

FAMILIES FIT FOR THE KING

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“God shows his grace and his people respond by loving him and each other. This is a family fit for a king.”

There is a marvelous little book in the Old Testament that demonstrates how God desires for his people to relate to each other by grace. It reminds us that while we tend to look at Christmas as the beginning of the story of grace with the coming of the Messiah, actually the story began long before with God preparing a family that would be fit for a king.

The Old Testament book is Ruth. It details the crushing blows that fell to a family in the days of the judges. To survive a severe famine, a man, his two sons and his wife Naomi relocated to a foreign land.

There the boys married – but in time all of the men died leaving behind three widows. At this time Naomi determines to return to her home in Bethlehem. She encourages her daughters-in-law to remain in their own country, remarry and take care of themselves. She kisses them goodbye and dismisses them with the prayer that God will show his kindness – his magnificent covenant mercy to them.

One of the girls returns home, but the second, the one for whom the book of Ruth is named, professes her faith in God and commitment to God’s covenant with these remarkable words to Naomi, “Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God.”

The prayer of Naomi introduces the theme of the book. She prays for God to show his *hesed* to the young widows. This Old Testament word is variously translated as mercy, kindness, loving kindness or a number of other English words that show how our God is a God who keeps faith with those in covenant relationship with him. He is loyal to his people, and he delights to give them grace. As the story unfolds in the book of Ruth, what becomes clear is this truth: God is a God who keeps faith with his children and deals with them by grace, and he expects his children to demonstrate the same qualities in their dealings with each other.

When Naomi and Ruth return to Bethlehem, Naomi is an embittered woman. She openly tells people not to call her Naomi (the word means pleasant) any longer. Instead, “Call me Mara, (bitter), because the Almighty has made my life very bitter” (1:20 NIV).

But God continues to give grace to her through a wealthy relative named Boaz who becomes a benefactor for the two widows. Naomi declares, “The Lord bless him! God has not stopped showing his kindness...!” (2:20 NIV).

Really, it is not surprising that Boaz is a man of grace who has pity on a foreigner. The Bible indicates that Boaz is at least a descendant of Rahab, if not her son or grandson. What a story this family had to tell! Rahab and her family were the sole survivors of Jericho when its walls came crashing down. God spared her from the evil city and gave her a place among his people. The gentle character of Boaz most certainly had been shaped by this story of God's kindness.

In Ruth 3:10, in a private moment between Boaz and Ruth, Boaz praises the young woman for her display of kindness both to her mother-in-law and to himself. In both instances, the Hebrew word translated kindness is *hesed*. God shows his grace and kindness and his children who become like him, do the same. Love blossoms between these kindred spirits and Boaz and Ruth wed. It is one of the great love stories of the ages.

Little wonder then, as the book closes we see a renewed Naomi, joyfully bouncing a baby boy upon her knee. God has been good to her. A son-in-law and a daughter-in-law have given her a home and a grandson – a boy who himself one day would be grandfather to Israel's great King David.

Here is a story of grace displayed among God's people that illustrates the way God's covenant with his people is designed to work. God shows his grace and his people respond by loving him and each other. This is a family fit for a king. Out of this family came not only King David, but years later the one born of a virgin and laid in a manger. This is Christ's family heritage.

In one sense, the birth of the Messiah is the ending climax of a magnificent family story. But in another, his birth is just the beginning of myriad stories of men and women in New Testament times who have the Savior birthed in their hearts and the story of grace alive in their own families.

We at FamiliesAlive pray that your family will always be a place of grace. May your family, too, be fit for the king.