

April 27, 2014

Ruth 1

“Handling Adversity: Flight, Fright, or Fight?”

Pastor Gary Hamrick

This message is the first of four in Pastor Gary’s series in the book of Ruth, which is one of two books in the Bible that are named after a woman (Esther). This book is about God’s story of love and redemption. It’s a story about a family and a famine. In this study, we’ll look at what our natural reactions are when adversity, problems, and hardship strike: flight, fright, or fight.

Historical Background

1. Ruth was a Gentile (Moabite).
2. The writer of the book of Ruth is not known, however, according to Jewish tradition (the Talmud), it was Samuel.
3. The scene for the events in the book of Ruth is primarily Bethlehem.¹
4. The time of these events fits somewhere early in the book of Judges, according to [Ruth 1:1](#).²
 - a. Another indicator of the timeline is that Ruth married Boaz, whose mother was the Rahab mentioned in [Joshua 2](#).
5. What we learn from the book of Ruth is encouraging in that while there was godlessness taking place in the foreground during the time of the judges, God was weaving another story behind the scenes: a story of love and redemption.
 - a. God chose to tell the story separately, even though it occurs during the same time, because he wanted it to stand-alone.

¹ In Hebrew, Bet Lehem means, “house of bread.”

² “In the days when the judges ruled...”

- b. It's interesting to note that Ruth is the eighth book in the Bible, and the number eight has a biblical meaning of new beginnings.
6. God's story of love and redemption begins with a family and a famine.
 - a. Elimelech is the husband, and his name means, "My God is King!"
 - b. Naomi is his wife, and her name means, "pleasant" or "delightful."
 - c. Mahlon is one of two sons, and his name means, "weak" or "sick."
 - d. Kilion is the other son, and his name means, "tired" or "dying."
 7. The Bible doesn't tell us how long the famine lasted or how wide spread it was.
 - a. Most of the time when a famine is mentioned in the Bible, it was not caused by a natural disaster; it was usually a sign of God's correction.
 - b. [Ezekiel 14:13](#) - *"Son of man, if a country sins against me by being unfaithful and I stretch out my hand against it to cut off its food supply and send famine upon it..."*
 - c. This understanding of the origin of a famine fits in this story, because this was a time when everyone *"did as he saw fit,"*³ so it's likely that God was using this famine as a way of correcting and admonishing the people of Israel.
 8. Bethlehem was known for its fertile wheat fields and a prominent location where bread was made, which is ironic in that there was no bread in a place called "house of bread"!

Flight

9. When trouble comes we are prone to flight, because it's our hope that we can escape difficulties if we just take off and run!
10. If we were honest about our experiences, we would agree that flight almost never works out.
11. Running from our problems doesn't fix them, because they will usually follow us if we don't deal with them the right way.
 - a. If you're in a difficult marriage, don't say, "I'll just get a new wife!"
 - b. If you're in a difficult "whatever," don't say, "I'll just get a new whatever!"
 - c. Coming to the conclusion that the answer to any problem is escape is faulty thinking.
12. Making a change in relationships, changing jobs, or moving out and moving on may only bring temporary answers.

³ [Judges 21:25](#)

13. Taking flight should not be our response because it just might be that God is trying to teach us something through adversity, and if we don't sit still long enough to learn what he's trying to do in us, we will continue to experience similar difficulties until we do.

Fright

14. People in fright mode become paralyzed by fear become indecisive and give up.
15. [2 Timothy 1:7](#) - *"For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind."* (KJV - King James Version)
16. Since God is love, we need to press into God more when we're afraid, because [1 John 4:18](#) tells us *"[God's] perfect love drives out fear..."*
17. [Philippians 4:6-7](#) - *"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."*
 - a. Prayer will bring the Lord's peace, and his presence and his peace will help us overcome our fears.

Fight

18. When adversity comes, those who fight through their circumstances with God's help become better and stronger because of it, and "fight" is really the only acceptable way for us to react to troubling times and situations.
19. [1 Timothy 6:12a](#) - *"Fight the good fight of the faith."*
20. Perseverance is the Christian's byword.
 - a. Hang in with God's help; don't give up and run or give in to fear!
 - i. Fight for your marriage!
 - ii. Fight for your family!
 - iii. Fight for your future!
21. We need to ask ourselves a few questions such as:
 - a. What is God trying to teach me in this process?
 - b. How is God trying to sanctify me or how is he trying to make me more holy?

- i. John Flavel, a Puritan preacher from the 1600's, called the difficult times we all have to deal with "sanctified affliction."

22. **Galatians 6:9** - *"Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up."*

The Impact Of Elimelech's Decision

23. When adversity struck Elimelech and his family, he took the option of flight, and made tracks for the land of Moab.

- a. Moab is about 50 miles away from Bethlehem, on the other side of the Dead Sea, in what today is the country of Jordan.
- b. The Moabite people were descendants of an incestuous relationship between Lot⁴ and one of his own daughters, who got her father drunk so she could sleep with him for the purpose of having children.
- c. Lot's daughter convinced her sister to do the same thing the following night, and she also conceived and had a son, so the Moabites and Ammonites were the children of incest.
- d. The Moabites were a pagan people that didn't worship God, but instead, they worshiped Chemosh, a god whose worship included human sacrifice.

24. Knowing more about the environment Elimelech led his family to causes us to ask a number of questions:

- a. Was this a decision he arrived at after prayerfully seeking the Lord's will or was it his decision based on circumstances?
- b. Why would he relocate his family to a godless place like this?
- c. Why would he expose his wife and sons to a godless culture?
- d. Why would he abandon a place of fellowship and friendship?
- e. Why would he leave the place of worship?
- f. Why would he leave in an attempt to circumnavigate his way around the potential lessons God was trying to teach him through adversity?

25. Whatever his reasons were, the fact is that he did not count the spiritual cost of relocating his family.

- a. He failed to consider that when a man makes a decision for his family, he is potentially mortgaging his family's future.
- b. When a man is leading his wife and family, and he makes a decision where they are going to live and raise their children, he's also deciding:
 - i. Who he and his wife will have fellowship and friendship with.
 - ii. Where they will attend church.

⁴ Lot was Abraham's nephew.

- iii. Who his children will become friends with and what influences they will be exposed to, as well as the climate/culture they will grow up in.
 - iv. Who his children will potentially marry.

- 26. Like so many men have done and, unfortunately, will do, Elimelech simply weighed the material cost and not the spiritual cost.

- 27. He exchanged one famine for a bigger one, in that he left a land where there was a natural famine to go to a land where there was a spiritual famine.

- 28. We shouldn't be fooled into thinking, "He was just trying to take of his family and spare them from dying of starvation."

- 29. [Ruth 1:3](#) says, "*Now Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died,*" so the end result was that his life saving plan didn't work out so well!
 - a. He moved the family to Moab so they wouldn't die, but that's exactly what happened to him.
 - b. The Bible doesn't tell us how Elimelech died.

- 30. [Ruth 1:5](#) tells us "*both Mahlon and Kilion also died, and Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband.*"
 - a. Again, if the decision was made so they would not die, that's exactly what happened to Elimelech's sons.

- 31. Historically speaking, when we read about famines in the Bible, we find that when people tried to escape famines, things didn't go well to say the least.
 - a. Abraham went down to Egypt to escape a famine, and while he was there he brought back a "souvenir" named Hagar!
 - i. The result of his yielding to his wife Sarah's plan was the birth of Ishmael, who would be in conflict with Sarah's son, Isaac, and this conflict exists to this day and it's known as the Middle East Conflict!
 - b. Abraham's son, Isaac, was ready to do exactly what his father did, essentially saying to himself, "I'll just go down to Egypt!"
 - i. [Genesis 26:2-4](#) - "*The Lord appeared to Isaac and said, 'Do not go down to Egypt; live in the land where I tell you to live. Stay in this land for a while, and I will be with you and will bless you. For to you and your descendants I will give all these lands and will confirm the oath I swore to your father Abraham. I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and will give them all these lands, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed...'*"

- c. Jacob, Isaac's son, took his sons to Egypt to escape a famine, to be united with his long lost son, Joseph, but once they got settled in the land the days turned to weeks, and the weeks turned into months, and months turned in to 400 years of slavery, from which God had to come and rescue them.

32. Flight is not always right, because God will take care of us!

The Rest Of The Story

33. Before Mahlon and Kilion died, they married Moabite women.
 - a. Mahlon married Ruth, and Kilion married Orpah.
 - b. Ruth's name means, "friendship."
 - c. Orpah's name means, "fawn" or "gazelle."
34. After Elimelech and the two boys died, Ruth and Orpah were left without their husbands, and Naomi was left without her husband or her sons in a foreign land, so she decided it was time to go back home to Bethlehem.
 - a. **Ruth 1:6-7** - *"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. 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."*
35. Before they had gone too far, Naomi realized that it would be best for Orpah and Ruth to stay in their homeland and find new husbands in Moab.
 - a. **Ruth 1:8-10** - *"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. 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 and said to her, 'We will go back with you to your people.'"*
36. Orpah is another example of someone who, when adversity comes, takes flight!
 - a. **Ruth 1:14** - *"At this they wept again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law good-bye, but Ruth clung to her."*
 - b. Orpah did a kiss and run, but Ruth lived up to her name, "friendship."
37. One lesson we can learn from this part of the story is that we will find out who our true friends are when we face adversity, in that our real friends will stick with us through thick and thin, while the pseudo-friends flee!

38. [Proverbs 17:17](#) - *“A friend is always loyal, and a brother is born to help in time of need.”* (NLT - New Living Translation)
39. Ruth would be a true friend to Naomi, as Naomi would be to Ruth.
- a. [Ruth 1:16-17](#) - *“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. 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.’ ”*
40. In the end, there was something about the influence of this family that turned the heart of a pagan Moabite girl into someone who became a loyal friend to Naomi as well as a faithful follower of God who would redeem her life in a wonderful way!

Discussion Questions

1. Review the introduction to the study guide with your group to provide the appropriate background.
2. Read [Ruth 1:1-14](#) to provide an overview for this study.
3. How have you seen the Lord work behind the scenes in your life to weave a story of love and redemption, even though there is godlessness all around you?
4. Read and discuss [Ezekiel 14:13](#), focusing on the fact that sometimes difficult times are used by the Lord as a part of his correction or maturing us into holy people. (See #8 above)
5. Allow the people in your group to share their experiences about being in flight mode when they were overwhelmed or surrounded by troubles and hardships.
6. What did the Lord teach you in this situation?
7. Allow the people in your group to share their experiences about being paralyzed by fear.
8. Read and discuss [2 Timothy 1:7](#), [1 John 4:18](#), and [Philippians 4:6-7](#).
9. Allow the people in your group to share their experiences about being their experiences when they fought *“the good fight of the faith...”* ([1 Timothy 6:12](#))

10. How did the Lord help you persevere?
11. What was God trying to teach you in the process and how was he trying to make you more holy?
12. Read and discuss [Galatians 6:9](#).
13. Read and discuss the questions outlined in #26 and #27 above.
14. Spend time talking about [Ruth 1:6-10](#), and the reaction of Orpah, and the friendship between Ruth and her mother-in-law, Naomi.
 - a. Read and discuss [Proverbs 17:17](#).
15. Close your time in prayer by asking the Holy Spirit to help each person: be a true friend to others, like Ruth was to Naomi; make the choice to stay and wait on the Lord, instead of running when adversity comes, because the Lord may be trying to teach something through adversity; understand that the Lord may be trying to purify them in the heat of difficulties; trust the Lord to take care of them no what the situation or circumstances; realize that decisions they make can have a long-term or eternal difference in their life and the lives of the members of the immediate and extended family.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New International Version (NIV 1984).