

LESSON 2

Love Breaks

1. Naomi Makes Her Case More Strongly 10 mins

Briefly review the first lesson. This is the second round of the conversation.



Read: Ruth 1:11-14

¹¹But Naomi said, “Turn back, my daughters; why will you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb that they may become your husbands? ¹²Turn back, my daughters; go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. If I should say I have hope, even if I should have a husband this night and should bear sons, ¹³would you therefore wait till they were grown? Would you therefore refrain from marrying? No, my daughters, for it is exceedingly bitter to me for your sake that the hand of the LORD has gone out against me.” ¹⁴Then they lifted up their voices and wept again. And Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.



Historical Background: Levirate Marriage

Levirate marriage was an ancient Jewish safety net to provide for childless widows. There are suggestions in other ancient texts that it was a common practice. If a woman’s husband died before she had children, her husband’s next-oldest brother was obligated to marry her, to take her on as a second wife. Any children that she had by him would receive her first husband’s inheritance. So it not only saved a wife from famine but it provided heirs for the deceased husband and continued his name.

Q. How does Levirate marriage make sense of what Naomi says in verses 12-13?

Naomi is implying that if she gave birth to more sons, then she would give them to Orpah and Ruth in marriage. But that is no longer possible.

Q. What is the logic of what Naomi says? Let’s list her reasons for Ruth and Orpah going home in verses 11-13.

1. Naomi is not pregnant. “Have I yet sons in my womb?” (Ruth 1:11).
2. Naomi is too old. “I am too old to have a husband” (Ruth 1:12).
3. Even if, miracle of miracles, she would get married tonight and pregnant on her wedding night with twin sons, would they wait another eighteen years for the sons to grow up?



Q. How many miracles are involved in Naomi’s best case scenario in verse 12?

This is actually a four-part miracle.

1. Getting married.
2. Getting married tonight.
3. Getting pregnant on her wedding night.
4. Becoming pregnant with twin sons.

Q. But what is Naomi saying about this incredible best-case scenario?

Even if all these miracles were to happen, it would be far too long for them to wait to be remarried.



Historical Background: Ruth and Orpah's Age

Naomi is painting the situation as bleakly as possible in order to get them to return to their home. She answers her own question as to whether they would wait, "Absolutely not!" Naomi is getting more passionate.

Assuming that Ruth and Orpah married in their teens and were married for about ten years before their husbands died, this would make them mid-to-late-twenty-somethings. After waiting another fourteen to eighteen years for the hypothetical boys to grow up, they would be in their forties.

Q. Paraphrase what Naomi is saying to them in everyday English.

"Face the facts. I'm as good as dead."

2. Naomi's Bitterness Erupts

10 mins

Q. Why does Naomi wait until the end to say "it is exceedingly bitter for me"?

As she speaks about how hard her life is, she is overcome with emotion.



Literary Insight: A Better Translation

The simplest translation is: "It is more bitter for me than you" (Ruth 1:13).



Q. How is it more bitter for Naomi than Ruth and Orpah?

- Naomi has lost both husband and sons. They have just lost husbands.
- They still have a chance to get remarried.



Q. Why does Naomi say this? What might she mean? *Scholars are divided on this. It is possible that Naomi has some self-pity here, but we don't know that.¹ Don't get bogged down in speculation. After a few answers suggest these answers:*

- "I am much too bitter for you."² That is, "Stay away from me. My life is too bitter."
- "Because of my love for you, my bitterness is increased." They have a family to return to. Because of her love for them, Naomi needs to encourage them to leave her.
- This could reflect some self-pity on Naomi's part.³



Literary Insight: "The hand of the LORD has gone out against me" (Ruth 1:13)

This phrase means that Naomi is saying, "Indeed, Yahweh's own hand has attacked me as an enemy."

Q. When Naomi says "Yahweh's own hand has attacked me as an enemy," why is that another reason for Ruth and Orpah to stay away from her?

God is against her and likely anyone who hangs around her. There is no hope for the future. She's just bad luck.

¹ For additional discussion see Jack M. Sasson, *Ruth* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 27; and Hubbard, 112.

² Block, *The New American Commentary*, 636.

³ Scholars are divided on this. We can't know for sure. The self-absorption that characterizes self-pity does emerge in subsequent scenes. Naomi is unable to thank Ruth, and Naomi ignores Ruth on their entrance to Bethlehem.



Read: Quote

“Naomi’s cry has all the depth of covenantal grief about it. Sure, maybe Yahweh could be expected to stand against some Moabite girls, but Naomi is an Israelite, a member of his covenant, one of his own children, and yet his hand has persecuted her. There is deep, ancient, forever-binding covenantal anguish in her complaint. Yahweh is her God, and yet he is against her. He has not only allowed but orchestrated the mini-holocaust of which she is the sole survivor, left destitute and without hope. That hurts! You might expect to be treated badly by some stranger on the street, but not by your dad.”⁴



Q. Is Naomi wrong to say, “God is against me”?

Answers will vary. It might be helpful to write “Yes” and “No” on the flip chart and organize their answers on both sides. The answers below go on the “No” side of the chart. Teach what they don’t say.

- No, it is not wrong. This is where she is at. Everything points to God being “out to get her.” My wife Jill used to pray her Social Security number to God because it seemed like God had the wrong person. None of her prayers seemed to be answered.
- God doesn’t judge Naomi for her struggle; he just quietly wraps her in his arms, beginning with Ruth’s expression of unconditional love in a few verses. God loves her silently. It is a striking example of Jesus’ “Judge not.”



Q. How is there faith in Naomi’s “God is against me”?

This goes under the “No” side of the chart. Teach what they don’t say.

Naomi says this **because** she believes in the sovereignty of God. If she didn’t have faith, then she wouldn’t be struggling with God.



Q. Is Naomi correct that God is against her?

This goes on the “Yes” side of the chart.

No. She is not correct. God’s hand is not against her; he is weaving a spectacular tapestry, and this is only the beginning of it.



Teach: The Value of Exposing Bitterness

Bitterness tends to see all of life through the lens of your own personal suffering. It is a demand of the heart that God take away the suffering. Its cousin, self-pity, combines suffering with pride. You compare your suffering with others’. One of the best ways to deal with bitterness and self-pity is not to try to control them by stuffing them, but to expose your heart to your friends. The exposure of bitterness and self-pity can open the door to grace. If bitterness is stuffed, it becomes a spiritual cancer that can destroy your soul.



Historical Background: The Lost Art of Lament

In the West, we’ve almost entirely lost the ability to pray prayers of lament. The Hebrews were constantly in God’s face. About one-third of the Psalms are laments where the Psalmist pours out his heart to God.

Listen to these Hebrew laments:

- “Why, O LORD, do you stand afar off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?” (Psalm 10:1).
- “How long O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?” (Psalm 13:1).

⁴ Libbie Groves, e-mail to the author, December 2009.

- “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning?” (Psalm 22:1).
- “How long O Lord will you look on?” (Psalm 35:17).
- “O LORD, why do you make us wander from your ways and harden our heart so that we fear you not?” (Isaiah 63:17).

Q. Why do you think it is hard for us to pray that way?

Feels disrespectful.



Teach: Greek Stoicism

One of the principal reasons for the loss of the lament is the influence of the Greek mind on the early church. Greek Stoicism believed that emotions were bad. The passionate person was the immature person.

Q. In what sense is a lament filled with faith?

Because it expects God to act. It believes in a God-who-is-there. It doesn't drift into cynicism or unbelief, but engages God passionately with the burdens on the heart.

3. Understanding the Flow of the Conversation — 10 mins

Q. What is the difference in Naomi's tone between verses 8-9 and verses 10-13?

In the first part, she is quiet, comforting, then she becomes passionate.



Draw: The Flow of Naomi's Dialogue

- 1st: Firmly but warmly blessing (verses 8-9).
- 2nd: Passionate and logical. Making a case (verses 10-13).
- 3rd: Theological and angry. God is against me (verse 13).

Q. Explain the flow of Naomi's conversation. Why might the 1st Step (verses 8-9) not mention the bitterness or even begin with reasoning? Why does she begin gently with a prayer of blessing on her daughters-in-law?

Teach what they don't say.

Her love for her daughters dictates how she relates to them.

- 1st: She tries to pull away from them as gently as possible.
- 2nd: Only when they refuse to go does she paint a bleak picture of what life would be like for them back in Bethlehem. They too would become permanent widows like her.
- 3rd: Thinking about her pain causes her to feel how bad her life is. She ends with a passionate statement that God is against her.

Q. How do you see the same firmness in Naomi starting this second round of conversation in verse 12?

She again commands her daughters-in-law, “Turn back...” (Ruth 1:11-12).

Q. Why does Naomi have to be so brutal with her daughters-in-law?

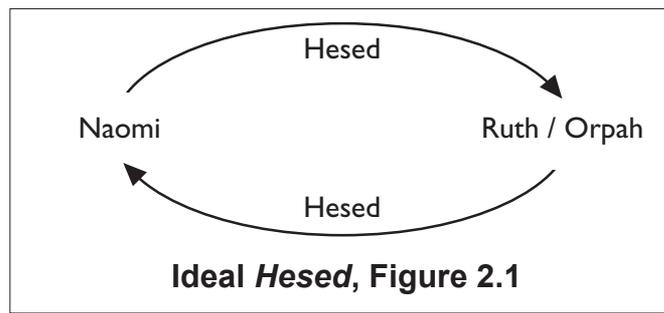
They loved her so much that they didn't want to leave.

Q. How could this conversation make Naomi even more bitter?

If they don't get this, then teach it. It is a subtle point. Because her life is so bad she has been forced by her love for her daughters-in-law to make her life even worse by almost pushing them away.

Q. How does Ruth and Orpah's *hesed* toward Naomi make it even harder for her?

Their *hesed* toward Naomi means that they don't brush off easily. They have bound themselves to her in love. So Naomi is forced to become stronger with them. Thus, their love for her deepens her own hurt.



Teach: The Cost of Love

As we have said, the bitter irony of Naomi's situation is that she must get rid of what is left of the skeleton of her family (her two daughters-in-law) for the sake of love. It is almost like she is cutting off her leg to save their lives. One participant pointed out, "It is worse than that because Naomi is the leg." So Naomi ends with a lament, "It is exceedingly bitter to me for your sake" (Ruth 1:13). She is broken by her own love.

Read: Quote

"There is no safe investment. To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to be sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket—safe, dark, motionless, airless—it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable....The only place outside of Heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers and perturbations of love is Hell.⁵

4. Conclusion

10 mins

Q. What do all three women do when Naomi is finished?

They burst into tears. Orpah, overcome by Naomi's logic, leaves for home. But Ruth stays.

Q. Why don't they argue with her?

There is no argument. Naomi is right.

⁵ C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Co., 1988), 121.

Q. There is a subtle difference between the order of the weeping and crying in verse 9 and in verse 14. What is it?

In verse 9 Naomi first kisses goodbye and all three begin weeping. In verse 14, Naomi has made her case so powerfully that all three begin weeping. Then Orpah initiates kissing Naomi because she is saying goodbye. She realizes that Naomi is correct.



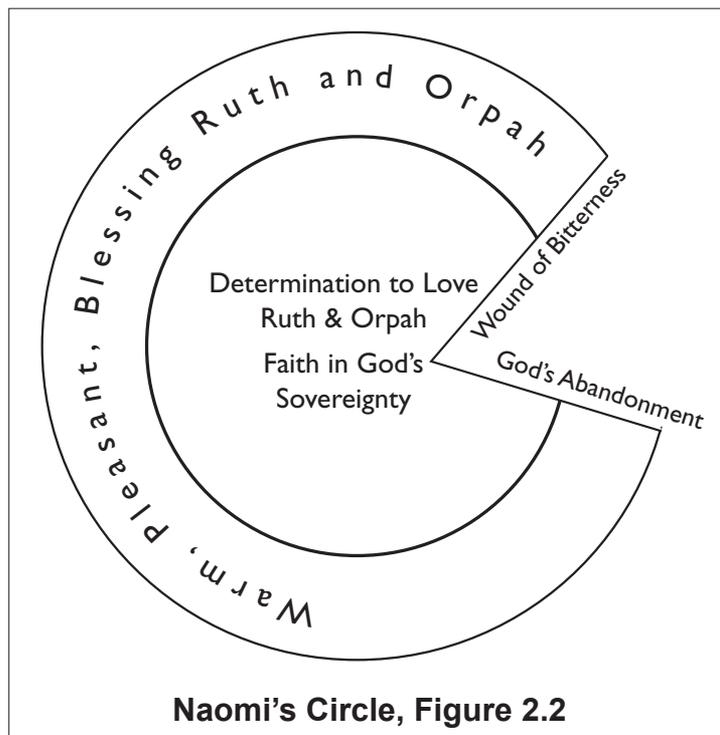
Q. What is Naomi like as a person?

- Firm, strong, resolute
- Outspoken
- Loving, unselfish
- Bitter, broken by life
- Filled with faith



Draw:

Draw the two concentric circles for the chart, and the wedge. Then label each circle and wedge as you ask the following questions:



Q. What is in the outer ring of Naomi's personality? What do people see when they are with her? What's the first thing you notice?

In the outer ring you see faith in the Lord. Love for her daughters-in-law. Blessing them.

Q. What wedge is threatening to break this apart? What are the wedge's two sides?

1. Suffering. A person broken by life.
2. Bitterness at what God has done.

Q. If you go down to the core of Naomi's heart what do you see?

Faith in the Lord, in Yahweh. It is a small light but it burns brightly. She still loves even in the midst of her bitterness. She still acknowledges that God is Lord of the universe, including Moab and Judah.

 **Teach: Naomi's Love**

What Naomi has done in pushing Ruth and Orpah away is an act of heroic love. In effect, she is telling them, "My life is over. Yours doesn't have to be."

5. Application

10 mins

 **Personal Connection: Living with Suffering**

Q. What can you learn from Naomi in how she copes with unbelievable suffering? What strikes you about her?

Lesson Summary

Use the space below to summarize in a few sentences what your group learned in this lesson and what captured their hearts. Read this out loud the next week as a short review.