

From Despair to Hope

Ruth 1:1-22

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The book of Ruth is relatable and ordinary. Through the life of Naomi and Ruth, we see that even in the ordinary struggles of life, God writes the best stories and has good plans for us.

Moving from Despair to Hope

1) The Wretchedness of Despair

vv1-2 – The story of Ruth was set at a time when judges (not kings; interim rulers) ruled; Elimelech's name ironically means '*my God is king*'. There was a famine in the land of Bethlehem, which ironically means *house of bread*. Elimelech and his family were Ephrathites, *original residents* of Bethlehem – yet ironically, they were sojourners in the land of Moab. Despair arises when reality is completely different from how things *should be* – and there is nothing we can do about it. Elimelech dies (v3), leaving behind his wife Naomi and two sons, who eventually married Moabite women [often regarded as immoral, seductive idol worshippers] (v4a). After 10 years, both the sons die (v5). Naomi was left completely crushed by despair and overwhelmed with anxiety and shame. The wretchedness of despair is real in this world, and the book of Ruth acknowledges it.

2) The Result of Despair

Naomi does 3 things in response to her despair:
#1 She returned home from the country of Moab (v6a) – returning was a big part of Naomi's response to despair.
#2 She pushed away those closest to her (vv8-15) – she did so out of a sense of responsibility; if her daughters-in-law had stayed with her, they would have had no chance at a happy and fulfilled life.
#3 She redefined herself through the lens of despair – Naomi renamed herself 'Mara' [bitterness] (vv19-21). Her suffering had hardened her; it made her existence and identity bitter, and her heart bitter towards God. Naomi's response to her despair was the complete opposite from Job's (Job 1:21b). Despair had robbed Naomi of a vision. Despair makes us vision-less. This is the result of despair.

3) The (surprising) Remedy to Despair

Ruth was the unexpected and surprising remedy to Naomi's despair. She made a covenant with Naomi (vv16a-17a) and invoked a curse upon herself should she fail to fulfil it (v17b). Ruth was entering into Naomi's world of bitterness and cutting off any remaining chance of a happy and fulfilled life. What motivated Ruth to such a vow was hesed (covenant loyalty) love. Hesed is the ordinary, slow acting but effective cure for despair. The remedy to vision-less despair is vision:love hesed. The vision of hesed love will see us through even the worst of times. Fight the atmosphere of despair with covenant loyalty. Hesed love must be our vision!

The only way we can push on in covenant loyalty is to keep returning to Jesus' hesed love towards us. Jesus is our greater Ruth! He gave up His happiness and fulfilment of heaven to enter into our despair. He became empty even to the point of dying on that bitter cross for us so that we can know the pleasant delightful love of God. Despite our resistance towards Him, He clung to us. Jesus vowed to never leave nor forsake us. He has made us His people; His God is now also our God. Where He died, we have died – but as He now lives, we shall also live! What Ruth did for Naomi, Jesus did for all of us. This same Jesus who extended His hesed love to us would surely also extend the same hesed love *through us*!