

Bible Study Discussion Guide

Ruth

The book of Ruth is a wonderful story of love and loyalty, in which God shows his love and faithfulness to people who are faithful to his Covenant. It is set during the distressing era of the Judges, when the majority of the people turned away from God and His Covenant, and instead 'the people did whatever seemed right in their own eyes' (Judges 21:25). In contrast, Ruth, Naomi and Boaz chose to act in faithfulness to each other and to God's Covenant.

The Knowing God Bible study discussion guides are provided to facilitate small group Bible study. We encourage everyone in the group to read or listen to the Bible text about ten times over the course of the study. We recommend providing a copy of these notes to each member of the group and selecting an individual to lead each week's study.

The book of Ruth takes approximately 15 minutes to read.

This discussion guides provides questions for two sessions.

Principles for use:

1. Encourage everyone in the group to read Ruth many times.
2. Trust God to help you understand and apply his Word.
3. Focus on what the book reveals about God/Jesus.
4. Focus on what it clearly reveals about how God wants us to live.
5. Don't get bogged down on minor, uncertain or controversial issues.

For further copies, visit the Bibleworld website and follow the link to Bible Study Resources. The notes can either be printed off or if you prefer to remain paperless, you can view the questions online.

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May the Lord repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the Lord,
the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.

Ruth 2:12

Background notes:

Widows: Widows were extremely vulnerable in the ancient world. Without a reliable source of income, they could find themselves homeless, poverty stricken and others within the community could take advantage of them. In the Covenant, God provided the Israelites with the practice of Levirate marriage in order to protect widows (Deuteronomy 25:5-10). The closest male relative would marry the widow to protect her and to provide children to carry on the family name.

Moabites: The Moabites were descended from Lot's son, Moab and had been long term enemies of the Israelites. Their territory lay on the Eastern side of the Dead Sea.

Session One: Does God care?

What were your initial impressions of the book?

This book introduces us to two vulnerable widows. Naomi had faced extreme hardship. She had moved to a foreign country as a result of famine. She had lost her husband and her two sons. She blamed God for her sufferings (see Ruth 1:13, 20-21). What she right to think and feel like this? Was God against her?

The widow Ruth also had to make difficult choices. As a widow in Moab she had few options: she could beg, sell herself as a slave, become a prostitute or hope for a decent second marriage. By travelling to Israel with Naomi she would have had the same few options, but also the stigma of being a despised foreigner in Israel. Why do you think she chose to go with Naomi?

When Ruth and Naomi arrive back in Bethlehem, Ruth pursues one of the few options available to her, gleaning. This practice was prescribed by the law as a method of providing for the poor in the land (Deuteronomy 24:19; Leviticus 19:9; 23:22). What was Ruth's experience of gleaning? What could have gone wrong (Ruth 2:22)? Why do you think things went well for her?

Have you ever felt abandoned by God? How did you respond? What did God do in your situation?

Session Two: Blessed by God

When Ruth gleans in Boaz's field, he gave beyond what the law required of him (see Deuteronomy 24:19) and showed kindness to Ruth. In what other ways does Boaz act admirably? In what ways does he show faithfulness to God? Can you recall a time when you have benefitted from someone else's faithfulness to God?

Boaz does not take advantage of Ruth when she comes to him at night. He agreed to be Ruth's kinsman redeemer and made sure he followed the process of Levirate marriage prescribed by God, even though it meant someone else may have been able to marry Ruth. Have you ever been tempted to take matters into your own hands and ignore God's ways? What can we learn from the example of Boaz?

At the end of the book, a son is born to Ruth and Naomi cared for him. The women of the village recognised God at work in Naomi's life. Have you had a situation when other people have been able to see God at work in your life? Have you had the experience of God changing a difficult situation in your life to a joyful one?

This child, Obed, later becomes the grandfather of King David. This suggests that God is working behind the scenes to achieve his plans and purposes. In what ways do you believe God wants to be active in your life to achieve his plans and purposes? What might he require you to do?