



Introduction to Our Study

The Book of Ruth: Loving Kindness

Welcome

Your lovingkindness, O LORD, extends to the heavens,
Your faithfulness *reaches* to the skies.
Your righteousness is like the mountains of God;
Your judgments are *like* a great deep.
O LORD, You preserve man and beast.
How precious is Your lovingkindness, O God!
And the children of men take refuge in the shadow of Your wings.
They drink their fill of the abundance of Your house;
And You give them to drink of the river of Your delights.
For with You is the fountain of life;
In Your light we see light. *Psalms 36:5-9*

Tonight

- How to Use this Study
 - Reading *Ruth*
 - Historical Context of *The Book of Ruth*
("In the days when the judges ruled...")
 - Reflection
 - Listen: *The Book of Ruth*, Chapter 1
 - Blessing
-



About this Study...

The Book of Ruth: Loving Kindness is written by a team of women from West End Presbyterian Church, who participate in our *SOW Together* Bible Study. The members of this team are: Heather Oberle, Brice Bowman, Katie Shaffer, Susan Wood, Erin Bouknight, Stacy Shore, and Kim Greene. Our deepest gratitude goes to these women who have faithfully engaged these Scriptures, and their hearts, on our behalf.

These studies are written from a reformed perspective of the Bible. This means that we believe that "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:16-17) It also means that we believe that God "has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word" (Hebrews 1:2-3).

The ministry of SOW Together is under the spiritual care of West End Presbyterian Church:

The core value of WEPC is that the Gospel changes everything. This fuels our sense of identity as a church. Because of this conviction we minister and live with great hope, joy and confidence. We boldly proclaim the Gospel to all people—both believer and skeptic.

The vision of WEPC is to be a biblically authentic community of faith expressing itself through love.

The mission of WEPC is to make followers of Jesus who bring the Gospel to bear on every facet of life and culture.

For those realizing their need for a Savior for the first time: A Prayer of Belief

Lord Jesus Christ, I admit that I am weaker and more sinful than I ever before believed, but, through you, I am more loved and accepted than I ever dared hope. I thank you for paying my debt, bearing my punishment, and forgiving me. I run from my sins— my old life living for myself—and receive you as Savior. Amen.

Resources used for this study:

- *The Book of Ruth*, Robert Hubbard Jr.
- *A Loving Life: In a World of Broken Relationships*, Paul Miller
- *Faithful God: An Exposition of the Book of Ruth*, Sinclair Ferguson
- *The Message of Ruth: The Wings of Refuge*, David Atkinson


To learn more about our faith community, visit our website, at <http://www.wepc.org/about/mission/>

To download studies, and listen to weekly recordings of the discussion: <http://www.wepc.org/women/>
Password: Naomi



'Gleaning' Groups

As we journey through the study of the Book of Ruth, we encourage you to find other women to walk alongside, hearing their stories and sharing your own. In this story, we see Ruth "gleaning" in the fields. Gleaning was a process in which the poorest in the community—widow, orphans, and aliens—were invited to follow behind harvesters in the fields, to pick up grain that had been left behind. Over time, this word *glean* has come to mean "to gather in a gradual way" or to "search carefully."

In that spirit, we invite you to consider meeting regularly with one or a few women after each study, to glean and gather the goodness that remains! We have put a star  to a few questions in each study that are conducive to conversation with others, following your study of the Biblical text. Also, each study has a Reflect section that is designed to help you to connect to your own story, and provide a point of sharing with others.

Below are some suggestions for meeting with others and gleaning from God's rich word together.

Simple Suggestions for gleaning together:

- ◆ Set a date and time that you plan to meet each week.
- ◆ Begin & end your time with a short prayer.
- ◆ We recommend that each woman in the group take a turn asking the discussion questions. The woman in charge for the evening can decide which question(s) your group will discuss.
- ◆ Questions with a star are application questions, and invite women to share their own thoughts and experiences. Everyone's thoughts are welcome!
- ◆ You may want to start a text or email chain to communicate with one another about your plans as well as share any prayer requests you may have.
- ◆ Please review as a group the SOW Together Group Commitments (on the back of this page).



Group Commitments

- ◆ We desire God to be glorified in our weekly time together.
- ◆ We are committed to this small group fostering our growth in Christ throughout the year. We believe that growth happens in the context of fellowship --that we learn to be a community by being *in* community.
- ◆ We are committed to our groups being a safe place for people to share their experiences, thoughts, questions and concerns. We will hold things that are shared in the group in the strictest confidence.
- ◆ We are committed to letting the Scripture teach us. We want to listen to what it says before we respond. When our focus strays onto tangents (as important as they may be), we may at times need to gently steer, or be steered, back to what God's says to us in His Word.
- ◆ We are committed to seeing each member contribute as he/she feels ready. Therefore, we will try to learn this year how to *listen* and encourage each other. We will refrain from giving unsolicited advice. We will make an effort to never dominate the conversation, or disengage from it.
- ◆ We are committed to lifting up Christ as the One who ultimately loves and cares for us. We do this by admitting that we need Him, receiving His loving grace, and reflecting that love to one another in Jesus's name.



Reading *Ruth*

I remember reading a fictionalized account of Ruth as a young girl, and being drawn to the romance between Boaz and Ruth. It is familiar to many of us, and we may recognize the book as a redemptive love story between a foreign woman and a faithful Israelite, or perhaps as the celebration of a devoted daughter-in-law to her mother-in-law when all else is lost. It is also the origin story of King David, "a man after God's own heart" and of Jesus, our ultimate King and Redeemer - both of whom originate from the line of Jesse, the grandson of Ruth and Boaz.

Our story begins "In the days the judges ruled." This description places events around the time between Joshua's death and the coronation of Saul (1200-1020 BC). Robert Hubbard describes it as an "era of frightful social and religious chaos. The book of Judges teems with violent invasions, apostate religion, unchecked lawlessness, and tribal civil war." Judges concludes with the statement "In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes." (Judges 21:25).

If the book of Judges is a desert of turmoil and disobedience, then Ruth, in contrast, contains streams of water which refresh our souls. It is notably one of two books named after women, and the only scriptures named after a non-Israelite woman. The name of God is mentioned only by the participants in the unfolding drama - we as readers are left to discern the Lord's care and orchestration in Ruth's life. In addition, we get to enjoy the story as it unfolds in much the same way as the original hearers must have heard it, for it was most likely passed down through oral tradition prior to being recorded.

Like many good stories, our author leaves room for contemplation and curiosity. God's plan is only evidenced by what actually occurs and how His people respond - we do not receive a divine explanation for the sequence of events. Large swaths of time are condensed to a few phrases, and critical scenes unfold slowly. We will have the opportunity to ponder the thoughts, emotions, and motivations driving each of our characters. We may find ourselves more curious, as the text raises as many questions as it answers. This scripture frees our imagination as we consider the story of Naomi and her journey, and in turn, contemplate the stories the Lord is weaving in and around us.

While the Book of Ruth is a lilting narrative, it is also part of God's Word to us. So we are confident that it will also teach, correct, comfort and equip us. We expect to see Jesus -- for the Book of Ruth, like all scripture, prepares us for the coming of a Savior and Redeemer. Finally, we will reflect on our own stories. What in the story of Ruth and Naomi strikes a chord in our own heart, and what work God is doing within us? Where have we seen His lovingkindness? God is writing a story in each of us. As we contemplate it, we recognize Jesus' promise that "Whoever believes in me... rivers of living water will flow from within them." Be refreshed and be in your story, that living water may flow to women around you.



Reflect

Take five minutes to consider your own “context” as you begin the study of *Ruth*. How would you personally complete the phrase “In the days when...” right now? How would you describe what is happening in the world around you, and in your own home, and heart?

Listen:

Settle in, relax, and enjoy listening to chapter 1 of the story of *Ruth*.

Bless

*Although we are weeping
Lord, help us keep sowing
The seeds of Your Kingdom
For the day You will reap them
Your sheaves we will carry
Lord, please do not tarry
All those who sow weeping
Will go out with songs of joy! (from Psalm 126)*



Study 1: *Left Without*

Ruth 1:1-5

Settle *(Take a moment to quiet yourself.)*

When the rain sees dirt on you it does not stop.

African Proverb

Ask

Your lovingkindness, O LORD, extends to the heavens,
Your faithfulness reaches to the skies.
Your righteousness is like the mountains of God;
Your judgments are like a great deep.
O LORD, You preserve man and beast.
How precious is Your lovingkindness, O God!
And the children of men take refuge in the shadow of Your wings.
They drink their fill of the abundance of Your house;
And You give them to drink of the river of Your delights.
For with You is the fountain of life;
In Your light we see light. Psalm 36:5-9

Listen

Ruth 1:1-5

In the days when the judges ruled there was a famine in the land, and a man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons. ² The name of the man was Elimelech and the name of his wife Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They went into the country of Moab and remained there. ³ But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons. ⁴ These took Moabite wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. They lived there about ten years, ⁵ and both Mahlon and Chilion died, so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband.

Prepare

The story of Ruth is set “In the days the judges ruled,” around 1200-1020 BC, between Joshua’s death and the coronation of Saul. It was an era of frightful social and religious chaos. And it is into this period that one family in Bethlehem is cast.

It is interesting to note that Bethlehem means “house of bread”. It was fertile land for harvesting grain, earning its name from the wheat, barley and other crops that grew plentifully in the area. Yet this story takes place when “there was a famine in the land”. While famines are often attributed to God’s judgment, the author is silent on this famine’s cause. What we can gather is that the situation is grim if the “house of bread” could not feed this Ephrathite family!

While we cover many miles, years and family events in these first five verses, we are invited to wonder where God is in the midst of these circumstances and decisions. Let’s enter their story and listen.

Study

1. *Warm-Up: Share a detail about your name. (For example: it was your grandmother's, you are named for a memorable place, or your parents liked an actress with that name)*
2. Our story begins "In the days when the judges ruled." Robert Hubbard explains that "the book of Judges teems with violent invasions, apostate religion, unchecked lawlessness, and tribal civil war."
 - a. Describe the setting in verse 1. What is happening, where is it happening, and who are our main characters? What do you think it was like in Bethlehem at that time?
 - b. Their destination is Moab, fifty miles southeast of Bethlehem. Paul Miller describes Moab as "the bad cousin to Israel... Moab was the son of Lot by Lot's incestuous relationship with one of his daughters. Lot was Abraham's nephew, making Moab Jacob's second cousin (Genesis 19:30-38)." Further, Deuteronomy 23:3-6 states:

"No Ammonite or Moabite may enter the assembly of the LORD. Even to the tenth generation, none of them may enter the assembly of the LORD forever, ⁴ because they did not meet you with bread and with water on the way, when you came out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam the son of Beor from Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse you. ⁵ But the LORD your God would not listen to Balaam; instead the LORD your God turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the LORD your God loved you. ⁶ You shall not seek their peace or their prosperity all your days forever."
 - c. Considering this mandate from Deuteronomy. What is curious about this family's choice to "sojourn" in Moab?
3. As the author introduces us to each family member, David Aktinson helps us understand that for the Hebrews "to know a person's name is to know his character, to know him." Ultimately, the name is the person!

Elimelech means "My God is King"
Naomi means "Pleasant, lovely, delightful"
Mahlon means "to be sick"
Chilion means "failing, pining"

- a. What might these meanings tell us about each person, or their family as a whole?

4. List the sequence of events that happened in verses 1 - 5.

- a. Are you curious about any of the shared details or omitted portions of the story? What stands out to you? What are you left wondering about?

5. Notice the verbiage in verses 1-4:

Vs 1-Naomi and Elimelech *sojourn* (which means, a temporary stay)

Vs 2-they *remained*

Vs 3-Naomi *was left*

Vs 4-Naomi and her sons *lived there about 10 years*

- a. What does this tell us of the couple's intention verses the reality of their time in Moab? What do you think might be behind this progression?

- ★ b. Can you think of a time when you intended to sojourn (stay temporarily) and found that you remained there longer than you intended? Perhaps in a job, a relationship, a living situation, a book or a movie? What was that experience like?

6. What has Naomi gained at this point or been left with? What has she lost or been left without?

- a. As a widow, Naomi lacks the provision and protection of a husband, sons or heir in a male-dominated ancient society. Further, her age and poverty effectively seal off the possibility of returning to her parents or remarriage. How might it feel for Naomi to face all she is "left without"?

★ 7. Notice that God is not mentioned in this introductory paragraph. What is your response to that?

- a. Are there any places in your life where God seems silent? Are there ways it is not obvious where God is?

★ ***We suggest you discuss the starred questions with your gleaning groups.***



Reflect

Take five minutes to consider and write about your own story. We encourage you to use the Reflection question below or to respond to something the Holy Spirit is stirring in your heart.

- ★ Can you relate to Naomi? Reflect on an experience in your life where you were "left without." For example, you experienced a loss or were left without something that mattered to you. What was happening around you, in you, and in your relationship with the Lord during that time? What is it like to reflect on that now?

Bless

*Although we are weeping
Lord, help us keep sowing
The seeds of Your Kingdom
For the day You will reap them
Your sheaves we will carry
Lord, please do not tarry
All those who sow weeping
will go out with songs of joy*





Study 2: *She Arose*

Ruth 1:6-9

Settle *(Take a moment to quiet yourself.)*

Faith is a journey of trust and growth; it is a moving mobile, not a still life.

David Atkinson

Ask

Your lovingkindness, O LORD, extends to the heavens,
Your faithfulness reaches to the skies.
Your righteousness is like the mountains of God;
Your judgments are like a great deep.
O LORD, You preserve man and beast.
How precious is Your lovingkindness, O God!
And the children of men take refuge in the shadow of Your wings.
They drink their fill of the abundance of Your house;
And You give them to drink of the river of Your delights.
For with You is the fountain of life;
In Your light we see light. Psalm 36:5-9

Listen

Ruth 1:6-9

⁶ Then she arose with her daughters-in-law to return from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the fields of Moab that the Lord had visited his people and given them food. ⁷ So she set out from the place where she was with her two daughters-in-law, and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah. ⁸ But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go, return each of you to her mother's house. May the Lord deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. ⁹ The Lord grant that you may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband!" Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept.

Prepare

Last week's passage gave us an introduction to Naomi, a woman who is left without her husband and her sons in a land that is not her own. She is lonely. She is abandoned. She is helpless. What does she have? Two daughters-in-law who are also bereft of identity without their husbands.

In today's passage, Naomi takes center stage of the narrative—a Hebrew cultural rarity as she is a woman!—and begins to respond to her tragedy. Paul Miller writes, "One of the oddest things about deep suffering is that the sun comes up in the morning. Life limps along." Although saturated with sorrow, Naomi's story continues as she hears of Yahweh.

As we see Naomi's story unfold in these five verses, the narrator is providing us with a tiny glimmer of hope. Another odd thing about suffering is that God is present and provides for His people, despite what we may think or even feel. He is present. He is providing. It is no coincidence that with the mention of "Yahweh" is also the mention of "loving kindness"—a central theme to the book of Ruth. So today, let's accept the narrator's invitation to see how Naomi's story is intersecting with God's story. Let's sit with the sadness, yet begin to encounter the hope.

Study

1. *Warm up: Share a place you have returned to (or would like to return to) as an adult, that was important to you growing up. (For example: Grandparent's house, former high school, favorite ice cream shop)*
2. Verses 6 and 7 are full of action. List the actions Naomi takes in these verses.
 - a. Notice who Naomi is responding to—Yahweh! What does God do to cause Naomi to act? (*Note: This is the first time we read of God's direct action in the book of Ruth!*)
 - b. The word "visited" means to "take note of, look after." It is often used to describe a superior who oversees a subordinate. What does it reveal about God that He "visits" His people?
 - c. Can you think of a time when God took note of or looked after you or someone else? What stood out to you about that moment?
3. In verse 6, we are introduced to the word "return" for the first time. The Hebrew word for "return" is *shub* translated to mean "turn back or repentance."
 - a. Consider for a moment Naomi's return from Moab to the land of Judah. Could it be an act of repentance? Why or why not?
- ★ b. Notice that there is a "return from" in verse 6 and a "return to" in verse 7:
 - i. How can moving "from" something be repentance? (For example: *moving away from* an aisle in the store that I am tempted by, a downward mental spiral from nursing a grudge, a social media post that elicits conflict)
 - ii. How can moving "to" something be repentance? (For example: *moving toward* my child, a person in need at church, an unwelcoming neighbor)
4. Verses 8 and 9 are the first time we encounter dialogue in the book of Ruth. What does Naomi ask Ruth and Orpah to do? Why do you think she ask this of them?

- a. Observe when this request occurs in the women's journey—they have left Moab and are on their way to Judah. Why do you think this conversation is occurring after they have already set out from Moab?
5. Naomi gives a blessing to her daughters-in-law in verse 8. What does she hope the LORD, Yahweh, will do for them?
 - a. The phrase "deal kindly" is translated from Hebrew as the word *hesed*. *Hesed* is a steadfast love, one that combines love and loyalty, commitment with sacrifice to love. David Hubbard observes that "...since [Naomi] will not be in a position in the future to do them *hesed*, she asked God to do it for her. Thus, Naomi's wish provides a glimpse of her utter hopelessness. Powerless to repay their kindness, her only recourse was to turn them over to God's care."
 - ★ b. Do you consider God's *hesed* (steadfast love, loyalty and commitment to sacrificial love) something you can call on God to do for others? Why or why not?
 - c. Is there a relationship in your life where you experience a powerlessness in your words or your actions to the other person? What is it like to consider that you can call on God in that relationship?
6. The second part of Naomi's blessing for her daughters-in-law includes "rest" literally translated from Hebrew to mean "a place of settled security where peace takes place".
 - a. What place is Naomi asking God to give Ruth and Orpah rest? What picture of rest does she have for them?
 - b. How does it strike you that although Naomi is requesting Ruth and Orpah to return to Moab (a country which doesn't worship Yahweh), she is requesting God to grant them peace? What might this say about Naomi's faith in God? What might this say about the character of God?
7. Today's passage concludes with a dynamic display of emotion. What words does the author use to help us understand the fullness of emotion in this interaction between the three widows?
 - a. What might these women be mourning as they come to this crossroads?



Reflect

Take five minutes to consider and write about your own story. We encourage you to use the Reflection question below or to respond to something the Holy Spirit is stirring in your heart.

- ★ Have you experienced a meaningful moment of “returning” (repentance)? What were you returning from or to? What was it like? Did you sense God looking after you in anyway?

Bless

*Although we are weeping
Lord, help us keep sowing
The seeds of Your Kingdom
For the day You will reap them
Your sheaves we will carry
Lord, please do not tarry
All those who sow weeping
will go out with songs of joy*





Study 3: *Turn Back*

Ruth 1:10-14

Settle *(Take a moment to quiet yourself.)*

But I, O Lord, cry to you;
in the morning my prayer comes before you.
O Lord, why do you cast my soul away?
Why do you hide your face from me?
Psalm 88:13-14

Ask

Your lovingkindness, O LORD, extends to the heavens,
Your faithfulness reaches to the skies.
Your righteousness is like the mountains of God;
Your judgments are like a great deep.
O LORD, You preserve man and beast.
How precious is Your lovingkindness, O God!
And the children of men take refuge in the shadow of Your wings.
They drink their fill of the abundance of Your house;
And You give them to drink of the river of Your delights.
For with You is the fountain of life;
In Your light we see light. Psalm 36:5-9

Listen

Ruth 1:10-14

¹⁰ And they said to her, "No, we will return with you to your people." ¹¹ But Naomi said, "Turn back, my daughters; why will you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb that they may become your husbands? ¹² Turn back, my daughters; go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. If I should say I have hope, even if I should have a husband this night and should bear sons, ¹³ would you therefore wait till they were grown? Would you therefore refrain from marrying? No, my daughters, for it is exceedingly bitter to me for your sake that the hand of the LORD has gone out against me." ¹⁴ Then they lifted up their voices and wept again. And Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.

Prepare

Sometimes while reading a story, particularly one we are familiar with, the ending is firmly planted (or assumed) in our minds. We either know or hope for a resolution to the conflict and strife in the story. When it comes to our lives, we forget that the moments fraught with uncertainty and pain, loneliness and grief are part of an ongoing story.

Have you ever looked at where you were in your own story and thought, "I am all alone. There is no end to this situation." Psalm 88 tells us that these moments are real, important, and may last indefinitely. Lamenting your situation and calling out to the LORD, even when you see no favorable resolution in sight, is a valuable pursuit for our hearts as believers.

How can we see God's hand in our situation? How can we bear the weight of sorrow or the uncertainty of resolution? Let's sit with Naomi in this study, as she considers these questions in one of these moments of her life.

Study

1. *Warm up: What is an activity you enjoy doing with your hands? (For example: gardening, kneading bread, writing)*
2. Our last study ended with Naomi asking her daughters-in-law to leave, speaking a blessing over them, and many tears. In verse 10, what is Orpah and Ruth's response to Naomi's request?
 - a. What might these words reveal about the relationship between Naomi and her daughters-in-law?
3. As you read Naomi's words in verse 11-13, what tone do you hear? How would you compare the tone in these verses to the tone in verses 8-9?
4. Verses 11-13 are Naomi's well-crafted argument, which is based on the Levirate law of brothers marrying the childless widows of their brothers. (Found in Deuteronomy 25:5-10) This law served the dual purpose of caring for the widow, while also providing potential heirs for the deceased husband to continue his name. Let's look together at Naomi's passionate plea.
 - a. ***¹¹ But Naomi said, "Turn back, my daughters; why will you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb that they may become your husbands?"***
 - i. What does Naomi want them to do?
 - ii. What point is she trying to make with her rhetorical questions? What might she want Ruth and Orpah to see?
 - b. ***¹² Turn back, my daughters; go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. If I should say I have hope, even if I should have a husband this night and should bear sons, ¹³ would you therefore wait till they were grown? Would you therefore refrain from marrying?***
 - i. Naomi asks them a third time to turn back. What reason does she give in verse 12?
 - ii. Here she adds a hypothetical case. What does she want Orpah and Ruth to see of the cost of staying with her?

- ★ 5. Naomi seems passionate in deterring them from continuing on with her. What are some reasons we push people away?

- 6. Naomi answers her own questions with a resounding "No!" in verse 13. Here she uses the covenant name of the Lord, Yahweh, which means Naomi sees His sovereignty in her life. What does she say about God's hand?
 - a. What do you hear beneath these words? What might she be feeling in this moment?

 - ★ b. Have there been times in your life when your experience has led you to feel or function as though God is not for you?

- 7. We finish the passage with more weeping, Orpah kissing Naomi goodbye, and Ruth "clinging" to Naomi. "*Clinging*" is the same word that is often used of marriage, meaning "*to cleave to another*." It brings to mind firm loyalty and deep affection.
 - a. What do you think it felt like to Naomi to have Ruth "cling" to her?



Reflect

Take five minutes to consider and write about your own story. We encourage you to use the Reflection question below or to respond to something the Holy Spirit is stirring in your heart.

★ You may have caught Naomi's words, "*If I should say I have hope.*" This phrase gives us a sense of Naomi battling with despair. Have you ever faced seemingly hopeless situation or circumstances? Reflect on that experience. What was that like? How did you handle it? Were you able to see God's hand in the midst of it?

Bless

*Although we are weeping
Lord, help us keep sowing
The seeds of Your Kingdom
For the day You will reap them
Your sheaves we will carry
Lord, please do not tarry
All those who sow weeping
will go out with songs of joy*





Study 4: *Determined*

Ruth 1:15-18

Settle *(Take a moment to quiet yourself.)*

Ruth is the face of God to Naomi. Our faces—how we reflect Christ in our gentleness, boldness, and love—are God's best picture of himself on earth.

Paul Miller

Ask

Your lovingkindness, O LORD, extends to the heavens,
Your faithfulness reaches to the skies.
Your righteousness is like the mountains of God;
Your judgments are like a great deep.
O LORD, You preserve man and beast.
How precious is Your lovingkindness, O God!
And the children of men take refuge in the shadow of Your wings.
They drink their fill of the abundance of Your house;
And You give them to drink of the river of Your delights.
For with You is the fountain of life;
In Your light we see light. Psalm 36:5-9

Listen

Ruth 1:15-18

¹⁵ And she said, "See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law." ¹⁶ But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. ¹⁷ Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the LORD do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you." ¹⁸ And when Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more.

Prepare

The children's book *Runaway Bunny* is a tale of a small bunny who tells his mother he wants to run away. His mother lovingly responds, "If you run away. I will run after you. For you are my little bunny." The young bunny conspires to become a fish, a sailboat, a crocus and even a trapeze artist to carry out his plan. For every scheme he concocts, his mother contrives her own creative ways to find him and bring him home. In the end, the little bunny concedes, "Shucks. I might as well stay where I am and be your little bunny."

This children's book is a simple picture of *hesed*. Recall *hesed* is a love in which you bind yourself to the one you love, regardless of their response. That is what Ruth does for Naomi. She decisively binds herself to Naomi, her home, her people and her God; throughout Naomi's life, till her death and even beyond. What a love! Ruth gives up her life, for Naomi. And in the face of such determination, Naomi says no more.

This passage invites us to reflect on God's *hesed* for us. Despite our rejection and faithlessness, God says to each of us, ***"I have loved you with an everlasting love [hesed]; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you*** (Jeremiah 31:3)."

Study

1. *Warm-up: Share a book or movie character you would like to emulate? Why?*
2. In verse 15, what appeal does Naomi make of Ruth? What leverage does Naomi use to compel Ruth?
 - a. Why do you think Naomi asks Ruth to go back to "her people" and "her gods"? What might she want for Ruth?
3. We hear Ruth speak for the first time in verse 16! What is her response to Naomi?
 - a. What tone of voice do her words have? What do you hear?
4. Naomi asks Ruth to "go back" and "return" in verse 15. Ruth uses the same word to declare she will not "return from following" Naomi. Why might Ruth weave Naomi's own verbiage into her response?
5. There are six commitments that Ruth makes to Naomi. List them below:

| | |
|----|----|
| 1. | 4. |
| 2. | 5. |
| 3. | 6. |

 - a. Do any of these commitments stand out to you? If so, why?
6. What are the possible costs to Ruth, to bind herself to Naomi in this way? What is she giving up?

7. In the end of verse 17, Ruth makes an oath. In your own words, what is she vowing?

a. In this oath, Ruth takes on unknown consequences if she does not fulfill these commitments to Naomi. What is significant about Ruth voluntarily casting her lot with Naomi's God, Yahweh?

b. How is Ruth already making Naomi's God, her God?

★ 8. From this passage, what words could you use to describe Ruth? What intrigues you about her?

★ 9. Paul Miller's explains: *"All acts of love done in faith are small pictures of the gospel. Our dying love replicates the dying love of Jesus."* The Christian gospel is the good news that Jesus Christ sacrificed his perfect life to forgive us of our sin. God's grace, kindness, mercy and love for us is seen in the gift of His Son, who set his face toward the cross when we were still sinners.

a. How is what Ruth does a small picture of the gospel?

b. How might our acts of love be small pictures of the death of Jesus to one another?

10. In verse 18, Ruth's words have an effect on Naomi. How so?

a. How does it feel for this conversation to conclude in silence?



Reflect

Take five minutes to consider and write about your own story. We encourage you to use the Reflection question below or to respond to something the Holy Spirit is stirring in your heart.

★ Think about a time when someone has served or sacrificed for you. What was it like to receive that? What was meaningful about it? Was there anything uncomfortable about it? Did it impact your view of God in any way?

Bless

*Although we are weeping
Lord, help us keep sowing
The seeds of Your Kingdom
For the day You will reap them
Your sheaves we will carry
Lord, please do not tarry
All those who sow weeping
will go out with songs of joy*





Study 5: *Very Bitterly*

Ruth 1:19-22

Settle *(Take a moment to quiet yourself.)*

God's providence is always around us. But sometimes that providence is frowning, it's confusing, it's mysterious and it is hard.

David Bisgrove

How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever?

How long will you hide your face from me?

² How long must I take counsel in my soul
and have sorrow in my heart all the day?

Psalms 13:1-2

Ask

Your lovingkindness, O LORD, extends to the heavens,

Your faithfulness reaches to the skies.

Your righteousness is like the mountains of God;

Your judgments are like a great deep.

O LORD, You preserve man and beast.

How precious is Your lovingkindness, O God!

And the children of men take refuge in the shadow of Your wings.

They drink their fill of the abundance of Your house;

And You give them to drink of the river of Your delights.

For with You is the fountain of life;

In Your light we see light. Psalm 36:5-9

Listen

Ruth 1:19-22

¹⁹ So the two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem. And when they came to Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them. And the women said, "Is this Naomi?" ²⁰ She said to them, "Do not call me Naomi, call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. ²¹ I went away full, and the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi, when the Lord has testified against me and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?"

²² So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabite her daughter-in-law with her, who returned from the country of Moab. And they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest.

Prepare

Our previous passage, filled with Ruth's many words, concluded with the two women in silence. As the scene changes, we meet the whole town and see Naomi share her raw pain openly with the women and before God.

Naomi's response gives us a window into her pain and her view of God. It is meaningful that she attributes her suffering to "the Almighty" (*Shaddai* in Hebrew) and "the LORD" (*Yahweh* in Hebrew). These names are packed with meaning. It is by the name of the LORD, the Almighty, that Naomi frames her bitterness, loss and grief.

While this passage bids us to wrestle with the mystery of God's sovereign hand in our lives, we are also invited to discover faith. When Naomi acknowledges God is LORD over her suffering, she attributes "nothing to chance and everything to God" (Hubbard). It opens up the possibility that the Almighty who "has dealt very bitterly" is also the LORD who "visited his people and given them food."

Study

1. *Warm up: What is something “full” in your life that you would like to see “empty”? (e. unread email folder, leaves in your gutters, the floor of your child's room)*
2. In verse 19, the journey continues on until Naomi and Ruth reach Bethlehem. What might it have been like for each woman as they traveled toward Bethlehem?
 - a. The *whole* town was “stirred” by Naomi and Ruth’s arrival. Imagine the scene! How might the town may have looked and sounded?
 - b. The women’s question, “Is this Naomi?” infers that they didn’t recognize her. Why might it be hard for them to identify her?
3. Naomi responds to the women in verse 20. What does Naomi say about her name?
 - a. The name Naomi means “pleasant” and the name Mara means “bitter.” How does Naomi’s request for a name-change reflect the depth of her sadness?
 - b. What reason does Naomi give to justify her name change?
 - c. Naomi frames her pain in the context of the Almighty, *Shaddai*. David Atkinson explains, “It is as though she is saying: You can see the bitterness I have experienced: the famine, the bereavements, the questionings, the parting, the apparent hopelessness: but I know God as *Shaddai*, and I can leave the explanation...for this bitterness with him.”
 - i. Consider how you have experienced grief, emptiness, loss or apparent hopelessness in this season. What is your response to potentially not getting an explanation for your pain?
 - ★ ii. Is there any way it could be freeing to leave our suffering with God? If so, how?
4. In verse 21, there is a contrast between “full” and “empty.”
 - a. In what ways did Naomi leave full? In what ways did she return empty?

- b. To whom does Naomi attribute her emptiness?
 - c. While Naomi sees her emptiness, do you notice any ways God is providing for her? Can you see any hints of fullness in her situation, even if she can't see them in the moment?
5. What claim does Naomi make against God in verse 21?
- a. The NIV translation says: "The Lord has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me." What words in this translation describe Naomi's accusation against God?
 - b. Like Job, Jeremiah and many of the Psalmists, Naomi is brutally honest. What do you think it means that these examples of raw honesty are in the Bible? What do you think God desires for us in such moments?
 - ★ c. Are there times when you have poured out your heart to God in lament or maybe you have wanted to, but hesitated? How does Naomi's honesty speak to our hesitations?
6. In each of these complaints, Naomi has identified the divine source of her fate as the Almighty, the LORD. Do you find Naomi's view of God encouraging or challenging in any way? Share your thoughts.
7. While seemingly forgotten, Ruth is present during this homecoming. How is she identified in verse 22? What does it tell us about Ruth in this moment, that she is identified in this way?
- a. The writer tells us that Ruth, is returning with Naomi to Bethlehem. Why did the writer use the word "return"? How do you think she can return to somewhere she has not been before?
8. What is the last detail we are given in this chapter? What sense does it give you as this chapter comes to a close?



Reflect

Take five minutes to consider and write about your own story. We encourage you to use the Reflection question below or to respond to something the Holy Spirit is stirring in your heart.

★ Reflect on your current life situations and the stirrings of your heart. Like Naomi, is there another “name” you would give yourself? *(Examples might be “perplexed,” “loved,” “unsure,” “searching,” “disappointed,” “conflicted,” “overwhelmed,” “grateful.”)* How does it feel to acknowledge this name? What thoughts, questions or hopes come to mind as you consider where God has you?

Bless

*Although we are weeping
Lord, help us keep sowing
The seeds of Your Kingdom
For the day You will reap them
Your sheaves we will carry
Lord, please do not tarry
All those who sow weeping
will go out with songs of joy*





Study 6: *Hesed*

Ruth 1

May the LORD deal kindly with you... Ruth 1:8

If someone gives you a pair of gloves when the sun is shining and your hands are warm, it doesn't mean that much. If you're well-fed and have plenty of food in your cupboard, a sack of grain and a ready-to-eat meal seem ordinary and perhaps a little boring. Prosperity tends to dull our senses to the presence of God's *hesed* in our lives. But, when trouble strikes and you're sitting in the darkness with a heart that aches for him, the slightest sign of his presence is monumental. A load of grain, a cooked meal, or a pair of gloves sends a signal—faint though it may be—that he is here and he hasn't forgotten. Naomi's experience is a lot like watching a heart monitor gone flat and suddenly seeing the flicker of a pulse. It is an exhilarating moment—the best possible news for the despairing Naomi, for now she knows God's *hesed* is still here and it is meant for her.

Carolyn Custis James

God Describes Himself

Yahweh, describes himself to the people of Israel, through Moses, on Mt. Sinai.

⁶ *The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love [hesed] and faithfulness,*

⁷ keeping steadfast love [hesed] for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation."

Exodus 34:6-7

God Does *Hesed* for His People

Of the 246 times *hesed* appears in the Old Testament, the great majority refer to God's relationship with His people. In the Psalms alone, the word is found 127 times!

*But I, through the abundance of your steadfast love [hesed], will enter your house.
I will bow down toward your holy temple in the fear of you. Psalm 5:7*

Let your steadfast love [hesed], O LORD, be upon us, even as we hope in you. Psalm 33:22

Rise up; come to our help! Redeem us for the sake of your steadfast love [hesed]! Psalm 44:26

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love [hesed]; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Psalm 51:1

*Why do you boast of evil, O mighty man? The steadfast love [hesed] of God endures all the day.
Psalm 52:1*

But as for me, my prayer is to you, O LORD. At an acceptable time, O God, in the abundance of your steadfast love [hesed] answer me in your saving faithfulness. Psalm 69:13

But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love [hesed] and faithfulness. Psalm 86:15

Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love [hesed], that we may rejoice and be glad all our days. Psalm 90:14

When I thought, "My foot slips," your steadfast love [hesed], O LORD, held me up. Psalm 94:18

Help me, O LORD my God! Save me according to your steadfast love [hesed]! Psalm 109:26

He is my steadfast love [hesed] and my fortress, my stronghold and my deliverer, my shield and he in whom I take refuge. Psalm 144:2

God Invites Us to Live *Hesed*

Naomi and Ruth are helping us understand *hesed* as they do simple, extraordinary acts of *hesed*.

As we pause our time together in Ruth, who might God invite you to extend *hesed* toward in your days?



Chiasm in Ruth 1:

A v. 19a So the two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem. And when they came to Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them.

B v. 19b-20 And the women said, "Is this Naomi?" She said to them, "Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me.

C v. 21a I went away full, and the LORD has brought me back empty.

B v. 21b Why call me Naomi, when the LORD has testified against me and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?"

A v. 22 So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabite her daughter-in-law with her, who returned from the country of Moab. And they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest.