

**Ruth 1:6-18**  
**November 13, 2016**

**Open with Prayer**

**HOOK:**

Most of us can remember when we made our profession of faith in Christ. We know how old we were, what our life was like before we knew Jesus, the catalytic event(s) that opened our eyes and heart to our need for Jesus. We all have a story, and I bet all of us can say that our decision for Christ didn't happen overnight. It was a process.

Q: Think about your spiritual journey and how you arrived at your decision to follow Christ. While you were on that journey, **who or what made God attractive to you?** Why were they attractive to you? Or what did you learn about God that attracted you to Him?

I was blessed to be born into a Christian home and unconditionally loved by my parents. They raised me in the church and taught me about Jesus all along the way. I made my decision to place my full faith and trust in Him at age 10. But I dare say that was not a hard decision for me because *Jesus was attractive to me*. I was drawn to Jesus because I knew He unconditionally loved me with all of my sins and flaws and quirks in me. Jesus was attractive to me because I saw the love of God in my parents. This is a statement of the obvious, but I think it's fair to say that if Jesus had not been attractive to me, I wouldn't have become His follower.

**Transition:** Many of you described beautifully the people in your lives that made God attractive to you. And it never hurts us to remember that there are lost people in our lives who are seeking God. They feel a void in their life that can only be filled by Jesus. They are looking for a God who is attractive to them. I think Ruth was attracted to Naomi's God. As we go through today's lesson, **consider that we CAN make God attractive to others BY incorporating into our lives the EVIDENCES of Naomi's strong faith in God.** As we go through today's lesson, let's see if we can tag those evidences of Naomi's faith.

**BOOK (NIV 1984):**

V.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.

V.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.

V.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.

V.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

V.10:

- and said to her, "We will go back with you to your people."

V.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?”

V.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—

V.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!**”

V.14:

- At this they wept again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law good-bye, but **Ruth clung to her.**

V.15:

- “Look,” said Naomi, “your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her.”

V.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.**”

V.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.”

V.18:

- When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her.

### **Process Observations/Questions:**

Q V.6: What prompts Naomi to move back to Judah? [She heard in Moab that the LORD had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them.]

Q V.7-8: (Find some humor) *When* does Naomi decide to suggest to her daughter-in-laws that they should go back to their homelands? [AFTER they started the journey to Judah! Shouldn’t Naomi have had that conversation before they left?!

Q: On a more serious note, I have to believe that she could have had this conversation before they left, but didn’t. It’s not like they moved on down the road and then it “hit” Naomi for the first time. So why do you think she had a hard time discussing this with them before they left? [Naomi loved her daughter-in-laws; they are her family; guilt for being selfish; wanting the best for them.]

Q V.8-9: Why did Naomi want her daughter-in-laws to go back to their mothers in their homeland? [She wanted each of them to be blessed by the Lord by finding rest in the home of a new husband. She wanted what she thought would be best for them because in that culture, marriage meant security for a woman.]

Q: What would be the prospects of her daughter-in-laws being married to Israelites, given that they were Moabites? [Pretty slight because Israel, as a general rule, had a low view of Moabites. However, because they had married Israelite men, though they were foreigners, they would be considered under God's covenant.]

Q: How would you describe Naomi's walk with God based on what you read? [She appears to be close to God. She has a genuine reverence and respect for the Lord. She prays over her Orpah and Ruth because she desired to see God be good to them.]

Q V.10: How do Orpah and Ruth respond? [They want to continue to Judah with Naomi.]

Q V.11-13: Naomi insists three times that they should go back to their homelands. What does she tell them to persuade them to go back to Moab? [Basically, even if I could remarry today and produce two more sons, would you really wait for them to grow old enough to marry them?!]

Observation: Notice Naomi's presupposition. Every selling point is based on the notion that her daughter-in-laws would marry additional sons of Naomi. Not once does she consider that Orpah and Ruth might marry a different Israelite man. As a teaser, you will discover in the weeks to come why Naomi had this thought process.

Q V.13: Naomi makes a strong statement saying, "It is more bitter for me than for you, because the LORD's hand has gone out against me!" Why do you think Naomi believes that her losses are "more bitter" and due to the "Lord's hand having gone out against her?" [At a practical level, the young ladies still had potential for childbearing. Naomi's chances of bearing more children weren't so great.]

Q V.14-15: How did Orpah and Ruth respond? [Orpah decides to go back to Moab, but Ruth "clung" to Naomi]

Q V.15-18: Naomi tries again to convince Ruth one last time to join Orpah and go back to Moab, but Ruth has no intentions of returning to Moab. What did Ruth tell Naomi to convey her love and loyalty to Naomi.? ["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."]

Q: What strikes you about Ruth's response? [Ruth was willing to give up the idea of marriage; Ruth was apparently attracted to the God of Israel. Knowing the God of Israel appears to outweigh her need to be married. Let others engage this.]

Share: I am struck by how Ruth is drawn to Naomi's God. It makes me believe that Elimelech and his family were God-fearing people, and Ruth saw that and found God attractive to her. I have found myself pondering throughout the week, "Do people I interact with find God attractive because of what they see in me? Or am I doing something or saying something that makes God unattractive to them." When I see Ruth so powerfully drawn to Naomi and see her willingness to take the risk of being unmarried the rest of her life and see her willingness to leave her family behind in Moab, I think it's possible that God is drawing Ruth through Naomi.

Q: What **EVIDENCES** do you see that Naomi had a strong faith in God?

***She was a woman of prayer*** (V.8-9)

In verses 8 and 9 we have her first attempt to persuade Orpah and Ruth to return to Moab. Twice she prays—‘May the LORD ...’ (v. 8); ‘May the LORD ...’ (v. 9). Prayer to the Lord is the expression of faith in the Lord. Naomi believed that the Lord orders and controls events, otherwise there would have been no point in her praying.

***She believed that any good thing is a gift of the Lord’s kindness*** (v.8-9)

This is revealed by the content of her prayer for her daughters-in-law (vv. 8–9). She recognized that, if they were to have new husbands, they would be a gift of the Lord’s kindness.

***She acted unselfishly toward others*** (v.13)

Naomi’s words in verses 11 to 13 are moving. She urged her daughters-in-law not to sacrifice their future for her. Her thoughts were for their welfare, not her own.

***She had a balanced view of the Lord*** (v.13)

Understanding the Lord’s sovereignty in all things, she recognized that her bitter experiences were from him (v. 13). Behind this appears to be a recognition that when she and Elimelech moved to Moab, it had been a bad move. She understood that the Lord disciplines his people.

***She had an attractive faith*** (v.14, 16)

If her faith had not been attractive, Ruth is unlikely to have clung to her (v. 14) and expressed her desire that Naomi’s God be her God (v. 16). Her faith in the Lord promoted Ruth’s faith in the Lord. We might think that the bitterness of Naomi’s experience would have had the opposite effect, but no. Faith that clings to the Lord in the face of bitter experiences is faith that promotes faith.

### **LOOK:**

I am struck by how Ruth is drawn to Naomi’s God. It makes me believe that Elimelech and his family were God-fearing people, and Ruth saw that and found God attractive to her. I have found myself pondering throughout the week, “Do people I interact with find God attractive because of what they see in me? Or am I doing something or saying something that makes God unattractive to them.”

We live in a world filled with lost people who are seeking God. People aren’t drawn to God if God is not attractive to them. God placed people in our lives to help lead us to Jesus. These special folk made God attractive to us. We need to do the same! We need to live our lives in a way that draws people to Jesus. They need to see God in us. Ruth was drawn to Naomi’s God because of Naomi. Ruth was willing to give up a life in Moab in order to know Naomi’s God.

Let’s make God attractive to others in our words and deeds!

**Close in Prayer**

**Commentaries for Today's Lesson:**

**Pentecost, J. D. (1985). Daniel. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Vol. 1, pp. 419-421). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.**

II. Seeking a Home by Faith (1:6–22)

The main narrative portion now begins. Dialogue was the primary device used by the author. Fifty-nine of the 84 verses in the book contain dialogue, beginning in verse 8. Naomi resolved to return home, and in so doing she believed that she had to leave her daughters-in-law in Moab because she thought that would be best for them. She received a surprise when Ruth resolved to return with her.

A. *A loving choice (1:6–18)*

1:6–7. **Naomi** learned that rain had come to her homeland. The famine was ended and God provided **food** (crops from the field and fruit from the trees). It was **the LORD** who had stopped the famine and given rain; it was not Baal, who the Canaanites believed was the god who sent rain. **Return** is a key word in Ruth. Hebrew forms of this word are used several times in this first chapter. Here is an apt illustration of repentance. Naomi reversed the direction she and her husband had taken. She turned away from **Moab** and the errors of the past. She turned her back on the tragic graves of her loved ones and headed **back** to **Judah**, her homeland.

1:8. **Naomi**, sensing that the prospects of her daughters-in-law for remarriage in Israel would be slight, urged them to stay in Moab. Her telling each of them to return to her **mother's home** was unusual in a male-dominated society. Since Naomi was thinking of their remarriages, she may have referred to their mothers because her daughters-in-law would have discussed their wedding plans with their mothers.

The word **kindness** is the Hebrew word *hesed*. It is an important word in the Book of Ruth (cf. 2:20; 3:10) and throughout the Old Testament. It speaks of God's covenant loyalty to His people. It involves grace in that it was extended even when it was not deserved. Here divine will and human action went hand in hand. Both God and humans were doers of *hesed*. The basis of Naomi's blessing was the gracious actions of Ruth and Orpah to their husbands and to Naomi. Both young women were worthy in the eyes of their mother-in-law, so she wanted God to be good to them. Though they were foreigners, they had married Israelite men and thus were under God's covenant.

1:9–10. Naomi then asked that God would give **each of** them a place of **rest** with **another husband**. This became a key issue in the book. Marriage meant security for a woman. And yet ironically Ruth seemed to be giving up this possibility by leaving Moab. Naomi's kisses were intended as farewells, but both women stated their desire to return with Naomi. Possibly a custom in that day required this.

1:11. Three times **Naomi** insisted that they **return** to Moab (vv. 11–12, 15). They needed to be sure to remarry. In the ancient Near East a woman without a husband was in a serious situation because she lacked security. And widows were especially needy. Naomi referred to the levirate custom in Israel in which a brother was responsible to marry his deceased brother's wife in order to conceive a son and perpetuate his brother's name and inheritance (Deut. 25:5–10). Naomi pointed out that this would not be possible in their case since she had no **more sons**.

1:12–13. Naomi said that she was past the age of childbearing. Even if she did acquire a new **husband** and have **sons** it was ridiculous to think that Orpah and Ruth would **wait** for them to grow **up**.

Naomi seemed a bit insensitive to the grief of her daughters-in-law. She thought that her case was **more bitter** than theirs because they still had potential for childbearing. She regarded her plight as a result of God's affliction (cf. vv. 20–21). Naomi was apparently in a stage of grief that caused her to speak in anger against God. And yet she was still a woman of faith. She had no doubt that God was actively involved in their lives (cf. vv. 8–9; 2:20). She saw God as sovereign and the ultimate cause of life's issues.

1:14. **Orpah** should not be unduly criticized for returning to Moab. She was obeying the wishes of **her mother-in-law**. Nothing more is said in the Book of Ruth about Orpah. Presumably she remarried in Moab.

Ruth, however, did the unexpected. Though Orpah chose to seek a husband, **Ruth clung to** Naomi, apparently choosing to follow and serve her widowed mother-in-law rather than seek a husband. In Ruth's mind the decision probably meant that she would never have a husband or children. James would have considered her concern for her widowed mother-in-law a profoundly religious act (James 1:27).

1:15. **Naomi** again urged Ruth to return to her home. She cited the example of Orpah's obedience to her request. Naomi was aware that the decision to return meant the continuing influence of the Moabite **gods** including Chemosh the chief god (Num. 21:29; 1 Kings 11:7), but the importance of Ruth's having a husband seemed to outweigh this concern. Naomi did not make it easy for Ruth to come to faith in the God of Israel.

1:16. **Ruth** had endured three entreaties of her mother-in-law to return home to Moab (vv. 11–12, 15). But she chose life with Naomi over her family, her national identity, and her religious idolatry. In one of the most beautiful expressions of commitment in all the world's literature she laced her future to that of Naomi. She confessed allegiance to the **people** of Israel (**your people**) and to the **God** of Israel (**your God**). Here was a stirring example of a complete break with the past. Like Abraham Ruth decided to leave her ancestors' idolatrous land to go to the land of promise. And Ruth did it without the encouragement of a promise. In fact she made her decision despite Naomi's strenuous encouragement to do otherwise.

1:17. Ruth's decision was so strong that it included reference to death and burial. She would stay with Naomi to death and beyond. To seal the quality of her decision, Ruth invoked judgment from Israel's God if she were to break her commitment of loyalty to her mother-in-law. Ruth's conversion was complete. The events that followed show that her life matched her confession.

1:18. **Naomi** then **stopped urging** Ruth to go back to Moab. Since Ruth had invoked God's name in her commitment (v. 17), Naomi acquiesced. Nothing more could be said. The Book of Ruth says nothing about Naomi welcoming her daughter-in-law to the fold of those who trusted in Israel's God. **Ruth** had leaped by faith the barriers that had been thrown up before her.

**Prime, J. (2007). Opening up Ruth (pp. 35-41). Leominster: Day One Publications.**

## **2 Patterns of the Lord's kindness (1:6–22)**

Our sense of taste is sometimes helpful in describing experience. This is true in the English language; it is also true in Hebrew.

‘Bitter’ is the graphic word used by Naomi to describe her circumstances as she made the journey back from Moab to Bethlehem. Three times the word is used:

1:13—‘No, my daughters, it is more *bitter* for me than for you, because the LORD’s hand has gone out against me!’

1:20—‘Don’t call me Naomi [pleasant],’ she told them, ‘Call me *Mara* [*bitter*], because *the Almighty has made my life very bitter.*’

Naomi’s circumstances make her use of this emotive word understandable. Ten years earlier her life had been full and pleasant. Happily married with two sons, when famine came to Bethlehem her husband acted to protect his family by moving to Moab. But then bitter tragedy struck in the form of bereavement. With the death of her husband and then her two sons, Naomi was left alone—a widow in a strange land. Her only family were her two Moabite daughters-in-law. Sorrow, pain and a sense hopelessness are behind her description of her circumstances as ‘bitter’. Her future looked bleak.

However, as we examine the way the story unfolds, we discover that her circumstances were not hopeless. In Naomi’s bitter circumstances the Lord was at work preparing the way for his transforming kindness. Three patterns of the Lord’s kind dealings with his people are seen:

#### **News of the Lord’s aid prompts a return to the Lord (vv. 6–7)**

‘When she heard ...’ (v. 6). How Naomi heard in the days before telephone, e-mail, radio and television, we are not told, but good news has a way of spreading. The good news was that ‘the LORD had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them’. The news was not that the weather had changed, that the sowing conditions were good, or that the crops were starting to grow. All those things may have been true, but instead the news conveyed the truth that the Lord had acted to end the famine. As we saw from Ruth 1:1, the famine was from the Lord—an act of judgement because of his people’s rebellion against him. But in his wrath, the Lord remembers mercy. His anger lasts only a moment. The Lord, who commits himself to his undeserving people, now came to their aid.

It is this news that prompted Naomi to return ‘home’ from Moab (v. 6). The words ‘home’, ‘return’ and ‘back’ all emphasize that Moab could never have been ‘home’ for Naomi. The land of Judah in the Promised Land was her true home. Elimelech’s decision to leave Judah had not been a good one. He and his family should have stuck out the famine, waiting for the Lord to come to their aid. But news of the Lord coming to the aid of his people prompted Naomi to return, just as the Lord intended. It was his plan that she would return to Judah, as part of his coming to the aid of his people in a far greater way than simply providing food for them. Through Naomi returning home, the Lord was putting in place the people who would establish the family line into which the Lord Jesus would be born.

The Christian message is the news that the same Lord who came to the aid of his people in Naomi’s day has come to the aid of the world in the Lord Jesus Christ. When the tsunami devastated the coastlines surrounding the Indian Ocean in December 2004, the television news showed pictures of aircraft dropping down aid to remote, devastated areas. In this world, devastated by the bitter effects of human sin, God did not just drop an aid parcel, he came himself. As the Bread of Life, the Lord Jesus gave his life on the cross to give life to all who will return to him. He died, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring us to God. The Lord Jesus is the living bread that came down from heaven to give his life for the life of the world.

Our first ancestors, Adam and Eve, lived with God in the place provided for them. It was home. It was the place where they enjoyed a close relationship with God. Through their rebellion against God, they forfeited their residence in that perfect place. This reality has been repeated in the lives of all their descendants (us) as we continue to ignore God and rebel against him. The good news is that the Lord Jesus has come to the aid of his people. The message of his cross is that there is a way back to God. It is as that message is made known that those who are far off are prompted to return to God.

‘Those who are far off’ includes backsliding believers. The seeds of backsliding are in the hearts of all believers. All Christians have the potential to wander. Like sunbathers floating on blow-up beds on the sea, careless Christians can suddenly discover that they have drifted far from their Lord. It happens when we do as we see fit, instead of doing what the Lord says is fitting. The record of Naomi’s return proclaims the good news that backsliders can return to God. The same Lord who showed restoring kindness to his rebellious people, to individuals like David, Jonah and Peter, continues to show that same kindness to his wandering people today. As an old hymn urges:

Let not conscience make you linger,  
nor of fitness fondly dream;  
All the fitness he requireth,  
Is to feel your need of him:  
This he gives you;  
'Tis the Spirit’s rising beam!

### **Faith in the Lord promotes faith in the Lord on the part of others (vv. 8–18)**

As Naomi starts her journey home the narrator describes the moving interaction between her and her two Moabite daughters-in-law. The words ‘wept’, ‘kissed’ and ‘clung to’ express the emotion of the scene as Naomi urged her daughters-in-law to return to Moab, resulting in Orpah leaving and Ruth staying with her. An important principle in studying Old Testament narrative is not to read more into the text than is there. While observations could be made about human relationships, a close examination of what was said and done reveals that, despite her bitter experiences, Naomi was a woman who had faith in the Lord. Consider the evidence of her faith:

#### *She was a woman of prayer*

In verses 8 and 9 we have her first attempt to persuade Orpah and Ruth to return to Moab. Twice she prays—‘May the LORD ...’ (v. 8); ‘May the LORD ...’ (v. 9). Prayer to the Lord is the expression of faith in the Lord. Naomi believed that the Lord orders and controls events, otherwise there would have been no point in her praying.

#### *She believed that any good thing is a gift of the Lord’s kindness*

This is revealed by the content of her prayer for her daughters-in-law (vv. 8–9). She recognized that, if they were to have new husbands, they would be a gift of the Lord’s kindness.

#### *She acted unselfishly towards others*

Naomi’s words in verses 11 to 13 are moving. She urged her daughters-in-law not to sacrifice their future for her. Her thoughts were for their welfare, not her own.



*She had a balanced view of the Lord*

Understanding the Lord's sovereignty in all things, she recognized that her bitter experiences were from him (v. 13). Behind this appears to be a recognition that when she and Elimelech moved to Moab, it had been a bad move. She understood that the Lord disciplines his people.

*She had an attractive faith*

If her faith had not been attractive, Ruth is unlikely to have clung to her (v. 14) and expressed her desire that Naomi's God be her God (v. 16). Her faith in the Lord promoted Ruth's faith in the Lord. We might think that the bitterness of Naomi's experience would have had the opposite effect, but no. Faith that clings to the Lord in the face of bitter experiences is faith that promotes faith.

Consider the faith that Naomi's faith promoted in Ruth:

*Ruth's faith was determined faith*

Three times Naomi urged Ruth to go back, until, realizing that Ruth was determined, she stopped urging her (v. 18).

*Ruth's faith was wholehearted faith*

She clung to Naomi (v. 14). The word 'clung' could be otherwise translated 'united' or 'cleaved'. Ruth attached herself to Naomi like a limpet might attach itself to a rock. And Ruth's action was explained by her words (vv. 16–17). They can be summarized like this:

Your journey = my journey  
Your home = my home  
Your people = my people  
Your God = my God  
Your future = my future

At the heart of her declaration was her commitment to Naomi's God. This was not just a commitment to Naomi. Orpah went back to her people and her gods (v. 15). Ruth left her gods behind and wholeheartedly embraced Naomi's God.

*Ruth's faith was serious faith*

Ruth saw herself as accountable to Naomi's God. 'May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me' (v. 17). Since all she knew of the Lord must have come from Naomi, it must have included this sense of accountability to the Lord. She was learning what the Bible calls the fear of the Lord.

Faith in the Lord, especially in the face of bitter trials, is frequently used by the Lord to produce faith in others. Often when a believer is least aware of it, the Lord may be using his or her faith to promote faith in him. As a watching world observes a submissive faith in the Lord, it is prompted to ask believers to give a reason for the hope that they have. It is a mistake to think that we need to make the Lord more attractive to others by giving the impression that the life of faith is easy. Faith in the Lord often shines at its brightest and most attractive in the reality of

bitter trials. The suffering believer who clings to the Lord in times of trial is more likely to promote faith in others than those who appear to have ‘successful’ and ‘straightforward’ lives.

For the Christian, accounts of the faith of others during times of trial are often a great encouragement to persevering faith. The list in Hebrews 11 of those who lived by faith is given to encourage faith that endures. The study of Bible characters like Joseph, David, Jeremiah, Daniel and Paul, and how they exercised faith in the face of trial, spurs us on to do the same. Reading Christian biographies has a similar impact. It is also why sharing fellowship with those who are clinging to the Lord Jesus in times of trial can often be a great stimulus to confidence in God.

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