

Ruth Clung To Her

Scripture: Ruth 1:1-18

Introduction

Oftentimes, when we read the book of Ruth, we think about the loyalty of Ruth. We remember how she remained with her mother-in-law despite difficult circumstances. We remember how Boaz redeemed Ruth and her family. We also may remember the faithfulness and the sovereignty of God working through all of these circumstances in Ruth's life to bring about His plan for humanity. After all, it was through the lineage of Ruth that King David was born and ultimately our Savior Jesus Christ. But what about Naomi, Ruth's mother-in-law? What type of person was Naomi? Whatever she was, she was the kind of mother to whom Ruth was loyal and would cling. (Ruth 1:14)

For many, if not all, of us, we are loyal to our family. We love our families even with their many problems. Admit it, your family has problems. Your family may be annoying at times. It may even be hurtful at times, but it is still your family. The same is true for the church. We are a family of God united in Jesus Christ, and in spite of that, we will get on each other's nerves from time to time. But, we are still family. I believe for most of us our moms hold a very special place in our families. The bond most of us have with our mothers is one that is not easily broken. Naomi may not have been Ruth's mother (she was her mother-in-law), yet Ruth was loyal to her. Ruth left her own father and mother and even resisted Naomi's plea for her to return to her own family, in order to remain with Naomi wherever she went. This was incredible given Ruth's circumstance.

Ruth was a childless Moabite widow lacking long-term financial support. As a Moabite, Ruth was choosing to go to an uncertain, potentially challenging, and hostile situation. Moab, Ruth's home country, was one of Israel's traditional enemies. The Moabites did not allow the people of Israel to pass through their territory when they came from Egypt. (Numbers 22–24) Israel excluded Moabites from the assembly of the Lord. (Deuteronomy 23:3–6) Eglon, a king of Moab, oppressed the Israelites. (Judges 3:15–30) What type of mother was Naomi that Ruth would be loyal to her in spite of these facts? There are at least three things that I think compelled Ruth to cling to Naomi:

- *Naomi Was a Mother Who Cared for Her Family*
- *Naomi Was a Mother Who Grieved with Her Family*
- *Naomi Was a Mother Who Modeled Faith to Her Family*

A Mother Who Cared for Her Family

The events in Ruth occurred sometime during the time of the Judges which was marked by "everyone doing what was right in his own eyes." (Judges 21:25) Maybe it was for this reason and the fact there was a famine at home that Naomi's husband, Elimelech, packed up his family and headed to the foreign land of Moab. Elimelech probably thought this was right. The times were tough for the family and to leave everything and everyone they knew to travel to a foreign place was no doubt stressful. We can accuse

Elimelech of a lack of faith for moving his family from God's people in the Promised Land to a heathen nation, but would we have chosen a different path? It is easy to say what they should have done until we face the same difficult situation.

The family escaped the famine, but the situation got worse. While in Moab, Elimelech died, leaving Naomi a widow in a foreign land. And as if it could not get worse, both of Naomi's sons, Mahlon and Chilion, died, leaving their wives, Ruth and Orpah, as widows, too. The situation was now precarious. What would these three widows do? Naomi then heard "that the Lord had visited His people and given them food." (Ruth 1:6) Things were better back home and the famine was over. Naomi decided that it would be better for them to return to her land and her people. Now, we may think that at this point things are good. They are returning home. They are going back to the Promised Land to be with God's people. At first, Naomi set out to return to her home land with her two daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpah. Along the way, though, she had a change of heart.

Ruth 1:8 ⁸ 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."

Maybe Naomi reassessed the situation and thought it was better for Ruth and Orpah to not go with her. Maybe she thought they would have trouble as Moabite women in the land of Israel. Maybe she thought they would have a better chance of survival with their own family. Whatever her reasons, it seemed that Naomi cared enough for her daughters-in-law to urge them to return to their homeland. She wanted Ruth and Orpah to be spared a life of restlessness and wandering and instead enjoy peace and security. To return to Moab might have been Ruth's most natural response. We might expect her to do that, but it would mean abandoning her mother-in-law. Ruth *clung* to Naomi, the same word used in Genesis 2:24 to describe the bond between a husband and a wife. Naomi cared very much for her family and Ruth responded to that motherly care with unyielding loyalty. Are we so loyal to our mothers?

A Mother Who Grieved with Her Family

Some may say that Naomi was a bitter woman, in fact she called herself "bitter". In the midst of very difficult circumstances, she wanted to change her name from Naomi, which meant "pleasant" to Mara, which meant "bitter". (Ruth 1:20) Remember though, Naomi had all but lost her family. She was in a foreign land without support. Her husband had died. She had lost both her sons. Would we have responded to these difficult situations any differently? Have you questioned God in the midst of very challenging circumstances? Has your situation ever made you bitter to God and towards other people? Have you ever asked God, "Why me?" If so, then you can probably relate to Naomi's situation. Yes, Naomi was bitter, but Ruth clung to her, anyway. Why?

Maybe it was how Naomi handled grief. Her grief was real. Her grief was honest and human. And yet, Naomi's grief did not destroy her faith. She understandably complained

against God, but she still believed in Him. She acknowledged her fate and God's sovereignty, but her grief was real and she wept *with* her daughters-in-law.

Ruth 1:13–14 ¹³ ...No, my daughters, for it is exceedingly bitter to me for your sake 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.

Naomi had no other sons to give in marriage to Ruth and Orpah, and at her age she could not have any more sons. She grieved that her own circumstances had affected them so terribly, feeling that God's hand was against her. Naomi kissed her daughters-in-law farewell, pled with them to return to their homes and live, and then all three widows vented their emotions with loud cries and wailing. Ruth and Orpah were not easily persuaded and were determined to go with Naomi to Judah. This shows that after all the grief these young women had shared with their mother-in-law, they were more attached to her than to their own people. They would not return to their home land. Naomi grieved with her daughters over their plight, and through it all, Ruth clung to her.

Maybe your mother has grieved over you. Maybe your mother has grieved *with* you. We may never know the grief our mothers endure. We may never know the sorrow they experience in the quietness of their own soul. I know that when I was younger, I caused my parents much grief, particularly to my mother. She worried for me and for her family. She wept when times were bad and when her family was hurt. That is what mothers do. They love their families so much that they grieve over them and sometimes with them. Ruth saw how Naomi handled her grief and she clung to her. She shared this grief.

A Mother Who Modeled Faith to Her Family

I do not know if this is true for you, but my mother was responsible for showing me the Christian faith early in my life. In fact, it was my mother who was responsible for me going to church as a young boy. She was also the one who “strongly encouraged” me to go to church as a teenager. I remember one time when I was a teenager and was asserting my own independence, I convinced my mother I could make an intelligent, informed and responsible decision regarding church. One Sunday she let me choose whether I would go to church on Sunday morning, so I chose to stay home and sleep. I did not get to choose the next Sunday, however. That was the end of my free will in deciding my Sunday morning activities as she made me get up and go to church the next Sunday. In all seriousness, though, my mother modeled Christian devotion. She was up early every morning reading her Bible and praying, and I am sure many of those prayers were for her youngest son who could get into all kinds of trouble.

Naomi must have demonstrated her faith to her family in at least a small way. At the risk of assuming too much about Naomi, she did seem to be a mother who at least believed in God, in God's sovereignty, and His blessing on His people, and she modeled that faith to her children. After Naomi heard that the Lord had shown favor to His people by ending their famine, she started the return journey from Moab with Orpah and Ruth. She then reconsidered their situation and pled with them to turn back. She prayed that the

Lord would give them the security of home and family in Moab. While Orpah eventually yielded to Naomi's plea to return to Moab, Ruth did not. Ruth was determined to remain with Naomi and to even follow Naomi's God saying this most famous verse.

Ruth 1:16–17 ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ 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."

We may fault Naomi for suggesting that Ruth and Orpah return to the godless land of Moab. She was by no means perfect, but on some level, she cared for her family and acknowledged the providence of Almighty God. When she heard that God was blessing His people in Israel, she left the foreign land of Moab to return to her God and to be with His people. Naomi recognized that her survival was found with God. In the midst of trouble, grief, and uncertainty, Ruth must have seen Naomi's faith in God. The greatest gift any parent could give their child is their faith in God. The greatest gift a child could give his or her parent is an acknowledgment that he or she serves the Lord. While Orpah tearfully kissed Naomi good-bye, Ruth clung to Naomi. She declared her faithful commitment to Naomi, to her people, and to her God even until death. To declare to your mother that you will serve God for as long as you shall live is truly a wonderful gift.

Ruth was willing to leave her native country and her pagan faith to become a part of Naomi's people and God. Ruth saw that the source of whatever strength Naomi had lay in her faith. It was not that Ruth saw Naomi's faith as a shield from the harshness of life, but she did see it as a source of strength to endure the troubles of life. Naomi had this faith in spite of all that had gone wrong. Life may not be easy for us and in fact we are told to expect trouble in this world (Matthew 24:9-13), but faith in Jesus Christ and the hope He gives can help us endure even the most difficult circumstances. Ruth clung to Naomi because she saw a faith that she wanted, and indeed declared, "Your God shall be my God." Is that the faith you have even during the worst times of life? Is that the faith you model to your family? May it be!

Conclusion

The American author Washington Irving once wrote the following:

"A mother is the truest friend we have, when trials heavy and sudden fall upon us; when adversity takes the place of prosperity; when friends desert us; when trouble thickens around us, still will she cling to us, and endeavor by her kind precepts and counsels to dissipate the clouds of darkness, and cause peace to return to our hearts."

Ruth's unwavering faithfulness to Naomi and to Naomi's God says much about the impact Naomi had on Ruth. Naomi may not have been a perfect mother to Ruth, and no one is, but she had such an impact on Ruth that Ruth clung to her. What impact has

your mother had on you? Are you willing to cling to your mother even to death as Ruth did? If not your mother, is there someone in your life who has had that kind of impact on you? Naomi gave Ruth a great gift — the example of faith in the one true God. Ruth also gave Naomi a great gift — a child who was the ancestor of King David and ultimately King Jesus.

Today is a day for us to be thankful to God for our mothers and to be thankful for the love, care and faith our mothers (and mothers-in-law) have given us. It is not just this day we should remember our mothers, for we should honor them everyday. There are also those women who filled the role of mother or were a mother figure to us who we can also thank God and them. Many of us have been blessed by foster mothers and step-mothers, and even by neighbors who provided a motherly image when it was needed. Let us be thankful to God for them and express our thanks to them as well.

But maybe you are here today and have not had a good family experience. Maybe it is difficult for you to be thankful for a mother or motherly figure in your life. If that is you, please know that there is a Person who loves you more than any human ever could. God loved the world in such a way that He gave His One and Only Son to die for you. You can trust God to gather you together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings (Luke 13:34) If you have faced bitter times or are facing bitter times like Naomi and Ruth and do not know what the future may hold, you can trust in King Jesus to care for you? Are you sojourning in a foreign land with an uncertain future, then turn to King Jesus. He will lead you to a fertile land with everlasting joy. The blessed assurance of the Gospel is that Jesus saves anyone who turns to Him in faith. Will you trust Him today? Amen!