

# RUTH: REDEEMING THE MESS

ruth 2.1-13: accidents and divine activity

## Questions for Personal Study

- Read Ruth 2.1-13. What is your impression of the story thus far?
- How do you see God at work in this chapter? Do the characters see it?
- Is it possible to become more aware of how God is working in our lives?
- How are you like or not like Ruth and Boaz in your character?
- How do you think their understanding of hesed influenced their character?

## Questions for Study in Community

- Share an “accident” this week in which you later saw the hand of God.
- Together make a list of the character qualities of Ruth and Boaz in ch. 2.
- What can single people learn from their conversation in ch. 2? Marrieds?
- How do you see the gospel in this section of Ruth?

## Questions for Staying on Mission

- Read the article on “What a Missional Community Is.”
- Which of the targets are you already hitting? Celebrate that together!
- Discuss how this definition is different from where you’ve been as a group.
- Consider how Boaz used wealth, resources, and relationships to bless Ruth.
- Commit together to intentionally bless 3 different people this week.

## Thoughts for Parents

Each night this week, either around the dinner table or before bed, take some time to read and explain the story of Ruth 2.1-13 to your kids. Here are some ideas for discussion and teaching. As always, be honest about your own failings, pray fervently for your kids, and keep pointing them to Jesus!

- Contrast Boaz and Elimelech. What makes Boaz such a great dude?
- Discuss Ruth’s willingness to work hard & serve Naomi. Why does she do it?
- Show your kids how Boaz is much like Jesus in his treatment of Ruth.
- How is Ruth an example of godly feminine character?
- Talk about what it means that Ruth has come under God’s “wings.”
- Just as Boaz prays for Ruth, pray together for the needy in your life.
- Fathers, pray this week that your kids would know the hesed of God in you!
- Mothers, pray this week that your kids would find refuge in God’s wings!

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## A Worthy Man

The first chapter of Ruth is tragic: an Israelite named Naomi finds herself all alone in the pagan nation of Moab, her husband and two sons dead, with only the wives of the sons to comfort her. Hearing that the Lord has graciously visited his people in Israel with food, Naomi decides to return home, albeit bitter and frustrated with God’s work in her life. But Naomi doesn’t yet see the whole picture of God’s activity, for Ruth is with her, it is barley harvest, and God is up to something good.

Chapter two opens by introducing us to Boaz, the man who will become the human hero of this story, primarily because he models his character after the Lord. Boaz is a “worthy man,” a title that highlights his integrity, his wealth, and the strength of his influence in the community. The unfolding of this incredible story in many ways relies on the masculine strength of Boaz: his deep commitment to the Lord, his gentle provision for the weak and marginalized, and his chivalrous protection of the young Moabite widow, Ruth. The narrator also tells us that he is related to Naomi through her deceased husband, a tidbit of information that will later become a key to the story.

## Going Out To Glean

Although Naomi and Ruth are now back in Judah, they’ve lost the men that in their patriarchal society would have had the responsibility to protect and provide for them, so they are likely impoverished and hungry. But Ruth is a woman of extraordinary character, and in an act of selfless commitment to her bitter mother-in-law, Ruth heads to the fields to “glean.” In the Law, God had provided a means by which the poor could be cared for within the community: land owners were commanded to not harvest the edges of their fields, nor to go over the fields more than once, in order to leave adequate provision for the poor who came “gleaning,” working hard to harvest whatever was left over.

Gleaning is the Old Testament equivalent to the food bank or social services today, and in doing so, Ruth is not only humbling herself but also showing courage and confidence that the Lord will show himself faithful: “Let me go to

the field and glean... after him in whose sight I shall find favor.” Ruth is again using the word *hesed* (translated “favor”) which means “loving kindness” or “covenant faithfulness.” Essentially, Ruth is stepping out in faith that God will provide in one way or another for her and for Naomi, though she doesn’t see how. She knows that God has provided the concept of gleaning in his Law as a way to provide for the needy, and she is walking out in obedience, trusting that he will provide what is necessary. She shows her character not only in being willing to humble herself and serve Naomi but also in her simple faith and solid work ethic. Though her situation is bleak, she goes to work in confident hope that the God of *hesed* has a plan that will unfold to his glory and her good.

### **Accidental Activity**

In v. 3, the narrator ironically says that Ruth “happened to come” to the fields of Boaz. In the Hebrew it literally says she “happened to happen,” and it is the narrator’s way of highlighting the sovereign work of God despite the characters inability to see it. The narrator knows - just as we do - that nothing happens by accident - that is, after all, the main theme of Ruth! And yet, we all know from experience that many things seem to “just happen.” From Ruth’s perspective, she just happened to come to Boaz’s field; from God’s perspective, it is all unfolding according to his perfect sovereign plan!

In fact, it is hard to imagine a more perfect plan: Ruth, the widowed foreigner, in need of provision, protection, and family, ends up in the field of a single, wealthy man who loves God and wants a family. And then, as if on cue, Boaz comes from town into the field to pray for his workers and check on the fields. Accident? Not a chance!

Boaz immediately notices Ruth in his field, inquires with his young field hand about who she might be, and learns that she is the recent convert from Moab. How does a man like Boaz treat a woman like Ruth? In these first conversations we get a glimpse of the kind of strong and tender man God would have all men be and the kind of gentle and quiet character that should adorn a woman of God.

For his part, Boaz treats Ruth as a daughter, provides her a job, introduces her to the other young women who work for him, and tells the young men to keep their eyes and hands off of her. He goes much beyond the letter of law and blesses and honors Ruth as a woman who has found refuge in God and been a blessing to God’s people. Just as he did for his workers, Boaz prays for

Ruth, asking that God would fill her life with abundance in every way. Though she is younger than him, vulnerable, poor, and has been working in the field all day, Boaz - like the God he worships - honors her for her character and treats her with *hesed*. He is the kind of man who should be imitated.

Ruth is equally worthy of imitation for a number of reasons. First, she is truly humble and not self-absorbed, a fact that is clearly seen in her surprise that a man like Boaz would take notice of her. Second, in her godly wisdom she asks Boaz *why* he is showing her such kindness, thereby getting to the heart and purpose of Boaz. She is a woman who does not have time for flattery or false pretense; she wants to know where he is going with his display of kindness. Finally, once she is certain that Boaz is pure in his intentions to her, she is not afraid to speak honorably of him and thank him for his genuine interest, even seeing him as the answer to her prayers for God’s favor and provision.

In this first exchange between Boaz and Ruth, the author leaves us guessing as to the romantic nature of it. Where will the relationship go from here? Is it simply “chance” which has brought them together? Will this meeting blossom into love, marriage, and babies? Could Boaz be the one through whom God will redeem the mess of Ruth’s and Naomi’s lives? The story is getting better!

### **God In Our Accidents**

If chapter one was about how God is at work in the tragic consequences of our sin and folly, the first part of chapter two is about how God in His sovereign goodness is at work in what often seem to us like accidents. Neither Ruth nor Boaz is aware of what God is up to in this “accidental” meeting, much in the same way that we are so often ignorant of what God is up to in the seemingly mundane events of our lives.

Part of what makes this first meeting so beautiful is the rich and deep character of Ruth and Boaz. Ruth, though she is a recent convert, shows incredible faith, courage, and humility. Unlike many women today, she is not absorbed with herself or her image but puts her trust fully in God’s sovereign power and faithful love to those who call on him. Boaz, whose name means “strength,” shows his strength by being a man who worships God, prays for those near him, functions with integrity in business, treats the poor with mercy, and honors women as equals while showing himself to be a model of chivalrous strength.

Finally, the contrast between Ruth’s poverty and Boaz’s wealth reminds us that righteous character and godly actions can adorn poor and rich alike.