

CELL NOTES
for Andrew Price's talk on 11 November 2007

Book of Ruth: Lives Transformed

- 1. Introduction.** The book of Ruth presents us with three characters whose lives are transformed by their choices and the events of the story. These notes summarise each character's change and invites cell members to see if they identify with a particular character.
- 2. Naomi.** (I suggest you read Ruth 1:1-18 as an introduction to Naomi and Ruth). Naomi left Bethlehem with her husband and two sons in a time of famine. They settled in Moab, but things do not go as she hopes. First Elimelech, her husband, dies. Then, after they had married Moabite women, Naomi's two sons die. She has lost her family and is far from home. She is bitter and angry. However, she does not stay where she is. She decides to return to Bethlehem where the famine is now over.

We can see Naomi as an example of faith and repentance. Instead of staying where she was in bitterness and emptiness, she makes a decision to change her life and go on a journey of hope. She was not driven by feelings but by a conviction that she needed to go back to Israel.

Do you identify with Naomi? If life has not worked out as you hoped, and you have seen disappointment, Naomi shows a way forward. We need to set a course for the kingdom of God and his people. Faith (a persistent belief that God is good whatever happens) will have to lead us and feelings may follow. By the end of the book, Naomi is back where she belongs and surrounded by a family, but it took time!

- 3. Ruth.** Ruth is a Moabite, who married one of Naomi's sons. When Naomi decides to return to Bethlehem, Ruth is a widow. Her decision to stay with Naomi is remarkable from a worldly point of view as Naomi has nothing to offer in terms of wealth, family and security. Yet Ruth commits herself to Naomi and decides to leave her old life behind. She has seen in Naomi something of another kingdom, another way of life

Ruth presents us with an example of discipleship. She has seen another kingdom and is prepared to leave everything to be part of it. Similarly, Jesus invites us to leave everything to follow him (Luke 9: 57-62).

Also, Ruth shows that discipleship is always worked out in relationship with other people. It is not just "me and Jesus". As part of her discipleship, Ruth helped Naomi practically. We see this combination of discipleship and community in Acts 2: 42-46

4. **Boaz.** (Read Ruth 2: 1-5 and 3:1-11). Boaz was a wealthy man. The story suggests he was well liked (2: 4) and that he was middle-aged (3: 10). But he had no wife, no children. There was a lack of fruitfulness in his life. Ruth's actions were, in effect, a proposal of marriage and a request that Boaz, as a kinsman of Elimelech, take on his dead kinsman's land and family to preserve his name.

Boaz had a choice. On the plus side, he gets a wife and an opportunity for growth and fruitfulness. But on the other side there is the cost of buying Elimelech's land and the change, the disruption of taking on a family. Boaz chose to embrace the cost of change for the sake of redeeming Ruth and Naomi. The result was a child, Obed, who was the grandfather of King David, the king who ushered in Israel's golden age. David in turn was the ancestor of Jesus

Boaz provides us with a challenge, first as individuals and as a church. Although we may want to see growth and fruitfulness, do we want it enough to embrace the change that must come with it? What makes it hard is that often the good can be the enemy of the best. In other words, if we are comfortable where we are, we find it hard to embrace change even for the sake of something better

5. Questions for discussion.
- ◆ Which character do you identify with most? (ask each person to consider this silently and then share their thoughts with the group)
 - ◆ Can you think of ways in which growth might mean change?