



NEW VISION

Getting to know me:

Have you ever experienced a time when you were disappointed in God because the circumstances you faced were not what you expected? How was your faith tested?

What did you learn from that experience?

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

Into the Bible:

Have a volunteer read Ruth 2:11-12.

What did Boaz recognize about Ruth? How did his actions provide for Ruth's physical needs?

Boaz gave Ruth permission to take all she wanted from the field, and then he also took steps to preserve her health and safety (see 2:8-9). His generosity was also motivated by what he saw in Ruth's character. Boaz had heard the basic account of Naomi and Ruth's situation from his supervisor (see 2:6). Perhaps he also had used part of the day to make further inquiries about them. It is clear, however, that Boaz was overwhelmed by Ruth's courage, faithfulness, and stamina. He knew how disconcerting it would have been for Ruth to come as an impoverished woman to a foreign land. He also knew that she didn't have to do this. Ruth could have gone back to her parents. Boaz recognized loyal love and good character when he saw it.

What did Boaz ask the Lord to do for Ruth? Why is this significant, and what does it teach us about him?

How did Ruth's faithfulness to Naomi (vv. 11-12,23) and Boaz's faithfulness to Ruth (vv. 8-9,14-16) reflect God's faithfulness to His children?

Boaz also desired that God show favor to Ruth. He pronounced a blessing on her. Boaz viewed Ruth's turn to the Lord as fully genuine, a faith demonstrated by her devotion to Naomi. Boaz understood that Ruth had cast herself into the hands of One who was previously a foreign deity. Boaz affirmed that, in his view, Ruth was now part of the covenant people and thus was under God's protection. (Refer to the commentary for a brief description of 2:13–4:12.)

Have a volunteer read Ruth 4:13-17.

How is Ruth's faithfulness celebrated? What is the point of this unusual birth announcement?

Although for 10 years in Moab, Ruth had been unable to bear a son for Mahlon, through the Lord's direct intervention she immediately conceived and bore a son for Boaz. The child would be a comfort for Naomi in her old age (literally, "would sustain her grey hair"); he would be her family redeemer who would provide for her needs in her declining years. He was named Obed, a short form of Obadiah, which means "servant of the Lord." Though no one could bring back Naomi's husband or sons, now she had a daughter-in-law whom all recognized as "better to you than seven sons"—an astonishing accolade in the ancient world.

Why do you think the story of Ruth concludes with a genealogy of David?

Read Matthew 1:5. Ruth was one of only five women Matthew named in Jesus' genealogy. Why is this significant?

The story concludes with a linear genealogy linking the child, Obed, backward and forward. It traces his roots back to Perez, the child born in Genesis 38 out of the dubious relationship between Judah and a foreign woman, Tamar. It also traces his progeny on to King David, who is highlighted not simply because he was a great king but also because he was the Lord's answer for the anarchy of the days of the judges, in which this story took place (1:1). The genealogy thus shows us that the Lord had been pursuing bigger plans than just bringing together two worthy individuals or restoring the emptiness of a Judean widow. Their story formed part of the bigger plan to provide the Redeemer, Christ Jesus, whom Israel needed.

Ruth stands out as an example of faithfulness, but her story ultimately points to a greater example—the faithfulness of God. The events of Ruth's life were a part of God's bigger plan to provide the Redeemer, Christ Jesus, whom Israel needed.

Have a volunteer read Ruth 2 Timothy 2:11-13.

How do we see Boaz as a picture of God's love?

As Ruth demonstrated, faithfulness is a perseverance in one's relationship with God through the seasons of life. How is faithfulness an active rather than a passive response to difficulties?

What were the incentives Paul focused on that allowed him to remain faithful to Christ regardless of circumstance?

What does it mean to you that God remains faithful to you even when you are not faithful to Him?

The notion of perseverance presumes an active Christian life. No perseverance is necessary if we seclude ourselves from the world and don't spread the gospel. However, the calling to follow Jesus requires activity, thus endurance. In this final trustworthy saying, Paul gives Timothy the incentive of enduring in faith to the end of our lives as he had modeled. We can endure because the grace of Jesus (2:1) allows us to hold to this promise of eternal life with Him (2:12).

Verse 12 is a clear statement on the necessity of perseverance. As Jesus said, only the person who endures will be saved (see Matt. 10:22). Verse 13 is a reminder of God's preserving power and faithfulness. In this context, to deny Him envisions a more serious offense than being faithless. To deny Him envisions apostasy, whereas "faithless" refers to a lapse in trust, which is something every believer feels at some point.

Why is dying to self an ongoing commitment we must make, rather than a one-time decision? How often do you find yourself needing to die to self?

How do the two promises (vv. 11-12) inspire you to endure in the Christian faith?

Application:

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

In Ruth 2:5 Boaz asks his men "Who's women is this?" Do you ever find yourself asking who you are? How would you answer this question?

Read Hebrews 4:23. What does God's faithfulness enable us to do?

How is your story like Naomi's and Ruth's story of how God cares?

The Book of Ruth is a wonderful story of God's faithfulness. Where have you seen God faithfully at work in your life in the past? Where do you need to trust His faithfulness now?

Faithfulness might not come with ease, but it does come with promises. What are some practical ways to remember God's promises when persevering in faith is difficult?

COMMENTARY

Ruth 2:1-23

2:1-3. The practice of gleaning allowed the poor to go through the fields after the harvesters, picking up the grain that was left behind, along with the grain that landowners were required to leave at the edges of their fields (Lev. 19:9-10). The phrase translated a worthy man could designate Boaz as possessing wealth and property, but it becomes clear as the story unfolds that Boaz is also a man of integrity. The family connection was unknown to Ruth. Humanly speaking, she just happened to end up gleaning in his field, but there are no coincidences in God's program, and this divine appointment proved that the Lord was not against Naomi, as she thought (1:20-21).

2:4-7. Boaz's noble character was displayed in his care for his workers. Even his greeting to them was in the name of the Lord, and he knew them well enough to recognize a stranger in their midst. His question did not seek Ruth's name but her relationships: Whose young woman is this? The servant's answer twice highlighted her foreignness. He also offered an unsolicited testimony to her diligent hard work in the hot sun.

2:8-10. Boaz's noble character is again on display in his kind words to Ruth. Gleaning could be dangerous, especially for a young foreign woman, and Boaz issued instructions to ensure her safety. He also allowed her to drink the water his young men had brought, saving her the lengthy trip to the well. Ruth's response was to prostrate herself as a mark of respect for a social superior. As a Moabitess, she could easily have been ignored by Boaz, but he had noticed her and shown kindness to her.

2:11-13. The death of a husband exhausted a daughter-in-law's obligations, as Naomi herself had made clear (1:11). Yet Ruth had remained with Naomi, leaving her own land and people,

which meant entrusting her future to the favor of the deity of the new land. Boaz asked the Lord, the God of Israel, to reward Ruth's faithfulness to Naomi and to shelter her under His protecting wings, as a mother bird shelters her young. Ruth responded with an expression of thanks for Boaz's kind and encouraging words to her, even though she had no claim on him, not even that of a maidservant in his employment.

2:14-16. As an impoverished gleaner, Ruth would normally have had little or nothing to eat while out in the fields. Boaz, however, invited her to eat with him and his harvesters. In contrast to Naomi's declaration in 1:21 that she went out full and came back empty, Ruth went out empty and came back full. There is no hint of romantic interest in Boaz's actions. He was simply demonstrating his compassion and generosity to Ruth who, even though a foreigner, was linked to him through Naomi. He went so far as to instruct his harvesters deliberately to leave some grain for her to pick up, an action that went far beyond the demands of the law of Moses.

2:17-20. The measure of Boaz's generosity and Ruth's hard work is demonstrated in the remarkable quantity of grain that she gathered—an ephah (about 26 quarts) of barley. This was enough grain to feed a working man for several weeks. Boaz's generosity was evidence for Naomi that the Lord has not forsaken His kindness to the living or the dead. This represents a change in Naomi's attitude toward the Lord from 1:21. The judgment that the family had experienced was not His final word for them.

Family redeemers (v. 20) were relatives who were obliged to buy back family members from debt-slavery or to redeem their field if they had to sell it (Lev. 25:25-30). The family redeemer would also receive restitution on behalf of a deceased family member or pursue his killer to ensure that justice was served (Num. 5:8; 35:12). He might also raise up a child for the dead relative in order to maintain the connection between the clan and its hereditary property (Deut. 25:5-10), though Boaz had no legal obligation to act in this way.

2:21-23. Naomi's approval of Boaz's invitation for Ruth to remain until the end of the harvest demonstrates a concern for Ruth's safety not evident in verse 2. However, the concern may also reflect Naomi's growing awareness of her own culpability in the fate of her own family. Her earlier journey to the fields of Moab was an attempt to glean food "in the field of another" instead of seeking refuge under the wings of the Lord as she should have done. Boaz's generosity may have provided food, but Ruth's need of a home with a husband of her own is still real.