

And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep His love is.

Several thousand years ago, a poet recounted the blessing of a person who delights in God's Word (Psalm 1). Though the issue of the Bible has challenged people and systems for millennia (and may be a challenge for you today), we believe that life with God is brought into real and full perspective when we dive deep into the Scriptures.

What follows are questions, maps, and pictures that serve as an invitation for you to see what could happen when you encounter God through reading the Bible. We highly encourage you to use this guide both in your personal study and to share with a few friends.

**Here's how it works:**

Be alone with God and **study** using the sections, "Beginning" and "Interlude." Join with a few friends and **discuss** the questions in the section, "Continuing." Note and **apply** what you've learned in the section, "Living."

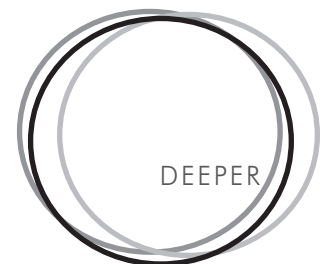
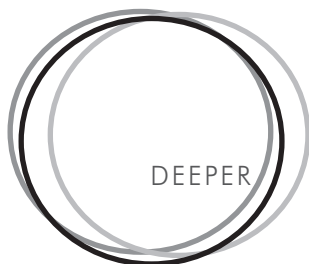
Study. Discuss. Apply.

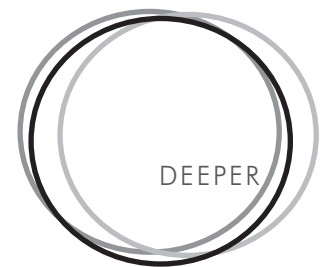
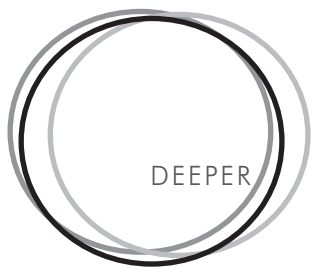
When the Scripture is read and applied, something profound happens.  
Something spiritual.  
Something life-altering.

May you catch a fuller glimpse of the beauty of God and His mission in the world, and be charged to join in this great life purpose.

**Take the invitation.**

**Go deeper** into everything that life was meant to be.





**RUTH**

Ruth, one of two books in the Bible named for a woman, is a story of grace, integrity, and redemption. It can be classified as a “romantic quest,” layered by the storyline of Ruth and Boaz and the love of the Lord for His people. Ruth is a reminder that, even in life’s difficult circumstances, God is still in control. God never gives up. He is always working for His glory and our good. He takes the fragmented pieces of life and forms a beautiful mosaic.

**CONTEXT**

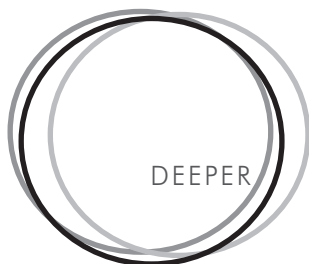
One of the keys to reading the Bible is understanding the context. Each book was written by a specific person, at a specific period of time, for a specific purpose. Understanding this information gives us a better glimpse at understanding what the text means and how it is to be applied today.

**Author and Date:** There is no specifically known date or author for Ruth. Jewish tradition attributes the book to Samuel, justifying David’s claim to the throne (Ruth and Boaz were the great-grandparents of David). However, most conservative scholars date the writing of the book of Ruth during either the reign of King David or King Solomon. Some scholars even suppose the book was written by a woman, as the book is totally unique among ancient literature for its focus on female friendship with a cast of female characters taking center stage in the story.

**Major Themes:** Grace, Integrity and Redemption

**TRADITION**

The “Feast of Weeks” (also known as “Pentecost”) is a harvest festival that occurred during the barley harvest in Jerusalem. It celebrated the giving of God’s law to Moses on Mount Sinai and God’s provision. Ruth’s betrothal to Boaz occurred during the barley harvest, and the book of Ruth is read each year during the Feast. In looking forward to the New Testament period, Pentecost is highly significant in the giving of the Spirit and launching of the Jesus-followers into the community later known as the church (cf. Acts 2).



**CULTURE AND LAW**

Several practices commanded to Israel in the Law are prevalent in the story of Ruth:

1. Leaving the corners of the field for the poor. The corners of the field were to be left for the poor to gather and have food. (cf. Lev. 19.9-10; 23.22).
2. The law of redemption. Redemption of the land was very important, as the land was the physical representation of the promise that God had given to Israel. If a person's land had to be sold for financial relief, a near relative was to buy it back and keep it within the family possession (cf. Lev. 25.23-28). Moreover, the near relative was to marry a widow who had not yet given birth to a son in order that the family name may continue through the birth of a son (cf. Deut. 25.5-10).
3. Elders at the gate. The wise people of a village would often gather at the city gate - the highest place of traffic (cf. Prov. 31.23). Matters of law would be heard and mediated.
4. Exchange of a sandal. This act symbolized the right of the receiver of the sandal to walk on the land as his own property.

**MOAB**

Moab was a separate nation from Israel, and the journey from Moab to Bethlehem spanned 50 miles. The relationship between Israel and Moab was extremely contentious throughout Israel's history, with Moab attacking Israel numerous times prior and after the setting of the story of Ruth. Moabites did not worship the Lord, but instead worshipped the god, Chemosh. Moabites were considered idolaters, which gives a disturbing context to Elimelech's decision to transfer his family from the land of the true God (Israel) for a nation centered on idolatry (Moab).

Bringing your study together, choose 2-4 truths or applications that resonated with you from this book. Take some steps now to incorporate them into your life.

Share them with someone

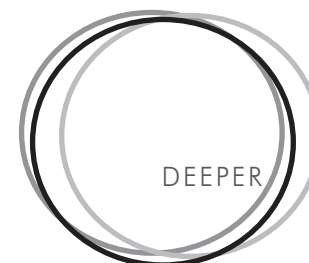
Memorize the verses

Write the words on a note card to keep with you

Take care to live what you've learned through this study. James, the early church leader in Jerusalem, wrote that the person who only hears (or reads) the word of God but doesn't live it out is like a person who looks in a mirror but walks away and forgets what they look like (James 1:23-24)! Live out what God is doing at work within you (Philippians 2:12-13).

Go deeper into living a life shaped by and in pursuit of Jesus.

"May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit."



Choose 2-3 applications from your study and discussions with others that you would like to make a part of your life. List them below. Spend a few minutes in prayer either alone or in a group and ask God to work these within you. Prayer can be a simple dialogue between you and God. Finish the study of this chapter by committing to live in a new way with God.

Read Chapter 1 of Ruth.

Read it again in a different translation or language.

(Various translations can be found here: [www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com))

1. Use the space below to list your observations from the text. Don't try to interpret what they mean or how it could apply to your life (that comes later), just simply note what you found interesting/strange/confusing/intriguing/etc. List what stood out to you from this chapter.

2. Choose 3-4 of your key or most substantial observations. Use some study tools (such as Commentaries, Lexicons, Encyclopedias, Dictionaries, etc.) to interpret the meaning of your observations. Some helpful resources for study can be found online here: [www.blueletterbible.org](http://www.blueletterbible.org) or [www.studylight.org](http://www.studylight.org).

3. In what ways can you apply your 3-4 interpretations this week? In what ways would your life look differently if you applied these truths? Be as specific as possible. Write a reminder to yourself or share with someone in order to stay accountable for following through.

**ARRIVAL OF GRACE**

Think of the last time you were shown kindness by someone. Did you deserve it? Was someone repaying you for kindness you had already shown them? Or were you shown kindness expressly when you didn't deserve it? This is where the story of Ruth begins - with an act of unmerited kindness...grace.

Ruth did not have to go with Naomi to Bethlehem. In fact, it seems that Naomi didn't even want her company. Three times she tells her to stay in Moab, to go back to her mother's house so she can remarry and have a family of her own. All that Naomi had to offer Ruth in Bethlehem was uncertainty and poverty. In this time period, being a widow with no family meant you had no income, no protection and had to rely on the charity of others. In modern terms, she would be homeless. Maybe it was Naomi's pride, maybe it was her love for Ruth, or maybe it was for both reasons, but Naomi makes it clear that she wants to go on alone to become a beggar in her homeland.

Under these circumstances, Ruth's response and pledge is one of unmerited kindness. In fact, she has positioned herself to show Naomi kindness at the expense of her own wants, needs, and future. Her covenant with Naomi requires nothing from Naomi, but costs Ruth everything. Looking forward to the New Testament, Jesus is the ultimate example of unmerited kindness. Jesus came in human form to a hostile land, to make a covenant with us. A covenant from which not even death would separate us (Rom 8:38-39). He left heaven, fully knowing what it would cost Him. A cost he was willing to pay in order that we may be saved. What was that cost? His life, sacrificed on the cross for you.

We did nothing to deserve this covenant of grace (cf. Titus 3:4-5). Our position before God is destitute. Like Naomi, we have nothing to offer Him but our messy lives. And yet God chose to show us His grace, His unmerited kindness towards us in salvation.

It seems that those who appreciate kindness the most are those who deserve it the least. You don't deserve His kindness, you never will. But you can accept it as a free gift from your Father who loves you. How will you respond to the arrival of grace?

6. Describe the transformation of Ruth throughout this story.

7. Describe the transformation of Boaz throughout this story.

8. In what ways did God show Himself faithful and act in grace through this story?

9. What person in this story most reflects your current life? How do you relate in similar ways to this person?

10. Describe your story during the past five years. How have you changed and matured? What were the high and low points? In what ways has God shown Himself faithful in your life story?

1. What was the cultural practice of meeting at the village gate with the elders (v.1-2; cf. "Context" in this study)?

2. What was the law of redemption which Boaz referenced in v.3-4 (cf. "Context" in this study).

3. Describe the character of Boaz based on his behavior in v.3-10.

4. What is significant about Ruth bearing a son (v.13)?

5. Describe the transformation of Naomi throughout this story.

1. List the characters in the story. (This will help you read the remaining chapters.)

2. Why did Elimelech, Naomi, and their sons leave Bethlehem? What was wise about Elimelech's decision? What was unwise?

3. Describe a time in your life when you and/or your family had to make a significant transition. What were the effects on you? Your family? What do you imagine was the emotional state of the family of Elimelech and his family at this point?

4. What happens in the life of Naomi within the first five verses of the book? How do you deal with pain and loss in life? Do you have any specific Scripture verses that have helped you walk through pain and loss?

5. What does Naomi try to do to her daughters-in-law in verses 7-15? What is her motivation for acting in this way?

6. How would you describe Ruth's statement to Naomi in verses 16 and 17? Would you consider this a wise or unwise statement?

7. What does Naomi choose to call herself in verse 20? What does this new name mean? What was Naomi's reason for changing her name?

8. Do you believe Naomi's perspective was correct? Was she justified in identifying herself in this way? What are the effects of taking this identity?

9. What is your identity? (Ephesians 1 describes identity in Christ.) If you decided to change your identity today, what would change in your life? How does "identity" affect how you live?

10. If you were Ruth, hearing what Naomi has said in verse 20, how would you feel about your decision to stand by her? After hearing Naomi's perspective on life, would you want to change your mind about serving her?

11. Describe a time when you sought to serve another person but their self-perspective/attitude made your act of service difficult. What can you do in these situations in order to continue to serve?

### SEEING THE MOSAIC

Life would be easier if we could see the whole picture. We are faced with the seemingly fragmented pieces of our life and we struggle to know how each piece fits together to form the whole. Divorce, job loss, debt, pain, rejection, doubt, loneliness, depression, sexual assault, death of a child, unresolved conflict - the broken pieces of life burden us with added confusion. Our soul cries out, "How do these pieces fit together?"

We strive to see how the various pieces of our life form something whole and uniform – like solving a jigsaw puzzle in which each piece has its specific place in completing the picture on the box cover. But what if life isn't like a portrait? What if life is more like a mosaic?

In a mosaic, pieces of various shape and color come together to form a beautiful image. In a portrait, beauty is found in seeing each piece in its proper place. But the mosaic is beautiful *because* of the contrasts of shape and colors in each piece. In a mosaic, fragmented pieces that appear confusingly out of place come together in harmonious compliment to form a beauty unknown when looking at each piece alone.

The story of Ruth – and the story of life – is a story of mosaic. From Naomi's loss of husband and sons, to Ruth's search for food, to the unexpected grace of Boaz, life did not "work out" exactly how they each would have imagined. Yet God brought together all of the fragmented pieces of their lives into a beautiful mosaic. We see a glimpse of the mosaic in the final words of the story. Ruth and Boaz are the great grandparents of King David, who will rule Israel. Centuries later, a descendant of Ruth and Boaz will bring his pregnant bride to this very city of Bethlehem. Their baby born in a barn will forever change the world with a message of grace and forgiveness for everyone who will believe.

The fact that Ruth and Boaz are in the lineage of Jesus shows that God is a mosaic creator. You can have hope because He is taking the seemingly fragmented pieces and is forming a beautiful mosaic from your life.

Will you trust Him to put the pieces together?

Read Chapter 4 of Ruth.

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Choose 2-3 applications from your study and discussions with others that you would like to make a part of your life. List them below. Spend a few minutes in prayer either alone or in a group and ask God to work these within you. Prayer can be a simple dialogue between you and God. Finish the study of this chapter by committing to live in a new way with God.

Read Chapter 2 of Ruth.

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6. What action does Boaz take in response to the marriage proposal (v.13)? Why doesn't Boaz say "yes" in that moment?

7. Why does Boaz give Ruth barley as she leaves (v.15)? What is his reason for this action?

8. From Naomi's statement in v.18, what character trait does Boaz possess?

9. Describe the character of Boaz from his actions in v.10-18.

10. In what ways is God currently growing your character? What character traits are being cultivated in you?

### PICTURES OF GRACE

Grace. It sounds good, but what does it look like practically? How does this word intersect our everyday life? In the meeting between Ruth and Boaz, we see three tangible ways grace appeared in their interaction. These examples point towards how we experience grace in our lives...

1) Ruth was graciously seated at the table. In this time period, where one was seated at the table showed both status and inclusion in the community. Ruth shouldn't have been included in the community at the noon meal because she was a poor foreigner. However, Boaz overlooked both the cultural and social barriers to welcome her into the community.

2) Ruth was graciously served. Not only was she seated at a table and not searching for her noon meal, but she was served by Boaz himself (the owner of the field)! The point leader stooped down to serve the lowest at the table.

3) Ruth was supplied abundantly. Boaz made sure she didn't leave his field that day without being amply supplied. He instructs his workers to leave extra on the ground for her. Ruth leaves the field that day with the equivalent of two weeks of food.

Boaz's gracious dealings with Ruth give a picture of God's movements of grace towards us through Jesus. Just as Boaz graciously seated Ruth at the table of community, God has graciously made a way for us, through Jesus, to enter into fellowship with Him (cf. Eph 2.13). Just as Boaz graciously served Ruth, Jesus stepped out of heaven to serve us through His life, death, and resurrection. He did not come to be served but to serve (cf. Matt. 20:28). He humbled himself to serve those who were not merited to deserve His grace. And just as Boaz supplied food for Ruth, God fully supplies all that we need in Jesus. He provides for our physical needs as he does in creation (cf. Matt. 5), and He has also made provision for the life and health of our souls.

Grace meets you today. Right where you are sitting and reading this statement. The grace of God collides with you in unrelenting passion and pursuit. Will you embrace His grace?

1. What does Ruth offer to do for Naomi in verses 2-3? What does this tell us about Ruth?

2. What is Ruth doing when Boaz first sees her (v.4-7)? How does Boaz show Ruth kindness in their first meeting (v.8-9)?

3. In what way does Boaz show grace to Ruth (v.10-12; cf. "Ruth and Tradition" at the beginning of this study)?

4. In context of this time period, the location of where a person was seated at a table spoke of acceptance within the community. As a foreigner, where would you have expected Ruth to have been seated?

5. In what ways do you graciously welcome others into your community? Describe a situation in which you were an "outsider." How did you feel? How did you move from "outsider" to "insider"?

1. "Uncovering the legs" was a custom at that time that signified a marriage proposal (v.4). Why does Naomi want Ruth to marry Boaz?

2. What does Boaz say is commendable about Ruth's actions (v.10)?

3. What is the reputation of Ruth in the village (v.11)?

4. What is your reputation among your friends and family? How would other people describe your character?

5. Why is it desirable to have a good reputation of character? What is the reason to pursue a worthy reputation?

**PERSON OF SUBSTANCE**

Think of someone that you admire. Not just someone that you find interesting, but a person whom you would want to model your life after. What character traits make this person admirable? Ruth and Boaz were admirable people in their world. They were admirable because very few people were living like they chose to live. Ruth and Boaz lived life with a character of integrity, and they resonate as people to emulate.

The Jewish rabbis said, "In a society where there are no noble people, strive to be a person of substance."

Our world, just like the world of Ruth, is marked by a lack of integrity. Plenty of people become famous, but rarely is their fame due to integrity. The people who are admirable and have lasting influence in the world are people who have established personal integrity. They are people of substance in the midst of a society in which integrity is absent.

Integrity means doing the right thing even in the face of intense temptation and persecution. It means remaining true to your core character, to be whole, to be complete and undivided. The person of integrity is clear and undivided in their pursuit to live well. Unfortunately, people of integrity are rare. We live in the midst of a world that will shift and change at the slightest uncomfortable experience or missed desire.

What if you poured your energy into living with integrity? What would change about your life? What new influence would you have? Where could you be an agent of change in the world?

How will your life be defined - will your life be marked by compromise and easily forgotten, or will you be a person of substance who makes a lasting impression in the world?

6. What does Boaz tell his servants to do for Ruth in verses 15-16? How does this benefit Ruth? Why does he act in this way?

7. Grace can be defined as "unmerited favor" or unnecessarily acting for good. In what ways have you extended grace to someone recently? Describe the last time someone acted in grace towards you.

8. How would you describe the character traits of Ruth in this chapter?

9. In what ways did Ruth care for Naomi? Who has God called you to care for within your sphere of influence?

10. How would you describe the character traits of Boaz in this chapter?

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