



**Ruth 1:6-18**  
*Coming Home to God*

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 that the LORD had visited His people by giving them bread.

7 Therefore she went out 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.

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

9 "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.

10 And they said to her, "Surely we will return with you to your people."

11 But Naomi said, "Turn back, my daughters; why will you go with me? Are there still sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands?"

12 "Turn back, my daughters, go -- for I am too old to have a husband. If I should say I have hope, if I should have a husband tonight and should also bear sons,

13 "would you wait for them till they were grown? Would you restrain yourselves from having husbands? No, my daughters; for it grieves me very much for your sakes that the hand of the LORD has gone out against me!"

14 Then they lifted up their voices and wept again; and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.

15 And she said, "Look, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law."

16 But Ruth said: "Entreat me not to leave you, Or to turn back from following after you; For wherever you go, I will go; And wherever you lodge, I will lodge; Your people shall be my people, And your God, my God.

17 Where you die, I will die, And there will I be buried. The LORD do so to me, and more also, If anything but death parts you and me."

18 When she saw that she was determined to go with her, she stopped speaking to her.

You've probably figured this out by now, but Ruth is a book about relationships, and it is told from a woman's point of view. One of the central relationships in this book is the relationship between Naomi and her two daughters in law, Orpah and Ruth. It isn't the *most* important relationship in the book, but it is one of them. Now generally speaking in our society today we don't generally have a high regard for the term "mother in law" – the very term often conjures up an image of a difficult relationship we've married into and have to endure, but don't necessarily enjoy. And for many a husband or a wife, unfortunately that is the case. They associate the term "mother-in-law" with other terms like "back-seat-driver." But clearly there is nothing negative in the relationship between Orpah, Ruth and their mother-in-law Naomi. They love one another, so much so that even after Mahlon and Chillion died, and their obligations to their mother ceased both Orpah and Ruth chose to stay with Naomi instead of returning to their own families and seeking new husbands.

Ruth has made quite an impression on them by her example – indeed in this she is an example to all mothers-in-law. Not only in her kindness but clearly also in her faith in the God of Israel. So that the daughters not only perceived Naomi’s good qualities, and how much better they were than the common standards of Moabite society, but they also perceived the source of those good qualities – namely Naomi’s God Yahweh. In the case of Ruth, that double testimony of Naomi’s words and Naomi’s deeds had been used to bring her to saving faith. Would that we all made that kind of impression on our in-laws!

Now before I go on, I need to say this, Ruth’s kindness, her faith and her willingness to share that faith with her daughters in law is highly commendable, but like all the heroes of the bible she too has her flaws. Last week we saw a major flaw in that she was willing to follow her husband out of the promised land, against God’s specific commandments and away from all of the religious ordinances God had given to his people, including the sacrifices, the tabernacle and so on. She had also apparently consented to both of her sons marrying Moabite women, which was also against God’s specific command. And now we see in the remainder of this chapter some further flaws, one of them is that while she still believes in Yahweh and His Sovereignty over all event places, she has some serious bitterness and anger against him because of the events of her life. She even goes so far as to essentially say that Yahweh has gone to war with her, because that is what the phrase “gone out against me” means in verse 13. She doesn’t seem to have seriously considered that the chastening of the Lord was on account of the sins of her family and were ultimately for her good. At this point in the narrative there is something very akin to the *“its not fair”* anger that you often see on the face of a child who has just been spanked for doing something wrong. *“You don’t love me, you wouldn’t spank me if you did!”*

But despite her bitterness, when she hears that God has lifted the famine from his people (and from that we can presume that they had repented and cried out to him) she decides immediately to go back. In this her return is very much like the prodigal son who left his fathers house and went into the far country full, because he thought it would be better there, but who has lost everything and now realizes that it is better there and that there is no reason to starve in a foreign land. So as something of a prodigal daughter, Naomi decides to come home to God. And so she prepares to leave, apparently she is so destitute that three women on foot, and eventually two can carry all their belongings.

Both Orpah and Ruth immediately decided to go with her, but here the same pragmatism that proved fatal to Elimelech and Mahlon and Chillion pops up again. Naomi reasons this way, I am a widow, I have nothing left, I have no more sons for these women to marry. Now that is very important because you see God had given a law in Deuteronomy 25:5 that when an heir married and died without fathering children, his brother should marry his wife, and the first child he fathered would become the heir to his dead brother’s property. That way none of the land that God had allotted to the tribes of Israel would be lost. This was called the law of levirate marriage. She can’t provide a son to do that anymore and even were it possible for Naomi to marry and have more sons, Orpah and Ruth couldn’t wait for them to grow up.

No Naomi reasons, there is no special blessing in the Land of Israel, especially because clearly the hand of the Lord is against her, and she doesn’t want them to suffer under it along with her. But she loves them so she prays that they would be blessed, and her prayer is very interesting. She prays that the Lord would repay their kindness to her and her sons by giving them his *hesed* that is his faithful covenant love. But in one sense while we can understand it, the prayer is essentially flawed she is asking the Lord to grant these two women what she and Elimelech never found, peace and rest in

MOAB outside of the Lord's covenant people. It would be as if you and I said to someone, I pray that the Lord grants you peace and peace *outside of the church*.

Now we might say, maybe Naomi expects them to somehow remain believers in Yahweh in Moab, but that clearly isn't the case, in verse 15 she says to Ruth, *your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law*.

Now at this point I will admit, counseling them to turn back is the sensible thing. For a woman in Moab or Israel, your livelihood was intimately tied up with your having a husband and sons, there was no social security net, no police, very few institutions to look out for widows and orphans, so they were often taken advantage of by the same kind of sinful people who prey on the elderly and defenseless today. She doesn't want that to happen to Orpah and Ruth, she loves them so she sends them back. The sensible and even the obedient thing to do is to listen to her advice and turn back.

Initially, though the love both women have for Naomi causes them to want to continue on with her, in verse 10 they both say "Surely we will return with you to your people" but eventually Orpah obeys Naomi's command and turns back. The narrative doesn't particularly condemn her choice, this is the sensible, ordinary, and expected thing to do. This would seem to give her a much better chance at a happy life than hanging on to a childless, impoverished, widow. So Orpah takes it. She is very sad to leave Naomi, but she kisses her goodbye and goes back.

Ruth on the other hand, clings to Naomi. She won't go back, she clearly understands that there are hard times ahead **but she is Naomi's daughter**, and she wants to stay that way even unto death. Now Ruth had a natural family back in Moab a mother and father, and she understands she is giving them up. But she has a closer bond to Naomi, and one that people outside of the covenant community just don't understand. Naomi was to Ruth, what Paul was to Timothy, her spiritual parent, the one responsible for bringing her to faith in the Lord, of nurturing her and setting that good example and the bond that existed between them transcended death. You see the foundation for that faithful love of Ruth for Naomi was her love of God, he was the bond that united them. That is why she stayed and Orpah turned back, Orpah loved Naomi not Naomi's God. So her choice was between Naomi and the idea of happiness and rest in Moab so she chose Moab. Ruth, on the other hand, had found that peace already through her faith in God, so she could choose Naomi.

I just can't explain this to unbelievers, but if you try to found your family on feelings of love for one another, you will always fail, because you will never, ever, fully meet the needs of your loved one, so when something else comes along that offers the potential of meeting that need, they'll go after it. If however, your deepest needs have been met by Christ, you are freed up to follow His command to love one another. That's one of the reasons why the love of a family founded on Christ endures even under the kind of pressures that cause the love of families founded on sentiment to fail. So young women, if you want a man who will love you to the end, choose a man who loves Christ most of all.

Ruth shows her resoluteness in all this by taking this oath, covenanting and then calling upon God to curse her if she ever turns back from Naomi. She even says, even after you die, I won't turn back, I will not be buried in Moab, I will be buried in Israel with you. She is essentially making a profession of faith, I am no longer Ruth the Moabitess and follower of Chemosh, I am Ruth, daughter of Naomi, child of the living God. And after that, Naomi can say nothing, she is still bitter but as we shall see, the God who still loves his prodigal daughter will use Ruth to change that forever.

So let me leave you with a few quick applications:

The first is this, **the sovereignty of God in Salvation**: Naomi was not a particularly strong evangelist. When it comes right down to it in fact she pressures them to go back to Moab. *“They’re nice girls, I love them, I want them to do well, I want them to get married and be happy, but they wouldn’t like my church, my God, my people, and maybe they wouldn’t fit in, and maybe when people back home see them they’ll remember that we took off for Moab and that my sons married Moabitesses and wouldn’t it be better for everybody if they just went home to Moab?”*

Despite her weaknesses, God uses Naomi as his agent to bring Ruth to saving faith in him. He does that a lot, he overrules the desires of the servant for the good of the people he wants to save. He used Jonah to bring an entire city to faith, despite the fact that Jonah didn’t want to preach to them and wanted that city to die and go to hell.

But also notice, the same message that was the savour of life to Ruth, was the savour of death to Orpah. Two identical women receive the same message from the same messenger, and yet one comes to faith and the other does not. The difference, brothers and sisters, was that God effectually called Ruth, but did not effectually call Orpah.

Nothing, other than that effectual calling and regenerating power of the Holy Spirit will save. Plenty of people will follow God for a while out of a desire to please their friends and relatives, but a time will come when their faith will be tested and they will fall away. Far too many children raised in Christian homes fall into the category. Often the first glimmers of persecution for your faith, or the realization of all the potential benefits of life in the world are all it takes for them to turn back from walking the same road with their parents.

Finally, I hope you see in this that sometimes what seems like common sense is in fact fatal and as a result as one commentator put it *you may understand Orpah, but you must emulate Ruth.*

We don’t know what happened to Orpah in this life, maybe she did get married again, maybe she had kids, maybe she prospered. But we know two other things, first she marched off the pages of history forever and failed to make a choice that might have given her life an eternal value. And secondly, she not only missed the chance at living a life of eternal value, she also missed the chance at eternal life. Like the rich young ruler, instead of taking up her cross and treading a path of hardship that ends in eternal glory, her love of the things of this world caused her to choose the broad and easy road that ends in destruction.

Ruth on the other hand, chose the narrow path, and that made all the difference. She was not told she would have a happy and prosperous life if she became a follower of Yahweh, in fact she was told exactly the opposite and yet she still chose a life spent serving him with his people. She resolved come what may, never to turn from it. Happily though she expected hardship, she eventually received blessing and prosperity as well as the reward of eternal life.

Kids, in particular, I beg you, don’t make the same decision Orpah did. If your parents are following Christ then make that same resolution today, say in your heart: *“Your people shall be my people, And your Jesus, my Jesus.”* As **Matthew Henry put it**: *“All of you must resolve that death itself shall not separate us from our duty to Christ, and then we may be sure that death itself shall not separate us from our happiness in Christ.”*