

SOUTHLAND CHURCH

THE BOOK OF
RUTH

5 Day Devotional



foundations
daily devotional

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DAY 1

The story of Ruth is one of the most beautiful stories of Scripture: a story of loving-kindness and of hope and joy during a time of moral and spiritual upheaval. Ruth's story takes place sometime during the years of the Judges – a time when the nation was bereft of godly leadership, where immorality and idolatry reigned and “everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judges 21:25). It is in this tumultuous and hopeless time that we find the story of Ruth the Moabite nestled within Bethlehem in Judah.

Right away, we who read this story thousands of years after it was written, and thousands of years after the resurrection of Christ, recognize immediately that Ruth's tale takes place in the same town that our Lord was born. This is no coincidence. In fact, in Matthew 1:5, we see Ruth's name in the genealogy of Jesus! The Holy Spirit was very intentional with the details in the book of Ruth. Written after David had become king, one purpose of the book is to show how God mercifully raised up a man of godly leadership for Israel through the union of Ruth and Boaz. But in hindsight, we see the Holy Spirit working on a larger scale. The story of Ruth is ultimately a story of redemption, pointing us towards not only a godly king on earth, but an eternal King of kings – a Messiah who will also come from this family line, and who will save the people from their sins!

The time of the Judges mark over 400 years of anarchy as a result of sin and rebellion, leaving the people grappling for solidarity, and the reader gasping for a breath of fresh air. Ruth is just that, though it is shocking to believe that her story could have taken place in such a time. (And you are encouraged to go through the Judges edition of *Foundations* if you have not.) This just goes to show us the reality of James 4:8, that if we draw near to God, He *will* draw near to us. Ruth is a shining example of one who chooses to walk in the ways of the Lord and receives the blessing promised to those who do so.



READ: Ruth 1-4



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. What sticks out to you in Ruth's story? Who do you admire and why?
2. What does this story tell you about God?
3. What do you think was God's purpose for writing this book? What are the themes He is trying to get across to us?
4. Ask the Holy Spirit how He wants you to respond to what you have read. How can what you have read help you to walk in God's ways today.

DAY 2

Over the next few days, we will look at this story through the perspective of each character. We begin today with Naomi. As you read today's Scripture reading, try to see the events through her eyes.

 **READ:** Ruth 1; 2:1-3, 17-23; 3:1-5; 4:13-17

Though Ruth is the title character of the book, Naomi is also very present: her circumstances bookend the entire story (1:1-5 & 4:13-17). The first five verses describe terrible loss, almost setting us up for a continuation of the sorrow we saw in the book of Judges. Naomi loses her husband and after ten years, her two sons as well. She finds herself a desolate woman in a foreign land. Not only are her circumstances every mother's worst nightmare, but her situation is a precarious one for the times as well. A woman in ancient times relied heavily on the males in her family for sustenance and provision. Naomi is left with nothing in a land where she has no relatives to help her, and so she takes the only sort of family she does have – her daughters-in-law – and begins the journey home. Imagine the burden she carried!

Naomi seems to be a woman plagued with guilt, bitterness and sorrow. It is evident in the first few scenes that she feels she is being punished – “the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me” (1:20). When her husband moved the family to Moab, they left the Promised Land and embraced a pagan people with pagan gods. The Moabites worshiped Chemosh and Molech, gods who required human sacrifice and sexual acts of worship. By leaving the Promised Land and marrying their sons to Moabite women, the family was walking out of God's blessing. Perhaps chapter 1 finds Naomi feeling the guilt of this decision – that her current destitution is a result of her family's actions – for, though her name means “Pleasant”, she commands her people call her Mara – “bitter”. She seems to feel undeserved of Ruth's kindness and commitment, which must only have added to her guilt. The end of chapter 1 depicts a broken woman who truly feels that the Lord is against her.

But God is with Naomi in her pain and deals patiently and gently with her. Through the love and kindness of others, God shows His faithfulness to her. Ruth is a tremendous blessing to her mother-in-law, and is one of God's tools in softening Naomi. Chapter 2:20 reveals a wonderful switch in Naomi's perspective: after finding out that Ruth has gleaned in the field of her husband's relative, Boaz, Naomi exclaims, “*May he be blessed by the Lord, whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead!*” In her joy, Naomi is recognizing the kindness of both Boaz AND Yahweh. This is the first time we see Naomi acknowledge God's kindness, showing an incredible shift in her heart. God has softened her and her eyes have been opened to His goodness and to the hope that is to be had in Boaz. This transformed Naomi is who we see throughout the rest of the story. Whereas before, Ruth had to grapple to handle their well-being (2:2), Naomi now takes charge on her own initiative, giving clear, intentional directives to Ruth (2:22; 3:1-4).

The end of the story finds a very different Naomi than we were introduced to at the beginning. God has changed her desolation to joy, her bitterness to pleasure and her emptiness to abundance! The women who once called her “Mara” lavish a blessing of life and hope; Yahweh has given her a hope and a future, and He has this same blessing for us who will soften our hearts to Him.

**JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. How did reading the story from Naomi's perspective change the story for you? Did it teach you anything, or open your eyes to anything different?
2. Naomi's perspective of God was off. She saw God as being against her. Is there an area where you feel God is against you? Bring this before Him. Ask Him if there is any sin in your heart that is causing you to feel this way. Ask Him to reveal any lies that have infiltrated your thinking.
3. What are some things you *know* are true about God – who He is and how He feels about you? Declare these things to be true about Him. Thank Him for these truths, even if you do not *feel* like they are true.
4. Ask God to show you a “Naomi” in your life – someone who currently feels bitter because of their struggles, perhaps someone who feels God is against them. Spend some time interceding for this person. Ask God to soften their heart and open their eyes to His kindness and goodness.

DAY 3

Today we will focus on the character of Ruth. Try to read today's passages through her eyes.



READ: Ruth 1:6-18, 2:6; 3:6-18; 4:11-12

Ruth is an excellent character. She really is like the woman of noble character that her great-great-grandson, Solomon, will one day write about (Proverbs 31). To have nobility is to have moral excellence, to be worthy of honour and respect; a noble person is one of love, sacrifice and humility. We see these things in Ruth.

Next to the brokenness and bitterness of Naomi in chapter 1 stands the nobility of Ruth. While Orpah kisses her mother-in-law goodbye, Ruth *clings* to her, showing her loyalty and devotion. In selfless sacrifice and faithful commitment, she pledges herself to Naomi entirely – her life, death, home and religion. By refusing to go home, Ruth was signing a contract to a difficult fate. She was abandoning her own father and mother and the security of their provision in order to care for her lost mother-in-law. She illustrates well the kindness that is a key theme throughout the story – in humility and love she willingly lays down her rights in order to serve Naomi.

But Ruth's kindness extends beyond a commitment to support her mother-in-law. In marrying Boaz instead of a younger or wealthier man (see 3:10) Ruth is showing kindness to her dead husband and his family. By marrying a close relative of Mahlon, Ruth would be able to carry on her husband's name, something that was very important in ancient culture. We see again a humble, selflessness in Ruth.

Ruth is one of two women to have a book of the Bible named after her, and is one of four mentioned in the genealogy of Christ. Like Rahab before her, Ruth was a foreigner who became an Israelite through her commitment to Yahweh. But before she was even one of God's people, Ruth was clay in His hands. He created her with a heart of kindness and compassion and through this, He brought her to Himself. By leaving her land and calling Naomi's God her own, Ruth was abandoning the idols of Chemosh and Molech and embracing Yahweh as her God. We aren't told anything outright about her relationship with Yahweh after chapter 1, but we see her righteous character throughout. We also

know her to be the great-grandmother of David. By ending the story with the news that the union of Ruth and Boaz resulted in a godly king for Israel, we are led to see Ruth and Boaz as strong spiritual influencers who, through their righteousness and commitment to Yahweh, left a legacy that produced a man after God's own heart.



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. What do you see in Ruth's character that is admirable? Ask God to show you a quality you possess that He loves to see in you.
2. Where is God evident in Ruth's story, even in portions where He is unmentioned? How is He at work throughout her life? Take some time to reflect on God's hand in your own life. Ask Him to show you something new – to show you a time when He was at work even though you didn't notice it.
3. Ask God to show you a quality you possess that He loves to see in you.
4. What is one godly characteristic that the Lord is asking you to intentionally work on today? Ask Him to help you to be like Him in this area.

DAY 4

Today we look at Boaz. As you read these chapters again, think about the character of Boaz. Imagine the events of the story through his eyes.



READ: Ruth 2:4-16; 3:6-15; 4

Boaz is a man of great character. He is a person of honour, integrity, humility and service. Like Ruth, Boaz displays the theme of kindness. He is a respected businessman, very kind and compassionate. Unlike many field owners, Boaz provided a safe working environment for gleaners. In ancient culture, it was customary for the poor, orphaned and widowed to glean in the fields of the reapers – walking behind the workers and gathering portions of the crop that were dropped or left behind. In many fields, female gleaners were made easy targets for rape and harassment. But Boaz's fields offered an environment of safety, security, and even refreshment. The first thing we hear him say is a blessing to his workers (2:4). He doesn't avoid them, or treat them as though they are beneath him. Neither does he greet them with a simple nod or a brief hello. Instead, he says, "The Lord be with you!" Boaz was a good man to work for. His success and prosperity did not get to his head. He valued his employees and their work, and he sought to point people towards God's goodness, and as a result, his workers loved and respected him.

Boaz immediately notices Ruth and shows interest in her. Even after discovering that she is a Moabite – a people cursed by Yahweh – he extends a hand of benevolence to her. We learn that Boaz is a relative of Naomi's husband. It seems that the news of Ruth's pledge has spread; Boaz holds deep respect for this young widow who would willingly forsake her homeland and her gods for the sake of her mother-in-law. He warmly accepts her, ensuring her safety and comfort and offering her rest.

Imagine Boaz's surprise when he wakes up to Ruth at his feet. While we, who are uncertain of the custom, may be somewhat confused, Boaz immediately understands what is going on – this woman is seeking to marry him that he might act as a *kinsman redeemer*. There are two customs woven into the book of Ruth: property redemption and levirate marriage.

According to God's law, property was to forever stay within the family. So when a man died, his next closest relative could purchase the land, thus "redeeming" it for the family. Alongside this was the custom of levirate marriage. It was customary, if a man died, for his closest male relative to marry his wife so that she would not remain a poor, destitute woman. If the woman had no children, the marriage would also allow her to carry on her husband's name. The one to fulfill these customs was called the *kinsman redeemer*.

As Ruth had extended kindness to Naomi, now Boaz extends kindness to Ruth. He agrees wholeheartedly to marry her, and with this act encompasses the central theme of the story: redemption – giving life and hope to what was once without. Both Ruth and Naomi are redeemed from a life of uncertainty, poverty and a lost family line. Through Boaz, the Lord has filled their cups to overflowing.



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Who has God used in your life to bless you? Make a list of those who have been a blessing to you and your family and spend time praising God for these individuals.
2. How can you be a blessing to others today? Ask God to release you from the bonds of self and to open your eyes to the needs of others. Ask Him for a specific way that you can point others to His goodness through a blessing.

DAY 5

Our final glance is to, with our own eyes, read the Scripture while looking for the hand of God. While this is a nice story, the implications of its message go far beyond the time in which it was written. Before you read today's passages, think about how God Himself displays the themes of kindness and redemption in Ruth's story, and think about what the greater implications of this story could be.



READ: Ruth 1:16-17, 4:13-22; Genesis 12:1-3; Romans 11:11-15; Colossians 1:25-27; Ephesians 2:11-22

God often reveals Himself through man, so when lovers of God are kind to others, the act of kindness is a revelation of God's character. Our love for others should be a sign that we love God, in fact if we love one another, people will know that we belong to God (see John 13:35). So through the kindnesses of those in the story (particularly that of Boaz to Ruth) we see also the kindness of God. However, this kindness is shown for a greater purpose.

The story of Ruth is, at its heart, one of redemption. This is what makes it a truly beautiful story. Right in chapter 1, God redeemed Ruth. Even if she had lived as a poor widow for the rest of her life, she would have been eternally redeemed by Yahweh because in verse 16, she renounced her people and her gods to follow the God of Israel. But God's redemption runs much deeper than that. Throughout the Bible, there are various Christ-figures – characters who give a prophetic picture of Jesus. Boaz is one such character. As we have already seen, through Boaz's kindness, Ruth was redeemed from a life of poverty and destitution to wealth and family heritage. Ruth is also brought physically into Israel – by marrying Boaz, an Israelite, she will start a family, and her children will be Jewish by blood. Together these things give us a *prophetic picture* of God's salvation plan for mankind!

Though God began with one man (Abraham), leading to one nation (Israel), His plan was always to bless the entire world. Abraham was told that *all the earth* would be blessed through his descendants. The Israelites were given strict separation laws that identified them as God’s holy and chosen people, set apart for His will. But there was always space for foreigners to become God’s people, *if* they were willing to abandon their ways and follow Yahweh as the one true God. In making her covenant to Naomi, Ruth was also accepting God’s covenant – a covenant of blessing for those who obeyed Him – *AND* illustrating a *New Covenant* that God would later foretell through the prophet Jeremiah: “I will be their God and they will be My people.” (see Jeremiah 31:30-34).

As God grafted Ruth into His family through His love and the redemption of Boaz, so He would graft in all those who would accept the gift of redemption through His Son, Jesus. This is where we stand right now. Ruth’s story gives a taste of the “mystery” that Paul would later talk about – the mystery of God’s Spirit dwelling within *anyone* who would put their faith in Jesus – Jew or Gentile, slave or free. Little did Ruth know when she left her homeland, and pledged her faithfulness to her mother-in-law, and selflessly married an Israelite businessman, that she would play a part in ushering her true Saviour into the world!

 **JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. What does this story show you about God’s sovereignty and faithfulness?
2. God is brilliant! If he could orchestrate the writing of Ruth to point so clearly to Jesus, then He can surely work out the circumstances of your life for good. What is something that you need to trust God with today? Ask Him to help you give this over to Him. Thank Him that He is sovereign and faithful in your life as He was in Ruth’s.
3. Mediate on the sacrifice of Jesus and the Gospel message. Think about how you came to know the Lord. Thank God for His hand on your life and for the great amounts of mercy He has shown you. Pray for His mercy to be extended on others who you know need to return to the Lord.

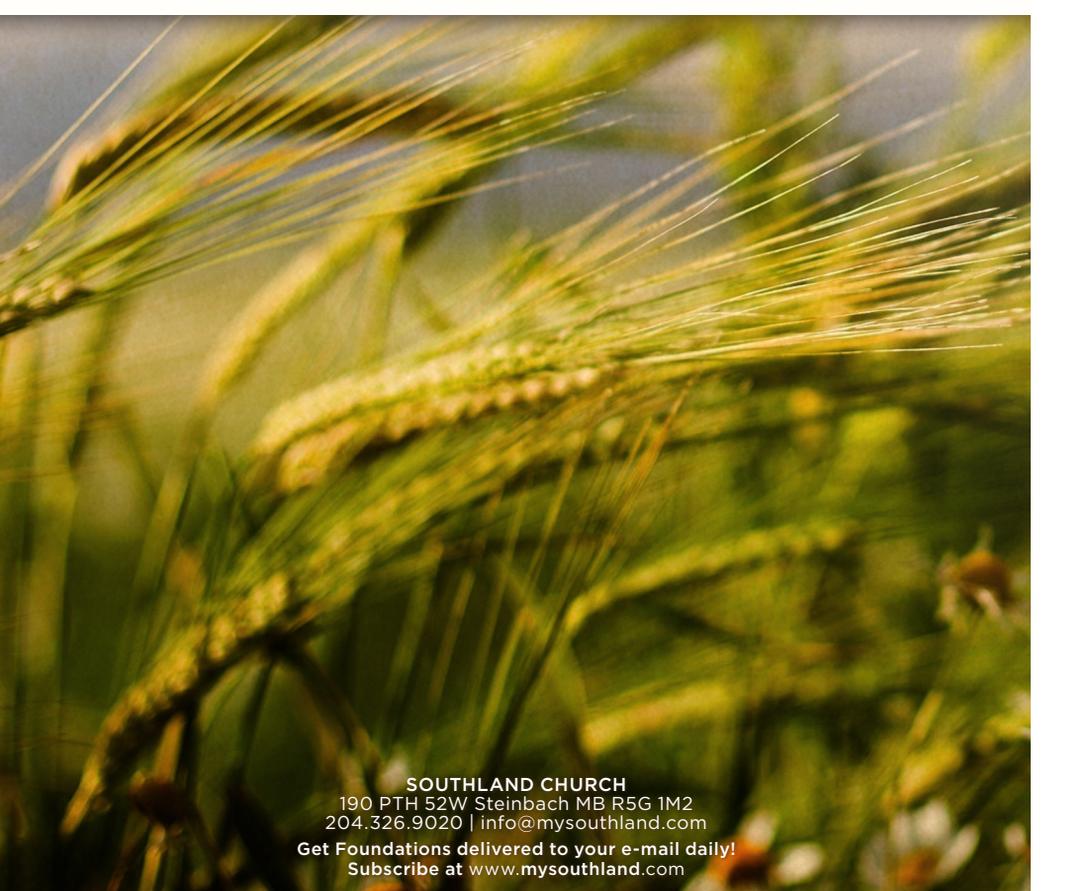


The Book of Ruth

Through the love story of Boaz and Ruth, this book gives us a glimpse into God's plan to redeem all the peoples of the earth, Jew and Gentile alike. Ruth is one of those books that show us the brilliance of the Holy Spirit! Though the story was penned hundreds of years before God incarnate, it pictures for us what is to happen as a result of Jesus' death and resurrection.

Ruth 4:14 (ESV)

"Blessed be the LORD, who has not left you without a redeemer, and may his name be renowned in Israel!"



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190 PTH 52W Steinbach MB R5G 1M2
204.326.9020 | info@mysouthland.com
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