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Ruth 1

“When Bitter becomes Better”

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This study focuses on the relationship between Ruth and her mother-in-law, Naomi. Pastor Gary commented on the fact that Ruth was the sweetheart in the story, and how appropriate it was that her name means “friendship.” Ruth was true to her name and she was a genuine friend to Naomi. Ruth told her that she would go wherever Naomi went, and that Naomi’s people would be her people, and Naomi’s God would be her God. We also read that Ruth went so far as to say that she would even die where Naomi died.

In some ways Ruth was like Abraham, in that he was a pagan living in a pagan land (Abraham lived in what is modern-day Iraq), worshiping pagan gods. All of that changed when God appeared to Abraham and told him to leave his land, his people, his family, and go to a new place – the land of Israel – that God would give him and his descendants. Abraham obeyed and followed God, and he became a worshiper of God. Ruth did much the same thing, with one notable distinction, which was that God didn’t appear to her, so in a sense, she exercised more faith than Abraham. She too left everything familiar and comfortable, including her own family, to go to the land of Israel with Naomi to become a follower of God and start a new life. Although Ruth was a grieving widow like Naomi, her grief didn’t show as much as her resolve, courage, and sweet character.

In this study, we’ll look at five things we can hold on to when times are tough and life doesn’t make sense: we only know things partially now; God is not the author of sin and evil; though God is not the author of sin and evil, he can use it for something good; there will be a day when suffering will cease and God will judge all evil and injustice; and while we wait, our hope is in the Lord.

Naomi

1. Naomi became bitter over the death of her husband and sons, and she said to her daughters-in-law, in **Ruth 1:13b**: *"It is more bitter for me than for you, because the Lord's hand has gone out against me!"*¹
2. Ten years after Naomi and her family moved to Moab, she returned to Bethlehem with her daughter-in-law Ruth.
3. **Ruth 1:19b-20a** - *"When they arrived in Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them, and the women exclaimed, 'Can this be Naomi?' 'Don't call me Naomi,' she told them. 'Call me Mara...'"*
 - a. In other words, she was saying, "Don't call me Pleasant; call me Bitter old woman!"
4. In **Ruth 1:20b-21**, we see, to her way of thinking, what she believed to be the reason for her bitterness: *"[Because] the Almighty² has made my life very bitter. I went away full, but the Lord³ has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The Lord has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me."*
5. Naomi described her life in these terms:
 - a. The Almighty has made my life very bitter.
 - b. The Lord brought me back empty.
 - c. The Lord has afflicted me.
 - d. The Almighty has brought misfortune upon me.
6. She was basically saying, "God, has ruined my life!"
7. We shouldn't be too quick to judge Naomi, because she was a woman who was experiencing tremendous pain.
 - a. Her husband and two sons died, she had no money, no home, and no hope in her present circumstances or her future.
 - b. She was being brutally honest about her feelings toward God, which is okay, because God is big enough to handle our feelings toward him.
 - c. We read words of anger and honesty being poured out to God many times in the Psalms.
 - i. David - **Psalm 13:1-2a** - *"How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart?"*

¹ The Hebrew word for bitter is "mara."

² The Hebrew word for Almighty is Shaddai.

³ The Hebrew word for Lord is Yahweh.

- ii. David – [Psalm 22:1-2](#) – *“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, and am not silent.”*
- iii. Asaph – [Psalm 77:7-9](#) – *“Will the Lord reject forever? Will he never show his favor again? Has his unfailing love vanished forever? Has his promise failed for all time? Has God forgotten to be merciful? Has he in anger withheld his compassion?”*

8. Naomi’s feelings were legitimate, but her theology was not entirely accurate.
 - a. She blamed God for all of her suffering and pain.
 - b. She said that God was responsible for all that had happened to her.
 - c. But the question needs to be asked, was God responsible?

9. Why are we so quick to blame God when things are messed up and the circumstances and situations in our lives are terrible?
 - a. There seems to be among many people – Christians and unbelievers – an intuitive recognition of the sovereignty of God; but it is often limited to bad things.
 - i. When something bad happens in life, since God is in control, he either caused it or he could have prevented it; thus, God is responsible for our misery.
 - b. Isn’t it odd that this way of thinking doesn’t translate the same way when something good happens?
 - i. When we get a good job or find a spouse, we think it was our doing, that we had the skill or charm to make it happen, and God had nothing to do with it.

10. Faulty thinking assumes that when good things happen, it’s okay for us to take credit, and when bad things happen, it’s okay for us to blame God.
 - a. We read Naomi’s understanding of things in [Ruth 1:21a](#), which says, *“I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty...”*
 - b. Why didn’t she say, “The Lord sent me away full, and I have come back empty”?
 - c. Because she believed in the sovereignty of God, but only as it related to bad things, and bad things translate to a bad God.

11. God is sovereign, but God is also good, and if we only see the sovereignty of God without the goodness of God, we will become bitter just like Naomi, and blame God for every bad thing.

12. God is good, but the world is not, which is why Jesus, in [John 16:33](#), said, *"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."*
13. Paul, in [Romans 8:28](#), encouraged Believers to know that God tells his people: "I am working all things together for your good."
14. We must hold on to two things: God is good and God is working out all things for our good and for his glory.
15. Lee Strobel, author of several books, including *A Case for Faith*, commissioned a national survey a few years ago, and he asked people to identify the one question they could ask God if given the opportunity.
 - a. The number one response was: "Why is there suffering in the world?"
 - b. Regular folks as well as giants of the faith, like C.S. Lewis, have questioned God when they experienced personal pain and loss.
 - i. After Lewis lost his wife to cancer, he called out to God for comfort but sense no reply.
 - ii. Confused, he asked, "What can this mean? Why is He so present a commander in our time of prosperity and so very absent a help in time of trouble?"

Five Things To Hold On To
When Times Are Tough And Life Doesn't Make Sense

#1 - We Only Know Things Partially Now

16. Our viewpoint and our understanding are limited.
17. We can't always comprehend the "Why's" of life, which means we will torment ourselves trying to answer questions that only God can answer.
18. [1 Corinthians 13:12](#) - *"Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known."*
19. Life right now is like looking into a foggy mirror, but one day we will know what we cannot know now.

#2 - God Is Not The Author Of Sin And Evil

20. Sin and evil in this world are the result of rebellion against God.

- a. The first was Lucifer (Satan), who rebelled against God and was kicked out of heaven, expelled to the Earth, who then tempted man to do the same.
 - b. This is how sin entered the world and the human race, and as a result, we live in a world of death, disease, injustice, perversion, hatred, etc., and the reason is that human beings rejected God and his best.
21. The good news is that God was not satisfied for us to remain lost, which is the reason Jesus died for us to save us and rescue us from a fallen world!

#3 - Though God Is Not The Author Of Sin And Evil
He Can Use It For Something Good

22. Joseph suffered betrayal in his own family.
- a. **Genesis 50:20** - *"You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives."*
23. In time, God can bring good things out of terrible times.

#4 - There Will Be A Day When Suffering Will Cease And
God Will Judge All Evil And Injustice

24. **Acts 17:31** - *"For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice..."*
25. **Ecclesiastes 12:14** - *"For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil."*

#5 - While We Wait, Our Hope Is In The Lord

26. **Romans 5:3-5** - *"... suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character, and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us."*
27. **Isaiah 49:13b** - *"For the Lord comforts his people and will have compassion on his afflicted ones."*
28. By the end of the book of Ruth, Naomi moved from feeling bitter to feeling blessed, even though she had no idea how things would go for her.
- a. The same is true for each one of us, because even though we can't always see how things will turn out, we need to hold onto the fact that:

- i. God is good!
 - ii. God works out all things for our good and at the same time his glory!
- b. During her imprisonment in a Nazi death camp, Corrie ten Boom wrote these words: “No matter how deep our darkness, He is deeper still.”

Discussion Questions

1. Review the introduction to the study guide with your group to provide the appropriate background.
2. Read [Ruth 1:15-22](#) to provide an overview for this study.
3. Spend time talking about the four ways Naomi described her life. (See #4 above)
 - a. Share experiences you’ve had when you agreed with Naomi’s theology.
 - b. What are some of the characteristics of people who believe “God has ruined their life”?
 - c. How did the Lord minister to you when you felt like he was responsible for the bad circumstances/situations?
4. Read and discuss [Psalm 13:1-2](#), [Psalm 22:1-2](#), and [Psalm 77:7-9](#).
 - a. Share experiences you’ve had when you cried out to God in your pain, grief, and suffering.
 - b. How did the Lord minister his healing, comfort, blessing, etc.?
5. Provide an overview of the five things Pastor Gary encouraged us to hold on to when times are tough and life doesn’t make sense, and spend time talking about the struggles and challenges the people in your group are having and how their difficult circumstances/situations relate to each of the five points. (See #15 through #28 above)
6. What would you say to people who’ve experienced pain and heartaches like these:
 - a. “How can you say God is good when I was raped?”
 - b. “How can you say God is good when I was beaten as a child?”
 - c. “How can you say God is good when my child died of cancer?”
 - d. “How can you say God is good when my husband/wife left me?”
7. Close your time in prayer by praying the Scriptures referenced in this study guide.

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