

## DISCUSSION GUIDE :: WEEK 4

**THE UNDERDOG**  
**WHEN LIFE DOESN'T GO AS PLANNED**  
**RUTH 1**  
**11/21/2016**



### MAIN POINT

God's providence means that He is both present and participating in our difficult circumstances.

### INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**Share a time you went through a really difficult circumstance? Were you tempted to question the goodness of God? Why or why not?**

**Has time changed your perspective of these events? How did God ultimately prove His faithfulness?**

You have probably heard the saying, "hindsight is 20/20". This adage rings true because being human means that we have a limited perspective. There are many situations in life we are not able to fully understand in the present. However from God's perspective, this is not the case. God sees everything that happens to us and divinely uses all of the circumstance in our lives for our good and His glory (Rom. 8:28-29). When we walk through difficult circumstances in this life, we are often unable to see what God is doing in the midst of them. The Book of Ruth introduces us to Naomi and Ruth at this part of their story, and invites us to see God's providence in their lives and in our own.

### UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

**The story of Ruth happened during the time of the judges. What do you know about this time? What was life like in Israel?**

**Read Judges 21:25. What happens when people only do what seems right in their own eyes? How is the time of the judges like our own? How is it different?**

The days when the judges ruled encapsulates the time between Joshua and Samuel's leadership of Israel. The book of Judges ends with the editorial comment "all the people did was seemed right in their own eyes." A quick glance through the book illustrates exactly what that means. From beginning to end Judges is filled with stories of war, crime, idolatry, prostitution, and murder. There was no leadership and the people of Israel rejected God and worshiped idols. Yet time and time again, God shows His kindness to Israel, by raising up Judges to deliver them. This time in Israel's history is the backdrop for the story of Ruth.

**HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ RUTH 1:1-5.**

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**Make a list of the events in these five verses. Who are the characters? Where are they from? Where did they go? What has happened to them?**

**What does Elimelech's willingness to move his family from Bethlehem to Moab reveal about his faith?**

There is peril in making the wrong decisions. Elimelech's decision moved his family from Bethlehem to Moab to escape the famine in Judah was a sinful choice for two reasons: 1) he left the promise land and 2) he moved to Moab, a land inhabited by Israel's enemies. The Moabites were the result of Lot's incestuous relationship with his daughter (Genesis 19:30-38), and were known for moral debauchery and the worship of false Gods. From a human perspective the relocation made sense. However, the decision to move took Elimelech's family away from the land of the promise into the land of compromise. Elimelech made the move to escape death, yet death overtook 75% of his family. Many choices we make in life have an effect that extends far beyond ourselves.

**HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ RUTH 1:6-18.**

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**Naomi says the fist of the Lord is against her. What does this reveal about her belief in God? Why is she incorrect to believe that God is against her?**

**What did Ruth's commitment to go with Naomi mean to her? What did Ruth give up to go with Naomi to Bethlehem? Has anyone ever given up something significant in order to be committed to you?**

**How does Ruth's statement in verses 16-17 mirror what happens when we receive and begin to follow Christ?**

Three times in these verses Naomi referred to Orpah and Ruth as her daughters. The affection Naomi felt for these women was very real. She came to love them and as such wanted what was best for them. Since Naomi had no other sons for them to marry she encouraged these young women to return to their mothers so they might be cared for. While Orpah accepted this kindness, Ruth remained with Naomi and expressed belief and confidence in the God of Israel when Naomi appeared to have very little. Naomi believed that her lot in life was evidence of God's judgment, but the rest of the story demonstrated that this is not the case. Ruth's commitment to Naomi was more than a vow of friendship, but a rather a decision that had far-reaching spiritual significance. She was denying the idols of Moab and clinging to the one true God.

**HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ RUTH 1:19-22.**

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**Verse 22 mentions that they came back at the beginning of the barley harvest. Why is this significant? How does this show God's amazing providence?**

**Did Elimelech's sin ultimately stop God from working in the lives of his family? How have you experienced this in your life?**

Naomi and Ruth finally made it to Bethlehem. The townspeople stirred because Naomi returned, but without her husband and sons and a Moabite in their place. The names of God Naomi used reflected that she believed He was powerful and able to help her, but her tone showed she did not believe He would, and that sin in her life caused her grief. However, the narrator points out they had returned at the time of harvest. The famine was over, and God was providing for the needs of His people, as He always had. Naomi's bitterness kept her from seeing the providence of God.

## **APPLICATION**

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**Why should times of struggle be times to turn to God rather than away from Him?**

**What kind of questions do you ask God in your struggles? What is our comfort in difficult circumstances?**

**In what area of your life do you need to trust in God's providence? What is one step you can take this week to help you trust Him?**

## PRAY

As you close thank God for His provision. Ask that even when our lives are difficult He would allow us to see His faithful love for us and protection over us. Pray for those around you who are struggling and thank God for His ultimate provision in Jesus Christ.

## COMMENTARY

### RUTH 1:1-22

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1:1 "During the time of the judges" identifies the events of this story as taking place during a time when "everyone did whatever he wanted" (lit "what was right in his own eyes"), when "there was no king in Israel" (Jdg. 21:25). During the time of the judges, a famine in the land probably would have been part of God's judgment on His people for their apostasy from Him, pursuing the Baals and Ashtoreths (Jdg. 2:11-15). This famine even affected Bethlehem, whose Hebrew name means "house of bread." As a result, one family from that city did what was right in their own eyes and left the promised land, going to live in the pagan land of Moab, where economic prospects seemed brighter. Somewhere along the way, that temporary move turned into a permanent stay.

1:2 Elimelech means "My God is king," which heightens the irony of his behavior in doing "whatever he wanted" because in those days "there was no king in Israel" (Jdg. 21:25). His wife's name, Naomi, means "Pleasant," which evokes Ps. 16:6: "The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places." In contrast, she and her husband were dissatisfied with the boundary lines assigned them by God. The names of their sons, Mahlon and Chilion, seem related to words for sickness and mortality.

1:3-5 In the land of Moab, Naomi's husband died and she was left with her two sons. The Hebrew verb "left" is related to the word "remnant" and often describes those who survive an outpouring of God's wrath. Her sons then took Moabite women as their wives, contrary to the law that forbade marrying women from nations that served other gods (Dt. 7:3-4). Moabite women in particular had a reputation for leading Israelites astray after other gods (Num. 25). It must have seemed evident that the hand of the Lord was against Naomi in judgment.

1:6-9 Naomi had little choice but to leave Moab and return home, a move encouraged by the news that the Lord was providing food there. This points to repentance on the part of the Hebrews and their restoration. Naomi asked the Lord's blessing upon her daughters-in-law in the form of His faithful love. This is a covenantal term that combines love and faithfulness, mercy and grace—all the positive aspects of committed relationship. It is a remarkable request that the Lord's favor should be shown in this way to covenant outsiders like these foreign women. The women were sad to part. They wept loudly as they embraced.

1:10-14 Orpah and Ruth repeated their desire to return to Israel with Naomi. Once again, however, Naomi pressed them both to return, on the grounds that the best prospect of remarriage lay among their own people. Naomi assumed that no other family in Bethlehem would be interested in marrying Moabite women, and she emphasized the certainty of there being no other children from her own line. She was probably at least 50 years old at this time. Even if she were to have more children at once, by the time they grew up Orpah and Ruth would be too old to have children. Besides, Naomi argued, she was herself under a curse: the Lord's hand had turned against her. There is no hint of Naomi taking any personal responsibility or expressing repentance for her own actions in leaving the promised land. Convinced by Naomi's arguments, Orpah took her leave of Naomi, but Ruth clung to her—the same word used in Gen. 2:24 to describe the marriage bond.

1:15-18 The intensity of Naomi's attempts to dissuade her Moabite daughters-in-law from accompanying her back to Bethlehem suggests that she was not completely motivated by concern for their well-being. Their presence would have been a constant and embarrassing reminder of her tragic sojourn in Moab. Yet Ruth was not so easily dissuaded. In a crescendo of commitment, she bound herself to go with Naomi and to live with her. In fact, she would even die and be buried where Naomi was—the greatest possible commitment in the ancient world. She sealed her commitment with a self-imprecatory oath, taken in the personal name of Naomi's God, Yahweh. Naomi's response to this moving speech was remarkably curt. Literally, the Hebrew in verse 18 says, "She stopped talking to her."

1:19-22 The townswomen's question, "Can this be Naomi?" pointedly and deliberately ignored Ruth's presence. In response, Naomi urged them to rename her Mara since the Lord had made her bitter rather than "pleasant." It was at Marah that the Israelites found only bitter water to drink on their way out of Egypt, and so they grumbled against the Lord (Ex. 15:23-24). Naomi's heart was similarly turned against the Lord, yet the connection also raised hope that the Lord would heal her bitterness and bring her to a place of rest, just as He did for Israel. Naomi had returned physically to Bethlehem from Moab, but would she similarly return to the Lord in repentance?