




THE COMMUNITY

Ruth | LOYAL LOVE

What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?

Ruth 1-4

History

We are told in Ruth 1:1 that the time frame of the Book of Ruth is when the judges judged. No doubt the judges judged justly and judiciously, but I digress. The period of the Judges (chronicled in the book of Judges) covers roughly the 350 years following Israel's entrance into the Promised Land.

Chapter One

Due to a famine in Israel, Naomi, her husband, Elimelech and their two sons, Mahlon and Kilion, migrate from Israel to the land of Moab, no doubt to find food, employment or both. As God's redemptive plans center on Israel, the Jewish reader would have anticipated far sooner than the modern reader that this excursion can only end badly.

While in Moab, Elimelech dies, leaving Naomi a widow. Her sons marry two Moabite women, Ruth and Orpah (not to be confused with Oprah), but then Naomi's two sons die, leaving Naomi and her two daughters-in-law all alone. I know that was a little confusing: just add Mr. Darcey and it's like trying to track with Pride and Prejudice. But the characters of the story are important, so go back and re-read it if you need to.

Upon hearing news that the famine was over (1:6), Naomi is ready to cut her losses, end her nightmarish sojourn in Moab and trek back to Israel. Both daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth, want to accompany her, but Naomi feels that their best chance of remarriage is to stay in Moab so she sends them away. Ruth, however, refuses to leave and pledges her loyalty to Naomi and "her God." Thus, chapter two will begin with Naomi and Ruth arriving in Israel.

There are two important character studies in this chapter. The first is Naomi. She's endured a famine and the death of her husband and two sons. Her speech reveals a woman disillusioned, without hope, and bitter toward God. In many ways, she represents the Jews to whom this book was written.

The second portrait is of Ruth. She is a Moabite. This would have certainly evoked strong feelings of prejudice in the Jewish audience. Much like Jesus' story of the

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What's the Big Idea?

Character Series: The main intent of these character studies is to help your group become more familiar with the entire Bible and to see how the Old Testament connects to the New, telling one complete story of redemption which reaches its climax in Christ.

This Study: The main idea of the book of Ruth is "loyal love." God is faithfully committed to His people even when they are faithless, and it is this grace that transforms us.

What's the Problem?

To cope with the brokenness of life, we wander away from God and not to Him, seeking to provide for our own needs and comfort. As life is not found apart from God, our wandering produces even greater hopelessness and despair, the result of which is a heart that's hardened and bitter.

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Good Samaritan, this Gentile is the hero of the story and the one who, ironically, manifests God's love and mercy. Ruth pledges her love and loyalty to Naomi – a commitment that's both selfless and sacrificial, for as a Moabite, it's doubtful she'll find a husband in Israel and likely she'll be a social outcast. She has nothing to gain and a whole lot to lose in her commitment to remain with Naomi. There is a Hebrew word for this loyal, unmerited love displayed by Ruth. It's called hesed (literally "loyalty born from love"). Hesed, repeated multiple times and demonstrated throughout the book, is the theme of the book of Ruth.

Chapter Two

In chapter two, Ruth goes out to the fields to glean (pick up scraps left by the harvesters) in order to provide food for both herself and Naomi. In the process, Ruth meets the owner of the fields. His name is Boaz, and not only is he a godly man, he turns out to be a long lost relative of Naomi. In this chapter there are three significant developments in the theme of hesed (loyal love) you should notice. First, Ruth's loyalty, demonstrated in her willingness to work and provide for Naomi gives us a fuller sense of what hesed means. It's not just an emotional pledge of loyalty and devotion, but a roll-up-your-sleeves, get-your-hands-dirty commitment to carry the burdens of another. Second, we are introduced to a faithful Jew named Boaz who also demonstrates this loving loyalty, protecting and providing for both Ruth and Naomi. Hesed, it would seem, is contagious. The love demonstrated by Boaz seems to be inspired by the example set by Ruth for her mother-in-law. The third development is that as bitter and despairing as Naomi was, her heart is not hesed-proof and all this loyal-love is having its intended effect in softening her heart. This demonstrates the effect of God's grace in our lives as well as the effect our loyalty, love and grace can have on others.

Chapter Three

In chapter three, we have a romantic interlude between Ruth and Boaz. In a Jewish custom rather foreign to us, Ruth basically proposes marriage to Boaz. In verse 10, Boaz is amazed by Ruth's "kindness" or hesed (there's that word again) and is more than happy to say "I do." Boaz is apparently a great deal older and praises Ruth's hesed, that does not look at outer appearance or at personal advantage, but is attracted supremely to character. Chapter three is a hesed-fest.

Chapter Four

In chapter four, Boaz and Ruth are married and conceive a child, Obed. The theme of God's loyal, faithful love is everywhere. There's the birth of Obed as Naomi becomes GrandNaomi (children are a common sign of God's faithfulness). Then Boaz redeems the family inheritance of Naomi and preserves the family line. And even as the ending credits role, or in this case the genealogy, we find out that Boaz, Ruth and Obed are all in the direct lineage of David and therefore, Jesus, who will be for us hesed incarnate.

The Hesed of God

The Bible is comprised of many chapters and verses but it tells only one story of redemption (the climax of the drama being Jesus Christ). It's important to note how each book uniquely fits into this great drama. In the book of Ruth, God is the ultimate source of hesed – the source of Ruth's hesed, the one who uses hesed to reach out and redeem Naomi and the one who pours out His hesed on Ruth and Boaz. The hesed of the book of Ruth in any and all of its manifestations points forward in the Bible to the ultimate demonstration of hesed: all of us were as bitter and estranged to God as Naomi, and yet Christ entered into our brokenness, extending to us grace and mercy. As Ruth pledged to Naomi, "Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay" (1:16), Jesus promises "never will I leave you, never will I forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5).

What's Our Response?

The Book of Ruth illustrates the depth and extent of God's loyalty (faithfulness) and love for us. So that's what you want your group to understand and respond to. Some of the facets of God's loyal love demonstrated through Ruth are:

It is unconditional. God is loyal to Naomi (through the love of Ruth) even though she had turned her back on Him.

It is inseparable. Ruth pledges to Naomi, "Where you go, I will go." Similarly, Jesus promises us, "Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you" (Heb. 13:5).

It provides and cares. Naomi is provided and cared for in every way through the love of Ruth and Boaz.

It is transformational. Naomi is redeemed and transformed through the love of Ruth.

With this greater understanding of God's faithfulness, you want your group to respond with:

1. Thanksgiving and gratitude for God's loving kindness given to us in Christ.
2. Awareness and repentance for where they have turned away from Him.
3. A desire to be like Ruth. That is, to be a vehicle of God's loyal love to others.

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What Are the Questions?

Ruth 1-4

Launch

Describe a time when you had to make a choice to be loyal to someone? Of the relationships in your life (including God), who do you wish you had been more loyal to? The opposite of loyalty is betrayal. Have you ever been betrayed?

Explore

Read Ruth Chapter 1.

- Without looking at the passage, try to describe what has happened in the chapter.
- Read verses 11-18. If there were a word that would best describe Ruth, it would be loyal. how would you define loyalty? Why do you think loyalty matters to God?
- Do you think Ruth was a “believer”?
- Read verses 11-13 and 19-22. What words would you use to describe Naomi? Do you know anyone like this?
- Do you think the author feels Naomi’s attitude and feelings are understandable? Do you think so?

Read Ruth Chapter 2.

- In the actions of both Boaz and Ruth, what do we learn about the nature of loyalty in this chapter?
- Boaz has no doubt been inspired by Ruth’s example. How have you seen kindness to be contagious?

Read Ruth Chapter 3.

Somewhat obscured by cultural custom, in this romantic interlude, Ruth proposes marriage to Boaz and he accepts.

8. In 3:10 we find the word “kindness.” This word is actually the theme of Ruth and is the translation of the Hebrew word hesed, meaning “loyalty born out of love.” Where else is hesed (translated as kindness) mentioned in Ruth? Where is it demonstrated?

9. In 3:10-11, Boaz is amazed by Ruth’s kindness (hesed). Why? What do we learn about hesed from Boaz’s description?

Read Chapter 4.

10. Where do you see God’s loyal love demonstrated in chapter 4? What effects has God’s hesed had on Naomi?

11. Moabites were looked down on by Jews and yet Ruth is the one who displays God’s loving kindness. Why is this significant?

12. At the end of Ruth, we learn that Ruth is in the family lineage of David. How does this point us to the ultimate demonstration of God’s hesed?

Apply

13. In what way do you see or understand God’s love better after reading Ruth?

14. Naomi sought to provide for her needs apart from God. In what ways do you tend to do this? In what ways have you experienced the frustration of these choices?

15. Naomi was transformed by God’s hesed. How is the hesed of Christ currently transforming your life?

16. As you have experienced God’s love, in what relationship could you better demonstrate hesed?

NOTES:

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What Are the Answers?

1. Due to a famine, Naomi, her husband Elimelech and their two sons leave Israel and go to Moab. There, her husband and two sons die, leaving Naomi alone with her two daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpah. See “What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?”

2. Loyalty is an unconditional commitment to treat another with kindness and preference. God values this because it is true of His nature. As we have been the recipients of his loyalty and love, He expects us to treat others with this same loyalty.

3. When Ruth pledges, “your God will be my God,” she seems to be expressing a loyalty to God in her commitment to Ruth.

4. Bitter, hopeless, despairing. Allow the group to discuss.

5. The author doesn’t make it explicit but it could be assumed.

6. Ruth demonstrates loyalty by returning with Naomi and working for her in the fields. Boaz provides both food, protection and compassion.

7. Allow the group to discuss.

8. Heseid is found in 1:8 and 2:20, as well as 3:10. Look for how Ruth and Boaz show heseid but also look at the many ways God shows heseid to Naomi apart from them.

9 It is unconditional love and not shal- low affection.

10. The birth of a new child, Obed, and the preservation of Naomi’s family lineage by Boaz who redeems her inheritance. God’s grace has transformed Naomi’s bitterness into thanksgiving.

11. You might turn to the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10) as the hero is also a Gentile. Loyal love in unconditional and unbiased; prejudice is its antithesis.

12. The lineage of David is the lineage of Christ.

13. See “What’s Our Response?” for aspects of God’s loyal love.

14. Allow the group to discuss. Have your own example at the ready.

15. Allow the group to discuss.

16. Don’t gloss over parents or siblings.

Memorize

Review the books from week one. Have the group memorize the next nine books and be able to say all 17 in order by next week.

1 Samuel, and 2 Samuel
1 Kings and 2 Kings
1 Chronicles and 2 Chronicles
Ezra
Nehemiah
Esther



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