

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES***Karl A. McKinney***RUTH 2:4-16****SHARE, EXTENDED OPTION B**

Print or project the photo Alex Proimos, “File: Homeless Female Holding Up Sign, Los Angeles, California 2012.jpg,” Wikipedia, July 10, 2012, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Homeless\\_female\\_holding\\_up\\_sign,\\_Los\\_Angeles\\_California\\_2012.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Homeless_female_holding_up_sign,_Los_Angeles_California_2012.jpg) Display it before the group arrives. When you start the study, make the following statement: “Look steadily at all the items in this photo; look at this woman for 60 seconds.”

- » Describe everything you notice about the setting and the woman. What do you see? What would you do if you saw someone like this in real time?

From their responses, decide which of the photos or articles from the list under Preparation to show to the group. Especially listen for differing responses, from “I would try to connect” to “She should get a job!”

If some students expressed a desire to connect, ask questions such as:

- » How do you or would you connect with a stranger who is saying, “Help me; I am poor?”

If students say things along the lines of “She should get a job” and otherwise ridicule the woman, continue the conversation by displaying one of the following websites and discuss:

- Eviction Lab, on evictions in the US between 2000 and 2016, <https://evictionlab.org/map/#/2016?geography=states&bounds=-125.351,19.837,-52.339,47.192&type=er> To use this map of evictions of renters between 2000 and 2016, (1) select your state, (2) by selecting your state and zooming in you can review the data about evictions in your county, and (3) select “View More Data” once you’ve selected your county.
  - » Do you know someone who is being evicted at this time? Do you know someone who was evicted during the Coronavirus pandemic or subsequently? Explain how you have been involved in evictions or related to someone as they were being evicted.
- “Family Separation Under the Trump Administration: A Timeline,” Southern Poverty Law Center, 2017–20, <https://www.splcenter.org/news/2020/06/17/family-separation-under-trump-administration-timeline>
  - » How has your family responded to the separation of families or the needs of refugees and asylum seekers under the immigration policies of the United States government?
  - » What led you to respond (or not) as you have?
- John Edwin Mason, “These Photos will Change the Way You Think About Race in Coal Country,” *Yes Magazine*, March 15, 2018, <https://www.yesmagazine.org/social-justice/2018/03/15/these-photos-will-change-the-way-you-think-about-race-in-coal-country/>
  - » In what ways has your family benefited from agriculture, finance, and industries in the North America since the pre-industrial age, from agriculture (slavery, land acquisition and settlement, finance and trading companies, media, sugar, alcohol, corn, cotton), to its industrial age (slavery, land acquisition and settlement, finance & trading companies, cotton, mining, energy and transportation, media, etc.) to the information and technology age in which we now live?
- Homeless evicted from encampment in Fresno, California, August 26, 2013, <https://www.democraticunderground.com/10023540157>
  - » What are the connections between agriculture, industry, information technology, and the impoverishment of millions of people?

**ADDITIONAL COMMENTARY**

**Relationship in Context.** Boaz saw Ruth, and he did not turn away from her. His attitude about God (he said a blessing to his people, “The Lord be with you,” and they returned the blessing) was connected to his attitude about strangers. Boaz blessed his people, and then he focused on intervening on behalf of a stranger about whom he knew very little.

Consistent with his relationships with God and his people, Boaz looked upon Ruth and expressed interest in her. He did not ignore her but was drawn to her. Boaz did not blame her for her vulnerability as a stranger and an alien in Israel. Instead, Boaz began to care for her even before he spoke with her.

Boaz’s care for Ruth was consistent with Israel’s laws. Surely, he was mindful of history between Israel and Moab and buffered Ruth from the wickedness that had control in Israel—the problems and legal constraints that hindered being good to strangers. Boaz pointed to those challenges. Boaz acknowledged the connections between himself and immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. Boaz’s behavior was *mandated by God* throughout the Scriptures (cf., Leviticus 19; “and not to hide yourself from your own kin?” Isaiah 58: 7).

Boaz’s first action occurred within himself, a decision to pay attention to Ruth and to prepare to act on her behalf. Seeing her, he asked the supervisor of workers, “Who is that young woman?” (v. 5, *Good News Translation*). Boaz did not have an attitude of “Hmmm, I don’t know who she is, and she’s not my problem.” Boaz didn’t let himself off from taking responsibility; nor did he put upon Ruth responsibility to care for herself, to pull herself up with her own sandal straps. Boaz did not avoid making connections with Ruth that began inside himself and quickly worked their way to her.

**Israel and Moab.** The Israel-Moab relationship was fraught with challenges because of historical incidents. The first incident in that history was the birth of Moab, the son of Lot (nephew of Abraham and Sarah) and Lot’s older daughter (Genesis 19:30-38). What was a chapter in their history that left Israel feeling shame did not paralyze Boaz as he learned about Ruth, a Moabite. Boaz set aside the shame he might have felt and instead considered Ruth’s treatment of Naomi, his cousin and Ruth’s mother-in-law.

Aside from the Israel-Moab connection, Boaz was mindful of the ways in which his people were overwhelmed by a devotion to injustice and unrighteousness. Boaz referred directly to this state of affairs in his instruction to the manager to protect Ruth from sexual abuse by his workers. Boaz had to give this instruction concerning Ruth because it was very likely that other women had been sexually assaulted in his fields on previous occasions. It turns out, Israel’s history with sexual abuse and aberrant sexual behavior had not ended

with Abraham and Sarah or Lot and his daughters but continued into the age when the prophets governed the nation.

Boaz also commanded the manager to be excessive in blessing Ruth, to go out of his way to show care, favor, and hospitality to her. Boaz wanted Ruth to be able to gather an abundance of barley. This action by Boaz on Ruth’s behalf was consistent with the law, which said,

When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt; I am the Lord your God. (Leviticus 19:33-34 NASB)

Then, in order that she would know the source of the kindness she was experiencing, Boaz went to Ruth and connected directly with her.

Some background from recent colonial history in the Americas and Africa illuminates this situation.

**Ivory Tusks and Church Coffers.** Often, we do not know our history and when we do, we make things worse by refusing to discuss and own that history. All the while, we perpetuate and suffer from the ongoing saga that our ancestors created.

We cannot talk about what we don’t know. Today, our discussion of “strangers and aliens” is conditioned upon a decision to acknowledge the historic context of sexism, racism, and white supremacy, including these widely held and strongly adhered-to beliefs that:

- women are the property of men.
- people of color are inferior to the superior, white race; less than human; and subject to the control and desires of white people.

On the North American continent, Christian congregations struggle with these same strongly held ideologies that disable us from connecting with the poor. Our disability happened due to our complicit role in the perpetuation of ideologies and structures that oppress and imperil people. Unlike Boaz, Christianity resists acknowledging recent shameful chapters in our history *because we are experiencing the fallout of our role in historical shameful practices*; in many ways, we perpetuate these behaviors today.

Throughout its history, organized Christianity consistently has participated in actions that result in impoverishing people worldwide, including immigrants, the poor, refugees, and asylum seekers. Christianity provided justification for colonialism 300 years before helping to spread it across the earth in the 14th and 15th centuries.

For over 900 years, Christianity has participated in reaping the rewards of conquest, colonialism, slavery, and ongoing oppression, while condemning the poor for being impoverished. There is not a period or season since 1096 when

Christianity has not been complicit in worldwide oppression. Through overt participation and by silence within our congregations and organizations, Christianity has remained a central player in the perpetuation of injustice.

From the 15th thru the 20th centuries, people who enslaved other people shaped economies atop the southern and northern regions of the Americas. In colonial times as Europeans settled the eastern portion of North America, they steadily built business and industries that produced wealth for investors, governments, and new settlements. Christian congregations and educational institutions reaped the benefits of businesses and industries that were developed atop the remains of Indigenous Peoples and with the labor of Africans. The enslavement of each group of peoples had been carefully imported and enshrined in laws.

In the 19th century, as every industry rushed to participate in the manufacture and sale of cotton in 10 states of the Americas, the entire US, investors worldwide, and laborers and governments gained wealth and income, while ignoring, attacking, and vilifying abolitionists who called for the end of slavery. Other industries also grew as cotton increased the ability of white settlers to buy sugar, rum, the piano forte, and other luxuries. Organized Christianity continued to benefit from the increase in wealth from the production of agricultural, industrial, and luxury goods.

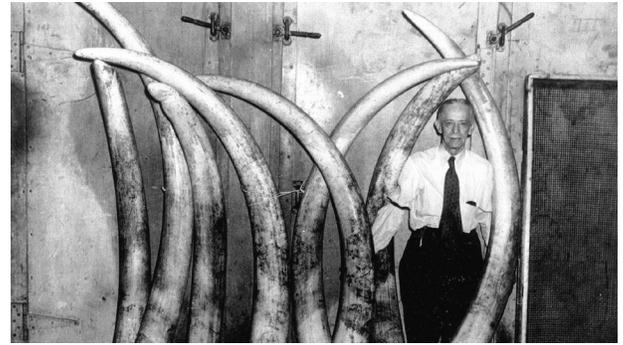
In the 1840s, wealth and income for whites began to increase. As growing numbers of whites became wealthier, they bought more luxury goods. Ivory was one of the luxury goods whites wanted, for everything from toothpicks to piano fortes. Ivory was deemed the best material for piano keys. From 1840–1940, whites killed hundreds of thousands of elephants to harvest their tusks and enslaved millions of Africans to carry those tusks from Central Africa to the coast. One in four Africans died while enslaved by ivory traders.

The United States was the single biggest buyer of ivory from Central Africa. The ivory was sold to ivory cutters in Deep River, Connecticut, for example, who would build and ship increasing numbers of the piano forte to cultured white settlers and Christian congregations around the world. The barons of ivory grew wealthy in Connecticut; some of these men, such as George Read,<sup>1</sup> funded abolitionist campaigns even as they grew wealthy off the extermination of elephants and enslaving Africans. Often, the enslaved people

***“Two little Connecticut River towns helped to produce music for the middle class, at a cost of as many as 2 million African lives, sacrificed to harvest elephant ivory.”***

—Complicity: *How the North Promoted, Prolonged, and Profited from Slavery*, p. 192.

1. Ibid. See “Plunder for Pianos,” chap. 10, 193 ff.



Louis E. Pratt, master ivory cutter for Pratt, Read, & Co., shows off eight ivory tusks, April 1, 1955 (see Christopher Joyce, “Elephant Slaughter, African Slavery, and America’s Pianos,” National Public Radio, August 18, 2014, <http://archive.kuow.org/post/elephant-slaughter-african-slavery-and-americas-pianos>)

who survived the trek to the Atlantic shore of Africa with the 80+ pound tusks were resold and then shipped to the sugar and indigo islands of the Caribbean.

The buildings of Christian congregations and Christian organizations where white settlers worshiped around the world were outfitted with new piano fortes with ivory keys; the coffers of white settler congregations were filled with the wealth of ivory traders, laborers, and ivory cutters. Most manufacturers of luxury goods had no interest to stop enslaving Africans to port the 80-pound tusks from the interior of the continent to its shores; there was no interest to stop killing elephants. Very few missionaries to Africa talked about the horrors of the ivory trade—because their support was provided by denominations that also enslaved Africans and reaped the profits of the slave trade. Few missionaries have told the stories of the complicity of their Christian ministries in the evil agricultural, industrial, mining, animal, and financial trades of those who financially supported these ministries.

In the 1990s, Christian seminaries did not acknowledge the connection between white settlement, slavery, the extermination of Indigenous Peoples, industry, and organized Christianity. Instead, seminaries like mine continued to focus on expansion and forming new congregations. We did not discuss the role of organized Christianity in slavery and the extermination of Indigenous peoples then, but we are telling these stories today in detail.

Even so, it is rare for Christian congregations to focus on the history of Christianity in colonialism, racism, slavery, and genocides. Why should followers of Christ initiate conversations about the role of Christianity in these evils on the North American continent?

- » In what ways could knowing the role of Christianity in modern colonialism benefit the church today?
- » How does your congregation or fellowship of congregations educate followers of Jesus on the role of Christianity in modern colonialism? Describe the effects of learning this history on your relationships with neighbors, including “strangers and aliens.”