

How Ruth Models a Godly Response to Hardship and Tragedy

Naomi said, "Look, your sister-in-law has returned to her people and her gods. Return with her!"

But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or to turn back from following you. For wherever you go, I will go, and wherever you stay, I will stay. Your people shall be my people and your God my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord do thus to me, and worse, if anything but death separates you and me!" When Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her (Ruth 1:15-18).

Devastated at the loss of her husband and only sons, Naomi remained determined to run to God's people and presence in her hometown, hoping God might also pour out His blessing upon her. Along their journey, Naomi paused to have the first of many dialogues in the book. Roughly two-thirds of the verses in Ruth contain dialogue. As a result, this is a personal book about relationships amidst tough times and a case study in how to respond to hardship and tragedy.

In their dialogue, Naomi encouraged her daughters-in-law to not venture with her, but rather return to their families, as she had no future to offer them. At least the prospect of remarriage and a new life remained possible for them in Moab.

Because the women had bonded in love through tragedy—to such a degree that Naomi now viewed them as "my daughters"—Naomi offered the first of many prayers that appear throughout the book, asking God to give Ruth and Orpah husbands (1:8-9; 2:12, :20; 3:10; 4:11-12, 14). By the closing of the short book,

every single prayer is answered by God. Curiously, not one of the prayers is uttered for someone's own wellbeing, but rather only for the blessings of God to be bestowed upon others. Theologically, prayer is simply the fruit of faith in God's providence, as the one who prays does so trusting that He does hear and can answer.

Naomi's prayer for God to "deal kindly" in 1:8 also introduces an important word that is spoken of as a characteristic of both God (2:20) and Ruth (3:10). That Hebrew word *hesed* is a little word that summarizes the totality of God's positive attributes such as love, grace, mercy, kindness, patience and faithfulness. *Hesed* rightly reveals the nature of God in Ruth and the correlating life of Ruth who imitates Him.

But Ruth chose the extraordinary course of faith in what was likely her conversion moment. In her first recorded words in the book, Ruth responded with a faith perhaps even greater than Abraham's. Like Abraham, she in faith left her family and homeland for an uncertain future. But, unlike Abraham, God never spoke to her, and she trusted in the providence of God as a brand-new believer who had never been with God's people or in God's presence in Bethlehem.

Ruth professed her loyalty to God as one of only three non-Hebrews who do so in the entire Old Testament (the other two are Rahab the converted prostitute in Joshua 2:11, and Naaman the healed leper in 2 Kings 5:15–17). Furthermore, she vowed herself to Naomi even in death, thereby pledging a life in which her geography, theology, and genealogy would be fully entrusted to the providential hand of God. All of this occurred despite the fact that she was a Moabite who was likely to face racism in Israel and constant danger with only the help of an old, broke, lonely and bitter woman. In Ruth's decision, we see that in the new birth of conversion we are given a second family among God's people that, despite their faults and flaws, is sometimes more precious and helpful than our family of birth.

Naomi and Ruth went to great effort to be with God's people. What sacrifices and changes need to be made in your life so you can be with God's people? {eoa}

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