

poverty and plenty

Ruth



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Introduction: Good Book Guides

Every Bible-study group is different—yours may take place in a church building, in a home, in a cafe, on a train, over a leisurely mid-morning coffee or squashed into a 30-minute lunch break. Your group may include new Christians, mature Christians, non-Christians, students, business colleagues or teens. That's why we've designed these *Good Book Guides* to be flexible for use in many different situations.

Our aim in each session is to uncover the meaning of a passage, and see how it fits into the 'big picture' of the Bible. But that can never be the end. We also need to apply appropriately what we have discovered to our lives. Let's take a look at what is included:

- ↻ **Talkabout:** most groups need to 'break the ice' at the beginning of a session, and here's the question that will do that. It's designed to get people talking around a subject that will be covered in the course of the Bible study.
- ↓ **Investigate:** the Bible text for each session is broken up into manageable chunks, with questions that aim to help you understand what the passage is about. **The Leader's Guide** contains **guidance on questions**, and sometimes ☑ additional 'follow-up' questions.
- 🗺 **Explore more (optional):** these questions will help you connect what you have learned to other parts of the Bible, so you can begin to understand how the Bible relates together as a whole.
- ➔ **Apply:** As you go through a Bible study, you'll keep coming across **apply** sections. Some of these have questions to get the group discussing what the Bible teaching means in practice for you and your church. Sometimes, a 🗣 **getting personal** section is an opportunity for you to think, plan and pray about the changes that you personally may need to make as a result of what you have discovered.
- ⬆ **Pray:** We want to encourage prayer that is rooted in God's Word—in line with His concerns, purposes and promises. So each session ends with an opportunity to review the truths and challenges highlighted by the Bible study, and turn them into prayers of request and thanksgiving.

The **Leader's Guide** and introduction provide historical background information, explanations of the Bible texts for each session, ideas for **optional extra** activities, and guidance on how best to help people uncover the truths of God's Word.

Why study *Poverty & Plenty*?

What's so special about the story of Ruth? This woman was no powerful princess—just a young, vulnerable widow, an impoverished outcast. The story records no famous events or places—just an average family suffering misfortune, in a small, agricultural community occupied with their livelihoods and customs.

But the hidden hand of God is at work in the lives of these utterly ordinary people. God transforms hardship from bitterness to joy; God's word liberates people to become a community filled with loving-kindness towards outcasts; God's people reach out to their enemies; men and women in troubled and chaotic times choose to do good and act right.

But bigger than all of these, we see God's great plan for the whole world being played out in the lives of ordinary people. We discover that these ordinary events in the lives of ordinary people are part of a chain that ends with the coming of a promised Saviour King to redeem people of all nations.

The whole story is a beautiful picture of Jesus our Redeemer, and the unimaginable difference He makes to people saved by Him.

Like those in this story, we are just ordinary folk, unable to see how the events of our lives will turn out. But by understanding God's wonderful sovereign purposes at work in the story of Ruth, we too can trust God and rejoice that our 'poverty' will be turned to 'plenty' by discovering the riches that are ours through Jesus Christ.



1 Ruth 1-2

A HIDDEN HAND

talkabout

1. At what times in your life have you have found it hard to trust God?

investigate

Read Ruth 1

2. How did Elimelech respond to famine?

3. Look at **Deuteronomy 32 v 15-18, 23-24, 36-39**. How should the people of Israel have understood their famine? How should they have responded?

4. **Read Deuteronomy 23 v 3-6**. What was the problem with going to Moab and marrying Moabite women?



5. Imagine what going back with Naomi meant for Ruth.

Fifteen times in chapter 1 God is called 'the LORD' or 'Yahweh'. It is God's special covenant name with Israel. The word 'kindness' in verse 8 means 'covenant love, loving-kindness or loyalty.'

6. How does Ruth show the covenant love of the LORD in her attitude to Naomi?

7. How did Naomi describe what has happened to her in v 20-21?

8. Who does Naomi blame her misfortune on? Was she right to do this?

➔ **apply**

9. **Read Romans 5 v 1-5.** What should hardship produce in our lives?





getting personal

Who do you blame for misfortune in your life? Do difficulties or setbacks make you bitter towards God? Or do they produce perseverance, character and hope?



investigate

In 1 v 21 Naomi says she comes back empty. But in 3 v 17 Boaz can say to Ruth: *'Don't go back to your mother-in-law empty-handed.'*

In chapter 1 Naomi is bitter because she has lost her two sons.

But in chapter 4 the women of the village praise God *'for your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons...'*

(4 v 15). The circumstances of Naomi and Ruth change completely.

▶ Read Ruth 2

10. How do we see God's hand changing the circumstances of Naomi and Ruth?

In verse 1 we learn that Naomi has a rich relative. In verse 2 Ruth asks to glean in the fields of 'anyone in whose eyes I find favour.' Ruth is going to pick a random landowner, but verse 1 suggests this choice may not turn out to be random at all! Verse 3 says 'as it turned out'. We might translate this as 'it just so happened'. It seems as if Ruth got lucky. But the writer highlights the 'big coincidences' in the life of Ruth to point to God's hidden hand. There is no 'miracle', but with the writer's help we can see God's providential care.

11. Look at verses 12 and 20. What is said about the Lord in chapter 2?



➔ **apply**

12. The writer gives us a glimpse of God's providence in the lives of Ruth and Naomi, but Ruth and Naomi do not see this as the story unfolds anymore than we usually do in our lives. What encouragement does this story give you for your circumstances?

13. Only in 2 v 20 does Naomi begin to put the pieces together and see God's hand at work. She is catching up with God's providence. Where can you see God's hand at work in your life?

⬆ **pray**

1. Compare 1 v 9 and 3 v 1 (see the NIV footnote). Prayer and providence interweave in the story of Ruth and in our stories. With this in mind, bring your needs to God in prayer.
2. Spend a few moments quietly thinking of the problems you face in your life. Slowly read aloud some or all of the following passages, giving people time to reflect on how these verses speak to their circumstances.
 - Ruth 2 v 12
 - Psalm 17 v 6-8
 - Psalm 36 v 7-8
 - Psalm 57 v 1
 - Psalm 91 v 1-4
 - Philippians 4 v 6-7

