

THE RESCUE

SETTING CAPTIVES FREE



DEE BRESTIN

THE RESCUE

Discipleship Unlimited

P.O. Box 145

Gatesville, TX 76528

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 Biblica. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved. Scripture quotations marked msg are taken from *The Message*. Copyright © 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002. Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group. Scripture quotations marked nlt are taken from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright 1996, 2004. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Wheaton, Illinois 60189. All rights reserved. Scriptures quotations marked esv are taken from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

ISBN: 978-1-4507-7668-4

Copyright © 2011 Dee Brestin

This book may be reproduced in its entirety in any form for noncommercial use. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form for commercial use without permission in writing from the copyright holder.

Printed in the United States of America.



*Dedicated to the One who sets the captive free—
Jesus, our Redeemer and Rescuer*

A companion DVD that includes teaching from Dee Brestin and testimonies from Karla Faye Tucker and Linda Strom is available through discipleshipunlimited.org.

The book *Karla Faye Tucker Set Free*, by Linda Strom, is available in cases of eighty. Chaplains and shelters can receive the book directly by sending an email to info@1687foundation.com.

CONTENTS

Welcome	vii
Session 1: The Big Picture	1
Session 2: The Ashes of Our Past	9
Session 3: When Pain Comes into Our Lives	19
Session 4: Finding a Healthy Family	29
Session 5: The Psalms of Lament	39
Session 6: The Rescuer	51
Session 7: A Covering, a Court Date, and a Celebration	61
Discussion Questions to Accompany DVD	73
Leader's Helps	79

WELCOME

Welcome to *The Rescue*. This book is especially for women who long to be set free. You may be in prison, in a shelter, or feeling hopeless because of the wounds of life. God sent Jesus Christ to be your rescuer.

In fact, we are all in “prison” in some way, but often those who have been in physical prisons or shelters are more aware of how we each can be held captive. Jesus said He came “to set the captive free.” He is reaching out to you with hope. He is near to the brokenhearted.

The Rescue will take you through the book of Ruth in the Bible. Ruth and her mother-in-law, Naomi, lost everything. Even so, God came to their rescue, giving them a hope, a future, and a legacy. He can do the same for you.

In this study, I sometimes refer to Karla Faye Tucker. Karla was a prisoner who was transformed by the love of Christ. Her radiance and joy impacted every person who met her. Though Karla was executed for her crime, her legacy lives on. If you are able to watch the DVD series that accompanies this study, you will hear from her. She is very much like Ruth. The DVD also includes powerful teaching from Karla’s mentor, Linda Strom, and worship with Terry Strom.

I want you to know that God is real and has the power to change lives—to give you a hope and a future. God loves you deeply just as you are, yet too much to let you stay as you are. He wants to rescue you from despair and destructive habits. He wants to set you free.

SESSION 1

THE BIG PICTURE

Have you ever tried to do a five-hundred-piece puzzle without looking at the cover? It's so much easier to look at the cover first! That is why we are beginning the first Session by looking at the big picture of the book of Ruth *before* we look at the details.

You will meet two women—Naomi and Ruth—who, like you, experienced the terrible feeling of being stripped of everything that mattered to them. They lost their homes, husbands, children, dignity, and sense of God's presence.

Yet they were also deeply loved by God. He opened their eyes to His love and performed a mighty rescue for them. The word the Bible uses for God's rescue is "gospel," and it is the central message of the whole Bible. "Gospel" means "good news"—the good news that Jesus can rescue us from our guilt before God and from the power of sin in our lives. Every single person, inside or outside of prison, is trapped in different ways, but Jesus came to set us free!

Let me make one thing clear: Jesus came to give us, not good *advice*, but good *news*. Every other religion throws a drowning person a book that gives him advice on how to swim, but Christianity sends a Rescuer. That's what Jesus became when He left heaven in order to come to earth and die for us. He died the death we each should have died in order to pay our penalty and set us free. It is as if we are standing in front of our judge and he makes the shocking statement that we are getting the death penalty. But then he stands up and says, "But I will take this punishment. I will die in your place. She can be released because I am taking the full penalty." Though no judge would or could do this, that is what our Savior, Jesus Christ, did for us. The Bible tells us, "We have an advocate who pleads our case before the Father. He is Jesus Christ, the one who is truly righteous. He himself is the sacrifice that atones for our sins—and not only our sins but the sins of all the world" (1 John 2:1-2, NLT).

Because of what Christ did, you can be forgiven, transformed, and set free. That's the good news of the gospel. Every person needs rescuing, but not all *realize* they need rescuing. Some trust in themselves, and they are the ones who are truly in trouble, for they refuse their only lifeline. Jesus is close to the brokenhearted and to those who realize they need help. This is what we see in the story of Ruth. God's people were far from God, ignoring Him. But God brought in Ruth—an outsider, a woman who came from a shameful people, but a woman who was broken before God. She reached out for God's lifeline in simple, pure faith and was transformed. Then God used Ruth to impact God's people and generations to come.

In the same way, Karla Faye Tucker, though she had a shameful past, realized her need and grabbed God's lifeline. Karla Faye was a contemporary Ruth, and as with the biblical Ruth, God rescued Karla and set her free.

◆ **ICEBREAKER:** Before you begin this study, share your name and what you hope to receive from reading *The Rescue*.

Bible Lesson

To prepare for your first group discussion, you will be reading the four chapters that make up the little book of Ruth. You will probably find things in it that you don't understand, but don't worry about that. Right now we're just trying to get the big picture. Later we'll look more carefully at the book and you will understand the details better. There is so much in this little book that will give you power and hope. (By the way, when you see a reference such as "Ruth 1:16," it means you are to look at the first chapter of the book of Ruth and then find the sixteenth verse in that chapter.)

Before you read, ask God to help you. In order to understand the Bible, you need God's help, so ask Him to help you.

Ruth 1: Stripped

Read Ruth 1. (This is the first chapter of Ruth—a book about one fourth of the way into the Bible. It comes right after the book of Judges.)

1. According to Ruth 1:1, when did this story happen and what hard thing

was happening in Bethlehem? Have you ever had a time in your life when you had trouble getting enough food? Share something about it.

2. Naomi was originally a wealthy woman in Bethlehem, but she went on to suffer losses. What losses can you find in the first five verses?

3. When you lose your home and your family, you can feel a loss of identity, of dignity. Have you ever felt that kind of pain? If so, share something about it.

4. Ruth also had losses. Though she was married for ten years, she had no children. She also went on to leave her home and her family. What else did she lose, according to Ruth 1:5?

5. The two daughters-in-law—Orpah and Ruth—made different choices when Naomi tried to send them back to Moab. Describe what each woman chose.

9. When Ruth came home with her arms full of grain, and Naomi realized that God had led her to encounter Boaz, Naomi underwent an attitude change. See if you can find it in Ruth 2:19-22.

10. Have you experienced the kindness of Christ toward you in any way? If so, share about that.

Ruth 3: Naomi and Ruth Respond to the Rescuer

Though Christ is always the One who reaches out to us first, our response is important. In this passage there is a scene that probably won't make much sense to you now, but we will explain it thoroughly later. What you can glean from this chapter now is how each of these two women responded to Boaz, our Christ figure.

Read Ruth 3.

11. How do you see Naomi coming out of her depression and coming up with a plan in Ruth 3:1-4?

12. How did Ruth respond to Naomi's plan, according to Ruth 3:5-6?

13. The complicated scene in Ruth 3:7-15 will be made clear later. Ruth was not having sex with Boaz (though a quick reading could make you think that). She was reaching out to him, asking for help. It is beautiful and symbolic. What does Boaz promise her, and how does he praise her?

14. Jesus is eager for you to come to Him and humbly ask for help. Remembering that Boaz is a Christ figure, how do you think Jesus would respond to you if you did?

Ruth 4: The Rescue

Again, there is symbolism in this chapter that you will understand better later. But for now, it is important to know that the “nearer kinsman” was a man who lacked moral character and who could have ruined the rescue. But God was not going to allow that to happen, as you will see.

Read Ruth 4.

15. How do you see Boaz taking action to rescue Ruth and Naomi?

16. Find the blessing that came to Ruth as a result of the action of Boaz in Ruth 4:13. What was it?

SESSION 2

THE ASHES OF OUR PAST

In this Session, you will learn the background to the story of Ruth. It took place in the days of Judges, in which God’s people kept “doing what was right in their own eyes” and getting into trouble. They were sorry about the consequences of their sin but not sorry that they had hurt God.

When you experience the joy of intimacy with God, you cherish His presence and do not want to push Him away. The Holy Spirit is a person, and just as we can grieve a person and make him want to back up from us, we can do that to the Holy Spirit. True repentance keeps us in the presence of God.

Also, when we don’t truly repent, we keep repeating our foolish cycles, and our chains get tighter. For a biblical example of this, you may want to read the book of Judges to see how far from God His people became—the ending of the book is a brutal murder. When we repent for consequences and not for God, we get so that we can no longer hear Him.

❖ **ICEBREAKER:** What is one of your favorite romantic rescue stories? (A movie, a fairy tale, a book...) Why did you like it?

Bible Lesson

Many people think the Bible is a book of rules. The truth is that, while the Bible has rules in it, it is not a book of rules. It is a true love story about a wonderful Rescuer named Jesus.

Other people think the Bible is a series of stories, each story teaching a different moral lesson. That view is not quite right either. Though there are many stories in the Bible, they are really each just a piece of one great story. This is the story of Jesus, our mighty Rescuer who left His home in heaven to come and pay the price for us, so that we might be transformed. It is a story filled with love and adventure. Every single book

of the Bible, from Genesis at the beginning to Revelation at the end, points to this great story and to this wonderful Rescuer: Jesus Christ.

Still others see the Bible as a book of heroes—men and women such as Abraham, Moses, Boaz, David, and Mary. Again, not exactly right. The Bible has heroes in it, but every one of these heroes failed. Together, then, they point to the one Hero who never fails: Jesus Christ.

The Bible is all about Jesus and how He longs to rescue us.

Every single book of the Bible shows us how men and women have messed up their lives and yet God keeps coming to rescue them. He knows we are chained in sin, partly because of what happened to us in our pasts, partly because of the choices other people made, but also because of our own choices. No matter how the chains got there, Jesus can break them and set us free.

Today we will look at the background for the book of Ruth. We will find that both Naomi and Ruth were in chains—chains that came as a result of their past and as a result of their own choices. Yet in the Lord, each was set free. When they surrendered their lives to the Lord, He turned their ashes into beauty. Jesus delights in reaching out to the poor, the outcast, and the forgotten and turning their lives into something beautiful.

He can do this for you, too.

The prophets of the Old Testament all pointed to the day when the Messiah, Jesus Christ, would come. They prophesied that He would come to earth twice. He came on that first Christmas to be our Savior, and one day He will return to take His children who are living on the earth home to live with Him forever. We live between the first and second comings of Jesus.

When Jesus lived on the earth the first time, He opened the scroll of Isaiah (one of those Old Testament prophets) and read from it to explain *why* He had come. Here is a part of what He read:

*The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me,
because the Lord has anointed me
to preach good news to the poor.*

*He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
 to proclaim freedom for the captives
 and released from darkness for the prisoners,
 to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor
 and the day of vengeance of our God,
 to comfort all who mourn,
 and provide for those who grieve in Zion—
 to bestow on them a crown of beauty
 instead of ashes,
 the oil of gladness
 instead of mourning,
 and a garment of praise
 instead of a spirit of despair.
 They will be called oaks of righteousness,
 a planting of the LORD
 for the display of his splendor. (Isaiah 61:1-3)*

1. Why, according to this passage, did Jesus come to earth? Circle all the relevant phrases you can find.
2. How can you see in the above passage that Jesus delights in taking those who are poor, downtrodden, and captive and transforming them? Which phrases in the passage are most meaningful to you, and why?

The Ashes of Naomi's Life

Naomi originally lived in Bethlehem, and she was one of God's people the Israelites. Yet it is possible to say you belong to God and yet live a double life. Many people may *say* that Jesus is their King, but the truth is, they are their own kings. The name of Naomi's

husband, Elimelech, meant “my God is King.” Yet, as you will see, that is *not* how Elimelech lived. He did what seemed right in his own eyes. If we are honest, every single one of us lives that way to a degree, and God longs to rescue us from that double life, that foolish way of living. During the time of Ruth, God’s people were living for themselves, and it led to the ashes of death and destruction.

In order to understand the ashes of Naomi’s life, you need to understand the times in which God’s people were living.

3. The book right before the book of Ruth is the book of Judges. Look at the last verse of Judges and explain how God’s people were living.

Repentance is taking a U-turn. Someone who was going one way (living for himself or herself) stops, turns around, and goes the other way (living for God). For example, a thief stops his stealing and starts work for a living. Or a person who tears God and other people down with her words stops this destructive behavior and starts praising God and saying things to others that will build them up. When we do the U-turn, this is a “Jesus repentance.”

There is also a shallow repentance that may look to an outsider like deep repentance, though time reveals that it is not. In shallow repentance you are not sorry that you have hurt God but rather are sorry that you are suffering from the consequences of your wrong choices. So you turn, not fully but partially, and then return to your old ways when the consequences are removed. This is a “Judges repentance.” You go back to living for yourself.

Every single one of us has been guilty of “shallow repentance.” I know I have. For example, there was a time in my life when I habitually told lies. I would lie to make myself look better. I would lie to get out of trouble. If I got caught, I would stop for a while. My concern was not that I had grieved God and was causing a rift between myself and Him, but that I was experiencing the negative consequences of my lying. This

was shallow repentance. Shallow repentance did not set me free. The chains of lies got tighter, the guilt heavier.

But as I grew in my love relationship with Jesus, I saw how this lying hurt Him. I also began to have confidence in His love for me, so my need to make myself look better to people began to lessen. I longed to be close to God. So I began to repent truly, making the U-turn (deep repentance). I was amazed at the new joy in my heart.

The Bible says, “Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death” (2 Corinthians 7:10). In the days of Judges, God’s people were practicing “worldly sorrow,” or “Judges repentance.” When they suffered consequences, their turn was partial. And then when the consequences were removed, they returned to doing what was right in their own eyes. Each time this happened, they spiraled further downward. Each time, the chains of their sin got tighter. Each time, they experienced more destruction, more pain, and more regret.

4. From your own life, if possible, give an example of shallow “Judges repentance” and then an example of deep “Jesus repentance.”

5. **Read Judges 2:8-13** and describe the behavior of God’s people after the death of Joshua, a godly leader of God’s people.

6. **Read Judges 2:14-15** and describe the consequences that God brought into the lives of His people.

7. Read **Judges 2:16** and describe God's mercy toward His disobedient people.

8. When the consequences for their bad behavior were removed, how did God's people respond, according to **Judges 2:17**? Was this shallow repentance or deep repentance? Explain.

In the above verse, the New International Version says that the people "prostituted themselves to other gods." In the Bible, turning away from God to other things is described as infidelity. God is our one true "Husband," the One who really cares for us and can meet our deepest needs. Yet often we turn to other "gods." Probably these gods aren't statues, as they were in Bible times, but they might be the gods of greed, sexual immorality, or drugs. They might even be good things, such as a husband, children, or a home, that we allow to become ultimate things to us, when only God should be first in our lives. As we hold these things up as most important to us, we are prostituting ourselves to other gods.

When God is truly our King, and we are surrendered to Him, He may or may not bless us with a husband, children, a home, or an early parole. But He will provide for us, protect us, and meet our deepest needs. When we run to other gods, we break His heart because He knows we are making ashes of our lives.

9. Give an example of how you have turned to another "god" and how it eventually made ashes of your life.

10. How does verse 17 show rebellion against God? How does verse 18 show deliverance from God? How does verse 19 show the cycle repeating?

The number seven in the Bible is significant. Whereas the number six is associated with falling short and with Satan, the number seven is associated with completion and with God. It certainly seemed a sign from God that the prison ID number given to Karla Faye Tucker was 777.

In the times of Judges, God allowed the sin cycle to happen seven times. In each cycle, the depravity deepened. The final episode included a terrible murder in which a woman was cut into twelve pieces.

That progression is true to life, isn't it? As cycles of sin repeat, the sin becomes greater and the power to resist becomes weaker. One commentator, Dr. A. C. Hervey, explained that each time we sin, it is as if our hearts get a little harder. It doesn't happen all at once but rather gradually. We eventually reach a depth of vileness that at one time would have seemed impossible. Resisting steadily at the beginning of sin and clinging to God is our only safety.

11. Have you experienced this downward spiral in your own life? If so, and if you are willing, comment on it.

When we continue to rebel against God, there is no limit to how dark and how imprisoned we can become. The book of Judges is a testimony to this. But then the book of Judges ends, and we have hope through the book of Ruth. God is going to use a surprising

person—an outsider, a woman, and a Moabite—to bring light to the darkness. Ruth was God's 777 in dark days, someone who was going to repent deeply. When you repent deeply, like Ruth and Karla did, there is no limit to how beautiful and impacting your life can become.

But to appreciate Ruth's transformation, we must first look at the ashes in which she began.

The Ashes of Ruth's Life

It is an act of God's mercy that Scripture doesn't go into detail about Ruth's life before He rescued her. Sometimes God chooses to cover our past to protect us from embarrassment. (In the same way, we might cover one another in love by not probing with questions, asking someone else why she is in prison or a shelter. Or if we know another's story, not to be the one to share it with others.) What we do know about Ruth's past is that she was a Moabite and that the Moabites were known everywhere as a wicked people.

Moab had religions, but they were terrible religions. Their temples had prostitutes who performed sexual acts in front of everyone. One of the gods of the Moabites was Chemosh, who demanded that the people sacrifice their babies on the fire. The religions of the Moabites were the opposite of Christianity. Instead of purity, there was impurity. Instead of mercy, there was murder. We don't know to what degree Ruth participated in all this, for God doesn't tell us—we are only told that she was a Moabite.

The Moabite nation had its beginnings in disgrace. God destroyed the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah because of their wickedness, telling Lot and his family to flee and not look back. He wanted them to forget the past and start a new life. Lot's wife, however, did look back, and so God turned her into a pillar of salt. Then Lot was alone with his daughters.

12. **Read Genesis 19:30-37** and describe how the Moabite nation began.

Moab became symbolic as a place of wickedness, of being far from God. This is important to understand, for there is a point in the story of Ruth where the two daughters-in-

law have a choice to make. They can choose to either return to their old way of life in Moab or go with Naomi to Bethlehem. And Bethlehem is symbolic of the place of God, for this is where Jesus Christ would be born. The prophet Isaiah also contrasted Moab with the city of beauty and purity God is building for believers—the heavenly city.

The books of the prophets are at the end of the Old Testament, beginning with Isaiah.

13. Read Isaiah 25:6-8 and write down everything you can find out about the heavenly place where all believers will one day live.

14. Read Isaiah's description of Moab:

*We've heard—everyone's heard!—of Moab's pride,
world-famous for pride—
Arrogant, self-important, insufferable,
full of hot air. (Isaiah 16:6, MSG)*

Why does pride keep us from God?

15. If you have a life sentence, why can you still have hope? What purpose can you have in prison? What hope do you have when this life is over?

Though a life sentence in prison is long, it is a drop in the bucket compared to eternity. Teresa of Ávila, who lived centuries ago, said that in heaven “the worst life on earth will seem like one night in a bad hotel.” If God could deliver Ruth out of Moab, and deliver Karla out of the wickedness of her life, He can deliver you.

16. What do you think you will remember from this Session, and why?

SESSION 3

WHEN PAIN COMES INTO OUR LIVES

If you have just joined the study, we are beginning our step-by-step study of the book of Ruth this week, as the last two sessions gave us background material. The important thing for you to know is that the story begins with God's people in what is called the Promised Land. God's people were not living close to Him but rather were doing "what was right in their own eyes." They were guilty of violence, sexual immorality, and other sins, and all of it broke the heart of God. God sent a famine to bring His people to repentance. Some did repent, but others tried to get around God.

This Session is about what happens when pain comes into our lives. Sometimes pain is a result of living in what the Bible calls a fallen world. When sin first came into the world, so did pain, sorrow, and death. Before sin, there were no hurricanes or diseases or wars. Yet now we live in a pain-filled world. No one, not even the most godly people, escape suffering.

Sometimes pain is a result of other people's choices. For instance, Naomi was married to a man who made bad choices, and those bad choices affected her. But the same kind of thing happens in our day. As you know, many people in prisons or shelters grew up in dysfunctional homes and had a hard start in life.

But then, sometimes pain is a result of our own choices. In the story of Ruth, we see how Elimelech responded poorly to pain and made a bad choice that led to his family getting entangled with worshipers of foreign gods and his dying in a foreign country. He tried to get around God, but no one can ever do that. We bring pain into our own lives when we try to get around God.

How should we respond to the inevitable pain of life? This is where we will begin our study today.

❖ ICEBREAKER: Over thirty years ago, Joni Eareckson Tada had a diving accident that left her paralyzed. Joni now lives in a wheelchair, yet she glows with the love of Christ. She says that she came to the point where she was glad for the pain, for it brought her close to Christ. As Joni writes, “God’s purpose for us is not so much to make us healthy, wealthy, or even happy (though it pleases Him to do so) but to make us holy—like Jesus.” Can you share a way that God has brought good out of your suffering?

Bible Lesson

A Foolish Response to Pain

Today you will see the choice that Elimelech made when faced with painful circumstances. On the surface, it may not seem wrong to flee a land in which there is a famine. But what is important to know is that this famine was sent by God in order to cause God’s people to realize they couldn’t be their own kings but rather needed Him to be their King. God had led His people out of slavery and into the Promised Land. Bethlehem was a part of that land.

God had promised this:

If you faithfully obey the commands I am giving you today—to love the LORD your God and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul—then I will send rain on your land in its season, both autumn and spring rains, so that you may gather in your grain, new wine and oil. I will provide grass in the fields for your cattle, and you will eat and be satisfied. (Deuteronomy 11:13-15)

Along with that promise, God gave them a warning if they turned to other gods. “Then the LORD’s anger will burn against you, and he will shut the heavens so that it will not rain and the ground will yield no produce” (Deuteronomy 11:17).

You may be thinking, *To what other gods were these people in Bethlehem turning?* We don’t know. They may not have been literal gods. In fact, if we think of “other gods” as just being stone statues, we miss the point.

As we saw in the last Session, a “god” can be anything we put in the place that rightfully

belongs to the one true God. And the most frequent other god we turn to is *ourselves*. Instead of allowing God to be our King, we are our own king, our own god. We do what is right in our own eyes. We mess up not only our own lives but also the lives of people we love.

This is the situation in the opening of Ruth. God's people were far from Him and had replaced Him with themselves. They were doing "what was right in their own eyes." God wanted them to respond to the pain He was bringing into their lives with true repentance. He wanted them to make a U-turn—to stop being their own gods and to surrender to Him. But Elimelech, who was the head of his family, must have thought, *I can get around this pain. I can get under this pain. I don't have to do it God's way. I'll just take my family to Moab, where there is food. I know Moab is filled with evil, but I'll just stay a little while . . . just until we can get on our feet.*

That's such a common response to pain. Many who are in prison think, *I can get around this pain. I can get under this pain. I'll just retreat within myself. I don't want to get involved with those Jesus freaks. One day I'll get out.* If they do get out of prison and are faced with the hard work of finding new friends and a job, they find it a struggle. They think, *I can get around this pain. I can get under this pain. I don't have to do it God's way. I'll just go into prostitution or back to my old boyfriend or use drugs for a little while.* In effect, they're saying, "I'll just go to Moab for a while."

Read Ruth 1:1-2.

1. Scripture is so deep and rich. Each phrase is filled with meaning. Take some time with each phrase in verse 1. Think about what you've studied so far from other passages, background, and teaching. Write down any observations you have. (It can be as simple as "There was a famine.") Writing down observations helps you to see more.

2. Name the members of Elimelech's family, according to verse 2.

It is interesting that this verse keeps saying “the name of.” You might want to reflect on the meaning of the names of the individuals in Ruth:

- Elimelech = “My God is King”
- Naomi = “Sweet” or “Pleasant”
- Mahlon = “Sickness”
- Chilion = “Pining” or “Failing”
- Ruth = “A woman friend (or companion)”
- Orpah = “Stiff-necked” or “Double-minded”
- Boaz = “In him is strength”

Meanwhile, the name Bethlehem means “House of bread,” and as we have seen, it is symbolic of a place that is close to the heart of God. This is the town in which Jesus Christ would be born. By contrast, Moab is symbolic of a place that is far from God. Some believers left Bethlehem, but others, like Boaz, stayed. They repented, struggled, and then saw God provide.

3. What does a journey from Bethlehem to Moab symbolize? What might that look like in your life? What truth do you need to speak to your soul when “Moab” tempts you? (Imagine Moab to be meth, prostitution, revenge, an old boyfriend who has repeatedly hurt you—anything that might give temporary relief but then increases bondage.)

Consequences of Foolish Choices

The consequences of Elimelech’s choice to go to Moab were severe for both him and his family. To help you understand this better, note that God had told His people not to intermarry with those who worshiped other gods. He wanted believers to marry believers. So, speaking of the unbelievers, He told His people, “Don’t marry them: Don’t give your daughters to their sons and don’t take their daughters for your sons—before you know it they’d involve you in worshiping their gods, and GOD would explode in anger, putting a quick end to you” (Deuteronomy 7:3-4, MSG).

4. Read Ruth 1:3-5.

A. What happened to Elimelech? (See verse 3.)

B. What choice did each of the sons make? (See verse 4.)

C. What happened to the sons after they married women who worshiped other gods? (See verse 5.)

D. How did all of this affect Naomi, even though she may not have been involved in their choices? (See verse 5.)

5. A wise older woman once said, “I’ve found that often the wrong choice makes life easier at first but then leads to tremendous pain, whereas the right choice makes life harder for a while but then leads to peace and joy.” Do you agree with that statement? If so, can you give an example of a wrong choice that made life easier for a little while but then led to great pain? How about a choice that made life harder for a while but then led to peace and joy?

A Wise Response to Pain

Jesus told a story about two foolish sons. Neither one really loved his father for himself but only for what his father could give him. The younger son, tired of having his father

tell him what to do, asked his father for his inheritance so he could do with it as he wanted. His father gave it to him and, at first, life was fun for the younger son. He partied and bought whatever he wanted. Eventually, though, not only did his money run out, but also, as in the days of Ruth, there was a severe famine in the country. He had to go and work for a pig farmer, but he wasn't even allowed to eat what the pigs were eating. As Scripture says, "That brought him to his senses."

He said, "All those farmhands working for my father sit down to three meals a day, and here I am starving to death. I'm going back to my father. I'll say to him, Father, I've sinned against God, I've sinned before you; I don't deserve to be called your son. Take me on as a hired hand." He got right up and went home to his father. (Luke 15:17-19, MSG)

6. How did the younger son's foolish choice make his life easier at first but harder later?

7. Pain can either make us retreat from God or bring us to our senses. When the younger son went to his father, how did he humble himself? How did he not only *say* but *show* he was sorry?

8. **Read Luke 15:20-24.**

A. Describe how the father responded, according to verse 20.

B. How can you see deep repentance on the part of the younger son in verse 21?

C. Describe how the father responded, as described in verses 22-23.

9. God is like the father in this story. How will He respond to you if you repent deeply, making the U-turn from being your own queen to allowing Him to be your King?

This is a picture of the gospel. God sees you just as you are, and He longs to rescue you. If you are sad that you have hurt God and truly want to change, go running to Him and He will open His arms. The price for your sin has been paid by Jesus. You need only to receive it.

Why the Pain of Incarceration Can Lead to Enormous Blessing

Those who experience the pain of wrong choices and deeply repent are far better off than those who feel they have no need to repent. Scripture is clear—every person has put something in the place of God, every person needs to repent. It's just that those who experience pain, poverty, and "famine" may come to their senses, while those who experience health, wealth, and plenty may not.

Though we may envy those whose lives seem easier than our own, Jesus (surprisingly) often implied that those who are poor, who mourn, or who are brokenhearted have a better chance of hearing Him and receiving the good news. The outsider comes in, and the insider, if she feels no need to repent, will be shut out of the kingdom of heaven. Jesus told this to people in His famous Sermon on the Mount:

You're blessed when you're at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and his rule.

You're blessed when you feel you've lost what is most dear to you. Only then can you be embraced by the One most dear to you. (Matthew 5:2-3, MSG)

10. Have you ever considered that pain could be a gift that brings you to God? What do you think of that idea?

The older son in Luke 15 has the privileges of wealth and security because of the goodness of his father. Yet somehow this son thinks he earned it for himself, so he is actually much further from the kingdom than the son who comes home, broken and repenting.

How do you know if someone really knows the Lord? Deep repentance always leads to the fruit of the Spirit—to joy, to peace, to love. This is the kind of fruit you saw in Karla Faye and in Linda. The older son in this story has none of that.

11. **Read Luke 15:25-31.**

- A. How does the older son respond to the news that his father is celebrating because the younger son has come home?

- B. According to verse 28, what does the older son refuse to do? How does the father respond to his unrepentant older son in this verse?

C. Describe the older son. Do you see any fruit of the Spirit in him? What do you see?

D. Look carefully at the older son's response in verse 29. What do you learn about the older son's attitude from each phrase?

- Look!
- All these years I've been slaving for you . . .
- . . . and never disobeyed your orders.

The irony is that this view sees Christianity as a set of rules instead of as a loving relationship with the Father. The older son may be a pretty good rule keeper, but he breaks the first and most important commandment—to love God with all his heart. He doesn't love his father; he is just keeping the rules to get his father's stuff.

Also, because the older brother doesn't love God, he doesn't love His children either. How do each of the following statements show a lack of love for the younger brother?

- Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends.
- But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!

E. In **Luke 15:31-32**, how do you see grace on the part of the father toward his unrepentant older son?

F. Which son is deeply repentant and experiences joy? Which son is not repentant and experiences misery (and possibly, if he never repents, will experience the fire of hell)? Why?

If the Lord allows you to get out of prison, out of the shelter, and into the mainstream outside, you may find that in the church there are “older brothers” who won’t accept you. But the truth is, God warmly receives you, and you will find believers who will receive you as well. But there will always be “older brothers,” self-righteous churchgoers who are confident in their own righteousness and angry with those “younger brothers” to whom God has given grace.

Here are some tips for when you return to life outside of prison:

- Ask God for a safe place.
 - Look up Celebraterecovery.com on the Internet and see if there is a church doing the program in your area.
 - Be honest and vulnerable. If you are not welcomed, keep looking.
13. What is a wise response when pain comes into your life? What is a foolish response? Why?

14. What do you think you will remember from this Session, and why?

SESSION 4

FINDING A HEALTHY FAMILY

When God says “the sins of the fathers are passed on from generation to generation,” He is not cursing but observing. It is so hard to break free of the destructive cycle of our past. But in Christ, it is possible. Ruth broke free. Karla broke free. You can break free. You can be the one in whom the cycle *stops*.

If you are able to do some extra reading this week, read and meditate on Numbers 11 and Psalm 78. It is so easy to forget what God has done for us and to start remembering just the sweet things about our slavery, distorting the truth. For your heart and soul, write down some of the ways God has delivered you. Then write a letter to your child or someone else you care about, and tell her or him of these things.

Psalm 78 encourages us to tell our children what God has done so that “the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn.” Be a chain breaker!

❖ **ICEBREAKER:** When God adopts us as His children, that means we have a new family: sisters and brothers in the body of Christ. Share one reason you are thankful for this family. (If you have time, the discussion leader can say the name of each woman in the group, and two or three women can share a sentence of thankfulness for her.)

Bible Lesson

A high percentage of women behind the fences and in shelters grew up with emotional, sexual, or physical abuse. Many also have been involved with men who are abusive or addicted to alcohol or drugs. Not a pretty picture. Still, these families are their comfort zone, the place that feels familiar, and it’s hard to leave the familiar for the unknown. But a wise woman asks, “How is this working for me?” With God as her strength and her counselor, she leaves her comfort zone in search of a new family.

Karla and the Ruth of the Bible left their old families behind and found new families. In each story, you can see God's plan in that He drew each of these women to someone He provided. Yet still, they had to make the choice to let go of their old family and align themselves with the family of God.

When Karla and Ruth found a new family, they also found the support to keep walking in the light. Not only did this impact their own lives, but also it affected the lives of generations to come.

If you have had an emotionally destructive family or boyfriend, one of the wisest things you can do is ask God to give you a new family, a godly family. Look in the "family of God" for your new sisters, your new mother, your new friends. Be alert to the believers who come across your path, for God may be bringing them to you.

In Moab, there were no godly families. But when Naomi moved from Bethlehem to Moab to follow her husband, Ruth and Orpah saw how different a godly woman could be. When we first meet Naomi, she is in the midst of great grief, yet you can still see love in her character.

Read Ruth 1:6-13.

1. What decision does Naomi make in verse 6? And who is going with her, according to verse 7?

2. The fact that both of her daughters-in-law are choosing to leave their own land, their own families, and their own mothers to be with Naomi speaks loudly. How do you think they felt about Naomi, and why?

Naomi seems surprised by their choice. She is also concerned. We can't know for certain why, but it seems probable, according to her words, that she feared they might not be well accepted or even safe in Bethlehem. It was true that many Moabites had practiced

violence and immorality, and even God had warned the Israelites not to intermarry with them. There was also prejudice against the Moabites, the way there was against Germans after World War II. They were seen as a group rather than as individuals. Even those who were innocent could be in danger. Both Naomi and Boaz warn Ruth of those dangers, telling her to stay in the field of Boaz, for in someone else's field she could be harmed (Ruth 2:22).

Naomi obviously loves Ruth and Orpah, despite their past, despite their shame. No doubt she, as a widow herself, would love to have them accompany her to Bethlehem, but she fears it may not go well for them if they do. Naomi has experienced so many losses that she is beaten down and not really expecting help from the Lord. Her sending them back is a sacrifice, for she thinks they will be better off with their old families.

3. What does Naomi tell these young women to do, and how does she pray for them, in Ruth 1:8-9?

4. How can you see that there is love between Naomi and these two girls?
List anything you see in verses 8-10. Notice what she calls them.

5. In Ruth 1:11-13, what reasons does Naomi give for sending them back?
How do you see grief and fear influencing her?

6. Have you ever had the experience of reaching out to a Christian, hoping she would embrace you, and being rejected? If so, why might this be more about her past than about how she feels about you?

Two Daughters-in-Law, Two Opposite Choices

It's a passionate scene when Naomi tells the girls to go back to Moab. There must be shock on their faces. We know there are tears. But Naomi seems determined to send them back.

Why does she do it? Some are critical of Naomi. Surely it seems unwise to send them back to a land of false gods. I, too, was once critical of Naomi—until I was widowed far younger than I ever expected to be. Grief can make you feel frozen and withdrawn and cause you to make poor decisions. I knew, like Naomi did, that I wasn't fun to be around. Like Naomi, I wanted to give the people I loved a chance to go away. And yet I was glad for those who read between the lines, gave me grace, and stayed.

Chances are, you can understand too. And chances are, you have approached some women in the jail or prison with friendship and have been given the cold shoulder. Often grief makes you pull inward even though you desperately need friends.

I understand how easy it was for Orpah to go back after being sent away four times. It was the natural response. It was Ruth's response that was supernatural.

But let us look first at Orpah.

Orpah Goes Back to Her Old Family and Old Way of Life

The scene where Orpah goes back and Ruth chooses to go with Naomi is full of symbolism. Moab is symbolic of a land far from God, whereas Bethlehem, the place where Jesus would one day be born, is symbolic of a land near to God. Each daughter-in-law makes a different choice, with great consequences for her and for succeeding generations. You never hear about Orpah again, but Ruth's name goes down in history as a woman who, like Karla Faye, impacted people dramatically for good, even after her

death. The name Orpah means “double-minded,” which is also significant, as we can see how she is torn, wanting to stay with Naomi, and yet she goes back.

God tells us to honor our father and our mother (Ephesians 6:2). How do we do that if their lifestyles are harmful to us? How do we honor them without being hurt by them and pulled down with them? This is often one of the hardest problems for a believer with a painful past. It is possible to honor parents by speaking to them respectfully, by praying for them, and by forgiving them.

You are not dishonoring your parents by drawing boundaries, by keeping your distance, and by finding a new family in the family of God. In fact, if you are set free, they may be drawn to the Christ who set you free. But if instead you go back into the nest of addiction, abuse, and godlessness, as Orpah did, you are not honoring your parents, for you are encouraging them to continue without Christ. Together you will stay in the pit.

7. According to Ruth 1:7, what does Orpah do?

8. When you think about Orpah’s name meaning “double-minded,” try to imagine why she was pulled both ways. Why might she want to go with Naomi? Yet what fears might she have?

9. Can you identify with Orpah? Is there a part of you that wants to follow Jesus and identify with His people, yet another part of you is afraid to do it? If so, explain.

10. We never hear about Orpah again. What consequences do you think Orpah may have experienced as a result of returning to Moab (a place renowned for idol worship, violence, and sexual immorality)?

The following memory device can help you choose not to go back to old destructive ways. Think of this as CALM thinking.

- C: Catch your thinking before you act.
- A: Admit where your thinking can lead.
- L: Look for healthy alternatives.
- M: Make a responsible decision.

Memorize the above phrases for CALM thinking. Often doing a word at a time helps.

- C.
- C. Catch . . .
- C. Catch your . . .
- C. Catch your thinking . . .

And so on.

Now let's look at how CALM thinking works in practice. For example, let's say that in the past, when someone was mean to you, you would respond with anger. Then that would escalate into a full-blown fight that would upset you for days and lead to more trouble. What does God's Word, the Bible, say about that kind of situation?

*A soft answer turns away wrath,
but a harsh word stirs up anger. (Proverbs 15:1, ESV)*

11. With the above in mind, imagine that another inmate says, “You think you are so high and mighty, but you are a *!\$&@ fake.” Write how you would respond using CALM thinking.

C: What might you be thinking?

A: Where would an angry response lead?

L: What might you do or say that would be healing?

M: What would you do?

12. Think of a bad choice you made in the past that you might be tempted to repeat. What is it? With that choice in mind, write out a response for each part of CALM thinking:

C:

A:

L:

M:

Ruth Chooses a New Family and a New Way of Life

Ruth's commitment here is famous. Sometimes her words are used in weddings when the wife commits herself to her groom. But it was originally a commitment from a daughter-in-law to her mother-in-law, from a woman who had a destructive old family to someone who could help her connect to a new family.

Ruth has remarkable spiritual insight. She may know Naomi really wants her, despite trying to send her back. Or she may realize that Naomi represents her only hope for connecting with a new family.

13. What does Naomi tell Ruth to do in Ruth 1:15?

14. Since other believers may give you bad advice, as Naomi does in this case, how can you be sure you are hearing from God? What might you do before you go to another believer? What might you do after you get her advice?

15. Describe Ruth's commitment in Ruth 1:16-17. List every promise she makes.

16. How does Ruth's choice illustrate CALM thinking?

There is tension between Ruth and Naomi. I have often wondered how Ruth overcame Naomi's negative words. I have paraphrased their words and then imagined what Ruth might have been thinking, putting her thoughts in italics.

NAOMI: "Go back!"

RUTH: "Wherever you go, I will go." *Don't send me back to that land of darkness. You are my hope. I'm coming with you.*

NAOMI: "I have nothing to offer you! Don't you see? I'm empty. No man would want me. Even if he did, my womb is empty. I can't give you sons who could become your husbands."

RUTH: *Oh, Mother! You aren't empty. Your worth isn't based on being married or being a mother. Your worth is based on the fact that you have a relationship with the one true God. You are so different from any of the women I know in Moab. Don't send me away!*

NAOMI: "You aren't going to like being around me. Call me Mara!" (Mara means "bitter.")

RUTH: *You are hurting. I know what that feels like. So I'm not going to take this personally. I know that hurt people hurt people. They are like wounded animals that strike at anyone who tries to help them. But I'm not going anywhere. You need me, and I need you. I'm going to stand by your side. I'm going to love you. I'm going to restore you to the sweet mother-in-law who I once knew, who gave me grace, who loved me—even when I didn't share her faith, even when I couldn't give her grandbabies, and even when I wasn't her dream daughter-in-law.*

NAOMI: *Oh, my darling daughter. You'll tire of me. You may not get a warm reception in Bethlehem. You may regret this, Ruth, and want to go back.*

RUTH: "May the Lord do so to me, and more also, if anything but death parts you and me. Your people will be my people. Where you are buried, I will be buried."

NAOMI: "My God has dealt severely with me!"

RUTH: *Yes, but your God is real. Your God is alive. Your God is both just and merciful. “Your God will be my God.”*

17. What are your thoughts on what Ruth is thinking and why she is going with Naomi?

18. Obviously, Ruth heard from the Lord. His still, small voice was strong enough to help her stand against Naomi’s voice. Eight times in the Gospels, and eight times in the book of Revelation, the Lord says, “He who has ears, let Him hear.” How could you help yourself better hear from the Lord? (One way is CALM thinking. Think of others.)

19. Meditate on Matthew 16:25: “Whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it.” How do these words of Jesus illustrate the consequences of the choices made by Orpah and Ruth?

20. What will you remember from this Session, and why?

SESSION 5

THE PSALMS OF LAMENT

If you have just joined this study, we are looking at a rescue of two women in crisis—a woman named Naomi and her daughter-in-law Ruth. Today we will look especially at Naomi and how she was telling God about her desperation.

You see, Naomi had been living in Bethlehem with her husband and two sons when a famine came to Bethlehem. God wanted the husband to repent (to confess his sin and make a U-turn in his life), but instead Elimelech tried to get around God. He moved his family to a sinful land named Moab because there was food there. But the fact is, whenever you try to get around God, you get into deeper trouble. (In your life, Moab could represent drugs, an unbelieving boyfriend, stealing, prostitution, lying, or any number of other things.) “Moab” may relieve suffering short-term, but it leads to enormous suffering long-term.

When she and her husband moved to Moab, Naomi suffered many kinds of losses:

- Elimelech died.
- Her two sons married women who didn’t know God.
- The two sons died.

Naomi felt desperate and was open about her grief. She decided to leave Moab and return to Bethlehem. When her daughters-in-law wanted to come with her, she tried to send them back. (The Israelites and the Moabites had been enemies, and Naomi feared they might not be safe in Bethlehem.) Orpah went back, but Ruth was determined to stay with Naomi and made her famous statement of commitment (Ruth 1:16-17).

We are about to see the tide turn for Naomi and Ruth. Naomi’s God is a real God who heard her cry, saw Ruth’s faith, and came running. Many are critical of Naomi’s harsh words at the end of Ruth 1. But if you look closely at her words, you will notice that Naomi never says God was wrong. She simply says He was severe with her. She grieves honestly. The Lord is not angry with her.

That's the way He is. He truly wants a relationship with us. He wants to be our friend. And to have a true friendship with Him, we must be truly honest. So He wants us to tell Him how we really feel, and as long as we are respectful, He won't be angry. When we are honest, He can, in return, be honest with us and help us see what we have missed, comfort us, or sustain us.

What made Jesus angry again and again were the Pharisees (certain legalistic religious leaders) who pretended to have it all together when they did not. They were religious, but they didn't have a relationship with God. They weren't talking honestly to God, and they certainly weren't listening to Him. There was no true friendship there.

This is a mistake we should never make. And why do we hide our real thoughts from God? He knows them anyhow.

◆ ICEBREAKER: When you are in enormous pain, you can honestly tell God how you are feeling. He wants honesty from you because He wants intimacy with you. How do you feel when someone bares their soul to you, telling you things that they might be tempted to hide about themselves? Why does honesty increase intimacy?

Bible Lesson

Being Honest with God in Times of Grief

Ruth goes with Naomi all the way to Bethlehem. When they arrive, the women of Bethlehem come rushing out. Naomi has been gone for ten years. When she left, she left with her husband and two sons. She left as a wealthy woman. Now she is back, stripped of her possessions, her husband, and her sons. All she has is Ruth. She is grieving. She is lamenting. ("Lamenting" means you are sharing your sadness honestly.)

1. Read Ruth 1:16-22.

- A. After Ruth's commitment to Naomi, Naomi does not tell her to go back again. Why, according to verse 18?

- B. When the two women come to Bethlehem, the “whole town was stirred” because of them. Why was that, do you think?
- C. What question do the women of Bethlehem ask of Naomi? Why do you think they wonder if it is really Naomi?
- D. Naomi means “pleasant,” and Mara means “bitter.” What does Naomi ask the women to call her, and why? Find four different laments (honest statements of grief) in verses 20-21.
- E. How honest is Naomi being? Do you think this is wrong? Do you feel she is being disrespectful to God? Why or why not?
2. You may not have time to cover this question in discussion, but you might appreciate how other women in the Scripture lamented and how God came to them. Consider reading:
- A. Genesis 21:14-21
 - B. Genesis 29:31-35 (See how Leah changed by the fourth son.)
 - C. 1 Samuel 1:1—2:11

Not only women but also men such as David, Job, and Jeremiah show us the honest prayer life of lamenting and listening.

There is a book in the Bible that teaches us how to pray, and that book is the Psalms. Unlike the other books of the Bible, which are written *from God to us*, this book instead is written *by believers to God*. When you read Psalms, it is as if you are looking over the shoulders of people who are writing their prayers to God. Clearly the psalmists were truly friends of God, for they were honest with God. When they were full of joy, they

told the Lord. But when they were full of sorrow or confusion, they told God that as well. At these times, they told the Lord their honest feelings. Then, usually, there is a turn somewhere in the psalm where the psalmist, despite the fact that he doesn't understand what is happening, remembers the character of God and decides to trust Him. It seems that in the midst of his prayer the Holy Spirit came to him and helped him to trust, to accept the mystery of suffering.

3. **Read Psalm 13**, which is a psalm of lament. David's enemies were often military enemies. Our enemies are usually spiritual enemies—Satan and all his rulers of darkness. They come to us in our suffering and tell us that God doesn't care, that we will never change, that there is no hope.

- A. What honest feelings and questions does David have for God in Psalm 13:1-2?

 - B. What does David want God to do, and why, according to Psalm 13:3-4?

 - C. Now there is a turn in the psalm, for it seems the Spirit of God has answered David's cry for help, for light, for understanding. What does David determine to do in verses 5-6?

 - D. When you read this prayer, how can you see that the lament has value?
4. Using Psalm 13 as a model, pray your own prayer of lament.
- A. Write down what you are feeling. Write down any questions you have for God.

B. Write down what you long for God to do. True, He is more apt to give you strength or wisdom for your circumstances than to deliver you from them. But share your heart honestly with Him. As the Bible says, He is the friend who is closer than a brother.

C. If the Spirit shows you anything, brings anything about God's character to mind, or whispers anything to you, write it down. Wait on the Lord. His word to you may come later, so then come back and write it down.

When Naomi laments honestly, sharing that she feels empty, that she feels God was against her, He answers in a surprising way—by giving her a steadfast friend. It takes Naomi months to realize the friend she has in Ruth, though we can see it right away.

Sometimes, when we are grieving, we cannot see a blessing that is right under our noses. Ruth has just committed her whole life to Naomi, so Naomi isn't really "empty." Surely Naomi's words hurt Ruth, but Ruth doesn't respond in anger. Why? Perhaps because Ruth knows what it feels like to lose a husband, to lose a family—and she doesn't take it personally. Gloria Golreich (quoted by Judith Kates in *Reading Ruth*) writes:

Naomi's words wound Ruth. Naomi is not alone. Ruth is with her. And how can Naomi's heart be empty when Ruth's own heart brims with love for her? But with the wounding comes the balm of forgiveness. Ruth knows (because Naomi has taught her) that in friendship, one must look away, accept small hurts and probe the source of pain. The source of Naomi's pain is her terrible losses, her fear of a solitary and poverty-haunted old age. She has, for the moment, forgotten Ruth, but then she is human. Ruth accepts her as, indeed, Naomi has always accepted Ruth.

5. Read Ruth 1:20-22.

A. Why would Naomi's lament in Ruth 1:20-21 hurt Ruth?

Like Naomi, many of the people who come into prison are angry. They are angry that their lives have been so hard. For many, even most, they didn't grow up in loving and healthy families. Many have been treated harshly by the world. Many feel like Naomi and want to close down and send people away.

Karla Faye Tucker said that was understandable, but she realized that she had two choices. She could reach out to people, sometimes be hurt, but perhaps make a friend. Or she could withdraw, be lonely, and not have a chance of making a friend. Karla, like Ruth, chose to reach out and take a risk. Karla developed real friendships in prison—something that is rare. You can too, though it will mean you will also be hurt at times.

B. Why do you think Ruth is able to forgive and keep on loving Naomi?

C. Gloria Golreich, in the above quote, says, "In friendship one must accept small hurts and probe [or look deeply] at the source of pain." When you reach out to a fellow inmate and she is unappreciative or even unkind, how might this advice help you to be like Ruth and keep on loving?

Those Who Have Suffered May Be More Compassionate Friends

After my husband died, I found it was easier to be around those who had suffered deeply than those who had not. They understood. I felt like I had an invisible knife sticking out of my heart. Those who had suffered saw it, but those who had not would press up against me with pat answers and push that invisible knife in deeper.

Twenty years ago, long before I was widowed, I was much more judgmental toward Naomi. I was on a national radio program and said, "Naomi should have been kinder

to Ruth. I think Naomi was too dependent on her husband. It was time to get past her grief and appreciate Ruth.”

Then I lost my own husband. I buried him in Wisconsin, where I was planning to move one day. But then I came back to our home in Nebraska. When I entered our home, it was so quiet. Steve wasn't there. I went up to our bedroom and looked at the bed we had slept in together. Steve would never be there again. I was overcome with grief. Suddenly I understood Naomi's grief so much better. She had buried her husband in Moab and come back to Bethlehem. Memories came flooding back. I understood her lament. I was so much less judgmental of her sorrow.

Ruth never criticizes Naomi. She simply comes alongside and loves her. She forgives her for her harsh words, for she understands the source of her pain. It isn't that she doesn't love Ruth; it's that she misses her husband and sons so much.

6. When Naomi returned to Bethlehem, what kinds of memories might have come to her? Why might this have been a fresh reminder of her loss?

7. Explain how your own losses, your own sorrow, might help you understand why another woman in the jail or the prison or the shelter might be sad, irritable, or unfriendly. Choose one or two from the following list and describe how you felt.

- You had some kind of tremendous loss, like Naomi had.
- You were first put into jail or prison or had to go to a shelter.
- You were strip-searched.
- Your children were sick, or had a birthday or Christmas, and you couldn't be with them.
- Someone you loved on the outside needed you but you couldn't go to him or her.
- You came to your first Christian service in this facility.

or finds out a loved one has died—that is the time to come and bear her pain with her silently. And if she sends you away, as Naomi tried to do with Ruth, keep loving her, forgiving her, and bearing her pain. Bear it silently. When she speaks, listen and don't offer solutions. When she weeps, weep with her. When she is angry, don't judge her. Love her, as Christ has loved you.

That's what we see Ruth doing here. She doesn't criticize Naomi or even point out that she has just committed her whole life to her. She loves her, stays at her side, listens to her, and finds ways to show love to her.

11. Read Romans 12:15. How does this verse tell us to comfort those who are hurting? Has anyone done this for you? If so, explain how it comforted you.

Sometimes people who mean well actually increase your pain by telling you to look on the bright side. Read the following:

*Singing light songs to the heavyhearted
is like pouring salt in their wounds. (Proverbs 25:20, MSG)*

12. What do you learn from the above proverb about things that can actually make a hurting person feel worse? Have you experienced this or done this? Explain.

The One Who Was Abandoned Will Never Abandon You

There are going to be times when no person can comfort you. You are alone in your cell and no one really understands. But there is One who is with you, One who has experi-

enced tremendous suffering. He was unjustly accused, beaten, stripped, given the death sentence, and executed. He is the Man of Sorrows, who loves you and longs to comfort you. In the psalms of lament, if you look deeply, behind the psalmist, you can see Jesus. When Jesus was on the cross, paying the price for our sin, God the Father turned His face away from Him because His eyes are too pure to look upon sin. *Jesus was truly abandoned so that we would never be.*

13. Turn to **Psalm 22** to see the One who truly understands your suffering. Though recorded thousands of years before the crucifixion of Christ, this psalm accurately predicted what He would suffer for us.

A. In Psalm 22:1-2 we see a prophecy of the time when Jesus was on the cross bearing our sin and God the Father turned His face away. (See the fulfillment in Matthew 27:46.) How did Jesus express His honest feelings to God?

B. How did people respond to Jesus when He was on the cross, according to Psalm 22:6-8? (See the fulfillment of this prophecy in Matthew 27:39-44.) How is this similar to how people in our day respond to an execution?

When you do not have an awareness of your own sin, when you have not experienced the wonder of God's forgiving grace, you are likely to be more judgmental and unforgiving toward others. Of course Jesus had nothing to forgive—which makes the jeering even more amazing.

C. What did Jesus experience, according to Psalm 22:15? (The fulfillment can be seen in John 19:28.)

I believe that what Jesus thirsted for even more than water was a connection to His heavenly Father. He had been with His Father for all eternity, and this was the only time He was cut off from Him.

D. What prediction do you see in Psalm 22:16? (Check out the fulfillment in Matthew 27:27-31.)

E. What prediction do you see in Psalm 22:17-18? (See the fulfillment in Luke 23:34-35.)

F. Psalm 22:22-31 shows how God the Father did come and rescue Jesus after His crucifixion by raising Him from the dead. According to verses 27-29, how will everyone from one end of the earth to the other one day respond to Jesus Christ?

G. What will future generations do because of what Jesus did, according to Psalm 22:30-31?

14. Turn to Psalm 42.

A. What question does the psalmist keep asking his soul? What does he tell his soul to do?

B. When we are downcast, it is because our trust is in something besides Jesus. Where do you tend to put your trust other than Jesus?

- C. Why can you be confident that Jesus understands your suffering? Why can you be confident that He is able to help you?
15. What truths do you want to remember from this Session, and why?

SESSION 6

THE RESCUER

The whole Bible is about Jesus, our Rescuer. In the Old Testament, He is concealed; in the New Testament, He is revealed. In the book of Ruth, Jesus is concealed in the person of Boaz. The Old Testament gives us many “Christ figures” to help us understand what Jesus is like, and Boaz is a Christ figure. Boaz was what the Bible calls a “kinsman-redeemer,” and once you understand what this means, you will better understand why Jesus is hidden in Boaz.

In the days of Ruth, women were not valued. In fact, without a man, they were desperate. Often the only way they could provide for themselves was by begging or prostituting themselves. If a woman’s husband died and she had no sons to care for her, she faced hard times. This was the situation for Naomi and Ruth. They had returned to Bethlehem, but they were alone. They were desperate. There were no homeless shelters, but there were laws in God’s Word that were meant to help the widow, the stranger, the alien, and the poor.

The first law that helped them was the law of gleaning. Farmers were to leave some grain for the poor to pick up. It was the food pantry of biblical days.

The next law was the law of the kinsman-redeemer. You can read about it in Deuteronomy 25:5-10. God has always cared for the person who is alone, who is broken-hearted, and who has no one to help her. The book of Deuteronomy said that if a woman was widowed and alone, then the brother or close relative of the deceased should marry the widow, take care of her, and raise up the first son bearing the name of his brother who died, so that name would be carried on.

Jesus is our Kinsman-Redeemer.

He is our *kinsman* in that He is related to us. He is not just fully God, but He is also fully man. He didn’t come down from heaven in His glorified state. No, He lowered Himself to take on human flesh. He is like us; He is related to us. And why did He do

it? To rescue us. That's what the name Savior means—"one who saves, one who rescues."

At the first Christmas, the angels were amazed that Jesus would leave heaven and become a baby. When the shepherds were terrified by the bright light and the angels, an angel of the Lord told them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:10-11). The angel could have said, "Today in the town of David a kinsman-redeemer has been born to you."

Jesus is fully related to us. He is our kinsman.

Jesus is also our *redeemer*. "To redeem" means "to pay a price for something to rescue it." If, in hard times, you pawned your mother's wedding ring in a pawnshop, there would be only one way to get it back, or to redeem it. You would need to pay the price that the pawnshop owner required. Similarly, when Boaz "redeemed" Ruth, he had to first buy the property that belonged to the men in her family who had died. When Jesus redeems us, he doesn't pay with money but with His own blood (1 Peter 1:18-19).

Jesus is our Kinsman-Redeemer. He is hidden in the person of Boaz—Ruth and Naomi's kinsman-redeemer.

❖ **ICEBREAKER:** Every other religion tells you how to be good enough to pay for your sin. Christianity sends a Rescuer, One who pays for your sin. This is the Gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ. If you have come to understand this, share in one sentence how it makes you feel.

Bible Lesson

God heard Naomi's lament and saw Ruth's faith. Next, He was going to send a rescuer: Boaz. When God brought a famine to Bethlehem to bring His people to repentance, some men, including Elimelech, fled. But others repented and stayed. Godly men like Boaz.

Ruth was about to meet Boaz. This is an exciting part of our story—where the two women who need rescuing meet the rescuer!

1. **Read Ruth 2:1-2.**

A. Write down everything you can learn about Boaz from Ruth 2:1. How does this verse show both that he was a kinsman and that he had the means to be a redeemer?

B. In verse 2, what does Ruth ask of Naomi, and how does Naomi respond?

Naomi must have told Ruth about the following law: “When you harvest your land, don’t harvest right up to the edges of your field or gather the gleanings from the harvest. Don’t strip your vineyard bare or go back and pick up the fallen grapes. Leave them for the poor and the foreigner. I am GOD, your God” (Leviticus 19:9-10, MSG).

2. What does the above law tell you about God’s heart for the poor?

Not everyone in Bethlehem loved God or was living for Him. But Boaz was a godly man and therefore wanted to obey God and care about the poor.

3. Often you can tell a lot about the genuineness of people’s faith by how they treat the poor, the outcast, and the foreigner. How have you seen real love and faith in people in the shelter or prison?

4. **Read Ruth 2:3-7.**

A. What field did Ruth “happen to come to”?

- B. The first words that came out of Boaz's mouth were a prayer. What were they? How did his harvesters respond?
- C. There are love and compassion in the family of God that you rarely see in the outside world. Have you experienced this? If so, share about it.
- D. The harvesters had just asked God to bless Boaz. Verse 5 could be the quickest answer to prayer in the Bible. Who did Boaz see, and what was his question?
- E. What godly qualities did the foreman see in Ruth that he told Boaz about in Ruth 2:6-7?
- F. If you are hoping to find a godly marriage partner, what have you learned from this passage?

Amazing Grace

As you read about Boaz in this passage, look for Jesus as well, for He is hidden in Boaz. Just as Boaz protected and provided for the outcast Ruth, so does Jesus long to care for you.

5. Read Ruth 2:8-13.

- A. In verse 8, what does Boaz tell Ruth? Compare this verse to what Naomi tells Ruth later in Ruth 2:22. Why was it important that Ruth stay close to Boaz and the girls who worked for him?

- B. When you remember that Jesus is hidden in Boaz, what might He be saying to you through verse 8?
- C. How do you see Boaz both protecting and providing for Ruth in verse 9?
- D. If possible, share one way Jesus has been your Provider or Protector.
- E. How did Ruth respond to the “amazing grace” she received, according to verse 10?
- F. What choices that Ruth made impressed Boaz, according to verse 11?
- G. How does Boaz pray for Ruth in verse 12?
- H. What does Ruth say in verse 13? Describe her sense of wonder.

Perhaps the clearest evidence of someone truly being a child of God—a Christian—is that she has a sense of wonder at His grace. If you ask her if she is a Christian, her

response is something like “Yes! Isn’t it wonderful? Isn’t His grace amazing?” Instead of having a sense of self-righteousness, she has a deep sense of her sin and a wonder that it has been forgiven. Like the apostle John, she can hardly believe that though her sin was great, His love was greater so that He forgave her sin and adopted her as His child: “What marvelous love the Father has extended to us! Just look at it—we’re called children of God! That’s who we really are” (1 John 3:1-2, MSG).

Sometimes those who have been forgiven much and have deep repentance also have the greatest sense of wonder. We see this in Ruth and in Karla. John Newton, who wrote “Amazing Grace”—the song Karla signs to in our video—had been a slave trader. When he realized he had really been forgiven for his terrible deeds, he never got over his sense of wonder, and from that flowed the lyrics to “Amazing Grace.”

*Amazing grace, how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost but now am found,
Was blind but now I see.*

*’Twas grace that taught
my heart to fear.
And grace my fears relieved.
How precious did that grace appear
the hour I first believed.*

*Through many dangers, toils, and snares
we have already come.*

*’Twas grace that brought us safe thus far,
and grace will lead us home.*

*The Lord has promised good to me,
His word my hope secures.
He will my shield and portion be
as long as life endures.*

6. What do the above lyrics mean to you?

7. **Read Ruth 2:14-16.**

A. What further kindness does Boaz show Ruth in verse 14?

B. What does he tell the harvesters in verses 15-16?

Love Spilling Out

Karla often said, “Friendships in prison are rare.” Yet Karla developed deep and meaningful friendships in which she experienced the joy of answered prayer and the security of honest relationships.

Likewise, in our story, Ruth was deeply touched by the love of Boaz. Ruth now comes home to Naomi. Do you remember how Naomi kept saying, “I’m empty—empty”? Now Ruth comes home with her arms *full* of grain because of the amazing grace she has just experienced. When we are overflowing with the love of Christ, it spills out and affects others.

Karla’s love spilled out to others—not just to the women incarcerated with her, but also to her mentors and to her mentors’ families. Her mentor, Linda Strom, had a son, Terry, when Linda was a teenager. Terry grew up in the drug world. His sense of shame was powerful, and the chains of his habits were strong. But when Terry visited Karla in prison and saw her wonder, her freedom—he wanted that as well and thirsted for Christ. Christ not only set Terry free but also is now working through him to minister to inmates with his music, his heart, and his story.

In our story, I want you to see how Ruth’s transformation affects Naomi. Naomi had been convinced that God was against her. But now she sees that Ruth, out of all the fields in Bethlehem, ended up in the field of her near relative Boaz, a good and godly

When Naomi mentions that Boaz has been kind to Ruth's dead husband, she is referring to this law of the kinsman-redeemer. Naomi is thinking that Boaz may have been so kind to Ruth because he was planning to fulfill this law, marrying Ruth and raising up their first son in Ruth's dead husband's name. It seems Naomi may have told Ruth about this law.

11. Ruth was excited and added another detail to the story in verse 21.

What was it?

12. What advice did Naomi give to Ruth in verse 22? What did Ruth do?

(See verse 23.)

13. How closely do you listen to the advice of your mentors? Can you share some advice that has really helped you?

14. What do you think you will remember about this Session, and why?

SESSION 7

A COVERING, A COURT DATE, AND A CELEBRATION

For those of you who are new, this Bible study is called *The Rescue* because it is a picture of how Jesus Christ rescues us. When we are without hope, He comes. He hears our cries and He cares. In the story of Ruth and Naomi, we see a man named Boaz come to the rescue of two widows. Hidden in Boaz is Jesus Christ—One who hears our cry for help and comes, willing to pay an enormous price to rescue us. Boaz rescued Ruth by paying with silver and gold, but Jesus paid with His blood. Being “rescued” doesn’t necessarily mean you are rescued from your circumstances, but rather that you are rescued from the prison of sin.

In this session you will see that there was a court date that resulted in the desired outcome. Sometimes that doesn’t happen, as in Karla’s situation. But Karla was still set free—free from guilt, free from the chains of sin, free to know she would be with Jesus forever.

This world is full of storms and sorrow, but there is One who has your back. He longs to cover you with His love, His protection, and His mercy. This is the beautiful picture we see through Boaz, our Christ figure, in Ruth 3 when Ruth asked him to “cover her.” Then, in Ruth 4, we move to a “court date” and eventually a “celebration.”

❖ **ICEBREAKER:** Have you ever gone to court? How did you feel? Did your faith help you in any way?

Bible Lesson

Ruth 3 opens with Naomi urging Ruth to approach Boaz again. Naomi and Ruth, because of Ruth’s persistence, had formed a friendship in the midst of difficult circumstances. Naomi wasn’t particularly open to friendship earlier in their relationship, for

she was drowning in the pain of her life. That is how it is with so many women in jail and prison. When you reach out to women in prison, you will experience rejection, not because of you, but because that individual may have a storm inside her. But if you persist, like Ruth did, you may be blessed eventually with real friends—friends who will ease your loneliness, friends who will help you find strength in God.

This is what we see happening with Ruth and Naomi. When Naomi saw how God had provided for Ruth, her own faith that God was still good, still cared for them, and would still be with them was brought back to life. Now we see Naomi taking the lead, encouraging Ruth to move out in faith yet again.

Yet Naomi's instructions to Ruth sound strange indeed. In order to understand Naomi's plan, it is important to know a few things.

Boaz is the owner and foreman of a large barley field. It is the time of harvest, and thieves could easily come and steal the grain. So Boaz would sleep near the grain, guarding it. Naomi is urging Ruth to go under the cover of darkness and talk privately to Boaz. She tells Ruth to wash and perfume herself, then put on her best clothes and go. Naomi tells Ruth to wait until Boaz has gone to sleep and then lie down at the bottom of his mat and uncover his feet.

Maybe you are thinking, *Uh-huh, I know what that is going to lead to.* But even though it may seem incredible that this could be innocent, it is. Ruth is not going to seduce Boaz but to tell him of her need for him to be her kinsman-redeemer. She is going at night so that no one will know, because that way, if he refuses, he will not be embarrassed. Both Boaz and Ruth are godly persons of character. They fear God and want to do what is right. It is very clear in the Hebrew language that nothing immoral happened. We also know that Ruth was considered "a woman of excellence," which wouldn't have been the case had she been breaking God's laws of sexual purity before marriage.

When Ruth asks Boaz to "spread the corner of his garment over her," she is telling him that she needs him to cover her with the protection and provision of a kinsman-redeemer, to be a husband to her. He understands what she means.

This is a beautiful picture of what Jesus will do for us if we come to Him and ask Him to cover us with the protection and provision of a Kinsman-Redeemer. Though our sins may be as red as scarlet, his righteousness is like a snowy white blanket, covering us, protecting us from the wrath we deserve, and making us as beautiful as an innocent

bride. When I see videos of Karla Faye Tucker, she often reminds me of an innocent bride. That is the power of our Kinsman-Redeemer to transform us.

Read Ruth 3:1-6.

1. What two questions does Naomi ask of Ruth in verses 1-2?
2. What change do you see in Naomi? What factors do you think led to her change?
3. What is Naomi's plan? Find at least four things she tells Ruth to do. Do you think any of them felt risky to her? If so, why?
4. How does Ruth respond to Naomi in verses 5-6? Why do you think Ruth trusts Naomi?

When a person has trusted Christ and is growing in Him, you will see Him in her life—you will see more love, more grace, more forgiveness, more self-control. But each of us is still a sinner, still in process, and still battling temptation. Every single one of us will let others down. The only One who will never do that is Jesus. But that doesn't mean that only Jesus can be our friend. God has called us into fellowship with one another, called us to give one another grace and help each other grow in Him.

In a Jewish wedding ceremony, the groom takes a corner of his robe and covers his bride, symbolizing that he will cover her with protection and provision. When Ruth asks Boaz to spread the corner of his garment over her, to “cover her,” she is really telling him she is open to a marriage proposal. One translation puts it like this: “She said, ‘I am Ruth, your maiden; take me under your protecting wing. You’re my close relative, you know, in the circle of covenant redeemers—you do have the right to marry me’ ” (Ruth 3:9, MSG).

The phrase “protecting wing” or “corner of your garment” is also a picture of what Jesus, our Kinsman-Redeemer, does for us when we humbly come to Him. One psalmist tells us this:

*He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High
will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.*

*I will say of the LORD, “He is my refuge and my fortress,
my God, in whom I trust.”*

*Surely he will save you from the fowler’s snare
and from the deadly pestilence.*

*He will cover you with his feathers,
and under his wings you will find refuge;
his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart. (Psalm 91:1-3)*

5. In the above psalm, what pictures of covering can you find?

6. If you come to the Lord in true repentance and ask Him to cover you with His righteousness, what will He say? Explain your answer.

Read Ruth 3:7-13.

7. What does Boaz say to Ruth in Ruth 3:10? Find everything you can.

As women, we often think that what we need to survive and have meaning in life is a man. But if we are not wise, if we are not listening to God, the man we find can lead us into a lot of trouble. We need to give this to the Lord. He may provide a good man, or He Himself will be “our husband” who will protect and provide.

8. Who is Ruth listening to concerning finding a man? What verse in Ruth 3 points to this?
9. What, according to the words of Boaz in Ruth 3:11, is everyone saying about Ruth? Why do you think they are saying that?
10. If you have made the mistake of “running after a man” and not being wise, what have you learned so you don’t do it again? Is there a man you need to stay away from? Why might this be hard? Where could you get help?

16. How do you see a difference in Naomi from the end of chapter 1 to the end of chapter 3? If you have experienced anything of the love of Christ, how has this made you less bitter and more hopeful?

The Court Date

Though it is clear that Boaz is attracted to Ruth, he puts his own desires aside to submit to God. Boaz is going to ask the nearer kinsman to come to the town gate for a meeting. In the days of Ruth, official business like this occurred not in court but at the town gate, where there were “elders,” or godly men, who could be witnesses. Boaz, in essence, is going to be the lawyer, asking questions of the nearer kinsman. Boaz is hoping that this man will not want to step up to his role as the nearest relative of Naomi and Ruth, for if he does not, the way will be clear for Boaz to do so.

Boaz doesn't lie, doesn't manipulate, and doesn't panic. His trust is in God. He does what is right and leaves the results to God. When we do that, it sometimes goes the way we hope and sometimes does not. But in God's great wisdom, He always does what is best. One day we will understand, though it may not make sense now.

Read Ruth 4:1-8.

17. In verse 1, what did Boaz do, and what did he say to the kinsman-redeemer? What godly qualities do you see in Boaz here?

18. In Ruth 4:3-4, what situation does he explain to the kinsman-redeemer, and how does this man at first respond?

19. What additional information does Boaz give the kinsman-redeemer in verse 5?

The right thing for the nearest relative to have done would have been to step up to his role. He should have bought the land of the relative who had died and taken the man's widow as his wife. He should have provided for her and protected her and raised up the first son in his late relative's name, so that the family name would continue.

This may seem strange to us, but in biblical days, family was extremely important, and that included carrying on the family name. This is why it was so hard for a woman to be infertile or for the sons to die, as Naomi's had, for there was no one to carry on the family name. This is where a brother or near relative could be a rescuer, the kinsman-redeemer. It was also a disgrace when the relative refused to do this, and Deuteronomy describes this ceremony of disgrace:

If the man refuses to marry his brother's widow, she must go to the town gate and say to the elders assembled there, "My husband's brother refuses to preserve his brother's name in Israel—he refuses to fulfill the duties of a brother-in-law by marrying me." The elders of the town will then summon him and talk with him. If he still refuses and says, "I don't want to marry her," the widow must walk over to him in the presence of the elders, pull his sandal from his foot, and spit in his face. Then she must declare, "This is what happens to a man who refuses to provide his brother with children." Ever afterward in Israel his family will be referred to as "the family of the man whose sandal was pulled off"!

(Deuteronomy 25:7-10, NLT)

20. How does the kinsman-redeemer respond in verse 6?

When this unnamed man looked at Ruth, he realized she was young enough to bear children. If she had a son, that son would take on the name of her late husband and grow up to inherit the land. Then he would lose the land. It now becomes clear that this kinsman-redeemer wasn't really trying to do the right thing; he simply wanted the land. Now that it appears he could lose the land, he backs out.

21. What does the kinsman say to Boaz in verse 8, and what does he do?

Removing his sandal made it legal, like the banging of a judge's gavel. This is good news for Boaz, and you can sense his joy and the joy of the townspeople who were watching in the next verses. The townspeople had come to love and respect Boaz and Ruth, so they rejoiced for them.

22. How might the model of Boaz guide you when it comes to appearing in court?

The Celebration

23. How do you feel when a friend in prison gets good news at her court date? Do you rejoice? Why or why not? What about when she gets bad news? Do you mourn with her sincerely? Why or why not? (See Romans 12:15.)

Read Ruth 4:9-12.

24. What does Boaz announce to all the people in verses 9-10? Find evidence of his joy.
25. The elders and the people at that gate who are witnesses pray for Ruth and Boaz.
- A. What did they specifically pray for Ruth in the first part of verse 11? Why was this a prayer of faith since Ruth had been barren in Moab?
- B. In verse 11b, the elders of Bethlehem pray, not only that Ruth will have children, but also that her child bearing will lead to two other things. What are they?

In verse 12, they pray that Ruth will be like Tamar. What Ruth and Tamar had in common was a rejection from the one who should have been their kinsman-redeemer. God rescued each of these women, giving each a son, and both are listed in the genealogy leading to Christ. The women listed in the genealogy to Christ, with the exception of Mary, all had pasts that were shameful. Yet God redeemed them, used them, and gave them a name of honor. What hope that should give every woman with a shameful past who comes to Christ!

Read Ruth 4:13-22.

26. How does the Lord bless this family, according to verse 13?

Boaz has not forgotten Naomi. She is living with them, for God has set this solitary widow in the home of a caring family. As the psalmist says:

*God sets the lonely in families,
he leads forth the prisoners with singing;
but the rebellious live in a sun-scorched land. (Psalm 68:6)*

27. Do you need to pray for a new and caring family? How can you find one in prison? How might you find one outside of prison?

28. The women of Bethlehem are rejoicing with Naomi, praying for her, and encouraging her. Find everything they say and pray in verses 14-15.

When they tell her that she has not been left without a kinsman-redeemer, they mean that her grandson, Obed, will grow up to care for her. They pray he will be famous in Israel. God certainly answered that prayer, for Obed would be the grandfather of King David (Ruth 4:22).

29. In Israel, a “perfect” family was a family with seven sons. What great compliment do the women of Bethlehem pay Ruth? What do you remember about the number seven? (See Session 2.)

30. As you survey the whole story of Ruth, why do you think the women of Bethlehem admired Ruth so much? Find everything you can.

31. What are some ways God rescued Ruth and Naomi?

32. What do you think you will remember from this session, and why?

This true story has a happy ending. There are some who would question that, saying, “But Naomi lost so much.” Yet the story of Ruth is all about redemption and the Redeemer. Redemption doesn’t wipe away the losses on earth, but it takes the ashes of your life and turns them into something beautiful.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS TO ACCOMPANY DVD

When you arrive at your group, the first thing that will happen is that you will watch and respond to a video. Then you will go on to discuss the Bible Lesson that goes with the video.

Video Session 1: The Big Picture

- A. Share your name and, if you can, one way you identify with Karla.
- B. In the opening video segment, Dee quotes two verses from Psalm 68:

Father of orphans,

champion of widows,

is God in his holy house.

God makes homes for the homeless,

leads prisoners to freedom,

but leaves rebels to rot in hell. (Psalm 68:5-6, MSG)

What do you learn about God from these verses? How did the story Dee told of her daughter in Thailand illustrate this passage?

- C. What did you learn about Ruth's background that might have made her feel ashamed?
- D. In the second video segment of Karla, what stood out to you?

Video Session 2: The Ashes of Our Past

- A. In the first video segment of Dee's teaching, she explained that the

events of Ruth took place during the days of Judges. Describe the cycle of sin that God's people kept repeating.

- B. What is the difference between a "Judges repentance" and a "Jesus repentance"?
- C. In the second video segment, Linda, who was Karla's mentor, shared some of her story. How did Linda start repeating her past? How did God help her break the cycle?
- D. Could you identify with Linda in this area? What hope does her story give you?

Video Session 3: When Pain Comes into Our Lives

The women on the video do this "Lion Hunt," and you may be doing it together too!

We're going on a lion hunt.

We're going to find Aslan.

What a beautiful day!

We're not scared.

Oh—look—grass—tall grass!

Can't go under it.

Can't go around it.

Have to go through it!

Swish, swish.

Swish, swish.

We're going on a lion hunt.

We're going to find Aslan.

What a beautiful day!

We're not scared.

Oh—look—a river—a cold, icy river!

Can't go under it.

Can't go around it.

Have to go through it!

Ohhh, ohhh!

Ohhh, ohhh!

We're going on a lion hunt.

We're going to find Aslan.

What a beautiful day!

We're not scared.

Oh—look—pain, prison, suffering!

Can't go under it.

Can't go around it.

Have to go through it!

Ohhh, ohhh!

Run straight to Him!

- A. In the video, Dee said there is a lie about God that Satan wants us to believe when we are hurting. What is it? Have you ever believed that lie? If so, share something about it.
- B. What do you remember about the painting that Dee's daughter made of Aslan? How does this painting address the lie that God does not love us?
- C. Moab represents a land far from God. Elimelech may have persuaded himself that he was just going "for a while," instead of permanently. Why is it dangerous to tell yourself you are going back to sin just "for a while"?
- D. In the second video segment, what do you remember from Terry Strom's testimony? What consequences came to him as a result of his living in "Moab" for a while? How did Christ set him free?

Video Session 4: Finding a Healthy Family

- A. Naomi is depressed and bitter. She keeps trying to send her two daughters-in-law back to Moab. She fears for them, thinking they won't be wel-

come in Bethlehem. And in fact, sometimes the “family of God” is not healthy. What are some things Dee suggested to find a safe place in the family of God?

- B. When Naomi kept sending Ruth and Orpah back, why do you think Ruth refused to go back?
- C. Often it is frightening to move away from our past connections, even if they have been hurtful to us. Have you had those feelings? Explain.
- D. Learning how to comfort people who have been hurt is important. What do you remember from what Dee shared? What comforts you the most when you are hurting?
- E. In the second video segment, Linda Strom shared her story of her mother-in-law’s acceptance. How did her mother-in-law respond when Linda brought Terry to her house? How did this show grace?
- F. How did the acceptance and love of Linda’s mother-in-law impact her? Impact her son Terry?
- G. If you are a mentor, how does this story encourage you?

Video Session 5: The Psalms of Lament

- A. Dee described her “lament” when she was honest with God, asking, “How do I connect with someone who is not flesh and blood?” What memory did God then bring to her—and how did He speak to her through it?
- B. How is the book of Psalms different from other books in the Bible? What is a psalm of lament?
- C. In the second part of this video, Dee looked at Psalm 42. What four water pictures are there in Psalm 42?
- D. What does “deep calls to deep” mean?
- E. Have you had a time when you were honest with God about your pain and He spoke to you through His Word, through a memory or thought, or through someone else? If so, share what happened and how it impacted you.

Video Session 6: The Rescuer

- A. The Bible has another word for “rescue”—it is “gospel.” It means “good news.” What is the good news of the Bible?
- B. Dee told a story about a friend named Jill whose husband was killed in a farming accident. Jill eventually married another man named Keith, whom Dee called a “contemporary kinsman-redeemer.” What were some things Keith did that earned him this label?
- C. God may give you a human “Boaz” or He may not. But God Himself will always be your Boaz, your Rescuer. If you have experienced this, share something about it.

Video Session 7: A Covering, a Court Date, and a Celebration

- A. Dee did a demonstration with a white napkin. Can you explain what she was illustrating?
- B. When we go to court, we must trust God. How did you see that in Karla?
- C. Some would say that God let Karla and her friends down because her execution was not stayed. How might Karla have responded to that?

LEADER'S HELPS

These materials were written specifically for those in desperate situations such as prison or homeless shelters. It is my prayer that through this study individuals will get involved in this fertile mission field. The harvest is great, and the workers are few.

Give these Bible study guides to the participants ahead of time, asking them to complete the first Session, to the best of their ability, before you meet the first time. To do the homework, each woman will need a Bible. If you don't have Bibles, you could print off the short book of Ruth to hand out. (You could download it from Biblegateway.com in NIV or ESV.) Bibles are best, because we refer to other passages, but work with what you have.

There is more homework than you will likely have time to discuss, so circle questions ahead of time that you want to talk about. Make sure you choose a few questions to get the content, and use the closing questions.

This study is designed to be completed in seven sessions. If you are using the accompanying DVD, you'll see that there is a two- or three-part video for each session to give you flexibility. No video segment is longer than twenty minutes, and most are shorter. The second part is usually a testimony that supplements my teaching. If possible, watch the video before the discussion. You may also opt to divide these Sessions and meet fourteen times, with a video segment for each time and half a Session for each time.

It would also be wise, midway through the study, to replay Karla's testimony from Session 1 if you have newcomers.

Reviews are frequent because, especially in jails and shelters, there can be rapid turnover. If you are doing this in a prison, you may want to skip some of the reviews.

Tips for Facilitating

Rather than thinking of yourself as the teacher, think of yourself as a facilitator for the Holy Spirit. Some women may be fearful, and God can use you to encourage them in many ways. Keep these tips in mind:

Tip 1: Greet the group members warmly by name as they show up for each session.

Tip 2: After the video, put the chairs in as small a circle as possible for easy conversation.

Tip 3: Ask the questions, and allow the Spirit to prompt the group members to answer.

- Don't be afraid of pauses.
- If you have time, you can sometimes go around with a question, always giving group members the freedom to say, "Pass."
- Affirm your group members' attempts to answer. If the answer is wrong, it's better that another participant correct it than if you do. But if that doesn't happen, you can refer the group back to the Bible text or say, "That's interesting. Let's keep going and see what else we discover."
- Usually you should allow your group members to answer first. But when a question calls for vulnerability, you may want to lead the way in honesty, showing the others that you struggle with sin too.

Tip 4: If you have someone in your group who tends to talk more than others, here are tips that may help:

- Pray for that person. Often excessive talkativeness springs from deep hurts.
- Ask if you can hear from someone who hasn't had a chance to talk.
- Go around the circle with some questions.
- Take the person aside and talk to her gently, asking her to help you draw out the quieter women by giving them a chance to speak and asking them what they think. Ask her to star just a few of her favorite questions rather than answering all of them.

Tip 5: Model social skills and kindness.

- When a new woman comes to the group, demonstrate welcoming techniques to the others by saying something like "Welcome, Anne—join in!"

- If one group member gives an off-the-wall answer, remind the others that they give that kind of answer sometimes too. You can even make a joke of it, teaching them to say, “That’s interesting.” Because it is—even if it is wrong.
- If a woman breaks down in tears, take time to pray for her on the spot. You might even want to have the women circle her as you do. Then go back to the Session.

Chances are, the members of your group have experienced little grace in the world. Your group is where they can begin to experience it.

Tips for Facilitating Session 1

Pass the guides out ahead of time, and warn your group members that the first Session, because it looks at the whole book of Ruth, may be the most challenging of all. Assure them not to worry if they don’t understand a question; they should just do the best they can. Tell them it is like a big puzzle. The puzzle is hard at the beginning, but the more pieces you do, the easier it gets. Session 1 is like looking at the box lid of the puzzle so that you can see what the assembled picture will look like.

Video Session

- A. You know your group and if this question will work for you. If not, start with B.
- B. If the group members are silent, begin now to teach them to look in the biblical text. Rephrase and say, “Who do these verses say God cares about?”
- C. Dee described the violence of sacrificing babies and sexual immorality in the temples of Moab.

Bible Lesson

1. If there is silence for the first question, try rephrasing it. “Have you ever been hungry or had your utilities shut down?”
2. Ask the group members to look in the verses.
3. If group members are quiet and not ready to share personally, you could ask, “How do you think Naomi felt after all her losses?”

4. If it is quiet, direct them to look in verse 5.
5. Orpah went back to Moab, a land far from God. Ruth took a risk and went to Bethlehem, a village in the land of God's people.
6. Again, if it is silent, direct them to look in the verses.
7. She "happens" in his field. In the Hebrew, the words imply the planning or the providence of God. Boaz was also a godly man and no doubt obeyed the Old Testament law that said he should leave some leftover grain for aliens and widows.
8. Direct them to look in the verses. (Don't tell them the answers!)
9. See if they can find evidences of excitement in Naomi.
10. Be willing to have some silence, giving women time to find courage to speak up.
11. Have them describe the plan, even if they don't understand it!
12. You might also ask, "What does this show you about their relationship?"
13. Tell them it will become clear later, but she is definitely asking for him to protect and provide when she says, "Cover me."
15. The nearer kinsman was first in line to reclaim the land that belonged to Elimelech, and so Boaz wanted to do what was right. He seems to have had a confidence, however, that whatever happened, God would take care of Ruth.
16. She became his wife and mother of his child.
17. Group members may not catch all this, but Naomi was part of their family, became a grandmother, and had a grandson who would, in the tradition of the time, grow up to take care of her.
18. You know your group best, but if you think it would work, you could go around the circle for answer, giving group members the freedom to pass if they want to.

Tips for Facilitating Session 2

Video Session

- A. Seven times the people got in trouble, called out to God, and got a "judge" who rescued. But then they went back to their old ways, and each time, the behavior was worse.
- B. This is important. In a "Judges repentance," they are not sorry for hurting God

or anyone else—they are just sorry for the consequences. But with a “Jesus repentance,” they are truly sorry they have hurt Him and others and long to change.

C & D. Hear from several in the group on these questions.

Bible Lesson

1. The main reason Jesus came to earth was to rescue and change those who were willing.

2. Hear from many on this question.

3. You might ask, “What does it mean to do what is right in your own eyes? Why can this be dangerous?”

4. This is a great opportunity to show the group members that you are a sinner too. So prepare something to share. Make yourself vulnerable.

5–8. Keep directing group members toward the verses.

9. If they are having trouble, you might ask, “What, besides the Lord, do you think you have to have to be happy? That will reveal where your trust is. You might want to point out that a good thing can turn into an idol when you run to it when you are stressed or sad. Warnings are found in Proverbs about depending on something other than God “too much.” There are warnings about “too much honey,” “too much wine,” “too much talking,” and running “too much” to your neighbor. Whenever we depend on something other than God for comfort and security, we’ve made it an idol.

10. Look in the verses.

11. Hear from several in the group.

13. Heaven is not a place where we play harps on clouds. There will be amazing food, and we will share it with people we love. There will be no more death, sorrow, or reproach.

14. This is a chance to affirm that those who have experienced loss are more likely to be humbled and nearer to God. Jesus told the Pharisees that the “crooks and the whores” would get into heaven before they did (Matthew 21:32, MSG). Why? Because the Pharisees, like the people of Moab, were proud and felt they didn’t need God.

15. You might ask what purpose Karla’s life had.

16. If time permits, go around with this question, giving freedom to pass.

Tips for Facilitating Session 3

Video Session

You are going to open by leading your group in “Lion Hunt.” You may be able to watch Michael Rosen on YouTube do “Bear Hunt” to help loosen you up as a leader!

A. The lie is “God doesn’t love you.”

B. You may need to explain the meaning of the title Lamb of God. Before Christ’s death, lambs were killed as a sacrifice to atone for sins, but it all pointed to the perfect Lamb of God who would die for our sins.

C. Make sure your group members see the deception of thinking you are going just “for a while.”

D. Hear from several members of your group.

Bible Lesson

1. Your group members are learning to observe. Affirm even the simplest observations.

2. The members of the family are Elimelech, Naomi, and their two sons, Mahlon and Chilion. If time permits, you could ask for your group’s reflections on the meaning of the various names. Elimelech’s name seems ironical, for he was not living as if God was his King. The sons married Moabites, which was forbidden, so they, too, were doing what was right in their own eyes. Their future seems to have been predicted in their names. The choices of Ruth and Orpah were in their names. It is also interesting that Naomi asked her friends to call her Mara, which means “bitter.” The love of God, through Ruth, made her sweet again. But see what your group members can discover—and you may want to refer to this later.

3. There are always consequences for visiting “Moab,” even for a little while. Ask participants to share the pain they carry because of visiting “Moab.” This is so important, for the battle is won or lost in the mind. Take the time to have them share how they will talk to their soul the next time “Moab” beckons. For example, if someone craves drugs, she could say to her soul, “This will hurt you so badly, and you want much more to be free. I want that more than the temporary fix.” Or if someone craves revenge,

she could say to her soul, “I will take him off my hook and put him on God’s hook, for God will take care of him. I want to be free of this hate more than I want to be the one to give revenge.” Or if someone craves overeating and avoids exercise, she could say to her soul, “It hurts to be overweight. I want to be free of this weight more than I want this food.”

4. Keep pointing them to the verses for the answers.

5. Hear from several group members on this question. If there is silence, make yourself vulnerable by answering it yourself.

6. Eventually he became hungry and ashamed.

7. It is important to see this picture of real repentance. Ask questions if the participants don’t see it—questions like “How did he own his sin? What sacrifice was he willing to make?”

8. Affirm the details the group members find as they look in the verses.

9 & 10. These questions are important, so take time with them.

11. This story may truly give your group members hope and also prepare them for the “older brothers” they may meet in the church on the outside. Even though not everyone may receive them warmly, if they have the attitude of the younger son, God is for them and so will be the believers who understand that they, too, need mercy.

Tips for Facilitating Session 4

Video Session

A. Not everyone in Bethlehem was living for the Lord. There was great prejudice against the Moabites. If your group members need help, direct them to Ruth 2:9 and Ruth 2:22 and see how both Boaz and Naomi were concerned that Ruth could be assaulted.

B. If participants are silent, ask, “What qualities in Naomi might have drawn Ruth?”

C. You might also ask what fears Linda’s mother-in-law might have had and how she overcame them to show Linda grace.

D. Hear from many on this question.

E. This is your chance to share!

Bible Lesson

8 & 9. Help your group members talk openly about the excuses we tend to give for “going back to Moab.” They need to make the decision not to go back to a dysfunctional family or partner and to have a different plan before they leave their prison or shelter. What suggestions can you, as a mentor, offer the members of your group?

10. Talk about how your choice here can impact not only you but also future generations. Hear from many on this!

11 & 12: Practice CALM thinking with each other with various temptations. *This is very important. You could do this in other Sessions too.*

13. Naomi was responding in fear, which is easy to do when one is grieving. Talk about how to overcome fear with faith by remembering truths about the Lord.

14. When someone gives us advice, we could ask ourselves, *Does it line up with God's Word? Do I have a peace about it? What do other godly people say?*

15–19. No big challenges here—but these are important questions.

20. If time permits, go around, giving group members the freedom to pass.

Tips for Facilitating Session 5

Video Session

A. After someone remembers Dee's memory of nursing her howling firstborn, you might ask for your group members' reflections on that story.

B. All other books are written from God to us; this one is a prayer journal, from the psalmists to God. It is just as inspired, but it is meant to show us how to pray. A psalm of lament is one that express hurt as well as fears and questions to God. In most of the psalms of lament, the psalmist expresses his fear, but by the end, the Holy Spirit helps him trust God's character, even if he does not yet understand.

C. The four water pictures are streams of living water, tears day and night, waves and breakers, and a waterfall.

D. “Deep calls to deep” refers to the deep voice of God speaking deep into a soul. Or the deep love of God, deeper than any pit.

Bible Lesson

1. This is a key passage in Ruth, and it is important to look at it carefully. You could also encourage the women in your group to memorize Ruth 1:16-17, for it also reflects the commitment we should make to God.

- A. Naomi saw she was not going to be able to persuade Ruth.
- B. Naomi had left a wealthy woman with a husband and sons.
- C. We can look different after years of sorrow, especially if we are bitter.
- D. Keep pointing them to find the answers in the verse.
- E. Remind them that Jesus got angry with dishonesty, not honesty.

2. You may have to skip this question for the sake of time. If you can look at just one of these passages, look at Hagar's story in Genesis 21.

3. Keep directing the participants to look in the verses.

4. You might have the group members pair up and share their laments with one another.

5. Take some time here, for this is so close to home. Hurt people hurt people. Have the group members reflect on Karla's words.

6. Direct the group members to the first part of Ruth 1:21. Naomi repeatedly said she felt empty.

7. If the participants can see that pain makes people less responsive, they are less likely to take rejection personally.

8. Hear from several participants on this question.

9. If time permits, hear from several participants.

10. This might be a time for you to share about how God's grace led you to work with the group.

11. Mourning with another is so much more comforting than trying to fix her problem.

12. Many translations say, "Like vinegar poured on soda," which makes it explode.

13. You may not have time to go all the way through this, but it is so important. You might ask the women in your group to call out some highlights.

14. Hear from many on this one.
15. If time permits, go around the circle, giving freedom to pass.

Tips for Facilitating Session 6

If you have several women who are new to the group, it would be great to replay just Karla's testimony. (It's in the first video.)

Video Session

A. *Gospel* means "good news." Though we deserve God's wrath, Jesus gave us a way to be forgiven. Though we are in chains of sin, Jesus gave us the power to be set free. He redeems us from both the penalty and the power of sin.

B. Keith not only loved Jill and her children; he also wanted the memory of Jill's late husband to be honored. So after moving back to the farm they lost, he erected a huge sign that said, "The Wolford-Johnson Farm."

C. If no one in the group has experienced this, you could share. (Even if you are not a widow, you still have experienced the love, provision, and protection of Jesus.) That may help the others to share.

Bible Lesson

This Session has the group doing a lot of digging into specific Bible passages. If they have trouble, steer them back to look again in the verses. The closing questions are ones you could go around on, giving freedom to pass. The following are a few with extra helps for you.

4A. In the Hebrew, there's a strong providential sense of God leading. It may also be that Boaz was particularly generous to the poor, and Ruth noticed a lot of leftover grain.

4F. It may be a new thought to look for character in a person and to go where godly people are—working in ministries, church. It's not likely you will find a man of character in a bar.

Tips for Facilitating Session 7

This is a longer Session, so you may need to skip some questions in discussion. I'll suggest some possibilities here, but you know your group best, so you may want to go through and circle the ones you feel could be skipped if time is an issue.

Video Session

A. You may want to bring a napkin, hold out your hand and cover it, as Dee did, and ask them what the napkin represents.

Bible Lesson

1. Direct participants to the Bible text.

2. You might ask, "It would be understandable if Naomi had begun to doubt God's love for her. How had she seen evidence that God in fact did care for her?" Ruth was a huge factor—watching someone trust God and seeing Him come to her encourages our own faith.

3. Boaz could certainly have refused her, and it appears her reputation could have been tarnished as well.

4–6. You could skip these questions.

7. Direct participants to the Bible text.

8. Naomi.

9. They know she took risks to be with Naomi, and they know she has shown Naomi unfailing love. They see how hard she works.

10. This one is important to discuss.

11. He left grain for the poor. He prayed all the time. He protected and provided for Ruth.

12–14. You could skip these.

15. Naomi told Ruth to wait. Remembering that Boaz is a Christ figure, often we must wait on Jesus—and His timing is so different from our timing. He sees all of eternity.

16. Hear from several group members on this one.

17. He was gentle with him but also made sure there were witnesses.

18. He wanted the land.

19. Ruth came with the land.

20. He was no longer interested.

21. You could skip this one.

22. This one is important. If you are leading the group with women in prison, hear from many of them on this.

23. Here's another important question.

25. You could skip this. These are challenging questions and not all that integral to the story.

26. Obed would become the father of Jesse, who would become the father of David. Obed would also grow up to care for Naomi.

27. This one is important.

29. You might remind group members about the number seven being associated with God and Karla being 777.

30. Hear from as many group members as possible.

Closing “Cardboard” Testimonies

This is an optional activity that many have found meaningful and that you could lead your group in. Pass out paper or small poster boards. On one side, write a word or a phrase that describes you before your Redeemer came to you. On the opposite side, write a word or phrase that describes you after your Redeemer came. Some examples would be:

Side 1: Brokenhearted

Side 2: Hopeful

Side 1: Drug addict

Side 2: Jesus addict

Side 1: Prostitute

Side 2: Cleansed and set free

Side 1: Blind

Side 2: But now I see

PRAYERS

PRAYERS

PRAYERS

PRAYERS

PRAYERS

PRAYERS