If you have a Bible, turn to Ruth. It comes after Judges in the English Bible, but after Proverbs in many of the best Hebrew manuscripts. Following Proverbs makes sense, as Proverbs ends by talking about a vitreous woman, which Ruth illustrates.

Ruth is one of the loveliest love stories of all time. It combines literary art and theological depth at its finest. Of course, people love stories. They have a strange attraction to the phrase, “once upon a time,” and the phrase “and they all live happily ever after.”

They love, love stories. Romeo and Juliet; Beauty and the Beast; Sound of Music; Twilight; Shrek. Two of mine are Open Range and Leap Year. In many of these stories, two unlikely people unite. A beast, and a beauty. A failed nun, a military captain and widower. A rough neck cowboy and a classy nurse; a stager for Realtors and an Irish innkeeper. A human and a vampire – she’s 18, and he’s 109.

Here in Ruth, two unlikely people get together, and Boaz a Bethlehemite, and Ruth, the Moabite widow. Boaz is the gentleman, who looks a lot like Jesus. He extends kindness and justice to her, and Ruth becomes one of the mothers of Jesus, appearing in the genealogy of Matthew.

“Ruth” is a surprising title to the book for two reasons:
1. **She's a Moabite**, five times we read “Ruth the Moabite.” This is the only book in the OT named after a non-Israelite.
2. **She’s not the main character**. Based on the plot, Naomi should be the title; based on the number of words spoken, Boaz should be the title. Of course, we know from the rest of the Bible why she's so important.
Why Study Ruth?

1. **God-Breathed Scripture** (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

2. **Redemptive History**. One can't understand it in the fullest sense apart from the coming of Jesus. Ruth connects Paradise with Christmas.

3. **Divine Providence**. We read of God's meticulous providence in this little book. He is a God at work in this seemingly insignificant family in detailed ways.

4. **Global Mercy**. God's grace and mercy extends to a Moabite woman. Even a despised Moabite is grafted into Israel. The royal, Messianic line has Moabite blood. This story shows us God's heart for the nations.

5. **Genuine Godliness**. We learn from Ruth, Boaz, and even Naomi what a life of faith looks like. While it's not the main point, there’s application for singles, courtship and marriage. We aren't studying it for that purpose, for that would be like **going to Zaxby's for the celery**. But it's there to consider.

“The book of Ruth records experiences of joy and sorrow. It tells a story of home life, romance and marriage, of unexpected conversion and radical consecration. The book of Ruth is *multum in parvo* (much in little) – a little book containing far more about God than its size would suggest. Here we will find many lessons about his grace and providence.” - Ferguson

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Great Problems (1-5)</th>
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<td>The book opens with one problem after another. It reminds me of a particular baseball player… Bobo Newsom ...</td>
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6 **Problems**

1. **Moral Decline**, “the judges ruled” (1)
   - Pentateuch, Deut (edge of Promised Land); Joshua (Promised Land) Judges. Cyclical, problems. See Judges 21:25
   - They were **lured into Canaanite worship** - Canaanites were
superior in many ways and they became like them.

**App:** Ruth shines in the darkness, like we are to shine in the darkness, in a day when the judges rule, so to speak. We are the salt and light in a world that is corrupt and dark.

2. **Financial Downturn,** “famine in the land” (1b)
   - Humanly speaking, there’s no rain.
   - *Theological speaking, it’s probably judgment.* (Deut 11:4).
   - Famine has historically also been an occasion to advance God’s purposes, as in the story of Joseph (cf., Gen 42:5).
   - Attendance increases (See Moreland) when economy is bad.
   - Consequently, they are broke.

3. **Personal Hunger,** “famine in Bethlehem”(1b)
   - We don’t know much about this. We say “I’m hungry” it is because we haven’t eaten in two hours.
   - *Where is the famine? Bethlehem*
   - “House of Bread.” “There are many subtle ironies in Ruth. It’s like saying, “**They were really hungry at Panera Bread.”** Bethlehem is associated with David (1 Sam. 20:6) and the birth of Jesus (Matt. 2:1, Luke 2:4; John 7:42). Bethlehem was a fertile location just 5 miles south of Jerusalem, a little insignificant town. From this story of an insignificant family in a little insignificant town comes Jesus. (Mic 5:2)

4. **A Questionable Move,** “[Elimelech] sojourned in Moab with his wife (Naomi) and two sons (Mahlon and Kihlion)” (1c-2)
   - **Elimelech** – “My God is King.” Some question if they should have made this move. Others think it makes sense. There’s no food, and it’s a possible judgment. I take it as a bad move, but one in which God is sovereign over.
Pragmatist, not a man of faith.

- **Naomi** – Means pleasant, or sweet, or *sweety pie*

- **Mahlon and Chilion** – Those sound like cool names, but they actually mean something like "Sick and Dying" – "Swine Flu" and Incurable walking Pnumonia. Don't name them that. Their names signify what's about to happen to Naomi.

- **Bethlehem** – city
- **Judah** – the tribal territory. **Judah is important because it is the line of the Messiah, first mentioned about David** (1 Sam. 17:12; Micah 5:2)

**Moab**

- **History of Moab is not good.** A traditional enemy of Israel. It is 50 miles away, a desolate area itself.

- **They are the product of incest between Lot and his daughter. They gave birth to a boy named Moab.** They didn’t worship Yahweh. They worshiped Chemosh. Worship of this idol was *grotesque, at times involving human sacrifice* (2 Kings 3:26-27). As Numbers 25 suggests, Moabite worship was also filled with erotic imagery and lewd conduct. **Elimilech moves his family away from fellowship and the worship of God.** In Num. 25, they seduce the men and as a result 24,000 Israelites were killed. They hated Moab!

- **The picture of Elimelech is not good, but it’s very instructive.** Some would rather run then repent and beg for mercy. Even though his name means, “My God is King,” he doesn’t act like it.
• God said in Deuteronomy that he would withdraw his anger and lift the famine (See Deut. 30:1-3, 8-10). But he runs instead of prays.

5. **Painful Grief**. “Elimelech died … Mahlon and Chilion died” (3-4)

• We don’t know how he died. "heart attack or hit by a camel" – how, why? He moved to not die, and he died. The language is just cold, and hard.

• **Moabite Wives** – Ruth’s Husband was Mahlon (4:10). There was no formal rule against marrying Moabites, but it was discouraged because of their idolatry to gods such as Molech and Baal.

• Picture Naomi – No husband. No sons. Idolatrous daughters. She’s destitute.

• Ten Years – no Children. No one to carry the line. This calls to mind Sarah, who after 10 years gave Abraham her servant to have a son.

6. **Overall Despair**, “that woman was left without…” (5)

• The Hebrew doesn't even mention her name; it's just "the woman."

• Boys die – The family is on the brink of ceasing to exist. This is the curse of all curses to the Hebrews.

• At the worst point in history, the worse thing in the world happened; I can think of nothing worse than burying my wife and kids. To make matters worse, she's in a foreign country. This is an absolute 10-year nightmare.
Application: In five verses, your whole world can fall apart. One moment, you are physically healthy, then you go to the doctor and are diagnosed with cancer; two weeks later you can’t get out of the bed. Car crash. Hurricane. Heart attack. It can all happen so fast.

Welcome to the book of Ruth. This dark backdrop provides the setting for the diamond of God’s grace and providence to shine.

Dreyfus and Kelley, *All Things Shining: Reading the Classics to Find Meaning in a Secular Age*… You’re in despair, read Moby Dick… We’ll here we have a book that gives meaning in a secular age, in dark age…

| God’s Gracious Providence (6) |

It may be hard to see it, but God’s gracious providence appears in several ways in this chapter. God’s providence is a mega theme in this book. This deals with God’s wisdom, grace and provision and his sustaining power. It is putting together the fact that God is in control, and God is good.

The things that happen in Ruth, like food and family, are not attributed to Auburn luck, chance, global warming, wheat grass, new political leadership, or Mother Nature – but GOD.

v. 6. “The LORD (Yahweh) had visited them and given them food (or bread).”

God is mentioned some 23 times. “God” is mentioned by the author of the Ruth twice – chapter 1:6, and 4:13 – God gives food; God gives a baby. God is a good God. These bookends show us how the author thinks we should view God. We interpret him in between these two realities. It may look like He is not good, but He is.
The other times the characters are speaking of God

The story of Ruth is like our lives, sometimes we can’t see God working. We don’t know the whole story, but we must trust in his hand. The book of Ruth is about his invisible hand, like Esther. There are no miracles, no visions, no great spectacles, just God at work in the lives of ordinary people to bring the Savior of the World – nothing major!

The book of Ruth shows us how… The Lord reigns over all things and works in the details of people’s lives.

I can’t read about a story of providence without thinking about a particular hymn from William Cowper. He was a marvelous hymn writer, and friend of John Newton. Cowper struggled with depression and other problems. One biographer said “His life seemed to be one long accumulation of pain.” He wrote of God’s mysterious providence and matchless grace like this:

God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea
And rides upon the storm.

Deep in unfathomable mines
Of never failing skill
He treashes up His bright designs
And works His sovereign will.

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy and shall break
In blessings on your head.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace;  
Behind a frowning providence  
He hides a smiling face.

His purposes will ripen fast,  
Unfolding every hour;  
The bud may have a bitter taste,  
But sweet will be the flower.

Blind unbelief is sure to err  
And scan His work in vain;  
God is His own interpreter,  
And He will make it plain.

Someone else will find bitterness turn to sweetness, named Naomi…. She will be able to sing this song later, but for now she is struggling…

**4 Gifts of God’s Providence**  
**How does God sustain them? (4 Ways)**

1. **Food (6)**

His Gracious Providence is revealed in:

- **Naomi was able to hear of God’s activity.** A change had taken place!

- **Naomi heard that his activity was on part of his people, and that God had not forgotten them.** Notice it is not, “Guess what Naomi, the weather has broken. The fields are producing. The storyteller is not concerned with secondary causes. Rather it is, “Yahweh has visited to us.” It is traced directly to the hand of God. God controls the land and the rain.

*You cause the grass to grow for the livestock and plants for man to cultivate, that he may bring forth food from the earth and wine to*
"gladden the heart of man, oil to make his face shine and bread to strengthen man’s heart…. These all look to you and you give them food in due season (Ps. 104:14-15…)."

The storyteller says that the **Lord visits** his people.
- Luke 1:68, Zechariah, praises God for John the Baptist, saying, “Blessed the Lord God of Israel, he has **visited** us…”
- In Genesis 21:1, 1 Sam 2:21, the same word is used to speak of God **visiting infertile women**, enabling them to conceive and give birth (Sarah “the Lord visited Sarah” and Hannah, “The Lord visited Hannah”) each of whom bore sons who played a significant role in redemptive history.

**Application:** Your trashcans are signs that God provides. No one likes to take the trashcans out, but remember, this implies you have stuff. Worship when you wheel down your trash cans.

2. **Faith (7-18)**

There are three exchanges, discussions. **52.4% of the book is discussion. Women need to talk. “Why does she need to talk? It’s biblical.”**

The key word is “return” – twelve times in the chapter

A. **Naomi’s Unshakable Confidence (7-13)**

  o **Naomi’s Plea (7-9)**

    "Go and return to your mother's house." You can hear the tenderness, love and affection. There’s nothing in Bethlehem. You need a husband and a home. **You won’t find a husband in Bethlehem.**
This was a difficult culture to be a widow. Laws were given to properly care for them. Naomi is saying “I don’t want you to be picked up by a man and be his concubine.”

“Mother’s house” is a curious phrase. In the OT, the “Father’s house” was the phrase normally used, but in Song of Songs it is used as the place where children are conceived. This is her longing. But Ruth will bear a child in Bethlehem!

0 Naomi’s Prayer (8b-9)

- “May the Lord deal kindly” (8)
- “May the Lord grant you” (9)
- LORD – Yahweh

She understands that it would be a great gift of God to give them husband, children, and a full life. This is the flip side to providence, prayer. We pray because God is good and sovereign.

Now, I will hold myself back from expounding long on this word “kindness” but you see it frequently in this book. It is without question one of the most important words in the Old Testament, the word “hesed” which is translated as loyal love, faithful love; the covenant loyalty of God to his people. One of the most common attributes of God spoken of in the Old Testament is his covenant-keeping love. God expects his people to show it to one another.

Naomi and Ruth had displayed hesed to Naomi for 10 years, and now she wants the Lord to show kindness to them.

You can feel the emotion. It would have been hard not to leave.

This is a convincing argument. It’s the smart move.
Verse 9 – weeping and kissing.

0 Naomi’s Perspective (10-13)

Verse 10 – for a moment, they will have none of this.

Verse 11-12 – the second dialogue. READ. Even if I have children and had twins, by the time they get old enough for marriage, you will be ready for the geriatric ward.

Verse 13 – Added to this, “The Lord is against me.”

- Don’t miss the faith behind the bitterness;
- Job said, “God’s arrows have gone out against me”
- John Flavel – sanctified afflictions

“I don’t understand what’s going on, but I do know that though this is a hard providence, a frowning providence, my life is still in God’s hands. And he is good, sovereign, and wise.”

I can be sure of two things: they will do me good and bring him glory.

She is a lady with unshakable convictions. She isn’t happy, but what is she doing? She’s dealing with God.

Do you deal with God when you are having a hard providence? Job said, “The Lord gives and the Lord takes away; blessed be his name.” Many people don’t have a category for this type of lamenting. But it’s part of what it means to have faith.

B. Ruth’s Unexplainable Conversion (14-18)

- Her Commitment to Naomi (14)
Ruth clung to her. – See Gen 2:24

Orpah left her. She does the calculation: Husband, land, children, security – I take Moab. Judah: Yahweh and nothing else. She takes the broad road. Ruth’s agenda was altogether different.

Orpah looks like a Christian, but is really faking it; we could call her Oprah.

In the language of the NT, Naomi puts before them the cost of discipleship. I can promise you nothing, but you can know the real God, or have everything and not have God.

Luke 14:25

- Her Conversion to the Real God (15-18)

a. First sentence: Stop Urging Me
b. Fifth Sentence: Concluding Oath
c. Second Sentence and Forth: Go together, verbal pairs
d. All of this frames, the middle sentence (Hebrew structure forms a chaism) – Ruth’s calculated response.

“Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God”

This recalls the central covenant promise – Gen 17:7-8

Another interesting note, there are no verbs – “Your God, my God, your people, my people.” The author is incredible. He writes for affect. This sentence is not a declaration of what she will do, but what she has already done.

In a word, this is conversion. She says, “Your God is my God.” Where you go, I will go.
This is probably the greatest conversion in the Old Testament. This is more than her commitment to Naomi. It is her commitment to Yahweh. She says, “I belong to you Naomi, because I belong to Yahweh.” And her conversion affects all of history, for through her will come Messiah.

Ruth, takes the narrow road, Orpah the broad road.


24 thousand people at Rupp Arena, but they all enter through the turn stile as an individual. Have you entered into covenant relationship with God by faith.

Revelation gives us a picture of a those who are saying “worthy, worthy to the Root of David” – a crowd to great to number. But they’ve all come through faith in Christ.

Have you turned your back on the substitute gods of this age, and trusted in Christ?

My friends this what it means to become a Christian:
• Turning from everything, for the treasure
• To love God, love his people
• Even if I lose everything, give me Jesus
• Has God made you to be a Christian? If so, you will be willing to give up everything to have him. To give all that you are, for all that he is.

What would make her enter? You can only explain it by grace.
• Attracted by Naomi’s faith? Please. Socially? She would have been an outcast? It's all grace.

3. Family (19-22a)
19 – whole town is talking, buzzing… blogging… who’s the Moabite? Who is with her? Ruth.

Honesty (19-20) – What was Naomi’s name? Sweety pie. She says, “Call me, “bitter old hag.” You ever met with one of those? If you’re with one, I’m sorry.

Aren’t bitter old women fun? Aren’t they great? No! No fun at all. How many of you young women, would give your whole life to a bitter old woman?

“I went away full, but I’ve come back empty. I have nothing.”

Really, what is your feeling toward Naomi?

• Most commentators rail on her. They say, “Don’t be bitter.”

• I love her honesty. I don’t recommend bitterness, but I do recommend honesty.

• They ask her, “How are you doing? It’s horrible!”

Community (20): Naomi doesn’t say this in the woods, she says it among people; she does it in the equivalent in a small group. Brutal honesty. That’s how we should be.

• You shouldn’t be bitter, but if you are, run to God’s people and get help. I think this is her public declaration for help, mercy, and correction. That is a virtue. She’s with the people of God, or the family of God.

Are you?

• I would encourage you to be as honest as she is.
Loyalty (22a) – There’s Ruth right by her side. That’s a blessing of providence. God gives us people to sustain us.

4. Future Hope (22) - sustained like us - by hope

“Barley Harvest” – What is that? That’s hope. God’s blessing has arrived. It’s a whole new season in Israel. Maybe it is for Naomi and Ruth. This is going in a good place.

Block states: “The timing is critical and providential, for it means that Naomi and Ruth arrive in “the house of bread” just when the grain for bread is ready to be cut, that is, in late April or early March by our calendars. Since barley was the first crop to be harvested each year, the timing of their arrival meant that Naomi and Ruth could get settled at a time when food would be relatively plentiful and that they were around to lay up stores of each crop for the dry season.”

They have a future hope. It’s barley harvest.

App: There are times when we think God is far from us, but remember he is always faithful to us.

• Sin, pain, and grief in your past doesn’t dispel hope for your future, because of His grace.

• Naomi thinks God is far from her, but standing next to her is a Moabite woman, who will be used in the lineage of the Savior of the word, born in Bethlehem.

2:1. If we peak into the next chapter, the hope intensifies. Boaz, a worthy man appears.

Now, the music changes. Funeral music, perhaps bag pipes, or even more depressing, country music...
What is in their future? And what is in our future?

This theme “emptiness to fullness” is helpful to think about

1. **Physically: Hungry to Full.** They will collect much grain. Ruth will eat at Boaz’s table. She will dip bread in the dish.

2. **Spiritually: Bitterness Hardship to Kindness and Favor.** Everything is about to be reversed. For Ruth will ask, “Why have I found such favor in your eyes, Boaz?”

3. **Emotionally: Insecurity to Security.** Boaz advocates for Ruth and says, “I have told the men not to touch you.” These vulnerable ladies, have a protector.

4. **Martially: Unmarried to Married.** Ruth finds Boaz, a fully qualified Redeemer. As a Redeemer, he will take all of these problems as His own.

Of course, they don’t know these things yet. Their lives, are like ours. We don’t see the next chapter, but we must believe in future grace.

What about us?

1. **We have greater bread.** Jesus Christ has come, born in Bethlehem. Years later in these fields, shepherds would hear from Angels good news of great joy, for in the house of Bread, a Savior will appear. And Titus tells us that we live between this first hope-filled coming and the second, which he refers to Jesus “the Blessed Hope.” Oh, yes, God supplies our physical bread, and we should truly give thanks, but Jesus has come as the bread of Life, and those who receive Him will never hunger again.
2. **We have received greater Kindness and Favor.**

Praise Him for His grace and favor  
To our fathers in distress;  
Praise Him, still the same forever,  
Slow to chide and swift to bless:  
Praise Him, praise Him,  
Glorious in His faithfulness.

Like Ruth asked to Boaz, we ask to our Redeemer, Jesus,  
“Why have I found such favor in your eyes?”

3. **We Have a Greater Security.** “Fear not little flock, it’s your father’s pleasure to give you the kingdom.”

4. **We Have a Greater Redeemer.** The Kinsmen would bear all of their problems as his own, and that’s what Jesus has done. “This physician heals by taking on the diseases on himself.” He will assume all our deepest problems! “He bore our sins in his body on the tree.”

Are you empty? You need to “return” to God. Turn your back on substitute gods and find grace.

This story makes me think of Luke 15. The Son is there in the pigsty, in complete emptiness. And he says:

“But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.”’ And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no
longer worthy to be called your son.’ But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.’ And they began to celebrate. (Luke 15:17-24 ESV)

**Arise, and return to the God of all grace.**

- There is grace for Elimilechs today. For those who have running from God, instead of running to God.

- There is grace for Ruths. For those who are outsiders – strangers to the Bible and the Gospel. Jesus welcomes you.

- There is grace for Orpahs. For pragmatic people, who are faithless.

- There is grace for Naomi’s. For those who are facing a hard providence. Come to God today in prayer, and believe the words of Cowper:

  As we prepare to dip our bread in the cup, let us receive grace afresh today as we reflect on the Savior, who is full of grace and truth.