

# LEAD SHEET

## RUTH : WEEK 1 RUTH'S LOYALTY TO NAOMI FEBRUARY 12, 2017

### THIS MONTH'S FAITH SKILL: **SHARE YOUR GRACE STORY**

If you want to know God better, tell other people about Him!

### **GETTING STARTED**

#### **General Discussion:**

- In life, do you ever feel a little lost, pulled in several directions at once, etc.? (*Allow students to share.*)

Today we will discuss someone who could have easily been lost and pulled in different directions in life but instead chose loyalty. Today, we start the phenomenal story of Ruth. If you are not familiar with Ruth's story, by the end of these four weeks, you will love this story. If you are familiar with the story, you will finish these four weeks with a greater understanding of Ruth and loyalty.

### **DIGGING IN**

Select three readers and assign them each a passage to read aloud:

#### **Ruth 1:1-4, Ruth 1:5-15, Ruth 1:16- 22**

To understand the first chapter of Ruth, we really need to wrap our minds around three things: the days, the tragedy, and the decision Ruth made to stick with Naomi.

## Understand the Days

### Read Ruth 1:1

What were “the days that the judges ruled” like? If you have not studied the book of Judges, here are some of the highlights:

- From the time of Joshua’s death to the naming of Saul as King, judges ruled Israel.
- This means the events of Ruth occurred sometime between those two men’s lives.
- A common phrase in the Book of Judges is that “everyone did what was right in their own eyes.”
- This was a chaotic, sinful, divided time in Israel.
- In the middle of all this, the author of Ruth tells us, a famine hits and many people travel to Moab.

### Discussion Questions:

1.. How desperate do you sense Elimelech, Naomi, and their sons are? (*They are very, very desperate.*) Now that we understand how desperate the situation was, let’s see how the story unfolds.

## Understand the Tragedy

### Read Ruth 1:3-5

### Discussion Questions:

1. Who dies first? (*Elimelech.*)
2. Who remains? (*Naomi and her two sons.*)
3. What happens next? (*Naomi’s sons each marry a Moabite woman—one named Ruth and the other named Orpah.*)
4. What unfortunate event happens again? (*Naomi’s two sons, Mahlon and Kilion die.*)
5. Now, who remains? (*Naomi, Ruth, and Orpah.*)

Naomi means “pleasant.” By the end of this chapter, she will insist people call her “Mara” which means “bitter.” The tragedy she endures is enormous. Naomi hears there is food in Israel again and decides to return to her homeland.

Naomi, Ruth, and Orpah start back for Israel, but on the way Naomi realizes how difficult it will be for these two single Moabite women to live in Israel. Therefore, Naomi insists her two daughters-in-law remain in Moab while she travels to Israel alone. But Ruth won't leave Naomi's side and asserts that she will join Naomi on the journey to Israel.

Now that we understand the setting and the tragedy that Naomi, Ruth, and Orpah faced, let's discuss their decision.

## **Understand the Decision**

Before we can appreciate Ruth's decision to follow Naomi back into Israel, we need to understand the relationship between Moabites and God's chosen people.

### **Read Genesis 19:30-38**

#### **Discussion Questions:**

1. Who was Moab? (*The son of Lot and one of his daughters.*)
2. Can you already see how Israel may have looked unfavorably upon Moab? (*Yes.*)

### **Read Judges 3:12-30**

#### **Discussion Questions:**

1. In Judges, what is the relationship between Israel and Moab? (*The Moabites enslaved the Israelites making them the subjects of Moab.*)
2. How does Moab become subject to Israel instead? (*Israel sends a judge to assassinate the Moabite King.*)
3. How do you think the Israelites generally viewed the Moabites? (*Poorly.*)
4. How do you think the Moabites generally looked at the Israelites? (*Poorly.*)

Keep all of this hatred, tension, and resentment in mind as we consider Ruth's actions.

## **Read Ruth 1:16-18**

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. Why do you think Ruth makes that decision? (*We cannot be sure, but possible reasons are faith, loyalty, love, etc.*)
2. How strongly does Ruth insist to stay? (*Although Orpah leaves, Ruth is “determined” to go with Naomi.*)
3. Despite the difficulty, what does Naomi decide? (*She decides to allow Ruth to return with her.*)

This is an interesting story, for sure. An Israelite family flees to a bordering nation to survive. In addition to living among their enemies, which was surely difficult, the three patriarchs of the family die, leaving behind three widows. Naomi decides to return home. The daughters-in-law follow at first, but when encouraged to stop one turns back while Ruth stays. At the end of chapter, Ruth (who is consistently called “a Moabite” in this chapter, lest we forget how we are supposed to feel about her) is in Bethlehem (remember that fact) just as the harvest season begins.

Even in this chapter, which is sort of an introduction to the real meaning of the book, we see incredible lessons of loyalty from Ruth.

## **MAKING IT REAL**

### **Read Ruth 1:16-17**

In those verses, Ruth states four items demonstrating loyalty to Ruth that serve as a guideline for how we can show loyalty to people in our lives.

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. What are the five statements? (*1. Where ever you go, I will go. 2. Where you stay, I will stay. 3. Your people are my people. 4. Your God is my God. 5. Where you die, I will die.*)

2. Why do you think Ruth feels this amount of loyalty to her foreign mother-in-law? *(We cannot be sure, perhaps enough time has passed that they have formed a very close relationship.)*

3. Can you think of stronger statements of loyalty than these? *(Allow for discussion.)*

4. Have you ever demonstrated that sort of loyalty to anyone? *(Allow for discussion.)*

Let's talk a little bit about each statement. Perhaps by modeling these five things, we can discover new opportunities to express loyalty in our lives.

## **Wherever You Go, I Will Go**

### **General Discussion:**

- What do you think this statement means? *(It means you will follow someone no matter the circumstances.)*
- How did Ruth apply it to her situation? *(Even though it was risky, she followed Naomi to a foreign land where she knew no one except Naomi. Ruth showed loyalty to Naomi by following her despite the risks.)*
- How can we demonstrate this type of commitment in our lives? *(It could mean completing difficult tasks to help a friend in need, or making sure that a loved one does not feel alone, etc.)*

Commitments to follow someone into risky situations are tough commitments to make, but that is a sure sign of loyalty between one person and another.

## **Where You Stay, I Will Stay**

### **General Discussion:**

- What do you think this statement means? *(It means a commitment to remain.)*
- How did Ruth apply it to her situation? *(She stayed with Naomi as long as she was in Moab. She will stay with Naomi for as long as she is in Israel.)*

- How can we demonstrate this type of commitment in our lives? *(Do not leave others when times are difficult though it may be inconvenient to you; when you make a commitment, you must stand by it even though a new, more-appealing option may present itself, etc.)*

Commitments to remain are few in our world. If you want to be a loyal person, stop leaving all the time.

## **Your People Will Be My People**

### **General Discussion:**

- What do you think this statement means? *(It is a willingness to sacrifice one's own identity to identify with another person.)*
- How did Ruth apply it to her situation? *(She abandons Moab to be assimilated into Israel's culture. She left behind all that was familiar and comfortable to her to remain with Naomi.)*
- How can we demonstrate this type of commitment in our lives? *(Adoption, associating with people different from ourselves, etc.)*

Commitments to sacrifice your own identity for someone else's good are often criticized in today's world, but it is a sure way to practice loyalty.

## **Your God Will Be My God**

### **General Discussion:**

- What do you think this statement means? *(Whatever deity Naomi follows will be the god Ruth follows.)*
- How did Ruth apply it to her situation? *(She left the Moabite gods to worship the One True God of Israel.)*
- How can we demonstrate this type of commitment in our lives? *(Allow for discussion)*

A willingness to switch faith systems is an extreme example of loyalty to another person.

## **Where You, Die I Will Die**

### **General Discussion:**

- What do you think this statement means? (*It means that her loyalty is unconditional—only death can end it.*)
- How does Ruth apply it to her situation? (*As far as we know, Ruth remains in Israel for the rest of Naomi's and her lives.*)
- How can we demonstrate this type of commitment in our lives? (*When we make a promise to someone, we keep it; we remain faithful to those we have promised to be faithful to until we die; etc.*)

A commitment to join someone in his or her place of death may be the ultimate expression of loyalty.

Life, death, faith, belonging—Ruth expresses strong words of loyalty towards Naomi. As the rest of the story unfolds, we will see how Ruth's loyalty is rewarded.

Your journey of loyalty is just beginning. To whom will you be loyal? Where will you belong? Whose God will you worship? What could disturb your loyalty to your friends, your family, or your church family? We all have to wrestle with these questions.

## **Have students re-read**

### **Ruth 1:16**

#### **General Discussion:**

- Who in your life, you could say these words to and mean them? Who is your Naomi? (*Allow students to share.*)
- What type of person do you think is worthy of this kind of loyalty? (*Someone who has a high moral code, is of high integrity, demonstrates loyalty themselves, etc.*)

- Another tough question: Are you the type of person who is worthy of receiving this type of loyalty from another person? What needs to change about you to make it so?

## **CLOSING PRAYER**

Invite students to pray silently for those whose names have just come into their minds. Have them ask God to make them a more loyal person. After some silent prayer, ask God on behalf of your group to make you a person others are willing to be loyal toward.