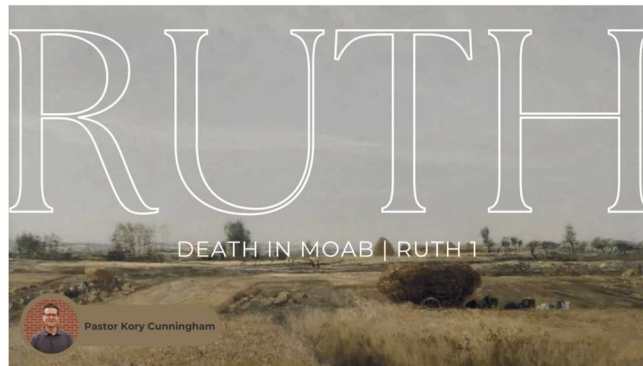


# Death in Moab



**Bro Kory Cunningham**

## **Ruth 1**

How many of you have already put up your Christmas tree? My wife's been telling me I should have already done that (I say that because I did it ☺ so I already check that off!" Usually the Saturday after Thanksgiving is our tradition of watching Elf, and we're going to put up our Christmas tree, decorate the house, and do all the Christmas things. Usually, we get to the Christmas lights today, so hopefully we're going to be on the roof, so pray for us as we put up Christmas lights on our house! Those are some of the traditions that we normally do, and you have all sorts of traditions as well. As a church, we also have a lot of traditions too, and usually one of those is we decide on a Christmas series. This year, we just really think the Lord led us to do Ruth. So...what does Ruth have to do with Christmas? If you haven't read Ruth in a little while, you'll find that even in chapter 1 that Bethlehem is mentioned four times, so there's kind of this connection of Ruth to Bethlehem. At the end of Ruth, there's a baby born in Bethlehem who is the line of the king. So it's like so much of Ruth has a lot in common with Christmas because we find in the beginning there's death and curse and it ends with life and hope, and really, that's what Christmas is all about. It finds us in death and curse and ends with life and hope. So we think Ruth has a lot to do with Christmas, but it also has a lot to do with you because what we find in Ruth is this very ordinary story. It's two women kind of doing life, they suffer loss, and they're trying to find bread and food, provision, marriage, work, kids, and all those kind of things that

all of us do. It's just ordinary things like farming, but what you find is, in their ordinary story you see the extraordinary story of God. That's also true of you and me. As believers, we often think we're the most ordinary people in the world. You're an ordinary person just going to your job and doing your thing. But what if you took a moment and actually looked up and looked around—you will find that God can use your very ordinary story to tell His extraordinary story to all of those around you. You, in your ordinary story, are actually part of the extraordinary story of God.

So let's try to connect those dots as we walk through Ruth. There's death in Moab that starts with really a curse. It starts with people fleeing from the presence of the Lord. They are running away from God. Perhaps that's you this morning. Perhaps you are running away from God and perhaps, like in this story, your running is not working. Life was great but now it's not. So what do you do when running doesn't work? Here's kind of the big idea—you run back to God when running from God doesn't work. We are going to read the first verse of Ruth chapter 1 together and then we're going to walk through the whole story during our time.

## **Scripture**

***"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."***

So the first thing we really see is fleeing. Just in that opening line that I read, we first see a timestamp that Scripture gives us. It was in the days when the judges ruled. Now, if you go to the book before that, there's an entire book called Judges. Fascinating read. The very last line of Judges says this, "In the days of the judges, everyone did what was right in their own eyes." The people were doing whatever they wanted. They were living according to their standard of goodness and right and morality, everyone just doing what they feel is right, not living under the Word of God. Everyone is their own king, their own god, and it doesn't work out very good. Judges is a crazy mess. They sin, curse happens, and then they repent. They come back and they sin again and discipline happens, and it's just a circle of rebelling, repenting and rebelling again. At the end of the

day, everyone is doing what they want to do. So here in Ruth, we find that it's in the day of the judge's rule and there is a famine in the land. So things aren't going good in God's place for God's people because they're not living under God's rule, they're doing whatever they want to do. I think it's kind of cool how Ruth is put right after the Judges because it tells us is the people of Israel don't do well at ruling themselves. When everyone does what's right in their own eyes, things don't go well.

So, what the Israelites need is a ruler to rule over them. They need a king, and here comes the story at the end of Ruth that tells us there's a baby born who is the dad of David, who is the king, the king they need. Then it entered into 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel, and then 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings. We need a king, but 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings reveals that none of the kings of Israel is perfect; they all mess up, they all rule in seemingly mixed bags—some are okay, some are really bad, so we have a problem. We need a king but there's no perfect king, which is exactly why the gospel comes to us because you know who we need; we need a perfect king and we actually know who that King is. That's what Christmas is about, our perfect King, born to us and His name is Jesus. So here's the reality in your life—you don't do good at ruling yourself. You need someone to rule over you and the only ruler that can truly rule over you is named Jesus. He's the good King who actually can rule over you.

Notice the time—it's when the judges rule and there's a famine in the land. Here's a man from Bethlehem in Judea but he's sojourning in Moab. So right off the bat we see a man who's supposed to be in Judea, which is the place of God, the people of God, the presence of God, but instead he's sojourning in Moab. Now, we have to think about the biblical storyline where we are here, because at this point in redemptive history God's presence is in a place, that's the Promised Land, with a particular people. So you had to link yourself with the Israelites and be where Israelites were to be in God's presence for God's blessing. Now, that's not true today. God's presence is not in a certain place among just a certain people; God's presence is everywhere among all people through His church. Well, if I go to Moab, I'm outside of God's presence...no, if you go to another place you are still in God's presence because the gospel has gone forth to all nations

and continues to spread to all nations. But at this particular point of redemptive history, there's a tabernacle in a certain place, and if you wanted to be in God's presence, you went there and you stayed there.

Now notice, in God's place there's a famine, and we know the famine is probably because the people are disobedient so God is bringing a famine to bring them back to Him. But instead of this family being brought back to God, they are away from God—they flee the presence, people, and place of God. It can't be more redundant in the first couple of verses to make the point that they are in the wrong place. Just notice with me in verse 2, the name of the man was Elimelech, which by the way, means God is king in Hebrew. We're going to see that he's actually acting as his own king because he's doing what he wants to do. The name of Elimelech's wife was Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judea, but they went into the country of Moab and they remained there. So they're God's people yet they're not in God's place. They fled because of the famine, but notice they didn't go to Moab just to get some bread; it says they remained there. They're not just going to look for provision outside of God's place; they actually like it outside of God's place. They actually like Moab better than they like Judea. They make their lives there, they settle there; they're linking themselves outside of the people of God.

So the first thing we see is they are fleeing, but in their fleeing, we find death comes to them. Look at verse 3. It says, "But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons." So Elimelech (meaning God is king) is not in God's place and he's doing his own thing. They left Bethlehem, which means the House of Bread, because there was a famine. They didn't want to die so they went to Moab where they could eat and stay alive, but ultimately, Elimelech still dies. He's running from death but death is what actually happens to him. So Naomi leaves with her sons, and verses 4–5 say, "These took Moabite wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth." They lived there about ten years, and both Mahlon and Chilion died, so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband." So they were trying to survive, running from famine, running from God not to God, but now there's death.

Her husband has died and you would think the most obvious thing to do is to go back to where she's from, back to Bethlehem in Judea, and submit herself back with the people of God to be under His presence and under His provision. Instead, she remains in Moab and found wives for her two sons, Orpah and Ruth. So Naomi is now trying to become a Moabite and she's going to come under their care and their provision and live the rest of her days in Moab; she was very comfortable living apart from the presence of God. Losing her husband should have led her back to God but it leads her even further away.

Then, something else happens—Naomi's two sons also die. So again, she's running, she's trying to escape death, she's trying to provide, she's trying to live, but now death and the curse has met her in a really, really significant way. All her hopes have now turned out hopeless. So I just want to ask before we move any further...could this be some of you in this room right now? Things have not gone well so you're running away from God and you think doing your own thing, being your own lord, being your own god, fixing your own life, that's what's going to work. But it's not working out well and you're experiencing pain and loss and suffering. Life's not working out and all these things are happening all around you just like it happened to Naomi. All of her hopes are now hopeless. So, what do you do when all of your hopes turn hopeless? In other words, what do you do when running from God doesn't work? Well, the thing Naomi gets right in chapter 4 is when running from God doesn't work what you need to do is run back to God. That's what you do—if you're in a far country, if you're away from God's presence, if you're away from God's people, if you're away from God and life is not working out, stop running away and start running to Him. So, Naomi's going to start making some ways back to God. It's sort of a mixed faith journey back, as we're going to see. She at least begins to go back to where she knows God's people and presence is.

So next, we find there is bread in Bethlehem. Notice this in verses 6–7, “Then she arose with her daughters-in-law to return from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the fields of Moab that the Lord had visited his people and given them food. So she set out from the place where she was with her two daughters-in-law, and they went on the way to return to the

land of Judah.” Now, back in that day, if you were a widow you were in a very hard place because there weren't as many safety nets and provisions as we have now. The husband was the main worker, provider, and protector of your home, so if he's gone you're in a real mess unless you had sons, then they would take care of you. But she's lost her sons too, she's lost everything, so she has really no protection, she has no place. She's an Israelite in the Moabite land so she's in a place of utter hopelessness, but she's trying to work, she's trying to provide for herself, she's trying to make ends meet...and in the fields of Moab, she hears about the goodness of God. We're going to see in this ordinary story, the extraordinary story of God all over it. We're going to see in all of their pain and suffering and all of their plans and mishaps, God is sovereignly working every detail of the story. Where she's in death and curse, He's working redemption and life and hope. We're going to see that throughout this story as it unfolds.

In the fields of Moab, Naomi hears that God has visited His people, and it's almost like there's a little distance between her and His people. She's talking about the Israelites, and she doesn't say God has visited *my* people, she says *His* people. She's sort of a Moabite now and she's out of the land, and so she is hearing about how God is faithful to His people. You know, often in our running and in our waywardness away from God, do you know what God does in His sovereign working? He reminds you of His goodness, and it's often through the whispers of people. In your running and your rebellion, when you don't trust God, you begin to hear your friends, or coworkers, moms and dads, or kids talking about how good God is, how God is providing for them, how God has redeemed them. You see people baptized; you remember the gospel story that there is a death and a resurrection that actually brings hope. You might not believe that, but people all around you are seeing that and believing that. See, Naomi's hopeless—she doesn't have bread, she doesn't have protection, she doesn't have a people anymore—but she's being reminded there is a God who provides in her pain. She's hearing about providence. Maybe that's happening to you this morning. You're running away, but through Naomi and Ruth, you're going to hear and remember that God is a God who provides. If your running is not working out, run back to God.

So Naomi is broken and she hears there's bread. Now, we don't really know her motivation for going back, but it seems like her motivation might very well be, hunger. She needs food and she knows in Judea, in Bethlehem, there's the house of bread, so she's going to go back to eat food. We don't really see that she's going back because she remembers and she loves God; she's going back because she's hungry and she knows that God provides. It's sort of a mixed bag of why she's going back, but at least she's going back, at least she's running in the right direction.

Next, we're going to see that Naomi actually gives bad advice to her daughters-in-law about where they should find rest. She tells them to find rest in the wrong places. Verses 8–9 say, "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. The LORD grant that you may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband!' Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept." I think what we're going to notice as the text unfolds is that by linking these girls to Moabite husbands, to Moabite households, they're also being linked to Moabite gods. And in a few moments, Naomi's actually going to tell them they need to go to the Moabite gods...they're going to give you rest. I think what Naomi is wanting for her daughters-in-law is the basic provisions of life. Naomi knows she has no survival in Moab so she's going to go back to Bethlehem of Judea and hopefully someone will take pity on her and give her the things she needs. But she tells her daughters-in-law, here's how you find rest—you go back to your mom's house, find a suitable man, get married, and then you will find rest within the households of Moab. Link yourself to Moabite men and Moabite gods. That's where you're going to find rest.

So, I don't think Naomi, in chapter 1, is a super faithful person to Yahweh. I don't think she's actually believing in Yahweh like she needs to because of what she told her new daughters-in-law about staying in Moab with the Moabite gods. Would you tell your friends to do that? As a follower of Jesus, would any of you say...*If your life is not working out, just pick a religion—Jesus, Muhammad—just pick one and go with it. As long as you're good, it's all going to work out in the end. You find rest in whatever*

*life and religion that suits you, and I'll go do the religion that suits me.*

None of us would say that, right, because we know that there's only rest in Jesus. Naomi should plead with these girls to come with her because there's only rest in Israel's God! There's not rest in any other god or life, there's only rest in Yahweh, but she's compelling her girls to find rest in a place that rest can't be had. Naomi should know that better than anybody because she's in death and curse in Moab.

So, Naomi's going to go back but I don't know that she's going back for the exact reason that she needs to. I think part of the problem is Naomi sees herself wrongly and she sees God wrongly, and we're going to see that in the next set of verses. Verse 10 says, "And they said to her [this is the two daughters-in-law] 'No, we will return with you to your people.'" So again, it's linking...do you want to be a Moabite or do you want to be an Israelite? If it is Israelite, then God is who you need to go with. Now, the daughters-in-law say no, we're going to go with you. Then, verses 11–13 say, "But Naomi said, 'Turn back, my daughters; why will you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb that they may become your husbands? Turn back, my daughters; go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. If I should say I have hope, even if I should have a husband this night and should bear sons, would you therefore wait till they were grown? Would you therefore refrain from marrying? No, my daughters, for it is exceedingly bitter to me for your sake that the hand of the Lord has gone out against me.'" So Naomi sees herself and God in wrong ways.

So, the first thing she sees wrongly is herself. She's telling her daughters-in-law to go find husbands and life in Moab because she has nothing to offer them. She says I don't have sons, and even if I got married today and got pregnant with two boys, you would have to wait many years before you married them. She's telling these girls don't stay with me, I have no value because I have nothing to offer you, I don't have anything to bargain or give away. Naomi sees her value as a human being based on what she can give and what she can produce. In other words, she only has value if she has sons and the only reason these two girls would love her would be because of what she could give to them. That is not the way Naomi should see herself. Naomi should not see her value based on what she does or



what she produces or what she can offer to those people around her. Naomi should know the God of the Bible and what the God of the Bible says about her is that she is valuable. Why? Because she's an image-bearer of God. That's her value—not what she does but who she is—she's a creation of God, she's an image bearer of God, and she's a daughter of God. That's her value, that's her significance. She should see that she's lovable because of who she is in God, an image-bearer, worthy of their love and affection, but she doesn't feel that. Do some of you see yourselves the way Naomi sees herself? You really believe your value as a human being is what you can offer people, what you can do for people, how useful you are to the people around you, and if you don't have anything to give or offer, then you are of no use and no value. Well, if that's you, you need to see that Naomi is wrong here. Naomi's not valuable because of what she gives and does; she's valuable because she's a creation of God and bears His image. And you need to remember that you are not valuable because you have sons and can offer marriage to someone. It's not what you offer, it's not what you give, it's who you are as an image-bearer of God. You have value, dignity, and worth. Naomi didn't understand that, but she needs to know that. Now, Ruth is going to show her that in a moment. Ruth is going to act like God acts towards us.

Not only does Naomi see herself wrongly, she also views God wrong, because she says...*Oh yeah, and also, God is completely against me.* Well, you can see how she gets that, right? I mean, she's lost her husband, she's lost her two sons (clearly God is against her!) and what I think Naomi is doing is looking at God through her circumstances...*Here's how life is going. I'm going to look at life and I'm going to determine who God is and how God loves me.* So, her thoughts about God are based on her living out in the world and how things are going. In other words, God is determined by her circumstances, and her circumstances tell her that God doesn't love her and God is not for her. God is actually against her. God is an enemy to her. But that's the wrong way to view God. We don't view God through our circumstances; we view our circumstances through God. If you look around at your life and say how's life going...well, let me see how God is; that's the wrong way to see God. You first look at God, who He is, that He is holy, that He is good, that He is loving, that He is for you, that in Christ He is not

going to leave or forsake you. You see that through the gospel, who God is, and then you can see your circumstances through God, not the other way around. So she sees herself wrongly and she sees God wrongly. And I just want to ask, is that you this morning? Do you have a picture of yourself that says I'm valuable based on what I do? If that's you, do you know what you'll do? You'll work really hard for the attention of people around you, and it's no way to live. If you think God's love is determined by your circumstances, do you know what you'll do? You'll try really hard to live a really good life so God will love you, and that's not the gospel. God doesn't love you because you do really good. He loves you through Christ. Christ did good for you. And if you believe in Christ, he loves you in Christ, he loves you not what you do. And so we gotta see ourselves properly and we have to see God properly. And Ruth is going to help in both of these.

Verse 14 says, "Then they lifted up their voices and wept again. And Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her." Orpah was like, yeah that's kind of right. You don't have a son so I'm out. I'll give you a kiss and I'm going to go find my man. I'm going to go link up. I'm going to go live my life in Moab. I'm going to find my own provisions. But Ruth, it says, doesn't listen to Naomi. She clings to Naomi. Why does she cling to Naomi? Because she loves Naomi. Ruth's name means friendship, and she's being that true friend to Naomi, loving Naomi for Naomi, not for what Naomi gives or produces. We each could take a little line from this playbook, that's how we need to love people, by the way. We need to love people who are unlovable, who don't have anything to offer and can't give us anything.

See, Ruth, in her loving, is showing and mirroring the covenant love and kindness of God. God doesn't love us based on what we give; He loves us, period, and that's what Ruth is doing. She clings to Naomi. Notice what it says in verse 15, "And she said, 'See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law.'" Naomi is saying don't cling to me, do what Orpah did. She's going to find a husband and she's submitting to the pagan gods, the Moabite gods. Naomi doesn't have a proper view of God, because she should know there are no other

gods besides the one God of Israel. She's telling Ruth to find rest and provisions in something that can't give rest or provisions.

Again, Naomi's giving her daughter-in-law bad advice, but Ruth is not going to have it. Notice what it says in verse 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.'" Naomi said just go link to the Moabites, go have the Moabites gods, and Ruth says no, I'm linking myself to you, I'm clinging to you because I want to be part of your people and I want your God to be my God. This is a faith moment for Ruth. Ruth's not just going with Naomi; she's going with Naomi's God. She believes more in the God of Israel than the god of the Moabites that she's grown up with, that she's heard about. But now she's hearing and seeing there is a God who is actually real, who can actually provide and love her, and she's linking herself not only to Naomi, but also to Naomi's God.

Listen to Ruth's commitment, verses 17–18, "'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.' And when Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more." Ruth says wherever you go I will go. I'm not going to leave you; I'm not going to forsake you. I think this is a picture of Ruth showing the covenant love and kindness of God, but of course, God's love is so much bigger than Ruth's love for Naomi. We're seeing what love looks like, not based on what you do but who you are. So I just want to ask you, who is your Naomi? Ruth is showing compassion and generosity to Naomi who really doesn't deserve it, but she just does it. Who is your Naomi right now? Who can you show love to? Who hasn't earned it, or who hasn't bought it, but you can just give it because that's what God does for you. How can you be like Ruth to Naomi?

Now, we see that Naomi is going back, but she's still bitter, she's still really frustrated and complaining about who God is. Look what it says in verse 19, "So the two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem. And when they came to Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them. And the women said, 'Is this Naomi?'" Let me set the scene. Imagine if you're Naomi and you're going back to Bethlehem after ten plus years of being

gone. You're probably wondering what's everybody going to think when I get there. Then when you get there, you were kind of right, because the whole town is stirred up. Everybody's talking, but it says specifically the women start asking, "Is this Naomi?" And I don't think they are asking like this is great, let's throw a party, we're so happy she's home. It's kind of like the prodigal son in Luke 15. Naomi came back and everybody's like...*Hmm, what's she doing back?* So you can imagine what Naomi would've thought...*What are people going to say? What are they going to ask? What are they going to think of me?* For some of you, you are thinking about coming back to God and God's people and you have those same thoughts...*What are they going to say when I get back? What are people going to say when I walk in?* Some of you are watching online right now, and you are thinking I've been at home since Covid and I haven't come back yet, and you haven't come back because you've waited so long and you're wondering what people are going to say when you get back. That had to be in Naomi's fear. She's coming back with no husband, no sons, and a plus one for Moab. Which means she obviously given her sons in marriage to Moabites, so there's a lot of baggage she's coming back with. Do you know where Naomi got it right? At the end of the day, she didn't care she just came back. If you have a roadblock for why you came back to be with God's people and be in God's presence, whatever the roadblock is just come back and the people of God can get over whatever it is and can respond. And through God's grace, we're going to embrace and love you when you come back. So whatever your reason, whatever the roadblock is, just run back to God and He will take care of the roadblocks.

Notice there's this bitterness that Naomi faces. In verses 20–1, she says to all of the women who are asking all the questions, "Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara." Now Naomi means pleasant, good, lovely; Mara means bitter. In other words, she's saying don't call me pleasant anymore...that was what my mama named me but now I'm naming myself bitter because life has not gone well. She goes on to say this is why they should call her bitter, "...for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went away full, and the LORD has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi, when the LORD has testified against me and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?" She's bitter. Life has not worked out, and in a real sense, she is

blaming God. Just notice the language, "I went away full, and the LORD has brought me back empty." She says her life was full, everything was great, but then the Lord got ahold of her life and the Lord brought her back empty. Which by the way, sometimes the Lord has to make you empty so that you'll be full in Him. That's a reality; that happened in my life. If you came to Christ, that probably happened in your life. There was an emptying of you so that you could get Christ.

I think Naomi also forgets what her life was like in Moab. I think it's similar to the Israelites. Remember when they escaped through the Exodus, they're in the wilderness with God in God's presence as God's people. Do you know what they continually said to God? *I wish we could go back to Egypt. Man, life was so good there. It was awesome in Egypt! We had tons of stuff to eat.* Uh maybe they had plenty to eat but they were slaves all day, every day, seven days a week. They never rested. Life was terrible in Egypt. But they thought, man, I was full and great and everything was good. I think that is like Naomi in this moment. She was thinking about being full in Moab...everything was great. No it wasn't. It didn't work out. Your running ran out, and yes, you're coming back empty. And yes, that might've been some of the Lord's doing that you're empty so that you would find His provision for your life. But she says I'm completely bitter. The Lord has done all this. She is blaming the Lord for her current circumstances and all of her current suffering.

So I want to ask the question, is her suffering the cause of the Lord? Did the Lord cause Naomi's suffering? Is this the Lord's doing in her life? Naomi certainly thinks so. Let's look again at just a few of the lines that she says about God:

The Almighty has dealt bitterly with me.

The Lord has brought me back empty.

The Lord has testified against me.

The Almighty has brought calamity upon me.

She absolutely believes all of her suffering, all of her wrongs, all of her ills, her bitterness, is because of the Lord. The Lord is the one who brought all

of her suffering. Is that true...is the Lord to blame for all of her suffering? I'll just say we're not given a yes or no in the text, so I just want to think through that question. Is Naomi saying true things? Well, I think for one, there are two truths when it comes to our suffering. Number one, the Lord is sovereign. That's absolutely true. And it's also true that the world is broken. So, both of those things are true. The Lord is sovereign, He's in control, and He's the almighty. But also, guess what? We sinned and rebelled against God and a lot of bad stuff has happened because of that. We have completely messed up the creation He has made. So we can see in our own suffering that one of two things are true—either God is causing it or God is allowing it. We're not really sure in Naomi's case, which one it is. Is God causing the suffering or is He allowing the suffering? Or, is it a mixture of both?

Now, in thinking through that, I want us to think about three things that we should do, or not do, in our own suffering because I think Naomi gets part of it right and part of it wrong in how she responds to God.

1. Don't blame God for all of your suffering.

I think that's sort of the first thing that we learn just in Scripture, but especially in this text—don't blame God for all of your suffering. Now, why do I say that? Naomi is complaining that all of her suffering is God's fault. He's against her. He brought calamity. He made her empty. All of this is God's fault. Now, can we just back up and say, "Hey Naomi, let's chat for just a moment. Where have you been the last ten years?" *Well, I've been in Moab.* "What have you been doing?" *Linking myself with Moabite gods.* "Okay, so it could be that a little bit of your suffering has to do with you making some really bad choices. You've been in the wrong place, outside of God's place, outside of God's presence, so maybe some of your hardship has been because you made some really bad decisions." See, when it comes to our suffering, sometimes the Lord is bringing suffering in our lives to bring us back to God, and I think that's some of what's happening even in the story. But I don't think we can blame all of our suffering on God, because sometimes, guess what? You do some really wrong things. You make some really wrong moves, and now you're reaping the consequences of those bad decisions. You can't just be angry and mad at

God for all of the wrong that comes your way because some of it is you're reaping what you sow. I mean, here's, here's Naomi, she's in. She's wanting to be a Moabite, so there's going to be some things that aren't going to work out. So I don't think all of her suffering can be blamed on God as she's clearly doing.

## 2. Trust that God is sovereign over your suffering.

I think that Naomi gets that right. She does believe God is absolutely sovereign over everything. I think that is absolutely true and absolutely right, and absolutely good. Trust God is sovereign over all of your suffering. It's not helpful to blame all of your suffering on God, but it is helpful to remember that God is sovereign over every single bit of your suffering. He either causes it or allows it. Because if you don't believe God has control of it, if you believe God didn't know about it or couldn't prevent it, then you can't trust God to get you through it. If God is not so sovereign in your suffering, He can't sovereignly get you out of your suffering. So when you're suffering, you have to trust God. Your suffering might be from the Lord, but it might be from your own wayward life. But you need to know that in your suffering, God is sovereign, He's the Almighty, and He's in control of all things, so you have to trust in God. So I think Naomi blames God too much, but she does trust that He is actually in control. I think that's what she does right.

## 3. Be honest with God in your suffering.

I think this is important, and I think this is where Naomi gets it half right, half wrong. Naomi is very honest about her life... *Don't call me pleasant; call me bitter. Life hurts. I lost my husband, I lost my two sons, and I'm not just going to smile and say God's got a plan all things are good. No, this is not good. Losing my husband, losing my kids is not good. I don't like it. I do not think this was right. I do not think this was good.* She's complaining about God and she is honest with her emotions. She's saying what she feels, but here's the problem. She's complaining *about* God and what she needs to do is complain *to* God. That is a big difference. See, the Bible gets us permission to lament. Lamenting is being honest about our emotions and our feelings and actually telling God how we feel. Not being

just like...*Hey, everything's good, life is good. I just love it. It's just happy.* No, lament is we cry, we complain, and we ask God the hard questions we're feeling in our souls...*I don't think this is good. I don't think this is a good decision. I need you, God, to tell me why this happened because I don't know if this was a good move.* She needs to complain to God. I think we're given help all throughout the Psalms about the goodness of lamenting and being honest with God. I'll give you two little snippets on this. Psalm 44:23 says this, "Awake! Why are you sleeping, O Lord? Rouse yourself! Do not reject us forever!" Now, if my little girl asked to pray at our dinner table and she begins with, "Hey God, can you wake up? Hey, God, I know you're sleeping right now, but can you wake up?" I would tell her that's a bad prayer; that is a lot of bad theology. God does not sleep. God is always up. He's always alert. He's always there. He always hears. So this is an irreverent, untrue prayer. The prayer is saying wrong things about God. This is not true. God is not asleep. God doesn't need to be roused up. But the prayer in Psalm is saying I *fee*/like you're asleep and I want you to wake up. Here the Bible is inviting us to take our emotions in grief, our emotions in pain, and actually complain to God! Notice, it keeps going in verse 24, "Why do you hide your face? Why do you forget our affliction and oppression?" God doesn't forget, He never forgets, but we're invited to ask God why are you forgetting? Why are you sleeping? Why don't you wake up? Why don't you do something? This is a prayer in the Bible, an honest prayer of people who are facing honest pain.

I mean, think about the Lord Jesus on the cross. He prayed Psalm 22, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" It's okay to pray that it, but it's not okay to ask your friend why has God forsaken me? Why is God sleeping? It's okay to say it to God. See, Naomi complained about God. She needed to complain to God, to be honest. Some of you've been through some really bad things, you've had some really bad suffering, and you haven't had permission to actually go and complain to God. And your pain has left you walking away from God because you don't trust Him, but if you will lament and be honest and complain to God, then your pain can actually bring you into His presence because He can handle your complaints. He's a big God. He can handle all of your complaints so take them to Him. Run to Him in your pain and in your hurt. Naomi has lost great loss. She doesn't



need to complain about God; she needs to complain to God because that's where God meets us. When we come into His presence, be honest with Him.

Lastly, we see the return of Naomi to Bethlehem. Verse 22 says, "So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabite her daughter-in-law with her, who returned from the country of Moab. And they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest." They are returning from Moab to Bethlehem, and it just so happens it's the beginning of barley harvest. We're going to see more in chapter two because we're going to find that at the barley harvest they're going to meet an unexpected person. His name is Boaz, and he's going to be an unexpected redeemer. We're going to see that even in her suffering, even in her pain, when she's running from God, when it doesn't work out, she runs back to God. And she had no clue that God was sovereignly working every detail of the story to bring redemption to her and to Ruth, and to the whole cosmos through her baby who had one day been the line of Jesus. That's the story of Ruth, a very ordinary story—loss, death, curse that ends with life, hope, and joy. It's our story, it's the gospel story; that ordinary life of you and me that ultimately is played under the extraordinary story of God. And we're going to see all throughout this book that they're doing and they're moving, but God is working every bit behind the scenes to bring about His glory. So my question this morning, are you running? If you are, is it not working? If you're running and it's not working, here's what you need to do—you need to turn and run back to God.