



Joshua



& Ruth

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

WEEK ONE

WHEN FAITH STANDS ALONE

SUMMARY

We open this series not in Joshua, but in the book of Numbers. Moses is still leading the people of Israel, and they've just arrived at the edge of the Promised Land after their journey through the wilderness. Moses sends twelve spies into Canaan—one from each tribe—and all twelve agree: the land is good, really good. But ten return overwhelmed by fear. The cities are fortified, the people are giants, and the spies say, "We seemed like grasshoppers" in comparison.

Only Caleb and Joshua bring a different report: "The LORD is with us, do not be afraid."

Unfortunately, the majority report wins, and the rest is history. The people weep and rage against Moses and his brother Aaron, and even plot a coup. In fact, things get so bad that they decide they'd rather go back to Egypt, where they had been enslaved.

In response, God declares that this generation will not enter the Promised Land, except for Caleb and Joshua because God honors their faith.

Ultimately, this is a story about the cost of conviction when everyone around you is afraid. It's about seeing the same facts as everyone else and still trusting God's character more than the size of the circumstances.

CONNECTION

- Tell us about a time you held a different opinion than everyone else in the room. What did that feel like?
- Where do you tend to look for confirmation before you trust something—facts, consensus, feelings, intuition, or something else?

READ NUMBERS 13:26–14:25

- All twelve spies saw the same land and the same giants—so what actually made Caleb and Joshua's report different from the other ten?
- Why do you think fear spread to the whole community so quickly, but trust didn't?
- The people say in 14:3, "Would it not be better for us to go back to Egypt?" What does that reveal about what they actually wanted—security, freedom...?
- God's response to Israel's unbelief is severe. What does this passage reveal about how seriously God takes the difference between faithful conviction—even when it's in the minority—and stubborn unbelief?

SERMON REFLECTION

- What's one thing from this week's message that challenged or clarified how you think about faith and fear?
- Where did you see your own story—in the ten spies or in the two?

APPLICATION

- Where in your life right now are you tempted to go with the majority report—the safer, more fearful read of your circumstances—instead of trusting what you know about God's character?
- What would it look like this week to act on a minority conviction, even in something small?

CLOSING PRAYER

Spend a few minutes in silence before God. Ask the Spirit to surface anywhere fear has been shaping your decisions. As a group, pray for one another by name—not generic prayers, but specific to what's been shared in your time together. Ask God to give each person the same spirit Caleb and Joshua had: not the absence of fear, but trust in God's presence, which is bigger than the fear.

WEEK TWO

WHEN FAITH FEELS ALONE

SUMMARY

Moses is dead, which to us, several thousand years later, feels like old news. However, for the Israelites in the wilderness—this was devastating. Moses was the prince who brought down an empire, the prophet who brought the ten plagues, and the priest who went before God on their behalf—he was everything!

Joshua, Moses' second in command and one of the only two surviving witnesses of the wilderness rebellion, was now in charge of leading Israel into the land his own generation refused to enter.

He had big shoes to fill, so before he even gets started, God speaks: "I will be with you... I will not leave you or forsake you." That has to be comforting, because Joshua must be wondering, "God was with Moses, will he be with me too?"

God's answer is a resounding, "yes."

God gives Joshua this charge, that is repeated four times: "Be strong and courageous." So we understand that Joshua's strength isn't self-generated. It's not based solely on his personality. It comes from confidence commanded by God and grounded in a promise made by God. The instruction to meditate on God's law day and night is given as the practice that keeps Joshua oriented to truth instead of fear.

Before, the people rebelled against God and Joshua's leadership. Now, the people respond with full support. But Joshua is still the one who has to take the first step into the unknown, carrying the weight of a calling no one else can carry for him.

CONNECTION

- Describe a season where you felt the weight of a responsibility that no one else could carry for you.
- When you're facing something hard, do you tend to isolate or reach out? Why do you think that is?

READ JOSHUA 1

- God tells Joshua to be strong and courageous before Joshua has done anything to prove himself capable. What does that order—promise first, then command—tell us about where courage is supposed to come from?
- Why do you think God repeats, "Be strong and courageous." four times instead of once? What might Joshua have needed to hear repeated?
- Verses 7–8 connect courage to meditating on God's Word "day and night." How are courage and continual attention to God's character connected?
- Joshua had support from the people (v. 16–18) but still had to be the one to lead. What does this passage suggest about the difference between being alone and feeling alone?

SERMON REFLECTION

- What stood out to you from how the sermon unpacked, "Be strong and courageous." this week?
- How did the sermon address the difference between courage as willpower and courage as trust in God's presence?

APPLICATION

- What's the first step you're being asked to take right now—the thing you feel called to but haven't moved on yet?
- What's one practical way you could build the "day and night" rhythm of attention towards God into this next season, even in a small way?

CLOSING PRAYER

Invite the group into a few minutes of quiet before God. Ask the Spirit to speak the same words he spoke to Joshua over anyone in the room who feels alone in their calling right now, "I will not leave you or forsake you." Pray specifically for the step each person named, asking God for the strength that comes from his presence, not from self-effort. Close by praying God's presence over one another by name.

WEEK THREE

WHEN GRACE FINDS YOU

SUMMARY

In an echo of Moses sending twelve spies into the Promised Land, Joshua sends two spies into Jericho—a major Canaanite fortress city standing between Israel and the Promised Land.

The spies end up in the home of a woman named Rahab, who we learn is a Canaanite, and a prostitute. Essentially, she is an outsider in every way the Israelites would have considered. She hides the spies, lies to protect them, and makes a remarkable confession: "The LORD your God, he is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath."

How can she make such a confession you might ask? She's heard stories about Israel's God and what he did to free the Israelites (demonstrating greater faith in what God has done than even the Israelites show at times) and she has chosen to trust him before she's ever been invited to.

In exchange, she asks for protection for herself and her family. The spies agree, marking her house with a scarlet cord so that when the battle comes, Rahab and her family will be safe.

Rahab becomes the first person in the conquest narrative to be saved, not because of her pedigree or her past, but because of her faith and trust in the character of God. She's proof that God's grace reaches people who, by every human standard, should be disqualified. Even more marvelous, Matthew's Gospel names her directly in the lineage of Jesus—demonstrating that God's story of grace is far more expansive than many of us could ever imagine.

CONNECTION

- Have you ever assumed someone (including yourself) was too far outside the lines to be welcomed by God? What shaped that assumption?
- Tell us about someone in your life whose faith surprised you because of where it came from.

READ JOSHUA 2

- Rahab is named specifically as a Canaanite and a prostitute. Why do you think the text doesn't soften or hide her background?
- What does Rahab's confession in verses 9–11 reveal about what she actually believed, even before she had any covenant relationship with God?
- We often miss it, but the spies' promise to Rahab cost them something: they were trusting an outsider with their lives. What does that risk tell us about how trust and grace work in both directions?
- Rahab acted on her faith before she had certainty about the outcome. What's the relationship between her faith and her actions in this chapter?

SERMON REFLECTION

- What did the sermon say about what grace can do for someone who genuinely believes they're too far gone? How does that challenge or encourage the way you see yourself or others?
- What character in the story did you find yourself relating to in this week's message?

APPLICATION

- Is there a part of your story you've decided disqualifies you from being fully used or fully loved by God? What would it look like to bring that into the light this week?
- Who in your life might believe they're too far outside the lines for God—and what's one way you could extend the same welcome Rahab received?

CLOSING PRAYER

Create space for quiet honesty. Ask the Spirit to gently bring to the surface anything anyone is carrying that has convinced them they're disqualified—a past, a label, a failure, etc. Let people share only as much as they're comfortable with. Pray over one another the truth Rahab discovered: that God's grace reaches further than our disqualifying story does. If appropriate, pray specifically by name for anyone who shared and ask God to replace shame with belonging.

WEEK FOUR

WHEN GOD MAKES A WAY

SUMMARY

Forty years after Moses declared to Pharaoh, “Let my people go!” and God delivered Israel from slavery in Egypt with his mighty hand, and after a generation of wandering through the wilderness, the Israelites are finally standing on the edge of the Promised Land, ready to enter.

They arrive at the last obstacle—the Jordan River. The river is at flood stage—the worst possible time to cross.

God instructs the priests to carry the Ark of the Covenant and step into the water first, before anything changes. The moment their feet touch the water's edge, the river stops flowing, piling up far upstream, and the entire nation crosses on dry ground as an echo of their earlier crossing of the Red Sea.

The priests stand in the middle of the riverbed holding the Ark until everyone has passed. Afterward, God commands twelve men to take twelve stones from the riverbed and stack them as a memorial, so that when future generations ask, “What do these stones mean?” the answer points back to this moment of God's faithfulness.

What's fascinating about this story is that the river didn't stop flowing until the priests stepped into it. They had to get their feet wet before the water responded. It's a good reminder for us that often obedience precedes the miraculous.

CONNECTION

- Describe a time you had to take action before you had any guarantee things would work out.
- What's something your family or community does to remember and pass down stories of God's faithfulness?

READ JOSHUA 3:14 – 4:14

- The river didn't part before the priests stepped in—it parted after. What does the timing of this miracle teach us about the relationship between obedience and provision?
- Why do you think God chose to make this such a public, undeniable miracle rather than a quiet provision?
- The priests had to stand still in the riverbed, holding the Ark, until every person crossed. What does their posture of steady presence in the middle of the miracle suggest about leadership and faith?
- Sometimes, obedience doesn't result in the overwhelming miracle. How do we wrestle with that reality as well? That it's not a formula?
- Why does God command a physical memorial (the twelve stones) instead of trusting the people to simply remember on their own?

SERMON REFLECTION

- What did the sermon say about where God might be asking Waterstone to "step into the water"?
- How did the message help you understand the difference between presuming God will act and responding with faith-filled obedience?

APPLICATION

- Where is God asking you to step toward the edge of the water—to act before you have certainty—rather than waiting until it feels safe?
- What's one "memorial stone" you could set up in your own life this week—a tangible way to remember and mark something God has already done for you?

CLOSING PRAYER

Invite the group to sit quietly and ask the Spirit to bring to mind a specific area in which they're waiting for certainty before they act in faith. Encourage honesty about where that hesitation comes from. Pray for one another by name, asking God for the courage to step toward the water's edge even without seeing it part first. Close by inviting people to verbally name one thing God has already done faithfully in their life—a spoken "memorial stone"—as an act of worship with the group.

WEEK FIVE

WHEN EVERYTHING FALLS APART

SUMMARY

The story of Ruth takes place directly following the time period of Joshua. It opens with this ominous line, “In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land...”

It’s our first clue that things in the Promised Land have not gone according to plan.

Famine drives a family from Bethlehem to Moab—which would have been considered enemy territory outside the Promised Land—as a last resort. This family, comprised of Naomi, her husband Elimelech, and their two sons, experiences tragedy after tragedy. Over the next ten years, Elimelech dies, both sons die, and Naomi is left with two Moabite daughters-in-law and nothing else.

Destitute, she decides to return home and urges Orpah (not to be confused with Oprah...) and Ruth to stay in Moab and rebuild their lives. Orpah eventually acquiesces and goes, but Ruth refuses, clinging to Naomi. With one of Scripture’s most famous declarations of loyalty, she promises: “Where you go I will go... your people will be my people, and your God my God.”

They arrive back in Bethlehem, and Naomi tells the women not to call her Naomi (“pleasant”) anymore, but Mara (“bitter”), because God has dealt bitterly with her. Honestly, it doesn’t feel unfair given all she has been through.

The chapter ends with no resolution—only two empty, grieving women arriving at the beginning of barley harvest. Yet in the midst of it, we get a glimpse of what faithfulness looks like—a woman with the strength and courage to stay when it would have been easier to leave.

CONNECTION

- Describe a season when life fell apart in ways you didn't choose and couldn't control. What helped you keep going?
- Who has been a "Ruth" in your life—someone who stayed with you when they didn't have to?

READ RUTH 1

- Ruth's commitment to Naomi (1:16–17) costs her everything familiar—her homeland, her gods, her future security. What made her willing to make that choice?
- Naomi tells her daughters-in-law to go back because she has nothing left to offer them. What does this reveal about how Naomi sees herself and her usefulness to God's story at this point?
- The chapter ends with no resolution, just two women arriving in Bethlehem at harvest time. Why might the author choose to end the chapter there instead of rushing toward hope?
- Naomi names her own pain honestly—"call me Mara"—rather than putting on a brave face. What does her honesty teach us about grief and faith?

SERMON REFLECTION

- What did the sermon say about honoring grief without leaving people there—did that distinction land for you?
- How did the message describe faithfulness as simply "staying"? Where did that challenge or comfort you?

APPLICATION

- Is there grief or bitterness you've been hiding behind a "Naomi" mask, afraid to name it honestly to God or others?
- Who is someone you could "stay" with this week—not to fix or to advise, but just remain present to?

CLOSING PRAYER

Give space for people to name their own "Mara" moments—where life has felt bitter rather than pleasant—without rushing to resolve it. Let the group practice simply staying present with one another in that honesty, the way Ruth stayed with Naomi.

Pray for those carrying grief right now, asking the Spirit to be near in the unresolved middle, not just at the end of the story.

Close by asking God to show each person who they're meant to stay with this week.

WEEK SIX

WHEN GOD SEEMS HIDDEN

SUMMARY

Ruth takes the initiative to provide for herself and Naomi, going out to glean leftover grain in the fields—which was a provision built into Israelite law for the poor and the foreigner.

“As it turned out,” she ends up in the field of Boaz, a relative of Naomi's late husband.

Boaz notices her, has already heard about her loyalty to Naomi, and goes out of his way to protect and provide for her. He instructs his workers to leave extra grain, invites her to eat with them, and ensures her safety from harm.

None of this looks flashy or miraculous, on the surface. It's ordinary kindness, driven by ordinary faithfulness from Ruth (to Naomi) and Boaz (to God's law), all taking place in the normal seasonal ritual of harvest work.

In other words, everything happening within the story is taking place in the ordinary and the mundane.

God's hand is present, but it's working through Boaz's character, through Ruth's diligence, through a field she “happened” to wander into. God is at work, even when it seems hidden.

CONNECTION

- Tell us about a time something felt like coincidence, but you later recognized as God at work in your life.
- Where in your life do you find it hardest to see God at work because nothing dramatic is happening?

READ RUTH 2

- The text says Ruth "happened" to come to the field of Boaz (2:3). What does that small phrase suggest about how God works behind ordinary circumstances?
- Boaz's kindness to Ruth goes beyond what the law required. What does his character reveal about how God's people are meant to treat the vulnerable and the outsider?
- Naomi blesses Boaz for his kindness to Ruth and her. It is the first time in the story she is not seemingly depressed or worn down. What does this show us about the kindness of others towards the hurting?
- Ruth is the one who takes initiative to go work in the fields. How do diligence and trust in God's provision work together in this chapter rather than against each other?

SERMON REFLECTION

- What did the sermon say about seeing God at work in the unremarkable parts of your life?
- How did the message describe the connection between God's hidden work and our trust in him?

APPLICATION

- Looking back at the last few weeks of your life—where might God have been quietly at work in ways you didn't recognize in the moment?
- What's one ordinary act of faithfulness you could practice this week, trusting God is present in it even if it doesn't feel dramatic?

CLOSING PRAYER

Ask the Spirit to open eyes to his presence in the unremarkable—the parts of life that feel hidden or quiet rather than miraculous. Invite people to share one "ordinary" moment from recent weeks they're now wondering if God was in. Pray for renewed eyes to see God's kindness in the everyday, and for trust that he hasn't stopped working even when he feels hidden. Close by praying for anyone in the group who is currently in a season that feels uneventful or stalled, asking God to reveal his presence there.

WEEK SEVEN

WHEN FAITH TAKES A RISK

SUMMARY

After Naomi recognizes Boaz's character, she begins hatching a plan like any good mother-in-law is prone to do. She instructs Ruth to wash, anoint herself, put on her best clothes, go to the threshing floor at night where Boaz will be sleeping, and uncover his feet—a vulnerable and culturally loaded act that amounts to a marriage proposal.

It's risky on every level: Ruth is a Moabite widow approaching a respected man in the dark, in a situation that could easily be misread or rejected.

Boaz wakes to find her there, and instead of sending her away, he calls her faithfulness remarkable. He wants to “redeem” her, which was a safety net of sorts in ancient Israel to care for widows and the vulnerable.

In ancient Israel, the kinsman-redeemer (Hebrew: go'el) was the nearest male relative responsible for restoring what a family member had lost—property, land, or lineage. If a woman's husband died without a son, the closest male relative had both the right and the duty to marry her, preserving the dead husband's name and keeping family land from passing outside the family. This practice is also called levirate marriage (from Deuteronomy 25).

But Boaz honestly recognizes that while he would love to redeem Ruth, he is not the closest relative and so does not have that right.

He sends her home before dawn to protect her reputation, with a generous gift of grain, and a promise that he'll resolve the matter that same day. Everything is moving toward redemption, but Ruth and Naomi have to wait overnight without knowing the outcome.

CONNECTION

- Describe a risk you took that required you to be genuinely vulnerable—emotionally, relationally, or otherwise. What made it worth it?
- Has anyone ever taken a risk on your behalf by advocating for you, stepping out to protect or provide for you? What did that do for you?

READ RUTH 3

- Naomi's plan required Ruth to be completely vulnerable and exposed. There was no way to take the risk quietly or safely. What does Ruth's willingness to follow-through reveal about her trust in both Naomi and God?
- Boaz responds to Ruth's vulnerability with protection rather than exploitation. What does his response tell us about the kind of person God uses to extend grace to others?
- Boaz describes Ruth's actions as "hesed"—the same Hebrew word used earlier in the book to describe God's covenant faithfulness. What does it reveal about Ruth's character that her risky act of love and loyalty is described with the same word used for God?
- Boaz is honest with Ruth that there's an obstacle—a closer kinsman-redeemer—rather than making a promise he can't yet keep. How does his honesty alongside his commitment reflect mature, trustworthy faith?

SERMON REFLECTION

- What did the sermon identify as the kinds of risks God might be asking us to take that feel too exposed or uncertain?
- Where did the message land for you personally—is there a risk you felt challenged to consider?

APPLICATION

- What's the vulnerable step you've been putting off because you can't control the outcome? Maybe in a relationship, a calling, a conversation, or a commitment?
- Is there someone in your life right now who needs you to take a risk on their behalf—to advocate, to show up, to say the thing you've been holding back?

CLOSING PRAYER

Invite the group into a moment of stillness and ask the Spirit to bring to mind the specific risk each person has been avoiding. Maybe it's the step that feels too exposed, too uncertain, or too costly.

Give people a moment to sit with what comes up without immediately trying to analyze it.

Pray for one another by name, asking God to give each person the kind of trust Ruth had—not certainty about the outcome, but confidence in the character of the One she was trusting.

Close by asking the Spirit to give each person the courage to take their next step, even before they know how it ends.

WEEK EIGHT

WHEN GOD BRINGS REDEMPTION

SUMMARY

The story picks up the very next morning. Boaz goes straight to the city gate where all legal and public business takes place and waits for the relative to pass by.

He initiates the conversation and lays out the situation: Naomi is selling Elimelech's land, and whoever redeems it must also take Ruth the Moabite as his wife to carry on the dead man's name. The closer relative is willing to buy the land until he hears about Ruth—the obligation changes his calculus, and he declines, formally transferring his right to Boaz by removing his sandal in front of witnesses (sandals were REALLY important in the ancient world).

Boaz publicly declares his intention to redeem Ruth, the witnesses affirm it, and the marriage takes place.

Ruth conceives and bears a son, Obed. Naomi—who had previously arrived home empty and bitter—is handed her grandson and declared blessed by the women of Bethlehem.

In a remarkable footnote, the book ends with a genealogy: Obed will become the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David.

Ruth had no idea. Neither did Boaz.

They were simply faithful in the chapter they were given, and God was writing something neither of them could see.

More than a thousand years later, they are named in the genealogy of Jesus, the Messiah.

CONNECTION

- Describe a moment when you looked back on a hard season and finally saw what God had been doing the whole time.
- Has there been a time when something that felt like an ending turned out to be the beginning of something else entirely?

READ RUTH 4

- The closer relative was willing to redeem the land until Ruth was included. Her presence in the deal as a Moabite widow made the cost too high for him. What does Boaz's willingness to pay that cost tell us about the nature of redemption?
- Naomi, who declared herself empty and bitter in chapter 1, ends the book with a grandson in her arms and the women of Bethlehem declaring her blessed. How does the book's ending reframe her bitterness in chapter 1, not dismiss it, but reframe it?
- Ruth and Boaz are both described throughout this book using the Hebrew word "hesed": covenant faithfulness. How does their story show that human faithfulness, however ordinary, can participate in something much larger than itself?
- The genealogy at the end (4:18–22) connects Ruth directly to David—and ultimately to Jesus. Neither Ruth nor Boaz knew this. What does that mean for how we understand our own faithful acts that feel small or unwitnessed?

SERMON REFLECTION

- How did the sermon reinforce the series' through line—that the conclusion points to God's faithfulness rather than human grit?
- Looking back across the whole series, what's the most significant shift in how you think about faithfulness in uncertainty through the books of both Joshua and Ruth?

APPLICATION

- What's one thing you've been waiting to do until you can see the full picture—and what would it look like to trust God with the part of the story you can't see yet?
- As this series closes, what's one specific step of faithfulness you're leaving with—something you're committing to, however small, in the chapter you're currently in?

CLOSING PRAYER

Take a few minutes to reflect quietly on the whole arc of this series—from Israel standing at the shore, afraid to move, to Ruth and Boaz faithfully stepping into a story bigger than either of them could see.

Ask the Spirit to bring to mind the single most significant thing God has been saying to you across these eight weeks. Invite people to share that one thing aloud, if they're willing, as a testimony of the ways the Spirit has spoken. Pray over one another by name, asking God to ground each person in the truth that his faithfulness is the floor they're standing on, not a reward they're working toward.

Close by praying together that Waterstone would be a community that takes the next faithful step, trusting God to write the rest.