

# Ruth 1 • Famine, Loss and Separation

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We're going to start a new book study here this morning. It's the Book of Ruth, so follow along with me as I read from the ESV. It says, <sup>1</sup> *In the days when the judges ruled there was a famine in the land, and a man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons.*

<sup>2</sup> *The name of the man was Elimelech and the name of his wife Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They went into the country of Moab and remained there.* <sup>3</sup> *But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons.* <sup>4</sup> *These took Moabite wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. They lived there about ten years,* <sup>5</sup> *and both Mahlon and Chilion died, so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband.*

<sup>6</sup> *Then she arose with her daughters-in-law to return from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the fields of Moab that the Lord had visited his people and given them food.* <sup>7</sup> *So she set out from the place where she was with her two daughters-in-law, and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah.* <sup>8</sup> *But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go, return each of you to her mother's house. May the Lord deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me."* <sup>9</sup> *The Lord grant that you may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband!"* *Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept.* <sup>10</sup> *And they said to her, "No, we will return with you to your people."* <sup>11</sup> *But Naomi said, "Turn back, my daughters; why will you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb that they may become your husbands?"* <sup>12</sup> *Turn back, my daughters; go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. If I should say I have hope, even if I should have a husband this night and should bear sons,* <sup>13</sup> *would you therefore wait till they were grown? Would you therefore refrain from marrying? No, my daughters, for it is exceedingly bitter to me for your sake that the hand of the Lord has gone out against me."* <sup>14</sup> *Then they lifted up their voices and wept again. And Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.*

<sup>15</sup> *And she said, "See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law."* <sup>16</sup> *But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and*

*where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. <sup>17</sup> Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the LORD do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you.” <sup>18</sup> And when Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more.*

*<sup>19</sup> So the two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem. And when they came to Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them. And the women said, “Is this Naomi?” <sup>20</sup> She said to them, “Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. <sup>21</sup> I went away full, and the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi, when the Lord has testified against me and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?”*

*<sup>22</sup> So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabite her daughter-in-law with her, who returned from the country of Moab. And they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest. (ESV)*

Stop there. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you so much for the opportunity to come together here this morning to dig into Your Word. And I just pray my Father, God, that you would use this time in the Word to really minister to your children. I pray, my Father, that you would speak to hearts right where they're at and Lord, especially for those who like Naomi are going through a rough season that you would speak to them, Lord, about your faithfulness, the very thing that we were singing about this morning in worship. Guide and direct us, speak to us, we pray. Teach us, for we ask it in the name of Jesus our Savior, amen. Amen.

You might have noticed that the book of Ruth begins with a timeframe identification. Look in verse one with me again. You'll notice it says, *<sup>1</sup> In the days when the judges ruled*, and this was the time immediately, really, after Israel came into the land, after Joshua passed away the Lord began to raise up individuals to lead Israel, usually leading them out of trouble because this was a period of time that lasted about 400 years. And during this time, Israel would fall into disobedience and because of that, their enemies would rise up against them and begin to oppress them. And so God would raise up individuals referred to as judges who would be there to lead the way to deliver Israel from whatever oppressive group or people had come against them.

We believe, as we're thinking of this timeframe, that the events that we're looking at here in Ruth took place toward the end of that 400 year period. You'll remember that the period of the judges ended by the raising up of the monarchy.

Remember the very last judge was Samuel and Samuel lived long enough to actually anoint the first two kings of Israel. The first being Saul, you'll remember, a Benjamite, and then finally King David. But this is that time toward the end of the period of the judges.

And the other thing that's interesting is that when Israel would fall into disobedience, God would not only bring enemies against her to get her attention, but he would also bring things like famines. And that's exactly what we see here in verse one, where it says there was a famine in the land. That's exactly what we would expect during a time of spiritual decline.

And by the way, the time of the times of the judges was a progressive decline in the spiritual health of Israel as they embraced idolatry more and more during that time. It goes on and it says, *(and) a man of Bethlehem in Judah*, and of course in the New Testament it refers to Judah as Judea, but that's the Greek word. But it goes on to say that this man *went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons*.

So we're introduced here at the beginning of the story to the man that is named Elimelech, who sought relief from the famine by moving his family over to the region of Moab. Let me put a little simple map up on the screen so you can kind of see this area that we're talking about. And we'll start by circling the area of Bethlehem in the tribe of Judah.



Then we'll circle also Moab, and you'll see that it wasn't a great distance for them to travel. They really just kind of had to cross the river or the dead sea,

whichever, to get over to Moab. And apparently there was food plentiful in Moab.



But this was a rather dangerous journey for Elimelech to take on because you see the Moabites and the Israelites rarely got along even though they were related. They were related in the sense that the Moabites were descended from a man named Lot. And you'll remember that Lot was the nephew of Abraham.

And Lot was an interesting kind of a guy, and he went to go live among the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. We read this in the book of Genesis, and while he was there, the Lord determined that the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah and the sexual immorality that was going on there was such that he was going to destroy those cities. But out of deference and mercy to Abraham and his family, he rescued Lot and his family out of Sodom and Gomorrah prior to the destruction of those cities and the region.

But after the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Lot's daughters believed that there was no way they were going to be able to find a husband. They probably thought that the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah was wider or broader than it was, and that maybe who knows how far this destruction went. And so they kind of assumed out of fear, and by the way that's never a good reason to make a decision, but they assumed that they weren't going to be able to find a husband to carry on their family name.

So they conspired together to get their dad to impregnate each one of them by getting him liquored up. It's not a great story. And bearing children. And so the

oldest daughter did become pregnant. She gave birth to a son and named him Moab, and he became the father of the Moabites. Yeah, not a tremendously honorable beginning, starting from incest, but being what it was.

Two other quick facts about the Moabites for you to think about. They frequently attacked the Israelites, so they lived kind of in a constant state of hatred and hostility toward them. And the Moabites did not worship the God of Israel. They had several other gods. In fact, they were known as the children of Kamosh, horrible, horrible pagan god. And they worshiped other gods as well.

We learn in verse two as we keep looking at the text we're given the name of Elimelech, his wife Naomi, his two sons, Mahlon and Chilion, and here they are, they've moved to Moab and they're there because there's a famine going on and there's no food. At least it's getting short in short supply in the land of Israel.

Before we move on, I think it is important probably for us to give this move that Elimelech decided to make a little scrutiny. I have to say, I've never lived in a time of famine. I've never been afraid that I was going to starve. Although when I left home for the first time, I think I got close. But that was just because I was a horrible manager of money. And it was, yeah, I was making peanuts at the time. I was working for a radio station. When I moved away from Minnesota I took a job. I don't normally admit this in public, but I took a job in North Dakota. Okay, now, you know.

But anyway, they didn't pay me much and it was a good position, but I used to, I'm almost ashamed to say this, but I had the late-night shift, 10:00 PM to 2:00 AM, and it was a rock and roll radio station. Anyway, I used to, during my shift, go into the offices of the sales department and rifle through their desks, because some of them had coupons for food from restaurants. They were given those because they're selling advertising to these places, and they'd give them free coupons and they'd just stuff them in their desk. They weren't going to use them, but I was starving so I used to, anyway, so enough about that.

I'm sure though, that when you're facing the reality of a genuine famine, because remember, this is an agrarian society. They grow their food. There's no grocery store down the street. You grow what you're going to eat. And if there's no rain, there's no crops. And if there's no crops, there's no food.

And you know, I can imagine, even though I've never been through that, how disturbing that would be for Elimelech and Naomi to think we may not be able to take care of our boys. You know, that's a pretty frightening thought but here's

the thing that we need to kind of scrutinize. Was it a good decision? Was it a good decision to go to another country, and particularly to Moab? And some of you might be thinking, well, yeah, of course it was a good decision. I mean, what else could he do? You know, there's a famine in the land. And if people aren't eating, they're starving. And so what are you going to do, sit around and watch your family starve? You know, I get that.

But you know, Elimelech had to be aware of what the Moabites were like as a people and what God had previously said about the Moabite people. In fact, let me show you this on the screen from Deuteronomy chapter 23. Listen to what the Lord is saying through Moses. He says,

**Deuteronomy 23:3-4 (ESV)**

“No Ammonite or Moabite may enter the assembly of the LORD. Even to the tenth generation, none of them may enter the assembly of the LORD forever, because they did not meet you with bread and with water on the way, when you came out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam the son of Beor from Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse you.”

*“No Ammonite or Moabite may enter the assembly of the LORD. Even to the tenth generation, none of them may enter the assembly of the LORD forever, because they did not meet you with bread and with water on the way, when you came out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam the son of Beor from Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse you.”*

So, this is how the Lord felt about the people of Moab. So you can imagine what it's like for someone like Elimelech to decide or make the decision to take his family into this country. And not only that, but to allow his sons to marry Moabite women. That was strictly forbidden. Many many years later, the Jews were still doing this even after the time of the kings.

And then you'll remember they went into exile for 70 years in the Babylonian kingdom, and then God graciously allowed them to come back to their nation after that time of discipline. But you know what, the Jews continued to intermarry with these pagan nations and we learn how this was perceived by the godly people from a passage that is given to us in the book of Ezra. Let me show you this on the screen from chapter nine, verses one and two, it says,

**Ezra 9:1-2 (ESV)**

After these things had been done, the officials approached me and said, “The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands with their abominations, from the Canaanites, the

Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians and the Amorites. For they have taken some of their daughters to be wives for themselves and for their sons, so that the holy race has mixed itself with the peoples of the lands. And in this faithlessness the hand of the officials and the chief men has been foremost.”

*After these things had been done, the officials approached me and said, “The people of Israel (and not just the people) and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands with their abominations, from the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians and the Amorites. For they have taken (look at this) some of their daughters to be wives for themselves and for their sons, so that the holy race has mixed itself with the peoples of the lands. (And here's where we find out what they thought about that) And in this faithlessness the hand of the officials and the chief men has been foremost.”*

So how did they perceive this intermarriage with these pagan nations? They perceived it as an act of faithlessness. So this is important to see this, but regardless of that, we kind of see what the man Elimelech was like, because even though he knew about Moab, he knew the history, he knew what God had said about Moab, and even though it was considered an act of faithlessness to give your children to intermarry with the Moabites, he was like, yeah, okay, we're going to do this.

I think he probably felt there was no other option. He was between a rock and a hard place, as they say. I mean, what else are we going to do? I'm not going to watch my kids starve, I'll tell you that much. So we're going to do something here. We're not just going to sit around and be stupid about this.

Have you ever heard somebody say to you, well, God gave you a brain, he wants you to use it. Yeah, but not for disobedience He doesn't. This was an act of disobedience. And you might say, well, what else could he have done? I mean, he was struggling to make a decision for his, what else could he have done?

Whoa. Wow. let's think about that for a minute. How about cry out to the Lord! How about ask the Lord to sustain his family. You think that would've done any good? Let me show you something from the Psalms, Psalm 33, up on the screen.

**Psalm 33:18-19 (ESV)**

Behold, the eye of the LORD is on those who fear him, on those who hope in his steadfast love, that he may deliver their soul from death and keep them alive in famine.

*Behold, the eye of the LORD is on those who fear him, on those who hope in his steadfast love, that he may deliver their soul from death (and oh look at this) and keep them alive in famine.*

You think the Lord is able to keep you alive even in desperate circumstances? Yeah, I think he is. I mean, He's all powerful. And so it says that His eye is actually looking, He's searching for those who are willing to put their hope in Him rather than take matters into their own hands, which is what we do most of the time, isn't it?

I mean, I've been guilty of it many times in my life, and I know you probably have too. We see a situation. We kind of take the circumstances into view. We decide this is desperate, we need to do something and somebody comes along and says, well, God gave you a brain, and that's all we need to run off halfcocked and do our own thing and try to solve the issue in our own strength.

Well, you probably know how that goes whenever you do that. And frankly, for Elimelech and his family, it was just that sort of a way. So rather than trusting the Lord, he takes his family into enemy territory. He stays there, or they stay there, for a period of about 10 years. And what happens during those 10 years? Elimelech passes away and then his boys pass away at, we assume a fairly young age because neither of them had any children yet, and Naomi is left alone.

Well, she's got her daughters-in-law, but I'm sorry ladies, that's not much help. You see, this is a time, this is a culture where a woman's security and her very wellbeing is all predicated upon the men in her life. And if her husband passes away she at least can rely upon her boys. But in Naomi's case, that's not going to happen because they're all dead.

We don't know how the boys passed away, but it doesn't really matter because in the end, Naomi is facing a future where for the rest of her life, she's going to have to depend on the generosity of other people. And she better hope they're going to be generous, because if they decided not to be, women in that culture sometimes died of starvation because what else is she going to do?

So suffice it to say, the future doesn't look all that rosy for Naomi, and she knows it. In fact we see how she begins to talk about this. And if you'll skip down to the end of verse 13, she starts to set these ladies free to go back to their families, find a man to marry. They can still, they're young enough. They can still remarry, she says here, go ahead, just go back to your house. And they're all crying, you know, of course, as women do. And then at the end of verse 13, she says this. She says, *it is exceedingly bitter to me for your sake that the hand of the Lord has gone out against me.*

So the first thing she says, and this is the first reference to this bitterness, the bitterness of life. She says, *it is exceedingly bitter to me for your sake.* I'm going back to my homeland, and I don't know what I'm going to find there, but I do know that I'm going to be begging for the rest of my life. I know that. But it is a very bitter thought indeed for me to think about you coming with me to the same future. Go and find a man and remarry and start over again. You're young enough to do that.

But you'll notice that she says at the end of that verse 13, *that the hand of the Lord has gone out against me.* Did you hear that? Did you see that? This is how Naomi sees her circumstances. God's hand has gone out against me. This is really interesting because this is human nature.

This is the first thing we do when we go through hard times we say, God's against me, or God did this or God...and you know, and people they'll say, well, you know, God didn't do that to you, but you know, the fact of the matter is He did allow it. And so for a lot of people that's the same thing. So you're not making me feel any better.

God allowed this. This is what's going on in my life. The hand of the Lord has gone out against me. In other words, he targeted me with this trouble. I think some of you can relate. Maybe you've been there, and you have felt at certain times of your life when things are kind of falling apart at the seams, that God is against you and he's in fact bringing all of this difficulty into your life.

It's a fair guess that Naomi probably believed by this time now that the Lord is punishing her and her family because of their disobedience. Because as I said before, this was an act of disobedience on their part to go to Moab and not trust the Lord. And so she's probably carrying the weight of this thing, and that's a pretty heavy burden to care.

Think about that. To carry, I mean, for someone to think that, you know, because of the decisions we made. Who knows? For all we know, Naomi, you

know, pushed Elimelech into this trip, who knows, whatever exactly happens, she's feeling that burden now.

And so she tells her daughters-in-law, you guys go back to your families. And at first, both of them say, no, we're going to go with you. And eventually Orpah decides better of it and she goes, but we have a very different response from this young woman named Ruth. And this is, we don't really know anything about Ruth at this point in the story.

This is really the first clue were given about the kind of a person that she was and what was going on in her heart. And when in verse 15 Naomi says, listen, Orpah left, you go too. But Ruth, look at verse 16, Ruth said, *do not urge me to leave*. Please don't urge me to go. And she said, *for where you go I will go*.

She said, *where you lodge I will lodge* and your people will be my people. And so she's saying, I want to be part of Israel. Your people are going to be my people. And then here's the big one, she says, your God, My God. And this is where we see what is going on in Ruth's heart and what God is doing in this young woman to bring her out of the paganism that she was raised in among the people of Moab, to a full understanding that there is one true God and I want to make him my God.

So you see this is far more than a woman who's willing to live in a foreign country. Ruth is turning her back on the Moabite gods. She says in verse 17, if you keep looking with me, *where you die I will die. And there I'll be buried*. And I want you to pay attention to this. She says, *May the LORD*, and I want you to notice that she's using the divine name there. Did you see that the word LORD is in all capitals, or at least small caps in your Bible? That means that's the divine name. That's the Tetragrammaton we call it. That's the name that God gave to Moses when he told Moses to go to Egypt and tell the people God has heard your cries. He's going to deliver you.

Moses said, "Who should I?" I am that I am. This is the divine name and she's using the divine name, Yahweh. She says here, may Yahweh do so to me and more also, if anything, but death parts me from you. And what Ruth is doing is she's calling on the God of Israel to hold her to her promise.

You see what's going on here in Ruth? This is more than just a foreign gal who doesn't seem to have any other options. She is connecting herself to the God of Israel, and it's a beautiful thing. And so we're told in verse 18 that when Naomi saw that Ruth wasn't going to make any other decision related to this, she said no more about it.

And so we have these final verses, and I want to read these final verses again of the chapter, because these are so important, not just to the narrative, but to what I believe the Lord wants us to really take away from this study. So in verse 19, it goes on and it says, *So the two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem. And when they came to Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them.* and the women of the town they were saying to each other, is this Naomi? And she eventually heard this and she said to them, no, don't call me Naomi. She objected because the name Naomi means pleasant and beautiful and full and so forth.

And she said, no, that name doesn't fit anymore to what I've been through. The last 10 years have stripped me of my name. And so she says, I want you to call me Mara from now on, because Mara means bitter. And that's what life has been for me. It's been bitter. And she goes on to say in verse 21, *I went away full, and the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi, when the Lord has testified against me and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?*”

Wow. I tell you, she is just, she's going for it, isn't she? And you can see what's going on now in Naomi's heart. She's hurt. She's disappointed. She's struggling. Have you ever been there? Have you ever been disappointed at God? You might not want to admit it, but we all get to that point at some place in our lives. Where we're just, you know, it's just like, hey, this isn't working out. This isn't what I signed up for, and this is not what I expected. And it's very common, and I think that's what's going on in Naomi's heart.

You look at some of the things that she's saying and she makes it pretty clear. I mean, first of all, the comment about her name that speaks for itself. Don't call me pleasant, call me bitter. But I want you to notice how she describes her life before they went to Moab. She says it was full. My life was full.

It's 10 years later, and now I'm empty. So she sees her life and all that was worth living for as gone. I'm empty at this point. And you'll notice here that she doesn't describe all of this emptiness and bitterness to just bad luck. She's very clear about the fact that this was God who caused this. She's very clear about the fact that the hand of the Lord was against me.

And you'll notice how she says in verse 21, and this is interesting, look at verse 21. This is where she says the *Lord has testified against me*. And what she's doing is she's seeing God as someone who stands up in a court of law and brings damaging testimony against her case.

In other words, it's like the Lord is standing up and pointing out all of her sin. You did this, you did this, and you're guilty of that. And there you go. And so that's what she's saying. The Lord is giving testimony of all of my faults, all of my sins, all of my failures. And then she finishes the statement by saying *the Almighty has brought calamity*.

If you have a New American standard Bible, your Bible says *the Almighty has afflicted me*. Your NIV Bible says *the Almighty has brought misfortune*. I looked this up in my Hebrew dictionary this word that in the ESV has translated calamity, and I found that first of all, there was a ton of words that could be in English that it could be rendered into, but they all seemed to carry the idea of evil. There's an evil connotation. So when she says, the Lord has brought calamity into my life, she's essentially saying here that the Lord has done evil to me. He has allowed this evil to come into my life, the loss of my husband, the loss of my boys. All this to say that Naomi is going through what I call a crisis of faith.

And I think some of you may have been there before. A crisis of faith is something that arises when we're living through a very very painful time. And not only is it painful, but because you can't see the future, you don't have any answers about why it is the way it is, and you don't see any change down the road.

And you come to church and people are talking about, and even singing about in the worship time, how God is good and you're kind of sitting there thinking to yourself, I don't know, doesn't seem very good to me. God doesn't seem good at all. In fact, the last 10 years of my life have been anything but good. They've been bad. They've been bitter. They've been hard. They've been painful. And it begins to slowly eat away at your faith and your belief that God is good.

And you read it in your Bible and you're like, I don't know. I don't know. And frankly, all this brings a person going through that kind of a crisis to one of the most challenging decisions that they will ever face. And the question then is, am I going to choose to continue to trust God, even when I can't see the road ahead of me? And even when what I can see is dark and painful and hard, am I still going to choose? Make no mistake about it because it is a choice. Am I still going to choose to trust the Lord and stand on His promises and His declarations of goodness?

The final verse of this chapter says, <sup>22</sup> *So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabite her daughter-in-law with her, who returned from the country of Moab. And they*

*came to Bethlehem (and then these last words) at the beginning of barley harvest.*

And you know, for those of you that know the story of Ruth, you know that this is the Lord's setting the stage for something down the road that Naomi couldn't have begun to imagine. But it's the Lord setting the stage for His goodness and mercy to be manifest in the lives of these two women. But you know, they couldn't see it at this point. They couldn't see it. None of us can. I can't see the future neither can you. I'm glad the fact that I can't see the future. It would probably freak me out.

So I'm kind of glad the Lord doesn't show me what's happening in the days ahead, but the bottom line is that when we can't see and when everything we do see is nothing but a big fat bumner, what's that going to do to your faith in God? Well, it's going to erode it, guys. There's just no question about it.

And then here's what happens, people begin to pull back. They begin to pull away. They pull away from fellowship. They pull away from reading their Bible. They pull away from praying. And then it's just insult to injury. It just spirals from there. See when you're, here's the deal, when you're going through a difficult season, what you need the most is to stay in fellowship, stay in the Word, and stay in prayer. But that's not what we do.

But there's this example we went through, we just finished the book of Matthew recently and we read that passage in Matthew about how Jesus is in the Garden of Gethsemane, right. And you know what the Garden of Gethsemane was like for Jesus. He was just, it was horrible. He thought he was going to die. He literally came to his disciples and said, I have this grief and this sorrow unto death. And so He implored them to start praying for Him. It was so bad. You guys remember that, right?

But there's this statement that is given to us that says that being in agony, in agony, He prayed more earnestly. See, that's the model. That's the model that we should follow as it relates to the situations of life that crowd against us and begin to block out any light and goodness and so forth. And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly.

That's when you need to come back to make sure you're in church. Because people are like, I don't want to come to church when I'm in agony because people are going to think there's something wrong and maybe I'm not a real Christian or something like that. Good grief. Guys, this is a hospital. Okay? That's what church is. It's a hospital. You don't go to hospital when you're well.

You go there when you recognize I have a need. I hope you're here today because you recognize you have a need. I need to be strengthened in my faith today. I need to be built up. I need to be encouraged. Right?

Because life is a drag sometimes. Do you guys understand we live in a fallen world. This isn't heaven and it never will be. The world that you and I live in is fallen and it's full of tragedy and pain and difficulty and bitterness. Sorry. But that's the truth. And the sooner you recognize it, the sooner you're going to stop pretending that it's going to be something.

And you know when a lot of people, when they realize life is full of just one bummer after another, they decide, well, I guess the best way to get through this is drugs, alcohol, sex, whatever. I'm just going to fill my life with something that's going to anesthetize this feeling of a void in my heart.

That's not going to work either. It's only going to make things worse. You need Jesus. Because He promised, listen, He never told you and me that this was going to be a cakewalk living in this world, but He did say this. I am with you always, even to the end of the age. I will never leave you nor forsake you.

I will never turn you away. And I'll be there to help you walk through the difficult times. I'll be there in the times of bitterness and I won't let you go. You cry out to me, I am there. I will not leave your side.

Now, know this, the enemy's going to come and tell you that God left your side and he's going to chirp in your ear. But you need to determine in your heart not to listen and to go back to the Word of God and remind yourself what it says, and here's what it says. Trust in the Lord with all of your heart. Not just some, but all of your heart. And don't lean on your own understanding.

People, do you understand to lean on your own understanding is to lean on what I can see in front of me. This is what I see, and this is my determination based on what I see. The problem is you don't see the whole picture. You can't. So God's Word says, don't lean on that. It's like leaning on a broken staff. It's going to splinter and break and hurt you, injure you on your way down to the ground.

Lean on the Lord. He will never leave you nor forsake you. He loves you. He loves you with an everlasting love. Well, pastor, how do I know He loves me? Because He gave His son to die and suffer on the cross just for you. Do you know He didn't have to do that? Do you understand He didn't have to send His son? He did it for you. How do I know God loves me? And this is love that God gave His only son. Amen? So, lean on the Lord, cry out to the Lord.

Would you guys pray with me, and let's take a moment just to commit what we've seen here in Ruth chapter one to the Lord, can we just pray? Heavenly Father, I thank you so much for the wisdom and the grace that You give us to see what life is like and to understand, Lord, that you know this isn't heaven. This is a fallen, sin-soaked world. And it's full of difficulty and pain and bitterness.

But, Lord, you have promised never to leave us nor forsake us. And You have promised to take care of us every step of the way if we would but turn to You, cry out to You, and put our trust in You for every path that we walk on.

Lord, do this work, we pray, to strengthen our hearts, and when we go through a crisis of faith, Lord give us the courage not to withdraw, but to keep praying, to keep fellowshiping with other believers who are going to encourage us to keep worshiping with other believers and to stay in the Word. Teach us your ways. Guide us, Lord, in Your truth. We look to You. In the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior, and all God's people said together, amen.