

Dealing with Life's Disappointments

Following Ruth's Example on the Path to Recovery

By David R. Ireland

The Book of Ruth is known as one of the most beautiful short stories of the Bible. In it we have the opportunity of viewing a snapshot of one family's pilgrimage—a family of significant genealogy, leading to the birth of Jesus Christ.

After serving people for the past seventeen years as a senior pastor, I am convinced that everyone everywhere will one day come face-to-face with disappointment.

The book of Ruth opens up with disappointment. There's a famine in the land of Bethlehem. The word Bethlehem means the House of Bread. Can you imagine the irony here? The very place that's called the house of bread is experiencing a famine. The land of plenty is experiencing emptiness. So Elimelech, Naomi's husband, leaves Israel with his family and moves to Moab. It was Elimelech's plan to move to Moab temporarily. Unfortunately, he died there. The now widowed Naomi, whose name means pleasant, stays in Moab and eventually both her sons die there.

Naomi has every reason in the world to be depressed. She's faced with famine, the grief of leaving her homeland, the death of her spouse, and finally the deaths of both her sons—her only children.

After learning that the famine had ended in Israel, Naomi and her two widowed daughters-in-law set out for Naomi's homeland. In what appears to be a moment of overwhelming grief, Naomi urges her daughters-in-law to go back home. She even gives them her blessing toward finding new husbands, lamenting to them that God's hand has gone out against her. In Ruth 1:16, we read:

“But Ruth replied, ‘don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where your go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God.’”

Avoiding the Trap of Denial

While we began looking at Naomi and her plight, I'd like us to now focus on Ruth and how she effectively dealt with the disappointing circumstances she and her mother-in-law faced. The first step Ruth took in overcoming life's disappointments was to accept her circumstances. Ruth did not fall into the trap of denial.

Denial is a refusal to admit the truth or reality. It's a refusal to acknowledge a person or a thing. Yet the Bible makes it clear that Ruth had a healthy perspective—first because she was willing to embrace a new life with the Living God through her determination to follow Naomi; second, because she didn't become absorbed in Naomi's grief. She was determined to follow the path of righteousness.

Refusing to Dwell on Loss

The next step Ruth took to overcome her disappointment was that she did not dwell on her loss. She sought a solution to her dilemma and decided to relocate. I am not suggesting that every disappointment should be handled by packing your bags and relocating. However, I am hoping that you'd recognize that moving on is a practical outworking of not dwelling on the past.

When Naomi conveyed the good news to Ruth, that there was food back in Naomi's homeland, Ruth was willing to move on from the place of disappointment in her life. I encourage you to take on a similar perspective by thinking and behaving practically in the face of disappointment.

Going Out and Doing Something

Another practical step Ruth took that led her out of disappointment was to become productive by going out and landing a job. Let's look at Ruth 2:1—“Now Naomi had a relative on her husband's side, from the clan of Elimelech, a man of standing, whose name was Boaz. And Ruth the Moabitess said to Naomi, “Let me go to the fields and pick up the leftover grain behind anyone in whose eyes I find favor””

Ruth did not sit around wallowing in depression. She was willing to address the practical issue of bringing in an income. Ruth didn't allow the fact that she was of a different ethnicity and a different culture to stop her from

trusting the providence of God in this new land. Similarly, you must relieve your mind from the pressure of disappointment by taking practical steps that help your situation. It may mean that you have to change jobs or maybe even make a career change.

Ruth's willingness to trust God led her to glean from the fields of Boaz—her future husband. In Ruth 2:3-5 we read, "So she went out and began to glean in the fields behind the harvesters. As it turned out, she found herself working in a field belonging to Boaz, who was from the clan of Elimelech. Just then Boaz arrived from Bethlehem and greeted the harvesters, "The Lord be with you!" "The Lord bless you!" they called back. Boaz asked the foreman of his harvesters, "Whose young woman is that?"

Cleaning Up and Looking Forward

From Boaz's reaction to Ruth, we can safely assume that she didn't let her looks go either. Later, Naomi encourages Ruth to put on some perfume and her best clothes to further attract Boaz. And the ever forward-looking Ruth complies. Some people simply let themselves go after experiencing disappointment. They forget about updating their wardrobe or getting haircuts as often as they used to. I encourage you to keep up your appearance. Don't walk around cloaked in disappointment. Don't let your pain define you.

While I'm not expecting you to be proud of your pain, I do want you to become sober about it. In this case, sobriety means that you don't allow your emotions to disable you. It means that you've learned some lessons from your disappointment and you're going to invest your new-found wisdom into a positive outlook on the future.

Ruth's sobriety made her a prized possession, giving her the ability to attract Boaz, whom the Bible calls "a man of standing." Her pain qualified and matured her to the degree that she couldn't deal with riff-raff. She knew what she wanted and she knew what she deserved. Her pain made her too valuable to deal with someone who would engage her in a childish relationship.

Looking to God

This brings us to the final step Ruth took in overcoming disappointment. She looked to God for her destiny. In Ruth 4:13, we read. "So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. Then he went to her, and the Lord enabled her to conceive and she gave birth to a son."

Ruth involved God from the very beginning when she announced to Naomi back in chapter 1, "Your people will be my people and your God my God." She didn't allow her sufferings to chase her away from God. Rather, she followed God and He led her to become a mother in the lineage of Christ. Her son was named Obed, who was the father of Jesse, who was the father of David. And when you read through the lineage of Christ, in Luke chapter 3, you will find that Christ was from the seed of David. Here we see that Ruth allowed God to create a phenomenal destiny from her season of disappointment.

God will do the same for you. Turning to God in your disappointments allows Him to reveal to you the pierced hand of His Son as He invites you to arise and shine in the wonderful purpose He has set for your life. **K**

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