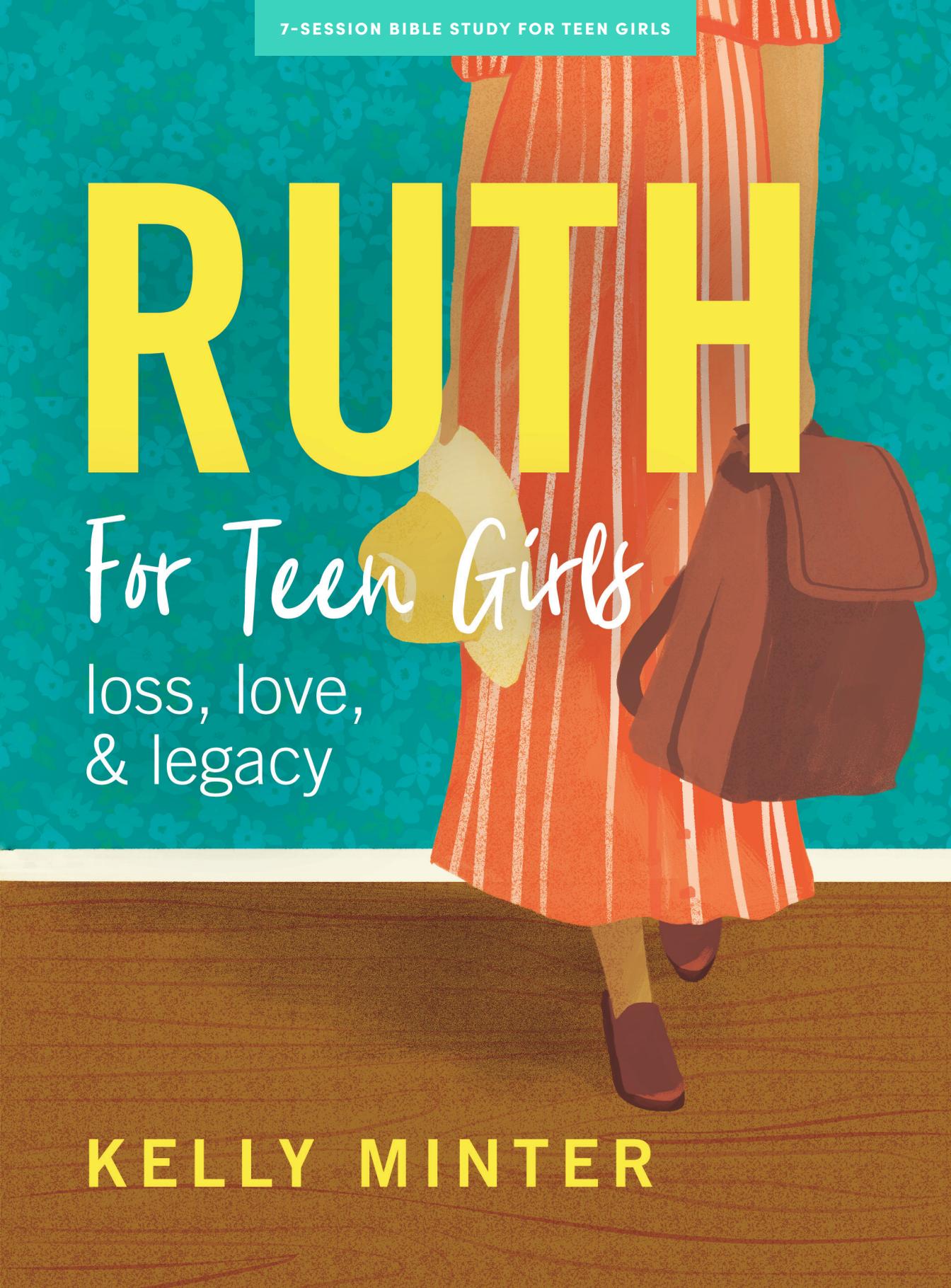


7-SESSION BIBLE STUDY FOR TEEN GIRLS

RUTH

An illustration of a woman from the waist down, wearing a long, flowing dress with vertical red and white stripes. She is carrying a large brown messenger bag on her right side and a yellow hat with a white band in her left hand. She is walking on a brown, textured ground. The background is a teal color with a pattern of small, light blue floral motifs.

For Teen Girls

loss, love,
& legacy

KELLY MINTER

RUTH

loss, love & legacy

KELLY MINTER

Lifeway Press®
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

KELLY MINTER is passionate about God's Word and believes it permeates all of life. The personal healing and steadfast hope she's found in the pages of Scripture fuels her passion to connect God's Word to our everyday lives. When she's not writing or teaching, you can find her tending her garden, taking a walk with friends, cooking for her nieces and nephews, riding a boat down the Amazon River, or walking through a Moldovan village with Justice & Mercy International.

Kelly's past Bible studies include *Encountering God: Cultivating Habits of Faith through the*

Spiritual Disciplines; Finding God Faithful: A Study on the Life of Joseph; No Other Gods: The Unrivaled Pursuit of Christ; All Things New: A Study on 2 Corinthians; What Love Is: The Letters of 1, 2 & 3 John; and Nehemiah: A Heart That Can Break.

Kelly partners with Justice & Mercy International (JMI), an organization that cares for the vulnerable and forgotten with the love of Jesus in the Amazon and Moldova. To find out more about JMI, visit justiceandmercy.org/cultivate. And to learn more about Kelly's Bible studies, books, music, and speaking schedule, visit kellyminter.com.

What's Inside



Personal Study Each week you'll have five days of personal study. I'll walk you verse-by-verse through the book of Ruth, with questions to help you process and apply what you read. After you finish a week of personal study, it's time to review the week with your group.



Group Guide These pages are intended to be done together in a group. There are questions throughout for discussion and a deeper understanding of Scripture. You'll want to begin your study together with Session One, and then complete the personal study for each week before meeting as a group again.

LEADING A GROUP?

Whether a large or small group, we have what you need to lead girls through *Ruth*. Visit lifeway.com/ruth for free leader downloads, including promotional resources and more.



STUDY QUESTIONS

In each day of study, you'll find a mix of basic observation questions along with the following types of questions that help you dig deeper in your study:

PERSONAL TAKE questions invite you to record your thoughts on the meaning of the Scripture passage being studied. Sometimes these questions have no right or wrong answers but require you to consider why you lean in a certain direction.

PERSONAL REFLECTION is a time to reflect on what you're learning—about God and yourself. These questions will challenge you to consider how what you're learning reminds you of who God is, impacts the way you see Him, shapes your character, and makes you more like Christ.

PERSONAL RESPONSE questions challenge you to take an action to apply or respond to what you're learning.

SESSION 1

Introduction



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

She was born in Moab but found her home in Israel. Ruth. The name that chimes a thousand redeeming notes for everyone 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 came to trust—the God of Israel.

Ruth's story runs the gamut of human experience, inviting us to engage with God about our own stories. Despite heartbreak and trial, she is an image of integrity, kindness, purity, commitment, faith, and hard work as a marginalized outsider and vulnerable widow. She is godliness with its sleeves rolled up. Perhaps most impressive, she is a committed God-fearer despite profound loss.

When I first wrote about Ruth and the book that bears her name, I was in my early thirties, single, and exiting not the land of Moab but the music industry. It was a time

in life when I particularly related to Ruth's aloneness, feeling like an outsider, longing for that one person to choose me. I wrestled with her resolve to follow God when it appeared that He had let her down, or at the very least let down the mother-in-law she lived with. As I write today, I have found God enduringly faithful even when I don't understand Him. And when I think of the book of Ruth, I don't only think of Ruth, Boaz, or Naomi but the redemption of Jesus Christ under whose wings each of us, no matter our past, is invited to take refuge.

It is one of my prayers that this study results in you loving Jesus more deeply. The whole book yearns forward toward Him. And if you're studying with others, I'm expectant for the fellowship you will experience that comes uniquely by being in God's Word together. You are not alone. Ruth and her God await you.

*Kelly
Minter*

Despite heartbreak and trial, Ruth is an image of integrity, kindness, purity, commitment, faith, and hard work as a marginalized outsider and vulnerable widow.

GROUP TIME

I don't know where you come from, and I don't know if you're new to Bible study, or if you've been coming since before your first birthday, or if you're just here because your friend convinced you to come. But I can't think of a better place to start. Maybe I shouldn't say that, but the book of Ruth is the gospel in a story, and I'm so excited to share it with you. I know you're going to be caught up in the drama of loss, and love, and legacy. I want to invite you not just in taking a journey through Scripture, but a literal journey because that's what this story is. As we walk through the book of Ruth together, and we're going to do it slowly and thoughtfully, give the Lord that space to work in your life, and when we get to the end of this, we will say, "Lord, I remember. I remember what you did in the past. I remember not just what You did, but who You are. That You are a redeeming God. That what You did then is still who You are today and it will be part of our memory."

READ RUTH 1:1-5.

What one word would you use to describe the overall tone of the opening verses of Ruth?

Okay, if you're like me, then you just said, "What does any of this mean?" So let's ground ourselves in the text. First of all, we see that this happened during the time of the Judges. So when was that? Well, it was one of the darker times full of chaos and unrest. After Joshua, who led the people into the promised land, died and before King Saul is anointed as king. That entire time in between is what we refer to as the time of the Judges. We can sum the time period up by saying, "Everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judg. 21:25, ESV).

Does this idea of doing what feels best seem familiar?

It certainly does to me. It feels a little bit like right now. This doesn't seem like an ancient idea. It feels like a right now idea. Let's dive in a little more here:

What does it look like when people give themselves to what is right in God's eyes versus what is right in their own eyes?

The entire book of Ruth goes against the grain of Judges. It's a bright beacon of light in the middle of darkness and chaos and unrest. During the time of the Judges, Israel would obey for a little while, but then they would move to disobedience. Then God would raise up a group of people to discipline them. Israel would cry out: "Oh, Lord, God, save us. We have sinned. We're ready to do what is right in Your eyes now." And then He would send a judge. These leaders would usually come and deliver them from the hand of their enemy. Then there would be peace, and all would be right with God for a split second, and then Israel would go right back to their disobedience. And again and again and again.

But I never want you to forget that the whole incredible, glorious, amazing, morally upright group of people in this story are happening in the middle of that time. You're going to be tempted to think that this story is taking place in Sunday school land, where everyone is neighbors and friends and they go to church together. But that is not what it was like.

Now, moving on we're going to see two people that follow God. Well, more than two. But we're going to see these people follow the one true God and His Word in the middle of a very dark and difficult time. This should give each of us courage and encouragement in our own dark places that God is still working today.

LOOK BACK AT RUTH 1:1-2. In your Bible, circle the name of every person and underline the name of every place.

Elimelech, Naomi, their two sons, Mahlon and Chilion left _____ to stay in the territory of _____ because there was a famine in the land.

Did you catch that? A famine in the land. There is a very good chance that the famine was part of God's discipline on Israel. The narrator doesn't tell us this, but we can guess from other Old Testament passages that this is something that God was using to bring them back to Himself.

If this is your first introduction to Moab, it sounds fine. But there's a whole messy story to go along with the Moabites. They descended from Lot and his relationship with one of his daughters. We also know that when God brought His people out of Egypt, the Moabites resisted passage for the Israelites coming out of Egypt. And just more sin and darkness from there including false gods and curses. But look at Deuteronomy 23:5: "Yet the LORD your God would not listen to Balaam, but he turned the curse into a blessing for you because the LORD your God loves you." He loved Israel and actually turned the curse into a blessing. He made something good out of something bad.

What does this verse teach us about the character of God, which the Israelites in Ruth's day were quick to forget?

So now that we understand Moab, we can get into this book. This Israelite family has gone to Moab, even with all of these issues and its history. And I want to tell you that things get better, but now we need to read verses 3-5.

READ RUTH 1:3-5.

So, now aren't you glad you started this study? Aren't you happy that I'm going to just leave you with all of this sadness here? But here's the thing: this is the reality of where this story starts. And what I will continue to repeat as we go week through week, is that we are not in a western society. We are in an ancient Israelite society that was patriarchal, and there were two things that the Israelites deeply valued. One was the survival of families through having descendants, and the other was family ownership of ancestral property. Those were the two things: descendants and land. That's what mattered to the Israelites.

So what's Naomi to do? She has lost her husband and her two sons. She is full of grief over her loss and has no one to carry on the family name and redeem that property in Bethlehem. We're starting with an impossible and unbearable set of circumstances, and we cannot skip over that. We need to feel that. Maybe that's not a big leap for you right now. Maybe you're already heavy from carrying loss and everything feels impossible.

But here comes the encouragement: We already know the end of this story. If you don't know it, you will soon, and you're going to love it. It gets a lot better because of God, because of the God of Israel, because of the God who loves you.

Why is it good news for you that God is still working?

As you work on your personal study this week, don't be intimidated by the names or the history. Just get in there and let yourself be lost in the story. Look for God's care for the hurting, care for the wounded, care for the outcast. Look for how God sees you. Look for ordinary people who are doing extraordinary things simply because they have chosen God to be their God and to obey what He says to do. Look for all of those things, but as you go, most importantly, look for pointers toward Jesus Christ because we will see that God is the hero of this story. And ultimate redemption, which is what this story is about, will come ultimately in the person of Jesus Christ.

So this is what we're in store for, and I hope you're ready. It is one of the most beautiful stories in all of the Bible.

PRAYER: Ask the Lord to lead you over the next seven weeks as we study His Word. That He would draw us closer as His daughters.



SESSION 2

Two
Journeys

Tn the early part of 2008, I began work on *Ruth*, my first verse-by-verse Bible study. More recently, it has been a pleasure to set my hand to updating and revising that original manuscript. Almost everything needs an occasional update. Think of how many iterations blue jeans go through in just ten years. For certain, the Bible never needs to *get with the times*, but as God's Word has continued to change me, so I wanted to bring to bear those revelations, that maturity, to this Bible study that is so dear to my heart.

I wonder if you've ever read through old diaries, cringing as you reminisce. *Why did I make such a big deal about that? Please tell me I never thought that!* Oh, the drama. And then in the same sitting, maybe on the same page, you come across some beautiful gem of wisdom, a piece of insight you didn't even think you were smart enough to possess, much less pen. Welcome to the life of an author. You go back and read across old works, a little embarrassed at certain points and a tiny bit wowed at others. This was certainly the case as I read back through *Ruth*.

If there's something that deserved more focus in this edition, it's the greater story in which Ruth's story sits. If the four chapters of Ruth were the only part of the Bible you'd ever read, you might get the impression that Ruth and Boaz were something of the world's original model citizens we'd all do our best to emulate. You might conclude that if you can just be more like them with a New Testament spin, you'll be a better Christian than when you first started. This is not completely wrong, but it misses the much larger story in which Ruth and Boaz are a part.

The Bible never needs to get with the times, but as God's Word has continued to change me, so I wanted to bring to bear those revelations, that maturity, to this Bible study that is so dear to my heart.

So, we'll keep an eye out for how the book of Ruth shines light on the greater whole of the Bible, and vice versa. We'll better understand where the book of Ruth sits within the narrative of the Old Testament. And we'll discover some of the prophetic ways the characters, and God's providence and provision, all point forward to ultimate redemption in Christ. We'll still fall in love with Ruth and Boaz because they're positively lovable people who have much to teach us. But we'll never take our eyes off the bigger story—God's grand drama of redemption.

If you don't already have some of this contextual knowledge, don't you worry one second. We'll do this together. If you have previously studied the book of Ruth, let me encourage you to explore. If you see a cross-reference in your Bible, chase it; if a verse tugs at your heart, pause and refresh yourself from its well. Everyone has permission to dig, scrape, investigate, and go beyond the borders of these pages. You're sure to discover wonderful insights—ones I've never thought of.

Lastly, and this is a big one, be looking not just for the practical portrayals of character qualities—love, generosity, faith, tenacity, courage, kindness, self-sacrifice, obedience—but also for what these reveal about the heart and nature of God. It's easy for us Bible students, us list-checker-off-ers, to try to better ourselves by implementing the tangible qualities we see in people like Ruth, Boaz, and, at times, Naomi. As we should! I can't imagine what rails I would have sailed over if not for godly examples of what being a serious follower of Christ looks like. At the same time, if we focus solely on behavioral changes and not on who God is throughout the story, we'll turn ourselves into well-groomed rule followers who appear holy on the outside but have little love or grace or dependence on Christ. And we don't want that, I know. So, we'll always, always keep our eyes open for the redemptive nature and work of God. Because if I've learned anything between the first and second writing, it's that His grace is everything.

**YOUR GOD
WILL BE
MY GOD.**

RUTH 1:16

DAY 1

FLEEING HOME

My first memorable encounter with the book of Ruth took place in the hunter green pews of Reston Bible Church—the church my dad and mom founded a year before I was born. We were there to hear a visiting speaker. The borderline gruff, elderly Englishman named Major Ian Thomas taught through the book of Ruth for almost two hours. I was captivated, which says a lot for a twelve-year-old who would have preferred being somewhere else on a Friday night. I remember Major Thomas exposing the fascinating symbolism that runs throughout Ruth as if he were tugging on a camouflaged thread with the skill of a seamstress.

The book of Ruth is prophetic in many respects. There is a story behind the story. Listening to Major Thomas is the first time I recall being taught the Old Testament Scriptures with the New Testament so compellingly in view. He is the one who helped me see the hints of Jesus woven throughout this short book. (I also remember him being distinctly against hats in the sanctuary, so make what you will of what has stuck with me.) This man of 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.

Today I'm anxious to begin surveying the historical context and setting of this short but powerful book with you. It will be like opening the curtains in your hotel room and remembering you're in New York City. This means world-class shows, coffee, and pizza are at hand. Context tells us a lot.

CAREFULLY READ RUTH 1:1-2. Elimelech's family lived in Bethlehem in Judah, and they were called

To be an Ephrathite meant to be from Bethlehem in Judah, which was also known as Ephrathah. Since Bethlehem was in ancient Israel, Elimelech's family were also considered Israelites. (Sort of like being a New Yorker also means you're an American.)



The book of Ruth is prophetic in many respects. There is a story behind the story.



Why did Elimelech and Naomi leave Bethlehem in Judah for Moab?

Circle your answer.

There was a famine in Bethlehem.

They had relatives in Moab.

There was a war in Bethlehem.

A judge ordered them to leave.

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

Next to each passage, describe the relationship between the Israelites and the Moabites.

Deuteronomy 23:3-6

Judges 3:12-14

Understanding the history of Moab and her relationship with Israel changes the tone of Elimelech and Naomi's journey. It wasn't as if they were Americans slipping into Canada for a spell. Moab was an enemy of Israel. The Moabites' blatant idolatry was a sure sign that the Israelites were to remain separate. The author of Ruth doesn't explicitly tell us how to feel about Elimelech's decision to move his family, but we know from Deuteronomy 30:1-9 that God promised to restore His people when they returned to Him in obedience. We also know that Bethlehem was God's chosen place for His people. So as scholar Daniel I. Block notes, "It seems, however, that Elimelech designed his own solution instead of calling on God for mercy and repenting of the sins that plagued the nation during the dark days of the judges."¹

After the Lord freed the Israelites from the land of Egypt, they wandered in the desert for forty 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 and, more importantly, with permanence. God had given them a home; they didn't need to look anywhere else.

The city of Bethlehem, where Elimelech's family lived, was a hill country in the land of Judah and part of the promised land of Canaan. Ironically, Bethlehem means "House of Bread," and there hadn't been much of that since their departure. You may be 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. What did God's people often do when a judge died (v. 19)?

PERSONAL TAKE: What evidence do you see for why there was a famine in the land?

Now look back at Ruth 1:1 and fill in the blank using the Christian Standard Bible (CSB) translation: "During the time of the _____, there was a famine in the land."

The story of Ruth took place during the time of the Judges, a period of approximately 450 years when God raised up different governors to rule and guide Israel. This period stretched from the time Joshua led the Israelites into the promised land to King Saul being crowned the first king of Israel. A quick skim through the book of Judges reveals that God's people had a history of turning to Him during seasons of turmoil but forgetting Him during seasons of prosperity.

PERSONAL REFLECTION: Are you currently in a season of trial, blessing, or both? How is your current situation negatively or positively affecting your relationship with God?

Perhaps you've thought or heard it said that theology isn't all that important; what matters is your relationship with God. But what we believe about God (our theology) impacts our relationship with Him. If we believe that difficult circumstances are a sign of God's cruelty, indifference, or displeasure with us, how deeply does that affect our relationship with Him? On the other hand, thinking that God is happy with us only when everything is going our way is equally harmful to our faith. We'll see in our study together that it is His presence with us that is superior to our circumstances, no matter how trying or wonderful.

Let's close by drawing Elimelech and Naomi's plight back to our own. They stood on the precipice of two compelling choices—stay in the arid land of God's choosing or flee to the bountiful one God had forbidden. We know that Elimelech chose the latter. The question for us is: *What will we choose?* Perhaps the loneliness is unbearable, your heartache is unrelenting, or a daily struggle has become overwhelming. The attractive land of Moab is calling, but you know it represents compromises of all sorts. When we're weary in obedience, escaping to easier terrain is tempting, but it always comes at a cost.

READ GALATIANS 6:9. What did Paul say will happen if we don't give up in doing good?

READ HEBREWS 11:24-26. What did Moses regard as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt? And to what was he looking ahead?

PERSONAL REFLECTION: How do these verses encourage you to stand firm where God has you? Be thoughtful about your response.

Fleeing our circumstances doesn't necessarily remedy them. How often do I want my circumstances to change when really God wants to change me? God is present right where you are. Stay put and stand firm. It is always more blessed to be in the fellowship of His presence than anywhere else.



DAY 2

RETURNING HOME



The first chapter of Ruth is a story of two journeys.

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.

Name the four people who traveled from Bethlehem to Moab.

To refresh your memory, all four family members were from Bethlehem and were called what?

Circle your answer.

Bethlehemites Canaanites Ephrathites Amorites

They were from the town of Bethlehem and the nation of _____ . (See p. 16 if you need help.)

NOW THAT WE HAVE THESE DETAILS, SLOWLY READ VERSES 3-7 TWO TIMES. Take a moment to appreciate the gravity of these 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 returned with two women who were not her flesh and blood.

Below, write the names of Naomi’s daughters-in-law, their nationality, and the name of the son each of them married. (See 4:10 for whom Ruth and Orpah were married to.)

Name	Nationality	Married To

READ DEUTERONOMY 7:3-4 AND 1 KINGS 11:1-4. Why could it have been problematic for Mahlon and Chilion to marry Moabite women?

In Deuteronomy 7:1-8, the Lord commanded the people of Israel not to intermarry with certain nations. The events of 1 Kings 11 took place after the events in Ruth, but they give us a good picture of why entering into a covenant relationship with these nations was problematic. Solomon’s heart was led astray to other gods because of his marriages to women from nations that didn’t worship the one true God. Solomon could not be fully devoted to the Lord and devoted to the gods of other nations.

It deserves special attention that God’s warnings had nothing to do with certain races; rather, He warned against His people aligning with nations that had rejected Him. For a New Testament perspective on this, read 2 Corinthians 6:14-18.

The apostle Paul instructed Christians not to be “yoked together” (or deeply tied) to unbelievers because the life-paths of each party will naturally move in opposite directions (v. 14). We are called to love and reach out to all people, but when we attach ourselves through covenant bonds to those who don’t follow Christ, our love for Him will eventually be compromised. (This principle—which we see in action in Ruth, Deuteronomy, 1 Kings, and 2 Corinthians—will be of even greater significance to us in the coming days.)

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.

A desire for physical nourishment caused Naomi to leave Moab; this same desire would lead her back. The catalyst behind both journeys appears to be governed by the physical, not so much the spiritual. Our physical circumstances are vital, and we should always take them into account. But I suppose the question is: *What ultimately dictates our decisions—our circumstances or the God of them?*

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

The challenge of staying committed to God when times are tough and seemingly greener pastures are a mere fence-hop away is one I know. Feel-good remedies abound for loneliness. Clinging to Christ and His promise of provision instead of reaching for the many available tonics has been an exercise I have both failed and succeeded at. His grace has held me fast even when my choices have looked more like Elimelech and Naomi's. This I know for sure: God's ways are not always the most practical, popular, or unopposed, but they are the most blessed. But I don't want us to get too far ahead of ourselves.

PERSONAL RESPONSE: Think about a time when you allowed your circumstances to direct you instead of leaving room for God's direction. How did this cause you to more quickly act on God's leading in the future?

LOOK BACK AT VERSE 6. From where did Naomi hear that God had come to the aid of His people? What about this feels significant?

I will never get over this. It was within the dark and dreaded land of Moab, the land of her family's choosing, that Naomi heard of God's provision. The echoes of His mercy somehow reached her ears in a place where God wasn't supposed to be heard, in a land God's goodness wasn't supposed to reach.

PERSONAL RESPONSE: Briefly write about a time when God pursued you—even drew you back—when you were in a far-off place. What did you discover about His character through that experience?

I've spent time in the distant land of my choosing, haunted by the warm glow of God's provision that seemed to be for everyone else but me. I pouted against Him in my disobedience, angry I wasn't experiencing Him but not wanting to change my allegiances either. I will never stop giving Him thanks for coming for me, even against what I wanted at the time. I wonder if Naomi would later feel similarly. Her return to Bethlehem wasn't necessarily out of a longing for her God but for His provision. God spread His table for her regardless. We will discover in this story that He is as generous with grace as He is with grain.

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). The word *return* is a key theme of this chapter, a word that reminds us it's never too late to come home. The God of grace was welcoming Naomi back to where she belonged, and what is more surprising is that the invitation was extended to two Moabite women. Psalm 16 feels like a fitting benediction for us as we consider the place God desires for us to dwell.

REFLECT ON PSALM 16:1-6.

PERSONAL RESPONSE: If you need to return to God in some way, write about the preparations you're willing to make. If you're in a place of peace and fellowship with Him, thank Him for His presence and provision.

No matter where you are, bread is always available at His table for anyone willing to return.

DAY 3



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

WEEPING FORWARD

I work closely with Justice & Mercy International (JMI), an organization that serves in the Amazon jungles of Brazil and the Eastern European country of Moldova. One of our primary ministries in Moldova is our Transitional Living Program. We have two boys and two girls' homes where teenagers from broken or abusive families come to live in a loving environment. The three-year program consists of learning life skills, studying God's Word, going to school and work, and mostly being part of a loving family environment. Despite the tragic pasts of these teens, many are growing into some of the finest young men and women I know. Pain has marked each of them, but what they do with their pain determines their paths forward. Those who have chosen to follow Jesus are extraordinary examples of how God can transform even our greatest hardships into blessing.

Today we find Naomi packing her bags and hitting the road back to Judah. She'll return to the place she left but not as the same person. Tragedy and loss have etched scars on her heart. She'll head 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 any of us envision Naomi returning, but then again, she probably never imagined it this way either. Who can blame her despairing posture? And yet, like my TL friends, what she chooses to do with her grief will make all the difference for her.

How gracious that God was already in Bethlehem waiting for her, waiting for whomever else would choose to come with her, stranger or not. Naomi just didn't know it yet. We'll see in the sessions to come that God's grace is always positioned for anyone who will simply come.

READ RUTH 1:7-14 AND SLOWLY TAKE IN THE DETAILS.

Naomi said, "May the LORD show kindness to you as you have shown to the dead and to me" (v. 8). The word *kindness* doesn't do justice to the Hebrew word it translates—*hesed*—a profound word throughout the book of Ruth. Consider the following descriptions of this term:



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.²

Israel associated [hesed] with Yahweh’s covenant relationship with her . . . despite her waywardness, Yahweh always stood steadfastly by Israel in “covenant loyalty.”³

Love, grace, mercy, kindness—all of the positive acts of devotion that flow out of a covenantal relationship.⁴

Based on these definitions, rewrite the definition of hesed in your own words.

PERSONAL TAKE: 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?

PERSONAL REFLECTION: Who has shown you hesed? Describe the person and what he or she has done for you.

We’re going to table our study of hesed for now, but we’ll keep coming back to it as we study. It’s a concept that is essential to God’s covenant love for His people.

Before writing this Bible study, I’d read the book of Ruth many times. For some reason, I’d mistakenly thought that Naomi urged Ruth and Orpah to stay in Moab before they’d set out on their trip. This seemed logical—having the discussion before they packed all their bags, said their goodbyes, and forwarded the mail.

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

Naomi, Ruth, and Orpah packed their bags, left their homes, and had gotten somewhere down the road when Naomi started urging them to go back. I guess it's a little 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 and mom promise they're not afraid to turn this car right around if everyone doesn't shape up. I don't remember how old I was when I realized that they were never going to actually do that.

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

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

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 respond to her initial nudging, she cut their faintest hopes.

After Naomi's compelling argument, how did they respond (v. 14)?

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

Verse 14 reminds me that though 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.

This idea of weeping in different directions is something we can all relate to. In the following passages, compare and contrast both individuals in the chart. Specifically, how did their grief affect their direction?

RICH YOUNG RULER Mark 10:17-22	WOMAN AT JESUS'S FEET Luke 7:36-38,48-50

The woman at Jesus's feet wept but didn't allow her grief to stop her forward motion, but the rich young man walked away from Christ with great sadness. How often we too have been tempted to turn back in the face of loss or adversity. But how great the honor and reward of Ruth and the woman at Jesus's feet 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? What would weeping forward as you continue to follow Christ look like for you? If this doesn't describe your current season, write about a past experience of weeping forward and what you gained from that experience.

God sees your tears. Cry them, feel them, wipe them, but don't let them stop you from moving toward Christ. It's possible to cry and walk. We will see this truth continue to blossom into the weeks ahead.

DAY 4

A LONG OBEDIENCE

One of the nice things about the short length of the book of Ruth is that we're able to take our time. I realize we're only to verse 14 and it's taken us three days to get here, but I'm savoring the slow pace. When I walk with my four-year-old niece, Lily, we make little forward progress but ample discovery progress. She pauses to examine pebbles, twirl oak leaves, and snap twigs in two. This is the leisurely but intentional pace of thoughtful Bible reading. Both nature and Scripture are filled with profound discoveries for those expecting to uncover something new. Be expectant in the Lord today.

READ RUTH 1:15. (I was serious about slow.)

Naomi refused to abandon her In-Laws-Turn-Back campaign even after Orpah went home and Ruth clung to her side.

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

Give 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?

The text doesn't tell us, but it's possible Naomi didn't want anyone to know her sons had married Moabites since they were outside the covenant nation of Israel. If she returned home alone, perhaps this would remain concealed.⁵ Whatever the reason, Ruth withstood several of Naomi's discouraging appeals to turn back. Obedience to God is often met with challenges that persuade us to change our minds. I used to think obedience



Both nature and Scripture are filled with profound discoveries for those expecting to uncover something new. Be expectant in the Lord today.

was a one-and-done decision, but I now realize it might mean having to make that same choice several times in a week, month, or year. Orpah made it through Naomi's first round of convincing persuasions (v. 10), but after Naomi's second and third push, Orpah gave in.

PERSONAL RESPONSE: Describe a time when you obeyed in the midst of consecutive trials or temptations. What did you discover about Christ and His blessings?



Orpah set her course toward the God of Israel, but when doubts about her security settled in, she turned back. We can all relate to wanting to run back to the familiar in the middle of difficulties. But we can also relate to the unparalleled blessings that arrive after prolonged obedience through temptation and adversity. These long stretches are what Scripture often refers to as “testing” (James 1:2-4). This word doesn't mean the grade you're hoping to get on the obedience test God just passed out; rather, it's the idea of pure metals being tested. As gold passes through a purifying flame, its nature is proven (1 Pet. 1:7).

Ruth's steadfast journey toward the God of Israel is similar to an account that took place before her time. Jacob's son Joseph was sold by his brothers to an Egyptian named Potiphar. While serving faithfully in his master's house, Potiphar's wife persistently tried to seduce him.

READ GENESIS 39:1-10 AND FILL IN THE BLANK FROM VERSE 10 USING THE CSB TRANSLATION.

“Although she spoke to Joseph _____,
_____, he refused to go to bed with her.”

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 had to choose righteousness day after day. Ruth and Naomi's relationship was clearly different from that of Joseph and Potiphar's wife, but Ruth still needed the resolve to move toward the God of Israel while Naomi tried to talk her out of it. At the same time, obedience to God requires more than willpower. Ruth's and Joseph's obedience wasn't based on self-determination alone; rather, their motivation was anchored in something deeper than their inner resolve.



You'll need 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 the living God factor into their obedience?

READ JOHN 14:15. Jesus says if we _____ Him, we'll keep His _____.

Only a love for Christ will sustain obedience to Him.

Ruth's and Joseph's commitment to obedience stemmed from their commitments to God. And as New Testament believers, our obedience flows from our love for Jesus. Only a love for Him will sustain obedience to Him.

PERSONAL RESPONSE: Since enduring obedience hinges on our love for Jesus, take a minute to evaluate your relationship with Him. Where are you struggling to trust, love, or believe in Him? How is it affecting your resolve to follow Him?

Joseph could have succumbed to Potiphar's wife's pleas for intimacy—who would have blamed him after being sold into slavery by his brothers, seemingly abandoned by God. And Ruth could have returned to Moab with her sister-in-law, Orpah. Surely no one would have cast a stone at her for choosing the familiar over an embittered mother-in-law and a foreign people. But neither Joseph nor Ruth was looking for easy outs or rationalizations. They'd tasted the goodness of the God of Israel, and despite opposition, their faith emerged as gold.

When we lose sight of God's goodness and holiness, we're prone to justifying decisions that oppose His Word and heart. But when we believe God is good and obeying Him is for our freedom, we will change our courses for the sake of obedience. Perhaps no one changed her course 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 in order to protect your path of obedience? It can be large or small. Write about it here.

Ruth and Joseph each showed resolve as they walked out their obedience to God while doing whatever it took to preserve their obedience. In the New Testament, the book of James touches on this beautifully.

Close by reflecting on these fitting verses as you seek to persevere in obedience. How does each encourage you to persevere in righteousness?

Consider it a great joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you experience various trials, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing.

JAMES 1:2-4

Blessed is the one who endures trials, because when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.

JAMES 1:12

DAY 5



Ruth would prove to be worth more to Naomi than either of them could imagine.

WHEREVER YOU GO

When I moved to Nashville more than twenty years ago, I didn't know a single person. I knew friends of friends, and a few people had scribbled on napkins the names of acquaintances to look up since no one could text contacts back and forth. (It was basically the 1800s.) Before moving, I'd been in the same church, in the same city, with many of the same friends my entire life. My first few years in Nashville were terribly lonely, but eventually, I met my friend April. Then a few years later, I met Paige and Mary Katharine, and now I have a church community I couldn't imagine life without. Having even one good friend in life gives you many things, not the least of which is the gift of not being alone. Naomi and Ruth had each other, and even though Naomi may have wanted to arrive in Bethlehem alone, Ruth would prove to be worth more to her than either of them could imagine.

READ RUTH 1:16-17.

PERSONAL TAKE: Up to this point, Naomi had done almost all of the talking, but now it was Ruth's turn. Which of her statements resonates with you most and why?

Naomi's spewing bitterness, her discouraging pleas—Ruth had had enough. Despite Ruth's tearful grief, she silenced Naomi's complaints with her resolve.

How did Ruth's loving yet firm words to Naomi affect the rest of their journey (v. 18)? Circle your answer.
Naomi . . .

got mad and ran ahead.

disowned Ruth.

stopped trying to persuade Ruth.

wept.

Ruth's resolute speech to Naomi emphasizes the power of the spoken word. She found her place in a long line of God's people who spoke truth at opportune moments. I think of Abigail speaking wisdom to David (1 Sam. 25:23-31), Jethro giving advice to Moses that helped him serve the people (Ex. 18:17-27), or Peter commanding a paralyzed man to "get up and walk!" (Acts 3:6). We could long recount the exchanges of Holy Spirit-filled men and women speaking life to the hopeless, despairing, deceived, rebellious, wounded. Ruth's words in 1:16-17 are not the stuff of knee-jerk responses. We can only reckon they were forged over time and in relationship with God. You don't decide to forsake all your gods and cling to a despairing in-law on a whim. Ruth's words quieted Naomi (v. 18) because they'd been formed in love and loyalty.

Briefly sum up the central thought of each passage:

Proverbs 15:1-2,4

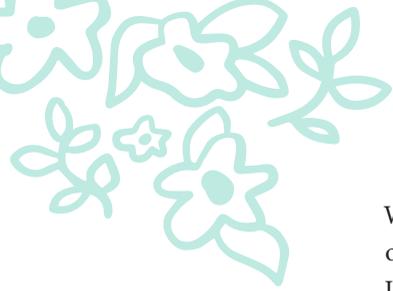
Proverbs 16:23-24

Proverbs 18:13

Proverbs 25:11

Proverbs 27:5-6

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



Humble, truthful, and kind speech is healing ointment in bitter and complicated situations.

When I was a child, my dad was relentless at making us kids talk things out. We had more family meetings than I now have business meetings. I didn't love learning how to apologize or listen to others explain their point of view—couldn't we all just agree that my perspective was probably the right one? I'm indebted to my parents for teaching me how to have difficult conversations. Humble, truthful, and kind speech is healing ointment in bitter and complicated situations.

Since Ruth's words hold such weight, let's look at her speech more closely. Read the printed verses below.

- 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.)

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. 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.

RUTH 1:16-17

NOW READ VERSE 18 AND TAKE IN NAOMI'S RESPONSE TO RUTH'S WORDS.

The CSB translation begins with “When Naomi saw . . .” It took Ruth’s strong words to finally convince Naomi that she wasn’t taking no for an answer. Our words have strength, especially when they’re governed by the Holy Spirit. Sometimes we need to speak the hard word, 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.

PERSONAL RESPONSE: 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 many weddings and printed on as many cards, gracing relationships since the day Ruth spoke them. 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 but rather a permanent home in a foreign land.

As we consider this passage in light of New Testament realities, the questions become: *Are we 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 sessions. You’ve already done a remarkable job.

GROUP TIME

I know we're starting with a sad first chapter, but there's no way to make this happy. It's a difficult beginning. We start with a family of four: Naomi, her husband, Elimelech, and their sons, Mahlon and Chilion. As famine sets in, the family sets out and they go east across the Jordan to the pagan territory of Moab. In this land of many gods, but not the one true God of Israel, Elimelech and his two sons pass away. In her patriarchal society, this leaves Naomi with nothing. No sons or heirs to carry on her family name and legacy. She is left without anyone to take care of her. She can't just go out and get a job; she depended on a male heir and now she is without. She has absolutely nothing.

READ RUTH 1:6-7. Underline verse 6 in your Bible.

You noted this provision in your homework this week and it is just so profound to me because this means the grace of God reverberated all the way east, all the way across the Jordan, all the way to this is pagan, godless land, that God was still being gracious. God was still being good to His people and Naomi heard it in Moab. And I love that because sometimes we think that the grace of God is only going to be good inside these walls, or it's only going to travel inside our church walls, or in our Bible study circles. But do you know that the grace of God can reach out?

Where have you seen the grace of God acting in your life or in the life of a friend?

How have you seen God working from outside the church?

I love that in this destitute, hopeless state, the message gets to Naomi that God has been faithful and He is providing again in Bethlehem. God's grace is for everyone. It is reaching out, and it is calling people home. You are not too far gone. Your friends are not too far gone. There is nowhere that is so far that God cannot reach.

NOW LET'S READ RUTH 1:8-13.

Naomi, Ruth, and Orpah are making a very perilous journey, especially for single women, all the way from Moab to Bethlehem. They are already on the road when Naomi decides that this is a terrible idea.

What does Naomi ask her daughters-in-law in verse 11? Fill in the blanks below:

“Why _____
to go _____?” (v. 11).

Why do you think Naomi is asking this question?

When have you been tempted to leave the place God had you for something easier or more attractive?

I love Naomi for the colorful, layered character that she is with a lot of good and some bad all rolled up in there. Naomi is not thinking about the God of Israel. She is not thinking of His goodness and power to do what is utterly impossible. She is thinking He has left her and maybe she's a little disappointed in Him.

How do you think Naomi is feeling in verse 13 when she says, “the LORD’s hand has turned against me”?

Naomi's circumstances are impossible. In her culture and situation, there is nothing she could do for Ruth or Orpah or herself. But God is not limited by our impossible circumstances.

READ RUTH 1:14-15.

Oh, look, we're weeping again. I know, I know, but I didn't write this story and I promise it gets better. But right now, we are sobbing. Hysterical. Grieving. It's a sad, bad situation. But did you catch what Naomi said in verse 15? Little “g” gods. Is that not a picture of us when we get into difficult circumstances? We go back to the familiar. To our little “g” gods. And that makes Ruth's response even more shocking. Orpah turns back. That's the normal thing to do. But Ruth does something no one was expecting.

READ RUTH 1:16-18.

What is your response to Ruth's words in these verses?

How does Ruth's loyalty to Naomi encourage you to show this same type of committed loyalty to a friend or loved one?

This is phenomenal. We don't witness a call or angels coming out of the sky. But God is all over this. Ruth is renouncing Moab and her god to follow the one true God. She didn't have a call. She just obeyed the law. The law that was given to God's people.

When have you felt God and responded to His Word?

When I respond to His Word, it's been transformational. It's been miraculous. And we're going to see that throughout this whole book. Everyday people doing what God says and making God the God of their lives.

We always want to know what God's will for our lives is. It's to obey His Word. Just this one thing, each and every day. Ruth didn't know that she was going down in history. She was just taking the next obedient step toward the living God. She knew God. She obeyed God. And that's it. That's the Christian life. Wherever you are, be obedient to God's revealed Word.

We see our three women weeping, facing three loses, three different responses. Orpah weeps backward toward her little "g" gods. Naomi weeps forward, but in a near frozen way. She's weeping outwardly but her heart's still back in the pain and loss. And you know, it counts. This counts. She's obeying mad. She's headed back mad. And for now, that's okay. Sometimes, that is what out obedience looks like.

Has a certain hardship in your life caused you to want to turn around in your weeping? Did you choose a long obedience in the same direction or did you choose to turn around?

READ PSALM 126:5-6. What are they doing in verse 6?

They're weeping with their seed. They have nothing, but they're going to take the next step and sow. But when you return, there's the bounty with shouts of joy.

What seeds are you casting while you're crying? What seeds are you planting in your hurt?

That is some of the most precious worship and obedience that we can give God. Serving Him even when we are hurting. Weeping is going to come for every single one of us, but the direction in which we weep will make all the difference. Are you weeping toward the one true God? I know this first chapter has been sad, but it gets better. A whole lot better. But if you are in a season of mourning and a season of weeping, still cast your seed. Take your tears toward Jesus Christ. God can handle all of it, and He wants us to come to Him.

PRAYER: Pray a prayer thanking God for His grace that reaches even the darkest places.