

# Ruth - Part 2

by John McGregor

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*The sermon explores the profound decisions made by Naomi, Orpah, and Ruth, highlighting themes of faith, commitment, and the importance of community in the journey back to God.*

**Duration:** 35:42

**Scripture:** Ruth 1:16

**Topics:** "Ruth", "Decisions", "Commitment to God"

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## Description

John McGregor explores the profound decisions made by Naomi, Ruth, and Orpah in Ruth chapter 1, emphasizing the significance of returning to God and the community of faith. Naomi's decision to return to Judah reflects a longing for restoration despite her bitterness, while Ruth's unwavering commitment to Naomi and her God showcases true conversion and loyalty. In contrast, Orpah's choice to return to Moab symbolizes a superficial commitment that lacks depth and transformation. The sermon highlights the importance of making life-altering decisions that align with God's will and the welcoming nature of the people of God. Ultimately, it encourages listeners to reflect on their own decisions regarding faith and community.

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## Transcript

Ruth chapter 1, and we did the first seven verses last week, and so let's begin at verse 7 and just read through the rest of the chapter. For a few moments, let's think about the Word of God and this character of Ruth. Verse 7 says, Therefore she, Naomi, went out from the place where she was, and her two daughters-in-law with her, and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah.

And Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, Go return each to your mother's house. The Lord deal kindly with you as you have dealt with the dad and with me, and the Lord grant that you may find rest each in the house of her husband. So she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept, and they said to her, Surely we will return with you to your people.

But Naomi said, Turn back, my daughters. Why will you go with me? Are there still sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands? Turn back, my daughters. Go, for I am too old to have a husband, and if I should say I have hope, if I should have a husband tonight, and should also bear sons, would you wait for them till they are grown? Would you restrain yourselves from having husbands? No, my daughters, for it grieves me very much for your sakes that the hand of the Lord has gone out against me.

Then they lifted up their voices and wept again, and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her. And she said, Look, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods. Return after her, after your sister-in-law.

But Ruth said, Entreat me not to leave you, or to turn back from following after you, for wherever you go, I will go, and wherever you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried.

And the Lord do so to me, and more also, if anything but death parts you and me. When she saw that she was determined to go with her, she stopped speaking to her. Now the two of them went until they came to Bethlehem.

And it happened when they had come to Bethlehem that all the city was excited because of them. And the women said in this, Is this Naomi? But she said to them, Do not call me Naomi, call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the Lord has brought me home again empty.

Why do you call me Naomi? Since the Lord has testified against me, and the Almighty has afflicted me. So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter-in-law, with her. She returned from the country of Moab, and now they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest.

Father, as the family of God, we come together this morning and have been blessed to worship you and to lift up our voices and our hearts to you. Blessed with the freedom that allows us to open your word and to think upon it together. And Lord, this morning we pray that you would bless us as a family and draw us close to you in the things of Christ, taking this your very word and giving us strength through it on this special day.

In Jesus' name we ask. Amen. Well, it's Mother's Day, and it's neat to see all the things that goes on, all the decisions that had to be made.

Who bought flowers? I see those hands. It's good to be an evangelist for a moment or two. Who bought something other than flowers? Who did something practical? Oh, good deal.

Yeah. See, there's all kinds of ways that we celebrate Mother's Day. And here this morning we're thinking about a mother who is now a widow, and her daughter's in-law are with her as she is going to return to her home.

And as we just recap a little bit from last week, we saw that Elimelech and the family moved to Moab, and the man died, and so the three women are left. And then in verse 7 it tells us how Naomi heard that God visited his people. And in the remainder of this chapter there are so many beautiful things.

Have you ever read anything more gloriously beautiful than what Ruth says to Naomi? That is so powerful, isn't it? You think about two people, and the words that she's saying. It's a beautiful thing. And you think about the journey homeward and so on.

There's so much in here. But in my moments this morning, I want us just to think about decisions. And, you know, decisions are kind of interesting.

Some of them are not nearly as significant as others. And I want you to think about the decisions that are made in the second half of this chapter. Darren and I happened to have some breakfast together

yesterday.

And, you know, decisions that are trivial, that's kind of the special. Okay, what way do you want your eggs? Well, what are my choices? Well, do you want bacon, sausage, or ham? Well, sausage. Well, do you want toast? What kind of toast? Boy, do we ever get this thing complicated.

There's about five decisions before you're done ordering brekkie. I grew up, I was lucky you could get brekkie, let alone order those kind of things. But that's part of the blessing that's unseen to us living where we live in the many things that we have.

So let's just think about decisions here. The first decision that we see in this second half of the chapter is Naomi's decision. It's a decision to return home.

And, you know, she's been there for ten years, and she's saying, I'm going back to the people of God. I'm going home. Did you know that Mother's Day actually was started by the church? That might be an interesting thought.

It started its life called Mothering Sunday. And the idea was that people would return to their home church, the place where they maybe were born and brought up and where they found Christ and where they came to faith in the Lord Jesus. And there was that concept of going home, just going back to that vital spot that means so much, going home.

Now I'm an immigrant, and Sharif and Brother Johnny here understand some of what I'm thinking about when I say that. When I left Northern Ireland I was very happy to leave, and in seventeen years I did not go back. But when I did journey back home to it surprised me how much emotion sort of floats into your heart.

And you begin to think about all the things, and Naomi must have faced this too. She must have thought about all the things as she grew up. All of the things that the people of God had blessed her with.

All of the teaching that she grew up with about the one true and living God. All of those things as she's journeying back and deciding to go back must have been coming into her heart, into her mind and life. And she's doing it as we said last week, because God has visited his people.

And there's something so good about, as you know, the presence of God. My first journey home after seventeen years, I got together one night with the man who was responsible for sharing Christ with me day after day for two years. And we sat down in his living room, and I had already spent some time with my family.

It was so good to see them and to be reunited. But as I sat down with Tom in his living room, now we're both somewhat older, married with family and so on. And we chatted for a bit, and Tom said to me, you notice anything? I started to look at the pictures on the walls and so on, and I thought, you know, maybe he wants me to see something special that's in his house.

And I said, not especially. What is it that you want me to notice? This is what he said. We haven't seen each other in seventeen years, and here we are sitting, talking about the Lord, and it's as though we had never been apart.

And I thought, that's it, isn't it? When you are part of the family of Christ, that is exactly it. There is this common denominator, this thing. And it was still in Naomi's heart after ten years of being away in the land of Moab.

And you begin to see a little bit of Naomi's character here. For instance, you can see that she has despair both before making the decision to go home and after she has arrived home. And why would I say that? Well, in verse 13, you see, she says this, "Know, my daughters, for it grieves me very much for your sakes that the hand of the Lord has gone out against me." See, there's a sense of despair in her heart.

She's going to go home, but she's saying, oh, the Lord has been so against me. And sometimes we feel like that, don't we? Circumstances of life and so on cause us to sense, oh, there's something between, something not right. And that's what we're seeing here as you read these words from Naomi's lips.

A little bit ago, I had the opportunity to sit with someone who was saying, I need to come back to the Lord. And when we prayed together and that person came back to the Lord, it was kind of like a burst of sunshine. Everything just cleared up.

But before we prayed, all the circumstances of life created such a burden that that person was really saying, you know, everything's just out of order and it's not working for me. Naomi's saying, it grieves me. The hand of the Lord has gone out against me.

And when she comes home in verses 20 and 21, let's just look at them. But she said to them, don't call me Naomi, call me Myra. Myra means bitter, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me.

I went out full and the Lord has brought me home empty. Why call me Naomi? Because God has testified against me. See the sense of bitterness and hurt that is there in her heart, both before journeying home and when she arrives as well.

But she made this decision to go home, to go back to the people of God. And what I want you just to see and think about this morning is that her reaction is understandable. There are times when we feel, nothing ever works out for me.

Maybe I'm the only one who feels that way, at least from time to time. But I suspect that many of us feel that from time to time. Nothing ever seems to work out for me.

But when you look at all of the story, when Naomi makes that decision to go back to God, it's the first step to healing and help. It's the first step toward a family life which she has lost through the death of her husband and sons. It's the first step to really beginning to see and understand what it is and who it is that God is.

And it's not that He is against her at all, but that He is working and drawing out these circumstances. In Genesis 42 and verse 36, Joseph says this. He says, Joseph is not, and now you want to take Benjamin away from me? All these things are against me.

That's kind of how Naomi feels. All this is against me. But that's not the end of the story for Jacob either, is it? Because the very one that he thinks is dead is the one that God is bringing him to.

And the very issue that he is struggling with is the thing that God is seeking to address and to pull together and to give such a life and a strength and a hope to. And you know, you see it many times in Scripture. In

1 Samuel 27 verse 1, David says, you know, I'm going to be killed.

Saul and his followers, they're going to kill me. Life is just at the end. But that's not the end of the story.

So the first decision that we see here in Ruth chapter 1 and the second half of it is Naomi's decision. I'm going back to God. I'm going back to the people of God.

I'm going back to the way of God. I'm going to do some business with God, and He is going to do something in me and through me. And although she has some perspective that God is trying to punish her, actually the Lord is just drawing her along to the place.

We're not so far down the road. She's going to have a little Ander bouncing on her knee. His name's not Ander, but we'll discover when we get to chapter 4 that he's the grandfather of King David.

And it was Naomi who is used in this so wonderfully. It appeared to be a bitter stroke, but God had life and purpose for her. When you see the rest of the story, now I don't know about you, but I am famous for ending the story before it's done.

And I think I'm not the only one. What do you mean by that, Pastor John? This is what I mean. There are times when things look difficult and black, and I just kind of throw my hands up and stick them eventually into my pockets and say, I quit.

And in one sense it's good because when I quit, the Lord can start. And in another sense, you'd think the guy would learn to quit soon enough and just let the Lord work out the details. Am I speaking to somebody this morning and life's not perfect? You know what? God isn't finished yet.

But there's a decision that you can make. That's a decision that Naomi made that says, I'm going back to the people of God. It doesn't say anything about the first time that Naomi would have been with the people of God in a service.

But my Irish imagination runs riot with this thought, because on that first trip that I made home to Northern Ireland, I went to the local Baptist Church where my friend Tom McLaughlin had become the pastor. And I sat there with my relatives and was enjoying the service. And you know, he did something.

He said, this man's home from Canada, and we're just going to sing a song because I know he likes it. And he interrupted the whole service, and we sang the tune is Danny Boy, the Londonderry Air. But the words say, I cannot tell.

You see, it still breaks me up. They sang that song, and I sat, and I didn't just cry. I wept.

Man. And at the end of that hymn, my friend Tom, friend in parentheses, said, Pastor John, come and lead us in prayer. You know why I was weeping? Because with the people of God, there's something so special.

Naomi's decision took her back into the family of God. And I did manage to squeak out a prayer. Sniveling as I was.

Secondly, there's Orpah's decision in this passage of Scripture. And let me just take a moment to think about that. She is saying, I'll return to Bethlehem with you, Naomi.

But her decision did not stand. And you know, when you think about Orpah and Ruth, we have a perfect picture of what is true conversion and what is false. And sometimes this is well worth just thinking about.

So for a few moments, let's look at Orpah's decision. She professed the same desire as Ruth did. I'm going to go back to Bethlehem with you.

She started out to go on the way, and her motives were tested in verse 11 by Naomi. And as there is that test, she knew the way to Bethlehem, but it was Moab that was in her heart. And she never really let go of that.

And as you look at Orpah and the decision that she makes, she's gone back to her people, back to the other way of life. You see, it was just a profession, not a conversion. There's no mention in here about what God is saying in the life of Orpah.

And when we come to Ruth, you'll see it's exactly opposite. Scripture is talking about what is happening in her heart and in her life. Orpah has made that decision.

It looks good on the surface, but it doesn't stand. Essentially, she faced the test of truth. Can you truly abandon everything back there to embrace all that God has out here? Isn't that still the question today? Can we truly abandon all of that and just to walk with Jesus? So Orpah has made a decision.

There's no real sense of the love of God or understanding God in her decision. It's a very practical kind of thing. And there's regret in her tears, but there's no repentance.

There's no life change. And when we come to just think about that a little bit, sometimes, you know, there can be all kinds of emotion. You watch me cry nearly every Sunday.

I'm sorry. I just I get cranked up. But tears don't always signify life change.

I remember working for two, maybe three years with a man who was struggling in his walk with the Lord and in his marriage. And one Sunday, I was taking services in Nippawin, and the man came all the way from his hometown. We had what looked like a major breakthrough where he came to the altar and just wept and wept and wept.

But there never was life change. And when it comes to this thing of conversion, Spurgeon used to be very strong. He would just ask people, what has Jesus done in your heart? Because that's where the life change takes place, isn't it? Warpa sort of is an example of false religion or decision-making without any discipleship.

And then as we come along in our text this morning, we see Ruth's decision. And she has decided to go home with Naomi. And her decision stands.

She is in fact mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew chapter 1. Quite a difference. Naomi decides to go back to the people of God. Warpa decides not to go to the people of God.

Ruth decides, I'm going with Naomi. I'm going to follow after her. But as you look, you see a commitment to God.

Look at verse 16. In all what you see of Ruth's heart, she's saying here, entreat me not to leave you or turn back from following after you. Wherever you go, I will go.

And then just look at the bottom of that verse, and your God shall be my God. Now there's something deep that has changed in the heart of this foreigner. She didn't start out in the people of God at all, but she's making that decision.

God is her God. And it is not easily moved because Naomi says to her, go ahead, your sister-in-law's gone back, you go back to her. You see, when God does the work, it goes so deep, and it leads to life change.

And it's a lifetime commitment, because she even goes on to say, will you die? I will die. It wasn't like I'm going to go to Bethlehem, investigate this, and see how it goes. There is that sense of this is firm and total and complete.

And that's one of the reasons why I love the character of Ruth. You see so many virtues in her. And on this Mother's Day, ladies, we see those kind of virtues in you.

You see in Ruth the virtue of how she is so industrious. And when Carol was reading that list of all the things that you ladies do, I was thinking, well, I'm not multitasking, and whoa, that looks like a lot to me. Well, Ruth is a very industrious person, as we'll see as we go on through the book.

And it is wonderful just to study how the Lord is at work in her. She is a person who truly loves the Lord, and she loves her mother-in-law. Whoa, isn't that the one that all the jokes are made about? Mother-in-law, daughter-in-law, all those exchanges and difficulties and struggles that people go through.

But look at the character of Ruth. It's her commitment to God that makes that commitment to Naomi what it is. It's the work of God in Ruth's heart that makes her able, as it were, to go on all the way through all of her life with Naomi and with the people of God.

God, you see, had changed her heart, and that's the issue, isn't it? And when He changes our heart, there's a new home. Now, you heard me say I'm an immigrant. You heard me say when I went back to Ireland, the emotions were stirred.

But that's nothing near the stirring that's going on in my heart and mind at the moment, because someday, who knows when, could be today, I'm going to immigrate again, and I'm going home. Yeah, I'll add to that. Whoa! You know, there are times in life when we get hurt by things, but when I go home, there's no more hurt.

There are times in life when I struggle with things and have a hard time getting victory, but when I go home, my real home, it's all gone. But we spend so much time holding on to the things here and trying to convince each other, be reasonable, see it my way, when really what we need to do is to live at that old cross and say, Lord, let me see it your way. I love that song that we sang this morning, don't you? He gives and takes away.

And when it's dark, I'll still say, blessed be the name of the Lord. Ruth made a decision to go to God and the people of God. She has a new master.

She has a new desire, a new lifestyle, and a new love. There's a fourth and last decision, and then we'll wrap it up. The people of God make a decision here in Ruth chapter 1 as well.

And, you know, you don't see a lot of the flesh in their decision. If somebody went away from us for 10 years and kind of snubbed us and had nothing to do with us, wouldn't talk to us, didn't write to us, didn't

care about us, what would we do when they showed up on the doorstep destitute? That's what we need to do, still love them. There's nothing in the people of God that says, oh, look what the cat dragged in.

Or as one lady said to her sister-in-law in a revival meeting a few years ago, when the sister-in-law apologized to her, she said, well, it's about time! There's nothing of that in the decision that the people of God make. They say, is this Naomi? And you see, there's a welcome there. And there's nobody who says, who's this? Oh, your name's Ruth.

Where do you come from? You're sure different. There's a welcome there. And when they come, they come at the beginning of barley harvest.

I love the sovereignty of God. I could preach my whole life every Sunday on the fact that He is so sovereign. Look at the positioning of this.

Starving people come home, but they don't come home when there's no crops, and they don't come home where there's no provision. And next week, we look into how God provided for every need that they had. So the people of God made a decision, and there's no hesitation in receiving Naomi home, and there's no hesitation in receiving Ruth.

And if you're here this morning, and you know the Spirit of God is saying to you, it's time to go home to the people of God, and the place of God, and the way of God, there's no hesitation in saying there's a welcome at the throne of grace. And if you're here this morning, and you've no relationship with Jesus, nor with His people, there's no hesitation in saying there's a welcome. Forty years plus, it'll be forty-one this August, have I walked with Jesus, and I've never yet seen one person go to Him and say, Lord save me.

And He said, can't do it. Won't do it. Not interested in you.

No. There's a welcome there. And when we just draw near to Him, it's so wonderful to see the way that He works things out in all of those difficulties, and divisions, and hardships.

Oh, what a thing to go home to Him and say, Lord, need your touch. So, let me summarize. Decisions are vital, aren't they? Even more so than what kind of bacon and eggs you have.

There needs to be a decision where you'll spend eternity. Need to make a decision that He will be my God. I hope this morning you can say, I've done that.

I know that. Some of us today maybe need to go to the Lord and say, Lord, I'm returning to you because I need victory. I need victory over sin and self.

I need victory over the things that are tearing me apart and pulling me down. I need victory over this old flesh that wants its own way. I need, Lord, even more of you.

And for some, maybe you're wrestling with this thing of baptism. It's good just to take that obedient step and say, yes, Lord. For 41 years, I've been trying to learn the difference between the sheep and the goats.

The sheep just say, yes, Lord. The goats, of which sometimes I feel my foot over there, say, yes, Lord. But it needs to be just, yes, Lord.

One chose to return to God. One chose to trust God. One chose to go back.

The people of God chose to receive them, to love them, and to cherish them. See what a wonderful little book this is. It has so very much in it.

Let's just pause and pray. My time is gone, and I don't want to ruin anybody's Mother's Day lunch because the pastor is kind of cold-tongued and hard-shouldered on those kind of circumstances. So, let's pray.

Father, as we look in your Word this morning, we see these various decisions. And you're talking to us this morning about decisions. And Lord, we can choose to be offended.

We can choose to fight for our rights. Or we can choose to trust you to work out all the details of our whole life for time and eternity. This morning, as we are bowed before you, I just would encourage you from your heart, what is it that you would ask God for this morning? What decision is it that you would make today to draw near to Him? And He will draw near to you.

And just as we are at the place of prayer, I'm just going to close and pray for us as a people. Father, we love you, and you first loved us. And we're grateful for the moving and working of your Spirit, for the quiet and gentle touch of your hand this morning in this worship service.

Grateful for the goodness of a Savior, your Son, Jesus Christ. Grateful for the opportunity to be able to decide today just to take all the issues of life to Jesus and ask you, Lord, have your way. Be real in our hearts, in our lives, in our homes.

Minister your grace to us and through us and enable us to walk with you. Amen. In Jesus' name, we pray.

Amen.

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