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Welcome

Two childless, destitute widows—one older, weighed down with grief and sorrow, the other younger and naive ... their journey from tragedy to joy is the story of the book of Ruth. Though one of the shorter books of the Old Testament, Ruth has proven one of the most memorable and influential to God's people struggling through life in a profoundly broken world. Ruth's example of faith and faithfulness even in the midst of great tragedy continues to leave an indelible mark on all who study her story.

This study of Ruth will guide you to:

Connect in authentic community as you and your group share the joys and struggles of life and pray together for big things.

Grow in biblical truth by searching the scripture and actively applying this truth to your life.

Engage joyfully in helping people find and follow Jesus by practicing simple discipleship tools that tune your heart to those who are far from God.

PERSONAL STUDY + PRAYER

Each lesson in this study begins with personal study sections designed for individuals to walk through the book of Ruth verse by verse. The Survey, Lesson 1, contains the big picture and background information for the book. Lessons 2-8 focus on studying the passages in detail. The Synthesis in Lesson 8 is a place to record an overall summary of the content and flow of the book.

In each lesson, you will learn and use a number of basic Bible study methods. These methods fit under three fundamental skills that are meant to be practiced in order each week.

Observe: What do I see?

Interpret: What does it mean?

Apply: How does it work?

These skills are summarized in the Bible Study Tools Overview in the Appendix on page 76.

Every time we study the Bible, we should begin with prayer thanking Him for the gift of His Word and asking for His Spirit to guide our study.

GROUP DISCUSSION

At the end of every lesson, there is a Group Discussion Guide that provides an outline of a balanced plan for the time you spend together as a group - connecting, growing and engaging.

LESSON 1

Survey

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

To fully experience the power and grasp the lessons of this short book, we need to have a clear understanding of the Old Testament background upon which the book of Ruth was built. The story begins with tragedy. In fact, the entire story is motivated and moved forward by the twin tragedies of death and famine that assailed the two main characters, Naomi and Ruth. Such tragedies were common in the world of the Old Testament. Yet the Old Testament insists that these calamities were never God's intention for our world. After creating the heavens and the earth, "God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good" (Genesis 1:31). To rule over His "very good" creation, God made mankind in His own image to be His ambassadors, extending His blessed and perfect kingdom throughout the earth (Genesis 1:26-28).

Sadly, we failed. Genesis 3 records the choice of Adam and Eve to rebel against God and the tragic results that followed. Their sin brought pain, suffering, and death to all of creation. Yet God remained committed to His original plan, and so, immediately began a process of restoration, a process that would begin with sinful human beings and end with all of creation made right once again. The first step in that plan of restoration centered on one man, Abraham, whom we meet towards the end of Genesis 11.

1. Read Genesis 11:26-12:3; 13:14-18; and 15:1-7. What does God promise to do for Abraham? How does Abraham respond to God's promise?

In Genesis 15:8-21, God sealed these promises in an irrevocable covenant with Abraham, a covenant that was passed on to Abraham's son Isaac, his son Jacob, and Jacob's twelve sons, the fathers of the twelve tribes of the nation of Israel.

2. Why did God give this gracious covenant to Abraham? Read Genesis 18:17-19.

As the book of Genesis closes and the book of Exodus begins, the story of Abraham's family takes a surprising turn. Though they possessed these gracious and irrevocable promises from God, they proved as prone to sin as the rest of the human race, and soon found themselves slaves of the nation of Egypt. Oppressed and impoverished, they cried out to God to fulfill His promise and bless them. So God sent a deliverer, Moses, to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. This great redemption from slavery became a proof and reminder to God's people of His covenant faithfulness to them.

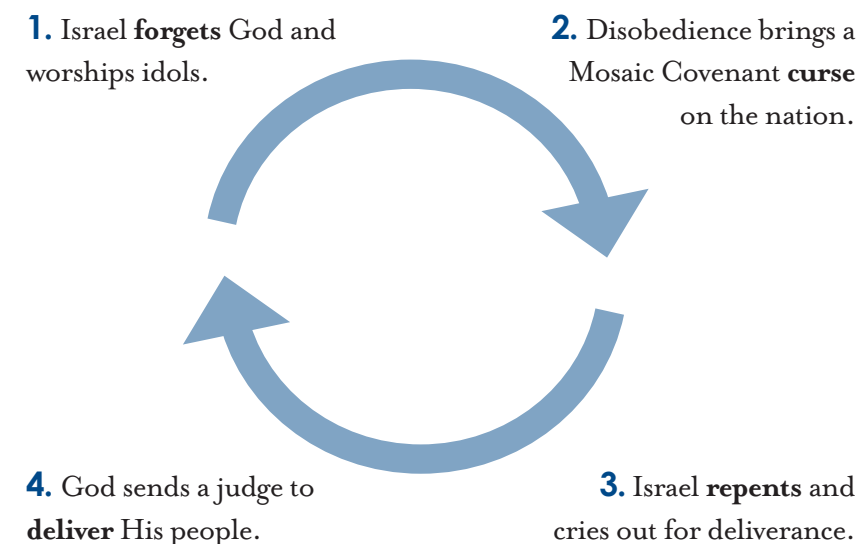
While the Exodus solved the problem of slavery, it left two big questions unanswered. First, what did Abraham's descendants need to do in the future to avoid experiencing anything like the curse of slavery again? And second, how would Abraham's family, who had proven as sinful as any other family, ever become the models of righteousness and justice that God intended them to be? Both questions were answered when God met His newly redeemed people on a mountain named Sinai and gave them a second irrevocable covenant, the Mosaic Covenant. This covenant was not like the first. Rather than being founded upon unconditional promises of blessing, this covenant was founded upon a Law summarized in the Ten Commandments that structured every area of life for the Israelites, from personal morality to social justice, from business practices to religious regulations.

This Mosaic Covenant Law was designed by God to serve as a constitution for the nation of Israel. If a particular generation of Israelites obeyed His Law, then God would unleash upon them the blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant. As a result, other nations would see God's goodness and be drawn to follow their righteous example. But on the flip side, if a generation chose to disobey God's Law, then He would withhold the blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant from that generation and, instead, unleash a curse upon them. In other words, while the blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant would always belong to the descendants of Abraham, a particular generation of his descendants could only enjoy those promises if they chose to obey the Law of the Mosaic Covenant.

3. Read Deuteronomy 28:1-48 and 30:1-11. List some of the specific "curses" that will result from disobedience.

The book of Deuteronomy closes with the death of Moses and the identification of a new leader for Abraham's family, Joshua. As recorded in the book bearing his name, Joshua led the nation of Israel into the Promised Land of Canaan where, in God's power, they conquered and displaced many of the pagan inhabitants. However, they failed to complete the task, and the pagan nations that remained in Canaan became a stumbling block to the Israelites (Judges 2:1-5). It's hard to worship a God you cannot see, especially one who requires such a high standard of righteousness. In comparison, the Canaanites worshiped gods of metal and wood that you could see and touch; gods that actually rewarded rather than punished immoral behavior. So as soon as Joshua's generation died out, the Israelites fell prey to the allure of idolatry (Judges 2:8-13). And just as the Mosaic Covenant promised, that disobedience brought from God a curse upon Abraham's family.

CYCLE OF THE BOOK OF JUDGES



Such is the story line of the next book of the Bible, Judges. It is during the time of the Judges that the events of Ruth occurred, so it is this book that provides the primary context for understanding her story. Unlike the book of Ruth, which moves linearly from problem to solution, the book of Judges is cyclical, repeating a four-step cycle multiple times. (1) That cycle begins with Israel's disobedience to the Mosaic Covenant Law, often in the form of idolatry. (2) As a result of their disobedience, God brings some curse upon the nation, usually in the form of a conquering foreign army. (3) That curse brings the Israelites to their knees. They repent of their sin and cry out for God's deliverance. (4) Just as the Mosaic Covenant promised, God responds to their repentance with deliverance. He sends a "judge," some person through whom God conquers the foreign oppressors and delivers His people. The Israelites rejoice in their

new-found freedom, but quickly forget the God who delivered them. Within a single generation they once again embrace the idols of the surrounding nations, beginning the cycle all over again (Judges 2:11-19).

4. According to Judges 21:25, what was the spiritual climate of the nation of Israel during the period of the Judges?

EXPERIENCING THE STORY

Everyone loves a good story, and God is no exception. Of His revelation to mankind recorded in the Bible, stories comprise a whopping 40% of the Old Testament and 60% of the New, far exceeding all other types of biblical literature (epistles like Paul's, poetry, proverbs, and prophecy). Therefore, for us to understand God's Word, we must learn how to appreciate, study, and apply the stories of Scripture. That begins with understanding their unique power to communicate truth. The purpose of all Scripture is to communicate truth; every type of biblical literature conveys truth. But stories do so in a uniquely powerful way. They engage not only our minds, but also our senses and emotions. Stories invite us to share an experience of God's truth. We enter into the lives of the story's characters; we share their joy and pain, their victories and defeats. And in that experience, God's truth takes hold of our hearts and minds and changes us in the process.

5. Read through the book of Ruth in one sitting. Afterwards, answer these introductory questions (you should ask and answer these six questions for every story of Scripture you study):

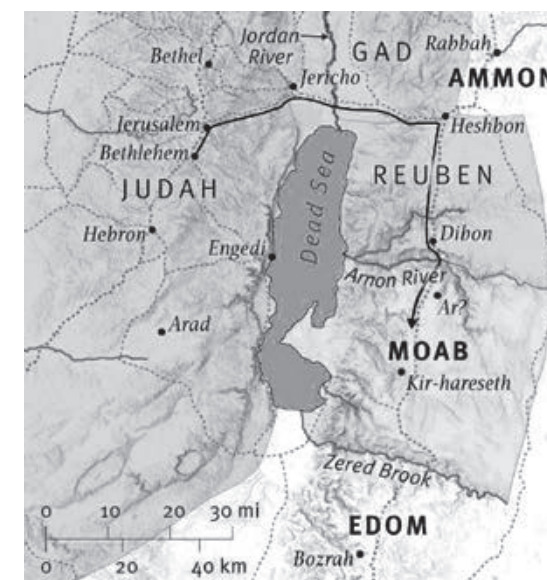
Who is the story about? Who are the central characters?

What is the story about? What are the big ideas, events, and themes of the story?

When does the story take place? What does the author tell you about this time period?

Where does the story take place?

What does the author tell you about the physical setting?



Why did God include this story in the Bible? There are countless ancient stories He did not include; why include this particular one? What key lessons does He mean for us to learn from it?

How does this story affect you? What emotions does this story elicit in you? How does it draw you in personally?

TRACING THE PLOT

What makes a story “good”? While complex characters, interesting settings, and surprising events all help, nothing is as important to a good story as its plot. A story’s plot is the sequence of events that keep the story moving forward. An engaging plot almost always includes (1) an initial introduction of setting and characters, (2) a conflict or set of conflicts that build as the story progresses towards, (3) a climax where the conflict(s) come to a head, after which (4) a resolution to the conflict emerges and the story ends.

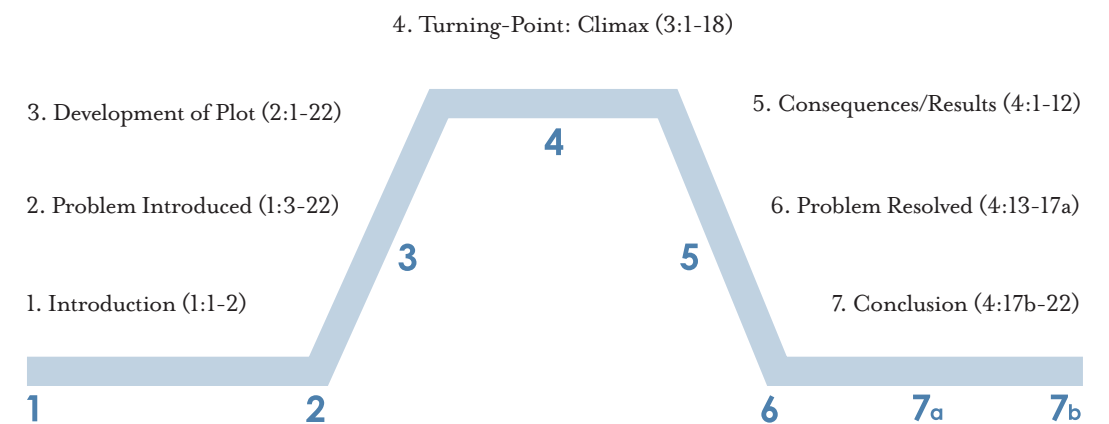
Let’s trace the plot of the book of Ruth. First, read through the book one more time. As you do, identify the main conflict(s) or problem(s) that the story of Ruth revolves around (stories will typically have just one or two main problems/conflicts).

Second, divide the story of Ruth into distinct “scenes.” Each scene presents continuous action occurring in one place at one time. For each scene, give a brief description of the main event or situation, list the characters present, and note what role the scene plays in the plot (introduction of setting or characters, development of the story, conflict or problem introduced or grown, climax of conflict, resolution of conflict). The first few scenes are done for you.

SCENE	DESCRIPTION	PRIMARY CHARACTERS	PLOT ROLE
1:1-5	Naomi’s family tragedy	Naomi	Introduction & conflict
1:6-18	Ruth’s astounding loyalty	Naomi, Ruth, Orpah	Development
1:19-22	Naomi’s bitterness	Naomi, Ruth	Conflict

Analyzing the individual scenes in a biblical story helps us in two ways. First, since these are biblical stories, we believe that every single word of the story comes directly from God. No scene is extraneous; every scene is essential for experiencing and applying the lessons of the story. Second, only by analyzing these individual scenes can we get a clear sense of the overall flow of the story. This flow identifies the climax and resolution of the plot which is often where God conveys the primary truths of the story to the reader. For the book of Ruth, the flow of the story can be diagrammed out as shown below.

FLOW OF THE STORY OF RUTH



APPLY

1. What have been some life changing moments that have marked your life’s journey?

2. When in your life have you been tempted to “do what is right in your own eyes” rather than follow God’s design for life?

GROUP GUIDE

CONNECT

Spend a few minutes catching up with each other. Share something you are celebrating or something that disappointed you during the last week.

Ask 1-2 people to take 5 minutes and share how they found Jesus and began to follow Him. Set a timer!

GROW

Discuss the Historical Background of Ruth.
Discuss the Cycle of Judges and Question 4.

Discuss six survey questions.

Discuss Tracing the Plot.

ENGAGE

Apply

Focus on Questions 1 and 2 .

PRAY BIG

Spend some time praying for each other. Make the focus of prayer time about applying Biblical truth personally.

Memory Verse

“But I am afflicted and needy; hasten to me,
O God! You are my help and my deliverer;
O LORD; O LORD, do not delay.”

PSALM 70:5

LESSON 2

Ruth 1:1-7

OBSERVE

Every time we study the Bible, the first thing to ask is, “What do I see?” This is the crucial skill of observation, which lays the groundwork for the rest of our study. We will learn a new observation skill each week to practice with the others we have already learned. This week, simply read the passage below and underline all setting details of the story. Identify the people, places, time periods, and events of a story (like “go to Nineveh... but Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish” in Jonah 1:2-3). These details not only provide significant background to understand the action within a story, but they also invite the reader into the story as an engaged participant.

RUTH 1:1-7

Record your observations in the margin as you read the passage.

¹Now it came about in the days when the judges governed, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the land of Moab with his wife and his two sons. ²The name of the man was Elimelech, and the name of his wife, Naomi; and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion, Ephrathites of Bethlehem in Judah. Now they entered the land of Moab and remained there. ³Then Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died; and she was left with her two sons. ⁴They took for themselves Moabite women as wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. And they lived there about ten years. ⁵Then both Mahlon and Chilion also died, and the woman was bereft of her two children and her husband. ⁶Then she

A famine occurs. Elimelech leads his family from Bethlehem to Moab.

Elimelech has a wife, Naomi, and two sons, Mahlon and Chilion.

arose with her daughters-in-law that she might return from the land of Moab, for she had heard in the land of Moab that the LORD had visited His people in giving them food. ⁷So she departed from the place where she was, and her two daughters-in-law with her; and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah.

1. Underline all setting details in the passage.

2. Circle the words that emphasize the emotional pain and problem that has befallen Naomi.

3. Construct a family tree in the space below.

INTERPRET

Our observation of Ruth each week will stir up some interesting and challenging questions. How do we begin to answer such questions? This week's interpretive skill - **look up background information** can begin to answer those questions by understanding what a passage meant to its original readers. You can find very helpful insights by looking up confusing names or words in a Bible dictionary (best is The New Bible Dictionary by Wood & Marshall) or looking up the particular verses you are studying in a background commentary (e.g. The TVP Bible Background Commentary by Craig Keener).

1. How does the presence of a famine according to 1:1 help locate the story of Ruth within the cycles of Judges (see chart on page 9)? Furthermore, what might it tell us about the relationship between God and His people at the time (see Leviticus 26:18-20; Deuteronomy 32:21-24)?

2. In view of the consequences of taking his family to Moab, do you think Elimelech's decision was right or wrong? Refer to the background article below then answer the questions that follow.

“Moab was the son of Lot by incestuous union with his eldest daughter (Genesis 19:36-38). His descendants and the land were known as Moab or as Moabites. The land of Moab was located on the plateau east of the southern half of the Dead Sea between the Dead Sea and the Arabian desert. It is through this land that Israel was prohibited from traveling as they came from Egypt (Numbers 22-24). The Moabites weren't just a political threat to their neighbors as they also had huge cultural and religious influence as well. As Israel prepared to cross the Jordan under Joshua's leadership, they were seduced by Moabite and Midianite women to participate in idolatrous practices. Hence, Israel was warned to

exclude Moabites from their assemblies (Deuteronomy 23:3). Interestingly, Moabites were not included in the list of foreign nations for which Israel was prohibited from marrying in Deuteronomy 7:1-4. In the days of the Judges, Eglon, king of Moab, invaded Israelite lands as far as Jericho and oppressed Israel for 18 years before he was eventually assassinated by Ehud the Benjaminite who delivered Israel. Moab would continue to vacillate from oppressive invader to conquered people under the rule of Israel and other peoples throughout the reigns of Saul, David, and Solomon and even to post-exilic times.”
(New Bible Dictionary 3rd edition.)

Why could he have been right?

Why could he have been wrong? (see Judges 17:6)?

3. How does the opening of this story cause you to feel about Naomi? What are her possibilities in the future as a single, older widow who now stands as head of her household? (See Deuteronomy 14:29; Lamentations 1:1, Malachi 3:5 or look up “widow” in a Bible dictionary).

4. Why does God visiting Bethlehem to end the famine carry such significance to the string of prior tragedies? In other words, how does God's visiting of Israel to end the famine relate to Naomi's situation?

APPLY

Our Bible study is only complete once we apply what we've learned. Begin by answering a few reflection questions designed to demonstrate how each passage relates to our own lives. Next, step back and look at the passage as a whole and list potential principles. A "principle" is simply a fact or command stated or implied in a particular passage that is practically relevant to our lives. A principle is not specific to a particular person or time. Finally, decide on specific action steps that you will begin to take right away to apply the principle in your daily life and consider how the principle impacts the relationships in your life.

3 Steps to Apply -> Reflect, List Principles, Make a Plan

1. Naomi experiences utter tragedy losing her husband, her two sons, and one of her daughters-in-law later. Have you ever felt like every support in your life had been stripped away? What did you do? How did you feel towards God at the time?

2. While you may still be waiting on resolution to the difficulty you experienced, how did you see God provide for you in your trial? Did He bring any restoration, even if only in part, to your difficulty?

3. Prayerfully determine the main biblical truth or principle that God revealed to you during your study. A few questions to ask are:

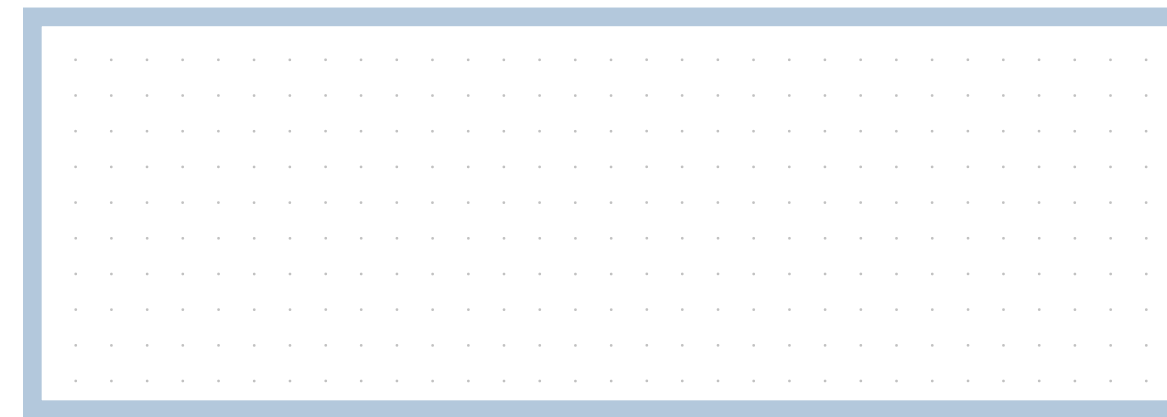
Is there a promise for me to claim?

Is there a truth for me to believe?

Is there a command for me to obey?

4. What specifically will you do this week to begin applying this principle in your daily life? Determine how this truth or principle impacts the relationships in our life where you live, work, and play.

In the box below, create a personal application statement, expressing how you will apply this truth in your life.



GROUP GUIDE

CONNECT

How was your week? Share a highlight or something that discouraged you during the last week.

Ask 1-2 people to take five minutes and share how they found Jesus and began to follow Him. Set a timer!

GROW

MEMORIZE THE WORD

Spend a few minutes reviewing the verses you are memorizing.

DISCUSS THE PASSAGE

Observe

Discuss skill of observing setting details.
Focus on Questions 1 and 2.

Interpret

Focus on Questions 2 and 4.

ENGAGE

Apply

Discuss the importance of applying God's Word to our lives.
Focus on Questions 1 and 2.

Take some time to share one another's personal application statements and their plans to follow through with it.

PRAY BIG

Spend some time praying for each other - primarily about personal applications.

Memory Verse

“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous!
Do not tremble or be dismayed, for the LORD your God is
with you wherever you go.”

JOSHUA 1:9



LESSON 3

Ruth 1:8-22

OBSERVE

Continue to make observations; answering the question "What do I see?" Also, begin to circle all character descriptions. Often the narrator or other characters will directly describe a character. Yet, usually an audience learns about a character through his or her own words, thoughts and actions. Use every relevant detail to get to know the characters. See page 76 for a list of character types.

RUTH 1:8-22

Record your observations in the margin as you read the passage.

⁸And 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. ⁹May the LORD grant that you may find rest, each in the house of her husband." Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept. ¹⁰And they said to her, "No, but we will surely return with you to your people."
¹¹But Naomi said, "Return, my daughters. Why should you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands?
¹²Return, my daughters! Go, for I am too old to have a husband. If I said I have hope, if I should even have a husband tonight and also bear sons, ¹³would you therefore wait until they were grown? Would you therefore refrain from marrying? No, my daughters; for it is harder for me than for you, for the hand of the LORD has gone forth against me." ¹⁴And they lifted up their voices and wept again; and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her. ¹⁵Then she

said, "Behold, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and her gods; return after your sister-in-law." ¹⁶But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or turn back 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. ¹⁷Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus may the LORD do to me, and worse, if anything but death parts you and me." ¹⁸When she saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her. ¹⁹So they both went until they came to Bethlehem. And when they had come to Bethlehem, all the city was stirred because of them, and the women said, "Is this Naomi?" ²⁰She said to them, "Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. ²¹I went out full, but the LORD has brought me back empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the LORD has witnessed against me and the Almighty has afflicted me?" ²²So Naomi returned, and with her Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law, who returned from the land of Moab. And they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest.

1. Circle the names of God in this passage. What do these names reveal about people's belief about God?
2. How does Naomi explain the change in her plight? Highlight the words to describe such changes. (Hint: Look for contrasts.)
3. Underline the scene details that change at the end of chapter 1.

INTERPRET

A skill that is a bridge between observation and interpretation is to **create and answer your own questions**. The chart below provides examples of the types of questions you might ask.

WHO IS	WHAT IS THE	WHY DID THE AUTHOR	HOW
...Paul talking about? ...accomplishing the action? ...benefiting from the action?	...meaning of this word? ...significance of this phrase? ...implication of this statement? ...relationship between these phrases?	...choose this word? ...include this phrase, statement, or command? ...not say _____?	...was this action accomplished? ...will this situation occur?

1. Create and answer any two of your own interpretation questions from this passage:

2. Why does Naomi urge her two daughters-in-law not to accompany her back to Bethlehem? What does Naomi ultimately want for these women? Where does she believe they will find it?

3. In verse 9, “rest” is an awkward translation for the Hebrew word “ma-noach”. Instead, a better translation would be “security” as found in 3:1. Where does Naomi believe security is found? Is she right or wrong?

4. In verses 20-21, what do we learn of Naomi’s view of God? Specifically, what does she correctly affirm to be true of God? What does she incorrectly disregard about God?

5. How does Ruth’s response to the tragedy contrast with Orpah’s and Naomi’s response? What does her response reveal about her own search for security and her own view of God (see Ruth 2:12)?

6. What is the significance of the change of setting at the end of chapter 1?

APPLY

1. Where do you search for security in light of life's unpredictability? How do you try to control life at times apart from God?

2. What does your search for security reveal about your view of God? In what ways do you doubt God's goodness, power, or provision?

3. Ruth's loyalty to Naomi in this passage stands out remarkably. Is there anyone in your life whom you need to encourage, exhort, or stand beside through difficulty? What can you say? What can you do?

PRAYER STORIES

Another way to encourage people is through prayer. Most people in today's world still value prayer. Think of someone in life with a need, struggle, or unmet desire. Can you do one of the following this week?

- Share how God has answered a prayer in your life, something specific and real and transforming.
- Make a point to tell them that you are praying to God in Jesus' name for their need. Check back with them with the expectation that God will move!
- Pray face-to-face with your friend. Again, check back and see what God has done!

4. Prayerfully determine the main biblical truth or principle that God revealed to you during your study. A few questions to ask are:

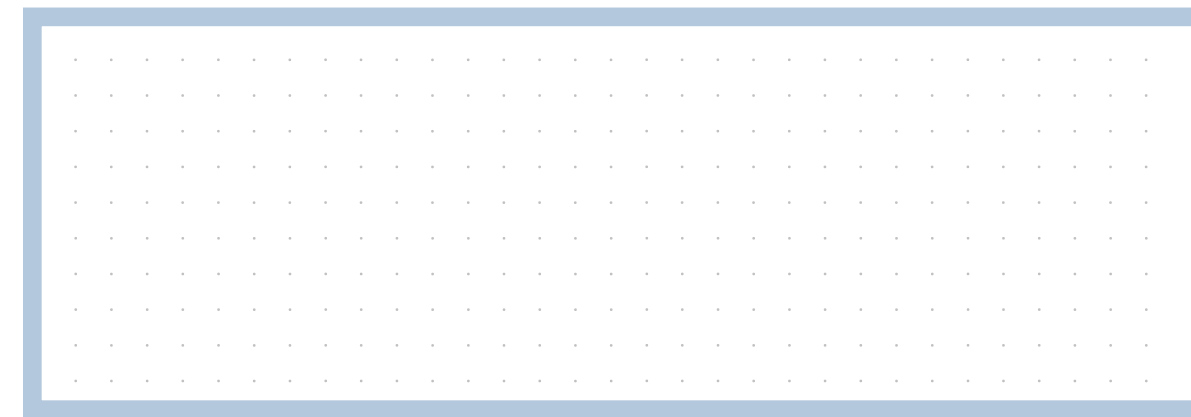
Is there a promise for me to claim?

Is there a truth for me to believe?

Is there a command for me to obey?

5. What specifically will you do this week to begin applying this principle in your daily life? Determine how this truth or principle impacts the relationships in our life where you live, work, and play.

In the box below, create a personal application statement, expressing how you will apply this truth in your life.



GROUP GUIDE

CONNECT

How was your week? What highs or lows did you encounter this week?

Share how you did applying God's Word in your daily life during the last week.

Ask 1-2 people to take 5 minutes and share how they found Jesus and began to follow Him. Set a timer!

GROW

MEMORIZE THE WORD

Spend a few minutes reviewing the verses you are memorizing.

DISCUSS THE PASSAGE

Observe

Discuss the character descriptions you observed.

Focus on Question 2.

Interpret

Discuss the skill of asking and answering your own interpretive questions.

Share some of these.

Focus on Questions 3 and 4.

ENGAGE

Apply

Discuss Question 1.

Discuss the skill of Prayer Stories. How have you seen offering to pray for someone who is far from God bring them closer to Him?

PRAY BIG

Pray for opportunities to love people by praying with and for them.

Memory Verse

“But as for me, I will watch
expectantly for the LORD, I will wait
for the God of my salvation. My God
will hear me.”

MICAH 7:7

LESSON 4

Ruth 2:1-13

OBSERVE

RUTH 2:1-13

Record your observations in the margin as you read the passage.

¹ Now Naomi had a kinsman of her husband, a man of great wealth, of the family of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz. ² And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, "Please let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain after one in whose sight I may find favor." And she said to her, "Go, my daughter." ³ So she departed and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers; and she happened to come to the portion of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech. ⁴ Now behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem and said to the reapers, "May the LORD be with you." And they said to him, "May the LORD bless you." ⁵ Then Boaz said to his servant who was in charge of the reapers, "Whose young woman is this?" ⁶ The servant in charge of the reapers replied, "She is the young Moabite woman who returned with Naomi from the land of Moab." ⁷ And she said, "Please let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves." Thus she came and has remained from the morning until now; she has been sitting in the house for a little while." ⁸ Then Boaz said to Ruth, "Listen carefully, my daughter.

Do not go to glean in another field; furthermore, do not go on from this one, but stay here with my maids. ⁹ Let your eyes be on the field which they reap, and go after them. Indeed, I have commanded the servants not to touch you. When you are thirsty, go to the water jars and drink from what the servants draw." ¹⁰ Then she fell on her face, bowing to the ground and said to him, "Why have I found favor in your sight that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?" ¹¹ Boaz replied to her, "All that you have done for your mother-in-law after the death of your husband has been fully reported to me, and how you left your father and your mother and the land of your birth, and came to a people that you did not previously know. ¹² May the LORD reward your work, and your wages be full from the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to seek refuge." ¹³ Then she said, "I have found favor in your sight, my lord, for you have comforted me and indeed have spoken kindly to your maidservant, though I am not like one of your maidservants."

1. Highlight any words repeated in the passage.

2. Box different glimpses of God's sovereignty in the circumstances for Ruth and Naomi in this passage. Also, highlight the specific ways that God provides for the needs of these women.

INTERPRET

As you answer the questions below, continue using your first two interpretive skills (look up background information and asking questions), and add this third one - **look up key words** (such as “favor,” “bless,” or “wings” in this passage). While doing so in English is helpful, looking them up in Hebrew is far better and is surprisingly easy thanks to the internet. Go to gracebcs.org/netbib. Simply search for the passage at the top of the screen, and the relevant text will appear. Be sure that “NET2” is your selected Bible in the drop down box, and then select the tab for “Hebrew” on the right side of the screen. Now hovering over any word in English will highlight the corresponding Hebrew term and reveal its Strong’s definition in the opposite window. For even further study, you can select a word, click the magnifying glass above it, then choose to run a “Word Search,” “Strong’s Search,” or “Word Study.” The first will provide all Biblical references that use the English term. The second will provide all Biblical references that use the Hebrew term. And the third will provide the full definition and derivatives of the Hebrew term. What used to take multiple books & many hours now takes one internet browser & a few seconds!

1. Create and answer any two of your own interpretation questions from this passage:

2. Why does the narrator introduce us to Boaz in verse 1 but Ruth doesn’t meet him until verse 8? What is the significance of this character’s introduction and description?

3. In 2:2, Ruth sets out to “find favor”. Practice the skill of looking up key words and answer the following questions about “favor”...

What does “favor” mean (see Numbers 11:5; 2 Samuel 12:21-22; Ephesians 2:8-9)?

Who gives “favor” (see Genesis 39:21; 50:4; Exodus 33:19)?

What does Ruth’s search for “favor” teach us about it?

What does Ruth’s response to finding “favor” teach us about it?

4. Does it seem that romantic interest might be driving Boaz’s kindness to Ruth? Use clues from this passage to support your answer. How would the meaning and significance of the story change based on either answer?

APPLY

1. Have you received the free grace of God for eternal life yet (see Romans 3:23 and 6:23)?

2. In what areas do you struggle to receive grace either from God or from others? Why do you struggle in those areas? How can you better receive grace this week in those areas?

3. How confident do you feel sharing the gospel of grace with someone who needs to hear about it? See page 75 for a simple tool to use.

A counselor, David Seamands, summed up his career this way:

"Many years ago I was driven to the conclusion that the two most major causes of most emotional problems among evangelical Christians are these: the failure to understand, to receive, and live out God's unconditional love, forgiveness, and grace to other people... We read, we hear, we believe a good theology of grace. But that's not the way we live. The good news of the Gospel has not penetrated the level of our emotions."

4. Prayerfully determine the main biblical truth or principle that God revealed to you during your study. A few questions to ask are:

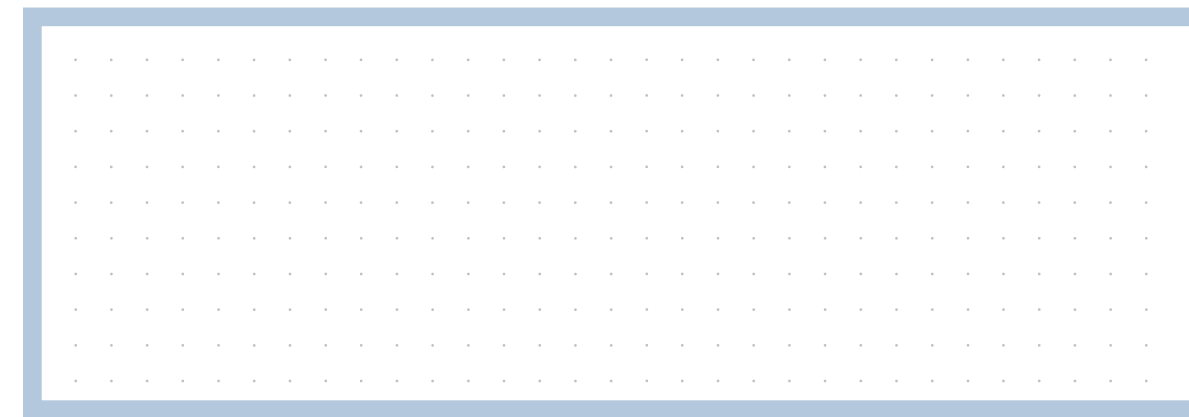
Is there a promise for me to claim?

Is there a truth for me to believe?

Is there a command for me to obey?

5. What specifically will you do this week to begin applying this principle in your daily life? Determine how this truth or principle impacts the relationships in our life where you live, work, and play.

In the box below, create a personal application statement, expressing how you will apply this truth in your life.



GROUP GUIDE

CONNECT

How was your week? Did you see God working in any specific ways?

Share how you did applying God's Word in your daily life during the last week.

GROW

MEMORIZE THE WORD

Spend a few minutes reviewing the verses you are memorizing.

DISCUSS THE PASSAGE

Observe

Focus on Question 2.

Interpret

Discuss skill of key words.

Focus on Questions 2 and 3.

ENGAGE

Apply

Focus on Questions 2 and 3.

Take some time to share one another's personal application statements and their plans to follow through with it.

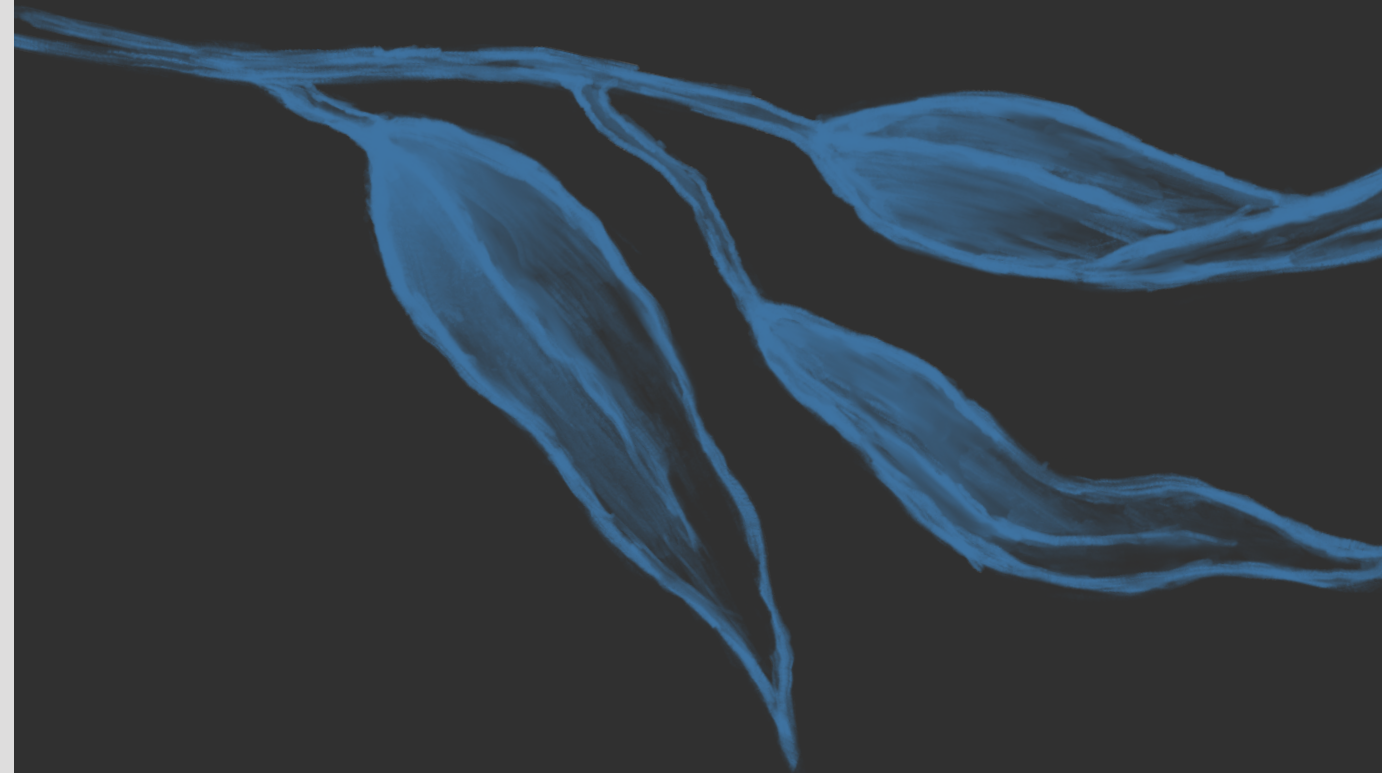
SHARE THE GOSPEL

Review the 3 Circles Gospel on page 75. Take a few minutes to practice sharing it in pairs.

PRAY BIG

Spend some time praying for each other - primarily about personal applications.

Pray boldly for opportunities to share the gospel of grace.



Memory Verse

“The Lord’s loving-kindness indeed never cease, for His
compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is
Your Faithfulness.”

LAMENTATIONS 3:22-23

LESSON 5

Ruth 2:14-23

OBSERVE

Over the next few lessons, we will focus on specific literary tools that an author uses to tell a story. This week, we want to begin to highlight character dialogue within our story. Dialogue within a story not only demonstrates the thoughts, feelings, and actions of characters, but it also reveals events that move a story's plot forward.

RUTH 2:14-23

Record your observations in the margin as you read the passage.

¹⁴At mealtime Boaz said to her, "Come here, that you may eat of the bread and dip your piece of bread in the vinegar." So she sat beside the reapers; and he served her roasted grain, and she ate and was satisfied and had some left. ¹⁵When she rose to glean, Boaz commanded his servants, saying, "Let her glean even among the sheaves, and do not insult her. ¹⁶Also you shall purposely pull out for her some grain from the bundles and leave it that she may glean, and do not rebuke her." ¹⁷So she gleaned in the field until evening. Then she beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley. ¹⁸She took it up and went into the city, and her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned. She also took it out and gave Naomi what she had left after she was satisfied. ¹⁹Her mother-in-law then said to her, "Where did you glean to day and where did you work? May he who took notice of you be

blessed." So she told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked and said, "The name of the man with whom I worked today is Boaz." ²⁰Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, "May he be blessed of the Lord who has not withdrawn his kindness to the living and to the dead." Again Naomi said to her, "The man is our relative, he is one of our closest relatives." ²¹Then Ruth the Moabite said, "Furthermore, he said to me, 'You should stay close to my servants until they have finished all my harvest.'" ²²Naomi said to Ruth her daughter-in-law, "It is good, my daughter, that you go out with his maids, so that others do not fall upon you in another field." ²³So she stayed close by the maids of Boaz in order to glean until the end of the barley harvest and the wheat harvest. And she lived with her mother-in-law.

1. Use a different color to highlight the dialogue of each character within this passage.
2. Box the different ways that we are beginning to see Naomi and Ruth's emptiness reversed. What has become full in this passage? How full is it? For how long is it full?

INTERPRET

Cross references are simply other passages in any book of the Bible that are somehow related to the verses you are studying. They often prove incredibly helpful as you seek to understand your passage. A few such cross references can be found in the margins of most English Bibles, but more can be found by visiting the online reference gracebcs.org/netbib. Simply search for the passage at the top of the screen, and the relevant text will appear. Be sure that “NET2” is your selected Bible in the drop down box, and then select the tab for “Notes” on the right side of the screen. Now, anytime you select one of the numbered annotations above particular words or verses, you can immediately see the relevant Biblical or historical context for that term or passage. This is a great tool for answering tough questions!

1. Create and answer any two of your own interpretation questions from this passage:

2. What exactly did the Law require Israelites to do for the poor and the foreigner (see Leviticus 19:9-10; 23:22; Deuteronomy 24:19-21)? How do Boaz’s actions toward Ruth compare with the Law’s requirement?

3. In verse 20, what is the significance of Naomi’s identification of Boaz not just as a “relative” but specifically as “our closest relative” or literally as “our kinsman-redeemer”? In particular, what duties and obligations were expected from such a “redeemer” (see Leviticus 25:26-29, 47-49; Numbers 35:19-21, 27; Ruth 3:9)? Was it required of such a redeemer to marry a relative?

4. What does Naomi mean by “kindness” in 2:20 (see Genesis 21:22; Exodus 34:6-7; 1 Samuel 20:12-17)? In particular, what characteristics of “kindness” do you see from these OT passages? How is the theme of “kindness” woven through Ruth (see 1:8; 2:20; 3:10)?

5. Why does Naomi invoke the Lord’s blessing upon Boaz in 2:19-20? In general, why does the Lord bless His people? (see Deuteronomy 28:1-4; Ruth 2:12)?

6. Verse 23 informs us that this scene comes to an end with “the end of the barley harvest.” Why is this significant for Naomi and Ruth? What does it imply about their future?

APPLY

1. In your obedience to the commands of God, do you fulfill only the minimum requirements of His commands or do you go above and beyond? Where can you stretch further in your obedience to God this week?

2. How generous are you toward those who cannot repay your kindness? How can you bless the poor and vulnerable this week? Write one specific person or group the Lord may be bringing to your mind.

4. Prayerfully determine the main biblical truth or principle that God revealed to you during your study. A few questions to ask are:

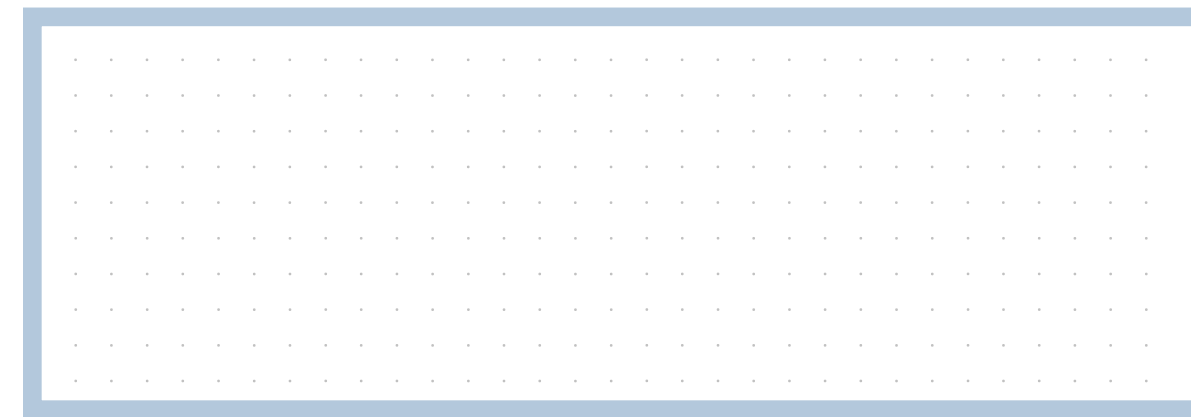
Is there a promise for me to claim?

Is there a truth for me to believe?

Is there a command for me to obey?

5. What specifically will you do this week to begin applying this principle in your daily life? Determine how this truth or principle impacts the relationships in our life where you live, work, and play.

In the box below, create a personal application statement, expressing how you will apply this truth in your life.



GROUP GUIDE

CONNECT

What are you thankful for this week? What are you asking God for currently?

Share how you did applying God's Word in your daily life during the last week.

GROW

MEMORIZE THE WORD

Spend a few minutes reviewing the verses you are memorizing.

DISCUSS THE PASSAGE

Observe

Review the importance of character dialogue.

Focus on Questions 1 and 2.

Interpret

Focus on Questions 2, 3 and 4.

ENGAGE

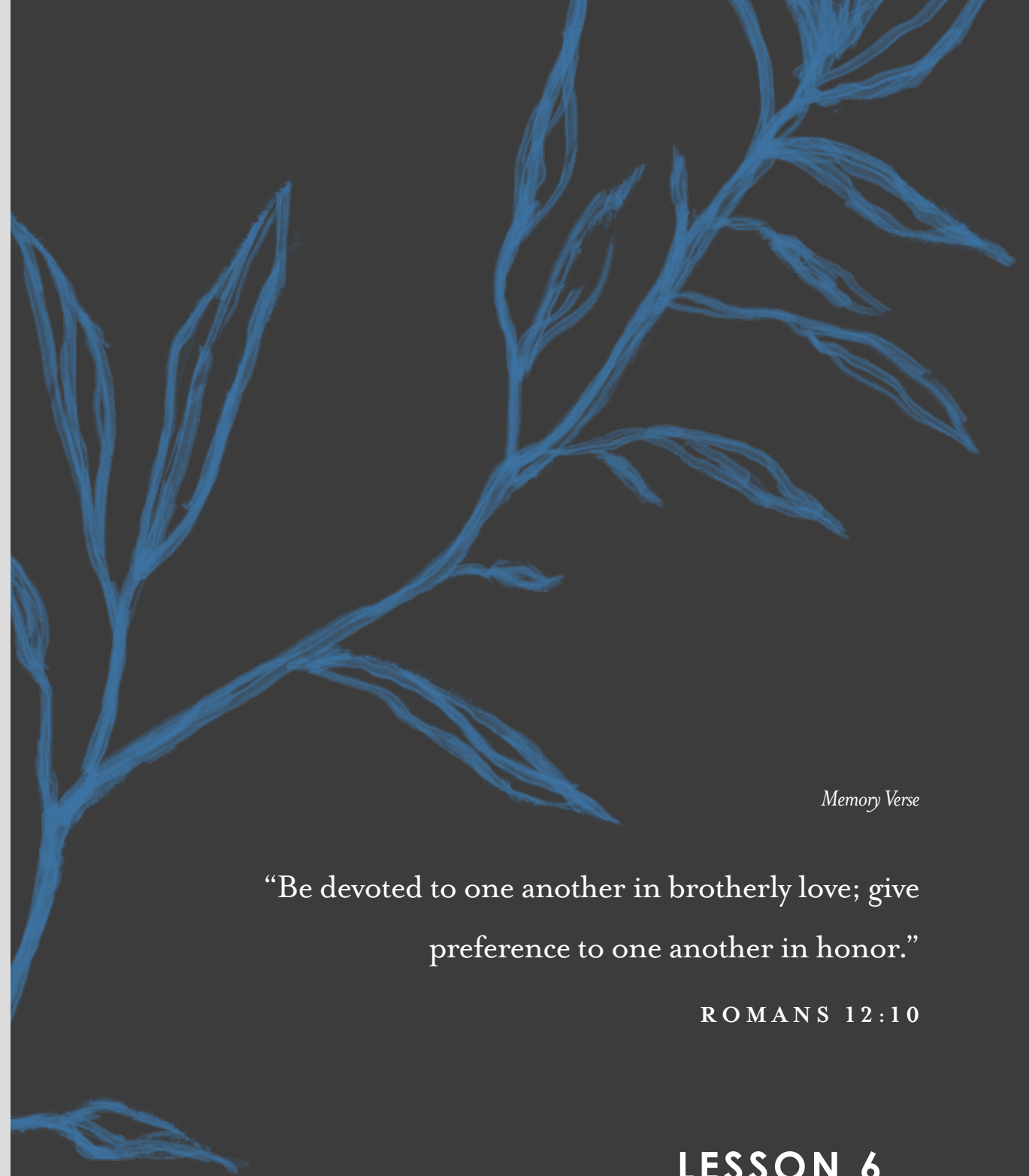
Apply

Focus on Questions 1 and 2.

Take some time to share one another's personal application statements and their plans to follow through with it.

PRAY BIG

Spend some time praying for each other - primarily about personal applications.



Memory Verse

“Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor.”

ROMANS 12:10

LESSON 6

Ruth 3:1-18

OBSERVE

Authors use many literary tools to tell stories including character dialogue, which we have examined already. This week, we will move on to a second tool - **point of view**. This refers to the various perspectives within a narrative, whether those of each character or the narrator who controls the overall point of view of the story itself. A story's author uses a narrator to control what the reader sees, how he sees it, and when he sees it. Such selectivity and arrangement of details create a lens through which the reader interacts with a story and each of its characters. In this way, the narrator's point of view guides the reader to the story's lessons by the end.

RUTH 3:1-18

¹Then Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, "My daughter, shall I not seek security for you, that it may be well with you? ²Now is not Boaz our kinsman, with whose maids you were? Behold, he winnows barley at the threshing floor tonight. ³Wash yourself therefore, and anoint yourself and put on your best clothes, and go down to the threshing floor; but do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking. ⁴It shall be when he lies down, that you shall notice the place where he lies, and you shall go and uncover his feet and lie down; then he will tell you what you shall do." ⁵She said to her, "All that you say I will do." ⁶So she went down to the threshing floor and did according to all that her mother-in-law had commanded her. ⁷When Boaz had eaten and drunk and his heart was merry, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain; and she came secretly, and uncovered his feet and lay down. ⁸It happened in the middle of the night that the man was startled and bent forward; and behold, a woman was lying at his feet. ⁹He said, "Who are you?" And she answered, "I am Ruth your maid. So spread your covering over your maid, for you are a close relative." ¹⁰Then he said, "May you be blessed of the LORD, my

daughter. You have shown your last kindness to be better than the first by not going after young men, whether poor or rich. ¹¹Now, my daughter, do not fear. I will do for you whatever you ask, for all my people in the city know that you are a woman of excellence. ¹²Now it is true I am a close relative; however, there is a relative closer than I. ¹³Remain this night, and when morning comes, if he will redeem you, good; let him redeem you. But if he does not wish to redeem you, then I will redeem you, as the LORD lives. Lie down until morning." ¹⁴So she lay at his feet until morning and rose before one could recognize another; and he said, "Let it not be known that the woman came to the threshing floor." ¹⁵Again he said, "Give me the cloak that is on you and hold it." So she held it, and he measured six measures of barley and laid it on her. Then she went into the city. ¹⁶When she came to her mother-in-law, she said, "How did it go, my daughter?" And she told her all that the man had done for her. ¹⁷She said, "These six measures of barley he gave to me, for he said, 'Do not go to your mother-in-law empty-handed.'" ¹⁸Then she said, "Wait, my daughter, until you know how the matter turns out; for the man will not rest until he has settled it today.

- 1.** In this chapter, what points of tension exist that build suspense towards a climax of the book?
- 2.** Box the verbs present in Naomi's instructions to Ruth in verses 1-4.
- 3.** Describe the point of view of Naomi, Ruth, Boaz and the narrator within this chapter. In other words, what does it seem like each character thinks and feels as the action unfolds in this chapter?

INTERPRET

This week's skill is the most important: **use the context**. Look for important clues in the sentences and paragraphs that come before and after the verse in question. Try to follow the author's flow of thought through the whole chapter. This may take you to the previous lesson, so have it handy as a review. You may also need to read ahead in Ruth for clues.

1. Based on Naomi's instructions to Ruth in verses 1-4...

What timing and situational factors are present in Naomi's plan (see Ruth 2:23)?

Why might Naomi have instructed Ruth in this way? (See Ruth 1:9-13).

2. Based on Ruth's actions and request in verses 6-9...

What is Ruth asking for when she says to Boaz, "spread your covering your maid"? In other words, what does inclusion under a man's skirt or blanket represent? (See Ruth 2:12, Psalm 36:7, Ezekiel 16:8, Deuteronomy 22:30.)

Why does Ruth appeal to Boaz as her "close relative" or "kinsman-redeemer" in her request? Refer back to the previous lesson on page 43 to see duties of the "kinsman-redeemer."

3. Based on Boaz's response to Ruth in verses 10-15...

What first "kindness" and last "kindness" has Ruth demonstrated? Who did Ruth's "kindness" affect?

Does it seem that Ruth's actions were immoral in any way? How do we know? Why or why not?

As the chapter and scene ends, what expectations do the women have regarding Boaz's immediate actions? Could their expectations be changed by the introduction of a new character in verses 12-13?

APPLY

1. Have you seen or experienced the kind of loyal love in your own life that Ruth and Boaz demonstrate? How is Christ the ultimate model of such love (see Romans 5:8; 1 Corinthians 13:1-8; 1 John 4:10)?

2. In what situations is it difficult for you to love? How can you grow in your ability to model the love of Christ in such situations this week?

3. Prayerfully determine the main biblical truth or principle that God revealed to you during your study. A few questions to ask are:

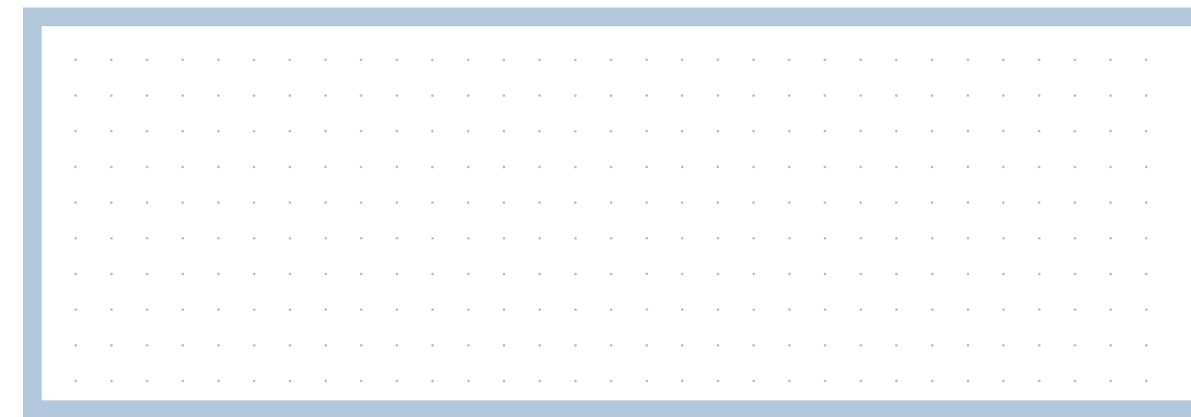
Is there a promise for me to claim?

Is there a truth for me to believe?

Is there a command for me to obey?

4. What specifically will you do this week to begin applying this principle in your daily life? Determine how this truth or principle impacts the relationships in our life where you live, work, and play.

In the box below, create a personal application statement, expressing how you will apply this truth in your life.



GROUP GUIDE

CONNECT

Share a highlight or something that discouraged you during the last week.

Share how you did applying God's Word in your daily life during the last week.

GROW

MEMORIZE THE WORD

Spend a few minutes reviewing the verses you are memorizing.

DISCUSS THE PASSAGE

Observe

Discuss Point of View.

Questions 1 and 3.

Interpret

Focus on Questions 2 and 3.

ENGAGE

Apply

Focus on Questions 1 and 2.

Take some time to share one another's personal application statements and their plans to follow through with it.

PRAY BIG

Spend some time praying for each other - primarily about personal applications.

Memory Verse

“We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.”

1 JOHN 3:15

LESSON 7

Ruth 4:1-12

OBSERVE

This week, we will move on to a third tool ... **box all foils**. A foil is usually a minor character who sets apart or highlights a major character by some contrast or less frequently by some parallel (e.g. the pagan sailors in Jonah who proved more reverent of God than did Jonah, the prophet). While foils are usually characters, sometimes an event or thread of action can serve as a foil to the main plot as well (e.g. the seemingly odd story of Judah and Tamar in the middle of the story of Joseph serves to highlight Joseph's integrity and contrast it with the failings of the rest of Jacob's family).

RUTH 4:1-12

¹ Now Boaz went up to the gate and sat down there, and behold, the close relative of whom Boaz spoke was passing by, so he said, "Turn aside, friend, sit down here." And he turned aside and sat down.

² He took ten men of the elders of the city and said, "Sit down here."

So they sat down. ³ Then he said to the closest relative, "Naomi, who has come back from the land of Moab, has to sell the piece of land which belonged to our brother Elimelech. ⁴ So I thought to inform you, saying, 'Buy it before those who are sitting here, and before the elders of my people. If you will redeem it, redeem it; but if not, tell me that I may know; for there is no one but you to redeem it, and I am after you.'" And he said, "I will redeem it." ⁵ Then Boaz said, "On the day you buy the field from the hand of Naomi, you must also acquire Ruth the Moabite, the widow of the deceased, in order to raise up the name of the deceased on his inheritance." ⁶ The closest relative said, "I cannot redeem it for myself, because I would jeopardize my own inheritance. Redeem it for yourself; you may have my right of redemption, for I cannot redeem it." ⁷ Now this was the custom in

former times in Israel concerning the redemption and the exchange of land to confirm any matter: a man removed his sandal and gave it to another; and this was the manner of attestation in Israel. ⁸ So the closest relative said to Boaz, "Buy it for yourself." And he removed his sandal. ⁹ Then Boaz said to the elders and all the people, "You are witnesses today that I have bought from the hand of Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech and all that belonged to Chilion and Mahlon. ¹⁰ Moreover, I have acquired Ruth the Moabite, the widow of Mahlon, to be my wife in order to raise up the name of the deceased on his inheritance, so that the name of the deceased will not be cut off from his brothers or from the court of his birth place; you are witnesses today." ¹¹ All the people who were in the court, and the elders, said, "We are witnesses. May the LORD make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, both of whom built the house of Israel; and may you achieve wealth in Ephrathah and become famous in Bethlehem. ¹² Moreover, may your house be like the house of Perez whom Tamar bore to Judah, through the offspring which the LORD will give you by this young woman."

1. Which character(s) act(s) as a foil within this passage?

2. How has the scene changed in this passage from previous passages?

INTERPRET

1. Create and answer any two of your own interpretation questions from this passage:

2. What is the significance of this scene occurring before ten elders at the “gates” of the city (see 2 Samuel 15:2-6; Amos 5:10 , 12, 15)?

3. In the proceedings that unfold, what seems to be Boaz’s chief motivation in verses 5 and 10?

4. How do Boaz’s actions relate to the Jewish custom of levirate marriage? (see Deuteronomy 25:5-10.) Under such a custom, did this closest relative have the option to decline the opportunity? What becomes of one’s reputation and legacy if they decline this obligation?

5. Why does the inclusion of marriage to Ruth change the other relative’s willingness to redeem that land? Specifically, how would marriage have jeopardized this man’s inheritance (see Leviticus 25:23, 28)?

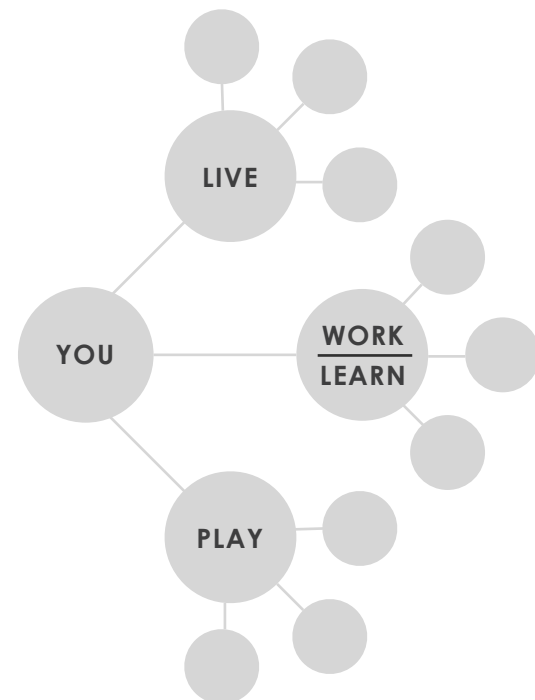
6. How does the response of the elders and witnesses in verses 11-12 contrast with Naomi’s initial despair in 1:19-21? How is the plot moving towards resolution?

APPLY

1. In what areas of life do your decisions affect those around you?

2. How can you better sacrifice for the interests of others this week?

Think about the people in your spheres of influence. With whom do you live, work, learn, and play? Be as exhaustive as possible and brainstorm away! Also, think about people that are just beyond your normal spheres. People that are that next step out—perhaps an acquaintance that you don't know well, a neighbor who is different from you ethnically, socially, or economically; a community member that the Holy Spirit has put in your path but is more a stranger than friend? Be creative and think outside the box on this one!



3. Prayerfully determine the main biblical truth or principle that God revealed to you during your study. A few questions to ask are:

Is there a promise for me to claim?

Is there a truth for me to believe?

Is there a command for me to obey?

4. What specifically will you do this week to begin applying this principle in your daily life? Determine how this truth or principle impacts the relationships in our life where you live, work, and play.

In the box below, create a personal application statement, expressing how you will apply this truth in your life.

A large rectangular area with a light blue border and a dotted grid pattern, intended for writing a personal application statement.

GROUP GUIDE

CONNECT

What are you thankful for this week? What are you asking God for currently?

Share how you did applying God's Word in your daily life during the last week.

GROW

MEMORIZE THE WORD

Spend a few minutes reviewing the verses you are memorizing.

DISCUSS THE PASSAGE

Observe

Discuss the character foils.

Focus on Questions 1 and 2.

Interpret

Focus on Questions 2, 4 and 6.

ENGAGE

Apply

Focus on Questions 1 and 2.

Review your Live, Work, Play Map.

Take some time to share one another's personal application statements and their plans to follow through with it.

PRAY BIG

Spend some time praying for each other - primarily about personal applications.

Pray for the people from your group's Live, Work, Play maps. Share about any opportunities God has given to start spiritual conversations and pray for more!



Memory Verse

“And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.”

ROMANS 8:28-29

LESSON 8

Ruth 4:13-22

OBSERVE

This week, we will move on to a fourth tool - **identify all irony**. Irony is a rhetorical device that an author uses intentionally but subtly in several ways:

- Irony is present when the narrator states one thing but intends for the reader to understand something different.
- Irony occurs with a dramatic reversal of a situation. Hence, it can involve poetic justice when good people are rewarded and bad people are punished.
- Irony is present when the least likely person does an expected action or when the least expected thing happens in a story (e.g. when the pagan sailors and pagan king of Nineveh prove far more responsive to God than Jonah, God's prophet). We especially find irony in the Bible as God's thoughts and actions are so often unexpected and unseen from man's natural and limited point of view.

RUTH 4:13-22

¹³So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife, and he went in to her. And the LORD enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son. ¹⁴Then the women said to Naomi, "Blessed is the LORD who has not left you without a redeemer today, and may his name become famous in Israel. ¹⁵May he also be to you a restorer of life and a sustainer of your old age; for your daughter-in-law, who loves you and is better to you than seven sons, has given birth to him."

¹⁶Then Naomi took the child and laid him in her lap, and became his nurse. ¹⁷The neighbor women gave him a name, saying, "A son

has been born to Naomi!" So they named him Obed. He is the father of Jesse, the father of David. ¹⁸Now these are the generations of Perez: to Perez was born Hezron, ¹⁹and to Hezron was born Ram, and to Ram, Amminadab, ²⁰and to Amminadab was born Nahshon, and to Nahshon, Salmon, ²¹and to Salmon was born Boaz, and to Boaz, Obed, ²²and to Obed was born Jesse, and to Jesse, David.

1. Box all of Naomi's blessings within this passage.

2. What examples of irony emerge in this passage as the story of Ruth ends?

INTERPRET

1. Why is it significant that the narrator directly attributes action to God here in 4:13 stating that “the Lord gave her conception” and in 1:6 that “the Lord had visited His people in giving them food”? What do we learn about God through famines and personal tragedies?

2. How does this chapter contrast the legacy of Boaz with the nearest relative in 4:3-6? What is ironic about their legacies?

3. Why do the women recognize Obed as a son born to Naomi and even as a kinsman-redeemer to her? How does Naomi’s dialogue with the woman in chapter 1 and in chapter 4 show resolution to the plot of Ruth?

4. Why is it significant that Ruth ends up in the genealogy of David and ultimately Jesus (see Matthew 1:2-6)?

5. How does the behavior or the characters within the book of Ruth contrast with those in the time of Judges? (see Judges 17:6; 21:25.)

6. SYNTHESIS | Looking back on the entire book, create summary sentences or phrases for each chapter.

Chapter 1:

Chapter 2:

Chapter 3:

Chapter 4:

APPLY

- 1. We are all leaving a legacy behind. What will characterize your legacy?

- 2. What steps are you taking to ensure a godly legacy like the characters in the book of Ruth?

- 3. How does the resolution of Naomi's and Ruth's story encourage you to process your own story and to trust in God even if you haven't experienced full resolution?

- 4. Prayerfully determine the main biblical truth or principle that God revealed to you during your study. A few questions to ask are:
 - Is there a promise for me to claim?
 - Is there a truth for me to believe?
 - Is there a command for me to obey?

- 5. What specifically will you do this week to begin applying this principle in your daily life? Determine how this truth or principle impacts the relationships in our life where you live, work, and play.

In the box below, create a personal application statement, expressing how you will apply this truth in your life.

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GROUP GUIDE

CONNECT

How was your week? What highs or lows did you encounter this week?

Share how you did applying God's Word in your daily life during the last week.

GROW

MEMORIZE THE WORD

Spend a few minutes reviewing the verses you are memorizing.

DISCUSS THE PASSAGE

Observe

Focus on Questions 1 and 2.

Interpret

Focus on Questions 2, 4 and 5.

Share your summary sentences.

ENGAGE

Apply

Focus on Questions 1 and 2.

Take some time to share one another's personal application statements and their plans to follow through with it.

PRAY BIG

Spend some time praying for each other - primarily about personal applications.

Continue to pray for the people from your group's Live, Work, Play maps. Share about any opportunities God has given to start spiritual conversations.

Appendix

ENGAGE TOOLBOX

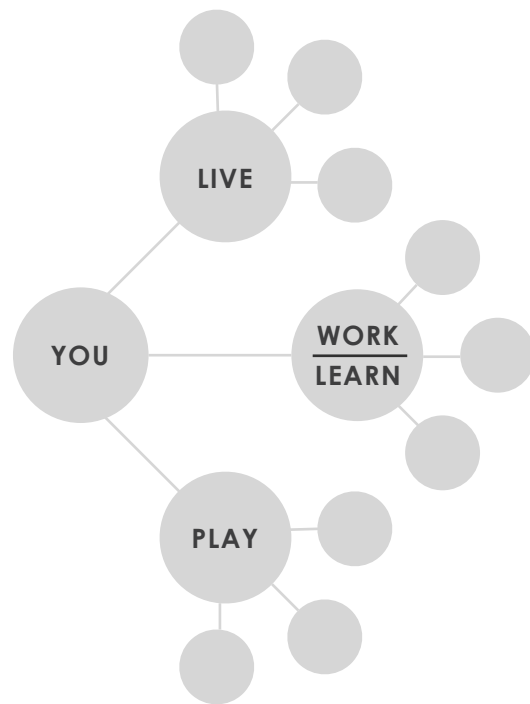
LIVE, WORK, PLAY MAP

In Jesus' time, a "family" would include workers, extended family, and people residing in their home. For us, our circle can also include our family, our friends, coworkers, neighbors and acquaintances. It can include the guy at the gas station that you see at each fill up or the barista that serves you that mocha latte each morning. It is anyone that we commonly encounter on a regular basis which gives us the ability to have influence in their lives.

Often when Jesus or His disciples found people that were open to the gospel, He would eventually share the message with their entire network. Jesus met the woman at the well (John 4), and after revealing His message and who He was as Messiah, she was amazed and told her whole town AND many believed! We want to see the same happen. As followers of Jesus, we are participants in a greater story of God's plan of salvation. We are representatives of Christ wherever and with whomever we find ourselves.

Think about the people in your sphere of influence; the people with whom you live, work, and play. Write down at least three names in each of these spheres on the Live, Work, Play Map. Be ready to share it with your group.

Also, think about people that are just beyond your normal spheres. People that are that next step out- perhaps an acquaintance that you don't know well, a neighbor who is different from you ethnically or social-economically, a community member that the Holy Spirit has put in your path but is more a stranger than friend. Be creative and think outside the box!



EVERY NEIGHBOR PRAYER LIST

We are called to be observant, expectant, and involved with the people God is bringing across our paths where we Live, Work, and Play. He wants us to pray that many will know Him as Father and as Savior, as He draws them to Himself and His Kingdom (John 6:44). Jesus modeled prayer for those who were like "sheep without a shepherd (Mark 6:32-34)." Jesus' own ministry of compassion (Matthew 14:14, 15:32) to those who were on the fringes of society, those who had no status or reputation, was a beautiful example of who we are to be praying for and seeking to include in our daily lives- those who are outside our comfort zones, but fully loved and wanted by our God.

When we gather as a group we will pray for these people. Who is God impressing upon you from your Live, Work, and Play network? Who are the people who might be seeking His Kingdom, who are asking hard questions, who are far from Christ and need a better hope?

Using your Live, Work, and Play network, create an Every Neighbor Prayer list with a least one name from everyone in your group. This list will include the names of those you are hoping to bless with the gospel through service, acts of love, conversation, and/or Bible study. Pray boldly for God to reveal Himself to them and open their eyes to His power and freedom.

You may meet someone new this week or renew an old relationship from the past. Is this someone God is asking you to put on the Every Neighbor Prayer list, to actively pray big for their salvation? Add them to the board. Each week, take time to update your group, and let's see what God will do!

HOW TO START A SPIRITUAL CONVERSATION

The parables that Jesus told created an interest in His Kingdom- the characteristics, the hopes, and the realities of the gospel. Sometimes, Jesus wouldn't even mention that He was Messiah; sometimes He did pointedly. Jesus made the gospel accessible to those who would hear and didn't apologize for who He was. Sadly, we have become conditioned to put on a filter and not speak of Jesus because we imagine that it is awkward, pushy, or politically incorrect. We need to take off this filter and grow in boldness and love as we share stories about who He is and what He is about. There was no doubt that He was marking Himself as special, as a spiritual being, and often, much more than that!

Likewise, "marking ourselves as spiritual" can help us gauge whether others are interested in God and His message. Some people will "lean in" as you speak about such topics, asking additional questions, sharing their own beliefs, telling about their own journey. Some will not; they will "lean back" and change the topic, become silent, or shut down altogether. Allow the Holy Spirit to prompt you as you initiate and let Him do the work of speaking to a person's soul.

Practice talking with your spouse, children, or a friend about two or three of the following “interest creating” topics:

1. Recently, God/Jesus has been teaching me that...
2. I am realizing more and more that God has blessed me by...
3. I used to struggle with (insert fear, stronghold, idolatry) but now I see God wants me to believe...
4. I decided to follow Jesus because...
5. Think of common topics that come up as you meet people— for example: career, living situation, family history, educational background. Pick one of these and tell how God changed your path in the past, or how He is guiding you in the present.

As you practice talking about these things, try to end with a learning question such as, “Have you ever considered God in this way before?” OR “Do you think God is teaching/blessing/asking you to believe anything right now?” Your questions are to gauge a response and to allow space for them to interact with your story. Now, be prayerful and alert as to who God wants you to share with this week!

PRAYER STORIES

Another way to create interest is prayer stories. Most people in today’s world still value prayer. Think of someone in your Live, Work, and Play network has expressed a need, struggle, or unmet desire. Can you do one of the following this week?

Share how God has answered a prayer in your life, something specific and real and transforming.

Make a point to tell them that you are praying to God in Jesus’ name for their need. Check back with them with the expectation that God will move!

Pray face-to-face with your friend. Again, check back and see what God has done!

THE GOSPEL

God’s Design

God designed our world and us to live in a thriving relationship with Him!

Brokenness

Yet as we look around our world, we see brokenness— injustice, hatred, corruption. We also see brokenness inside ourselves.

We chose to reject God’s design, (the Bible calls this **sin**) and now our relationship with God is broken (the Bible calls this **death**).

"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

Romans 3:23

Jesus

Because of His great love, God did not leave us in brokenness. He sent His own Son, Jesus, to rescue us!

Jesus lived the life we could not live (without sin).

Jesus died the death we deserved.

God raised Him from the dead, defeating sin and death.

"But God proves His own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

Romans 5:8

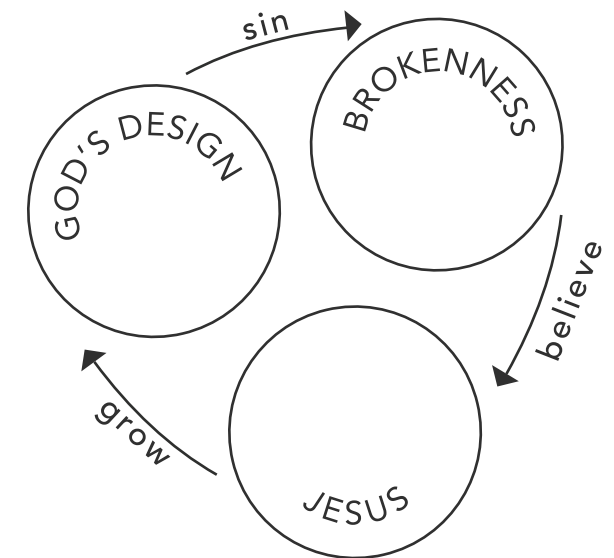
Believe

Trust in Jesus. When we believe, our sins are forgiven, and we know we have eternal life. We can now begin to grow in our relationship with Him.

"For you are saved (rescued) by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God’s gift."

Ephesians 2:8

Where do you see yourself in this diagram? Are you living in brokenness or in God’s design?



BIBLE STUDY TOOLS OVERVIEW

Every time we study the Bible, the first thing to ask is, “What do I see?”. This is the crucial skill of observation, which lays the groundwork for the rest of our study. Here are four tasks involved in observation which should be performed in the order below:

OBSERVATION TASK 1 | Underline all setting details.

Identify the people, places, time periods, and events of a story (like “go to Nineveh ... but Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish” in Jonah 1:2-3). These details not only provide significant background to understand the action within a story, but they also invite the reader into the story as an engaged participant.

OBSERVATION TASK 2 | Circle all character descriptions.

Characters come in all different types as seen in the list below:

Protagonist | Character who overcomes conflict and serves as the hero often drawing audience’s sympathy (such as David in the story of David and Goliath).

Antagonist | Character who creates the conflict or problem in the story (such as Goliath).

Round | Character who has many strengths and weaknesses (such as Jonah-as he’s admirable at times and deplorable at others).

Flat | Character who appears one-dimensional (both Goliath and King Saul in the story of David and Goliath-there’s little depth or development for either character in this story).

Agent | Character who appears only to help move the plot along as he performs a simple action (such as the messenger in 1 Samuel 4 who brings Eli the disastrous news of Israel’s defeat—we don’t even learn his name because he’s merely an agent in the story).

Foil | Character who acts as a mirror to compare or contrast the main character or main events of a story (such as the pagan sailors in Jonah who proved more reverent of God than did Jonah, the prophet).

Despite their variety, no character is extraneous to the story as each character fulfills a specific purpose. Often the narrator or other characters will directly describe a character. Yet, usually an audience learns about a character through his or her own words, thoughts, and actions in a story. Use every relevant detail available in a story to get to know the characters as well as possible especially as they develop and change throughout a story.

OBSERVATION TASK 3 | Chart the plot development.

Examine the story’s arrangement of events, also known as the plot. A story’s overall plot almost always involves an initial introduction of setting and characters, followed

quickly by a conflict or set of conflicts that build toward a critical climax after which a resolution finally emerges in the end. Hence, each story has a certain flow or structure to it, and each scene within the story uniquely contributes to the development of the plot. Take note of the mood of each scene and the growth of each character as the story unfolds.

OBSERVATION TASK 4 | Mark up the passage by visually identifying the following specific literary tools.

Highlight character dialogue within the story. Dialogue within a story not only demonstrates the thoughts, feelings, and actions of characters, but it also reveals events that move a story’s plot forward.

Determine point of view within the story. This refers to the perspectives within a narrative, whether those of each character or even the narrator who controls the overall point of view of the story itself. A story’s author uses a narrator to control what the reader sees, how he sees it, and when he sees it. Such selectivity and arrangement of details create a lens through which the reader interacts with a story and each of its characters. In this way, the narrator’s point of view guides the reader to the story’s lessons by the end (e.g. Jonah displays more compassion for a plant than he does for those in Nineveh who were facing the judgment of God).

Box all foils within the story. A foil usually is a minor character who sets apart or highlights a major character by some contrast or less frequently by some parallel (e.g. the pagan sailors in Jonah who proved more reverent of God than did Jonah, the prophet). While foils are usually characters, sometimes an event or thread of action can serve as a foil to the main plot as well (e.g. the seemingly odd story of Judah and Tamar in the middle of the story of Joseph serves to highlight Joseph’s integrity and contrast it with the failings of the rest of Jacob’s family).

Identify all irony within the story. Irony is a rhetorical device that an author uses intentionally but subtly in several ways:

- Irony is present when the narrator states one thing but intends for the reader to understand something different.
- Irony occurs with a dramatic reversal of a situation. Hence, it can involve poetic justice when good people are rewarded and bad people are punished.
- Irony is present when the least likely person does an expected action or when the least expected thing happens in a story (e.g. when the pagan sailors and pagan king of Nineveh prove far more responsive to God than Jonah, God’s prophet). We especially find irony in the Bible as God’s thoughts and actions are so often unexpected and unseen from man’s natural and limited point of view.

BIBLE STUDY METHODS: QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE

Our observation of a passage should stir interesting yet challenging questions, leading us to the second stage of our Bible study: interpretation. Fortunately, we do not have to run to a commentary or study Bible for answers (though these are helpful tools to check our conclusions). Use the following six methods, as needed, to tackle a variety of questions. Also, make sure to familiarize yourself with the three “Principles of Interpretation” that appear in the Appendix on page 81.

INTERPRETATION METHOD 1

Look up background information.

You can find helpful insights by looking up confusing names or words in a Bible dictionary or by looking up the particular verses you are studying in a background commentary. One of the best dictionaries is *The New Bible Dictionary* by Wood & Marshall. *The IVP Bible Background Commentary* by Craig Keener is another excellent example of a verse-by-verse background commentary.

INTERPRETATION METHOD 2

Compare multiple translations.

This packet uses the New American Standard (NASB) translation. You can often find helpful interpretive clues by comparing this translation with other translations. The New King James Version (NKJV), like the NASB, is a fairly word-for-word translation of the Hebrew text. The New International Version (NIV) and the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) are excellent phrase-to-phrase translations of the Hebrew and thus often easier to read. Another excellent phrase-to-phrase Bible, which includes extensive translation notes, is the New English Translation (NET) available online for free at gracebcs.org/netbib. You can find and compare numerous translations of any Bible passage at gracebcs.org/bst.

INTERPRETATION METHOD 3

Look up key words.

While looking up a key word in English is helpful, doing so in the original language provides deeper understanding and is surprisingly easy, thanks to online tools such as gracebcs.org/netbib. Simply search for the passage at the top of the screen, and the relevant text will appear. Be sure that “NET2” is your selected Bible in the drop down box, and then select the tab for “Hebrew” on the right side of the screen. Now hovering over any word in English will highlight the corresponding Hebrew term and reveal its Strong’s definition in the opposite window. For even further study, you can select a word, click the magnifying glass above it, then choose to run a “Word Search,” “Strong’s Search,” or “Word Study.” The first will provide all Biblical references that use the English term. The second will provide all Biblical references that use the

Hebrew term. And the third will provide the full definition and derivatives of the Hebrew term. What used to take multiple books & many hours now takes one internet browser & a few seconds!

INTERPRETATION METHOD 4

Study cross references.

Cross references are simply other passages in any book of the Bible that are somehow related to the verses you are studying. They often prove incredibly helpful as you seek to understand your passage. A few such cross references can be found in the margins of most English Bibles, but more can be found by visiting the online reference gracebcs.org/netbib. Simply search for the passage at the top of the screen, and the relevant text will appear. Be sure that “NET2” is your selected Bible in the drop down box, and then select the tab for “Notes” on the right side of the screen. Now, anytime you select one of the numbered annotations above particular words or verses, you can immediately see the relevant Biblical or historical context for that term or passage. This is a great tool for answering tough questions!

INTERPRETATION METHOD 5

Use the context.

Look for important clues in the sentences and paragraphs that come before and after the verse in question. Try to follow the author’s flow of thought through the whole chapter. This may take you to the previous lesson, so have it handy as a review. You may need to read ahead in Ruth for clues.

INTERPRETATION METHOD 6

Tackle tough questions step-by-step.

When trying to answer the most challenging questions, follow this four-step process:

- 1. List all the options.** Always start by brainstorming every possible answer to your question.
- 2. List pros and cons for each option.** See all the evidence you can find that either argues for or against a particular option. This evidence comes from your study of key words, the grammar of the sentence, the context of surrounding verses and the book as a whole, cross references to other books, and comparison with your overall understanding of Christian theology.
- 3. Choose the most likely option.** Look at your evidence for each option. Typically, evidence from the immediate context is most important, followed closely by evidence from the book as a whole. Evidence from other books of the Bible, or from Christian theology as a whole, does not carry quite as much weight unless the solution contradicts a clear passage elsewhere or a major tenant of Christian doctrine. In that case, since Scripture never lies and God cannot contradict Himself, you must eliminate that option.

4. Decide on your certainty level. Once you have chosen the best solution, step back for a second and humbly gauge how certain you are of its accuracy (90% = I am very sure this is correct ... 60% = This solution is just a bit more likely than the others!). Finally, talk with others and check commentaries or reference books to see what solutions they have chosen and why.

Our Bible study is not over until we apply what we have learned to our everyday lives. And lest we underestimate the value of this last step, remember that in God's eyes it is the person who does not just know His Word, but also obeys His Word that truly loves Him (see John 14:21). So how do we apply a passage to our lives? Application involves the following two tasks:

APPLICATION TASK 1

List potential principles from your passage.

A "principle" is simply a fact or command stated or implied in a particular passage that is practically relevant to our lives. Legitimate principles are not specific to a particular person (e.g., 1 Timothy 5:23 is just for Timothy) nor a particular time (e.g., "do not leave Jerusalem" in Acts 1:4). An example from Ruth would be, "God provides for our needs as He can even reverse famines" (Ruth 1:6). It is often helpful when listing principles to consider the following questions:

Is there something to worship or thank God for?

Is there a promise for me to claim or a truth for me to believe?

Is there something I am convicted about that I need to change or begin doing? Is there something or someone I need to pray for specifically this week?

Is there any relationship I need to work on?

APPLICATION TASK 2

Choose one principle, and create a plan to apply it to your life this week.

Once you complete your principle list, prayerfully choose the one principle you most need to work on (Do not just choose the easiest to apply!). If you felt deeply convicted about one in particular, that is probably the principle God is leading you to apply.

Once you have chosen a specific principle, answer these two questions:

What exactly will I do differently this week to apply this principle to my life? Be specific. Whom, other than the Lord, will I ask to help me follow through with this application?

ADDITIONAL STUDY RESOURCES

ONLINE RESOURCES

biblestudytools.com | Multiple translations and cross references

netbible.org | Word studies and cross references

soniclight.com | Commentary

bestcommentaries.com | Commentary database

DISCIPLESHIP/BIBLE STUDY RESOURCES

Living By the Book

by Howard Hendricks and Charles Swindoll

A more in-depth book on how to study the Bible using the tools discussed in this packet.

The Master Plan of Evangelism

by Robert Coleman

A highly motivational analysis of Jesus' own principles of evangelism and discipleship.

The Lost Art of Disciple Making

by Leroy Eims

This practical resource will give you a detailed structure to follow and great content to cover as you begin to disciple a new believer.

A Survey of Bible Doctrine

by Charles Ryrie

An easy-to-read, relatively short systematic theology primer that you can walk a new believer through to ground them in the faith.

Essentials of the Faith

by Grace Bible Church, College Station, TX

This small group Bible study packet walks a new believer through the fundamental trusts and practices of the Christian faith in ten self-paced lessons.

Note: Grace Bible Church does not always agree with the views of these commentaries. These are good tools to help understand hard passages, but the particular theological views reflect the author, of the commentary and not those of Grace Bible Church.



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