

Redeeming Love

The Book of Ruth

Through the Bitter Valley

Key idea:

When suffering comes into our lives, it is hard to see God's purposes clearly, but He will bring us through the bitter valley to restore our hope.

Key text:

Ruth 1

In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land, and a man from Bethlehem in Judah, together with his wife and two sons, went to live for a while in the country of Moab. ² The man's name was Elimelech, his wife's name Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Kilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem, Judah. And they went to Moab and lived there. ³ Now Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died, and she was left with her two sons. ⁴ They married Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other Ruth. After they had lived there about ten years, ⁵ both Mahlon and Kilion also died, and Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband. ⁶ When she heard in Moab that the LORD had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them, Naomi and her daughters-in-law prepared to return home from there. ⁷ With her two daughters-in-law she left the place where she had been living and set out on the road that would take them back to the land of Judah. ⁸ Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go back, each of you, to your mother's home. May the LORD show kindness to you, as you have shown to your dead and to me. ⁹ May the LORD grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband." Then she kissed them and they wept aloud ¹⁰ and said to her, "We will go back with you to your people." ¹¹ But Naomi said, "Return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me? Am I going to have any more sons, who could become your husbands? ¹² Return home, my daughters; I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me — even if I had a husband tonight and then gave birth to sons — ¹³ would you wait until they grew up? Would you remain unmarried for them? No, my daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you, because the LORD's hand has gone out against me!" ¹⁴ At this they wept again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law good-bye, but Ruth clung to her. ¹⁵ "Look," said Naomi, "your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her." ¹⁶ But Ruth replied, "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. ¹⁷ 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.”¹⁸ When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her.¹⁹ So the two women went on until they came to Bethlehem. When they arrived in Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them, and the women exclaimed, “Can this be Naomi?”²⁰ “Don’t call me Naomi,” she told them. “Call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter.²¹ I went away full, but the LORD has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The LORD has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me.”²² So Naomi returned from Moab accompanied by Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter-in-law, arriving in Bethlehem as the barley harvest was beginning.

Key points:

1. Life inevitably includes "bitter valleys" - times of suffering and hardship that can make it difficult for us to see God’s hand or perceive life correctly.
2. God walks with us through these valleys, even when we can't perceive His presence.
3. Our response in the bitter valley matters - we should cry out to God, lean on faithful friends, and look for signs of God's faithfulness.

Discussion Questions:

1. The teaching describes Naomi's journey through a "bitter valley." Can you relate to her experience? Share a time when you felt like you were in a similar valley.
2. How did Naomi's perception of her situation differ from reality? In what ways can our perceptions become distorted when we're going through difficult times?
3. Discuss Ruth's vow to Naomi (Ruth 1:16-17). What stands out to you about her commitment? How does this relate to the kind of friendships we should cultivate?
4. In what ways does Ruth's loyalty and faithfulness to Naomi reflect God's faithfulness to us, even when we feel abandoned?
5. What role do faithful friends play in our spiritual journeys, especially during times of hardship? How can we be a 'Ruth' to others in our community?
6. Bret mentioned three ways to respond when in a bitter valley:
 - a. Cry out to God in prayer
 - b. Lean on faithful friends
 - c. Look for signs of God's faithfulness

Which of these do you find most challenging? Why?

7. How does the Lord's Supper serve as a reminder of God's faithfulness, especially during difficult times?
8. The teaching highlights how Naomi missed signs of hope (returning to Bethlehem, Ruth's loyalty, beginning of harvest). Can you think of a time when you initially missed signs of God's faithfulness in your life?
9. How might our perspective on difficult circumstances change if we actively looked for 'signs of God's faithfulness'?

Practical Applications:

1. Practice Lament: Spend some time this week reading and praying through a lament Psalm (e.g., Psalm 3, 13, or 22). Journal your own honest prayers to God about any struggles you're facing.
2. Cultivate Faithful Friendships: Identify one way you can deepen a friendship this week, keeping in mind the goal of being a "Ruth" to others in times of need.
3. Faithfulness Journal: Each day this week, write down at least one way you see God's faithfulness in your life, no matter how small it may seem.
4. Connect Group Involvement: If you're not already part of a connect group, consider joining one to build relationships that can support you through life's valleys.
5. Listen to the worship song [God Moves In A Mysterious Way](#) - it powerfully describes how we can learn to walk through bitter valleys while clinging to our faith.