

REDEEMED AND SECURE

God can surprise us with those whom He chooses to bring about His purposes.

RUTH 3:8-13; 4:13-17

MEMORY VERSE: RUTH 2:20

PREPARE TO LEAD THE GROUP TIME

- **READ** Ruth 2:1–4:22, First Thoughts (p. 134), and Understand the Context (pp. 134-135).
- **STUDY** Ruth 3:8-13; 4:13-17, using Explore the Text on pages 135-139. As you study, look for the ways that Ruth and Boaz conducted themselves as people of integrity. Consult the *Explore the Bible Adult Commentary* (available in print and digital format from LifeWay.com) for additional study helps.
- **PLAN** the group time using suggestions under Lead Group Bible Study (pp. 140-141). Also refer to *QuickSource* and Blog.LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible for other ideas. Look for ways to creatively call attention to this session's memory verse (Ruth 2:20).
- **GROW** from expert insights on weekly studies through the Ministry Grid (MinistryGrid.com/Web/ExploreTheBible).
- **GATHER** the following items: Personal Study Guides. Prepare to display the following Pack Items:
 - PACK ITEM 2** (*Outlines of Joshua; Judges; Ruth*); **PACK ITEM 3** (*Poster: Winter 2016-17*);
 - PACK ITEM 9** (*Poster: Family Tree of Boaz and Ruth*).



FIRST THOUGHTS

KEY DOCTRINE

Humanity

Only the grace of God can bring man into His holy fellowship and enable man to fulfill the creative purpose of God.

Sometimes, life situations make us feel helpless and hopeless. Abandoned children often become victims in systems that fail to meet their needs. Widows spend long hours alone facing uncertain futures. Sudden illness interrupts an otherwise seemingly normal life. Financial and family problems force students to drop out of school. Spouses often suffer great emotional stress as they watch their marriage crumble.

Each of these scenarios plays out every day around the world. Even the most faithful followers of the Lord can be shaken, becoming disoriented in their spiritual walk and filled with despair. If left to themselves, they often make bad choices in an effort to cover the pain. These bad choices further complicate the problems.

The surprise twists of life can make us wonder if unexpected crises and catastrophes derail God's plans and purposes for our lives. If we search, we find that God can restore us and bless us again. In the process, He can surprise us with those whom He chooses to bring about His purposes.

(In PSG, p. 133) **Looking back over the hard times of your life, how did God use an unlikely person to advance His purposes through your difficulties?**

BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR

For additional context, read "Levirate Marriage and the Book of Ruth," available digitally in *Biblical Illustrator for Explore the Bible at LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator*.

In this week's session we see how God used Boaz, a "family redeemer," to bring help and hope to Naomi and Ruth. When Ruth vowed to stay with Naomi (1:16-17), she had no idea what would become of the two of them. Naomi described her life as having been made bitter by the Lord (1:13,20). Like Naomi, Ruth was a widow with no visible prospects of support. Yet, Ruth put Naomi's welfare above her own, a sacrificial act of love that would factor into God's plan (2:10-12).

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

RUTH 2:1–4:22

Several things happened between the end of last week's session passage (Ruth 1:18) and the beginning of this week's session passage (3:8). First, Naomi and Ruth successfully completed their journey to Bethlehem and were welcomed with excitement. Naomi was still straining under the bitterness of her losses and suggested her name be changed to Mara, meaning "bitter" (1:19-22).

Second, Ruth met Naomi's relative, Boaz. He is described as a prominent man of noble character from Elimelech's family (2:1). His blessings to the harvesters and later to Ruth reveal Boaz as a man devoted to the Lord (2:4,12). Boaz is later described as a "family redeemer" (2:20).

Third, Ruth took the initiative to harvest some grain for Naomi (2:2-3), resulting in an encounter with Boaz (2:8). Having heard of Ruth's devotion to Naomi, Boaz took immediate action to provide for both women (2:9-11). Thus, Ruth was able to stay with and provide for Naomi in relative security from that point onward (2:21-23).

Fourth, Naomi sought to reciprocate Ruth's diligence by providing long-term security for her in the form of a husband (3:1). The most obvious candidate was Boaz, who had shown extraordinary care for Ruth already. Naomi instructed Ruth on how to arrange a private meeting with Boaz, during which she could make her intentions known to the family redeemer (3:2-7). Thus, the events that would culminate in a marriage, a birth, and a secured future had been set in motion. God was in the process of bringing about His purposes.

In last week's session, we dealt with the customs of levirate marriage and the family redeemer. Since both customs factor heavily in this week's session, additional explanation is needed. First, the law of the levirate marriage was given by Moses as the children of Israel were about to enter the promised land (Deut. 25:5-10). The purpose of the law was to assure a deceased man's name was remembered through offspring. Thus, in a case where a married man died childless, the levirate marriage law instructed a brother to marry the deceased man's widow and raise up a son. This son would carry on the dead brother's family line.

Second, closely related to the levirate law was the idea of a family redeemer. The family redeemer had two responsibilities in addition to fulfilling the levirate marriage. The family redeemer was a blood avenger responsible for securing retribution against the perpetrator of murder of a family member. This responsibility does not appear in Ruth. The family redeemer was also responsible for ensuring the dead man's land stayed in the family.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

INQUIRY (RUTH 3:8-9)

VERSE 8

As we study the events that led up to the marriage of Boaz and Ruth, we must remember that the main characters were people of the highest moral and spiritual integrity. We noted in last week's session how Naomi viewed her life as being under the Lord's hand. Ruth willingly served Naomi and pledged allegiance to Yahweh as her God. Several notable character qualities of Boaz were listed in chapter 2. All of these people feared the Lord and honored Him by the way they lived their daily lives. Thus, when we read of Ruth secretly slipping into the threshing floor storeroom and lying down at Boaz's feet (3:7), we know she is up to something good. The view that Ruth and Boaz did nothing untoward is supported by a Jewish document known as the Targum of Ruth, which compares Boaz's restraint to that of Joseph when tempted by Potiphar's wife (Gen. 39:7-9).

BIBLE SKILL

Review additional passages to gain a clearer understanding.

Review the following passages: Exodus 6:6-8; Leviticus 25:24-28; Deuteronomy 25:5-10; Job 19:25; Psalms 19:14; 69:18; Isaiah 43:1; Acts 7:35; Revelation 5:1-5. How would you describe a family redeemer based on these passages? How does this give you a greater understanding of the role Jesus plays as our Redeemer?

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RUTH 3:8

⁸ At midnight, Boaz was startled, turned over, and there lying at his feet was a woman!

RUTH 3:9

⁹ So he asked, “Who are you?” “I am Ruth, your slave,” she replied. “Spread your cloak over me, for you are a family redeemer.”

RUTH 3:10

¹⁰ Then he said, “May the LORD bless you, my daughter. You have shown more kindness now than before, because you have not pursued younger men, whether rich or poor.

RUTH 3:11

¹¹ Now don't be afraid, my daughter. I will do for you whatever you say, since all the people in my town know that you are a woman of noble character.

Ruth had serious business to discuss with Boaz. The long-term security of both Ruth and Naomi was best protected by Ruth's getting married. Perhaps *midnight* afforded her both the privacy and the time to speak of Naomi's welfare. That Boaz was *startled* underscores that he had not arranged a somewhat risky meeting with a woman late at night. He simply *turned over, and there lying at his feet was a woman!*

VERSE 9

The conversation between Boaz and Ruth is terse at first. The abruptness of Boaz's question—*Who are you?*—suggests he was still trying to awake and could not see who was at his feet in the dark. Ruth identified herself as Boaz's *slave*. By self-identifying as Boaz's servant or handmaid, Ruth acknowledged her lowly social status.

Ruth quickly told Boaz: *Spread your cloak over me, for you are a family redeemer*. The title *family redeemer* would have directed Boaz's attention to his role of redeeming his dead relative's land and also to the levirate marriage law. The word *cloak* literally means “wings” in Hebrew. Ruth clarified her intentions by invoking the language Boaz had used earlier when he blessed Ruth and asked the Lord to reward her for her kindness to Naomi, providing her refuge under His wings (2:12). Ruth was proposing marriage to Boaz. Boaz's blessing could be fulfilled for Ruth, and by extension Naomi, if Boaz was willing to fulfill the role of family redeemer.

How did Ruth's compliance to Naomi's plan and her inquiry to Boaz represent the coming together of God's plan for this family?

INTEREST (RUTH 3:10-13)

VERSE 10

Boaz's response to Ruth was positive. First, he said: *May the LORD bless you, my daughter*. The Hebrew text conveys the meaning of one already under the Lord's blessing. Second, he viewed Ruth's willingness to marry him as showing *more kindness now than before*, perhaps referencing her loyalty to Naomi. Third, Boaz seemed to be in shock that a young woman like Ruth would be willing to marry an older man. His shock was over the fact that she could have *pursued younger men*. Boaz's qualifier, *whether rich or poor*, revealed his belief that Ruth would have been better off with a young man, whether *rich or poor*. That she chose him, an older man, came as a welcome surprise. God can surprise us with those whom He chooses to bring about His plans. Perhaps even Ruth was surprised too.

VERSE 11

Boaz again referred to Ruth as *my daughter* and immediately told her, *don't be afraid*. The directive could be translated “stop being afraid,” indicating Ruth feared what would become of her and Naomi

if Boaz refused. However, Boaz's instruction, *don't be afraid*, might have been simply assurance of his compliance to her inquiry about fulfilling the role of family redeemer by marrying her and bringing her under his protective wings.

Boaz's compliance was robust. He told Ruth: ***I will do for you whatever you say.*** In his statement, we see the providential hand of God. Naomi had told her daughters-in-law the Lord's hand had turned against her (1:13). Now, through Boaz, the Lord's hands were providing.

Boaz's quick acceptance of Ruth's proposal was based largely on the fact that she was ***a woman of noble character.*** The phrase *noble character* renders a Hebrew word that can mean "wealth," "strength," or even "upper class." Yet Ruth was a foreigner and a handmaiden, so we understand this to refer to her strength of character.

Boaz revealed that ***all the people*** in his town knew of Ruth's noble character. The Hebrew is literally "all the gate of my people," referring to the city gate where business was conducted and where people were judged as worthy of the community or where they were excommunicated. Thus, Boaz's statement could have been a reference to the city elders who sat at the gate and made judgments on legal cases.

VERSES 12-13

Both Ruth and Boaz were such people of integrity that they wanted any relationship they entered into to be legitimate. Boaz's emphasis on "all the gate of my people" (v. 11) pointed to his desire to have a legally binding relationship.

He also informed Ruth there was ***a redeemer closer*** than he was. This reality tempered his enthusiasm and Ruth's anticipation of possible marriage. Apparently, the closest kinsman had the right of first acceptance or refusal in matters pertaining to the family redeemer. By law, Boaz would have to allow the nearest kinsman the first opportunity to redeem Mahlon's land and to marry Ruth.

Boaz promised to handle the legal aspects of the nearer kinsman in the morning, the earliest possible time to do so. Boaz put up a brave front, knowing full well the nearer kinsman could possibly marry Ruth and redeem Mahlon's land. If so, he told Ruth, ***let him redeem you.*** Then he took an oath that he would redeem her if the other man didn't want to. No matter who redeemed her, Ruth could rest assured she and Naomi would be secure.

As the events unfolded at the city gate the following morning, the nearer kinsman was interested in redeeming Mahlon's land but had no interest in his widow. Since Ruth was part of the deal, the nearer kinsman backed out. Boaz was free to marry Ruth and to redeem Mahlon's land. As one reads the Book of Ruth, Boaz's love for Ruth becomes evident.

(In PSG, p. 137) **What feelings have you experienced as you began to realize the Lord was working things out in a positive way for you?**

RUTH 3:12-13

¹² Yes, it is true that I am a family redeemer, but there is a redeemer closer than I am. ¹³ Stay here tonight, and in the morning, if he wants to redeem you, that's good. Let him redeem you. But if he doesn't want to redeem you, as the LORD lives, I will. Now lie down until morning."

INHERITANCE (RUTH 4:13-17)

RUTH 4:13

¹³ Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. When he was intimate with her, the LORD enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son.

RUTH 4:14

¹⁴ Then the women said to Naomi, “Praise the LORD, who has not left you without a family redeemer today. May his name become well known in Israel.

RUTH 4:15

¹⁵ He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. Indeed, your daughter-in-law, who loves you and is better to you than seven sons, has given birth to him.”

VERSE 13

Ruth 4:1-12 recounts the careful steps Boaz took to ensure his marriage to Ruth and his acquisition of the ancestral lands were done legally (v. 7). The nearest kinsman forfeited his rights as family redeemer, giving Boaz the legal right to take Ruth as his wife. The elders at the gate were witnesses and blessed the marriage (vv. 9-12).

After the marriage was legally authorized by the town elders, Boaz took Ruth and **she became his wife**, yet another testament to the integrity of this man and his new bride. The remainder of the verse shows the perfect balance between human actions and divine sovereignty. First, Boaz and Ruth had **intimate** relations. Second, **the LORD** blessed their union and enabled her to conceive; literally, “the Lord gave her conception.”

With the simple statement **she gave birth to a son**, Ruth could raise an heir to Mahlon’s name and heritage. Moreover, Naomi was instantly given hope of a brighter future, and Boaz was given a family. God had surprised both Ruth and Naomi by using Boaz to bring about His purposes. Boaz too was surprised, having never imagined a younger woman from Moab would one day become his wife and bear his son.

VERSE 14

The women of the town spoke with Naomi about the birth of her grandson. They said, **praise the LORD**, indicating God’s blessings had been poured out on Naomi through the birth of Ruth’s son. They also referred to **the LORD** as the one who had **not left** Naomi **without a family redeemer**. Their wish that **his name become well known in Israel** was a blessing for the future.

Surely Naomi was encouraged by the future this son represented. The bitter tears she had shed in Moab when her husband and two sons had died were replaced with tears of joy. Her bitterness was turned to sweetness. The gloom of her hopeless past was giving way to the joy of a bright future. Based on the reaction of the women, Naomi was a respected person who could enjoy once again the full status of being a grandmother in Bethlehem. The son of Ruth had become God’s down payment on Naomi’s promising future.

VERSE 15

The women of Bethlehem helped Naomi understand the long-term implications accruing to her as a result of the birth of her grandson. First, he would **renew** her **life**. Literally, Naomi’s grandson would become “one causing her life or soul to return.” The oppressive weight and bitterness of Moab would be replaced by joyful living. Second, he would **sustain** her in her **old age**. As she grew older, Naomi would not have to worry about support. Her own grandson eventually would become the provider for her and Ruth.

After speaking of Naomi’s future, the women began to praise Ruth. They described her as **your daughter-in-law, who loves you**. The Hebrew

verb means “to love by putting first” or “to prioritize.” It is the same word used in Deuteronomy 6:5, commanding all Israelites to love the Lord. They also described Ruth to Naomi as being **better to you than seven sons**. If Naomi had interpreted the death of her husband and sons as the Lord’s hand being against her, then she must now see that the Lord was for her.

VERSES 16-17

Naomi joyfully embraced her newly given responsibilities of being a grandmother. The painful and bitter memories of three graves in Moab were being overshadowed by the energy and excitement of cradling a newborn boy. One gets the picture of a joyful grandmother tenderly cuddling the newborn grandson in her arms.

Interestingly, Ruth falls out of the picture in this part of the story, being mentioned for the last time in verse 13. This last paragraph (vv. 14-17) before the concluding genealogy (vv. 18-22) focuses more on Naomi and the bright future secured for her through her grandson.

The women of Bethlehem continued to play a prominent role in Naomi’s life. First, they proclaimed: **A son has been born to Naomi**. Second, **they named him •Obed**. Normally, the pronoun *they* would refer to the parents, but in this context, the women of the town named the baby boy. Why the women had the honor of naming the son is not stated.

They chose to call him *Obed*, meaning “servant” in Hebrew. Ruth had served her mother-in-law well. Then, she had served Boaz well. As for the boy, he himself would serve God’s purposes by raising up children and grandchildren of his own. Obed would become **the father of Jesse** and the grandfather of **David**, Israel’s most beloved king.

The remainder of the Book of Ruth is a genealogy extending ten generations from Perez to David (vv. 18-22). The book intentionally ends with David, who became the greatest king God’s people ever had. All the kings that followed were measured by David. By ending the book this way, the writer showed how God was fulfilling His purposes for His people.

God surprised the widow Ruth by giving her a new husband and a child of her own to raise. He surprised Boaz by giving him a wife. Most of all, God surprised Naomi by whom He chose to bring about His redemptive purposes—a baby boy named Obed.

God can also surprise us with those whom He chooses to bring about His purposes. He chose to bring about His redemptive purposes for us through Ruth, Boaz, and Obed, who became ancestors of Jesus, the ultimate Redeemer (Matt. 1:5).

Do you have a keen awareness that God is bringing about His purposes in your life? Could you be surprised by whom He might use to do it?

RUTH 4:16-17

¹⁶ Naomi took the child, placed him on her lap, and took care of him.

¹⁷ The neighbor women said, “A son has been born to Naomi,” and they named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.

LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

GUIDE: As the group arrives, lead them to name examples of unexpected obstacles that sometimes crop up in our lives. List their examples on the board. Note that it is likely all of us might have experienced at least one of these obstacles in our lives.

DISCUSS: *Looking back over the hard times of your life, how did God use an unlikely person to advance His purposes through your difficulties?* (PSG, p. 133)

LOOK: Quickly review the events covered in last week's study of Ruth 1. Use **Pack Item 2** (*Outlines of Joshua; Judges; Ruth*) and **Pack Item 3** (*Poster: Winter 2016-17*) as visual guides to help set the context for this final session on the Book of Ruth. Share the information in *Understand the Context* (pp. 134-135; PSG, pp. 133-134) to help fill in the details of what has happened in the story of Naomi and Ruth between last week's study and today's session.

TRANSITION: *Let's examine Ruth 3-4 to find out how God used an unlikely person to bring about His plan in Ruth's life.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud Ruth 3:8-9, while the others listen to this conversation about Boaz's role as the family redeemer.

STUDY: Instruct half the group to silently read the first four paragraphs under Verses 8-9 (PSG, p. 134) and the other half to read the last three paragraphs under Verses 8-9 (PSG, pp. 134-135). Then call for volunteers to share the details they found that help us better understand this nighttime encounter between Ruth and Boaz. Be sure that the important concept of the family redeemer is explained.

DISCUSS: *How would you characterize Ruth's approach to Boaz? How does her approach to Boaz compare to how we should approach Jesus, our Redeemer?* (PSG, p. 135)

EXPLAIN: Stress that the behavior of Ruth and Boaz in these verses shows them to be people of integrity.

TRANSITION: *Now let's see how the story unfolds in verses 10-13.*

READ: Instruct someone to read aloud Ruth 3:10-13, while the group listens for Boaz's response to Ruth.

ASK: *How did Boaz see Ruth as a person of integrity? How did Boaz's response reveal his integrity?*

EXPLAIN: Using the information under Verses 10, Verse 11, and Verses 12-13 (pp. 136-137; PSG, pp. 136-137), help the group to understand that Boaz was willing to marry Ruth, but he was concerned that there was a family member who was closer to Ruth in relationship. *Boaz wanted to proceed carefully to be sure the right thing was done in regard to marrying Ruth.*

DISCUSS: *What feelings have you experienced as you began to realize the Lord was working things out in a positive way for you? (PSG, p. 137)*

GUIDE: *While the concept of the family redeemer is not familiar to us in our culture today, there are lessons to be learned from the way Boaz and Ruth conducted themselves in this situation.*

DISCUSS: *How does Boaz's willingness to accept responsibility apply to modern Christians?*

TRANSITION: *With a promise that Ruth would be cared for, Boaz set out to find the closest family redeemer. We will pick up the story again in Ruth 4:13-17.*

READ: Call for a volunteer to read aloud the paragraphs under Verse 13 (PSG, pp. 137-138), so the group knows what happened when Boaz found Ruth's closest redeemer. Then invite a volunteer to read aloud Ruth 4:13-17.

DISCUSS: *What does the inclusion of Ruth in His redemptive plan reveal to us about God? What are the implications of Ruth being included? (PSG, p. 139)*

SHARE: *The story of Ruth, Boaz, and Naomi reminds us of how God is always at work, making His redemptive plan known. It tells us that God's plan is available to all people who accept Him. It helps us see how God carries His people through obstacles in surprising ways, even during those times when it seems impossible.*

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

EXPLAIN: *When we were first introduced to Naomi and Ruth in last week's study, it would seem that they were a family struggling to hold together as they coped with death, loss, and famine. Now in chapter 4, we see how God has provided a way through the hardships.*

ASK: *When and how have you seen God use obstacles or challenges in your life for His honor?*

DIRECT: Lead the group to share their responses to the first question set under In My Context (PSG, p. 140): *Discuss as a group the value of integrity in relation to our witness. What actions can the group take to foster integrity?*

CHALLENGE: Encourage the group to demonstrate integrity in all their relationships as a witness to their relationship with God.

DISCUSS: *How can we demonstrate the importance of integrity to our children, grandchildren, nieces, or nephews? Encourage the group to think of integrity as a legacy we can pass along to the younger people in our family and our circle of influence.*

PRAY: Ask God to strengthen the group to confidently trust God in every obstacle they face.



PRACTICE

- Evaluate your own life and consider these questions: *What role do you play in revealing God's redemptive plan to others? How can you use the information on the inside front cover to reveal that plan to others?* (PSG, p. 140)
- Email or text the group to encourage them to live with integrity in every area of life.
- Follow up with any answers to questions the group had during today's study. Then distribute copies of the Spring 2017 PSG for the next session.

MORE IDEAS

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

To replace the introduction, ask: *What's the best surprise you've ever received?* Call for volunteers to share responses. Use the question and the group's responses to introduce the idea that God sometimes surprises us with those whom He chooses to use to bring about His purposes in our lives.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

- To supplement Ruth 3:8-13, stress that Ruth's and Boaz's words showed them to be people of integrity. Instruct volunteers to find and read aloud the following verses: Proverbs 12:18,25; 15:1; 19:14; and 25:11. Ask: *In what ways can we use our words to show that we are people of integrity?*
- For further discussion of Ruth 3:10-13 and to help the group better understand the role of the family redeemer, encourage them to complete the Bible Skill activity (PSG, p. 135). Then discuss: *How was Boaz's marriage to Ruth an immediate solution for the problems Ruth and Naomi faced? How was their marriage a bigger part of God's plan? How do we see God's redemptive plan unfolding in this marriage and in the birth of the child Obed?*
- To connect Ruth 4:13-17 to God's plan for all Christians, call for a volunteer to read Matthew 1:1-16, the genealogy of Jesus. Use **Pack Item 9** (Poster: Family Tree of Boaz and Ruth) and the information in the second paragraph under Verse 17 (PSG, p. 139) to help the group better understand the genealogy.

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

Guide a discussion on the second question set under In My Context (PSG, p. 140): *What opportunities is God placing in front of you that come out of trials and challenges you have faced? How can God use those trials and challenges for His honor? Ask Him to help you honor Him in the trials and challenges.* Encourage the group to keep a list this coming week of the opportunities they see God placing in front of them. Challenge them to step into those opportunities with action.

SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA

As a group, read or sing the words to "In Times Like These," by Ruth Caye Jones, noting that these words remind us of the security and confidence we have in Jesus.