

BREAKING BOUNDARIES

THE STORY OF RUTH

Sermon-Based Study Guide
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church
Ruth 1.10-19 | September 15, 2019
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I. Introduction to this Study

This week we continue our study of the Book of Ruth. In our series' first study we learned how Naomi, Ruth's mother-in-law, lost everything, similar to the story of Job. In this week's study, the story continues with Ruth and Orpah's response to Naomi's desire to "shüv" (translated as return home, take them back, go back, turn back, brought me back).

What will Ruth and Orpah do? What would you do!?

II. Connecting with One Another

When have you been invited along on a trip? Where did you go?

III. Study the Text

a. Reread Ruth 1.1-9a.

How would you describe the emotional state of Naomi? Ruth and Orpah?

How about their spiritual perspective?

b. Does Naomi's situation in Ruth 1 remind you of a season in your life when loss or grief was overwhelming?

Did the emotional and physical pain affect your perspective of God? If so, how?

c. Naomi has already "left the place where she had been living and set out on the road that would take them back to the land of Judah." (verse 7)

Why do you think Naomi wanted to return to Bethlehem?

Why do you think she waited until she was on her way to encourage Ruth and Orpah to return to their homes?

d. Read Ruth 1.10-13.

In verse 10, Ruth and Orpah show their fidelity to Naomi, as would be expected. Immediately, however, Naomi breaks the boundaries of that familial bond, releasing her daughters-in-law to return to Moab. Why do you think she does so?

e. We've seen how the narrator repeatedly uses the Hebrew word *shüv* (10 different times!) to direct our focus to the meaning of the story – returning to God.

Why, then, do you think Naomi (an Israelite, who worships the true God) would encourage her Moabite daughters-in-law (who worship the evil pagan god Chemosh) to *shüv* back to their homes, culture, and religious identity!?



- f. Despite the initial shock of an Israelite advising Ruth and Orpah to return to their gods, it's something we all do.

What "gods" are you tempted to return to when life is turned upside down?

- g. In verses 12-13, Naomi may be alluding to the practice of Levirate marriage, in which a widow would marry her deceased husband's brother (see Deuteronomy 25.5-10 and Genesis 38, for discussion of the practice).

Why does Naomi reject that option for Ruth and Orpah?

What else do you think Naomi is feeling in these verses as she envisions her daughters-in-law returning home to their mothers?

- h. Read Ruth 1.14-15.

Orpah finally obeys Naomi's command. Why do you think she does so?

Was it wrong to return to Moab? Or realistic?

- i. Read Ruth 1.16-18.

Why do you think Ruth rejected Naomi's counsel?

In light of Naomi's bitterness, what do you think prompts Ruth's belief? What does this tell us about the power of the gospel?

How does Ruth's radical resolution renew your hope regarding loved ones who seem hardened to the gospel message?

- j. Throughout the book that bears her name, Ruth is repeatedly referred to as "the Moabite." Why do you think the narrator continues referring to her in this way?

How does the animosity between Jews and Moabites underscore how radical her decision really was? What would it be like to be a "Ruth" today?

- k. More than just committing to Naomi, Ruth converts to Yahweh, the God of the Israelites – like Abraham, who left his people, his home, and his gods! She even uses similar language to God's covenant with His people in Leviticus 26.12.

Despite Naomi's bitterness toward God, perhaps Ruth saw something in the Israelites she hadn't seen anywhere else. One author explains: "Many, and perhaps most, people come to God because they know and love someone who knows and loves God."

How does this reveal the need for us to get outside of our "holy huddles" with only other believers?

IV. Pray

- a. Be honest with God about the other "gods" you can turn to during seasons of difficulty and ask for his gracious presence and provision during challenging times,
- b. Ask God to help you see those who you could invite to "journey with you" toward wholeness in Christ.

