



## Grief to Gratitude

### *Working Through the Pain*

The book of Ruth begins in the Judahite village of Bethlehem where a famine has come. Apprehensive about the threat of starvation, a man named Elimelech leads his wife Naomi and their two sons Mahlon and Chilion to the country of Moab. With hopes of prosperity and the escape of impending devastation, the family says good-bye to their friends, their family, and the life they know. Even as she experiences the hardships and fears of relocating, Naomi's heart is full—she has her family with her (Ruth 1:21).

They prospered for a time in Moab. Then Naomi's husband died and she was left alone with two sons to raise. Eventually, her sons married Moabite women, Orpah and Ruth. For ten years they enjoyed the love and companionship of family. Then Mahlon and Chilion also died.

Once Moab seemed to be the land that would shield Naomi's family from grief and loss. Now with the death of her husband and sons, Naomi was destitute and isolated. (Please note the lesson at this juncture in the story: running away from a cri-

sis or changing locations may not be God's will and may not necessarily guarantee security from future catastrophes.)

### **Application:**

**Being still.** Are you in a situation where you want to run away for fear of the future? Name your fear, then look at God's promises in Jeremiah 29:11 and Romans 8:28. Ask for God's timing and leading. As you make decisions in faith, determine in your heart to say, "Be still and know" that He is God (Psalm 46:10).

After their husbands died, Naomi, Ruth, and Orpah were all that remained of the family. No children, no grandchildren. Fortunately, young widows like Ruth and Orpah were allowed to return to their fathers' homes for provision and the opportunity to marry again and have children. But for older widows like Naomi, they were dependent upon their children for support. Naomi had no husband or children. She lost her joy when she lost those dearest to her. No amount of physical provision in Moab could furnish a balm for her broken heart. Though in a land of plenty, Naomi was empty (Ruth 1:21).

### **Application:**

**Being filled.** Has a broken heart left you feeling hollow? Regardless of prosperity or poverty, sadness is an inescapable part of the human experience. In Psalm 63, David says his soul thirsted for God "in a dry and thirsty land where no water is." According to verses 3-5, what satisfied his soul? When we focus on praising God and giving Him thanks, our souls are filled with His peace and joy.

Coming to grips with her new reality, Naomi arose and set out for Bethlehem. Her two daughters-in-law begged to go with her. But Naomi, believing their lives would be better by staying, bid them to return to their mothers' houses (Ruth 1:8). Orpah refused at first, but finally gave in to Naomi's pleas and went home. Ruth was more determined to stay with Naomi, declaring, "where you lodge, I will lodge, your people shall be my people, and your God will be my God, where you die I will die, and there will I be buried" (Ruth 1:16-17).

Ruth, too, lost the one dearest to her heart. She and Naomi were both grieving and found comfort in each other's consistent presence.

Naomi and Ruth journeyed back to Bethlehem. Naomi carried the hope of a kinsman redeemer. Mosaic law expected a male relative to rescue ("redeem") a kinsman in need. In this case, he would marry the deceased's widow, inherit his estate, and preserve his name.

Naomi had accused God of bringing her back to Bethlehem empty, yet God had given her Ruth—a devoted daughter-in-law. By focusing on the negative, Naomi became so bitter she failed to see the good and positive ways in which God was working. (When we are hurting, we, too, can be blind to the goodness of God—wishing away our lives and asking God to give back what He took away.)

### **Application:**

***Living in the present.*** Are you longing for things to be as they once were? Read Ecclesiastes 7:10 and Isaiah 43:19. What wisdom and hope can we garner from these verses? Hebrews 13:8 tells us God remains the same yesterday, today, and forever. Think about how this truth can comfort us.

To provide food for herself and Naomi, Ruth immediately set out to glean the edges of a Bethlehem field. The Levitical law allowed widows, the poor, and foreigners to do this without penalty (Leviticus 19:9; 23:22; Deuteronomy 24:19). That is where Ruth was gleaning—with the poor and destitute and dependent on the generosity of a stranger. Ruth was not only poor, but she was a woman; she was a widow who was childless. And worse, she was a foreigner. In that culture, these identifiers made her a nobody. Even in her lowly state, Ruth was grateful for the gracious provision of a field where she could support herself and her mother-in-law. (In our grief, God gives us strength for living. He gives us a place, a purpose, and provision. Philippians 4:19 says, “But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”)

Unwittingly, Ruth happened

to be gleaning in the very field that belonged to Naomi’s close relative, Boaz. Naomi’s hope was that he would be their kinsman redeemer. Boaz noticed Ruth one day and asked his servant who she was. He explained she was Naomi’s daughter-in-law who had worked tirelessly to glean all she could to provide for herself and Naomi.

Hearing of Ruth’s faithfulness and character, Boaz showed her great favor and generosity by encouraging her to remain only in his fields, gathering directly behind the reapers so she could collect an ample supply each day. He even instructed his servants to purposefully drop stalks of grain for Ruth. Boaz also told her to drink from his vessels when she was thirsty and to eat of his bread when she was hungry. Because of Ruth’s faithful, selfless, and determined character, she had found favor in the eyes of Boaz and in the eyes of those around her.

### **Application:**

***Being faithful in the field.*** How has God proven faithful to you as you’ve worked in pain? Ruth had to be faithful in the field to receive the great blessing God had in store. Learn this lesson from Ruth—keep going.

Ruth serves as a model for womanhood. In her gleaning, Ruth found grace. Through her diligence, she found favor. And that favor led to great blessing. Ruth did not complain about her plight nor did she trumpet her good works. She conducted herself with humility, gratitude, dignity, and a great work ethic. All these brought her favor. "God works through a woman who moves forward even in

the midst of tragedy and trial, actively seizing every opportunity God provides rather than waiting passively for events to happen" (Guideposts Study Guide). Even when we are crushed in spirit, we can give thanks and be grateful for the provisions God has given us. First Thessalonians 5:18 says, "In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you."

### Application:

**Receiving grace.** What does God promise in 2 Chronicles 26:5 and 1 Samuel 26:23a. We must be willing to humble ourselves in any situation, asking God to strengthen our arms for the spiritual, emotional, and physical tasks at hand. Read Proverbs 31: 17.

Naomi was taken aback when she saw how much grain Ruth brought home. She asked in whose field Ruth had been working. When Ruth shared the details about Boaz and the favor he had shown her, Naomi blessed God and declared that

it was His faithful and loving provision and kindness that had orchestrated Ruth's presence in Boaz's field. God's obvious blessing strengthened Naomi's faith and caused her once empty heart to overflow with gratitude!

Sensing the mutual, genuine attraction and favor Boaz felt toward Ruth, Naomi wisely advised her to go to Boaz, and when he fell asleep, to lie down at his feet. Ruth did as she was told and when Boaz awakened, he was startled to see her there. Delicately, Ruth stated her simple yet straightforward plea, “I am Ruth, your maidservant. Take

your maidservant under your wing, for you are a close relative” (Ruth 3:9) NKJV. She was asking him to be the kinsman redeemer. Overjoyed by her request, Boaz declared her to be a most kind and virtuous woman. Boaz redeemed Elimelech’s estate and married Ruth. They had a son aptly named Obed, meaning “servant of God” or “worshipper.”

### **Application:**

**Asking big.** What does Hebrews 4:16 say about the manner in which we should approach the Lord with our needs? He loves us and wants to lavishly bless us. Speak the promises of God with faith and boldness in each area of your life.

“God uses the faithfulness of ordinary women to accomplish His extraordinary plans: He provided bread for two widows through Ruth’s gleaning; He provided security for the young widow Ruth through her marriage to Boaz, He provided posterity for Naomi through Obed, the son born to Ruth and Boaz; God provided King David for Israel, even the Messiah through this gentle woman” (Guideposts Study Bible for Women).


From this poignant story, we’ve learned pain is unavoidable. We cannot run from the realities of grief—an experience we all endure. Even in the midst of our suffering, the best way to protect our hearts is not by running away from our grief but by relying on the Lord to give us strength, joy, and peace. While in our pain, we can give thanks, trusting always in His providence and provision because He is faithful.

When we follow Christ, grief is never the final destination nor is it experienced in a vacuum. The way we journey through life impacts everyone around us in ways we cannot fathom, even affecting those in generations to come.

Sometimes, we ask God to give back what has been taken from us. In his book *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, C.S. Lewis penned this quote spoken by Prince Caspian, "I spent too long wanting what

was taken from me and not what was given. I was given a kingdom, a people." God did not give back what was taken from Naomi and Ruth, but what He gave instead brought about great joy and expressions of gratitude not only to their immediate family, but also to all the world through their lineage. Eternal hope and redemption for all humanity was brought about by the ultimate Kinsman Redeemer Jesus Christ, whose reign and kingdom shall never end (Luke 1:33)!

### Application:

**Holding on.** According to Isaiah 40:31 and Isaiah 61:1-3, what does God promise to give those who are sad and weak? Whenever you are grieving, you can take comfort that God not only sees you in your grief, but He also leads you to a place of goodness and blessing. We claim the promise, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever" (Psalm 23:6). 

**About the Writer:** April Tummins lives in Dickson, Tennessee with her husband Philip and two sons Grant and Oliver. She serves as the worship leader and as a Sunday School teacher at United Free Will Baptist Church. Professionally, she enjoys serving others in a local hospice organization.