



LIFE LESSONS FROM THE LADIES

The Book of Ruth: LESSON 2

I'm so excited to continue our study in the Book of Ruth. I've thought about it all week! Chapter one was remarkable, really. We witnessed one of the most dramatic moments in Biblical history as we read about Naomi's and her daughters in-law's journey from Moab back to Bethlehem. We witnessed Naomi's decision to "release" her girls and send them home, which was not only against the customs of the day, but also jeopardized her own social, economic, and emotional welfare. We saw Ruth's radical decision to leave behind all she knew, and unselfishly honor her mother in-law, as well as declare her allegiance to the God of Israel. Although the book of Ruth is known for being about "ordinary" women, an absence of obvious "miracles," and not many references to God Himself, the story is truly miraculous! It's a story of God's providential care and work in our lives. Last week we contrasted Naomi with Job, noting some of the similarities of their lives and overwhelming circumstances. Both of their worlds fell apart, making it seem like God wasn't "showing up" to help; no voices from Heaven or miraculous healings and no explanations about why their world came unglued. They both went to their graves without answers and the ache of their loss still present in their hearts. But both met God in the midst of their pain, gaining a deeper and more powerful trust which enabled them to persevere through their adversity and hold on to God. Their stories remind us to do the same, as we wrestle with God about the hard situations in our lives.

In chapters one and two, Ruth's love is demonstrated toward Naomi and God, and in chapters three and four, her love is rewarded. As we continue our study, keep Naomi's pain and Ruth's vow in mind. Carry their pain and determination into the barley field and the threshing floor to get the full impact of what's happening. Make sure you take notice of the changes in Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz as God transforms their hearts and their lives. Pray and ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to see what He wants you to see, especially the things you can't see on your own. Look for repeated words, phrases, and thoughts that will help you fully understand the story. And always look for God's heart behind the truths you find, asking Him to show you how those truths can affect your life and those around you.

First Day

1. Our drama continues as we read Ruth 2:1-23. List any repeated words, thoughts, or phrases you find. Briefly summarize the chapter and give it a title that reflects the main thought.

2. What would you say is the key verse in this chapter?

3. The author doesn't tell us, but how do you think both women would be feeling at this point? (How would you feel?) What might they be tempted to do?

4. The writer of the story lets us in on a secret in verse one. Why do you think the author lets us know this up front?

5. Our next character is introduced in verse one. How is Boaz described?

It's important to remember that Elimelech, Naomi, and their two sons came from Bethlehem-Judah, part of the nation of Israel. Israel was divided into 12 tribes, which began with the 12 sons of Jacob. The tribe of Judah is one of the most significant, which included Elimelech. So Boaz is from the nation of Israel, the tribe of Judah, and the family/clan of Elimelech. This is important to understand as the story unfolds. A "clan" is a subgroup of a tribe consisting of several families. So in verse one we find out that Naomi has a relative named Boaz from her husband's clan. Hmmmmm, interesting that the author wants us to know this up front. Perhaps there is someone who can help them?

6. What is Ruth called in verse 2? (Also in 1:22 and 4:10) Why do you think the author keeps referring to her that way?

Maybe it's just me, but I think both women could be struggling with depression. I certainly would be. In fact, I am right now for both of them! For anyone who has lost someone close to them, we get it. The temptation to quit, to give up hope rather than continue, or to focus on

our pain, is overwhelming. Phillip Yancey said, “Pain narrows vision. The most private of sensations, it forces us to think of ourselves and little else.” Naomi almost seems to have shut down, drowning in grief and despair. But Ruth, in pain herself, chooses not to allow her grief to immobilize her. She pledged to stay with Naomi, and intended to honor that vow and take care of her. We don’t see her giving Naomi grief or attempting to “chastise her” out of her pain, but lovingly supports her and is faithful to her. Margaret Maxwell wrote, “Ruth didn’t surrender to despair and hopelessness. Instead, after she and Naomi arrived in Bethlehem, she immediately went to work looking for ways to provide for them. The lesson we learn from Ruth is that we don’t ever have to see ourselves as a victim of circumstances. Especially in a modern world with more options than Ruth had, we can instead choose to have hope and look for a way to overcome challenges. We don’t have to be defined by what has happened to us. Rather, I can follow God’s lead and take action, and it will open the way to changing our circumstances and finding fulfillment and joy according to God’s plan.”

7. Do you define yourself by something that has happened to you, or a circumstance you find yourself in? Do you see yourself as a “victim” of circumstances? How can this affect your spiritual growth and perspective on everything?

8. Are you willing, like Ruth, to follow God’s lead and choose to find your identity and joy in Him?

Memory Verse of the Week: “The Lord repay you for your work, and a full reward be given you by the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge.” Ruth 2:12

Second Day

Work on your memory verse. Do you find your refuge in Him?

Yesterday we didn’t get very far, but verse one was so significant! We’re going to be moving at a little faster pace today, don’t worry. We will finish chapter two this week!

1. Read Ruth 2:1-23 again, concentrating on verses 1-7. What great idea does Ruth come up with to provide for the two of them?

The harvest is over and it’s time to glean, or gather, what is left in the fields. Kathy Collard Miller describes this process: “Harvesting and gleaning are hard work. Reaping is accomplished by using a wooden sickle. The sickle has sharpened pieces of flint embedded to form a blade.

Those who bind the grain follow the reapers and gather the grain into sheaves. The gleaners follow, gathering the stray stalks. All this is done as one stoops over in the hot sun.”

2. Is Naomi in agreement with this plan?

3. In His law, God had provided for those who were poor, needy, and oppressed. Read Leviticus 19:9-10; 23:22, and Deuteronomy 24:19-22 and describe the Old Testament Law pertaining to landowners and how this law affected Ruth’s right to glean.

4. What does this tell us about God’s heart for the poor, the foreigner, and the widow?

Ruth had a right to do this, yet she was hoping to find favor in someone’s eyes and glean in their field. Don’t forget, she was not only a woman, but an outsider; a foreigner. There was potential danger lurking there, yet Ruth seemed fearless.

5. In verse 3, what phrase is very significant? Why?

6. Whose field did she land in?

7. What two similar words are found in verse 4?

The book of Ruth is full of “just happened” “as it turned out” or “now behold.” Oh my heavens, how I love this! We see God’s invisible hand all through the book. The writer wants us to notice that it wasn’t coincidence that Ruth stumbled upon Boaz’s field. God’s providence is fully working here! His hand was working in the midst of their pain and confusion, using every heartache and circumstance, working things all together for their good and His glory. (Romans 8:28)

8. Can you look back at your life and see the “invisible” hand of God providentially working in a circumstance? Have you had a “just so happened” moment, or many of them? Can you briefly share one?

9. Describe Boaz’s greeting to his workers? What does this show us about his character?

10. Why do you think Boaz notices Ruth right away? (He seemed to be intrigued by her.)

11. Read the servant's description of her in verses 6-7. How does his description reveal her:

- a. Humility?
- b. Reputation and character?
- c. Work ethic?
- d. Courage?

Tomorrow we'll discuss the kindness Boaz shows to Ruth, but I don't want to fail to make mention of the way she is described, specifically her work ethic. Ruth worked hard and long. She rolled up her sleeves and jumped in, not fearing sweat, judgement, or failure. Having a good work ethic seems to be becoming a lost virtue, sad to say.

12. How does your work ethic affect your reputation, as well as your Christian testimony?
How would you describe yours?

Well, we didn't get very far again! There's so much to talk about! I pray that you will take time to ponder a few of the hard questions so far, such as your work ethic, trusting in His providence, and whether you see yourself as a victim. These three truths and what you believe about them can be life changing.

Third Day

Continue to work on your memory verse. It's one of my all-time favorites!

1. Read Ruth 2:1-23 again, focusing on verses 8-16. What does Boaz tell Ruth to do in verses 8-9?
2. What dangers could a young woman face as a gleaner? Why?

In ancient times, landowners were on their honor to comply with the law we read in Leviticus and Deuteronomy. By complying, they were acknowledging Yahweh as the true landowner and themselves as stewards of His property. By showing mercy to the poor they were also imitating His mercy to them when they were helpless slaves in Egypt. When Ruth went to glean, she tapped into the Israelite welfare system, which gave a way to provide for

themselves with dignity. “Sadly, greedy owners and reapers often obstructed the efforts of gleaners by ridicule, tricks, and in some cases, outright expulsion.” (Hubbard) They could be handled roughly, further exploited, and taken advantage of. God does have, and always has had, a tender heart for the weak, oppressed, and those marginalized. Don’t mess with them, that’s all I’m gonna say!

Boaz was so kind to Ruth. Most people believe it was because she was so beautiful, but our text really doesn’t say that. She obviously would have stood out as a foreigner, but he also had heard of her and the kindness she had shown Naomi. He also, being the son of Rahab the former prostitute, understood God’s redeeming grace and how He transformed people. Boaz was a stand-up guy. In verse 9, he orders his men not to touch her. He wanted to protect her. His expression literally meant, “to strike, harass, take advantage of, or mistreat.” One commentator wrote, “Boaz is hereby instituting the first anti-sexual harassment policy in the workplace recorded in the Bible.” That’s funny. But in reality, Boaz was showing the foreigner Ruth, “*hesed*” by protecting someone who could not protect themselves. The word “kindness” is a translation of the Hebrew word “*hesed*” which is used many times in this book. Naomi used it in chapter 1:8. Boaz shows it here. It means, “A strong relational term that wraps up in itself an entire cluster of concepts, all the positive attributes of God—love, mercy, grace, kindness, goodness, benevolence, loyalty, covenant faithfulness: in short, the quality that moves a person to act for the benefit of another without respect to the advantage it might bring to the one who expresses it. *Hesed* involves two parties, someone in desperate need and a second person who possesses the power and the resources to make a difference. *Hesed* is driven, not by duty or legal obligation, but by a bone-deep commitment- a loyal, selfless love that motivates a person to do voluntarily what no one has a right to expect or ask of them. They have the freedom to act or to walk away without the slightest injury to their reputation. Yet they willingly pour themselves out for the good of someone else. It’s actually the kind of love we find most fully expressed in Jesus. In a nutshell, *Hesed* is the Gospel lived out.” (Carolyn Custis James)

3. Have you ever been shown such kindness and extraordinary love? Do you typically show it to others? Maybe someone who didn’t deserve it, or wasn’t able to show it back? Do you have a tender heart to those who are outsiders and exploited? Ask the Holy Spirit to do some heart surgery on you today and reveal to you things you need to see. 😊

4. Read verses 11-12. Beautiful. How did Ruth “take refuge under His wings?”

5. What do the following verses say about wings, refuge, and trust? Which verse specifically speaks to your heart?

- a. Psalm 36:7
- b. Malachi 4:2
- c. Deuteronomy 33:26-27
- d. Psalm 46:1-3
- e. Psalm 57:1
- f. Psalm 62:8

I picture cuddling up under God's great wings, all snugly and safe, like a bird shelters her babies. But to "place ourselves under His wings," we must stoop and duck. We must bow in humility to place ourselves under His care, much like Ruth bowed before Boaz in verse 10. We must surrender our will as we humble ourselves to find true and lasting refuge in Him.

6. In what other places do we sometimes take our refuge? What can happen as a result? (Where have you chosen to place yourself?)

7. Read verses 13-16. Boaz now pulls her into the circle of his household, so to speak. What does he do? Why?

This is a very interesting section. Hubbard writes, "In modern terms, by giving access to the water cooler and the lunchroom, Boaz resembles a boss showing a new employee around the company. Although he wasn't hiring Ruth, his actions created a powerful Gospel scene: a gleaner seated alongside paid workers, a Moabitess 'dining' with Israelites, a man serving a woman, the poor included among the rich, an outsider embraced by the inner circle. Looks like the kind of feasting Jesus would have enjoyed, a prefiguring of the kind of world His Gospel restores, where there is 'neither Jew nor Greek, slave or free, male or female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus' (Galatians 3:28). Ruth was on the losing end of all three categories, but Boaz refuses to maintain those boundaries. But it doesn't stop there. Boaz instructs his workers to act sacrificially as well. Who would imagine that the simple task of providing food for a woman's family would shake up an entire community and move others to reach for higher levels of obedience?"

8. What are your thoughts on the paragraph above? And how can your act of obedience shake up an entire community for obedience?

9. Is God calling you to cross over some boundaries that you have set up in your life to minister to the "other"?
10. From what we've read so far, how does the character of Ruth challenge you? How does Boaz?

Tomorrow we will continue reading this beautiful multi-faceted love story. A daughter in-law to her mother in-law, a man for a woman (we'll get there), and the Lord for His people. Doesn't get better than this! What a "Reason to Rejoice"!

Fourth Day

Working on your verse? Can you share it with someone today?

1. Read Ruth 2:1-23, focusing on verses 17-23. Again, we witness Ruth working hard until evening. She must have been hot and exhausted after such a long day. How much had she gleaned?

2. How do these verses show us Ruth's generous heart?

3. How does Naomi react when she sees how much Ruth brought home? How does she react when she hears it was Boaz' field?

4. What does Naomi tell Ruth about Boaz?

It's so fun to picture this scene. Ruth coming home, exhausted but feeling happy after a long day's work. She must have been so blessed to be able to provide for her beloved mom in-law. I wonder what Naomi was doing. I mean, I don't think she was working. Maybe she was too old, or couldn't find a job, or maybe too depressed. I picture Naomi waiting anxiously for Ruth to come home, being the bread winner of the family. Her eyebrows must have gone up when she saw the amount of barley Ruth brought home, but when she heard it was Boaz's field, she must have leaped off the couch and jumped for joy! (Did she have a couch?) This was hope! There was someone who might be able to help them, and God had providentially led Ruth right to his field! I bet she was giddy! I read that the average gleaner would bring home enough to get by for another day, but Ruth brought home an ephah, which is about twenty-nine pounds of barley! One Commentary said, "Such a startling quantity of grain testified both to Boaz's generosity and Ruth's industry." Records show that an average man would take home about one or two pounds a day. So, in one day, she made 15 times more than what Boaz's harvesters were probably making in a day. My oh my. Ruth shared all this with Naomi, as well

as whatever part of her “lunch” she had kept back in verse 14. She was an amazing daughter in-law.

5. When the Lord graciously and generously provides for you, do you share it with others, or do you keep it to yourself? How does Ruth’s example challenge you?
6. In verses 20-23, Naomi blesses the Lord. Even in her despondency and depressed state, Naomi recognizes God’s hand in provision. What counsel does she give Ruth?
7. In verse 20, Naomi uses the word *hesed* (kindness) again. If you remember, it’s the extraordinary, the unexpected, the exceptional. Notice whom she says God is showing His kindness towards.
8. In verse 20, what does she call Boaz?

Naomi was brought up believing in God’s *hesed* towards His people. It appears she’s beginning to see that God’s *hesed* is still there for her. But not only for her, she figures out that God is still working on her husband’s and son’s behalf, remarking that His kindness is to the living and the dead. Boaz’s act of kindness towards Ruth showed her that her husband and sons were not forgotten by God either. God’s *hesed* will never run out. The prophet Jeremiah says, in Lamentations 3:21-23, “Because of the Lord’s great love (*hesed*) we are not consumed, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning. Great is Your faithfulness.” Naomi is a picture that shows us that God’s *hesed* and our heartache will always coexist. This is the reality of a broken world. But God will never stop loving us; He will never leave us. God’s *hesed* knows no limits. Living by faith means hanging on to God’s love, even when we’re looking at Him from heartbreak hill. (I ran Heartbreak Hill in Boston - wasn’t as bad as everyone said it would be. I think God’s *hesed* was with me that day!)

9. Do you need to be reminded that God’s love is never ending? That His mercies are new every morning? Are you feeling hopeless in a situation? How can this story encourage you? How can you use it to encourage someone else?
10. Let’s end by writing a short prayer to the Lord, thanking Him for His love and kindness. I think it would bless His heart.

Fifth Day

Write out your verse by memory. Did you make it your prayer this week?

In Ruth 2:20, Naomi calls Boaz a “near kinsmen” or a “goel.” “Goel was a term from the realm of Israelite family law. It describes not a precise kinship relationship, but the near relatives to whom both law and custom gave certain duties toward the clan. As a kinship term, it denotes the near relative who is responsible for the economic well-being of a relative, and he comes into play especially when the relative is in distress and cannot get himself/herself out of the crisis ... the custom of redemption was designed to maintain the wholeness and health of family relationships, even after the person has died.”

1. A kinsman-redeemer’s role has several additional aspects. Read Leviticus 25:25-30 and list the responsibilities of the “goel”.

We will discuss the importance of Boaz being a “goel” next week, but for now, I want you to see that Boaz is said to be “a type of Christ.” Jesus is our own kinsman-redeemer, who buys us back from slavery into freedom; who redeems us unto Himself. As you begin to appreciate all that Boaz does for Ruth and Naomi, remember that Jesus has done that and more for us!

We are going to talk a little bit about God’s providence. It was mentioned earlier, but I’d like to take a closer look. The book of Ruth is a book about “apparent coincidences” which aren’t coincidences at all. We see evidence of God’s fingerprints on every page. How much is God involved in our everyday life? That’s a question that has been debated over time. Providence is the theological word the church has historically used to describe the subject of how God governs this world. Obviously, it’s a major theme of the book of Ruth. We’ve been reading about ordinary people, with ordinary lives, making ordinary decisions, making difficult choices. Providence tells us there’s a lot more going on than we can see, for God is at work behind the scenes to keep things moving in the direction of His goal for us as individuals and also for this world. Custis James writes, “Theologians describe providence as the way God sustains, cares for, and governs the world so that it moves toward the destiny He defined at creation.” Stan Grenz explains, “According to the Bible, God does not set the wheels of the universe in motion

and then abandon it to run on its own. Instead, He enters into a relationship with what He makes ... providence focuses on God's activity in guiding the historical process with the goal of bringing to pass His intention for the world He creates."

Historically, Christians have disagreed over how to believe God's providence works. At one end, some believe God has chosen to operate in response mode -- waiting to see what we will do first and then He responds accordingly. At the other end are those who believe that God plans and orchestrates everything in minute detail. In reading our story, I'm sure Naomi thought that Ruth's finding Boaz's field was a "God-thing," and no doubt it was. In fact, the whole book seems to be written with the purpose of showing us His behind-the-scenes work in ordinary lives. No voices from Heaven, no miraculous food on the table. Ordinary people living ordinary lives, lived by people who trusted and feared God. They prayed, asking God to bless, to intervene, to guide, to reward, etc. The people of God believed that He cared about them and was personally and actively involved in every aspect of their lives. Boaz himself believed that Ruth was blessed as she placed herself under the shadow and protection of God's wings.

I also believe in God's providential hand in our lives. Do I have it all figured out? Absolutely not. Have I figured out how "choices" play into it? Not entirely. There's another theological word, *concurrence*, that plays a part as well. That means "God in whom we confess faith invites us to participate with Him in the completion of His program for the world." His preferred method of getting things done is through His people. We aren't spectators to what He's doing in the world, we are participants. Life isn't a fairytale. Not everything has happy endings. Suffering doesn't interfere with God's purposes for Naomi or Ruth. Instead, He uses their pain and confusion to deepen their relationship with Him and prepare them for the next chapters of their lives. Eugene Peterson says, "The Gospel offers a different view of suffering: in suffering we enter the depths; we are at the heart of things; we are near to where Christ was on the cross." How can we know Jesus as He wants to be known if we experience no trouble or grief? How can I reflect His image if I never share in His suffering? How can I minister to broken people if I've never been broken and experienced God's love and healing? Carolyn Custis James wrote, "Without knowing suffering and confusion firsthand, we're stuck in the superficial and we cannot know, much less express, the heart of Christ for others."

2. Have you ever experienced something you would call a "God-thing?" Can you describe it?

3. Do you have trouble seeing God in the "ordinary" and continue to seek signs and wonders? How has the book of Ruth challenged you in this? How can you begin to see God and life differently?

