

Revive Our Hearts™

RUTH

EXPERIENCING A
LIFE RESTORED

A Bible study based
on the teaching of

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WOLGEMUTH

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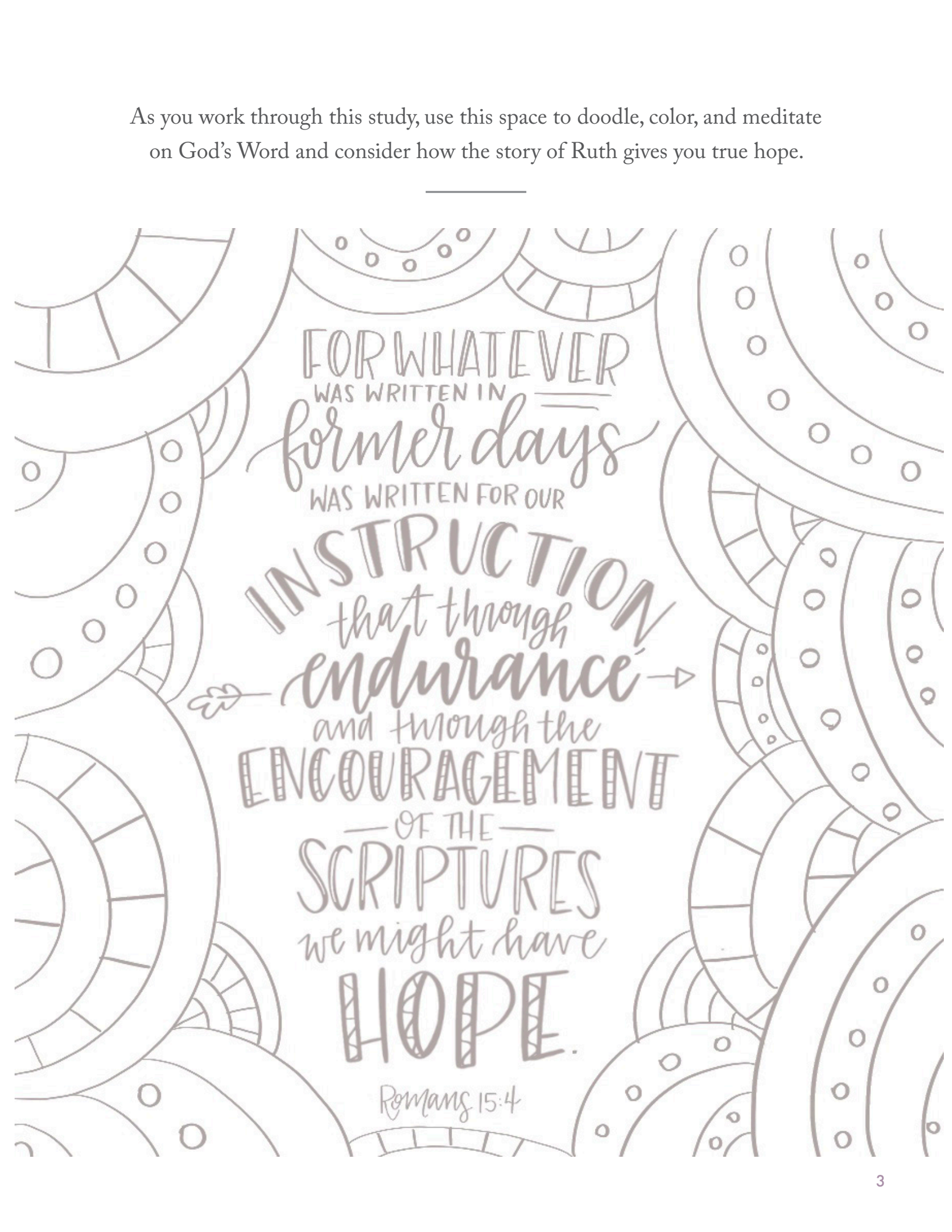
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As you work through this study, use this space to doodle, color, and meditate on God's Word and consider how the story of Ruth gives you true hope.



FOR WHATEVER
WAS WRITTEN IN
former days
WAS WRITTEN FOR OUR
INSTRUCTION
that through
endurance →
and through the
ENCOURAGEMENT
— OF THE —
SCRIPTURES
we might have
HOPE.

Romans 15:4



Ruth's Story

AS FOUND IN RUTH 1

NAOMI WIDOWED

¹ In the days when the judges ruled there was a famine in the land, and a man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons.

² The name of the man was Elimelech and the name of his wife Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They went into the country of Moab and remained there.³ But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons.⁴ These took Moabite wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. They lived there about ten years,⁵ and both Mahlon and Chilion died, so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband.

RUTH'S LOYALTY TO NAOMI

⁶ Then she arose with her daughters-in-law to return from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the fields of Moab that the LORD had visited his people and given them food.⁷ So she set out from the place where she was with her two daughters-in-law, and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah. ⁸ But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go, return each of you

to her mother's house. May the LORD deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me.⁹ The LORD grant that you may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband!" Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept.

¹⁰ And they said to her, "No, we will return with you to your people."¹¹ But Naomi said, "Turn back, my daughters; why will you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb that they may become your husbands?"¹² Turn back, my daughters; go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. If I should say I have hope, even if I should have a husband this night and should bear sons,¹³ would you therefore wait till they were grown? Would you therefore refrain from marrying? No, my daughters, for it is exceedingly bitter to me for your sake that the hand of the LORD has gone out against me."¹⁴ Then they lifted up their voices and wept again. And Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.

¹⁵ And she said, "See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law."¹⁶ But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or to

return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God."¹⁷ Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the LORD do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you."¹⁸ And when Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more.

NAOMI AND RUTH RETURN

¹⁹ So the two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem. And when they came to Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them. And the women said, "Is this Naomi?"²⁰ She said to them, "Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me.

²¹ I went away full, and the LORD has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi, when the LORD has testified against me and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?"

²² So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabite her daughter-in-law with her, who returned from the country of Moab. And they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest.

INTRODUCTION

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

A suffering nation, reeling from famine, judgment, and war, Israel was a dark and unfriendly home for most, *particularly for a woman*. Even more so for a widowed woman. Ruth's story begins in desolation. But as in every story whose Author is God, that desolation is not without a glimmer of hope.

As you watch that glimmer of hope bloom into a dazzling display of grace, you'll understand why the book of Ruth is called, by some, the greatest love story of all time. But this love story is much less about *romance* and more about *restoration*. It's a story of how God can turn tragedy into joy, no matter how desperate our circumstances may seem.

While the book of Ruth contains the story of wanderers coming home, mourning turned into dancing, and desperation shifting to celebration, most of all it illustrates the redeeming and restoring love of Jesus, who takes the broken pieces of our lives and turns them into a thing of beauty.

WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT TO LEARN

Expect these five themes to deeply embed themselves in your heart through this study:

- **Hope.** We'll see how God turns hopeless situations to joy, how He brings beauty out of ashes. God can restore even the most desperate situations of life.
- **Love.** Ruth is one of the most beautiful love stories of all time. We'll see that true love is more than just romance—it's unconditional, sacrificial, and lasting.

- **Relationships.** Through Ruth, we will see how relationships can be healed and made whole through God’s restorative power.
- **Rest.** Through Naomi’s search for rest for herself and her daughters-in-law, we’ll see that rest isn’t a matter of a change in our external circumstances but something God gives within our hearts.
- **Restoration.** As we walk through this book with Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz, we’ll see how Christ can redeem and restore our lives in a way that overrules the losses and failures caused by our sins.

TIPS FOR USING THIS STUDY

As you use this study, ask yourself:

- What does this passage teach me about the heart, ways, and character of God?
- How does this passage point to Jesus and the gospel?
- Is there an example for me to follow or avoid? If so, how should I seek to change?

Each week of study is divided into five suggested daily lessons, but feel free to work at your own pace. Do what works for you!

You may also find it beneficial to listen to the audio series “Ruth and the Transforming Power of Redeeming Love” at ReviveOurHearts.com/Ruth.

The Holy Spirit helps us understand God’s Word. He is a gift and a “Helper” who is able to “teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I [Jesus] have said to you” (John 14:26).

Secondary tools that can help you better understand the Word of God (but aren't necessary) include:

- An English dictionary to look up the basic meaning of words
- Various translations of the Bible (a good online tool is BibleGateway.com)
- A concordance
- A Bible dictionary
- Commentaries
- A study Bible
- Colored pens or pencils to write in your Bible

We've included group discussion questions at the end of this book. Join the discussion about Ruth with the *Women of the Bible* podcast created to accompany this study. Find it at ReviveOurHearts.com/WomenoftheBible.

OUR HOPE FOR YOU

Over the next six weeks, the *Revive Our Hearts* team hopes you:

- Find practical wisdom to apply to your daily life.
- Read your Bible with greater passion.
- Experience the wonder of your own restoration.
- Rediscover that every story is really God's story, even yours.
- Know God better as a result of this study.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY

Spend time meditating on and memorizing the following verse this week:

To
grant to those
who mourn in
Zion—
to give them a
beautiful
HEADRESS
instead of ashes,
the oil of
gladness
instead of
MOURNING.

ISAIAH 61:3

Week 1

BEAUTY FROM ASHES

Big Idea: WE ARE ALL DESPERATE AND NEED RESTORATION.

INTRODUCTION

What comes to mind when you think of ashes? Perhaps something gray and gritty, smoky and dirty, the residue of an item that's been destroyed. Maybe it's the rubble you sweep from a fireplace and throw out in the trash. Whatever comes to mind, ashes probably aren't something you associate with beauty.

As we open the book of Ruth, Naomi's life seems to be nothing but ashes—at least looking at it from her perspective. Far from her homeland in a culture that didn't worship the one true God, her husband, dead, along with her two sons, Naomi's life was full of tragedy; her situation looked hopeless. Yes, she had her two daughters-in-law, but how could three women alone in ancient Israel provide for each other?

“But God” (two of the most beautiful words in the Bible!) had a different plan. He took the ashes of Naomi's life and made something beautiful. He used Naomi's story to showcase His power to restore, even when restoration seemed impossible.



Day 1: *A Desperate Situation*

Read Ruth 1:1–18.

The book of Ruth is one of two books in the Bible named after a woman (the other is Esther). The writer of Ruth focuses on two women: Ruth and her mother-in-law, Naomi. Both women were widowed. Beyond the emotional toll such losses must have taken, they likely also found themselves financially destitute. As a result, they left the country of Moab to return to Naomi’s homeland of Israel.

Over the next six weeks, as we walk through Ruth together, we’ll take time to dive deeply into this book. For now let’s get an overview.

Overview of the Book of Ruth

Author:

The Bible does not say who wrote Ruth. The Talmud (Jewish tradition) points to Samuel as the author. However, other scholars speculate that Nathan, Solomon, or someone else wrote this book.¹

When:

The events in the book of Ruth took place during the last part of the period of judges, sometime between 1160 BC and 1100 BC.²

Where:

The first part of Ruth occurred in the country of Moab, located east of the Dead Sea. The rest of the story of Ruth took place in Bethlehem in Judah.

Reread Ruth 1:1–5.

List the words that come to mind to describe Naomi’s situation.

-
-
-
-

Have you ever been in a desperate situation and been tempted to think, *How could anything good ever come out of this?*

Think about instances in the Bible where God’s people were desperate. List some of those situations. (We’ve listed a couple to get you started.)

- Israel turned to God in desperation (2 Chron. 15:3–4).
- King David cried out to God when his son was sick (2 Sam. 12:15–17).
-
-

Ruth’s story is a beautiful reminder that even our darkest circumstances can be redeemed. Because of God’s faithfulness, there will be joy at the end of every heartache. There will be beauty out of the ashes.

What parts of your story feel like “ashes” right now?

Take time to meditate on Isaiah 61:1–3 below, then write a short prayer asking God to give you hope that He can turn your ashes into something beautiful.

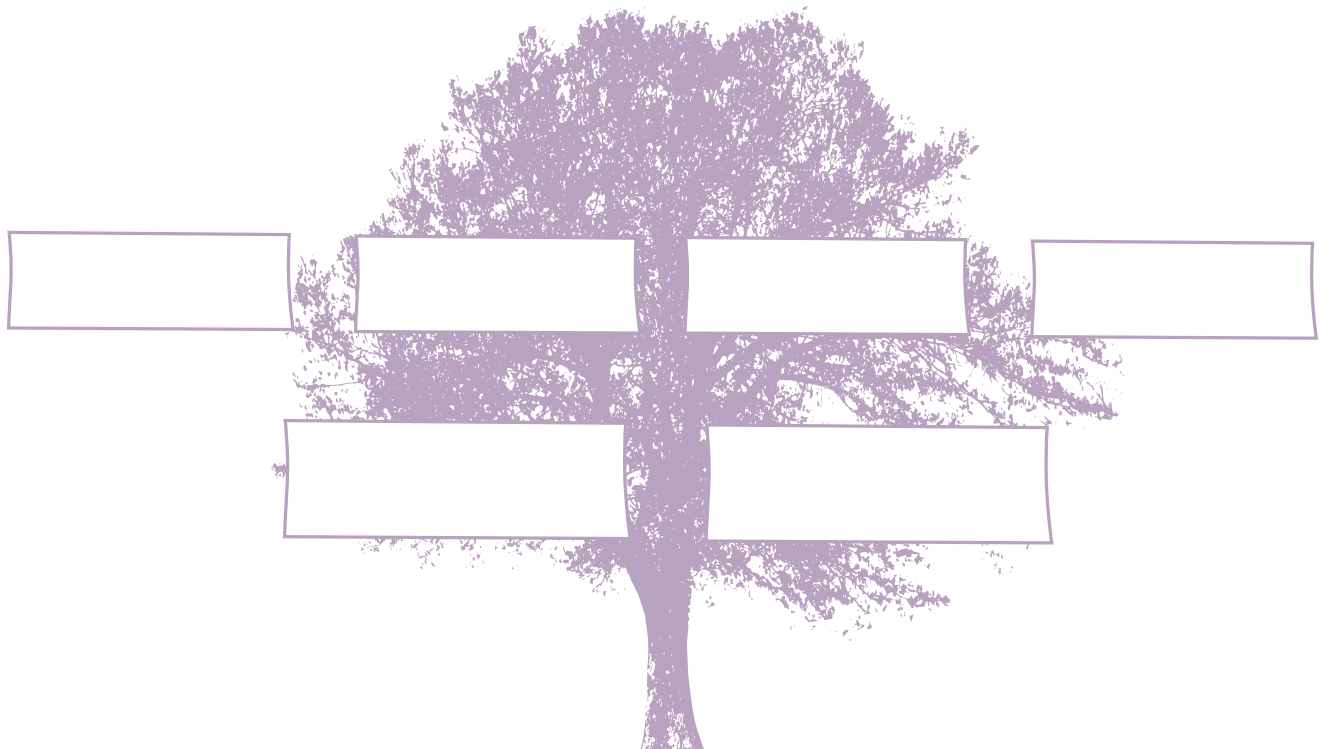
The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,
because the LORD has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor;
he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and the opening of the prison to those who are bound;
to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favor,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn;
to grant to those who mourn in Zion—
to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes,
the oil of gladness instead of mourning.

Day 2: *Meet the Cast*

Read Ruth 2:1–21.

While this book is named after Ruth, she's not the only character in the story. Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz all play prominent parts, with a few others filling out important supporting roles. Ultimately, however, the book of Ruth is a story about God.

Revisit Ruth 1:1–2 and sketch a family tree of the people mentioned.



The names on this family tree may give us insight into the story. Throughout the Bible, a person's name is often symbolic, revealing something about his or her character, situation, or aspirations (or perhaps the aspirations of his or her parents!). Here is a list of names from the book of Ruth and their potential meanings.

Name	Potential Meaning
Elimelech	"My God is King" ³
Mahlon	"Sickly" ⁴
Chilion	"Wasting away" ⁵
Orpah	"Neck" or "fawn" ⁶

On to our three main characters: Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz. Give a brief description of each of these individuals using words, drawings, word art, or a combination. Be creative!

Naomi

Ruth

Boaz

In Hebrew, Naomi's name means "pleasantness,"⁷ Ruth means "friend,"⁸ and Boaz means "fleetness" or "swiftness."⁹ Are there any ways that the meaning of their names is evident in our reading for today?

Review Ruth 1:19–21 and record the new name Naomi gave herself. What did this new name mean?

We will learn to love this cast of characters over the next six weeks, but their stories point us to the Director of *every story*, God. We'll see more clearly all the little incidents and details throughout the book of Ruth in which, from a human standpoint, restoration seemed impossible . . . “but God.”

Make a list of the “cast” in your own life. Next to each name write out a brief prayer about an area where you're asking the Lord to bring restoration.

Cast Member

Prayer for Restoration

Day 3: *In the Days When the Judges Ruled*

Reread Ruth 1:1.

The first phrase of the first verse of Ruth tells us something important about the setting of this story—“in the days when the judges ruled.”

The judges were those who ruled over Israel after the death of Joshua. Joshua was a spiritual and military leader. He followed in the footsteps of his mentor, Moses, who led God’s people out of slavery in Egypt. During Joshua’s lifetime, the people had seen the works of God—they had been delivered from slavery, walked through the parted Red Sea, and been led through the wilderness. They saw the power of God that took them into Canaan, conquered foreign nations, and gave them the Promised Land.

After Joshua and his peers died, however, a new generation was in place.

Read Judges 2:6–13 and compare the people during Joshua’s time and during the days of the next generation.

Joshua’s generation (v. 7):

The next generation (vv.10–13):

Verse 13 says that the Israelites “abandoned the LORD and served the Baals and the Ashtaroth.”

This is a reference to the Canaanite gods. Canaan was an agricultural economy, and in order for the people to be prosperous, two things had to be fertile: the land, so they could have crops, and their wives, so they could have laborers to work the crops.

The Canaanites' chief god was called Baal. That word means "lord or owner,"¹⁰ and the Canaanites believed that Baal owned the land and controlled fertility. Ashtoreth was believed to be Baal's female partner.

The Canaanites believed that the fertility of the land and of their women was the result of sexual activity between the gods. In order to get the gods in heaven to do what the Canaanites wanted on earth, the people would go up to hills, called high places, and perform the sexual acts they wanted the gods to perform in heaven. They believed this would make the land and the women fertile.

Over time, the Israelites became assimilated into this culture and began to practice these same sins.

What evidence do you see of spiritual darkness in our culture? Make a list.

According to verses 14–15, what was God's response to Israel's sin?

The book of Judges ends with this description of the culture in Israel:

In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes. (JUDG. 21:25)

Ruth lived in dark days; cultural and spiritual darkness surrounded her. Choosing righteousness couldn't have been easy for her. It's not easy for us. However, the story of Ruth can give us confidence that it's possible to walk with God in our workplaces, with our families, in our churches and communities even when cultural and spiritual darkness are pervasive.

In Philippians 2:15, the apostle Paul shares the reason why we're to live for God in a world that doesn't love Him or acknowledge Him. Write out the verse below, then underline that purpose.

Read Matthew 5:14–16. Draw a picture illustrating how God calls us to live in our dark world.

Day 4: *You Can Run, But You Can't Hide*

Reread Ruth 1:1–2.

Do you ever find yourself wanting to run from pressure? The real question might be “which day *don't* I feel like this?” The temptation in the midst of pressure, pain, or problems—whether big or small—is to want to escape from the realities of life. As we see in the story of Ruth, we're not the only ones to feel this way.

What difficulty was happening in Israel at the start of the book of Ruth (v. 1)?

What is a famine?

Although there are many reasons famines can happen, Scripture tells us that sometimes God allows famine for a specific purpose. In Deuteronomy 30:15–18, God made an agreement with the Israelites. He promised that if they obeyed Him, they would be blessed. They would have families and the land would produce crops. If they disobeyed His laws, there would be natural consequences of their disobedience, like famine and hunger, military oppression, etc.

Read the passages below that describe famines experienced by the nation of Israel. Underline the description of the famine. Double underline *why* God allowed each famine to occur.

“And if in spite of this you will not listen to me, then I will discipline you again sevenfold for your sins, and I will break the pride of your power, and I will make your heavens like iron and your earth like bronze. And your strength shall be spent in vain, for your land shall not yield its increase, and the trees of the land shall not yield their fruit.”

(LEV. 26:18–20)

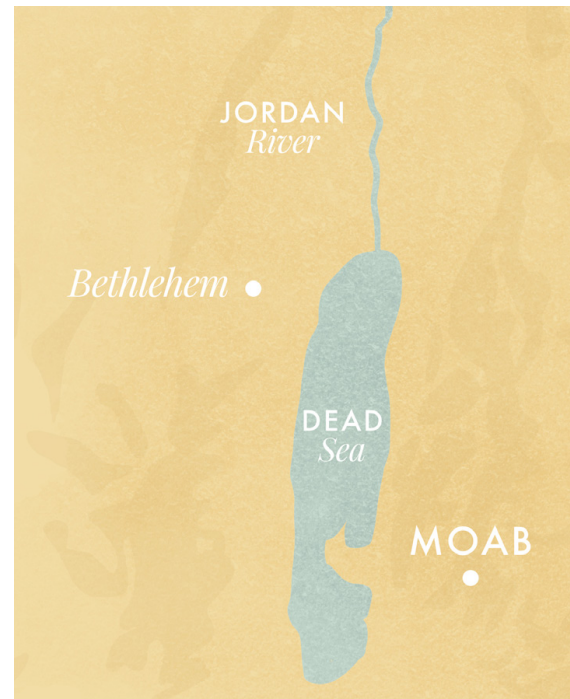
“But if you will not obey the voice of the LORD your God or be careful to do all his commandments and his statutes that I command you today, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you. Cursed shall you be in the city, and cursed shall you be in the field. Cursed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. Cursed shall be the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground, the increase of your herds and the young of your flock. . . . And the heavens over your head shall be bronze, and the earth under you shall be iron. The LORD will make the rain of your land powder. From heaven dust shall come down on you until you are destroyed.” (DEUT. 28:15–18, 23–24)

In each of these famines, God used natural disasters to restore His people to a place of obedience. We don't know if the famine Elimelech's family experienced in Bethlehem was God's judgment or not. We do know how Elimelech chose to respond.

Fleeing the Famine

In response to the famine, Elimelech chose to leave his homeland of Bethlehem in Judah and go to the neighboring country of Moab. Moab was approximately sixty miles from Bethlehem on the other side of the Dead Sea.

Match the following passages with what they tell us about Moab and the people who lived there.



Genesis 19:36–37

When the Israelites sinned, God let Moab defeat them and rule over them.

Numbers 25:1–4

The Moabites worshiped Chemosh, a false God.

Judges 3:12–14

They were descended from Lot's incestuous relationship with one of his daughters.

2 Kings 23:13

God was angry at Israel for following the practice of the Moabites including sacrificing to other gods.

The Moabites were the enemies of the Israelites. They worshiped false and evil gods (Num. 25:2). Despite generations of tension between Moab and Israel, Elimelech chose to leave his homeland and escape to neighboring Moab.

Revisit Ruth 1:1. What word is used to describe their travel to Moab? _____

What does this reveal about Elimelech's intentions for his family's time in Moab?

Approximately how long did they stay? (vv. 2–5)

We don't know whether Elimelech was trying to escape God's judgment by fleeing to Moab. We don't know whether it would have been better for him to stay and repent. We *do* know that even in enemy territory, even during a famine, Elimelech could not escape God's plan for his family.

Where Are You Running?

What circumstances do you wish you could just run away from right now?

What do you tend to run toward in the midst of hardship to try and find relief? Food, shopping, social media, work, friends, something else?

How has God used difficult circumstances to cause you to turn to Him?

Scripture tells us that there were times when King David, the man after God's own heart (1 Sam. 13:14), wanted to run away, too.

Psalm 55 describes a time when David was dealing with his enemies and had been betrayed by someone he thought was a close friend. In your own words describe David's words recorded in Psalm 55:6–8.

We don't get an indication from this psalm that David was able to escape his troubles, but verse 16 represents a shift in David's tone. Read verses 16–19 and 22 below. Circle the phrases that indicate what David relied on in this time of hardship.

But I call to God,
and the LORD will save me.
Evening and morning and at noon
I utter my complaint and moan,
and he hears my voice.
He redeems my soul in safety
from the battle that I wage,
for many are arrayed against me.
God will give ear and humble them,
he who is enthroned from of old, *Selah*
because they do not change
and do not fear God. . . .
Cast your burden on the LORD,
and he will sustain you;
he will never permit
the righteous to be moved. (vv. 16–19, 22)



What was He trusting God to do?

To close today's study, meditate on Psalm 139:7–12. This passage is a reminder that we can never outrun God. Even in the spiritually dark nation of Moab, Elimelech could not outrun God's plan for His family. How does it comfort you to know you cannot outrun God's plans for your life?

Day 5: *Alone, but Not Abandoned*

Reread Ruth 1:3–5.

Today's passage describes the events in Naomi's life very plainly—as a matter-of-fact. Beneath the words, however, we can feel the currents of pain. Naomi had lost her whole family. She was left destitute. She was in an extremely difficult and painful situation.

Based on what you've learned about her life, what emotions do you think Naomi was likely wrestling with?

-
-
-
-

Did “abandoned” make your list? Do you think that Naomi may have felt like God had abandoned her? Why or why not?

Have you ever felt like God abandoned you? Write honestly about that experience.

Throughout Scripture, we find multiple examples of people who were going through a difficult time. They most likely felt like God was far away. Yet He was working through their situation for a purpose.

Match each person from Scripture with the trial they went through.

Bible Character

Joseph (Gen. 37:12-36; 39:11-20; 50:15-21)

Job (Job 1:13-19; 2:7; 42:1-6)

Hannah (1 Sam. 1)

Paul (Acts 28:17-30; Phil. 1:13)

Trial Faced

Could not have children.

Thrown in prison for teaching others about Jesus.

Lost his property, children, and health.

Betrayed by his brothers and unjustly thrown into prison.

Choose one of the characters from this list. Imagine yourself in his or her shoes. What emotions would you be feeling?

Psalm 22 is another psalm of David. Read verses 1–2 and rewrite them in your own words.

Based on what you read, do you think David felt abandoned by God? Why or why not?

Jesus quoted this psalm as He hung on the cross. Read Matthew 27:45–50. In your Bible, underline the words that come from Psalm 22 or write them in the space below.

Jesus was in an extremely difficult situation—physically, emotionally, and spiritually. He was hanging on a cross for a crime He hadn't committed, abandoned by His friends and followers. Do you think He felt abandoned by God the Father? Why or why not?

Look up the following verses:

DEUTERONOMY 31:6, 8

HEBREWS 13:5–6



What do these passages promise for God's children?

Use the paraphrase you wrote for Psalm 22:1–2 as a starting point to talk to God about the times you've felt abandoned by Him. Be completely honest about your feelings and your fears. Then ask Him to give you assurance of His presence as you reflect on His character and the knowledge that He has promised to never leave you or forsake you.



SCRIPTURE MEMORY

Spend time meditating on and memorizing the following verse this week:

where you go I
will go, and where
you lodge I will
lodge. Your people
shall be my people,
and your God my God.
Where you die I will
die, and there will
I be buried. May
the Lord do so to me
and more also if
anything, but
death parts me
from you.

RUTH 1:16-17