

FOLLOWING GOD'S GUIDANCE

+ SESSION IN A SENTENCE:

Faithful love is not focused inwardly but outwardly, seeking the welfare of others.

+ BACKGROUND PASSAGE:

Ruth

+ SETTING:

The Book of Ruth is a story within a story, namely, the one told in the Book of Judges (Ruth 1:1). The dominant narrative of Ruth's day was one of sin, suffering, and chaos. There was no king in Israel at the time, and everyone did what was right in their own eyes (see Judg. 17:6; 21:25). Sin spiraled out of control and reaped severe consequences. Amid the destruction, however, the Bible reminds its readers of the mission of God to save sinners and the world. The Book of Ruth is a surprising story of redeeming love that proves God has not abandoned His mission. His faithful love will never give up.

DAY 1

READ:

Ruth 1:1-7

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Ruth 1:1-5

NOTES

A key theme in the Book of Ruth hinges on her being a Moabite. The story of the Moabites is unpleasant, to say the least. Moab, the namesake of the people, was the son of an incestuous relationship between Lot and his daughter shortly after the destruction of their hometown of Sodom (see Gen. 19). The resulting nation was a place known for sexual perversion. In Numbers 21–25, the Israelites traveled close to but around the land of Moab on their journey to the promised land. In fear of the Israelites, the Moabites tried to curse Israel but had to settle for the Moabite women seducing the Israelites into sexual sin and idolatry. God judged His people for their sin with Moab and 24,000 people were struck down and killed. Needless to say, Moab was a place with a shameful, dreadful history.

This history makes it all the more startling that Elimelech would take his family there. Furthermore, a Bible reader is meant to be shocked when he or she then reads that Elimelech's two sons took Moabite wives. Israelites shouldn't have been in the land, much less intermarried with the people. By our reckoning, nothing good could come from such folly. But it is true the Lord works in mysterious ways.

Ruth's story is not that of a smitten widow finding love from a knight in shining armor. Hers is a story of a destitute outsider in need of salvation. So naturally, this is a fitting picture for the way God loves each of us. In our pride, we are all prone to elevate ourselves above the position of need. We don't like to think of ourselves as destitute and helpless, as outsiders in need of mercy. But that's exactly what we are. Paul wrote that we were far away from God in our sin but have been brought near to Him by the blood of Jesus, who died for us (Rom. 5:8; Eph. 2:13). Ruth is like all of us—a broken sinner in need of help. Thankfully, that's just what God provides.

With full honesty, what are some of the reasons you must rely on the Lord Jesus for salvation?

DAY 2

READ:

Ruth 1:8-22

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Ruth 1:19-22

NOTES

If you are familiar with the story of Ruth, you quickly notice the irony of Naomi's words in this passage against the overall theme of the book. Naomi said that life had been hard because the hand of God had been against her. Her bitterness is understandable. Her husband and their two sons had died, she was destitute and without hope, and she had returned home in scandal with a Moabite daughter-in-law.

You've probably been there a time or two in your life. Maybe you are there right now. You know those times and places when it seems like the weight of the world is on your shoulders. You might say something like, "I just can't seem to catch a break," or, "When it rains, it pours." It does seem like that at times. Sometimes it actually is like that. In a fallen world, there are days, weeks, months, and sometimes years when it seems the deck of life is stacked against us.

But Naomi went further. She knew these situations did not escape the care of God. Twice in two verses she described God as "the Almighty" (Ruth 1:20-21). The Lord is supreme over all things. He's in charge. He can do whatever He wants. And on top of that, He is good! Surely if He allowed such calamity, then He could sovereignly orchestrate the next scene in her life for her good. The foreshadowing of verse 22 provides the first glimmer of hope that this is just what God is doing as Naomi returns to Bethlehem after a long famine at the beginning of the harvest.

It's hard to believe that God is truly the Almighty when we move through places of deep pain. We're all prone to doubt God's care or blame Him for our suffering. We often lose hope that He is working all things together for our good (Rom. 8:28). We need to remember again and again that God is faithful—both in Naomi's story and in ours—to His promises to His people and that He will not abandon us in whatever we are going through at the moment.

Where in your life do you most need to remember that God is the Almighty?

DAY 3

READ:

Ruth 2:1-13

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Ruth 2:3-13

NOTES

Young children don't pick up on the illusion of a sock puppet and the reality of the invisible hand that's actually making the sock puppet work. The puppet talks and moves and the kids giggle with joy, thinking it's a make-believe monkey, but everyone else knows a hand brings the puppet to life.

The story of Ruth and Naomi takes on a similar feel. On the surface, all sorts of circumstances are seemingly attributed to chance or fate. It's stunningly unlikely that this Moabite outsider would happen to stumble into the field of the very person who could help her. And even more so, it is astounding that he would notice her and pursue her welfare so quickly.

These circumstances are meant to point our attention to the seemingly invisible hand of God moving all of these pieces into place to accomplish His perfect plan. The name of God is not used often in the Book of Ruth, but His handiwork is seen throughout the developing story. He's everywhere, if you know how to spot Him.

Like a young child watching a sock puppet, we can easily get captivated by the circumstances and miss God. We might attribute events to chance or circumstances and forget that God is always at work in our story. Sometimes God's ways might become clear over time, and sometimes we won't understand or see how God has worked until we're glorified in heaven. We might not always see His hand, but we can be assured that the Lord is at work for our good and His glory. As John Piper suggests: "God is always doing 10,000 things in your life, and you may be aware of three of them."¹

What are some ways you have seen God's hand at work in your life, even when your circumstances seemed stacked against you?

DAY 4

READ:

Ruth 2:14-23

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Ruth 2:14-20

NOTES

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"It cost Boaz to do what he did. And he is, in that, a wonderful picture to us of the Lord Jesus Christ. He was a kinsman. He had to be related to do what he did, and Jesus became like us in order that he might be the priest for our sins, a faithful High Priest. Boaz shared his bed with a penniless alien, making her his bride, and Jesus by redeeming us has made us his bride ... And Boaz provided for this young Moabitess a future and a hope. And the Lord Jesus Christ, as our Redeemer, has provided for us also a future and a hope, so that we look forward to the day when we will stand in glory and we will see his face."²

-Alistair Begg

It is easy to overlook a basic practice of Boaz throughout the Book of Ruth. He sees a need and meets the need. He steps into chaos and works to make things better.

Granted, Boaz had a family responsibility to honor. At least at the outset, however, he was not even sure this responsibility belonged to him. From what we are told, he merely saw a stranger gleaning in his field, learned of her plight and her faithfulness to Naomi, and went out of his way to step into her pain and show her undeserved mercy.

In this passage, that kindness took the form of Boaz giving Ruth a meal—table fellowship. A wealthy Israelite eating with a destitute Moabite outsider. She ate till she was full and then had more left over.

This would not be the last time God provided in this abundant manner. A later redeemer, Jesus Christ, came and stood on a hillside to offer thousands of people a meal from a few pieces of bread and a couple of fish (Matt. 14:13-21). They too would eat until they were full, and still there would be leftovers at the end of the meal.

All of this eating is meant to point to a bigger picture. In John's Gospel, Jesus says that He is "the bread of life" sent from heaven by the Father to satisfy a far deeper need than physical hunger (John 6:22-59). He nourishes the soul by offering forgiveness, freedom, and hope. Like Ruth and Naomi, may we be people who take joy in the fact that God serves us by meeting our needs and giving us far more than we deserve.

How will you give thanks to God for providing you with blessing today?

DAY 5

READ:

Ruth 3-4

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Ruth 3:6-11

NOTES



ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #78: BRIDE OF CHRIST

The church is described as the bride of Christ, faithfully waiting for the day when Christ will return and heaven and earth will be one. Made up of all believers from all tongues and nations, the church is the bride that Christ redeemed. The picture of a bride also speaks to the permanence of Christ's relationship with the church, for marriage was intended by God to be a lasting covenant between a man and a woman (Gen. 2:24; Matt. 19:5).

The established arrangement of the books of the Hebrew Bible is different from the order of books in the Old Testament as we have it in our English translations. The Book of Ruth was placed in a later section called the Writings, along with books such as Psalms and Proverbs, rather than with the historical books as it is in our modern versions. This makes sense because the book reads a bit like a poetic love story, and some of its language overlaps with that of these other poetic books.

One such place of overlap is found in Ruth 3:11, where Boaz encouraged Ruth by sharing that the fellow townspeople knew her to be a worthy woman of noble character. That Hebrew phrase in Ruth matches the description of the woman of virtue in the oft-cited final chapter of Proverbs (see Prov. 31:10). Ruth, it would seem, was meant to be a living illustration of the character traits listed in Proverbs 31. How amazing is that? This Moabite outsider is forever held up as the picture of virtue among the people of God.

It seems Ruth's worthiness and nobility was connected, in large measure, to the way she treated Naomi. Back in chapter 2, Boaz mentioned that his favor toward Ruth stemmed from all that she had done for Naomi. On the basis of this faithfulness, she captured Boaz's attention and received the care of the larger community.

Not only is it true that our sin will find us out (Num. 32:23), it is also true that our virtue follows us into the future (Rev. 14:13). Often God uses past faithfulness, even in obscure circumstances, to position us for blessing down the road. Such virtue is evidence that God's Spirit is actively at work in us to make us the kind of person He loves to use.

In what areas of life are you presently being called to demonstrate virtue in obscurity?

GROUP

NOTES

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"For all who have trusted in Jesus, all who know God, who are children of God, who have trusted in God's grace to save them from their sins, to restore them into relationship with Him. For everyone who has done this, you have come to the God of the universe and under His wings you have refuge."³

-David Platt

POINT 1: Faithful love is loyal

(Ruth 1:6-9,16-17).

Naomi and Ruth found themselves in a brutal set of circumstances. They were without _____ and _____, and Ruth was a _____.

? What reasons would Ruth have had to return to Moab with Orpah?

Ruth chose loyal love for Naomi over her own comfort. In this, she reflected the _____ of the God in whose _____ she was created.

? What are some ways we can model the loyal love of God in our relationships?

POINT 2: Faithful love is gracious

(Ruth 2:2-3,8-12).

Ruth the Moabite knew she needed to _____ to provide for her and Naomi, but she also knew she would need favor, or _____, if they were to survive.

Boaz was a _____ of God's grace to Ruth and Naomi as he secured Ruth's provision and protection. In this, Boaz prefigured _____, who showers His grace on all who come to Him for _____.

? What does it mean to find refuge in God?

POINT 3: Faithful love is redeeming

(Ruth 4:9-10,13-17).

ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #78: BRIDE OF CHRIST

The church is described as the bride of Christ, faithfully waiting for the day when Christ will return

and heaven and earth will be one. Made up of all _____ from all tongues and nations, the church is the bride that Christ _____. The picture of a bride also speaks to the permanence of Christ's relationship with the church, for marriage was intended by God to be a lasting _____ between a man and a woman (Gen. 2:24; Matt. 19:5).

? What are some ways believers resemble or ought to resemble Ruth?

The true love story of Ruth illustrates our need for redemption from _____, and Ruth's descendant, Jesus Christ, came to redeem the _____.

MY RESPONSE

Because we have been redeemed by an act of God's love, we extend the same kind of steadfast, gracious love to others so that they too might find redemption through Jesus Christ.

- **HEAD:** How could the metaphor of human marriage help you testify to the love of Christ for sinners?
- **HEART:** What are some ways you will express your thankfulness for who Jesus is and what He has done to love you?
- **HANDS:** What needs have you observed that you will now meet and so demonstrate the love of God in Christ?

NOTES

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"Are we really redeemed (especially from our own self interest) if we are not passionate about passing on the fullness of God's love to those who do not yet know infinite spiritual freedom?"⁴

-Marva Dawn