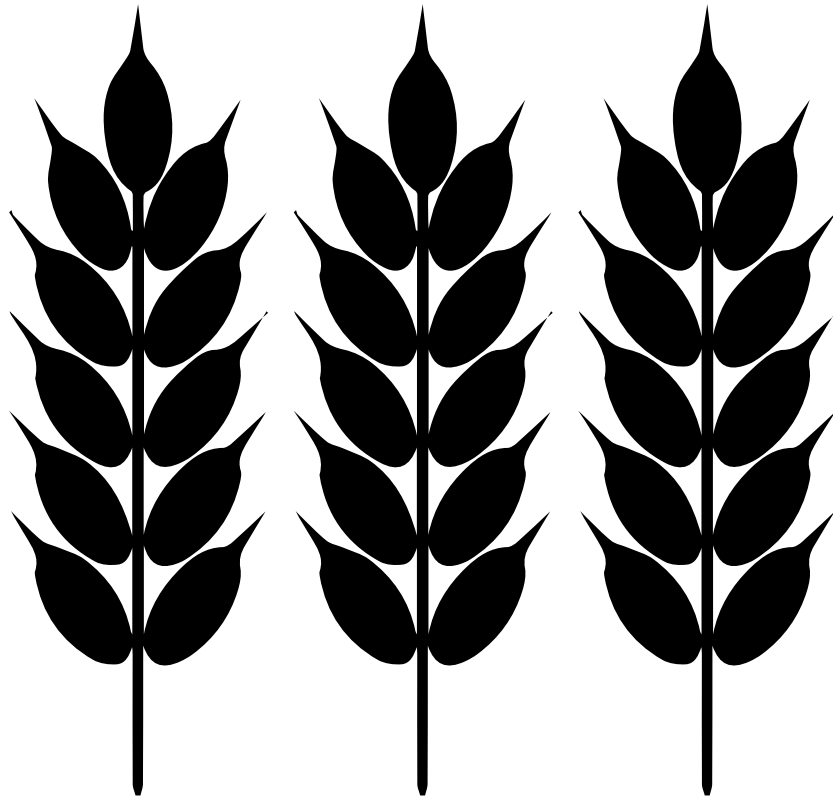


THE WHOLE STORY



RUTH

- Small Group Guide -

Welcome to Ruth

We are excited that your small group will be going on this four-week journey through the book of Ruth with us!

The book of Ruth is regarded as one of the most beautifully written stories in the Bible. Ruth portrays a marriage between Ruth, the young Moabite woman after whom the book is named, and Boaz, an upright and worthy man, who takes Ruth and her widowed mother-in-law, Naomi, into his home.

This picture of marriage is meant to show God's redemption and foreshadow a greater marriage, a greater story of redemption that we see in the Bible — God's plan for redeeming mankind through the person of Jesus Christ.

Over the next four weeks, we hope you and your small group:

- Learn how to read narrative in the Old Testament better.
- See God's plan of salvation more clearly than ever before.
- Grow closer to God and one another through your time studying the Bible.
- Are stirred to engage those far from God and invite them into his bigger story.

Enjoy!

The Summit Small Group Team

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How to Use This Guide

This study guide has two main objectives. Our first objective is to know and trust God more through a deeper knowledge of his Word. The second is to learn how to read biblical narrative in the Old Testament.

Did you know that more than 40 percent of the Old Testament is written in the narrative genre? Along with seeing God's plan of redemption unfold in Ruth, the goal of this study guide is to train you how to study Old Testament narrative passages better.

This study contains four guides for you to work through with your small group. The material can be examined individually, but the primary benefit will pair private and corporate study.

Over the next four weeks, you will study one chapter in Ruth per week:

- **Ruth 1:** Ruth's faithfulness
- **Ruth 2:** Boaz's provision
- **Ruth 3:** A plan for redemption
- **Ruth 4:** The Lord's restoration

Each of these weekly studies will include:

- **An introduction to the chapter**
- **Connections to Christ**
- **Small group study questions**
- **A prayer guide**

In order to get the most out of this study, we suggest that you read each chapter of Ruth and review the study questions before your small group meeting.

Because Ruth is a short book and can be read in around 10 minutes, you may consider reading the entire story each week so you can have a more complete picture of how God is working behind the scenes in each chapter.

We hope that you'll find this study to be an encouragement as you see the beautiful portrait of God's redemptive work played out in the story of Ruth.

Introduction to Ruth

Ruth's Place in the Story of Scripture

Historical Context: Ruth takes place during the time of the Judges (v. 1) and likely early in that era, as Boaz is the son of Rahab, who helped the Israelites very soon after they entered the Promised Land. The famine in Bethlehem may have been indicative of God's judgment — remember the recurring theme of Judges: "In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25 ESV). The troublesome age prompts Elimelech to take his family away from God's promised land, but the story of Ruth gives us hope in the people's return to God and the restoration of his favor.

Because Ruth and Judges are from the same historical period, the book of Judges can shed some light on our study. During this time, the spiritual and physical conditions in Israel were in rapid decline. This is a clear parallel to the plight of women in Israel and how it also deteriorated throughout the period of the Judges. Women were leaders and saviors at the beginning but objects of abuse and torture by the end. The nation becomes idolatrous, and Judges ends with a civil war.

This story of Ruth is inserted into that historical context to show that God had not abandoned those who were in a covenant relationship with him. His favor and loving-kindness were the means by which his plan for redemption would be revealed. Ruth reminds the reader that there is still a God in Israel, and there are still people honoring and obeying his Word.

Ruth 1 makes an important allusion to Deuteronomy 28 to 30. Naomi and Ruth repeat the Hebrew word for "return" several times. In those last chapters of Deuteronomy, God says what will happen to the Israelites as a result of the covenant they were making. If the people followed the covenant, God would bless them with food and abundance. If they did not live according to the covenant, God would bring famine in the land and even carry the Israelites out from there.

In the time of the Judges, the people were failing on their end of the covenant miserably and were in danger of being removed. The famine got so bad that some Israelites, like Elimelech, had to leave their land. God said in Deuteronomy 28–30 that this kind of thing would happen. But he promised that after they left, he would still restore their fortunes (30:3) and return them to the land, where he would make them prosperous (30:9). The word “return” appears all over Deuteronomy 28 to 30, just like in Ruth 1. Interestingly, the place where the people reiterated this covenant with God was in Moab — the place where Ruth is from and where our story begins!

Years later, the people went into exile and lost their land completely. The prophets reiterate that it was because they disobeyed the covenant from Deuteronomy 28 to 30. God was true to his side of the covenant. The prophets beckoned the people, often using the imperative, “Return to the Lord” (Malachi 3:7, Hosea 6:1, and Zechariah 1:3, to name a few).

Some prophets even predicted that when this return from exile would happen, people from every nation would “take hold of the robe of a Jew saying, ‘Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you’” (Zechariah 8:23). Thus, even though exile was a sad and undesirable outcome for the Israelites, it would still help with God’s mission to bless all nations. This story about Ruth shows how a foreigner is brought into a covenant relationship with God because some Israelites had to leave their land.

Redemptive Context: The book of Ruth is primarily a story about God’s redemption of Naomi. The love story between Boaz and Ruth is secondary to the love story between God and Naomi. She falls on very troubled times in chapter 1. Her fortunes and her attitude do a 180-degree turn by the end of chapter 4.

How did this happen? God worked redemption through Boaz and loving-kindness through Ruth. Ruth and Boaz are God’s hands and feet in taking care of Naomi. Thus, Naomi becomes representative of how God feels and treats his people. She had given in to bitterness and was at times not acting faithfully in this book, but God restores her to an important place at the end.

The genealogy at the very end of chapter 4 shows us one more redemptive result of this story (see the article from chapter 4 on genealogy). While the book of Ruth seems small in comparison to some of the other great stories of Scripture, it is important in the grand redemptive narrative of the Bible. The son that was born to Boaz and Ruth would become the grandfather of the great king, David, and generations later, it would be through this line that our Savior, Jesus Christ, was born.

Characters in Ruth

When reading historical narrative, it's important to pay close attention to the characters in the story and how they interact.

Main Characters

The LORD: In some stories in the Bible, God takes center stage, speaking and acting in big ways. In the story of Ruth, the Lord takes more of a behind-the-scenes role. We never hear the Lord's voice in Ruth, and we never see him directly interact with the characters of the story. Instead we see the other characters in Ruth interact with what God has already said in other parts of Scripture. They become God's representatives and his means of grace to Naomi by embodying his principles. While we never hear God's voice, his name is on the lips of the characters in the story 18 times in four short chapters.

Naomi: Naomi, whose name means "sweet" or "pleasant," is an Israelite woman from Bethlehem. Early in the story, she becomes a widow when her husband, Elimelech, and her two sons die suddenly. As she wrestles with the loss of her husband and children, she asks to be called "Mara," which means "bitter." Throughout the story, Naomi begins to see God's providence in her life.

Ruth: Ruth is a young woman from the country of Moab, as the author will emphasize almost every time she is mentioned. The people of Moab are descendants of Lot (Genesis 19:37) and were known for their idolatry (Numbers 25). Ruth proves to be a faithful companion to her mother-in-law, Naomi. She leaves her people in order to follow Naomi, loving her and serving her as she would her own mother. Ruth represents God's loving-kindness to Naomi in this story. Orpah is her foil.

Boaz: Boaz is a wealthy landowner and distant relative of Elimelech. Described as a "worthy man," Boaz is well thought of by his employees and demonstrates his character by caring for Ruth and Naomi during the harvest season. As the harvest season comes to a close, Boaz resolves to redeem Ruth and Naomi by marrying Ruth and taking Naomi as his own mother-in-law. Boaz represents God's redemptive work in the life of Naomi. The unnamed kinsman in chapter 4 serves as Boaz's foil.

Notable Supporting Characters

Elimelech: Elimelech, whose name means "God is king," is Naomi's husband and father to Mahlon and Chilion. Facing a famine in their hometown of Bethlehem, Elimelech moves his

family from their home with God's people to the land of Moab. After being in Moab for some time, Elimelech dies, widowing Naomi and leaving behind his two sons.

The Women of Bethlehem: The women of Bethlehem show up at three pivotal moments in the story: upon Naomi's return to Bethlehem, in Boaz's field, and at the birth of Obed. Their function in the story is to provide some commentary, and they also prove to be faithful friends to Naomi.

Themes in Ruth

In addition to the primary theme of redemption that we find in Ruth, we see several recurring sub-themes throughout the book:

- "Returning"/Spiritual renewal
- God's providence
- Commitment/Covenant
- Famine/Plenty

Each "act" of Ruth contains elements of God's covenant love toward his people. Every chapter has a significant phrase in it that connects to covenant language in other parts of the Old Testament:

- **Chapter 1:** Ruth clung (same verb as in marriage, Genesis 2:24) to Naomi, showed kindness to her, and says, **"Your people shall be my people, and your God my God."** (Ruth 1:8-16)
- **Chapter 2:** Ruth has **"found favor"** (v. 13) in Boaz's eyes. This is language often reserved for a person speaking to God.
- **Chapter 3:** Ruth says, **"Spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer."** (v. 9) This is language that the Israelites use for God's salvation at the Exodus and in the Psalms.
- **Chapter 4:** Boaz says he will **"redeem"** Naomi's land and **"purchase"** Ruth as a wife. This is language that the Israelites use for God in how he purchased Israel out of Egypt.

Now that you know some of the background and thematic connections to the rest of Scripture, it is time to dive into the story. Ruth 1 sets the scene for this redemption story. Or, if you want a little bit of training on how to read a biblical narrative, the article for week 1 by Pritesh Garach will give you some helpful reading tips.

Week 1:

Ruth's Faithfulness

(Ruth 1:1-22)

Before You Begin

- Pray for God to give you and your small group eyes to see and ears to hear what he is saying in the book of Ruth over the next four weeks.
- Read Ruth 1 (and maybe 2 to 4) before coming to your small group meeting.

Introduction

When we open the Bible to the story of Ruth, we are immersing ourselves in a larger story. The tribe of Judah — from which King David and ultimately Jesus Christ will come — is in hard times. There is a famine in the land, and there are no wives for the young men. One family in particular becomes overwhelmed with these circumstances and flees Israel in hopes of a better future. As we learn to read narrative in the Old Testament over the next four weeks, we will use the book of Ruth as both our teacher and lesson.

Most stories (both in and out of the Bible) have five essential elements that draw in the reader. Their presence helps our hearts and minds commit to the end. This first chapter in Ruth establishes the first four elements of the story: character, setting, plot, and conflict (the last element is resolution, but we'll get to that in chapter 4).

The crucial element of chapter 1 happens in the conversation between Ruth and Naomi in verses 15 to 18. Naomi pleads with Ruth to return to her home country. Ruth, however, clings to Naomi and covenants to remain with her. Naomi tries again to dissuade Ruth, but to no avail. Ruth's kindness in this act is astounding. She leaves her country and people to accompany a starving widow. She takes on new customs and a new people, just because she loves Naomi too much to part with her. Ruth's act is the specific means by which God provides for Naomi and becomes a greater picture of his love for Israel.

Connection to Christ

Steadfast Love

Ruth's kindness in this passage is extraordinary. She stays with her widowed mother-in-law and promises to become part of her family and nation, despite having no prospects or security in a strange, new land.

What reason does the Bible give for why Ruth would deal so generously with her mother-in-law? The Hebrew word in Ruth 1 and 2 that summarizes all her loving statements is "*hesed*," translated as "kindness," "loving-kindness," or "steadfast love." In the Old Testament this word is used repeatedly when a person (Abraham, Joseph, and Rahab are examples) is saving someone else's life or making a long-term promise.

The word *hesed* takes on a heightened meaning when God declares that it is a core part of his own nature in Exodus 34:6-7. He shows "steadfast love" to Israel because he has covenanted with his people.

The book of Ruth expands our understanding of the breadth by which God gives his loving-kindness to humanity. Ruth is a foreigner, and yet she sees God's provision for his people applied to her.

By the end of the Old Testament, "steadfast love" is mostly associated with God's promise to save his people through the Messiah who would come from the line of King David (see 2 Samuel 7).

When the New Testament writers call Jesus "Messiah" or "Christ" in the line of David, they are saying that Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment of God's promise. God's steadfast love to David's line becomes available to all of us, those who once were far and near to God, through Jesus.

Unfortunately, this incredible act of kindness alone doesn't soothe Naomi's deep grief. If the story ended at the end of chapter 1, Naomi's story would be a tragedy. In the end, you will see that her story serves as an analogy for God and his people. The book of Ruth is a subplot of the greater story that God is writing: the story of how he is bringing salvation to a lost and dying people. Through this story, we can gain a greater perspective on the hard circumstances of life and see a glimpse of how our stories can be used by God in his grand narrative.

Study Questions

1) Context is important for understanding an Old Testament narrative. Look back in your Bible, and read Judges 21:25, and then read Ruth 1:1 again. What do we learn about the spiritual state of Israel during this time?

2) What has happened in Ruth 1:1-5? Who are the characters?

3) What reasons does Naomi give to her daughters-in-law for not remaining with her in verses 6 to 18?

4) In verses 19 to 22, Naomi changes her name. Using the footnotes in your Bible (or another resource), what are the meanings of her two names? Why does Naomi change her name?

5) The theme of “returning” is very prominent in Ruth 1. Go through this chapter and list every occurrence of the word “return” or a similar word. How do the usages of “return” shape what this chapter is about?

6) What is Naomi’s attitude in the midst of tragedy and loss? Who does she blame for all her hardships?

7) How is God showing kindness and love to Naomi through Ruth in verses 15 to 18, even when Naomi thinks the opposite of God?

8) In the midst of terrible circumstances, it is easy to lose perspective and stop trusting God. Have you ever been in a situation when God felt distant? Please explain.

9) God uses Ruth to show his presence in Naomi's life. How can you and your group be the instrument of God to show his love and kindness to one another? Please provide specific examples.

Prayer Guide

In this chapter the theme of returning is very important. Ask your group to share a prayer request in one of these two areas:

- That a friend or family member who is far from the Lord would return to him.
- That you would return to the Lord from a specific area of unfaithfulness in your life.

Author: Cindy Peterson

Week 1 Article

An Invitation to Enjoy Biblical Narratives

Everyone loves a good story. Stories capture the imaginations of children and adults alike. So we should rejoice that much of God’s word to us in the Bible is in the form of stories, also known as **narratives**. Almost half of the Hebrew Bible (the Old Testament) is narrative. Additionally, all four Gospels and Acts in the New Testament are written in narrative form. God chose to communicate to us primarily through stories.

Joys and Challenges

Narratives communicate in a way few other genres can (genre means “a category of literature”). Here are some ways this is done:

- **God usually includes himself as one of the main characters in a narrative.** Thus, we can learn a lot about God by how the author portrays him.
- **Narratives pull us into the action of the story.** They usually depict real-life situations, and are easy to relate to. Often we ask, “What would I have done in this situation?”
- **Narratives are easy to remember and retell.**
- **Narratives present us with interesting characters who struggle, sin, change their course, and sometimes find resolution.** Thus, they portray the complexities of life.
- **Narratives relate the little incidents to a larger story.**

All these characteristics make reading narratives enjoyable. Sometimes, however, we may find it hard to understand biblical narratives. Since the meaning of narratives can be subtle and perhaps not stated outright in one sentence, a casual reader might miss the point. We may try to read too much theology into the narrative — for example by allegorizing. Perhaps the narrative itself is so interesting, we overlook how the narrator is making meaning of it all. Some readers approach the biblical narratives as merely a history book. In doing this, readers fail to grasp how the author is presenting this story in order to make theological meaning. Thus, while narratives are enjoyable, a careless approach leads to confusion. What are we to do?

A Roadmap

If our aim is to read a narrative faithfully, we must ask one very important question: How does the author (or narrator) make meaning? Or to restate the question: What devices does he use to get his point across? If we observe the text closely, we will interpret it accurately. In turn, we will be able to apply God's Word faithfully to our lives. Here are three tips to get us started:

1. Read, re-read, and re-read the text (observation).

Reading the text and re-reading it several times is critical to accurate interpretation. Repetitive reading alerts us to how the author makes meaning. Each time we come to a text, we have a working idea of what the text is in our minds. The minute we start reading, the text starts re-shaping and correcting our working idea to line up more with itself. For example: Say you pick up a book thinking that it is a history book and crack it open. What if in the first 20 seconds you see pictures of superheroes and speech bubbles? You would immediately revise your previous understanding: "This is no history book — this is a comic book!" The more we read the author's work, the more our working idea is adjusted.

This concept applies even if we already know the genre. Although all novels share similar features, we know that Jane Austen's novels and Victor Hugo's novels don't use the exact same methods to make meaning. Furthermore, even the same author can use different devices in different works. The point is: We must get to know each text on its own and come to terms with its intrinsic genre. The text itself determines our direction. The more we read, the more we become familiar with the author's method of making meaning.

The Bible itself shows evidence that it is a work intended to be read several times over. For example, God explicitly directs us to not merely read but meditate on the Torah (the Pentateuch) day and night (Psalm 1:2). Reading, re-reading, and meditating on the text is one of the best ways to hear God's voice in the narrator's work and grasp its meaning.

2. Look at the text, not behind it (interpretation).

If you had a choice, would you want to read the book of Exodus or watch all the events happen live? Imagine watching the Red Sea parting or standing at the foot of the cross. If you were there, however, would you have known that Jesus was dying for sins in that moment? We learn that because of the Apostles' message through the New Testament that tells us exactly what that moment meant for us. The same goes for most other miracles throughout the Bible's history. Without an interpreter, these events can often be misread, since events alone are rarely self-revelatory. We need someone to help us interpret events, and by God's grace we have an inspired interpretation of events in narratives.

Biblical narratives recount things that actually happened in history. The narrative, however, is not the event itself — it is a text. The narrative contains a record of the event, but it is not identical to the event. We all know this — just like we know that, for example, a picture of an apple is not an actual apple. Similarly, the text and the events are two distinct things. Thus, the author has the author-ity to shape the presentation of the events and give it meaning in the text.

So how does that affect how we approach a narrative?

The narrative should not be treated as a window to God’s revelation since it is God’s revelation. God has chosen to reveal himself in words (2 Timothy 3:16). This makes the task of interpretation word-focused, not event-focused. We are not trying to access the realities behind the text when we read narratives; we will be most enriched with the author’s representation of reality in the text.

For example, consider the absence of Pharaoh’s name in the story of the Exodus. The author has strategically chosen to avoid using Pharaoh’s name — interesting, considering the Hebrew name for the book of Exodus is “Names.” We do not need to look behind the text and ask, “Can we find out which Pharaoh this was?” We need to look at the text and ask, “How is the author making meaning by avoiding Pharaoh’s name? What is his strategy?” The first question is a good question for a historian or archeologist. It is a distracting question for an interpreter of narratives.

Being content with the author’s representation means we will not ask questions that the author is not answering. Who did Cain marry? What about dinosaurs? Did Abraham have a mustache? All good historical inquiries, but all of them will distract us from what the author is trying to tell us.

Instead of exploring the ambiguities of what is absent from the text, we should ponder what is present in the text. It is a good practice to ask why the narrator would leave out something that we would expect to be there. For example, why would the narrator avoid using Ishmael’s name in Genesis 21:9-21?

Looking at the text alone not only focuses our attention, but it is also quite liberating. We don’t need to be experts in a variety of fields to understand biblical narratives. We just need to stay with the author’s words and keep our nose in the book.

3. Look for features the author employs to make meaning (interpretation).

If we are reading and re-reading a text, undistracted by non-textual questions, we will begin to notice things. These observations can help us identify how the author uses different strategies to make meaning. Below is a list of some common techniques the author might employ.

Note that some of these are more common than others in narratives:

- **Plot:** What is the organizing structure that ties the narrative together? This includes the sequence of events, the rise and fall of action, the turning point, the resolution, etc.
- **Setting:** What is the narrator communicating about the “when” and “where” questions?
- **Characterization:** How is the author presenting characters to us in this story?
- **Narrative Time:** How quickly or how slowly does time pass in the narrative? Does this feature focus our attention on certain characters or events?
- **Narrator’s Viewpoint:** How does the narrator step in and make judgments about the people, places, and events? Where does he restrain himself?
- **Foreshadowing:** How do earlier events or speeches indicate what occurs later in the narrative?
- **Comparison/Contrast:** Is the narrator comparing or contrasting two different events, characters, or places?
- **Irony:** Is the author using statements or dialogue that mean the opposite of his intention in order to present his meaning with more force?
- **Repetitions:** Is the author using words or phrases that repeat throughout his text (for example, the verb “to return” in Ruth 1).
- **Inter-Textuality:** Is the author quoting or alluding to other biblical texts to inform or enrich the meaning of his narrative?

The author uses many of these features to guide the reader along. Neither God nor the biblical writers are trying to conceal the meaning of the text from ordinary people. They want you to read and understand. Why else would the author take the time to compose a text with such care? This should comfort us and encourage us to dive into the narrative.

4. Hearing and Doing (Application).

Careful observation and interpretation of narratives should lead to faithful application. God commands us to not merely be hearers of the word but also faithful doers (James 1:21-25). Here it is helpful to see a distinctive nature of biblical narratives. Unlike other stories we read, God speaks to us in biblical narratives. And he wants us to submit to, love, and glorify him.

Without faithful application of God’s Word to our hearts, our reading will do us little or no good. The same Spirit that inspired the biblical narratives is given to us to read, interpret, and apply them. God has provided a rich feast for us in the stories of Scripture.

Author: Pritesh Garach

Week 2:

Boaz's Provision

(Ruth 2:1-23)

Before You Begin

- Pray for God to give you and your small group eyes to see and ears to hear what he is saying in the book of Ruth over the next four weeks.
- Read Ruth 2 (and maybe 1, 3, and 4) before coming to your small group meeting.

Introduction

At the end of chapter 1, things aren't looking good for Ruth and Naomi. The first chapter closes with Naomi and Ruth's return to Bethlehem. They are fatherless widows with no means to provide for themselves.

In chapter 2, Naomi and Ruth begin to experience God's providence. As one preacher often says, **"Providence is the intersection of God's sovereignty and God's goodness. Providence is God's work in the seemingly coincidental events in our lives."**

Upon returning to Bethlehem, Naomi and Ruth find themselves arriving during the spring barley harvest — a time of celebration, where God's people would rejoice in his provision and remember the poor among them.

Ruth seeks her mother-in-law's permission to go out and glean in the fields. Gleaning was God's way of providing for the poor and marginalized as he commanded Israel in Leviticus 19 and 23. When farmers harvested their crops, God instructed them to leave some behind for the disadvantaged to collect so that they may provide for their families.

As Ruth goes out to the fields to glean, the Bible says that she "happens" to come to the part of the field belonging to a man named Boaz. He takes notice, asks his workers who she is,

implores her to stay in his field, and protects her.

Taken aback by the kindness he has shown to a social outcast, she asks the obvious question: “Why have I found favor in your eyes?” At this, Boaz reveals that he has heard of Ruth’s commitment to Naomi and her faithfulness to the God of her people, and he prays that God would bless her and provide for her.

Connection to Christ

Finding Favor

In this chapter, Ruth talks about “finding favor” at three key moments:

1. Ruth begins this chapter seeking to find favor with someone who can rescue her and Naomi (v. 2). A gracious landowner may be their only hope for survival.
2. While gleaning in his field, Ruth receives Boaz’s aid and is drawn to ask one question: “Why have I found favor in your eyes?” (v. 10). She is overwhelmed with gratitude.
3. At the end of their conversation, Ruth rejoices in finding favor with an honorable man who will protect and provide for her (v. 13).

In these exchanges, she shows an amazing amount of deference to Boaz. She uses language when speaking to Boaz that reminds the Hebrew reader of how people talk to God. She calls him “lord” and she hopes to have “found favor” in his eyes.

Throughout this story, Boaz is modeling the love God has for his people and the love his people should have for one another. Ruth’s use of this language to address him helps us see that Boaz is acting in a particularly godly way.

The concept of “finding favor” in someone’s eyes is a common phrase in the Old Testament, and it always refers to someone in a high position showing unmerited kindness. “Finding favor” in God’s eyes means being on the receiving end of God’s grace.

In Exodus 33 to 34, Moses begs God to stick with his people, despite their terrible sins. Since Moses has “found favor” in God’s eyes, God continues on with the Israelites. Likewise, we cannot find favor in God’s eyes without someone to intercede for us.

Because of Jesus, we can enter into God’s presence *already knowing that we have God’s favor*. When God looks at us, he sees Christ’s perfect and sinless record, which means we will receive his grace. Like Ruth, let us seek, marvel at, and celebrate the times that God’s grace came to us.

Just as God provided for Ruth and Naomi through one man's obedience to his commands, God still provides for the world through the obedience and faith of his people. In this story, Boaz is a picture of God's love and provision for his people.

As you study this passage, celebrate God's provision for everything you need for life and godliness according to the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Study Questions

1) One of the main themes of Ruth 2 is God's providence and provision. List all the instances in this chapter where we see God's provision for Naomi and Ruth.

2) Boaz is described as a "worthy man" (v. 1). What are some ways in which his character is shown in this passage?

3) God's law required landowners like Boaz to provide for the poor by leaving behind some of their crops during the harvest time. What are some ways in which Boaz goes beyond the minimum requirement of the law and seeks to honor God in his actions?

4) Describe Boaz's treatment of Ruth. Why did he act so favorably toward her?

5) In verse 20, Naomi identifies Boaz as "a close relative ... one of our redeemers." Why is this important to Naomi?

6) How has God used others to provide for your needs? How has he used you to provide for someone else's needs?

7) Where do you struggle to trust God with your needs? This could be physical, spiritual, or emotional.

8) What are some needs that you have now? What is God teaching you about faith as you trust him to provide?

9) In what areas of your life do you struggle to honor God versus doing the minimum standard expected? How can you improve in these areas?

Prayer Guide

As you pray with your group, use the acrostic "ACTS" to structure your time:

- Adoration: Praise God for being the provider and sustainer of all things.
- Confession: Confess to God areas where you struggle to trust him to provide.
- Thanksgiving: Thank God for the providence that he has shown to you.
- Supplication: Ask God for his continued providence, ask him to provide in any areas of need, and ask him to show you how he wants you to provide for others.

Author: Rob Laughter

Week 2 Article

The Proverbs 31 Woman

The thought of being or becoming the “Proverbs 31 woman” causes many women to inwardly roll their eyes and glaze over. They smile and shake their heads, not because it sounds terrible but because it sounds farther off and less desirable than many other destinations. However, studying the book of Ruth warrants another look at this woman described in Proverbs 31.

In the Hebrew Bible (the Tanakh or, to us, the Old Testament as it was originally constructed), the book of Ruth immediately follows Proverbs 31 and provides a real-life example of that seemingly elusive Proverbs 31 woman.

There is not much known about Ruth’s formative years, but we catch a glimpse of her character in the book that bears her name. We know she was a Moabitess, which means she was grateful to not have been chosen to be a child sacrifice (yes, this happened with alarming frequency in Moab). There was no love lost between her people and the Israelites. Her story happened during a time when the Israelites had conquered the Moabites. Somehow Ruth drew the short straw and had to marry Naomi and Elimelech’s son. Ruth’s depth of character shines after her new family seemingly falls apart.

Walking through Proverbs 31, we will see how Ruth puts flesh and bones to this seemingly elusive passage describing the woman who fears the Lord.

Ruth’s Character is Known

“The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain. She does him good, and not harm, all the days of her life.” (Proverbs 31:11-12)

This woman has the trust of her husband, but as the book of Ruth shows, she had this character before she was married.

“Boaz answered her, ‘All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told to me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before. The Lord repay you for what you have done, and a full reward be given you by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings

you have come to take refuge!” (Ruth 2:11-12)

Boaz knew of Ruth’s honorable reputation before he ever laid eyes on her.

Ruth is a Blessing to Those Around Her

“Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her: ‘Many women have done excellently, but you surpass them all.’” (Proverbs 31:28-29)

Her life is one that produces admiration from those closest to her.

“He shall also be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age, for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has given birth to him.” (Ruth 4:15)

The women about town said that Ruth was better than seven sons. That is a shocking statement when you consider the role of women and men in a patriarchal culture. Sons were valued much more than daughters.

Ruth Married a Man of Integrity

“Her husband is known in the gates, when he sits among the elders of the land Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.” (Proverbs 31:23, 30)

There is a clear, verbal connection to Ruth 4:1, 10-11 of Boaz redeeming Ruth and Naomi at the city gate with the elders present. The husband of this woman of integrity is known and honored for his fear of the Lord, which is the primary quality that he praises in his wife.

“Behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem. And he said to the reapers, ‘The Lord be with you!’ And they answered, ‘The Lord bless you.’” (Ruth 2:4)

Boaz had a good reputation. The workers in his field blessed him (as opposed to swearing at him).

“Boaz answered her, ‘All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told to me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before. The Lord repay you for what you have done, and a full reward be given you by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge!’” (Ruth 2:11-12)

He is a man who fears God, is known for fearing God, and honors Ruth because of her fear of God.

Boaz is much more concerned with the content of his wife's character than if she is well dressed or put together. It was her walk with God that he praises.

Ruth Provided for Her Family

“She seeks wool and flax, and works with willing hands. She is like the ships of the merchant; she brings her food from afar. She rises while it is yet night and provides food for her household and portions for her maidens. She considers a field and buys it; with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard.” (Proverbs 31:13-16, 27)

Ruth does not desert her mother-in-law in her time of need, though she was given an out. She gives up her culture, her country, and her future to stay with Naomi. There is nothing in it for her. She gets up early to find food for them both. The people around town have taken notice of how she cares for her mother-in-law, and it wasn't because Naomi was being delightful (remember “Call me Bitter”?). There was no fairy godmother turning Ruth into a princess. She worked through two harvests to care for Naomi and herself. There was no sitting around eating cookies, waiting for a husband to bring home the bacon. She does what is necessary to care for her family.

It was not until the Industrial Revolution that some American women even had the option of staying home and not working. If you didn't work, you didn't eat. In the Evangelical church we have often made women staying home a test of spirituality, whether this is said explicitly or implied. For many families in America and around the world, that is just not an option. Ruth worked to feed her family. The woman whom God esteems in Proverbs 31 is a working woman who honors God in her work.

To be clear: A stay-at-home mother is a working woman. We need to honor her for the choice that she makes. However we also need to discontinue dismissing the women working outside of the home as less spiritual and less caring of their families. That is Americanized Christian culture from a previous century, but it is not biblical culture. God made humanity to work in the world he created. The question is not where, when, or if someone will work but if she will honor God in her work.

The Proverbs 31 woman is the standard that God sets. Ruth is an example. As we study the book of Ruth, we see a picture of a real woman who was known for her character above all else.

Author: Cindy Peterson

Week 3: A Plan For Redemption

(Ruth 3:1-18)

Before You Begin

- Pray for God to give you and your small group eyes to see and ears to hear what he is saying in the book of Ruth over the next four weeks.
- Read Ruth 3 (and maybe 1, 2, and 4) before coming to your small group meeting.

Introduction

At this point, we've met widowed Naomi with a loyal daughter-in-law, Ruth. We've seen Ruth turn to the God of Israel. We've even seen Ruth and Boaz's brief, providential interaction — their enchanting “meet cute,” if you will. The readers know one thing for sure: They like Boaz! He has offered protection, food, and security for Ruth while she works in a world where other men could have harmed or taken advantage of her.

We know Ruth needs a new companion in order to carry on the family line and keep her and Naomi safe. And we know that God has placed Boaz in their lives at just the right time.

What we need to know now is an obvious next question: How will this all come together? Surely God has a plan, right? Thus, Ruth 3 begins the resolution God has intended for Naomi and her family all along.

There are a few things to remember while studying Ruth 3.

First, marriage rituals were different in Old Testament times than they are today. While it seems odd that Naomi and Ruth would create a strange plan, they are trying to be creatively obedient to kinsman-redeemer laws of their people. In other words, Ruth has already told Naomi, “Your religion will be my religion in all parts of my life,” and now she's trying to work within the marriage system God has laid out in the law. Being a Moabite, Ruth was not accustomed

to these new marriage rules. Her obedience to Naomi's plan, though seemingly strange, actually shows her loyalty to God and illustrates Naomi's bold trust that God will provide for them!

Next, remember that not all accounts written in the Bible are *prescriptive*. Helpful *principles*, however, can always be found in them. For example, is God *prescribing* that an unmarried woman lay at the feet of a man in the middle of the night to ask for marriage? Absolutely not! Boaz could have taken advantage of Ruth in this moment, but instead he chooses to protect both his and her integrity. The *principle* is that honoring God is more important than fast tracking the end result.

Connection to Christ

Refuge in His Wings

While themes connected to Christ are found throughout the entire book of Ruth, we see a special version of this in chapter 3. Ruth comes to Boaz in dire need. Her hope for the future is fleeting, and she desperately needs his continued provision and redemption. She says to him, "Spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer."

The psalms reflect this phrase. Psalms 17:8, 36:7, 57:1, 61:4, 63:7, and 91:4 all say something about people taking refuge in the shadow of God's wings. This is how Boaz used the phrase in Ruth 2:12. Rarely is a phrase like this used for taking refuge in a person. This is one of the clues showing that the author is setting up Boaz as an example of God's care for his people.

The imagery originates in Exodus 19:4 and Deuteronomy 32:11, where the exodus is described as God gathering his people on his wings. Jesus picks up on the same imagery when he says that he wanted to gather Jerusalem like a hen under its wings (Matthew 23:37 and Luke 13:34).

At one point in Christ's ministry, an afflicted woman comes to Jesus and touches his garment. She is instantly healed from a years-long bleeding problem. This scene calls to mind Malachi 4:2, where the "sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings" on the day that the Lord visits his people. "Wings" and the "corners of a garment" are both from the same word in Hebrew.

The New Testament urges believers to be found hidden in Christ — under his wings. When we look to him for refuge, we get protection from God's wrath, refuge from the world, healing, and safety.

This was an incredibly dark time in Israel, as you have already read about in Judges. It seems like the line of Christ could never come through such vicious and depraved people who are breaking God's covenant. Yet Ruth's story gives us the glimmer of hope that God is still among covenant-keeping people, even in the worst of times.

The Bible has one overarching story that unfolds in four acts: Creation, Fall, Rescue, and Redemption. The book of Ruth is located after the Fall but before the Rescue. While Boaz foreshadows the coming Rescuer, the ultimate Rescuer (Jesus) has not yet arrived. Ruth is living through a painfully clear outworking of the Fall — death that was never supposed to happen has taken her husband, food that was never supposed to be in short supply was gone, and belonging to a warm family was a distant dream.

Ruth 3 has both an immediate and future objective: to reveal God's little plan that will undo Naomi and Ruth's present suffering through Boaz and to foreshadow God's big plan that will undo the whole world's suffering in the future through Jesus.

Study Questions

- 1) What is your first impression of what is happening in Ruth 3? What surprises you about this narrative?
- 2) Thinking more closely about the situations of each of the main characters (Naomi, Boaz, and Ruth) in Chapter 3, who of these do you relate most to? Least to? Please explain why.
- 3) Compare Naomi's instructions with what Ruth actually says to Boaz. What clues in the text give us insight into what Ruth meant in her conversation with Boaz?
- 4) Naomi instructs Ruth to "anoint herself," presumably with fine oils to be more presentable and attractive. Do you think this was necessary? Why or why not?

5) How does Boaz demonstrate ultimate trust in God by consulting the closer kinsman-redeemer before moving forward in relationship with Ruth?

6) People often wonder how much they should do to make something happen and how much they should let God do. How does Ruth 3 give us insight into answering this question?

7) How do Boaz's actions model faith and trust in God?

8) Making plans is part of daily living. How can you apply what you've learned in Ruth 3 to your planning this week?

9) We are all called to obey and trust God. What areas of your life, this week specifically, do you need to act in obedience or wait in trust to God?

Prayer Guide

Ruth 3 puts Naomi's audacious faith on display. Have your group break into groups of 3 or 4 and each person share one specific way he or she wants to trust God's provision. Then, pray for each other in the smaller groups.

Author: Ashley Marivittori Gorman

Week 3 Article

Bold Faith with Bad Advice

Naomi has her struggles in this story, but one admirable quality shines through in Ruth 3. In this passage we see her boldness as it is attached to her faith. Naomi begins to hope in God's goodness and provision again and devises a plan to boldly pursue God's favor. No matter if her advice was sound or scandalous, there is no doubt that she is racing after God's favor and looking out for Ruth along the way.

Boaz may appear hesitant at this point, and later we find out that he is unsure of whether Ruth would go after an older man like him. More than him being hesitant, Naomi and Ruth, in racing after God's blessing, have also raced ahead of his plan. Naomi's plan pushes the envelope and puts Ruth in a very vulnerable position (we don't recommend this for you single ladies!). Boaz, the righteous and upright man, sneaks Ruth out before anyone knows that she has approached him in the middle of the night. He could have taken advantage of her but instead preserves both his and her integrity by his actions and his restraint.

Naomi knew that Boaz was a godly, honorable, and righteous man, a man who could be trusted. She knew that Ruth would be safe gleaning in his fields (Ruth 2:22), but she took a big risk in assuming that Ruth would be safe climbing into his bed. Naomi had no doubt that Boaz would be God's means of redemption for them and that he would take care of his legal obligations as soon as he could, thereby rescuing them from ruin. Instead of praising Naomi for her harebrained scheme to have Boaz rescue them, Naomi's boldness matches up with some other bold women throughout Scripture.

When Tamar was wrongly neglected by Judah (the great-great-grandfather of David), she pretended to be a prostitute and made herself available to Judah. In that story Judah knows he has done wrong and says that Tamar is "more righteous" than he (see Genesis 38). In Numbers 27 the daughters of Zelophehad approach Moses, boldly asking for a share in their father's inheritance. In response God makes a statute unheard of in ancient times: that daughters could inherit land in Israel! Rahab, Deborah, Esther, and other women in the Old Testament are praised for how they attached boldness to their faith — even when their actions bordered on scandal.

Even though Naomi went through a brief, dark season — she bore (most likely) sickly and fragile sons, lived through a famine, moved far away from her home, suffered the deaths of her sons and her husband, leaving her destitute — she recognized God’s grace and favor and was determined to lay hold of him.

These challenging circumstances and life experiences are what made Naomi such an edgy woman. Naomi feared God. She went through some tough trials, but she never forgot that God was sovereign over her situation, whether rich or poor. The language throughout the book shows that Naomi understood God’s sovereignty over her circumstances, even though they sometimes looked bleak: “The Lord has brought me back empty” and “She had heard in the fields of Moab that the LORD had visited his people and given them food” (Ruth 1:21 and 1:6, emphasis added). Later, Naomi saw the hope in Bethlehem, so she went that direction. When she saw a glimmer of hope in Ruth and Boaz, she nudged Ruth in the right direction, too.

Ruth didn’t know the Jewish customs and barely knew the Jewish God. But Naomi knew them both. Following Naomi made Ruth bold as well. Though it’s difficult to understand all the historic and cultural nuances going on in chapter 3, what is clear is that Naomi was bold in her pursuit of God’s favor.

What does this mean for you?

Ruth is pictured as a righteous woman and by all means a woman worthy of praise, but where would she have been without Naomi’s bold faith? When looking at Ruth 3, we can see Titus 2:3-5: “Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled.” Naomi, an older, wiser woman is showing Ruth how to fear God and trust him more than anything else. She’s teaching Ruth how to have audacious faith. She’s also teaching Ruth how to have hope in God that leads to taking action in light of his promises. John Piper calls this “strategic righteousness” — being intentionally, purposefully active in obedience. Piper notes that “strategic righteousness takes the initiative and dreams of how to make things right.”

Naomi isn’t pictured as a sage, but her bold faith in God is commendable to all. We all need people like Naomi in our lives — people we can watch and follow in making decisions based on faith. All of us find ourselves in situations where we need someone to show us how to walk with God, what to do, how to pray, and how to believe.

May we not be distracted by the strangeness of Ruth 3 to miss an extremely valuable picture of someone whose boldness of faith was used by God to eventually bring about his promised Messiah.

Author: Sarah Perkins

Week 4: The Lord's Restoration

(Ruth 4:1-22)

Before You Begin

- Pray for God to give you and your small group eyes to see and ears to hear what he is saying in the book of Ruth over the next four weeks.
- Read Ruth 4 (and maybe 1, 2, and 3) before coming to your small group meeting.

Introduction

The drama of Ruth has been building up to the events of chapter 4. At the end of chapter 1, Naomi and Ruth return home from Moab as widows. Naomi was bitter, broken, and hopeless. In chapter 2, Boaz shows great kindness to Ruth and introduces hope back into the narrative. In chapter 3, Naomi devises a plan to lay hold of God's provision by sending Ruth to Boaz. At this point in the story, you're likely hoping for Naomi and Ruth's redemption, but there is something — or someone — standing in the way.

The first 12 verses of chapter 4 offer the climax of the drama. This other "kinsman" has the first right of refusal for Naomi's husband's property (mainly his land but including producing an heir to carry on the family). In Ruth 4:4, this nameless man declares his intention to buy the land, almost dashing the hopes of the reader. But wait! Boaz has more information to share. There is still the matter of how Ruth fits in.

The rules they refer to in this scene are complicated. Basically, whoever purchases Elimelech's land will also have the obligation to continue Elimelech's family line. We are not entirely sure why, but this was an undesirable outcome for the unnamed relative. For whatever reason, this new information caused the unnamed relative to have a change of heart. Boaz is now able to redeem Ruth and Naomi and bring them into his family. And as we see in the genealogy that ends Ruth 4, this lineage continues marching toward the promised, ultimate Redeemer, Jesus Christ.

Connection to Christ

Purchased and Redeemed

Scholars have sometimes been puzzled by some of the language and customs in this chapter. It is not so much that these are ancient customs found in Ruth but that we see here some interesting variations of the customs contained in the Pentateuch. The requirement for a “relative” to marry a widow in the family clan originated from Deuteronomy 25 and is called “Levirate” marriage. This, however, was only supposed to refer to brothers, and Boaz expands this custom in Ruth 4. In addition, we have no previous record of the Levirate marriage and the redemption laws from Deuteronomy 25 ever being combined. Lastly, it is unusual and startling language for a man to be “purchasing” a wife along with land, as we see here. Perhaps this unique combination of customs and laws are what Boaz used to persuade the other kinsman to step aside.

What we know from the choice of words here is that Boaz’s redemption is intended to mirror God’s redemption of his people. Exodus 15:13-15 and Psalm 74:2 are two passages that refer to God’s redemption through the Exodus story. In both passages, God is said to “redeem” *and* “purchase” his people, using the very same Hebrew words we have here. Deuteronomy 32:6 also uses this word “purchase” to describe the exodus and God bringing the people to himself. The author intended to call to mind how God rescued his forsaken people out of dire circumstances, the way Ruth and Naomi are purchased out of destitution and into restoration by Boaz.

In 1 Corinthians 6:20 and 7:23, Paul makes the point that Christ’s blood purchases us. We are his, because he has paid the ultimate price for us by dying on a cross. Our lives are not our own; we are now his servants and his bride. Revelation 5:9 says that his blood has ransomed people from every tribe, tongue, and nation to be part of the bride of Christ.

As we conclude the book of Ruth in verses 13 to 22, an interesting shift occurs. Ruth and Boaz fade into the background. Naomi ends the narrative holding her grandchild. Her bitterness has given way to joy, and her redemption is complete. We learn that the story we know as Ruth has really been about Naomi all along, namely her journey to experience God’s restoration. Ruth showed her loving-kindness, and Boaz offered her full redemption. Ruth and Boaz were God’s instruments in Naomi’s life to give her what God loves to bestow on all his people.

The last few verses provide an epilogue that heightens the importance of the story even

more. The kindness that is shown to Naomi functions as a historically-based metaphor for how God cares for his people, even through the dark times. Then, the genealogy tells us that God was doing something even more important here. Through this story, God preserved the line of David, who eventually brought Israel peace and prosperity, the likes of which were unthinkable in the time of the Judges. Naomi's times were dark, but God was still working through his people — even in the smallest and most intimate corners — to bring redemption to the whole people.

Study Questions

1) Recount the events of Ruth 1 to 3 thus far. Make sure to include the ways you have seen God orchestrate protection and provision throughout the narrative.

2) In verses 1 to 6, we see the conversation between Boaz and the other redeemer. What reasons does the other redeemer give for not wanting to redeem Naomi and her family? How are his reasons for not redeeming Naomi's family in contrast to Boaz's willingness to redeem her?

3) Describe what is said by the townspeople about Ruth in verses 11 and 12. What do these things mean, and why are they important?

4) How did God redeem Ruth? What about Ruth makes her a surprising recipient of God's grace?

5) In what ways does the marriage between Ruth and Boaz bring restoration to Naomi?

6) Naomi, whose name means “pleasant,” turns bitter because of loss in her life. At the end of the story, the bitterness is melting away. What are some ways that God has acted in your life to pull you out of bitterness and sadness?

7) The comparisons in verses 11 and 12 point back to Israel’s history. The mini-genealogy in verses 18 to 22 points forward to Ruth’s grandchildren. Why is this an appropriate end to the story?

8) As we wrap up this story, how would you summarize what you are taking away from Ruth as a whole?

9) The book of Ruth is a wonderful story of God’s faithfulness. Where have you seen God faithfully at work in your life in the past? Where do you need to trust his faithfulness now?

Prayer Guide

Reflecting back on our study, use the “ACTS” structure of praying through your last four weeks of small group.

- **Adoration:** How have you grown to adore God more in this study?
- **Confession:** What sin do you need to confess that has been exposed during this study?
- **Thanksgiving:** What can you thank God for from the last four weeks?
- **Supplication:** Who do you need to pray for in light of this study?

Author: Eric Stortz

Week 4 Article

The King's Genealogy

At the end of an in-depth study of Ruth, the primary question that remains is how this book fits in with the rest of Scripture. It seems somewhat of a microcosm in the history of Israel and an isolated story in the larger narrative. Yet if we look at the story and ask how it shows us God's methods, we see that it is a defined part of a pattern he uses to reveal himself to us. To our 21st century Western Christian eyes, we see that Ruth is a fine candidate for God to use to preserve his genealogical line, but to Israelites of the day it would have been absolutely shocking.

Ruth was a Moabite. The people of Israel would have generally excluded most foreigners from God's favor because of their misunderstanding of what it meant to be God's chosen people, but Moab was a particularly bad origin. The nation of Moab descends from Abraham's nephew Lot, whose daughters got him drunk and seduced him so that they might ensure their own pregnancy and continue their family line (Genesis 19:30-38). One of the two children created by that terrible deception was Moab, and the entire nation descended from his line. To many of the Israelites this heritage was enough in itself to prevent God's favor from ever resting on someone. But the history between Moab and Israel runs even deeper. We see this in Judges 3 when Israel forgets God. It is King Eglon of Moab that leads a coalition of nations to conquer Israel and forces them to live under subjection for 18 years. This subjugation only ends when the Lord sends Ehud to assassinate the king of Moab, and he leads a revolt where thousands of Moabite soldiers were killed. So to say these two nations weren't on the best of terms during the timeframe of the book of Ruth would be an understatement.

There's also the fact that ancient near-Eastern cultures' family lines were only legitimized through males. There were few ways for Ruth to make any type of living or provide for herself as a woman. When Ruth's husband died, she would have been counted as one of the most unwanted people in Israel's society. To an Israeli reader at the time, this woman would have been the single most unlikely candidate for any blessing from God — in fact they would have seen her as cursed. So to see that she not only holds true faith in the God of Abraham, but that she also eventually becomes the person through whom the line of David is maintained would turn everything they assumed upside down.

When we look through Scripture, we see that this is the way God so often works. Sarai was a barren woman who had her husband sleep with a servant girl. Tamar was a prostitute who manipulated and seduced her father-in-law. Rahab was a foreign prostitute that harbored spies and deceived guards. Yet all of these women were chosen by God to be part of maintaining the family line that would lead to King David. Ruth is not an oddity or an exception when we see that God repeatedly redeems people that the world thinks of as entirely unqualified.

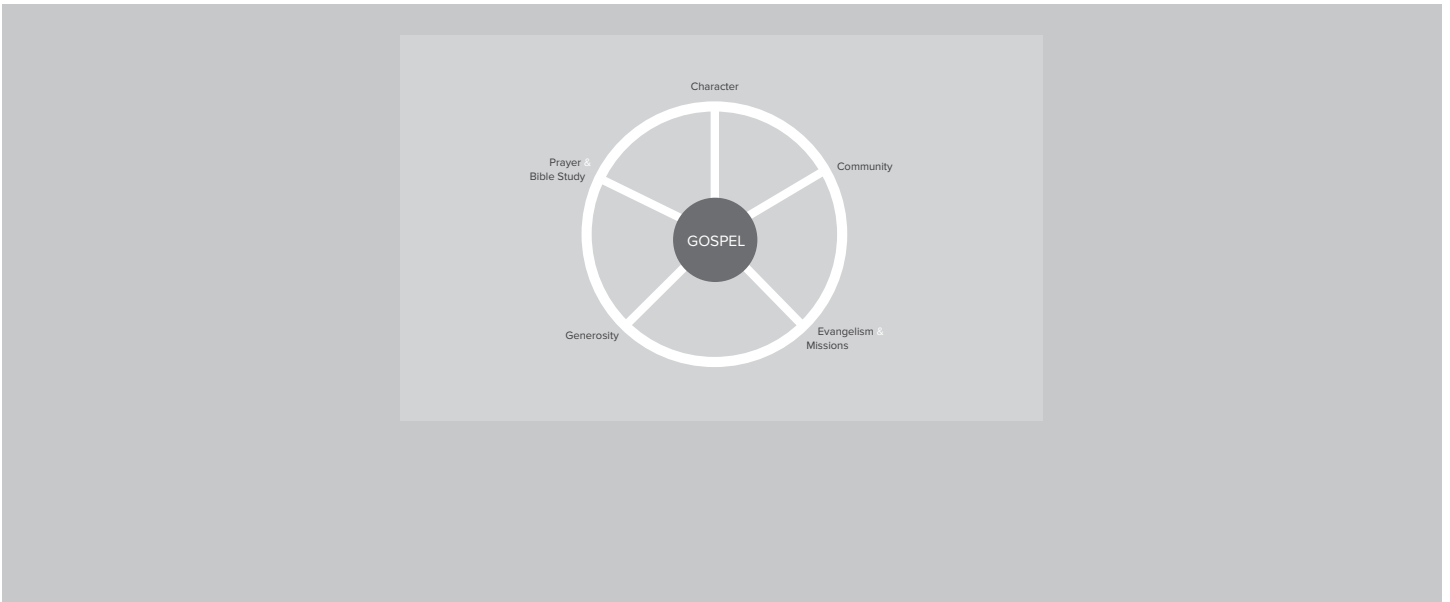
He does this so that when we reach the New Testament, we will recognize his pattern. Mary was a young girl, with no earthly wealth to speak of, who became pregnant before she was married. Yet this very pregnancy that would have made her a social and moral outcast was a result of God's favor. The line of David that was maintained by these unlikely women throughout the history of Scripture culminated in the birth of the Messiah from an equally unlikely woman. From then on we see that God builds his Church through people who have no religious or political qualifications but that he chooses to redeem out of his love.

In Matthew's genealogy of Jesus Christ, he makes sure to include Ruth, Tamar, Rahab, and even Uriah's wife, Bathsheba. Rarely do the ancient cultures include women. Even less so when there are foreigners in the bloodline. To add to the shock, several of these women have a checkered past. But God was pleased to honor all of them by being in the line of his son. The Apostles honored them by making sure to mention them in this kingly genealogy (Matthew 1).

As we study Ruth, we are reminded that God uses people who do not fit our religious criteria for divine blessing and redemption. Ruth was a woman whose heritage would be disdained, who would have lived as a refugee from a hostile nation, and whose social status would have inspired no more than pity. Yet we see that God chooses to lavish divine blessing on her, using her to bring his ultimate plan forward. Through Jesus we are offered the same divine blessing Ruth received, even though we are foreigners who were born outside of God's people. Ruth should teach us to both rejoice at the scandal of our blessing and to remember that God's criteria is far different than ours.

Author: Chase Campbell

The Gospel Wheel



The Gospel Wheel is a tool the Summit uses to help gauge our growth in particular areas as disciples of Jesus Christ.

The Center: A gospel-centered life

We want everyone to be changed by the power of the gospel. This means taking ourselves off the throne of our lives and putting God on the throne. When the gospel is the center of one's life, it redefines everything about that person, including the trajectory of his or her career, family, and future.

The Spokes: Fruit of the gospel

The gospel takes dead people and makes them alive — and that is no small change! When the gospel becomes the center of one's life, it starts to work its way from the inside out. These five spokes represent five key areas that one can assess if and how the gospel is advancing in one's life.

A Warning: Keeping the main thing the main thing

The gospel is the center of the wheel, not the spokes. Although one can measure his or her growth in the gospel by assessing these five spokes, the goal is to grow deeper in the gospel, not to master a spoke.

The Goal: Gospel-motivated transformation

A wheel works best when it's full and balanced. Growing in just two or three spokes does not improve a wheel; it actually makes it worse. In the same way, gospel-centered growth in all of these areas puts God's glory on display in the life of a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Contributors

This resource, along with everything else that comes from the Sam James Institute and the Summit small groups ministry, is the product of a few dedicated people whose primary desire is to see The Summit Church grow to love and glorify God from a deeper knowledge of his Word.

This team of staff and volunteers exemplify the Summit's mission to "Love God, Love Each Other, and Love Our World" through every resource that they produce. It is my desire to show "honor to whom honor is owed" as God commands in Romans 13:7, so with this in mind, here are the contributors who made this resource possible:

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Rob Laughter

Sarah Perkins

Cindy Peterson

and

Eric Stortz, Primary Contributor and Editor

It is my joy to work with this team, as their efforts personally minister to me, my family, and our small group. If you know any of this team, I encourage you to take this opportunity to thank them for their work and for this reasonable service to their God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

David Talbert, Small Groups Pastor