

SMALL GROUP

FALL 2021

Dear Students,

Congratulations! Do you know how rare it is for a high school student to find and commit to a small group like this one? The fact that you're holding this booklet represents the reality that God has given you an incredible gift. In this group, you have a community of Christian friends that want to help you grow in your faith. You also have one or more adult leaders who care about you and want to guide you through their teaching and example. You also have this study guide as a tool to help you grow in your understanding and application of God's word!

As you journey through small group this semester, here are three points of advice to help you get the most out of your time:

Be consistent – Make a commitment to yourself and the group to attend as consistently as possible. If you have to miss a meeting, do the lesson on your own and try to catch up with what you missed by checking in with a leader or a friend from group.

Be real – High school can be hard. Be as honest as possible with God, with your leaders, and with your group about what's going on in your life. Don't bury your hurts, failures, questions, or doubts. Pretending everything is always amazing is not the path to growth.

Be open – Your small group might not always meet your expectations. Group members might be shallow, hypocritical, annoying, awkward, or fake. New people might join in the middle of the year and change the dynamic of the room. Remind yourself regularly that God is in control and that He can use anything to produce a positive result. Everyone deserves the gift of Small group and God desires to bless each person in wonderful and unique ways.

Have a great semester studying Ephesians, Philemon, and Ruth!

Small Group Fall 2021 Schedule

August 25 Shoreline
September 1 Ephesians 1
September 8 Ephesians 2
September 15 Ephesians 3
September 22..... Ephesians 4
September 29..... Ephesians 5
October 6 Shoreline
October 13 Ephesians 6
October 20 Philemon
October 27 Ruth 1
November 3 Shoreline
November 10 Ruth 2
November 17 Ruth 3
November 24 Thanksgiving Break
December 1..... Shoreline
December 8 Ruth 4
December 15 Christmas Break
December 22 Christmas Break

Special Events

October 1-3..... Hideaway

Before you begin...

Bring a Bible (Cell Phone Policy)

Cell phones are awesome! They are incredible tools that help us connect with others and discover endless amounts of information. However, our mobile devices can also easily become a huge distraction. For this reason, we highly encourage our small groups to bring a print version of the bible and to put away their phones, iPods, iPads, etc. during the actual bible study portion of your time together.

About Bible Translations:

The best translation of the bible is...the one you actually read! It is important to choose a readable Bible translation to use in your Bible study and small groups. Although there are many great translations, we've decided to write our curriculum based on the easy-to-read, teen-friendly translation called the New Living Translation (NLT). Editors for the NLT have done a great job making God's Word accurate and understandable.

If you're considering a new bible, we recommend a specific version called the NLT Parallel Study Bible by Tyndale House Publishers. It is available online and in bookstores. It contains both study notes and application notes to help you get the most out of your time in the Word!

The Gospel

The gospel is the epicenter of the Christian faith. It is the good news that God became man in the person of Jesus Christ. He lived the life we should have lived and died the death we should have died...in our place. Three days later, he rose from the dead, proving that He is the Son of God and offering the gift of salvation for all who repent and trust in this good news. To find out more, visit MoreShoreline.com and click the "Good News" icon for some awesome videos!

Why Study Ephesians?

Ephesians is a letter written by Paul from prison. Unlike his letters written to other churches, Ephesians does not deal with specific problems in the local congregation. Instead, Paul explains and celebrates general themes about Christianity and the church. The first 3 **chapters**

are theological, emphasizing the basics of Christian doctrine. The last 3 chapters are practical and focus on Christian behavior. The simple goal of this letter is to inspire and equip maturing Christians and churches.

In our small groups, we'll be covering one chapter each week for six weeks. This book is packed with truths that are incredibly helpful and relevant for our lives today. Consider going deeper in your personal time with God by prayerfully examining one chapter at a time. Underline or highlight truths that stand out to you. Jot notes in the margins of your bible. Journal about things that God is teaching you. Ask or research questions when you find something you don't understand. Carefully studying this book will challenge, inspire, and equip you with a wondrous picture of what it truly looks like to walk with God and be a part of His church.

Suggested Memory Verses

Ephesians 1:3

All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ.

Ephesians 2:8-9

8 God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. 9 Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.

Ephesians 2:10

For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.

Ephesians 4:3

3 Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace.

Ephesians 6:10-11 10 A final word: Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. 11 Put on all of God's armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil.

Ephesians 1

Key Points:

(v. 1-2) This greeting is brief compared to many of Paul's letters. Paul starts by expressing his authority as an apostle of Christ Jesus. Essentially, Paul is claiming to have equal authority as the 12 disciples of Jesus. "Grace to you and peace from God" were typical greetings from Paul. Note how "grace" comes before peace. Paul knew that in order to have peace from God, one must first receive God's grace.

(v. 3-14) Originally, this portion of Ephesians would have been one sentence, albeit a long and elegant sentence. In this section, Paul lays out the spiritual blessings one has in Christ. Blessings such as, being made blameless, holy, adopted as sons, being redeemed, forgiven, and inheritance to name a few.

One can read this section and conclude that humans are at the center of the Gospel. While we are valued, predestined, and loved, Ephesians 1 clearly reveals that this is all done "to the praise of his glory". God has sovereignly planned for all things to be united in Christ (v. 10). In sum, this section is filled with glorious truths that one could search forever. We encourage everyone to explore these truths. More than anything, however, one must understand the ultimate purpose is the praise of His glorious name through redemption.

(v. 15-23) What does Paul do after introducing the spiritual blessings for us in Christ? He prays that others would receive these spiritual blessings. Specifically, Paul prays the Ephesians will have the Spirit of wisdom, enlightened hearts, the hope to which they have been called, and the immeasurable greatness of His power. Paul simply wants the Ephesians to recognize the beauty of the Gospel. That Christ, by the power of God, was raised from the dead and seated in Heaven. So, remember, even the best Christians need to pray and be prayed for. Continue to ask God to fill your soul with these spiritual blessings and continue to ask God to enlighten your friends, family, and others.

One last thing... This chapter is one of the most common chapters to visit when studying predestination and election. While we cannot afford to get "lost in the weeds" on this issue, it is

important to understand the truth of v. 4: “In love he predestined us”. If you believe in a God who does not love us, then you have a misunderstanding of God. All of God’s choices, decisions, and actions are done out of love. I start and end with this point because we seem to often forget this when talking about predestination.

Discussion Questions:

1. Ephesians 1:4-5 and 11 indicate that “Even before he made the world...God chose us” and that “he decided in advance to adopt us.” Does God purposely choose some for salvation and not others? What do you believe about “predestination”? On what do you base our belief? Can you think of other places in scripture where these ideas are represented?
2. Ephesians 1:5 says that God decided to “adopt” us. What does it mean to be adopted into the family of God? How do you (or don't you) live out that identity in your daily life?
3. Ephesians 1:7 explains the Christian concept of “redemption”. It means to release someone from prison based on a payment of ransom. Can you explain how sin has imprisoned us? What is the price for freedom from sin? If you have been redeemed, what impact has this had on your life?
4. Ephesians 1:13 states that we have been identified as God’s own by the Holy Spirit. Paul’s language suggests that the Holy Spirit serves as a type of seal or stamp which guarantees our inheritance of eternal salvation and rewards. On a scale of 1 to 10, how sure are you regarding your salvation and eternal destiny? Why did you choose that number? How does this impact your daily life?

Know and Do

In your opinion, what’s the most important idea that you will take away from this chapter?

Ephesians 2

Key Points

(v. 1-10) Let us take a look at the first half of this chapter. Paul makes 3 points in these 10 verses:

1. All of us are dead in our sins.
2. God loved us despite our sins.
3. We are saved by grace through faith.

Before Paul gets any further in this letter, he wants to dispel the notion that any of us are saved by our own merit. None of us are good. We have all sinned and this sin leads to death. Only by God's grace, through faith, are we saved. One of the oldest lies in the world is the belief that eternal life is found through good works. Being "good" is not good enough. Thankfully, Ephesians 2:8-9 make these muddy waters clear. Salvation is not by works. Instead, salvation is by grace, through faith and it is the gift of God. We simply have to accept this gift.

(v. 11-13) Historically, the Gentiles did not have a relationship with God. Verse 12 describes the Gentiles as having been alienated from citizenship, strangers, having no hope, and **without God**. These words have terrible implications. Without God is to be without rest, without hope, without peace, and without joy. Fortunately, these implications do not have to be true. Verse 13 reminds us that the Gentiles are now in Christ Jesus. They are no longer far away. By the blood of Christ, they have been brought near to Him. When you have doubts about your salvation or status as a believer, remind yourself of this verse. Just like the Gentiles you have been bought by the blood of Christ and brought near to Him.

(v. 14-18) Christ sacrificed himself so we may have peace. To be clear, he did not create peace, rather, he is peace. These verses help us understand that we are one under Christ. To put it another way, there must be no division within the body of Christ. No one person, church, or people group has greater access to Christ.

(v. 19-22) Paul concludes this chapter by reminding the Gentiles of their citizenship within the household of God. There are no foreigners, aliens, or outcasts within the Church. All believers are

standing together on the sturdy foundation of the apostles, with Christ as the cornerstone. There is nothing as solid, noble, and perfect as God's Church.

Discussion Questions:

1. Paul begins by reminding us in Ephesians 2:1-3 who we were apart from Christ describing us as "dead". What does it mean to be "dead because of disobedience and many sins?"
2. What does Ephesians 2:5-6 and 8-9 tell us about how a person is saved from God's anger and certain death?
3. Would you say that you are "saved"? If so, what role did you play in your salvation? What role did God play?
4. How can the pressure to be a "good person" distract us from giving God the credit He deserves for salvation and every good thing in our lives? So is it "bad" to want to be a good person?
5. Most people, when they think of themselves, think too highly or too negatively. What does Ephesians 2:10 say about our identity? What keeps you from viewing yourself as God's marvelous work of art?

Know and Do

In your opinion, what's the most important idea that you will take away from this chapter?

How does this chapter move you to action? After reading this chapter, what would God have you start doing, stop doing, or keep doing?

Ephesians 3

Key Points

(v. 1-7) Paul is a prisoner of Christ, a truth we often fail to appreciate. Yes, Paul suffered on Christ's behalf, but he was also cared for and protected by Christ. Why? For the sake of the Gentiles so they may understand the mystery of Christ. The mystery is this: Salvation is found in Jesus Christ.

(8-13) Take a look at verse 8, specifically when Paul calls himself "less than the least of all the saints". Is Paul faking humility here? Or maybe he has low self-esteem? Neither. Paul is a rare type of man who truly understands the weight of his flesh and shortcomings. When, and only when, we acknowledge our sin are we able to have a relationship with God.

(9-13) These verses answer a question: How will the mystery of Christ be communicated? Through pastors and apostles? No, verse 10 states that the wisdom of God will be disclosed by and through the Church. God's plan, since the beginning, has been for us (the Church) to communicate the Gospel to the world, with our boldness and confidence stored in Christ's faithfulness. Do not lose heart in this mission, Paul begs.

(v. 14-21) When reading this prayer, remind yourself of Paul's condition. He is in prison, yet his chief concern is for the Ephesians. Paul prays for Christ to dwell in our hearts. He wants Christ to actually live within us. Not just visit us from time to time like a stranger. And where Christ dwells, the love which surpasses all understanding will also be found.

Discussion Questions:

1. What does Ephesians 3:15-16 teach us about God?
2. Paul knows that God has unlimited resources. Of all the things he could have asked God for (money, freedom, etc.), why do you think Paul asks for “inner strength” in Ephesians 3:16?
3. Look at Ephesians 3:17. Would you say Christ has “made His home” in your heart or is it more like He is an occasional visitor or guest? What’s the difference?
4. Ephesians 3:17 tells us that Christ will “make His home” in the hearts of those who trust in Him. Give some examples of life experiences that God uses to build our trust in Him.
5. The second part of Ephesians 3:17 talks about being rooted in God’s love and staying strong. Have you ever experienced the love of God keeping you strong? Tell us about the experience.
6. According to Ephesians 3:18-19, what are the 3 amazing results of understanding and experiencing the love of God through Christ?

Know and Do

In your opinion, what’s the most important idea that you will take away from this chapter?

How does this chapter move you to action? After reading this chapter, what would God have you start doing, stop doing, or keep doing?

Ephesians 4

Key Points

(v. 1- 6) When scripture repeats itself, pay attention. Verses 4-6 repeat the word “one” 7 time. What theme is scripture trying to illustrate by this repetition? Well, now that Paul has explained the mystery of the Gospel, he wants us to live accordingly. Paul wants God’s people to be unified. We are all united under one Spirit, one hope, one faith, one baptism and one God.

(v. 7-16) Paul describes the various gifts given to the church. Verse 11 describes these gifts as being the leaders of the church (teachers, evangelists, shepherds, etc.) Most importantly, the work of these leaders is to equip the saints for the work of ministry. All members of the body of Christ are called to do ministry. The Church needs each member of the body. We will never be perfect, but together we will grow in maturity, truth, and love in Jesus.

(v. 17-24) Paul reminds the Gentiles to no longer live as Gentiles. For context, the Gentiles were not known as people who loved God. They were known for being ignorant and alienated from God. So, Paul wants the Gentiles to leave this former life. The same is true for us. We were once sinners and in love with this world. But this is not who we are in Christ! Now we are free from sin. The old has gone and the new has come. If you are a Christian, put away your old desires and put on the new self which is created in the likeness of God.

(v. 25-32) Paul has explained the gospel and the gifts we receive. He has encouraged the readers to avoid returning to their former lifestyles. Now, as he concludes this section of the letter, he describes the conduct of the new life. As Christians, we are to put away falsehood, speak truth, labor, do honest work, encourage one another, and forgive one another as Christ forgave us.

This section can be overwhelming. Paul has given a set of commands which are difficult for anyone to follow. Thankfully, we can return back to Ephesians 2:8-9 to remind ourselves that our salvation and status in God’s eyes is not determined by our works. Obedience to these commands simply comes from an overflow of love for God and for others.

Discuss

1. Paul describes different gifts Christ gave his people in verse 4:11-13. Why are these gifts important?
2. Ephesians 4:17-19 talks about the former life of the Gentiles. What is the difference between those who know God and those who do not know him? Think about these verses in the context of your own life. How has your life changed after knowing God?
3. Ephesians 4:25-32 has a list of behaviors that are encouraged and discouraged. List some of the discouraged behaviors and compare them to the encouraged ones.
4. Reading the “dos and don’ts” of scripture can be discouraging. Being a Christian is more than simply following a list of commands. Remember, Ephesians 2:8-9 tells us that we are not saved by works. So, what should our motivation be for doing good?

Know and Do

In your opinion, what’s the most important idea that you will take away from this chapter?

How does this chapter move you to action? After reading this chapter, what would God have you start doing, stop doing, or keep doing?

Ephesians 5

Key Points

(v. 1-5) Paul challenges believers to live in love. We are told not to partake in sexual immorality, foolish talk, or jesting. It can be so easy to make inappropriate jokes and talk foolishly with friends and teammates. But such a person is an idolater.

(v. 6-14) After some commandments, Paul reminds us that we are no longer living in darkness. We are now living in the light of the Lord. What implications does living in the light have? It means we have the fruit of goodness, righteousness, and truth. All things, good and bad are made visible in the light.

(v. 15-21) What does Paul mean in verse 16 when he says the days are evil? Paul wants us to take every opportunity to redeem the time we have. Paul is not saying “You only live once so make the most of it”. Instead, he is saying we should always snatch up opportunities to glorify Christ. Don’t be a fool. Don’t waste your life.

(v. 22-33) After Paul gives some instructions on Christian living (singing, giving thanks, submitting to one another) he gives an example of how this Christian living plays out. This example takes place in the household. Immediately, Paul tells wives to submit to their husbands. This passage can easily be taken out of context, so pay close attention to the text. Most importantly, what does submission mean here?

- Submission does not mean inferiority. The Bible does not say women should submit in business, politics, etc.
- Submission means you recognize someone has legitimate authority over you and follow their leadership. For example, we submit to coaches, teachers, elders, policemen, and government by following their leadership.

Perhaps the most important phrase in this passage can be found in v. 22 “as to the Lord”. This phrase describes the motive behind submission. It does not mean women should submit to their husband if their husband follows the Lord. It does not mean to submit to your husband as if he were God. Instead, “as to the Lord” describes the motive behind submission. In essence, Paul is

calling for women to submit to husbands for the sake of Christ. Prayerfully, the husband is submitting himself to Christ's leadership, and the leader of the whole family is Christ, not man.

Also, let us be clear that Paul also addresses the conduct of husbands in this chapter. Husbands are the head of the household just as Christ is the head of the church. And just like Christ loved the Church, Husbands are to love their wives and give themselves up.

There are many questions concerning the topics addressed in chapter 5. In fact, Paul himself calls marriage "a great mystery." As you encounter challenging subjects in scripture such as this one, I encourage you to find a parent or leader to help understand this passage.

Discussion Questions:

1. Ephesians 5:2 calls us to walk in love. When are you tempted to walk in anger and judgement? What are some ways we can instead walk in love?
2. Ephesians 5:15-21 warns us against being foolish. What is your process for avoiding foolishness and finding out what the Lord wants you to do?
3. Ephesians 5:22-33 can become a divisive and confusing topic. How do we navigate and help ourselves understand difficult topics in the Bible?

Know and Do

In your opinion, what's the most important idea that you will take away from this chapter?

How does this chapter move you to action? After reading this chapter, what would God have you start doing, stop doing, or keep doing?

Ephesians 6

Key Points

(v. 1-4) Paul applies the same ideas in chapter 5 to children, slaves and master in chapter 6.

Children are to honor their parents and fathers are told not to provoke their children.

(v. 5-9) Additionally, bondservants are to serve their masters *with obedience*. We are to obey our earthly masters with enthusiasm as if we were serving the Lord. What does this mean for us? It means Christians are not the type of people to celebrate on Fridays and grumble on Mondays. No, we do every work with enthusiasm.

(v. 10-20) This portion of scripture is a beautiful reminder to put on the armor of God. We are in a war, and we must put on the armor of God until our race is done. Paul starts this section by stating “Finally”. This indicated that Paul wants us to remind ourselves of everything he has said leading up to this point. He wants us to remember that we are children of God, heirs of inheritance, living in the light, called away from our former lives, and called to holy conduct. So, in light of these truths, we are called to **fight**. There is a battle in the Christian life and this passage will help prepare you for this battle. This section has three subsections on how to approach spiritual warfare. First, we rely on the Lord’s strength (v. 10-13). Secondly, we must stand firm (v. 14-17). Lastly, we are to be constant and steadfast in prayer.

(v. 21-24) Paul concludes the letter with general benedictions, and notably he uses the word “love” three times in the last two verses. This is a fitting ending for a book that is filled with reminders of the love Christ Jesus has for us and His church.

Discuss

Questions I want to ask at Small Group about this chapter:

1. Ephesians 6 talks about a battle. Who are we in a battle with and how do we fight this battle?
2. What does an attack from Satan look like?
3. What is the one offensive weapon mentioned in chapter 6? What does this tell you about the Word of God?
4. Why is prayer so important? What does your prayer life look like?

Know and Do

In your opinion, what's the most important idea that you will take away from this chapter?

How does this chapter move you to action? After reading this chapter, what would God have you start doing, stop doing, or keep doing?

Why Study Philemon?

In this short personal letter, the Apostle Paul writes from a prison in Rome asking his friend Philemon to extend forgiveness to a runaway slave named Onesimus (On-iss-e-mos). It is unclear why Onesimus ran away. Perhaps he stole money or property from Philemon. Nonetheless, while Onesimus was fleeing, he somehow met Paul and came to know the Gospel. As you read this letter, you will realize Paul wants Onesimus to help his ministry. However, he recognizes Onesimus needs to reconcile with his master, Philemon. In this letter, it is interesting to think about how Paul (and also Jesus) approached the issue of slavery. Neither tried to attack the social or political system of the Roman Empire. Instead, they simply preached the gospel and called people to a life of love.

The book of Philemon demonstrates the powerful impact of the gospel on social norms. It speaks directly into the world of Dallas high schools. Every school has its own system of social circles and friend groups. There are plenty of excuses for upholding social norms, but Jesus calls us to something different. Paul makes a compelling case for forgiveness, equality, and grace that goes beyond any social barrier or expectation. Our faith should have a radical impact on our social lives!

Suggested Memory Verse

Philemon 1:6

And I am praying that you will put into action the generosity that comes from your faith as you understand and experience all the good things we have in Christ

Philemon

Key Points

Instead of commenting on each individual verse, this commentary is going to look at three of the major themes in Philemon. These themes will be reconciliation, equality, and redemption. Let us start by looking at reconciliation.

Reconciliation

Paul wants Onesimus to help him serve for the sake of the Gospel (v. 13). However, Paul wants there to be amends between Onesimus and his master, Philemon. We are unsure what caused Onesimus to flee, but it is clear that reconciliation needs to happen. Reconciliation involves acknowledging that someone has wronged you, accepting their apology, forgiving them, and choosing to love them and not to harbor bitterness or resentment. Paul could have forced Philemon to let Onesimus be free from his servitude (v. 8). Instead, Paul chose to appeal to Philemon through love rather than by force. (v.9) Paul wants Philemon to *choose* to forgive Onesimus from a heart of love (v. 14).

Equality

There should be no walls or barriers that separate Christian brothers and sisters (v. 16). Christ's death has brought us all together under one banner of grace and love. Paul didn't just preach equality, he exemplified it. He appealed to Philemon in Christian love and not with an authoritative threat or an order (v. 9-14). Exhibiting courtesy and respect can accomplish much more than adopting an attitude of superiority and commands.

Redemption

(v. 17-22) Paul's actions reflected his Christ-like character. Paul offered to pay off all the debts that Onesimus had racked up. This is a small representation of what Christ did for us. On the cross, Jesus took our sin upon himself and paid the debt that we could never pay for ourselves. Because of Jesus, we are no longer slaves to sin, we are sons and daughters of God.

Discussion Questions

1. In your social life, what type of people have you put up walls against? How do you respond to those who are mean, uncool, or different from you?
2. In the eyes of God, Philemon and Onesimus are now equals in Christ (regardless of social distinctions). Have you ever observed inequality amongst Christians? Have you ever looked down on other Christians? Have you ever felt looked down on by other Christians?
3. Is there any outstanding conflict or inequality in your life that need to be resolved? Is there someone in your life who you need to forgive? Is there someone in your life who you need to ask for forgiveness from?

Know and Do

In your opinion, what's the most important idea that you will take away from this chapter?

How does this chapter move you to action? After reading this chapter, what would God have you start doing, stop doing, or keep doing?

Why Study Ruth?

The book of Ruth is about an outsider becoming an insider. Ruth didn't have much going for her. She was poor, foreign, and a widow. According to the law of Israel, Moabites like Ruth should have been excluded from the people of God. Her destiny seemed doomed, but she remained faithful to the God of Israel. Because of her faith, God showers her with blessing and gives her a special place in His family. Her great-grandson turns out to be King David and - no big deal - she ends up getting named dropped in the genealogy of Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:5)!

We must come to a place where we understand that Ruth's story is our story. By nature, Ruth was excluded and yet she trusted God. He sent Boaz as her redeemer, to literally purchase her and rescue her from a hopeless life of poverty. Her life was marked by purpose and a powerful legacy. By nature, we are sinful. We are outsiders and do not deserve to be a part of God's family. God sent Jesus to redeem us and, if we believe and trust Him, we can be saved from an empty life of sin. God welcomes us into his family and has a wonderful plan for our lives!

Suggested Memory Verses

Ruth 1:16

But Ruth replied, "Don't ask me to leave you and turn back. Wherever you go, I will go; wherever you live, I will live. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God.

Ruth 2:12

May the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge, reward you fully for what you have done.

Ruth 1

Key Points

(v. 1) *"In the days when the Judges ruled"*. For context, this book was written when the nation of Israel was ruled by judges. These are not the types of judges that you may think of today. Instead, these judges were warriors God would raise up to help deliver Israel from oppression. This was a time of great turmoil for the nation of Israel.

(v. 2-5) Elimelech, Naomi, and their family fled to Moab to seek a better life. Unfortunately, their lives only became more difficult. Naomi's husband, and her two sons both passed away. Now, Naomi is just left with her two daughters-in-law's, Ruth and Orpah. They are three childless widows. At this time, to be a childless widow was to be among the lowest class. They had no one to support them and would have to live off the generosity of strangers.

(v. 6-15) After the tragic deaths of her family, Naomi decided it was time to head back to her homeland of Judah. But what about Ruth and Orpah? They were native Moabites. They would have nothing if they followed Naomi, not even their homelands. Naomi recognizes this and tries to convince Ruth and Orpah to stay in Moab and not follow her to Judah. After some discussion, Orpah decides to leave, but Ruth clings to Naomi.

(v. 16-18) Naomi continues to persuade Ruth to stay in Moab. Ruth declines and proclaims her loyalty: "Where you go, I will go, and where you stay, I will stay. Your people shall be my people and your God my God." This proclamation is striking. Ruth was a Moabite and a foreigner. She did not know God. Yet, she so greatly admired Naomi's faith that she was willing to lay everything aside to follow her. Just as Ruth left her country behind to follow Naomi, we are also called to leave many things behind to follow Christ.

(v. 19-23) Naomi arrives to her home with Ruth. People began to recognize Naomi, but Naomi insisted they call her "Mara", which translates to "bitter". Naomi has come home empty, poor, childless, and without a husband. While Naomi's life had become bitter, she was not bitter towards God. Many do not respond as well to such harsh circumstances.

"Not everyone reacts to trials the way Naomi did. "Many are humbled, but not humble; low, but not lowly. These have lost the fruit of their afflictions... and are therefore most miserable." (Trapp)"

Discussion Questions

1. Ruth, Naomi, and Orpah felt like all hope had been lost. Have you ever been in a situation where you had no hope? How did you respond and what was the outcome?
2. Ruth was clear she was going to follow Naomi no matter the cost. She trusted God with her future. How much of your future have you given up to God? Are you focused more on your own plans or God's plans?
3. Think about a time when you have suffered or experienced bitter circumstances. What was your reaction? Did you go back to the Lord like Naomi? Or did these bitter moments cause you to avoid God altogether?

Know and Do

In your opinion, what's the most important idea that you will take away from this chapter?

How does this chapter move you to action? After reading this chapter, what would God have you start doing, stop doing, or keep doing?

Ruth 2

Key Points

(v. 1-7) Notice Ruth's attitude. Although life circumstances had made her poor, she did not complain. Instead, she immediately went to work. Ruth went out to harvest grain. The Bible never permits idleness and laziness, no matter the circumstance.

Another important observation in this chapter is the word "kinsman" (or relative depending on translation). This chapter introduces a wealthy man named Boaz as Naomi's kinsman. Being a kinsman is more than just a relative. A kinsman is a special and chief representative of the family. By the providence of God and Ruth's faith, the field she went to work in was one of Boaz's fields. Ruth did not wait for a "spiritual sign" to go work in this field. She simply faithfully went to work just like anyone else. Like we see in Ruth, God will not always give us a clear sign of what He is going to do in our lives. Sometimes, we can only see his providential work in hindsight.

(v. 8-13) Boaz notices Ruth working in the field, and he helps her. Boaz gives her safety, work, and water. Ruth cannot believe the generosity. She cries out saying, "Why have I found favor in your eyes that you should take notice of me, a foreigner?" Notice how Ruth never questioned God during times of hardship, yet she asks questions when she receives a blessing. Ruth displays an attitude of gratitude. She does not consider herself entitled to blessings. Let us, like Ruth, think humbly of ourselves and not have an attitude of entitlement.

(v. 14-18) This is the first time we may see a hint of a relationship forming between Ruth and Boaz. More than letting her work, Boaz also offered to share a meal with her. Most importantly, Ruth ate and was "satisfied". In fact, there was food left over. In the same way, Jesus Christ has claimed to be the bread of life (John 6:35). Ruth was temporarily satisfied, but Jesus offers a satisfaction that will never leave you disappointed. You will be satisfied if you seek Christ.

(v. 17-23) Ruth continues to work hard and brings back the produce home. When Naomi finds out where Ruth worked all day, she revealed that Boaz is one of their "redeemers". The significance of a kinsmen redeemer will be revealed in the next two chapter. For now, simply reflect on the faithful work of Ruth, her loyalty to Naomi, and the generosity of Boaz.

Study and Discussion Questions:

1. Ruth 2:2 describes Ruth as a Moabitess. Living in Bethlehem, this made Ruth a stranger in a foreign land. Do you remember a time in your life when you felt like a stranger? How did you respond?
2. Although a stranger, we see in verses 2-3, that Ruth takes initiative in the midst of unknown and difficult circumstances. Ruth did not make excuses for herself. She took a step of faith. What areas in your life are making excuses in? What areas of your life do you need to take initiative? What is that one thing that requires an action step, a step of faith, from you? What is holding you back and why?
3. In Ruth 2:10-12, we find that Ruth's reputation had gone before her and led her to find favor in the eyes of Boaz. What is your reputation with authority figures? What areas of your life do you feel would lead to you finding favor in the eyes of others? What areas of your life do you feel you would not find favor?
4. Though Ruth may not have always recognized God's guidance, he had been with her every step of the way. Can you think of a time when you could clearly see, after-the-fact, that God had been leading you somewhere or to something?

Know and Do

In your opinion, what's the most important idea that you will take away from this chapter?

How does this chapter move you to action? After reading this chapter, what would God have you start doing, stop doing, or keep doing?

Ruth 3

Key Points

(v. 1-5) The time for harvesting has come to an end, and Ruth and Boaz had likely gotten to know each other better over the course of time. Naomi must have recognized the potential for a relationship, and she reminds Ruth that Boaz is their “relative”, which is sometimes translated as “kinsman redeemer”. What is so important about this?

Well according to the Law at the time, the kinsman redeemer was responsible for buying a fellow Israelite out of slavery, buying back family blood, and among other things he was responsible for marrying a **childless widow** (Deuteronomy 25: 5-10). So, when Naomi encourages Ruth to wash herself, uncover his feet, and lie down, she is not suggesting for Ruth to be sexually provocative. All these actions were considered to be humble forms of submission at the time. Naomi is advising Ruth to go to Boaz in a humble and submissive way to claim her right to be redeemed.

(v. 6-11) Ruth followed Naomi’s advice and went to the threshing floor to meet Boaz. Ruth asked Boaz to “spread his wings” (v. 9). Essentially, this was Ruth’s way of asking Boaz to marry her as a widow.

Boaz’s conduct towards Ruth in this moment must be praised. He could have easily mistreated or taken advantage of Ruth sexually in this situation. Instead, he chose to encourage her, commend her, and praise her for her character. Boaz was attracted to Ruth, yet he chose to honor her.

(v. 12-13) There was a potential problem. Naomi had a closer relative who had the primary right to redeem Ruth. Boaz wants to honor this other man’s rights to redeem Ruth. If this man declines these rights, Boaz states he will redeem Ruth himself. Take notes on Boaz’s character. He does not shy away from responsibility. In fact, like a Godly man, he is going to do everything in his power to make this situation right.

(v. 14-18) Thankfully, because of their faithfulness to purity, there would be no scandal here. Now, the only question that remains is who will Ruth be married to?

Discussion Questions:

1. While everything worked out fine for Ruth and Boaz, do you think it is best to enter into situations that could be potentially compromising to your purity? How do we avoid these situations?
2. Proverbs 13:20 says, “Walk with the wise and become wise; associate with fools and get in trouble.” Ruth and Boaz are a perfect example of wisdom in action. They helped each other maintain integrity. If you want to preserve godly character, it is of utmost importance to associate with others who share the same morals and convictions. Consider your past and current associations (friends, dating relationships, etc.). Who helps you grow in wisdom? Who gets you into trouble?
3. Look at Ruth 3:12-13. Clearly, Ruth and Boaz were alone together, and this was a moment that could have led to sexual sin. But verses 12 & 13 are clear that Boaz had an understanding of what was right, and he had made up his mind to not compromise. Do you have God-informed moral standards that you have made up your mind to uphold? What can you do today to prepare for the moral tests that might come tomorrow?

Know and Do

In your opinion, what’s the most important idea that you will take away from this chapter?

How does this chapter move you to action? After reading this chapter, what would God have you start doing, stop doing, or keep doing?

Ruth 4

Key Points

(v. 1-6) Boaz begins to act on his commitment to Ruth. He finds the redeemer, sits him down among elders, and asks the primary redeemer if he wishes to redeem Naomi's land and marry Ruth. This kinsman redeemer rejected to redeem Naomi and Ruth when he learned he would also have to marry Ruth. We cannot place too much blame on him. He likely had a wife already, so this would have been an awkward situation to take Ruth home as well. Fortunately, the nearest kinsman redeemer asks Boaz to take the right of redemption.

(v. 7-12) Boaz proceeds through the required ceremony to make the redemption possible. As he gives a speech, it is clear that Boaz is not concerned about the land is about to receive from Naomi. More than anything, he is proud to be able to have a Godly and faithful wife.

(13-22) Ruth had a son, and not just any son. This son, named Obed, is the grandfather of another man named David. David eventually became king of all of Israel and was known as a man who was "after God's own heart". Even great than this, through the line of David, Jesus Christ would be born!

So, in sum, God used a broken, poor, childless, widowed, and hopeless family to be a part of the Jesus's family tree. If you think this story is simply about dating and marriage, you are thinking too narrowly. The greatest conclusion from this story is understanding that God takes broken people, He redeems them, and He sovereignly uses every situation for good. I hope you leave this book knowing that, despite your circumstance, God is working in your life, is hoping you will draw near to Him, and desires for us to know that He loves us.

Discussion Questions:

1. Marrying a foreign widow probably wasn't part of Boaz's plan for his future, but he was faithful to the Lord when this opportunity was given to him. He continued walking through the doors God opened without taking any short-cuts. Can you think of a time when God gave you an opportunity that you weren't expecting? How did you respond?

2. Ruth 4:5 shows Boaz's great integrity. It was clear that Naomi wanted him to buy her field and marry Ruth, but Boaz knew that there was another man in line ahead of him for this privilege. Boaz took the opportunity to the other man and told him the whole truth. In your own life, do you tell the full story, or are you more likely to just say what will help you get your way?

3. The Book of Ruth is a story of redemption. God rescued Ruth from a hopeless destiny, brought greater things into her life than she could imagine, and made the greatness of His name known. Do you have your own personal story of redemption? God used Boaz to foreshadow Jesus Christ. What does it mean for you to be redeemed by Jesus?

Know and Do

In your opinion, what's the most important idea that you will take away from this chapter?

How does this chapter move you to action? After reading this chapter, what would God have you start doing, stop doing, or keep doing?

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