

discover
RUTH



LEADER GUIDE

discover
RUTH

revised by Kathleen Evenhouse
with contributions by
Brent and Diane Averill



CoffeeBreak

A small circular logo featuring a stylized coffee cup with a swirl of steam or liquid rising from it. The logo is positioned at the bottom center of the page, below a horizontal dotted line.



We thank Kathleen Evenhouse and Diane Averill, with assistance by Brent Averill, for their efforts in extensively updating and revising this study of Ruth. We also thank Sarah Schreiber, assistant professor of Old Testament at Calvin Theological Seminary, for contributions made in a theological review of the content. The original lesson material was written in 1991 by Sylvia Boomsma, and a revision by Faith Alive staff was published in 2001.

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Contents

To the Leader.....	4
Glossary of Terms	7
Introduction.....	9
Lesson 1	
Where You Go, I Will Go.....	11
Lesson 2	
A Glimmer of Hope.....	21
Lesson 3	
Meeting at Midnight	31
Lesson 4	
Naomi Receives an Heir	40
An Invitation and Prayer of Commitment.....	51
Bibliography.....	52
Evaluation Questionnaire	

Please Note: A free guardian-redeemer lesson and appendices for digging deeper into the four main lessons of this study are available online (search “Discover Ruth” at FaithAliveResources.org).

To the Leader

Prepare the Lesson

Bible discovery leaders help people discover together what the Bible says and means. They are not teachers but guides, facilitators, and conversation leaders.

This leader guide is meant to assist you as a small group leader by coming alongside you in your own personal work. Always answer the study guide questions first, using the suggested basic steps of preparation. Then use the leader material to enrich your understanding of the passage.

We encourage you to study ahead of time so that you do not have to rely on the leader guide during your Bible study group meeting. You don't want to give the impression that the leader guide is an answer book. The answers are in the Bible; you are a guide to help your group find the answers in God's Word.

This leader guide aims to include helpful ideas from a number of sources. Ideally you should use this information *only after* you have studied the text yourself. Read the passage and first ask your own questions. Allow God to speak to you through his Word. Look for answers in the text. What was God saying to the original readers and listeners, and what is he saying to us today? Consult the glossary if there are names and places with which you are unfamiliar.

Get Ready to Lead

Learn to think in terms of questions. As you prepare to lead a lesson, ask yourself questions and try to discover the answers yourself. This will prepare you to anticipate group members' questions and thus help others discover truths from God's Word.

The "Conversation" boxes in the study guide are for extra questions. The text of the leader guide includes many extra questions that you may wish to use to help build the group's conversation around the text. We also suggest that you adapt the questions in the booklet or write your own questions as needed. You know the interests, personalities, and needs of your group members. You know what they will be curious about or when they will want to dig deeper into a Scripture passage. Put those extra conversation-building questions in the "Conversation" boxes and use them during your group time to help get dialogue started.

Also, encourage group members to put their own questions and discoveries in the “Conversation” boxes. By doing this, they will also be preparing for the group discussion. You might want to start a group discussion by saying, “What is in your ‘Conversation’ box? What would you like to talk about together?”

If you are able to prepare and pray thoroughly before each group session, you will be able to lead without frequent references to your notes. This will free you to be more aware of the work of the Holy Spirit during your group discussion time and to focus more effectively on your facilitation and leadership responsibilities. You will also be able to keep better eye contact and listen more carefully.

Lead with Questions

Use questions to direct the group discussion. Draw out positive contributions by asking questions. Break down difficult or unclear questions with smaller, concise ones. Also use questions to respond to wrong or problematic answers. If you learn to lead others into truth by using questions, you will be a good Bible discovery leader. The questions in this study are designed to be used with the New International Version of the Bible, but other translations can also be used.

Use the comments in this leader guide to help the discovery process of your group. You are leading a conversation on the text, and you want to help guide the conversation so that group members will hear the “big ideas” from the text rather than getting bogged down in small details. Avoid using this leader material to “teach” the lesson.

Assume that you will not use all the information supplied in this leader guide. Ask questions that will help you get at what the text says and means. *There are additional questions in bold that may help to clarify the discussion. However, do not feel that you have to answer all of these questions.* Members of your group may have their own questions. Use questions as well as the comments in the leader guide only when it is helpful to guide and clarify your group’s conversation on the text. The information is supplied to help you guide the discussion and answer some questions that may arise. *Do not bring up information simply because you find it interesting.* Introduce it only if it will help the members of your group. In other words, tailor the questions to your particular group members. If some people in your group are new to the Bible, make certain that you help to clarify information. But do not use extra background material that may add confusion. Feel free to delve a bit deeper

with groups who may be familiar with the Bible. However, keep in mind the evangelistic purpose of this study and make certain that you are being most sensitive to members who may be new to Bible study and may not yet be believers in Christ.

Should differences of opinion arise, allow members to disagree. Your purpose is not to win arguments or even to defend a particular idea. Allow the Holy Spirit to work in the hearts of your group members.

Help to Apply

Ask God to guide you to ask application questions throughout the lesson when it seems appropriate for your group. As leader, pray that God will first teach you what he wants you to hear from his Word. Then ask God to guide you in helping others hear what he is saying to them. **Keep in mind that the purpose of this study is not to fill minds with facts but to change hearts as we learn what God is teaching us through his Word.**

Gently help group members discover the meaning of God's message for their own lives. Be careful not to be judgmental of persons who may not yet seem to be applying the truths you encounter together. It's the Holy Spirit's work to apply God's Word to people's hearts. Tactfully let the group know how the Spirit is applying the Word in your own heart and life. Pray faithfully for the Spirit's work in others.

While giving people the time and space to apply biblical truths as the Spirit leads them, simply try to help group members see that there is a relationship between the Bible and life. Questions for reflection at the end of each session invite everyone to take some time for personal reflection and optional sharing. Try to offer at least a few minutes for reflection time toward the end of each lesson, and encourage group members to do additional follow-up reflection at home.

Glossary of Terms

- Bethlehem**—an ancient town in Israel; it was known earlier as Ephrathah (also Ephrath—see Gen. 35:19; Ruth 4:11); hometown of Elimelek and Naomi; known later as “the town of David” (Luke 2:4) and the birthplace of Jesus (Luke 2:11). *Bethlehem* means “house of bread.”
- blessing**—a pronouncement asking or stating that God’s favor would rest on someone, providing spiritual and material benefits from the Lord. Blessing the name of the Lord is also an appropriate response of praise to God for all he has done (see Ps. 103:1).
- clan**—a group of related families within a tribe in Israel (see, for example, Josh. 15).
- David**—the second king of Israel and an ancestor of Jesus Christ. He was called “a man after [God’s] own heart” (1 Sam. 13:14). David’s story is found in 1 Samuel 16:1 through 1 Kings 2:12, and he is the writer of many psalms (for example, Ps. 3-9; 11-32).
- elders**—respected leaders in a community who were called upon to witness business transactions, settle complaints, and judge criminal cases according to the local laws.
- ephah**—ancient dry measurement, probably about three-fifths of a bushel (5.5 gal.; 21 liters). An ephah of barley would weigh about 30 pounds (13 kg).
- Ephrathah**—the region surrounding Bethlehem; also used as a name for Bethlehem.
- glean**—to follow after harvesters and reapers and gather any grain or produce they have left behind. (See Lev. 23:22; Deut. 24:19-22.)
- guardian-redeemer**—the Hebrew word (*go’el*) for “guardian-redeemer” (or “kinsman-redeemer”) is a legal term for one who has the obligation to redeem (buy back, or bring back into safety) a relative in serious difficulty (see Lev. 25:25-55).
- Israel**—God’s chosen Old Testament people; the Israelites were the descendants of Jacob (who was renamed Israel—Gen. 32:28) and his wives Leah and Rachel.
- Judah**—the land allotted to the tribe of Judah in Israel and located west and south of the Dead Sea. This tribe was made up of the descendants of Judah, one of the twelve sons of Jacob (Israel).

judges—individuals who led the loose confederation of Israelite tribes from the time of Joshua to the period of kings in Israel’s history. The era of the judges was a time of upheaval, often characterized by disunity among the Israelite tribes and punctuated by periods of God’s punishment for being unfaithful and following the false gods of other nations (see Judg. 2:10-19).

Leah—a wife of Jacob (Israel); one of the mothers of the Israelite nation; sister to Rachel (see Gen. 29-30).

Mara—a Hebrew word meaning “bitter.” When she returned to Bethlehem, Naomi said the people should call her Mara (Ruth 1:20).

Moab—a land lying across the Dead Sea from the land of Judah; by caravan route, Moab was about 60 miles (96 km) from Bethlehem.

Perez—a twin son of Judah by his daughter-in-law Tamar (Gen. 38); Perez became an ancestor of Boaz, David, and Jesus (Ruth 4:18-22; Matt. 1:1-16).

Rachel—a wife of Jacob (Israel); one of the mothers of the Israelite nation; sister to Leah (see Gen. 29-30).

redeem—see **guardian-redeemer**.

sheaves—bundles of grain stalks bound together during harvesttime.

Tamar—mother of twin boys by her father-in-law Judah (Gen. 38); one of the twins, Perez, became an ancestor of Boaz, David, and Jesus (Ruth 4:18-22; Matt. 1:1-16); Tamar is also listed in the lineage of Jesus (Matt. 1:3).

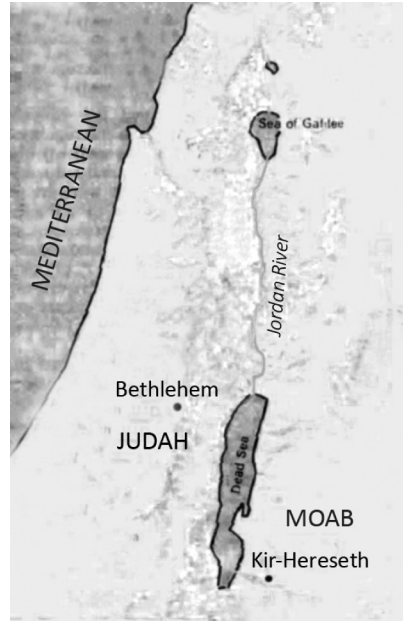
thresh—to loosen grain from the stalk; at harvesttime communities joined together at a common threshing floor where they had cattle walk over or drag a heavy sled across grain stalks to thresh wheat, barley, oats, and other grains.

winnow—to throw threshed grain into the air so that chaff (lighter pieces of stalk and straw) blew away in the wind while the grain fell to the ground.

Introduction

The story we're reading in the Book of Ruth takes place in two locations.

Most of the action occurs in Bethlehem, a town in Judah in the land of Israel. The name *Bethlehem* means “house of bread,” and this farming community was located between fertile mountain valleys and hillsides on the east and a wilderness area that reached west to the Mediterranean Sea. Normally this area received adequate rainfall and provided valuable cropland for farmers, while the nearby wilderness offered grazing land for shepherds' flocks. For more than ten years in the lives of our main characters, however, the whole region of Judah suffered from a prolonged drought and famine.



The story of Ruth begins in Bethlehem and quickly shifts to the land of Moab, located east of what is now the Dead Sea. Moab had drought-resistant and fertile tablelands watered by adequate winter rains that filled deep cisterns and wells.

Although both of these neighboring nations claimed a lineage through Abraham and spoke dialects of the same language, they did not have a friendly relationship. The Moabites were descendants of Abraham's nephew Lot (see Gen. 19:30-38). They worshiped pagan gods and had been hostile when the Israelites entered the area after their exodus from Egypt (Num. 22-25; Josh. 24:9-10). Then, during the time of the judges in Israel, the two nations were in conflict, and an uneasy relationship followed (see Judg. 3:12-30).

The book of Ruth takes place “in the days when the judges ruled” (Ruth 1:1). This was a time when the Israelite nation was not united under a king, and “everyone did as they saw fit” (Judg. 21:25). The nation was at best a confederation of tribes loosely unified around a central sanctuary, the tabernacle of the Lord at Shiloh (Judg. 18:31; 1 Sam. 1:3). Judges

(tribal leaders who were sometimes also prophets) were responsible for administering justice and providing the people a centralized authority. But this was a time of spiraling unfaithfulness to God, often characterized by disunity among the tribes of Israel and punctuated by periods of foreign oppression, punishment by the Lord for the people's disobedience (see Judg. 2:10-19). In contrast, the book of Ruth provides a story of faithfulness in this predominantly dark time; commentator Daniel I. Block calls it "a lily pad in a cesspool."

1 Ruth 1

Where You Go, I Will Go

Getting Started

The short story of Ruth is part of the history of God’s people, Israel, who were also known as the Hebrews and who wrote in the Hebrew language. Their writers didn’t overly concern themselves with historical details or explanations about their culture and customs, as we might expect today. They wrote mainly to reveal the ways God interacted with men and women in the world and how God often worked through his people. The book of Ruth is a good example of this. This purpose is also stated in the New Testament: “Everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope” (Rom. 15:4).

Please note: For groups that may wish to dig deeper in their study together, we have included optional appendices to each of the four main lessons in this study of the book of Ruth. An optional lesson on the guardian-redeemer concept in Scripture is also recommended for more in-depth study. These resources are available as free electronic downloads (search “Discover Ruth” at FaithAliveResources.org).

Optional Share Question

Optional share questions introduce a simple idea for an “icebreaker” to help everyone get acquainted and to help put newcomers at ease. You may want to come up with your own share questions; just make sure they can be answered with only a word or phrase rather than a few sentences. Take care also that your share questions have to do with everyday life so that anyone new to the Bible will feel comfortable answering them.

How far do you live from your birthplace?

or

Have you visited or lived in a place where the customs, language, or beliefs were different from your own? If so, share one discovery that was either delightful or difficult.

Note: In the lesson material that follows, the *a, b, c* questions in italics are for discussing the passage. These same questions are included in the study guide for your group members. The bulleted questions in bold print are optional. Use whichever of these questions will be helpful to the discovery process for *your* particular group. You can jot down those questions, or any others that you think would be helpful, in the “Conversation” boxes in your study guide. Group participants should also be encouraged to write their own questions in the “Conversation” boxes in their study guides.

Some additional related Scriptures are listed at the end of each lesson (under the heading “For Further Study”). These passages are mentioned at various points in the leader’s notes for the lesson, and if you have time, you may want to discuss some of these with your group as you work through the lesson together. Some group members will find the list helpful if they want to look up the additional Scriptures at home.

What Does the Bible Say?

1. Ruth 1:1-2

a. As the story begins, what characters do we meet, and what is their situation?

Elimelek and Naomi have two sons, Mahlon and Kilion. Residents of Bethlehem, they go to live in Moab to escape a famine. You may wish to note an irony in this situation, since the name *Bethlehem* means “house of bread.”

Study Note: Caravan Route

Moab and Judah were connected by a caravan route that skirted the northern edge of the Dead Sea. From the area of Bethlehem the route ran northeast along a low mountain range past the fortified city of Jebus (later called Jerusalem), bypassed the ruins of Jericho, crossed the sluggish Jordan River, and proceeded through the northern plains of Moab. The journey from Bethlehem to Moab was a rough and dangerous 60 miles (96 km) or more by camel in a trader’s caravan.



b. *Elimelek chose to move to Moab even though others stayed in their homeland. What do you think were the pros and cons he considered?*

- **What kind of journey did they have to make?**
- **What would the religious practices be in Moab?**

It will be helpful to refer to the Introduction as you begin discussing this question. The Israelites were God's chosen people. Moving to a country where God was not worshiped would have been against Israel's beliefs, customs, and teachings, so Elimelek must have felt that he had no other options but to move away. In Moab, Elimelek's family may have been the only Israelites or part of a small Hebrew subculture. Isolated in a foreign land, it would have been a challenge for them to continue the customs and traditions of their people. The famine in their own land was the result of a prolonged drought, and Elimelek had the responsibility to provide for his family.

2. Ruth 1:3-5

a. *Describe the situation Naomi found herself in ten years after moving to Moab.*

Elimelek died, leaving Naomi a widow with two sons. The sons grew up and married Moabite women: Orpah and Ruth. The tradition and ceremonies of the Israelite religion became part of their everyday life. Ruth and Orpah, raised in a Moabite culture, would have had to learn and adapt to a new way of living. This would have been a challenge for the whole family. Then tragedy struck again: Naomi's sons died.

Study Note: Widowhood in Ancient Times

The loss of a husband in Old Testament times was a social and economic tragedy. Without a father, husband, son, or other male relative to advocate and care for her, a woman had no legal rights, no protection, and no way to fight back against injustice. When they married, women were absorbed into their husband's family. Land was also connected to the family of the male, and a woman could only own land or a business on behalf of a husband's male heir until he came of age. Widows were often overlooked and uncared for, and they could quickly become social outcasts, especially if they had no male children to carry on their deceased husband's name. In Moab, this was the situation for Naomi, Ruth, and Orpah.

b. *After reading the study note above, discuss the pain and hardships Naomi, Ruth, and Orpah faced as widows in Moab.*

- **Why was it so difficult not to have any men in their lives?**
- **What options were open to them?**

Although the text does not tell us a great deal about Naomi's situation, we know that widows in that day often had to turn to scavenging and begging, and some resorted to prostitution. Because they were extremely vulnerable economically and socially, they became prime targets of exploitation. The pain of widowhood for Naomi was magnified because both of her sons had died, leaving her with no one to carry on the family lineage.

- **How do people deal with this kind of loss today? What is the same, and what is different from what Naomi, Ruth, and Orpah faced in Moab?**

Invite group members to discuss widowhood today as compared to ancient times. It is impossible to lump all widows' experiences together because there are so many personal and cultural variables. In some places in the world today widows face situations that are similar to Naomi, Ruth, and Orpah's predicament. Others experience emotional loss, but they maintain a financial means of support and are able to own property and conduct business. But all widows experience change of some kind. These changes may involve legal issues, finances, lifestyle, support systems, cultural status, and more.

3. Ruth 1:6-13

a. *What prompted Naomi to move back to Bethlehem?*

- **What had happened in Bethlehem?**
- **What had she heard?**
- **What are some reasons why she may have wanted to return?**

The text says that the Lord had provided food for his people. In the agricultural society of that day, this meant that rain had returned, crops were again growing, and there was enough forage for farmers' livestock.

Under the circumstances it isn't surprising that Naomi would choose to return to her homeland at her first opportunity. In Bethlehem she would be with her own people, where she possibly could find comfort in old friendships, the care of relatives, and common beliefs and customs.

b. What kind of relationship did Naomi have with her daughters-in-law? What did she want for them?

- **What does Ruth and Orpah's willingness to go with Naomi reveal about their relationship with her?**
- **What would they be sacrificing to go to Bethlehem with Naomi?**
- **What would Naomi be sacrificing to leave them in Moab?**
- **How did Naomi bless her daughters-in-law? What did she ask God for in this blessing?**

Clearly Naomi and her daughters-in-law were close; even the thought of separation caused them to weep aloud. Perhaps their shared grief caused them to bond deeply. If Ruth and Orpah returned to Bethlehem, they would be leaving all that was familiar to them, and they would severely limit their prospects of finding husbands. Naomi, on the other hand, would be giving up the companionship of these young women and also the support they could provide for her, especially in terms of gathering food and water and helping with other daily strenuous duties. But Naomi tried to convince them to go home.

She released her daughters-in-law from responsibility for both her and her husband's family. Culturally they would have been morally obligated to stay with her, but she urged them to return. She invoked a blessing on them as she encouraged them to stay in Moab. In her first statement of blessing, she asked God to help them find kindness. Her second statement of blessing expresses her hope that they will enter the security of another marriage.

If group members ask why the phrase "to your mother's home" is used in Ruth 1:8, note that in some other passages of the Old Testament this phrase describes the place where marriage is discussed, announced, and/or consummated (see Gen. 24:28, 67; Song of Songs 3:4; 8:2).

Study Note: Levirate Marriage

In Ruth 1:11-13, Naomi refers to an ancient practice that had become part of Israel's law (see Gen. 38:8; Deut. 25:5-10). Called levirate marriage today (*levir* is Latin for "husband's brother"), it was designed to save from extinction the family name of a married man who died without an heir (a son). If a married man died without a son, his brother (or another near relative) would marry and try to have children for him by his widow. In Naomi's case, if a near relative married her and she gave birth to a son to carry on Elimelek's family line, one of her daughters-in-law could marry that son when he came of age.

c. What argument does Naomi use to try to convince Ruth and Orpah to stay in Moab?

- **What are the impossibilities she presents to them?**

Naomi makes her case by bringing up the idea of levirate marriage. She explains how impossible it would be for her to have more sons whom Ruth and Orpah could wait to marry when the sons came of age. Group members may find the idea of levirate marriage disconcerting. It may be helpful simply to acknowledge this and emphasize the protection that would be provided a widow when no other means of security were available.

d. What do verses 6, 8-9, and 13 tell you about Naomi's belief in God?

- **What does Naomi believe about God's care for people? About God's authority? About God's role in calamity?**

- **How might she have come to this view of God?**

Naomi heard that the Lord had come to the aid of her people to end the drought and famine. She also asked the Lord to bless Ruth and Orpah. She understood that God's authority extended throughout the world. She also assumed that God cared about families and individuals. Her request that human kindness be answered by God's kindness shows that she believed God cared about these Moabite women.

Naomi had faith that God would still bless Ruth and Orpah, but she also blamed God for her own misery, saying that his hand had turned against her and emptied her life, making her situation bitter. It seems that she no longer looked to God for blessings for herself.

4. Ruth 1:14-18

a. *Which daughter-in-law, Ruth or Orpah, do you think made the more sensible decision? Explain your choice.*

- **What do their final decisions reveal about the two women?**
- **Facing this cultural reality, what choice would you want a loved daughter-in-law to make?**

Naomi was giving her daughters-in-law a chance for survival instead of possible death. She asked them to face the realities of their situation—being a widow without a son could end up being a slow death. Orpah showed her devotion and love for Naomi by her first refusal to go back, but as Naomi continued to urge them, Orpah submitted to Naomi's reasoning.

b. *What commitment did Ruth make? List the promises she made.*

- **What do you think motivated Ruth's decision?**
- **What part of Ruth's decision was based on her growing faith in Naomi's God? Where do you see evidence of her faith in these verses?**

Perhaps the most telling clue to Ruth's reaction and promises is found in Naomi's words in verse 15: "your sister-in-law is going back to her people *and her gods*." Ruth makes a lifelong commitment to Naomi and to her God. She even states that she will die where Naomi dies. In other words she won't return to Moab even after Naomi dies.

c. *When faced with similar choices, what guidelines might we use to make life-changing decisions? How does faith affect our choices?*

d. *Naomi decided not to continue trying to persuade Ruth (v. 18). What does the text say prompted this decision?*

Naomi tried to convince Ruth to return. She even tried to apply some peer pressure by pointing out that Orpah had begun her journey back to Moab.

- **What emotions might have been involved in Ruth's decision to go with Naomi, and in Naomi's acceptance of her decision?**

- **Was Naomi relieved? Was Ruth resigned? Was Naomi upset that Ruth wasn't listening to her?**

Whatever their emotions, Naomi finally gave up when she knew that “Ruth was determined to go with her” (v. 18).

5. Ruth 1:19-22

a. *Describe the response in Bethlehem to Naomi's return. What possible reasons could have prompted the women's question “Can this be Naomi?”*

- **Consider how Naomi might have looked and acted. Who was with her, and who was not with her?**

In her commentary on Ruth, Katharine Doob Sakenfield states: “The ten or more intervening years of toil and tragedy, let alone the hardships of the journey, have taken their toll on Naomi's appearance, and the expected clues for confirmation of identity on sighting a long-lost friend are missing—no husband, no sons, only an accompanying woman stranger.”

Not only might Naomi have been unrecognizable to the people of Bethlehem at first glance, she may not have recognized herself. Yet her return caused a stir, and the townspeople were certainly affected by it. She had left Bethlehem as a wife and mother in search of a better life. Now, devastated by grief for her husband and sons, scarred by misfortune and a hard journey, she may have seemed like an empty shell of her former self.

b. *The name Naomi means “pleasant” or “lovely.” Why do you think Naomi no longer wanted to be called by that name? What do you think her response indicates about her view of God and her state of mind?*

- **Whom did Naomi blame for her misfortune, saying her life was now “very bitter”?**

Naomi emphasized her sorrow and pain by declaring that people should call her *Mara*, which means “bitter.” Casting subtlety to the wind, Naomi appears to blame God for the tragedies that struck her family. In verse 21 the statement “The LORD has afflicted me” can be translated more literally to say, “The LORD has testified against me.” Naomi doesn't accuse God of a moral evil, but she apparently feels personally cursed by God.

Naomi saw, however, that God had come to the aid of his people by providing food in Bethlehem, since the barley harvest was beginning. But even with the promise of food, Naomi emphasized that she was returning empty.

Taking It Home

a. With whom do you identify in this story? What has drawn you to that person?

This question serves multiple purposes. It asks people to speak from the heart in naming a character they feel they understand and have empathy for. It also encourages sharing a little from their own experience about the shaping of their own life and personality. Group members who have experienced loss in their life may identify with Naomi, Ruth, and Orpah in some ways. Those who have left home and what is most familiar may identify with Ruth's experience (or perhaps with Naomi's in her move to Moab earlier). There may be other ways that group members identify with these characters. Allow them to share their experiences briefly.

b. Naomi and Ruth took two journeys, one by physically traveling to Bethlehem, and one in their inner beings. What did they experience on their journey? What are some inner and outer journeys that change us?

- **How do we view God when we experience loss of some kind?**
- **Is it more natural to experience God's love and care during good times or in hard times? Explain.**
- **In what ways was the journey different because these women took it together?**
- **How can we see God's love through others?**

Perhaps for some members of the group, difficult experiences have led them to believe that God has turned away from them. It seems that Naomi felt that way. Listen carefully to what group members express, and resist the temptation to respond with easy answers. All of us struggle to see God's purposes during times of pain or loss, even though we may trust, through faith, that he will work things out for good (see Rom. 8:28).

It may be helpful to suggest that group members consider how God was working in Naomi's life even though she didn't see it at the time. It may be easier to see God's purpose in *her* life than to see it in *our own* lives. If it seems appropriate, you might ask, "How was God showing his care for Naomi through Ruth?" When Ruth said, "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), she was speaking God's covenant words to Naomi—she was representing God's love for Naomi (see Ex. 6:7; Lev. 26:9-12; Josh. 1:5, 9). While Naomi felt desolate and forgotten, Ruth continued to love and work diligently, boldly taking risks in the hope of a better tomorrow. God placed Ruth in Naomi's life to show Naomi the kind of love that God had for her.

For Further Study

Genesis 24:28, 67; 38:8

Exodus 6:7

Leviticus 26:9-12

Deuteronomy 25:5-10

Joshua 1:5, 9

Song of Songs 3:4; 8:2

Romans 8:28

The hardest times in your life may be when God does some of his greatest work in you. The book of Ruth shows what can happen when people take God at his word.

The short story of Ruth is part of the history of God's people, Israel, and it takes place "in the days when the judges ruled" (Ruth 1:1). This was generally a dark time in Israel's history, when the people did not often follow God faithfully. But the book of Ruth provides a bright spot in this difficult period, revealing how God works through his Word and through a few faithful people to bring blessing and to remain true to his centuries-old promises.

Discover Ruth features four lessons on the full text of the Old Testament book of Ruth. This material is intended for small group Bible study, but it can also be used profitably for personal study. Guides for leaders and group members are available.

The approach to Bible study in this series emphasizes discovery (the reader discovers what the Bible has to say by asking questions and seeking answers from the passage studied). This is an effective and enjoyable way to study God's Word.

For groups that may wish to dig deeper in their study together, **optional appendices** to the lessons are available as free electronic downloads (search "Discover Ruth" at FaithAliveResources.org).

An **optional free lesson** on the guardian-redeemer concept in Scripture is also recommended for more in-depth study (available on the "Discover Ruth" webpage at FaithAliveResources.org).

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