

Ruth

**REDEMPTION
STORIES**



**SERMON SERIES
STUDY GUIDE**

This book contains study notes to accompany the ChristCentral Church Sermon Series based on the book of Ruth. Each chapter relates to a separate sermon in the series.

The sermon series: “Redemption Stories: Ruth” can be found on the ChristCentral Church website: <https://christcentral.church/redemption-stories-ruth>

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Ruth

The Redemption of God Through Relationships - Ruth 1

God's redemption is a major biblical theme and central to The Gospel. Through Christ, God has bought us back! At inestimable personal cost to Himself, God ransomed sinners from slavery, adopting them into His own family, sharing His glory with all He has redeemed.

'You are not your own, for you were bought with a price'. We begin with 4 sermons from the book of Ruth, a distant ancestor of Jesus, an unlikely hero in the biblical narrative, an inspirational woman, who met her redeemer and was wonderfully used by God.

1) Trajectory of Tragedy (Verses 1-5)

Time of the judges, a 400-year period after Israel entered promised land, the opening verses of Ruth paint a desperately sad and tragic picture. Famine in the land; a massive decision to leave home (a desperate move - they might not survive otherwise); Mahlon and Chilion - Hebrew names meaning 'sickly' and 'weak' That's a burden. Then they travelled, on foot from Bethlehem to a foreign land - a perilous journey through wilderness, over mountains, with sick children. Naomi became a single mum in a foreign country with no family or community – providing for herself.

Remarkably, despite being called Sickly and Weak, Naomi's sons got married. Moabite wives were not ideal for Israelite men. 10 years and no children: bareness; no legacy to leave; low position in society. Mahlon and Chilion died - this was not the life Naomi dreamt for herself as a young girl. Every redemption story has tragedy in it. It is the soil into which the seed of faith so often takes root. Naomi's life was especially tragic.

Q. Why are names significant to ancient Israelites? Do names have the same significance in today's society?

Q. Does belief in an all-powerful and all-knowing God, create problems when you feel helplessly out of control? Does it provide any solutions?

Q. In terms of history, no society has suffered less than ours. Why does our generation have the biggest issue with suffering? Why is suffering used as an argument against God?

2) Theology Matters (Verses 6-18)

"What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us"

– Tozer

This passage contains a whole load of theology. Naomi decides to return to Bethlehem because 'the LORD had visited his people and given them food'. She believed in the LORD - despite everything that had happened to her Naomi continued to believe. She believed in a God who provides, who was sovereign even over the availability of food. She understood that this life is lived under the guiding hand of God.

However, Naomi doubts the Goodness of God. She doesn't doubt His existence, she doesn't doubt that He can provide, she doesn't doubt His sovereignty, but she clearly doubts His

Goodness. Because she doubts His goodness, she has become hopeless, and her hopelessness has caused her great bitterness! Her greatest treasure gone, her family gone, her purpose gone. Naomi did not believe that she could find happiness again in life, she did not have faith that God could bring her to a place of joy, the one thing she lived for was gone, and now bereft of hope she is trapped in bitterness.

"If anything becomes more fundamental than God to your happiness, meaning in life, and identity, then it is an idol"

Sons; husbands; security. Because Naomi doesn't have those things she has nothing to offer these women. She even encourages Ruth to return her 'false gods' (verse 15). She feels worthless / hopeless / void of any purpose. If God isn't good, if his sovereignty doesn't inspire hope, then tragedy will lead to gloom, to bitterness. What you think of God matters. If he isn't your ultimate treasure, then whatever idol is will likely lead to the same place of bitterness and despair that Naomi was stuck in should it be toppled.

Q. How do you handle shattered dreams and disappointments? How does it affect your view of life, of God?

Q. How do non-believers cope with shattered dreams and disappointments? What opportunities does this provide for the Gospel to be shared?

Q. In theory we want to wholly rely on God. Do our lives reflect this in practice? How can we rely on God?

3) Faithful Friend (Verses 16-18)

Ruth is a standout character in the OT scripture. A 'mother of Jesus', what incredible character she has. She is also, like Naomi, a childless widow - the most vulnerable of society. She has just lost her husband. She is grieving. She has every right to doubt the goodness of God, why should she maintain her faith? Naomi hardly makes a compelling case for Him. Ruth's theology prevailed over Naomi's. Her theology expressed in how she loved Naomi, choosing not seek out the easy route to a comfortable life, but to remain faithful to the family through which she came to know the One True God!

Your theology makes a difference to friendship. Ruth had hope! Hope that she could be a good friend to Naomi; hope of a better life in Bethlehem; hope in a Sovereign God who is also Good; hope that a Good God can redeem the most seemingly lost lives. Jesus came beside us when we were at our most hopeless; when we were pushing him away, his love overcame; when we realised we had nothing to offer, he opened his arms and shared everything with us. Ruth was a faithful friend to Naomi. Jesus is our better friend - even more faithful.

Q. Why do you think Ruth was willing to forgo comfort in order to support Naomi?

Q. How can our friendship provide hope to those around us who are suffering?

Q. How can we as a church be a faithful friend to our city and those around us?

The Redemption of God Through Circumstances – Ruth 2

In the last chapter, the focus was on Naomi and how she had become embittered through a life of tragedy. This week our focus shifts to Ruth as the main character and we get introduced to Boaz. Naomi decided to return to Bethlehem in Judah, her home country, and she pleaded with her daughters in law to go back to their homes in Moab, and find new husbands there, restoring their hope of having a family and care and protection that it would bring them. Forsaking the opportunity to find another husband amongst her own people, and going to a foreign land as a widow, not knowing how she would be received, Ruth trusted that the God of Naomi would provide for them. This is the start of Naomi's bitter circumstance being redeemed by God through her relationship with Ruth.

1) The Faithfulness of Ruth

Naomi and Ruth have now arrived in Bethlehem in Judah, they had caused quite a stir, and the first thing we read is Ruth requests to go out to the fields and to pick up leftover grain behind anyone in eyes she finds favour. This practice, 'gleaning', follows God's instruction to the Israelites (Lev 19), a demonstration of the heart of God for the poor and the marginalised. Ruth faithfully laboured to provide for her friend and mother-in-law Naomi, but what makes this extraordinary in my mind is her initiative in stepping out and her courage.

Ruth could have waited for Naomi's relatives to notice their position and rely on their generosity; she could have been a 'faithful' friend by sticking by Naomi. Ruth had every reason to lose confidence, to become paralysed by fear; she could easily have become bitter like Naomi. Yet Ruth - despite being a foreigner, an outsider, the scorn of Jewish society - took a step of faith. Her courage led her to act, without knowing how it would work out.

Q. In what areas of our lives are we most at risk of settling? How is God encouraging change in our circumstances? What is the next step of faith God is calling you to take?

Q. How do you react to steps of faith taken by others? ...steps of faith taken by ChristCentral Church?

Q. Have you felt like an outsider, or felt your views are foreign to society? How did this affect your ability to engage with those around you?

2) The Favour of Boaz

Boaz is a man of standing, a wealthy man, a landowner and a relative of Naomi, of the clan of her husband Elimelek. This is significant as there was an established Jewish practice responsibility for male relatives to act for any relative who was in trouble; a guardian - or kinsman - redeemer. Boaz immediately notices Ruth; he had heard of her extraordinary loyalty to Naomi. The whole of Bethlehem was abuzz with the news of what happened, and the foreman had told of her diligence in gleaning. Ruth finds favour in Boaz' eyes, unaware of his family connections.

Boaz knew God would richly reward Ruth. The key for us is that Boaz then went on to be part of that rich reward. Boaz knew God had blessed him to be a blessing. He took responsibility for Naomi and Ruth in that moment and did everything in his power to provide protection and care. Boaz did this happily, at personal cost to himself. The reputational cost of favouring a foreigner; the financial cost of leaving grain; the cost to his workers, as they had to slow their work, and carry extra water would have affected the view of their employer. Yet Boaz was happy to pay this cost, because he had seen the faithfulness of Ruth.

Q. Who are the 'outsiders' in our society? What role does the Church have, to support and protect the marginalized? How can ChristCentral Church achieve this?

Q. How far are we willing to be inconvenienced to extend love, care, honour and respect to those around us?

3) The Restored Faith of Naomi

On seeing how much Ruth had gleaned in just a day, Naomi is giddy with excitement, "Blessed be the man who took notice of you!". Naomi recognises just how extraordinary the amount of barley is and that Ruth must have received favour to enable her to gather this much. Then on hearing that it was Boaz, we see a complete transformation from the embittered, God-afflicted, hopeless Naomi. The Lord bless him; the Lord has not stopped showing His kindness to the living and the dead! This was not just chance or coincidence. This was a blessing from God.

Not only did Ruth 'chance upon' Boaz' field, but he arrived whilst she was there. Not only did he arrive but God had prepared him for this moment as a God-fearing generous man who had favour upon her. Naomi correctly sees God's redemption through circumstance, orchestrated out of his kindness. The Lord's kindness had not forsaken her. Naomi, didn't know the end of the story yet, it had only been one day, one harvest. Would Ruth remain faithful? Would Boaz remain favourable? What would come of his position as a kinsman redeemer? She didn't know yet, but bitterness had given way to hope.

The story continues, through Ruth to Jesus, who came so that the whole world would be able to become part of God's people. He removed from us any penalty for our past, any animosity with God, and has brought us, all foreigners, to be His people, sheltering under His care as members of this glorious Church.

Q. How do our circumstances affect our view of God? How can we focus on God while things are tough?

Q. How does our understanding of the Gospel, and the blessings we have received, affect our faith during times of suffering?

The Redemption of God Through Patience and Purity – Ruth 3

So far in the book of Ruth we have seen Naomi's life go from bad to worse. Having left her home in Bethlehem to Moab, she loses her husband and her two sons, and Naomi is left with no family. Ruth, Naomi's daughter-in-law decides to be a good friend to Naomi, and joins her when they travel back to Bethlehem.

Back in Bethlehem, Ruth works in the field gleaning crops. Boaz, the owner of the field. Ruth goes to work, expecting to earn a day's pay and some food for her family, but comes away with a huge blessing. Ruth and Naomi receive far more than they expected. Naomi goes from being 'bitter' at the end of chapter 1, to saying "may he be blessed by the Lord, whose kindness has not forgotten the living or the dead".

Q. What are your expectations of God's blessing? In what ways has he exceeded your expectations?

Today's passage describes three people patiently and purely pursuing the purposes of God.

1) Naomi

Through the previous chapters, and in chapter 3, we see Naomi understands God's sovereignty. It's not always been easy, Naomi has experienced some incredibly hard trials, but still she knows that God is sovereign. In chapter 1, Naomi tells her daughters-in-law to go home, that the Lord may grant they have rest. Naomi knows that God provides the rest. God's hand is at work, despite things being tough, Naomi still knows that God is in control

Then, in chapter 3, Naomi says "My daughter, should I not seek rest for you that it might be well with you?". Naomi has not given up on the sovereignty of God; Naomi understands that God is sovereign, but she also knows that she must be active in pursuing this purpose. Naomi knows God is sovereign and has a purpose, which leads her to actively step out into where God is calling her. Taking action does not mean rushing God or questioning His timing, but pursuing His plans.

Q. Do you know what God has called you to? What steps are you taking to see it happen?

Q. What steps can we take when we don't know God's clear calling?

Q. How do you react when God is not acting as quickly as you expect?

Q. How is the Mission and Vision of ChristCentral Church seen in the work it is doing? How can the church take the next step in faith to pursue God's purpose?

2) Ruth

The first action Ruth does in this chapter is to clean herself up and prepare herself. Ruth knows that Boaz is the one to redeem her, but she doesn't know how Boaz will respond. The path wasn't clear, but she prepares herself. Ruth did not wait until she knew Boaz was willing to redeem her. This isn't Ruth cleaning herself up to be redeemed, to seduce or convince her

redeemer. Ruth was preparing herself, ready for what is to come. Ruth takes a risk, steps into what God has called her to, but has first prepared herself. Prepared for what God (through Boaz) was going to do, not prepared to make God (through Boaz) do it.

When Ruth approaches Boaz, as he wakes during the night, we see a proposal. A covenant between Boaz and Ruth (compare with Ezekiel 16:8). Ruth is aware of the redemption to which God is calling her. Ruth appealed to Boaz as her redeemer, as one who could look after and protect her. Ruth came not as one who had worked hard, nor as one who had prepared herself and made herself worthy. Ruth came to Boaz as one who needed him to help her, to redeem and recover her, prepared to live as one redeemed.

Q. What are you doing now to prepare for what God has called you to? How can you prepare for what has yet to come?

Q. How faithful are you with the little? What excuses do we give for not being prepared for the much?

Q. How does the Gospel call us to prepare? How does it not call us to prepare? How does this differ from common views of religion and the church?

3) Boaz

Boaz had seen Ruth. He knew she was a godly, pure, “woman of worth”. Ruth has come to him and has proposed marriage. His response: “there is someone closer who could redeem you”. Boaz wanted to do this right. He wasn’t after a fleeting encounter. If this is God’s plan, then it will happen – in the right way, in His timing.

It would have been easy to rush the plans of God. Ruth needed a redeemer. Boaz could redeem her. It could have happened there and then, but they wanted to do this right. They needed to be patient, and remain pure, in their desire to see God’s purposes. Ruth came boldly, but vulnerable and in need. Boaz responded as God responds to us; pure, patient and with amazing blessing.

Q. “If it is right, God will make it happen” – What are the benefits and risks of this thinking? How do Naomi, Ruth and Boaz each treat their circumstances with respect to God’s plan?

Q. What “quick pleasures” are we confronted with, and tempted by, that can lead us away from God’s plans?

Q. How does our patience and purity honour God in the eyes of those around us?

The Redemption of God through The Redeemer – Ruth 4

Ruth has been a ray of sunshine in the bitter storm Naomi encountered. From gleaning the scraps, Ruth encountered grace - receiving immeasurably more than she dared hope. Through patience and purity, the road to redemption is revealed through Boaz, a godly, rich and single man who honoured women and God! He's every godly single woman's dream guy. He's not rash; he's not abusive; he's not lusty; he's not sex obsessed. He's a great example for men.

We will work through the chapter in three chunks this week – featuring the 3 central characters of the story.

1) Boaz – A Man Trained in Truth (Verses 1-6)

Boaz is determined to marry Ruth – he desires to be the redeemer. But he knows for this to be blessed by God, he needs to do things the right way. He does his research, and knows there is someone else in line. He is meticulous and fast acting, this isn't a '2 year' engagement. He is a man of integrity, who is committed to doing the right thing. This whole scene is shaped by The Word of God. These 'customs' that seem odd to us come from scripture. The law given to the Israelites was not just to do with spiritual instruction but also governmental, how to run a nation. Boaz was trained in truth and knew the word of God and delighted in it - to the benefit of those around him, not least Ruth.

Boaz is an older single man who wants to get married fast, but, most importantly, in a worthy manner. Boaz doesn't do a runner with Ruth, because she could yet be another man's wife. (Read 1 Timothy 4:7) Until you are married to a woman you either relate to her as you would your mother, or as you would your sister, in all purity! Boaz behaved honourably toward Ruth, because he knew what God had commanded.

The "friend" is keen to redeem Elimelech's land, until he realises Ruth is included. She is a 'Moabite' woman and not 'first' choice. He does not want to corrupt his bloodline and will not accept a foreigner. This is not a problem for Boaz, who is also a man of grace! We see this pattern in the Bible. Whether it's Rahab the prostitute, Leah the unloved, Bathsheba the adulteress, we see how God loves to bring about his purposes through 'the alien', 'the foreigner', 'the least likely'.

Q. How do we allow the Word of God to instruct us? Do you take it seriously and trust it to do you good?

Q. How can men, and particularly single men, stand apart from society in the way they honour women?

Q. Who are we tempted to ignore and leave out? How can we show an inclusive invitation of grace to "the outsider" and "the least likely"?

2) Ruth – A Redemption Secured, Seen and Savoured (Verses 7-12)

This is the moment of Ruth's redemption. Boaz secures Ruth as his wife, lawfully, rightfully and before witnesses, the sandals exchanged as signs that the transaction occurred. This seems odd to us, but it was required as proof. If ever there were any doubt, should the 'friend' get second thoughts, the sandal would be presented as evidence. Like a wedding certificate – a physical token that speaks of the moment of marriage. The cross is our 'sign' that the transaction took place, that we have been redeemed, that we are loved, and loved beyond our imagination. Never dismiss the cross as just sticks. There is no symbol of love that exists in this universe like it. Redemption secured.

The witnesses are there to attest that this event took place, that Ruth indeed had been redeemed by Boaz, that she now belonged to him. The witness of our baptism in water and baptism of the Holy Spirit. At our baptism in water we declare publicly that we belong to Jesus, and witnesses can confirm this. The Holy Spirit also is a witness for our redemption. (Read Romans 5:5, Ephesians 1:13-14, Romans 8:16). Redemption seen.

They pray over Ruth that she would be fruitful and have many children. This is the third aspect of her redemption, the third proof – the proof of fruitfulness. For us, our fruitfulness comes in growing in our love and enjoyment of God - transformed by the Gospel, enjoying God, and glorifying Him in all things. Seeing the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) is further proof the God has redeemed us. Redemption savoured.

Q. Why is it important to remember the Cross as more than just a method of torture and execution?

Q. Do you remember your baptism? How does your commitment and changed life honour God?

Q. How does the Vision of ChristCentral Church help to show the redemption we have received? How do we see this in the work done throughout the Church?

3) Naomi - Triumph from Tragedy (Verses 13-22)

Naomi never stopped believing in God, although tragedy had caused her to give up hope for her own life. Naomi now held the child of God's redemption. This son would be the grandfather of King David, and Matthew 1 records him in the family of Jesus Christ. Naomi's family was lost, but through her suffering she gained a friend in Ruth; because of Ruth, Naomi found redemption for her family; this family would lead to famous kings, and ultimately to Jesus. Naomi suffered severe tragedy. This did not stop God from bringing about a His redemption story, and a family line that would complete the greatest redemption story in history.

Q. When have you been tempted to 'give up' on God's will? Have you seen God's purposes in spite of suffering?

Q. Did you realise what characters were in Jesus' family history? Who are you tempted to 'write off' because of their past? How are you tempted to give up because of your history? How does God treat the 'write offs'?