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REVIEW	
Mark said Scripture is the primary way we hear the voice of God. God speaks through His written Word. Mark called it "the key of keys," which he likened to the starting point of a coordinate system on a map. How has Scripture shaped your conversations with God?	
Mark said truth is always coupled with grace. He defined grace and truth as, "Grace means I'll love you no matter what. Truth means I'll be honest with you no matter what." In what ways has the truth of Scripture impacted your life? How was God's grace involved?	
Read 2 Timothy 3:16–17 and Hebrews 4:12. What do these verses tell us about Scripture? What, then, makes the Bible unique from all other books?	
Mark talked about reading the entire Bible once a year, every year. How do you feel about trying to read the whole Bible? Have you read it all before? If so, what did you learn through the process? If not, is there anything that is keeping you from trying it out?	
While the Bible is living, active, and breathed-out by God, the goal of reading Scripture isn't to gain information. Rather, we read the Bible to grow in intimacy with God. Just as we spend time to get to know a new friend, reading Scripture helps us get to know God. What's your attitude toward Scripture? Do you see it as information to be gathered? As a tool? As a way to get to know God?	
How has the Bible helped you grow closer to God? What specific verses encourage you the most? Why do those passages have that effect on you and your relationship with God?	
Mark mentioned the work of the Holy Spirit in interpreting Scripture. How has the Holy Spirit helped you understand the Bible?	
Mark said the Holy Spirit quickens—or resurrects—us every time we read God's Word. In other words, the Spirit awakens us—He gives us life—by showing us truths about God and ourselves. In what ways have you experienced the resurrection power of the Spirit when	

you've read the Bible? (Answers may include: the Spirit provided encouragement in a trial, conviction of sin, insight into God's character, comfort in grief, etc.)	
Mark taught that we should "get into God's Word so His Word gets into [us]." He also said, "The surest way to get into the presence of God is to get into the Word of God." How, practically, do you "get into God's Word"? How have you experienced God's presence as a result?	
Getting into God's Word isn't easy. Mark talked about how difficult it is—it takes meditation, prayer, and contemplation. Reading the Bible is a discipline that every Christian needs to develop in his or her life. Digging into God's Word deepens our relationship with God, grounds us in truth, and grows us spiritual maturity.	
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3 of 9

BIBLE EXPLORATION

We're going to spend the next few minutes walking through a passage of Scripture together. You can use this model as a starting point for studying the Bible on your own. This method isn't the only way to read Scripture, but it is a helpful starting point if you're new to the Bible and a good refresher for those more familiar with Scripture.

Leader: You can choose to go through the passage we've outlined below, or pick one yourself. The fourquestion model works on any passage of Scripture. You can even get creative with this time—pick several passages for the group to go through together, break everyone into small groups, and debrief as a large group. Do what best suits your group.

We're going to use four questions to unpack the first chapter of the book of Ruth. The four questions are:

- What's happening in this passage?
- What about this passage was significant to the original audience?
- What does this passage teach us about the character of God and humans?
- How can we apply the timeless principles from this passage to our lives this week?

Before we get started, let's pray that God would speak to us through His Word during this time.

Let's begin by reading Ruth chapter 1. As we read, think about the first question, "What's happening in this passage?" Consider who the story is about, what events occur, where this takes place, and when.

Leader: You can choose one person to read all twenty-two verses, or several readers. One format for four readers is: 1:1–5; 6–10; 11–18; 19–22.

It's always a good idea to read the Bible in context, which is why we just read the entire first chapter. If we had just read one or two verses without knowing the rest of the story, we might have misunderstood what the passage is actually saying. How did you feel about reading the entire first chapter? Was it difficult to follow? Surprisingly insightful? Why do you think that

is?	
The first question we answer is, "What's happening in this passage?" This question involves simply observing what's occurring in the verses.	
Who is this story about? What characters are introduced? (Elimelek, Naomi, Mahlon, Kilion, Ruth, Orpah, God) How are these characters related to each other?	
What time period is this story set in? (It's set in the time of the judges.)	
Leader: For context on the time of the judges, read Judges 1–2 before meeting with your group. Take a moment to summarize what happened in the time of the judges. When they entered the Promised Land, the Israelites failed to completely conquer Canaan as God commanded and they fell to pagan gods. God judged them and the people cried out for help. God raised up judges to deliver Israel, but eventually Israel would fall again and the cycle continued.	
What natural disaster happens at the beginning of the story? (There's a famine.) What does Elimelek decide to do? (He decides to move from Bethlehem to Moab.) What happens to all the men at the beginning of the story? (They die.)	
Where are Ruth and Orpah from? (They are from Moab.) Where are the rest of the characters from? (They are from Israel, specifically Bethlehem in Judah.)	
What does God do in verse 6? What does Naomi decide to do after hearing what God had done?	
Who left Naomi? Why did she leave? Who stayed with Naomi?	
What did Naomi name herself after returning to Bethlehem? (She chose the name Mara.) What does it mean? (It means "bitter".) Why did she choose that name? (She chose that name because in her eyes, God had dealt bitterly with her. She left full—with two sons and a husband—and returned empty.) Tight MEDIA At what time of year do Naomi and Ruth return to	

Bethlehem?	
These questions might seem simple, but it's important to start small to understand what God is teaching through this story. What other observations do you have about the passage?	
Now that we have a basic understanding of the story, who it's about, and what's happening, we can move to the next question, "What about this passage was significant to the original audience?"	
This question takes a little bit of digging. There are huge differences between us and the people of ancient Israel. What differences can you think of off the top of your head? (Some answers might include: Israel was new to the Promised Land, they lived under the Law of Moses, men and women had different rights than today, being a widow was much more devastating than today, etc.)	
What elements of the story do you have questions about?	
Leader: Depending on what your group says, it might be worth investigating different elements of the story further. For this Leader's Guide, we'll look at the time period of the judges and Moab.	
A great tool to help us learn more is the cross references listed in your Bible—sometimes they're off to one side, listed at the bottom of the page, or in the middle of the columns. These cross references point you to other passages of the Bible that have to do with what you're reading and can help broaden your understanding of what the original audience thought when they read the passage.	
For example, look at the first cross-reference for verse one.	
Leader: The first cross-reference should be for Judges 2:16, and some Bibles might include the surrounding verses. There might be other cross references listed for verse one, but the one used in this example is the Judges passage. Take a moment to help everyone find the cross-references in their Bible—most should have them but if not, they can pull up BibleGateway.com on their phones.	

Read Judges 2:16–19. What do these verses tell us about the period of the judges? What would the original audience have understood about this time in Israel's history? (This was a time of turmoil, political chaos, and disobedience. Israel rebelled against God and God sent judges to save them out of strife. Israel repented for a time but eventually fell back into sin.)	
Another way to dig deeper into the text is to use the references at the back of your Bible. Some Bibles might not have references at the back, but you can always do a search on the Bible app or on BibleGateway.com.	
Leader: If time allows, let your group spend a few moments looking up verses about Moab/Moabites. If you're in a time crunch, encourage them to take time to investigate on their own after small group.	
After doing a search for Moab/Moabite, one of the passages that comes up is Deuteronomy 23:3–6. Someone please read those verses for us. What do these verses tell us about what the Israelites thought of Moabites? (Israel and Moab should never interact on friendly basis. Moabites were not allowed to enter the assembly.)	
What might have an Israelite thought of Mahlon and Kilion's choice of wives? (They would have looked down on Mahlon and Kilion for marrying foreign wives.)	
How might have an Israelite expect a Moabite to act? How does Ruth go against that expectation?	
How did digging into the time of the Judges and the Moabites shape your understanding of the text?	
The next question is, "What does this passage teach us about God and humans?" When is God mentioned in these verses? (He's mentioned seven times: once each in 1:6, 8, 9, 13, 17, and twice in 1:21.) What is Naomi's attitude toward God? Whom does she blame for her circumstances?	
What is God's only action in this story? (The only action is in verse 6. He comes to the aid of His people and provides food.) How did His action help Naomi? (Since He ended the famine, He opened the way for Naomi to	

7 of 9

	return to Bethlehem.)	
	What do God's actions teach us about His character in relation to His people? (It teaches that God's character is constant, even if His people don't see it. He works on behalf of His people despite their bitterness toward Him.)	
	What's Ruth's attitude toward God? (She is faithful to Him—He becomes her God when she follows Naomi.) How does her faithfulness to God translate to how she treats Naomi? (Ruth is faithful to Naomi and follows her to Bethlehem, leaving her old home behind.)	
	How then should our faithfulness to God influence our actions toward others?	
	The last question is, "How can we apply the timeless principles from this passage to our lives this week?" It helps us tie the biblical principles found in this passage to our lives. How could you apply these truths about God to your life this week? What might it look like to treat someone in your life as Ruth treated Naomi?	
	LAST WORD	
	We just studied the entire first chapter of Ruth. We walked through four questions that can help us dive deeper into the meaning of the text. But, our brief study only scratched the surface of what God is saying through these verses. What other things stood out to you from this chapter? How could you apply that truth to your life this week?	
	How did you feel about this style of studying Scripture? How does it compare to other ways you've studied the Bible? What did God teach you through this exercise?	
	This week, let's try to apply these four questions every time we read Scripture. Before you read, pray and ask God to speak to you through His Word.	
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DEEPER WALK	
Leader: Encourage your group to pick at least one of the following suggested applications to put into practice this week. You may even invite them to circle the one they choose. Follow up at the beginning of the next session to see how it went.	
Read: Read chapters 4 and 5 from Mark's book <i>Whisper</i> .	
Study: Use the method discussed in this session to study the Bible this week. If you don't know where to start, finish reading the book of Ruth. Read a chapter a day and pray for the Holy Spirit to speak.	
Memorize: Pick one of the verses from this session to memorize this week. Write the verse on a card and put it where you'll see it often and practice saying it multiple times a day.	
Discuss: Sit down with Christians who are more mature in their faith than you this week. Ask them how Scripture has helped them grow closer to God and how they approach reading the Bible.	
Pray: Ask God for a heart for His Word. Every time you open the Bible this week, pray for the Spirit to speak and awaken your heart to hear His voice.	

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9 of 9