

## Ruth 3 – The Threshing Floor

Alright. So, the first week of our study, we hit rock bottom with Naomi and her two daughters. In her grief, Naomi was pushing everyone away, but RUTH CLUNG TO HER.

Naomi and Ruth make the journey back from Moab to Bethlehem, but Naomi's emotional state has improved none. When people approach her, excited that Naomi was back after being gone so long, they aren't met with the bubbly, vivacious woman who left some ten years ago. Instead, they're met with a woman haggard by sorrow

When they call her by the name that means "pleasant," she snaps, "Don't call me that. Call me bitter because that's how the Lord's dealt with me." She said, "I left for Moab whole, and I came back with NOTHING," and Ruth was standing right beside her. She had lost hope.

Again, we're not judging Naomi, she had been through it, and her hardships had caused her to lose perspective.

Ruth kept going, though, "just happening" to venture onto the field belonging to Boaz to glean. Well, we know God was bringing the pieces together, and Naomi catches a glimpse of God at work when Ruth brings back her bounty from the fields.

Chapter two ends saying that Ruth finished out the harvest season, and remained at home with Naomi after that.

Now, if you've found your place in Ruth 3, we'll pick up in verse 1...

### **Ruth 3:1-2**

**1 Then Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, My daughter, should I not seek rest for you, that it may be well with you? 2 Is not Boaz our relative, with whose young women you were? See, he is winnowing barley tonight at the threshing floor.**

Naomi's hope had been restored, and Ruth 2:19-20 shows us the moment it happened...

### **Ruth 2:19-20**

**19 And her mother-in-law said to her, Where did you glean today? And where have you worked? Blessed be the man who took notice of you. So she told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked and said, The man's name with whom I worked today is Boaz. 20 And Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, May he be blessed by the Lord, whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead! Naomi also said to her, The man is a close relative of ours, one of our redeemers.**

After all the loss, all the heartache, and all the bitterness, this news from Ruth snaps Naomi out of it, and for the first time in the story, she truly sees God at work. Previously Naomi said the Lord was against her, now she saw the truth, that His **"kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead!"**

As a result of this, Naomi steps into the work the Lord is already doing by giving Ruth the instructions that are coming.

THINK OF THE TIMING OF NAOMI'S INITIATIVE! The barley and the wheat harvest are past. Think of how chapter two ended...

### **Ruth 2:23**

**So she kept close to the young women of Boaz, gleaning until the end of the barley and wheat harvests. And she lived with her mother-in-law.**

In the NET Bible it reads...

**"...After that she STAYED HOME with her mother-in-law" (NET).**

So here's your timeline...

1. Ruth had met Boaz, the kinsman redeemer (God's doing something).
2. Then the wheat (and barley) harvest ended.
3. There was nothing to glean, so Ruth stayed home with Naomi.
4. Ruth (and Naomi) are now in need of stable provision, so Naomi pushes for finding security.

Between the nearing reality of running out of food and having met and receiving favor from Boaz, if there was a time to take steps for securing provision, it was NOW!

By catching a glimpse of God at work, Naomi was emboldened to take calculated action.

Do you see what I mean? Have you experienced something like this? There's a need for provision or wisdom, a potential solution enters your line of sight, and it makes you ask, "God, is that You?"

If we're looking for Him, we'll see Him. If we're listening for Him, we'll hear Him. If our focus is elsewhere, we'll miss Him.

It's the reason some people are perceived as "spiritual giants," when the fact is, they've been given no more spiritual insight than anyone else; they just paid God more attention.

Naomi started out blinded by grief to God's activity, but as soon as the blinders were taken off, she saw Him, and everything that had happened suddenly made sense.

IT WAS TIME FOR ACTION, but what if Naomi had held back in doubt?

God doesn't make us take action, does He? He doesn't force us. If we're too absorbed in other things to notice His activity or too afraid to step into it with Him, He will let us miss it. We've been given the free will to do that.

QUESTION: Are you in such a situation now? Has God seemingly brought the solution to your problem into view?

If you're not in such a situation at the moment, you will be. Are you still walking close enough to the Lord NOW so as to be ready to respond to Him THEN?

Naomi could've missed God's activity, but she didn't. She told Ruth, "Boaz is winnowing barley TONIGHT..."

NOW is the time. Go to him!

So, Naomi instructed Ruth, saying...

### **Ruth 3:3**

**Wash therefore and anoint yourself, and put on your cloak and go down to the threshing floor, but do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking.**

Naomi told Ruth to bathe, put on some smell-good and a pretty dress and go to Boaz. One note I read said that Ruth was most likely still carrying out the ANCIENT MOURNING CUSTOMS which would've included NO BATHING, and wearing MOURNER'S GARMENTS.

Dramatically ending that ritual sent the message that she was ready and available for remarriage.

Naomi also told Ruth, "**do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking.**"

"Don't let him see you before he goes to sleep." As one commentator suggested, I believe that Ruth was fashioning herself as a bride. Allowing herself to be seen by Boaz too early would have given away her intentions.

No, Ruth would appear before Boaz just as she planned WHEN she planned...

Naomi continues...

### **Ruth 3:4-5**

**4 But when he lies down, observe the place where he lies. Then go and uncover his feet and lie down, and he will tell you what to do. 5 And she replied, All that you say I will do.**

THIS IS WHY Naomi pushed Ruth to go out and meet Boaz on the night he was winnowing barley--he would be sleeping out under the stars! This wouldn't have worked any other night because Boaz would have been sleeping in his home. I mean, that WOULD have been strange to roll over in bed at home and find a woman in your bed who wasn't there when you went to sleep!

TONIGHT he would be sleeping somewhere where Ruth would have INNOCENT access to him.

Why would he be sleeping beside the grain pile? He would be guarding it! He was winnowing into the night, so there wouldn't have been a chance to cart away the grain; that would happen the next morning.

However, raiders could swoop down on the small town and take the fruit of Boaz's labor. That was a frequent occurrence in the days of the judges (the setting of our story), and 1 Samuel 24 even records it still happening during the reign of King David.

So, Boaz would be camping out tonight, and Naomi tells Ruth to uncover his...uncover his *feet*?

Now, it's been said by several commentators that the description of Ruth's uncovering of Boaz's feet (or legs) was actually a euphemism for something sexual. I wholeheartedly disagree. Call me a prude, but I don't believe Ruth was propositioning Boaz, and I'll show you why in a moment.

Instead of trying to sensationalize this scene, let's simply reason through it...

If you're sleeping outside and someone pulls your cover off of you, at some point in the night, you're going to get cold!

Naomi was making it so that Ruth and Boaz would have a ONE-ON-ONE ENCOUNTER IN PUBLIC that would be witnessed by no one. THIS WAS PERFECT! She wouldn't walk up to him, shake him until he woke up, and scare him to death. Nor would she make noise and risk waking everyone else up too. Yeah! There were others!

Naomi tells Ruth, "**when he lies down, observe the place where he lies.**"

She was telling Ruth, "Don't go pulling the covers off the wrong guy!" Haha!

Wow. This was some date Naomi was setting up, huh?! Haha! Boaz didn't even know about it! Ruth was going to be yanking the covers off this poor guy, then she'd have to sleep outside until he got cold and noticed her, but you know what?

The scriptures don't indicate that Ruth questioned Naomi in any of this. She wasn't like, "That's awfully forward!" She didn't say, "Are you sure that won't just make him mad? I thought the goal was to get him to like me."

No, Ruth OBEYS. "**All that you say I will do.**"

### **Ruth 3:6-11**

**6 So she went down to the threshing floor and did just as her mother-in-law had commanded her. 7 And when Boaz had eaten and drunk, and his heart was merry, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain. Then she came softly and uncovered his feet and lay down.** (everything was going according to plan!) **8 At midnight the man was startled and turned over, and behold, a woman lay at his feet! 9 He said, Who are you?**

I love that! Again, we know what's going on, but we're being transported by the storyteller and experiencing this event through the eyes of those in the story.

WE know the plan, but as far as Boaz is concerned, he's just taking a well-earned rest after a hard day's work, he's woken up in the night, turns over, and WHOA! There's a girl!

You know, like the seven dwarves when they find Snow White snoring in bed, "It's a girl!"

This is the super exciting, romantic part. You can imagine the little girls of the family huddled up together as they listen to the story. One's shaking the shoulder of the other, saying, "I bet it's Ruth! I bet it is!"

**V9.**

**And she answered, I am Ruth, your servant.** ("I knew it! I told you it was Ruth!" And then she says) **Spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer.**

**"Spread your wings over your servant..."**

Now, at first reading, you may not get "marriage proposal" from that phrase. It could be rather vague to you, but it's use elsewhere in scripture, so to interpret it accurately, we'll let those other passages of God's Word do the interpreting. Ezekiel is the passage I'm thinking of. The Lord says,

**Ezekiel 16:8**

**When I passed by you again** (talking about Israel) **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.**

The spreading of the Lord's garment (or wings) to cover Israel's nakedness is a precursor to a covenant that the Lord enters into with the Nation, and that covenant is a marriage covenant. He literally says at the end of that passage, **"and you became mine."**

Just as the Church is betrothed to the Son, Israel is betrothed to the Father. As it relates to this beautiful scene between Ruth and Boaz, can I say it even plainer? When Boaz woke up and found Ruth, he was attempting to cover himself back up. She essentially said, "Hey, while you're covering yourself back up, why don't you cover me up too?" which is to say, "Take care of me. MARRY ME."

Boaz's response supports this interpretation...

**Ruth 3:10-11**

**10 And he said, May you be blessed by the Lord, my daughter. You have made this last kindness greater than the first in that you have not gone after young men, whether poor or rich.**

He was saying, "You could have had any husband, but you chose me," which further supports what Dale said last week about Ruth being beautiful. However, what wasn't the only attractive thing about her. Boaz says...

**11 And now, my daughter, do not fear. I will do for you all that you ask, for all my fellow townsmen know that you are a worthy woman.**

Now when Boaz said that Ruth's **"...last kindness greater than the first..."** he was talking about the fact that she chose to marry HIM.

If Ruth had married anyone else, it would have been the same as letting Naomi go home from Moab alone.

Ruth would have joined someone else's family, and Naomi would have been left to sell the family property and survive as long as she could on the proceeds. Naomi would have died a beggar.

By marrying Boaz, the property would remain in the family with Naomi on it, and this new family would take care of her in her last days.

EVERYTHING RUTH DID WAS ALL FOR NAOMI!!! And there was tremendous reward for Ruth and Boaz for being obedient to the Lord's will too.

Now this next part is what I alluded to earlier when I said that I don't believe there was anything sexual about this nighttime encounter between Ruth and Boaz...

Boaz tells Ruth that she has...A REPUTATION, and it isn't a reputation for being "that girl." No, he says that everyone knows she's a "worthy woman" or a "woman of valor."

Many of us have heard that phrase recently, haven't we? We heard it at the beginning of an episode of The Chosen. ***"Woman of valor, who can find?"***

I tear up at the scene (as I do with most of the scenes in The Chosen) because it's so through-and-through GOOD. Know what I mean?

It's a picture of how God always intended for humanity to live--the whole and wholesome family, the faithful and diligent wife and mother, the children who respect and obey her, and the husband who rejoices in and praises her.

Boaz's description of Ruth as a "worthy woman" is, in fact, the same Hebrew phrase used by Solomon in Proverbs 31...

#### **Proverbs 31:10**

**An excellent wife who can find?**

**She is far more precious than jewels.**

In fact, in the Hebrew Bible, Ruth comes right after Proverbs, the 31<sup>st</sup> chapter immediately preceding her story like a lovely forward written by her great-great-grandson.

All that to say, regardless of who Solomon was thinking about when he wrote the 31<sup>st</sup> Proverb, the storyteller behind the book of Ruth says that she was of the same caliber. She was a "woman of valor."

Was what she did in pulling back Boaz's covering *SUGGESTIVE*? Certainly! She told him, "Hey, as you're covering yourself back up, why don't you cover me up too?" She was asking him to make her his wife! Along with that relationship comes a sexual component.

But was there a sexual encounter? Absolutely not. Such an act between an unmarried couple would have been immoral, and, therefore, the scriptures would have been wrong to call Ruth a "woman of valor."

Boaz and Ruth's integrity and purity are a breath of fresh air, but there's a hitch! Boaz admits in verse...

### **Ruth 1:12-13**

**12 And now it is true that I am a redeemer. Yet there is a redeemer nearer than I. 13 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.**

"It's true, I *am* a close relative, but I'm not the closest!"

Boaz is so upright that, even though he would be happy to take Ruth as his wife and provide for her and Naomi (AND ALL OF THAT WOULD BE GOOD!), he admits that there's someone else who has greater right to do so than himself. He's gotta do things the right way.

Can you feel the suspense! This is the part of the drama (I envision the entire story as a play) where the beloved couple SEEMS to come together, she tenderly says, "Take care of me. Make me your wife." He says, "Wow! You're amazing. Yes, I will marry you," and the whole audience goes, "AWW!"

Then comes the PLOT TWIST! "I'm not the closest relative to you." The audience GASPS!

Their hearts BREAK! They've watched this beautiful story of a man and a woman running after God. They've honored Him in the way they've conducted themselves. Now's the time when their integrity and faithfulness is supposed to be rewarded, BUT IT ISN'T!

THEY DESERVE A BREAK, but now it looks as if they still won't get it!

Will there be a happy ending? Boaz is confident, but he can't say for sure; Ruth trusts him and the Lord. He tells her...

**"Lie down until the morning."**

That's all. Just "lie down." There's NO SEX SCENE. You can easily tell that Hollywood didn't write this story, right? I mean, on TV shows and movies today, when a man and a woman shut a door behind themselves, all their clothes magically fall off their bodies. Writers and directors add a few romantic lines and a musical score that helps the audience feel that what's transpiring on screen is right, WHEN IT ISN'T!

Here, none of that happens between Ruth and Boaz, and because of our hyper-sexualized, social conditioning, this is almost MORE AWKWARD! She just slept down at his feet until morning? Yep. That's all!

You see, HE WAS ALREADY PROTECTING HER! By not sending her away, he was making sure she wasn't on her own at night when humanity seeks to carry out its evil desires.

### **Ruth 3:14-15**

**14 So she lay at his feet until the morning, but arose before one could recognize another. And he said, Let it not be known that the woman came to the threshing floor. 15 And he said, Bring the garment you are wearing and hold it out. So she held it, and he measured out six measures of barley and put it on her. Then she went into the city.**

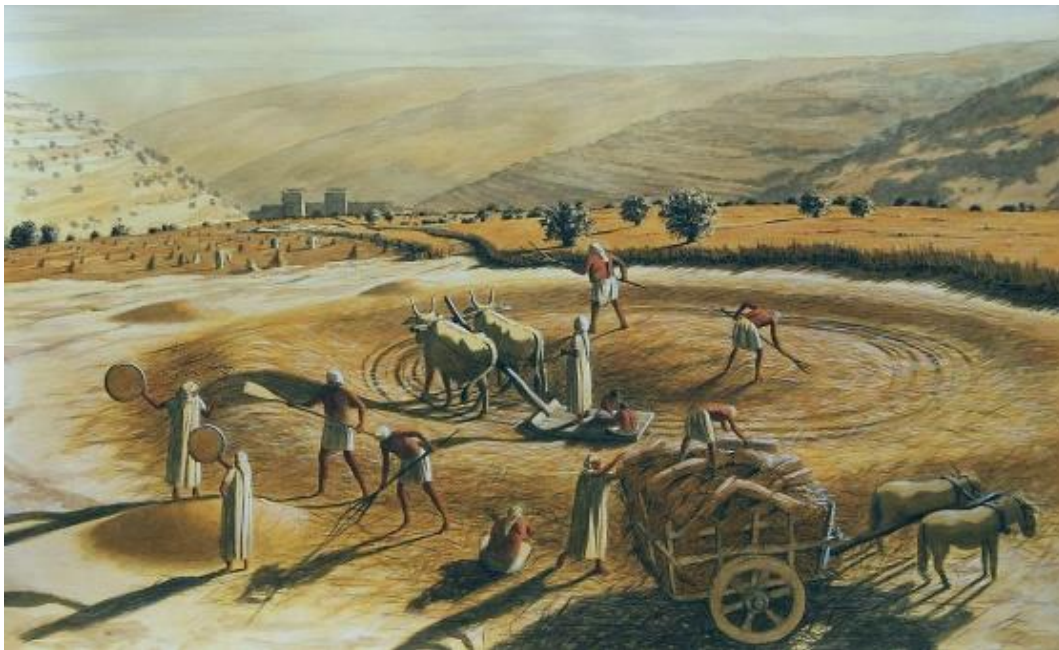
After keeping her safe through the night, Boaz sought to preserve her honor and integrity by sending her away at first light. He filled her cloak up with six measures (probably six seahs, which amount to two ephahs, or 60 pounds) of barley. Then he sent her on her way so that it would look like she “got there when the store opened” and was already on her way home.

**"Let it not be known that the woman came to the threshing floor."**

Such a major event has taken place at this threshing floor. It feels like we've been at the threshing floor for a while, doesn't it? I mean, the first quarter of the book covers ten years in Moab. The second quarter of the book spans two months in the fields. Now the third quarter has been spent recounting the events of ONE NIGHT at the threshing floor.

You know, throughout scripture, the threshing floor has always been a symbol for judgment.

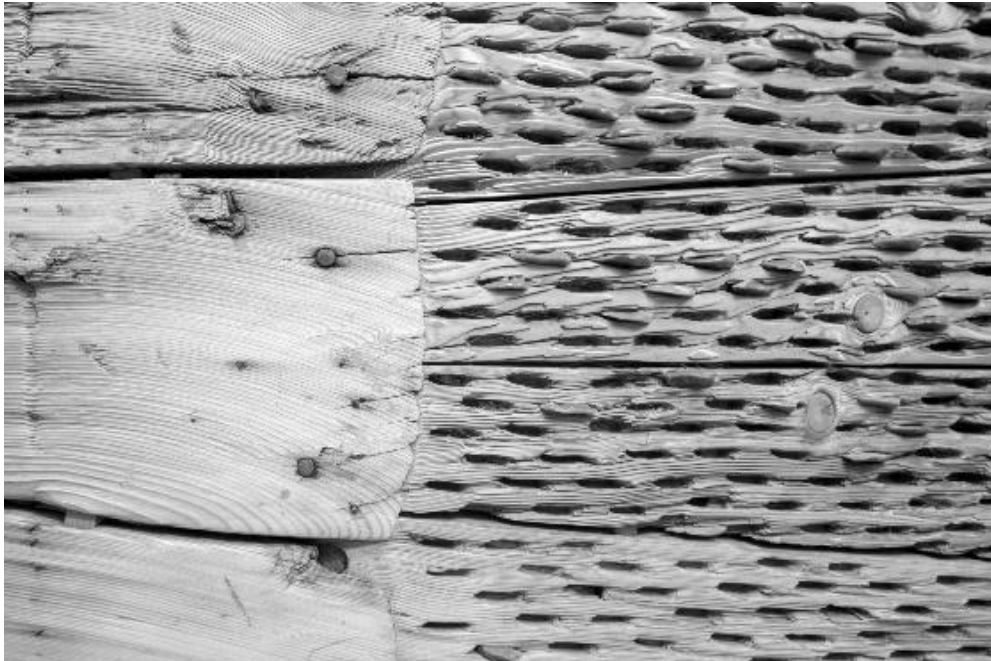
TO THRESHING MEANS TO SEPARATE.



In THIS PAINTING, the threshing of a large harvest is depicted. A "threshing sled" would be pulled by an ox or two.

THIS is a threshing sled.





The rocks inserted into the bottom would pulverize the wheat or barley underneath.



Once sufficiently pulverized, the remaining substance would be thrown into the air with a winnowing fork. The substantial part, the grain, would fall back to the ground while the reed and the chaff would blow away, and ultimately gathered and used for animal fodder or simply burned.

This is where the imagery of judgment comes into play. When God threshes, He SEPARATES the good from the wicked. Just as the grain falls back to the ground and is kept, and the reed and chaff are burned or fed to animals, God keeps the good, and He destroys the wicked.

We see this imagery used throughout scripture...

**Malachi 3:18-4:1**

**3:18 Then once more you shall see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve him.**

**4:1 For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the Lord of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch.**

Then, after 400 years of silence following the prophetic ministry of Malachi, John the Baptist seemingly picks up where he left off, speaking of the Messiah...

**Matthew 3:12**

**His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.**

I see the imagery of THRESHING and SEPARATION a couple of ways here on the threshing floor tonight...

God allows trials to touch our lives to test us and refine us. Like the pulverizing stones under the sledge, hardships test us. After a major trial, many are like the reed and the chaff; the trial literally "blows them

away." Others, who have spiritual substance to them, are like the grain that falls back to the ground, going nowhere. They remain.

Death and loss had pulverized Ruth and Naomi. The whirlwind was blowing all around them, but when they were tossed by God's winnowing fork, they weren't blown away like the chaff. No, they were the grain that fell back to the ground. In spite of the tragedy they'd lived through, they made it because they had trusted in the Lord.

The next thing I see is the romantic and PURE pairing up of a godly man and a godly woman. As I've already stated, this wasn't a scene out of Hollywood or some romance novel. The storyteller makes it clear that Boaz was a hard worker living a godly life, and that Ruth was a "woman of valor," running after the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob just as hard. However, upon meeting at the threshing floor, a lot of things could've transpired that were not good.

DIDN'T HAPPEN, THOUGH.

Ruth uncovered Boaz's legs (that's all). He got cold, shivered, woke up, and saw Ruth. She proposed, and he committed to do right according to the Law and by this family, covered Ruth up, told her to sleep there for the night (to keep her safe), and sent her on her way (with provision) in order to preserve her testimony.

Ruth and Boaz were tossed up by the Lord's winnowing fork, and they too were not blown away like the chaff. Like the substantial grain that falls back to the ground, they remained. They "passed the test."

### **Ruth 3:16-18**

**16 And when she came to her mother-in-law, she said, How did you fare, my daughter? Then she told her all that the man had done for her, 17 saying, 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. 18 She replied, Wait, my daughter, until you learn how the matter turns out, for the man will not rest but will settle the matter today.**

Naomi asks for a report, and they both must now wait...and trust. The Lord had taken care of them and guided them this far. He had started this whole encounter! Now they had to WAIT and trust that He would bring it to fruition.

Have you ever been in such a situation? YOU REALLY NEEDED SOMETHING TO HAPPEN, but you had done all you could do. The rest was out of your hands. Did you fret and seek to maneuver circumstances into your favor? Or did you rest in the Lord, knowing that, no matter what happened, He was in control, and that His way is the best way?

How could these women just wait?!

They could wait and REST in the Lord because they had **DISCERNED HIS PAST ACTIVITY**. They could tell this was His will because of how everything had turned out thus far.

Do you recognize what the Lord is doing in your life right now? I dare say, in the world of distractions and drama, we could all learn to hear his voice and see His activity more.

Our Christian lives perfectly lived could be described as a cycle of OBEY and WAIT, and that's easier to do the more we understand the plan. No, we may not get the full plan. Oftentimes the Lord doesn't reveal it all. However, we can still confidently partner with Him in its execution because we know He's good, and we've watched how He's worked in the past.

We take a step in obedience to the Lord (STEP), and then we wait on Him to move. Then we take another step (STEP) when He tells us to. Then we wait on Him to move on His end.

Waiting's hard, though, isn't it? We're afraid to wait for fear of missing an opportunity. When we get anxious like that, though, it's like we're hanging on God's shoulder saying, "God, You're going to miss it!" How silly is it to behave that way regarding Someone who is in complete control as He literally sits outside of time?

The One who sits outside of time doesn't miss a thing! So we can OBEY and WAIT.

We can cultivate a closer relationship with the Lord through prayer, Bible study, and submission to His Spirit so that we'll be able to discern His activity and be ready to join Him in it when He calls us to do so.

And in the same way, we'll be able to trust Him enough to sit still and wait in the interim.