Ruth 1:1-22 and 4:13-17 (New International Version)

1 In the days when the judges ruled,[b] there was a famine in the land. So a man from Bethlehem in Judah, together with his wife and two sons, went to live for a while in the country of Moab. 2 The man’s name was Elimelek, his wife’s name was Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Kilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem, Judah. And they went to Moab and lived there.

3 Now Elimelek, Naomi’s husband, died, and she was left with her two sons. 4 They married Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other Ruth. After they had lived there about ten years, 5 both Mahlon and Kilion also died, and Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband.

6 When Naomi heard in Moab that the LORD had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them, she and her daughters-in-law prepared to return home from there. 7 With her two daughters-in-law she left the place where she had been living and set out on the road that would take them back to the land of Judah.

8 Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, “Go back, each of you, to your mother’s home. May the LORD show you kindness, as you have shown kindness to your dead and to me. 9 May the LORD grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband.” Then she kissed them good-by and they wept aloud 10 and said to her, “We will go back with you to your people.”

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

14 At this they wept aloud again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law good-by, but Ruth clung to her. 15 “Look,” said Naomi, “your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her.”

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

19 So the two women went on until they came to Bethlehem. When they arrived in Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them, and the women exclaimed, “Can this be Naomi?”

20 “Don’t call me Naomi,”[b] she told them. “Call me Mara,[c] because the Almighty[d] has made my life very bitter. 21 I went away full, but the LORD has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The LORD has afflicted[d] me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me.”

22 So Naomi returned from Moab accompanied by Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law, arriving in Bethlehem as the barley harvest was beginning.

Chapter 4 13 So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. When he made love to her, the LORD enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son. 14 The women said to Naomi: “Praise be to the LORD, who this day has not left you without a family guardian. May he become famous throughout Israel! 15 He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth.”

16 Then Naomi took the child in her arms and cared for him. 17 The women living there said, “Naomi has a son!” And they named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.

OASIS: LivingClose: A Tale of Two Women—The Book of Ruth

Preface: Welcome to our new series LivingClose, as we explore relationships that are spiritually influential and inspiring. The six Sunday messages will be complemented by three LIFE Communities studies. These usually will use the same biblical texts and will allow your LC to continue the conversation and go deeper in application.

Possible “starter” approach: In our new LivingClose series, we will be doing several Bible studies on relationships that are spiritually influential and inspiring. So take a moment and quietly think of a person or two who you’d like to support and encourage in their spiritual development. …Let’s not mention names, but what kinds of people came to your mind? (i.e. neighbor, family member or child, a co-worker, a friend from college, etc.)

Transitional comment: Today we get the opportunity to immerse ourselves into the unlikely relationship between a mother and her daughter-in-law. This is NOT a portrait of the normal caricature.

Let’s listen as our story is read aloud (1:1-22 and then 4:13-17).
(n.b. Since this is narrative, consider asking different people to read as the narrator, Naomi, and Ruth, with the Narrator also reading the portion from Chapter 4.)
(Pray for the Holy Spirit to lead your study, if you haven’t already prayed.)

Read and Overview: Now take several minutes by yourself to study this passage. What is the situation? What do you observe about the main characters? What happens? Any repeated words and ideas?

First Section (1: 1-5):

O In verses 1-3, what do you learn about the context (when, where, what’s going on)? Who are the various people that are identified?

(n.b. the time of the judges was roughly 1250-1050 BC;
Moab was the land on the other (western) side of the Dead Sea, probably about 50 miles away;
the Moabites descended from Lot [Gen. 19:37], distant relatives to the Israelites and often hostile;
Ephrathites are simply people from Ephrath, an earlier name for Bethlehem, see Gen. 35:19)

O What changes are reported in vs. 3-5? What are some of Naomi’s losses?

I Put yourself in Naomi’s situation. How would you imagine these changes might affect her?

A List some of the many different kind of challenges that people you know are dealing with?

Second Section (1: 6-18):

O In vs. 6-7, what does Naomi do and why?

O In vs. 8-13, what are some ways that the women show kindness, as they look out for one another?

I What do you sense about Naomi’s outlook?

O From vs. 14-18, what do you learn about Ruth?

I What might be some of the reasons for Ruth’s determination?

A What do you most admire?
Third Section (1: 19-22):

O What do you think probably “stirred” the people of Bethlehem about Naomi and her return? (v. 19)

O How does Naomi explain her changes? Why does she prefer to be called “Mara”? (vs. 20-21)

O What blessings are inferred in v. 22?

Comment: At this point in the story (Chapter 2), Ruth begins to glean in the fields of a relative named Boaz. He is very impressed not only by her industriousness, but also her care for her mother-in-law, and Boaz says to Ruth: “May the Lord repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.” (2:12)

Fourth Section (4: 13-17): (“and now, for the rest of the story”—Paul Harvey, radio commentator)

O What developments occur in Ruth’s life?

O What changes occur in Naomi’s life?

1. Where do you discern the “fingerprints” of God’s presence and provision?

Summary and conclusion:

In the book of Ruth, ordinary humble people endure tough times and undergo deep personal losses. Yet, at the same time God is working and providing—both for them, as well as for the future. God is developing a broader family, more extensive leadership than they could ever imagine, and an enduring home in Him.

I How did God show his power and goodness to Naomi and Ruth?

(bonus question: For Ruth, what do you think her definition of “home” would be?)

I In what ways did Naomi and Ruth encourage one another to trust in God?

A How can you support someone this week in their journey with or toward God?

Prayer together: Pray…

For the kindness and commitment to spiritually assist others, in both tough times or good zones. For the confidence and discernment to realize that God is working—and glad to be our refuge.

Text notes (you can access biblical texts via www.Biblegateway.com).

a. BIG idea: Spiritual friends accompany each other on the journey of life and faith.

b. Key verse: Ruth 1: 16: “Your people will be my people and your God my God.”

c. KEY: O = Observation; I = Interpretation; A = Application (or C = Challenge)

Advice to study leaders:

d. Complement your OIA questions with “process questions” (what else? What more? What do others of you see/think?).

e. Determine the core questions you’ll ask (know which ones to skip if pressed for time).

f. Always reword questions in words that are comfortable for you (and, if the question doesn’t make sense to you, then discard it.) You want to “own” each question.

g. When you ask questions, give people ample time to think and respond. How long do you wait? Take your time; don’t rush people but encourage their participation. And avoid answering your own questions!

h. Timing/pacing: allocate your time and move forward gently, with a steady pace.

i. Application: Pace the study to conclude with “difference making” application.

j. Secondary texts—use other texts very sparingly, even if they are relevant. Otherwise, other texts will push you more into the “teacher role,” rather than that of facilitator. It also can cause some people to feel distracted or de-powered.

k. If you are utilizing this “on-line” study and not part of the OASIS course, I recommend you get the one volume commentary New Bible Commentary, Revised (21st Century Edition, IVP). Well worth $35.