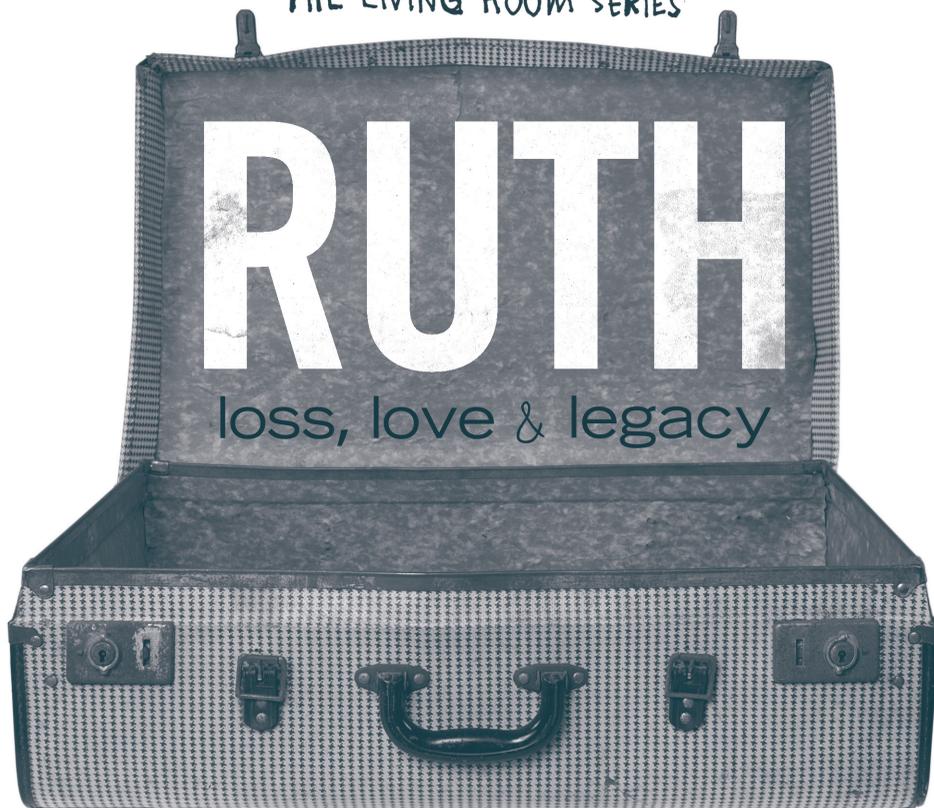


THE LIVING ROOM SERIES



kelly minter

LifeWay Press®
Nashville, Tennessee

Published by LifeWay Press®

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Reprinted February 2017

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ISBN 978-1-4158-6693-1

Item 005189427

Dewey decimal classification: 222.35

Subject heading: BIBLE. O.T. RUTH \ CHRISTIAN LIFE \ FAITH

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Printed in the United States of America

Adult Ministry Publishing
LifeWay Church Resources
One LifeWay Plaza
Nashville, TN 37234-0152

Author's literary agent is D.C. Jacobson & Associates LLC, an Author Management Company, www.dcjacobson.com.

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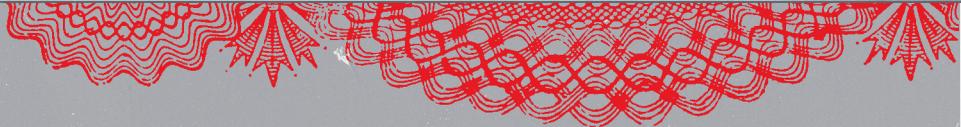
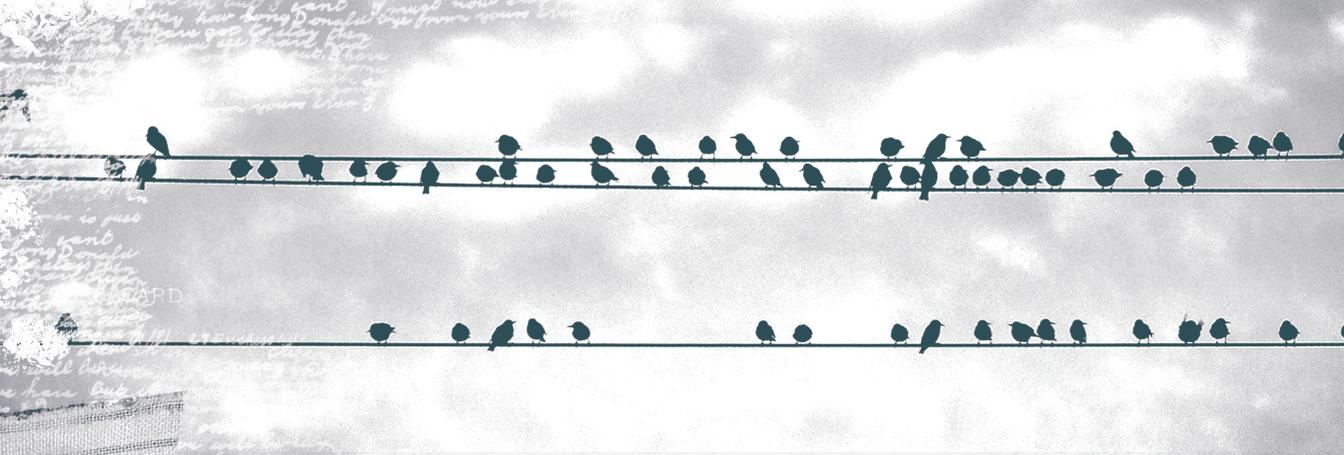
MEET THE AUTHOR KELLY MINTER

**KELLY MINTER IS AN AUTHOR, SPEAKER, SONGWRITER,
AND SINGER.**

SHE IS PASSIONATE ABOUT WOMEN DISCOVERING CHRIST THROUGH THE PAGES OF SCRIPTURE. SO WHETHER IT'S THROUGH A SONG, STUDY, OR SPOKEN WORD, KELLY'S DESIRE IS TO AUTHENTICALLY EXPRESS CHRIST TO THE WOMEN OF THIS GENERATION. IN A CULTURE WHERE SO MANY ARE HURTING AND BROKEN, SHE LOVES TO SHARE ABOUT THE HEALING AND STRENGTH OF CHRIST THROUGH THE BIBLE'S TRUTH.

Her first Bible study, *No Other Gods*, is the first installment of *The Living Room Series*, which helps women unveil the false gods in their lives for the ultimate purpose of discovering freedom in the one, true God. *Ruth: Loss, Love & Legacy* focuses on the inspiring story of Ruth presented in the same *Living Room Series* format (studies can be done in any order). Also in the series are *Nehemiah: A Heart That Can Break* and *What Love Is: The Letters of 1, 2, & 3 John*.

Kelly writes extensively and speaks and leads worship at women's conferences, retreats, and events. She recently recorded *Loss, Love & Legacy* specifically written to complement this study. She also has worship records entitled *Finer Day* and *Hymns and Hallelujahs*. To view more of Kelly's music projects, books, studies, and calendar, visit www.kellyminter.com.



INTRODUCTION

I WAS SITTING WITH A FRIEND ACROSS A SMALL WOODEN TABLE IN ONE OF MY FAVORITE NASHVILLE CAFES, CHIN IN HAND, WHEN IN A WILTING TONE I EXPRESSED HOW MUCH I REALLY WANTED TO WRITE A BIBLE STUDY ON THE BOOK OF RUTH.

I'M FAIRLY CERTAIN WE WERE THE ONLY TWO IN THE RESTAURANT HAVING THIS CONVERSATION, THOUGH AT LEAST WE LOOKED LIKE EVERYONE ELSE WITH OUR NIFTY CHEESE PLATE. AFTER HAVING WRITTEN MY FIRST BIBLE STUDY *No Other Gods*, A TOPICAL STUDY ON CONFRONTING OUR MODERN-DAY IDOLS, I LONGED TO DELVE INTO A SPECIFIC BOOK AND LET SOMEONE ELSE'S STORY LEAD ME—PREFERABLY A WOMAN'S STORY IF POSSIBLE, AND MAYBE A WOMAN WHO KNEW BOTH SINGLE AND MARRIED LIFE, CHILDREN AND BARRENNESS, LOSS AND FULLNESS—THOUGH NOT TO APPEAR PICKY. I KNEW OF ONLY ONE PLACE TO TURN.

The Book of Ruth, nestled between Judges and 1 Samuel, is a short, four-chapter narrative that wraps together the human experience of loss, love, and legacy with the divine hope and sovereignty of a redeeming God. From its pages steps a wayfaring foreigner into the town of Bethlehem, amidst hardship and famine and tragedy, affecting the course of human history forever.

A widow turned wife, a servant turned heir, a childless foreigner turned mother, she was born in Moab but found her home in Israel. Ruth. The name that chimes a thousand notes of redemption for every woman who has ever been devastated by loss, struggled as a stranger, lived with the bitter, longed to be loved, fought for crumbs, or wept along the journey. She is an emblem of grace for every flawed and ailing sinner who has lived in her wake, not because of her own nobility but because of the One under whose wings she had come to trust—the God of Israel.

Because of Ruth's exquisite journey, her story becomes a remarkable setting for us to engage with God about our own stories. She is a flesh-and-blood example of integrity, kindness, purity, commitment, faith, and hard work. She is godliness with its sleeves rolled up, expressing her love for God even when she was profoundly devastated and left with a mother-in-law who had changed her name to "Bitter." (I think this means they weren't baking a lot of cookies together.) All this in the middle of a culture distinctly hostile to Israel's God.

Perhaps you can relate to Ruth's plight and her journey's challenges. You've struggled with the daunting dynamic of being a woman and a follower of Christ in an environment that doesn't always promote your beliefs or your gender. Or maybe you feel well supported but you've quietly wept in your singleness, longing for a man to choose you ... only you. Maybe you've been blessed with intimacy but you've been struggling to love that one person in your life you'd like to rename Bitter—or something else not as nice. Or maybe you've been completely shattered by a recent loss, or one far removed that has left a wound still bleeding. Or perhaps you've never done a Bible study before but the story of Ruth sounds intriguing and you're willing to give it a try.

No matter why you're here, I wholeheartedly welcome you to the *Living Room Series* where we will greet a woman from the pages of Scripture we will all be the better for knowing. And, of course, I invite you to do this in the context of a warm community where authenticity and vulnerability aren't so scary. That's why this book is filled with not only pages of Bible study but also recipes, original songs, a web site (kellyminter.com/the-living-room), and personal stories from Alli, Lauri, Carrie and Anadara—the four women who have studied, cooked, and eaten their way through this book (and *No Other Gods*) well before it ever made it to print. You will get to know their stories as we go, mostly finding that you are not alone, no matter where you are in your journey with God.

So grab your favorite recipes, closest friends, most exotic strangers (if you're up for it), darkest coffee, weightiest pen, and dearest Bible, and sink into your favorite living room.

Ruth and her God await you ...

Kelly

SESSION 01

TWO JOURNEYS

I CAN'T FORGET THE DAY I MET LORRAINE.

THE 60-YEAR-OLD, GRAY-HAIRED, LIGHT-HEARTED PILATES INSTRUCTOR WELCOMED A FRIEND AND ME INTO HER STUDIO WE NOW LOVINGLY DEEM, “LORRAINE’S HOUSE OF PAIN.” WHO KNEW SUCH A KIND LADY COULD MAKE ME CRY SO MUCH? THAT HOLDING MY LEGS IN THE AIR, GRABBING THE BOTTOMS OF MY FEET, OR MAKING PERFECT CIRCLES WITH MY TOES COULD BE SUCH TORTURE? THE TIGHTLY WOUND WILL SUFFER UNDER SUCH SEEMINGLY INNOCENT EXERCISES, I’M JUST SAYING. AND DO NOT LET A SWEET LITTLE NAME LIKE *Lorraine* FOOL YOU—SHE’S STRONGER AND MORE NIMBLE THAN I’LL EVER BE, WHICH IS TERRIBLY DE-MOTIVATING WITH ALL MY “YOUTH” AND STUFF.

Despite the challenges, I was determined to master the exercises to make my bad back better. I was tired of being in pain, weary of not being able to do things I wanted to do like sit, run, hold children, or bend down to slide chocolate chip cookies out of the oven. Lorraine insisted I could get better if I agreed to one thing: strengthen my core. It sounded a little hocus-pocus, but I was desperate and apparently wanting for new forms of affliction.

A year later and Lorraine’s House of Pain continues to be a place where I moan and whimper for an hour a session but, surprisingly enough, with almost no back pain. After several months and a lot of hard work, my core is strong. It is silly how enthused I am about the whole thing. My friends are sick of hearing me talk about it. They really don’t want to see me touch my toes, again; they’re not nearly as interested as you might think in my newly elongated spine.

But if you will allow me to tarry on the subject of *core* the spiritual parallels are inviting. Just as the cores of our physical bodies are engaged in everything we do, we must also give proper significance to our spiritual cores. I remember this truth taking shape for me when I noticed this striking concept, “For physical training is of some value, *but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come*” (I Tim. 4:8, emphasis added).



I'd never realized that godliness held value for *all* things. I suppose I hadn't thought of it being this practical, this all-encompassing. For church and extra spiritual activities, yes, but for regular stuff, I wasn't so sure. In addition to such a sweeping statement, Paul (the writer of Timothy) said that godliness holds promise not only for eternal life but for our immediate, present, actual lives. This means it holds promise at our jobs, in our relationships, at the store, in our marriages, on vacation, and at the gym. Godliness affects things. It matters not just on the front row of church or when we get to heaven but in all things, right now.

Like anything, strengthening our spiritual cores requires training and a measure of dedication. It involves time and commitment and a little direction, which is where a Bible study can be really effective. But it mostly requires our hearts. Going through religious motions doesn't usually prove terribly rewarding in the spiritual realm. I only know this because I've spun a lot of energy on some pretty admirable activities that left me exhausted and frustrated when my heart wasn't engaged.

This heart-engagement is where Lorraine always gets me in Pilates. "Don't skimp on the old family recipe," she likes to say when I'm slacking in the middle of a routine exercise, half-heartedly plowing through the motions. I think the point is for us not to let familiarity with something make us think we don't have to give it our all. Seeking God with our whole hearts through the age-old avenues of Scripture, prayer, and fellowship will always prove valuable, no matter how many times we've heard it.

Because I know how easy it is for me to let the core spiritual disciplines slip (skimping on the family recipe), I really don't want you to skimp over the next six weeks when so much is at stake. The Book of Ruth is so infinitely remarkable that I want you to drink the last dregs of it, sipping on truths and principles that the Holy Spirit uniquely reveals to you—things I may never have conceived. So if you get interested in a cross reference, read the story around it; if a verse tugs at your heart, put everything down for a minute and refresh yourself from its well. You've got permission to dig, scrape, investigate, and go beyond the borders of these pages. And if all this sounds too daunting and over-achieverish, just stick to what's in front of you, but give it your all for the next six weeks—your core will be so happy!

DAY 01 TWO JOURNEYS

FLEEING HOME

When you grow up wearing proper Sunday School dresses and learning about Adam and Eve before you've heard of Bert and Ernie, it's sometimes hard to determine when that first introduction took place, how you felt, and what you thought. I could have been sucking on a pacifier the first time I heard Ruth's name. In most ways, I am really grateful that I got to hear both the great and not-so-great names of Scripture resounding off the walls before words had been formed on my tongue.

But if we're talking about cognizant memories, my first encounter with the Book of Ruth took place as I sat in the hunter green pews of Reston Bible Church—the church my dad founded a year before I was born and still pastors—listening to a borderline gruff, elderly Englishman named Major Ian Thomas. He spoke on the Book of Ruth for almost two hours, and if I recall correctly, I was spellbound. That's saying a lot for a 12-year-old who might prefer being somewhere else on a Friday night.

I remember Major Thomas not merely presenting the text but also exposing the fascinating symbolism that runs throughout the Book of Ruth like a camouflaged thread. He spoke as if he were tugging on some mysterious code, revealing the real story behind the story (revelations we will soon discover). For effect he really should have carried a magnifying glass and worn a fedora, but he was distinctly against hats in the sanctuary so this probably wouldn't have flown. This great man of the faith has since gone on to be with the Lord, but I am grateful to remember him as someone who kindled a love in my heart for the person of Ruth and, more importantly, her God—even Jesus hinted at in the pages of this Old Testament story.

Today I am anxious to begin surveying the context and setting of this amazingly small but powerful book with you. If you're like me, you'd just as soon skip the preliminary information and get right to the action, except it makes our understanding of Ruth's story so much richer when we understand the surroundings. It's sort of like pulling back the shades in your hotel room and remembering, "Oh yeah, I'm in Chicago!" To me, that always means three things: real coffee, tiramisu, and pizza. Context tells us a lot.

www.lifeway.com/ruth
Watch: Naomi's
Disappointment With God

Carefully read Ruth 1:1-2. Elimelech's family lived in Bethlehem-Judah, and they were called _____.

To be an Ephrathite simply meant to be from Bethlehem-Judah, which was also known as Ephratah. It will be important for us to know throughout our study that Bethlehem was in ancient Israel, so that meant Elimelech's family were also considered Israelites. (Sort of like being a New Yorker also means you're an American.)

Why did Elimelech and Naomi leave Bethlehem-Judah for Moab? (Circle your answer below.)

- There was a famine in Bethlehem.**
- There was a war in Bethlehem.**
- They had relatives in Moab.**
- A judge ordered them to leave.**

Read Genesis 19:30-38. What do these verses say about the origin of the Moabites?

For more insight read Deuteronomy 23:3-6 and Judges 3:12-14. Describe from these verses the relationship between the Israelites and the Moabites.

The people had a history of turning to God during seasons of punishment but forgetting Him during seasons of prosperity.

Understanding the history of Moab and their relationship with Israel changes the tone of Elimelech and Naomi's journey. It's not like they were Americans heading to Canada. This was an enemy of Israel, a nation the Lord had historically commanded His children not to be in relationship with. Although he applauds Elimelech's zeal to take care of his family, Matthew Henry eloquently wrote, "I see not how his removal into the country of Moab, upon this occasion, could be justified ... the seed of Israel were now fixed, and ought not to remove into the territories of the heathen."¹

After the Lord freed the Israelites from the land of Egypt, they wandered in the desert for 40 years. They lived as vagabonds, their tents pulled up and pinned down over and over like finicky campers. Then one day Joshua led them across the Jordan River into Canaan, the

land of promise that flowed with milk and honey but, perhaps more importantly, with permanence. God had given them a home, and they didn't need to look elsewhere.

The city of Bethlehem, where Elimilech's family lived, was a hill country in the land of Judah and part of the promised land of Canaan. Interestingly enough, *Bethlehem* means "House of Bread," and there hadn't been much of that since their departure. So perhaps you're thinking, *If God had given the Israelites a permanent place to live where He promised to take care of them, why the famine?*

Read Judges 2:11-19. Do you see any evidence for why there was a famine in the land? If so, explain your answer.

For Discussion: When Alli, Lauri, Carrie, Anadara, and I studied this Scripture, one question that came up was, *Does God still work like this today?* Use Scripture to support your thoughts.

What tended to happen to the people when a judge died (v. 19)?

Now look back at Ruth 1:1 (NIV) and fill in the blank: "In the days when the _____ ruled, there was a famine in the land."

It's important to note that the story of Ruth took place during the time of the Judges, a period of approximately 450 years when God raised up judges to rule over Israel. Clearly these verses in the Book of Judges show us the people had a history of turning to God during seasons of punishment but forgetting Him during seasons of prosperity.

Personal Take: Are you currently in a season of trial, blessing, or both? Describe how your current circumstances negatively or positively affect your relationship with God.

Escaping to easier terrain is all too tempting when we're weary in hardship.

I'm so happy to write that I'm in a great season at the moment. My family is strong, my relationships sweet, and I'm in a new house with a walnut tree in the yard that intermittently drops hard green walnut balls onto my roof that sound like miniature bombs while I write. It is a wonderful time. Although I will be honest in saying that it's in seasons like these when I have to be more purposeful about my pursuit of the Lord in Scripture, study, and prayer. These don't come quite as naturally when life is smooth and the walnut trees are bombing.

I want to close the day by drawing Elimelech and Naomi's plight back to our own. Here they stood on the precipice of a sticky decision—to stay in the arid land of God's choosing or to flee to the bountiful one God had roped off. We know that Elimelech chose the latter, but the question today is *What will you choose?* Perhaps the Lord has you in difficult circumstances and the attractive land of Moab is an alluring decision away. Escaping to easier terrain is all too tempting when we're weary in hardship.

Ponder Galatians 6:9 and Hebrews 11:24-26, and then write about how these verses encourage you to stand firm where God has you. Be as thoughtful and detailed as you can.

Be encouraged by this quote from Matthew Henry, reminding us that fleeing our circumstances doesn't necessarily remedy them. "It is our wisdom to make the best of that which is, for it is seldom that changing our place is mending it."²

God is present right where you are. Stay put and stand firm. It is always more blessed to be under the care of His will than anywhere else—no matter how green the grass or bountiful the walnut trees.

DAY 02 TWO JOURNEYS

RETURNING HOME

The first chapter of Ruth is a story of two journeys: The journey from Bethlehem to Moab and the journey from Moab back to Bethlehem. The first is briefly described in the two verses we studied yesterday, but the second journey, the journey of return, takes the rest of the chapter.

Before looking at today's reading, reread Ruth 1:1-2 . Who were the four people who traveled from Bethlehem to Moab?

Just to refresh your memory, all four family members were from Bethlehem and were called what? (Circle your answer below.)

Bethlehemites Canaanites Ephrathites Amorites

They were from the town of Bethlehem and the nation of _____ . (See the top of p. 12 if you need help.)

Now that we've got some of the technical details down, read verses 3-7 through a couple of times. Take a moment to appreciate the gravity of such tragic circumstances.

One of the most significant differences between the journey from Bethlehem to Moab and the journey from Moab back to Bethlehem is the difference in people. Naomi was the only one to take both journeys. Though she left with two sons and a husband, she was returning with two women who were not her flesh and blood.

Write the names of the daughters-in-law below, their nationality, and the sons of Naomi's that each of them had married. (See 4:10 to deduce who Ruth and Orpah were married to.)

_____	_____	_____
name	nationality	married to
_____	_____	_____
name	nationality	married to

We are to love and reach out to all people.

According to I Kings 11:1-4, why might it have been a problem for Mahlon and Kilion to marry Moabite women?

God's ways are not always the most practical, popular, or unopposed, but they are the most blessed.

In Deuteronomy 7 the Lord commanded the people of Israel not to intermarry with certain nations. First Kings 11 shows us a specific example why entering into a covenant relationship with these nations presented a significant problem. Solomon's heart was led astray to other gods because of his marriages to women from other nations who didn't regard the one true God. Ultimately, his heart was not fully devoted to the Lord.

Note that God's commandments were not against the races of these people, but instead, their rejection of Him. It is the same concept found in 2 Corinthians 6:14, where the apostle Paul instructed us not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers. We are to love and reach out to all people, but we are not to compromise our love for the Lord by attaching ourselves by covenant to those who don't share this same love. This principle in Ruth, Deuteronomy, and 1 Kings will be of even greater significance to us in coming days, so hang on to it.

Why did Naomi decide to return to Bethlehem (Ruth 1:6-7)?

Personal Response: Have you ever turned back to God out of desperation or necessity? If so, describe it here.

Read Luke 15:11-20 and list as many similarities as you can find between Naomi's situation and the son in this account.

I can't help but note that the driving force behind Naomi's choices to leave Bethlehem, and later Moab, was the same—a desire for physical nourishment. It would be especially hard for me, of all people, to fault anyone for being motivated by such a thing as food. If Moab had been known for its fresh mozzarella and olive oil, I might have moved too. But sarcasm aside, the catalyst behind both journeys seems to

be governed by the physical and not the spiritual. On both occasions their physical circumstances and not necessarily the God of their circumstances dictated their decisions.

I deeply admire some of my friends for heeding the Lord over their natural desires. Three in particular have chosen to stay in tough marriages when divorce continually cries as the easier option. I went to elementary school with a friend who unexpectedly got pregnant in college and, while abortion may have seemed the obvious answer, she committed to having the baby who is now a beautiful, blonde teenager. God's ways are not always the most practical, popular, or unopposed, but they are the most blessed. I wonder how Elimelech and Naomi's lives would have been different had they been directed by the supernatural over the natural and stayed in the land of Judah.

Personal Response: Have you ever allowed your circumstances to direct you instead of leaving room for God's direction? In what specific ways can you act on God's leading?

For Discussion: I can understand why Naomi decided to return to her homeland when she found out the famine had passed, but why do you think Ruth and Orpah decided to go with her? (Remember, Naomi's family moved to a foreign country out of need, but what might Ruth's and Orpah's reasons have been?)

While Naomi was in the land of Moab she heard that the Lord had come to the aid of His people (v. 6). The great pastor and scholar, Warren Wiersbe, made this moving statement, "How sad it is when people only *hear* about God's blessing, but never experience it, because they are not in the place where God can bless them."³

I can identify with Naomi when I hear from the distant land of my own choosing about the warm glow of God's provision and presence for someone or somewhere else. I have pouted against Him in my disobedience, angry that I wasn't experiencing Him but not wanting to change my allegiances either. In these times I often experience God's gracious pursuit of me even when my heart is cold and far away. Notice that Naomi's return to Bethlehem wasn't necessarily out of a longing

for her God but for His provision. Yet God used this basic desire for food to pull her back to Himself, wanting to bless her immeasurably.

Personal Response: Think of a time when God pursued you—even drew you—when you were in a far-off place. Jot down just enough detail to remind you of the story for sharing with the individuals in your group.

When Naomi heard that God had come to help her people in Bethlehem, she and her daughters-in-law prepared to return home (v. 6). My friend April noted the word *prepared* and gave me a mini-sermon over lunch about how it takes preparation to return home. She thought of all the things that would have encompassed for Naomi, Ruth, and Orpah; and she likened it to her own spiritual journey, remembering the things that turning back to God required of her. She left me with Psalm 16 as a benediction—a fitting tie-in about the place God intends for us to dwell.

In closing meditate on Psalm 16:1-6. If you need to return to God in some way, write about the preparations you're willing to make. If you are where you need to be, write about the details of verses 5-6.

God's grace is always positioned for anyone who will simply come.

No matter where you find yourself today—flourishing in His presence or struggling on your own terms—bread is always available at His table for anyone willing to return.

DAY 03 TWO JOURNEYS

WEEPING FORWARD

For the past few months I taught a Wednesday night Bible study for some fabulous women from The Next Door ministry in downtown Nashville. This ministry assists its residents who have recently been released from prison and helps them successfully transition back into free society. Each woman agrees to live on its premises for six months, participate in counseling, attend a weekly Bible study, work a solid job, address her addictions, and assume other responsibilities. As you can imagine, it's a spicy group where raw is in and sugarcoated is most definitely out. They need all their energy for survival, so there's not a lot left over for religious affectation. Their honesty and vulnerability is what I love so much about these women, mostly because when God hits their lives, it's the real deal. You can't fake transformation in shoes like theirs.

These girls are some of the most courageous women I know, forging ahead on a journey that will take them back to the place from which they came—the outside world. Many seek to return to family, distant homes, past careers, and dear friends. They hope for fresh starts and new lives, all of them convinced that success is only possible if they return changed. Going back the same person is not an option.

Naomi's journey is strikingly similar. Today we find her packing her bags and hitting the road back to Judah. We find her returning to the place she left. She's hardly the same person, but in this case the change is not necessarily for the better. She is heading back without her husband or sons, bitter at God, and with two trailing daughters-in-law she wishes would just leave her alone already because she's not in the in-law, let's-have-tea mood right now. This is not the way I want my Next Door girls to return to their homes, but then again, Naomi probably never imagined it this way either, and who can blame her despairing posture? How gracious that God was already in Bethlehem waiting for her, waiting for whoever else would choose to come with her, stranger or not. Naomi just didn't know it yet. We'll see in the weeks to come that God's grace is always positioned for anyone who will simply come, often for the ones who don't even know it.

Today's reading is Ruth 1:7-14. Slowly take in all the details.

Naomi said, “May the LORD show kindness to you, as you have shown to your dead and to me” (v. 8). The word “kindness” is an unfortunately weak translation of the Hebrew word *hesed*, a huge word throughout the book. It is described this way by a few different authors:

A strong relational term that wraps up in itself an entire cluster of concepts, all the positive attributes of God—love, mercy, grace, kindness, goodness, benevolence, loyalty, covenant faithfulness: in short, that quality that moves a person to act for the benefit of another without respect to the advantage it might bring to the one who expresses it.⁴

Israel associated it [*hesed*] with Yahweh’s covenant relationship with her ... despite her waywardness, Yahweh always stood steadfastly by Israel in “covenant loyalty.”⁵

Love, grace, mercy, kindness—all of the positive acts of devotion that flow out of a covenantal relationship.⁶

I want to emphasize the word *hesed* because it represents a significant theme throughout the book and will be used several times.

Briefly describe *hesed* in the margin using your own words.

Given that the word was often used as a unique, covenant-love between God and Israel, how is it significant that Naomi asked God to show *hesed* to Ruth and Orpah?

For Discussion: Has someone shown you *hesed*? If so, describe the person and what this extraordinary love means to you.

Even though I’ve read this story many times, for some reason I always thought Naomi urged Ruth and Orpah to stay in Moab *before* they set out on their trip.

Where did Naomi’s discussion with her daughters-in-law actually take place (v. 7)?

My friend wept, but she wept forward.

Note that Naomi, Ruth, and Orpah had packed their bags, left their homes, and had gotten down the road when Naomi started urging them to go back. It's sort of like being a kid on vacation, stuffed in the family station wagon, six hours from home when you start fighting with your siblings and your dad promises he's not afraid to turn this car right around if everyone doesn't shape up. The terrible thought of turning around after getting so far down the road usually prompted a temporary truce for the Minter kids—at least for five more minutes.

Although there will be weeping in this life, the direction in which we weep is what truly matters.

What reason did Naomi first give them for returning to Moab?

In verse 10, who turned back? (Circle your answer below.)

Ruth Orpah both Ruth and Orpah neither

Naomi realized she had two very determined and committed in-laws on her hands. When they didn't take her hint, she kicked up her argument a notch as if to say, "The only reason you're following me to Bethlehem is because I'm your only hope for another husband. Even if I got married and pregnant with another son tonight, you'd have to wait 20 years for him to grow up, and that might be a little sketchy anyhow. So your best bet is just to cut me and your losses and find another husband your own age in Moab who can take care of you. Oh, and also, the Lord's hand has totally gone out against me—just in case the other stuff I mentioned wasn't convincing enough."

After Naomi's compelling argument, verse 14 says, "At this they _____ again."

One of my closest friends moved from Boone, North Carolina, to Nashville three years ago. She had lived in Boone for 20 years and had made a home whose roots held almost as firm as the surrounding Appalachian Mountains. Leaving was not really an option until the Lord opened up a very specific job for her in Nashville and the Holy Spirit's leading became even stronger than those mountains she awoke to every morning. Through months of tears and grief, she packed her bags, made the journey, and dug a new foundation in Tennessee. Fortunately for me, she landed about a mile down the road. My friend wept, but she wept forward.

Verse 14 is one of the most meaningful verses to me in all of Scripture because it poignantly reminds me that although there will be weeping in this life, the direction in which we weep is what truly matters.

According to Ruth 1:7-14, who wept going forward and who wept going backward? Describe your answer below.

Personal Take: The verses say Orpah kissed her mother-in-law good-bye, but Ruth clung to her. What do you think motivated their decisions? There's not necessarily a "right" answer, but given what you know so far, be as thoughtful as you can.

This idea of weeping in different directions is very relevant to us. In the following passages compare and contrast both characters. Specifically, how did their grief affect their direction?

**Apostle Paul
Acts 20:22,36-38**

**Rich Young Man
Mark 10:17-22**

The apostle Paul wept but didn't allow his grief to stop his forward motion while the rich young man walked away from Christ with great sadness. It's difficult to point a finger at Orpah or the rich young ruler because we too may have turned back in the face of loss or adversity. But how great the honor and reward of Ruth and Paul who, in their tears, kept walking forward.

Personal Response: Are you in a season of grief that makes you want to stop or turn around? Have you ever experienced moving forward with the Lord even in the midst of weeping? Write about your experience below.

Be encouraged. God sees your tears. Cry them, wipe them, feel them, but don't let them stop you. It's possible to cry *and* walk.

DAY 04 TWO JOURNEYS

A LONG OBEDIENCE

Does it feel like we're creeping through the Book of Ruth? I realize we're only to verse 14 and it's taken us three days to get here, but for whatever it's worth, I'm really enjoying the slow pace as we wade the depths of such a rich book. Any faster and we might miss the buried diamonds and concealed treasures. I'd like to think we're smelling the roses as we go, sort of like my niece, Maryn, who's just learning to walk and pauses with every step to pick up the exciting pebble or tattered leaf. Of course she can only pick up one new item at a time because she carries her toothbrush with her wherever she goes—she's into hygiene. If she could speak beyond her excessive vocabulary of "No" and "Mama" (short for her dog, Murphy, *not* her mother who birthed her), she might be saying, *Why rush through life when you've got this amazing toothbrush to examine?* It will help us to harness this attitude.

Read Ruth 1:15. (See what I mean?)

It's interesting that even after Orpah went home, Naomi refused to abandon her In-laws-Turn-Back campaign. She wasn't going down easily.

How many times did Naomi urge Ruth to turn back (vv. 8-15)?

Name two reasons why Naomi encouraged Ruth to go back (v. 15).

Personal Take: Why do you think Naomi was so adamant about not having Ruth and Orpah return to Bethlehem with her?

Although the text really doesn't tell us, Warren Wiersbe suggests that it's possible Naomi was trying to cover the fact that her sons had married Moabites (outside the covenant nation of Israel). If she returned home alone, perhaps no one would ever know.⁷

Obedience to God is often wrought with a slew of obstacles that persuade us to change our minds.

Whatever the reason might have been, we just can't miss how many times Ruth had to deflect Naomi's discouraging persuasions to turn back. This is an important principle, as obedience to God is often wrought with a slew of obstacles that persuade us to change our minds. I used to think that my choice to obey in any given situation was a one-time decision, but I now realize that obedience might mean having to make that same choice several times in a week, month, or year. We saw in yesterday's reading that Orpah successfully dodged Naomi's first deluge of discouragement (v. 10), but after Naomi's second and third push, she gave in.

Personal Response: Describe a time when you committed to obedience but experienced defeat after one or two obstacles. OR, describe a time when, by God's grace, you held firm even in the midst of several trials or temptations to respond otherwise. What do you think preserved your obedience?

I find the idea of sustained obedience difficult in a myriad of situations but distinctly so when it comes to any kind of addiction. Just yesterday I had coffee with one of my amazingly talented musician friends who is a recovering alcoholic. To quote Friedrich Nietzsche (of all people), my friend's commitment to stay dry is "A long obedience in the same direction."⁸ There is rarely a day in his industry when the temptation is not present in some form. And yet for over two years he has relied on the strength and grace of God to refuse every alluring drop, a sustained obedience I'm convinced rises to the heavens as a fragrant aroma to our Savior.

Often times I can closely relate to Orpah, who made the right decision once but couldn't hang on after further persuasions. But now I am learning the art of prolonged obedience as modeled so gracefully by Ruth and my musician friend. This principle makes me think of Joseph and a period when his master's wife persistently tried to seduce him.

Read Genesis 39:6b-10 and fill in the blank from verse 10:

"Though she spoke to Joseph _____, he refused to go to bed with her or *even be with her.*"

Only a love for Christ will sustain a long-term commitment to obedience.

I wonder how many times Joseph had to choose obedience in the face of temptation. He wouldn't have escaped her seductive trap had he only stood firm once. Instead, he was faced with making the same decision for righteousness day after day, much like Ruth stood firm in the face of Naomi's multiple persuasions. But I would hate for us to walk away from today's reading thinking that all we need is a little more willpower. I don't think Ruth's and Joseph's determined obedience had much to do with willpower at all, and to think so only encourages us to live by our own strength and self-righteousness. Instead, we see their motivation anchored in something far greater than their inner resolve.

You'll have to glance at tomorrow's reading to answer this, but compare Joseph's statement to his master's wife (Gen. 39:9) with Ruth's statement to Naomi (Ruth 1:16-17). Whom did Joseph and Ruth both reference?

In what way did God factor into their obedience?

We simply cannot miss that Ruth's and Joseph's commitment to obedience stemmed from their commitments to God. This is an enormous truth that will sustain us through times of temptation and trial that urge us to forsake the path we're on. We won't be able to last if our motivation is based on anything but our relationship with God. We may be able to resist once or twice like Orpah, but only a love for Christ will sustain a long-term commitment to obedience.

Personal Response: Because enduring obedience hinges on our love for Jesus, can you pinpoint any weakness in your trust, love, or belief in Him that is affecting your resolve to obey?

Look back at today's fill-in-the-blank verse from Genesis and notice the italicized words. Not only did Joseph refuse to go to bed with her, but he also refused to *even be with her*. Joseph changed his

It's easy to kid ourselves and justify our behavior when our hearts aren't really committed to God.

circumstances so he wouldn't be tempted to sin against the God he loved so deeply. It's easy to kid ourselves and justify our behavior when our hearts aren't really committed to God. But when we grasp His love and the truth that obedience is for our freedom, we will change our circumstances to protect our environment to obey. Perhaps no one changed her circumstances more than Ruth when she decided to leave her people, false gods, and homeland for the God of Israel.

Personal Response: Do you need to make a life change for the preservation of obedience? It can be large or small. Write about it here.

Ruth and Joseph each showed enormous resolve as they walked out their obedience to God while doing whatever it took to preserve such obedience. The Book of James touches on this beautifully.

Close by meditating on these fitting verses as you seek to live out a long obedience: James 1:2-4,12.

“Consider it a great joy, my brothers, whenever you experience various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. But endurance must do its complete work, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing. ... Blessed is a man who endures trials, because when he passes the test he will receive the crown of life that He has promised to those who love Him” (HCSB).

DAY 05 TWO JOURNEYS

WHEREVER YOU GO

I burned my scrambled eggs this morning. I've been picking up farm fresh brown eggs from a local farm for the past four months, and I've gone a little crazy with my egg intake. Who knows what this has done to my cholesterol level, but doggone it if the stuff that's clogging my arteries isn't the healthiest, most organic sludge available. Nonetheless, the smell is really bad, and my dear friend with whom I share my home was not so pleased when she walked in to discover I had accidentally left the eggs on the stove until they were burned beyond recognition. She had the instinctive but not so helpful urge to vigorously light candles in every room so our house could smell like rotten eggs with a hint of honey-ginger or red currant, depending on which room we were in. I am now desperately trying to open every window, but we just moved into this 1930s house and most of the windows are painted shut. I'm thinking this is a fire hazard, but more seriously, it puts us at risk for trapped burned-egg smell.

I mention this because it's all I can think about because it's all I can smell. It also has just a little—and I do mean little—to do with our reading today as we visit one of the most celebrated passages in Scripture. We will see the importance of spouses, roommates, friends, relatives, children, and coworkers sticking together in times of adversity—like when the eggs are burned and you can't open the windows ... or something like that.

I know you glanced at these two verses yesterday, but read Ruth 1:16-17, taking special note because this is the first time we really hear from Ruth.

Personal Take: Up to this point, Naomi had done all the talking, but then Ruth spoke up. Out of all the things she listed, write the words that resonate with you the most and explain why.

I love that in essence Ruth respectfully, but strongly, said, "Enough already!" She wiped her tears and got a little aggressive, kindly putting an end to Naomi's dissenting remarks. She had finally had enough, and

Learning the quality of gracious but bold speech can be a balm in bitter and complicated situations.

sometimes this isn't a bad place to be because it forces us to deal with the issue at hand.

In Ruth's case, how did her loving, yet firm, words to Naomi change her situation (v. 18)? (Underline your answer below.)

Naomi ...

got mad and ran ahead

stopped trying to persuade Ruth

disowned Ruth

hysterically cried

Ruth's eloquent speech to Naomi uncovers an incredible treasure in our reading: the power of the spoken word. Many times I've gotten so discouraged by Satan, my own weak flesh, or another opposing entity, that I've finally resorted to speaking out loud the truth of Scripture. Audibly praying and reading Scripture is a wonderful discipline to employ, especially when you are overwhelmed. But keeping Ruth's words to Naomi in mind, today we'll look specifically at the use of our spoken words—especially as they relate to the people in our lives.

Briefly sum up the central thought of each of these verses:

Proverbs 16:23-24 _____

Proverbs 18:13 _____

Proverbs 25:11 _____

Proverbs 27:5-6 _____

Your Take: How do these principles from Proverbs play out in Ruth's conversation with Naomi?

Just last night I asked a friend over to discuss some misunderstandings. I had discovered that I had offended her, and I wanted to make things right. In case you're wondering if I enjoy these kinds of conversations, think about being shoved off a high dive and you'll be right at my level of awkwardness. The good news is that we both spoke honestly to one another, cleared some things up, and left with a sense of relief. I realize this isn't the direction these discussions always go, but even despite the hard things we had to address, the conversation was healing.

Because I grew up in a home where we were taught to talk things out respectfully, I am amazed at how many people don't know how to have difficult conversations. I say this with not a hint of judgment, as I would have no idea either had my parents not taught us at an early age how to deal with conflict. Still, I'm surprised at how many people I've seen refuse to have hard conversations. Instead, they harbor anger and unforgiveness, never allowing for an honest exchange. Lack of honest communication has to be one of the ultimate destroyers of relationships, while learning the quality of gracious but bold speech can be a balm in bitter and complicated situations.

Without getting overly clinical with Ruth's eloquent speech, I want us to dissect some of the elements in the following passage:

**Circle the words that show Ruth's determination and strength.
Underline the words that show her love and support for Naomi.
Check the words that show her spiritual conviction.
Star the words that show her humility.
(Mark words as many times as you think they apply.)**

"Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die and there I will be buried. May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me" (1:16-17).

Now read verse 18 and take in Naomi's response to Ruth's words.

The NIV starts out with "When Naomi realized." It took Ruth's strong resolve mingled with humble love to finally convince Naomi that Ruth wasn't taking *no* for an answer. It took Ruth's words to make her realize this. Why? Because, governed by the Holy Spirit, our words have great strength. Sometimes we need to speak the hard word. Sometimes we need to speak the word of forgiveness or the word of accepting forgiveness. Other times we need to speak the loving, determined, or committed word. Always the humble word.

Matthew 5:23-24
Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.

Personal Response: I know we're wading into sensitive waters, but do you need to speak a word to someone? Matthew 5:23-24 talks about the importance of not delaying in certain circumstances. If you are sensing the Holy Spirit's nudge, write it here.

The verses we've studied today have been read at a million weddings and printed on as many cards, gracing relationships since the day Ruth spoke them. We memorialize her words in the context of loving friendships and brides and grooms who are so zealously in love that the rest of us have to go drown ourselves in cake. But the truth is that this famous speech was uttered amidst loss and hardship and in the face of much bitterness. Ruth's words did not usher in a honeymoon for her but rather a permanent home in a foreign land. As we close week 1 of studying this phenomenal book, the obvious questions become: *Are we so committed to Christ? Will we go where He goes? Stay where He stays? Will His people be our people? His Father our Father?* I'm really looking forward to answering these questions with you over the next five weeks. You have done a remarkable job.

WHEREVER YOU GO

Connie Harrington & Kelly Minter

When your cup's full, when your road is open
Or when you've lost your light
I'll cling to you when you're whole or broken
Cause we're all broken sometimes

Chorus

Wherever you go I'll go
Wherever you stay I'll stay
The steepest of the steps you take we'll take together
I'm never gonna turn around
My place is where you are found
The promise I give you now will be forever

Lend me your tears, the ones you cry the hardest
We'll water the seeds you sow
One day you'll wake up and joy will be your harvest
And peace will be your home

Chorus

Bridge

Your people will be my people
Your God will be my God
Where your feet go I will follow
You're where I belong

Chorus

Kelly Minter & Connie Harrington. Warner-Tamerlane Publishing Corp. (BMI),
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Publishing Corp. (BMI) Mintyfresh Music (ASCAP)



To purchase this song or CD go to
www.lifeway.com/ruth

CHICKEN ENCHILADAS

PRE-HEAT OVEN TO 350° SERVES 6-8

This is perhaps one of my all-time favorite dishes. It takes a little effort, but your group will love you for taking the time to tackle this one. (And it's even better the next day.)

- 6 chicken breasts (boiled 20 minutes; keep 2 cups broth)
- 2 cups canned chicken broth
- 8 burrito size tortillas
- 8 tablespoons picante sauce
- ½ cup tightly packed cilantro
- ½ cup sour cream
- 1 teaspoon cumin (I use more)
- 1 tablespoon flour
- ½ stick of butter
- 4 oz. grated jack cheese
- 4 oz. grated cheddar cheese
- 1 can black beans, optional

Directions:

In blender combine cumin, cilantro, sour cream, 1 cup canned chicken broth, and 1 cup reserved chicken broth. In skillet or saucepan, heat butter slowly and add flour until smooth. Slowly add 2 remaining cups of chicken broth until smooth and creamy (I usually add more flour to make it thicker). Add to sauce in blender. This is the "gravy."

To make enchiladas: Take each tortilla and fill with ⅓ cup shredded chicken and 1-2 tablespoons of picante sauce. Add black beans if desired. Roll tortillas and place in 9x13" pan, seam side down. Fill pan with gravy, completely covering the enchiladas. Sprinkle cheeses on top. Bake at 350° uncovered for 30 minutes.

MEXICAN ICE CREAM SUNDAE

SERVES 6

Lauri pulled this out during one of our last gatherings. We were putting the cinnamon whipped cream on anything we could find. It's a Lauri original, easy and sophisticated.

1 quart of good vanilla ice cream
1 cup sliced almonds
¼ cup sugar

Put almonds in small saucepan with ¼ cup sugar. Cook over low heat, stirring constantly until sugar has melted and coated the almonds. This will take a while, but don't try to speed it up! When all are coated, dump onto plate and allow to cool. These should break up pretty easily. Set aside.

CINNAMON WHIPPED CREAM

2 cups heavy whipping cream
¼ cup sugar
½ teaspoon cinnamon

In the mixer bowl of an electric mixer put the heavy whipping cream, ¼ cup sugar, and ½ teaspoon cinnamon. With the whisk attachment, blend at low speed until consistency is thick enough to turn it up. Turn to med-high speed until stiff peaks form on the end of the whisk. Test it to get the texture that you want. Just don't overbeat it. Set aside.

Assemble: Scoop some ice cream into a dish, add a scoop of whipped cream and sprinkle with almonds and extra cinnamon if you want! The best part is the leftover almonds to munch on and whipped cream to add to your coffee.