

## INTERVARSITY BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

### *Ruth 3:1-18 NIV, The Threshing Floor (60 minutes)*

#### **WELCOME (7 minutes)**

Icebreaker: What is something that has been bringing you joy in this last week?

Let's pray and ask God to help us as we study today's passage together...

#### **GROUP NORMS (3 minutes)**

Each time we meet, let's be careful to work well together as a group. We are coming from many different backgrounds, so the purpose of these group norms is to help everyone feel welcome so they can fully participate:

1. Use "I" statements (speak for yourself, not for everyone)
2. Avoid judgmental statements (no shame or blame)
3. Allow space for everyone to share if they choose
4. Practice active listening and give advice only if invited to do so
5. What we share here stays here (confidentiality)

As your leader, I will help us remember our group norms. Also, as members of this group, feel free to speak up if you notice we are straying from these norms.

#### **INTRODUCE the Scripture Text (3 minutes)**

During the harvest season, Ruth and Boaz have gotten to know each other. We already know from chapter 2 that Boaz is a "man of standing" and a relative of Naomi's late husband, Elimelech. Our text today is widely discussed by commentators and there is a range of perspectives regarding what exactly takes place this night. Much of this discussion is due to the fact that "feet" can mean literal feet or be a euphemism for genitals. While we may not ever exactly know what took place, there's nevertheless so much to contemplate from this narrative.

#### **SEE the Scripture Text (10 minutes)**

Let's read the passage and talk about what we see.

- Who are the characters? How are they connected?
- What is happening? When? Where?
- Which words are being repeated?
- Is the author comparing or contrasting anything?
- Would you like to point out anything else you notice?

Ruth 3:1-18 NIV –

One day Ruth's mother-in-law Naomi said to her, "My daughter, I must find a home for you, where you will be well provided for. **2** Now Boaz, with whose women you have worked, is a relative of ours. Tonight he will be winnowing barley on the threshing floor. **3** Wash, put on perfume, and get dressed in your best clothes. Then go down to the threshing floor, but don't let him know you are there until he has finished eating and drinking. **4** When he lies down, note the place where he is lying. Then go and uncover his feet and lie down. He will tell you what to do."

5 “I will do whatever you say,” Ruth answered. 6 So she went down to the threshing floor and did everything her mother-in-law told her to do.

7 When Boaz had finished eating and drinking and was in good spirits, he went over to lie down at the far end of the grain pile. Ruth approached quietly, uncovered his feet and lay down. 8 In the middle of the night something startled the man; he turned—and there was a woman lying at his feet!

9 “Who are you?” he asked. “I am your servant Ruth,” she said. “Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a guardian-redeemer of our family.”

10 “The LORD bless you, my daughter,” he replied. “This kindness is greater than that which you showed earlier: You have not run after the younger men, whether rich or poor. 11 And now, my daughter, don’t be afraid. I will do for you all you ask. All the people of my town know that you are a woman of noble character. 12 Although it is true that I am a guardian-redeemer of our family, there is another who is more closely related than I. 13 Stay here for the night, and in the morning if he wants to do his duty as your guardian-redeemer, good; let him redeem you. But if he is not willing, as surely as the LORD lives I will do it. Lie here until morning.”

14 So she lay at his feet until morning, but got up before anyone could be recognized; and he said, “No one must know that a woman came to the threshing floor.”

15 He also said, “Bring me the shawl you are wearing and hold it out.” When she did so, he poured into it six measures of barley and placed the bundle on her. Then he went back to town.

16 When Ruth came to her mother-in-law, Naomi asked, “How did it go, my daughter?” Then she told her everything Boaz had done for her 17 and added, “He gave me these six measures of barley, saying, ‘Don’t go back to your mother-in-law empty-handed.’”

18 Then Naomi said, “Wait, my daughter, until you find out what happens. For the man will not rest until the matter is settled today.”

### **DISCOVER the Scripture Text (25 minutes)**

Let’s discuss a few questions that will help us discover and understand the text.

1. After two chapters of Ruth taking action and leading the way, why is Naomi suddenly stepping up with such a risky plan? What do you think has changed?
2. Why is Ruth willing to carry out Naomi’s strange plan?
3. Why is Boaz at the threshing floor in the first place?
4. Ruth takes Naomi’s instructions one step further when she requests that Boaz spread the corner of his “garment over her.” What does this metaphor from Ezekiel 16:8 reveal that Ruth is asking from Boaz? See Leviticus 25:25-55 for more information on the guardian-redeemer.
5. If we could communicate the core message of this text in just one sentence, what would it be? What do we sense God is communicating through this passage?

### **RESPOND to the Scripture Text (10 minutes)**

Naomi is calling Boaz to live up the systems that have been put in place, namely the system of guardian-redeemers to protect widowed women and preserve the family line. This passage illustrates not only the integrity, grit, and determination of all the characters involved but is a primary example of the initiative of those with the least power working within a system to call those with the most power to bring about

justice. We see Ruth and Naomi, two seemingly powerless women of their times, partner together to advocate for themselves to those in the system with the greatest power.

Advocacy for justice and wholeness is beautiful and risky business.

Let's discern together how we can respond to what God is saying. We will answer one option from below, whichever seems most relevant to our group's discussion of the text.

- A. What systems do you find yourself in where you are yearning for more justice?
- B. Who around you has been or could be a partner in seeking justice for yourself, your family, and your community?
- C. What encouragement do you draw from Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz's examples in this passage?

**CLOSE (2 minutes)**

Let's pray and thank God for our time in Scripture together...

*Tips for leading the group discussion (and more tips are available at [howto.bible](http://howto.bible)):*

- *Participate but keep your comments short to make space for others.*
- *Silence is okay. Encourage further discussion by saying "What else?" instead of commenting on every response.*



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