The Valley of the Shadow of Death: Poverty & Widowhood

Day 1
Loving-Kindness in the Valley

Primary Scripture: Ruth 1:6–18
Additional Scriptures: Psalm 34:18; Psalm 136:1; Romans 8:35–39; 2 Corinthians 1:3–4

When Life Does Not Turn Out as We Expected
Some of the most difficult seasons of life are the ones we never expected to experience. We expect marriage to bring companionship, work to provide stability, and family to be a source of joy. We hope that faithfulness will lead to peace and that doing what is right will protect us from the worst kinds of suffering. We know intellectually that life does not always work this way, but it can still be deeply unsettling when our own experience contradicts our expectations. The opening chapter of Ruth confronts us with this reality. Naomi leaves Bethlehem with her husband, Elimelech, and their two sons because a famine has struck the land. They travel to Moab, hoping to find the food they need to survive. Yet what begins as a journey to escape one hardship becomes the beginning of a far greater tragedy. Elimelech dies. Naomi's sons marry Moabite women, Orpah and Ruth, but eventually both sons die as well. Naomi is left without her husband or her sons. In the ancient world, this is an even more devastating turn of events than it is in the modern world. In essence, her world has collapsed, her provision is gone and her future is taken. The biblical author does not give us a complete explanation for these tragedies. We are not told precisely why Elimelech and his sons die, nor are we given a hidden explanation that makes Naomi's suffering easy to understand. There is no magic “knowledge” to take away the pain of suffering. Sometimes Scripture gives us answers. Sometimes it teaches us how to live

faithfully when we do not have them. Ruth begins in the second category. Naomi's Bitterness and God's Faithfulness When Naomi hears that the Lord has provided food for His people in Bethlehem, she decides to return home. Her daughters-in-law initially accompany her, but Naomi urges them to return to their own families. Naomi does not want them to share in her bleak prospects and the suffering she will endure. Her grief is so deep that she tells the women of Bethlehem not to call her Naomi, a name associated with pleasantness, but Mara, meaning bitter (Ruth 1:20).

Notice something important: the Bible does not hide Naomi's grief in order to protect a simplistic picture of faith. Naomi does not pretend that everything is fine. She does not offer a cheerful explanation for her suffering. She speaks honestly about the pain she has experienced and the way it has changed her understanding of her life. This is an important lesson for believers. Faith does not require us to deny sorrow. We can trust God and still grieve deeply. We can believe that God is good while struggling to understand what He has allowed us to experience. Psalm 34:18 declares that the Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. It does not say that the brokenhearted will never exist. It assures us that their brokenness does not place them beyond God's concern.

Likewise, Romans 8:35–39 asks whether suffering, distress, persecution, famine, danger, or even death can separate God's people from the love of Christ. Paul's answer is an emphatic no. These passages do not promise that every painful circumstance will be quickly reversed. They promise something deeper: suffering does not have the authority to separate God's people from His love.

Ruth's Love in Action
Ruth chooses to remain with Naomi. Her declaration in Ruth 1:16–17 is one of the most moving expressions of loyalty in Scripture. She commits herself to

Naomi's people, Naomi's God, and Naomi's future. Ruth does not know how the story will end. She cannot see Boaz, the future marriage, the birth of Obed, or the genealogy that will eventually lead to David and Jesus. She simply chooses faithfulness in the circumstances immediately before her. This is where we see an important expression of the Hebrew concept of hesed. The word can describe steadfast love, loyal kindness, and faithful commitment. Its precise meaning depends on the context, but in Ruth's story it is demonstrated through costly, practical love. Ruth does not merely feel sympathy for Naomi. She binds her future to Naomi's. Her love means accepting uncertainty. It means accompanying a grieving woman into an unfamiliar future. It means choosing relationship and responsibility when leaving would be easier.

Ruth's decision does not immediately solve Naomi's problems. Naomi still has to return to Bethlehem and face the reality of her losses. Yet Ruth's presence means that Naomi will not face that future alone. Sometimes loving-kindness begins there—not by solving every problem, but by refusing to abandon someone in the middle of one.

Where Is God When Life Hurts?
One of the remarkable features of Ruth is that God is not shown performing spectacular miracles in the opening chapter. There is no miraculous healing, no dramatic prophetic announcement, and no immediate explanation for the deaths that have devastated Naomi's family. Yet the story is not godless. God's work in the story becomes clearer as ordinary events unfold. The author invites us to recognize providence without pretending that we can explain every tragedy.

This distinction matters. We should be careful about telling people that God caused a particular loss for a specific reason unless Scripture gives us grounds to say so. We do not know why Naomi lost her husband and sons. We do know that her losses do not prevent God from working toward

restoration, a closer relationship with Him, and ultimate blessing.

The same principle offers hope today. We may not understand why a season of suffering has come. We may not know when it will end or what good might emerge from it. But we can still seek God, receive the love of others, and offer loving-kindness to those who suffer alongside us. Second Corinthians 1:3–4 describes God as the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in our affliction so that we may be able to comfort others.

Notice the movement: we receive comfort, and we become people who offer comfort. We do not have to understand every mystery of suffering before we can love someone who is suffering.

Putting It into Practice
Consider the people in your life who are walking through a valley. Perhaps someone has lost a spouse. Perhaps a friend is facing financial uncertainty, a family crisis, a serious illness, or a disappointment that has changed the way they see the future. You may not be able to remove their burden. You may not have the right words to explain what has happened. But you can listen. You can pray. You can provide a meal, offer practical assistance, make a phone call, or simply remain present.

You can practice hesed.

Also consider your own grief. Are you allowing yourself to be honest with God about your pain? Are you assuming that because you are struggling, you must somehow be failing to trust Him? Naomi's story reminds us that sorrow and faith can coexist. Her bitterness is real, but it is not the final word in her story. We do not always see God's purpose in the valley, but we can continue to trust His character and practice His love while we walk through it.

Questions for Reflection
1. What stands out to you about Naomi's response to her suffering? What does her honesty teach us about faith?
2. Why do you think Ruth chose to remain with Naomi when she could have returned to her own family?
3. Who might need your loving presence more than your advice or explanations?
4. Is there a sorrow in your own life that you need to bring honestly before God?

Day 2
The Extraordinary Importance of Ordinary Faithfulness

Primary Scripture: Ruth 2:1–23
Additional Scriptures: Colossians 3:17, 23–24; Ephesians 2:10; Matthew 6:25–34; Galatians 6:9–10

God Works in Ordinary Places
Some stories are built around extraordinary events. They feature heroes who defeat armies, leaders who change nations, and individuals who perform astonishing feats. We naturally gravitate toward these stories because their significance is immediately apparent.

But much of life does not feel extraordinary.
We get up, go to work, prepare meals, care for family members, complete tasks, pay bills, attend church, and repeat many of the same activities day after day. We may wonder whether these ordinary routines have any lasting significance.

Ruth offers a surprising answer.

The story that begins with famine, widowhood, and grief eventually leads to the birth of Israel's great king, David, and, through David's family line, to Jesus Christ. Yet the path from Naomi's sorrow to that remarkable future runs through ordinary activities: a journey home, a field, a day's work, a conversation, a meal, and a series of decisions to act faithfully.

God's purposes unfold through ordinary people doing ordinary things with extraordinary faithfulness.

Ruth Goes to Work

When Ruth and Naomi arrive in Bethlehem, the harvest is beginning. They need food, and Ruth takes the initiative to find a field where she can glean. Gleaning was not simply a charitable custom invented by a generous landowner. Israel's law required landowners to leave portions of their harvest for the poor and vulnerable. Leviticus 19:9–10 instructs Israelites not to harvest every corner of their fields or gather every fallen grape. The remaining produce was to be available for the poor and the sojourner.

Deuteronomy 24:19–22 similarly commands Israel to leave some of the harvest behind for the foreigner, the fatherless, and the widow. These laws reveal something about God's concern for the vulnerable. The community was not to treat the poor as invisible or assume that their survival was solely their own responsibility. Those who possessed land and resources were expected to structure their economic lives in ways that provided for people in need.

At the same time, Ruth's story shows her working to obtain food. She is not portrayed as passive. She takes the initiative to seek provision for herself and Naomi.

Here we see an important relationship between human responsibility and God's provision. Ruth goes into the field, but her survival depends on more than her effort alone. She benefits from the provisions of God's law, the opportunity to glean, and Boaz's willingness to act generously.

God's provision often comes through a combination of human effort, community responsibility, and the generosity of others.

That remains true today.

We may pray for daily bread, but God often provides it through work, neighbors, family members, employers, churches, and the kindness of people whose names we may never know. Prayer does not make ordinary means unimportant. It teaches us to recognize God's provision through them.

Boaz's Ordinary Generosity
Ruth comes to the field of Boaz, a relative of Elimelech. Boaz notices her and asks his foreman about her identity.

Once he learns who she is, Boaz speaks to Ruth with kindness. He tells her to remain in his field, stay close to his workers, and drink from the water they have drawn. He also instructs his workers not to mistreat her.

Boaz has the resources and authority to make Ruth's day safer and more productive. He uses those resources to protect and provide for her. He goes further. He instructs his workers to leave extra grain for her to gather (Ruth 2:15–16).

Boaz does not need to turn this into a public performance. He does not make

Ruth prove that she deserves every additional handful of grain. He simply uses his position to do good.

His generosity is particularly meaningful because Ruth is a foreign widow. She is vulnerable, and she has little power to demand that others treat her well. Boaz's conduct demonstrates that godliness is not merely a matter of private belief. It affects how we exercise authority, manage resources, treat workers, and respond to people who have less power than we do. This is one of the practical lessons of hesed: steadfast love becomes visible in the way we treat people.

For Boaz, faithfulness includes respecting the law, protecting Ruth, and going beyond the bare minimum to help her.

For Ruth, faithfulness includes working diligently and caring for Naomi. Neither character knows the full significance of the events taking place in the field. They are not told that their actions will become part of a story preserved in Scripture and connected to the coming of the Messiah.

They simply do what love and faithfulness require in front of them.

Small Acts, Lasting Significance

Ephesians 2:8–10 offers an important perspective on good works. Paul explains that we are saved by grace through faith, not as a result of works, so that no one can boast. Yet he immediately adds that we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works that God has prepared for us to walk in.

The order matters.

We are not saved because we have accumulated enough faithful actions to

earn God's favor. We are saved by grace. But grace does not make faithful living irrelevant. Rather, God's grace gives us a new life in which good works become a natural expression of our relationship with Him.

Colossians 3:23–24 tells believers to work wholeheartedly, as for the Lord rather than for human masters.

This instruction gives ordinary labor a new horizon. Our work matters not only because of the recognition we receive, the money we earn, or the goals we accomplish. It also matters because our daily conduct can express our devotion to Christ.

A person may never preach a sermon, lead a congregation, or hold a position of public influence. Yet that person can faithfully care for children, serve a neighbor, work honestly, encourage a discouraged friend, or give generously to someone in need.

These acts may never attract public attention. Their significance is not measured by how many people notice them. Of course, we should not assume that every small action will lead to a visible success or that faithfulness guarantees a life without hardship. Ruth's story does not give us a formula for controlling outcomes. Instead, it teaches us that ordinary faithfulness can participate in God's purposes even when we cannot see the full picture.

We are responsible for faithfulness. We are not responsible for controlling the entire story.

The Burdens Are Sometimes the Blessing
Boaz's generosity also reminds us that doing good can involve a cost.

Providing food for someone, protecting a vulnerable person, mentoring a younger believer, caring for an aging relative, or serving a church may require time, money, energy, and patience. Such responsibilities can feel burdensome.

The same is true of the nearer relative in Ruth 4. When Boaz explains the additional responsibility connected with Ruth and the preservation of the deceased man's family line, the relative declines to proceed. The precise financial calculations behind his decision are not spelled out in the text, and we should be cautious about claiming to know every detail of his reasoning. What is clear is that Boaz ultimately accepts a responsibility that the nearer relative does not. Boaz's willingness to take responsibility becomes part of the means through which Ruth and Naomi's circumstances are restored. This does not mean every burden should automatically be accepted. Wisdom, justice, healthy boundaries, and the protection of vulnerable people matter. Nor does it mean that we should seek suffering for its own sake.

It means that love sometimes asks us to accept a real cost for the good of another person. The burden and the blessing may be inseparable.

Putting It into Practice

Think about your ordinary responsibilities. Which ones do you tend to dismiss as unimportant? Is there work you perform without recognition? Is there a person you serve whose needs repeatedly interrupt your plans? Is there a small act of generosity you could practice without expecting anything in return?

This week, choose one ordinary responsibility and approach it as an opportunity to serve God.

Do your work honestly. Listen carefully to someone who needs to talk. Offer practical help to a neighbor. Use your resources to provide for someone in

need. Encourage a person who may feel unseen. Do not wait until you can do something spectacular.

Ruth went to a field. Boaz treated a vulnerable woman with dignity. Neither action looked like the beginning of a world-changing story.

Yet God used their faithfulness in ways they could not have anticipated. You may not know what God is doing through your ordinary faithfulness. You do not need to know in order to be faithful today.

Questions for Reflection
1. What does the law of gleaning teach us about God's expectations for people who have resources?
2. How do Ruth's diligence and Boaz's generosity work together in this chapter?
3. What ordinary responsibility in your life might become an opportunity to express your faith?
4. Is there a cost you have been reluctant to accept for the good of another person? What would wisdom and love require?

A Prayer
Lord, thank You for working through ordinary people and ordinary circumstances. Forgive me for measuring significance only by visibility, recognition, or dramatic results. Help me to work honestly, treat people with dignity, and use the resources You have given me to serve others. Teach me to recognize that Your grace does not merely rescue me from sin; it also calls me into a life of faithful service. Give me wisdom to know which burdens are mine to carry and courage to accept the costs of love when You call me to do so. Amen.

Day 3

What Does Your Ordinary Life Mean to God?

Primary Scripture: Ruth 4:13–22
Additional Scriptures: Matthew 1:1–6; Romans 12:1–2; 1 Corinthians 10:31; Ephesians 2:8–10; Galatians 6:9

Are You Living in a Seinfeld Episode or a Superhero Movie?

Imagine two kinds of stories.

In the first, extraordinary things happen. A hero faces an overwhelming threat, makes a costly decision, and saves the day. The events are dramatic, the stakes are obvious, and the audience knows that something important is taking place.

In the second, people go about their daily lives. They have conversations, complete routine tasks, make decisions, and encounter the ordinary frustrations of human existence. No one appears to be saving the world.

Which story better describes your life?

Most of us would probably choose the second. We rarely feel as though we are living in the middle of a heroic adventure. We are more likely to be concerned about the next appointment, an unfinished task, a family responsibility, or something that did not go as planned.

The ordinary nature of life can tempt us to believe that our days have little significance. We may imagine that a meaningful Christian life must be filled with dramatic experiences, visible accomplishments, or extraordinary acts of service.

But the story of Ruth challenges that assumption.

Naomi's family does not begin with a grand mission. Ruth does not set out to become part of the ancestry of Israel's greatest king. Boaz does not enter the story announcing that he will help change the course of redemption history.

They live, work, grieve, love, and make decisions.

Yet their ordinary lives become part of a story much larger than they could have imagined.

From Bitterness to a Future

At the beginning of Ruth, Naomi returns to Bethlehem grieving the loss of her husband and sons. She sees herself as a woman emptied by suffering.

By the end of the book, Ruth has married Boaz, and they have a son named Obed. The women of Bethlehem celebrate with Naomi, recognizing that God has not left her without a family redeemer and that the child will bring renewed life and hope into her household (Ruth 4:13–17).

The story does not suggest that Naomi's previous losses were insignificant or that the birth of a child erased her grief. Restoration is not the same as pretending that suffering never happened.

Rather, the ending shows that Naomi's losses do not have the final word over her future.

The final verses then give us a genealogy connecting Obed to Jesse and David (Ruth 4:18–22).

This is a remarkable conclusion. The book begins with a family struggling to survive a famine and ends by connecting that family's story to the royal line of David.

Matthew's Gospel carries the genealogy forward. Matthew 1:5–6 names Boaz

and Ruth among the ancestors of Jesus, connecting their family to the birth of the Messiah.

The people involved in the events of Ruth could not have seen the entire future that their story would enter. They did not know how the history of Israel would unfold or how the promises associated with David would find their fulfillment in Christ.

They were simply living their lives before God.

This is not an invitation to imagine that every one of our decisions will produce a result as historically significant as Ruth's. Scripture does not promise that. Instead, Ruth teaches us that the significance of a faithful life may extend beyond what the person living it can see.

God's purposes are larger than our perspective.

Your Life Is Not Meaningless Because It Is Ordinary

The Bible does not divide the world into people whose lives matter and people whose lives do not.

First Corinthians 10:31 says that whether we eat or drink or whatever we do, we should do everything for the glory of God. Paul applies this principle to

activities that are ordinary and familiar.

Eating and drinking are not extraordinary achievements. They are part of being human. Yet even such ordinary activities can be shaped by gratitude, love, self-control, and devotion to God.

Similarly, Colossians 3:17 teaches believers to do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

These passages invite us to think differently about our days.

A parent caring for a child can honor God. A worker who acts with honesty can honor God. A person who patiently listens to a lonely neighbor can honor God. A Christian who fulfills a responsibility without recognition can honor God.

The question is not simply, "Did I accomplish something impressive today?"

It is also, "Was I faithful to God in the opportunities and responsibilities He placed before me?"

Sometimes we cannot choose our circumstances. We may have limitations we did not expect, responsibilities we did not plan, or opportunities that seem

much smaller than those available to others.

But we can ask how to respond faithfully within the circumstances we actually have.

This is not a claim that every circumstance is good or that God wants us to remain in harmful situations. Some circumstances require us to seek help, confront injustice, establish boundaries, or make necessary changes. Faithfulness includes wisdom and courage.

Still, wherever we find ourselves, there are often opportunities to love God and our neighbors.

Small Acts of Obedience and the Work of God

Ephesians 2:10 describes Christians as God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works that God prepared for us to walk in.

The verse gives us both dignity and direction.

Our worth does not depend on our achievements. We are God's workmanship, and our salvation is a gift of grace. At the same time, our lives are not meant to be empty or aimless. God calls us to walk in good works—to put our faith

into practice through the choices we make.

Consider the way this works in ordinary relationships.

You may never know how much an encouraging word matters to a discouraged person. You may not see the long-term effects of the time you spend teaching a child about Jesus. You may not learn how a quiet act of generosity affects someone who is struggling financially.

You cannot measure the full significance of these acts at the moment you perform them.

That uncertainty is not a reason to stop doing good. It is a reason to trust God with the results.

Galatians 6:9 encourages believers not to grow weary in doing good, because in due season they will reap if they do not give up. The surrounding passage calls Christians to bear one another's burdens and to take responsibility for their own conduct.

Paul is not promising that every act of kindness will produce the outcome we want on our preferred timetable. He is encouraging perseverance in the life of faith.

Faithfulness often requires us to continue doing what is right before we can see what difference it makes.

Offer Your Life to God

Romans 12:1 urges believers, in view of God's mercies, to present their bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God. Paul describes this as spiritual worship.

Notice where the instruction begins: in view of God's mercies.

Paul does not say that we should offer ourselves to God so that He might become merciful toward us. We offer ourselves because of the mercy He has already shown.

The gospel changes the motivation for obedience. We do not serve in order to persuade God to love us. We serve because His love has already been demonstrated in Jesus Christ.

This means your ordinary life can become an offering to God.

Your work can become an offering. Your patience with a difficult person can become an offering. Your generosity, honesty, hospitality, prayer, and willingness to forgive can become an offering.

Such faithfulness will not always feel dramatic. Much of it may go unnoticed. Some days, it may simply mean doing the next right thing when you are tired or discouraged.

But worship is not limited to a church service. The whole of life can be offered to God.

One Faithful Step

You do not need to discover your entire life's purpose before you can begin living faithfully.

You do not need to know whether your efforts will become historically significant. Ruth did not know. Boaz did not know. They responded to the responsibilities and opportunities before them.

So ask yourself: What is one act of faithfulness God has placed within my reach today?

Perhaps there is a relationship that needs attention. Perhaps there is a responsibility you have been neglecting. Perhaps you have an opportunity to give, serve, encourage, or forgive. Perhaps the next faithful step is to ask for help because you have been trying to carry a burden alone.

Start there.

Do not despise the ordinary day. Do not assume that God is absent because nothing spectacular is happening. And do not measure your life solely by the results you can see.

You belong to a story that is larger than your own perspective. Your calling is to trust God's grace and walk faithfully with Him.

You may not know the full significance of today's obedience. You can still offer today to God.

Questions for Reflection

1. What makes ordinary life feel insignificant to you? Recognition, repetition, comparison with others, or something else?
2. How does Ruth's place in the genealogy of Jesus change the way you read her seemingly ordinary decisions?
3. What is one responsibility or relationship through which you can honor God this week?
4. How does knowing that salvation is a gift of grace change your motivation to obey God?

A Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank You that my life is not measured solely by my accomplishments, recognition, or influence. Thank You for Your grace in Jesus Christ, which gives me a secure foundation for living and serving. Help me to see my ordinary responsibilities as opportunities for worship. Give me perseverance when the results are hidden, humility when my work is noticed, and faith when it is not. Show me the next faithful step, and help me trust You with what I cannot see. May my life bring glory to You in both the extraordinary moments and the ordinary ones. Amen.

Day 4

The Redeemer Who Gives Us a Future

Primary Scripture: Ruth 4:1–17
Additional Scriptures: Isaiah 53:4–6; Mark 10:45; John 6:51; Romans 5:6–11; Ephesians 2:8–10; 1 Corinthians 11:23–26

When We Cannot Rescue Ourselves

The story of Ruth begins with loss and vulnerability. By the fourth chapter, we see a path toward restoration, but that restoration requires someone to accept responsibility.

Boaz is willing to become Ruth and Naomi's family redeemer. He meets with the nearer relative who has the prior opportunity to redeem the family property. The transaction is discussed publicly before the elders of the town, and Boaz explains that the matter involves not only the land but also Ruth and the preservation of the deceased man's name in connection with his inheritance.

The nearer relative initially expresses willingness to redeem the property. When he learns of the additional responsibility, however, he declines, explaining that he does not want to jeopardize his own inheritance (Ruth 4:1–6).

The text does not tell us every detail of his financial situation, and we should not claim to know precisely how he calculated the cost. What matters to the story is that the nearer relative does not proceed, while Boaz accepts the responsibility.

Boaz acts in a way that helps provide a future for Ruth, Naomi, and the family line.

This is the point at which the language of redemption becomes especially important.

In the Old Testament, a family redeemer, or go'el, was a relative who could act on behalf of family members in certain circumstances, including matters

involving family property. The laws concerning redemption appear in passages such as Leviticus 25:25.

The details of Ruth's situation are not identical to every other Old Testament law concerning family preservation. For example, the law of levirate marriage in Deuteronomy 25:5–10 specifically addresses a deceased man's brother. Boaz is not identified as Mahlon's brother, so we should avoid treating his actions as though they were simply the fulfillment of an identical legal obligation.

Nevertheless, the story presents Boaz as a man who willingly accepts a costly responsibility and acts to protect the future of a vulnerable family.

He does not merely express concern. He takes action.

The Cost of Redemption

Redemption is more than a pleasant feeling toward someone in need.

It involves doing what is necessary to bring about release, restoration, or the recovery of what has been lost. In Ruth, that involves a real commitment of resources and responsibility.

Boaz's actions point us toward a larger biblical theme: God is concerned not only with the plight of His people but also with bringing about their restoration.

Throughout the Old Testament, God is portrayed as the One who hears the cries of the oppressed, delivers His people from slavery, and acts to preserve the promises He has made. The Exodus is a central example. Israel cannot free itself from Egypt by its own strength; God intervenes to deliver His people.

The prophets continue to speak of God's restorative purposes, including His promises to bring His people out of exile and renew their hope.

The story of Ruth belongs within this larger biblical testimony. It does not present Boaz as the ultimate redeemer of all humanity, but it shows a concrete act of family redemption within the history through which God's purposes continue to unfold.

For Christians, the story also provides a meaningful way to reflect on the redemption accomplished through Jesus.

We must distinguish between the two. Boaz is a human family redeemer acting within a particular historical and legal situation. Jesus is the Savior whose death and resurrection accomplish God's saving work for sinners. Ruth does not explicitly identify Boaz as a prophetic symbol of Christ, but Christians can reasonably draw an analogy between Boaz's costly willingness to act and the far greater redemption accomplished by Jesus.

The analogy points beyond Boaz to Someone greater.

Jesus Enters Our Need

Romans 5:6–8 describes the condition of humanity and the character of God's love. Paul says that Christ died for the ungodly and emphasizes that God demonstrates His love for us in that, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

The order is important.

Christ does not wait for us to become worthy of redemption. He does not wait until we have repaired every failure or demonstrated that we can rescue ourselves. He acts out of God's love toward people who are unable to make themselves righteous before Him.

Mark 10:45 says that the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many.

At the cross, Jesus does what we cannot do for ourselves. He bears the cost of our redemption. Through His death and resurrection, He brings forgiveness, reconciliation with God, and the hope of new life.

This does not mean that salvation is a financial transaction identical to the property redemption in Ruth. The language of redemption in Scripture is rich, and no single human analogy captures everything Christ accomplishes.

But the central contrast is clear: our salvation rests not on our ability to overcome sin and death by our own strength, but on God's gracious action through Jesus Christ.

The book of Ruth moves from the fear that Naomi's family has no future to the hope of a restored family line. The gospel announces an even greater hope: through Christ, sin and death do not have the final word over those who belong to Him.

Grace Comes Before Our Response

Ephesians 2:8–10 helps us understand the relationship between redemption and faithful living.

Paul teaches that we are saved by grace through faith. Salvation is God's gift, not the result of our works. Yet the same passage says that we are created in Christ Jesus for good works.

Grace does not eliminate our response; it makes our response possible.

This is an important distinction because religion can easily become a system of trying to earn God's approval. We may think that if we do enough good things, sacrifice enough, or become sufficiently useful, God will finally accept us.

The gospel turns that logic around.

In Christ, we are invited to receive God's grace. We then respond with gratitude, obedience, love, and service.

Our good works do not purchase redemption. They grow out of the life God gives us.

The story of Boaz helps us see the beauty of costly love, but we must not conclude that our own sacrifices can redeem us or earn God's favor. We are not the saviors of the world. We are people who need a Savior.

Once we understand that, service becomes less about proving our worth and more about expressing our gratitude.

We can give without needing to establish our importance. We can serve

without needing to be the hero. We can love others without pretending that we have the power to solve every problem.

We serve because we have received mercy.

Remembering Christ Through Communion

For Christians who celebrate Communion, the Lord's Supper provides a regular opportunity to remember the cost and meaning of our redemption.

In 1 Corinthians 11:23–26, Paul passes on the tradition he received concerning the bread and the cup. Jesus identifies the bread with His body and the cup with the new covenant in His blood. Paul explains that when believers eat the bread and drink the cup, they proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.

Communion draws our attention away from our own achievements and toward the work of Christ.

We come not because we have successfully redeemed ourselves, but because Jesus gave Himself for us. We remember His death, give thanks for His grace, and proclaim our hope in His return.

Christian traditions differ in how they understand Christ's presence in Communion and the precise relationship between the bread, the cup, and His body and blood. Yet the passage clearly places the focus on Jesus, His self-giving death, the covenant established through His blood, and the church's ongoing remembrance of Him.

The meal also has a communal dimension. We do not remember Christ as isolated individuals who have no responsibility toward one another. We gather as a people who need the same grace and who are called to live in love.

The One who gave Himself for us teaches us to give ourselves in service to others—not in an attempt to repeat His saving work, but as people transformed by it.

Remembering Christ Through Baptism

Baptism likewise points us toward God's saving action in Christ.

In Romans 6:3–4, Paul connects baptism with being united with Christ in His death and resurrection. Those who belong to Christ are called to walk in newness of life.

Baptism is therefore not a declaration that we have become capable of saving ourselves. It points to our relationship with Jesus and the new life associated with His death and resurrection. Christian traditions differ on some details

concerning baptism's relationship to faith, regeneration, and church membership, but the passage makes the central connection between Christ's death, His resurrection, and the believer's new life.

The message of baptism and Communion fits naturally with the story of Ruth when we keep the distinction clear.

Ruth tells us about God's work in the preservation and restoration of a family. The New Testament proclaims God's saving work through Jesus Christ. Both direct our attention away from the idea that we can secure our future through our own strength.

We need God's provision. We need His mercy. We need the Redeemer who can do for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

And when we receive His grace, we are called to live differently.

The Burdens We Carry After Redemption

The Christian life still involves sacrifice. Following Jesus may require us to give time, money, comfort, and attention to the needs of others. Sometimes faithfulness will be inconvenient or costly.

But we do not carry these burdens in order to persuade Christ to redeem us.

We carry them because we belong to Him.

Romans 12:1 calls us to offer our lives to God in response to His mercies. This is worship expressed through the whole person.

The burden of serving others can become a blessing when it grows out of love. The cost of generosity can become an expression of gratitude. The discipline of obedience can become a way of enjoying fellowship with God.

Still, we should remember that Christian sacrifice is not a command to accept abuse, neglect our responsibilities, or pretend that every hardship is good. Jesus' example calls us to love truthfully and wisely. At times, love requires saying no, confronting wrongdoing, or seeking help for someone who is being harmed.

The goal is not to accumulate burdens. It is to live faithfully in response to God's grace.

Putting It into Practice

As you prepare for Communion, reflect on the redemption Christ has accomplished.

Where have you been trying to earn God's approval through your own performance? What would it mean to rest more fully in the grace He has already offered through Jesus?

Then consider how that grace might change your relationships.

Is there someone you can serve without expecting repayment? Is there a practical need you can help meet? Is there a relationship in which you need to pursue forgiveness, reconciliation, or a wiser boundary?

You cannot redeem the world. You cannot carry every person's burdens. But you can live as someone who has been redeemed.

Boaz accepted a responsibility that helped provide a future for Ruth and Naomi. Jesus has accomplished a redemption far greater than any human act of generosity could achieve. In response, we are invited to trust Him, remember His sacrifice, and become people whose lives reflect His love.

We do not sacrifice in order to become God's redeemed people. Because of Christ's sacrifice, we can offer our lives to God in gratitude and love.

Questions for Reflection

1. What does Boaz's willingness to accept responsibility reveal about costly love?

2. In what ways is Jesus' redemption greater than the family redemption described in Ruth?
3. How does Ephesians 2:8–10 help us understand the relationship between grace and good works?
4. As you remember Christ through Communion or baptism, how might that remembrance shape your ordinary life this week?

A Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank You for giving Yourself for us when we could not rescue ourselves from sin and death. Help me to rest in the grace You have accomplished rather than trying to earn Your approval through my own efforts. As I remember Your death and resurrection, deepen my gratitude and strengthen my faith. Teach me to offer my life to You in worship and to serve others with humility, wisdom, and love. Help me recognize which responsibilities You have placed before me and give me courage to fulfill them faithfully. May my life bear witness to the redemption I have received through You. Amen.

A Final Reflection: Four Lessons from Ruth

The story of Ruth invites us to see the Christian life from four complementary perspectives:

1. Loving-kindness in suffering: We will not always understand our circumstances, but we can trust God's character and practice steadfast love toward those who suffer.

2. The importance of the ordinary: God often works through ordinary responsibilities, practical generosity, and faithful decisions. We should not despise the small acts of obedience through which we love our neighbors.

3. The significance of your life: Your life does not need to be spectacular to be meaningful. You can honor God through your ordinary work, relationships, and daily decisions, trusting Him with results you cannot see.

4. The redemption of Christ: Our hope rests ultimately not in our own faithfulness but in God's saving work through Jesus. We respond to His grace by offering our lives in gratitude, worship, and service.

Ruth's story begins with famine, loss, and uncertainty. It ends with a family restored and a genealogy that points toward the coming of Jesus. The people in the story could not see the entire path ahead of them, but their ordinary acts of faithfulness became part of a story far greater than they knew.

That is an encouragement for us, too.

We do not need to know everything God is doing. We do not need to make ourselves the heroes of our own stories. We need to trust His grace, love the people He places before us, and take the next faithful step.

The God who works through ordinary faithfulness is also the Redeemer who gives us hope beyond what we can see.

Day 5

Thanks to Sylvester Warsaw, Jr for our devotional today

The Valley of the Shadow of Death is the title of the sermon series being preached and Sunday's sermon, Nov. 1, 2026, is taken from Ruth 1:6-14. According to rabbinic teachings the shadow of death is both a physical and earthly reality as well as a spiritual/metaphysical dimension. In 1 Samuel 23:13-29 is the account of David fleeing Saul and hiding in the Desert of Ziph also known as the Wilderness of Ziph. This is a physical place with a lack of resources and David felt vulnerable because there was almost no habitation so David hid among the cliffs. We are told God used Saul's son, Jonathan to strengthen David's hands in Him. In Job, God, allowed the devil to afflict Job and in Job 3 when Job cursed the day of his birth we find these words in vs. 5, "May darkness and the shadow of death claim it; may a cloud settle on it; may the blackness of the day terrify it." In Amos 5 when God spoke through Amos to the nation of Israel to return to Him you'll find these words as recorded in verses 8-9, "He made the Pleiades and Orion; He turns the shadow of death into morning; and makes the day dark as night; He calls for the waters of the sea and pours them out on the face of the earth; the LORD is His name. He rains ruins upon the strong, so that fury comes upon the fortress." In Job 38 when God responded to Job's questions in verses 2-3 God asked Job this, "Who is this who darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Now prepare yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer Me." One of the questions God asked Job in verse 17 of chapter 38 is this, "Have the gates of death been revealed to you? Or have you seen the doors of the shadow of death?" Even in the appearance of the shadow of death God is there just like He was there when Jesus His only begotten was crucified for the sins of humanity. In Psalm 139:7-12, David tells us there's no place we can hide from God because His presence is there. Therefore the question becomes do you respond or react when in the shadow of death because there's a difference

between responding and reacting. Responding is out of a value system whereas reacting is emotional without thought. Perhaps one of the best known accounts of one responding while in the valley of the shadow of death is found in Genesis 38-50 the story about God's redemptive purpose for humanity in and through Joseph. Even Pharaoh in Genesis 41:38 stated these words, "And Pharaoh said to his servants, can we find such a one as this, a man in whom is the Spirit of God?" When faced with the shadow of death do you respond by standing as we're encouraged to in Ephesians 6:10-20 or do you react by leaning unto your own understanding which we're warned against Proverbs 3:5-8. Isaiah 64:4 says this, "For since the beginning of the world Men have not heard nor perceived by the ear, nor has the eye seen any God besides You, who acts for the one who waits for Him."