

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.

Genesis 1:27 - "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

- Why do you think its so important to remember that people are created in the image of God?
- How should we treat people know that they were made by God to represent him?

John 15:17 - "These things I command you, so that you will love one another."

- Jesus said everything he taught his disciples was so that they would love one another. Why do you think treating others in a loving way was so important to Jesus?
- Does love the way the world presents it look different than the way God presents it?

Luke 6:36 - "Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful."

- What does God's mercy towards us look like?
- What are some examples of how we can show that kind of mercy to others.
- Mercy is not weakness. It's the ability to judge or get even but choosing not to do so. What do you think makes this type of forgiveness more difficult?

Luke 9:25 - "What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits himself?"

- What kind of "whole world" things do we chase instead of what truly matters?
- How can we work to keep what truly matters in front of us, like other people?

Romans 12:10 - "Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor."

- Outside of the more common reasons or this, the Christlike example it sets, how might our understanding that all people are created in God's image inform his call for us to outdo one another in showing honor?
- What practical ways can we go about showing honor to one another.

Digging Deeper.

As we learned last week, the book of Ruth was most likely written around the time of David's rule in Israel and its publication/circulation was to help support his claim as the king. The story, carrying themes of kindness, redemption, and sovereignty, also does its best to help support David's claim to the throne by helping him make practical and symbolic connections to the early Israelite patriarchs.

There are driven themes in the book that as we read the story would quickly remind the intended audience of stories and themes from the patriarchs found in Genesis. There are examples of this in our current storytelling as well. We sometimes call them parodies or knock offs, but they're stories that borrow a premise or theme from another famous work to pay tribute and recreate the original work. The movie groundhog day was a funny story about a man doomed to repeat the same day, groundhog day, until he learned a cosmic lesson. The inspiration from this movie came from a lesser known work by Friedrich Nietzsche called "The Gay Science. It's a book about a man forced to live the same day over and over. The success of groundhog day though created a plethora of remakes including Palm Springs, Edge of Tomorrow, and some would even argue 50 First Dates. The theme of being stuck in the same day over and over pays tribute to the original work connecting the two together.

Were there only one theme that was congruent between the Patriarch and Ruth it might simply be considered a coincidence. However, in the two we see a number of matching concepts.

Famine Motif

Both Abraham and Elilemech faced a famine in their stories. The first obeyed God's voice and moved while the second ignored God's command and left the promised land.

Barrenness and Blessing.

In both stories the concepts of barren women being seen as an unsurpassable problem is overcome by the blessing of God to bring about Children. Sarai thought she would never have a child because of her age and diagnosed barrenness, but through God's promise Sarai (by that time renamed Sarah) would gift birth to Isaac proving God's faithfulness. Naomi thought she was the last of her family as her husband and sons had passed away but it was through the kindness and faithfulness of Ruth that the family thought destitute would be redeemed. And through God's intervention in the last chapter we see Ruth give birth to a son.

Kindness and Hospitality

In both the story of Ruth and Abraham we see examples of God's call to be hospitable to the sojourner or the foreigner in the land. Ruth came in as a Moabite and Boaz chose to, because of her character, chose to protect and care for her during the harvest. In the same manner Abraham tends to guests who turn out to be angels as he welcomes them in and prepares a feast before them.

Covenantal Connection

The entirety of the Patriarch's story is about showing the work of God to fulfill his promise to bring about the people of Israel and fulfill his promise to Abraham. Unknown to its reader until the very end, everything happening in Ruth and Naomi's life after their return is working towards the protection and fulfillment of the promise God made to Abraham in Genesis.

The two stories, while separated by many factors, are in fact more closely connected than most modern readers realize on a casual reading.

The importance of understanding the connection here, in hindsight, is to understand that while as literary features these might seem like coincidence, but as points of God working in the lives of real people and real situations, you may not understand why you are going through sometime or why life isn't the way you desire, but we know that God has a plan and his plan is so beautiful that not only does he plan the good for us (Ruth eventually being redeemed by Boaz and giving birth to a son) but he also takes the bad that happens in our life due to the free will of others and turns that for good too (Elimelech leading his family out of Israel for Ruth to rebuild and work to restore them).

We may not understand what's happening in our life. The connection in Ruth's story to the larger story of the scripture is the reminder of the confidence we can have in God's faithfulness.

