



I'm super excited to start this series with you guys. It's a series I've wanted to do for a while, because while we often look at these incredible people in the Bible, with their amazing faith ... we tend to look more often at the MEN of the Bible.

Now, while the lives and ministries of men were huge, their stories and faith vital, we tend to pass over the women. They are the ones we overlook, and yet their faith, their stories, what God did in and through their lives, is just as important.

Without a few of these key women in the Bible, much of what happened—well, wouldn't have. These women, through their faith, paved a way for Jesus and the spread of the gospel.

Back in the day, women were looked down upon. They were not exalted. In fact, they were overlooked. A woman's role back then was to provide children and take care of the household.

Now, there is absolutely nothing wrong with being a mom and taking care of the house. Trust me, I tried staying home with my kids for a whole day when my wife was gone. It makes working outside of the house full-time seem like a cakewalk.

Being a wife and mother wasn't celebrated or honored, it was expected. It was their identity. Women weren't expected to do “great things” like the men were.

However, God saw something much more in the women of the Bible. He saw how He could use them in key roles, and He did just that.

Today, we'll be talking about two women of the Bible. Each had their own stories, but their lives and stories were beautifully intertwined. One, Naomi, was facing her darkest hour. She had given up on her faith. The other, Ruth, while facing her own tragedy, chose to stay with Naomi. Ruth stayed amidst the pain, and she chose to have faith for the both of them. She

dared to believe that God COULD use their greatest struggles to lead them to their greatest impact.

TENSION

Before we dive into their stories, I want to ask you a question: have you ever had a bad day? Like, a really bad day, or consecutive bad days? You know what I mean ... where everything and anything that can go wrong, does. Sometimes, it's all those little things, and then other times, the big things are thrown in, too.

[**Author Note:** Share a personal story about a really bad day that you had. Spilled coffee all over your car, dog pooped in your shoe ... you know, just a rough day!]

I don't know about you, but when this sort of thing happens and continues to, I can't help but say to myself (and to God, for that matter!), “When's the next shoe going to drop?” Because the hits just keep on coming, and after a while, I start to doubt that God really cares about me. Or sometimes, when it gets *really* bad, I start wondering if He's even there at all.

Ever been there? Where you can't really see God working, because it really just seems like He's not? But what if it's not what it appears to be? What if God is working, but we just can't see it?

TRUTH

Naomi found herself in this place. She and her husband had moved to Moab, from Judah, due to a famine. They had two sons who married Moabite woman, and then her husband died. Ten years later, so did both of her sons. She was left with nothing. At that time, women weren't allowed to own land, so she had no home, no family. Talk about a bad day.

She decided to head back to her home country, and told her daughters-in-law to go back to their homes. She told them this because they were still quite young. They could still remarry and go on to lead normal lives. She didn't want them linking themselves to her, a homeless woman who had not a cent to her name. However, neither daughter-in-law wanted to leave her.

This is where we pick up the story.

Ruth 1:11–13

11 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? 12 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? 13 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.”

Naomi is basically saying that her worth was stripped of her. A mom’s greatest pride is her kids, and she had to bury hers. In her mind, she was left with nothing.

Now, you have to wonder if she said something like, “God, why not me? You could’ve taken me. You could’ve spared my husband, because he could’ve remarried and gone on with life. But me? You keep me alive and leave me with nothing.”

[**Author Note:** If you have one, tell a story about a time when you wondered the same thing. For example, maybe someone close to you passed away, and you gladly would have traded places to save them.]

Naomi says, “The Lord’s hand has turned against me!” She’s essentially saying, “You are a cruel, God, because you gave me something good and then took it away. You’ve not only left me, but now you are AGAINST me.”

Have you ever felt this way? Felt like maybe God has given you something—maybe your family, and then over time, it unraveled, and your parents got a divorce and your world was split in two? Or maybe God brought someone into your life, whether a friend or significant other, and before you knew it, everything that you thought was going good turned south and that friend or loved one is no longer a part of your life.

What is God doing? There comes a point when we get past just questioning God’s goodness, and we start questioning God’s character—who He is at His core.

I’ve been in that place, where God had given me something good, and I was blessed, and then little by little, things fell apart. The good I once held

was stripped from me in several areas of my life. I looked at my life at that point, and it was nothing like what I planned it to be. All I felt was pain, heartbreak, failure, and worthlessness. I didn't see God, let alone understand Him. I lost my faith for a while.

Have you ever been in that place? Feeling like God not just turned His back on you, but He was against you? Where you begin to realize that your life is so far past anything you anticipated or expected, and in fact it's the opposite of anything you planned for? Just like Naomi, we question God, and sometimes, we find that we've actually lost our faith.

Faith is believing in something we can't see. Yet, so much of the time, we place our faith in what we can see. When we see God working, we have faith, and we believe He is good. Yet, when pain, loss, and separation happen, when “the good” is taken from us and we're left with struggles, we lose our faith.

But maybe it's because our faith wasn't in God to begin with.

This is the place where we come face-to-face with ourselves. We come face-to-face with our faith. God strips us down to show us where our faith is so that we can then find it. There's purpose to our struggles.

This is where Naomi found herself, but what about Ruth?

You see, it's easy to forget this, but Ruth was also facing a big loss. She came face-to-face with her life as she knew it, as well. When she lost her husband, the realization that the life she had planned was not the life she would live hit her square in the eyes. Yet, she handled her loss differently than Naomi did. Listen to this.

Ruth 1:11–18

¹¹ But Naomi said, “Return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me? Am I going to have any more sons, who could become your husbands? ¹² Return home, my daughters; I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me—even if I had a husband tonight and then gave birth to sons— ¹³ would you wait until they grew up? Would you remain unmarried for them? No, my daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you, because the Lord's hand has turned against me!”

¹⁴ At this they wept aloud again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye, but Ruth clung to her.

¹⁵ “Look,” said Naomi, “your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her.”

¹⁶ But Ruth replied, “Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. ¹⁷ Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me.” ¹⁸ When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her.

Ruth allows her pain to connect her to Naomi. She chooses to have compassion on her mother-in-law in her distress, because a part of her heart knows what Naomi is feeling. Ruth doesn’t look up to Heaven and curse God. Ruth chooses to stay in the middle of both of their pain.

Can you imagine someone doing this for you? Basically, Ruth is saying, “Come hell or high water, I’m with you. No matter what comes our way, I am not leaving you. In fact, I will choose to believe in your God for you, and I will die by your side doing so.”

In a way, God is using Ruth to embody His character. God promises us that He won’t leave us or forsake us—but so often, when we’re in pain or feel angry—we can’t see Him. That’s why He often sends someone else, someone we least expect.

Ruth dared to believe that they did not have to resign to their tragedy, but that somehow, God would do something good with it—that there was purpose to it.

But it took a little bit longer for Naomi to see it.

Ruth 1:19–21

“Call me Mara, because the Lord Almighty has made my life very bitter.” Did you catch that? Talk about vulnerability! Naomi doesn’t sugarcoat it; she says it like it is.

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