



Week One, *God sees our suffering and is present with us in it whatever the circumstances.*

How to Use This Guide: You and your small group are encouraged to listen to the weekend message. It is not required for this guide to be helpful. This guide will complement, but not compete OR complete what was communicated in the weekend message.

Brief Intro/Teaching for Your Group:

1. At the heart of the book of Ruth is the word “hesed” that describes a covenant love. We would use two words in English, both “love” and “loyalty” to describe this one word in Hebrew. The word occurs in Ruth 1:8, 2:20 and 3:10. Ruth tells the story of a love that endures through life’s hardships and tragedies. As we begin our reading and study of Ruth, let’s invite this story of redemption to redefine our understanding of God’s love for us and our practice of loving one another.

2. The book of Ruth opens with a family leaving their home in the promised land of God due to a famine. The difficult circumstances of being displaced turns to tragedy when all the men in the family die. Naomi and her daughter in laws Orpah and Ruth are widowed and left to live in a foreign land with a shell of what their family once was.

3. Without husbands, fathers or sons Naomi, Orpah and Ruth are left vulnerable. In traditional eastern cultures, men played all of the protective roles and daughters leave their mother’s house to live with their husbands and his parents. This means Orpah and Ruth are culturally bound to serve Naomi. Naomi is concerned for her daughter in laws and desires that they go to find “rest” within the protection of the families of their husbands. Naomi has lost hope that she will be able to provide for herself, Orpah and Ruth.

Big Idea for Discussion: How do we respond to difficult circumstances and what do we learn from Naomi when she is faced with tragedy?

Let's pray and invite God into our discussion.

My Story (Help us get to know one another):

1. When you are faced with difficult circumstances in life, where do you find yourself running for comfort?
 - a. Do you tend to be drawn toward others?
 - b. Do you tend to withdraw from others?

Digging Deeper (Exploring the big idea in and through God’s Word):

1. Have someone in your group slowly read Ruth 1:1-14.
2. As a group, list all of the losses experienced in the first 14 verses of the book.
3. Have someone read Ruth 1:8-9. What do we learn from these verses about Naomi’s desires for the well-being of her daughters-in-law? Naomi reverses the cultural norm, she is serving Orpah and Ruth not the other way around. What does this tell us about her character? What do we learn about Orpah and Ruth in their response to Naomi’s wishes for them in verses 10-15?
4. In verses 16-18 Ruth makes six commitments to Naomi. What do we learn about love and loyalty from her commitments? Ruth’s love and loyalty contrast with Naomi’s questions. She’s left asking herself: has my God’s love and loyalty run out for me?
5. Read verses 19-22 slowly as a group. Take a closer look at verse 20. What do think about Naomi re-naming herself as she returns home, “going away full and returning empty”? Naomi widowed and barren, appears to be asking herself “has my usefulness in society run out?” Is she justified in saying so?
6. Naomi exposes her own bitterness and self-pity. When we share our hurts with God and one another, what is most often the result? What happens to our hearts when we choose not to share our bitterness?
7. Re-read the final verses of the chapter verses 19-22 and discuss as a group the subtle hints that God is present with Naomi and Ruth.

Taking It Home (Putting this into action):

1. How has God let you endure through hardship? Who has he brought into your life to help you endure?
2. How have you seen others persevere in the face of tragedy?
3. Is there a relationship or situation that God is calling you to endure?
4. Now that we have taken a closer look at love and loyalty in the lives of Naomi and Ruth, what lesson are you taking with you to endure your own hardship?
5. What lesson are you taking with you in regard to the subtlety of God’s presence in this first chapter of Ruth?



Week Two, God's faithfulness welcomes us into a new kingdom reality of covenant community.

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Brief Intro/Teaching for Your Group:

1. Remember, Naomi and Ruth are left vulnerable as widowed and barren woman without husbands to play a protective role. Ruth's commitment to Naomi has real life costs. She is committing herself to a widow without a promise of future provision, returning to a land where she most likely does not have friends or family, is without legal rights and will most likely face ethnic pressures because she is a Moabite, not an Israelite.
2. Ruth's commitment *"where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people will be my people; your God will be my God; where you die; I will die; there I will be buried"* contains literary parallelism often seen in Hebrew writings. Her use of parallelism highlights for us *"your people will be my people and your God will be my God,"* centering her commitment to Naomi. Ruth's covenant love with Naomi creates a new community of two barren and widowed women committed to honor God and one another.
3. In the book of Ruth we read the story of redemption that depicts the faithfulness of God's hesed love. We see that God takes the new community of two single women one, an Israelite and the other a Moabite, and weaves them into the bigger story of redemption by tying them to Boaz. Boaz fathered Obed, Obed fathered Jesse and Jesse fathered David. Ultimately, this lineage reaches to the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus' love and loyalty creates a new community for us through the cross. We now all share in a new reality of relating to one another as brothers and sisters in covenant community.

Big Idea for Discussion: Ruth's love and loyalty to Naomi creates a new community. This is a picture for us of what it means to move into Beloved Community with one another as the family of God.

Let's pray and invite God into our discussion.

My Story (Help us get to know one another):

1. Think of a close relationship where you make the decision to love no matter the consequences. What fears arise in you when you decide to love like this?
2. What do you find keeps you from being controlled by fears and frees you to love?

Digging Deeper (Exploring the big idea in and through God's Word):

1. Have someone in the group read Ruth 1:22-2:7. Invite the group to imagine all of the emotions that Naomi and Ruth were experiencing as they returned to Bethlehem.
2. How might Naomi's experience of returning to Bethlehem be different than Ruth's experience? Do you think they have any shared thoughts or feelings?
3. It is important to call out that the book of Ruth is centered on two single women facing loss and tragedy together. Read verses 8-13. What unique challenges are Naomi and Ruth courageously facing together? What are challenges that single women face today?
4. Read verses 14-23 slowly as a group. List the specific things that Boaz does for Ruth during this meal. What stands out about Boaz character in these verses? Ask the group to decide on the three best words to describe his actions toward Ruth.
5. In the book of Ruth, chapter one is full of death and chapter two is the beginning of being restored to life, or "rest." How does Boaz's presence in Naomi and Ruth's life change their future?
6. How are Naomi and Ruth's relationships changing as a result of returning to Bethlehem and moving away from death toward life?

Taking It Home (Putting this into action):

1. Can you think of a time that a hardship put you in a low place with God? How do our beliefs shape how we see God?
2. Ruth shows us that sometimes a low place in our life can be used by God to show us His love and grace through others...How does our belief about God influence how we see our circumstances in life?
3. Ruth's humility is honored by Boaz with further humility and grace...Who might God be asking you to practice humility with in expressing your love and loyalty?
4. How does the book of Ruth challenge your thinking about your commitments of love and loyalty within the family of God?



Week Three, How we show up in small acts of faith and love either adds or subtracts from us becoming the Beloved Community.

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Brief Intro/Teaching for Your Group:

1. In the book of Ruth we learn the power of love that evokes love in others. Ruth's gritty love for Naomi of working in the fields gleaning for provision, is seen by Boaz and compels him to love both Naomi and Ruth with safety and provision for the entire harvest season. Notice that Boaz's love does not stop with himself, he also invites his workers to participate in his radical generosity.
2. The big reveal in chapter two is that Naomi does not know whose field Ruth labored in and Ruth does not know the significance of who Boaz is to Naomi. Naomi shares with Ruth that Boaz is a "redeemer." Israel's law made a provision that male members of a clan could rescue or redeem other members of the clan that have fallen on hard times. Boaz not only represents a provision from the law, but more importantly a personification of the law to "redeem" another.
3. This personification of being a "redeemer" points to Jesus, but also points to us as we are called to reflect the redeeming life of Jesus to one another. Jesus says that others will know we are his disciples by our love for one another. The apostle Paul says that we are to carry one another's burdens and thus "fulfill the law of Christ." Redemption is not a distant theological truth in this story, it is intimate and personal!

Big Idea for Discussion: Our small acts of faith and love can never be underestimated in God's big story of redemption. Each of us has a vital role in becoming the Beloved Community.

Let's pray and invite God into our discussion.

My Story (Help us get to know one another):

1. Who is in your life right now could use some love and loyalty to comfort them in hardship?

Digging Deeper (Exploring the big idea in and through God's Word):

1. Read Ruth 3:1-9 slowly as a group.
2. In these verses Naomi is faced with a challenge of creating time and space for Ruth to make a strong and effective appeal for marriage with Boaz. Remembering that Ruth is a grieving widow, what is the significance of the instructions that Naomi gives her? What are the risks that Ruth is facing as she heeds Naomi's instructions?
3. In Hebrew culture, at the time immediately following the wedding ceremony a couple would enter a bridal tent and consummate their union while all the other guests kept celebrating around them. The Israelites celebrated the joy of sex. The Hebrews were not influenced by Greek thought of a separation of physical and spiritual. God created both to be good. In knowing this, read 3:9-18 and name all of the dramatic tension that exists in the unfolding of this story between Boaz and Ruth.
4. How does the telling of the story highlight the strength of character of Naomi, Ruth and Boaz as they wait on redemption? What part of the story captures you? Why?
5. Do you find yourself surprised by Ruth's courage? What is your reaction to Boaz's response to Ruth's courage?
6. What do you make of a God who wants the story of redemption to be told with such romance and intimacy detailed?

Taking It Home (Putting this into action):

1. Where in your life do you find it easy to take risks of faith out of obedience to God? Are you aware of any places that you are holding back where God is asking you to risk?
2. Why can Ruth risk? What lessons of risking faith and love are you learning from the book of Ruth?
3. What might it look like for you to take a risk of faith or love this week?
4. Ruth is called a "worthy woman." How are you looking to God in becoming/growing into a worthy woman...Boaz is called a "great man of worth." How are you looking to God in becoming/growing into a man of worth?



Week Four, We get to walk in the way of Redemption as we look forward to the person of Jesus Christ

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Brief Intro/Teaching for Your Group:

1. In the telling of the story within the book of Ruth there are “by chance” moments that heighten the drama. We hear that “by chance” Ruth gleaned in Boaz’s field, “by chance” he is a relative of Naomi, and “by chance” the other redeemer with whom Boaz must negotiate to redeem Ruth walks by the city gate. These moments are not so subtle hints in the narrative to pay attention to God orchestrating the events that lead to redemption.

2. Boaz’s redemption of Ruth is full of wisdom. His actions honor all the parties involved, and he is a shrewd negotiator. Boaz is willing to pay the full cost of redeeming Naomi and marrying Ruth. Once again, we see that mindset of the Hebrews does not separate the physical from the spiritual like the Greeks who believed the physical was bad and the spiritual good. Boaz’s business dealings in the city gate are a reflection of his faith, love and devotion to God.

3. Boaz is a redeemer that looks forward to the Redemption we find in the person of Jesus. Boaz’s care for Ruth during the harvest season is physical, he provides food, and emotional, he provides safety. Boaz’s care for Ruth at the conclusion of the harvest is physical, with the provision of six measures of barley, and emotional, by sharing his plan to relieve her fears of the scandal that could result from their night together. Boaz’s care is physical once again in paying the price of redemption of the land, and emotional in that his pledge to marry Ruth gives her a rightful place within the people of Bethlehem.

Big Idea for Discussion: Our faith and love for Jesus compels us to walk in the way of redemption. We get to participate in the redemption of all creation as God makes all things new again.

Let's pray and invite God into our discussion.

My Story (Help us get to know one another):

Think about the “by chance” moments in your life, where do you now see God at work in these moments?

Digging Deeper (Exploring the big idea in and through God’s Word):

1. Read Ruth 4:1-12.
2. What do you find noteworthy in the way in which Boaz negotiates in the City Gates?
3. What hints do we read that this business transaction reaches far beyond the agreement itself?
4. Have someone in the group read Ruth 1: 19-22 followed by someone reading Ruth 4: 13-17.
5. These two scenes are full of the contrast of passing from death to life. Identify how the women in the village in both scenes help us see the weight of loss and the heights of joy in life. Why is it that people who surround us in life help us see our lives with more clarity?
6. Ruth tells the story of the redemption that we find in the gospels, allowing us to pass from death to life. In the person of Jesus, we see it more fully in the life-giving work of the Holy Spirit raising Jesus to life. Resurrection is our way of life in Christ. How does Naomi experience a passing from death to life? How does her life impact our lives?

Taking It Home (Putting this into action):

1. How has God brought about a passing from death to life in you? What happened?
2. When we share these moments in community it brings depth of meaning. What is especially meaningful for you about your experience of redemption?
3. Take a moment and reflect if there is someone in your life where God wants you to celebrate with them to help them understand the depth of His redemption in their life.
4. Where in your life are you waiting on resurrection power to raise you to life?
5. Share one thing you want to rejoice in with your small group. Rehearse your joys in a posture of prayer by giving thanks to God for all He is doing to bring you life from death.



Week Five, *In God's story of Redemption there are no small lives in the Kingdom of God.*

How to Use This Guide: You and your small group are encouraged to listen to the weekend message. It is not required for this guide to be helpful. This guide will complement, but not compete OR complete what was communicated in the weekend message.

Brief Intro/Teaching for Your Group:

1. Boaz and Ruth's son completely reverses the dead end that Naomi's life was becoming. The birth of a son brings the past and future together in a moment. We see the strands of redemption all tied together by God as Naomi's suffering, Ruth's commitment to her, and their mission together culminate with God bringing the joy of heaven to earth.
2. Naomi and Ruth's loss is not erased, but it is reversed from empty to full. Naomi and Ruth's meaning and purpose is changed slightly by the birth of Obed, but more significantly their legacy of risk-taking faith is passed on for generations. Obed's grandson is David, who takes five small stones and defeats Goliath.
3. The book of Ruth ends with a seemingly unending example of the love and loyalty that "hesed" love provides in sacrifice. We would all agree that it might finally be time that Ruth enjoys her life with Boaz as a reward for all she has endured in her commitment to Naomi. Ruth honors her legacy of love and loyalty with one more act of sacrificial love by placing her son Obed in the arms of Naomi to be his "nurse."

Big Idea for Discussion: Each of our small lives plays a role in the big story of God. Finding our way in God's story of Redemption impacts the Kingdom of God now and forever.

Let's pray and invite God into our discussion.

My Story (Help us get to know one another):

As you consider the strands of redemption in your life, where is one place that you can point to that God "counted" on you to play your role in His big story of redemption?

Digging Deeper (Exploring the big idea in and through God's Word):

1. Read Ruth 4:13-22.
2. Looking at Ruth's life as we know it told in the book of Ruth, how does she speak and act for Yahweh - Naomi's God?
3. How is God's working redemption evident in her life?
4. Does the ending of the book of Ruth feel too much like a story book ending? If so why, what or who is left out? If not, why does this ending, which feels too good to be true, speak with such authenticity?
5. How did God count on Naomi and Ruth to face their immediate circumstances? What do you make of how their faith changes the future unfolding of His story of redemption?
6. Read Matthew 1. How does reading the first chapter of the gospel of Matthew change your understanding of the book of Ruth in God's big story of redemption?
7. What has the "gospel of Ruth" taught you?

Taking It Home (Putting this into action):

1. How is the "gospel of Ruth" casting a bigger vision of God's calling on your life?
2. Where is God asking you to take a risk of faith to grow into His love and loyalty for another in your life?
3. Who are the people in your life you are certain that God is calling you to a life of sacrificial love and loyalty?
4. Reflecting on the entire book of Ruth how are you most challenged to live with more courage and whole-heartedness?

