

**The Book of Ruth**  
**The Journey Home, Part 1**  
**Ruth 1:6-22**  
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Tonight we come back to Ruth. I have already so much enjoyed our journey through this wonderful Old Testament book, and tonight we come here again. Just to remind you, sort of to orient you again of where we are, according to chapter 1, verse 1, the events described here in the Book of Ruth occurred during the days of the judges: the period that began with the death of Joshua in about 1390 BC, and ended with the coronation of Saul as Israel's first king in 1051 BC. A period of about 340 years, and by far, the darkest period of Israel's history. Now the last time that I studied with you Ruth together, we listed nine separate purposes that lay behind the writing of this book. I am not going to take you through all nine of those again; instead, I think out of those nine, we can say that there are three primary spiritual purposes. You know, we could talk about the fact that it gives the lineage of David; it shows us where the Messiah will come from as recorded in Matthew's genealogy. We noted all of those things last time; but I think three primary spiritual purposes.

First of all, Ruth provides a personal portrait of the cycle of sin and deliverance that occurred again and again during the period of the judges. The cycle was one of disobedience, followed by God's judgment, followed by repentance, and followed by God's deliverance. Again and again, that national cycle is repeated in the Book of Judges. But here, in the Book of Ruth, we see that same cycle recorded in the life of one Hebrew family.

Secondly, we can say that Ruth shows that God's plan of redemption includes more than the Jews. It even includes Gentiles when they repent and believe in Yahweh. In fact, look at chapter 2 and verse 12, one of, certainly, the key verses in the book. Boaz says, "May the Lord reward your work, and your wages be full from the Lord [Yahweh], the God of Israel, under whose wings [Ruth] you have come to seek refuge." That's a beautiful picture of her conversion which, Lord willing, we'll look at together next Sunday night. The story of Ruth is a story of grace and redemption even for pagan Gentiles, for idolatrous worshipers who were willing to sacrifice their own children to their gods.

Thirdly, Ruth puts on display the amazing work of God's providence. This is a celebration of God's providence. Leon Morris writes, "The implication throughout this book is that God is watching over His people, and that He brings to pass what is good. The book is a book about God. He rules over all, and He brings blessing to those who trust Him." Or as John MacArthur puts it, "Ruth describes God's sovereign and providential care of seemingly unimportant people at apparently insignificant times which later prove to be monumentally crucial to accomplishing God's will." God's providence, His sovereignty is over all. His providence works out His

sovereignty in individual lives and the lives of families as well as nations.

Now last time we examined just the first five verses of chapter 1. And we called this introduction, really, to the book, “The Far Country,” because in a very real sense, these five verses are to this book and to the life of this family what the departure of the prodigal son for the far country was in the parable that Jesus told. We began by looking at *the desperate circumstances of the nation*. Verse 1 says, “Now it came about in the days when the judges governed.” Those were difficult times. Politically, the time of the judges was a time of great confusion. There was no central government in Israel; instead, there were a series of local deliverers that God raised up. Judges, they’re called: more rulers and leaders than those who deliberated on cases. And because there was no central authority, every man did that which was right in his own eyes. Politically, these were desperate times. Religiously, the times of the judges was a time of idolatry. If you want to read about that, read the end of the Book of Judges. We touched on it last time. It’s amazing the idolatry that characterized Israel at this time. Even the grandson of Moses set up idolatrous worship in Dan which lasted for 600 years. Morally, it was a time of great sin and immorality, depicted in the rape and death of the concubine in the Book of Judges. Amazing times. Dark, desperate times.

But that’s not all of it. Notice verse 1 says, “It came about in the days when the judges governed, that there was a famine in the land.” Because of Israel’s rebellion, their idolatry, God brought upon them not only the man-made disasters of oppression from foreign armies (which you read about again and again in the Book of Judges), but He also brought upon them natural disasters, the natural disaster of famine as well. God had withheld the rains that are so important to the land of Israel and to its agriculture—apparently for several years. And so our story begins in the time of the judges when the people had sinned against God and were experiencing the heavy hand of His judgment upon them.

We move from there to *the disastrous choice of one family*. The disastrous choice of one family. We noted last time, notice verse 1) in the middle of those days, “a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the land of Moab with his wife and his two sons.” One man, rather than choosing to humble himself in repentance and to trust God to restore the rain and, therefore, the crops, decided instead to uproot his family from the land of God, the land God had given him and his ancestors, and from his neighbors, his extended family. And of all things, amazingly, he decided to move to Moab. And we talked last time about the amazing choice that was for a man who’d grown up in Israel.

We’re introduced to this man and his family in verse 2: “The name of the man was Elimelech.” Which means “my God is king.” Obviously, he had parents who were devoted to the worship of the true God. “And the name of his wife, Naomi.” Which means “pleasant.” “And the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion.” These are “sick” and “pining.” (“Ephrathites of

Bethlehem in Judah.” “Ephrathites of Bethlehem” means they didn’t just live in Bethlehem, their family was a historic part of Bethlehem. They were a prominent family, an aristocratic family, and obviously a family with a rich spiritual heritage of devotion to God. Elimelech’s parents had named him “my God is king.” But they decided to leave their relatives, leave their town, leave Israel, and move to idolatrous Moab.

Verse 2 says, “Now they entered the land of Moab and remained there.” This decision showed Elimelech’s heart. As Daniel Block writes in his excellent commentary on Ruth, “Instead of recognizing the famine to be punishment for the nation’s sin and repenting of their spiritual infidelity, they left their people and their land for the unclean land of Moab. Elimelech designed his own solution.”

Now in response to that disastrous choice, unfortunately, as we noted last time, came the divine consequences of rebellion. Verses 3 through 5 record it:

Then Elimelech, Naomi’s husband, died; and she was left with her two sons.  
They took for themselves Moabite women as wives; [and] the name of the one was Orpah and the name of other Ruth. And they lived there about ten years.  
Then both Mahlon and Chilion also died, and the woman was bereft of her two children and her husband.

In those three verses there is unimaginable tragedy for this family. Think about what happened to them physically and spiritually over a 10-year period. A famine struck their own country. They made a sinful decision as a family to move away from everything familiar to a pagan land of idol worship. Then came the unexpected death of Naomi’s young husband, followed by the marriage of her boys to women who worshiped the false god Chemosh, the god of the Moabites. Then the barrenness of her daughters-in-law: both of her sons were married for 10 years without any children. Then came the premature death of those boys, still in the prime of life; but they died suddenly, unexpectedly. Divine consequences of rebellion.

Now that brings us tonight to the new section we want to consider. That’s “The Far Country”; tonight we come to “The Journey Home.” Let’s read it together. Ruth chapter 1. I’ll begin reading in verse 6:

Then she arose with her daughters-in-law that she might return from the land of Moab, for she had heard in the land of Moab that the Lord had visited His people in giving them food. So she departed from the place where she was, and her two daughters-in-law with her; and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah. And Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, “Go, return each of you to her mother’s house. May the Lord deal kindly with you as you have dealt with

the dead and with me. May the Lord grant that you may find rest, each in the house of her husband.” Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept. And they said to her, “No, but we will surely return with you to your people.” But Naomi said, “Return, my daughters. Why should you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands? Return, my daughters! Go, for I am too old to have a husband. If I said I have hope, if I should even have a husband tonight and also bear sons, would you therefore wait until they were grown? Would you therefore refrain from marrying? No, my daughters; for it is harder for me than for you, for the hand of the Lord has gone forth against me.” And they lifted up their voices and wept again; and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.

If we were to read the rest of this chapter and the next section,—which, Lord willing, we’ll look at next Sunday night—you would see that in this entire section, two Hebrew words that don’t appear once in verse 1 to 5 recur repeatedly in verses 6 through 22. Those two words are—first of all the word “return.” Return. And of course, many of those times were describing the return to Israel, or we have Naomi urging her daughters-in-law to return to Moab. But it’s not a coincidence that the very same word that’s translated “return” is a common Old Testament word for “repentance.” Naomi’s physical return to the land of Israel from the far country of Moab is a picture of her spiritual return to the Lord, or her repentance.

The other word that occurs repeatedly in verse 6 to 22 is God’s personal name, *Yahweh*. You’ll notice in the English Bibles that we have, whenever you come across the word LORD (in all caps) or occasionally the word GOD (in all caps), it is showing us that it is in fact a translation of God’s personal name pronounced *Yahweh*. When God says it, it’s “I AM.” When we say it, *Yahweh*, it means “He is.” This is God’s personal name. It is the God who depends on no one or nothing outside of Himself. He simply is. He is the One who is. It’s also God’s covenant name, the name by which He commits Himself to His people.

So from those two key words, we can construct a statement of the section’s theme. This is how I would describe it. Verses 6 to 22 really point to this reality: *Yahweh* demonstrates Himself to be a Savior by restoring the land from drought and famine to food, by restoring Naomi from sin to repentance, and by converting Ruth from idolatry to salvation. You see, this section is about God and about God as a rescuer, as a Savior. It’s a remarkable story of the repentance and spiritual restoration of one of God’s own, and the spiritual conversion of one of God’s enemies.

Tonight, I just want to examine the spiritual restoration of God’s child. The spiritual restoration of God’s child. All the evidence points to the fact that Naomi was a genuine believer, a genuine worshiper of God, but she, along with her husband, had gone to the far country. We don’t know if it was Elimelech’s decision; we’re not told. We don’t know if it was Naomi’s decision. We

don't know if they decided together. All we know is that they went to the far country together and after Elimelech's death, Naomi still decided of her own free will to stay, knowing that would mean that her sons would marry idolatrous women. What was forbidden in God's Law. And so clearly she had strayed from God's ways and God's path. And this passage dictates and spells out for us the path of her spiritual restoration.

First of all, it began with a deliberate decision. A deliberate decision. Verse 6 says, "Then she arose with her daughters-in-law that she might return from the land of Moab." The Hebrew word "arose" is often used of beginning a journey, not merely getting up. And the Hebrew grammar here points out that the initiative behind this decision was that of Naomi and Naomi alone. Her daughters-in-law will accompany her, but the driving force here is Naomi. Finally after 10 hard years of heartache, Naomi has had enough. Now she will do what she should have done almost 10 years before after the death of her husband Elimelech. She will leave idolatrous Moab, now without her husband and without her sons, and she'll return home. In the verses that follow, she'll make constant reference to Yahweh, Israel's God. That underscores that her resolve to physically return to Israel was accompanied by a spiritual return to Israel's God as well. The path home begins with a deliberate decision. It always does. I will arise.

There's also a sincere motive. Notice verse 6. Here's why she decided to return: "For she had heard in the land of Moab that [Yahweh] had visited His people in giving them food." We aren't told exactly how she heard this news. Perhaps it was from travelers passing through, or perhaps from some kind of rudimentary mail system carried on by travelers. But notice exactly what it was she heard. She heard that "the Lord had visited His people." This is a very familiar Old Testament expression. The picture is that of a vassal king who leaves his own city and goes out to visit his subjects. And his response to his subjects is based on what he finds when he visits. Leon Morris puts it this way:

When God visits, everything depends on the state of affairs He finds. If He finds that His people are living in a state of rebellion, He brings punishment. If He finds they are living in a state of submission to Him, then He brings blessing and reward. When God visits, He decides exactly what's going on, and He responds appropriately.

That's why in the Old Testament sometimes when God visits His people, He comes in judgment and in punishment. For example, look at Exodus. Go back to Exodus 32. Exodus 32:34. After the golden calf incident, God says to Moses, "But go now, lead the people where I told you. Behold, My angel shall go before you; nevertheless in the day when I {notice the marginal note} in the day when I visit, I will visit them." Or literally, "I will visit their sin upon them." Here we have God visiting and finding sin and saying, I'm going to punish that sin, I'm going to deal with that sin.

On other occasions when God visits, He brings blessing. He brings relief and deliverance. Go back to chapter 4 of Exodus. Chapter 4:31. When Moses comes to tell the people of Israel who were in Egypt about God's coming deliverance, verse 31 says, "So the people believed; and when they heard that Yahweh" (you see it's translated) 'was concerned,' but if you'll notice the marginal note, literally the Hebrew reads, "They heard that the Lord had visited the sons of Israel and that He had seen their affliction, then they bowed low and worshiped." They knew that God had come to visit. And He had found them in a terrible situation, and He would respond for their deliverance.

"The Lord had visited His people." Naomi had heard this, and in *this* case it was for blessing and the end of the famine. Now we aren't told here whether the people had repented and had, therefore, experienced God's deliverance, as was often the case in the time of the judges; or, if, as was true in the case of Sampson, the people had not repented, but God had simply responded to them in utter and complete grace (in spite of their failure to repent) and relieve their suffering; we don't know which was true. But regardless, God had visited His people in blessing. Specifically notice, Ruth's writer adds, "in giving them food." Literally, "in giving them bread." In Hebrew, there's an interesting play on words with the word for "Bethlehem" which means "the house of bread." God was restocking the house of bread with bread. Don't miss the point here, by the way, that it's God who brings the rain and provides food. We have a hard time keeping that in mind in our culture, because everything seems so distant. I like what Robert Hubbard writes. He says, "Modern urbanites living far from farmer's fields would do well to remember that ultimately God, not the grocer, stocks their shelves." In this verse we have the first hint of hope in this dark scene.

Now that brings us to a third part of the journey home. Not only was there a deliberate decision to return, not only was there a sincere motive based on hearing that God has visited His people, but there was along with it in the heart of Naomi a genuine love for others. Notice verse 7: "So she departed from the place where she was, and her two daughters-in-law with her; and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah." In this verse, Naomi's resolve to go back is translated into action. At this point, it appears that Naomi and her daughters-in-law are poor. We see that when they return. So it doesn't take them long to gather their belongings, and they leave. Naomi left where she had been living in Moab for over 10 years, and her two daughters-in-law accompany her. She's finally on her way home.

Now we can't be absolutely sure why her daughters-in-law went with her. Some commentators argue that it was the custom for family members to accompany their relatives who were moving, to accompany them to the border of that region or country. In other words, this view says that initially Ruth and Orpah only intended to accompany Naomi to the Jordan River and then return home to Moab, but in the emotion of the moment, they committed to return with her all the way

to Bethlehem either for a time or perhaps permanently. Others say, no, that from the beginning these two women intended to permanently relocate to Israel. They say at this point they were willing to abandon their own families and their friends to be with Naomi. If that was true, by the way, it certainly was a great testimony to how Naomi had loved them and cared for them. We can't be absolutely sure, but they're on the road together headed to Israel.

At some point into the journey (we're not told how far), Naomi tries desperately to change their minds. Naomi breaks the silence, and she speaks. Verse 8: "And Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law." This is the first time here that there is dialog in the book of Ruth, but it certainly won't be the last time. In fact, Ruth is famous for its dialog. Of 85 verses, 56 of them are conversation between the main characters. "Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, 'Go, return each of you to her mother's house.'" She gives them two commands: "go" and "return each of you to her mother's house." Go back to your homes. She is here releasing them officially from all obligation to her. They no longer need to feel they have any sense of responsibility to care for her. Now in the Hebrew way of thinking, what Naomi says is not surprising. But how she says it, is. Notice what she doesn't say. She doesn't say, "return to your father's house." This is what young widows were typically told to do. Instead, she tells them to return to their mother's house. That's not because their mothers were dead, by the way. Chapter 2, verse 11, Boaz tells us that Ruth left her mother and her father. It's likely Orpah's mother and father were living as well. So what does this mean? Well it's interesting, because the other three times this unusual expression is used in the Old Testament, it's in the context of love and marriage. And so it's likely here that Naomi is saying, I want you to return to live in the context where your mother can be a part of arranging a second marriage for you. Naomi, here, is not only freeing them of all obligation to her, but she's freeing them to remarry. It's okay, she says, you've grieved long enough; I want you to go, and I want you to remarry. I think this is very likely in light of the verses that follow, as we'll see.

Now notice her two wishes for her daughters-in-law, which are really prayers on their behalf. Verse 8: "May [Yahweh] deal kindly with you as you have dealt with the dead and with me." Literally, the Hebrew text reads, "May Yahweh treat you with hesed." May He treat you with steadfast love. Here is that wonderful Old Testament word that speaks of both love and loyalty brought together in the context of a relationship or a covenant. Naomi tells her two daughters-in-law that they have exercised the human version of this quality, both to their former husbands, to the men who are now dead, as well as to her, Naomi, after the death of their husbands. Therefore, it's her prayer that Yahweh will be gracious toward them, that He will show them loving loyalty, steadfast love, unending love.

And she has in mind one very specific way that He would do that. Notice verse 9: "May [Yahweh] grant that you may find rest, each in the house of her husband." This is remarkable, because it tells us that the reason Naomi is willing to lose the companionship, the only

companionship she has left, is out of genuine concern for these two women. In the words of Alfred Edersheim, “She is willing to strip herself of all remaining comfort and to face the dark future utterly childless, alone, and helpless. Why? Out of love and concern for her daughters-in-law.” And that concern is clearly reflected in her prayer: “May [Yahweh] grant that you may find rest.” The Hebrew word for “rest” here has the connotation of permanence and stability, settling down in a home, security. She’s saying may Yahweh end your grief, and may He bring peace and permanence and security into your life. How, specifically? Notice: may you find that rest in the home of a new husband. That’s Naomi’s prayer for her two daughters-in-law.

Now don’t miss how remarkable this prayer is. Not only does it demonstrate her complete selflessness, but it also reflects her new commitment to Yahweh. Remember, she’s speaking to two women who did not worship her God, two women who were idolaters, who worshiped the Moabite god Chemosh. She could have used the generic word for God, a word that would have been more than acceptable to them—as many Christians today are tempted to do as opposed to using the name of Jesus Christ. But when she tells these two women that she’s praying for them, she deliberately chooses to use the name, again and again, Yahweh. You see, she is making some intentional, theological affirmations. She is affirming that Yahweh is her God. She wants that to be clear. This is, in essence, a testimony. But she is also making the affirmation that Yahweh is the God who controls their circumstances. Even though they don’t worship Him, He controls their circumstances, and not just in Israel, but in Moab—not the god Chemosh. Do you see what she’s saying? She’s saying let me just tell you that Yahweh is the One who can calm your grief; Yahweh is the One who can give you a home; Yahweh is the One who controls relationships and can give you a husband, even though you don’t worship Him. This is, in a very real sense, an evangelistic prayer.

This is a remarkable change for Naomi. For nearly 10 years Naomi seems to have been perfectly happy to have stayed in Moab among idolaters, and even for her sons to marry idolaters. But now that her heart is turned back to Yahweh, and now that she’s returning to the land of promise, she is concerned about the spiritual condition of her daughters-in-law. And so she prays for them.

You know, there are remarkable and powerful lessons here about the role of prayer and providence. You know, there are people who think that if you come to believe in God’s sovereignty, that it sort of makes prayer unnecessary, superfluous. The truth is exactly the opposite. When you really come to understand that God is sovereign, then it makes perfect sense to ask Him to act. It’s when you don’t believe He’s sovereign it makes no sense to ask Him to act.

David Atkinson writes,



Naomi's loving concern for her daughters-in-law first of all finds expression in prayer. As has been well said, what a man believes or does not believe about prayer is a good guide to his religious beliefs in general. What he believes about prayer is an indication of what he believes about God. More particularly, what a man does about prayer is an indication of what he believes about it. (He goes on to say) prayer is as it were the flip side to the doctrine of providence. Prayer is the acknowledgment that we believe that God is there, God cares, God rules, and God provides. Prayer is our way of expressing our "yes" to the conviction that God is working His purposes out in nature, in men, and in history.

When we don't pray, it tells us a lot about our theology of God. It means we don't really believe God intervenes and acts in the lives of people. But when we really do believe that, then we are driven to our knees and to our God.

Now after her farewell greeting here to her daughters-in-law and her prayer for them, notice verse 9 says, "Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept." She gives them a farewell kiss. Sensing the finality of this moment, they are all overwhelmed with emotion. The Hebrew expression describes loud wailing and sobbing that was, and still is, typical in that culture. Verse 10: "And they said to her, 'No, but we will surely return with you to your people.'" As they contemplate never seeing Naomi again, these two young widows resolve to return to Israel with her. They say we will return, Naomi, but not to our own homes but with you to your people, to Israel. Now we really can't be sure what motivated this commitment to return with Naomi. It may have been simply out of their love for Naomi, perhaps out of an effort to repay her kindness to them. Maybe it was out of a sense of loyalty to their now dead husbands.

But when Naomi understands their renewed resolve to go with her, she tries to convince them how completely irrational that decision really is. She wants them to see just how hopeless their situation will be if they go back with her to Bethlehem. Notice verse 11: "But Naomi said, 'Return, my daughters. Why should you go with me?'" By the way, that's not a real question. Guys, you know what that's like—when your wife asks you a question that's not a real question. "You're not wearing THAT out are you?" It's not a question. It's a statement. "Why should you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands?" Again she urges them to return to their homes, and she's going to advance several arguments in favor of their returning to Moab.

Argument number one is, I cannot have any more children. Naomi's language here is unusual, even perhaps a bit brusque. Literally translated, she doesn't even use the word "womb." She uses a different word. It's something like this: do I have more sons in my gut? I don't have any more sons to provide you.

Verse 12: “Return, my daughters! Go, for I am too old to have a husband.” Again she commands them to return home. And she gives argument number two: I’m too old to marry again. How old was Naomi at this point? Well, we can’t be absolutely sure, but we can be pretty close. Think of it this way: if Naomi was around 15 years old when she was married (which in that culture was fairly typical) and around 20 when her sons were born, and if her sons were around 20 when they married (all of those things are normal assumptions in that culture); if we factor in then the 10 years they spent in Moab after the boys were married but before without children, then Naomi would have been about 50 years old at this time, maybe slightly older. She was past menopause, and in a culture where men married to have children, she likely would have been passed over for someone younger. So marriage was very unlikely for her. She says I’m too old to marry again.

Argument number three: if I could still have sons, it would be too long for you to wait. Look at verse 12: “If I said I have hope, if I should even have a husband tonight and also bear sons, would you therefore wait until they were grown? Would you therefore refrain from marrying?” You see, she’s painting this impossible picture. She says all right, even if the impossible could occur and I can be married today and I can get pregnant tonight, and if I could be pregnant with two children, and if both of those children were boys, even then you two, Ruth and Orpah, would—Orpah, not Oprah. (My daughters did that to me. They were telling me a story about the misnaming of Oprah.) Ruth and Orpah, would not want to wait for 20 years until those boys were grown. Notice the end of verse 12 and the first part of verse 13: you’re not going to going to “refrain,” or literally, “deprive yourself” from marrying for that long. Now it’s possible that in all of this discussion Naomi is referencing the Old Testament practice of Levirate marriage described in Deuteronomy 25:5 and following. We can’t be sure, but possibly. She’s saying look, I don’t have any way to produce sons that could grow up and marry you and deliver you from your widowhood.

Notice that all of her arguments here have to do with *her* providing sons for them in some way. Why is that? Because Naomi knew that they had little to no hope of marrying into some other Jewish family if they went back to Bethlehem. Their best chance for a future, for their own homes, for their own husbands, was in Moab not in Bethlehem. Verse 13: “No, my daughters.” No, my daughters. This makes no sense. This is irrational.

And then she adds, “For it is harder for me than for you.” What does she mean? It’s harder for Naomi, because Ruth and Orpah had only lost their husbands. And they were young and had the prospects of remarriage. Naomi, on the other hand, had lost not only her husband but also her sons. And she had no prospects of having another husband or other sons.

Now in the balance of verse 13, Naomi makes a remarkable, theological statement about her circumstances. Notice what she says: “For the hand of Yahweh has gone forth against me.”

Now obviously, that expression “the hand of Yahweh” is anthropomorphic. It’s attributing to God, who is a spirit, bodily parts. God doesn’t technically have hands because He’s a spirit. This expression simply speaks of God’s activity, God’s acting. Again and again, throughout the Old Testament this expression “the hand of Lord was against (someone)” occurs. But as you noted what I just said, most often when this expression occurs, it’s worded like this: “the hand of the Lord *was* against.” But notice what Naomi says: “The hand of the Lord has gone forth against me.” That expression is used of armies going and attacking other armies. It stresses, *she’s* stressing, that in her case God has been especially aggressive in dealing with her. Naomi told her daughters-in-law that the hand of Yahweh was against her individually in the same way that He had acted against the nation’s enemies.

Now what’s going on here? Some believe that here in verse 13 and again down in verses 20 to 21, Naomi is wallowing in anger and bitterness against God for her circumstances. She’s angry with God for what He’s done, and she’s sort of wallowing in this bitterness. I don’t see that at all; to me, that’s reading into the text here. Take Naomi at her word. Another explanation is that she is simply stating that her circumstances were an expression of God’s discipline in her life, just as God’s hand often went out against the nation as an expression of His discipline in the life of the nation. She’s not angry. She’s not bitter at God for what He’s brought into her life. I think this is clear from the fact that she’s returning to Israel where she’d heard the Lord had visited His people. And she prays again and again to the Lord on behalf of her daughters-in-law. So at the end of verse 13, she’s simply stating a fact. Because of her sin, she has experienced divine discipline. She’s also, by the way, affirming that nothing happens by chance. Yahweh is sovereign over the lives of people, and He does in their lives as He chooses.

Now, that brings us back to the flow of the story. And this doesn’t have so much to do with Naomi’s restoration as it does the continuing movement of the story. In response to all of this discussion, there are two possible decisions in verse 14. “And they lifted up their voices and wept again.” In response to Naomi’s arguments, which make perfect sense, there was again, this outpouring of emotion. They sobbed and they wailed in grief. And in response to her arguments, there were two distinct responses.

First of all, there was the expected human response. Verse 14 says, “And Orpah kissed her mother-in-law.” Now, what we’ve read already, we understand that Orpah loved Naomi. She was committed to Naomi. She had evidenced a level of commitment that was extraordinary already. But it becomes clear that her mind was completely absorbed with marriage and the things of this life. And in light of that, Naomi’s arguments made perfect sense to her. And so she gave Naomi a final farewell kiss, and she headed home. Don’t miss the main point though. As we’ll see next week, hers was a response of unbelief, because notice what the writer of Ruth says. She returned—notice verse 15. She has returned “to her people and to her gods.” Orpah’s response is the expected human response. She’s all concerned about her own life, her own

future, what she wants. And the spiritual issue matters not at all. She's returning to her own land and to her own gods.

But Ruth's response was the surprising response of faith. Notice verse 14: "But Ruth clung to her." The Hebrew word "to cling" is the same word that's used in Genesis 2:24 to describe a husband and wife who are glued together. It describes a deep relationship. As Robert Hubbard writes, "Ruth's gesture signaled her commitment to abandon her Moabite roots, to remain with Naomi permanently." Now understand that clearly part of what's going on in Ruth's heart is her commitment out of her love for Naomi. But as we will see next week, there was much more going on in Ruth's heart than that. The response in her heart was a response of faith, faith in Israel's God. This is the beginning of the journey home.

Now as we conclude our time together tonight, I want to note for you three lessons that there are here for us to learn. Three lessons.

First of all, there is a lesson in personal evangelism. The evidence seems to indicate that for most of the 10 years that Ruth had known Naomi, Naomi's testimony for Yahweh had been not particularly good. Ruth had remained a pagan idolater through all of those years. But in the next few moments of this scene that's unfolding, Ruth will place her faith in Israel's God, apparently, at least in part, because of the testimony of Naomi. So although we always understand that salvation is a sovereign act of sovereign grace, what can we learn from Naomi's example here?

I think there are several very practical guidelines for evangelism that unfold in Naomi's interaction with her daughters-in-law. And I think number one for a believer is begin by repenting of your own sin. I think the greatest impetus to Ruth's change of heart was the change in Naomi. Secondly, I would say pray for the unbelievers in your life, and tell them that you pray for them. That's what she did: I'm praying for you, and here's what I'm praying.

Thirdly, talk naturally with them about the true God, and don't acknowledge the existence of false gods. In other words, don't change your conversation. Don't change the reality of your own commitment as you talk to lost family members and lost friends. Talk about God. He is the only God. Talk about Him as though He were, just as she does. She doesn't use the generic name for God to sort of make them more comfortable. She talks about Yahweh, and she says He is my God.

Number four. Show genuine concern for unbelievers and their ordinary human needs. You just see the genuine concern here. You know a lot of Christians are intimidated about talking to unbelievers. You say, what do I talk with them about? Guess what? They're real people too. They have the same struggles and concerns you have. You can relate to them on that normal human level. They care about their families and their kids and their jobs and what's going on in

the world at large. What you see here from Naomi is -- she relates to them at the level of their concern, which was a concern about husbands and a home.

Number five. Be God-centered not man-centered in your interpretation of life's circumstances. I love this. Did you notice in verse 6 she didn't hear that the weather had broken? She heard that God had visited His people. Interpret life and its circumstances through a God-centered grid as opposed to a man-centered one.

And number six. Openly share about God's work in your life. Both His blessing and even His discipline; that's what she does. She says Yahweh has visited me, and He's visited me with discipline. His hand has gone out against me because of my sin, because of our choices. Don't be afraid to share about God's work in your life, both in blessing and in trouble.

Lesson number two. There's a lesson in personal repentance. Perhaps tonight like Naomi, you find yourself in a similar situation of a life marked in recent days or weeks or months by a pattern of disobedience. And perhaps you have even felt like, as she did, the hand of the Lord has gone out against you in divine discipline. Listen, if that's how you feel tonight, there's good news for you. You can always return home. God accepts the prodigal. He always is a prayer away, a genuine prayer of repentance away.

This week I was enjoying—And you'll probably hear about it in coming weeks, maybe as we celebrate communion. Psalm 32. Turn there with me. Psalm 32. David, you know the nature of his sin. Psalm 51 was likely composed when he was repenting of his sin. Psalm 32 was likely composed later as he was looking back on the whole process and reflecting on it. And he says,

How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered!  
How blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity,  
And in whose spirit there is no deceit!

Oh to be envied, he says, is the one whose act of rebellion God has forgiven, blotted from the record, whose sin is covered from the sight of God, to whom the Lord doesn't impute guilt.

Then he describes his journey. He said, there was a time after I sinned "when I kept silent." I didn't go back to God. I just kept silent. And it had physical effects. "My body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me." The hand of guilt, the hand of maybe discipline. "My vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer." We understand that. He just waited. He remained silent in his sin. But then verse 5, "I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I did not hide." I didn't try to keep it from God. I just acknowledged it all. I just confessed it all. "I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord [Yahweh]'; and You forgave the guilt of my sin. Therefore, let everyone who is godly (that

is, everyone who knows You, God) pray to You”—just like I did when they find themselves in a place of sin.

Let me offer that you tonight. If you find yourself in a pattern of unrepentant sin, there's always a way home. All you have to do before you lay your head on your pillow tonight is get alone with your God, pour out your heart before Him, and seek His genuine forgiveness. Express your willingness to turn from that sin, and He will hear. David, here, is teaching us God will do for you what He did for David. When you confess your transgressions to the Lord, He will forgive the guilt of your sin. It's a lesson in personal repentance.

There's also, thirdly, a lesson in God, as Savior. In God, as Savior. You see, God is by nature a Savior. Again and again He calls Himself that. In other words, God is by nature a rescuer. Think about that. Our God delights in rescuing people from physical and from spiritual disaster. In this one paragraph that we're studying together, Yahweh shows Himself to be the One who rescues. He rescues Israel from drought and famine and provides them with food. He rescues Naomi from her sin by bringing her to repentance and back to her people. And He will rescue Ruth from her idolatry and lostness by changing her heart in the miracle of regeneration. This is our God. This is who we worship. He is a Savior, a rescuer. And wherever you find yourself, He's always a prayer away. Let's pray together.

Father, we thank You for what this passage reveals to us about Yourself. Lord, thank You that You are a savior, that You rescue us from the consequences of our sins in many cases, that You always rescue us from the guilt of our sin when we cry out to You in repentance. And thank You, O God, that for many of us here, for most of us here, You have rescued us from the penalty our sins deserve in and through Your Son and our Lord Jesus Christ. Lord, thank You that You will rescue this idolatrous woman Ruth from her lostness and You will give her new life. And Lord, in an irony of Your providence that we can't fully appreciate, You will save this woman, and her offspring will become the Messiah, through whom You rescue her. Father, thank You that You are a Savior.

Lord, I pray for those here tonight who may not know You. May they see who You are. And may they run to You tonight and accept Your Son as Lord and Savior and find You to be everything that Naomi found You to be, that Ruth will find You to be, that we have found You to be.

Father, I pray for those who know You tonight, like Naomi, who have strayed from the path of obedience, who, as they sit here tonight, have to admit that they're walking in a path of disobedience. O God, help them to see the way of the transgressor is hard, but You are open when we come home, that You receive us, that You forgive the guilt of our sin. Father, may tonight before they lay their head on the pillow, may they open their mouths, stop being silent

like David was and like we're all tempted to be, and cry out to You. Father, help us to be evangelists, learning the lessons we see even from this encounter, telling others that You are a Savior. We worship You and praise You in the name of Your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.