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THE GOSPEL-CENTERED LIFE IN THE BIBLE

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• STUDY GUIDE •  
WITH LEADER'S NOTES

# RUTH

REDEMPTION FOR THE BROKEN

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JARED WILSON

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# **RUTH:**

*Redemption for the Broken*



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Jared C. Wilson

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# INTRODUCTION

About midway through the book of Ruth, Boaz says to Ruth, “A full reward be given you by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge!” (Ruth 2:12). That is more than just a summary of what happens in the book. One wonders if that blessing also became a bit of family lore, or a repeated teaching topic around the dinner table, because in five of the psalms attributed to Ruth’s great-grandson David, he wrote and sang and prayed about how God’s wings are our refuge (see Psalms 17:8; 36:7; 57:1; 61:4; 63:7).

You see, Ruth is about God’s care in the midst of life’s disappointments, but it is also a story about family. There’s a legacy in this book, and an inheritance. There are reminders of God’s goodness in generations past, echoes of a Brother who sacrificed everything to redeem the entire clan, and hints of a family feast still to be celebrated. Amid the struggles of life here and now, there is good news of God’s enduring bounty.

And if you belong to Jesus by faith, Ruth is *your* family story. It is your spiritual heritage, more personal and true and lasting than if you had discovered an old scrapbook in your grandmother’s attic. So gather with some other members of God’s family and open the pages together. Reminisce and imagine. Learn from your common history and shared future how to trust your Father today.





# HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

Like the other small group resources in this series, *Ruth: Redemption for the Broken* has a distinct focus. Your goal will be bigger than merely to study the book of Ruth. You will also be learning to keep your eyes on Jesus, the ultimate Redeemer behind the redeemer in the story. And you will consider how the fullness of his love for you takes you beyond yourself, to love others—including those who are poor or are outsiders like Ruth.

This guide will help you do this in a group study. Studying with others in your spiritual family lets you benefit from what God is also teaching them, and it gives you encouragement as you apply what you learn.

Gospel-centered growth includes growing in awareness of your sin and in confidence that Jesus saves you in every way from that sin. Therefore, the group will be a place to share not only successes, but also sins and needs. Expect differences in how people participate. It's okay if some in the group are cheery while others are weary, if some “get it” quickly while others want to look more deeply, or if some are eager to share while others take it slowly. But because you'll be studying the Bible and praying together, also expect God's Spirit to work and change people—starting with you!

Each participant should have one of these study guides in order to join in reading and be able to work through the exercises during that part of the study. The study leader should read through both the lesson and the leader's notes in the back of this book before each lesson begins. Otherwise, no preparation or homework is required from any participant.

There are eight lessons in this study guide. Each lesson will take about an hour to complete, perhaps a bit more if your group is large. The lessons include these elements:

**BIG IDEA.** This is a summary of the main point of the lesson.

**BIBLE CONVERSATION.** You will read a passage from the Bible and discuss it. As the heading suggests, the Bible conversation questions are intended to spark a conversation rather than generate correct answers. In most cases, the questions will have several possible good answers and a few best answers. The leader's notes at the back of this book provide some insights, but don't just turn there for the "right answer." At times you may want to see what the notes say, but always try to answer for yourself first by thinking about the Bible passage.

**ARTICLE.** This is the main teaching section of the lesson, written by the book's author.

**DISCUSSION.** The discussion questions following the article will help you apply the teaching to your life. Again, there will be several good ways to answer each question.

**EXERCISE.** The exercise is a section you will complete on your own during group time. You can write in the book if that helps you, or you can just think about your responses. You will then share some of what you learned with the group. If the group

is large, it may help to split up to share the results of the exercise and to pray, so that everyone has a better opportunity to participate.

**WRAP-UP AND PRAYER.** Prayer is a critical part of the lesson because your spiritual growth will happen through God's work in you, not by your self-effort. You will be asking him to do that good work.

The book of Ruth will show you what a sure refuge you have in Jesus. Whatever your disappointments in life or wherever you have doubts, you will see his concern and his eagerness to welcome you. You will hear him once again tell you the gospel—the family story you share with him.



Lesson

# 1

## EVERYTHING FALLS APART

### BIG IDEA

Bitter experiences provoke many different feelings about God. One response is to cling to him, knowing that he also clings to us.

### BIBLE CONVERSATION *20 minutes*

Before we begin reading the book of Ruth, let's get familiar with the time and places it mentions:

- *The days when the judges ruled* was an early period in Israel's history, more than a thousand years before the birth of Jesus. The people suffered from weak leadership, so that "everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25).
- *Judah* was one of Israel's largest tribes, living in the southern region. Prophecy said Judah would rule the rest of Israel (see Genesis 49:8–10), but no king had yet emerged.

- *Bethlehem* was a town of Judah. Its name means “house of bread,” but it was experiencing famine. You’re probably familiar with another Bethlehem-based Bible story, which Ruth will eventually hint at.
- *Moab* was a neighboring and ungodly land. Its people were considered “unclean,” and came from a line begun through incest (see Genesis 19:30–37). Marrying them was ill-advised, since they worshiped false gods and were forbidden from joining in worship of the true God due to past sins (see Deuteronomy 23:3).

Now have a few group members take turns reading **Ruth 1:1–14** aloud. Then discuss the questions below.

List several problems Naomi faces or worries she might have. Which would most worry you if you were in her situation?

If you were assigning blame for all that happened to Naomi’s family, whom might you say was responsible, and why? Consider several possibilities.

What difference might it make who Naomi feels is responsible for her troubles? How might it change what Naomi and Ruth do as their lives go forward?

Notice Naomi’s beliefs and feelings about God. Do any of them seem either wrong or admirable, and why? Which of these beliefs and feelings about God has been part of your own life? Explain.

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Now read the following article from this book’s author. Have participants read it aloud, taking turns at the paragraph breaks.

*Lesson*

# 1

**ARTICLE**

## **Hanging On for Dear Life**

*5 minutes*

This is a love story. But probably not the way you think of love stories. Yes, it has a man, a woman, a matchmaker, and a wedding, but this is not some cutesy, romantic movie script. In the four short chapters of the biblical book of Ruth we have a complex interweaving of family history, socioeconomic commentary, racial and religious culture, and of course depths (and shallows) of human desires and longing. Yes, there is a romance here, but there is actually more than one in this book, and the central, most important romance of all remains implicit.

But we are getting ahead of ourselves. First, we are introduced to the family when it all fell apart. One unique thing about the book of Ruth is its setting within the larger narrative of Old Testament history. This little story is backdropped by the story found in the previous book, Judges. It may be good to take another look through that book if you are not familiar with it, because the world of Judges is full of sin-sick depravity and violence.



It's against that setting filled with blood and perversion that we get this little love story called Ruth. And the beginning could not look bleaker. Ruth's father-in-law Elimelech had originally moved his wife and sons from Israel into the land of Moab in order to improve their lot due to a famine in their home country. The original plan was likely to sojourn until such time as they could return home, but they ended up staying there, and Elimelech's sons took Moabite wives. The Moabites generally worshiped a god called Chemosh, making them pagan people the Jews weren't supposed to marry.

But these good Jewish boys married them anyway. And then Elimelech died. And then the boys died. So the story starts in a fairly rough fashion, the widowed Naomi and her two pagan daughters-in-law, also widows, trying to figure out what to do.

It should not be too difficult to apply this scenario to some moment in our own lives. You may not have lost a spouse or a roof over your head, but it's quite likely if you've lived long enough that you have felt so overwhelmed by the circumstances in your life that you have no idea what to do next. Every option seems to offer little prospect of hope. Every step you take is in the weakness of faith rather than the confidence of sight.

Naomi decides to go home, mainly because she has heard the Lord has been gracious to end the famine there. But it is not as though she is returning as a woman of joy and means. This decision is merely the least bad option before her. Yet there's something Naomi is doing we can all learn from. She does not give up her belief that the Lord is at work, and his plan is good. How do we know this?

Well, first of all, she loves her foreigner daughters-in-law. As filled with bitterness as she is, Naomi loves these women and

wants what is best for them. When she tells them to return to their mothers' homes, she's not trying to get rid of them. She is trusting that the Lord will deal kindly with them in the place of their own people. Naomi knows that they are grief-stricken too, but also that they are more likely to find new husbands in the land of their ancestors.

The scene of their imminent parting is quite moving. "Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept." Make no mistake: parting with her daughters-in-law is part of Naomi's bitterness. Given how much she obviously has come to love them and how kind they have been to her, she would prefer to keep them with her rather than journey alone as an older woman back to Judah. But she puts others before herself, and thus affirms the sovereignty of God over the situation.

We also know that Naomi, despite her fear and grief, is trusting in the Lord because she ultimately ascribes all her troubles to his sovereign hand! "The hand of the LORD has gone out against me," she says. In her own way, she is echoing the pledge of allegiance of the most famous biblical sufferer: "The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD" (Job 1:21). Naomi knows that whatever happens next—whether good or bad—like everything that has come before, it must pass through the sovereign control of the one true God.

And then a curious thing happens. Orpah returns Naomi's farewell kiss. She says goodbye. But Ruth latches on. The Hebrew word that is translated "clung to her" in verse 14 is *davaq*, the same word used in Genesis to describe the marriage covenant of man and wife cleaving to one another.

Now, keep in mind, as Iain Duguid says, Ruth “would be about as welcome in Bethlehem as a ham sandwich at a bar mitzvah.”<sup>1</sup> But despite all the odds against being happy, finding a husband, and being welcome in the land of God’s people, Ruth tells Naomi she is with her, no matter what.

Isn’t this a wonderful picture of faith for you and me? Ruth had certainly learned a few things from her believing mother-in-law, bitter or not. Namely, she learned that when you convert to the one true God, you don’t throw in the towel when things get difficult. Despite all the odds, she says to Naomi, “I’m with you. I’m going ‘all in’ with you.”

Naomi and Ruth had abandoned themselves to God, and because of that, they were willing to commit themselves to each other’s blessing. When everything falls apart, you can trust the God who holds everything together.

And the biggest reason we can do this is because he has done it for us. When Christ the Lord gave up all he’d known to inhabit the land of the foreigner, he surrendered to the will of the Father, despite the bitterest prospect of all—the cross. And yet he went. To honor the good plan of God. And to bless “pagan” outsiders like us. When everything falls part, cling to him for dear life. For he is clinging to you, and not even death will part you.

## DISCUSSION *15 minutes*

(NOTE: This opening lesson’s discussion is meant to help your group get to know each other by talking about experiences with God. It is common—and perfectly okay—for these experiences to vary greatly from person to person because God’s methods

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1. Iain M. Duguid, *Esther and Ruth* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2005), 142.

and progress are different in each of us. It's also normal for some people to be more eager than others to talk about their experiences with God. So take the pressure off yourself: feel free to share whatever you like, as much or little as you like.)

What hardships or troubles have you had, or when have you felt overwhelmed by circumstances? If you've ever felt bitter or resigned to unhappiness, you might tell about that.

How have your hard times affected the way you think about God, or how you interact with him? For example, you may have done some of the following:

- blamed God
- ignored God
- decided God doesn't help
- prayed to God
- questioned God
- found God for the first time
- learned something about God or about yourself
- felt/done something else

Naomi gave her daughters-in-law a choice: stay in Moab and have husbands, children and respect, or come to Bethlehem and have nothing except God. When have you faced similar decision points about God, and what was that experience like?

*Lesson*

# 1

**EXERCISE**

## In God's Hands

*15 minutes*

In this exercise, you will use a specific example to consider what it might look like in your life for you to know that God clings to you, and for you to cling to him as well. First work through the three steps on your own. Try to reach an answer in each section, writing them down if that is helpful. When everyone is finished, you will have an opportunity to share some of your insights.

**STEP 1: BITTERNESS IN LIFE.** Pick a hardship or concern in your life that you are willing to think through and talk about. It may be past, present, or a future situation you're worried about.

A problem, concern, or source of bitterness in my life is/was:

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**STEP 2: GOD CLINGS TO YOU.** Consider how God clings to you even when he brings bitter situations. Pick a Bible passage

that encourages you to see how you are in God's hands, and tell why you find that passage helpful.

I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. (John 10:28–29)

For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38–39)

Where shall I go from your Spirit?

Or where shall I flee from your presence?

If I ascend to heaven, you are there!

If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!

If I take the wings of the morning

and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,

even there your hand shall lead me,

and your right hand shall hold me. (Psalm 139:7–10)

According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials. (1 Peter 1:3–6)

Other Bible passage: \_\_\_\_\_ .

When life gets bitter, this passage can encourage me because

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**STEP 3: YOU CLING TO GOD.** Knowing that God clings to you, think about how you might be encouraged to cling to him. Pick at least one response and complete it.

Like Naomi, I can believe that God remains in charge even when life is bitter. One way I can rely on his care is

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Like Naomi, I can entrust family members and other loved ones to God's care. A way I might do this is

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Like Naomi, I can move toward life with God's people instead of hiding away in my own country. One way to do this is

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Like Naomi, I can be honest with God about my feelings and frustrations. One way I can draw personally closer to him is

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Now share some of your observations and desires with the group. If God has been helping you grow in these things, tell about that. (NOTE: When someone else is sharing, you can probably be helpful to them too—by listening rather than offering advice.)

### WRAP-UP AND PRAYER *5 minutes*

Take time to thank God for what he's done in the lives of your group and to ask him to continue his good work. Pray especially that God would help you cling to him in any ways you've mentioned. Spending time in prayer is a way to practice trusting God and to remember that even our progress in faith is ultimately *his* work. Because of this, we will continually turn to God in prayer during the course of this study.