

God in the Barley Field - Finding Purpose in Ordinary Life | Ruth 2:1-7

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 12 July 2026

Preacher: Simon Lawrenson

[0:00] Hey, good morning, everyone. Good to see you. Thanks, Andy. We've actually been through the Bible twice. Yeah, yeah. So, we've been through the whole Bible twice in 21 years. It's just that not everything's up online.

We haven't always done that on a Sunday morning, but we have done that consistently over the years. And there's not a chapter of the Bible that we haven't looked at, which is great, isn't it? So, all that to say is you're going to need a Bible this morning. All right? So, either open your app or grab a Bible that's on the back table. You're going to need one. And then if you scoot to the book of Ruth, these little books get lost in our Bibles a little bit, don't they?

So, if you have an electronic one or an app, you can just kind of like go there nice and easy. But roof is about, well, maybe a centimeter from the front. Page 270.

And if you want to as well, why don't you go ahead and scan that QR code. There's a little, they'll bring you up to a little mini site. They'll help you follow along. If you get lost at any point during the study, you can just refer to that.

[1:17] And if I get lost at any point during the study, I will do likewise. So, if you see me looking at the screen, that's why.

So, I want to pray and then just ask God to help us because we're going to need that. It's warm in here. There is water at the back. And look, you will not disturb anyone.

I'm just going to talk for all of us. If you need to get up and get yourself a glass of water halfway through the sermon, please, please, we'd much rather you do that than you be counting down the seconds until I finish.

Which you may be doing anyway, but on the account of the heat, please don't do that. Please, by all means, grab yourself a cup of water at the back at any time during our service this morning. Father, thank you for your word. Thank you for this time, Lord.

We thank you that you brought us here, Lord. And we want to delight, Lord, in your word. Lord, we want to be fed by your word. Lord, we don't want this just to be wood to us.

[2:18] Lord, we want it to be fire to us. And Lord, so we pray, Lord, that you would provide both this morning. Lord, that as we approach your word, Lord, we know that, Lord, you've given it to us for our benefit, for our good.

Lord, but we want it to be more than just academics and intellectual kind of ascent, Lord. We want, Lord, these words to come alive to us. Lord, would you speak to us this morning?

Lord, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. For some of you who are old enough to remember, in 1982, there was a British band called The Clash.

Come on. Who released a song that became one of the most recognizable rock songs of all time. Anybody remember what it's called?

There you go. Should I stay or should I go? It's catchy. Why? Sorry, that's going to be stuck in your head for the rest of the year. So it's universal, isn't it?

[3:22] It's a universal question. Should I stay or should I go? So most of us think actually the hardest part in following God is about making the right decisions at the right time for the right reasons.

But Ruth chapter two, as we look at it this morning, reveals something much harder. What do you do after you've made that decision to stay or to go?

What do you do? Right. Because most often, and look, I'm going to be super honest with you this morning, and it's not probably what you want to hear.

I'm just going to say that up front. Sorry to disappoint you. Most often, God doesn't send us burning bush moments.

Like I'm not getting up every morning, walking into the garden, seeing a burning bush and hearing God speak to me. Are you? He doesn't send us burning bush moments.

[4:24] He sends us barley fields. This is how this plays out in the story. Ruth chapter two, verse one. Read along with me. Now, Naomi had a relative of her husband's, a worthy man of the clan of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz.

So look, if you're just joining us in this story, because of famine, Naomi's husband, Elimelech, took Naomi and their two sons to Moab. Moab was like an enemy of Israel at that time.

But whilst they were both there, both he, Elimelech, and their two sons died. And so Naomi made the decision then to return to Bethlehem, where the family are from.

Now, look, I just want to bring you up to speed. Most of us remember Bethlehem, right? Because we've been to carol services. But you know the first time Bethlehem is mentioned in the Bible? It's when Rachel dies.

Rachel, the beloved of Jacob, mother of Benjamin. Rachel dies on the road to Bethlehem. First time it's mentioned in the Bible. No one knew Bethlehem was going to be a setup for the birth of King David or the setup for the birth of Jesus.

[5:46] And that's true of this story too. Bethlehem at this point in history is not the Bethlehem that we sing about at Christmas. Right? So, and actually you remember the story is Rachel names Benjamin Ben-Oni, Ben of my sorrow.

Right? And Jacob comes along and says, I'm not having that. He's going to be called Benjamin, son of my hope. Right? And so look, they decide to go back or Naomi goes back with her two, initially with her two daughters-in-law.

And one decides to go back with her. And they go back to Bethlehem. And they get there. And look what happens in verse 2. That Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, let me go into the field and glean among the ears of grain after him in whose sight I shall find favor.

And she said to her, go my daughter. So look, would you notice the first thing? There's three things I think we can learn from this short passage. We're just going to do the first seven verses this morning.

And the first thing is this, that faithful people stop waiting and start working. Faithful people stop waiting and start working.

[7:09] The last verse of chapter 1 ends with a harvest beginning. And chapter 2 begins with someone getting up to work. No vision.

No angel. No miracle. No dramatic sign from heaven. Just a widow walking into a field with empty hands and a faithful heart.

And here's what I love about this story is that while Ruth thinks she's simply looking for enough grain to survive another day, God is quietly orchestrating in the background, nice and quietly so that nobody notices one of the greatest redemption stories in the whole Bible.

We know that because we know what comes next in chapter 2, 3 and 4. Ruth hasn't arrived there yet. And so God is quietly orchestrating.

And look, that's how often God works. You know, we spend our lives asking that question, should I stay or should I go now? Right? And God says, well, look, wherever you go and wherever you are, be faithful there.

[8:23] Do the work there. Don't wait until you get that burning bush experience and then go, be faithful now.

Look, I think sometimes it's true. Some of us are waiting for a burning bush moment. But Ruth reminds us that most of God's work happens in barley fields, not in burning bushes.

The question is not where is my miracle. The question is, am I faithful in the field that God has already given me? So Ruth says to Naomi, let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain. Now, look, don't miss the desperation in this moment. Ruth isn't walking into the field because she's discovered her purpose. Right? Right? She's walking into the field because there's two widows who need dinner.

Simple. Right? And what this is referring to is in the part of God's law in Leviticus, God sets up a system where the poor in society and the traveling people through the country could be fed.

[9:46] They could collect grain. So look at it with me. In Leviticus 19 is coming on the screen. The landowners of that time were told that when you reap the harvest, when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge.

So keep a margin. So keep a margin. All the way around the field. Neither shall you gather the gleanings after you harvest.

And so the gleanings are like the stalks or the ears of grain left behind after the harvesters have passed through the field. This is just a bit left over. And notice that the law isn't if you have anything left.

Right? It's not, oh, give the poor people your crumbs. That's not what he's saying. He's saying make allowance. Don't go after everything.

Leave a margin. The land wasn't ultimately Israel's land. And this is what God is teaching him. It's God's land. So in Leviticus 25 verse 23, God said the land is my land.

[11:05] And look, that principle is still actually remarkably countercultural, isn't it? We're told that the reason for leaving the margins, the edges of the field and harvests and the gleanings in the field is not economics, but it's theology.

The land belongs to God. Leviticus 19 verse 10, he says, you shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner. So Ruth is actually both.

She is both poor and she's a sojourner. She's a Moabites, right? For the reason, I am the Lord your God. So God's people were to reflect God's generosity. Not as an afterthought, but as a planned process in their life.

But what's super interesting is that this law is then repeated in Leviticus 26 in the context of the Feast of Weeks, which we've talked about before. So this story is read every year up until this day. When? During the Feast of Weeks. In Israel. You remember in the New Testament, there's this story. It becomes a bit of a talking point.

[12:18] In fact, so much of a talking point is mentioned three times in the Gospels, right? Where Jesus' disciples were walking through the fields and they began kind of plucking their heads off the wheat.

And there in Matthew 12, we're told that at that time, Jesus went through the grain fields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry and they began to pluck grains of heads of grain and to eat. And so the law explicitly permitted hungry people to take grain. But notice something. That Ruth doesn't know that currently she's standing inside one of the greatest stories of redemption ever written.

She doesn't know that yet. All she knows is we need food. And it's not a Tesco Express. Right? She's like, we need food.

So she says, let me go to the field. And look, can I just talk frankly that sometimes we can be pretty frustrated by that.

[13:19] By life that feels ordinary. But I want to encourage you this morning that God has always loved ordinary.

Jesus spent 30 years building tables. That's pretty ordinary.

King David watched sheep before leading Israel. That's pretty ordinary. Ruth gathered grain before becoming King David's great grandmother.

Look, look, don't despise ordinary. Because his greatest work is usually accomplished not through spectacular moments. But through ordinary obedience.

And most of us spend so much time trying to discover God's future plan for us. That we actually neglect the responsibilities that he's already given us.

[14:24] We're all the time living in tomorrow. And what tomorrow is going to bring. And what next week is going to bring. What next year is going to bring. And setting ourselves up for that which hasn't even come yet.

And we neglect what God has given us today. And we want those burning bushes. But God gives us barley fields. We want angels. But God gives us alarm clocks.

We want a five year plan. Hate to say this. God gives us Monday mornings. And look, this is where Jesus changes the way we see ordinary life.

Because Jesus himself, again, spent 30 years in an ordinary home. Before he preached the sermon. Before he healed the sick. At least that we know of. Ordinary faithfulness is not a distraction from God's purposes.

It is often where God's purposes are actually formed. And the truth about Ruth is that there isn't a miracle anywhere in sight.

[15 : 28] Not in any of the chapters. Just ordinary people doing ordinary things on ordinary days. And through those daily, ordinary acts of faithfulness, God is working in very extraordinary ways.

Like this is one of the reasons that the Jews read Ruth every year during their Feast of Weeks festival. Like think about it. God could have chosen any book of the Bible for a harvest festival. Right? I mean Genesis, Exodus, Davidicus. Any of those. Right? About the Psalms. They're great, aren't they? But instead he chooses a story about a widow going to work.

Like for most of us that doesn't make sense. And it doesn't make sense because like we want that extraordinary. We're looking for the massive harvest.

But listen, harvests don't come without faithful labor. Talk to any farmer. Talk to any farmer. God sends rain. God provides growth.

[16 : 39] But someone still has to get up. Someone still has to sow. Someone still has to reap. And the Feast of Weeks, this yearly reminder, was there for God's, as a reminder for God's blessing, that God's blessing never eliminates human responsibility.

His grace doesn't make work unnecessary. His grace makes work meaningful. God could feed the hungry without farmers.

But he chooses not to. He could build his church without us. But he chooses not to. God delights in involving ordinary people in extraordinary purposes.

And look, the ordinary ones in this story, would you notice, are not just Ruth and Naomi. Because in verse 4, if we read too quickly, we read over a couple of people who we miss.

Who are they? The reapers. And the thing that really struck me about this passage was that Ruth comes to this field completely empty-handed and has no claim and no right and no wealth.

[17 : 55] And she is only able to survive because someone else obeyed God's law. Someone else obeyed God. She is the recipient of someone else's obedience.

The reapers. The unnamed. But it also reminds me, of course, of Jesus.

That we get mercy and grace not because we have kept the law, but because someone else has. Jesus. And because he has, we get the gleanings.

Now, notice what happens in verse 3. We're going to see that faithful people stop worrying and start trusting.

So verse 3. So she set out and she went and gleaned in the field after the reapers. And she happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the clan of Elimelech.

[19 : 03] So a relative of Naomi's husband. And this may be one of my favorite verses in the entire book. Because look, do you notice what it says?

It says that she happened to come. Really? Just like happened to come? Like out of all the fields around Bethlehem, out of all the landowners, out of all the harvests, she happened to end up in Boaz's field.

Like, I think the storyteller is smiling. Like as he's writing this. It just so happened. That Ruth found her in Boaz's field. And who was Boaz?

Well, Boaz was a relative of Naomi. Who would have thought? What a coincidence. And he's smiling. Because of course, it's a setup. He's inviting us into the joke.

He's saying, from Ruth's perspective, it was a complete coincidence. But from God's perspective, it was the fruit of his labor. And that changes everything.

[20 : 09] Because isn't that how most of us experience God's guidance? Like very few of us have dramatic stories. Most of us don't get angels.

Most of us don't hear audible voices. Most of us look backwards and suddenly realize, Ha! I'm standing in a field. Exactly where God wanted me to stand.

And what looked like a random set of coincidences was redemption in disguise. Like, can I be brutally blunt with us this morning?

Like, sometimes we try and force the next chapter of our life because we don't trust God. Don't delete it. So we start manipulating our own lives and those around us to get to where we think we need to get to.

So like, we start chasing every opportunity. We start manipulating relationships. And then we get exhausted trying to make something happen. Look, can I lovingly ask, what if God isn't asking you to fix your future?

[21 : 29] What if he's asking you to faithfully walk in today's field? Because the beautiful mystery is that Ruth doesn't find Boaz because she's looking for Boaz.

Right? She finds Boaz. Why? Because she's looking for barley. She just went to the store. And then found out someone else was at the store.

She wasn't looking for Boaz. She just went to work. She's simply being faithful. And while she's faithfully gathering grain to feed herself and Naomi, God is quietly arranging redemption.

And some of you think that nothing significant is happening because your life feels ordinary. And sometimes that can be discouraging. You're changing nappies. Ain't nothing extraordinary about that.

[22 : 38] It's very ordinary, right? You're teaching school. Nothing extraordinary about that.

You're driving. You're writing code. You're stacking shelves. You're caring for your elderly parents. You're studying for exams. You're serving coffee. You're packing away this hall after everyone goes.

And sometimes that can be discouraging. Why? Because we're looking for those moments. We're looking for the burning bush. We're looking for the parting of the Red Sea.

And heaven would say to you and heaven would say to me, keep gleaning. Keep being faithful.

Keep showing up. Because God does his greatest work through people who simply trust him.

And then look in verse four, we see the final thing. And that is that faithful people stop performing and start becoming. Verse four, behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem.

[23 : 47] So he arrived on the scene. Coincidence? He thinks it's a coincidence. Ruth thinks it's a coincidence. Everybody who's working thinks it's a coincidence because he didn't give the two days notice that he was supposed to do, that HR had told him to.

Right? He just rocks up as the landowner. And everybody's like, Boaz is here, look busy. Right? So coincidence, from their point of view, absolutely.

But a storyteller is going, you wait. And so Boaz came from Bethlehem and he said to the reapers, now look at this, he said to the reapers, the Lord be with you.

I love that. Do you love that little bit of detail that the story kind of includes? The Lord be with you.

The first words out of his mouth are not about crops.

They're not about judging productivity. It's not about the yield or the profit margins. He wasn't instantly concerned about the crop.

[24 : 59] He was instantly concerned about whether the workers are okay. Like he wasn't worried about them meeting their targets. The very first thing he notices is a person and the very first thing he speaks about is someone else's welfare.

There is an awareness, listen, in the field, this is where we are, we're in the field, there is an awareness that God is present right in the middle of that ordinary working day.

Do you notice that? It makes me wonder what our church would look like if we learned to have those kind of conversations. Like, hear me carefully.

This is, this is, this is, there is nothing wrong with talking about football if we win, if we win, right?

Don't talk to me when we're losing. There is nothing wrong with talking about football.

There is nothing wrong with talking about work and holidays and weather and the latest DIY project or how the children are going on at school or whatever. Those conversations matter because they build relationships.

[26 : 11] But if that's all we ever talk about, then our relationships never move beyond the surface. One of the greatest dangers, I think, as I look at the modern church is that, that we can know each other for years and years and years and not really know how others are doing spiritually.

And so you have this massive wave which seems to be in the news quite a bit of either church leaders or Christian ministry leaders falling and failing.

Why? Because people have known them for years but not really known them for years. We might know what team someone supports and we might occasionally mock them for it quite rightly.

And I don't want that to stop especially the mocking part. Sam, amen? We may know where they work. We may know what car they drive.

We may know where they went on holiday. We may know what they think about politics so we don't tread on their feet or we challenge them in a right way.

[27 : 36] But we don't know what God is doing with them. Or to put it more candidly, who knows what God is doing in your life right now? If we're going to be the kind of family of God that He calls

us to be, then we need to be comfortable asking better questions.

And at first that will feel super awkward. And there's a danger to come to church thinking, I'm going to rehearse what I'm going to say just in case anybody asks me.

And it might feel awkward but that's because we've trained ourselves to keep faith private. And society tells us keep your faith private.

The New Testament paints a different picture. How many times have we told things like encourage one another daily, bear one another's burdens, teach and admonish one another, stir up others to good works and to love.

None of that happens if our conversations never move beyond the weather and the weekend. Like don't get me wrong, the weather is important as Brits, we love to talk about the weather.

[28:49] Like it's our go-to, isn't it? But Boaz reminds us that people are always more important than production. And spiritually healthy people cultivate spiritually meaningful conversations.

And Boaz kind of rocks up and he says, the Lord be with you. And they are, would you notice how they answer? They say, the Lord bless you. And so then Boaz said to the young man, verse 5, who was in charge of the reapers, whose young woman is this?

And the servant who was in charge of the reapers answered, well she is the young Moabite woman who came back from Naomi from the country of Moab. And she said, please let me glean and gather among the sheaves after the reapers.

And so she came. And she has continued from early morning until now, apart from a short rest. And what is interesting to me is that the detail that is included in the story is important because the storyteller seems to be showing us character and how character really matters.

So like Boaz arrives and there's spiritual conversation and the people reply in kind. And then Boaz asks about Ruth and the servant tells him about her character.

[30:24] He doesn't reply like saying, yeah, we should probably hire her to be one of the reapers because like she's so productive. Like she's returning grain quicker than any of my reapers.

Like do we have a position for her in the company? Like they don't talk shop. He says she's got character.

She got up really early and she's only had one break all day. She works really hard. She's really, really faithful. And look, I think sometimes we live and we do, sometimes we do, we live in a culture obsessed with gifting.

Right? Skill. What can you do? What can you do? How quickly can you do it? How well can you do it? But God is less obsessed with gifting as he is with character.

The world will ask what can you do? God asks who are you becoming? Ruth is becoming the kind of woman that God delights in.

[31:37] And like a serious question for us is are we becoming the kind of person that God delights in? God delights to use? God delights And it's not because Ruth is extraordinary.

She is in so many ways. But the definition of extraordinary is change. Why? Because she's just faithful. Now look, here's our problem.

None of us, none of us have been perfectly faithful. have we? Some of us worship our work.

Others avoid responsibility altogether. Two ends of the spectrum. Some build their identity on achievement. Others live in chronic comparison.

We've all looked to work to give us only what Jesus can give us. and because we aren't perfectly faithful, the question becomes, well then, where is the hope?

[32:50] If our lives should be faithful and we haven't been faithful, then where is the hope? Well, of course, the issue is that the hope is not that Ruth becomes our example.

faithful. The hope is that Ruth points us to Christ and that Jesus is the truly faithful worker. Like, again, for 30 years, he lived an ordinary life.

No miracles recorded, no crowds, no sermons, just faithfulness. In fact, in Hebrews, it says that he had to learn faithfulness.

He had to learn obedience. This is Jesus. If Jesus has to learn faithfulness, like, that's a lesson that we all need to learn.

Jesus got up every day and honored his parents. He worked with his hands. He loved his neighbors. And then he said on the cross, it's finished.

[33:58] What's finished? The greatest work in history ever completed. which means you no longer work for God's acceptance.

This is the extraordinary thing about Christianity. Every other world religion or non-religion, you have to work, you have to do something. And if you don't do it, then watch out. But because Jesus has already done the work, we don't work for acceptance, we work from acceptance. And tomorrow, most of us are going to go and walk into different fields. Offices, hospitals, schools, homes, construction sites, shops, university lecture halls, wherever we are, different fields. And some of you will think nothing important is happening today. But Ruth will tell you otherwise. Heaven never despises ordinary faithfulness. Done to the Lord. [35 : 10] Done because God has already approved you. Because of Jesus. The God who wrote the story of redemption through a widow gathering grain is still writing his story through ordinary men and women who quietly obey him.

So keep gleaning. keep serving. Keep loving. Keep praying. Keep showing up. Keep being faithful. You may think you're just gathering barley.

But your father may be weaving together a story far bigger than you can possibly imagine. Let's pray together. Father, thank you for your word. Lord, we want to thank you for Jesus.

Lord, we want to thank you that we don't work to get your approval. But we trust Jesus in the one, the only one who has gained your approval. And we follow him as the reaper.

And we follow gleaning, walking in the obedience that he has won for us. Lord, we want to confess, Lord, that we are far from faithful.

[36 : 21] Lord, we want to confess this morning, Lord, that we have often become discouraged because our lives just seem ordinary.

Lord, we want to commit again our ordinary to you. Lord, and we want to trust you, Lord, that you are weaving our ordinary together with other people's weaving, other people's ordinaries for a great cause and a great outcome of what you are doing in us.

Lord, though we might not know it yet, Lord, we trust you. Lord, we want to say thank you, Lord, for doing the work. Lord, we thank you that you went to the cross and you saved us from our sins.

Lord, we want to say thank you, Lord, that you rose again on the third day, proving that you are faithful, proving that you are victorious over sin. And Lord, thank you, Lord, that we can just simply follow you today in our ordinary, trusting you, the one who has gone before us to do the work.

Lord, we want to say thank you for those burning bush moments. Lord, we want to acknowledge, Lord, that you do do that today. Lord, we pray, Lord, that you would help us keep rooted in what you're doing with us right now in the field that you've placed us in.

[37 : 46] Help us to do that, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Shall we stand together? Amen.

Good save.