



Faithfulness

IN THE MIDST OF NAOMI'S TRAGEDY, GOD DEMONSTRATED
HIS CARE AND SOVEREIGNTY.

Scripture Passage: Ruth 1:11-18; 2:5-12 Memory Verse: Ruth 1:16

The book of Judges focuses primarily on the work of men. Aside from the ministry of Deborah, all of the judges were male. Yet, at a time and in a world dominated by heroes, a heroine by the name of Ruth emerged. In fact, the Bible book that bears her name is one of only two in the Scriptures (along with Esther) named after a woman. And while many of the men mentioned in Judges were broken and flawed by the cycle of sin, Ruth provided a breath of spiritual fresh air.

What's more, this encouraging protagonist was not just a female. She also was a Gentile, a native of Moab who made an amazing impact on Jewish history. On the surface, this book provides a beautiful love story about a wealthy Jewish man and a poor Moabite widow. On a deeper level, it illustrates the extent God will go to redeem a lost and wayward people. Ultimately, it all points to Jesus.

As you dig into this session, recall a season of physical or spiritual distress. How did God reveal Himself in that time? Consider sharing this experience with the adults in your Bible study and ask them to provide their own stories of God's care and sovereignty.



Weekly Podcast: Group Leader Training

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In his book, *A Grief Observed*, C.S. Lewis wrote, “No one ever told me that grief felt so like fear. I am not afraid, but the sensation is like being afraid.”¹ People who face tragedy feel both grief and fear. They wonder what the loss means for their future. When grief and fear cloud your path, nothing comforts your heart and gives you the courage to take steps into the unknown like knowing that God cares and controls every moment of your life. (PSG, p. 109)

How might faith in God’s care and control help a person navigate grief and fear?



Understand the Context (Ruth 1:1–2:23)

The period of the judges was characterized by an ongoing cycle of rebellion, retribution, repentance and restoration—a repetitive saga of poor choices and painful consequences. Much of the book’s focus emphasizes Israel’s idol worship, leadership voids, and battlefield operations. Leaders like Samson, thwarted by his promiscuity and disobedience, offer living illustrations of the nation’s ongoing spiral into sin.

Yet, in the midst of this turmoil, a love story unfolded. At a time when so many matters of significance played out on the public stage, an intimate account of charity and loyalty within a family took place.

The book of Ruth begins on a somber note by describing two unfortunate events, one national and the other personal. First, Israel experienced a famine. It seems strange that a famine would occur in Bethlehem, since the city’s name means “house of bread.” Yet, famines were common in the Old Testament, with Genesis alone recording three (Gen. 12:10; 26:1; 47:13). In fact, God even said He would send famines as punishment for His people’s disobedience (Lev. 26:20; Deut. 28:24). It’s not clear if that is what was happening here, but it is possible.

Because of this particular famine, a resident of Bethlehem named Elimelech, along with his wife Naomi and their two sons, left Judah to find food in Moab. The nation of Moab was located about fifty miles south of Jerusalem, just east

of the Dead Sea. While in Moab, Elimelech died, triggering the second tragedy. To make matters worse, his two married sons passed away as well.

Possibly, Elimelech should have never left his home country. Like Abraham before him, he sought relief in a foreign land rather than waiting for God’s deliverance (Gen. 12:10). The fact that Naomi heard about the Lord providing food in Israel (Ruth 1:6) proves that God wasn’t going to allow His children to beg for bread (Ps. 37:25).

Before their untimely deaths, Naomi’s two sons each married Moabite women: Orpah and Ruth. Jews were not supposed to marry Gentiles, especially Ammonites and Moabites (Ezra 9:1-4). In the time of Moses, Moabite women lured Jewish men into immorality, resulting in the death of twenty-four thousand people (Num. 25).

As God is prone to do, though, He worked beyond Elimelech’s lack of faithfulness, laying the groundwork for a beautiful narrative of romance, restoration, and redemption. Despite being a Gentile, Ruth eventually became the great-grandmother of King David, which also placed her in the genealogy of Jesus (Matt. 1:5).

Read Ruth 1:11-18; 2:5-12. How do you see God’s care and sovereignty demonstrated? (PSG, p. 110)

1. Lewis, C.S. *A Grief Observed* (HarperCollins, 1961) 3.

ENGAGE



INTRODUCE:

PREPARE: Display **Pack Item 2** (Poster: *Outlines of Joshua, Judges, Ruth*), **Pack Item 3** (Poster: *Key Characters in Joshua, Judges, Ruth*), and **Pack Item 7** (Poster: *Key Verse: Ruth 1:16*) on a focal wall.

ASK:

How might faith in God's care and control help a person navigate grief and fear? (PSG, p. 109)

DISCUSS:

Lead a brief discussion with the group about their responses. Ask for two or three volunteers to share their experiences.

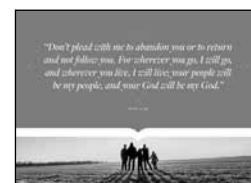
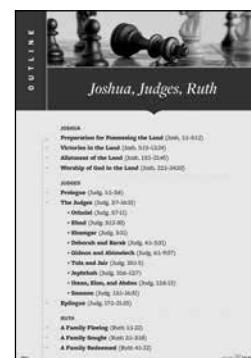
RECAP:

Point out the outline for Ruth on **Pack Item 2** (Poster: *Outlines of Joshua, Judges, Ruth*). Explain that the next two sessions will come from the book of Ruth and will focus on learning to depend on God in uncertain times. For context, summarize this from page 110 of the PSG:

"The book of Ruth comes toward the end of the judges' rule over Israel just before the start of Israel's reign of kings. . . . Ruth reminds the reader that God's providence and faithfulness will not fail no matter how dark the times. . . . The story is one of tragic loss, deep loyalty, and God's faithfulness to Ruth, a foreigner who trusts Him. As the story unfolds, Ruth decided to remain with Naomi after the loss of her husband. She followed God into an unknown future and found God faithful through every trial and hardship."

TRANSITION:

In today's study, loyalty will be exemplified amid uncertainty. We will see that even in the midst of tragedy, God revealed His care and sovereignty.



Group Activity Option

Music

Distribute hymnals or copies of the lyrics to "God Will Make a Way" (Baptist Hymnal 2008, No. 85). Create two groups, directing them to alternate the reading of each verse. Ask: **How do these lyrics encourage confidence in God?** For a contemporary option, use the song "Way Maker." Ask: **How is God described in these lyrics?** Share that today's session focuses on how God's character shines through His provision.

Loss (Ruth 1:11-15)

11 But Naomi replied, “Return home, my daughters. Why do you want to go with me? Am I able to have any more sons who could become your husbands? **12** Return home, my daughters. Go on, for I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me to have a husband tonight and to bear sons, **13** would you be willing to wait for them to grow up? Would you restrain yourselves from remarrying? No, my daughters, my life is much too bitter for you to share, because the LORD’s hand has turned against me.” **14** Again they wept loudly, and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her. **15** Naomi said, “Look, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods. Follow your sister-in-law.”

(vv. 11-13) Naomi’s husband had died after bringing the family to Moab. In time, her two sons passed away as well. In the wake of these tragic losses, Naomi decided to return to Judah. Apparently, the famine around Bethlehem had ended, so it made sense to return to the land of her family and friends.

Initially, Naomi’s daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpah, were determined to travel with her. Yet, she urged them to **return home** to their Moabite families. The Hebrew language is emphatic. In fact, Naomi used emphatic language three times in urging her daughters-in-law to go back (vv. 11,12,13).

Her initial question—**Why do you want to go with me?**—assumes that the younger women would experience no benefits in coming with Naomi to Israel. But it also includes a sense of rebuke, as if Naomi considered the idea of the women coming with her as absolute foolishness.

Naomi’s second question sounds even more blunt: **Am I able to have any more sons?** Likely referring to the practice of levirate marriage (Deut. 25:5-10), she clearly expected a negative answer. Naomi was not looking for **another husband** and had no desire to **bear sons**.

In case the Moabite women were unsure of Naomi’s stand, she answered her own question. **No, my daughters** is the third emphatic statement in the passage. From Naomi’s perspective, her life was **too bitter** because the **LORD’s hand** was against her. Ruth and Orpah were better off without her and had better prospects in Moab.

Some scholars also suggest that Naomi may have been concerned about appearances. Ruth and Orpah were living proof that her sons had violated the law’s prohibition against marrying foreigners. If that is the case, Naomi needed them to stay in Moab.

(v. 14) At first, both daughters-in-law rejected Naomi’s directions to head back home. Ruth and Orpah each insisted that they would return with Naomi (see v. 10). However, Naomi’s stronger appeal in verses 11-13 apparently convinced one of the Moabite women to return home.

While both women **wept loudly** at the prospect of being separated, the phrase **Orpah kissed her mother-in-law** emphasizes that she would not be continuing on the trip. The text does not explain Orpah’s motives, but her actions confirm that this was a farewell kiss.

In contrast to Orpah, Ruth **clung** to Naomi. The Hebrew wording suggests holding fast to something or following closely after someone. It also can refer to two things that are stuck together. This seems an apt description of how Ruth responded to Naomi.

With this verse, readers can discern a sharp distinction drawn between the two Moabite women. To this point, Ruth and Orpah had been equals in the story, suffering the same losses and sharing a loyalty to Naomi. But Ruth’s choice to reject conventional wisdom changed everything. Without criticizing Orpah, the writer placed the spotlight squarely on Ruth.

(v. 15) Naomi made a third attempt to convince Ruth to leave. She noted that Orpah had returned **to her people and to her gods**. In Near Eastern thought, nations were identified with their gods, so a return to Moab meant a return to its idols.

Some commentators suggest that Naomi’s words reveal a degree of spiritual lethargy on her part, placing the gods of Moab on a fairly even plane with the God of Israel. If so, her attitude would reflect the attitudes of many Israelites during the days of the judges. It also provides another contrast to the fledgling faith of Ruth.



APPLICATION: Believers will suffer loss.

READ: Call for a volunteer to read **Ruth 1:11-15** as the group listens to how Naomi, Orpah, and Ruth respond to their tragic loss.

DISCUSS:

Draw attention to **Pack Item 3** (Poster: Key Characters in Joshua, Judges, Ruth) and highlight the information about Naomi and Ruth. Lead a brief discussion on Naomi's questions. Reflect on why she likely believed Ruth and Orpah were better off in Moab. Share this information about levirate marriage and how it could apply to this situation:

Orpah and Ruth could have considered the Israelite custom of levirate marriage. Levirate marriage involved a close family member, such as a brother-in-law marrying his brother's widow to preserve the family through progeny (Deut. 25:5-6). The oldest brother-in-law had the obligation to marry his brother's widow, and as such, he inherited all of his dead brother's estate. The importance of levirate marriage was the perpetuation of the deceased's name in Israel. (PSG, p. 111)



SHARE:

Note that Naomi felt bitter because she thought God had abandoned her. Highlight the contrast between Ruth and Orpah. Use information from Ruth 1:14 (p. 134) in the Leader Guide to supplement discussion of this contrast.

ASK:

Why does loss draw some people closer to God, while others struggle with anger toward God? How can the church community be a source of compassion for both? (PSG, p. 113)

TRANSITION:

Orpah went back to Moab and its gods. But Ruth clung to Naomi; and, in doing so, she was taking early steps toward a meaningful relationship with the God of Israel.

Group Activity Option

Bible Skill

Using a Bible atlas, locate Moab and note its proximity to Israel. **Why would Elimelech take his family to Moab during the famine in Israel?** Read an article about Moab in a Bible dictionary. Use a concordance to find other times Moab is mentioned in the Bible. For each verse, write a summary statement that describes the role Moab played in the biblical narrative.

Loyalty (Ruth 1:16-18)

16 But Ruth replied: Don't plead with me to abandon you or to return and not follow you. For wherever you go, I will go, and wherever you live, I will live; your people will be my people, and your God will be my God. **17** Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD punish me, and do so severely, if anything but death separates you and me. **18** When Naomi saw that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped talking to her.

(v. 16) Orpah left, but Ruth boldly said “no” to her mother-in-law. The first words readers find in the voice of the book’s namesake have encouraged and challenged God’s people for centuries.

Ruth’s speech can be divided into three primary sections. The first section presents the Moabite’s plea to Naomi: **Don’t plead with me to abandon you**. Orpah was gone, but Ruth had no desire to **return** to her past. The Hebrew word translated *abandon* underscores the passion of Ruth’s fidelity. She begged Naomi to stop challenging her desire to make the journey to Israel.

Following her imperative request, Ruth offered a poetic, three-part statement of loyalty to her mother-in-law. Each phrase in the reply represents a stronger, more personal commitment from Ruth to Naomi. She would **go** wherever Naomi wanted to go and **live** wherever Naomi wanted to live. Ruth had experienced the ups and downs of life with Naomi; and whatever the future held, they would face it together.

Earlier, Naomi had released Orpah to her people and her gods (v. 15). Here, Ruth stated a desire to reject her family (and nation), along with their false deities. A move to Israel meant a clean break. Naomi’s **people** would become Ruth’s people, and Naomi’s **God** would become Ruth’s God. The pledge to live with Naomi was a promise of companionship, while the pledge to follow Naomi’s God was a promise of commitment.

This is especially interesting considering the law made it clear that no Moabite could enter the Lord’s assembly (Deut. 23:3). In addition, the only exposure Ruth likely had to Yahweh had been the broken lens of Naomi’s faith. Some scholars believe this does not represent a full conversion for Ruth since she used a more generic name for God (*Elohim*). However, it likely suggests a first step toward a deeper faith down the road.

(v. 17) The next portion of Ruth’s declaration of loyalty takes the conversation to a new level. Ruth promised to be with her mother-in-law until the

very end. She would **die** where Naomi died, and she would be **buried** wherever Naomi was buried.

In addition to painting an incredible picture of lifelong devotion, Ruth’s words reveal a strong sense of familial connection. Naomi’s immediate family was gone. Her other daughter-in-law had returned to Moab. Ruth valued her role in the family and would never leave Naomi.

In ancient treaties, covenants often were sealed with a “self-imprecatory oath.” In these statements, deities became witnesses. And, if one party or the other failed to live up to the promise, the gods could bring calamity on their lives.

The final section of Ruth’s speech includes a similar form of divine witness: **May the LORD punish me, and do so severely**. Here, Ruth used the covenant name of God (*Yahweh*) rather than *Elohim* (v. 16), suggesting she understood God as a living entity who moved in the lives of His people. The condition for His judgment would be **if anything but death separates you and me**. Again, Ruth focused on a long-term commitment.

(v. 18) All of Naomi’s arguments melted away in the light of Ruth’s statement of fidelity. The Hebrew term rendered **determined** implies something that has hardened and usually relates to an inner strength of conviction. Faced with such bold and firm allegiance, Naomi **stopped talking to her**. Ruth had made her point.

Key Doctrine

God

God is all powerful and all knowing; and His perfect knowledge extends to all things, past, present, and future, including the future decisions of His free creatures. (See Proverbs 16:33; Romans 8:28.)



APPLICATION POINT: We need to allow others to minister to us.

READ: Choose a volunteer to read **Ruth 1:16-18** aloud, directing the group to listen for key points in Ruth's response to Naomi.

ASK:

What value does society place on loyalty? (PSG p. 113)

EXPLAIN:

Discuss responses. Remind adults about the contrast between Ruth and Orpah. Using Ruth 1:16 (p. 136) in the Leader Guide, explain the structure of Ruth's pledge and its intensity. Note that this is the first time Ruth speaks in the book that bears her name.

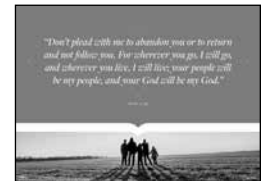
CREATE:

Divide the group into teams of three or four people. (*Note: For smaller groups, an individual can be a team.*) Give each team a large sheet of paper and a marker. Briefly review the statements in Ruth's promise. Direct adults to work together in their teams to identify an image that illustrates each part of Ruth's statement and to draw that image on the paper. After a few minutes, allow a volunteer from each group to share their work.

REVIEW:

Direct attention to **Pack Item 7** (Poster: Key Verse: Ruth 1:16). Encourage the group to read this session's memory verse from the poster. Summarize this content from page 113 of the PSG:

"Ruth's words capture the beauty of true love. She opened her heart to her mother-in-law without reservation or hesitation. She begged for Naomi to accept her decision to remain with her. She enjoined her life to Naomi's and called on God to witness her promise. Ruth's unselfish loyalty has been quoted, praised, and shared throughout generations. In an age of self-promotion and individualism, loyal love stands out like a rare jewel."



SHARE:

Point out that once she heard Ruth's passionate plea, Naomi stopped trying to convince her to follow Orpah back to Moab. Suggest that Naomi realized that Ruth wanted to stay by her side, no matter what.

ASK:

How can loyalty be a way to view God's provision and protection? (PSG, p. 114)

TRANSITION:

By pledging her loyalty to Naomi, Ruth was also surrendering her future to God.

Provision (Ruth 2:5-12)

5 Boaz asked his servant who was in charge of the harvesters, “Whose young woman is this?” **6** The servant answered, “She is the young Moabite woman who returned with Naomi from the territory of Moab. **7** She asked, ‘Will you let me gather fallen grain among the bundles behind the harvesters?’ She came and has been on her feet since early morning, except that she rested a little in the shelter.” **8** Then Boaz said to Ruth, “Listen, my daughter. Don’t go and gather grain in another field, and don’t leave this one, but stay here close to my female servants. **9** See which field they are harvesting, and follow them. Haven’t I ordered the young men not to touch you? When you are thirsty, go and drink from the jars the young men have filled.” **10** She fell facedown, bowed to the ground, and said to him, “Why have I found favor with you, so that you notice me, although I am a foreigner?” **11** Boaz answered her, “Everything you have done for your mother-in-law since your husband’s death has been fully reported to me: how you left your father and mother and your native land, and how you came to a people you didn’t previously know. **12** May the LORD reward you for what you have done, and may you receive a full reward from the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge.”

(v. 5) Naomi and Ruth returned to Bethlehem. Still feeling stung by God, Naomi told her old friends to call her Mara (“bitter”) rather than Naomi (“pleasant”). Yet, in the midst of Naomi’s pity party, God responded with grace through Ruth. Despite being a Gentile and new to Jewish laws, Ruth took advantage of gleaning, where workers allowed the poor to gather grain dropped during the harvest (see Lev. 19:9-10).

In God’s providence, Ruth began her work in the fields of **•Boaz**, a member of Elimelech’s family. Boaz (meaning “in him is strength”) asked his overseer, **Whose young woman is this?** The question was not demeaning. Boaz probably knew everyone in town, and he also knew that this stranger likely had a local connection. So, he was asking about Ruth’s father or fiancé.

(vv. 6-7) Boaz’s servant gave him a quick run-down on what he knew about Ruth. First, she was the **young Moabite woman who returned with Naomi**. While the servant did not mention Ruth by name, his reference to Naomi may reveal that Ruth’s story was common knowledge in Bethlehem. It also begins connecting the relational dots for readers between Boaz and Ruth.

The servant next explained that Ruth had sought permission to **gather fallen grain** and that she had been **on her feet since early morning** with only a brief rest. Once she had secured permission to glean, Ruth had demonstrated an incredible work ethic. This was an outward manifestation of her inner loyalty to Naomi. It also caught Boaz’s attention.

(vv. 8-9) After hearing Ruth’s story, Boaz initiated a conversation with her: **Listen, my daughter**. In that culture, a woman would not dare to start a conversation with a man, especially if the woman was a poor Gentile and the man was a wealthy, Jewish landowner. Yet, his reference to Ruth as a *daughter* would have broken down social barriers along with highlighting the age difference between them.

In his address to her, Boaz gave Ruth four basic instructions. First, she should not go to **another field** to glean. Boaz was extending his security over her, probably out of respect for Naomi and in recognition of Ruth’s character. Next, she should remain **close to my female servants**. The Hebrew wording reflects the same spirit as Ruth clinging to Naomi in 1:14.

Third, Ruth could rest assured that Boaz’s **young men** would not harass her. He had ordered them to leave her alone. Finally, she could **drink from the jars** prepared for Boaz’s field workers. It would have been extraordinary for a Gentile to share water with Jews.

(vv. 10-12) Ruth **bowed to the ground** in a demonstration of humility and gratitude. Though she was a **foreigner**, God was providing for the needs of her family. Boaz was happy to be an instrument of God’s grace in this matter because of all Ruth had **done for her mother-in-law**. She had placed herself under God’s **wings** of care, and He was providing a **full reward** for her loyalty and character.



READ:

APPLICATION POINT: Believers can be confident in God's sovereign ability to provide for our needs.

Invite a volunteer to read Ruth 2:5-12, focusing the group to identify God's protection and provision for Ruth as she went out into the fields as a foreigner.

EXPLAIN:

In the ancient world, gleaning involved going behind workers and gathering the grain that fell to the ground during the harvest. By Jewish law, Ruth had the right to glean in any field with the landowner's permission. In fact, the law encouraged landowners to leave the corners of the fields for the poor. This would allow them to put in an honest day's work and to provide for their needs without shame.

HIGHLIGHT:

Draw attention to **Pack Item 3** (Poster: Key Characters in Joshua, Judges, Ruth) and highlight the information about Boaz. Draw attention to how God began to connect the dots for Boaz and Ruth:

Finding Boaz's field, a close relative to their family, was not by chance. Her steps were established by the Lord (Ps. 37:23). When Ruth gained permission to glean, she did not know the field belonged to Boaz, a relative of her deceased father-in-law, Elimelech. . . . Boaz told Ruth not to glean in another field. He did not want her to go outside of his protection but to stay close to the other female servants. (PSG, p. 115)

ASK:

How has God provided for you in a way that assured you of His care? (PSG, p. 116)

TRANSITION:

Even in our darkest moments, we can find hints of God's care and sovereignty in our lives. We might feel frightened or confused, but He is always at work and providing for our needs.



Group Activity Option

Object Lesson: Apple

Bring an apple to the session. Lead a brief discussion on how we get apples and other fruits and vegetables. Highlight the need for a farmer to care for the trees and plants so they can produce everything we need to eat. Emphasize that God is our ultimate Provider, but He uses others along the way. Ask: **How does this compare to how God used Boaz to meet the needs of Ruth and Naomi?**

CHALLENGE

REVIEW:

Review these points from Apply the Text on page 117 of the *Personal Study Guide*:

- *Believers will suffer loss.*
- *We need to allow others to minister to us.*
- *Believers can be confident in God's sovereign ability to provide for our needs.*

REFLECT:

Lead the group to read the statements and to discuss with a partner which one is most challenging to them and why. After a few minutes, allow volunteers to share their responses.

REFLECT:

Guide the group to read and reflect on the first set of questions on page 117 of the PSG. Challenge them to recall times God has strengthened their faith during times of loss and uncertainty. Encourage them to list ways the group can serve others who are going through difficult times.

MEMORIZE:

Direct attention again to **Pack Item 7** (Poster: Key Verse: *Ruth 1:16*). Lead the group in reading the memory verse aloud two or three times. Challenge them to continue working to memorize the verse this week and to ask God how He wants them to apply it in their lives each day.

PRAY:

Close in prayer, thanking God for His sovereignty in times of suffering. Lead the group to pray in response to today's points. Ask that God would help them know that their future is secure in Him.

AFTER THE SESSION

Send a text or email to the group, thanking adults for their attendance and participation. Invite them to reflect on God's provision in their lives. Suggest they read and respond personally to the second set of questions on page 117 of the PSG. Encourage them to express gratitude to anyone who has walked with them through a painful circumstance.

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