

Excellence:

A GOAL WORTH PURSUING



This I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ.

PHILIPPIANS 1:9-10

ONE DAY WHILE READING THE OLD TESTAMENT book of Ruth, I was touched by the words that Boaz spoke to Ruth: “All my people in the city know that you are a woman of excellence” (Ruth 3:11).

The description surprised me. I had always thought that *excellence* indicated success or high achievement or perfection. But here the word was used to describe a woman who was destitute. Ruth was a widow, a foreigner, and her life was what we would consider hand-to-mouth. She provided for herself and her mother-in-law by working in the fields, gleaning the grain that the harvesters missed.

So what was it about Ruth that made Boaz describe her as a woman of excellence?

If we look at the whole story, we learn that Ruth was the

daughter-in-law of Elimelech and Naomi. When a severe famine struck the land of Israel, Elimelech and his family moved from their hometown of Bethlehem to nearby Moab, where the sons married Moabite women, Orpah and Ruth. After a number of years, Elimelech and both of his sons died. When Naomi heard that the famine was over in Judah, she decided to return to her home. She encouraged her daughters-in-law to stay in Moab with their families, but Ruth loved Naomi and Naomi's God and chose instead to go with her mother-in-law, despite the fact that Naomi was heartbroken and downcast.

After arriving in Bethlehem, Ruth gleaned in the fields of Elimelech's relative Boaz, who greeted her as she worked. He had heard that she had refused to stay in her homeland because she was committed to her mother-in-law, and he was impressed by her loyalty.

He also knew that other people in the town considered her a virtuous woman, a woman of noble character. Ruth's selflessness in "approving the things that are excellent" earned her the reputation of being a woman of excellence, of strength, and of worth.

THE SEARCH FOR EXCELLENCE

- I. Most people define *excellence* as the quality of being very good at something, being the highest and the best, something that is superior, or the quality of being virtuous. What words or thoughts would you add to those definitions of *excellence*?