



# *Naomi*

REASON TO HOPE

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Although many publishers do not capitalize terms, and particularly pronouns which refer to the Trinity, in this study CDM publications has capitalized those elements for clarity of reference.

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WEEK 1:

*Transitions*

## HOPE TO GROW

September 11, 2001, and the years around 2020 with Covid-19 and racial unrest are events none of us will forget. Our lives irretrievably changed as a result of the sudden destruction and devastation. Shock waves rippled throughout the world. Unrest and continued deaths occurred as a result. Safety and accountability practices changed at an almost immeasurable cost. Families and extended families, as well as businesses and friends, continued to mourn and fail.

Heroes putting their own lives on the line were made, as were villains willing to destroy everything in their paths. Children spent sleepless nights worrying about the safety and predictability of their lives and worlds. Families mourned losses of beloved relatives and the death of what once existed. Religious convictions and ideological differences were debated.

Visiting the site of the Twin Towers the December after September 11 was unforgettable. The flowers were profuse; the letters and photographs hung on the boards at the edge of the rubble. Hearts broke over the senseless destruction and loss of life. At the Twin Towers families and friends wondered about missing persons: their lives and work, their loves and relationships—pieces of a shattered world they tried to put back into some sort of order.

In the year of Covid-19, the experience was different, yet just as life-altering. The world stopped. People isolated for weeks. There was social distancing, hand washing, masks, government payouts and job losses. No travel. After two and a half years of living in Australia, the no-travel ban brought even more unexpected change to my own life.

Unexpected change was a key factor in Naomi's life as well. Chapter 1 of Ruth says,

*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. 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.*

My own life story is not what I had anticipated as a young girl. I had expected abundant life, a wonderful plan, and pursued perfection. How could life be bad when God loves me? . . . when I have all these Bible promises? When I was young, I thought I was going to be the perfect wife, the perfect mother, have the perfect kids, and be marvelously happy. I came to Christ in 1968, through the ministry of Young Life. Having never heard of a relationship with Christ, I eagerly began to pursue knowing my new-found Friend, Jesus. A half century later, the passion has not wavered or waned, yet experiences have. I've been married twice: once to a pastor, who committed adultery and abandoned me and our four teenaged children, and once to a widowed seminary and college president, who died in 2016. I am a divorcée and widow. I had heard years ago, "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life." Wherever we were, there was guaranteed success and happiness. Isn't that the promise? How could life be wonderful without it? So, that

became my expectation and what I thought I deserved. Somehow, God had promised it. The expected story never came. The theme of my life changed. I had hard lessons to learn—that life is not about me and my wants and my happiness. It is about God and His glory and His pleasure. The changes began in seminary. . .

Our call to seminary in my early married days was to prepare for the mission field, not the pastorate. We were going to minister with a pioneer missionary working with urban professionals. At that time, very few missionaries went to the affluent. Most went to the poor. But we were going to transform countries by winning the influential and powerful to Christ. They would in turn win their oppressed fellow citizens to Christ and improve their quality of life. Surely God would honor this kind of life. How could He not? On the bulletin board of the student union at seminary was the scripture Jeremiah 29:11: “I know the plans I have for you; plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.” Of course, I expected God to intervene on our behalf. He did, but not with the solution I expected.

We have these illusions: life will be pleasant; we will be happy; the great tragedies of life won't happen to us because we have the “magic” formula. *Really, God would not allow it to be different than we expect. He could not be glorified in struggle and/or sin. God's role in my life is to make it so others will want to be like me. We will rank with the great men and women of faith. Cancer will not be diagnosed, and our finances and friendships will flourish. After all, life is about me, how I feel and what is happening now.* We think that when life is good, we demonstrate good things about God. If life is difficult, God must not be good. Or so we fear, and so we live. We build illusions involving our children and our husbands.

Like all of us, Naomi experienced broken dreams. Whoever imagines she will lose a husband and two children within ten years? As with Naomi, our illusions become broken. Our expected story does not come. The themes of our lives change. We are not perfect wives with perfect children and untouchable husbands who provide a predictable future of happiness, pleasantness, and vibrant ministry. The anticipated theme of our lives is changed forever. We wonder how God could allow this. Didn't He promise something else? Yes, God did promise something else. His promise is not a life without pain and struggle, but a life which shows transformation through the struggle and the loss and the pain, *by His grace and for His glory.* In the midst of pain, we are not sure what we really want. We'd rather not hurt. Larry Crabb says, “Without trials, only spoiled brats enter into heaven. That would turn heaven into hell.”<sup>1</sup> Let's think about our expectations. Where did our expectations come from?

We need to examine what is biblical and what is cultural. Have you noticed that “God has a wonderful plan for your life” is no longer in the *Four Spiritual Laws* booklet from Campus Crusade (a.k.a. Cru)? But “God loves you” is. For He surely does. Have prosperity teaching and attractive catch phrases set up a culture of expectations in developed countries for personal peace and affluence? Perhaps the competitiveness in Western culture creates an environment for more, even in the Church. When dealing with spiritual issues,

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<sup>1</sup>Larry Crabb, *Shattered Dreams: God's Unexpected Path to Joy* (Colorado Springs: Waterbrook Press, 2010), 157.

do we begin to measure success by the tangible rather than the intangible? How else can we know success? Perhaps that is why we in ministry measure numbers, dollars, programs, and time pressure when comparing ourselves among ourselves. Perhaps we are not wise (2 Cor. 10:12). We are setting standards that God does not intend for measuring what is good.

Determining whether expectations or standards are biblical versus cultural is difficult. Most Sudanese Christians do not think that their children will go to college, or that their church will have a 10-million-dollar budget, or that they will live long happy lives. Why do Westerners put those expectations on each other and on God? What sets these as the standard for our expectations? We set ourselves up for disappointment with God. When our illusions are shattered, we scream “not fair,” and our hearts are broken. God *is* absolutely just and fair. He is also infinitely good and loving. An illusion is a shadow, after all, and was never intended. God has something of greater substance. Naomi faced much the same. She was part of God’s chosen people set apart to demonstrate His own character.



## HOPE THROUGH PRAYER

As you begin your study today, pray for wisdom, insight, and application.

## HOPE IN THE WORD

To get a sense of context for your study, read the book of Ruth.

1. Every day for the first four weeks, the following is suggested as a way to build and to use Bible study skills. By doing so, you will see the correlations within the text and make connections between the studied text and other parts of Scripture. Create an optional observational worksheet of Ruth chapter 1 as suggested in Appendix B. There is a copy of Ruth in Appendix A for you to mark as an observation worksheet. Work on this a little every day. The more time you spend, the more insight you will gain. Do what you can.

- a. For example, today, in Ruth chapter 1, look for and mark (either in the copy of Ruth at the back of this book, in your Bible, or in a printed version of the chapter) the key words and their synonyms: Naomi, Elimelech, Ruth and Orpah, the two sons, and the Lord. You can use markers, crayon, or symbols. In an electronic copy, you can use highlight, font color, different font, or symbols. (See sample in Appendix E.)

- b. List any other words that are repeated three or more times and give an explanation why these words seem to be important.

## HOPE TO APPLY THE WORD

Read Ruth 1:1-18.

2. Who was Naomi, and why had she gone to Moab?
3. Have you ever moved? What were causes for you to make a move? What were positive aspects of making this move? What made it difficult?
4. How long did Naomi live in Moab? What evidence is there that God had not abandoned their family when they moved from Israel? How long do you think it takes to be settled in a new place? What helps us adjust when we, like Naomi, need to move from one home to another? How might you see God's presence when making a move?
5. Do you know anyone who has moved internationally? What were the struggles they experienced? What things about moving internationally might be more difficult than moving from one part of the country to another? What unique adjustments might missionaries have to make when they move?



6. Before you end today, what is a take-away or principle from the Bible you learned in your personal study?



## HOPE THROUGH PRAYER

As you begin your study today, pray for wisdom, insight, and application.

## HOPE IN THE WORD

1. Work on the optional observational worksheet of Ruth chapter 1 as suggested in Appendix B. Work on this a little every day. The more time you spend, the more insight you will gain. Do what you can.

- a. Do you see any new key words in Ruth 1? Note any mention of words you marked yesterday that you did not see then, but you do today.
- b. Mark any terms of conclusion, e.g., “wherefore,” “therefore,” or “finally.” Mark any words indicating time such as “then,” “after,” “until,” or “when.” What terms, ideas, or events are these words connecting?

## HOPE TO APPLY THE WORD

2. Yesterday you identified why Naomi went to Moab. Consider the following questions to decide if this was a good choice.

- a. What in this passage might lead you to think Naomi and Elimelech’s move was a lack of faith? What did Elimelech lose by leaving Israel?

- b. Read Exodus 3:8 and Leviticus 20:24. Where had God called His people to be?
  
  - c. Read Ruth 2:1-4. Had Boaz left Israel because of the famine? Why might one person leave and another not?
3. Think about your finances over your lifetime. Identify the periods when you had fewer financial resources and times when you had more money. How did you see God in financially difficult circumstances? Did He seem present when there were enough resources and not when there were few, or vice versa? Why might that be?
4. Read Ruth 1:1-4. Does the text give any indication of a reason for the famine? In earlier cultures, food indicated sufficient resources or wealth. Sometimes people believe poverty or wealth is tied to God's blessing. Do you think the presence of abundant money (or food) indicates God's blessing? How might you explain the reasons we can gain or lose money? How should we respond when we face difficult financial times?
5. Ruth 1:1 says there was a famine in the land. Elimelech moved to avoid poverty. Surely financial insecurity is difficult for many people. Read Isaiah 48:10, and identify one or two reasons God puts adversity in our lives.

6. How can financial insecurity be a trial? Did you or someone you know experience financial insecurity during 2020 and Covid-19? How did you feel? How did others feel?

7. What emotions do you experience in times of crisis? In reading chapter 1 of Ruth, do you suppose Elimelech or Naomi experienced some of those same emotions in this famine? How do you think Elimelech's emotions led in his decision-making, and why? How can our emotions lead us to the wrong decisions?

8. Read the following and note the purposes for trials or adversity.

James 1:2-5

Romans 5:3-5

## HOPE TO GROW

One underlying purpose of trials is for our growth and God's glory. Always. Yet there may be other purposes for pain. The purposes of pain are the subject of whole books, but we will only touch on possible purposes. Think of a time in your own life when adversity led to your spiritual growth and/or God's glory.

During the Covid-19 crisis anger, despair and hoarding, fear, self-protection, even rebellion were prevailing attitudes in many people. Christians have the opportunity to demonstrate faith, peace, and service. We have unprecedented opportunity.

9. How might a crisis like a pandemic cause us to wonder how our priorities and attitudes reflect the priorities and attitudes in Elimelech's day? How do our priorities and attitudes reflect the priorities and attitudes of God?

10. How have your priorities changed since Covid-19?

11. When times are frightening, what is your first reaction? What does God desire us to do?

 *Day Three*

## HOPE THROUGH PRAYER

As you begin your study today, pray for wisdom, insight, and application.

## HOPE IN THE WORD

1. Work on the optional observational worksheet of Ruth chapter 1 as suggested in Appendix B. Work on this a little every day. The more time you spend, the more insight you will gain into the context of the passage: the period, the people, the expectations, the relationships with God and others. Do what you can.

Create the following:

- a. Simple lists: Using your key words you marked previously, list everything the text says about each word.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- b. Descriptive lists: What adjectives are used to describe something? For example, how is Naomi described? Use each of your key words to make a descriptive list for that key word.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- c. Topical lists: Summarize any material which relates to one specific topic. For example, what happened to Naomi in Moab?

- d. Analytical lists: Pick up themes within the text such as progression of thought or events, attitudes or behaviors of individuals, experiences, or characteristics of people. What were possible motives of Elimelech and Naomi in making a move?

## HOPE TO APPLY THE WORD

2. Read the following and note what you learn about adversity and God's knowledge or plans for us in adversity:

Ruth 1:6

Exodus 3:16 and 4:31

Jeremiah 29:10-14

3. How is God present in adversity? Is His presence obvious to you? Why or why not? Give an example of how you knew God was near during adversity you have experienced. Describe a time you have seen God's presence in adversity and a time when you have doubted His presence. What was different about those times?

4. Describe how your reactions to adversity may have affected your spiritual growth.

5. Elimelech and Naomi moved to Moab (Ruth 1:1). Because Israel was a patriarchal society, we could assume that Elimelech made the decision to move. Throughout history we have examples of a husband (or wife) making poor decisions. Some of these decisions are financially irresponsible or are risky choices. Let us suppose one partner in a marriage is financially irresponsible. What should be the response of their spouse? How might we balance responding with compassion with having healthy boundaries? Read 1 Peter 3. Which verses would you use to help find that balance?

6. Are there any women you can think of in Scripture who dealt with a husband who obviously made a poor choice?

One possibility might be Abigail. Read 1 Samuel 25:2-42. What did she try to preserve? What ultimately happened to Nabal in verse 38? What happened to Abigail and her home (verses 40-42)?

7. How does the following verse guide our development of this principle? *Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others* (1 Cor. 10:24 NIV). When might our actions as a woman, wife, or mother be for the good of an irresponsible person and when might our actions be for their harm?

8. There are opportunities where we can create a family heritage of fame or shame. How might you provide a legacy of respect and character for your immediate or extended family? What scriptures can you turn to for guidance?

## HOPE TO GROW

We see that Naomi was widowed for ten years with two sons in a foreign country. Her sons married, and then they died. *Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband* (Ruth 1:5b NIV). Naomi had to make some choices about her life, the directions it would take in the next years, and what she would do. She decided to return to the land of her people. When she heard in Moab that the Lord had come to the aid of His people by providing food for them, Naomi and her daughters-in-law prepared to return home from Moab (Ruth 1:6). Our dreams may not be the dreams God has for us. Are we willing to see our dreams shattered to have more of what God intends for us to have? Are we willing to face pain in order to have a better life?