

## DISCUSSION GUIDE

### PINELAKE CHURCH

#### LOVE STORY

MAINTAIN YOUR PURITY FOR MARRIAGE (RUTH 3:1-18)

JUNE 1, 2014



## PREPARATION

- > **Spend the week studying Ruth 3:1-18.** Consult the commentary provided and any additional study tools to enhance your preparation.
- > **Determine** which discussion points and questions will work best with your group.
- > **Pray** for our pastors and this week's message, the upcoming group time, your group members, and their receptivity to God's Word.
- > **Focus on the Main Point.** The Book of Ruth is a love story about Ruth and Boaz, but it's also a love story about God's love for Naomi and ultimately for us. Sex is a gift from God, but it is a gift that God designed to only to be enjoyed in the context of marriage. In Ruth 3, we will see how Boaz and Ruth sought to honor the Lord and each other by maintaining their sexual purity before marriage.

## INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to help get the conversation going.

**If you could only learn about sex from pop culture, what would you learn?**

**Growing up, who taught you about sex? How helpful and influential were they?**

**What have you learned about sex from the church? How does the church tend to approach this topic? Explain.**

Churches can't afford to be quiet about sex, because no one else in our society is ashamed to talk about it. Arguably, pop culture emphasizes everything about sex except for God's plan. Furthermore, as Christians, we have been given the truth about these issues. In Scripture, we see that God designed sex to be enjoyed only within the context of marriage. By looking to the example of Ruth and Boaz, we will be encouraged to trust the Lord's design and honor Him by maintaining sexual purity in marriage.

## LEARN

Unpack the biblical text to discover what Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

> **HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ RUTH 3:1-18.**

**How did Naomi tell Ruth to prepare to meet Boaz (v. 3)? Was there anything scandalous about this?**

**What was the significance of uncovering Boaz's feet (vv. 4,8)?**

**What does Boaz's response to Ruth's request (vv. 10-11) and his actions in verses 14-16 tell us about how he treated Ruth?**

Naomi encouraged Ruth to wash and anoint herself and uncover Boaz's feet and lay down beside him. There is no indication from the text that this was a sexual act, as Boaz's response to Ruth's request was to honor her and pray God's blessing upon her (vv. 10-11). Furthermore, by sending Ruth home with barley, Boaz protected Ruth from wrongful accusations (vv. 14-16). In so doing, Boaz showed her respect and kindness. The act of uncovering Boaz's feet and lying down was meant to demonstrate dependence on Boaz and further evidence that their relationship was founded upon honor and respect.

**What can we learn about how God would have us conduct ourselves in relationships with people of the opposite sex from the story or Ruth and Boaz in this chapter? What about their courtship might be unwise for us to emulate (see 1 Corinthians 6:18 and 10:13)?**

We should be careful of thinking that Boaz and Ruth's courtship is an example to us of how we should conduct ourselves before marriage. It would be unwise for us to assume that we are strong enough to lie down with someone of the opposite sex, particularly after consuming alcohol. We must remember that the Bible commands us to "flee sexual immorality." God commands us to actively avoid putting ourselves in situations where we know we will be tempted toward sexual sin.

**> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 CORINTHIANS 6:9-11,18-20.**

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**How should our actions regarding sexual immorality be different from the world? What role does the gospel play in our understanding of biblical sexuality?**

**How do we see the truth of the gospel confirmed in 18-20? What does it mean that our bodies are not our own?**

**Do you agree that sexual sins have a more personal impact than "every other sin"?**

Paul communicates a difference between sex and other physical acts. "Every other sin" that we commit has an effect outside our bodies, but sexual immorality impacts us in a more personal way. We can also infer that the opposite is true—that following God's plan for sex and sexuality will be especially fulfilling for us.

**> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 CORINTHIANS 7:3-7.**

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**How does marriage protect against sexual immorality?**

**We tend to think about of sexual immorality in limited forms, but through the internet, sexual immorality can take many diverse and hidden forms. What are some of those forms that both single and married people should guard against?**

When Jesus taught on adultery in Matthew 5, He said “everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (v. 28). Like all sin, sexual immorality, pornography and even emotional infidelity begins in the heart. True sexual purity requires that we trust God’s design for sex and refuse to give ourselves over to our selfish impulses. If we hope to honor God, we must not view sexual immorality as merely a physical act. We must ask God to help us trust Him and devote our hearts completely to Him.

**How is meeting one another’s needs through an intimate marriage relationship a picture of the gospel? See Ephesians 5:25-33 or Genesis 2:18-25 for additional discussion.**

Marriage protects against the temptations of immorality only when it functions properly. For this reason, Paul spoke explicitly about the marital duty that enjoins partners. The Bible often speaks of sexual relations as a privilege and blessing (Prov. 5:18-19; Song of Sol. 4:9-16), but married couples also have a duty not to refrain from sexual relations without just cause.

### LIVE

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives. Create some talking points for the group by looking at the practical implications of the study. Get group members to talk about the real-life implications of the passage. Look at what can be applied specifically to Pinelake.

**For those of us who are single, what impact does today’s study have on our lives for the week ahead?**

**In light of our culture’s obsession with sex, what does it look like to “flee sexual immorality” (1 Cor. 6:18)?**

**How has reading about God’s design for sexual relationships changed the way you think about sex?**

### LEAD

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage impact the way you lead at Pinelake and interact with people outside of Pinelake.

**How might our understanding of biblical sexuality help our marriages to better reflect the beauty of marriage as God designed it?**

**For those of us who are married, what can we do to be more open with our spouses about reflecting**

### God's plan for marriage?

#### PRAY

Close in prayer, asking God to lead the individuals and couples at our church in healthy relationships. Pray that God will strengthen the marriage commitments in our congregation. Pray for the unmarried people at Pinelake—that they would remain pure as a way of honoring God and their future spouses.

#### FOLLOW UP

Midway through this week, send a follow-up email to your group with some or all of the following information:

- Questions to consider as they continue to reflect on what they learned this week:
  - **How does understanding God's design for sex increase your joy in marriage?**
  - **Is there any sexual immorality in your life that you need to flee from? What would that look like for you this week? Take some time and pray to God to help you overcome any sexual temptation you might be facing.**
- The challenge to memorize 1 Corinthians 6:18.

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## MAINTAIN YOUR PURITY FOR MARRIAGE (RUTH 3:1-18)

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## RUTH 3:1-18

**3:1-3.** In view of Boaz's relationship to the family and his kindness and generosity thus far to Ruth, perhaps he could be persuaded to take the further step of marriage. At the end of the barley harvest, in late May or June, the barley had to be winnowed, tossed into the air with a fork allowing the wind to carry away the lighter chaff while the heavier grain fell to the ground. At night, someone would guard the grain against being stolen or eaten by animals. Apparently, this was Boaz's night to be on duty. Dressing as Naomi instructed would not only enhance Ruth's attractiveness to Boaz but would symbolize an end to her period of mourning for her husband (2Sam 12:20), signaling her willingness to remarry.

**3:4-7.** Naomi instructed Ruth to go to Boaz when he was asleep and uncover his feet, or, more precisely, "uncover the place of his feet." By this act Ruth was inquiring about Boaz's willingness to fulfill the role of family redeemer, to take her as wife and provide for her.

**3:8-9.** Whereas her mother-in-law had anticipated Boaz taking the initiative in the conversation, Ruth responded to Boaz's question about her identity with a clarification of her purpose. She asked him to spread the corner of his robe over her as a symbolic statement of a marriage commitment (Ezek 16:8). The request also involved a wordplay, since spread your cloak over me literally means "spread your wing over me," inviting Boaz to become the answer to his own prayer in 2:12 that she might find refuge under the wings of the Lord.

**3:10-11.** Boaz's first words, my daughter, showed he had not been misled by the potential ambiguity of the situation. He declared himself willing to pay the social and financial costs of welcoming this despised outsider into his family. Boaz rightly saw Ruth's proposal as another act of covenant faithfulness (Hb chesed) on Ruth's part. Just as she had left her own household and her own family to be with Naomi, so now she was subordinating her own interests to those of Naomi. In the Hebrew ordering of the OT, the book of Ruth comes immediately after the book of Proverbs, which closes with a description of a woman of noble character (Pr 31:10).

**3:12-13.** Even though Boaz was a near relative of Naomi, there was another who had a prior claim to act as redeemer. Yet Boaz reassured Ruth that, one way or another, she (and Naomi) would be redeemed.

**3:14-15.** If it became widely known that Ruth had visited Boaz that night, people would wrongly assume that Boaz had taken Ruth as wife or that they were guilty of sexual impropriety. Boaz was unwilling to preempt his close relative who had first right of refusal to Ruth, so getting Ruth home before daylight kept wrong impressions from being formed. To seal his commitment (and perhaps also to provide Ruth with an excuse for being out so early), Boaz gave her six measures of barley. If the unspecified measures are seahs, then that would be around 80 pounds, an enormous load. Yet the lack of a measure may be intended to focus attention on the number six, which often represents incompleteness in the OT. Even this generous gift is incomplete. Ruth still awaited the final installment of "seed" that would accomplish her rest.

**3:16-18.** On Ruth's return, Naomi asked her literally, "Who are you, my daughter?" This is the same question that Boaz asked in 3:8. Was Ruth merely an awkward and embarrassing duty to Naomi, or was she the one who would provide Naomi with an enduring place in the genealogies of Israel through the provision of a son? The answer depended on what transpired overnight. This was the real nature of Naomi's question, as evidenced by Ruth's answer.

## 1 CORINTHIANS 6-7

**6:9-10.** The situation in Corinth was bringing the church into disrepute. Moreover, the various kinds of

immoral behavior called into question whether the individuals involved were saved at all. Did those who were acting unjustly ever stop to realize the unjust will not inherit God's kingdom? Verses 9-10 list specific lifestyles that can never be considered moral or Christian lifestyles in God's kingdom. Such immoral lifestyles include various kinds of sexual immorality—including homosexuality and prostitution—as well as dishonest, greedy, drunk, hateful, and fraudulent lifestyles.

**6:11.** Paul reminded his readers that some of them were mired in such immoral lifestyles before they received Christ as Savior. The pull of their former lifestyles was a constant temptation for some of the Corinthian believers. Paul used three metaphors to remind them of their salvation. **Washed** refers to the inner, spiritual cleansing of which their water baptism was a symbol. **Sanctified** underscores their calling to live holy lives. **Justified** is an important Pauline concept that refers to Christians' right standing before God. This standing comes to believers by grace and through faith, not as a payment for good deeds or obedience to the law. Paul's mention of the name of the Lord Jesus Christ was an intentional reminder to these Christians of the Source of their salvation and the Lord they pledged to follow. The Spirit had been given to them as Christians to teach them Christ's ways and to convict them of sins.

**6:18.** To a culture that accepted sexual immorality as "normal" activity, Paul issued a clear imperative for Christians to flee this perverted behavior. The Greek term translated sexual immorality in this verse is the root of our English word pornography. It referred in Paul's day to any form of sexual sin. Today we should certainly add pornography in all its forms—including that on the Internet—to the list of sins included under the term sexual immorality. Bible students debate exactly what Paul meant in the second part of verse 18. He may have been addressing another slogan some Corinthians spouted about sins being out- side the body. In any event, he wasn't suggesting a hierarchy of sins in which sexual immorality was the worst. Rather, he was pointing out that believers who engaged in sexual immorality were using their bodies for sinful purposes. In effect they were sinning against themselves!

**6:19.** Paul had explained previously that the church as a collective body was the Holy Spirit's dwelling place (3:16-17). In light of his teachings about sexual immorality in this section, Paul emphasized that an individual Christian's body also was a sanctuary of the Holy Spirit. Thus believers are to carefully avoid any behavior that dishonors the Spirit who lives in us.

**6:20.** Paul reminded his readers they had been bought with a price. As believers, we belong to God completely—body, mind, and spirit. To glorify God in our bodies means to live out our faith in the ways we use and care for our bodies. Some New Testament manuscripts have the words "and in your spirit, which are God's" appearing at the end of verse 20.

**7:3-4.** Marriage protects against the temptations of immorality only when it functions properly. For this reason, Paul spoke explicitly about the marital duty that enjoins partners. The Bible often speaks of sexual relations as a privilege and blessing (Prov. 5:18-19; Song 4:9-16), but married couples also have a duty not to refrain from sexual relations without just cause (Exod. 21:10).

The Corinthians were defrauding each other of their sexual rights, so Paul pointed out the obligations to sex that married couples bear. He also let them know that these obligations were mutual—the husband has a duty to have sex with his wife just as she has a duty to have sex with her husband. Neither partner has the right without good cause to refuse the other.

Paul expressed his view in a remarkable way. The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband, or as the NASB puts it, "The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does." Unfortunately, these words have been used to justify abuse by husbands against their wives. They have been used to compel women to submit to their husbands' sexual desires even when husbands are not loving to them. Husbands are called to love wives as Christ loves the church. We must recognize that other teachings of Scripture, such as self-protection and the principle of love, inform us of limitations on Paul's statement.

Paul emphasized complete parity and mutuality of authority by adding, **The husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife.** Wives have the same authority over their husbands' bodies that husbands have over their wives'. Sexual relations must be mutually agreeable. Couples should strive toward the ideal of marriage as they evaluate their specific situations and responsibilities.

**7:5-6.** In the Christian ideal, spouses must not deprive partners sexually except by mutual consent and for a time, and only for special religious purposes: **that you may devote yourselves to prayer.** Throughout the Old Testament, times of special religious devotion, such as prayer and fasting, included sexual abstinence (1 Sam. 21:4-5). Paul made it apparent that such practices were to be carried over into the New Testament as well.

Once the time of special religious devotion is over, the couple must return to normalcy so that Satan will not tempt them to be involved in illicit sexual relations. The longer couples abstain from sex, the greater the risk that one partner will fall into sexual immorality. In allowing couples to abstain from sexual relations for a time by mutual consent, Paul made a concession. He by no means intended to command periods of abstinence. His command was that they not deprive each other.