

Women of the Church Study

Month 5

Ruth

Ruth was an incredible woman of the Church. Her choices impacted salvation history. Her story is relevant for all Christians, especially women, even today.

During the rule of the judges in Judah (approximately 1200-1050 BC), a man named Elimelech and his wife Naomi and their two sons moved to the country of Moab, due to a great famine in their homeland.

Elimelech died and Naomi was left with her two sons. They married Moabite (Gentile) wives, Orpah and Ruth. Within about 10 years, these sons also died. Naomi decided to return to her homeland of Judah at this time; she encouraged her two daughter-in-law's to return to their mothers' homes so that they could have a more secure and positive life. But Ruth refused this, remaining loyal to Naomi and returning with her to Bethlehem.

Upon their return, Naomi and Ruth had no way to support themselves and were in need of food. It was the time of the barley harvest. Ruth set off to the field of Boaz, a kinsmen of Naomi's husband, to pick grain.

Boaz was aware of Ruth's loyalty to Naomi and he asked the Lord to reward her for her deeds.

According to Mosaic Law, if a married man dies without children, his closest male relative was required to marry his widow and raise up heirs. Naomi was aware of this practice (levirate marriage) and helped Ruth to gain Boaz's interest and favor. Ruth followed her mother in law's guidance. Boaz showed willingness and kindness toward Ruth, taking her for his wife. Ruth bore a son, Obed. Obed became the father of Jesse, who became the father of David. Thus Ruth became the great-grandmother of King David and gained the honor of being among the forebears of Christ the Messiah.

The Bible contains an entire book dedicated to the story of Ruth. Her story begins with loss, pain and tragedy and ends with redemption, restoration and blessing. "It portrays love and loyalty of human beings in working their way through tragic circumstances to participation in the community of the faithful people of God" (USCCB). Ruth sacrificed her personal comfort because of her devotion and love for her mother-in-law, Naomi. She remained loyal to Naomi, even though she was considered an "outsider" in the land of Judah; she determined to follow God and His path for her life. As a Gentile, Ruth's story reminds the audience of the universality of the embrace of salvation. "Wherever and whenever it was told, its claim of God's universal concern for humankind and the attractiveness of caring human responsibility shines forth" (USCCB).

Resources:

- Biblical Women in Crisis: Portraits of Faith and Trust* by Jeanne Kuhn
- Courageous Women: A Study on the Heroines of Biblical History* by Stacey Mitch
- The Story of Ruth: Twelve moments in Every Woman's Life* by Joan Chittister
- <http://www.usccb.org/bible/ruth/0>

Reflections

Ruth's story provides many avenues of reflection, especially pertinent to the day to day lives of all women. These include (but are not limited to) grief and loss, trust, loyalty, suffering, and love of family, transformation, recognition and empowerment. Joan Chittister states of the story of Ruth "One moment at time it takes us from one life moment to another to show us how God works in us all, to remind us to what God calls us all, whatever the period, whatever the place."

--Ruth definitely displays many virtues and positive qualities and characteristics as she endures loss, accompanies Naomi to her homeland, works in the fields, and eventually marries Boaz and bears a son.

-Which virtues and positive characteristics do I especially admire in Ruth?

-Which of these qualities do I possess? Which ones could I possibly develop in myself?

--Ruth's story begins with difficult circumstances which include personal pain and loss. It ends with restoration and blessing which will continue through the generations.

-Have I had any experiences where challenges have resulted in blessings? Have I seen this in the lives of those around me?

-In my current challenges, can I trust God to know best and to redeem and restore me? What would help me be better able to do this?

--Ruth moved out of her comfort zone to accompany her mother-in-law Naomi to her homeland. This homeland was foreign to Ruth; she and Naomi had few resources or supports. Yet Ruth persisted in her faith in God and her loyalty to Naomi in making a life for themselves.

-When I am out of my comfort zone or when I seem to be short on resources or supports in my life, how do I cope/manage?

-In what ways does my faith in God sustain me in these difficult circumstances?

--The love of family is a priority for Ruth. She helps take care of Naomi. In the process of doing so, she is noticed by Boaz, who later takes Ruth as his wife. Ruth and Boaz are blessed with a son who becomes the grandfather of King David in the messianic lineage.

-What positive things have resulted from love in my family?

-Even despite multiple family issues which can arise, how can I set love as a family priority?

There is so much more to explore about Ruth! What other things about this story attract me and help me to see myself as a "whole woman, a spiritual woman" (Chittister) like Ruth? What parts of my life resonate with the story of Ruth? What does this story say to me on a personal level?

Devotionals/Prayers

The Song of Ruth can be found at the following: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=79KUTX-hE18>

The song illustrates how Ruth pledged her life to Naomi in these familiar words (Ruth 1:16-17):

Wherever you go I will go, wherever you lodge I will lodge.

Your people shall be my people and your God, my God.

Where you die I will die, and there be buried.

"Some may find it ironic that words so often chosen for the sacrament of marriage originally were a pledge from a daughter-in-law (a foreigner at that) to her former mother-in-law, from one widow to another. But as the story unfolds, these words become a powerful witness to the kind of practical love that is necessary for the physical survival of these two women, and necessary for spiritual health in every age. The relationship between Ruth and Naomi is a reflection of the faithful love of God offered to Israel and to us in the gift of covenant. Their story illustrates the power of mutual commitment between persons...Ruth and Naomi also shared a mutual commitment to survival. Sometimes a great and necessary mission can be the place where we discover our own gifts and in the process discover God's abiding and creative presence with us." <https://www.dolr.org/article/ruth-naomis-bond-reflects-gods-love>

Let us learn valuable lessons from the book of Ruth:

-Don't Let the Past Hold You Back

-Be Full of Faith

-Value Great Character

-Believe Redemption is Possible

-Leave a Legacy

<https://www.crosswalk.com/faith/bible-study/5-lessons-women-can-learn-from-ruth.html>

Gracious God, we give you thanks for the gift of family. Thank you for the people in our lives who support and encourage us and who love and care for us. Thanks for showing us your faithfulness in people like Ruth. Help us follow her example, to be loyal and faithful members of a family. Open our eyes, ears, hearts, and minds to what you will teach us. Give us patience when we are frustrated and help us know what to say when loved ones are in need. Amen

Adapted from: <https://stjohnssa.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/13-Ruth-Ruth-1-4R-27-Mar.pdf>

Heavenly Father, what a comfort to know that You are our never-failing help in times of trouble. Thank You for the book of Ruth and the many lessons it teaches us. I pray that I may remain in the center of Your perfect will for my life, but that when I go astray, I would quickly call to You in the time of trouble. Thank You that nothing in life is so terrible that You do not have an answer and I pray that my faith would continue to grow and mature. Amen. <https://prayer.knowing-jesus.com/Ruth>

Practical Applications

--A major theme in the story of Ruth is that of loss and despair being turned into restoration and joy. Think of an example of this in your own life or in the life of someone you know. It does not have to be a major event, but one that does end with God's goodness!

Take a journal page and draw a line down the middle. On one side, write words which describe the beginning of the story—the tragedy, the loss, despair, sadness, discouragement, etc. On the other side write words which describe the end of the story. (Journal the whole story if you would like, rather than just words). Take some time to think about this story. Is it like that of Ruth? Is it different? How does it stand as a testimony to God? Finish by writing a short prayer of thanksgiving to God for his restoration in your story.

--Ruth literally moved out of her "comfort zone" when she chose to return to Judah with Naomi. She did not know what was ahead for her, yet she was convicted as to what she was going to do.

Think of a situation in your life right now where you feel a "nudge" to move out of your comfort zone into some action. Hmm... yes, difficult—pray about it. Try taking a first step toward this action. What is it like to begin moving into the unknown? Are there more steps you can take? Can you see how you might be blessed as you do this?

--The story of Ruth contains many aspects of family commitment and loyalty. We all know that family relationships can be quite challenging in everyday life. Yet standing by one and other is a sign of love and can strengthen our relationships. Choose something you can do on a consistent basis that will demonstrate your loyalty and commitment to a family member. (This might be able to be combined with the comfort zone suggestion above!)

--If not already completed, make a decision to read the Book of Ruth in the Bible. Read slowly and carefully. See what the words of the story in Scripture say to you and how Ruth's story applies to your life.