



Leader tip: The “Bad News” resource on DYM is an icebreaker that is a fun way to introduce the topic of Naomi’s loss:

<https://www.downloadyouthministry.com/p/bad-news-/games-1510.html>

[Slide 1] The book of Ruth is unique in the Bible; it is the only book to be named after a foreign woman. And not just any foreign woman, but a woman from a people that were enemies of the Jews.<sup>1</sup>

Each year the book of Ruth was, and continues to be, read out loud in the synagogues during the Feast of Weeks (celebration of harvest season).<sup>2</sup> The story in Ruth happened during the time of the Judges<sup>3</sup>, however, we’re not sure when the book was written or who wrote it. Because of its focus on women’s experience and women’s voices, some scholars believe it may have been written by a woman.<sup>4</sup>

[Slide 2] Here’s what we do know; it is a beautifully written exploration of **hesed**. What is *hesed*? It’s an ancient Hebrew word that describes “kindness, graciousness, and loyalty that goes beyond the call of duty.”<sup>5</sup> It is a type of godly faithfulness to one another that God calls each of us to, and over the course of this book it is displayed by its main characters, Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz. But first, it opens with tremendous loss.

[Slide 3] *Ruth 1:1-5 (NLT)* <sup>1</sup> In the days when the judges ruled in Israel, a severe famine came upon the land. So a man from Bethlehem in Judah left his home and went to live in the country of Moab, taking his wife and two sons with him. <sup>2</sup> The man’s name was Elimelech, and his wife was Naomi. Their two sons were Mahlon and Kilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in the land of Judah. And when they reached Moab, they settled there. [Slide 4] <sup>3</sup> Then Elimelech died, and Naomi was left with her two sons. <sup>4</sup> The two sons married Moabite women. One married a woman

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<sup>1</sup> Sandra Glahn, *Vindicating the Vixens: Revisiting Sexualized, Vilified, and Marginalized Women of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2017), Kindle location 1237.

<sup>2</sup> Carol A. Newsom, Sharon H. Ringe, and Jacqueline E. Lapsley, *Women’s Bible Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 143.

<sup>3</sup> K. Lawson Younger, *Judges and Ruth: From Biblical Text ... to Contemporary Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), Kindle location 7979.

<sup>4</sup> Newsom, Ringe, and Lapsley, *Women’s Bible Commentary*, 142.

<sup>5</sup> Frederic William Bush, *Ruth-Esther* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 42.

*named Orpah, and the other a woman named Ruth. But about ten years later,<sup>5</sup> both Mahlon and Kilion died. This left Naomi alone, without her two sons or her husband.*

One death is horrible. Three deaths? Devastating. Far from her home and what she knows, Naomi lost her husband and both her sons. Around that time, Naomi heard that the famine in Bethlehem was over and crops were growing again, so she decided to return to her homeland. Initially, Orpah and Ruth were traveling with her, but Naomi stopped them and told them to go back to their families. She told them they needed to stay where they were known and welcome, where they could perhaps find new husbands and have another chance at families of their own. All three of them were crying, and Orpah and Ruth both told her no, they wanted to stay with her. Do you see the *hesed*, the kindness and loyalty already being displayed?

[Slide 5] *Ruth 1:11-13 (NLT) <sup>11</sup> But Naomi replied, “Why should you go on with me? Can I still give birth to other sons who could grow up to be your husbands? <sup>12</sup> No, my daughters, return to your parents’ homes, for I am too old to marry again. And even if it were possible, and I were to get married tonight and bear sons, then what? <sup>13</sup> Would you wait for them to grow up and refuse to marry someone else? No, of course not, my daughters! Things are far more bitter for me than for you, because the Lord himself has raised his fist against me.”*

There were two ways a woman could have security in ancient times; through marriage and being a mother.<sup>6</sup> Either their husband would provide their resources, or their children would. There was no government aid for those in need in those times. Back then, a woman was viewed almost like property; first of their father, then of their husband. There was so much women could not do because of how unbalanced the view of men and women in that era.

Normally, the protection for a woman whose husband died was that one of the husband’s brothers would marry her, have a son in the dead husband’s name, which would then allow her family to keep their land and continue. But Naomi had no more sons, which is why she told them to stay with their

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<sup>6</sup> Glahn, *Vindicating the Vixens*, Kindle location 1239.

families; she wouldn't be able to provide them security, and without sons, they would lose what their husbands had.

On top of that, she knew in her homeland that Orpah and Ruth would be viewed as enemies. They would have also been viewed as damaged because even though they had been married, neither of them had children. Damaged is a disgusting word in this context, but that is how the culture was back then.

It was a frustrated and hopeless commentary about a world that made women too dependent on men.<sup>7</sup>

[Slide 6] *Ruth 1:14-15 (NLT)* <sup>14</sup> *And again they wept together, and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law good-bye. But Ruth clung tightly to Naomi.* <sup>15</sup> *“Look,” Naomi said to her, “your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods. You should do the same.”*

Orpah decided to go back to her homeland. Some have criticized her for this, but nowhere in Scripture is anything negative said about Orpah. She clearly loved Naomi and had gone beyond what was expected of her. She made the decision that was best for her, and Scripture affirms her for it.

“But Ruth clung tightly to Naomi.” The phrase “clung tightly” was used to describe incredibly close relationships. Typically, it was used to describe the relationship between a husband and wife, or a close relationship with God.<sup>8</sup> It speaks to commitment, and the author is making sure we see the *hesed*, the loving kindness and sacrifice that is present here.

For the third time, Naomi told Ruth to go, but Ruth's answer ended the debate:

[Slide 7] *Ruth 1:16-17 (NLT)* <sup>16</sup> *But Ruth replied, “Don't ask me to leave you and turn back. Wherever you go, I will go; wherever you live, I will live. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God.* <sup>17</sup> *Wherever you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord punish me severely if I allow anything but death to separate us!”*

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<sup>7</sup> Newsom, Ringe, and Lapsley, *Women's Bible Commentary*, 144.

<sup>8</sup> James McKeown, *Ruth: The Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015), 24.

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