



November 3, 2013

Journey through the Valley of the Shadow



A Grow-Pray-Study guide for small groups

This guide uses the Scripture readings from the daily “GPS” study guide. Group members may read the daily readings before the group meeting, or read the verses aloud when the group meets.

The group may subdivide into two or three smaller groups, each discussing a set of the daily readings and the matching questions on page 2, or the entire group may discuss those questions together. We pray that, whatever pattern of study you choose, the Holy Spirit will weave God’s Word into the life and heart of each group member.

MONDAY

Ruth 1:1-5

A severe famine in Israel sent Naomi and her family to live in the foreign land of Moab. In Moab, her husband and both sons died. That left Naomi and her daughters-in-law alone. That would be an overwhelming kind of loss today. But in a male-dominated Middle Eastern culture, it was even worse. Women with no male relative to give them a “family” identity also lost all legal rights and standing.

TUESDAY

Ruth 1:6-18

After the famine in Israel ended, Naomi decided to return home. Though her daughters-in-law set out with her, she argued that they would be better off, and more likely to find new husbands, in Moab. She convinced one of them, but Ruth insisted that she was going to stay with Naomi no matter what. (Interestingly, although we often hear her words in verses 16-17 at weddings, they were originally from a daughter-in-law to her mother-in-law.)

WEDNESDAY

Ruth 1:19-2:23,
Deuteronomy 24:17-22

Naomi’s awful losses left her outwardly vulnerable, with few practical or legal resources. They also left her spiritually vulnerable. In Ruth 1:13 she said “the Lord’s will has come out against me.” In Bethlehem, she told those who knew her, “Don’t call me Naomi (‘pleasant’), but call me Mara (‘bitter’)” (Ruth 1:20). When Boaz, a kinsman, was kind to Ruth (as Hebrew law in Deuteronomy 24 directed), hope began to revive in both women.

THURSDAY

Ruth 3:1-18

The culture and customs of early Israel sound strange and puzzling to us. But the gist of this story was that Ruth and Naomi knew they needed God to provide for their future (cf. Ruth 2:20). Yet, while trusting God, they didn’t just wait passively for their luck to change, but actively pursued Boaz’s favor. And as things turned out, God used Boaz’s favor and love to provide for Ruth and Naomi’s future.

FRIDAY

Ruth 4:1-12

Again, the book of Ruth assumed readers knew the customs and laws, but we aren’t likely to. For example, we don’t close car deals or home sale contracts by removing a shoe (cf. verses 7-8)! According to Israel’s laws, Boaz was second in line to be Ruth’s “redeemer” (which also helped Naomi, because her son had been Ruth’s husband). Boaz shrewdly negotiated with the relative who was first in line, and happily won the right to marry Ruth.

SATURDAY

Ruth 4:13-22, Matthew
1:5-6

Boaz and Ruth married, and had a son named Obed. Naomi’s friends joyously celebrated her new grandson with her. No doubt for most of the people of Bethlehem, that seemed like “happy ending” enough. It’s unlikely that any of them suspected that Obed would one day have a grandson named David, who would become Israel’s greatest king. And who could have imagined what Matthew knew and recorded—that the faithfulness of Ruth from Moab had made her one of the Messiah’s ancestors?

To access the Family Activity suggested in this week’s GPS, download the printable GPS from www.cor.org/guide.



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SUGGESTED PRAYER

Lord God, when we face loss in our lives, remind us that the worst thing is never the last thing and that you are there with us and completing your plan for us. Grant us such wisdom, patience, hope and encouragement during these times that we might bless others. Draw us ever nearer to you and to your path so that we might be a guide for those who might be lost. Amen.

CONNECT (5-10 minute discussion, at most)

What feeling(s) does the fall season conjure for you? Do you look forward to fall? What do you most like to do during the fall?

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND STUDY

- Read **Ruth 1:1-5**. As a widow in that society, left without any males in the family, Naomi had hit rock bottom. Have you ever felt that you had hit bottom? How did those circumstances affect your trust in God? Naomi had moved a great distance, and had to do it again to return to Israel, leaving everything and everyone except Ruth behind. Have you ever made a move like that? How did you deal with the losses and changes a move like that presents?
- Read **Ruth 1:6-18**. What might have caused Ruth stay with Naomi? Have there been people in your life who influenced you to make “their God your God”? Ruth left behind all that she had ever known to follow Naomi. Have you ever had to leave something behind in order to follow God? How did that affect your relationship with God?
- Read **Ruth 1:19-2:23, Deuteronomy 24:17-22**. What do you think Ruth might have said if someone asked her about God after the experience in these verses? Who was the instrument of God’s mercy? Has anyone, after you have faced trouble, ever blessed you in some way that made you thank God for all his blessings? Do you believe the way Boaz (and God) treated Ruth is relevant to the debates in our country about the proper attitude toward immigrants? Why or why not?
- Read **Ruth 3:1-18**. Did Naomi and Ruth’s actions open the door for God to act on their behalf? Although there are times in which we should wait and trust that God will act in our lives, are we sometimes expected to be proactive in preparing the way for God’s help? What might be examples of times for us to wait, and times for us to be proactive? Has God ever used others as instruments in your life? How can you be an instrument of God in the lives of others?
- Read **Ruth 4:1-12**. From what you gather from the story, did this turn out the way Boaz had hoped? Why or why not? Have you ever been “nudged” to give up your own comfort or enrichment in order to bless someone else? Has anyone else ever done that for you? Did you feel at the time that this happened as a result of God’s guidance? Do you have confidence in God’s love for you, and has that confidence affected your actions toward others?
- Read **Ruth 4:13-22, Matthew 1:5-6**. Through this series of events and the faith of the participants, Ruth, an immigrant who was not Hebrew, became an ancestor of the Messiah. What does this make you think of God’s plans relative to our lives? In reading these stories, are you encouraged that God will complete whatever plan he has for your life, whatever life throws at you? Do you routinely use the Bible to find encouragement?

From last week: Did you make your own, personal and private list of hurtful things others have done to you that you still harbor hard feelings about? Did you pray for these people and ask for God’s help as you let go and forgave them? Did you, if possible, seek these people out and make every effort to reach reconciliation? If you can, share with the group whatever you learned about yourself in the process.



FOR ADDITIONAL INSIGHT

Coping with grief and loss

Get support:

The single most important factor in healing from loss is having the support of other people. Even if you aren't comfortable talking about your feelings under normal circumstances, it's important to express them when you're grieving. Sharing your loss makes the burden of grief easier to carry. Wherever the support comes from, accept it and do not grieve alone. Connecting to others will help you heal.

Finding support after a loss:

Turn to friends and family members – Now is the time to lean on the people who care about you, even if you take pride in being strong and self-sufficient. Draw loved ones close, rather than avoiding them, and accept the assistance that's offered. Oftentimes, people want to help but don't know how, so tell them what you need—whether it's a shoulder to cry on or help with funeral arrangements.

Draw comfort from your faith – If you follow a religious tradition, embrace the comfort its mourning rituals can provide. Spiritual activities that are meaningful to you—such as praying, meditating, or going to church—can offer solace. If you're questioning your faith in the wake of the loss, talk to a clergy member or others in your religious community.

Join a support group – Grief can feel very lonely, even when you have loved ones around. Sharing your sorrow with others who have experienced similar losses can help. To find a bereavement support group in your area, contact local hospitals, hospices, funeral homes, and counseling centers.

Talk to a therapist or grief counselor – If your grief feels like too much to bear, call a mental health professional with experience in grief counseling. An experienced therapist can help you work through intense emotions and overcome obstacles to your grieving.

Take care of yourself:

When you're grieving, it's more important than ever to take care of yourself. The stress of a major loss can quickly deplete your energy and emotional reserves. Looking after your physical and emotional needs will help you get through this difficult time.

Face your feelings. You can try to suppress your grief, but you can't avoid it forever. In order to heal, you have to acknowledge the pain. Trying to avoid feelings of sadness and loss only prolongs the grieving process. Unresolved grief can also lead to complications such as depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and health problems.

Express your feelings in a tangible or creative way. Write about your loss in a journal. If you've lost a loved one, write a letter saying the things you never got to say; make a scrapbook or photo album celebrating the person's life; or get involved in a cause or organization that was important to him or her.

Look after your physical health. The mind and body are connected. When you feel good physically, you'll also feel better emotionally. Combat stress and fatigue by getting enough sleep, eating right, and exercising. Don't use alcohol or drugs to numb the pain of grief or lift your mood artificially.

Don't let anyone tell you how to feel, and don't tell yourself how to feel either. Your grief is your own, and no one else can tell you when it's time to "move on" or "get over it." Let yourself feel whatever you feel without embarrassment or judgment. It's okay to be angry, to yell at the heavens, to cry or not to cry. It's also okay to laugh, to find moments of joy, and to let go when you're ready.

Plan ahead for grief "triggers." Anniversaries, holidays, and milestones can reawaken memories and feelings. Be prepared for an emotional wallop, and know that it's completely normal. If you're sharing a holiday or lifecycle event with other relatives, talk to them ahead of time about their expectations and agree on strategies to honor the person you loved.

Source: http://www.helpguide.org/mental/grief_loss.htm

Final application:

This week, if you are experiencing grief and loss, review the suggestions above and apply them to yourself. If not, and you know others who are experiencing difficulties, offer any support you can to help them deal with their situation. Pray daily for God's insight, wisdom and strength for those times when you will face loss and those times when you might be able to help others. Next week, share your experiences with the group.