



ruth

DEVOTIONAL

STARTING OVER // NOVEMBER 7, 2021

GRACE
FELLOWSHIP

This lesson begins a four-week study of the Old Testament Book of Ruth.

Key Passage: Read the first chapter of the Book of Ruth (1:1-22)

Discussion Starter: Based upon your reading of Ruth 1:1-22, what do you observe about the sovereignty of God in the way He guided Ruth through the circumstances of her life to fulfill His plan for her?

We see in Chapter 1 three ways that people often deal with problems in their lives.

1. Like Elimelech and Naomi, some people try to run from their problems (1:1-5).

A man who was having marital difficulties went to a counselor. The counselor, a jogging enthusiast, believed jogging was the answer to almost every problem. Therefore, he advised the man to start jogging. The man was desperate and replied, "Doc, I'll do anything you say. Just tell me what to do." The doctor responded, "I think you ought to jog 10 miles a day for 14 days. That will relieve you of your tension, give you good rest, and change your whole outlook. Then give me a call after 14 days and we'll see how things are going." So, the man got on his jogging program, and at the end of 14 days, he called the doctor as he had been told. The doctor asked, "How are you doing?" The man replied, "I'm doing fine." "Have you kept up with your jogging as I recommended?" asked the doctor. The man replied, "I sure have, just like you said: 10 miles a day for 14 days." The doctor then asked, "Well, how's your wife?" The man replied, "How should I know? I'm 140 miles from home!"

Some people think they can solve their problems by running away from them. Elimelech and Naomi made a bad decision when they chose to run away from Bethlehem and go to Moab during the famine in Israel. Their step of disobedience in moving to Moab led to a second disobedient step of their sons marrying pagan women, which God had forbidden (Deut. 7:1-11). It all ultimately ended in death for Elimelech and his sons.

Discuss: Do you agree or disagree with this statement: "It is better to be in a famine and in God's will than to be well-fed but out of God's will"? Explain your answer.

Discuss: When have you been in God's will even though you were going through a tough time? How did knowing you were in God's will help you through that time?

Discuss: How would you explain to a new Christian that being in God's will doesn't mean you'll never go through tough times?

Discuss: How can sin be a "slippery slope" – one bad decision leads to another and then another – when we try to run from problems?

2. Like Naomi, some people misdiagnose their problems (1:6-18).

When Naomi heard that the famine in Israel ended (1:6), she decided it was time to go back to Bethlehem. The problem here is that Naomi had misdiagnosed her root problem. She had been faithful to God only when times were good; when the famine came, she abandoned God and her commitment to Him. She misdiagnosed her faith problem as a food problem!

In his book *The Shadow of Agony*, Oswald Chambers wrote, “The majority of us begin with the bigger problems outside and forget the one inside. A man has to learn ‘the plague of his own heart’ before his own problems can be solved.” It is easy for us to shortsightedly attempt to solve temporal, physical needs at the expense of eternal, spiritual needs.

Discuss: When have you seen a person misdiagnose their problems by attributing their issues to the wrong thing instead of to what was really causing them?

Discuss: What causes us to misdiagnose our problems?

Discuss: How can a Christian be sure he is diagnosing his problems accurately?

Discuss: How would you advise a new Christian to be intentional about focusing on eternal, spiritual priorities rather than on temporal, physical priorities?

3. Like Naomi, some people become bitter against God for their problems (1:19-22).

The name “Naomi” means “pleasant,” but Naomi had allowed her trials to make her bitter, not better (1:13). We cannot always control the circumstances in our lives, but we can always control our response to those circumstances. Notice that Naomi accused God of dealing bitterly with her (1:20) and of bringing calamity upon her (1:21). Naomi knew God’s name – she refers to Him twice as “*the Almighty*” (1:20-21) – but she didn’t know God’s nature.

God desires to use our problems for our good. Even when we bring suffering upon ourselves through disobedience, God can use it to correct us. Rather than viewing her suffering as a window through which to glimpse God’s goodness, she viewed her suffering as a wall blocking her hope and joy.

Discuss: Naomi knew God’s name but not His nature. What words does the Bible use to describe God’s nature, and how can knowing His nature help in tough times?

Discuss: Do you tend to view your problems as windows or walls? Why?

For Further Study:

“7 Little Known Facts about Ruth” article at www.crosswalk.com

“The Book of Ruth: Journey of Faith” movie

Life Change Commentary on Ruth and Esther by the Navigators