

INTERVARSITY BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

Ruth 1:1-22 NIV, From Bethlehem to Moab, Then Back Again (60 minutes)

WELCOME (7 minutes)

Icebreaker: Describe one person in your life that you can be completely honest with. How does spending time with them compare to someone else you're not as close to? How did this honesty in your relationship develop?

We are studying the Bible together because we want to grow in our love for Jesus through Scripture and because we want to grow in our witness to Jesus through Scripture.

Let's pray and ask God to help us as we study today's passage together...

GROUP NORMS (3 minutes)

Each time we meet, let's be careful to work well together as a group. We are coming from many different backgrounds, so the purpose of these group norms is to help everyone feel welcome so they can fully participate:

1. Use "I" statements (speak for yourself, not for everyone)
2. Avoid judgmental statements (no shame or blame)
3. Allow space for everyone to share if they choose
4. Practice active listening and give advice only if invited to do so
5. What we share here stays here (confidentiality)

As your leader, I will help us remember our group norms. Also, as members of this group, feel free to speak up if you notice we are straying from these norms.

INTRODUCE the Scripture Text (3 minutes)

You'll quickly see that the book of Ruth is more than just a love story. It's a story about friendship, which is the meaning of the name "Ruth." This story takes place in the city of Bethlehem. In this first chapter, however, a famine prompts a move away to Moab. Moab is quite the distance away, 300 miles from Bethlehem, and these Moabite people are the descendants from the incestuous union of Lot and his daughters in Genesis 19:37. In fact, intermarriage with foreigners (such as the Moabites) was strictly forbidden (Exodus 34:16; Deuteronomy 7:3).

Additionally, this book takes place during the time of the judges. After Joshua's death, people began to follow other gods and do what was right in their own eyes. Yet, despite their disobedience, the Lord raised up judges to call the people back to God. But when a judge died, people would again stray from God. The book of Ruth takes place in these turbulent, violent, and rebellious times.

SEE the Scripture Text (10 minutes)

Let's read the passage and talk about what we see.

- Who are the characters? How are they connected?
- What is happening? When? Where?
- Which words are being repeated?
- Is the author comparing or contrasting anything?
- Would you like to point out anything else you notice?

Ruth 1:1-22 NIV –

In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land. So a man from Bethlehem in Judah, together with his wife and two sons, went to live for a while in the country of Moab. 2 The man's name was Elimelek, his wife's name was Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Kilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem, Judah. And they went to Moab and lived there.

3 Now Elimelek, Naomi's husband, died, and she was left with her two sons. 4 They married Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other Ruth. After they had lived there about ten years, 5 both Mahlon and Kilion also died, and Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband.

6 When Naomi heard in Moab that the Lord had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them, she and her daughters-in-law prepared to return home from there. 7 With her two daughters-in-law she left the place where she had been living and set out on the road that would take them back to the land of Judah.

8 Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go back, each of you, to your mother's home. May the Lord show you kindness, as you have shown kindness to your dead husbands and to me. 9 May the Lord grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband."

Then she kissed them goodbye and they wept aloud 10 and said to her, "We will go back with you to your people."

11 But Naomi said, "Return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me? Am I going to have any more sons, who could become your husbands? 12 Return home, my daughters; I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me—even if I had a husband tonight and then gave birth to sons— 13 would you wait until they grew up? Would you remain unmarried for them? No, my daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you, because the Lord's hand has turned against me!"

14 At this they wept aloud again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye, but Ruth clung to her.

15 "Look," said Naomi, "your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her."

16 But Ruth replied, "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. 17 Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me." 18 When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her.

19 So the two women went on until they came to Bethlehem. When they arrived in Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them, and the women exclaimed, "Can this be Naomi?"

20 "Don't call me Naomi," she told them. "Call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter. 21 I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The Lord has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me."

22 So Naomi returned from Moab accompanied by Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law, arriving in Bethlehem as the barley harvest was beginning.

DISCOVER the Scripture Text (25 minutes)

Let's discuss a few questions that will help us discover and understand the text.

1. Put yourself in Elimelech and Naomi's shoes in verses 1-2. How are they feeling and what sort of mental, physical, and spiritual states may they be in?
2. What calculations is Naomi making as she decides to go back to Bethlehem? Why does she choose to go back, and why might this be risky?
3. What is so radical about Ruth's commitment and plea to Naomi in verse 16? Why would Ruth want to leave her immediate family, land, and all that is familiar to go with Naomi to Bethlehem?
4. What causes Naomi to introduce herself as Mara? How is she making sense of what has happened in light of her relationship with God?
5. If we could communicate the core message of this text in just one sentence, what would it be? What do we sense God is communicating through this passage?

RESPOND to the Scripture Text (10 minutes)

Naomi has been on a journey from Bethlehem to Moab and now back again to Bethlehem after ten years. In the process, she has suffered great loss, shame, disappointment, and grief. Yet, in the midst of it, she desires to go back home and be honest with herself, with her community, and with God. Life hasn't been easy and she has become bitter.

God is leading Naomi on a journey of honesty.

Let's discern together how we can respond to what God is saying: How would you describe the level of honesty you have with God and those around you? What would enable you to be more deeply honest in your relationship with God? With your friends? What keeps you from being honest with those closest to you and with God?

CLOSE (2 minutes)

Let's pray and thank God for our time in Scripture together...

Tips for leading the group discussion (and more tips are available at howto.bible):

- *Participate but keep your comments short to make space for others.*
- *Silence is okay. Encourage further discussion by saying "What else?" instead of commenting on every response.*



this material and more can be found at tiny.cc/biblestudyguides
contact christy.gates@intervarsity.org or sara.chang@intervarsity.org with any questions