



Message Discussion Guide Week of July 9, 2023

Message: Word to the Wise, Part 6: Dealing with Differences

Key Scriptures: [Ruth 1:1-17](#)

Preacher: Pastor Tom Parkinson

Message Highlights:

In the 21st century, wise living requires us to learn how to deal with differences among people. In a time of division and polarization, how should we respond to people who act, think, believe, and live differently than we do?

At the root of this challenge is American individualism. We value the self-made hero, who doesn't rely on anyone for anything. This makes us averse to asking for help and closes us off to the ways others can enhance our lives. Note that:

- God made us to be dependent creatures.
- God made us with differences, knowing that each of us would need a healthy dependence on others to flourish.

Ruth is the story of a Moabite woman who brings the gift of God's presence and grace to an Israelite woman. She is ethnically, culturally, and religiously different, and yet God's grace comes through Ruth.

From Ruth's story, we glean three lessons for how to deal with differences:

- **Do not label people, especially those you do not know.** It's easy to label somebody based on what you think you know about them. Wisdom allows each person to stand on their own merits and uniqueness, refusing to define them by social stereotypes and circumstances.
- **We all need the same thing...and no one is needier than you.** Every human is a sinner in need of God's grace, and we are all searching for love, meaning, and purpose that we can only find in Christ.
- **Be open to God's presence and grace at work in anyone.** Every person is made in God's image, and God can use anyone to speak truth into our lives.

Discussion Questions:

- 1.) Do you find it difficult to ask other people for help? If so, why?
- 2.) Pastor Tom said that our culture's value of independence can lead us to miss out on "healthy dependence." In what ways is it healthy to be dependent on other people? When does that dependence cross the line and become unhealthy?
- 3.) Do you agree with Pastor Tom that being wise in the 21st century requires us to know how to deal with people who are different from us? Where do you see differences causing polarization in the world today? Who do you see handling differences well?
- 4.) [Read Ruth 1:1-17](#)
 - a. What makes Ruth different from Naomi?
 - b. What motivates Ruth to stay with Naomi, even through hardship and uncertainty?
 - c. What does this story teach us about God? What does it teach us about ourselves?
- 5.) Pastor Tom shared that we do harm to each other when we assume we know each other before we have taken time to listen to one another's stories. Can you think of a time when you judged someone and then heard their story and realized how much you didn't know about them? Why is it so easy for us to label people?
- 6.) What is your primary takeaway from this message? How will this message challenge, inspire, and impact your faith this week?

Abundant Life Tip: In life, we will always encounter people who are different than us. Rather than being alarmed by differences, it is wise to be open to how God is present in and working through the lives of others, even those who are different than us.