

ECF

Ruth

A Love Story Through...

S T U D Y G U I D E

RUTH—A *Love Story*

By: Dave Parker

The book of Ruth starts out simply setting a very important stage: “In the days when the judges ruled there was a famine in the land, and a man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons.”

The setting for Ruth takes place during the time of Judges. The book of Judges is one of the most disturbing narratives in Scripture, a recording of some very disturbing people, who do some of the most disturbing things imaginable. It is the story of a faithful God’s mission, to love an unfaithful people and save them from their sin.

Most of the story of Judges takes place on a gigantic scale with major rebellion, powerful judgments, brutal oppressors with big armies. Oh, and over-the-top heroes. And with the death of each hero, a new cycle of rebellion, judgment, and deliverance occurs. Instead of becoming more faithful as a result of God’s faithfulness, the people get worse with every cycle and, by the end of the book (400 years), they are more unfaithful and more hopeless than when they started. So in the midst of all that, we have what amounts to a love story, not just between a young woman and man, but between a God and His people.

The story of Ruth is a story within the story—a glimpse into what a sovereign and good God is doing to accomplish his mission, not despite the sinful choices of men, but in fact through them. The story is not big, it is small; the characters are not amazing, they are very ordinary. It is a story about one small family, and one young non-Israelite widow, serving as a light of hope in all of the darkness of Judges, who ultimately leads us to Jesus Christ, the light of the world. When all things appear hapless and hopeless, God is faithful.

The book of Ruth is a story that reminds us not only that God works visibly through prophets and miracles, but that he is invisibly and mysteriously working all of the time, even within tragedy. It’s a story for those of us who *have, are, and will* suffer tragedy, loss, or pain. It’s a story for those wondering where God is in the midst of heartbreak upon heartbreak. It is a story for those who will doubt whether God is in control, whether God is good, and whether faithfulness to do what is right, is worth it during the hard times. And, it’s a story for people who question whether all things, including suffering, are in fact purposed for good.

Week #1—Ruth Chapter 1
A Love Story Through Loss & Hopelessness
By: Cheryl Stark

BIG IDEA

Like the characters in the book of Ruth, we are never the main character in our own stories. The main character is the Almighty God. He is faithfully and lovingly at work behind the scenes weaving His good will and purpose into the stories of our lives even when everything seems to go wrong and our hope is gone.

COMMENTARY

As the story opens, Naomi has been stranded, grieving in a foreign land. Widowed, childless and poor, it must have been a desperate and frightening situation. We know that Naomi understood the seriousness of her situation from her conversation with her daughters-in-law (v 8-13). She had to have wondered how things ended so badly. She had to have been consumed by the same question that haunts us in circumstances of deep loss: Why?

Like much of life, this story does not provide enough information to come to solid conclusions. We are not even given insight into Naomi's thoughts about what happened. This may be an intentional design in the story. What is not said gives us an insight into the character of Naomi. There is no record of her complaining about her loss even though great. We do not find her complaining about God or about anyone else. We find her quietly accepting, even of her belief that God was punishing her (v 13,21). She simply prepared to move on.

The journey back to Bethlehem reveals more about Naomi's character. She is revealed as a woman who loved others well. Shortly into the journey, she placed Ruth and Orpah's interests above of her own, determined to continue the dangerous journey alone (v 7-13). A woman out of hope, she blessed her daughters-in-law (v 9). Ruth, based on the example of faith demonstrated by Naomi's life, chose to place her hope in Naomi's God and declared one of the most beautiful covenants of faith found in the Bible (v 16, 17).

Naomi was warmly and enthusiastically welcomed back into her village (v 19-21). It is clear that this family was once welcome members of this community. Naomi may have been overwhelmed by a sense of belonging again because it is in this moment the depth of her brokenness and hopelessness was revealed. She openly announced a change of name, from Naomi (which means pleasant) to Mara (meaning bitter). A common practice of this time, changing a name reflected a significant life change. While extremely uncomfortable to witness, this was a courageous and vulnerable act revealing the true condition of her heart instead of hiding. In her book, *I Thought It Was Just Me*, Brene Brown explains that courage "... in one of the earliest

forms... meant 'to speak one's mind by telling all one's heart.'" Surrounded by old friends and neighbors, Naomi revealed her heart. According to Brown, this takes incredible inner strength. Naomi simply chose to return home and live honestly and openly about who she was in light of the changes she experienced.

RESPONSE

The book of Ruth is ultimately about God's faithfulness to Naomi, Ruth and the others. It is not a story about their faithfulness. It is also a story about God's sovereignty. Behind their choices and suffering, God was at work, leading them to His will and perfect ending: redemption. This truth applies to our own stories. Paul David Tripp explains suffering like this:

"Here is the bottom line: you will suffer because your suffering is an essential part of God's good plan for you... these difficult moments of life are not the failure of God's plan or in the way of God's plan; these moments are part of His plan."

In the midst of suffering, we are caught in what Tripp describes as the "already" and the "not yet". Like Naomi, we simply need to accept and continue on in the journey. We have not yet seen how God intends to use our suffering for His purpose. We need to keep going to reach the end of the story.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Describe a time in your life when God used loss or suffering to redirect you.
2. Do you currently find yourself in a season of suffering? What can you do to get support?
3. How can you develop a community where you feel you belong and can be vulnerable and honest?
4. What can you do to be more transparent and vulnerable?

Week #2—Ruth Chapter 2
A Love Story Through Humility & Hard work
By: Jessica Soltani

BIG IDEA

In this chapter, we see Ruth demonstrating love through humility and hard work. Without a husband or her own land to provide for her needs, she meekly follows behind the workers of Boaz's field, gleaning barley and wheat. Ruth works hard all day, diligently gathering leftover grain after the workers harvested their crop. Boaz affirms Ruth's hard work and devotion, after hearing she had left her own family and her familiar homeland to support her mother-in-law, Naomi (vs 11). Amid tragedy, Ruth responds with faith, trust, and diligence.

COMMENTARY

Ruth had every excuse to hold her own pity party. She was a poor widow who gleaned leftovers from the harvest that belonged to someone else's land. Her history also placed her in very humble circumstances as a Moabite, with Moab her descendent conceived through relations between a father (Lot) and his daughter. Moreover, there had been tension amongst the Moabites and the people of this new land (Israelites). Moabites were not allowed to enter the Israelite's temples due to their lack of support when the Israelites came out of Egypt and their attempt to later curse the Israelites (Deut. 23:3-7). Despite this history, Ruth focused on the present, seeking to obtain the Israelites' favor as she worked hard gleaning in their fields amid the probable judgment and discomfort that comes from being "that" foreigner. Her actions eventually reaped respect from Boaz and revived her mother-in-law from hopelessness (vs 11, 19-20).

RESPONSE

Ruth exemplified the kind of life God designed us all to live, remaining faithful, humble, and diligent amidst the pressures of this world. Sometimes we need to remain in tough situations and make the best of them (1 Corinthians 7:20). Like Ruth, we can seek to be obedient through everyday life experiences. While chapter 2 does not specify why Ruth made these choices, it is evident that she lived out love through her work. We can also be reminded to demonstrate love through action and in truth (1 John 3:18). Ruth's efforts clearly represented her good intentions and quality character. As we seek to emulate Ruth, we can aim to "not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap a harvest, if we do not give up (Gal 6:9)." While the harvest appears to sprout rather quickly in this chapter, sometimes it can take time for us to get through the hard seasons in our own lives. Like a farmer anticipating the harvest, we will eventually see the fruit we've worked so hard for, just as God has planned (James 5:7, Rom 8:28).

Think about what keeps you from making the most of the life God has given you. How might you live differently if you knew God might want you in your current position for a reason? Take some time to reflect on the choices you make on a daily basis. Do they reflect the humility and hard-working spirit of Ruth? Instead of telling someone we hope their house move goes well, we can offer to help clean their home or move the furniture in the process. In place of, "I'll pray for you," we can bring a meal to a grieving widow and be the company she needs for the day. Through our sacrificial efforts, we can seek to demonstrate not only Ruth's devotion, but the kind of love that Jesus offers to us. Some of the best gifts come with sacrifice, but they speak loud and clear of authentic, unconditional love.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Consider how Ruth remained faithful to Naomi. Who is someone who has been a faithful friend to you? What were some of the actions this person took to show he/she cared?
2. What keeps us from giving our all at work or in life in general? How can we better improve our work ethic?
3. We can see how God provided for Ruth in difficult times. What has God taught you in life's challenges?
4. How do you remain humble in times when society tends to focus on believing in yourself and building yourself up?
5. What is the harvest you're seeking through perseverance at this time?

Week #3—Ruth Chapter 3
A Love Story Through Trust
By: Laura Quist & Ruth Quist-Eklund

BIG IDEA

This is a love story based upon Ruth's ability to trust. She has a trust in God and His plan. She trusts Naomi and her advice about her potential husband. Ruth trusts that Boaz is an honorable man and will choose what is right. The ultimate big picture is that we need to trust God in our lives completely like Ruth did.

COMMENTARY

As an immigrant, Ruth returns from Moab to Bethlehem with her mother-in-law. Ruth gleans in the barley fields of Boaz (God's law commanded that you leave the gleanings for the poor and sojourners. Lev. 23:22). God loves Ruth as much as his chosen people, the Israelites. In fact, God chooses to have the bloodline of King David and eventually the Lord Jesus Christ come through Boaz and Ruth. Boaz becomes the kinsman redeemer of Ruth and Naomi (according to Old Testament laws, a kinsman redeemer is a male relative who acts on behalf of a widow in need by buying her property, marrying her, and thus preserving the family inheritance. Lev. 27:9-25, 25:47-55). This action is a picture of how Christ can become our kinsman redeemer. Boaz did not only meet Ruth's needs of food and protection, but also sought an intimate relationship with her, which is an example of how Jesus seeks an intimate relationship with us.

Naomi comes out of her deep depression (from the loss of her husband and sons) when she focuses on the well-being of Ruth. And Ruth trusts Naomi as she advises her on how to present herself to Boaz at the threshing floor. As Boaz sleeps, Ruth takes Naomi's advice; she lies down at his feet. Naomi has told her to wait until Boaz tells her what to do. When Boaz awakens, he recognizes that Ruth is of noble character by the way that she has presented herself. While he wants to pursue her, he insists on doing it God's way by giving the closest related kinsman redeemer the first choice to redeem her. Boaz tells her if the closest kinsman redeemer will not marry and provide for her, then he will gladly be her kinsman redeemer because he and the townspeople know that she is a woman of noble character (Ruth 3:12). Like Ruth, Boaz also has noble character. He trusts God, is honest with the closest kinsman redeemer, and honors Ruth.

RESPONSE

Ruth had a scary journey back from Moab to Bethlehem. She and Naomi had no protection on their way except the Lord Almighty. Ruth also experienced some fear of being attacked, because she was a foreigner, when she went to glean in the barley fields (the Moabites were at one time enemies of the Israelites). I, Ruth Eklund, can relate to the fear that Ruth experienced as she traveled to her new surroundings. In 2013 I had a scary journey with the discovery of breast cancer. My first husband had died of colon cancer. My current husband Gary was battling non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. My first thought was, "Dear Lord, haven't I been through enough cancer in my family." But as time went on, God gave me peace each step of the way. The mastectomy was a breeze compared to the heavy-duty chemotherapy that came next. God taught me to live in the present moment. The whole experience deepened my walk with the Lord. I would not wish my cancer journey on anyone, but I would not trade the world for what the Lord has taught me about peace and living in the present. Like Ruth, trusting God was essential for my well-being.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever been depressed (like Naomi) and discovered that in helping someone else, the depression began to lift? If so, would you be willing to share that experience?
2. Ruth's small decisions mattered. They were part of God's big plan for her life and ultimately for our salvation. Can you think of a time when a small decision you made had a big impact on your walk with the Lord?
3. Ruth was bold and courageous and proposed to Boaz. She asked him to marry her and be the kinsman redeemer for her and for Naomi's family inheritance. Have you ever done something bold and courageous with the Lord's leading? What were the results?
4. Ruth trusted God on the journey to Bethlehem and then through gleaning in the barley fields. What is something you are trusting God for?

Week #4—Ruth Chapter 4
A Love Story Through Redemption
By: Annaleah Riley

BIG IDEA

Boaz's love and redemption of Ruth is a picture of Jesus' love and redemption of us.

COMMENTARY

The last chapter of Ruth is a wonderfully classic happy ending. Ruth has put herself out there to Boaz, letting him know she's interested. Fortunately, he reciprocates, overcomes the obstacle of the man standing in his way, marries Ruth, and they are blessed with a baby boy. What could be better than that? Ruth's story does get better, though. Because of her faithfulness, she is included in the lineage of David, and, as we see in Matthew chapter 1, in the lineage of Jesus.

Ruth's happy ending didn't come about all through her own efforts, however. While she is indeed very courageous, bold, and hard-working, her story wouldn't have had the same ending without her knight in shining armor, her kinsman-redeemer, Boaz. She was in a bad situation, and she couldn't get out of it herself. She needed Boaz.

Although Ruth is just a little book telling the simple story of a woman and her family, it is also an important book showing the big story of Jesus' redemption of us. Our world is broken and bad things happen. Like Ruth, we can't fix things ourselves. We can't take away our sin or change people's hearts. Ruth needed a redeemer to come in and make things better for her and those around her. We, too, need a redeemer to come in and help us in our brokenness. Like Boaz, Jesus comes to our rescue. He does for us what we can't do for ourselves. He is able to take away our sin and brokenness and make us whole.

The book of Ruth shows us that nothing, not who we are or what we do, can keep us from Jesus' love (Romans 8:35-39) or from playing a role in God's story on earth. Ruth was a Moabite, but she gave up her country and her people and decided to stay with Naomi, taking Naomi's people and God as her own. Because of her faithfulness and love, she became part of the lineage and family of Jesus. In fact, Ruth is one of just five women named in the genealogy of Jesus. Several of those women are well known for breaking God's law. Thankfully, Jesus looks past who we are and what we have done and He loves us anyway. He wants to redeem and use any of us who are willing to admit that we need His redemption.

Boaz didn't need to redeem Ruth. The text makes it clear that he was a wealthy man. He didn't need the land Naomi was offering, but he had fallen in love with Ruth and wanted to redeem her. He wanted her to be his wife. In the same way, Jesus didn't need to redeem us. He is God. He doesn't need our love or anything that we have to offer, but He wants us. He loves us and He wants our love in return. He wanted to redeem us and make us His. We can't give Him anything that He doesn't already have, but He still wants us. That is true love.

RESPONSE

I have always loved the book of Ruth, mostly because I love a good romance with a happy ending. I also love it because it reminds me a bit of my own love story, since I “pulled a Ruth” by making the first move and it happily turned out well! I think of that every time I read Ruth.

Ruth’s story reminds me that even if we feel like our roles are small, God can use them to bring about important things in His story. Most of our days are filled with small, seemingly unimportant things that don’t feel like will make much of a difference in the world. But as we see in Ruth, God often uses ordinary people doing ordinary things to accomplish great things beyond anything they can ever imagine. Like Ruth, we may never know the full impact of our actions, but her story should encourage us to do everything, even the little things, faithfully and with love.

Through Jesus, our stories will all have happy endings. Unfortunately, we don’t always see those happy endings on earth. When we allow Jesus to redeem us, we are promised that happy ending when we get to heaven. May we be thankful for the blessings of all the happy endings we receive here and now, and even more thankful that someday all of our sorrows will be turned into joy.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever felt like your life is small and isn’t making a difference? In what ways? What are some ways that those things might actually be having an impact?
2. We know the redemption story of Jesus. It is something we hear over and over. How can we keep it fresh and remain passionate about it?
3. How did God bless Ruth beyond her expectations? How has God blessed you beyond your expectations?
4. If you had been chosen to be in the genealogy of Jesus, would you feel worthy? Why? Why do you think the genealogy of Jesus includes people some would consider unworthy?
5. Besides salvation, what part of your life or situation in your life has God redeemed? What are you currently praying for God to redeem?

Ruth

STUDY
GUIDE

RESOURCES



CROSSWAY

*Why study the books
of Ruth & Esther*
Article



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in-depth study of God's Word through our free
online reference library, with study tools that are
grounded in the historical, conservative Christian*