



**ENTER** God's presence

**Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his Holy name...The Lord works vindication and justice for all who are oppressed...The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.**

– Psalm 103:1,6,8

Lord God, as we walk together through the story of Ruth, open our eyes and ears to see and hear again a story of redeeming love and faithfulness, the kind of love which you have given us through your Son Jesus Christ, Amen.



**SHARE** life together

1. **Where have you seen God's power at work in your life this last week?**
2. **Share how you went with your living purposefully from last time?**
3. **What do you think of the saying, 'The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence'? How have you experienced it to be true/false in your life?**
4. **What are some things in your life that you have been tempted to just walk away from?**

Sometimes every hope is destroyed, every dream shattered and every plan is crushed. Sometimes life goes to ruin in an instant. Sometimes we walk away from the very blessings before us. But in those moments when you wonder if God has forgotten you or even intentionally stepped on your heart, God has not left you to crumble on your own. He is still holding you, leading you, working in you for his glory. In the very worst of times, we discover the mystery of God's mercy at work to bring fullness from our desolation and blessing from our bitterness. We'll explore that together and over the next 4 weeks as we experience the 'Sweetness of Redemption' from the book of Ruth as God leads us from Bitterness to Blessing.

Week beginning:  
Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> June 2020

Worship series:

**The Sweetness of Redemption**



**VERSE** for the week

**But Ruth said, "Do not press me to leave you or turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; where you stay, I will stay; your people shall be my people, and your God my God."**

Ruth 1:16



**REMEMBER** this week

**Even in the midst of dark, difficult, and chaotic times, God is with us; working behind the scenes in the lives of his people to bring redemption, blessing and joy.**



**LISTEN** attentively

## Read Ruth Chapter 1

- 5. What key words/thoughts/ideas/questions arise for you as you hear this text?**
- 6. What do you hear this scripture saying to you right now?**
- 7. Who do you think shows the greatest 'faithfulness' in this chapter? Why?**

In a story like this, the details we are given in the beginning serve to set up the rest of the story. Particularly for the Israelites, the names of people and places were very significant. In Hebrew, Elimelech means 'my God is King' yet at the signs of famine and hardship in the land Elimelech leaves Bethlehem (which means 'house of bread') and moves his family to Moab who were not part of God's kingdom. Mahlon is commonly translated as "sickness" and Chilion as "destruction". Even the names of the Moabite wives foreshadow their role in the story. Orpah means young deer or fawn, and when given the chance, she ran back home to her family like a young deer might take flight. Ruth on the other hand, means 'friend' and we certainly see how she befriends Naomi (which means 'pleasant') as the story progresses.



**GROW** deeper

We tend to focus on the actions and faithfulness of Ruth toward Naomi in this story and there are good reasons to do so. However, it is worth taking a look at Naomi's reactions and responses to her two daughters-in-law. Through marriage, these women had become family, but the prospects for each of them as widows in that time and place were bleak at best, especially considering that there were no men left in that family to take responsibility or care for them. Naomi was heading home to try and find help from her own people and was ready to release the two young women to return to their homes and do likewise.

- 8. Even in her own desperate situation and grief, Naomi first considered the wellbeing of her daughters-in-law. How well do we see and address the needs of others when our own lives are troubled?**
- 9. Ruth and Orpah demonstrate two different ways of dealing with things when life seemed to fall apart. One is to try and go back to the way things were before the crisis, the other is to move forward boldly into something new. Which of these is your default response? What are the pro's and con's of each?**

One of the things which can be overlooked in this particular part of the story of Ruth, is the role of empathy. Naomi knew what it was like to be a widow in a foreign land. That had been her experience since the death of her husband in the land of Moab. Although Ruth was still in her own country, she knew some of the grief and loss that Naomi felt, having lost her own husband and being widowed and left without children or prospects for the future. The ability to identify with the suffering of others is a powerful tool in understanding and supporting people in difficult times.

- 10. How do you see empathy at work in this story? Where do you see it at work in the world today?**
- 11. Is empathy something that some people just have and others don't or do you think it can be learned and practiced?**

The reaction of the people in Bethlehem when Naomi and Ruth return, gives a sense of how drastically her situation had changed. From being blessed with a husband and two sons, to returning a widow with a widowed daughter-in-law in tow had obviously changed her. Here again, names are significant. Naomi, which means 'pleasant' now tells everyone to call her 'Mara' which means 'bitter' and in verses 20-21 you can understand why. Significant life challenges change us, there is no denying that, but if we allow him, God wants to take us out of our bitterness and fill our lives with blessing.



## **LIVE** purposefully

While we have only considered the beginning of the story of Ruth, even in chapter one it seems as though Naomi and Ruth were a blessing to each other in their grief and sorrow. While we all have our own struggles to deal with at the moment in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, we also know other people whose struggles are similar or greater than our own.

- 12. Who is someone that you know of that is doing it tough at the moment? It may not be due to the pandemic, perhaps they have other struggles. How could you show empathy and support for them in their struggle this week?**
- 13. Perhaps the most significant part of Ruth's declaration to Naomi in verse 16 is the statement, 'Your God will be my God'. This is the same God whom Naomi later blames for all their misfortune. How do our misfortunes sometimes skew our perception of reality and our ideas about God? Think about how you might respond to someone who wants to blame God for all the bad things that happen in their life.**



## **PRAY** intentionally

- Praise God for his steadfast love and faithfulness, for redeeming us from our sin and restoring us to abundant life.
- Ask God to help you and the church as a whole, to act with empathy towards others and not to judge people based on their financial or social status, but to always act towards others with the love of Jesus.
- Pray for unity like that of Naomi and Ruth within the church and around the world. Pray that in the midst of the Coronavirus pandemic, we might all learn to be less self-centred and more 'other-people centred'



## **BLESS** one another

You might like to address one person in your group and make the sign of the cross in the air as you say...

**[Name], God has and is blessing you. Amen**