

Small Group Guide THE MYSTERY OF MERCY

The Church at Brook Hills

Dr. David Platt

August 10, 2014

Ruth 1-4

Use this resource as a tool to help Christ-followers move forward in their spiritual growth. To do this well requires that the Small Group Leader is building a relationship with the individuals in the small group and has identified where the people are in their relationship with God. Are they Christ-followers? Are they growing in Christ? If so, in what areas do they need to grow further? As disciplinarians, Small Group Leaders shepherd people to know the truth of Scripture, to understand why it matters, and to apply it to their lives. Small Group Leaders come alongside those whom they disciple to discover how loving God, loving each other, and loving those not yet in the Kingdom should shape how they live. The structure of this resource coincides with moving people from knowledge (Main Truth) to understanding (Why It Matters) to application (Now What Do We Do?). Utilize this Small Group Guide as a flexible teaching tool to inform your time together and not as a rigid task list.

GETTING STARTED

Before Small Group

Weekly Readings for August 11-17

1 Samuel 1-9 and Romans 1-7

Where We Are In The Story ~ Old Testament (1 Samuel)

Background of 1 Samuel: Originally, 1 and 2 Samuel were one book but were divided into two books (probably because of length) in the Septuagint (LXX), the Greek translation of the Old Testament. 1 Samuel spans Israel's history from the era of the judges to the establishment of a monarchy in Israel, and Samuel, Saul, and David stand as the main characters in this book. While we do not know who wrote 1 and 2 Samuel, one common conjecture assigns 1 Samuel 1-24 to Samuel and the rest to Nathan and Gad who were two prophets and contemporaries of King David.

Structure of 1 Samuel:

- 1 Samuel 1-7 describes the life of Samuel, the last judge of Israel.
- 1 Samuel 8-12 expresses the establishment of a monarchy in Israel with Saul as the first king.
- 1 Samuel 13-15 records the circumstances that led God to reject Saul and his line as rulers in Israel.
- 1 Samuel 16-31 chronicles the life of David beginning when God appointed him as the next king of Israel and concluding with the death of Saul when David assumed the throne.

This Week in 1 Samuel: In the Tanak (the Hebrew Bible), Samuel comes immediately after Judges. Judges concludes with the thrice repeated statement that there was no king in Israel (Judg. 18:1; 19:1; 21:25), and those chapters depict the sexual immorality and double standards of the people as they engaged in a civil war over one raped woman in Gibeah but ended with the abduction and rape of 200 women and Shiloh, which demonstrates the need for godly leadership and for repentance in the nation. 1 Samuel 1 picks up in Shiloh by describing a family who went to Shiloh to worship each year but whose priest did not even recognize a true worshipper and whose sons took from the Lord and had sex with women who served at the tabernacle. The birth of a son to a barren woman follows the example of Sarah and Isaac, Rebekah and Jacob and Esau, and the wife of Manoah and Sampson, so the birth of Samuel signals that he would be an important figure for Israel in a season when Israel faced a great leadership crisis. Furthermore, many generations later, another child would be born to a barren woman, John the Baptist, who would serve as the forerunner to the Messiah and prepare the people for His coming.

1 Samuel 1-3 presents information related to Samuel's birth and calling and provides pertinent information regarding the sad state of the priesthood during his lifetime. 1 Samuel 3:1 informs us that "the word of the LORD was rare in those days." God was silent, but that does not mean that He was not active and working. The people needed a leader, and in His perfect timing, He groomed Samuel to be a prophet and to transition

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the nation to a monarchy. The silence ended when God communicated coming judgment on Eli the priest's sons to Samuel (1 Sam. 3:4). As John Woodhouse states in his commentary on 1 Samuel, "It has taken half the chapter for the word of the Lord to be heard. But at least there was a servant at Shiloh who was hearing" (79).

1 Samuel 4 describes the fulfillment of God's prophecy to Samuel regarding the death of Eli, Hophni, and Phinehas, and during the battle with the Philistines that prompted the death of Eli's sons, Israel's enemy took the Ark of the Covenant. Even though God's people did not revere Him and treated the Ark as a lucky charm when they took it into battle, God protected His glory and reputation among the nations by the plague he sent the Philistines until they returned the Ark to Israel (1 Sam. 5-6), and He also struck the Israelites who did not handle the Ark as instructed. His actions remind the people of His sovereignty over illness, death, and other gods. Samuel called the people to destroy their idols and to turn to God (1 Sam. 7:3-4), and the people witnessed the Lord's power as He defeated the Philistines and prevented them from attacking the people of Israel. Samuel served as both a judge and prophet in Israel, but as he grew older, the people wanted security with regards to national leadership and demanded the establishment of a monarchy in Israel.

Where We Are In The Story ~ New Testament (Romans)

Background of Romans: Paul's wrote the letter to the church in Rome, which was a church he had not visited prior to writing the letter, to prepare them for his arrival before attempting to take the gospel to Spain. However, Paul did not make it to Rome until he was under house arrest while he appealed to Caesar (Acts 28), and as far as we know, he never made it further west than Rome. The church in Rome contained both Jewish and Gentile Christians, and this mixed community provided opportunity for conflict as seen in Romans 14-15. Romans 1:16-17 marks the thesis of Romans, for it explains the gospel as "the righteousness of God" that is available to all who believe. Romans 1-11 gives an overview of God's plan to redeem humanity, and Romans 12-16 describes how we should live in light of what God has accomplished.

Structure of Romans:

- Romans 1:1-15 contains Paul's greetings to the church at Rome and his tentative travel plans.
- Romans 1:16-4:25 unpacks God's wrath towards sinners and His grace towards those who trust in Christ.
- Romans 5-8 describes the hope and obedience of Christ-followers, despite a continued struggle against sin.
- Romans 9-11 surveys God's plan to save both Jews and Gentiles.
- Romans 12:1-15:13 explains how Christians are to live in light of the gospel.
- Romans 15:14-16:27 includes Paul's concluding remarks to the Roman believers, his upcoming travel plans, and his personal greetings.

This Week in Romans: Romans contains the longest prescript or greeting of any of Paul's letters (vv. 1-7), which makes sense considering that, unlike the recipients of his other letters in Scripture, this was a church that Paul had never visited. Because they do not know Paul personally, he introduces himself with his apostolic credentials and with the message that he spent his life proclaiming.

Romans 1:16-17 stands as the theme of the entire epistle. The primary statement is Paul's keenness to share the gospel with the Roman believers (v.15), and verses 16-17 include four supporting statements: (1) Paul's pride in the gospel (v. 16), (2) the gospel's power to save all who believe (v. 16), (3) the gospel reveals God's righteousness (v. 17), and (4) the Old Testament supports the link between faith and God's righteousness (v. 17).

Romans 1:18-32 describes the depravity or sinfulness of humanity. For those with questions about what happens to people in remote parts of the world who never live and die without even hearing the gospel, Romans 1 provides a response. God reveals Himself to all of humanity through His creation (general revelation), so an individual can look at nature or the human body and recognize that there is an all-wise,

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powerful Creator. While they lack knowledge of Christ (special revelation), they are without excuse since “what can be known about God is plain to them” (vv. 19-20). Some may argue that this is not fair, but Romans 3 teaches that *all* people sin and *all* are condemned and accountable to God for their sin. That person in a remote part of the world is still guilty and going to Hell because there are no innocent people in the world. Such people cannot be with God in Heaven when they die because they are sinners. Never hearing about *Jesus* does not exempt someone from eternal condemnation because they rejected *God* by sinning in the first place. This demonstrates the great need for believers to join God in His work by proclaiming the gospel to those who have never heard about Christ and the cross (Rom. 10:14-17).

While Romans 1 describes the sinfulness of people (particularly Gentiles), Romans 2 specifically targets the Jews and informs them that they too are sinners in need of God’s righteousness. Being a Jew in and of itself does not spare that person from eternal condemnation because Jews are also sinners, for as Romans 3:10 states, “None is righteous, no, not one.” Romans 3:21-31 explains how God can be righteous and just yet forgive sinners – through Christ, the perfect sacrifice who took our punishment for sin. With the phrase “whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood,” Romans 3:25 presents Christ’s death as the ultimate Day of Atonement sacrifice (see Lev. 16), and as a result, the Day of Atonement is no longer necessary because of Christ’s sacrifice.

Lest anyone think that their actions justify them before God (Rom. 3:26-31), Paul explains that salvation has always been by grace through faith, and he points to Abraham as proof of this claim (Rom. 4). Even before he was circumcised (circumcision being a sign that someone was part of the covenant community of Israel), God had issued that Abraham was counted righteous because of his faith in God (Gen. 15:6; 17:9-27; Rom. 4:1-5).

Romans 5 presents the results of being justified by faith in Christ: (1) we have peace with God (Rom. 5:1), (2) we have access to God (Rom. 5:2), (3) we have hope (Rom. 5:2), (4) we have purpose and the ability to rejoice in suffering (Rom. 5:3-4), and (5) we have the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5). Romans 5 also explains how the sin of one man infected the entire human race and caused them all to become sinners and, therefore, why it was necessary that a new man, a new Adam, come and bring righteousness and life to all who believe.

While God supplies grace that covers our sin, this grace does not mean that we can go out and sin as much as we want. Romans 6-7 presents four different pictures to help us understand who we are in Christ and what occurs when we become Christ-followers.

- **Baptism** (Rom. 6:1-11) – In Romans 6, Paul uses baptism as a picture of the conversion experience (going from an unbeliever to a believer) and of how we as Christians should not remain in sin because we have died to sin. In baptism, a person demonstrates their identification with Christ’s death (“buried with Christ in baptism”) and resurrection (“and raised to walk in the newness of life”). While we will not be sinless on this earth, we attempt to put to death what is earthly in us, and we live with faith and obedience, looking forward to the day when we will be with Christ in our resurrected bodies in Heaven. Baptism does not save someone or make them a believer; it is an outward demonstration of a decision someone has already made to trust in Christ as their Lord and Savior. The example of a wedding ring can help in explaining this truth. A wedding ring in and of itself does not make someone married, for it is just a piece of jewelry. But it is an outward way to demonstrate to all people of a commitment that person made when they married their spouse.
- **Instruments or Weapons** (Rom. 6:12-14) – When we become Christ-followers, we transfer our loyalty from sin and its authority to Christ and His righteousness. No longer should we let sin “reign” in us (v. 12). Instead of presenting our bodies as “weapons” or “instruments” for sin, we should be “weapons” for righteousness (v. 13). We are, in a sense, repurposed. We have a new function, and our lives should reflect our new loyalty to God.
- **Slavery** (Rom. 6:15-23) – All unbelievers are slaves to sin, which means that they are in bondage with no hope of release from that lifestyle (see Eph. 2:1-3). Sin is their master. When someone becomes a Christ-follower, they have a new master – God. Whereas we had no hope when under sin’s rule, we have hope, purpose, and a future in Christ. When we were slaves to sin, we acted shamefully, indulging ourselves and rebelling against God. As slaves to God, we live righteously.

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Slavery to sin brings death and eternal separation from God while slavery to God brings eternal life (Rom. 6:23). The word “slavery” often taints our understanding of passages like Romans 6 because of our connotations with this practice, but unlike antebellum slavery or modern human slavery, slavery to God brings ultimate freedom, freedom that can only come from knowing and trusting in Christ as Savior and Lord. While following God may not bring comfort or security in this life, we can be secure and content *in Him* because of His character and sovereignty.

- **Marriage** (Rom. 7:1-6) – Paul uses this illustration to express the change from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant, from the Law to life in the Spirit. As long as the husband is a life, the wife is bound in a covenant relationship to him, but if he dies, she is no longer married to him. With Christ’s death and resurrection, the Old Covenant “died,” and with that era of salvation history ended, people no longer have to keep the sacrifices and rituals of the Old Covenant. Does this mean that we do away with the Old Testament? No. The teachings of the New Testament nullify, ratify, or augment the teachings of the Old Testament, so careful study of both testaments is necessary in order to determine which commands believers this side of the cross still keep. The Old Testament acted as a tutor (see Gal. 3:24; Rom. 7:7-12) preparing humanity to understand their sinfulness, their need for God, and God’s character and redemptive power.

During Small Group

Welcome – Incorporate time for greeting one another, enjoying any refreshments, and making announcements. If guests are visiting, make introductions and help them feel welcomed. Ask for their contact information, so you can follow up with them.

Looking Back – Provide an opportunity for small group members to share what God is teaching them, how they are applying what they are learning, and how He has given them opportunities to share the gospel with others. This can be done as a whole group or in smaller groups. Do the people know each other well enough to share more than surface level information? How can time together be used to foster deeper relationships among those in the small group? Also, what are the struggles and needs of the people in the small group? How can the people in the small group sacrificially serve each other?

Looking Up – Hold prayer as fundamental to small group time rather than supplemental to it. Give adoration and thanksgiving to God in prayer. Submit yourself to Him, confessing sin. Petition God for personal needs and other requests. Pray for the disciple-making efforts of those in the group and for the salvation of the lost in each other’s families, spheres of influence, and in the world. The Weekly Prayer Focus below can also be incorporated in the group’s prayer time.

Weekly Prayer Focus (from Our Worship Guide)

- *Pray for Our Lives: Praise God for His redemption of His people. Pray we will all recognize our need for our redeemer. Ask God to grant us the boldness to proclaim to the world around us the only true source of redemption. Pray for those in need of Christ to trust in His love for them. Pray for us to continually trust in Jesus’ redemption of every single one of our struggles and pains. Ask God to help us learn to live evermore in the freedom granted us through redemption.*
- *Pray for Our City: This week we are praying for our children and their families as the new school year starts in Birmingham. We are also praying for North Shelby Baptist Church and Alan Murphy, Pastor.*

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- *Pray for Our World: This week we are praying for Brook Hills Long-Term Missionaries Ronnie and Joan Brock. Ronnie and Joan, along with their kids Katelyn, Lydia, and Brandon, serve in Ecuador with disciple-making partners. Specifically, the Brocks partner with Houses of Happiness, an orphanage that serves the children of Ecuador. The Brocks have been living and working to provide a camp ministry to serve the children and grow the body of Christ in Ecuador. To learn more about the Brock family, visit littlehouseintheandes.wordpress.com.*

MAIN TRUTH

Message Summary

The book of Ruth expresses four characteristics of a redeemer that are true of Boaz, Ruth and Naomi's kinsman redeemer, but that are ultimately true of Christ. Ruth 2-4 demonstrates that a redeemer seeks the needy as his family, saves the needy from harm, serves the needy at his table, and showers the needy with his grace. In order to redeem or to purchase or claim something, one had to have the right to do so as a family member, have the necessary resources to redeem, and have the resolve to do so. God the Father has sought us as His family (Eph. 1), and He offers us salvation and a place at His table. Furthermore, He showers us with grace and sent Christ to be our redeemer, for as the Son of God, Christ has the right, the resources, and the resolve to take our sin and punishment and to offer us the opportunity to enter into relationship with Him. No matter our circumstances, we can have hope both now and for the future because of Christ our Redeemer.

WHY IT MATTERS

Digging Deeper

Consider at least three directions your small group can take in light of the current Bible reading plan. Knowing the people in the group, prayerfully think about what would be the best route to help those in your group grow. The group's meeting style could also vary each week, so, feel the freedom to take all or some of the content in this guide to do what you feel is best for your group.

- *Using the discussion questions below, the small group time can focus on discussing the sermon and how to apply it.*
- *The group can discuss the Bible readings from the past week. If choosing this route, ensure that the group does not simply discuss information but also focuses on how to apply what they have learned from the Bible readings. The information in the "Where We Are in the Story" section can assist the leader in knowing the background and context for the readings.*
- *Using the REAP (read, examine, apply, pray) outline for studying Scripture, the group can take one or both passages from that day's readings and discuss them. If the group meets on Monday, you could pick one or both of the passages for Monday. This also helps those who are new to studying the Bible or who struggle with reading it learn how to do so. To assist the group with REAP questions, download the Guide to Personal Worship from brookhills.org.*

For many people in your small group, the story of Ruth will be quite familiar. Discuss together how you can freshly approach stories or books in the Bible with which you are well versed. For example, with this particular

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book, you could read it with the purpose of seeing what it says about God. How is He working behind the scenes? What does this book express about His character? What are the qualities of a kinsman redeemer? How is God our ultimate Redeemer? Or you could read this book to learn more about faith in suffering.

Whatever approach you take, encourage the group to read for knowledge *and application*. How does God want to use what they have read to change their hearts and how they live? Challenge the group to be as specific as possible when thinking about application. What change does God want to occur in their lives? What does this change involve? How will they take the first step on that path of change? When will they take that first step? What do they need to take that first step? How can others encourage, pray, and come alongside them as they take that first step towards change?

NOW WHAT DO WE DO?

Group Discussion & Application

Use the following questions to help review the application of God's Word to our Head (What does God want me to know?), to our Heart (What does God want me to desire/value?), and to our Hands (What does God want me to do?).

- Why is the providence of God so perplexing? Why do we wrestle with – and often dislike – God's sovereignty? Where would we be if God were not sovereign? How is this attribute of God a source of hope for humanity?
- How should believers respond when we have questions about what God is doing in our lives? What keeps us from responding to unanswered questions with faith? How can we trust God when His ways seem so bewildering? How do we deal with doubt? What does trusting Him look like on a daily basis, particularly when we doubt or do not know the purpose for our circumstances?
- Define mercy. In what ways does God demonstrate mercy to people? How has He acted mercifully towards you? How is God's mercy mysterious?
- Read Ruth 1:1-5. Naomi was left without a husband, children, hope, or security. Who are the widows that you know? How can you and your small group come alongside widows in our faith family and in our community? What needs do they have physically? How can you encourage them and pray for them?
- Read Ruth 1:19-21. Naomi changed her name to Mara in order to reflect her feelings of bitterness and her sad situation. Why was Naomi bitter? Why do people today – believers and unbelievers – feel bitter towards God? Why do many people choose to hold on to bitterness? What does bitterness do to us?
- Our feelings express our theology. What does bitterness about a situation reflect about what believe about God, people, and the world?
- How do we let go of bitterness? What does Scripture say about how to respond when you feel bitter?
- How should you respond when you do not *feel* like God is near?
- In the sermon, Pastor David stated, "Amidst your sorrow, God may actually be plotting for your satisfaction." Describe the satisfaction that God seeks to bring about in us. How does God satisfy us? While not every sorry leads to *immediate* satisfaction, what can we be confident about with regards to God and the purpose for our suffering?
- If we do not feel satisfied in Christ, what should we do? What sins do we need to confess? What needs to change in our lives? What is the state of our relationship with God? What does time spent with Him in prayer and in the study of His Word look like in our lives?
- Read Ruth 2:1-7. With God, nothing happens by accident, but how should you respond when *you* do not know what His purpose is for your situation? What is His purpose is not what you would prefer?
- What does the book of Ruth express about the character of God?
- How does the book of Ruth point towards Christ?
- What does the book of Ruth and/or the truths of this sermon have to do with how we should live as Christ-followers?

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1 Samuel & Romans Resources

As we study 1 Samuel and Romans, listed below are helpful resources that can assist you in further study of these books.

- *1 Samuel: Looking for a Leader* by John Woodhouse
- *The First Book of Samuel* by David T. Tsumara
- *1 & 2 Samuel* by Joyce Baldwin
- *1 & Samuel* by Ronald F. Youngblood
- *1 & 2 Samuel* by Bill T. Arnold
- *1 Samuel* by Dale Ralph Davis
- *2 Samuel* by Dale Ralph Davis
- *The Epistle to the Romans* by Douglas Moo
- *The Epistle to the Romans* by John Murray
- *The Epistle to the Romans* by Leon Morris
- *Romans 1-8* by C.E.B. Cranfield
- *Romans 9-16* by C.E.B. Cranfield
- *Romans: A Shorter Commentary* by C.E.B. Cranfield
- *Romans* by Thomas R. Schreiner
- *Romans 1-7 For You* by Timothy Keller
- *Romans* by Robert Mounce
- *Romans: Righteousness from Heaven* by R. Kent Hughes
- *Romans* by F.F. Bruce
- "What Happens to People Who Never Hear about Jesus" by David Platt (podcast on Romans 1 on radical.net)
- "The Marvel of God's Mercy" by David Platt (podcast on Romans 9 on radical.net)
- *Old Testament Theology* by Paul R. House
- *Theology of the New Testament* by Frank S. Thielman
- *An Introduction to the New Testament* by D.A. Carson & Douglas Moo
- *An Introduction to the Old Testament* by Tremper Longman III & Raymond B. Dillard
- Radical (radical.net) – Listen to previous Brook Hills sermons, and search by Scripture, date, or topic.
- Ligonier Ministries (ligonier.org) – This site provides a helpful list of top commentaries for each book of the Bible.
- The Gospel Coalition (thegospelcoalition.org) – Use their Scripture index to download sermons from trusted pastors on almost every chapter in the Bible.
- Desiring God (desiringgod.org) – Listen to or read sermons by Pastor John Piper.