



Week Two: A Character Study - Ruth

This is a moving account of God's overruling in the life of one family. It teaches much about our heavenly Father's care.

Day 1. Yahweh, Ruth's God

Ruth 1:1-18

Verses 1-5 give the background and approximate date. The previous Old Testament book, Judges, records historical events when the judges ruled. It must have been bad enough to leave Judah in search of food, but imagine Naomi coping with bereavement in a strange country. Since Naomi's family had been in Moab only ten years it is likely Ruth and Orpah were still young when their husbands died. Tragedy had struck.

1. Write down from vv.6-13 the phrases the writer uses involving 'the Lord'. What do they teach about God and about Naomi's understanding of his ways?
Note: LORD - 'Yahweh', the Hebrew personal name for God.
2. What do we learn of Ruth's character and her faith (14-18)? Notice she used the same personal name for Israel's God as Naomi had done.
3. Despite tragedy Naomi and Ruth acknowledged the Lord as God in their lives. What has been your response when difficulties or tragedies have crossed your path? In what ways have you seen God's purpose in them?

PRAY: Write a prayer that expresses your desire to go God's way. As Ruth did, you could think of the different aspects of your life this would involve.

Day 2. No flukes with God in control

Ruth 1:19-2:13

1. Naomi was very clear that the Almighty, who was yet her personal God, had been the author of her distress (vv.19-22). Why was it important that she grasped this and did not say 'God has forgotten me; he no longer cares'?
2. Ruth gathered up the leftovers of the harvest, not realizing that Boaz, the owner of the field, was a relative (2:1-7). How does the author show that God ordered events for her? (Note v3).
3. Ruth met Boaz and recognized that his kindness was beyond duty (2:8-13). What do we learn of Boaz' knowledge of God and at the same time the way God acts? How did this confirm that Ruth now acknowledged the Lord as her God?

4. Read again 1:20-21. Naomi and Ruth both described the same God. How can this be so? How does God both reward and afflict (2:12; 1:21, RSV) - an apparent contradiction? In what ways can this lesson encourage and indeed comfort us? For example, how is God our refuge when we have failed an exam or missed a job we applied for?

PRAY today for any you know who need to grasp these different sides to God's character.

“For a final example and proof of the truth that following God's guidance brings trouble, look at the life of the Lord Jesus himself. No human life has ever been so completely guided by God, and no human being has ever qualified so comprehensively for the description 'a man of sorrows'.” (J. I. Packer, Knowing God)

Day 3. Working with God

Ruth 2:14-3:13

1. Boaz' generosity continued. How did Naomi's response in v.20 show that her understanding of God had held firm despite hardship? She sounded almost excited!

Think of situations where your faith has been tested. Have you allowed that to strengthen your relationship with the Lord? Be honest!

2. The situation of two widows is unusual but in v.9 Boaz would have understood that Ruth was asking for marriage (not necessarily the procedure to adopt today!). Some Christians suggest we should sit back and wait for God to drop blessing from heaven. How do vv.1-9 and Naomi's previous initiatives show us otherwise? How did Boaz also demonstrate that we need both God's blessing and our God-given mind in action (vv.10-13)?

Think of a major decision in your life, like choosing a career. What does the attitude of Naomi and Boaz teach you about finding out God's will?

“You can't follow Christ if you stand still”. John White, The Fight (IVP)

PRAY that you will so know the mind of God that you will increasingly know when to take the initiative and when to wait. Bring to him particular situations where this applies to your life.

Day 4. Waiting

Ruth 3:14-4:12

1. How did Boaz show that he was anxious not to discredit Ruth and careful to abide by the customs of his day? In what ways can we cause offence to others by thoughtlessness?

Note: 4:1 'Gate' means place for public assembly - see Proverbs 31:23. National customs strike many visitors from overseas as very strange. How much

allowance do we make to someone from another culture who seems to misunderstand our way of doing things?

2. Naomi and Ruth had done their part and had to wait. How can waiting for God to act strengthen our faith in him?

Naomi and Ruth had to wait a matter of hours, but sometimes God expects us to wait years and years. Examine the situations and people for whom you are praying. How far are you prepared to be patient and wait for God's timing?

PRAY for the things you have been wanting God to do for a long time. Lift up these needs again to God, trusting Him to respond when His time is right. You might like to ask an older Christian how he or she manages to be persistent in prayer.

Day 5. A happy ending

Ruth 4:13-22

The Lord had turned Naomi's joy into bitterness and then completed the cycle by giving her joy (not that this is the way he always works).

1. Looking back over the book, think how many other people had been blessed and would benefit from God's dealings with Naomi. What does this tell us about God's long-term perspective on events in our lives?

Can you think of ways in which, through hardship in your own life, many people (including yourself!) have ultimately been blessed?

2. Look back through the whole book and pick out from the phrases which start 'The Lord...' - all the activities which are ascribed to him.

PRAY about all these areas of God's activity, and ask him to show you his control and give you faith to trust him.

Weekend

Write a character profile of Ruth, picking out her qualities as a person. (It would be wise to read through the whole book again to make sure you don't miss anything.)

Which of these qualities would you do well to copy, with God's help? Turn your thoughts into prayer, asking God to help you change where necessary.

Although Ruth lived before Jesus, Romans 8-28 is a good summary of her attitude to God's action and sovereignty. Memorize: Romans 8:28.

Read Psalms 34 and 138. How does David echo some of Naomi's and Ruth's experiences in these psalms? In what ways does David show us the same God we saw in the book of Ruth? Write down any fresh insights into God's character which you have gained from this series.

PRAY for the young adults in the Church to make good choices and right decisions especially regarding their career choices and their future life partners.