

Ruth 1:6-22- Handout

How to Handle Life's Difficulties Part 2: Remain Faithful to God's People

The Bible talks many times about the importance of who we surround ourselves with. It matters. It affects our attitude and our actions.

Self-check: Are we the kind of friends that others want to surround themselves with? Are we leading our friends closer to the Lord or further away? How do we speak? How do we behave?

Naomi was a childless widow, and this was the lowest, most disadvantaged group in the ancient world. Not just a difficult situation, it was a desperate situation!

We see a sweet bond between Ruth and Naomi. This is more than just a daughter-in-law/mother-in-law relationship. This is a trusted friendship.

Ruth's name means: friend, companion

God made us for companionship. He made us relational beings. We were made in his image that reflects God's triune nature.

"Statistics show having people in our life that we care about and trust promotes overall health. Strong social connections have a reduced many significant health problems like depression, high blood pressure and unhealthy body mass index. Studies have also found that older adults who have meaningful relationships and social support are likely to live longer than their peers with fewer connections."

Science just proves what God already knew: relationships matter, friends matter.

How to be a faithful friend...

1. Lead them well.

Naomi heard that God was doing good things back in Judah. Seems there's a shift in Naomi's life. She left Judah years before but now she is turning back to Judah. She is turning away from a pagan land turning to God.

Ruth decides to go with Naomi. Naomi is now not on a journey alone but is leading Ruth. There is a physical and spiritual move here.

Important that we too lead our friends in these 2 different ways..

A. Lead well physically (Location)

Naomi was going back to the land God had given their family generations before. Ruth wanted to join her.

Our life being lived God's way should make others want to come along too. Not because of us but because they see God working through us!

I love that we see Naomi not only “wish” to go back to the good ole days but she realized what was good about it and went. She realized it was God!

Are we leading others well physically?

Are we leading others to places of refreshment where they can experience God’s goodness?

Are we leading them to places of bondage and consequence?

B. Lead well spiritually.

More than change of location, Ruth had a changed heart!

Ruth was willing to forsake the Moabite gods she grew up with and embrace the God of Israel. She decided to follow the one true God. She was a gentile woman, once far from God, and now drawn near to Him!

Naomi’s relationship with God made not just a physical impact but a spiritual impact on Ruth.

Let’s not forget it is God alone who saves. God wants and does use us, but the transforming power is His! We’re just called to faithfully follow him.

Our trust in God during difficult times is often what draws others to the Lord.

“Ten years of Naomi’s compromise in Moab never made Ruth confess her allegiance to the God of Israel. Yet as soon as Naomi stood and said, “I’m going back to the God of Israel, I’ll put my fate in His hands” Ruth stood with her. Only a bold stand for Jesus will really do it.”

The name Naomi means “pleasant.” The name Mara means “bitter.”

Naomi had left Judah because of a food famine but she returned with seemingly a famine in her soul. She knew the right thing to do was turn back to where God had first led her. She also knew her decisions in Moab were costly, bitter. Her difficulties left her feeling depleted, but her difficulties pointed her back to her God.

Naomi was *not* bitter against God. She seemed to understand that he either caused or allowed this. When we’re not doing things God’s way there are consequences and life can be bitter! The good news is we can always turn back and see God moving and working.

-It was God who broke the famine and opened the way home.

-And it was God who worked it so Ruth would stay with Naomi.

-It was God who preserved this family.

Naomi’s experience in Moab was bitter, but she didn’t stay there. Her example challenges us to lead others well and see beyond present bitter setbacks, have courage to venture closer to God, and see the people God puts in our life.

We cannot lead others well if we're not close to God ourselves.

Prov. 3:5-6 Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.

Are we trusting him with our whole heart? Leaning on his understanding and not ours?
Are we letting Him lead us?

2. Love them well.

Love is not just an emotion, but an action.

Ruth's declaration of loyalty to Naomi was as serious and binding as a marriage commitment. Ruth commits herself to stay with Naomi and care for her in her aging years despite a hopeless future of widowhood and childlessness. Ruth took her hand and walked into it with her. Ruth loved well.

Are we loving our friends well? Is there a need that needs to be met?

We cannot love others well if we don't first love the God who made them.

Matt. 22 Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.'^[c] ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'^[d]

We love because he first loved us! He loved us which leads us to love him which leads us to love others!

3. Loan them well.

We're not getting rid of our friends but sharing them.

God created us uniquely different but purposeful for building God's kingdom through relationships.

Naturally our similarities may draw us to people but it's our differences that help compliment friendships.

We need different types of friends in our life, but we need to share them so others can experience their giftings too.

Naomi and Ruth got back to Judah and the barley harvest was beginning. As we move into chapter 2 we see Ruth ask Naomi if she can go to the fields and gather leftover grain.

Naomi knew Ruth's gifts and allowed her to go. Because Naomi was willing to share Ruth, led to a life changing situation, family changing situation and a history making situation!

When we look at the big picture of the bible we see this small decision was greatly impactful.

Do we loan our friends well?

Do we realize that God wants to use their giftings to help others too?

Growing up there's a lie that we tend to believe: "I need to find my circle of friends." Yes we need to find people who love and accept us for who we are, but nowhere in scripture does it say find my circle. Circles are closed. Rather than friend circles, the bible tends to encourage friend U's. A U is open and there's always room for more!

Some argue Jesus met with an intimate few so that's what we need as well. We do need a few people who we know and trust well, but our focus should always be on inclusion. Jesus's time with disciples was only for a short time and it was purposeful. He then sent them out! We can share our friends and allow them to impact the world as well.

We cannot loan others well if we don't first understand how God did this first by sharing his son with us! God loved us so much that he not only shared but GAVE his son's life for us so that we could be made right with God. If he can give his son, we can share our friends for God's glory.

We will fail at being a good friend. We will let others down. Jesus is the ultimate faithful friend that will never fail us. We can look to Him as our example.

Homework Questions:

Why does it matter who we surround ourselves with?

Explain a time when you chose poorly. What was the effect?

Explain a time you chose wisely. What was the effect?

Are you the kind of friend that others want to surround themselves with? Why/why not?

Read Ruth 1-5. What tragic situation does Naomi find herself in?

Read Ruth 1:6-22. What kind of relationship do you see in Naomi and Orpah? Naomi and Ruth?

What differences do you see in these relationships?

What evidence do we see in God himself to prove that we're created (in His image) and relational?

In what way does science prove our need for friendship?

Explain how friendships have been beneficial to you.

Read Prov 27:17. What does a healthy friendship do? In contrast, what does an unhealthy friendship do?

Why does Naomi decide to return to Judah?

Define repentance. What evidence do we see that proves repentance on her part?

In what ways does Naomi lead Ruth physically? Spiritually?

Give an example of not leading your friends well physically. Give an example of not leading your friends spiritually.

In what ways are you leading your friends physically? Spiritually?

Read Colossians 1:10. In what ways can we walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God?

Explain a time when you were impacted by how a friend handled difficulty. (can be positive or negative.)

How can we conclude that Naomi was not bitter at God but that her life was bitter away from Him?

How did her bitter circumstances impact her relationship with God?

Why is it that we can't lead others well if we're not being led by God?

What are some practical ways we can love our friends well?

How does our love for God impact our love for people?

What is the purpose of friendship?

Why is sharing our friends an important part of life?

How does the impact of Naomi sharing Ruth challenge us to share our friends?

How can "find my circle of friends" be detrimental?

Define a circle of friends. Define a U of friends. Which is healthier and why?

Describe a time when you were not a part of a circle of friends and not "allowed in."
How does that experience impact the way you view friendships now?

How does the way Jesus handled friendship encourage us on our friend journey?

List 1 way you can lead your friends, love your friends and loan your friends this week.

1. Lead: _____

2. Love: _____

3. Loan: _____