

REDEEMED

*Extraordinary Grace
for Ordinary People*

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Dedication

I couldn't do any of this without my husband. He encourages me, loves me, leads me, and forgives me. He works hard for me and our three girls, relentlessly giving himself in the office and at home. I am so happy that our girls will grow up with such a wonderful father who will help point them to their true and better Heavenly Father. I love you, Dan.

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Redeemed: Extraordinary Grace for Ordinary People

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Introduction

I didn't want to write about Ruth. When God began to whisper her name to me and point me to her story, I pushed it aside. It isn't the story I would choose to unpack with you. This tiny book squished between Judges and 1 Samuel seemed too common, too ordinary.

Is that too honest? Perhaps. But God is faithful and persistent. As I read each word again and again, I became acquainted with a woman who began to feel like a friend. It became clear that what I thought was just a simple, everyday story of a common woman was so much more.

Ruth was a Moabite, she was a widow, and she was poor. But God took notice and delighted in using this ordinary woman to birth a king and, eventually, the Messiah. This is no coincidence. This is how our Heavenly Father works, using both the grand and the ordinary, both the strong and the weak, both the sought-after and the looked-over, both a thundering earthquake and a still small voice.

Ruth's life not only provides insight into how to live out our own faith, but it paints a portrait of redemption and highlights a humble moment in the intricate landscape of the gospel story. In four short chapters we meet a woman with such faith, an aged widow of such grief, and a man of such love that we can't walk away unchanged. And we simply can't walk away without knowing more of our Redeemer and the grandeur of His passion for us.

It is my prayer that the richness of God's Word would be open to you and that the fullness of the gospel would be blindingly clear as we get to know Ruth. And that by knowing her story better, we will become better acquainted with the Son of God, Who humbled Himself, wrapped Himself in human flesh,

left His glory, died, and rose again in order to bestow forgiveness upon us.

This is what it means to be redeemed.

How to Use This Study

Under the title of each lesson is the Bible reference for the passage covered in that lesson. Please read the entire passage before you start the lesson. You will be asked to reread portions of the passage as you work your way through the lesson.

At the end of each lesson, you will be asked three questions: What does this tell me about God? Which of God's attributes is displayed in this passage? and How can I apply what I've learned to my life?

These three questions are fundamental to studying the Bible and will help you learn how to study on your own. Your answers may, and will most likely, be different from others' answers. That is okay! The Bible is God's Word. It is active—living and breathing—and God will speak to you personally through His Word if you are listening.

If you are unfamiliar with God's attributes or just like to have a handy reference nearby, like I do, I have included a list of key attributes with a brief description of each (p. 9). This will help you in answering the second of the three questions. The list by no means includes all of God's attributes.

Finally, throughout each lesson you will mainly see three types of questions. Some will be straightforward question-and-answer formats that will come right from the Biblical text. These questions are meant to send you back to the Bible to help you look strategically at what is being said.

Other questions will ask you to write out different passages. This is because writing out a verse or verses on paper begins to write the words on our memories as well. You may even want to memorize these passages.

Another type of question includes "What do you think?" These questions are the hardest for some, because we all want to have the right answer. However, these questions may not give

a right answer or may not have a right answer that we can determine with the information given in the passage. I ask, “What do you think?” because I want you to share what you think. You may think your answer seems silly, that your answer’s too personal, or that no one else thinks the way you do. That’s great! At least you are thinking.

Attributes of God

Eternal God always has been and always will be. He has no beginning and no end. He exists undiminished into the future. See Exodus 3:14 and Hebrews 13:8.

Good God is good. He is the source of goodness and the rule by which goodness is measured. A good God can do only good for those who love Him. See Psalm 25:8.

Holy God always exists in moral purity, and it is impossible for Him to be tainted by sin. He is so holy that no human can approach Him in his fallen state. This is what makes Christ's coming to earth so remarkable. See Exodus 3:5–6 and Revelation 4:8.

Immanent God is intimately involved in our lives, even the tiniest details of them. He orchestrates and uses all our moments for our good to bring Him glory. See Acts 17:27–28.

Immutable God does not change. His plans don't change. His character doesn't change. Nothing about Him changes. He is the same today as He was yesterday, and He will be the same tomorrow. See James 1:17.

Love God is more than loving; He is love. He is love in its truest embodiment, because He is the source of all true love. See Deuteronomy 7:7–8 and 1 John 4:8, 16.

Merciful God does not give us what we deserve—

punishment and death—but offers us His grace instead. See Romans 9:23–24 and Titus 3:5.

- Omnipotent** God has unlimited power to do whatever He wants. See Jeremiah 32:17 and Mark 14:36.
- Omnipresent** God is completely present in all places at all times. He is not constrained by time or space. He is fully Himself everywhere and always. See Psalm 139:7–10.
- Omniscient** God knows everything, for He is the source of all there is. No one can teach Him. He is never surprised. See Psalm 147:5 and Romans 11:33.
- Self-existent** God was not created and needs nothing from anyone or anything. See Exodus 3:14 and John 1:1–5.
- Sovereign** God has divine control over everything. He uses everything for our good and His glory. See Psalm 115:3 and Matthew 10:29.
- Transcendent** God’s ways are higher and better than ours, and we will never be able to fully describe or understand Him. See Isaiah 55:8–9 and Psalm 113:5–6.

A Famine

Ruth 1:1–7

I LOVE TO EAT. I will tip up a bag of chips to get to those glorious flavor crystals that get stuck in the corners. I will polish off a dessert with my fork directly in the pan and not be ashamed. And don't even get me started on the rich aroma of a fresh cup of coffee. I enjoy a good meal with the best of them, and I am blessed to have never experienced the feeling of real, desperate hunger.

This was not so for the Israelites at the beginning of our study. It was the time “when the judges ruled” and “there was a famine in the land” (Ruth 1:1). With the opening lines we are thrust headfirst into a tragedy. The opening is meant to draw us in and take our breath away. But, spoiler alert, Ruth will end up being a breath of fresh air.

When the Judges Ruled

Read Ruth 1:1.

In setting up the story, the writer wants us to be aware of where we are. In the first verse we learn a lot about what faces the characters we will soon get to know.

1. When did the famine take place?

The judges were a group of individuals whom God strategically raised up to help wrangle in and rescue the rebellious Israelites. The judges were not casting judgment but were, rather,

instruments to bring God's justice. The Israelites did not have a king other than the King of Kings, the Lord their God. They were meant to be self-ruling people who obeyed the laws and commands God had given them.

If you are familiar with the book of Judges, you will know that this period was not a pleasant time to be an Israelite. It immediately followed the death of Joshua, the one who had ushered the Chosen People into the Promised Land following the death of Moses. It had taken forty years of wandering before they were finally allowed to enter and make the place home. However, they couldn't just throw down a doormat and call it a day; they still had work to do.

2. According to the following passages, what were the people commanded to do / not to do?

Joshua 24:23

Deuteronomy 20:17–18

The first command seems easy enough. They just needed to put away all the false gods, or idols, from among them. But those gods belonged to a powerful group or groups of people abiding in the land. The command in Deuteronomy tells us more about that.

The Israelites were told to destroy the people and drive them out. I don't know about you, but to me, at first glance this is shocking and seems downright cruel. Why would God give the command to completely destroy entire groups of people? On the surface it is absolutely confusing. But when we dive into the Scriptures, we find that this command is not given because of their race or the land. The people were so detestable, their ways so violent, and their sins so grievous that they simply could not

be allowed to be that close to the Israelites in the land that God had promised them.

Their destruction was to be a direct result of their despicable sin. These were people who worshiped Chemosh and other false gods. But it wasn't like they just went to a different church than the Israelites. No, these people were steeped in a religion and culture that not only accepted but openly praised incest, adultery, child sacrifice, prostitution, sexual deviance, bestiality, and homosexuality. And they hated any and all who didn't accept or embrace their way of life. Imagine the Israelites moving in and pitching their tents or building their homes right in the midst of this open sin and idolatry and expecting to not be affected by it.

3. How did the Israelites do at driving out the people? For help, take a glance at Judges 1:27–33.

Instead of driving out the inhabitants, the Israelites either moved in right next door or conquered them just enough to make them their slaves. So the customs and practices of the inhabitants, such as the Canaanites, remained and eventually corrupted the hearts of the Israelites, causing them to do just what Deuteronomy 20:18 warned would happen.

4. Read Psalm 81:8–13. According to this passage, what did God promise to do for the Israelites if they followed Him?
5. But in verse 12 of Psalm 81, we read what they did instead. What was it?

During times of oppression or persecution, the Israelites would cry out to God, and God would send a judge to deliver them. But as soon as the judge died, the people would return to their old ways and repeat their mistakes over and over again.

They pursued other gods, and the Lord would give them over to their desires.

6. Have you ever desired something you shouldn't have, gotten it, and then realized it wasn't what you really wanted or needed?
7. Are there any enemies (sins, habits, relationships, etc.) that God has commanded you to conquer (drive out of your life) that you have refused to give up?

A Family in Crisis

Read Ruth 1:1–2 and Judges 6:1–6.

This is the world Elimelech and Naomi were trying to raise their children in. Nowhere was safe. Even the small town of Bethlehem wasn't off limits, and a famine was the result of living with the enemy. Because there is only one famine mentioned in the book of Judges, we are safe to assume that the one in Ruth and the one in Judges are one and the same; therefore, we will place Ruth's story here.

8. According to Judges 6:1–6, what was the cause of the famine?

9. Define *famine*.

In the Western developed world, people don't know much of famine. We Americans have had glimpses of it in our history, and certainly we have suffered our share of catastrophes. When the Bible tells us there was a famine, particularly one affecting God's people, we ought to take notice.

The famines we know of are ones caused by lack of rain,

extreme heat, or other weather anomalies. But this one that threatened the lives of Elimelech and his family was of a different nature. The Israelites would be the ones sowing and reaping the food. They would watch the seeds turn to abundant crops; however, they would not get to taste of the harvest or have their bellies filled by it.

The Israelites became scavengers in the Promised Land, sneaking and hiding the food their own hands had gone to the dirt to grow. Elimelech and Naomi were right there, scared and scavenging. Another famine, in Genesis 12, drove Abram (later to be called Abraham) from Canaanite territory down to Egypt. There, in the process of fleeing the famine, Abram would make quite the blunder and almost lose his wife, Sarai, to Pharaoh (Genesis 12:10–20).

10. What do you think drove these two men (Abram and later Elimelech) to flee the famine?

In Genesis 12:10–20, Abram’s decisions were driven by a desperation to save his wife and secure his future as the father of many nations (Genesis 17:6–8). To him, a famine posed a real threat to that promise. In the same way, it seems that Elimelech was a desperate man.

11. Have you ever been so desperate?

A Family of Faith

Read Ruth 1:2.

While Elimelech was desperate, he was also faithful. In the Bible, particularly in the Old Testament, a person’s name was an indicator of his or her character. The name *Elimelech* means “My God is king.” Coupled with *Naomi’s* meaning of “pleasant” or “my delight” (and her faith we see in later passages), we get a picture

of a family who loved and worshiped their Lord God. Elimelech was a faithful man who simply made a desperate move.

12. Naomi and Elimelech had two sons. What were their names?

The name *Mahlon* means “sickly,” and *Chilion* means “wasting away” or “pining.” The indication is clear: these boys were not healthy to begin with. Add to their condition a famine, which made food scarce, and you have the makings of a parental nightmare. When famine comes, it is only natural for people to run, so it is no surprise that we find this family leaving Bethlehem in search of relief.

13. Thoughtfully consider what you would do in Elimelech’s or Naomi’s situation. Would you begin to look for a place to go?

The Thing about Moab

The Moabites were descendants from Lot, Abraham’s nephew, as a result of an incestuous relationship between Lot and his elder daughter (Genesis 19:30–38). The Moabites were worshipers of a particularly heinous idol, Chemosh. The rituals to the god Chemosh included temple prostitution, orgies, and human sacrifice (1 Kings 11:7; 2 Kings 3:26–27; Jeremiah 48). Lot and his family had been strongly influenced by the sex- and violence-obsessed culture of Sodom and Gomorrah while they lived there, and they carried it with them to Moab (Genesis 19:1–11).

Tension and often hatred existed between the Israelites and the Moabites (Judges 3:12–30). Obviously, Moab was a place that no self-respecting Israelite would go. Therefore, for a Jehovah-fearing man like Elimelech to take his family there, he must have

been experiencing a great deal of suffering in Israel and saw no hope of immediate relief.

While we can make lots of healthy speculations, I am not sure we can really know if Elimelech's move to Moab was good or bad. In fact, I'm not sure it really matters for our purposes. What we do know is that He was a loving father and tried to be a faithful Israelite. But he was faced with desperate circumstances. And so the family left relatives, friends, and home in Bethlehem and settled in Moab. Our story reveals that, unfortunately, over the course of ten years, Elimelech died, his sons married two Moabite women, and then his sons also died.

The Gospel

Faith and Trust

Personally, I've never felt the lingering ache of real hunger, the debilitating emptiness of starvation, or even the threat of such an existence. I can't relate to the fear that must have engulfed Elimelech when he thought of the safety of his precious family.

However, I do know the lingering ache of uncertainty and the debilitating emptiness of fear. I know well the threat of financial loss or, worse, the scent of disease and the death it inevitably brings. I know the desperation that leads us to turn over every stone and search every corner for an answer or an escape. I also know what it's like to look to God as the last resort instead of the first person we turn to in answering these woes.

Our spiritual famine, lack, and weaknesses naturally make us want to run, seek greener grass, and shore ourselves up. But the great news is that when we are presented with a famine, God doesn't abandon us.

14. In your own words, define *faith*.

15. In your own words, define *trust*.
16. What do you think the main difference is between faith and trust?

It seems that Elimelech had faith in the Lord, but perhaps he lacked trust. I can relate. Can you? For example, I find it easy to have faith that Jesus has redeemed me and that I face the joyful promise of eternity with Him. But, in contrast, I find it most difficult to trust God for the everyday trials. Will I see Him face-to-face in Heaven one day? Absolutely! Will He provide for my daily strength right now? Unfortunately, I am sometimes debilitated by doubt.

It's in these everyday, common, ordinary moments that it is most easy to lose sight of God. We forget that He is a God Who delights in the details. In fact, the entire book of Ruth shows us a God Who delights in orchestrating the details. We call it God's immanence.

He is not a God Who sits high on His throne completely and totally removed from the creation He spoke into being. He is intimately involved in every moment, everywhere, all the time. Nothing escapes His notice. And His providence tells us that He uses all of these moments for our good. Yes, God can even use our mistakes, fears, and faithlessness to compose a story we wouldn't dream could ever be our own.

The Real Need

So, at the end of Ruth 1:5, we find three women suddenly forced into a situation they never would have wanted. In a culture and time when widows were often neglected and left destitute, the situation couldn't have been much worse.

17. Reflect over the verses we've seen in Judges 1, 3, and 6. What was the root of all this devastation?

We see in Ruth 1:1 a good family suffering because of the sins of others. Our sins don't affect just us. Our sins can affect our families and communities, both in the moment and for generations to come. The Bible tells us that by one man, sin entered the world (Romans 5:12). While we have sinned enough on our own to warrant condemnation and death, it was by Adam's sin that every life after him and all of the world has been marred by the effects of sin: death, disease, illness, tragedy, catastrophe, hatred, racism, war, lying, gossip, betrayal, famine, and eternal separation from God.

18. Why do we like to think our sins don't affect other people?

Our sins are not little secrets that we keep high on a shelf perfectly hidden from human eyes. They are cancerous tumors that, when left, grow and devour and kill. However, the effects of our sin, unlike cancer, are contagious. Sin spreads, casting its shadow far and wide.

19. How have you seen your sin or the sins of another tragically affect a community, family, or generations?

The famine that touched the Israelites is a perfect example of sin's destruction. We can see that not all the Israelites had their hearts turned from following Jehovah. But there were enough to warrant a reckoning with God that everyone, including Elimelech and Naomi, had to face.

Weakness, loss, grief, and famine are the perfect setting for a rescue. God didn't miss the intimate details of this family's lives—the everyday decisions that perhaps seemed so

meaningless and ordinary. Nothing escaped His attention. He saw it all, and He was planning to use it all.

Tragedy and grief define the first seven verses of Ruth. A nation was being gutted as a result of their own sin. A family sought relief but found death. Three wives lost their husbands. One wife also lost her sons. But the bloodline of the Promised One was pulsing in our story, even through desperation, empty hands, and brokenness.

God can do a lot with someone who has empty hands. It's at the end of our own efforts and striving that the gospel first gets ahold of our hearts. Oftentimes we must be emptied to be filled back up. Our brokenness drives us to reach out and grab hold of Jesus' nail-pierced hands. And, because of this, we can be thankful for our desperate and broken parts. But, praise God, this is only the beginning of the story.

Personal Application

What does this tell me about God?

Which of God's attributes is displayed in Ruth 1:1-7?

How can I apply this to my life?