



TEND Your Soul Bible Study Series

A 4-WEEK STUDY

Finding Grace  
in the Unexpected

# RUTH

MARIEL DAVENPORT

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GOD HEARS HER



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*Ruth: Finding Grace in the Unexpected*

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# INTRODUCTION

**E**very part of life involves transition. Growth, development, milestones, and changes are constants in life. As I box up things from my firstborn's room for his move across town, I'm reminded of my need for stability in all the changes. My son's upcoming wedding, my other son's approaching graduation from college, our move to a new town, the passing of my dad—all mark transitions in my life, places where I need to be reminded of God's grace.

As you consider your own life's transitions, I wonder where you have anchored yourself in their midst. Our God is a rock for us, our stronghold. I find myself returning to a familiar place in the Bible when I near major changes in my life, as I search for grace in the unexpected. God spotlights a woman in Scripture who—despite experiencing loss and the unknown—held fast to the One who held her fast.

Ruth is a woman who knew transitions well. She buried her husband; moved to a foreign land; was the caregiver of her bitter, widowed mother-in-law; and even navigated the adjustments of a new marriage and motherhood. In some ancient Jewish traditions, the book of Ruth appears directly following the book of Proverbs; its proximity to Proverbs leads some scholars to believe that Ruth was considered the

living embodiment of the Proverbs 31 woman! (Both women are also described by the same Hebrew word—*chayil* [meaning “valor”]—and they are the only women to receive this commendation.<sup>1</sup>)

In other Jewish traditions, the book is placed preceding the Psalms as a recognition of the book’s connection to King David. David, the author of most of the psalms and a key figure in Israelite history, is a great-grandson of Ruth. In the English translations of the Bible, the book of Ruth is placed following the book of Judges in a concern to follow chronological and historical order.

Ruth has profoundly influenced my own relationship with God. As a new wife and mom and someone new to faith in Jesus, I yearned for the example of a godly woman, and found it in Ruth—in her character and in her surrender to God. Her account in Scripture has taught me that I too can find grace in the unexpected, and so can you.

## **My Atheist Eyes Opened**

As a young woman who had been an atheist, I surrendered my life to Jesus after reading Genesis in a Bible borrowed from a coworker. Unsure what the Bible held in its pages, and in an attempt to guard my insecure heart, I approached Scripture with skepticism. The challenge before me was to disprove the Bible.

One evening as my newborn lay asleep and my young husband sat watching the news, I opened the Bible for the first time. Never could I have imagined what would happen in the days ahead as I continually returned to the complicated storyline of dysfunctional people in Genesis—to whom I could relate all too well! My eyes were opened! Every day at work, I peppered my coworker with questions, and she never seemed to tire of sharing the gospel with me. By the reading of the last chapter of Genesis, I surrendered my life to this one and only God who had given His perfect Son for me.

This newfound faith in God filled me with excitement, joy, and a bit of hesitation since I was completely green in my knowledge of the Bible. As a new wife and mom—and a first-generation Christian in my family—I had trouble finding older women to mentor me along the

way. Maybe that's why the book of Ruth caught my attention early on. Ruth is an example of lived-out godliness. Her character compelled me to uncover her story in Scripture and, even more so, to seek to know and trust her God.

The book of Ruth is set in the time of the judges, when "everyone did what was right in [their] own eyes" (Judges 21:25). We also navigate life in a culture where everyone is doing what is right in their own eyes. As masterfully illustrated in the brief book of Ruth, God is at work redeeming and wooing His people despite the corruption and injustice of the time. As women of God and of His Word, we, like Ruth, can choose to trust Him as we uncover God's unfailing character revealed in the Bible. God will prove Himself faithful to you and me just as He did for an ancient Moabitess.

## **Tending Your Soul**

As we lean in to learn from Ruth, it can feel intimidating to approach the Scriptures, and even more so, to rightly live in response to it. After many years of living dependent on other people's Bible studies, I yearned to hear God's voice through His Word for myself. I studied how to dig into the Bible inductively, which is a practice of observing and seeking to rightly interpret the text based on the context before applying it to your life.

As I sat in my backyard salsa garden and learned to tend the young plants there, God taught me how He desired to tend my soul by His Word. In the process, the TEND method was born and has been my guide through Scripture for many years. TEND is a simple, meaningful inductive approach to discovering God's Word. TEND encourages us to slow down and listen carefully to the heart of God and to draw near to Him.

## **As You Begin**

Just as a gardener gathers her tools before heading into the garden, you will want to gather yours. All you will need:

- *Your favorite Bible.* Having access to various translations on a phone or laptop can be helpful too.
- *Pen or pencil of choice.*
- *This guided journal.* Throughout the journal, there will be some suggestions for further study; some of these resources are listed in Appendix B. These resources are extra and certainly not *needed* to begin tending your soul by the Word. But they are helpful for digging deeper as you grow in your study of the Bible.

## How to Use the TEND Method

TEND is an acronym that guides you through a simple four-step method to engage with God’s Word for yourself. (To learn how to TEND through a Bible passage, scan the video podcast QR code on page 9.)

- **T** stands for *Take time to pray*. As you begin the study, simply pray and ask the Holy Spirit who teaches us truth (John 14:25–26) to lead and direct your mind and heart as you uncover His Word.
- **E** stands for *Examine the Scriptures*. Write down the verses from the day’s directed Bible text. (Need help with choosing a translation? Check out Appendix A.) As you copy down God’s living words, consider the subjects and verbs in the verses. Place yourself in the scene.
- **N** stands for *Notice the lessons*. Rather than jumping to application, we want to pause here to consider what the author was saying to the original reader or hearer of these words. Ask yourself, *What is being taught here? Is there a characteristic of God being revealed?* Then write out the attribute of God displayed. This step will take practice, but the time and effort are worthwhile because the goal of time in the Bible is to know and love God more. That begins by identifying what the verse is teaching about God.

- **D** stands for *Do what it says*. We want to be doers of the Word, and not hearers only (or readers only), deceiving ourselves, as James 1:22 warns against. In this final step of TEND, we want to respond to what God is teaching. Consider the insights from Scripture in light of your own life, your relationships, and your circumstances. How will you respond to who God is and to the lesson you gleaned today through your relationships or circumstances?

Some days you might respond by praising God, repenting, or journaling. Other days you might respond by texting an apology to someone or encouraging someone the Lord brings to mind. We will never look like Jesus if we have a head full of learning but lack applied knowledge. If that's the case, we will remain weak-willed and increasingly vulnerable to the enemy (2 Timothy 3:1–7).

**New to the TEND method? Join me, using the QR code below.**



# SETTING THE CONTEXT

Looking at the background and context is imperative as we prepare the soil of our souls to walk with God through Ruth, the only Old Testament book of the Bible named for a non-Israelite woman.

## 1. What Genre Is This Written In?

The book of Ruth is a historical narrative, meaning it is the retelling of the actual events that happened to the family of Elimelech.

*So where in history does this story happen?* Knowing the metanarrative of Scripture helps us understand the book of Ruth's purpose and meaning within the larger scope of Scripture.

According to Impact 360 Institute, "The metanarrative is the big picture of the Bible. Though it is essential to take a deep dive into specific pieces of scripture and meditate over them, it is easy to forget that the Bible is one big story of a family. It begins with Adam, leads to Jesus, and continues through us."<sup>1</sup>

The metanarrative of Scripture:

**Creation → Fall → Redemption → Consummation**

*Exploring the Metanarrative of Scripture.* **Creation** happened at the beginning of time as outlined in the first chapters of Genesis. The **fall** of humanity followed when Adam and Eve chose to sin against

God, ushering sin into the world and damaging our relationship with God. Before the fall, Adam and Eve had direct access to their Creator. Consequences of Adam and Eve's sin included their removal from the garden of Eden and loss of constant communication with Him. Still, God pursued humankind, foreshadowing the direct access to Himself that He would offer in His Son, Jesus.

Jesus would reconcile humanity back to God. Born of a virgin and without sin, Jesus Christ was sacrificed in the place of God's people at the cross, which brought **redemption** for those who would trust in the Messiah Jesus. Jesus was then resurrected. He returned to heaven to sit at the right hand of the Father. He also sent the Holy Spirit to indwell those who surrender to Jesus until the day of **consummation**, when God's people will be eternally together in His presence.

Between the fall in Genesis and Christ's redeeming sacrifice in the New Testament were many ups and downs for God's people, including the period we will be focusing on. Just before God assigned them a king in the book of 1 Samuel, the Israelites were led by judges.

*Ruth: When the Judges Ruled.* Around 1100 BC, during the rule of one of the judges, a severe famine in Israel affected the land in and around Bethlehem, which means "house of bread."

In the book of Ruth, a young family from Bethlehem sought pasture for their dying flock and thus traveled as far as the land of Moab. Moab was across the Dead Sea from Bethlehem. The area had been founded by Abraham's nephew Lot and his family under sinful circumstances (see Genesis 19:30–36). The people of the area were known for their worship of Chemosh and other pagan gods.

As mentioned in the introduction, during this time, "everyone did what was right in [their] own eyes" (Judges 21:25). The period of the judges was a season of heightened moral anarchy. When God's people returned to the promised land, the Lord raised up judges to lead His people. Those judges often failed to lead the people in righteousness and led them away from God.

**The book of Judges highlights the cycle of rebellion and idolatry among God's people.** When the Israelites rebelled against God, they

were subjugated by other nations. In their oppression, they cried out to God and He would raise up a judge to deliver them. After their deliverance, the Israelites served the Lord for a time, until they didn't. Again. Forgetting God's goodness to them, they would return to other gods. The final verse of Judges (see above) illustrates a vivid picture of what was going on then, and what is common to us in our human nature: rebellion, enslavement, cries for rescue and mercy, deliverance, gratitude, and right back to rebellion.

Have you noticed this cycle in your own heart in the seasons of your life? What a gift grace is! When we come to God and confess our sin and rebellion, God offers us the grace through Jesus that we desperately need (1 John 1:9).

## **2. Who Wrote the Book?**

The Jewish Talmud credits the prophet Samuel as the author of both Judges and Ruth, though the author is never disclosed in the text itself.

## **3. To Whom Was the Book Written?**

The original audience of Ruth was the Jewish people.

## **4. When Was This Book Written and When Did Its Events Occur?**

The book was likely written around 1000 BC to 962 BC, during the time of King David's reign, which is why the author is careful to end with a brief genealogy of the king. As previously mentioned, the book of Ruth was set during the time of the judges, between 1160 BC to 1100 BC, possibly sometime around Samson's leadership (Judges 15:20).

## **5. What Are the Main Themes or Keywords of the Book?**

The main theme of the Bible overall is God's pursuit and redemption of His people. God's faithfulness and loyal love (*hesed*) to His people

is a primary concept throughout the book of Ruth and is displayed in the relationship between Ruth and Naomi as well as in the relationship between Boaz and Ruth.

Ruth displayed the faithful love of God toward Naomi. Although a Moabite outsider, Ruth exhibited extraordinary courage and loyalty to her mother-in-law, along with an embrace of Naomi's God, Yahweh, when she left her people, her gods, and her homeland to join Naomi in her journey.

Similarly, Boaz showed God's loving kindness to Ruth and Naomi by stepping in as the *go'el*, the close relative—the kinsman-redeemer—who provided and protected vulnerable family members. He married Ruth and restored Naomi's land inheritance, shielding the two widows from poverty. Looking through the lens of the Gospels, we can see that in his role as kinsman-redeemer, Boaz is a picture of the ultimate Redeemer, Jesus. As *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* says: "Boaz is an illustration of the greater One who came from his family, the Lord Jesus Christ. Boaz acted in grace to redeem Ruth; Christ acted in grace by giving Himself as the Redeemer to provide redemption for all mankind."<sup>2</sup>

Though God's movement is often subtle in the book of Ruth, He ultimately is the one who redeems and restores His people. In the opening chapter, Naomi and Ruth were left destitute, grieving, and without a family. God orchestrated the events so that Naomi's lands are restored to her; Naomi and Ruth are provided for through Ruth's marriage to Boaz; and Obed, Boaz and Ruth's son, perpetuates Naomi's family line—a lineage that counts among its descendants King David and ultimately Jesus Christ.

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# WEEK 1

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# RETURNING TO GOD, RUTH 1

**W**e have all walked through seasons of choosing our own way over God's way. It can be difficult to differentiate the voice of self over the voice of God at times, especially when it comes to trusting God with our fears and with our loved ones. But God never ceases to invite us to return to Him. Regardless how far we have strayed, His arms are open like the father to his prodigal (Luke 15:11–32). Even now—no matter your past, the burdens you carry, or your circumstances—God generously invites you to return to Him.

The book of Ruth opens with Naomi and Ruth's journey of return. Following a devastating famine in their homeland, Elimelech, Naomi, and their family sought solace in Moab, a country known for idolatry. The choice to live in a country often openly hostile to Israel and God's ways may suggest this Israelite family relied on themselves for a solution to their needs instead of seeking Yahweh's wisdom. After experiencing successive tragedies in Moab, Naomi returned home to Bethlehem. Notice the repetition of the word *return* throughout the chapter. Consider this as you spend time studying Scripture each day. Where are you in your journey with the Lord? God is always inviting you to return to Him. Let that be your invitation as you lean in and use the TEND method to hear God through His Word. Join me as we journey with this Israelite family from Israel to Moab and back again.

# DAY 1

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

VERSES: *Ruth 1:1–5*

## **T. Take time to pray.**

Ask the Lord to speak to you through His Word today.

**TENDING TOOL:** Names are important in Scripture. Most biblical names carry a meaning that gives insight into the character of the person to whom it was assigned. Consider the names of this family: *Elimelech* means “my God is King,” yet Elimelech failed to live that out. *Naomi* means “pleasant” (we will see that name contrasted with the name Naomi later gave herself). *Mahlon* means “sickly,” and *Chilion* means “feeble,” and—reflecting the definitions of their names—the two sons had ill-health and tragically died while in Moab.

## E. Examine the Scriptures.

Write out the verses from your Bible below. Pay attention to the details in these verses, such as any action taking place and repeated words or keywords used.

**TENDING TOOL:** In these verses, we see Elimelech and his family affected by a famine in the land where God had planted them. While they were an Israelite family given covenant promises of God, their lineage didn't shield them from the devastation in the land. To escape hardship, Elimelech led his family to sojourn to Moab, a nearby area untouched by the ravages of the famine. But then they remained there. It seems as if they sought to solve this problem in their own way, but they ended up staying longer than they anticipated.

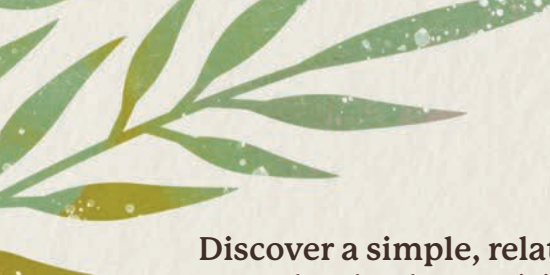
Circle repeated words or keywords in the verses you wrote. Take note how those concepts or keywords might affect the people we are being introduced to. Put yourself in their situation.

**N. Notice the lessons.**

What do these verses teach about God? Remember the original audience and what the passage meant to them. In these verses, is there a sin, promise, action, command, or example to follow or not follow? Write down the lessons.

**Join me as we TEND through Week 1, Day 1, together.**





## Discover a simple, relational Bible study method that leads to spiritual transformation!

Whether you're new to the Bible or you've read it for years, *Ruth: Finding Grace in the Unexpected* helps you encounter the God who keeps His promises. Gather your friends and journey alongside Ruth and Naomi, who learned to trust Him in the face of the unknown.

This fresh approach for studying Scripture will help you water your soul with the inspired Word of God. Gain unique rewards and insights through guided journaling pages and study tools that lead you to

- Take time to pray
- Examine the Scriptures
- Notice the lessons, and
- Do what it says

Mariel Davenport uses the TEND method in the Bible studies she leads. Scan the QR code provided with Week 1, Day 1, and see the beauty of digging into God's Word in community. On your own or with a group, you—like Ruth—will recognize and experience God's limitless grace in unexpected ways!



**Mariel Davenport** is the creator of the TEND Your Soul Bible Study Series, empowering women to experience God through a dynamic inductive study of Scripture. For more than 20 years, Mariel has taught women from all over the world how to study the Bible. She and her husband live in Wilmington, North Carolina.

The TEND Your Soul Bible Study Series is part of the God Hears Her collection, designed to bring inspiration and encouragement to women every day. Connect with us at [godhearsher.org](http://godhearsher.org) and [marieldavenport.com](http://marieldavenport.com).

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