

Small Group Guide THE MYSTERY OF MERCY

The Church at Brook Hills,

Dr. David Platt

July 5, 2009

Ruth 1

This guide is to help you facilitate discussion with your Small Group. Use it as a resource to lead your group in discovering and owning the truths of God's Word. There may be questions you do not want to use and there may be instances where you just want to focus on a particular point or truth. Some questions may bring out emotions and cause people to dwell on their relationship with God. Your role is to facilitate this experience not to complete the discussion guide. Use this as a flexible teaching tool not a rigid teaching task list.

Connect . . .

Use one or both of the following options to introduce the discussion time to follow.

Option 1

Invite a few learners to share briefly about times in their lives when they or someone close to them (without using their name) questioned God's goodness. Then ask the following question: How did God show Himself faithful to you, or to them?

Explain that today we will look at how God shows Himself faithful to us even in the midst of our struggles.

Option 2

Invite learners to create collectively the description of a person who has lost everything. Ask: How do you think this person would feel about God during this time?

Explain that today we will begin to discuss God's faithfulness at a time in someone's life when she had lost everything.

Review the Message . . .

Explain that the study of Ruth will take place over the next four weeks, proceeding chapter by chapter. This first chapter will set the stage for the following chapters. It exposes the precarious predicament of Naomi and Ruth and how the condition of this predicament left their hearts.

Two Places...

- A land of _____ promise _____.
- A land of _____ compromise _____.

Discussion Questions

- Read Ruth 1:1-2. Enlist two learners to read Ruth 1:3-5. Direct the two readers to alternate reading from each semicolon, comma, and period. After the verses are read, point out the straightforward nature of those verses. Explain that this terseness

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illustrates the tragic nature of the information and how those years had left Naomi with little.

- Remind learners that Bethlehem (which means “House of Bread”) was in Israel, the land of promise, for the Jews and that Moab was a foreign land spiritually and physically. Knowing this, what did Elimelech’s move to Moab indicate about his faith in God?
- How did Elimelech’s move to a land with foreign gods and with racial animosity toward Israel cause spiritual compromise within his family?
- How does Orpah and Ruth’s barrenness even further leave Naomi feeling destitute? Remind learners that barrenness in that culture was an extreme feeling of shame and judgment.

Application . . .

- How do we react to struggles when we are at a place where God has led us? Can anyone relate to Naomi?
- Why do we sometimes see “strange lands” as preferable to God’s promises to us?
- How do our choices not to trust in God’s promises sometimes affect those closest to us?
- Have you ever created a “list of injustices” that God has allowed or caused in your life? Ask: Would someone be transparent enough to share that experience?

Two People...

- A woman with honest _____ hurt _____.
- A woman with humble _____ devotion _____.

Discussion Questions

- Enlist one or two learners to read Ruth 1:6-18.
- Why did Naomi want to return to her home in Israel?
- To whom does the author of Ruth attribute this provision of harvest?
- Describe the life that Naomi had experienced during the ten years in Moab.
- What did Naomi do to cause such judgment in her life? What does this say about how God viewed her?
- Enlist a learner to read Deuteronomy 25:5-10. How did God provide for young widows in His law?
- Based on this law and Naomi’s ability to fulfill it, how was Naomi’s instructions to Orpah and Ruth an act of kindness towards them?
- What did it mean for Ruth’s future when she refused to leave Naomi? What was Ruth sacrificing?

Application . . .

- Naomi’s hurts were real. How can we create community where we are free to express real hurts without feeling shame or embarrassment?

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- Why are we so hesitant to share our hurts with others?
- How can our hurts reveal God's character to us?
- What responsibilities do we have to share our own hurts and to respond to others who are hurting?
- What are we willing to sacrifice to follow God? Are we willing to abandon the same things as Ruth did to follow God? Why or why not?
- What do we have to believe about God in order to sacrifice everything to follow Him?

Two Points of Need...

- They were in need of food .
- They were in need of family .

Discussion Questions

- Enlist a learner to read Ruth 1:19-22.
- How does Naomi describe her return to Bethlehem?
- What does Naomi's description of family indicate about Ruth's position?
- Remind learners that the male in this culture was the provider. How did the lack of a male relative leave Naomi and Ruth destitute?

Application . . .

- What kinds of struggles leave us feeling destitute in our lives today?
- What would it take for us to believe that we have absolutely nothing?
- What is often our attitude toward our "rights" in this life? What does this attitude indicate about our attitude toward God?

Two Pictures of God...

- He is great .
- He is good .

Discussion Questions

- Continuing to look at Ruth 1:19-22, how does Naomi address God?
- Explain that the title of Almighty indicates the belief that God is great, powerful, and sovereign. What does Naomi's use of this title indicate about her view of God and her circumstances?
- Explain that the use of LORD is the covenant name Yahweh. This name is indicative of His relationship with His people. What does Naomi's use of this name indicate about her view of God and her circumstances?
- How does Naomi's belief in God's sovereignty and her belief in His relationship with her cause her to struggle?

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Application . . .

- If we believe that God is sovereign, why would we want to believe that He didn't have control over the bad things that happened in our lives?
- What kind of a God would we serve if He does not remain in control over all aspects of our lives?
- What kind of a God would we serve if He were all-powerful but did not care about our well-being?
- How must our view of God's relationship with us inform our belief of the way that He works in our lives?

One Promise for His People...

- In His sovereign design, God ordains sorrowful _____ tragedy _____ to set the stage for surprising _____ triumph _____.
 - We think that God is _____ far _____ from us...
 - When we are surrounded by _____ famine _____.
 - When everything seems _____ foreign _____.
 - When _____ death _____ strikes.
 - When _____ despair _____ sinks in.
 - Amidst _____ loneliness _____.
 - Amidst _____ barrenness _____.
 - In our _____ grief _____.
 - In our _____ shame _____.
 - But God will show Himself faithful to us.
 - His grace will cover our _____ sin _____.
 - His mercy will overcome our _____ sorrow _____.

Discussion Questions

- Read Verse 22 again. Note how the author points out that in the midst of what had been famine, the beginning of the harvest was at hand. How does this statement begin to bring hope to them? Explain that this verse alludes to God's great working in the following chapters.
- Knowing that God did work Naomi's circumstances out for her good, how did Elimelech's sin provide the foundation for God's sovereign and redemptive work?
- How was God's mercy evident in the midst of Naomi's struggle?
- Did Elimelech's sin prevent God from working faithfully in the lives of His people? In future generations?

Application . . .

- What kinds of questions do we ask about God in the midst of our struggles?
- How do our beliefs about God affect how we view His role in our struggles?

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- How do we often let sin (either our own or someone else's) rule out any semblance of hope for our future?
- Who is the foundation of true hope?
- How can our hope in God change how we view tragedies?

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“God Moves in a Mysterious Way”
William Cowper, 1774

God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants his footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm.

Deep in unfathomable mines
Of never failing skill,
He treasures up his bright designs
And works his sovereign will.

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take,
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy, and shall break
In blessings on your head.

Judge not the lord by feeble sense,
But trust him for his grace;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.

His purpose will ripen fast,
Unfolding every hour;
The bud may have bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flower.

Blind unbelief is sure to err,
And scan his work in vain:
God is his own interpreter,
And He will make it plain.