

The Tale of Two Women
An eight week Bible Study in the Book of Ruth by Marleen Bahr

Outline

Study # 1 – Introduction & Background

Preparation: Read all four chapters of the Book of Ruth.

Part I – Leaving & Loss

Study # 2 – Naomi’s Story –Dreams Dashed

Prep: Read Ruth 1:1-5.

Plan to share briefly how your dreams before marriage were fulfilled or dashed.

Study # 3 – A Sorrow Shared – Naomi & Ruth

Prep: Read Ruth 1:6-22.

Who has been there for you when you struggled with a deep loss?

Part II – A Friendship Forged

Study # 4 - New Beginnings – for Naomi & Ruth

Prep: Read Ruth 2: 1-23

From discouragement to encouragement. How changes in our outlook and attitude affect our relationships?

Study #5 – Building Deeper Family Relationships

Prep: Read Ruth 3:1-18

Mother\Daughter, Mother\Daughter-in-Law

Share tips on encouraging positive relationships.

Part III – Relationships Redeemed & Revitalized

Study #6 – Building Healthy Relationships with Men

Prep: Re-read Ruth 2: 5-16, 3: 1-18, also Genesis 1:26-31.

How did Ruth and Naomi deal with their male relationships? Do we interact well with men? What was the original plan?

Study # 7 – Dealing With the Future & the Past

Prep: Read Ruth 4:1-12

Ruth draws from Naomi's past. How do we balance the situations of the past so as to benefit our present?

Study # 8 - A Delight for Naomi & Ruth

Prep: Read Ruth 4: 13-16, 2 Timothy 1:3-7.

The blessing of children and grandchildren. Consider the delights and responsibilities of being a mother or grandmother. Consider also how we as the members of God's family are able to "mother" or "grandparent" the children of our friends and relatives.

Session # 9 – Review & Conclusion –“Pass it On!”

Re-read Ruth 4: 11-12, Ruth 4:18-22.

Lessons learned from the book of Ruth and how these lessons apply to our daily lives. (This session is optional and can be combined with a pre-Christmas social luncheon)

Dedication

This study has been written in memory of our dear “sister” Daphne who went to be with the Lord on Monday, July 31, 2006. How we loved her and how we miss her presence in our midst! She showed us how to live and she showed us how to die. Faithful to the end! Let's pass along her smile and practice her habit of listening to the voice of God.

Marleen

RUTH -THE TALE OF TWO WOMEN

Study #1 - Introduction and Background

Greetings and Opening Prayer

Welcome and Introductions:

This study is dedicated to our dear sister Daphne. She was a regular member of this group for the past four years. Somehow I believe we will continue to sense her smile and her words of inspiration as we continue without her. I have written this study in her memory and will be referring to her in my illustrations from time to time. I think it would be appropriate for us to spend a few moments thanking God for what she meant to us.

(You may well wish to use your own personal experience to introduce this study.)

Now let's move into the book of Ruth:

The story of Ruth and Naomi is set in the time of the judges explaining why it is placed after the book of Judges. It reflects a temporary time of peace between Israel and Moab. The author of this book is unknown. It could well have been a story which had been verbally passed along for many generations. The introduction in my study Bible calls it a "Jewel of Hebrew narrative art." It may have taken place sometime during the forty years of peace during the time when Gideon was the Judge in Israel but was probably not written till some time during the reign of King David.

1. What do you think is the main theme of this book?
2. This is a book of contrasts. List as many as you see?
3. How far is Moab from Bethlehem and why did Naomi and her husband relocate to the land of Moab?
4. What strikes you most interesting about Naomi and Ruth in this story?

Close this study by sharing in small groups and praying for one other.

RUTH - THE TALE OF TWO WOMEN

Part I – Leaving & Loss

Study # 2 - Naomi's Story – Dreams Dashed

Greetings and Opening Prayer

(If possible take about twenty minutes to have one of your women share her story)

Read Ruth 1: 1-5

The Spring I was seven we had the misfortune of having our home catch fire. We lived there for the summer while my parents made arrangements to find a home to rent till ours could be replaced. With four youngsters and a brand new baby we packed up and picked up life in a place about thirty miles away. I'm sure this was a difficult time for my mother. For us it was an adventure and I have fond memories of those two years. For many people in New Orleans, or South East Asia or New York this was not the case. For many African refugees trying to find water after years of drought life is very difficult. For Ruth & Elimelech it must have been a big decision to leave Bethlehem and go to the country of Moab.

1. Elimelech and Naomi have two sons probably in their late teens. What might have been some questions going through their minds as they decide to leave?
2. If Naomi were to come and share her story and title it "Dreams Dashed" what might she share?
3. Plan to share briefly how your dreams before marriage were fulfilled or dashed. (This sharing time may be more suitable for smaller groups)
4. During all this loss in Naomi's life how can you see God at work to redeem good out of death and loss?

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Break into small groups for prayer ministry.

Study #3 -A Sorrow Shared – Naomi & Ruth

Greetings and Opening Prayer

Read Ruth 1: 6-22

Naomi finds herself in a foreign country fighting over whelming grief and loss. Not only has she lost her husband to an early death but now she has lost both her adult sons. I know what it's like to lose a premature son but I can't even begin to understand the depth of pain in losing an older or adult child. I recall spending much time with dear friends whose daughter, the mother of two pre-school children died in a tragic car accident. The pain never goes away.

In the middle of her own grief Naomi appears to be reaching out to Ruth and Orpah, her daughters-in-law, who are working through their own grief. When we look more closely I believe that Ruth and Orpah were also trying to be strong for Naomi. They now understand more fully Naomi's pain of widowhood.

When Naomi was able to face the lengthy journey she decides to return to Bethlehem. She dared to believe that going home might enable her to salvage a few pieces of her history. It was a sliver of hope.

1. What questions might Naomi have asked herself before deciding to leave? What doubts would have entered her mind?

2. Naomi seems to have sunk into a deep pit of discouragement and depression. What might give us this idea?

3. How do we know Ruth had accepted Naomi's faith and become a follower of the true God?

5. What characteristics of Ruth do you admire? How do you think the relationship of Naomi and Ruth was strengthened during the journey to Bethlehem?

Break into groups of four. We have all experienced loss to some degree. Share what you are able. Who came along side to be there for you? Pray a brief prayer of continued healing after each sharing.

Part II – A Friendship Forged

Study # 4 - New Beginnings for Naomi & Ruth

Greetings and Opening Prayer

We have moved quite a number of times over the years. Each time had its own difficulties and delights. Each time brought different adjustments and challenges. Rather than share one of my stories I would like to hear some of your re-settling stories so we can get to know each other better.

(Share stories)

Read Ruth 2:1-23

1. What might have been the most difficult adjustment for Ruth? What makes it appear relatively easy?
2. Naomi seems to have a new purpose for living. (Her name means, “pleasant”) Discuss?
3. How do we see Ruth’s submissiveness towards Naomi?
4. What do you see happening in Naomi and Ruth’s relationship which can only strengthen their friendship?
5. What are the key components of a good friendship and how has a friendship deepened for you when you found a common bond with someone in a new setting? Discuss

Break into groups of four. Share with each other one thing that has strengthened and deepened a friendship more than anything else. Now turn to the person next to you and pray for each other.

Part II – A Friendship Forged

Study # 5 - Building Deeper Family Relationships

Greetings and Opening Prayer

We've just celebrated Thanksgiving. I'm sure we could all share stories of laughter or of tension, depending on the family dynamics. One year everyone around our table was asked to share one experience from the past year for which they were especially thankful. Let's imagine sitting around one big table. Share an experience which has strengthened the bond of your family.

Read Together: **Ruth 3:1-18**

1. What is happening in Naomi's question to Ruth in verse 1?
2. It appears that Naomi is pushing her daughter-in-law into a relationship with Boaz.
 - a). How is this culture different from ours?
 - b). What does this conversation tell us about Ruth's relationship with her mother-in-law?
3. In Verse 9 when Ruth is lying at the feet of Boaz why do you think he asks the question, "Who are you"? What questions or statements come to your mind concerning this situation?
4. What is the meaning of Kinsman-redeemer and why was this so important in Naomi and Ruth's relationship?
5. Imagine the conversation when Ruth returns to Naomi in the morning. What does Naomi say to Ruth? What does this tell us about their relationship?
6. What does verse 18 tell us about Naomi and how does she encourage Ruth?

Break into groups of four – Share briefly items of praise or concern regarding your mother/daughter or mother-in-law relationships. What would you say are the two best things you can do to strengthen the family bonds? Pray for each other as concerns are shared.

Part III – Relationships Redeemed & Revitalized

Study # 6 - Building Healthy Relationships with Men

Greetings and Opening Prayer

Ron & Daphne met before they started school. Their homes shared a back alley. Daphne was right in there playing with the boys; climbing trees, building go carts and learning to communicate in many different ways. They married soon after high school and even though they knew each other well I'm sure they had to learn to communicate in a whole new way.

Share: How well did you communicate in your early years of marriage? Did you connect with each other's family?

Read Together: **Ruth 2:5-16, 3:1-18 & Genesis 1:26-31**

1. What did Naomi do to encourage Ruth to "connect" with Boaz? What tactics would we use today?
2. How can we best encourage our children and grandchildren in healthy mate selecting? Discuss.
3. According to Genesis 1:26-31 what do you see as God's original plan for good husband\wife relation?
4. How would God's original plan for marriage also apply to male\female relationships outside of marriage?
5. What may hinder us from having healthy relationships with the opposite sex?
6. How can we encourage each other to develop healthy marriage relationships without betraying confidences or feeling disloyal to your husband?

Break into groups of four – Go to prayer praying specifically for:

- a) Our mates and for our children and grandchildren
- b) Healthy marriage relationships.

Part III – Relationships Redeemed & Revitalized

Study # 7 - Making the Best of the Past & the Future

Greetings and Opening Prayer

Today we pick up the narrative of Ruth and Naomi where we left it two weeks ago. Ruth has come home to Naomi after a night at the feet of Boaz. She is sharing with her mother-in-law\friend Naomi every little detail. Naomi reassures her that Boaz will not be long in bringing his decision to a conclusion. She knew Boaz well enough to encourage Ruth to wait till the end of the day.

Read Ruth 4:1-12

Ruth and Naomi were brought together by their love for Mahlon.

1. a) What benefits did Ruth gain from her relationship with Naomi?
b) What did Naomi gain from accepting Ruth into her heart and home?
2. How did both Naomi and Ruth rise above the grief and sorrow in the loss of their husbands?
3. How does the Holy Spirit and the Word of God enable us to deal with the losses of our past? (Share from personal experience.)
4. a) What happens when we blame our circumstances on our past and wallow in the “if only’s”?
b) What happens when we live only for the future? Ie: “Once we’re finishes this year, this assignment, this house we’ll be able to settle down and enjoy life.”
5. What did Jesus say about concerns for the future? (Matt. 6:31-34)

Break into small groups. Share experiences from your past from which you learned valuable lessons for today and the future. Move into prayers of thanksgiving and encouragement for one another.

Part III – Relationships Redeemed & Revitalized

Study # 8 - A Delight For Naomi and Ruth

Greetings and Opening Prayer

Read Ruth 4:13-16, 2 Timothy 1:3-7

Naomi had waited a long time for a grandchild and now her dream was becoming a reality.

1. a) What do you think it was about baby Obed that would cause Naomi to be especially thankful?

b) What might Ruth have “treasured in her heart” when she gazed on her newborn son?

2. Why would Ruth and Naomi share the responsibility of parenting?

3. Naomi may well have assisted at the birth of little Obed. How would the faith of both Naomi and Ruth have been strengthened by this event?

4. a) What part does the faith of the grandparents play in the lives of their grandchildren? Why do young children often have a strong spiritual connection with their grandparents?

5. Share idea's and experiences which have enabled you to stimulate or encourage faith in your children and/or grandchildren.

Break into small groups for prayer.

Pray as God leads for each other and for our children and grandchildren.

In preparation for next week: (This is optional. We used week # 9 for a fellowship lunch and review.)

Re-read Ruth 4:11&12 and Ruth 4:18-22. Come prepared to share how God has spoken to you through this study.