

THE LOVE STORY

THE STUDY OF RUTH

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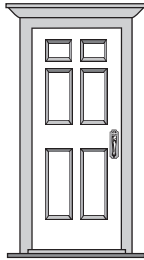


A Romance for Your Heart

CHAPTER I

ROMANCE PRINCIPLE #1

YOU WERE CREATED FOR ROMANCE.



You were created for a love story. God designed your heart to be romanced. He made you to experience the full force of His love and desire for you. He craves relationship, connection, and intimacy with you as you walk together through this life. He wants you to live in the safety, luxury, and abundance of His passion for you and longs for you to know the inner workings of His heart. He wants to write His love story across the pages of your soul.

The Bible is, at its core, a love story. It is the story of a God who loves, pursues, woos, chases, and romances a people created to be loved. The people in the story sometimes respond with love and, for a time, live in the delight of being fully loved by God. Too often, they (and I really have to say *I*) choose to live in lesser stories, give themselves to lesser loves, and are satisfied with ragged remnants rather than real romance.

This is why the book of Ruth is tucked into our Scriptures. It is a tale of losing our way, coming home, and experiencing the romance God intends for us to live. It is a story meant to sweep us off our feet and into His arms. It reminds us of the love we were always destined to find, and the “happily-ever-after” God purposes for our hearts.

ASK

WILL YOU BE MINE?

Ancient church fathers once asked: *“Question: What is the chief end of man? Answer: Man’s chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.”*¹ Do you agree or disagree? What does it mean to you to “enjoy Him forever.”?

God has been whispering this invitation to romance across the centuries. Throughout the Bible, we hear its echoes. Listen....

- *“The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.”* – Zephaniah 3:17
- *“I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you.”* – Jeremiah 31:3
- *“And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know the LORD.”* – Hosea 2:19-20
- *“You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God. You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate, but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her, and your land Married; for the LORD delights in you, and your land shall be married. For as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your sons marry you, and as a bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.”* – Isaiah 62:3-5
- *“When I passed by you again and saw you, behold, you were at the age for love, and I spread the corner of my garment over you and covered your nakedness; I made my vow to you and entered into a covenant with you, declares the LORD God, and you became mine.”* – Ezekiel 16:8

The New Testament continues this romance picture as it reaches a crescendo in the person and love of Jesus.

- *“For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” – Romans 8:38-39.*

Immanuel came into this world to literally walk as *God With Us*. This is the great romance of eternity. Jesus came to tell God’s love story, proclaim His intention to make us His own, and demonstrate His willingness to sacrifice everything to win our hearts. In Christ, we find the ultimate romance.

This love story is meant to be written large across the pages of our lives. It isn’t an impersonal story about someone else “once upon a time”. It is a romance meant for your heart, a story written for your soul, as personal and intimate as your own heartbeat. You are not a minor character or a face in the background. Revelation 19:7-8 reveals that you are the bride Christ longs to love and cherish forever. You are the one He wants to romance.

The story of Ruth is a story of redemption. God frames that redemption for us in the context of a love story, for that is how we must understand our own redemption. It is a love story. It isn’t a business transaction, a legal duty, or an obligation. It is an act of love. Redemption is the work of a heart that loves and longs for our love in return.

God invites us into the love story He has been writing since the beginning of time. Jesus is the hero of the romance that literally ends with us living with Him happily ever after.

Our Romance Principle for this chapter is that *you were created for romance*. Do you believe that you were created for romance with God? Explain.

Make a timeline of your love story with God.

SEEK

Outline the cycle of rebellion and redemption found in Judges 2:11-19. Where do you see God's love at work among His people's hearts? What impact does seduction have on the lives and souls of the people?

In what way is Israel's cycle of rebellion and redemption a mirror for your own heart?

INTERTWINED INVITATIONS

Even as we warm to the invitation to live in God's romance, we must be honest about another reality. While God's love story has been unfolding since the beginning of time, there is another story at play in our world.

The first words of the story of Ruth help us catch its shadow. *"In the days when the judges ruled..."* (Ruth 1:1) Ruth is not an isolated book. It is an inset, one of two pieces that intricately fit together. We can't completely understand or appreciate the story of Ruth outside of the context of the Judges. They fit together to show us two different paths our hearts can take, and two stories our souls can live.

The time of the Judges begins as the Israelites are settling into the Promised Land. The great leaders who brought them out of Egypt and helped them conquer the land of God's blessing have passed on. The days of longing and anticipation are over as they begin the adventure of living in the fullness of God's presence as His very own people.

It only takes until Judges 2 for the fickle hearts of Israel to be revealed. They break the covenant that binds them to the heart of God, and begin to flirt with the idols of the land. They give up on romance in order to play a dangerous game with their own desire.

Thus begins a cycle that ensnares the heart of Israel, and is repeated over and over again in the book of Judges. The people let their hearts be enticed by the gods of the land, and walk away from the love story of the Lord. God, however, never gives up pursuing those He loves. He even

sends raiders and enemies into the land in order to break their fascination with the foreign gods that have captured their hearts. Finally, the people remember the mercy of the Lord, and cry out to Him for redemption and rescue. God raises up a judge who leads the people out of danger and back into the arms of their Redeemer. Until they are seduced again...

Ruth is the story of a romance. The word *romance* means "to court, or woo, to treat with love and chivalrousness."² This is God's intention toward you. He longs to romance you. He wants to love you, woo you, and treat you with gentleness and chivalry. God's great desire is to pursue your heart and make you His own.

Judges is the story of seduction. False gods lure the eyes and hearts of Israel away from the love story in which God intends for them to live. Seduction is a counterfeit form of romance. It is the story of our world. The word *seduction* means "to lead astray, to corrupt, to entice."³

Our hearts are always going to have a choice to make – to be romanced by God or seduced by the world.

ANATOMY OF SEDUCTION

In the beginning, seduction seems so harmless. A pinch of novelty, a dash of excitement, a little giving in to a simple desire. Seduction doesn't ask us to take a big step off a giant cliff. It involves a thousand small compromises, justifications, excuses, and rationalizations that eventually lead us to destruction.

Describe one way God has sought to romance you today.

KNOCK

Read Proverbs 7:1-27.
Name three ways in which
seduction entices you to
live outside of God's love
story for your heart.

Proverbs 7 lays out the anatomy of seduction. It takes the world's ways apart piece by piece so that we can see the traps that often grab us, the tricks that it uses against us, and the consequences of letting seduction capture our attention and imagination.

The conversation between a father and son begins with a plea to take up wisdom and guard our hearts from the enticing lures of seduction. In his words, we hear a basic truth. We will all face moments where seduction will pull hard at our hearts. It isn't a matter of "if," but "when." Our world is filled with it. It sells seduction on every corner. It trumpets seduction as the place to fill every desire. Knowing what seduction looks like and how it moves helps us protect our hearts from its enchantments.

Looking out the window, the father points out a young man on his way to trouble. The young man, unguarded by wisdom, walks down a dangerous road at a perilous time. There he comes face to face with the power of seduction in the form of an adulteress. Understand that seduction takes on different faces at different times in our lives, depending on what will most appeal to our base natures. As you read these wisdom words, stop and think carefully about what tempts you, what draws your attention, what coaxes you to turn your eyes away from God, even for a second. Name this adulteress Temptation, and we can see that the tools the adulteress uses are the same tools all temptation uses to seduce our hearts away from the romance for which we were created.

Seduction is attractive. It looks good, is appealing, fires the imagination, and uses innuendo to create a false picture of reality. Just like today, this ancient seductress calls attention to herself, advertising unholy passion as an adventure into the alluring unknown. Seduction justifies and rationalizes its invitation. Seduction insinuates that sin isn't really sin. Something so readily within reach can't be wrong. Everybody's doing it, and besides, you deserve the rush. It comes at our hearts with eager boldness, using flattery to wrap us in a web of our own desire. Seduction, in whatever form, speaks to our senses. It encourages us to indulge, splurge, and experience the heady sensation of walking in forbidden ways.

After spinning a suggestive picture, seduction makes its invitation. Cross the line. No one will ever know. Nobody will get hurt. Enjoy yourself. Let yourself indulge, just this once.

It isn't until the young man crosses the street and enters adulteress' house that the true nature of seduction is revealed. *"All at once he follows her,...he does not know that it will cost him his life"* (Proverbs 7:22a, 23b).

Proverbs 4:20-27 provides a powerful antidote for seduction. What specific steps does the wisdom writer give us for guarding our hearts against the enticing lure of seduction?

Would you describe yourself as living in God's love story or in a tale of seduction? Where do you want to live?

ROMANCE AND SEDUCTION

You were created for romance. God's love is the template on which the story of your heart is meant to be written, read, and lived. He has been pursuing you, wooing you, and romancing you since before the foundation of the earth. True love and "happily ever after" are yours for the asking.

Seduction is Satan's answer to God's romance. Seduction's masquerade encourages us to set up our own desire as the standard by which to live. Our wants become the ruler by which everything is measured. Our satisfaction is the mark of success, and our pleasure highlights the path to what is true and right.

This is what characterized the time of the Judges. The most revealing statement about this troubled era is found at the end of the book of Judges. *"In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes"* (Judges 21:25).

Seduction captured Israel's heart and, over and over again, lured her away from the romance God always intended for His people. It is within this tension between romance and seduction that we find the story of Ruth. It is within the story of Ruth that we find the key to living within the love story for which we were created.

1 Tozer, p32.
2 "romance."
3 "seduce."