

The Story of Ruth

Start by reading Ruth Chapter 1.

Naomi and Elimelech leave to go to Moab. Do you think it was a good idea to flee a land of famine? Look up Deuteronomy 23: 3 – 6. What else in these opening verses confirms that Elimelech has given up on the Lord, and that his wandering away is Spiritual not just practical?

Naomi tries to send Orpah and Ruth back to their people and their gods. Why is she discouraging them from following the one true God? what insight does that give us into her spiritual wellbeing?

Do you think Elimelech's disobedience is being punished by God? Does Naomi think this (vv20 – 22)?

Reflection: Naomi and Ruth both have to face really difficult personal circumstances. How do they respond differently to them? What about you – how well does your faith keep going through difficult and painful times?

When things don't turn out as we want them to, do we blame God, ourselves or a mixture of both? How do we discern what is right and true?

Go on to read Ruth Chapter 2.

What has Ruth to lose or gain by staying behind? What has she to lose or gain by going with Naomi? What do you think is the key factor in Ruth deciding to go with Naomi?

Ruth has clearly learnt about the practices of God's people. Look at Leviticus 19:9-10 and Leviticus 23:22 to get a quick overview of the practice of gleaning. Why do you think it was important for God's people to do this? What did it teach them about him?

Are there ways in which we see principles of gleaning in today's society? Are there practical ways that we could encourage more of it?

What were the dangers that Ruth faced when she went out gleaning in the fields? How does Boaz seek to make things easier for Ruth?

What does this chapter tell us about Ruth's character and Boaz's character?

Reflection: the words that Boaz speaks to her are so significant. Sheltering under God's wing is used frequently in the psalms. Look at Psalm 57: 1 – 3 and Psalm 61: 1 – 5. What do these Psalms tell us of God's redemption and care?

Boaz clearly doesn't see Ruth as a Moabite woman to be despised (according to Deuteronomy 23) but as a child of God under his care that God is drawing to himself. How do we learn to see others as Boaz saw Ruth? How might this challenge us in our thinking about how we see those in poverty, who are refugees or who worship other gods?

Continue reading Ruth, looking at Chapter 3.

Look at v4. The language is full of inuendo and can be understood in a number of different ways. Do you think Naomi was hoping that some sexual union would take place? Why might this have helped her cause?

Ruth is obedient to Naomi's promptings. Yet she also seeks to act honourably so that there is no disgrace. How does she do this?

v9 is key to this section. Whilst the NIV goes for the meaning "spread the corner of the garment" the literal translation of "spread your wings over your servant" is much more helpful as it brings echoes of verse 12 in chapter 2. What is she asking of Boaz?

What more do we learn about Boaz from his response?

Boaz agrees that he is a redeemer. What is there in Boaz's character and actions that help us better understand Jesus?

Reflection: It is easy to think that the end justifies the means. Naomi seems to be willing to do anything to get what she thinks is a good outcome. Boaz is willing to lose everything to do things the right way. In what circumstances might you be like Naomi? In what areas do we need to learn to be like Boaz. Ultimately why does it matter which we are if the end point is the same?

Finish off by looking at Chapter 4 of Ruth.

There is another character given the chance to redeem Naomi and Ruth. What do you think puts him off? In what ways is his decision wise? In what ways is his decision unwise?

The irony is that the man who wants to protect his legacy isn't even named or remembered. What do you think the Bible is teaching us through this?

When Naomi arrived she said she had nothing, now, as she sits with the grandchild in her lap, she is told that she has a daughter worth seven sons. What do you think this says to us about trusting in God's providence? What helps us to trust, even when we can't see it?

Ruth's faithfulness has been rewarded. Is our faithfulness always rewarded? In what ways?

Reflection: What parts of this story most help you to understand the Gospel of Grace?