

1. THE JOURNEY FROM BAD TO BETTER

Ruth 1:1-22

When Benjamin Franklin, when Ambassador to France, occasionally attended the Infidels Club - a group that spent most of its time reading literary masterpieces. On one occasion Franklin read the book of Ruth to the club but changed the names in it so it would not be recognised as a book of the bible. When he finished, the listeners were unanimous in their praise, saying it was one of the most beautiful short stories that they had ever heard. He loved to tell them it came from the bible!

Everything in Naomi's life steadily went from **bad to worse**. It started with a plan to escape from a famine for a short period of time and ended a decade later with her alone and destitute, facing more responsibility than she could handle.

Naomi's life didn't continue in the bad-to-worse spiral. Within a short period of time she was blessed beyond her greatest dreams. **The same can be true for each of us.**

If you don't like your current situation, do what Naomi did in Ruth 1...

1. Get on the Right Road

Naomi received word that the famine had ended in Bethlehem:

Ruth 1:7: *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.*

Things don't go from bad to better overnight! We must first travel from where we've been, to the place where we need to be. Get on the right road!

For example: You know where you want to be spiritually, but God feels too far away. He isn't! Start taking steps in his direction: Spend time in prayer and in the bible. Spend time listening to worship songs. Spend time with other believers. Take those first few steps.

Naomi began the journey back to Jerusalem with her daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth. Her sons had married foreigners because they didn't have much choice. But Naomi knew that in Bethlehem, men would be inclined to marry an Israelite, not a foreigner. So Naomi gave them a way out:

Ruth 1:9b-10: *^{9b} Then she kissed them goodbye and they wept aloud ¹⁰ and said to her, 'We will go back with you to your people.'*

Later Naomi again urged them to stay in Moab and find a husband there. Orpah kissed Naomi good-bye and headed back to Moab. **Ruth decided to stay...**

2. Not Everyone will be Willing to Take the Journey

When you leave Moab for Bethlehem, some people will want to stay in Moab:

Ruth 1:13b-15: *^{13b} 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.'*

Naomi was being really honest. Her spirit had been crushed by previous events, so she could hardly be optimistic about the future.

Naomi gave both of them a way out: Stay in Moab, find a husband, have children, build a good life for yourself. Or go to Bethlehem, live as foreigners with an old, poverty-stricken widow. You probably won't marry and have children, and spend your life working in the fields, earning just enough to get by, and be outsiders.

Oprah did what most would say was the rational, sensible, strategic thing to do - return to Moab where her prospects were brighter.

Even though Naomi was in the depths of despair, Ruth saw something in her that she didn't see in the people of her religion back home, and made a commitment:

Ruth 1:16-17: *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.'*

Ruth chose Bethlehem over Moab:

Ruth 1:19-21: *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.'*

Naomi seems out of options, and at the end of her tether, but...

3. When you 'Take the Journey' you arrive at a 'Place of Harvest'

Naomi said: *^{21a} I went away full, but the LORD has brought me back empty.* Often things need to be removed from our lives in order to make room for something better:

Ruth 1:22: *²² So Naomi returned from Moab accompanied by Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law, arriving in Bethlehem as the barley harvest was beginning.*

- **Don't pretend everything is fine** - Religious people develop a habit of pretending that everything is wonderful when it isn't. That's not in the Bible! In the Psalms David pours out his heart and expresses his doubt, fear and pain. Job releases his resentment and frustration about what is happening in his life. Naomi does the same thing.
- **Leave your Moab behind** - I encourage you to take whatever steps are necessary to do this.
- **Begin the journey to Jerusalem** - where God's harvest is waiting for you.