

# ▣ LIVING FOR ANOTHER WORLD

July 24, 2022 | Love

## PREPARATION

### A WORD ON THIS SERIES

This series will study the seven qualities found in 2 Peter 1:5–7. Peter said after stating them, “If these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:8). None of us aspires to be ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of Christ. Instead, with the help of His divine power, we must seek all the things pertaining to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3). The word “life” in this verse refers to the transcendent life of one who has received salvation in Jesus Christ. It is a life lived now but with eternity in mind. C. S. Lewis described this life as “another world.” Each lesson in this series will examine the life of a biblical character who exhibits one of these seven qualities. None of these individuals was perfect, but they modeled these qualities for us and inspire us to do the same. This week, we conclude our study by considering love in the book of Ruth. We will see how Ruth exemplifies genuine love.

### GETTING READY

How would you define love in your own words?

Read the book of Ruth (only four short chapters).

Ask God to use the book of Ruth to show you how love works in conjunction with His grace to make the gospel known to us.

## THIS WEEK

### ▣ KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

Genuine love testifies to the goodness of God in the gospel.

## THEOLOGY APPLIED

Your capacity for love reflects how well you understand the gospel.

## MEDITATE

*“Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments” (1 John 5:1–2).*

## GETTING STARTED

*+This section introduces the lesson by discussing the need for genuine love instead of what is often mistaken for love in our culture.*

🗣️: *Why would love be considered the ultimate Christian virtue?*

🗣️: *Why do even secular cultures find the idea of love appealing?*

The final word in Peter’s list of qualities is “love.” The Bible frequently presents love as the ultimate Christian virtue. Peter likely alludes to the primacy of love by concluding his series of virtues with it. Elsewhere, Peter said, “Above all, keep loving one another earnestly” (1 Peter 4:8). Paul repeatedly emphasized the importance of love when discussing Christian behavior. He admonished the Colossian Christians to have love “above all [else]” (Colossians 3:14). He considered love to be greater than faith and hope (1 Corinthians 13:13).

This biblical focus on love is seemingly matched by current cultural sentiments. Our culture loves love. People say love is the key to resolving all the world’s problems. It is the secret to finding physical, spiritual, and emotional fulfillment. It is universally affirmed as good, and everyone would be happier if there were more love in the world.

Taking a critical step back, however, reveals enormous gaps in the world’s thinking about love. How can love be the solution to world conflict when loving one’s country, religion, or people is often the source of the conflict? How can we think love leads to personal happiness when nearly half of all marriages, presumably founded on love, end in divorce? How can love save us from physical illnesses or pandemics? The apostles called believers to love, but the world’s understanding of love is often confused. How can believers follow the apostle’s command in a world where there is so much confusion surrounding love? This lesson will look to Ruth as an example to guide us through the fog.

♀: *Why is the world's "love talk" so appealing?*

♀: *Do you think people who speak so highly of love in our culture would appreciate the Bible's vision of love in the same way? Why or why not?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Although this lesson will look to Ruth as an example of genuine love, we must begin by recognizing that the greatest example of love we could ever have is our Savior, Jesus Christ. Jesus gave His life as a sacrifice so that we may be forgiven of our sins and have a renewed relationship with the Father. Jesus's death for us was the ultimate demonstration of love. Furthermore, Jesus commanded us, to the degree that we carry on the ministry of His disciples, to love one another just as He has loved us (John 13:34). What is amazing is that Jesus referred to this as a new commandment even though the people of God have been told to love one another before (Leviticus 19:18). What was new about this commandment? The key rests in Jesus's sacrificial demonstration of His love. The world had never seen love like that before, so Jesus's command to love one another as He has loved us must be a new commandment. When the apostles hold up love as the ultimate Christian virtue, they do so because Jesus's act of love resides at the center of our faith.

## ▣ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

+This lesson surveys the book of Ruth and presents six principles concerning genuine love as exemplified by Ruth.

1. GENUINE LOVE IS NOT ALWAYS EASY OR CLEAR.
2. GENUINE LOVE PRIORITIZES GOD.
3. GENUINE LOVE IS SACRIFICIAL.
4. GENUINE LOVE DOES NOT TAKE BREAKS.
5. GENUINE LOVE TRANSFORMS.
6. GENUINE LOVE SHOWS SELF-RESTRAINT.

## GOING DEEPER

+This section examines passages from the book of Ruth in which Ruth demonstrates genuine love. Not every passage in Ruth will be discussed nor will every example of genuine love be covered. Nevertheless, the six principles drawn from Ruth give us an example of genuine love to follow.

## 1. GENUINE LOVE IS NOT ALWAYS EASY OR CLEAR.

### ■ RUTH 1:1-18

🔗: *How were Ruth and Orpah related to Naomi?*

🔗: *Was Naomi's reasoning in verses 8-13 sound?*

The setting and plot of the first chapter of Ruth are well known. Naomi's husband, Elimelech, had moved his family from Bethlehem to the foreign country of Moab because of a severe famine in Bethlehem. Elimelech and Naomi's two sons married Moabite women but had no children. Elimelech and his sons died, leaving Naomi and her two daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpah, widowed. Later, Naomi learned that the famine in Bethlehem had subsided and made plans to return. Ruth and Orpah planned to move with her to Bethlehem, but Naomi discouraged them from doing so.

Naomi and Orpah give us examples of divided loves. Naomi argued that Ruth and Orpah would face bleak futures in Bethlehem. Even though they wished to remain loyal to her, there was no hope of Naomi ever producing another son for them to marry within her family. She thought it would be best for them to remain in Moab, find new husbands, and forget about her. From a standpoint of their physical needs, Naomi's reasoning seems sound. Ruth and Orpah stood a greater chance of being cared for and starting a family if they remained in Moab. Staying, however, meant staying in a land that worshipped pagan gods. Naomi's plan would have met their physical needs, but their spiritual needs would have suffered. Orpah prioritized her physical needs over her spiritual needs. She remained in a land of idolatry in hopes of starting over and having the family life she yearned for. Ruth, on the other hand, refused to be divided. She was committed to Naomi's welfare and to Naomi's God, no matter the cost (Ruth 1:16-17). This was not an easy decision. As we will see, returning with Naomi placed Ruth in a vulnerable situation. We will also see how God provided for Ruth even when all hope seemed lost.

🔗: *What commitments can divide your loves?*

🔗: *How do you decide what the most loving thing to do is when the answer is not clear?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – In a fallen world, it is not always clear what the most loving action is. Sometimes we must weigh competing interests and make the best decision we can. In such situations, it is important to go to an authority outside of ourselves to understand what the most loving thing to do is. We need to go to Scripture for guidance. God’s Word can help us cut through the cultural expectations and confusion that make the decisions we face in a fallen world uncertain.

## 2. GENUINE LOVE PRIORITIZES GOD.

### ■ RUTH 1:19–22

Q: *Why did Naomi ask to be called Mara?*

Q: *Why did Naomi say she had returned empty even when she had returned with Ruth?*

Naomi’s return created quite a stir among the townspeople. She and Elimelech were obviously notable people in Bethlehem. Her return would have been an occasion for joy. Not only was a friend and neighbor returning, but Naomi’s return was a reminder of God’s goodness in the land despite the earlier famine. But Naomi refused to appear joyful. She refused to be called Naomi, which means “pleasant,” and instead demanded to be called Mara, which means “bitter.” In her mind, God had only dealt bitterly with her in Moab. She had no joy left even though the famine had relented, she had returned to her homeland, and had Ruth to help care for her. Naomi’s bitterness kept her from seeing Ruth’s love for her and, more importantly, God’s love for her.

Q: *Why couldn’t Naomi find joy when she returned home after the famine?*

Q: *How could someone count trials as “joy” (James 1:2)?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Naomi is a perfect example of what happens when our loves become disordered. Naomi was consumed with loss, so much so that she did not even regard Ruth as worthy of mention. She would have preferred to remain in Moab with her family but without her God than to return to the land where her God was known but without her family. When we cannot correctly prioritize our loves, which always means loving God

above all else, our love becomes disordered. Correctly prioritized love is why James was able to tell his readers to consider it a joy when they face trials. How can someone joyfully face a spiritual or physical trial? Only by prioritizing God over everything else. Prioritizing God helps us maintain genuine love. Prioritizing God helps us to endure when we receive a bad health diagnosis or suffer the death of a family member. Prioritizing God helps us maintain genuine love even when nothing else is going the way we want.

### 3. GENUINE LOVE IS SACRIFICIAL.

#### ■ RUTH 2:1-13

🔍: *How did Ruth love Naomi sacrificially in these verses?*

🔍: *What were the dangers of Ruth gathering wheat in the field?*

Although the famine in Bethlehem had subsided, Naomi and Ruth had not planted a crop, so they still had to find food for themselves. The Old Testament law made provision for the poor and sojourners in Israel. Landowners were not allowed to harvest the edges of their crops, which yielded the weakest produce, or to go back over their fields to collect what was missed during the initial harvest (Leviticus 23:22). This part of the harvest was left for those in need. In order to provide food for herself and Naomi, Ruth joined the poor and sojourners in gathering what remained of the crops after the harvest.

The text of Ruth does not go into much detail, but apparently Ruth's actions placed her in a certain amount of danger. It doesn't take much imagination to realize how a group of people foraging the same land for a small portion of leftover crops could create a contentious situation. No doubt arguments frequently erupted between them. The text of Ruth hints that the men employed to harvest the fields would have posed a certain amount of danger to Ruth as well (Ruth 2:9, 22). Whatever the case, Ruth's actions placed her in danger. Her willingness to face this danger on behalf of Naomi was an act of sacrificial love. Ruth took upon herself the danger Naomi would have been exposed to.

Ruth's is not the only example of sacrificial love in this chapter. Boaz allowed Ruth to gather from his primary crop (Ruth 2:15-16) and even instructed the harvesters to intentionally leave behind some grain for her to easily gather. Boaz sacrificed part of his crop and his livelihood for Ruth's sake.

Q: *Why must genuine love at least be willing to sacrifice?*

Q: *Why does the sacrificial nature of love make it the supreme Christian virtue?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Genuine love is not about what you can get for yourself. Genuine love drives you to sacrifice your dreams, your money, even your wellbeing for the sake of others. This is what Christ did for us in His sacrificial death on the cross. This is why genuine love is the greatest virtue. Peter and the other New Testament writers call you to love sacrificially. They call you to value the object of your love more than yourself.

#### 4. GENUINE LOVE DOES NOT TAKE BREAKS.

##### ■ RUTH 2:14, 18

Q: *What did Ruth do with the leftover lunch she received from Boaz?*

Q: *What did this show about Ruth?*

Boaz's generosity included allowing Ruth to share in the meal prepared for the harvesters. Ruth was given more than she could eat. Rather than discard the rest, she took it home to Naomi with the rest of her gatherings. Ruth never stopped thinking of Naomi, even in the smallest ways. Ruth's thoughtfulness allowed Naomi to eat as soon as Ruth returned home rather than having to wait for a portion of the day's harvest to be prepared. Who knows how long it had been since Naomi had eaten? Since Ruth left with no food and could not have expected to have received any during the day, this would have been a completely unexpected grace for Naomi.

Q: *How does Ruth's thoughtfulness compare to the way we often love others?*

Q: *Why must genuine love persevere through absence? Sickness? Disagreements?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Ruth’s thoughtfulness contrasts with the way many people love today. When love is only an emotion or feeling, you can love more strongly at some times than others. An extended or even sometimes momentary absence is enough to diminish feelings but not genuine love. An argument can quickly transform a feeling from love to hate, but genuine love sustains through arguments. Familiarity can diminish emotions, but genuine love can never become too familiar with its object. Genuine love is more than mere convenience.

## 5. GENUINE LOVE TRANSFORMS.

### ■ RUTH 2:20–23; 4:13–17

**Q:** *How did Naomi’s outlook change when Ruth returned with a bountiful harvest?*

**Q:** *How do the words of the women [4:14–15] contrast with Naomi’s words upon her return [1:20–21]?*

Naomi returned from Moab with only bitterness. Although Ruth has shown tremendous love and concern for her, she did not even acknowledge Ruth at her return (1:21). Naomi’s outlook transformed throughout the book as she encountered one example of genuine love after another. Ruth returned with food ready for her to eat. This was a demonstration of genuine love she had not expected. Furthermore, Ruth returned with far more gleanings from a single day’s labor than could have reasonably been expected. After Ruth beat out the wheat from the husks, she had about an ephah of barley, which was at least fifty pounds. Naomi knew someone had to have been extraordinarily generous to Ruth for her to have gathered that much. When she learned that person was Boaz, who was a kinsman redeemer for her and Ruth, she recognized the hand of God at work (Ruth 2:20). Genuine love began to transform Naomi from bitter to hopeful.

The transformation was complete by the end of the book. Naomi contrived a rather uncertain plan to suggest to Boaz that he redeem Ruth (3:1–5). Her plan had more pitfalls than even she was aware of (3:12), but by God’s providence and the genuine love of Ruth and Boaz, her plan succeeded. Boaz redeemed Ruth, Naomi and Ruth obtained the security they needed, and Boaz and Ruth had a child who was as much Naomi’s as theirs (4:17). The woman who had returned from Moab empty and bitter was now full of joy. She had been transformed by the genuine love of others, even the genuine love of a providential God who never stopped providing for her.



- Q: *How have you witnessed others being transformed by genuine love?*
- Q: *Why do some people need to see a demonstration of genuine love before they are convinced of the love of God in the gospel?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Life in a sinful and broken world takes a toll on people. Some people, like Naomi, have endured such heartache and disappointment they have become hardened to the possibility of genuine love, even from God. Christians want the genuine love of God to penetrate even the hardest hearts. We cannot be resentful of people who are hardened to the love of God. Instead, we have to be willing to show them genuine love. Sometimes people, like Naomi, need to witness a demonstration of genuine love before they are willing to love others or open their hearts to the gospel. Sometimes they need to see three or four or ten demonstrations of genuine love. When we encounter such people, it is important for us to remember that genuine love is sacrificial. We cannot demand a reciprocal response when we demonstrate genuine love for others, and since genuine love is sacrificial, demonstrations of genuine love cannot lead to bitterness on our part.

## 6. GENUINE LOVE SHOWS SELF-RESTRAINT.

### ■ RUTH 3:6-13

- Q: *How did Boaz show self-restraint in Ruth 3:6-13?*
- Q: *How does Boaz's self-restraint show genuine love for Ruth, the nearer kinsman, and God?*

The final example of genuine love we will consider comes from Boaz. Scholars disagree about the merits of Naomi's plan (Ruth 3:1-5). Some people believe Naomi was trying to trick Boaz into having sex with Ruth, forcing his hand as a redeemer. The weight of the evidence, however, suggests that Naomi simply wanted to get Boaz and Ruth together in a way that would suggest to Boaz that he should redeem Ruth. Naomi's plan, however, was quite clumsy and could have gone disastrously wrong in several ways. Even if Naomi did not intend it, Boaz could have taken advantage of Ruth sexually in this situation. It seems this kind of behavior was common during the harvest season, and prostitutes even made themselves available for such occasions.

But Boaz restrained himself when he could have taken advantage with little consequence. He showed genuine love to Ruth by restraining any sexual urge he had and treating her honorably.

Boaz also showed restraint in redeeming Ruth. Although Naomi and Ruth had made their desires clear and Boaz also desired to redeem Ruth (Ruth 4:10), Boaz knew it was another man's right to redeem Ruth if he chose. The cultural practice alluded to here is called levirate marriage. In ancient cultures, when a married man died with no children, one of his brothers was responsible to marry his widow and raise children on his behalf. When no brothers were available, it appears that this responsibility was extended to the nearest kin, though it could be declined. Boaz was aware that another man was a nearer redeemer for Ruth than he was. Rather than being led by desire or emotion, Boaz determined to resolve the claim of the nearer redeemer before acting himself. Boaz's restraint showed genuine love for the nearer redeemer, for Ruth, and for God. He would not disregard the existence of the nearer redeemer and his right to redeem Ruth. He would not place Ruth in the middle of a dispute. He would not work against God's providence in the whole situation. Boaz showed genuine love by showing self-restraint. In God's providence, he was able to marry Ruth with honor.

🕒: *How does our culture prioritize desire over self-restraint in love?*

🕒: *Why is important to understand that love is more than just an emotion?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Boaz's self-restraint shows us that genuine love is not driven only by emotion or passion. Genuine love rests on the character of God and is defined by His goodness. This means we cannot define love in terms of what we want to do or how we feel. Genuine love is restrained by God's perfect plan for His creation. Failing to acknowledge the restraints God has placed on genuine love is not love at all.

## NEXT STEPS

Who do you need to show genuine love to? Although the story of Ruth addresses genuine love between a man and a woman, it also demonstrates genuine love in many other types of relationships. Whether it be a romantic interest, a spouse, a family member, a brother or sister in Christ, or an unbeliever, find who God is calling you to show genuine love toward. Consider how these principles from the book of Ruth can help you love this person in a manner that would glorify God.



## PRAY

*+Use these prayer points to instill the lessons you learned from God's Word this week.*

*-Father, you are the author of love. Help me define love the way you define it. Help me to love genuinely.*

*-God, I have not always loved others sacrificially. I have loved selfishly. Forgive me. Renew my heart so I know how to love like you do.*

*-Jesus, you have provided the greatest example of love that could ever be shown. Thank you for my salvation. Thank you for loving me when I was unlovable.*

*-God, help me to demonstrate your love for others. Help me to transform others by loving them genuinely.*

