

Series: Ruth
When Everything Falls Apart
 Ruth 1

Sermon by Care Pastor Melonie Richards
 Waterstone Community Church, Littleton, Colorado
 Sunday morning, August 16, 2026

A reading from Ruth chapter 1: “In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land. So, a man from Bethlehem and Judah, together with his wife and two sons, went to live for a while in the country of Moab. The man’s name was Elimelech, and his wife’s name was Naomi, and the names of their two sons were Mahlon and Chilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem, Judah, and they went to Moab and lived there. Now Elimelech, Naomi’s husband, died, and she was left with her two sons. They married Moabite women, one named Orpah, and the other Ruth. After they had lived there about ten years, both Mahlon and Chilion also died, and Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband. 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. 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. Then Naomi said to her 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 husbands and to me. May the Lord grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband.’ Then she kissed them goodbye, and they wept aloud and said to her, ‘We will go back with you to your people,’ but Naomi said, ‘Return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me? Am I going to have more sons who could become your husbands? 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, 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.’”

“At this they wept aloud again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye, but Ruth clung to her. ‘Look,’ said Naomi, ‘your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her,’ 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. 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.’ When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her. So, the two women went back, 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?’ ‘Don’t call me Naomi,’ she told them. ‘Call me Mara, because the almighty has made my life very bitter. I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The Lord has afflicted me, and the almighty has brought misfortune upon me.’ Naomi returned from Moab, accompanied by Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law, arriving in Bethlehem as the barley harvest was beginning,” the word of the Lord. You may be seated.

Beautiful. Welcome. So glad that you are here this morning. Welcome to all of you here. Welcome to you online. Summer is ending. I don’t know how you feel about that. Summer is a time when we go on

vacation. We go camping, maybe on road trips. How many of you went on a road trip this summer? Anyone? Yeah? I wonder if you took snacks with you. I have a friend. Whenever she goes on a road trip, she always has her Coke and her pretzels ready to go for the trip. Maybe you packed a suitcase. Maybe it was a backpack. I recently went on a road trip to Royal Family Kids Camp. Woohoo! I can't believe how much I packed. I was asking myself, "Why are you taking so much stuff?" Took me like thirty minutes to unpack my car. I was trying to prepare for any type of scenario, any weather. We have crazy weather here in Colorado, right? Honestly, I took a lot of items for the girls' tea party, but we try and prepare. We try and expect the unexpected, but one thing that is hard to prepare for is hardship. How do we prepare for hardship? This morning we are going to look at two women who took a road trip, and in their suitcase was loss, heartache, and some bitterness, two women, grief, and a long road trip. What was the journey like for these women? How did they travel the road of hardship, and how do we do it? How do we do it when we are facing uncertainty, when governments are failing, when there is famine, there is drought? I think we can find some direction in the book of Ruth. I'd like to pray.

Father, we welcome you this morning, because this is about you, Lord, and this is your word, and we want to hear from you. Let me just take a breath, Lord. Come, Holy Spirit, be present. Show us your thoughts, so much higher than our thoughts. Lord, we honor you, and we glorify you, and we praise you. You are mighty, and it is in your name we pray, amen.

I am so excited that we get to jump into the book of Ruth. Ruth is the first, there are two books named after women, Ruth and Esther. What was it like during the time of Ruth? It was a dark time. Spiritually, there was decline. Politically, there was unrest and oppression. Economically, environmentally, there was drought and starvation. Can we relate to this idea? I think we can. Barna says in their surveys in the last 25 years, Christian faith in America has been declining. Global Freedom Watch, which measures democracy around the world, said in 2025, global democracy declined once again in many countries. What about famine? We see that in all kinds of places right now, drought and famine. Maybe you are feeling a little bit of spiritual decline right now. Maybe you are feeling some oppression. Maybe you are starving spiritually, and it feels dark. What do we do in times like this one? How can we travel the road of hardship? How can we choose fortitude? How can we choose faithfulness? How can we even have hope?

Well, let's dive into the book of Ruth and see what they have to tell us in Ruth. We're going to read Ruth 1:1-5: "In the days when the judges ruled, 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. The man's name was Elimelech. His wife's name was Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem, Judah, and they went to Moab, and they lived there. Now Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died, and she was left without her two sons. They married Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other Ruth, and after they lived there about ten years, both Mahlon and Chilion also died, and Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband," Ruth 1:1 through 5.

So, what about Elimelech? He packs up his family, and he moves them to Moab, and this was more than a geographical move, okay? This was leaving the promised land that God had given to the people. This was considered really a spiritual failure by other Jews. They would have looked at this as not good. It would have been a breaking of covenant, really a lack of trust in God and in his provisions. Elimelech's name means, "God is my king," and he leaves, taking his family with him. It appears that he might have

been on the run from God. He might have been going the other way. He thought maybe he could be a better provider. How often do we do this? We think, “Oh, I can do a better job, God. I can provide. I am not going to listen to those promises,” and what about Moab? Moab was not a vacation destination, I will tell you. It was not on the top ten list of places where Jews would want to go. It was dark. It had a complicated history. It was birthed out of Lot and his daughter. At times, Moab cast curses on Israel, so it was not a place that Jews would naturally go to find nearness to God, and then how about Naomi? She left home, goes to this foreign land. Her husband dies. Her two sons die. Her dreams die. Her identity is shattered. In verse 4, we are told that Naomi’s sons marry Moabite women. This was strictly against covenantal laws, and then they die. How did this decade in Naomi’s life feel? It must have been so hard. The text says she had left without. Certainly, she felt grief, loss of her home, moving to a forbidden land, her husband dying, her sons dying. Just one of these events would have been really hard.

I know in my life I have lost a husband to divorce, and I have buried a son way too early, and what can I tell you? I can tell you that loss changes you. Maybe you know loss as well. Maybe you are in a relationship that is breaking apart, and your heart is struggling. Maybe you have lost your job, and you thought you were going to have it forever. Or maybe you can’t even find a job. It is hard right now. Or maybe you have a family member that is slowly dying. Or maybe you have experienced sudden death. We all face loss. It is inevitable in this world, right? It says we will have trouble. Sometimes the road is simply hard. Sometimes it is just hard.

Naomi returned to her homeland, which held her community. That was where she was from. She was full when she left. She had a husband and two sons. She goes to the foreign land, and she comes back empty, so much so that she asked to change her name to Mara. Did you catch that in the passage? “Mara” means what? Bitterness. “Naomi,” means pleasant or sweet or delightful, so she asked to change her name to Mara. Have you ever felt that way? Have you ever had some bitterness, where it is creeping up in your soul and spewing out of your mouth? I think we all have. Bitterness is a little bit, actually reminds me of a biscuit. Sounds a little strange, but like soft on the inside, right? We are soft. We cut it open, and you leave it out, and a biscuit gets what? Hard and crusty. It crusts over on our soul, and that also really impacts our health. It might sound funny to say it is a biscuit, but it is dangerous. Bitterness is dangerous. We see Naomi in her bitterness. She does not deny it. What does she do? She laments, and can we pause a minute on lament? A few weeks ago, Hannah Arata preached and talked about lament. It is so important, and I think in our country in particular, we are grief illiterate, and we do not lament. There is a great book. It is called, “Dark Cloud to Deep Mercy, Discovering Grace of Lament,” by Mark Vroegop. He says, “Lament is a prayer in pain that leads to trust,” a prayer in pain that leads to trust.

Maybe you are not sure how to lament. I would encourage you to camp out in the Psalms. David is an expert at lamenting. Some scholars estimate that over half of the Psalms are laments. Pray through those psalms. Read through those laments. It is important. Lament might be your next step, your step out on the road. Maybe today fear has stopped you. Maybe grief has stopped you. Maybe self-protection. Maybe bitterness. Maybe, like Naomi, you feel left without, but the story does not end here. Naomi does not stay in grief forever. I, for one, am glad to hear that. In this chapter, we see a lot of her grief, but you look at the context. It says something happens, and Naomi hears.

When she hears, she gets up, and she moves. She sets out on the road. She does not stay in the foreign land. She does not stay stuck there. She gets up and sets out on the road. This is where we begin to see their road trip happening. We look at Ruth 1:6-7. It says, “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. With her two daughters-in-law, she left the place where she had been living and she” what? “She set out on the road that would take them back to the land of Judah.” So, we see that Naomi heard, she listened, she believed, and she moved. When Naomi heard of the Lord’s aid and his provision, she did what? It says, hearing his provision, she prepared to return home, so we see that faith is not simply just hearing. A lot of times we will just hear, but at some point, faith eventually gets up and walks. Faith gets up and walks. Returning home was a step of faith. She was in that foreign land. Returning home was a risk. That was a place of risk. She had to set out on the road.

Do you know what the road was like, the road going from Moab to Bethlehem? It was hot. It was dry. It was barren, and for two women in that culture, if we put on our Middle Eastern lens, it would have been scary. We do not know if they were accompanied. One commentator said, traveling from Moab to Bethlehem was risky business. It should not be undertaken lightly. They could have faced robbery. They could have faced assault. They could have been exploited, and yet, they set out, and just think, there was no GPS, no air conditioning, and there was no Bucky’s. Oh, my goodness, how did they do it? I don’t know. Both these women, they showed fortitude. Did they not? Are you still able to hear me? Keep going. All right, thank you, man.

A recent example of fortitude for me, and some of you may groan, I know some of you may not like this, but Netflix has a new “Little House on the Prairie,” and I know there were family members on my house that didn’t like it, but I will say, if you want to see fortitude, look at these people. They came out on covered wagons. They did not have roads. It was muddy. They lost a lot. They would have fires, and they would just have to pick up, but they would have to do it together as a community. They had fortitude. What is fortitude? Fortitude is courage to keep walking while you are still hurting. I think it is important for us to understand however, fortitude doesn’t just happen. Fortitude is a choice. Fortitude happens when we partner with hardship.

Hardship demands a decision. Let me say that again. Hardship demands a decision. The question is not simply, “What happened to you?” Because we all have things that happen, right? It is not what happened to you, but what will you do with what has happened to you? How will you let it form you? Will you let the hardship build fortitude within you? Will you ask God to help you, give you a willing spirit to partner that fortitude within you? We do not want to run from hard. Obviously, we do not want to pursue hard, but we want to walk through hard. We see fortitude in the choices of these women.

We also see it in Jesus, right? It says in Hebrews 12:2, “He endured the cross.” That was torture. That was abuse. That was shame. “He endured the cross.” Why? “For the joy set before Him. He scorned the shame, and now He is seated at the right hand.” So, like these women, like Jesus, we want to choose fortitude. We see the decisions the women made in the face of grief and loss. We see that they set out on the road. Naomi urges her daughters-in-law to go back three times. Did you catch that? I mean, she is like determined, “Go back, go back, go back.”

It reminds me a little bit of my grandmother. My grandmother would offer food relentlessly, which was wonderful, but “Do you want a biscuit? Here, have this biscuit. It is a great biscuit. Do you want that biscuit?” I would be like, “No, I’m good. I am good,” but unlike my grandmother, Naomi is not being polite. She really believes it is best for her daughters-in-law not to be with her, not to go. She is likely feeling shame as she set out on that road. She returns empty and feeling loss, and what about Ruth? We see Ruth’s fortitude to go. She is a Moabite. We also see her faithfulness, right? She chooses her mother-in-law. She chooses the God of Israel. Let’s look at Ruth 1:16 through 18: “But Ruth replied, ‘Don’t urge me to leave you and return back from you. Where you go, I will go. Where you stay, I will stay. Your people will be my people, and your God, my God. 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.’” When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her.”

Many times, we hear that verse at weddings, right? “I will go where you go, die with you, your people will be my people,” but really, this is an identity and a covenant commitment Ruth is making. Ruth chooses Naomi, but she is not only choosing Naomi. She is also choosing Naomi’s God. She is choosing Yahweh. How did she even know about Yahweh? It must have been through Naomi. Ruth chooses faithfulness. What is faithfulness? I think we all know what it is, but it is the quality of being loyal, constant, and reliable to a person, a promise or belief. It is being full of faith, right? Faithfulness, full of faith. For Ruth to go to Bethlehem, she risks being childless. She risks being marginalized. She was a foreigner in a country where that wasn’t looked upon well. She is giving up her cultural identity and her spiritual security, but she chose to be faithful.

Here is a distinction I think we should make. Fortitude keeps us walking. Faithfulness determines how we will walk, so we see Ruth is not simply enduring hardship. She walks faithfully. She chose Naomi. She chose Naomi’s God, and she chose community. She chose to walk out her grief with someone. I want to encourage you that you do not have to walk out your grief alone. There are many here at Waterstone that want to walk with you. One thing we are offering this fall, be leading the Hope for Journey. It is a parent support group. Family relationships are hard. Maybe you are a parent of an adult. That is a whole different ball game, isn’t it? Or a teenager. Let’s walk together. Let’s encourage each other. Let’s support one another. The road of hardship, it can form that faithfulness and that fortitude in us.

Talking about mothers-in-law, years ago I had the privilege of taking care of my mother-in-law. Our family took care of our mother-in-law, of Lars’ mom, Velma. This was what I call the Velma season of life, and it was hard. It was hard. I had elementary-age children, and then Velma came to live with us. I remember one time, you are always on alert. At 3:00 a.m. I hear this rustling in the kitchen. I’m like, “Oh no, what’s going on?” So, I go down there, and Velma is uncertain of the time. It is hard. She is uncertain of the time, so she is over the counter, unwrapping chocolate, about to put it in her mouth, and I realize, no, that is not chocolate. That is our daughter’s science fair project. It is clay. “Don’t eat it. Don’t do it,” so we had moments of laughter. God brought some healing, but it was hard. It was hard. It was a hard season, and I remember going into that season, I only had dread. I felt like it was just going to be hard, and the Lord said to me, “Am I going to be in that season? Because there is going to be good in it,” and there was good in the midst of the hard.

My story included a Steven minister. We at this church are so blessed to have Steven ministers. If you are not familiar with them, they are people who go through training, and they walk beside you as a companion. They encourage you, and they pray. Take advantage of our Steven ministers, and sometimes you notice that fortitude and faithfulness do not look dramatic and big. It is that slow, day-to-day, one-step-at-a-time walk. Faithfulness, like fortitude, just keeps showing up in moments of hardship. Fortitude keeps us walking, while faithfulness determines how we will walk, and maybe you have had some spaces of faithfulness. I think about some of you who have been at this church for years and years, and you have been walking faithfully, day in and day out. Those who are new, you are coming. You are wanting to receive. You want to be in community. Maybe you have had a friendship or a family member that has been challenging, but you keep showing up. That is faithfulness, and God delights in that. It reflects his heart.

Let's look at the last part of this passage. It says in Ruth 1:22, "So Naomi returned from Moab, accompanied by Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law, arriving in Bethlehem as the barley harvest was beginning." Early in verse one of chapter one, the author tells us this family is from Bethlehem. This is significant. That is their home, and if you were a Jew in that day, you would know Bethlehem. Your ears would be alerted. There is another layer of significance. Those Jews would have known that is where the messiah is coming from. It was prophesied in Micah 5:2. It says the one who would rule over Israel would come from Bethlehem. Naomi did not know that. Ruth did not know that. They did not know at that time. They just knew they were going home, and we know something that they do not know, because we know the story, and here they are. It says they are arriving in Bethlehem at the time of the harvest, and we can see that God is preparing hope before it can be seen.

The narrator of Ruth does not minimize the hardness of their journey. We see that. We see the lament, the bitterness. The story is told as it was, but at the end of this chapter, hope is hinted at: "They arrived in Bethlehem at the time of the barley harvest." The time of the barley harvest, that represented God's faithfulness. That was actually the beginning of the Passover, the Passover festival. There would have been lots of activity, people, joy in the streets. Maybe this is similar to how Spain felt recently, right, with winning the World Cup, just excitement and exuberance, by arriving at this precise moment, entering Bethlehem, which by the way means "House of Bread," that's right, House of Bread, when the community was experiencing collective joy and spiritual renewal.

Ruth is only four chapters long. Chapter one ends with the women arriving in Bethlehem. In chapter two, they meet a man named Boaz, and he is a relative of Naomi, and he becomes an important part of the story. We get to hear more about that next week. I encourage you to follow along, read Ruth, and if you do not know the story, here is the short version. Ruth marries Boaz. Spoiler alert, they are married, and then they have a son named Obed. Obed has a son named Jesse. Jesse has a son named David, and guess what? Coming through that line of David is Jesus, so when Ruth ends, the two grieving women arrive in Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest. We are getting a hint that the story is not over. At that time, Naomi could not see Boaz, and Ruth could not see David. Neither of them could see Jesus. What they could see, one step in front of them, one moment. Sometimes when you are in grief and lament, it is one breath at a time, but we see that the women just simply walked, and God wrote the redemption. The women simply walked, and God wrote the redemption. God was what work in the midst of those daily mundane choices, the choices of ordinary women, who showed extraordinary fortitude and faithfulness.

They chose to set out on that road. They chose community over isolation. They chose to take a risk in the face of the unknown. They chose to set out on that road. They were empty in order to travel and become full. They simply walked, and God wrote the redemption. In the heart, God shows up in fortitude and faithfulness for us. The road of hardship can lead to hope. We can have hope. Where do we find that hope? It is not because suffering disappears, so we live in a broken world. I often wonder if that brokenness, that is the very invitation for that intimacy with Christ. Imperfection is that invitation to intimacy.

People will disappoint us. Governments are going to fail. Surprise! Things are falling apart around us, but where do we find hope? We find it because God is faithful. It says that his character never changes. He is the same today, yesterday, and forever. He is the same. His promises remain. Naomi could not see chapter two. She did not know. Ruth could not see what was coming, what was next. They certainly could not see Jesus, not at that time, but God could. God could see that. Sometimes the road is just simply hard. Fortitude is the courage to keep walking. Faithfulness, that is really choosing to keep walking with God, and with his people, and hope, that is trusting that God is at work behind the scenes, that He has gone ahead of you on that road, and maybe today you feel like Naomi. Maybe you feel empty. Maybe you feel tired. Maybe you feel bitter. Or maybe you feel like Ruth. You are stepping out into this space, and you do not know what is ahead on the road. You do not know, but I think the invitation of Ruth chapter one is to keep walking. It is to keep taking the hand of Jesus, to trust Him. It is to keep holding on, because God met Naomi and Ruth. He wants to meet us. He is no different. He is already at work farther down our road. The women simply walked. God wrote the redemption.

My question this morning is, what is your next faithful step? Maybe it is lament. Maybe it is learning, taking some intentional space to lament. Maybe it is to join the parent support group or Steven ministers or a small group or Wednesdays at Waterstone. Or maybe it is just holding onto Jesus. Sometimes that is hard. Maybe you do not know Jesus. Maybe this is your moment to say, "Hey, I want to know you. I want to take your hand." The question is, what is your next faithful step? I'd like for us to take some space to sit with the Holy Spirit and ask Him, because He wants to speak to us. He wants to be on that road with us. So, the band is going to play, and we are just going to sit with that and listen to the Spirit.

Father, we just thank you for the fact that you care so much about us. It is amazing that you want us to set out on the road. You want us to keep walking. You want us to have fortitude. You want us to be faithful, because that is who you are, and our hope is not in ourselves. It is in you. It is in you and you alone, and so we surrender. We look to you. We thank you for who you are, for what you want to do, for being with us this morning, for Ruth, Lord. We thank you. Amen.

I just want to encourage you, when the road is filled with hardship, keep trusting. Allow God to form that fortitude in you. When the road is filled with hardship, be faithful. When we get to heaven, we want to hear Him say, "Well done, good and faithful servants." Just know that God is a God of hope, and He is still moving on your behalf. He has not forgotten you. God is still offering hope through Jesus, so the question is, will we take His hand? Will we walk with the Savior? Will we be like these women and simply just walk on that road that He has called us to? As we walk, He will write that redemption.

Paul Joslin: As we close today, I want to take a minute to acknowledge that sometimes there are sermons when we are preaching through as pastors, that we have looked at the text, and we want to share what that is. There are also sermons where we have actually lived what we are teaching, and today

Melonie's teaching on walking in fortitude and faithfulness comes from a deep place of her story. She mentioned losing her son. She mentioned the divorce that she has walked through. She has been to those places where it looks like there is hopelessness, and so I just want to thank her for stepping into that today and sharing that story with us. If you are in that space today, if you need someone to pray for you, we have elders, Stephen ministers, prayer ministers who will be around the room after service. They would love to just say a prayer over you. All of us need prayer for different things that are going on in our lives, and so as they make their way to those spaces, you will see them. Often, they have a red lanyard, and they would be happy to pray with you this morning.

Also, if you are newer to Waterstone, welcome. We are so glad that you are here. I would love to get to know you, hear your story, hear a little bit more about you, and so I will be right outside these doors. Feel free to come up, say hello, tell me a little bit of your story, and I would love to get to know you. Then finally, this is a big week for a lot of you. Many of you are getting back into that school rhythm, dropping kids off in the morning, trying to get bedtimes locked in, and we just want to take a moment and pray for you. We have a lot of teachers, coaches, and staff at different schools, elementary schools, high schools, and so we just want to bless this week. We want to pray for strength. We want to pray for fortitude. We want to pray for joy in the midst of that changing season, and so if you would, the benediction today will be along that line, and so if you are in that space, and you want to just hold out your hands to receive this blessing, I would encourage you to do so.

Heavenly Father, we come to you, and Lord, we give it all to you, the new wake-up times, the goodbye to summer that we are grieving, the new rhythms and routines where we feel like we maybe see less of our kids than we would like. God, for the teachers and the faculty, the staff who are investing so deeply into the lives of the next generation, we just pray blessing over them. God, for parents and for the challenges that they face of raising kids in this world, Lord, we just pray blessing over them. Lord, for our students and for our kids, for the challenges that they face, for the experiences that they have, for the nerves, for the excitement, for the weariness, God, we give it all to you, and we pray a blessing over them. May we, the people of Waterstone, go in peace this week, to become like Jesus and live for others everywhere that we go, and it is in his name that we pray, amen. You may go in peace.

37:47 minutes

Edited by Tom Kenaston

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