

Reading Group Guide for
Redeeming Grace
by Jill Eileen Smith

(Spoiler alert—these questions assume you've already read the book)

1. Other than Mary, the mother of Jesus, Ruth shines as one of the most selfless women of Scripture. She is only one of two women with a book that bears her name. What one characteristic of Ruth did you find most endearing? How would you contrast her to her mother-in-law, Naomi?
2. The story begins from Naomi's point of view. Given the life she knew among friends and family in Bethlehem, how do you think she felt when her husband announced they would be moving to Moab? Have you ever dealt with similar circumstances such as job relocation or a move to an unfamiliar country? How did you handle it?
3. Ruth grew up in the Moabite culture with their morals and beliefs, yet she marries an Israelite and later moves to Israel when she could have remained with the familiar—her family. Since we really don't know what Ruth's family was like, what reasons other than those posed in the story might have caused Ruth to marry outside her culture? What do you think drew her to choose Israel over Moab?
4. In the story and in Scripture, we learn that Naomi's husband dies at some point after they have moved away from Israel. Naomi seems to consider his death punishment of some kind—she hints at God making her life bitter, indicating that she knew He held the power of life and death. Do you think she was blaming God for her bitter life? Do you think God allowed Elimelech to die because he moved to Moab? If not, how do you view his death?
5. Ruth and Orpah are married to Mahlon and Chilion for ten years, yet the Bible indicates that they had no children. Do you think it odd that both women appeared to be barren during those years? Do you also think it strange that once Mahlon and Chilion realized that, they did not take second wives or concubines to bear children? What might their actions or inactions in this matter say about these two men?
6. Do you think Mahlon and Chilion remained in Moab because of the famine or because they had succumbed to the Moabite culture? Have you ever faced culture shock by living in or visiting a place far different from your own? How did that make you feel, and did it change you in any way?
7. Have you ever faced a time in your life when you really wanted something and it seemed as though your dream would never become reality? How do you think Ruth felt when she realized she might never have children? Do you think having children was her greatest dream, or might something else have been her life's focus?
8. Ten years into marriage, both Ruth and Orpah are widowed and Naomi has lost all but her two daughters-in-law. Apparently by custom or law, the younger women are bound to Naomi, which explains why she needs to release them once she decides to return to Bethlehem. Why do you think Orpah took that offer and left? Do you think her sorrow over leaving Naomi and Ruth was real?

9. Ruth gives a powerful plea to accompany Naomi to Israel. Why do you think she was so passionate in her plea? What might have prompted her to stick with an old, destitute woman rather than seek refuge from her family? Recall the reasons suggested in the story, then try to imagine the scenario another way. What if she had come from a loving home? Might her responses have been different?
10. The religious culture of Moab was one that practiced child sacrifice, which God considered an abomination. Do you know of any countries today that worship their gods in this way? Could abortion be considered a similar practice? Why or why not? In what way might it be similar? How is it different?
11. When Naomi and Ruth arrive in Bethlehem, the women recognize Naomi and seem glad to have her back. But Naomi is a broken, bitter woman. How do you think Ruth felt when she heard Naomi refer to herself as “Mara,” meaning “bitter” or “sorrow”? Do you think Ruth might have shared Naomi’s bitter grief? Have you ever suffered something so deeply that you got stuck in the grieving process? What comfort would you give someone who had endured so much?
12. In the fictional retelling of this biblical story, we have some symbolism, including the broken-down home the women return to and the dilapidated basket that Ruth manages to use in gleaning. How might these things signify life’s changes for these women? What happened later in the story to both the house and the basket, and what lesson do you think the basket taught Ruth?
13. Another symbol is one of redemption. What happens in the story involving Hamul that turns out to be a foreshadowing of the greater redemption Boaz would offer to Ruth? Did the incident surprise you? Have you ever sacrificed yourself to help another in such a personal way?
14. The Bible tells us little of Boaz until we meet him in the fields where Ruth gleans. From the story and from the biblical account, what kind of man do you picture Boaz to be?
15. Why do you think God commanded His people to leave the corners of their fields for the poor to glean? Do you think it was hard for Boaz to obey this after he’d watched his people suffer from famine for so many years? Have you ever trusted God in times of great need? What was the result?
16. Naomi knows she has relatives who can redeem her through Ruth, but she does not act on that knowledge immediately. Why do you think she waited? Why do you think the other “close relative” did not help Naomi and Ruth immediately upon their arrival?
17. Do you think Ruth’s foreign heritage made the people of Bethlehem uncomfortable? Have you ever been in the minority in a situation where you felt uncomfortable? How did you handle it?
18. Naomi at last decides on a plan for Ruth to seek redemption and marriage to Boaz. Why was it risky for Ruth to seek out Boaz in this way?
19. In essence Ruth ends up asking Boaz to marry her. Traditionally this went against all cultural norms. How do you think that made each of them feel? Have you ever had to take a similar risk?

20. What is the final outcome of Ruth's marriage to Boaz? What is significant about her being included in the lineage of Jesus Christ? What does this tell us about God's love for all people? Have you encountered that love for yourself?

