the power to help who oftentimes we are looking right through them?

[21 : 53] High schoolers. So it's great that it's Youth Sunday. We've got some youth in the room. I'm not going to ask you to put your hand up. In Moorhead, a few weeks ago, I did. I said, hey, we've got any high schoolers in the room? One person raised his hand. That's what every high schooler wants is to be singled out in front of 300 people.

So I'm not going to ask you to put up your hands. But I know you're in the room because it's Youth Sunday and you pretty much advertised your presence on the way in. So I know that you're here. Let me talk to high schoolers.

I know the cafeteria. For those of you who, I know we've got probably kids who are homeschooled, but we've got kids who are in schools as well. I know what the cafeteria scene is like. I remember vividly what it was like to be in high school.

And I remember vividly the cafeteria scene. And I remember vividly the kids who always sat by themselves. And I remember with shame, being embarrassed when they wanted to sit with me.

What if you find the kid who sits by himself and you do for that person what Boaz did for Ruth and you say, why don't you come sit with my friends?

[22 : 56] We're going to take care of you. We're going to let you be a part of our friend group, our community. We're going to watch out for you. Or consider foster care and adoption. Some of you will know that my wife and I have been foster parents.

So we have adopted kids through the foster care system. I'll tell you what. When it comes to adoption, everybody wants to adopt babies, which is great. And there's nothing wrong with that. My wife and I, we have actually done it twice.

But what about the 13-year-old with behavioral problems who's never had a day of stability in their entire life? Friends, the stats for kids who age out of the foster care system are horrific.

Because nobody steps in and says, I want you to come be with me and my people. I am going to look out for you. If nobody does that, it's just like Ruth.

Ruth, Boaz knew, if I don't help this young woman, it's not going to end well. That's how it is for kids aging out of the foster care system. If no one steps in, it's overwhelmingly, it overwhelmingly doesn't end well.

[24 : 07] See, the thing is, when we're in here and we're reading the book of Ruth and we're singing songs, it's really easy to talk about loving people. But it's not always easy to do. And it's not always easy even to see them because we see right through these people.

They're out of sight and they're out of mind. Ruth knows that. She says, she asks Boaz, how is it that you would recognize me? How is it that you would take notice of me? Nobody in Boaz's position takes notice of people like Ruth.

And she knows it. How is it that you took notice of me? There's actually some wordplay in the Hebrew that amounts to a pun. Why have you taken notice of the unnoticeable? She does not expect it from people like Boaz.

Because people with power and influence often do not even see the ones who do not have power and influence. And if you do have power and influence, man, guarding someone and protecting them can be costly.

Because the more that you have, the more of those things that can be called upon by someone else. But that is exactly how God treats us.

[25 : 09] Scripture calls him a fortress, a protector, a guardian. And he tells us that at the end of time, there's a new city that's going to descend to earth. A heavenly Jerusalem. A city with walls that is going to guard us and protect us.

And he comes to people who he owes nothing to. To people who are totally overlooked. He sees the ones that no one else sees. And he says, I want you to come be a part of my family. To live in my city.

To be a citizen of my kingdom. To be a son in my house. That's what love does. The Gospels are full of instances where the writers will talk about the significance of Jesus seeing people.

Have you talked about that yet at all in Ruth? No? Yeah. So, you know, next time you read through Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, look out for how many times it says that Jesus saw somebody.

That he noticed somebody. That's an important detail. Think about how many details are not in Scripture. And that detail comes up again and again. Jesus notices the people that even his own disciples don't notice.

[26 : 12] And look right through. The Good Samaritan is really Jesus' premier teaching on this idea. Coming across the person in the road who's injured. A lot of people take the long way around. Followers of Jesus are supposed to do what the Good Samaritan did.

You notice the person in the road. And then you stop and you use what you have to help them. Your money, your time, your influence. You can't do it for everybody. But we can all do it for somebody.

And I think that the story of Boaz is an extraordinary example of what it looks like to guard the vulnerable. The second thing that this story illustrates for us is how real love or his said love gives generously.

So we've seen some of this already. We've made it explicit. Ruth goes just to glean some scraps. Makes this pretty bold request of Boaz. But he doesn't just say yes. He goes on to tell the reapers to give her even more.

Ruth seems to have a sense of how crazy that is. She told Naomi, I'm going to go glean in the fields of someone in whose eyes I found favor. But then she falls at Boaz's feet. It says, why have I found favor in your eyes?

[27 : 22] Like, how could I have found so much favor that you would take notice of me? Robert Hubbard, the Old Testament scholar in his commentary on Ruth, says, The implication to the reader is that Ruth has found the person she's looking for, but he has exceeded her expectations.

And then Boaz has her sit down. He heaps out food in front of her, so much so that she has leftovers. And in that moment, he demonstrates that he is not only going to meet her needs, he's going to go way beyond them.

He's going to be generous. And that is this idea of being generous, but specifically with being generous with food. This is a big theme in the book of Ruth.

Remember at the very beginning of the story, what drove Naomi away from Israel to Moab? It was a famine. There was not enough food. And then she decides to return where?

To Bethlehem. Bethlehem literally means house of bread. Naomi comes back at harvest time to the house of bread. And she says, the Lord has sent me back empty.

[28 : 32] And the narrator is dropping all these hints saying, Naomi has no idea what God has planned for her. She is going to be feasting and discovering the harvest of God's bounty.

In agricultural communities, harvest time is always a time of celebration. Partying, feasting, an abundance of food. But you know what's so ironic about this? Is actually, it's not just that Ruth was a foreigner.

And not even just that she was a Moabite. But the reason that the Moabites were hated. So in Deuteronomy 23, we already saw that they were forbidden from coming into the land. Well, look at the reason why.

Deuteronomy 23, verse 4. Because they didn't meet you with bread and water on the way when you came out of Egypt. Because when Israel needed food and water, the Moabites withheld it.

So look what's happening. Boaz is pouring out generously the very things that her ancestors refused to give his. And the generosity is extraordinary.

[29 : 35] He doesn't meet the need. He goes beyond the need. And that is the kind of God that we have. He does not just meet your needs. He wants to blow your mind.

He wants to go beyond them. To heap out blessing in front of you that you weren't expecting. You come to God with asks sometimes that feel bold. You wonder what he's going to say.

And he says yes and gives you more than you were even asking or expecting. It's probably represented in the ministry of Jesus the best with the feeding of the 5,000. Remember that story?

Jesus takes a few loaves and a few fish and he miraculously feeds 5,000. Do you know that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, there is only one miracle story that all four of them include.

They all kind of have different stories. There's only one that they all include and it's that one. All four of them said everyone needs to know about the time. That Jesus took 5,000 people and they were hungry and they're out in the hills and there's no food.

[30 : 35] And he miraculously takes these brightened fish and he feeds them but he doesn't just feed them. There's this detail at the end where it says that there's so much food left over that the disciples have to go around with baskets and pick it up.

Because it's that kind of abundance. It's that kind of feast. You come to Jesus hoping that maybe he can fix your problem but he does more than you're expecting. In fact, in Mark's telling that story, there's this point in the story where Jesus says, he tells the disciples, have them sit down on the green grass except in the Greek, it doesn't say that he wants them to sit down.

He uses a word that was specific for what you would do at a Greek feast. You wouldn't just sit. You would recline at a meal. Jesus is saying, have them, don't just have them sit.

Have them recline. I'm about to put a feast in front of them. I'm going to blow their minds. It's the kind of generosity that Jesus has for people. Boaz, he anticipates this way that Jesus would, Jesus, he would actually, he would actually in some ways you could say that he inverts the priesthood.

You see, again, food isn't just a theme in Ruth. Food is a major theme in the whole Bible. And in the Old Testament, worship and food almost always go together. Think about all these great, like the Passover moment.

[31 : 54] The Israelites are about to run out of Egypt. Then what does God have them do? Sit down and eat. You ever think about how strange that is? Have your staff in your hand. You're in

such a rush. You need to be ready to go. But first, you need to eat. Eating and worshiping go hand in hand.

And so when you would go to the temple, the way the priestly system would work is you bring food to the priest. And then that becomes part of this moment of worship. And Jesus shows up as an inverted priest. He doesn't preside over an altar for you to bring a sacrifice, but a table in which you lay down and he lavishly provides the meal that you're going to eat.

Boaz is pointing forward to that moment. He gives in a way that's extraordinary and generous. And he doesn't tell this woman to, he doesn't say, well, you know, for the number of hours you've worked, here's your wage for the day.

No, she makes this request. He gives her more than she asks for. And I would say the power of that kind of generosity is hard to overstate in terms of how it transforms people's lives.

And as Christians, I would say most of us, we know this in some ways. We know it so well. We know it when we talk about friends and family and raising our kids.

[33 : 03] But we forget it when we talk about the downtrodden and the lowly and the poor and the stranger. Because for a lot of reasons that we don't have time to get into, we are so afraid of giving a handout.

Now, I would say that handouts given without love are probably unhelpful. They are. When you give someone a handout and you do it without love, it probably is unhelpful.

The problem is we often think that successful people, that the way that they become successful is not through handouts, but through self-reliance, self-determination, and a good work ethic. And I would in no way ever want to take anything away from things like a good work ethic.

We need to be teaching people how to have a good work ethic. But the thing is, we see very clearly in the Bible that the most successful people are never self-made. They are always the recipients of someone's chesed generosity.

In fact, the most appropriate way to become successful, and this is not everyone's story, but the most appropriate way to become a successful adult, fully functioning adult, is through the influence of loving parents.

[34 : 12] The best picture that we have in the world of God's love is the love of parents to children. Because it's gracious. It's gracious. Which means it goes beyond what they deserve.

I mean, think about what good parents, and I appreciate that not everyone in the room probably had good parents. But we've all probably seen somebody and we thought, man, that's a good mom. Or that's a good dad. Good moms and dads don't give their kids just enough.

And I'm not talking about spoiling kids. That's not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about good parents who show up for their kids again and again, who heap encouragement, heap encouragement and praise onto their kids, giving them assistance they don't deserve when they've made mistake after mistake, and no one else will show up for them but mom and dad will show up for them.

That's grace. Again, when Harbor is in a very, we come out of a conservative evangelical tradition, we will often complain, and I am one of the people, who will often complain that government handouts don't work.

But I think theologically, the reason that they don't work is the opposite of what people often say. See, the argument is, if you give someone a handout, it will make someone lazy. Instead of learning to work, that person will get something they didn't deserve, and it creates a victim class and so on.

[35 : 27] Now, I'm not saying that isn't true. Maybe that is true. That's not the real problem. The problem isn't that government handouts give people too much. It's that they give people far too little.

Because what every human being needs to flourish, to become the best version of themselves, to be confident and capable, is an investment of love that is radically generous and extravagant, and no government program can do that.

They don't give too much. They give way too little. One of the best pictures of what I'm trying to explain and what I think Ruth demonstrates is from the story Les Mis, right? You may have seen the movies or the musical.

This very famous story of a guy named Jean Valjean, who he goes to prison as a young man for petty crime, for theft, and he languishes there for 19 years.

He gets out, and he goes to a town where no one will put him up because he's an ex-convict, except this kindly old bishop who puts him up. And in some ways you consider that a handout.

[36 : 28] He said, hey, I feel bad for you. You can come and stay in my house. But Valjean is still operating in survival mode. He's been in prison for 19 years. He sees some very, very expensive silverware the bishop owns.

He steals it, and he takes off. He is still a criminal at heart. And the police arrest him, but when they bring him back to the bishop to return the silverware so that they can then take him to jail or put him back in prison, the bishop says, no, no, no.

The silverware was a gift. I wanted him to have it. And it's this crazy moment, this extraordinarily crazy moment that totally transforms Jean Valjean and his future.

Because in that moment, he now realizes he's not going to go back to prison. And this very wealthy silverware is now his legitimately. But as a consequence of that act of radical generosity, that's the moment where Jean Valjean is transformed and becomes an honest man.

Prison didn't change him. Even a handout didn't change him. Extraordinary love filled with generosity that he was not expecting. That is what changed him into an honest man.

[37 : 39] And that is what God does to us. It's called grace. He changes you by giving you what you don't deserve. Lavishly and extraordinarily.

And Boaz knows this about God. Boaz says to Ruth, the Lord repay you for what you've done and a full reward be given to you by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you've come to take refuge.

Boaz is saying when you take refuge in God, you get drenched in blessing. God does not give wages. Like one for one, like you do a good deed and you get a dollar.

It's like you do a good deed and God gives you the bank. And then you don't do the good deed and he still gives you the bank. Because he's generous. And that aspect of God doesn't change.

Last week we talked about how we're supposed to be servants of God and rightly so. But like Boaz, God delights in serving the servants. And Jesus didn't just do it with the 5,000.

[38 : 35] He's going to do it with you and he's going to do it with me in the life to come. It's insane to think about this. That he wants to serve us. He told his disciples in Luke 12. He's telling them, I want you to stay ready.

You have a job to do. Stay ready. I'm coming back. He says, stay dressed for action. Keep your lamps burning. And be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the wedding feast.

So that they may open the door to him at once when he comes and knocks. And then he says, blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes. Truly I say to you, he the master will dress himself for service.

And have them recline at the table. And he will come and serve them a feast. Jesus is anticipating that moment that's been called the wedding supper of the Lamb.

When God is going to gather his church, his bride. And he's going to sit her down at a table. And we are going to recline. And he's going to throw down a feast. And he's going to give generously to you.

[39 : 36] Like he did to the 5,000. And like Boaz generously gave to Ruth. But even more so. Did you notice that it says that Boaz gave Ruth bread and wine? Man.

Sometimes the Bible is just so on the nose. It's not even trying to be subtle. Bread and wine are an important meal in the Bible. Bread is the food of sustenance.

It's like what your body needs. But wine represents mirth. It's what we toast with. It represents joy. It's not just what your body needs.

It's what you want. And Boaz gives that to Ruth. And it's what Jesus gave his disciples. The night before he's betrayed.

This moment where Jesus at the time where, you know, it's the Passover. So all throughout Jerusalem, Israelites are preparing lambs for slaughter. And Jesus tells his disciples, I want you to go find a room so we can celebrate the Passover meal.

[40 : 34] This meal that Jews have always been eating because eating and worship always go together. And it's a lamb except they go up there and there's no mention of a lamb because where's the lamb? Well, Jesus is the lamb. And he gives them a meal and he says, he gives them bread.

He gives them wine. He says, this is my body given for you. I'm the feast, is Jesus is saying. My life for you guys. I am the feast poured out for you.

My life for you. God gives you that kind of love, man. Real, extraordinary, generous love. So if you are a nobody and you think nobody sees me. Nobody sees me. Nobody sees the problems I have. If you are overlooked, God never overlooks you. And he always sees you. And he has a plan to pour out a feast in front of you. And whatever it is that you plan to ask God, no matter how bold it is, he has a plan to give you even more. Are you asking him for things? You know, Jesus never rebuked his disciples for asking too much.

[41 : 40] He only rebuked them for asking too little. God wants to be asked. His reflex is generosity. And he loves to show it off. Are you asking?

Do you want the Holy Spirit? Ask because he is so generous to give the Spirit. Do you want peace and joy? Ask and never stop asking. Maybe you've never asked him for anything.

Maybe you've never asked him to be your father. Maybe you've never asked him to be your friend, to be your savior. The answer in Jesus is always yes.

And he loves it when you ask. Ruth found in Boaz someone who exceeded her expectations. She fell at his feet overwhelmed. He will so exceed your expectations.

Friends, I mean, friends, right now, I don't know if you know this, but right now you have only to ask. And he will heap out grace and mercy on your life.

[42 : 39] He will pour it out in front of you. He's waiting to be asked and he delights to do it. And he doesn't do it because you worked really hard today in the fields. He does it because he loves to do it.

If we have been treated this way, if we've been so guarded, so protected, and given so much, it is not only our duty, it's our privilege, but it is also our duty to give this kind of love to others.

The culture will train you to think about what people deserve from you. Don't think like that. Don't think about what people deserve from you. It's irrelevant. Give people what they don't deserve.

Give people what they're not expecting. Show people generous love that blows their mind because it is one of the best pictures of the gospel that you can give.

People need the sermons. They need the teaching. They also need the grace and the things that they don't deserve heaped in front of them. It will cost you.

[43 : 44] But whatever you give, it's all coming back and more. It's all going to be given back to you. Show people the chesed love of Jesus. Why don't we pray?

Lord, we're just amazed at how much you love us. I think sometimes we imagine that you are a God in the sky, a bit stingy, a bit reluctant, frustrated with us because we can't seem to learn our lessons.

We think we're going to come to you and you're going to hold back maybe because last time you were so good at us. Well, look what we did with it. What a small view of you we have.

Help us to see you as the kind of God that rejoices to give and give and give and all you want us to do is to come with open hands.

We thank you that you don't call us to an altar. There are no altars in this room. You call us to a table. You command us to lay down on the green grass so you can pour out a feast in front of us.

[44 : 53] God, help us to feast on Christ today. As we prepare to come to this meal, I pray that you would bless this meal that we're about to take, that we would feast on you and that we would realize you have actually given us more we need.

There is so much. Ruth took that abundance of food and went back to Naomi. Lord, help us to take the abundance of what you've given us and turn around and give it to others. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

You can take the cup, which should have been on your chair, and you can take the little wafer out of the top. There are traditions, Christian traditions, that call this meal the Eucharist, which just means meal of thanksgiving, of gratitude.

There's one writer who says that gratitude follows grace as thunder follows lightning. You cannot appreciate what Jesus has done for you and feel anything other than an overwhelming sense of gratitude, and eating this meal is a way of showing it.

You don't come to Jesus primarily to do anything for him. You come to him every day so that he can do more and more for you. Everything we do for him is just a response of gratitude, and this meal is the sign of that.

[46 : 06] So I want you to take a moment, and before you take this meal, I want you to do business with the Lord. I want you to think about his extraordinary love for you and express gratitude to him. Amen. On the night he was betrayed, Jesus took bread and broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, This is my body broken for you. Eat in remembrance of him. And then he took the cup, poured out for the, the blood of Christ poured out for the forgiveness of sins. Friends, if you have not shown his said love, if you've been stingy actually, you're forgiven in Christ all over again. And his mercies are new for you every day. The blood of Jesus poured out for you.