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Naomi

Sadness Swallowed Up by Joy

Ruth 3—4

Life is like a grindstone, someone once said, and whether it grinds you down or polishes you depends on the stuff you are made of. It also depends on your view of God. Some people seem to get more hard knocks in life than others, and if you say, "That's not fair," you are probably right. Life isn't always fair. But the question is, even in the hardest circumstances, is God in control? If he is, that means he can change the bitterness of our hard experiences.

GROUP DISCUSSION. What hard experiences are you presently undergoing that you feel are testing what you are made of?

What difference does confidence in God make in handling your pain and disappointment?

PERSONAL REFLECTION. How conscious are you that God is in control of your life? What can you do to feel closer to God?

Naomi is a case study in hardship. During a time of famine, her family became refugees in a foreign land. There she lost her husband, and her two sons also died. Now it seems she has few prospects other than a

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lonely future. Despite Naomi's trials, Ruth's insistence on returning with her is a strong indication of God's care. Gradually it dawns on Naomi that God has provided for her and Ruth in ways she never expected. In these two chapters we see Naomi's bitterness turned to joy. *Read Ruth 3 and 4.*

1. Naomi's name means "pleasant." When she returns to Bethlehem, why does she suggest a change of name (1:20-21)?

2. A kinsman-redeemer was responsible for protecting the interests of his extended family. What new hope comes to Naomi as a result of Ruth meeting Boaz (2:19-23)?

3. To "spread the corner of your garment over me" (3:9) was a request for marriage. Why might this be a risky plan?

4. What is Naomi's opinion of Boaz's character?

How would you evaluate him from his actions in these two chapters?

5. What is the relationship between your willingness to take risks in your relationship to God and your confidence in his character?

6. What does Naomi gain from the transaction that takes place?

Why does the birth of Obed mean so much to her (4:13-17)?

7. What do you see as the turning point in Naomi's life from the bitterness she expressed as she returned to Bethlehem (1:20) to the joy she feels at the end of the story (4:16)?

8. In what way has God provided a kinsman-redeemer for us?

9. Ruth's son becomes an ancestor of King David. Although Ruth is a Gentile, she is mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1:5. What do you learn about God from the amazing ways in which he blesses Naomi after all her tragedies?

10. How does this story encourage you personally?

Thank God for the times when he has shown his faithfulness to you and changed your sorrow to joy. Ask him to increase your confidence in his love and care in your life.

Now or Later

Who can you encourage today or tomorrow with your confidence that God knows our disappointments and pain and cares for us?