

# The Book of Ruth

*Divine Providence. Divine Love.*

If ever you've been found yourself emotionally distraught or overwhelmed with excitement while watching a movie, or finding time to squeeze in *one more chapter* in that novel that you can't put down, then you know the power of story. Good stories draw you in and carry you along to a particular destination known only to the author, and they invite you to see and smell and think about certain things along the way. So it is with the Book of Ruth, this short but powerful story that is situated in the midst of the forest of the Old Testament. It's easy to overlook it. But what it lacks in breadth it more than makes up as it plumbs the depths of God's character and the nature of his care for his people.

While we can rightly say that this tale of Ruth and Naomi and Boaz is, indeed, a story, that is not to say that it is not also true. This isn't a fairy tale. Ruth is set in real time with real people looking for any light in the darkness of their lives. And the reader is left unabashedly rooting for Ruth and Boaz, grieving with Naomi, and wondering what exactly God is up to in the midst of it all. But he is not absent. Like a strong wind in the sail of a ship, the story of Ruth is propelled along by the unseen hand of a sovereign God.

The experiences of the characters in Ruth are meant to mimic life in the world that we experience each day. When confronted with the pain of loss, the confusion of grief, the challenge of the unknown, we have perhaps found ourselves asking two deeply significant questions: *Is God really in control?* and *Does God care about me?* Wherever those questions take us, the story of Ruth meets us with an unpretentious invitation to trust that no matter how hopeless our situation might seem, we are never beyond the sight and love and providential care of God. The lives of the characters in this story offer a distinctly human perspective on the love and loyalty of the Lord toward his people. In Naomi we see an anguished, grieving, angry widow whose life is transformed from bitter loss to hopeful promise. Ruth presents a picture of loyalty, mercy, and the sacrificial love of God. Boaz offers a glimpse of a faithful redeemer whose kindness echoes the heart of God for his people. Wherever we are, the book of Ruth meets us there.

## **But why *this* Reading Guide?**

With that background in mind, we wanted to consider with you for a moment why it is that we have constructed this Reading Guide as we have. Two of the core values that we

esteem highly at Summit are cultivating an individual passionate pursuit of the Lord and, correspondingly, living connected to faithful, biblical community. We believe that this Reading Guide can help us move toward both of those values. Why?

- 1) We will emphasize your individual engagement with the Lord as you spend time in his Word.
- 2) We hope to grow your familiarity with the Word as you continue to read it.
- 3) We pray that you increase your awareness of the Spirit's activity in your life as you prayerfully invite the Spirit to meet you while you engage the Word.
- 4) We encourage you to practice all of this with others in biblical community.

### **So how do we hope to do that with this Reading Guide?**

Each week that we are in Ruth, our Reading Guide will consist of the following elements:

- An invitation to read Ruth, in full, once each week during the month of March.
- An overview giving attention to a specific focus for the chapter we are studying each week.
- Supplemental passages that will help provide biblical context for what you are reading in Ruth.
- Questions for personal and corporate application.

Ultimately, it is our hope, our prayer, that you would immerse yourself in Ruth. There are many ways to study Scripture. If you are wondering how you might spend a full month in such a short book, we would encourage you to consider printing out the text of Ruth. Then each week, as you go back through the text, do so adding highlights and comments with a different colored pen or marker. We believe that you'll be amazed at the cumulative impact of time spent prayerfully meditating on these four chapters. We are praying and trusting that the Lord will meet you and grow your confidence in his sovereign care and perfect love as you spend time in this remarkable story. We are excited to walk through Ruth with you.

## *Ruth 3 | Reading Guide*

\*Read Ruth, in full, at least once this week. While this week's Reading Guide will focus on Ruth 3, we would encourage you to continue to immerse yourself in this story throughout this series. As you read, consider these questions:

- What observations stand out?
- What does this text invite me to believe about God?
- What does this text invite me to understand about myself?
- How might the Lord be asking me to respond?

### **Overview of Ruth 3**

Bravery is compelling, be it in the form of a child jumping off of a diving board for the first time, a timid person pushing through stage fright to sing before an audience, or a firefighter rushing toward flames to save lives. Ruth's third act begins with tremendous bravery. This is nothing new for Ruth. She has already willingly left the comfort of her home and family in Moab to journey as a prospect-less widow to Bethlehem with Naomi. She has already risked abuse and ridicule by going into the fields in order to glean so that she might gather enough grain to feed herself and Naomi. And now, Naomi asks her to be brave once again.

Motivated by her desire that Ruth might experience security and rest through marriage, Naomi instructs Ruth to present herself to Boaz as one who is available for marriage. But the plan is far less straightforward than it sounds. Naomi instructs Ruth to visit Boaz at night (risky), while he's on the threshing floor (riskier still), after he has fallen asleep (risk sirens blaring) in order to request that he would redeem her. Yet despite these inherent risks, despite uncertainty as to how Boaz might respond, Ruth sets her face to the task before her and does precisely what her mother-in-law has instructed her to do.

The tension is palpable as Ruth approaches a resting Boaz on the threshing floor. The threshing floor was notoriously a place of debauchery, and so she must wonder whether Boaz would misinterpret her actions as something far more illicit. Would he reject her, balking at her forwardness? Would he shame her publicly for her actions? Boaz has demonstrated integrity of character to this point, but will darkness demonstrate something other to be true? From the moment Boaz awakes, startled, and is told that it is Ruth at his feet asking that he would redeem her, we are given indication that this is indeed a man of integrity. "May you be blessed by the Lord, my daughter." These are

kind words, caring words, spoken from a man whose heart is bent toward Ruth with tender affection.

Yet even in our exhale of relief at Boaz's positive response, he introduces an unanticipated twist. There is *another redeemer*, a *nearer redeemer*, whose right of redemption supersedes that of Boaz. We are left joy-filled at the knowledge that Ruth will be redeemed, but strangely disquieted by the presence of this other, unknown redeemer. As Ruth returns to Naomi, the story is filled with a strange commingling of hope and uncertainty. We must wait for resolution, even as Ruth returns to Naomi laden with barley and the promise from Boaz that he will see this matter through soon.

The story of Ruth, thus far, has invited us to engage two related questions: *Is God actually in control?* and, if so, *Does he care?* Ruth 3 provides a lens that mirrors real life through which we might consider our answers. God is clearly guiding the interaction between Ruth and Boaz — we are invited to feel the tension of the text while recognizing that nothing that has led to this point in the story has been happenstance. Both Ruth and Boaz demonstrate tangible evidence of God's loyalty and care toward his people. And we get a glimpse of divine grace as Naomi, one who was so recently bitter and angry toward YHWH, has the whole of her future redirected toward hope and life. Yet we are reminded by the questions that still hang in the air at the conclusion of this chapter that we are not, in fact, omniscient. Will we live as those who anticipate God's provision in our lives, not presumptuously, but trusting in the promises of God? Will we be a people of bold, courageous faith, rooted in our trust in a sovereign and loving God?

### Supplemental Passages

1) **1 Samuel 12:1-23** | Though there is uncertainty as to why Naomi encouraged Ruth to wash and dress herself as she did before visiting Boaz, some scholars hold that she was inviting Ruth to end her period of mourning for her late husband (Naomi's son) so that she might present herself to Boaz as available for marriage. Consider this scene from David's life, wherein the prophet Nathan confronts David over his sin. Pay special attention to David's actions in 12:20 as a possible parallel for Ruth's actions in concluding her period of mourning.

2) **Proverbs 31:10-31** | Boaz ascribes tremendous value to Ruth by describing her as a "worthy woman" in 3:11. This phrase is only used twice more in the Old Testament, once in Proverbs 12:4, and once again here in Proverbs 31:10. As you read through this text, consider the implications of Boaz's use of this language to describe Ruth.

3) *Psalm 147* | Thanksgiving for the Lord's faithfulness in our lives helps to cultivate the bold, courageous faith that we see modeled in Ruth 3. As you read through Psalm 147, prayerfully reflect on your own life and offer praise for the Lord's faithfulness to you.

### Life Group Questions

1) How would you describe the atmosphere of Ruth 3? Asking it another way, if Ruth's story were a film, what music would be playing in the background throughout this chapter?

2) What is Naomi's stated motivation for sending Ruth to Boaz in 3:1? Why might that be significant to our understanding of the story?

3) In 3:9, Ruth makes this request of Boaz: "Spread your wings over your servant for you are a redeemer." Consider this in light of Boaz's statement in 2:12. What connections exist between these verses and why might these be significant for our understanding of the story?

4) The scene on the threshing floor carries implicitly sexual overtones. And yet, Boaz and Ruth maintain their integrity throughout. Why does this matter? How does this challenge us to think of our personal integrity in our own hyper-sexualized culture?

5) Boaz and Ruth both demonstrate a trust that compels them to exercise bold and courageous faith. Ruth risks safety and rejection in approaching Boaz because she trusts Naomi. Boaz risks his inheritance and reputation by agreeing to redeem Ruth. Yet neither is guaranteed success or any measure of certainty. How has the Lord (historically or in the present) asked you to trust him with bold, courageous faith, even in the face of uncertainty?

6) The Lord demonstrates faithfulness to provide for the characters throughout Ruth's story. How has the Lord provided for you throughout the last several months? How has the Lord specifically used his people to help care for you?

*Celebrate the Lord's faithfulness, expressing gratitude for his sovereign care. Consider reading Psalm 147, or another psalm of thanksgiving, together as a group as you recognize all that God has done, and is doing, in your lives.*