

The Faith of Ruth

Mexico? At your age?" asked Sister Helen. The two women were having a celebratory lunch at a restaurant for Sister Ida's 74th birthday, which was a week ago.

"I've always wanted to do mission work outside of the country," said the 64-year-old Precious to her Christian friend of more than 20 years.

Precious had lost her husband, Jonathan, four years ago. She had recently retired from her job of 30 years. She was working part time at her church in the office. Precious was also involved with the outreach and prayer ministries at her church.

"I have more time to devote to the Lord," Precious had told her pastor.

So, when the church announced that it would be taking a mission trip to Chiapas, Mexico, Precious said she was all in.

"What if you contract a dreadful disease?" asked Helen. "What if you can't get back in the country? What if you all get robbed or hurt in Mexico?"

"I feel called to do mission work," Precious smiled. "I have helped with mission efforts in the U.S., like natural disasters and other evangelistic efforts across the country and in my neighborhood. I want to go outside of the U.S., and Mexico is right next door!"

"But why now at your age?" pressed Helen.

"Why not?" said Precious. "I know it will be exciting; and besides, I trust God!"

1. What does it mean to trust God in faith?

2. Why is it sometimes difficult to follow God on a faith-filled adventure?

3. How might these difficulties hinder us from trusting God and following Him in faith?

Naomi Decides to Return

Ruth 1:6-10, KJV

6 Then she arose with her daughters in law, that she might return from the country of Moab: for she had heard in the country of Moab how that the LORD had visited his people in giving them bread.

7 Wherefore she went forth out of the place where she was, and her two daughters in law with her; and they went on the way to return unto the land of Judah.

8 And Naomi said unto her two daughters in law, Go, return each to her mother's house: the LORD deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the dead, and with me.

9 The LORD grant you that ye may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband. Then she kissed them; and they lifted up their voice, and wept.

10 And they said unto her, Surely we will return with thee unto thy people.

Ruth 1:6-10, NIV

⁶When Naomi heard in Moab that the LORD had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them, she and her daughters-in-law prepared to return home from there. ⁷With 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.

⁸Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go back, each of you, to your mother's home. May the LORD show you kindness, as you have shown kindness to your dead husbands and to me.

⁹May the LORD grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband."

Then she kissed them goodbye and they wept aloud ¹⁰and said to her, "We will go back with you to your people."

The story of Ruth is a reminder that God's heart was focused on all nations—not only the people of Israel. The tale begins with Naomi, who traveled with her husband and sons from Bethlehem to the land of the Moabites because there was a famine in Judah. While there, Naomi's sons took Moabite wives (Orpah and Ruth); but after about 10 years, Naomi's husband and sons passed away.

When Naomi heard that the famine had lifted in Judah, it was time to return home. Naomi urged her daughters-in-law to return to the homes of their fathers (in Moab) so that they might marry again. Naomi knew the kindness of these two women, so she believed that God would show His compassion to them by finding them new husbands.

The women resisted the idea of separating from Naomi. The two cried and insisted on staying with her and returning to the land of Naomi's "people" (vs. 10).

4. *What caused Naomi to decide to return home?*

5. *Before she left, what did she encourage her two daughters-in-law to do?*

6. *What was their response?*

Naomi's Bitterness

Ruth 1:11-13, KJV

11 And Naomi said, Turn again, my daughters: why will ye go with me? are there yet any more sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands?

12 Turn again, my daughters, go your way; for I am too old to have an husband. If I should say, I have hope, if I should have an husband also to night, and should also bear sons;

13 Would ye tarry for them till they were grown? would ye stay for them from having husbands? nay, my daughters; for it grieveth me much for your sakes that the hand of the LORD is gone out against me.

Ruth 1:11-13, NIV

¹¹But 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? ¹²Return 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—¹³would 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 turned against me!"

Naomi intended to open the eyes of Orpah and Ruth to the harsh realities they would have to face if they stayed with her. To stay with their mother-in-law, they would likely not be able to marry again. In ancient Middle Eastern cultures, the economic survival of most women depended on being married and being a part of a revenue-producing household. The law of Moses made many accommodations for widows—if the men did what the law said.

A person who has experienced tragedy may feel that he or she is being punished by God—or, at the very least, has ceased to find favor with Him. Naomi concluded her argument with the conviction that the Lord had turned against her. She was too old to remarry, so she could not provide her daughters-in-law with new sons; and she was returning to a life of loneliness after the deaths of a husband and two sons.

7. *What argument did Naomi make for the return of the two young women to their hometowns?*

8. *Why did Naomi feel like God had turned against her?*

Ruth Insists on Staying with Naomi

Ruth 1:14-18, 22, KJV

14 And they lifted up their voice, and wept again: and Orpah kissed her mother in law; but Ruth clave unto her.

15 And she said, Behold, thy sister in law is gone back unto her people, and unto her gods: return thou after thy sister in law.

16 And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will

Ruth 1:14-18, 22, NIV

¹⁴At this they wept aloud again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye, 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."

¹⁶But 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

lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God:

17 Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me.

18 When she saw that she was stedfastly minded to go with her, then she left speaking unto her.

22 So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter in law, with her, which returned out of the country of Moab: and they came to Bethlehem in the beginning of barley harvest.

and your God my God.

¹⁷Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me.” ¹⁸When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her.

²²So Naomi returned from Moab accompanied by Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law, arriving in Bethlehem as the barley harvest was beginning.

Naomi convinced Orpah to go back to her home in Moab and pleaded with Ruth to follow her sister-in-law’s example. But Ruth was willing to integrate into every aspect of Naomi’s life—not only in community and family, but also with the God of Israel. So the young woman told Naomi to stop trying to persuade her. She clung to what she knew and to the God who had proven Himself faithful in times of crisis. Ruth was so committed to Naomi that she invited God to hold her accountable if she failed to keep her promise never to abandon her.

Seeing Ruth’s determination, Naomi gave up trying to get Ruth to go back home. They set out on their journey back to Bethlehem. And then, as the story develops, we see the Lord orchestrate events for them that eventually give Ruth a place in the family tree of Jesus.

9. *Who left and who stayed with Naomi?*

10. *What was Ruth’s reason for staying with her mother-in-law?*

11. *Why did Naomi give up trying to convince Ruth to go back?*

Trust and Follow

In this lesson, we read the story of Ruth's choice to follow her mother-in-law, Naomi, on a faith-filled adventure. Although Judah was Naomi's homeland, Ruth was from Moab. Ruth chose to do the right thing in staying with her otherwise destitute mother-in-law and committed herself to following the God of Israel despite the uncertainty of their shared future.

We're not Ruth, and our adventure doesn't have to be to another country; it can be across town or even next door. Our faith-filled adventure might not be as challenging as Ruth's; but God is ahead of us if we will trust that He is leading us, whatever happens.

The beginning of Ruth's adventure happened with a change in circumstances when her husband died, leaving her a widow. Widows were in a precarious situation in ancient times. Whether Ruth and Orpah chose to remain in Moab or leave with Naomi, their future was uncertain. It was less likely they would remarry if they followed Naomi to Judah, however.

Ruth chose to accept Naomi's family, community, culture, and the God of Israel. In faithfulness to God, who cares for the widows, orphans, and strangers (Deut 10:17-18), she journeyed with Naomi to a foreign land. And God proved Himself faithful by blessing her and Naomi with family and home. She acted on that belief by journeying with Naomi to Bethlehem.

12. *What does it mean to believe God exists and seek Him?*

13. *How does trust in God support a faith-filled adventure?*

14. *Why is it important to act on our belief and faith in God?*

15. *What is one step you can take to follow God on a faith-filled adventure?*

Stepping Out in Faith

Ruth chose to step out in faith and follow Naomi back to her homeland of Judah. More importantly, Ruth chose to trust in and embark on a faith-filled adventure with the God of Israel.

► *What “faith-filled adventure” has God been nudging you to consider? What would be the purpose, or goal, of this adventure: Obedience in a particular area? Service to others? Spiritual growth?*

► *What benefits would you expect to receive from going on such an adventure with God?*

KEY VERSE

And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God. —Ruth 1:16, KJV

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.” —Ruth 1:16, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK’S LESSON

Week of December 4 through December 10

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Joshua 1:1-9—Faith Expressed through Courage.
- Tue.** Matthew 20:25-34—David’s Son Came to Serve.
- Wed.** Matthew 21:18-22—Ask in Prayer with Faith.
- Thu.** Psalm 27—Wait for the Lord.
- Fri.** 2 Timothy 1:3-14—Rekindle God’s Gift and Stand Firm.
- Sat.** 1 Samuel 17:1-4, 8, 20-30—Israel’s Wavering Faith.
- Sun.** 1 Samuel 17:31-37, 45, 48-50—Faith That God Will Act.