

God's People Reflect God's Character, Pt. 1

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[0:00] We are going to spend this Sunday and the next two Sundays working through the book of Ruth in a three-part series. It's one book, and I'm hoping that it will be one sermon with three parts, and they all connect together.

I'm really excited about it because I love the stories of the Old Testament. They are so interesting and attention-grabbing, and then they just sneak up on you with these powerful images of who God is and how he relates to his people and how his people are supposed to relate to him.

The book of Ruth is a really popular book. It's fairly short. It's only four chapters long. There are a limited number of characters and a fairly simple plot.

Interestingly, it's one of the few books of the Bible that is focused on women. Another reason I think people like it, I don't want to spoil anything here, but the people in this story are all good.

It's one of those books where everyone is a good guy. It's very easy to relate to them and root for them. In this book, we don't read about kings.

[1:22] We don't read about, quote-unquote, important people. These are just God's people in everyday life. We're not hearing here about armies at war and great military campaigns or prophets standing in the marketplace proclaiming the word of the Lord.

This is just a simple family in a simple rural village in the middle of nowhere that nobody knows about. And I think that's part of its power.

That's one of the reasons that we can relate to it and that we appreciate it so much. So there are four chapters in the book. Today we're going to look at chapter one. Next week we're going to look at chapter two. And then the third week we're going to look at three and four together.

But it's one story, and every chapter builds in the plot toward the conclusion. And so today we're just going to get part of the story, and we're going to look at Ruth chapter one.

Would you turn there with me in your Bibles in Ruth chapter one? One of my favorite works of fiction is J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. It was adapted into a film trilogy 17 years ago.

[2:29] It's really hard to believe that it's been that long. In the second film, in the two towers, things are really starting to get dark.

The characters, Frodo and Sam, are attempting to travel across country to get to the fires of Mount Doom, where they will attempt to destroy the Ring of Power.

And Frodo, who is carrying the ring, Sam, who is with them, and then there's this golem fellow who's tricky and deceptive, a thief who may or may not be their guide.

And along the way, Frodo falls into a pool of water filled with corpses. And when they arrive at the enemy gates, they're almost captured and killed by these hideous orcs.

And they wander through enemy territory, hungry and isolated and exhausted, and their hope is dwindling. And the ring is constantly pulling at Frodo.

[3:32] It's constantly tempting him and wearing him down, and there are these hideous, screaming beasts in the air who attack them, and they keep hiding, and barely escaping with their lives.

And finally, exhausted and broken and filthy, Frodo turns to Sam, and he says, I just, I don't think I can do this.

And Sam says, a speech, probably one of my favorite speeches in the whole trilogy, he says, I know, it's all wrong. By rights, we shouldn't even be here.

But we are. It's like in the great stories, Mr. Frodo, the ones that really mattered. Full of darkness and danger they were, and sometimes you didn't want to know the end. Because how could the end

be happy?

How could the world go back to the way it was when so much bad had happened? But in the end, a new day will come, and when the sun shines, it will shine out the clearer.

[4:32] Folk in those stories kept going because they were holding on to something. And Frodo says, what are we holding on to, Sam? And Sam says, that there's some good in this world, Mr. Frodo, and it's worth fighting for.

It's an inspiring speech, but there's one thing that Sam didn't get to in that speech. There's one thing that we're left to sort of fill in the blanks for ourselves, and that is, what is the good?

What kind of values drive our decisions and our life experiences? When life is dark and difficult, that's when our true value and characters come out.

What is there as a compass for us? What is the basis of the decisions that we make? Especially when things become hard and difficult. We all want there to be good in the world and in our lives. We want to be good. We want to experience the good. But where does that come from? Let's look at Ruth 1 together.

[5:37] We'll read it. We'll read it together, then we'll talk through it, and then we'll draw some conclusions. It says this, And the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land, and a man from Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons.

The name of the man was Elimelech, and the name of his wife Naomi, and the name of his two sons were Machlon and Kilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They went into the country of Moab and remained there, but Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons.

These took Moabite wives. The name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth. And they lived there about ten years, and both Machlon and Kilion died, so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband.

Then she arose with her daughters-in-law to return from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the field of Moab that the Lord had visited his people and given them food. So she set out from the place where she was with her two daughters-in-law, and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah.

But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, Go, return, each of you, to her mother's house. May the Lord deal kindly with you as you have dealt with the dead and with me. The Lord grant that you may find rest, each of you, in the house of her husband.

[6:58] Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices, and wept. And they said to her, No, we will return with you to your people. But Naomi said, Turn back, my daughters. Why will you go with me?

Have I yet sons in my womb that they may become your husbands? Turn back, my daughters. Go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. If I should say I have hope, even if I should have a husband this night and should bear sons, would you therefore wait until they are grown?

Would you therefore refrain from marrying? No, my daughters, for it is exceedingly bitter to me for your sake that the hand of the Lord has gone out against me. Then they lifted up their voices and wept again.

And Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her. And she said, Look, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods. Return after your sister-in-law. But Ruth said, Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you.

For where you go and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die, I will die and there I will be buried.

[8:04] May the Lord do so to me and more also if anything but death separates me from you. And when Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more.

So the two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem. And when they came to Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred up because of them. And the women said, Is this Naomi? And she said to them, Do not call me Naomi, call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me.

I went away full and the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi when the Lord has testified against me and the Almighty has brought calamity on me? So Naomi returned and Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law with her, who returned from the country of Moab and they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest.

This is the beginning of a great story. And it's also history. But it's not just history. It is theological history because it's a story that has been presented in such a way and given to us to teach us about God.

It begins in verse 1 by saying, In the days when the judges ruled. The author begins by telling us the names and the time and the place of the story. And there are some details here that would really catch the attention of an ancient Israelite reader.

[9:28] First of all, he says, It was when the judges ruled. God had brought Israel out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

He had brought them into the land, through the wilderness, into the land that he had promised way back in the Pentateuch to Abraham. And over time, Israel forgot what God had done and they turned away from him.

In the period of the judges, they turned away from him so severely that this became one of the lowest points in Israel's history. It was a time of declining faith and declining morality.

And the decline of the nation is personified in the various judges that we read about in the book of Judges. When the Canaanites invaded, Barak was supposed to go and fight them, but he was a coward and he insisted that Deborah go with him.

When the Midianites invaded, Gideon did not believe God. Remember the story with the golden fleece? He tested God and then when the people tried to make him king after his victory, he says, Oh no, no, no.

[10:38] I won't be your king. Only God is king. And then he named his son Abimelech, which means my father is king. When the Ammonites invaded, Jephthah made a very foolish vow that whatever came out of his house, he would kill as a sacrifice to the Lord.

And then when he got home from battle, his daughter came out. And so he killed her. And when the Philistines had control, God raised up Samson, kind of the Old Testament version of the superhero. This guy should have been the most powerful and potent of all God's soldiers, but instead, he wastes his time partying, visiting prostitutes, and in the end, his death is a tragic waste of all that potential squandered on his own selfishness.

And as we go through the book of Judges, the stories get longer and they get more complex and each judge is more compromised than the one before and the story just gets darker and more dreary and it's like everything's just sort of going down the drain.

And one really interesting thing in the book of Judges is that as you go through the book, there is increasing danger for women. And that's because when society is out of whack, when society is going crazy and has lost their foundations, it's sometimes the vulnerable who end up bearing the brunt of the immorality.

[11:58] And in chapter 11, Jephthah kills his virgin daughter and in chapter 15, the Philistines burn Samson's wife alive and in chapter 19, the Levite's concubine is gang raped and then cut into 12 pieces and it starts a civil war and then in chapter 21, the Benjamites, who are supposed to know better, essentially go and kidnap all these women and steal the women from their families.

It is ugly. And the book of Judges tells us in a repeating refrain that in those days, there was, Israel had no king. The reason I think it says that is because the Lord was not their king.

They just did whatever they wanted. Whatever felt good to them at the time, they abused each other, they exploited each other, anyone who was weak and vulnerable, they just took advantage of them.

Just traveling from one town to another, you were just as likely as not to be cut up into pieces. And in fact, in the book of Judges, the evil Canaanites, the evil Canaanites that are supposed to be the ones that Israel is purging from the land, they stand around and they say to each other, what is with Israel?

They are bad. What is with them? And this is the setting of the book of Ruth. Not only that, but there was a famine in the land, a severe famine and a man from Bethlehem thought he could do better

somewhere else than staying in Israel so he packed up his family and he left Israel and he traveled to Moab.

[13:29] It raises a couple of questions. First of all, why did he leave Israel? The irony is that the name Bethlehem in Hebrew means house of bread.

Second, lots of people stayed in Israel. We're going to see at the end of the chapter that when they get back, everybody's still there. So was it really necessary for them to leave in the first place? Third, why did they go to Moab of all places?

Moab was not just a foreign country, it was an enemy country with assorted history. All the way back in Genesis after God destroyed the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, Lot and his daughters escaped and went up into the hills and his older daughter got him drunk and had intercourse with him and she gave birth to Moab, the ancestor of the Moabites.

So they come from incest. In the book of Numbers, when Israel was traveling to the promised land, Moab refused to let them pass. And the king of Moab hired Balaam to curse Israel.

But when that didn't work, the women of Moab came out and sexually seduced the men of Israel and led them into idolatry and it's one of the great scandals in Old Testament history.

[14:48] So if you're an ancient Israelite and you're reading this book and you hear that they went to Moab, you just kind of get this sickening feeling in the pit of your stomach. Like, Moab?

Ugh. It represents idolatry and all kinds of sexual deviancy. So the setting of the story, we're only in verse 1, but the setting of the story sets up all kinds of expectations for us as a reader because we know how this is going to go.

Not well. Right? The Israelites in this story in the time of judges are disobeying God and doing whatever is right in their own eyes.

They're raping and killing and dismembering each other. And it's in Moab where especially Moabite women have this reputation of being conniving and idolatrous and sexually immoral.

These are dark times and we're just thinking, oh boy, this is not going to end well. No good is going to come out of any of this. Then in verse 2, we learn the names of the family.

[15:54] Naomi means pleasant. That's important. We're going to talk about that in a bit. Machlon in Hebrew means something like sickness and Kilion in Hebrew means something like death.

I mean, who would name their sons sickness and death? But it's appropriate because they die very young and it just sort of adds to the sickly, dark picture of this family that we're being presented with here.

And we're not told how Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, but Naomi was left a widow without her two sons. And those two sons took Moabite wives.

The name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other was Ruth. Now, marriages to foreign women were not forbidden in the Old Testament, Testament.

But we can question the wisdom of this. Because Moab was typically at war with Israel in the Old Testament and the people of Moab were pagans who worshipped their own gods.

[16:56] And in Deuteronomy 23.3, it says, that because of the history, no Moabite would ever be allowed to enter the assembly of the Lord ever because of how they had treated Israel.

So, it raises a question in my mind, why didn't Naomi stop her two sons from marrying these two Moabite women that they, I don't think they should have married? And then there's another clue that this isn't right.

Because the word marry here is the word took. they took Moabite wives and in Hebrew that is a word that is reserved for illegitimate marriages.

Marriages that should not have taken place. It is almost always used in connection with concubines or mistresses or taking wives that were forbidden.

And then it says that they lived there about ten years and yet there were no children. There are many couples in the Bible that are unable to conceive children. And that is a very sad and heartbreaking fact.

[18:05] And it's something that definitely adds to the pain of the situation here. But when you think about it, neither of these couples had

children for ten years. I think it's possible that there may be something additional going on here.

Moses had said in Deuteronomy 28 that those who break his covenant will not be allowed to have children. That was a special circumstance in the Old Testament in Deuteronomy. And it just makes me wonder if there's some indicator here of something that was off.

In verse 5, Naomi's two sons, the husbands of Ruth and Orpah, die, and Naomi is left with nothing. I mean, this is like the female version of Job. It is hard to be a widow.

In our society, it's hard to be a widow. A widow is alone. A widow has lost her social connections. She's lost her companion. It affects her friendships.

When everyone pairs off, she doesn't have a partner like she used to. She doesn't have the support of her husband. She struggles with loneliness.

[19:17] At least in our society, there are often financial safety nets. Sometimes the husband will have life insurance or there are food stamps or other kinds of government assistance.

But in the Old Testament, a woman who was a widow was truly desperate. She had no way of providing for herself except through her sons. Because someone has to go out there and work in the fields and grow the crops to eat.

There are no grocery stores and you can't get a job somewhere. But Naomi didn't have any sons because they had died. And so here is Naomi with no one except two other widows who are also with her.

It is a terrible, desperate situation. Now in verse 6, she had heard that there was food in Israel, so she decides to pack up and travel with her daughter-in-laws back to Judah.

Judah. And they're on their way and they're traveling on the road toward Judah and at some point, Naomi starts to think about the situation here and she changes her mind. This is really what dominates, this conversation is really what dominates this chapter.

[20:28] She realizes that there is no hope for her daughters back home in Judah. It is not in Ruth and Orpah's best interest to come along.

And so she says to them, somewhat forcefully, go, return each of you to your mother's house. And as she says goodbye, she blesses them and she says, may the Lord deal kindly with you as you have dealt with the dead and with me.

What is this kindness that they have done? Well, maybe their faithfulness to her in hard times. I think perhaps the fact that they're returning to her with Judah.

Returning to Judah with her, I should say. They're moving to a foreign country to stay with her and help take care of her. This word kindly or kindness is a really significant theological word in the Old Testament.

It's the Hebrew word *chesed*. And sometimes it's translated covenant love or something like that. In the passage in Lamentations that Brian read this morning, it's translated as steadfast love, the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases.

[21:40] It's characteristic of God throughout the Old Testament and it's built upon his relationship with his people. It involves love and mercy and kindness and grace and goodness and benevolence and loyalty.

And because God acts toward his people with *chesed*, because he is kind to them and he loves them on the basis of his covenant relationship, he expects his people in the covenant community to show *chesed* toward each other.

And Naomi's blessing of her two daughters-in-law suggests that the Lord is interested in *chesed*. She says, may the Lord deal kindly with you as you have done with me.

She hoped that the Lord would recognize the *chesed* that they had showed toward her and that he would then deal kindly with them in response. And in verse nine, she blesses them, hoping that they will find new husbands back in Moab and that they'll be taken care of and provided for.

And the dialogue here in verse nine is just infused with emotion. She kisses them and they lifted up their voices and wept. This isn't, this isn't, you know, standing around dabbing your eye with a little tissue.

[22:56] They are, they have lifted up their voices. They are wailing and weeping, three desperate widows on a dusty road on the way to Judah. It is a miserable scene.

This family has experienced so much brokenness and so much pain and now these desperate, poor, miserable widows are wailing and weeping on the road because now they have to separate because there's no hope for them at all in the future.

Naomi says, look, don't even, don't even come with me. As bad as things have been in Moab, in Judah, you will be foreigners and there is no possibility of your finding a husband there.

That isn't going to happen. All they have left is each other and now they have to separate. But the two daughters-in-law say, no, no, no, we'll go with you and Naomi urges them again and says, why would you do that?

It's a really good question. She's probably right. She's probably right about that. What do they have to look forward to in Bethlehem, where they are foreigners who have been so traditionally maligned by the people of Israel?

[24:10] And then Naomi says to them, do I have sons in my womb right now that they would grow up and be sons for you? Verse 12, turn back. I am too old to have a husband.

Even if I should have a husband tonight and conceive two sons and bear them, are you going to wait until they're grown up? Now, it's a ridiculous scenario, but the point that she's making is quite serious.

There is no possible way that they are going to find husbands in Israel. No one is going to want to marry them if they're Moabite women. What Naomi's point is, is this, the only possible way that you are going to have a husband to take care of you and make you anything other than desperate when we get to Judah is if I bear him for you and you wait 20 years until he's grown up and then you marry him yourself?

Or we can say it like this, it is more likely that I will have a husband and conceive a child and give birth to him and you will wait 20 years and marry him than that anyone in Israel would ever want to marry you.

That is not going to happen. So don't get involved with me. I am a poison pill. I'm like a sinking ship. Just get off while you can.

[25:25] Go back to Moab. Maybe you can cobble together some kind of life back there. Now we shouldn't miss here that Naomi is actually being very unselfish because think of how important it is to her to have that support, to have these daughters-in-law to stay with her and help provide for her.

But she is being unselfish and she's saying I give you up so that you have some kind of hope for the future. She's looking out for their interest and not her own. So, maybe she's right.

And in verse 14 they wail again and now Orpah realizes, yeah, that's probably the best thing and she kisses Naomi goodbye but at the same time that Orpah is kissing her mother-in-law goodbye, Ruth is just clinging to her.

And so Naomi tries one more time and she encourages Ruth to follow her mother-in-law and she says, look, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods, return after your sister-in-law.

Now, some scholars think that this is bad theology here, that Naomi is actually encouraging Ruth to go back to the gods of Moab. But I think what's happening is that the author here is setting up Orpah and Ruth as a contrast.

[26:41] Orpah is providing a foil for Ruth and it's for this reason, Ruth has a decision to make. Is she going to go like Orpah back to her own family and her own home?

Or is she going to go to Judah? Is it going to be Naomi's family or is it going to be Orpah's family? Is it going to be Judah or is it going to be Moab? Is it going to be the gods of Moab or is it going to be the God of Israel?

And Ruth makes her choice and says in one of the most beautiful statements in the Bible, no. Where you go, I will go. And where you lodge, I will lodge.

Your people shall be my people and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die and there I will be buried. May the Lord do to me. Here she swears. She swears by the Lord if anything but death separates me from you.

Ruth is not saying here that Naomi is wrong. Ruth is not saying here to Naomi, don't worry about it. I'm sure things will work out. She's saying it's okay, Naomi, because when you die back in Judah of

starvation, I'll be right there with you.

[27:50] They will bury me there. Notice she says, where you lodge, I will lodge. That means to kind of camp out outside temporarily. She's saying, I have no hope for a home.

I have no hope for a husband. I have no hope of even living, but I'm with you. She is turning her back on her country. And I believe here that she is a believer in the God of Israel.

She has committed herself to the God of Israel. She says, your God is my God. It's difficult to be more clear than that. And she says, by the Lord, I swear it. That is God's covenant name.

So even though there is no future for Ruth at all, and even though Naomi urges her to leave, and even though Orpah has already made the decision to go home, Ruth has decided that she is going along with Naomi, not for herself, but for Naomi's sake, to take care of her and be with her and have a relationship with her.

And it's startling. Naomi has been so unselfish in trying to get Ruth to leave, and now Ruth is being so unselfish in deciding to stay with her.

[28:57] And so, verse 19, the two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem, and when they came to Bethlehem, the whole village was just in a tizzy, right? They were just worked up. Because news travels fast in a small village, and Naomi had been gone for ten years, and everyone is excited.

We can just imagine people stopping in each other's homes, or over at the little market, and saying, hey, did you hear? Naomi is back. She's been gone for ten years, and she's home, and she's got a Moabite girl with her.

But Naomi immediately squashes their excitement. She is discouraged. She's been through a lot. She is discouraged and depressed, and she's even angry.

And she says to them, don't call me Naomi. In Hebrew, that means pleasant. She says, call me Mara, which in Hebrew means bitter. She says, call me what I am.

Call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. She says, this is who I am now.

[30:06] Have you ever felt that way before? Things have been so hard and so dark and so broken for so long that you just kind of feel like this is who I am.

This is my identity now. Don't call me pleasant. Call me bitter, because that's my name, she says. I went away full.

She can't be talking about food, because she didn't go away full of food. She went away in a famine. I went away full with my husband, with my sons who I love. And now I have come back empty, and it's God's fault.

And so she uses two statements in verse 21 that kind of intensify from one to the next. She says, not only has the Lord testified against me, he has brought calamity on me.

And not only do I call him Lord, I call him Almighty, which is a name often in the Old Testament that you reserve when God is a little bit scary. She is angry at God.

[31:09] He is the source of her trouble, and she has struggled and lost everything, and she comes to the conclusion, I guess God is just out to get me, so call me what I am. You remember what Sam said to Frodo?

Boy, do we really want to know the end here? I mean, this is dark stuff. How could the end possibly be happy? But one thing we can say is that in the midst of all this darkness, these two women are good.

They are kind to each other and good. And so having worked through this story, we want to ask ourselves, what's the point here? What is the message that the author is trying to communicate to us? I think one of the ways that we can identify that message is by noticing the key details in the story, the most significant things that the author wants us to note in the story.

And here they are, I think. Number one, these women stand out in stark contrast to their surrounding culture. In verse one, the author makes sure that we know that this story takes place in the time of judges in the country of Moab.

It sets up expectations that these are going to be horrible, disobedient, evil people that do whatever is right in their own eyes. And then that's not what happens at all.

[32:28] These two women are showing tenderness to each other and kindness to each other and loyalty. And Ruth is from Moab. She's not a seductive, licentious idol worshiper.

She's a faithful woman who is sacrificing her own future to commit herself to the God of Israel. It is, that's a surprise. Second, a second key detail is that Naomi links good character with God's character.

In verse eight, Naomi wants the Lord to bless Orpah and Ruth because of their chesed, because of their kindness. And so she says, may the Lord show you kindness as you have shown the dead and to me.

This word chesed, this word kindness only occurs three times in the book of Ruth. It occurs one time in chapter one, one time in chapter two, and one time in chapter three.

Isn't that interesting? This is going to be the key theological thread that we follow through the book. I believe it's the interpretive key to the book. The question here is, why does Naomi think that God cares if Ruth shows kindness to her?

[33:44] Well, the answer is obvious. It's because God is kind. In other words, there's a link between God's character and the way that his people act.

Naomi is angry at God and hopeless, but she still believes. In fact, I would say that her anger at God is proof that she believes in him.

So she tries to send her daughters-in-law back to the family, even though she will be alone. And Ruth has determined that God of Israel is her God.

So even though Orpah goes home, Ruth swears an oath to the Lord that she will stay with Naomi, even though it will probably end in starvation and death. This kindness that they show to each other is a reflection of their faith, and that is the reason Naomi think that the Lord might bless them because of it.

There is a link between the chesed of God, the kindness of God, and the kindness of his people. And that, I think, is the main point of this particular chapter. God's people are sacrificial in their actions toward each other because God is sacrificial.

[35:02] It's because he is sacrificial that his followers look out for each other's needs, even at their own expense. It's because God is sacrificial that his followers act differently than everyone else in that country, in that time period.

His character is reflected in his people, and the way his people act is showing us something about God's character. We can look at the actions of Ruth and Naomi here and say, so that's what God is like because of that link.

And I think there are three more sort of sub-points of application that we can take from this. First of all, this story reminds us that God cares for apparently insignificant people, which is really good news for all of us.

Ruth and Naomi are poor peasants without any political or social connections. They are women. They are widows.

They don't have anything to contribute to society. In fact, they have to be cared for by other people. And Ruth is an immigrant from Moab.

[36:16] She's a foreigner. She's an outsider. She speaks with an accent. She comes from a different people group. Isn't it amazing that there is an entire book of the Bible about these two women?

In our culture, there is constant pressure to network, to connect with people that will benefit you, to get a following on social media, to meet the head of the company, to have dinner with someone who can advance your vocation.

There is pressure to avoid wasting time with people that are a drag on you and don't have anything to contribute to your personal welfare. But that's not how God is. That's not how God prioritizes his concerns at all.

He doesn't need to network with anyone. Every relationship he has is lopsided. Every relationship that God has is about him giving to someone else who has nothing to give to him in return.

These poor widows in the middle of nowhere, weeping on the road, are significant to him. And this story, as we'll get into chapter 2, chapter 2, and 3, and 4, is about how God will care for them in

increasingly significant ways.

[37:39] If you're an unimpressive person, if you're weak, if you don't measure up, that's okay. We aren't significant because we benefit God.

We are significant because God benefits us. The second sort of sub-application, I think, that's going on here is that God is faithful through his people.

How is it that he sacrificially cares for the people that he loves? It's through his people. When we say that God sacrificially cares for people, of course we mean that he will never leave us and that he will help us, but that rarely comes as sort of an airdrop out of heaven.

He's not sending C-130s over, and here come the package and the parachute. It doesn't work that way. He didn't provide for Naomi through a package from heaven or even through the high priest up in Jerusalem.

It wasn't even through the local town elders. He provided for Naomi through Ruth, and he provided for Ruth. Well, we'll get to that in chapter two.

[38:50] There are people in our church who have given up hope, and they're discouraged, and they are tired of everything always turning out wrong. And maybe when we talk to them, they sound like Naomi, and they just feel like, I'm trying to follow God, but it is not working.

Maybe they have a questionable past. Maybe like Naomi and Ruth and that situation in Moab, maybe there's some murkiness there, some illegitimacy there. That's okay. The way that God will show faithfulness to them and sacrificially care for them is through us.

So as a body here at Christ the King, we won't wait for the pastors to do it. We won't wait for the elders to do it or the deacons to sort of jump into that situation. It's our job, all of us.

Because that's how God will care for these people who are hurting. We're the ones who will listen to them. We're the ones who will hug them, who will give them money that they need for their daily needs on behalf of God.

And finally, the story is a good reminder that God is faithful even when he is silent. Did you notice in the course of this story that God doesn't say a thing the whole time? He doesn't say a thing.

[40:09] He's there in the background. People are talking about him, but he has not done one thing yet. And so from Naomi's perspective, not only was God silent, but he was actually working against her.

I mean, how could she not feel that way? She had experienced one soul-crushing event after another one. Even though famine and sickness and death and poverty with no hope for the future, she calls out to God, where are you?

And he is silent. For 10 years, he was silent. But one thing this book tells us, not only in chapter 1, but in the course of the book, is that being silent is not the same thing as being absent.

God has not abandoned Naomi, even though she doesn't know it. He is there. First of all, in the form of Ruth, clinging to her and saying, I will not let you go.

And he is also there behind the scenes, watching, caring, biding his time until the moment is right for him to step in and redeem her.

[41:27] Even though Naomi feels like God is working against her, we will soon find out in just the next chapter that he is actually working for her, even though she doesn't know anything about that yet.

Some of us have suffered and experienced God's silence. It is painful. It is painful to struggle and suffer. That is when we want God the most.

That's when we want some answers from him and we want to feel that he is near. We want to have some type of hope that we can cling to in the future, that God has not given up on us.

It's painful to think about the fact that in this situation, God could do something, but he doesn't. But silence is not the same thing as absence.

God's presence doesn't always remove our suffering, but he is there in our suffering. He will always know and care and work in the situation that we are going through even though we cannot see it.

[42:36] Now, Naomi is angry now, but if she would just wait a little longer, then she would see that God is at work. In fact, there are some hints of hope in the next two verses. Look very quickly at verse 22.

They came to Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest. Oh. So there is food. And then in 2.1 it says, And Naomi had a relative of her husband's, a worthy man of the clan of Elimelech

whose name was Boaz.

Interesting. Why are we told that little detail? Maybe God has something even greater in mind for Naomi and Ruth that they don't know about yet. But that's for next week.

We'll continue the story next week, and for now we'll remember that God cares for us sacrificially, and his people care for each other sacrificially in good times and in bad.

Let's pray. Father, we know that there are people among us, there are people here in this building who are hurting.

[43:47] Some of us don't have enough. we pray that you would provide for what they need. Some of us are lonely. We pray that you would comfort them and give them friendship.

Some of us need counsel and support and are struggling with what to do. We pray, Lord, that you would give them wisdom and guidance. Some of us are dealing with physical sicknesses and illnesses and pain.

We pray, Lord, that you would give them healing and grace. And we pray that you would do that through us. That we would be sensitive to the needs of each other and that we would reflect your character by sacrificially caring for each other, looking to the needs of each other, encouraging each other in really significant ways.

You are a good God. And you have shown yourself to be good and kind in the way that you care for us. And we know that in this book of Ruth, you show yourself to be an amazing, redeeming, kind God.

And we know that that kindness and even that sacrifice was ultimately demonstrated in Jesus' sacrifice on the cross and his glorious resurrection.

[45:11] We thank you that you have saved us from our sins because you sacrificially gave your son as an atonement for us. You are a good God and we want to be like you.

We pray that you would teach us your ways, transform our hearts, and bring glory to you in the ways that we act in our daily lives in the good times and the bad.

We pray these things in your name. Amen.