

Savoring God's Word

A Meditation on the Book of Ruth (selected verses)

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BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

When You'd Like to Connect Better with Others

Ruth 1:8, 14-18; 2:11, 19-20; 3:1; 4:13-16

This meditation exercise is especially for those wishing to *build relationships with others*. If you wish to have a group meditate on the passage together, the instructions for the group leader are in italics. If you wish to use it alone, ignore those instructions. This meditation roughly follows the pattern of *lectio divina*, but also includes elements from the Ignatian style of Scripture meditation. For more information about how to meditate on Scripture, see [Savoring God's Word](#) or the recording [Meditating on Scripture](#) (scroll to bottom of page).

WARMING UP (5-10 minutes)

Center yourself by breathing in and out several times. Relax your neck and then take time to let your muscles relax. If thoughts interrupt, set them aside, or write them down if you need to do so. Ask yourself the following question to help focus your thoughts for meditation on today's passage. **What does God want me to be in my relationships with others?** Give your answer in the form of an object -- a household gadget, a yard or car tool, or anything simple like that. Close your eyes and take a few minutes to quietly see yourself in relationship to others.

Group leader: After group members have had a chance to greet each other, read the centering instructions above. Then present the above "quiet question" and let them reflect quietly for a few minutes. Repeat the question and ask them to share their thoughts in a sentence or two. Anyone who wishes to pass may do so.

READING the PASSAGE (15-20 minutes)

If you have heard this story of Ruth before, set aside what you've heard about Ruth or Naomi. View them for their strength of character. Read silently the passage printed below, noting the explanations in the right column.

Group leader: Ask a group member to read the passage below aloud. Suggest that other group members might want to close their eyes and listen.

RUTH 1:8, 14-18; 2:11, 19-20; 3:1; 4:13-16

ITALICIZED WORDS &
PHRASES

TRAGEDY STRIKES

1:8 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. . .

14 Orpah kissed her mother-in-law good-bye, but Ruth clung to her.

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

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

RETURN TO ISRAEL

2:11 Boaz replied, "I've been told all about what you [Ruth] have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband --how you left your father and mother and your homeland and came to live with a people you did not know before.

2:19 Her mother-in-law asked her, "Where did you *glean* today? Where did you work? Blessed be the man who *took notice of you!*" Then Ruth told her mother-in-law about the one at whose place she had been working. "The name of the man I worked with today is Boaz," she said. . . . 20 [Naomi] added, "That man is our close relative; he is one of our *kinsman-redeemers*."

SECURITY & FAMILY RESTORED

3:1 One day Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, "My daughter, should I not try to find a home for you, where you will be well provided for?"

4:13 So *Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife*. Then he went to her, and the Lord enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son. 14 The women said to Naomi: "Praise be to the Lord, who this day has not left you without a kinsman-redeemer. . . . 15 For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth." 16 Then Naomi took the child, laid him in her lap and cared for him.

If you haven't read the notes in the right column, read them silently now. Take a minute to consider the following questions.

Group leader: After the passage is read, ask group members to read silently the explanations in the right column and then to jot down answers to the questions below. After a

NAOMI This Israelite woman and her husband had gone to live in Moab, a foreign country. After her sons married Moabite women, her husband and two sons died. A widow faced with starvation, she decided to try to return to Israel.

GLEAN a law in Israel (Lev. 19:9; 23:22) allowing the poor to follow the reapers and gather the grain that was left behind. Gathering these stalks was not easy.

TOOK NOTICE OF YOU Naomi noticed that the reapers had left quite a bit behind, and she assumed they did it on purpose to help Ruth. This was true (2:15).

KINSMAN-REDEEMERS were close relatives who had the right to buy property of the deceased and to marry the wife of the deceased.

BOAZ TOOK RUTH AND SHE BECAME HIS WIFE Boaz was attracted to Ruth because of her kindness to Naomi. Then through Naomi's wise counsel, Ruth gained his attention even further.

few minutes, have them choose one question and share their answer to that question in a sentence or two. Or they may pass, if they wish. Explain that this is not a time for discussion, but for reporting responses to the questions.

RUTH & NAOMI'S RELATIONSHIP

1. Check the qualities listed below that you think describe Naomi.

- strong-minded
- listens to others
- confident
- bold
- controlling
- assertive
- easily swayed

In what ways was Naomi good to Ruth?

2. Check the qualities listed below that you think describe Ruth.

- strong-minded
- listens to others
- confident
- bold
- controlling
- assertive
- easily swayed

In what ways was Ruth good to Naomi?

3. These two women traveled together, lived together, probably starved together a few nights. What would it have taken for these two women to have gotten along?

4. Ruth seems to have been obeying the last phrase in these verses (italicized): "Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But *pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!*" (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10). In turn, Naomi tried to help Ruth by coaching her in marriage matters. Can you think of a time when you "helped someone up" and they also helped you? If so, ponder the value of the help you gave.

PICTURING the PASSAGE (10-15 minutes)

Before reading the passage again, consider these cues.

CHARACTER CUE: NAOMI'S GOOD WILL

This woman invalidated the myth that all mothers-in-law are controlling. Not only did Naomi try to keep her daughters-in-law from going with her for their own good, but when Ruth insisted, she gave in. She also didn't try to keep Ruth to herself, but began thinking about how Ruth could link up with her the family's kinsman-redeemer.

CHARACTER CUE: RUTH'S MOTIVES

Going with Naomi on that journey was not a clever choice, and we can only guess why Ruth did it. Perhaps she wanted to attach herself to God, and to Naomi's people, Israel. She implied that she believed in Jehovah God: "May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me."

CULTURAL CUE: PLIGHT OF WIDOWS

The passage opens with one of the most destitute situations in Scripture -- three widows without sons. In those times, widows got absolutely nothing. A deceased man's property went to the man who owned the family birthright. If no one helped the widow, she spent the rest of her life in extreme poverty. Because a widow had no male to protect her, people often took advantage of her. Israelite law stated that the son should care for a widow, but these three women had no sons! In that case, they returned to their parents (as Orpah did) to live a life of near-servant status. Ruth stayed with Naomi, but neither of them had anything.

Contrast this with the end of the account. Naomi and Ruth not only survived, but Ruth's remarriage meant they would also be cared for and have the thing that gave an Israelite woman the biggest boost in her self-worth: a son.

CULTURAL CUE: THE "ALIEN" OR "STRANGER"

Scripture required then (and now) godly people to care for certain groups of people who are likely to be forgotten and abused. Widows are one of those groups, as are "aliens" (NIV) or "strangers" (KJV). In those days, these were foreigners and immigrants who came to Israel. A certain class of "strangers" (of which Ruth seems to have been a part) put themselves under the protection of Israel's God. They often submitted to many requirements of the law of Israel and also received some of the privileges.¹ But aliens were not always treated well, evidenced by the need to command Jews not to oppress the alien (Zech. 7:10).

So imagine Ruth, a young foreign woman, gleaning in the fields. It was providential that Boaz commanded his men not to harm her (Ruth 2:9). She must have been a brave woman to have come to foreign country destitute, but eager to make a way for Naomi and herself.

SETTING CUE: THEIR JOURNEY

Naomi and Ruth traveled together from the land of Moab to the town of Bethlehem in southern Israel. It's difficult to imagine how these two made the journey. They had to walk through the hilly country of Moab around the Dead Sea -- about 70 miles along the trade routes. How did they cross the Jordan River, one wonders? People probably took them in at night and may have given them food for the next day. Daytime temperatures in Palestine can be in excess of 100 degrees, although in the hill country the evening temperature can fall sharply and the nights can be chilly.²

Armed with the above cues, read the passage aloud and close your eyes, picturing the events as if they were a movie playing in your mind. Work through each scene, imagining the sights, sounds and smells of the experience.

- Tragedy strikes
- The trip home to Israel
- Gleaning in the fields and meeting Boaz
- Forming a new family with Boaz

Group leader: Have group members read these cues silently. Then have a group member read the passage aloud while the others picture the events.

SOAKING in the PASSAGE (5-15 minutes)

¹ Merrill C. Tenney, *The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1967), p. 812.

²J. A. Thompson *Handbook of Life in Bible Times* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), p. 21

Reflect now on how this Scripture passage touches your life today. Read the passage aloud again and ponder the following question for several minutes: **What word or phrase, scene or image emerges from the passage and stays with you?**

After several minutes, write below the word or phrase or images or scenes that resonate within you from the passage.

Word or phrase: _____

Scene or image: I hear . . . or I see . . . _____

Group leader: Have a different group member read the passage aloud and then state the question printed in bold. Have the group sit quietly for a while and then fill in the one of the blanks above. After a few minutes, ask group members to read what they've written. Remind them that they may pass if they wish.

PONDERING the INVITATION (5-15 minutes)

Perhaps God is offering you an invitation in this passage to do or be something in the next few days. What might that be? Sit in silence for a few minutes, pondering this question: **What do I sense this passage is calling me to do or be right now?** Be open to the quiet, but don't feel pressured to come up with something.

Group leader: Read the above instructions aloud and after a few minutes, repeat the question printed in bold. Ask group members to respond by saying, I SENSE THIS PASSAGE CALLING ME TO: and then completing that statement with a short phrase. Anyone who wishes to pass may do so.

PRAISING (5-10 minutes)

Take a few minutes to respond to God about this meditation. **How do you feel about what you sensed (or didn't sense)? What is it you most want to say to God at this time?**

Group leader: After allowing a few minutes for private prayer, ask group members to pray for the person on their left. Anyone wishing to pray silently may do so, saying, "I'm praying silently." When they're finished, they can say, "Amen."

DAILY LECTIO:

If you wish, use the above format to meditate on God's word between group meetings. You may wish to focus on today's passage everyday this week or use the following passages:

- Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 (Why two are better than one.)
- Proverbs 17:17 (Friends through adversity)
- Galatians 6:9-10 (Caring for members of the church family)
- 1 Timothy 5:4-8 (Caring for family members)
- Psalm 68:1-10 (God provides family for widows)
- Psalm 146:1-10 (God provides for widows and aliens)

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