

Faithfulness

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

Ruth 1:11-18; 2:5-12

1:11 But **Naomi** **A** replied, “Return home, **my daughters**. **B** Why do you want to go with me? Am I able to have any **more sons** **C** who could become your husbands? **12** **Return home**, **D** 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** **E** 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** **F** 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.” **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**. **G** **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. [. . .] **2:5** **Boaz** **H** 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** **I** among the bundles behind the harvesters?’ She came and has been **on her feet since early morning**, **J** 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** **K** 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** **L** 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** **M** you have come for refuge.”

Exploring Key Words

- A** The wife of Elimelech, an Israelite. Her family moved to Moab during a famine.
- B** Naomi’s sons married Moabite women. Elimelech and both sons died in Moab, leaving the three women with choices to make.
- C** In levirate marriage, a dead man’s relative married his widow to protect the family line.
- D** Naomi was returning to Israel, but she believed her daughters-in-law should stay in Moab.
- E** “Grieveth” (KJV); “more bitter” (NASB). Naomi complained that God had turned His hand against her, making life unbearable.
- F** Hebrew wording (*dabaq*) indicates extreme loyalty, like attaching one object to another. It highlights a contrast between Ruth and Orpah.
- G** Moabites worshiped Chemosh, but Ruth embraced the God of Israel. She even used His covenant name in verse 17.
- H** A relative of Elimelech and “a prominent man of noble character” in Bethlehem (2:1). Ruth gathered grain in a field that he owned (2:3).
- I** The law encouraged “gleaning,” allowing the poor to gather grain that fell during the harvest. Often, workers were told to drop grain on purpose (Lev. 19:9-10; Deut. 24:19-22).
- J** Ruth’s impressive work ethic was a tangible demonstration of her loyalty to Naomi.
- K** Impressed by Ruth’s character, Boaz promised to take care of her and Naomi.
- L** Ruth had earned respect around Bethlehem because of her integrity and loyalty to Naomi.
- M** Old Testament writers often used the image of God’s wings to describe His protection. See Psalm 17:8; 36:7; 57:1; 61:4; 63:7; and 91:4.



NOTES

Loss (Ruth 1:11-15)

- After the deaths of her husband and two sons, Naomi determined to leave Moab and return to her tribal home in Judah.
- She encouraged her two Moabite daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth, to return to their own families where the prospects of remarriage were better. Orpah finally relented to this plan, but Ruth did not.

Loyalty (Ruth 1:16-18)

- In a moving speech, Ruth expressed a deep commitment to Naomi. She desired to live, die, and be buried among her mother-in-law's people.
- Ruth also made an oath of commitment to Naomi's God, asking the Lord to punish her if she separated from Naomi.
- Ultimately, Naomi stopped trying to persuade her.

Provision (Ruth 2:5-12)

- The women returned to the village of Bethlehem at the beginning of the harvest season (1:22). Ruth set out to glean grain that was left behind by harvesters in a field.
- Boaz, the owner of the field and a relative of Naomi's husband Elimelech, issued instructions to ensure Ruth's safety as she gathered grain. God divinely orchestrated this provision for Ruth and Naomi.

Summary Statements

In the midst of Naomi's tragedy, God demonstrated His care and sovereignty.

- 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.

Memory Verse

Ruth 1:16

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.)



For additional commentary, see the Leader Guide or Adult Commentary, available for purchase at [goExploreTheBible.com](https://www.goExploreTheBible.com).

ENGAGE

Bonus: How are grief and fear connected? What do we fear most in times of loss?

- 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.
- When grief and fear cloud your path, nothing comforts a heart and provides courage like knowing that God cares and controls every moment of your life.

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

EXPLORE

LOSS (RUTH 1:11-15)

Bonus: How can bitterness affect our decisions?

- Naomi had experienced unimaginable loss. Her family had moved to Moab during a famine, and her sons had married Moabite women. But the three men died there.
- In ancient times, widows and orphans were the most vulnerable people in society. While her own future seemed bleak, Naomi likely felt the weight of providing for her two daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth. She was moving back to Israel, but she believed the best option was for them to find husbands and raise children in Moab.
- Naomi’s words probably refer to levirate marriage, where a close family member married a relative’s widow to preserve the family line (Deut. 25:5-6). But Naomi was not interested in finding a new husband or having more sons, even if Orpah and Ruth were willing to wait.
- Orpah chose the reasonable route of returning to Moab. But Ruth “clung” to Naomi (see “Key Word F,” p. 57). Still, Naomi urged her to go back home.

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 to both? (PSG, p. 113)

LOYALTY (RUTH 1:16-18)

What role does loyalty play in our relationships with God and others? What value does society place on loyalty? (PSG, p. 113)

Bonus: How would you define loyalty? What person best defines loyalty in your life?

- Rather than leaving, Ruth fully committed herself to Naomi. She also pledged to embrace Naomi’s country, home, people, and God. She promised to stick with her mother-in-law until death.
- Ruth’s words capture the beauty of true love. She opened her heart to her mother-in-law without hesitation and

begged for Naomi to accept her decision. Naomi did, and the two widows continued their journey to Bethlehem.

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

PROVISION (RUTH 2:5-12)

Bonus: Why is it important to nurture solid character and a good reputation?

- In Bethlehem, Ruth gained permission to glean in the field of a man named Boaz. In gleaning, poor people would follow harvesters and pick up grain that fell to the ground. The law ensured that workers would not pick up anything that was dropped, either accidentally or on purpose.
- Boaz, a relative of Naomi’s husband, noticed Ruth. Hearing his servant’s report about her, Boaz promised to take care of her if she would only glean in his fields.
- Ruth was astounded by Boaz’s kindness. When she asked him why he was extending such favor to a poor Moabite widow, he pointed to her character and her unshakable loyalty to Naomi. He also encouraged her to continue taking refuge under the wings of Israel’s God.

How does God’s provision impact the way you view the needs of your family during life’s uncertainties? (PSG, p. 116)

CHALLENGE

As a group, discuss how loss has had an impact on the personal faith of adults in the group.

What specific ways could your group minister to others most effectively during difficult seasons? (PSG, p. 117)

Encourage individuals to consider how times of loss and uncertainty has shaken their faith.

Who has walked alongside you through the pain? What are some life lessons you have learned from God and those He has graciously placed in your life? (PSG, p. 117)

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

FURTHER DISCUSSION



Scan here for additional discussion questions for this week’s study.

BIBLE SKILL (PSG, P. 116)

Use Bible study tools to learn more about a place in the Bible.

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.

Encourage adults to share what they know about the nation of Moab in Scripture. Direct them to work in groups of three or four to complete the Bible Skill activity on page 116 of the PSG. After a few minutes, allow volunteers to share what they learned from their research. Record their responses on the board. Challenge the group to consider the sacrifices Ruth was making by leaving Moab and resettling in Bethlehem.

OBJECT LESSON: AN 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 to serve as His hands and feet along the way. Ask: ***How does this compare to how God used Boaz to meet the needs of Ruth and Naomi?*** Discuss responses.

Point out that Boaz was a man of character, so he recognized the importance of Ruth's character as she struggled to provide for Naomi. Emphasize that while God can use anyone to accomplish His plans, He leans toward those who demonstrate loyalty to Him and to others. Challenge the group to examine their character and to make any changes necessary to make them more effective as God's servants in the world.

USING POWER APPROPRIATELY

The book of Judges provides the setting for Ruth's story. She is introduced as a powerless person, a Moabite woman resettling in the Israelite town of Bethlehem. In addition to being a foreigner, she is a widow. Politically, Moab was a longstanding enemy of the Israelites, including during the days of the judges (Judg. 3:12-30).

In addition to these sizable obstacles, Ruth also had to deal with a harsh family dynamic. Physically, Naomi had little to offer her daughter-in-law. Spiritually, Naomi ached with bitterness, blaming God for the losses she had suffered.

On the other side of the power spectrum, Boaz stood tall. He owned fields and had servants whose work enhanced his wealth. When he noticed Ruth, he could have treated her miserably, with little concern of being held accountable for his actions. Instead, he honored her with respectful courtesy. He noticed that she was powerless. He appreciated the way she worked tirelessly to gather some grain for her equally powerless mother-in-law.

The kindness of Boaz astonished Ruth. She pointed out to him the number of ways in which he had been attentive to her. When she asked him about the reason for his kindness, he affirmed her respect for Naomi. Then he turned Ruth's attention to the Lord.

Ruth had vowed to Naomi that she would worship and serve the God of Israel. With the kindness of Boaz, she experienced the blessing of being in the company of an Israelite who showed her the Lord's goodness. Boaz used his power in a way that honored the Lord.

The apostle Paul also wrote about the ways believers should utilize power. He instructed powerless Christian slaves in Ephesus to treat their masters with respect. He also directed powerful Christian masters to respect and protect their slaves (Eph. 6:5-9). Powerful and powerless disciples each have a responsibility to honor God with their lives.