

Study of Ruth: Returning with Sorrow

Scripture Focus: Ruth 1:19-22

Naomi has chosen to return to Bethlehem, Ruth has chosen to accompany her, and Orpah has chosen to stay in Moab with her family; all choices of consequence. No doubt the decisions were filled with emotion as well as uncertainty about the future. It has been said, “Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced.” (James Baldwin) Naomi has chosen to face her uncertain future in Bethlehem and Ruth, out of love and devotion, has chosen to face the future with her.

When Naomi returns to Bethlehem, those who remember her hardly recognize her for the grief she is carrying. Out of her anguish Naomi says, ***“Call me no longer Naomi, call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt bitterly with me. I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty...”*** (v. 20-21a) Ruth’s words perhaps remind us of the words of Job, who also lost so much and wondered what God was doing to permit such heartache. But notice that Ruth, like Job, is willing to trust. She is returning to Bethlehem and to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Naomi is willing to draw near to El Shaddai (the Almighty), to return home. This name for God was to signify God’s power and ability to provide, the all-sufficient one. Naomi uses the name “the Almighty” twice (verses 20 and 21).

- What do you make of Ruth’s declaration that “the Almighty has dealt bitterly with me?” Is her devastating loss a punishment from God? (Job wondered too. See Job 10:1-3.)
- Does Naomi seem angry with God? If so, to what extent, if any, are we permitted to have feelings like this toward God? (See Lam. 3:19-26, 31-35.)
- Has Ruth truly returned to Bethlehem empty? How does grief interfere with our ability to recognize and give thanks for God’s blessings that remain?
- If a friend were to ask you, “How can I get through this period of grief and trust God,” what would you say?