



### Looking Inwards (15 mins) *Caring For Each Other*

*Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an **opportunity to share**, not something you have to do, however, 'it's the sharing that enables the caring!') for:*

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?



### Looking Outwards (15 mins) *Concern For Others*

*Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours; or church, which you would like to share (please be careful not to pass on anything that is **confidential** or which you think the person/people concerned would not wish to be shared) for:*

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?



### HG24: Ruth 1/4 *A Tale Of Two Widows*

**Ruth 1:1-22**

### Home Group Study Notes

10th January 2010 - Revd Paul A. Carr



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN  
ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION  
**BEFORE** THE MEETING!

*Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group  
with you along with any previous notes and  
other resources that might be helpful.*



### Welcome (10 mins)

A New Year is a time when people resolve to live life differently in the year to come. In addition to the resolutions you are making, what 'spiritual resolutions' (if any?) are you planning to introduce in the next twelve months? Share your hopes with your home group! How might you be able to ensure they last longer than a few weeks?



### Looking Upwards (10 mins) *Worship*

In your time of worship, you may want to sing some Songs of Praise, or listen to a Worship CD, as well as using Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers; etc.





## Looking Upwards (40 mins) *Bible Study*

Read through the text for this study, Ruth 1:1-22, and any references given below, alongside those in the sermon notes, then answer the following questions - you may find it helpful to read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss your answers with your Home Group.

**1:** Naomi seemed to act/behave/believe that God had forsaken her. Have you ever experienced this in your Christian own life? If so, can you describe how you felt? How did you move away from feeling like that?

**2:** Much of Naomi's circumstances were the consequences of her disobedience to God's commands. Is it right that Naomi, and ourselves, should blame God for our own decision-making and choices? Is freedom of choice, as a Christian, good or bad? Should there be tighter restrictions on what we can and can't do?

**3:** Have you, like Naomi, failed to present God (Christianity) in a positive way? Have you, through indifference and weariness, allowed others to stray away from God's love? How does this make you feel? Are there people you need to speak with to put this right – sooner rather than later? How might you go about resolving this?

She basically agreed with her. There's no evidence that she believed she would ever have a husband again. She was certainly no catch! She wasn't a Jew, she had no money or property. She had nothing to offer - why would anyone want to marry her? It's as if Ruth said, "You know, I may never have anyone but you. But you're enough for me. The relationship that God has given us as mother and daughter, as sisters, as friends, is enough for me. God has not been bad to us, he's been good to us in ways that we didn't expect. So don't send me away and forbid me to make my future with you and then said that beautiful statement of commitment and support, vs16-17, one of the most wonderful statements to be found anywhere in the Bible: *"Where you will go, I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and Your God my God. Where you die, I will die and there will I be buried."*

But, remember, there was a law, Deuteronomy 23:3, that says a Moabite shall never enter the congregation of the Lord, even to the tenth generation. This meant permanent exclusion. How then could Ruth enter into the congregation of the Lord? By trusting in God's grace and throwing herself completely at his mercy. The Law excludes us from God's family, but grace includes us if we put our faith in Jesus. We must read Ruth's speech in this setting as one of gratitude. Naomi had chosen to focus on what she didn't have, and had grown angry and bitter and had assumed God didn't love her. Ruth had chosen to focus on what she did have and was thankful, because everything had changed. She had grown up as a worshiper of a false god and she now knew the God of Israel. She had grown up among a people who had no future, and she now had the possibility of joining the people of God, the heirs of the promise, the ones from whom Messiah would come. She had the opportunity to have what she had never had: status; intimacy with God, a true friend. She didn't have a husband, but that was okay. She was grateful for what she had. She knew God as king in her life.

**Conclusion:** Ruth knew God as king in her life and she wanted to know Him more. In contrast, Naomi was frustrated, angry, and bitter because she had decided that God didn't love her. Ruth, given essentially the same hand in life except that she was younger, concluded that God did love her. And what made Ruth able to see that is that she saw what she had as a gift from God, and she was grateful for it. They were completely different in their vision of the future, weren't they? Ruth said, "I have no idea what will happen, but I can be committed to you and your God and your people, and let *Him* deal with the future." Naomi said, "The future will come only as you make it happen. Go back to Moab." She was frightened, angry, and withdrawn. We'll see in the rest of the story that God struggled to make her believe that anything could happen that she didn't have to do for herself.

We, too, also have the option, given whatever set of circumstances in which we find ourselves, of determining what the future will hold. You have the option of being thankful, leaning into the future, holding on to what is good; or like Naomi, you can conclude that God has forsaken you, turned his hand against you and rejected you. But the issue is not what your life will be in the future; the issue is what you will make your future to be. Will you rejoice in obedience or will you suffer the consequences of disobedience? One of the great things about this story/book is that God doesn't leave Naomi there. When people are frustrated and angry, and they pray with their fists clenched at God, yell at people, and struggle with life; they don't get left behind. Naomi is going to be changed.

What about you? Do you feel as though God has forsaken you? Do you blame God for your disobedience and your own decision-making? Do you really want to go through all the hardship that Naomi went through? Or should you start living live knowing that God loves you, unconditionally, in spite of the mistakes you've made in the past? Why not live like God loves you now? Why not trust in the Heavenly Father who loves you unconditionally just as you are?

Why did Naomi respond in this way? Was it really weariness? Yes, I believe it was, but there was something else. I believe it was because her daughters-in-law were living proof that she, and her husband, had allowed their two sons to marry women from outside the nation of Israel. Naomi was trying to cover up her disobedience. If she returned to Jerusalem alone, no one would know that the family had broken the Law of Moses. And so, in order to save face, Naomi was willing to send Orpah and Ruth into a godless, and potentially dangerous, situation. Pride is a dangerous thing!

Finally, we have two statements that Naomi gives about herself. In vs13 she said, "... It is more bitter for me than for you, because the Lord's hand has gone out against me." Whether this is true is another matter, but it's certainly sums up how Naomi was feeling. But she knew, didn't she, that the situation she found herself in was the consequence of disobedience many years before. Things would be different if that weren't true and it reminds us that each of us suffer the consequences of disobedience to God in our lives. Is it right that Naomi/we should blame God for the choices we make? Does this mean that God abandons us and leaves us to our fate? I don't think it does – especially if we say we are sorry! It's interesting that as we think of Naomi praying, we don't come across any prayers of repentance and confession, do we? Whilst we bear the consequences of disobedience, God also promises to come to the aid of those who call on His name.

If you were asked to describe yourself in one word, what word would you use? When, in vs20-21, Naomi returns to Bethlehem, and when the people come out to see her, she changed her name: "Don't call me Naomi (there's nothing pleasant about me) Call me Mara (wretched, bitter, angry) because the Almighty has made my life very bitter (Did he?). I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty."

Warren Wiersbe: *When trouble comes to our lives, we can do one of three things: endure it, escape it or enlist it. If we only endure trials, then trials become our master and we have a tendency to become hard and bitter. If we try to escape our trials, then we will miss the purposes God wants to achieve in our lives. But if we learn to enlist our trials, they will become our servants instead of our masters and work for us; and God will work all things together for our good and His glory (Romans 8:28).*

Now let me ask you a question before we move on. Did Naomi come back empty? Was she alone when she came back to Bethlehem? No, there was a young woman with her. As far as Naomi was concerned she came back with no one, but as far as God was concerned, she came back with the whole future of the human race holding onto her arm. She came back with a young woman who would be the mother of Obed, the father of Jesse, the father of David the king of Israel, the father of the Messiah and Lord of the nations, the Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world. That's who/what she came back with. Not empty, but fuller than she had ever been. Yet in her bitterness she couldn't see it.

The facts became distorted for her: "I'm empty, nothing, nobody, God-forsaken." How often, because of our bitterness and frustration, do we not see what God has blessed us with? When Naomi went back to the town of Bethlehem, all the people, vs19, came rushing out to see her. I think there must have been something marvellously attractive about Naomi. She was charismatic and energetic, and she probably overshadowed her husband when he was alive. She was one of those people who fought life, fought with God, wanted the best, had a deep heart and a deep love for people, and they loved her back. It's just that she had lost her hope in the Lord by this time.

**Ruth: The Difference Gratitude Makes:** It's interesting that Ruth didn't say: "I'm going to go back with you to Bethlehem because God will surely provide a husband for me there." She had listened to Naomi give her all the reasons why that wasn't going to happen.

**4:** Ruth's words of commitment in vs16-17 is, according to Paul: *"One of the most wonderful statements to be found anywhere in the Bible."* Share with your Home Group how you would feel if these words were said to you. Do they bear any relevance to your own relationships?

**5:** Naomi and Ruth had two completely different responses to the same set of circumstances. Have you ever felt as though your cup was half empty rather than being half full? How have other people encouraged/enabled you to see the brighter side of life?

**6:** What really touches you in this opening chapter of Ruth? With whom do you identify? What has encouraged and/or challenged you the most during this study?



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



## HG24: Ruth 1/4 *A Tale Of Two Widows*

Ruth 1:1-22

### Home Group Sermon Notes

10th January 2010 - Revd Paul A. Carr

**A Tragic History:** The book of Ruth opens, vs1-5, with a tragic history: involving hardship, loss, grief and suffering. We are given some details about a man named Elimelech, which means 'My God is King' and a woman named Naomi, which means 'Pleasant' and Ruth ('friendship'). If names are anything to go by, we may assume they were good people. But the Lord was not King in Elimelech's life, for he left God completely out of his decisions. He made the wrong decision to go to Moab, and this led to another bad decision when his two sons married Moabite women (according to the Law of Moses, Jews were forbidden to Moabite women).

If we trace the Moabites back to their beginnings, we discover they descended from Lot - the nephew of Abraham. You may remember that when the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were being destroyed by fire and brimstone, angels led Lot and his family up into the mountains to safety. Lot's wife looked back and was turned into a pillar of salt, but Lot and his two daughters hid in a cave and survived. It's a rather sordid, incestuous tale of how these girls, believing they were the last two women left on earth, tricked their father into sleeping with them. They both conceived and bore sons, one was named Ammon and the other Moab.

Elimelech and his family had fled to Moab to survive the famine. However, ironically, it was here that Elimelech and his two sons, Mahlon and Kilion, who married there, died - for reasons we don't know. Naomi's tragedy was compounded because she had two sons who also died, not as older men who had lived full lives, but as young men, recently married. Neither of them had been able to produce children, so we can imagine they were in their prime when their lives were taken. It's not meant to happen this way, is it? The emotional pain and loss of seeing her family die, was made even worse for Naomi, for to be a woman alone was to be faced with ruin in that culture. There was no social security, no safety net, no way for a woman to have a positive future if she didn't have a man in her life. Naomi's future was filled with threat and fear and difficulty.

**A Tale of Two Widows:** The rest of this opening chapter gives us two voices, Naomi's and Ruth's. Voices which are very different from each other. One of the helpful literary parallels of this book is that Naomi's daughter-in-law went through what Naomi herself went through. Ruth was also a widow, childless, and poor; Ruth would also live a life in a land that was not her own, being dislocated and an immigrant. Yet Ruth's response to it was completely different. She saw the situation differently. For one the cup was half empty and for the other half full! Seeing the two of them side by side will help us understand much of what God has to say to us in this passage. There are many ways we can take hold of the circumstances in our lives and try to give them meaning. Remember what Job's comforters did to try to give meaning to his life when Job suffered blow after blow, like Naomi. They came to him and said, "You're suffering because you're guilty." A lot of people think that way, don't they? When life gets hard they say, "I must have done something terrible to deserve this."

And they pile shame upon the suffering they're already experiencing. That's what Naomi did! So let's see how Naomi and Ruth each speak about their situations. As we read through, you'll notice that more than half this book is, what you might call 'spoken word.' In other words, this is a book of conversation, and we'll do well to hear what the people are saying.

**Naomi: Deciding God Has Forsaken You:** It's interesting to notice that the first thing Naomi did was pray. Twice Naomi called on God to do good to Orpah and Ruth. She may have turned her back on her country, people, tribe and even her religion, but she hadn't turned her back on God. Sound familiar? Naomi recognised, either willingly or begrudgingly, that nothing happened outside God's will. God deserved to be prayed to, and Naomi took him seriously. I imagine that a woman whose first response, in her current situation, was prayer, must have prayed and prayed during those ten years in Moab. She may have prayed that the famine would be over quickly. And when her husband got sick she must have prayed. When her first son got sick, then her second, she must have prayed. Burying her husband, burying the first son, burying the second son, she must have prayed, asking for relief from the Sovereign God. She was a woman of prayer but, over and over again the things she asked for were withheld. But it didn't stop her praying.

At the end of the famine, vs6, it says that she heard that God had visited his people. It doesn't say that she heard that the rains came back, or the meteorological conditions were now favourable. God came. The reason there was no more famine was that he did something about it. She prayed, vs8: "May the Lord show kindness to you ..." But it seems quite significant that she said to these two young women, "May the Lord show kindness to you ..." not, "May the Lord show kindness to us!" Why? Was it because she had stopped praying for herself? Had she concluded that God had forsaken her? Whilst God's power was certain, His love was not.

Her daughters-in-law made an important statement in vs10: "We will go back with you to your people." Her people were the covenant, chosen, people of God, the ones who were given the promises and the Law, the ones God had chosen especially to work through in all of history. They wanted to go and join the community of those who knew the Lord.

But Naomi said, "Don't be a fool. Who's going to marry a woman of Moab in Israel in the time of the judges, when everybody is selfish and lawless? You've no hope of getting a husband if you come back to Israel with me. Return to your own homes. At least you have a chance there." What she was basically saying was, "I've petitioned God, now forget that. If I were rich, I'd help you. If I had sons, I'd help you. But I don't have anything I can do for you. Therefore, you have to help yourself." In vs15, when Naomi couldn't persuade Ruth to leave, she said, "Orpah has gone back to her gods." I think this is one of the heart-breaking statements in this story. Naomi sent that young woman back to Moab to worship a false god. The Moabites worshipped an image of Chemosh that had an open mouth and a fire inside, where they sacrificed (living) children by placing them into the open mouth.

It seems amazing that Naomi was urging Ruth to go back to that. It was all right for Naomi to go to Bethlehem to worship the one, true God, but it wasn't OK for her daughters-in-law. Sometimes, we react in a similar way. We, ourselves, may want/enjoy spending time with God and with God's people, but we lose our passion and commitment for others to know God for themselves and so we allow them to wander off to do their own things and worship their own gods. It's heart-wrenching to realize how little hope Naomi had. After years and years of praying to God and watching people die, she was even willing to send Orpah and Ruth to their spiritual death. Weariness is a dangerous thing. The tragedy is that Naomi didn't present the God of Israel in a positive way: this didn't deter Ruth, but it did Orpah. How many of us have turned people off God because we haven't presented Him, our faith/Christianity in a positive way? It's a challenging thought isn't it?