

EVERYDAY FAITH: "The Road Back"

INTRODUCTION

- **Key Idea:** God specializes in turning dead ends into doorways.

Elimelech led his family down the road to nowhere. Naomi was destitute and despairing. But this end was in many ways merely a beginning. The book of Ruth shows how God redeems the poor decisions of Elimelech.

THE PATH (RUTH 1:6-7)

Reasons for Naomi's Return:

1. Her **pitiful state**: Naomi had few options. She had no husband and no sons. She had no provision and no protection. Her life was functionally over.
2. Naomi had heard that **the Lord had visited the people of Israel**.
 - God had acted in covenant love and had brought an end to the famine (1:6).
 - When it comes to returning to God, Naomi is being **pushed** by dire circumstances, and she is being **pulled** by the mercy of God and His covenant faithfulness.

"When you've come to an end of yourself, that's the beginning of a work of God. God often empties us so they might fill us."

THE PARTING (RUTH 1:8-15)

- Naomi encourages Orpah and Ruth to return to their mother's house (1:8). Naomi intended to return to Judah by herself.
- There is a lot of emotion in this passage (1:9, 14). This language shows that these women have become like daughters to Naomi.
- **Naomi's prayer** in 1:8-9 invokes the covenant name of God (YHWH – "The LORD"). This is a **selfless act** because Naomi would have been better off with the girls accompanying her.

Substitution is the structure of love. Naomi wants to give Ruth and Orpah freedom and marriage. She gives them hope and a future by giving up what little hope that she had.

THE PLEDGE (RUTH 1:16-18)

- Ruth is determined that nothing but death will separate her and Naomi (1:16-17). This is a **staggering show of loyalty** because Ruth had living parents she left behind in Moab (2:11).
- Ruth's love is a gift in response to Naomi's lament.

"God does *hesed* to Naomi through Ruth. Ruth is God's answer to Naomi's lament. Within seconds of Naomi's charge that 'the hand of the Lord has gone out against me,' Ruth's hands are clinging to Naomi in a fierce grip of love." (Paul Miller)

"What the book of Ruth has the audacity to suggest is that a single act of heroic love on the part of an insignificant, ethnically alien widow was the key to the whole of Israel's future blessing." (John Tucker)

- It is a wonderful providence of God to look back on your life and see someone who has loved you like Ruth – a mother, a father, a faithful friend, or a counselor who has said hard things out of love.

Sermon Application Questions

May 24, 2020

PERSONAL RESPONSES

Pastor Philip taught us the word **return** is used 12 times in Ruth chapter 1.

In this chapter, Naomi “quits traveling the road to nowhere and **returns** to her home in Jerusalem.”

1

Many of us have prodigals in our lives who have made bad decisions and strayed from the ways of the Lord. Yet the book of Ruth teaches us that what seems like the end can be turned in God’s providence into a brand-new beginning.

Do you have a person in your life whom you pray will **return** to the ways of the Lord? How will you pray and prepare for his or her return?

Ruth is an example of *hesed*, covenant love. Reflect on this description of Ruth’s faithfulness to Naomi:

2

“Ruth made singleness, not her fate, but her choice. She committed herself in covenant love, not to a husband, but to a widow. Her wifely devotion and maternal energies would be at least for a period of time, sublimated in serving and caring for a lonely, vulnerable person in desperate need of support. She made the choice and there are people who are making that choice each and every day.”

How can you demonstrate this type of covenant faithfulness in your relationships today? Is there a particular relationship that the Lord is leading you to demonstrate *hesed* to?

DIGGING DEEPER

1

Take some time and reflect on some of the key passages related to this week’s sermon. Ask the Lord for help in making application of these truths to your life.

Ruth 1:16-17

But Ruth said, “Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the LORD do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you.”

Ruth 1:19-21

So the two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem. And when they came to Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them. And the women said, “Is this Naomi?” She said to them, “Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went away full, and the LORD has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi, when the LORD has testified against me and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?”

Ruth 2:11-12

But Boaz answered her, “All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told to me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before. The LORD repay you for what you have done, and a full reward be given you by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge!”

Read **Ruth 1:6-18** carefully with a view towards understanding the **emotions** of Naomi and her daughters-in-law.

2

What kinds of emotions are displayed in this passage?

What does this tell us about the relationship between Naomi and her daughters-in-law?

Do you find this type of relationship remarkable? Why or why not?

PERSONAL APPLICATION

Reflect on the words of John Tucker:

“What the book of Ruth has the audacity to suggest is that a single act of heroic love on the part of an insignificant, ethnically alien widow was the key to the whole of Israel's future blessing.”

1

Remember the theme of this sermon series is: **Everyday Faith**. Ruth changed the world by ordinary acts of everyday faithfulness. In this chapter, she demonstrated faithfulness to her mother-in-law.

What are the “ordinary acts” of faithfulness that God is calling you to fulfill this week? How can you be more faithful in your everyday responsibilities?

Pastor Philip said:

“There are the Orpahs who kiss us goodbye and there are the Ruths who take the journey with us. They suffer our laments, they bear the cost of our love. They love past our feelings and our moodiness. They display in greater measure the faith we once had. They love us out of the overflow of love for God.”

2

Who are the ones in your life who have taken the journey with you? Perhaps a faithful pastor who has called you to repent, a friend who has stuck closer than a brother, a counselor who has said some hard things out of love?

How can you be this type of faithful friend to someone else?