



## **WHAT COULD BE FOUND THROUGH THE LOSS**

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### **SCRIPTURE: BOOK OF RUTH 1**

(NIV Reference, Life Application Bible)

No one has been immune to the effects of Covid-19. We are constantly reminded of the barriers it has injected into our lives. We have lost the ability to normally visit friends, family, co-workers or cuddle our kids/grandkids as freely as we did before. We have lost going to our favorite stores, eateries, cafés, entertainment facilities, etc. Unfortunately, we have also lost the ability to gather as One body of believers and worship together in our Corps. As an officer I have lost some of my identity. I have been trained to serve, visit, embrace others and now that is not possible. This has brought on the internal questions of "How do I live out The Salvation Army ministry as an officer?" I was forced into this position, there was no choice involved for anyone. We live in a challenging time as we strategize how to best navigate our new ministry lifestyle. A bigger introspection is knowing that how we cope with our losses is important.

Katherine Wolf in her newest book "Suffer Strong," that she co-authored with her husband Jay Wolf, precisely reminds us: *"It's human nature to rebel against losing what defines us. Our deepest animal urges demand that we store up anything that sustains our sense of identity and helps us to keep on living into our desired future. The fear of loss can paralyze*

*us, and redefining it may be the hardest redefining of them all. But losing something familiar or precious can also help us let go of the illusion of control and the weight of expectations that have ruled us our whole lives.” (p.81)*

The Bible gives us various accounts of loss and one of the most profound accounts is in the book of Ruth. This powerful little story shows us clearly how the Lord can breathe life into a situation that appears lifeless. Our Lord is Restorer. He is Rebuilder. And the book of Ruth ministers the message of hope to all who are overwhelmed with loss, hurt, or brokenness.

## THE LOSS OF COMMUNITY

### Read Ruth 1:1

In chapter 1 we are introduced to the happy Hebrew family residing in the land of Judah, in the city of Bethlehem. How do we know they are happy? Look at their names: *Elimelech* means “God is my King”, *Naomi* means “Pleasant” *Malhon* means “Song” and *Chilion* means “Satisfaction”. Interestingly Bethlehem means “house of bread”, a noticeable sign of sustainability. As Jon Courson writes in his Application Commentary, “No wonder there were satisfaction and pleasantness in Elimelech’s family. No wonder there were songs and happiness. God was their King and they lived in the House of Bread.”

When the season of dryness came, Elimelech and Naomi move their family to Moab. The Moabites were descendants of Lot, Abraham’s nephew. (Genesis 19:30-38). The Moabites were recognized as extremely violent and immoral people. Moab is located just east of the Promised Land, across the Jordan River. They attacked the Israelites during their wilderness experience. (Numbers 23-25; Deuteronomy 23:3-6). In Scripture we read in Psalm 60:8, “Moab is my wash pot...” A vivid illustration for the reader. The wash pot was the container that held water. It was used by slaves to wash the feet of others and usually one of the most uncleaned items in a household.

2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 7 teaches us that the cure for times of famine is to stay where you are and call on God. But Naomi and Elimelech went to Moab instead. It’s a fundamental mistake we often make. God promises to us that He will go with us through the fire (Isaiah 43:2). But we want to escape the fire. We want to change our circumstance. For Naomi this move will cost her connections with all her friends and community.

What do you tend to do when you face “famine” in your own life?

## THE LOSS of A FAMILY

Sometimes when we look for our own solutions, we discover that our human decisions have led us astray from the place where “God is King”, when we forsake “The House of Bread”. By verse 3 Naomi’s husband is deceased with no details written of his death.

Then her sons married Moabite women. As Jon Courson warns, “*Mom and Dad, listen carefully. When we journey into Moab – when we kick back, pull away and pursue worldly things – do you know who pays the price? Our kids. Kids end up marrying Moabitish women when parents choose Moab over Bethlehem.*”

Naomi’s experience is the perfect picture of what happens to us when we leave the House of Bread. First, God is no longer our King. Then the song departs from our hearts, finally satisfaction leaves our souls. Now Naomi has lost her husband and children, home and social standing. Ironically the place that her family left to escape from the famine is the same one that introduces them to a more painful journey. She finally realizes that allowing her family to move to Moab was a disaster, and for the first time in 10 years, she longed for Bethlehem (verse 6).

## THE BROKEN ROAD

Read Ruth 1: 8-18



Ruth told her daughter in laws to retreat to their family homes. She felt that her life had become a burden and utterly hopeless. Naomi did not want her daughters-in-law to endure in her affliction and stigma. How often have we desired isolation in order to deal with a painful situation? I just want to be alone to deal with what is happening. To involve another almost seems to be contradictory, a light shone on an open wound. As Ann Voskamp describes it in her book “The Broken Way” (p. 100),

*“Letting yourself be loved is an act of terrifying vulnerability and surrender. Letting yourself be loved give’s you over to someone’s mercy and leaves you trusting that they will keep loving you, that they will love you the way you want to be loved, that they won’t break your given heart.”*

Orpah decides to go back home, never to be mentioned again.

Ruth remains with Naomi. Ruth is prepared to change her entire lifestyle for her mother in law. **Vs. 16, “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.”**

Naomi had to make a choice to be loved and vulnerable, or to be in control, and independent. In her brokenness she allows Ruth to be part of her story, part of her painful return.

How have others helped you to believe that you are loved unconditionally?

## **LOSS of IDENTITY**

### **Read Ruth 1:19-22**

The women arrive in Bethlehem. Scripture reads in Verse 19, ***“When they arrived in Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them, and the women exclaimed “Can this be Naomi!”***

The people were shocked to see how Naomi had changed. Here comes a widow, a woman who also has lost her husband, children; you would have thought that the people would have shown compassion, sympathy for her. They don't, the words “can this be Naomi” are revealing. In other words, she looks awful, what happened to her! Sometimes we hurt others at their lowest point, especially based on appearance, or our own interpretation of their situation. Life is not a competition-it is a companionship. We must exercise our compassion for others more intently and carefully.

In Verses 20 & 21 it reads, ***“Don't call me Naomi, she told them. “Call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter. 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.”*** Naomi's name means “my delight” or “my sweetness.” She no longer wants to be identified in that way. Sometimes our pain is so overwhelming we forget, or we fight, as an attempt to cope. We need to remember that our God is here for each of us and understands our pain. Our identity does not need to change because our losses are instructing our own coping capabilities, enforcing what remains.

How do you react to Ann's Voskamp words quoted below? What would you do if you knew you were brave enough, strong enough, loved enough, because Christ in you is enough?

***“You are not your yesterday, you aren't your messes, you aren't your failures, you aren't your brokenness. You are brave enough for today, because He is. You are strong enough for what's coming, because He is. And you are enough for all that is, because He always is”***

How we comfort ourselves can many times be determined by our past understanding of self-protection. Sometimes we choose to blame God, or push people away, in order to protect ourselves. We may find ourselves going through the stages of grief. We need to remember that the process may initially be painful, but it is necessary. This is where we find restoration and reclaim our true identity.

The Covid-19 virus can be blamed for many of our losses, but our responses to our circumstances are personal decisions. Our interconnectedness is crucial in overcoming losses. The tensions between our losses and faith may sometimes feel palpable, but do not have to confine us. There is a sanctity in loss as we gain a deeper knowledge of the depth our relationship with God. Our relationship with God can grow as we trust His provisions through our losses. During these difficult times we have an opportunity to cultivate productive, authentic relationships, as we learn to live life together with God remaining our center. We must take every opportunity to stay connected with each other.

*Psalm 34: 18 & 19, "The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears them; He delivers them from all their troubles. The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit."*