

RUTH 1–4

Ruth: Loyalty in the Ruins, Redemption from a Kinsman

Lesson at a glance

Ruth is one of the most beautiful stories in Scripture, and one of the richest pictures of Christ in the Old Testament. The lesson walks through the four chapters in order: the bitter return of Naomi from Moab, Ruth's vow of loyalty, the gleaning in Boaz's field, the bold proposal at the threshing floor, and the redemption at the city gate. Underneath the love story sits the Hebrew word *hesed* (covenant love that chooses to stay), and above the love story sits the figure of Boaz, the kinsman-redeemer who points forward to Christ.

Goals for this session

First, that each woman would see what *hesed* (covenant love that stays) looks like in daily life, and would identify one place she is being called to live it this week.

Second, that the group would understand the doctrine of the kinsman-redeemer and see how clearly it points forward to Christ.

Third, that women in seasons of loss would be helped to lament honestly without slipping into faithless bitterness.

Fourth, that any woman who has not been clothed with Christ in baptism (Galatians 3:27) would be drawn toward that obedience by what Boaz, in shadow, did for Ruth.

Preparing to lead

Read Ruth in one sitting earlier in the week. It is a quick and powerful read. Then go back through it slowly with the lesson questions in hand.

Read Deuteronomy 25:5 to 10 and Leviticus 25:23 to 34 for the background on levirate marriage and the kinsman-redeemer. The lesson cites both, but the leader should read them in full.

Read Matthew 1:1 to 17 once more, paying attention to Ruth's place in the genealogy. Pray that the women in your group would see how seriously God takes the line of redemption that ultimately produces His Son.

Sensitive topics in this lesson

Loss of a spouse or child (chapter 1). Three funerals open the book of Ruth. Any woman in your group who has lost a husband, a child, or both will feel the weight of those first five verses. Honor the weight; do not rush past it.

Honest lament (question 4). Naomi's words in 1:20 to 21 are hard. Some Christian women are afraid that admitting bitter feelings to God is sinful. The Psalms (and Naomi) tell us otherwise. Honest lament is part of how God's people heal. The danger is not the lament; it is the faithless drift that sometimes follows. Help the women see the difference.

In-law relationships (chapter 1). Ruth and Naomi's tenderness is unusual in the ancient world and in ours. Some women in the room have hard relationships with mothers-in-law or daughters-in-law. Don't push for sharing, but make space for honesty.

Being a foreigner or outsider (Ruth was a Moabite). Some women in your congregation come from other countries, other denominations, or other walks of life. Ruth's story is particularly powerful for them.

Suggested 60- to 75-minute schedule

Five minutes: welcome.

Five minutes: open in prayer. Read Ruth 1:16 to 17 and 4:14 to 17 aloud, the two bookends of the story.

Five minutes: warm-up. Ask each woman to share about a person who showed her extraordinary kindness during a hard season.

Thirty-five to forty minutes: discussion. Choose six or seven questions in advance.

Five to ten minutes: "Your response" reflection.

Five minutes: closing prayer.

Discussion priorities

Make sure these are among the questions you discuss: 4 (Naomi's lament), 7 (Boaz's kindness), 9 (Ruth's bold request), and 12 (Boaz as a type of Christ). If time is short, do not skip 12. It is the heart of the book.

Notes on key questions

Question 3. Ruth's vow in 1:16 to 17 is more than a sentimental promise; it is a confession of faith. "Your God will be my God" is the language of conversion. Help the women see that Ruth is not just choosing Naomi; she is choosing the LORD. The fact that she does this with no obvious benefit to herself (a Moabite widow in Israel had little prospect) makes the confession even more striking.

Question 4. Naomi calls herself Mara ("bitter") and says the LORD has dealt bitterly with her. This is honest grief, not faithless rebellion. Be careful not to scold Naomi. Compare with Psalms 13, 42, and 88

to show that honest lament is part of the biblical vocabulary of faith. The danger is stopping in lament; the gift is being able to bring our grief to God rather than carry it alone.

Question 6. Ruth 2:3 ("she happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz") is one of the most quietly humorous sentences in the Bible. The narrator is winking at us. There are no accidents in God's economy. This is also where the Study Skill on small words pays its first dividend.

Question 9. Ruth's request to Boaz at the threshing floor is bold but honorable. The uncovering of his feet and the request that he spread his garment over her are formal gestures asking for covenant protection (compare Ezekiel 16:8). This is a marriage proposal. Ruth and Naomi are taking a risk on a godly man.

Question 12. Boaz as a type of Christ. List the parallels with the group: Boaz is a near kinsman, willing, able to pay the price, publicly identified, and motivated by love. So is Christ (Hebrews 2:14 to 17; Galatians 3:13; 1 Peter 1:18 to 19). Boaz pays for both the redemption of the field and the marriage to Ruth; Christ pays for both the redemption of His church and the marriage that follows (Ephesians 5:25 to 27). Boaz does this out of love; so does Christ. Linger here. This is the heart of the lesson.

Question 14. Personal response. The lesson connects the kinsman-redeemer to baptism into Christ (Galatians 3:27), where the believer is clothed with Him. If a woman in your group has never been baptized, this is the natural moment to invite her to take that step. Do not push; do offer.

About the Study Skills in this lesson

Two Study Skills appear in Lesson 5. Watching for Small Words That Carry Big Meaning is a habit that pays off all through Scripture. Ruth 2:3 is the example, but the same skill works in Esther 6:1 and Acts 8:26. The second skill, Recognizing Types and Shadows in the Old Testament, is essential for reading the Old Testament as Christians. Be sure to make the two cautions clear: we only call something a type when Scripture itself authorizes the connection, and the type is the shadow, not the substance.

A suggested closing prayer

Pray your own prayer. A sample, if you would like one:

"Father, thank You for the book of Ruth, and for the long, patient hesed You have shown Your people. Thank You for Naomi's honest grief and Ruth's stubborn loyalty. Thank You most of all for Boaz, who is a small shadow of the great Kinsman-Redeemer You sent in Your Son. Thank You that Jesus came near to us, paid the price we could not pay, spread His covering over us in baptism, and now calls us His own. Help every woman in this room to live in the rest of being redeemed, and to practice the hesed that stays. In the name of our great Redeemer we pray. Amen."

Looking ahead to Lesson 6

Next week is Hannah, 1 Samuel 1:1 to 2:11. Hannah's story rhymes with much of what the women have already studied: the long wait, the cruel rival, the honest prayer, the song of praise. Encourage the women to also read Mary's Magnificat in Luke 1:46 to 55 in preparation, since Hannah's song will set up Mary's twelve weeks from now.