



GO WITH GOD

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Eulogy virtues

How the celebration of a life is changing mine

I knew Ruth was an amazing cook. She was a fixture at Barnabas, the family camp on Keats Island we visit every summer – a steady, friendly presence who managed to feed an endless throng of campers wholesome, delectable meals without seeming to break a sweat. In recent years I noticed her roles were multiplying – among them developing an internship program and becoming the associate director of the camp. She seemed to be flourishing.

In fact when we saw Ruth a few months ago, she looked radiant. There was a glint in her eyes and a lightness to her steps that made us suspect she was holding a secret as delicious as her meals. Just as we were leaving the camp, she spilled the beans. She had fallen in love with a widower named Carson. Weeks later we heard Carson and Ruth, with the blessing of their children, were to be married in June.

Then in the middle of May Ruth suddenly became ill. A cancer that had been miraculously healed eight years earlier had returned. In eight days she was gone.

It wouldn't be right for me to attempt to tell the story of Ruth's precious life here. That story belongs to her kids, her fiancé, her siblings, coworkers and closest friends. Besides, even if the story were mine to tell, I didn't know Ruth well enough to be able to tell it properly.

But what I can tell you is this. I suspect attending the service that celebrated Ruth's life has genuinely changed mine.

At Ruth's memorial, as person after person shared their stories – a lot of them young adults – it be-



came clear she had enriched and altered the course of innumerable lives. Under Ruth's unassuming watch her kitchen had been, for many, a haven, a hospital, a chapel, a therapist's couch, a training ground and a dance party. Her influence had gone deep and remarkably wide. Her love for Jesus had been contagious.

I hadn't known any of that about Ruth. I had spent at least a week in her orbit every year for nearly a decade, and I had missed what was right in front of my eyes.

I have a good excuse. My husband and I attend that camp as the adult

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speakers. The job is delightful, but the teaching schedule demanding. Often we are still adjusting parts of our new curriculum onsite, and it's all we can do to keep up. I guess that's why I never got to know Ruth as much as I now desperately wish I would have.

And that's why it wasn't until her memorial service she was able to mentor me the way she had so many others. Ruth's life confronts me with the reality that, while my work truly matters, camp is not the only place where my workload tends to eclipse my relationships. Her legacy asks me to assess my priorities. Her witness reminds me that practising the presence of other people (much the way Jesus did) is the most important work God has given any of us to do.

In his book *The Road to Character*, David Brooks observes there are two sets of assets we can cultivate – resumé virtues and eulogy virtues. "The resumé virtues are the skills you bring to the marketplace," he explains. "The eulogy virtues are the ones that are talked about at your funeral – whether you were kind, brave, honest or faithful. Were you capable of deep love?"

So, what to do? I've decided to sit down and write an aspirational eulogy – a list of the sorts of things I hope people will say about me when I'm gone. On that list, I'm going to include the two words I heard repeated most often in descriptions of Ruth – "present" and "available."

Then I'm going to ask the Holy Spirit and the people closest to me to help me order my life in such a way that I begin to move more fully toward those eulogy virtues.

More present. More available. More like Ruth. More like Jesus. /FT



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