

WEEK ONE

A STUDY BOOK OF
RUTH



WRITTEN BY
JENIFFER DAKE

flourish

DESIGNED & PRODUCED BY
USA SOUTHERN TERRITORY WOMEN'S DEPARTMENT

Contents

6-Week Ruth Bible Study

ESV translation used unless otherwise noted

Week One: **Providence**

Ruth 1:1-6

Week two: **Gleaning**

Ruth 1:7-2:4

Week Three: **Response**

Ruth 2:5-23

Week Four: **Approach**

Ruth 3:1-18

Week Five: **Redeemer**

Ruth 4:1-12

Week Six: **Choices**

Ruth 4:13-22



A NOTE FROM JENIFFER

Thank you for joining me on a journey through Ruth. This first week is going to dive deep into the first six verses of this book. It may seem like a slow start. Please trust me on this; understanding the details of how this book begins is key to knowing the beauty and power with which it ends. While many of you may have studied this book previously, I pray this next six weeks will bless you and deepen your knowledge of how God works in the midst of the ordinary moments of life to bring about the extraordinary.



Ruth 1:1-6

"In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land, and a man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons. The name of the man was Elimelech and the name of his wife Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They went into the country of Moab and remained there. But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons. These took Moabite wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. They lived there about ten years, and both Mahlon and Chilion died, so the woman was left without her two sons and her husband. Then she arose with her daughters-in-law to return from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the fields of Moab that the Lord had visited his people and given them food."

DAY ONE

Ruth 1:1a

PRAYER

Lord, protect my time as I prepare to study your word. Draw me close to your spirit and open my eyes to my own condition, that I may see your providence and my choices clearly.

SCRIPTURE

“In the days when the judges ruled there was a famine in the land”

Before we even dive into the single verse of today's study I think it is important we solidify our understanding of *Providence and Miracles*. When I was young, I remember praying God would do miracles in me and through me, but now as a mom, a wife, and a school teacher, I am praying that God's good hand (Ezra 8:22) would move in the **ordinary moments of life**.

Oxford uses the following definitions:

Providence: the protective care of God or of nature as a spiritual power.

Miracle: a surprising and welcome event that is not explicable by natural or scientific laws and is therefore considered to be the work of a divine agency.

More simply put, miracles are those one-time events that defy natural laws while providence uses the ordinary moments to bring about the extraordinary. This is what we see throughout the book of Ruth; ***please keep your eyes open for the ordinary that becomes extraordinary for Ruth.***

The beginning tells us so much, for each of you, your story started long before you picked up this study. Take a minute to finish this opening verse for yourself:

In the days when...

Would you like ideas to write your verse? Here you go: In the days when kettle season just ended, camp planning began, my kids started a new school, we are nervous about moving, my marriage is on the rocks, I am tired of being single, and at the same time I don't want to be married, I am uncertain of my calling, I am frustrated with everything, I am tired, I am expecting, all seemed right, I don't feel like enough, the divorce was finalized, the judges ruled).

Ruth was living "in the days when the judges ruled." For the full understanding of what this meant, we need to turn back a page to Judges 21:25. "In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in their own eyes." This was a horrible time for Israel; with no king on the throne, they were choosing to live with no law. Each person decided what was right for them with little regard for their neighbors, and no regard for the laws God had given them. Thus the verse finishes: ". . . there was a famine in the land." There are many reasons famines occur; war, weather (drought, high rainfall, wind), attack of insects and other pests. But according to Deuteronomy 28,* it is safe to say this famine is the result of Israel's disobedience. In fact that chapter lays out the blessings for obedience and the curses for disobedience.

It is safe to say, for according to Deuteronomy 28: the productivity of your land shall be proportionate to your obedience to God.

Can we rest on that for a moment? My productivity at _____ shall be proportionate to my obedience to God.

Hardships come to all; even those whom God loves get sick (John 11:3). We need to stop looking at why and start seeking the purpose. God disciplines those he loves (Hebrews 12:6) to draw us into his presence and refine us.

2 Chronicles 15:3-7 reflects on God's active presence even in the midst of the hardest time.

"but when in their distress they turned to the Lord, the God of Israel, and sought him, he was found by them"

It is here where Ruth's story begins; the lawlessness of society, a time of famine for God's people, and a promise from God to be found by those who seek him.

DAY TWO

Ruth 1:1b-2

PRAYER

Lord, protect my time as I prepare to study your word. Draw me close to your spirit and open my eyes to my own condition, that I may see your providence and my choices clearly.

SCRIPTURE

"and a man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons. The name of the man was Elimelech and the name of his wife Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They went into the country of Moab and remained there."



"A man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab." It's interesting to me that the Scriptures point out he was from Bethlehem in Judah. Bethlehem by definition means House of Bread, Judah means land of milk and honey. So, here we have a country who by the very definition has everything needed for survival. It is the House of Bread, the land of milk and honey and yet there was a famine in the land. The response to that famine is that this man, Elimelech, takes his family and sojourns in the country of Moab, a country that kept food and water from the people of that land. Moab was the enemy of God's people. Yet, when life got rough in the House of Bread, this man ran away, straight into the hands of the enemy.

It was as though Elimelech decided if God couldn't do it for him the way he wanted it done, then he would take his family and go do it for himself in the land of Moab.

May I ask you now, so boldly, how are you responding to the famine? Are you running away because life isn't what you expected? Because the hand of God isn't what you signed up for?

God permits the famine to draw us into his presence. Is the famine in your land drawing you in, or is it driving you out?

The providence of God that crushes us is the very same providence of God that gives us life. When we become bitter to God's providence, it can blind us to the blessings that God's providence has for us.

How you respond to the providence of God whether that providence is bringing famine or plenty. It is your choice. Elimelech and Naomi took their sons and ran away to the city that kept bread and water from them. What are you choosing? How are you responding?

"The name of the man was Elimelech"

Names in the Bible are very significant; Elimelech's name means "Lord is king." He literally proclaimed God is king everywhere he went, and yet he did not trust him to move in the midst of hardship, so he ran away to the land of Moab. It is as though Elimelech didn't what to be where God had placed him for the season he had placed him.

you have a choice.

The story of Jesus and the fig tree in Mark 11, is a beautiful example of what it means to be in the season God asks us to be in. Jesus and his disciples are walking from Bethany to Jerusalem and they are hungry. Jesus sees a fig tree in the distance. But, it's not the season to make figs, and Jesus walks up, and he searches for a fig but finds nothing. The scripture is clear; it wasn't the season for figs, but his response is to curse the tree. "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." I read this, and for the longest time I felt as though God was being unfair to his creation. I could never understand why Jesus would walk up to a fig tree and curse it. The tree is doing what it is supposed to do: it's growing. While I know that God is a just God, honestly, it made me mad until the day I realized God was calling that fig tree to a purpose: produce food to feed the very one who created you.

The tree was called by the creator, touched by the creator and the tree responded by choosing NOT to obey the hand of the creator. If the wind and the waves obey him at his voice (Matthew 8) then surely a tree can obey him at his touch.

The fig tree was cursed by Jesus because it chose to stay subject to its season and not its creator. Like Elimelech the tree was choosing what season it wanted to be in and not obeying the Lord.

God called to the tree, and it did not answer. God touched the tree, and it did not produce. God rummaged through the tree intensifying the call and the touch and the tree said not my season. Sorry I'm not gonna do that right now, God, because it's not my season. God's response: because you are subject to your season and not your creator, nobody will eat of your fruit.

The question then becomes are we being subject to our calling or to the season we are in?

Elimelech and his family remained in their season in Moab. They didn't call out to God, and they didn't obey his call on their life, so they suffered for this. But the crushing providence of God will draw Naomi back to a place where she can receive the blessings of his providence.

Providence

REFLECTION

What am I being subject to?

What do I trust more than I trust God?

How do my priorities need to change?

Have I become bitter to the providence of God?

Am I proclaiming God as King but not trusting him?

PRAYER

Lord, help me trust you in the times of famine to be my provider. Let me focus more on the one who has created me rather than on my physical needs. Help me not to be subject to my season, but to be subject to you, Lord, and help me to see that the good hand of my God is upon me. Amen.

DAY THREE

Ruth 1:3-4a

PRAYER

Lord, protect my time as I prepare to study your word. Draw me close to your spirit and open my eyes to my own condition, that I may see your providence and my choices clearly.

SCRIPTURE

"But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons. The sons took Moabite wives; the name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other, Ruth."



As they remained in the land of Moab, things went from bad to worse and Elimelech the husband of Naomi died. The full implications of this are not emotionally understood to us in this culture. Naomi had left the house of her father to marry her husband. She became a part of Elimelech's house in Judah, not only living in his physical house, but she was now legally tied to the establishment of his family line. If anything happened to Elimelech, it was the responsibility of his house to care for Naomi and her children. Had they remained in Judah, Naomi and the boys would have moved back into the grandparents home upon the death of Elimelech.

However, when Elimelech moved his family to Moab they left the house of Elimelech's family line. So upon his death Naomi is left house-less. She is a widow, a foreigner in the land of her enemy, and the mother of two unwed sons. She could have packed up and taken the month long journey back to Judah. That would have been the right choice. Return to the place of protection.

Sit on that thought for a minute. Everyday we have choices; they are either drawing us into the presence of God and his protection or pulling us away from it.

What choices are you making right now?
Are you choosing to return to the place of protection?

The sons decided to fix the problem their way, not God's. You can't blame them; after all this is what their father did years earlier. I wonder how often he taught the boys, "when God doesn't work the way you want him to, do it your own way." Maybe he didn't say it, but he defiantly lived it. After all it is what brought them to Moab, and now upon their father's death, it is what will keep them in Moab.

What are you teaching those around you about how to respond to God when his providence is hard or when things aren't going your way, or do you have to do it yourself because it is the only way it will be done right? How do you respond when you believe the places God has called you to and the people he has given you to work along side are not the right choices? So, will you do it your own way?

These boys decide that they can solve the problem of not having a house or a clan by marrying wives and becoming their own house. This is where I like to say, things go from bad to worse for they choose Moabite wives. God is very clear in Deuteronomy 23 that the Israelite men are not to marry Moabite women. In fact, he is so set on this that the punishment for marrying a foreign wife of Moabite descent is to be cast down for 10 generations.

How many times do we find ourselves trying to solve our circumstances our own way when instead the answer might be to return to where we first left God's plan. It is as if we believe if we continue to go farther in the wrong direction we can find the answer.

One of my favorite stories in the Old Testament scripture is found in Second Kings Chapter 6. There is a group of godly men who decide they want to increase the size of God's temple. So they go to the prophet of the Lord and ask permission to go to the river and cut logs. Once granted permission they ask the prophet of the Lord to join them. In short they have asked for the blessing and the presence of God to be with them in their endeavor, both of which are granted.

Do you ask for both? How often in your prayers are you asking for both his blessing on a situation and his presence? I can honestly say I may ask for one but not the other depending on the situation.

These men have done it all right, but as the story continues something goes wrong. "As one of them was cutting down a tree, the axe head fell into the water [and sank]." In this moment of despair the man could have jumped in the river after the axe head, or gathered all his friends around to talk about how unfair it was that God allowed this to happen since he was only trying to work for God's house, or he could have just thrown the handle in the water and walked home. But instead he cried out directly to God, "Oh no, master! It was borrowed!"

It is as though he walks into the presence of God, and he prays about his tragic loss. And God's response through the prophet is: "Show me where it fell." They walk back to the spot in the river where this axe head fell, and the prophet works a miracle. The axe head rises to the surface of the water and floats. This must have shocked the man because Elisha says, "Pick it up." The disciple reached for it and picked it up."

I think I am drawn to this story because the prophet doesn't just solve the problem for the disciple. Elisha requires the man to go back to the place where he lost the axe head. I imagine, as they are walking back to the spot on the river bank, this disciple is recounting the details of what happened, reflecting on the choices he made and just possibly seeing why it all went wrong.

Have you lost your axe head? Not sure? I know I have lost mine when I am easily frustrated, or when I am just waiting to have a reason to throw down the handle and walk away from the task at hand, or when I am the center of a ring of people crying out about the unfairness of my circumstances.

It might be helpful to journey back to the place where you lost your axe head and pick a trusted friend who will direct your heart to the presence of God in the midst of your circumstances. Talk it out and ask God to help the weight of your heart float on the waters of his presence.

REFLECTION

Do you need to return to a place of protection?

Where have you lost your axe head?

How are you teaching others about the character of God by how you respond to his providence?

PRAYER

Lord, help me see the areas of my life where I am trying to fix it myself. Help me trust that you Lord are king, and that you have a place of protection for me.

DAY FOUR

Ruth 1:4b-5

PRAYER

Lord, protect my time as I prepare to study your word. Draw me close to your spirit and open my eyes to my own condition, that I may see your providence and my choices clearly.

SCRIPTURE

"They lived there about ten years, and both Mahlon and Chilion died, so that the woman, Naomi, was left without her two sons and her husband."



The boys have married, and it seems as though everything is going to work out. Naomi is now part of two families in the community. Her sons are building a house of their own; surely grandchildren are on the way. Naomi is established maybe for the first time since leaving Judah. There must have been a peace of heart settling in; yet, I can't help but wonder if somewhere in the back of her mind Naomi knew it wasn't right.

In a culture where women desired to have children and were not waiting for the right time to get pregnant, 10 years is a long time to be married and childless. I imagine the conversations about children slowly lessened as the women worked together to take care of the men in their lives. As the weeks turned to months and the months to years, I wonder if they had given up hope. Were the extended members of their families referring to them as barren? Did Naomi see it as a curse from God on her family since she allowed, maybe even encouraged her boys to marry these Moabite women?

One thing is certain; the life they attempted to build their way was about to crash down upon them all. Both of the boys died. While scripture doesn't tell us why they died, their names might give us a clue. Mahlon means "sickly" and Chilion means "frail" or "crying child." The ancient Targum blames their death on their wives being Moabites; the Talmud claims God struck them because they left Israel in the first place.

No matter the reason, we now have 3 widows and no children.

Because widows are extremely vulnerable, God has set up a plan to protect and provide for them. God promises to hear the cries of the widow and carry out his wrath on those who abuse a widow (Ex. 22:21-24). God creates a system where every three years, the people are to store their tithes for Levites, the fatherless, widows, and sojourners (Deut. 14:28-29) and farmers are forbidden to harvest the edges of their fields. They are to leave them for the fatherless and widows (Deut. 24: 19-22)

God has not forgotten the widows. In fact he has provided richly for them. God has not forgotten you; in your desperate times God has a plan. God is in fact writing the story, and he knows what is needed to sustain you to the end.

Unfortunately, for Naomi, she is not in Israel where God has provided for her.

Sometimes when we don't feel the provision of God, it is less about God not providing and more about us not being in the right place. For Naomi that right place was in fact a physical location, but for many of us that "right place" is a mental, emotional and spiritual place. Are we able to see how God is moving in the place where he has called us. Are we placing ourselves under his hand of protection in the place where he has called us to? Or are we checked out? Have we predetermined that this task God has called us to is not really for us?

As we will see in the coming verses, Ruth and Orpah's circumstances are a bit more hopeful than Naomi's. They are in their homeland; they can return to the house of their mother and father. They still have a chance to be married and bear children. For Naomi, this is her darkest hour. She will reflect on her time in Moab as it being the place that the Lord emptied her.

Today I want to leave you with the question: Are you in the right place mentally, emotionally and spiritually to receive the provisions of God?

REFLECTION

What parts of my life seem to be crashing in on me?
What parts of my life seem to be working but lack the abundance of God's presence?
What changes can I make to move myself closer to God's will?
Am I in the place I need to be to receive your provision?

PRAYER

Lord, help me to know you are in the dark places, that you are able to speak to me when nothing seems to be going as planned. Help me draw near to you when I am feeling lost, that my desire for you may increase.

Providence

DAY FIVE

Ruth 1:4b-5

PRAYER

Lord, protect my time as I prepare to study your word. Draw me close to your spirit and open my eyes to my own condition, that I may see your providence and my choices clearly.

SCRIPTURE

“They lived there about ten years, and both Mahlon and Chilion died, so that the woman, Naomi, was left without her two sons and her husband.”



It is important to note that this verse is written in reverse order. The way we read it it seems as though her sons died, and then she got up and started her journey back to Judah but that's not the case. Her sons die, and she continues to work in the fields with her daughters-in-law. After some time while she's in the fields of Moab, she hears that the Lord has visited his people in Judah and given them food. Then after hearing this, she rises from the field with her daughters-in-law to return to Judah.

Looking at this verse in this way helps us understand the following:

We will see in the coming verses that over the past 10+ years God has been working for the good of Naomi. He has built a relationship between her and Ruth that will have an eternal impact for all of us.

This is the first time in the book of Ruth that the Lord is mentioned. In many translations the word Lord is in all capitals; this indicates that it is actually Yahweh, the covenant name of the Lord for the Israelites. This may seem insignificant at first; however, it gives us great insight into how Naomi heard that God has visited his people. If she was told by a Moabite or another foreigner in Moab, they would not have used Yahweh to speak of him. Thus, it is safe to say she heard from God himself. While Naomi has lost everything she had in Moab, her inheritance, her family name, her husband, her sons, her entire identity, but somehow in the midst of all the brokenness a seed of faith remains. I believe she is talking with God in the fields of Moab. Maybe not in a tone I would allow my daughter to speak with me, but her anger and self proclaimed bitterness has not shut the door on hearing the voice of God.

Did you catch that? No matter how angry, bitter, sad, happy, grieving, frustrated, confused, anxious you are, God is still speaking to you. Have you stopped listening to his voice?

Naomi's God consciousness has been awoken. According to David in Psalm 119: 67 "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep your word." The affliction, the hardships of life are intended to draw us into the very presence of God. When we allow ourselves to hear God's voice above all else, we find that God's worst is still better for us than the world's best offer.

Are you in a place that God has called you to and being tempted to move to another place because it seems as though the world has more to offer you?

Both Moab and Judah had food. The women wouldn't have, been in the fields if there was nothing for them in Moab. So Naomi's choice to return to Judah is more about a mental, emotional, and spiritual return to her faith than providing for her physical needs. In one step she returned to the presence of God as the ruler of her life. You may feel as though you have run 1000 miles away from God, but you were only ever one step away.

"Then she arose with her daughters-in-law to return from the country of Moab." Return here is the Hebrew word Shimbare. It means to repent. Naomi rose out of her disobedience and Shimbare. She repented. She turned her back on Moab and began the long journey home.

While it took but a moment to right herself spiritually with God, it will take her the next 30 days to get herself physically in the right location. Let's not overlook the fact that there are spiritual, emotional and physical consequences to our choices. While repentance brings us back to the presence of God in a moment, the natural consequences of our choices will take effort and time to repair.

Are you in a place where you need to Shimbare? What do you need to turn your back to? What do you need to do to get yourself back on track physically and emotionally? It is a journey but you are not going at it alone, for God has been moving in the darkness.

REFLECTION

- What areas of my life do I need to return to be reminded that God is working for the good of his people?
- How can I encourage others that God is present?
- In what areas do I need to Shimbare?

PRAYER

Lord, help me be a voice that reminds others of your goodness. Help me be the messenger of your presence to those around me. And when I fail, help me return to you without delay, that I may rise from the pit and seek you and your good hand above all else.

Providence

WEEKEND CHALLENGE

We made it. Six verses into one of my favorite books in the Bible. I pray that you have been encouraged this week. This is a time for you to worship and review what God has taught you this week. Some of my friends love to journal and write out word pictures of what they have learned from God, while others love to doodle and paint. Still, I have other friends who take a hike or run around their neighborhood. My dearest friend loves to have coffee with a friend and talk it all out. Let me encourage you to try something different each week to find what is the best fit for you. There are only 2 rules:

- 1) stay focused on what God has taught you this week
- 2) Stay on task and worship

Okay, so they are kind of the same thing. . . make sure you set aside a few minutes to simply sit with God, sing, dance, journal, hike, or paint; all of these are forms of worship that draw you into the presence and knowledge of God.

If you need help getting started, the questions below might guide your time.

QUESTIONS OF REFLECTION:

1. Remember that God spoke to Naomi in the fields of Moab. I bet she would be the first to tell you this was a dark time and place of brokenness for her. Can I encourage you a minute to think back to the times God spoke to you?
 - a. Did he show up in your dark places? God spoke to Naomi and then she repented (Shimbaret), because it was clear to her that her choices brought her to that field in Moab.
2. Where have you heard God?
3. What did he say?
4. Is there something you need to Shimbaret?
5. What is standing in your way?