

***The Story Series: Week 9***  
***Ruth            The Faith of An Outsider***  
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Someone once came up with a wonderful definition of coincidence. They said a coincidence is when God decides to act anonymously. Don't you love that? A coincidence is when God decides to act anonymously. The more we explore *The Story* of the Bible – the more we learn about God – the more we realize that there is no such thing as a coincidence. God is alive and well and at work in our lives, but sometimes we just don't recognize it as the hand of God at work, so we just dismiss it as happen stance, a coincidence.

In all of the Old Testament stories that we have explored so far, it was quite obvious that God is and always has been actively and personally involved in the daily affairs of his people. St. Paul noticed this as well, and he wrote in the 8<sup>th</sup> chapter of Romans: "And we know that God *causes everything to work together* for the good of those who love God, who are called according to his purpose for them." Again, in Ephesians 1, St. Paul says, "God makes everything work out according to his plan." St. Paul didn't believe in coincidence. He believed that the hand of God was at work all over the place, ensuring that God's Grand Vision would be realized.

Today we will see this truth being played out clearly and powerfully in an ordinary woman named Ruth. Ruth's story can be found in the Old Testament book that bears her name. A terrible famine has developed in the land of Canaan, and so a couple by the name of Elimelech and Naomi move their family to Moab (on the other side of the Dead Sea) in hopes of finding food. Tragically, soon after the move, the husband and the two sons die, leaving three women all alone.

If you know anything about biblical culture, you know that three women with no man to support them is a death sentence. Women were not allowed to work so they were at the mercy of a father or husband to provide for them. Naomi realizes this and so she decides to return home and tells her two daughters-in-law that they should return to their birth families so that they can be provided for.

One of the young women named Ruth refused to do that. She insists that she be allowed to return to Canaan with her mother-in-law Naomi. She responds with this beautiful sentiment: "Wherever you go, I will go; where you live, I will live. Your people will be my people; and your God will be my God." You can bet we will come back to that statement, but for now let's finish the story.

When Naomi and Ruth arrive back in Canaan, they seek out a relative named Boaz for protection and help. The Jewish law actually has a provision called the "kinsman redeemer." The law states that when a situation like this occurred in families, someone in the family line was obligated to take widows in and care for them.

If you read the story of Ruth this past week, you know that a beautiful love story develops between Boaz and Ruth. They end up getting married, and from their family tree comes the royal line of King David, which ultimately brings forth the royal line of Jesus Christ. If there is a story in the Bible that ends “and they lived happily ever after,” this is it!

From the life story of Ruth, we learn that coincidences are really “God incidences”. God is in charge; God is at work in our everyday lives. God is in the details, one might say. As we read through the story of Ruth, there are lots of “As it turned out...” or “It just so happened...”

In the first chapter of Ruth we read that after Naomi and Ruth both lost their husbands and decided to go back to Canaan, it just so happened that, quote: “Naomi and Ruth arrived in Canaan at the beginning of harvest time.” In the next chapter: “As it just so happens, Ruth found herself working in a field that belonged to Boaz, a relative of Naomi.” Hmm, what a coincidence!

Then get this: “Boaz just so happens to hear about Ruth’s circumstances...” And in the end, “As it turned out, Ruth gives birth to a son, who just so happens to be lineage of King David, who just so happens to be in the lineage of Jesus Christ.” As this story plays out, we see God’s hand at work all over the place.

So what great lesson can we learn from all of these “God incidences” in the story of Ruth? What do we need to know so that we might recognize some of the God incidences happening in our lives?

Let it be known that the same God who was working in Ruth’s life is still alive and well today and at work in our lives. God is still involved in our lives, making things “just so happen” in order that God’s plan and purposes for our lives will take place. It’s not that God orchestrates every detail and moment of our lives, but the Bible is clear that God is involved in the details of our lives, working in the daily circumstances of our life, turning them into God incidences.

When I think about my own life (the church I grew up in, where I went to school, the congregations I have served), at the time they all just seemed like all one coincidence after another. But as I look back, I now realize that it was all one big “God incidence” that God was orchestrating.

How important it is for us to be on the lookout for God. God is always at work, making known his purpose for our life. But often times, God doesn’t reveal his whole plan up front. God works one moment, one encounter, one coincidence at a time. And as we live out our lives, all of those moments begin to start fitting together, like pieces of a puzzle that create the full picture of what God has in mind for our lives.

If we speed through life without ever taking the time to slow down and contemplate what God might be doing around us, and through us, and in us, life might just seem like one random event after another. If we never stop and ask the question, "What is God up to?" we might totally miss God's hand at work in our life.

We need to look for God's fingerprints. If you've ever seen shows like CSI on television, the crime investigation series, what's the first thing the investigators do when they get to the crime scene? You got it, they search for fingerprints. They look for evidence as to who has been there. What if we approached our lives with a CSI mentality? That throughout each day, we would walk into the rooms of our lives and intentionally search for God's fingerprints, to see if we can find clues of God's presence and purposes?

Has God been here? Can I perceive God's hand at work in any of this? We might be surprised how often we find one of God's fingerprints if we just take the time to look.

Ruth had a wonderful gift of discovering God's fingerprints in her life. Even when unthinkable tragedy struck her family – the death of her husband – in faith she was able to ask the question, "What is God's plan? What is God up to?" When most of us would have given up on God, or questioned God's goodness, Ruth instead chose faith. She diligently searched for God's fingerprints, and when she found them, she knew that God was still in charge and that God had a plan for her life. And so, in one of the most beautiful statements of faith in the whole Bible, Ruth declares to Naomi: "Wherever you go, I will go; wherever you live, I will live. Your people will be my people and your God my God." Ruth chose faith and trust over her own doubts and fears.

We need to learn to recognize and marvel at the way God works. Who in their right mind would have ever guessed that God would choose to use a Moabite widow – a complete outsider with no future – to continue on the lineage that would ultimately lead us to birth of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world? If God dreams up plans like that, can we even begin to imagine what God incidences God has planned for our lives?

If God can use Ruth – Ruth of all people – can we even begin to imagine how God will use US to fulfill his divine plan? Who knows what things God is setting into place right now in our lives so that our faith in Jesus Christ would grow stronger and that we might lead others to the Savior's love?

When we are willing, like Ruth, to give our lives fully to the Lord, God will use us in ways that will simply amaze us. Can we, will we, like Ruth totally give ourselves over to God by saying, "Wherever you need me to go, I will go. Your concerns will be concerns. Your way will be my way. Hear I am, Lord. Allow me, by the way I live my life, to leave your divine fingerprints upon people's lives so that they will know of your goodness and love."

So instead of dismissing something as just a "coincidence" in your life, be mindful of how God is at work in your life through God incidences. It may happen in aisle 4 of the grocery store when you run into someone you haven't seen in years and yet for some reason you've been thinking about them lately. Coincidence or is God up to something? Maybe you've

been privately wrestling with something in your life, and then out of the blue someone you know shares their struggle with the exact same thing. What might God be doing through your friend?

God wants to be a part of our lives and desires to richly bless us. It's truly amazing what God does in Ruth's life when she opens herself up to God's leading. Get this: The book of Ruth begins with a famine, but it ends with an abundant harvest. It begins with the funeral of Naomi's husband, but ends with the wedding celebration of Boaz and Ruth. Because Ruth was mindful of God at work in her life, she was able to witness God transform scarcity and tragedy into abundance and celebration. That's just what happens when God gets involved in our lives.

God is working through all of the events of our lives, whether they be joyful or tragic, plentiful or in short supply. God is there, setting into motion his plan to use us for his purposes, and to bless us beyond our wildest imagination.

God invites us to be part of his *Story*. Let's be bold and say to God, "Just like you used Ruth, use me." Let's be mindful of all the God-incidences in our lives. Let's be on the lookout for God's fingerprints so that we can powerfully tell others about how God is alive and well and at work in our daily lives.

Let it be so. Amen.