

Ruth 

Study Guide

Weekly Reading

The verses below relate to the kindness we saw in the book of Ruth this week. Try to find time every day this week to read one of these verses, look through the questions below each verse, and spend some time thinking through the answers.

Ecclesiastes 4:12 “And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

- There is value in choosing to stick with people. Who are you with?
- Who can you rely on and who do you think can rely on you?

Acts 20:35 “In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, “it is more blessed to give than to receive.”

- In your life, who has been there to give of themselves?
- How did it feel when someone was willing to give of themselves for you?
- Where in your life is there an opportunity to experience the blessing of giving to others?

James 5:19-20 “My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.”

- Why do you think there is so much value in being there for the lost and hurting?
- How has Jesus been the best example of this for you?
- Who in your life are you praying for and engaging with to bring back towards Jesus?

Philippians 2:4 “Let each one of you look not only to his own interests but also to the interests others.”

- Why do you think its so important in scripture for us to be there for others and consider their interests?
- How can we keep a healthy balance of looking after our own good and the good of others?
- Who in your life do you think helps look out for your interests? Whose interests do you look out for?

Ephesians 4:2 “Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.”

- Why do you think its important for us to humble and gentle when dealing with other people?
- How do you think being patient and bearing with one another shows a loyalty like Ruth did with Naomi?

Digging Deeper.

We all have struggled at some time with wondering about God's role in this world. Why do certain bad things happen and how come good things that seem to be exactly what God would want do not.

Why don't families stay together? Why are there so many global natural disasters? How come the treatment didn't work and help them get better? Why is there hunger and how come God doesn't just give people food. In these questions, we begin to dabble in what Bible scholars call the sovereignty of God. Sovereignty defined by the Oxford dictionary is simply this, "The supreme power or authority." In a theological sense, we are talking about God's control over everything.

The Bible clearly teaches that God is in control. In Psalm 103:19 we see "The Lord has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all." Again we see in Isaiah 46:9-10 "I am God, and there is no other God; I am God and there is none like me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say 'My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.'" In these verses we see God's reign over all things past, present, and future. He is in control of it all.

The funny thing though is we also see verses in scripture that tell us we have a choice. There are numerous instance in scripture where people have a choice as presented by God and make a choice. In Joshua 24:15 Joshua tells Israel "choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods of your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates or the gods of the amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."

Proverbs 3:31 we're warned about the consequences of our choices when the scripture says "Do not envy the violent or choose any of their ways." We're shown again in this passage our ability to choose a direction and a path forward in our life.

Even in Jesus' own teaching on our life we're told of the choice we have between two different ways in Matthew 7:13-14. "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow is the road that leads to life, and only a few find it." In this text Jesus is describing the struggle each of us must face as we make the choice to either walk in the narrow path that leads to life or the same path most people take that leads to destruction.

Scripture is showing us a very real and uncomfortable truth about our human condition in these verses. First God is completely in control. But in his divine sovereignty, God allows us to make choices on what we will do and what paths we will take. In the garden God made his will known to Adam and Eve, but he allowed them the freedom to choose him or the fruit. They chose the fruit. In Israel, God made clear his desire for them to be his people and for his dwelling to be among them. They were given the freedom to choose though and decided to chase other gods. In the church we're told the will of God, that "none should perish but all should have eternal life." but at this age we still see many who reject his offer and decide instead to trust in other things. It was this dichotomy that led C.S. Lewis to write, "the doors of hell are locked from the inside."

In the Book of Ruth we see the author playing with and teasing this principle of sovereignty as well. The book opens and closes with direct reference to God's intervention in the narrative. In the opening verses we see a famine that has come across the land driving Naomi and her Husband Elimelech into Moab. In the closing chapter we see that Ruth and Boaz are blessed with a son named Obed. In verse 13 of chapter 4 the scripture makes clear that this son was because God allowed it. So, we see in clear effect in the book of Ruth, God acting and implementing his will to fulfill his purposes in the Land.

However, outside of those two instances, that's the only time we see God working. The rest of the book intentionally highlights the decisions made by ordinary people. It sheds light on the way people moved the story forward because of what they chose. Elimelech took his family into Moab. After Elimelech died his two sons chose to take wives from the land of Moab. The two sons die and new choices must be made. Naomi decides to go back to Israel and she then makes a proposition to her daughter in laws that they can go back to their families. Orpah goes home. Ruth chooses to stay. Once back in Bethlehem, Ruth decides to go gleaning in the fields to feed herself and Naomi. Boaz decides to treat her kindly when he sees her work ethic. Naomi encourages Ruth to seek Boaz as a redeemer. Ruth agrees to do so. Boaz chooses to pursue redemption. Ruth and Boaz chose to try for a family and there is a baby boy born into the family.

The book is bookended by God's sovereign acts that man had no control over. However the entire book highlights the choices that everyday people made and the consequences (both good and bad) that came from them. Ruth highlights that ultimately God is in control. However, in his Divine nature, beyond our ability to understand and comprehend he allows us choice.

This means, we all have a choice to make. And Ruth shows us there are real consequences to our choices. Elimelech went to Moab, died, and left his family to suffer into terrible tragedy. Ruth chose to stay, be loyal, work hard, and she was able to redeem all the misfortune that befell the family from Elimelech's decision.

What type of story are your choices creating?

