

Ruth: A Heart of Faith

Passages: Ruth 1–4

Memory Verse

“The LORD repay your work, and a full reward be given you by the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge.” (Ruth 2:12)

Knowledge of God’s Will [God’s Word]	Knowledge of God [God’s Divine Nature]	Good Works [Behavior]
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Learn how Ruth’s faith was evident in her actions.2. Learn about Boaz’s godliness, generosity, and moral integrity.3. Understand how Ruth and Boaz’s faith was connected to God’s blessings.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. God is compassionate.2. God is loving.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Have faith even in difficult times, and also diligently maintain our faith.2. Understand the extent of God’s loving nature, and learn how this should affect our daily lives.

Overview

Events and Spiritual Teachings

- A. Ruth’s Characteristics
- B. Boaz’s Characteristics
- C. God’s Redemptive Power

Life Application: God Uses the Faithful

Memory Verse

Conclusion: When life brings us devastation, it is often very difficult to have faith. But it is during those times that we need the most hope and faith. Like Naomi, we need to start with hope and return to Christ.

Introduction

The story of Ruth takes place during the time of judges when “there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judg 17:6; 21:25). It was a period full of darkness and suffering, brought by violence, immorality, idolatry, and disobedience to God. Naomi and her family left Bethlehem during a time of famine, and after experiencing severe hardships, she returned to Bethlehem a widow. However, she did not return alone: her daughter-in-law, a Moabitess, refused to leave her side and returned with her to Israel. Naomi’s return and Ruth’s faith for a God not originally her own trigger a series of events that show God’s care for the faithful, and the hope that He offers even in times of despair.

Teachers: If any of your students are unfamiliar with Ruth’s story, you may want to spend a few minutes briefly summarizing the book, as the lesson is not entirely chronological.

A. Ruth’s Characteristics

1. Her faithfulness

From the very beginning of the book, Ruth’s characteristics are clear. Let’s read Ruth 1:11–17. Naomi’s prospects were clear: she had no future to offer her daughters-in-law, and with the death of her sons, they were under no obligation to follow her. But Ruth “clung” to Naomi and told Naomi to entreat her not to leave Naomi. Ruth had no blood relation to Naomi, nor was she an Israelite, yet she declared that Naomi’s God would be her God, and Naomi’s people her people. Her words are not only moving to us because of her passionate appeal – they are moving to us because she backs her bold declaration with her actions.

As we read the book, we can see that Ruth not only leaves behind her home and family, but also goes the extra mile in caring for her mother-in-law and in following her instructions (Ruth 2:22–23; 3:5). Her actions clearly indicate that she had truly chosen to make Naomi’s people her people, and Naomi’s God her own as well. Her loyalty to Naomi and her obedience to God’s commands were demonstrations of her faithfulness in action.

2. Her compassion and kindness

Let’s read Ruth 2:5–7. Ruth worked hard to glean enough for both Naomi and herself, and in addition, she even set aside food for her mother-in-law when treated generously (Ruth 2:14, 18). When Boaz speaks to her for the first time, he says, “It has been fully reported to me, all that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband, and how you have left your father and your mother and the land of your birth, and have come to a people whom you did not know before” (2:11).

It may be easy to move to different cities, or even countries, today. But back then, Ruth had no job or living prospects since she had chosen to move, and she also had to leave her family behind. Boaz’s words remind us of how difficult a decision this must have been, especially as Naomi herself admitted that she had nothing to offer her daughter-in-law. But Ruth insisted on following her so that Naomi would not have to suffer alone, but would have the support of a younger family member.

3. Her obedience

Let’s read Ruth 2:2, 21–23. The book’s title and content focus on Ruth, but at the time, Ruth’s

focus was on supporting her mother-in-law. Furthermore, aside from leaving her homeland, her every action was done under the advice of Naomi and Boaz. Ruth was also exceptionally obedient to Naomi's advice. She did not take any matters into her own hands, but humbly did as Naomi instructed, word for word, even in the choice of her marriage.

Let's read Ruth 3:1–10. Boaz comments on Ruth's kindness in that she "did not go after young men, whether poor or rich" indicates that there was a distinct age difference between the two (v. 10). Ruth did not turn away her mother-in-law's instructions, and even humbly submitted herself as a "maidservant" before Boaz. Because of her obedience to Naomi's wisdom, she not only received God's blessings in the form of a stable and peaceful life, but she was also included in the genealogy of King David and the Messiah Himself.

Teachers: The following is an optional teaching about Ruth 3:1–4, if your students are curious about the meaning of Naomi's instruction and Ruth's actions, time permitting.

Naomi's Wisdom

This passage may seem baffling to us, so it is important to understand the context and intent behind Naomi's directions for her daughter-in-law.

- **"My daughter, shall I not seek security for you [...]?" (v. 1)**
Naomi's words may seem to encourage selfishness on Ruth's part, but in truth, what she desired was a peaceful life for her daughter-in-law. As a Moabitess and a widower, Ruth was unlikely to find a husband or a household within which she could safely dwell in. She would have struggled to survive, so Naomi sought a future with stability and rest for Ruth.
- **"Now Boaz, [...] is he not our relative?" (v. 2)**
Boaz being their relative may seem confusing and inappropriate for us. However, the word that Naomi uses is *goel*, sometimes translated as "kinsman-redeemer" in the Bible. This means that Boaz had a specific role towards Naomi's family under Mosaic law. That role included several responsibilities, including marrying Ruth and buying the land of her deceased husband.
(Teachers: See Section C for more details on redemption.)
- **"[Go] in, uncover his feet, and lie down [...]." (vv. 3–4)**
This part is perhaps the most perplexing part of Naomi's instructions. Some might interpret this as a provocative action, but it was actually a standard gesture of submission at the time, done by a master's servant. Servants would lie at their master's feet so that they would be ready to act upon any needs that the master might have. Naomi was telling Ruth to approach Boaz not as someone demanding his help, but as a humble and submissive servant.

The directions that Naomi gave to Ruth were specific. Although Boaz had the responsibility to accept Ruth's proposal, the method that Naomi recommended ensured that Boaz would not be placed under pressure. By following Naomi's instructions and proposing in this secretive manner, both Ruth and Boaz were able to keep their integrity in the eyes of both man and God.

B. Boaz's Characteristics

1. His godliness

Let's read the following verses: Ruth 2:4, 12, 14–16; 3:10–13. What do we immediately see about Boaz's character from these verses? From his simple greeting to his workers (2:4) to his

dealings with Ruth (2:12), we can see that Boaz lived a God-centered life in his speech and actions. He truly acknowledged God in all his ways (Prov 3:5–6).

According to Leviticus 19:9–10, Mosaic law demands that farmers refrain from completely harvesting their fields, but instead leave some behind for the poor. The fact that this law was being preserved so faithfully in Boaz’s field tells us much of his character: not only is Boaz himself one who abides by God’s laws, but he also surrounds himself with faithful workers who followed his instructions (Ruth 2:4, 16–17).

2. His generosity

Let’s read Ruth 2:8–9. Boaz offers three things that Ruth would have been sorely lacking as a foreign widow: friendship, protection, and refreshment. We also know that Boaz had absolutely nothing to gain by offering these things to her – he extended a helping hand, and he expected nothing in return. Let’s continue reading Ruth 2:15–16. After hearing of Ruth’s circumstances, he made sure to take care of her even without her knowledge, in a way that would not shame or humiliate her.

Let’s read Malachi 1:6–7. Generations later, although the Israelites followed the laws, they “despised” God’s name. They offered according to the law, but they did not follow the spirit of love that God desired (Mt 22:36–40). Their hearts were focused only on themselves. Boaz not only upheld God’s laws in deed, but also in the spirit of their purpose by showing kindness to the unfortunate and loving his neighbor as himself.

3. His moral integrity

When Naomi instructs Ruth on how to propose to Boaz, she concludes by saying, “[He] will tell you what you should do” (Ruth 3:4). When Ruth later returns and reports what happened, Naomi reassures her, saying that Boaz “will not rest until he has concluded the matter this day” (v. 18). After observing Boaz for a while, Naomi clearly had a good grasp of Boaz’s diligence and integrity. She knew that Boaz would not take advantage of Ruth, and that he would seek to quickly settle any responsibilities that he had.

As we read in the introduction, in the time of judges, “everyone did what was right in his own eyes.” In contrast to a lawless time where everyone did what was right in their own eyes, Boaz was honest and upright, and he abided by God’s laws in both deed and in spirit. Like Ruth’s compassion and faith, Boaz’s moral integrity was very clear.

C. God’s Redemptive Power

Although the book does not state God’s actions directly, we can clearly see His redemptive power at work in the events that occur. Boaz’s redemption of Ruth is a foreshadowing and analogy of our own redemption through the death of Jesus Christ. To understand this teaching, we need to learn more about the rules of redemption in the Mosaic law.

1. Redemption from slavery

Let’s read Leviticus 25:47–48. One of the redeemer’s responsibilities was to buy back a family member who was forced to sell themselves to a foreigner as a slave. This redemption was important in cases where the foreigner may not have followed God’s laws, such as the release of slaves in the Year of Jubilee.

2. Redemption of property

The second form of redemption was to buy back land that a kinsman was forced to sell (Lev 25:25). Boaz stated this rule of redemption clearly when he met with Naomi's kinsman-redeemer (Ruth 4:3–6). Upon buying back the land, the redeemer had the responsibility to keep and take care of it, then eventually return it to the family to whom it originally belonged. In Naomi's case, it would be returned to her family when Ruth bore a son.

3. Kinsman-Redeemer

Let's turn to Deuteronomy 25:5–6. At the time, preservation of the family name was of utmost importance. It was considered a tragedy if a family's name was no longer continued, so to safeguard against this, there were rules in place to help prevent this tragedy. If a man died before the birth of any sons, his brother was to marry his wife, and the firstborn son that they have together would instead take the name of the deceased. In the case of Ruth, the nearer relative, or "kinsman-redeemer," was willing to redeem the property, but did not want to deal with potential conflicts of inheritance when it came to his children (Ruth 4:6–8), so he willingly passed the responsibility on to Boaz.

From these laws, we can see that God cares about His people's freedom and prosperity. Although they may experience poverty or difficulties, His laws offer them a way out through the grace of their kinsmen-redeemers. However, the redemption shown in this book goes beyond the physical redemption that Boaz offers. Let's read Ruth 4:14–17.

It is not by mere chance that Naomi received so many blessings once she chose to return to God. But if she had not chosen to return, she would not have received such joy. In addition, Ruth, a Moabitess, is unusually compared to Rachel and Leah, the mothers of the Israelite nation (Ruth 4:11). Her status as a foreigner did not deter Boaz from agreeing to redeem the house of Elimelech, and our status as Gentiles did not stop God from choosing to redeem us from sin. Before we came to Christ, we were "dead in trespasses and sins," "having no hope and without God in the world" (Eph 2:1, 12). But through His death, He has redeemed us of our sins so that we can now receive salvation when we return to Him as Naomi did (Gal 3:13–14; Eph 1:7–8).

Check for Understanding

1. What were Ruth's characteristics? Briefly explain how we can see each in her actions.

- Faithfulness: She "clung" to Naomi and chose to follow the Mosaic law.
- Compassion and kindness: Everything she did was to support her mother-in-law. Boaz's words also remind us how difficult it must have been for her to live in a foreign land.
- Obedience: Aside from leaving her home country, all that she did was under the advice of Naomi and Boaz.

2. What were Boaz's characteristics? Briefly explain how we can see each in his actions.

- Godliness: From his greetings to his dealings with Ruth, we can see that he lived a God-centered life.
- Generosity: Boaz offered a helping hand to Ruth and expected nothing in return.
- Moral integrity: Naomi tells us clearly that he was a diligent man of integrity, and that he would seek to quickly settle any responsibilities that he had.

3. What do we learn about God from His laws regarding redemption? God cares about His people's freedom and prosperity. Although they may experience poverty or difficulties, His laws offer them a way out through the grace of their kinsman-redeemers.

- 4. What can we see about our own redemption in the Book of Ruth?** Like Ruth, our status as Gentiles did not stop God from choosing to redeem us from sin. Before we came to Christ, we were “dead in trespasses and sins,” “having no hope and without God in the world.” But through His death, He has redeemed us of our sins so that we can now receive salvation when we return to Him as Naomi did.

Life Application

God Uses the Faithful

We may believe that we have no skills or talents that God can use. Sometimes, we may even use this as an excuse to decline any work that we have been offered, no matter how minor. It is easy to feel that we are incapable of serving God in certain capacities or feel that we are ineligible even if we want to do something for Him.

Ruth was a poor and foreign widow, childless and struggling with poverty. She had to glean the fields behind harvesters just to survive. With this kind of insecure and lowly position, no one would have guessed that not only would Naomi’s line be revived through her, but that God would even choose her for the line of the promised redeemer! What was it about her that made God choose her for such an important role?

When Boaz spoke with her, he praised her for her faith towards Naomi, and added, “The LORD repay your work, and a full reward be given you by the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge” (Ruth 2:12). Ruth was a foreigner with nothing to her name, but God accepted her because she had faith. Let’s read Hebrews 11:6. “But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.”

a. Faith in difficult times

One of the clearest markers of our faith is when we face difficult times or trials in life. Naomi had no prospects for either her own or Ruth’s future, and Ruth herself was a foreigner who was not originally from Israel. But Ruth did not let any fears of the future stop her from doing what she was determined to do: to remain faithful to her mother-in-law and, in turn, remain faithful to her mother-in-law’s people and her God.

God wants His workers to remain faithful to Him, but this is often difficult to do when we are struggling with different physical or spiritual trials in our lives. Let’s read Hebrews 12:1–3. In order to keep our faith in difficult times, we need to lay aside every weight and remember what Jesus endured before us and for us.

b. Faith in her diligence

The Bible records that Ruth gleaned the fields from morning until evening and continued working until the end of the wheat and barley harvest. Boaz also took note of her faith towards her mother-in-law, as well as her hard work and sacrifice. These qualities were clear not only to Boaz, but also to many others (Ruth 2:11; 3:11). From Boaz’s words, we know that everyone saw that Ruth went above and beyond in honoring and respecting her mother-in-law. Ruth’s faith was seen not only in her loyalty to Naomi, but also in her diligence.

Let’s read Matthew 6:5–6. We need to show our character even when we think that no one else is watching. When we do this, we are showing a heart that is concerned with our integrity and

love for God, rather than with showing off towards others or gaining public appreciation for our deeds.

From the Book of Ruth, we can see that it doesn't matter what kinds of skills we have or do not have. No matter what our circumstances are, even in our obscurity, God can use us, and often in ways that we could never have imagined. Perhaps He will use us to help keep a brother or sister in church, or perhaps He is planning to call us to serve as a minister or teacher for Him. All that we need is faith! We can be the most skilled person in the history of mankind, but if we do not have faith, then we will be of no use for God's work. On the other hand, we may be like Ruth, with no money, future, or particular skillset. But if we hold on to our faith in difficult times and act diligently with faith, then God will use us for His work.

Let's read a couple of testimonies to see these aspects of faith in action, and reflect on how we can do the same in our lives. *(Note: These testimonies have been summarized and shortened for the sake of this lesson. Names have been changed for anonymity.)*

Testimony #1:

Brother Aaron was the General Affairs officer in his local church, and the main source of financial support in his family. However, one year he lost his job due to the COVID-19 pandemic. With the added stresses of the pandemic, such as inflation, it was a difficult time for him, and he struggled with the loss of his job during a time when he really needed to keep it. However, during this time, his local church also had to continue running various events throughout the year, many of which became very difficult to manage due to the pandemic. Because of his job loss, Brother Aaron found that he was able to focus more on what was needed in his church as the General Affairs member. He was faithful in doing God's work without any complaints. In fact, despite the difficult time he experienced with the loss of his job, he went above and beyond, ensuring the church remained in mint condition and virus-free! Two years later, God gave him another job that offered a higher pay than his previous one. Reflecting back, he realized that God truly knew and understood his needs.

Testimony #2:

Sister Livia and her husband lived in the same home as her husband's parents. However, her in-laws were not True Jesus Church members, and they were quite demanding of Sister Livia. After she gave birth, her mother-in-law became more difficult, demanding that Sister Livia do double the amount of housework and chores despite having a child to care for. For ten years, she experienced intense hardship because of her mother-in-law's treatment. However, Sister Livia endured all of this adversity. Even when she was sick, she got up to fulfill her mother-in-law's requests, and when her father-in-law fell ill, she visited the hospital two or three times a day to check on him. Because of this diligence, Sister Livia's mother-in-law saw how amazing she was in enduring this hardship. She saw God in her actions and came to believe in Christ.

- What do you think of Brother Aaron and Sister Livia's faith? Do you think you would be able to endure in your faith and diligence if you encountered similar situations?

Memory Verse

"The LORD repay your work, and a full reward be given you by the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge." (Ruth 2:12)

Meaning

Ruth worked diligently to support her mother-in-law and followed up with her promise to make Naomi's people and faith her own. Her compassion and loyalty towards Naomi were shown in her actions. As a result, God blessed her for her diligence and faith in the greatest way imaginable: not only was her and Naomi's futures secured through the grace of redemption, but she herself became a mother in the genealogy of the Messiah, God Himself. It is clear that those who work diligently and seek out God in faith will receive an abundance of blessings in return.

Conclusion

When life brings us devastation, it is often very difficult to have faith. But it is during those times that we need the most hope and faith. Like Naomi, we need to start with hope and return to Christ. When we act in faith towards God, He will also guide us to experience blessings while acting out His good works, in much the same way He silently guided Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz.

Lesson 5 Homework Assignment Answer Key

1. How do we receive the same abundance of blessings that Ruth received?
We must work diligently and seek out God in faith.
2. Why was it so unusual for Ruth to insist on following Naomi?
Naomi had no future to offer her daughters-in-law, and with the death of her sons, they were under no obligation to follow her. Ruth had no blood relation to Naomi, nor was she an Israelite, yet she declared that Naomi's God would be her God, and Naomi's people her people.
3. In which of his actions can we see that Boaz's life was centered around God?
We see this in his simple greeting to his workers, as well as in his dealings with Ruth. In addition, the fact that he followed the law so faithfully in his field tells us that he was not only one who abided by God's laws, but also one who surrounded himself with faithful workers who followed his instructions.
4. Briefly explain what a kinsman-redeemer is, and why the law regarding redeeming land was such an important law.
A kinsman-redeemer is the closest relative of a deceased man who would "redeem" his land and marry his wife. The firstborn son they have would then take the name of his deceased father and the redeemed land would become his. It was considered a tragedy if a family's name was no longer continued, so this law allowed the deceased man's family name to continue.
5. How do we show our faith through our diligence?
We need to have a heart that is concerned with our integrity and love for God, rather than with showing off towards others or gaining public appreciation for our deeds.
6. Can you recall a time when difficulties that you faced made you waver in your faith? Do you think you would waver again if faced with the same circumstances?
Personal answers.