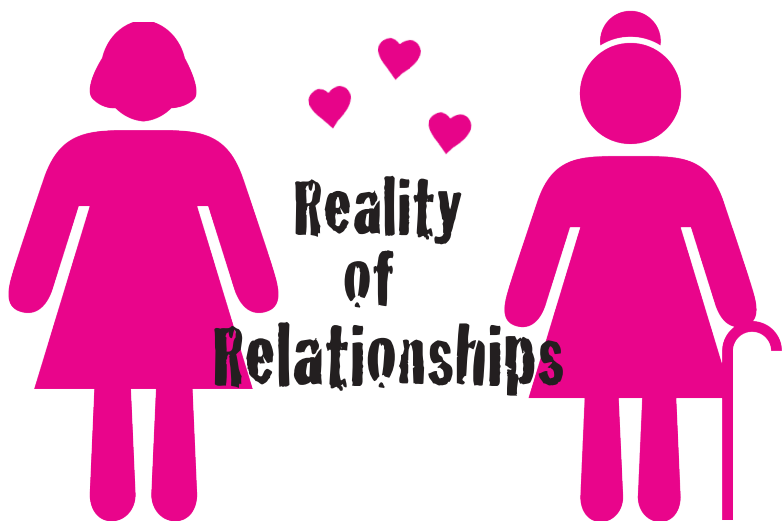


Relationships have the power to build you up or break you down. Often, relationships depend on what we are willing to put into them. The Bible is filled with lessons for every relationship we encounter. However, the most important lesson we can learn is that love has redemptive power.



Before beginning this study, take time to read the Book of Ruth, marking passages that have particular meaning to you. Highlight key words and phrases, and then meditate on why they are important to you. Let the Holy Spirit teach you through the Word.

Relationships, at best, are tricky. They can be downright hard. A healthy relationship requires patience, understanding, a willingness to forgive and to ask for forgiveness, and a commitment to give 100%.

The Book of Ruth gives us some beautiful word pictures of relationships. The unknown author (possibly Samuel) has given us a beautiful narrative of an Israelite family, weaving together a story of love, loss, and a glimpse of the redemptive power of love.

So, let's dive in, examine the relationships in the four chapters of this book, and see what we can learn from the handfults left for us on purpose.

What's in a Name?

Before we get into the story, consider the main characters. In Bible times, a person's name could tell you a lot about a man and his family. Take Elimelech, for example. His name means, *My God is King*. He was of the clan of Ephraim and worshiped Jehovah God. The name of his wife, Naomi, means *pleasant*. Before disaster struck in Moab, she was most likely very happy raising her boys and taking care of her household. The couple had two sons named Mahlon and Chilion. Mahlon translates into *unhealthy*, while Chilion means *puny*. This may give us insight into why they passed away at a relatively young age.

As for the main characters in our story, the meanings of their names are significant. They tell us Ruth had a *pleasant personality*, and Boaz was a man of *strength*.

Think about how these meanings factor into the events of the story. Now let's get to it!



Key Verses: Ruth 1:16-17

As our story begins, Elimelech and Naomi, along with sons Mahlon and Chilion, are living in the town of Bethlehem. A famine strikes the land of Israel, and Elimelech makes the decision to take his family to the heathen land of Moab. Going against God's command not to associate with pagan nations, they leave Bethlehem in Judah (*house of bread and praise*) and travel to Moab, a place of idolatry. This move begins dark days for this family.

We do not know how long Elimelech and his family were in Moab. We do know Elimelech died after arriving, leaving Naomi with two sons at home. In time, Mahlon and Chilion take Moabite wives, once again going against Mosaic Law by marrying pagan women.

Sound familiar? Before we go too far into condemning Elimelech for taking his family into idolatry and his children for going against the law, let's think about our own lives for a minute. Do you ever travel to your own Moab? Have you found yourself in places you knew would not please the Lord? Have you ever been "unequally yoked" in a personal or business relation-

ship? Don't be so quick to play the blame game. Elimelech was probably desperate and needed to find a way to sustain his family, even if that meant going in the wrong direction. He did not make the right decision, but we see it is a thread woven into the fabric that will be the robe of redemption.

After some time passes, the two sickly sons (remember the

follow the Mosaic Law in their everyday lives? Did Naomi resent having to leave her home? Were Mahlon and Chilion God-fearing men? Did Naomi teach Ruth and Orpah about Jehovah and His love for His people? What was the relational dynamic between these three women?

As Naomi begins her journey home, her daughters-in-law start back to Bethlehem with

"...Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the LORD do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me." — Ruth 1:16-17

meaning of their names) die, leaving their wives, Ruth and Orpah, young widows.

Now, Naomi has two pagan daughters-in-law and no way to meet their daily needs. She hears the famine has loosened its grip on Israel. Likely feeling overwhelmed, she makes the decision to return. Three graves are all she has in Moab. Her homeland awaits.

Don't you wonder what life in Moab was like for this God-fearing family? Did they continue to

her. She begs them to go back home because she has nothing to give them. Naomi knows they will be considered outcasts if they return to Israel with her.

After much pleading and weeping, Orpah decides to return to Moab and a life of idolatry. On the other hand, was she a changed woman? Did she, too, now worship Israel's God? How much influence had Naomi had on these two women?

Apparently, she had made a huge impact on Ruth. The

young woman makes it very clear to Naomi she will not desert her. She is going with Naomi, even though she knows she is heading into a life of poverty. Idolatry or poverty—not much of a choice, if you ask me.

Oh, how many times have we started out with excitement and determination only to be dissuaded by other's opinions, difficulty, or fear of the here and now and of the future? So many of us are scared to leave the familiar, even if God is calling us to leave our Moab and come back home.

Ruth's decision changed history for all time. Even though

she knows difficult days are ahead; she chooses to go with Naomi. Maybe she had no other family in Moab, or maybe Naomi had loved on her so much that she couldn't bear to let her mother-in-law go without her. Maybe, just maybe, Naomi did not fit the stereotype.

Whatever the reason, Ruth utters a heartfelt plea and promise as she leaves Moab and idolatry behind and sets her eyes on Naomi's home and her heart on Naomi's God (Ruth 1:16-17).

The die was cast, and there was no looking back. Naomi and Ruth begin their journey home.

Reflective Questions:

How do you think Naomi felt about leaving her home?

Have you ever found yourself in a Moab? What did you do?

What is our role in mentoring younger women?

Have you ever been called to make a major sacrifice to follow Christ's leading?



A Relationship From Reaping

Key Verses: Ruth 2:15-16

Chapter 2 begins by throwing in what, at first glance, seems a random fact about a relative of Elimelech, Naomi's husband. Of course, we know that one sentence embraces the entire theme of the Book of Ruth—the kinsman-redeemer.

Naomi and Ruth make it to Bethlehem and simply try to survive. Naomi is depressed—right-

er the gleanings of the harvest. Mosaic Law made provision for the poor to be able to have the stray grains or ears of corn the harvesters did not get the first time through (Leviticus 19:9).

Some biblical scholars say the gleanings could have been as much as 30% of the field's yield. Aren't you thankful for the handfuls on purpose God leaves for us along the way?

Ruth finds a field and begins to work. It is the beginning of the barley harvest, and the reapers are already hard at work. Ruth has a strong work

Naomi lets her bitterness blind her to her blessing.

fully so—and asks her friends to call her *Mara* because she feels the Lord has *dealt bitterly* with her (1:20). She focuses on what she has lost, but she misses what is right beside her. She has someone who loves her and has sacrificed everything to be with her. Naomi lets her bitterness blind her to her blessing.

Ruth knows she is their only means of procuring food to sustain them, so she asks Naomi to let her go to the fields and gath-

ethic, (likely motivated by the desire not to starve), and her diligence is noticed by, not only the other laborers, but by Boaz, the owner of the field. Now we know why verse one tells us who he was!

Boaz seems to be a boss who looks after his employees and treats them fairly. He sees Ruth and doesn't recognize her. His supervisor shares her story, and that she has worked hard all day long picking up the leftovers from

his field.

Boaz speaks to Ruth kindly. He offers her a place to work, protection, and food to eat during the day, as well as an abundance of grain to take home with her. I think he was definitely smitten with the young Moabite widow. Maybe it was love at first sight.

As a rich and important man in the city, he had heard the talk in town of how Ruth accompanied Naomi back to Israel, had kept to herself, and taken care of the older woman. He makes sure she and Naomi have what they need.

Ruth cannot understand the kindness of this man, Boaz. It may be she had never known a gentle man as her relationships

with her father-in-law and husband had apparently not lasted very long. Boaz compliments her on her faithfulness to Naomi and her conduct since moving to Israel. This is quite a different reception than she had been expecting. She makes certain she stays in Boaz's fields with the other women, just as he has instructed her to do.

When Naomi finds out where Ruth has spent her day and the grain she brought home—along with leftovers from lunch—she is beside herself. Already, we can hear the wheels turning in Naomi's mind. God was working behind the scenes, setting the stage for a love story for the ages.

Reflective Questions:

Have you ever been led to a place that you knew was only possible through God's hand?

What made Boaz take notice of Ruth?



A Relationship From Romance

Key Verses: Ruth 3:13, 18

Now we begin the romance.

Naomi explains to Ruth the role Boaz held as her family's kinsman-redeemer (read Deuteronomy 25:5-10). She instructs her to make herself beautiful because she is going to put a plan in motion. Wouldn't you like to know what was going through Ruth's mind as she listened to Naomi's instructions?

Naomi was tired of waiting for the light bulb to go off in Boaz's brain, so she was forcing his hand by having Ruth make the first move.

Ruth readies herself, applies some oils to her skin, and puts on her best dress. Following

Naomi's guidance, she goes to the threshing floor and finds Boaz sleeping among the other men. She quietly lies down and uncovers his feet. She is staking claim to her kinsman-redeemer.

When Boaz suddenly awakens, Ruth's appearance startles him. When she tells him the reason for her midnight visit, he blesses her but gives her the bad news there is a kinsman with first right of refusal for Elimelech's property. He promises to do his part to make it right.

When Ruth gets back from seeing Boaz, loaded down with grain, Naomi assures her all is well and just to sit tight. She knows he is an honorable, God-fearing man who will do the right thing. The ball is now in Boaz's court.

Reflective Questions:

What is the significance of Ruth asking Boaz to spread his clothing over her?

What was Boaz's opinion of Ruth? Did her midnight visit change his view?



A Relationship From Redemption

Key Verses: Ruth 4:13-14

Now we come to the main point of the Book of Ruth—the kinsman-redeemer. Boaz knows he has to find the man with more rights to Elimelech's property and settle the matter. He goes to the city gate and waits for him to come by. When he sees him, Boaz gathers ten men of the city as witnesses and asks him to perform his duty as next of kin and redeem Elimelech's property.

The man agrees...until he finds out the property comes with a Moabite wife. He then refuses, and, according to Jewish custom, the man takes off his shoe as confirmation of the deal (Deuteronomy 25:7-9). Romantic, right?

Boaz then takes Ruth as his wife, and God blesses them with a son, Obed (*servant, worshiper*), who would become King Da-

Reflective Questions:

How far would you go to claim your rights in Christ?

vid's grandfather.

What a turnaround! Naomi, who had been left alone in Moab, returns home with a daughter-in-law and a boat-load of bitterness, and is now bouncing her grandson on her knees. Ruth, a Moabite outcast, is now married to a respected town leader and contributes to a royal bloodline.

Dear sister, can you see the power of redemption woven throughout this little book? When we were poor, wretched outcasts, God sent our Redeemer to buy us to Himself. We had nothing to give, but He covered us with His robe of righteousness so we could be included in the royal bloodline.

Have you claimed your redemption? As Boaz redeemed Ruth, so Christ is waiting to redeem us as His Bride. Like Ruth, come humbly and ask for His gift of salvation. It's free to all who ask.

About the Writer: Amanda Kilgore has been involved in women's ministry and WNAC for most of her life, serving several years as President of Tennessee WAC. She and her husband, Dr. James Kilgore, live in the beautiful Smoky Mountains.