

Faith Through Trials
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Ruth 1:6-18

Opening: Tragedy is a part of life. **What are the various ways a person can respond to tragedy? How can God use tragedy and hardship to sharpen our faith in Him?**

The Big Idea: God can use life's tragedies to bring about His purposes if we will trust in His faithfulness and be obedient to His direction.

A video overview of the book of Ruth from TheBibleproject.com

- The book of Ruth is a story of a simple Jewish family and how God would use them in His plan to bring to earth Jesus, our Redeemer and Messiah.
- In this book God works through average people to do His will.
- The husband and father was Elimelech, and his wife was Naomi. Their two sons were Mahlon and Kilion.¹
- The first five verses of Ruth tell us there had been a famine in the land of Judah, and this family from Bethlehem fled to the land of Moab.
- The Moabites were enemies of the Israelites and worshiped false gods. In other words, instead of staying in Bethlehem and trusting God to provide for them, Elimelech had taken his family to a pagan land looking for food. It appears he would pay a heavy price for this.²
- The family stayed in Moab ten years. During that time Elimelech died. Then their sons married Moabite women named Ruth and Orpah.
- Tragically, the sons also died leaving Naomi and her two daughters-in-law as widows. Though scripture doesn't say this specifically, there is some possibility that the death of Elimelech and his sons was judgment from God for moving to Moab and for the sons marrying Moabite wives.

- Regardless, the situation was grim. In that day, the life of a widow with no family for support was a future of poverty and struggle. Naomi's family was back in Bethlehem.

Ruth 1:6–18 (NLT)

Naomi and Ruth Return

⁶ Then Naomi heard in Moab that the Lord had blessed his people in Judah by giving them good crops again. So Naomi and her daughters-in-law got ready to leave Moab to return to her homeland.

⁷ With her two daughters-in-law she set out from the place where she had been living, and they took the road that would lead them back to Judah.

- In verse six, **what do we learn about Naomi's view of God?**

⁸ But on the way, Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go back to your mothers' homes. And may the Lord reward you for your kindness to your husbands and to me. ⁹ May the Lord bless you with the security of another marriage." Then she kissed them good-bye, and they all broke down and wept.

¹⁰ "No," they said. "We want to go with you to your people."

¹¹ But Naomi replied, "Why should you go on with me? Can I still give birth to other sons who could grow up to be your husbands? ¹² No, my daughters, return to your parents' homes, for I am too old to marry again. And even if it were possible, and I were to get married tonight and bear sons, then what? ¹³ Would you wait for them to grow up and refuse to marry someone else? No, of course not, my daughters! Things are far more bitter for me than for you, because the Lord himself has raised his fist against me."

- **What does this reveal about the relationship between these women?**
- Naomi talks about having sons Ruth and Orpah would wait to marry.
- Levirate Law— A custom Moses put in place. If a husband died without a son, his brother was required to marry the widow to continue the line.³
- We'll learn about this and the concept of a kinsman redeemer next week.

- Verse 13: **What was Naomi’s attitude and outlook in her distress? Is it okay for God’s people to become distraught and lash out in a time of tragedy? Why? How could this be taken too far?**

¹⁴ And again they wept together, and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law good-bye. But Ruth clung tightly to Naomi. ¹⁵ “Look,” Naomi said to her, “your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods. You should do the same.”

- It seems like a selfless gesture sending these women back to their families. But based on verse 15, **could Naomi have been doing something wrong? What was it?** Wiersbe’s theory.⁴
- **What is your overall perception of Naomi at this point? What words would describe her? What’s your impression of her faith in God?**
- Naomi is a somewhat complicated character in this story.
- We see loyalty and love, yet we see some immaturity.
- It’s clear she believed in the sovereignty of God, yet she blamed Him for her problems. To me this makes Naomi someone we can all relate to.
- She had faith in God but it was an imperfect, flawed faith. Still, God was able to use her as an important part of His plan for the Messiah.

The Holman Old Testament Commentary tells us:

One questions the orthodoxy or at the least the maturity of Naomi’s theology—first in blaming all her woes on the Lord (vv. 13,21); second in encouraging her daughters-in-law to return to the idolatry of Chemosh (v. 15). One might add her bitter eruption at God when the Bethlehemites were acknowledging her return (vv. 19–20). Critics should keep in mind that Naomi’s knowledge was imperfect, that she lived during the conflicted days of the judges, and that we are all saved by redemptive grace, not by theological consistency.⁵

- Now let’s look at Ruth.

¹⁶ But Ruth replied, “Don’t ask me to leave you and turn back. Wherever you go, I will go; wherever you live, I will live. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God. ¹⁷ Wherever you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord punish me severely if I allow anything but death to separate us!” ¹⁸ When Naomi saw that Ruth was determined to go with her, she said nothing more.

- This is one of the most beautiful expressions of commitment in scripture!
- **What does this say about the influence Naomi had on Ruth? Specifically, what does “your God will be my God” tell us?**
- **What is your overall perception of Ruth? What words would describe her? What is your impression of her faith in God?**
- Although she came from a pagan background in Moab, once she met the God of Israel, Ruth became a living testimony to Him by faith. Ruth, the Moabitess, is one of only three women mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:5).⁶
- **When you look at the story of Naomi and Ruth, what lessons can you see for us today? What does it teach us about how families should operate? What does it teach us about faith when we’re in the midst of tragedy and hardship?**

So, What’s the Takeaway?

- If the story ended here it would be a great example of family love and loyalty; but it didn’t end here. As we’ll see next week, these two simple women (one a Jew and the other from Moab,) would be central figures in God’s plan for redeeming mankind from sin.
- Naomi teaches us when we’re in the midst of hardships and tragedy, it’s okay to “vent” to God as long as we don’t TURN from Him.
- It’s clear that Naomi didn’t abandon her faith in God, and her faith must have been “attractive” to Ruth, for Ruth...to have clung to her (v. 14) and expressed her desire that Naomi’s God be her God (v. 16).⁷
- When we look at Ruth we see an incredible commitment to care for Naomi even if it meant her own future would be bleak.

Though Ruth came from a pagan background, it's clear she had trusted in the God of Israel and was willing to be used by Him though she had no idea where that would lead.

- The lesson for us: God can use life's tragedies to bring about His purposes if we will trust in His faithfulness and be obedient to His direction.

¹ Tyndale House Publishers. (2013). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Ru 1:2). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

² There was no formal prohibition against marrying Moabites (cf. Canaanites in Deut. 7:1–4). However, marriage to Moabites was discouraged because of their commitment to other gods (such as Molech), the Balaam debacle, Israel's debauchery with Moabite women in the wilderness, and the 10-generation Moabite male exclusion from the assembly of the Lord (Numbers 22–25; Deut. 23:3–7; Ezra 9:2, 12; 10:44; Neh. 13:25).

Crossway Bibles. *ESV Study Bible* (Kindle Locations 38253-38257). Good News Publishers/Crossway Books. Kindle Edition.

³ Easton, M. G. (1893). In *Easton's Bible dictionary*. New York: Harper & Brothers. (Gen. 38:8; Deut. 25:5–10; comp. Ruth 3; 4:10). Its object was "to raise up seed to the departed brother."

⁴ Wiersbe, W. W. (1993). *Be Committed* (p. 19). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books. Naomi was trying to cover up her disobedience. If she returned to Bethlehem alone, nobody would know that the family had broken the Law of Moses

⁵ Anders, Max; Phillips, W. Gary. *Holman Old Testament Commentary - Judges, Ruth* (Kindle Locations 6530-6534). B&H Publishing. Kindle Edition.

⁶ <https://www.gotquestions.org/Moabites.html>

⁷ Prime, J. (2007). *Opening up Ruth* (p. 39). Leominster: Day One Publications.