**Part 8:** The last section of Chapter 2 (verses 18-23) speaks of Naomi’s coming home again and Ruth coming home for the first time. Naomi first interpreted her misfortune as God’s doing (1:13, 20-21). This mentality of blaming God or assuming that bad fortune was punishment continued into the NT. Jesus was asked who sinned to cause a man to be blind, the man himself or his parents. Jesus’ answer was neither, but that God’s glory would be made manifest. It is only when Ruth had succeeded in finding help that Naomi finally told her that Boaz was actually a distant relative. Finally, she also warns her against the danger for her in the fields. Naomi is finally teaching Ruth about how the Israelite culture operates. Finally, Naomi has recovered some hope and confidence so that she began to think about Ruth’s well-being, not just her own. We recall that Ruth was given her fill of food, so the story indicates that even though she was fully committed, she was not required to sacrifice her own well-being.

***Blessed be he of the Lord, who has not failed in His kindness to the living or to the dead!*** [Naomi’s words, Verse 20]. The words translated as “failed in his kindness” are literally “who has not abandoned his *hesed.*” Please recall that *hesed* means lovingkindness, the idea of faithful love in action and often it is expressed in God’s covenant relationship with Israel. God’s *hesed* reflects his persistence and unconditional tenderness and mercy, seeking after us in mercy and love. Boaz was kind to the living (Ruth and Naomi) as well as honoring their dead. The latter is always an act of people, not God, who attends to the living. But the JPS commentary also suggested that Ruth may have believed that Boaz also showed *hesed* to her husband when he was still living.

And again, there are parallels with the Abraham story. The phrase, ‘abandoned his *hesed*’ occurs only one other place in scripture where it refers to God. Abraham’s servant was looking for a wife for Abraham’s son. He asked God to “make it happen” and bring a qualified young woman to the well. Immediately, Rebekah came. The servant then says, *Blessed be the Lord…who has not withheld* *[‘asabh*] *His steadfast faithfulness* [*hesed*] *from my master* [Genesis 24:27]. Naomi appreciates the actions of a powerful man who acts as God’s agent, and this is not too surprising. In their ancient world, women were utterly dependent on good men. And even though the world has changed a lot, there will always be people who are genuinely at the mercy of *hesed* who cannot survive and take care of themselves. We are to be God’s agents in those situations.

***He even told me, ‘Stay close to my workers***…[Ruth speaking, verse 21]. Looking at the Hebrew words, Ruth first was told to keep close to Boaz’ girls, but the term could refer to either gender. Ruth mistakenly uses the masculine form of the word, leaving some scholars to think that perhaps as a Moabite she did not appreciate the distinct gender roles in the Hebrew culture. Then Naomi corrects her and she learns that her safety will be better maintained if she sticks with the girls.

***Then she stayed at home with her mother-in-law*** [verse 23]. We see that no matter how connected Ruth was becoming with Boaz and the Hebrew community, her first allegiance was still with Naomi. And this is viewed as acceptable and to be praised. She was not yet in Boaz’ house and after the first day, there is no indication of what will come. The end of the season of reaping comes, and there is no indication that they will be cared for in the future. It is then that Naomi hatches a bold plan and instructs Ruth step by step. And while Ruth seeks Boaz on the threshing floor as she was instructed to do, she does this in her own way. She follows her own path in seeking a permanent home for them. We will address that part of the story in the part dealing with chapter 3.

**Food for Thought:**

1. We see that Naomi has become more active in seeking a solution to their future. As the story will develop, both women become more active. There is a term in psychology called “learned helplessness.” Such helplessness is often attributed to passive victims, whether male or female, who react to events but do not initiate actions. From the story of Ruth, we can see that the two women were ultimately rewarded for taking action and not simply waiting to be cared for. We also know there are times that, biblically, we are called upon to wait on the Lord and not take control. There is a tension here between being too controlling or being too passive. Can you think of times in your own life that you were too controlling, or taking charge? Or too passive, or waiting too long? What were the outcomes?
2. How have solutions for women’s survival and well-being remained the same as they were in Ruth’s time? How have they changed? As you look back on your own grandmothers and mothers, how did they approach problems of survival differently than you have done?
3. How would you work with a woman in your church coming out of a family with “learned helplessness” to understand her options in a violent marriage from a Christian point of view?