

7-SESSION BIBLE STUDY
WITH VIDEO ACCESS

RUTH

loss, love
& legacy

KELLY MINTER



RUTH

loss, love & legacy

KELLY MINTER

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

KELLY MINTER is passionate about God's Word and believes it permeates all of life. The personal healing and steadfast hope she's found in the pages of Scripture fuels her passion to connect God's Word to our everyday lives. When she's not writing or teaching, you can find her tending her garden, taking a walk with friends, cooking for her nieces and nephews, riding a boat down the Amazon River, or walking through a Moldovan village with Justice & Mercy International.

Kelly's past Bible studies include *Encountering God: Cultivating Habits of Faith through the Spiritual Disciplines*; *Finding God Faithful: A Study on the Life of Joseph*; *No Other Gods: The Unrivaled Pursuit of Christ*; *All Things New: A Study on 2 Corinthians*; *What Love Is: The Letters of 1, 2 & 3 John*; and *Nehemiah: A Heart That Can Break*.

Kelly partners with Justice & Mercy International (JMI), an organization that cares for the vulnerable and forgotten with the love of Jesus in the Amazon and Moldova. To find out more about JMI, visit justiceandmercy.org/cultivate. And to learn more about Kelly's Bible studies, books, music, and speaking schedule, visit kellyminter.com.



WHAT'S INSIDE



Personal Study Each week you'll have five days of personal study. I'll walk you verse-by-verse through the book of Ruth, with questions to help you process and apply what you read. After you finish a week of personal study, it's time to watch the teaching video.



Watch These pages provide a place to take notes from the video teachings. You'll want to begin your study with the Session One video and then watch the rest of the videos after you finish each week of personal study.



Recipes I've included some of my favorite recipes for you to enjoy over the next seven sessions you spend studying Ruth. Make these together with your Bible study group, friends, or family, or enjoy them on your own!

LEADING A GROUP?

Whether a large or small group, we have what you need to lead women through *Ruth*. Visit lifeway.com/ruth for free leader downloads, including a Leader Guide PDF, promotional resources, and more.

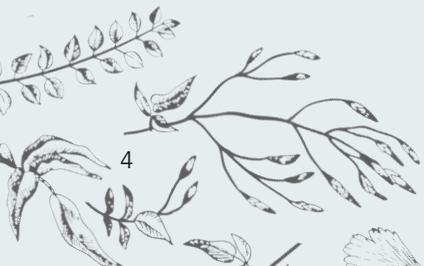
STUDY QUESTIONS

In each day of study, you'll find a mix of basic observation questions along with the following types of questions that help you dig deeper in your study:

PERSONAL TAKE questions invite you to record your thoughts on the meaning of the Scripture passage being studied. Sometimes these questions have no right or wrong answers but require you to consider why you lean in a certain direction.

PERSONAL REFLECTION is a time to reflect on what you're learning—about God and yourself. These questions will challenge you to consider how what you're learning reminds you of who God is, impacts the way you see Him, shapes your character, and makes you more like Christ.

PERSONAL RESPONSE questions challenge you to take an action to apply or respond to what you're learning.



SESSION 1

INTRODUCTION



The book of Ruth, nestled in the Old Testament between Judges and 1 Samuel, is a short, four-chapter narrative that bundles the human experience of loss, love, and legacy with the divine hope and sovereignty of a redeeming God. From its pages steps a wayfaring foreigner into the town of Bethlehem, amidst hardship and famine and tragedy, affecting the course of human history forever.

A widow turned wife, a servant turned heir, a childless foreigner turned mother, she was born in Moab but found her home in Israel. Ruth. The name that chimes a thousand redeeming notes for every woman who has ever been devastated by loss, struggled as a stranger, lived with the bitter, longed to be loved, fought for crumbs, or wept along the journey. She is an emblem of grace for every flawed and ailing sinner who has lived in her wake, not because of her own nobility but because of the One under whose wings she came to trust—the God of Israel.

Despite heartbreak and trial, Ruth is an accessible image of integrity, kindness, purity, commitment, faith, and hard work as a marginalized outsider and vulnerable widow.



Ruth's story runs the gamut of human experience, inviting us to engage with God about our own stories. Despite heartbreak and trial, she is an accessible image of integrity, kindness, purity, commitment, faith, and hard work as a marginalized outsider and vulnerable widow. She is godliness with its sleeves rolled up. Perhaps most impressive, she is a committed God-fearer despite profound loss and with a mother-in-law who changed her name to Mara, which incidentally means "bitter." (I think this means they weren't baking a lot of cookies together. Or sharing sweaters.)

When I first wrote about Ruth and the book that bears her name, I was in my early thirties, single, and exiting not the land of Moab but the music industry, so kind of the same. It was a time in life when I particularly related to Ruth's aloneness, feeling like an outsider, longing for that one person to choose me. I wrestled with her resolve to follow God when by all accounts it appeared He had let her down, or at the very least let down the mother-in-law she lived with. As I write today, I am still single though not unhappy. I have found God enduringly faithful even when I don't understand Him. And when I think of the book of Ruth, I don't only think of Ruth, Boaz, or Naomi but the redemption of Jesus Christ under whose wings each of us, no matter our past, is invited to take refuge.

It is one of my prayers that this study results in you loving Jesus more deeply. The whole book yearns forward toward Him. And if you're studying with others, I'm expectant for the fellowship you will experience that comes uniquely by being in God's Word together. You are not alone. Ruth and her God await you.

Kelly Minter

WATCH

WATCH the Session One video teaching and take notes below.

#RUTHSTUDY

LEADING A GROUP?

Don't miss the free Leader Guide PDF, group promotional resources, and more at lifeway.com/ruth

SESSION 2

TWO JOURNEYS



In the early part of 2008, I began work on *Ruth*, my first verse-by-verse Bible study. More recently, it has been a pleasure to set my hand to updating and revising that original manuscript. Almost everything needs an occasional update. Think of how many iterations blue jeans go through in just a decade. For certain, the Bible never needs to *get with the times*, but as God's Word has continued to change me, so I wanted to bring to bear those revelations, that maturity, to this Bible study that is so dear to my heart.

I wonder if you've ever read through old diaries, cringing as you reminisce. *Why did I make such a big deal about that? Please tell me I never thought that!* Oh, the drama. And then in the same sitting, maybe on the same page, you come across some beautiful gem of wisdom, a piece of insight you didn't even think you were smart enough to possess, much less pen. Welcome to the life of an author. You go back and read across old works, a little embarrassed at certain points and a tiny bit wowed at others. This was certainly the case as I read back through *Ruth*.

If there's something that deserved more focus in this edition, it's the greater story in which Ruth's story sits. If the four chapters of *Ruth* were the only part of the Bible you'd ever read, you might get the impression that Ruth and Boaz were something of the world's original model citizens we'd all do our best to emulate. You might conclude that if you can just be more like them with a New Testament spin, you'll be a better Christian than when you first started. This is not completely wrong, but it misses the much larger story in which Ruth and Boaz are a part.

The Bible never needs to *get with the times*, but as God's Word has continued to change me, so I wanted to bring to bear those revelations, that maturity, to this Bible study that is so dear to my heart.

So, we'll keep an eye out for how the book of Ruth shines light on the greater whole of the Bible, and vice versa. We'll better understand where the book of Ruth sits within the narrative of the Old Testament. And we'll discover some of the prophetic ways the characters, and God's providence and provision, all point forward to ultimate redemption in Christ. We'll still fall in love with Ruth and Boaz because they're positively lovable people who have much to teach us. But we'll never take our eyes off the bigger story—God's grand drama of redemption.

If you don't already have some of this contextual knowledge, don't you worry one second. We'll do this together. But some of you have a lot of preexisting Bible knowledge. If this is the case, let me encourage you to explore. If you see a cross-reference in your Bible, chase it; if a verse tugs at your heart, pause and refresh yourself from its well. Everyone has permission to dig, scrape, investigate, and go beyond the borders of these pages. You're sure to discover wonderful insights—ones I've never thought of.

Lastly, and this is a big one, be looking not just for the practical portrayals of character qualities—love, generosity, faith, tenacity, courage, kindness, self-sacrifice, obedience—but also for what these reveal about the heart and nature of God. It's easy for us Bible students, us list-checker-off-ers, to try to better ourselves by implementing the tangible qualities we see in people like Ruth, Boaz, and, at times, Naomi. As we should! I can't imagine what rails I would have sailed over if not for godly examples of what being a serious follower of Christ looks like. At the same time, if we focus solely on behavioral changes and not on who God is throughout the story, we'll turn ourselves into well-groomed rule followers who appear holy on the outside but have little love or grace or dependence on Christ. And we don't want that, I know. So, we'll always, always keep our eyes open for the redemptive nature and work of God. Because if I've learned anything between the first and second writing, it's that His grace is everything.



**YOUR GOD
WILL BE
MY GOD.**

Ruth 1:16



DAY 1

FLEEING HOME



The book of Ruth is prophetic in many respects. There is a story behind the story.

My first memorable encounter with the book of Ruth took place in the hunter green pews of Reston Bible Church—the church my dad and mom founded a year before I was born. We were there to hear a visiting speaker. The borderline gruff, elderly Englishman named Major Ian Thomas taught through the book of Ruth for almost two hours. I was captivated, which says a lot for a twelve-year-old who would have preferred being somewhere else on a Friday night. I remember Major Thomas exposing the fascinating symbolism that runs throughout Ruth as if he were tugging on a camouflaged thread with the skill of a seamstress.

The book of Ruth is prophetic in many respects. There is a story behind the story. Listening to Major Thomas is the first time I recall being taught the Old Testament Scriptures with the New Testament so compellingly in view. He is the one who helped me see the hints of Jesus woven throughout this short book. (I also remember him being distinctly against hats in the sanctuary, so make what you will of what has stuck with me.) This man of faith has since gone on to be with the Lord, but I am grateful to remember him as someone who kindled a love in my heart for the person of Ruth and, more importantly, her God.

Today I'm anxious to begin surveying the historical context and setting of this short but powerful book with you. It will be like pulling back the shades of your hotel room and remembering you're in New York City. This means world-class shows, coffee, and pizza are at hand. Context tells us a lot.

CAREFULLY READ RUTH 1:1-2. Elimelech's family lived in Bethlehem-Judah, and they were called

To be an Ephrathite meant to be from Bethlehem-Judah, which was also known as Ephrathah. Since Bethlehem was in ancient Israel, Elimelech's family were also considered Israelites. (Sort of like being a New Yorker also means you're an American.)

Why did Elimelech and Naomi leave Bethlehem-Judah for Moab?

Circle your answer.

There was a famine in Bethlehem.

They had relatives in Moab.

There was a war in Bethlehem.

A judge ordered them to leave.

READ GENESIS 19:30-38. What do these verses say about the origin of the Moabites?

Next to each passage, describe the relationship between the Israelites and the Moabites.

Deuteronomy 23:3-6

Judges 3:12-14

Understanding the history of Moab and her relationship with Israel changes the tone of Elimelech and Naomi's journey. It wasn't as if they were Americans slipping into Canada for a spell. Moab was an enemy of Israel. The Moabites' blatant idolatry was a sure sign that the Israelites were to remain separate. The author of Ruth doesn't explicitly tell us how to feel about Elimelech's decision to move his family, but we know from Deuteronomy 30:1-9 that God promised to restore His people when they returned to Him in obedience. We also know that Bethlehem was God's chosen place for His people. So as scholar Daniel I. Block notes, "It seems, however, that Elimelech designed his own solution instead of calling on God for mercy and repenting of the sins that plagued the nation during the dark days of the judges."¹

After the Lord freed the Israelites from the land of Egypt, they wandered in the desert for forty years. They lived as vagabonds, their tents pulled up and pinned down over and

over like finicky campers. Then one day Joshua led them across the Jordan River into Canaan, the land of promise that flowed with milk and honey and, more importantly, with permanence. God had given them a home; they didn't need to look anywhere else.

The city of Bethlehem, where Elimelech's family lived, was a hill country in the land of Judah and part of the promised land of Canaan. Ironically, Bethlehem means "House of Bread," and there hadn't been much of that since their departure. You may be thinking, *If God had given the Israelites a permanent place to live where He promised to take care of them, why the famine?*

READ JUDGES 2:11-19. What did God's people often do when a judge died (v. 19)?

PERSONAL TAKE: What evidence do you see for why there was a famine in the land?

Now look back at Ruth 1:1 and fill in the blank using the Christian Standard Bible (CSB) translation: "During the time of the _____, there was a famine in the land."

The story of Ruth took place during the time of the Judges, a period of approximately 450 years when God raised up different governors to rule and guide Israel. This period stretched from the time Joshua led the Israelites into the promised land to King Saul being crowned the first king of Israel. A quick skim through the book of Judges reveals that God's people had a history of turning to Him during seasons of turmoil but forgetting Him during seasons of prosperity.

PERSONAL REFLECTION: Are you currently in a season of trial, blessing, or both? How are your current circumstances negatively or positively affecting your relationship with God?

Perhaps you've thought or heard it said that theology isn't all that important; what matters is your relationship with God. But what we believe about God (our theology) impacts our relationship with Him. If we believe that difficult circumstances are a sign of God's cruelty, indifference, or displeasure with us, how deeply does that affect our intimacy with Him? On the other hand, thinking that God is happy with us only when everything is going our way is equally detrimental to our faith. We'll see in our study together that it is His presence with us that is superior to our circumstances, no matter how trying or wonderful.

Let's close by drawing Elimelech and Naomi's plight back to our own. They stood on the precipice of two compelling choices—stay in the arid land of God's choosing or flee to the bountiful one God had forbidden. We know that Elimelech chose the latter. The question for us is: *What will we choose?* Perhaps the loneliness is unbearable, your heartache is unrelenting, or a daily burden has become overwhelming. The attractive land of Moab is calling, but you know it represents compromises of all sorts. When we're weary in obedience, escaping to easier terrain is tempting, but it always comes at a cost.

READ GALATIANS 6:9. What did Paul say will happen if we don't give up in doing good?

READ HEBREWS 11:24-26. What did Moses regard as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt? And to what was he looking ahead?

PERSONAL REFLECTION: How do these verses encourage you to stand firm where God has you? Be thoughtful about your response.

The late Matthew Henry astutely points out that fleeing our circumstances doesn't necessarily remedy them. "It is our wisdom to make the best of that which is, for it is seldom that changing our place is mending it."² No matter how many times I read that quote, it always feels like a word. How often do I want my circumstances to change when really God wants to change me? God is present right where you are. Stay put and stand firm. It is always more blessed to be in the fellowship of His presence than anywhere else.



DAY 2

RETURNING HOME

The first chapter of Ruth is a story of two journeys: the journey from Bethlehem to Moab and the journey from Moab back to Bethlehem. The first is briefly described in the two verses we studied yesterday, but the second journey, the journey of return, takes the rest of the chapter.

BEFORE LOOKING AT TODAY'S READING, REREAD RUTH 1:1-2.

Name the four people who traveled from Bethlehem to Moab.

To refresh your memory, all four family members were from Bethlehem and were called what? Circle your answer.

- Bethlehemites Canaanites Ephrathites Amorites

They were from the town of Bethlehem and the nation of _____ . (See p. 14 if you need help.)

NOW THAT WE HAVE THESE DETAILS, READ VERSES 3-7 TWO TIMES AT A REFLECTIVE PACE. Take a moment to appreciate the gravity of these tragic circumstances.

One of the most significant differences between the journey from Bethlehem to Moab and the journey from Moab back to Bethlehem is the difference in people. Naomi was the only one to take both journeys. Though she left with two sons and a husband, she returned with two women who were not her flesh and blood.

Below, write the names of Naomi's daughters-in-law, their nationality, and the name of the son each of them married. (See 4:10 for whom Ruth and Orpah were married to.)

Name	Nationality	Married To

READ DEUTERONOMY 7:3-4 AND 1 KINGS 11:1-4. Why could it have been problematic for Mahlon and Chilion to marry Moabite women?

In Deuteronomy 7:1-8, the Lord commanded the people of Israel not to intermarry with certain nations. The events of 1 Kings 11 took place after the events in Ruth, but they give us a good picture of why entering into a covenant relationship with these nations was problematic. Solomon's heart was led astray to other gods because of his marriages to women from nations that didn't worship the one true God. Solomon could not be fully devoted to the Lord and devoted to the gods of other nations.

It deserves special attention that God's warnings had nothing to do with certain races; rather, He warned against His people aligning with nations that had rejected Him. For a New Testament perspective on this, read 2 Corinthians 6:14-18.

PERSONAL TAKE: What reasoning did Paul use to encourage separation between Christians and non-Christians when it comes to deep covenantal bonds?

The apostle Paul instructed Christians not to be "yoked together" (or deeply tied) to unbelievers because the life-paths of each party will naturally move in opposite directions (v. 14). We are called to love and reach out to all people, but when we attach

ourselves through covenant bonds to those who don't follow Christ, our love for Him will eventually be compromised. (This principle—which we see in action in Ruth, Deuteronomy, 1 Kings, and 2 Corinthians—will be of even greater significance to us in the coming days.)

Why did Naomi decide to return to Bethlehem (Ruth 1:6-7)?

PERSONAL RESPONSE: Have you ever turned back to God out of desperation or necessity? If so, describe it here.

A desire for physical nourishment caused Naomi to leave Moab; this same desire would lead her back. The catalyst behind both journeys appears to be governed by the physical, not so much the spiritual, though I imagine the spiritual losses—fellowship, worship, residing in the land—were in view all along the way. Our physical circumstances are vital, and we should always take them into account. But I suppose the question is: *What ultimately dictates our decisions—our circumstances or the God of them?*

The challenge of staying committed to God when times are tough and seemingly greener pastures are a mere fence-hop away is one I know. Feel-good remedies abound for the loneliness and challenges of singleness. Clinging to Christ and His promise of company and provision instead of reaching for the many available tonics has been an exercise I have both failed and succeeded at. His grace has held me fast even when my choices have looked more like Elimelech and Naomi's. This I know for sure: God's ways are not always the most practical, popular, or unopposed, but they are the most blessed. But I don't want us to get too far ahead of ourselves.

PERSONAL RESPONSE: Think about a time when you allowed your circumstances to direct you instead of leaving room for God's direction. How did this cause you to more quickly act on God's leading in the future?

LOOK BACK AT VERSE 6. From where did Naomi hear that God had come to the aid of His people? What about this feels significant?

I will never get over this. It was within the dark and dreaded land of Moab, the land of her family's choosing, that Naomi heard of God's provision. The echoes of His mercy somehow reached her ears in a place where God wasn't supposed to be heard, in a land God's goodness wasn't supposed to reach.

PERSONAL RESPONSE: Briefly write about a time when God pursued you—even drew you back—when you were in a far-off place. What did you discover about His nature through that experience?

I've spent time in the distant land of my choosing, haunted by the warm glow of God's provision that seemed to be for everyone else but me. I pouted against Him in my disobedience, angry I wasn't experiencing Him but not wanting to change my allegiances either. I will never stop giving Him thanks for coming for me, even against what I wanted at the time. I wonder if Naomi would later feel similarly. Her return to Bethlehem wasn't necessarily out of a longing for her God but for His provision. God spread His table for her regardless. We will discover in this story that He is as generous with grace as He is with grain.

God's ways are not always the most practical, popular, or unopposed, but they are the most blessed.



PERSONAL TAKE: I can understand why Naomi decided to return to her homeland when she learned the famine had passed, but why do you think Ruth and Orpah decided to go with her? Naomi’s family moved to a foreign country out of need, but what might Ruth and Orpah’s reasons have been?

When Naomi heard that God had come to help her people in Bethlehem, she and her daughters-in-law prepared to return home (v. 6). The word *return* is a key theme of this chapter, a word that reminds us it’s never too late to come home. The God of grace was welcoming Naomi back to where she belonged, and what is more surprising is that the invitation was extended to two Moabite women. Psalm 16 feels like a fitting benediction for us as we consider the place God desires for us to dwell.

REFLECT ON PSALM 16:1-6.

PERSONAL RESPONSE: If you need to return to God in some way, write about the preparations you’re willing to make. If you’re in a place of peace and fellowship with Him, thank Him for His presence and provision.

No matter where you are, bread is always available at His table for anyone willing to return.

DAY 3

WEEPING FORWARD

I work closely with Justice & Mercy International (JMI), an organization that serves in the Amazon jungles of Brazil and the Eastern European country of Moldova. One of our primary ministries in Moldova is our Transitional Living Program. We have two boys and two girls’ homes where teenagers from broken or abusive families come to live in a loving environment. The three-year program consists of learning life skills, studying God’s Word, going to school and work, and mostly being part of a loving family environment. Despite the tragic pasts of these teenagers, many are growing into some of the finest young men and women I know, unfolding as individual flowers in morning’s light. Pain has marked each of them, but what they do with their pain determines their paths forward. Those who have chosen to follow Jesus are extraordinary examples of how God can transform even our greatest hardships into blessing.

Today we find Naomi packing her bags and hitting the road back to Judah. She’ll return to the place she left but not as the same person. Tragedy and loss have etched scars on her heart. She’ll head back without her husband or sons, bitter at God, and with two trailing daughters-in-law she wishes would just leave her alone already because she’s not in the *in-law, let’s-have-tea* mood right now. This is not the way any of us envision Naomi returning, but then again, she probably never imagined it this way either. Who can blame her despairing posture? And yet, like my TL friends, what she chooses to do with her grief will make all the difference for her.

How gracious that God was already in Bethlehem waiting for her, waiting for whomever else would choose to come with her, stranger or not. Naomi just didn’t know it yet. We’ll see in the sessions to come that God’s grace is always positioned for anyone who will simply come.

READ RUTH 1:7-14 AND SLOWLY TAKE IN THE DETAILS.



God’s grace is always positioned for anyone who will simply come.

Naomi said, “May the LORD show kindness to you as you have shown to the dead and to me” (v. 8). The word *kindness* doesn’t do justice to the Hebrew word it translates—*hesed*—a profound word throughout the book of Ruth. Consider the following descriptions of this term:

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, that 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.³

Israel associated [*hesed*] with Yahweh’s covenant relationship with her . . . despite her waywardness, Yahweh always stood steadfastly by Israel in “covenant loyalty.”⁴

Love, grace, mercy, kindness—all of the positive acts of devotion that flow out of a covenantal relationship.⁵

Based on these definitions, distill the idea of *hesed* into your own words.

PERSONAL TAKE: Given that the word was often used as a unique, covenant-love between God and Israel, how is it significant that Naomi asked God to show *hesed* to Ruth and Orpah?

PERSONAL REFLECTION: Who has shown you *hesed*? Describe the person and what he or she has done for you.

We’re going to table our study of *hesed* for now, but we’ll keep coming back to it as we study. It’s a concept that is essential to God’s covenant love for His people.

Before writing this Bible study, I’d read the book of Ruth many times. For some reason, I’d mistakenly thought that Naomi urged Ruth and Orpah to stay in Moab before they’d set out on their trip. This seemed logical—having the discussion before they packed all their bags, said their goodbyes, and forwarded the mail.

Where did Naomi’s discussion with her daughters-in-law take place (v. 7)?

Naomi, Ruth, and Orpah packed their bags, left their homes, and had gotten somewhere down the road when Naomi started urging them to go back. I guess it’s a little like being a kid on vacation, stuffed in the family station wagon, six hours from home when you start fighting with your siblings and your dad and mom promise they’re not afraid to turn this car right around if everyone doesn’t shape up. I don’t remember how old I was when I realized that they were never going to actually do that.

What reason did Naomi first give them for returning to Moab?

In verse 10, who turned back? Circle your answer.

Ruth Orpah Both Ruth and Orpah Neither

Naomi realized she had two very determined and committed in-laws on her hands. When they didn’t respond to her initial nudging, she snipped the threads of their faintest hopes. *You’re following me to Bethlehem because I’m your only hope for another husband. Even if I got married and pregnant with another son tonight, you’d have to wait twenty years for him to grow up. Seeing that’s unlikely—and a little sketchy—you best cut me and your losses and find another husband your own age in Moab who can take care of you. Oh, and the Lord’s hand has gone out against me. So, there’s that.*

After Naomi’s compelling argument, how did they respond (v. 14)?

One of my dear friends moved to Nashville from Boone, North Carolina. She had lived in Boone for twenty years and had made a home whose roots held almost as firm as the surrounding Appalachian Mountains. Leaving was not a consideration until the Lord opened up a tailor-made job for her in Nashville and the Holy Spirit's leading became even stronger than those mountains she awoke to every morning. Through months of tears and grief, she packed her bags, made the journey, and dug a new foundation in Tennessee. Fortunately for me, she landed about a mile down the road. My friend wept, but she wept forward.

Verse 14 reminds me that though there will be weeping in this life, the direction in which we weep is what truly matters.

According to Ruth 1:7-14, who wept going forward and who wept going backward? Describe your answer below.

PERSONAL TAKE: Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye, but Ruth clung to her. What do you think motivated each of their decisions?

This idea of weeping in different directions is something we can all relate to. In the following passages, compare and contrast both individuals in the chart. Specifically, how did their grief affect their direction?

RICH YOUNG RULER Mark 10:17-22	WOMAN AT JESUS'S FEET Luke 7:36-38,48-50

Though there will be weeping in this life, the direction in which we weep is what truly matters.

RICH YOUNG RULER Mark 10:17-22	WOMAN AT JESUS'S FEET Luke 7:36-38,48-50

The woman at Jesus's feet wept but didn't allow her grief to stop her forward motion, but the rich young man walked away from Christ with great sadness. How often we too have been tempted to turn back in the face of loss or adversity. But how great the honor and reward of Ruth and the woman at Jesus's feet who, in their tears, kept walking forward.

PERSONAL RESPONSE: Are you in a season of grief that makes you want to stop or turn around? What would weeping forward as you continue to follow Christ look like for you? If this doesn't describe your current season, write about a past experience of weeping forward and what you gained from that experience.

God sees your tears. Cry them, feel them, wipe them, but don't let them stop you from moving toward Christ. It's possible to cry and walk. We will see this truth continue to blossom into the weeks ahead.



DAY 4

A LONG OBEDIENCE



Both nature and Scripture are filled with profound discoveries for those expecting to uncover something new. Be expectant in the Lord today.

One of the nice things about the short length of the book of Ruth is that we're able to take our time. I realize we're only to verse 14 and it's taken us three days to get here, but I'm savoring the slow pace. When I walk with my four-year-old niece, Lily, we make little forward progress but ample discovery progress. She pauses to examine pebbles, twirl oak leaves, and snap twigs in two. This is the leisurely but intentional pace of thoughtful Bible reading. Both nature and Scripture are filled with profound discoveries for those expecting to uncover something new. Be expectant in the Lord today.

READ RUTH 1:15. (I was serious about slow.)

Naomi refused to abandon her In-Laws-Turn-Back campaign even after Orpah went home and Ruth clung to her side.

How many times did Naomi urge Ruth to turn back (vv. 8-15)?

Give two reasons why Naomi encouraged Ruth to go back (v. 15).

PERSONAL TAKE: Why do you think Naomi was so adamant about not having Ruth and Orpah return to Bethlehem with her?

The text doesn't tell us, but it's possible Naomi didn't want anyone to know her sons had married Moabites since they were outside the covenant nation of Israel. If she returned home alone, perhaps this would remain concealed.⁶ Whatever the reason, Ruth withstood several of Naomi's discouraging appeals to turn back. Obedience to God is often met with challenges that

persuade us to change our minds. I used to think obedience was a one-and-done decision, but I now realize it might mean having to make that same choice several times in a week, month, or year. Orpah made it through Naomi's first round of convincing persuasions (v. 10), but after Naomi's second and third push, Orpah gave in.

PERSONAL RESPONSE: Describe a time when you obeyed in the midst of consecutive trials or temptations. What did you discover about Christ and His blessings?

Obedience to God is often met with challenges that persuade us to change our minds.

Orpah set her course toward the God of Israel, but when doubts about her security settled in, she turned back. We can all relate to wanting to run back to the familiar in the middle of hard obedience. But we can also relate to the unparalleled blessings that arrive after prolonged obedience through temptation and adversity. These long stretches are what Scripture often refers to as "testing" (Jas. 1:2-4). This word doesn't mean the grade you're hoping to get on the obedience test God just passed out; rather, it's the idea of pure metals being tested. As gold passes through a purifying flame, its nature is proven (1 Pet. 1:7). The dross is skimmed off, and the gold shows itself for what it is.

Ruth's steadfast journey toward the God of Israel is similar to an account that took place before her time. Jacob's son Joseph was sold by his brothers to an Egyptian named Potiphar. While serving faithfully in his master's house, Potiphar's wife persistently tried to seduce him.

READ GENESIS 39:1-10 AND FILL IN THE BLANK FROM VERSE 10 USING THE CSB TRANSLATION.

"Although she spoke to Joseph _____, _____, he refused to go to bed with her."

I wonder how many times Joseph had to choose obedience in the face of temptation. He wouldn't have escaped her seductive trap had he only stood

firm once. Instead, he had to choose righteousness day after day. Ruth and Naomi's relationship was clearly different from that of Joseph and Potiphar's wife, but Ruth still needed the resolve to move toward the God of Israel while Naomi tried to talk her out of it. At the same time, obedience to God requires more than willpower. Ruth's and Joseph's obedience wasn't based on self-determination alone; rather, their motivation was anchored in something deeper than their inner resolve.

You'll need to glance at tomorrow's reading to answer this, but compare Joseph's statement to his master's wife (Gen. 39:9) with Ruth's statement to Naomi (Ruth 1:16-17). Whom did Joseph and Ruth both reference?

In what way did the living God factor into their obedience?

READ JOHN 14:15. Jesus says if we _____ Him, we'll keep His _____.

Ruth's and Joseph's commitment to obedience stemmed from their commitments to God. And as New Testament believers, our obedience flows from our love for Jesus. Only a love for Him will sustain obedience to Him.

PERSONAL RESPONSE: Since enduring obedience hinges on our love for Jesus, take a minute to evaluate your relationship with Him. Where are you struggling to trust, love, or believe in Him? How is it affecting your resolve to follow Him?

Joseph could have succumbed to Potiphar's wife's pleas for intimacy—who would have blamed him after being sold into slavery by his brothers, seemingly abandoned by God. And Ruth could have returned to Moab with her sister-in-law, Orpah. Surely no one would have cast a stone at her for choosing the familiar over an embittered mother-in-law and a foreign people. But neither

Joseph nor Ruth was looking for easy outs or rationalizations. They'd tasted the goodness of the God of Israel, and despite opposition, their faith emerged as gold.

When we lose sight of God's goodness and holiness, we're prone to justifying decisions that oppose His Word and heart. But when we believe God is good and obeying Him is for our freedom, we will change our courses for the sake of obedience. Perhaps no one changed her course more than Ruth when she decided to leave her people, false gods, and homeland for the God of Israel.

PERSONAL RESPONSE: Do you need to make a life change in order to protect your path of obedience? It can be large or small. Write about it here.

Ruth and Joseph each showed resolve as they walked out their obedience to God while doing whatever it took to preserve their obedience. In the New Testament, the book of James touches on this beautifully.

Close by reflecting on these fitting verses as you seek to persevere in obedience. How does each encourage you to persevere in righteousness?

Consider it a great joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you experience various trials, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing.

JAMES 1:2-4

Blessed is the one who endures trials, because when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.

JAMES 1:12

Only a love for Christ will sustain obedience to Him.



DAY 5

WHEREVER YOU GO



Ruth would prove to be worth more to Naomi than either of them could imagine.

When I moved to Nashville more than twenty years ago, I didn't know a single person. I knew of friends of friends, and a few people had scribbled on napkins names of acquaintances to look up since no one could text contacts back and forth. (It was basically the 1800s.) Before moving, I'd been in the same church, in the same city, with many of the same friends my entire life. My first few years in Nashville were terribly lonely, but eventually, I met my friend April, and then a few years later I met Paige and Mary Katharine, and now I have a church community I couldn't imagine life without. Having even one good friend in life gives you many things, not the least of which is the gift of not being alone. Naomi and Ruth had each other, and even though Naomi may have wanted to arrive in Bethlehem alone, Ruth would prove to be worth more to her than either of them could imagine.

READ RUTH 1:16-17.

PERSONAL TAKE: Up to this point, Naomi had done almost all of the talking, but now it was Ruth's turn. Which of her statements resonates with you most and why?

Naomi's spewing bitterness, her discouraging pleas—Ruth had had enough. Despite Ruth's tearful grief, she silenced Naomi's complaints with her resolve.

How did Ruth's loving yet firm words to Naomi affect the rest of their journey (v. 18)? Circle your answer.

Naomi . . .

got mad and ran ahead

disowned Ruth

stopped trying to persuade Ruth

wept

Ruth's resolute speech to Naomi emphasizes the power of the spoken word. She found her place in a long line of God's people who spoke truth at opportune moments. I think of Abigail speaking wisdom to David (1 Sam. 25:23-31), Jethro giving advice to Moses that helped him serve the people (Ex. 18:17-27), or Peter commanding a paralyzed man to "get up and walk!" (Acts 3:6). We could long recount the exchanges of Holy Spirit-filled men and women speaking life to the hopeless, despairing, deceived, rebellious, wounded. Ruth's words in 1:16-17 are not the stuff of knee-jerk responses. We can only reckon they were forged over time and in relationship with God. You don't decide to forsake all your gods and cling to a despairing in-law in a moment of whimsy. Ruth's words quieted Naomi (v. 18) because they'd been formed in love and loyalty.

Briefly sum up the central thought of each passage.

Proverbs 15:1-2,4

Proverbs 16:23-24

Proverbs 18:13

Proverbs 25:11

Proverbs 27:5-6

PERSONAL TAKE: How do these principles from Proverbs play out in Ruth's conversation with Naomi?

When I was a child, my dad was relentless at making us kids talk things out. We had more family meetings than I now have business meetings. I didn't love learning how to apologize or listen to others explain their point of view—couldn't we all just agree that my perspective was probably the right one? I'm indebted to my parents for teaching me how

Humble,
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to have difficult conversations. Humble, truthful, and kind speech is healing ointment in bitter and complicated situations.

Since Ruth's words hold such weight, let's look at her speech more closely. Read the printed verses below.

- **Circle** the words that show Ruth's determination and strength.
- **Underline** the words that show her love and support for Naomi.
- **✓ Check** the words that show her spiritual conviction.
- *** Star** the words that show her humility.

(Mark words as many times as you think they apply.)

But Ruth replied: Don't plead with me to abandon you or to return and not follow you. For wherever you go, I will go, and wherever you live, I will live; your people will be my people, and your God will be my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD punish me, and do so severely, if anything but death separates you and me.

RUTH 1:16-17

NOW READ VERSE 18 AND TAKE IN NAOMI'S RESPONSE TO RUTH'S WORDS.

The CSB translation begins with "When Naomi saw . . ." It took Ruth's strong words to finally convince Naomi that she wasn't taking no for an answer. Our words have strength, especially when they're governed by the Holy Spirit. Sometimes we need to speak the hard word, the word of forgiveness, or the word of accepting forgiveness. Other times we need to speak the loving, determined, or committed word. Always the humble word.

PERSONAL RESPONSE: Do you need to speak a word to someone? Matthew 5:23-24 talks about the importance of not delaying in certain circumstances. If you are sensing the Holy Spirit's nudge, write it here.

The verses we've studied today have been read at many weddings and printed on as many cards, gracing relationships since the day Ruth spoke them. But the truth is that this famous speech was uttered amidst loss and hardship and in the face of much bitterness. Ruth's words did not usher in a honeymoon but rather a permanent home in a foreign land.

As we consider this passage in light of New Testament realities, the questions become: *Are we committed to Christ? Will we go where He goes? Stay where He stays? Will His people be our people? His Father our Father?* I'm really looking forward to answering these questions with you over the next five sessions. You've already done a remarkable job.

WATCH

WATCH the Session Two video teaching and take notes below.



To access the video teaching sessions, use the instructions in the back of your Bible study book.

RECIPE

GRILLED SALMON WITH LEMON SAUCE

Salmon is pretty great no matter what, but what puts it over the top is how you dress it up. I love this recipe because you can still feel healthy while not skimping on what we all love—a good sauce. Add a green vegetable and you will feel even better about this meal. (SERVES 6)

INGREDIENTS FOR SALMON FILETS

2 garlic cloves, minced
2 tablespoons of olive oil
2 tablespoons of lemon juice
Salt and pepper to taste
6 salmon fillets

INGREDIENTS FOR SAUCE

2 tablespoons of butter
1 tablespoon of flour
 $\frac{2}{3}$ cup of heavy cream
1 tablespoon of dijon mustard
 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon of paprika
2 tablespoons of water
Zest of 1 lemon
1 teaspoon of chopped basil

DIRECTIONS

1. In a small saucepan, melt butter, stir in flour, and cook until starting to brown. Whisk in salt and pepper to taste, paprika, cream, mustard, and water. Cook until simmering. Add basil and lemon zest. Set aside until ready to pour over salmon.
2. Heat the grill to 450°. In a small bowl, combine garlic, salt, pepper, oil, and lemon juice. Brush mixture over salmon. Grill turning once (6 minutes total).
3. Pour sauce over salmon and serve with sautéed spinach or your favorite green vegetable.



Turn to pages 184–187 for appetizer, side, and dessert ideas that go well with this dish.