



Committed (Ruth 1)

Small Group Study, week commencing 18th March 2024

For starters

When have you committed to something hard because it was the right thing to do?

Introduction

Although all books of the Bible are special, Ruth is special in some particular ways. It is one of only two books of the Bible named after a woman (can you think of the other one?) and it is the only Old Testament book named after a non-Israelite. But more than that, it is a beautiful example of “a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair” (Isaiah 61:3).

Ruth 1 doesn't take us as far as the beauty, joy and praise. Instead, it ends on a downer. If this was a television series, you might not feel inclined to watch the second episode, as the first was too depressing! But it's the action that takes place in chapter 1, action in the face of tragedy, that is at the root of the blessing which follows.

Study

1. “Commitment means that it is possible for a man to yield the nerve center of his consent to a purpose or cause, a movement or an ideal, which may be more important to him than whether he lives or dies” (Howard Thurman, theologian and civil rights leader). **Discuss.**

2. Read [Ruth 1:1-5](#). The narrator's introduction to the story is very factual. There are names, places, and events. But in the middle of it all is a flesh and blood person, Naomi. **What do you imagine her emotional state to be by the end of verse 5? What kind of thoughts must she have been living with?**

On top of the incredible pain of losing the three people closest to her, Naomi now faces old age without anyone to care for her. She is effectively cut off from the three options that might normally be open to a widow: returning to the house of her father (her parents were



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most likely already dead), remarriage (she was almost certainly beyond child-bearing years) and supporting herself through some kind of craft or trade (it was unlikely she had one).

3. “It is easy to live out the belief in God’s sovereignty when things are going well. When one good thing after another comes along, we can easily acknowledge and praise God’s sovereignty over our lives. But when disasters strike, when one bad thing after another piles up, the doctrine of God’s sovereignty is harder to accept and live out” (K. Lawson Younger, *Judges, Ruth*). **Discuss.**

4. Read [Ruth 1:6-14](#). Naomi initiates a difficult conversation “on the road that would take them back to the land of Judah”, perhaps near the Moabite-Judah border. **What arguments does she use to persuade her daughters-in-law to turn back?**

5. Initially, both Ruth and Orpah maintained they would stick with Naomi (verse 10), but after further persuasion Orpah says her farewells (verse 14). **Do you think the author intends us to be critical of Orpah’s decision?**

6. Read [Ruth 1:15-18](#). If Orpah’s decision is rational, then Ruth’s is radical. In addition to all of the uncertainty of making this journey with Naomi she knows that as a Moabite woman “she would be about as welcome in Bethlehem as a ham sandwich at a bar mitzvah” (Iain Duguid, *Esther and Ruth*). And yet, despite every logical reason to the contrary, she commits to Naomi. **How does Ruth express her commitment in her response to Naomi?**

7. Jesus once said, “Very truly I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life” ([John 12:24-25](#)). **In what ways does Ruth’s statement of commitment reflect Jesus’ expectation of his followers?**



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8. Again, Jesus said, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me” (Mark 8:34). **What does this look like for you in a practical, day-to-day terms?**

9. Read [Ruth 1:19-22](#). The chapter ends on a depressing note, except for the final phrase which hints at what is to follow. What the readers don’t know if they are reading this for the first time is how this story will pan out. Skipping the beautiful love story in the middle and jumping to the end, Ruth will find a husband in righteous Boaz, and will eventually become the great grandmother of David, Israel’s greatest king, and ultimately an ancestor of Jesus (Matthew 1:5,16). **How can we grow in confidence that “in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28). What kinds of things will eat away at that confidence?**

Pray

It is possible to be confident that in all things God works for good, but also insensitive in offering pat answers to those who are suffering. Pray for those who you know are going through a hard time presently, holding on to the truth of God’s sovereignty, but with compassion and gentleness.