

# Ruth 1:6-22

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[ 0 : 00 ] The Bible takes us in directions that we would never go. I'm convinced of that. It makes us think in ways we would never think on our own.

! Would you think about your grief?

Would you think about the good old days? Would you think about how to recover? Or would you think about love? Now, surely, you'd probably be thinking about how to receive love, how to heal after your loss, but would you think about how to show love?

How to act in love? And that's what this passage confronts us with. It's all about love. Not in the I love tacos kind of love.

Not in the I feel affection for you kind of love. Instead, we're going to see people act in love. Even when it hurts.

[ 1 : 17 ] Even when it's costly. This is kind of instructive for us in how we approach God's word.

because we do bring our big and weighty questions to his word. The Psalms are filled with petitions to the Lord. Why, O Lord? How long, O Lord?

All the things in our lives. But then, we need to be humble to allow God's word to confront us and make us ask new questions.

I would not have come to this passage and asked, how can I show love? That is exactly what he intends for us to ask as we walk into this passage.

And so, that is where our hearts need to be. Our hearts need to be in the place where we come with our questions but holding them loosely so that he can instruct us on how to think, on how to approach his word.

[ 2 : 14 ] So, as we move to this passage, we see that trouble in our own lives, loss in our own lives, and uncertainty, they make us tend to turn inwards, don't they?

We have those hard experiences in our lives and we think about me and my loss and my grief. But the Lord desires that we turn to others in love.

Both Naomi and Ruth have lost everything in the first five verses of the book of Ruth. And each of them is going to show us today what it looks like not to turn inward but to turn outward in love.

So, if you'll join me in the book of Ruth, we're going to start in verse 6 where we finished last week. If you don't have a Bible, we have them in the back. They are bookmarked already to our passage today. We would love to give you a Bible if you do not have one.

Ruth chapter 1, verse 6. Then she, that is Naomi, arose with her daughters-in-law to return from the country of Moab for she had heard in the fields 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.

[ 3 : 39 ] So, the first thing that we see in this passage is that the Lord acted in love towards his people.

How? He didn't just send them a note. He acted to restore them. There was a famine in the land and he brought crops.

And so, we find that here and in all of life, the Lord is the prime mover, the first one to love. And he spurs us on to love as well.

1 John 4, 19 says, we love because he first loved us. When we receive his love, he renews our hearts and we begin to love like he does.

One author put it this way and I think this is the heart of this whole passage. the kindness, goodness, loyalty, and faithfulness that are characteristic of God are true of his people.

[ 4 : 49 ] Not only do they love, they respond. Verse 7, so, it begins with the word so, Naomi did something because of God's love.

He provided a blessing, she had to receive it. He had restocked Bethlehem. So we saw last week that meant literally the house of bread. He restocked it with food, with bread.

She had to go where the blessing was. And it's the same today, isn't it? The Lord has made the blessing of his gospel of reconciliation available to the whole world but we must receive it in faith and repentance.

We have to go to where the blessing is. We have to go to Christ. Christ. We love because he first loved us. And so, the Lord has first acted in love to his people and Naomi responded.

And now, we'll see that Naomi is going to also act in love to her two daughters-in-law because the Lord first loved her. Verse 8, but Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, go, return each of you to your mother's house.

[ 5 : 55 ] May the Lord deal kindly with you as you have dealt with the dead, that is, their husbands, and with me. The Lord grant that you may find rest, each of you, in the house of her husband.

Then she kissed them and they lifted up their voices and wept. In the midst of her crisis, where did Naomi's thoughts go? She's in deep grief.

As we'll see in a few verses, she's going to consider herself empty. She's got nothing left. There's nothing going for her. But the first words we have recorded from her are not a lament.

They are not a weeping. Instead, they're a blessing. She's concerned for her daughters-in-law.

Instead of focusing on her future, how they might help her, how they might serve her and get her through, she thinks of their future, how she might free them to prosper.

[ 7 : 03 ] She recognizes their kindness and expects that the Lord will return it. And that phrase, may the Lord deal kindly with you, it's so wonderful.

If you check different translations of the Bible, you might be working with a different translation. You might have something a little bit different there. The word is chesed. It's really tough to translate because it covers kind of a scope of things, of ideas that we would combine together.

It deals with faithfulness. It deals with love. It is most frequently attributed to God and his faithfulness to his people. And so, other translations you might have might say gracious love or your devotion, your faithful love.

What does that mean then for Naomi and her two daughters? It means that she wants what's best for them. She's putting their interest above hers.

She knows that she has been for ten years or more an unwelcome foreigner in a foreign land, in the land of Moab. And she knows that they will be unwelcome foreigners in the land of Israel.

[ 8 : 14 ] She doesn't want that for them. She's an elderly widow with very few prospects for remarriage. And in that society, meaning very few prospects for survival.

But she knows that they have a chance if they stay in Moab to remarry. A chance for family, a chance for a future. You know, she could have brought them back to Israel.

It would have made her life a little bit easier. But, she had their interests at heart first, even in the midst of her own grief. And so, she releases them from their obligation to her.

She wants blessing for them, not from them. She wants family for them. She wants rest, she says, for them. So, what is love?

What does it look like? 1 Corinthians 13, Paul says, love does not insist on its own way. And here we see that love is actively seeking the best.

[ 9 : 31 ] Actively seeking the best for someone else. And we're going to see more of it. Look with me. Verse 10. And they said to her, no, we will return with you to your people.

Ruth and Orpah know what's at stake for them and for Naomi. They know going with her will mean significant hardship for them. It will be much easier for them to stay.

But they want to go with her. They want to serve her. It will be hard for them to fit in. It will be hard for them to remarry. It will be hard for them to make a future. But they, too, are seeking what's best for someone else in the midst of their grief.

They know that going to Israel with Naomi meant that they could probably help her scratch together a living. so that she wouldn't go completely hungry.

How does Naomi respond? Again, in love. Verse 11, But Naomi said, Turn back, my daughters.

Why will you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb that they may become husbands?

[ 10 : 41 ] 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 till they were 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 is going out against me. Then they lifted up their voices and wept again.

Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her. So here's what we've seen so far. First, Naomi has Ruth and Orpah return to their people where they have a chance at a future.

Second, they've said we will stay with you. And third, she said, here, I'm going to enumerate all of the reasons that you don't have a future with me.

Go, I want a future for you. And she says something incredible. She says, in verse 13, it is exceedingly bitter for me, bitter to me for your sake.

[ 11 : 47 ] It's a weird phrase, isn't it? It's exceedingly bitter to me. I am sad for your sake. I'm sad for you.

How amazing is that? In the midst of this incredible grief and this incredible uncertainty for her own life, she says, I am sad for you because I know you hurt too.

And so she's looked beyond the borders of her own life into the lives of others and has compassion for them.

She doesn't let her own grief blind her to the grief of others. And here is where we see Naomi's plea return to your people. We see it take hold.

Having been released twice and in fact almost ordered by Naomi, Orpah chooses to return to Moab.

[ 12 : 52 ] Now, should we fault her for that? Is that what we're to get from this? Are we to assess her faithfulness? I think not. I think not.

Naomi truly did release her from obligation twice and wants what's best for her. It's the wise, reasonable thing to do in a way.

And in a way it honors her because it's obeying what she has asked of her. And so I don't think this is really about Orpah and her level of faithfulness or not.

I think what this is about really is the incredible love and the incredible commitment of Ruth. She doesn't even respond in words, does she?

Verse 14, Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, Ruth clung to her. There aren't even words there. And Naomi in one last gesture of her own love releases her from obligation a third time.

[ 14 : 02 ] Verse 15, she said, that is Naomi, see, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods. return after your sister-in-law. What does love look like?

It seeks the good of someone else actively. And it's persistent, isn't it? And Naomi is going to get a surprise because she's going to get that persistence right back, that persistent love.

Love is going to return to her in one of the most beautiful passages of the entire Bible. Verse 16, but Ruth said, do not urge me to leave or to return from following you, for 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 so to me, and more also, if anything but death parts me from you.

Most wedding vows aren't that committed. And as we see in verse 18, it silences Naomi.

[ 15 : 25 ] She doesn't have a response. Verse 18, then when Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more. that kind of love has a way of quieting our hearts, I think.

And this is a rich and beautiful pledge that Ruth makes, and we could spend weeks of sermons digging through it.

It is so deep. I want to highlight just two things. First, sit squarely in the center of this promise are the words, your God will be my God.

The Lord doesn't speak directly to anyone in the book of Ruth. There are no direct addresses from the Lord, but he is everywhere in it.

The Lord blessed his people with renewed food. Naomi called on the name of the Lord to bless Ruth and Orpah. We're going to see how the Lord is called on again and again through this book.

[ 16 : 29 ] He is everywhere. And Ruth chooses not only to commit her life to Naomi, but also to the Lord. He is the source of love. And second, the second thing I want to draw out from her pledge, her vow, is that there aren't any qualifications on it.

Remember I said this isn't the I love tacos kind of love, or the I am really affectionate kind of love.

This is the I am really committed. kind of love.

It does not wax and wane with the seasons or our feelings. It could be difficult from time to time, but that's not how love works.

The heart of love is serving someone else. Love. We don't have to have our emotions worked up into a frenzy to serve someone else, do we?

And that's what love really is. Love is first something you do, not something you feel. One writer put it like this, no one in this passage demands that anyone else meet his or her needs.

[ 17 : 43 ] On the contrary, true covenant faith is expressed by concern for the welfare of others. In the story, this concern is expressed by loving actions that promote the next person's well-being, by verbal expression, and by prayer for the next person.

And so we see that love is bringing them back to the promised land, back to Bethlehem. And we pick up in verse 19, And so the two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem.

When they came to Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them. And the women said, Is this Naomi? She said to them, Do not call me Naomi. Call me Marah.

The Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went away full, and the Lord has brought me back empty. Why then call me Naomi, when the Lord has testified against me, and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?

So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law, with her, returned from the country of Moab. And they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest. They've returned to the promised land.

[ 19 : 00 ] They've returned and found themselves in Bethlehem, a city that we know is charged with meaning, with a future, with hope, and expectation.

But I don't want to paint an overly idealized picture as if love has suddenly and finally conquered all in the midst of their lives. They're still destitute right now.

Right? their future still looks bleak. And Naomi gives an accurate assessment of that. She says, do not call me Naomi.

Naomi means pleasant in Hebrew. Call me rather Mara, bitter. Some people think that saying, you know, the Lord has brought me back empty is kind of an insult to Ruth.

Like, she's not standing here? What the heck? I'm not convinced of that. I think if you are taken to a foreign land where you are a stranger, you lose everything, you lose your husband, you lose your sons, and you come home, you can say, I'm empty.

[ 20 : 13 ] I think you can say that. And it certainly seems to have emptied her prospects, her future, everything she had. So I think that's okay.

But what we do know, what she knows, is that Ruth is with her, and Ruth is seeking her best interests before her own, because that's what love looks like.

Now, I hope you want to love like that. I hope you want to be loved like that. I hope you know that if you are in Christ, you have been loved like that.

Christ actively came and sought our best interest. Now, he's not in this passage, but we know how this story ends. It ends with David, and David's story ends also in Bethlehem with a king who came for us to put our best interest at heart.

Where Ruth said, where you die, I will die, Jesus has said to all who have repented and believed in him, he has said, because I live, you also will live.

[ 21 : 36 ] And so now we can love too, because we know that we have been loved. The greatest love the world has ever known, God who came, died for his people, and walked out of that grave so that they might live.

Now what does that mean? Well, first it means that God's love frees us from thinking selfishly about our choices, because we know that we'll never lack in love.

And so like Naomi, we can work for the good of other people when life is really rough for us.

We can think of others first. But it's not just, hey, I know I've got my love check coming, so I'm free for other people. No, God's love transforms us.

In love, he gives us renewed hearts. Because they've been regenerated, we can also love. This is what the Bible calls being born again.

[ 22 : 52 ] We are a new creation in Christ. And so I return to that quote that I mentioned at the very beginning that I thought was the heart of this passage.

The kindness, goodness, loyalty, and faithfulness that are characteristic of God are true of his people. And we can say that is true because he has reshaped them and renewed them and given them life in his love.

I love what Matt said earlier. Hope doesn't come from things, it comes from the Lord. And so in the midst of situations where things in our life are going poorly, we know that we have the Lord and so we have hope and so we can love.

What does that look like? Like when we walk out those doors, what does that look like? Well, it looks like a life lived in love.

How about in our families, what does that look like? Do you want a happy family? I can tell you this, my family suffers when I am concerned with myself.

[ 24 : 08 ] but it flourishes when I seek their needs first. When I'm seeking my wife's best, when I'm seeking my daughter's best, that's when my family works.

And your emotions and your feelings ebb and flow in your family, don't they? But just like Ruth's commitment didn't have conditions on when I'm feeling in love with you.

So two, we don't decide, you know, oh, well, we'll stay married as long as it suits us. You choose to actively love. And your family blossoms.

How about in church? There are some totally unlovable people in church. Let's just get that out of the way, right? I'm one of them. So, when we love one another, even when it's hard, we do something.

Christ told us we do something when we actively seek others' good. In John chapter 13, he said, a new commandment I give you, that you love another just as I have loved you.

[ 25 : 38 ] You also are to love one another. And then he says this, by this, all people will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another. In loving and serving each other in the church, we not only serve each other, but we serve the world by proclaiming the love of Christ.

because this kind of love doesn't happen outside of Christ and his redeeming love. We have the story of Ruth written down for us because it is incredible.

Love like this doesn't just happen. It's because God has intervened. What might this look like in the family? What might this look like in the church?

What might this look like at work? My last tour in the Coast Guard was at the R&D; Center here in New London, and so I got a chance to mentor a number of cadets.

One of them was we were having a Bible study, and he mentioned that he was really convicted by the particular passage that we were studying to do a love, to act out in love in a particular way that looked very much like this.

[ 26 : 58 ] There was a classmate of his. Some of you might have peers at work, peers at school, peers wherever you are engaged in your work that might be able to relate to this.

Nobody really liked this guy. Nobody wanted to help him out. He was kind of an annoyance to everybody else. And the cadet I was mentoring knew that. he was guy who was a guy who was a man who was a man who was a man who was a guy who was just lost at sea, wasn't going to make it, and was a giant burden to his classmates.

And he had treated him as such. Everyone had treated him like a giant burden, dragging them down. but he knew that he had to seek actively someone else's good.

And so he took him aside and spent hours, and cadets, you can verify this, hours are not something you have in great supply. And he served him.

And he helped him understand, and he helped him succeed. Because he knew that Christ's love demanded that he also seek someone else's best.

[ 28 : 22 ] Even when it was hard. And so you don't love someone when you're really attracted to them. You love someone when you serve them.

And we can look to our king who has come and served us. We sang earlier, he came to wash our feet.

And now at his feet we bow. Now, we're going to do something a little different today. Group work. We're going to take the next five minutes. You're going to turn to someone near you. And you are going to talk about this kind of love. You can move around.

The person next to you is weird. give them a different reason. We're going to spend a few moments sharing with one another.

[ 29 : 32 ] I want you to do two things. I want you to share with one another a time where God or someone else showed this kind of love to you. And so share that in the spirit of thanksgiving.

And secondly, I want all of us to share with each other somewhere in our lives that we need to be sharing this kind of love. This love that actively seeks out the good of someone else.

love. And then I want you if you don't already have each other's contact info I want you to exchange it.

And on Wednesday you have a couple days to do this. I want you to get in touch with each other and make sure you've actually taken steps to make that happen.

Because if I gave us a whole sermon about active love and we didn't actively do something I would be sorely missing the point and really not serving us well.

[ 30 : 38 ] Because God's word demands that we share his love in every facet of our lives. So let's take that step today.

I'm going to pray for us and then we're going to share. Father in heaven we are so grateful that you have come when we didn't even know you when we didn't even love you.

And you have showed us love vast as the oceans. A love that sought our good when we sought your ill.

When we sought to turn away from you. Lord I thank you so much for giving us examples of what this love looks like in real life in the midst of real hardship, real life.

So Lord I pray that our conversations today would be fruitful and honoring to you that as we take these steps to serve you, to serve others, that you would be glorified in our midst and that you would shape our hearts in love.

[ 31 : 50 ] That in doing this we would each come to know you more fully and to look more fully like your wonderful son in whose name we pray.

Amen. You got five minutes. Let's go.