

MATRIARCHS

A 13 Week Study of Mothers of the Bible

*Discover the Power of Motherhood
through the Lives of Those Who Have
Gone Before Us*

Week: Four

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Biblical Mom: Naomi

Title of Lesson: NAOMI - Not Forsaken

Key Influence: Used by God to Include Ruth in the Genealogy of Jesus Christ

Key Verse: The Book of Ruth

Video Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tqOZnyXTVeI>

NAOMI - There's Always Hope

It is hard to admit that this writer has never been much of a reader. But, truth be told, it's not reading that I love. It's studying. Always has been.

When I was a little girl, I'd situate myself at the head of my bed, prop myself up with the fluffiest feather pillows I could find and begin flipping through the pages of the books on my assigned reading list. I'd rummage through each chapter in search of those pertinent points, just enough to give me the gist of the story without having to reach the whole book.

But I never skipped out on the last page because I wanted to see those final words, *And they all lived happily ever after!* That was always my favorite part, Not because it was the end, but because no matter what the main characters experienced, hope reigned, they were not forsaken, and they all lived happily ever after.

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We all want a storybook ending, but *happily ever after* seldom happens without the reality of life's ups and downs. The seasons of our lives beckon us to come to grips with the pain and heartache tucked not-so-neatly between the pages of our lives.

Today, we turn to the book of Ruth and if we flip to the end of the story first, we will find that they did, indeed, live happily ever after. But happy endings rarely exist without heartache and pain.

Life is like that, you know?

This is a time when judges ruled and a famine swept the land leaving people's lives as barren as the parched earth on which they walked.

Allow your imagination to experience the families that were affected by the famine, What thoughts must have crossed their minds? What fear parents must have had for their children? What plans would you conjure up to fix it for your family?

Most of us can't even conceive what ran through the minds of mommas who heard the growls of their children's empty bellies yet had no way to help them. Oh, the heart of those brave dads who couldn't protect or provide for their families!

Oh sweet friend, I desperately want you to know this story is so much more than words on a page. These were real families, in the midst of a real famine, with real decisions to make, and God really put it inscribed it in Scripture because He really wants us to know Him more.

For the sake of allowing your heart to feel what their hearts may have felt, please write out how you might feel in the same circumstances and some solutions you might come up with to rectify the situation and save your family from the hardships, perhaps even from starvation, from a famine.

New Doesn't Always Equal Better

Let me allow Scripture to introduce you to a sweet family from Bethlehem. A family much like yours and mine. A family gripped by the effects of a famine and forced to choose whether to stay or to go.

Elimelech chose to go.

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“1 Now it came to pass, in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehem, Judah, went to dwell in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons. 2 The name of the man was Elimelech, the name of his wife was Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion—Ephrathites of Bethlehem, Judah. And they went to the country of Moab and remained there.” Ruth 1:1-2 (NKJV)

Thinking it was the best thing for his family, Elimelech and his family packed their bags and made a 10 day trek to Moab.

In our day, moving is normal. Not nearly as complicated as loading up a caravan of camels, strapping donkeys down with the weight of your whole household, and taking a ten day trip over treacherous, rocky terrain with two boys in the back asking for the umpteenth time, “Are we there yet?”

We aren’t told about the conversation between Elimelech and Naomi before the decision to move. We are given any details about the their age or the age of their sons, or if their sons piped in with their opinion about the whole move. We don’t know if it was Elimelech’s idea or Naomi’s... if Naomi agreed or if she went reluctantly... if they sought God about the decision before the left or if they didn’t even whisper the first prayer.

What we know is they left their family and friends and all that was familiar in hopes that they could escape the hardships of the famine and start a new life in a town called Moab.

Named after Lot’s incestuous firstborn, Moab thrived economically largely in part because of its trade route connecting Egypt and Mesopotamia. It was was known for its well-watered fields and thriving commerce. But things don’t always turn out like we think they should just because we move to a nice new neighborhood with ample opportunities to secure a strong and stable financial future.

Read the following three verses and notice how quickly things can change.

“3 Then Elimelech, Naomi’s husband, died; and she was left, and her two sons. 4 Now they took wives of the women of Moab: the name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth. And they dwelt there about ten years. 5 Then both Mahlon and Chilion also died; so the woman survived her two sons and her husband.” Ruth 1:5-5 (NKJV)

One minute, they are one big happy family full of dreams for a brand new life and the next minute Naomi is a widow. One minute she’s is trying to move forward with her sons and their new wives, the next minute she loses both of her boys.

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Alone. Such a hard place to be.

What does a woman do when she loses everyone she loves? How does she go on with any kind of hope when she doesn't have even a grandchild left to make her feel like she is part of something that matters?

During Naomi's day, widows were cared for by their children. But Naomi had no children left to take care of her. She only had two daughter-in-law and she knew she had to send the back to their own families and give them a chance for a future of their own.

It didn't take long for Naomi to discover that new doesn't always equal better.

Oh, how **James 4:13-15 (NLT)** resound with that truth...

"13 Look here, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we are going to a certain town and will stay there a year. We will do business there and make a profit.' 14 How do you know what your life will be like tomorrow? Your life is like the morning fog—it's here a little while, then it's gone. 15 What you ought to say is, 'If the Lord wants us to, we will live and do this or that.'"

How often do you and I embark on a journey we haven't even prayed about and then feel forsaken when we get out there on the limb? Maybe you too have felt like the Lord was leading you to do something and thought you were stepping out in faith only to find out you were stepping out on your own.

Have you ever felt like the Lord was leading you to do something and thought you were stepping out in faith only to find out you were stepping out on your own?

Think for a moment about some of the decisions you've made in the past year. Jot a few of them down and indicate if you believe the Lord led you to do them or not and whether you still believe that to be true. _____

Naomi's life teaches us that seeking God's face before we make any decision is always the most important part of the decision process. We don't know if Naomi and her man were wise enough to ask for wisdom before they started their journey.

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But before we go any further, I also want you to think about those we know who did seek God's face first. Men like Abraham, Moses, David, and Paul. Women like Hannah, Deborah, Elizabeth, and Mary. Many of their lives remind us that saying yes to do God's will doesn't mean it will be easy, but it does assure us that the Lord will be with us every step of the way.

Trusting God to be good even when our circumstances are bad takes a lot of faith for a heart that feels forsaken. But we can rest in the promise of His Word to be true...

"And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." Romans 8:28 (NASB)

Sweet friend, if you are going through something that isn't good right now, hang on to your faith. You are not forsaken. And somehow, in some Divine way, God will weave whatever it is that is making you feel forsaken into something good.

God alone has the power to do just that. And God alone loves you too much not to.

A Life Worth Following

Some people live lives that invite us to embrace their journey as if it was our own calling us to be more than we thought we could and better than we knew was possible. Elizabeth Elliot's life is such a life for me. Naomi was such a life for Ruth. Why else would Ruth be so determined to not only follow her, but also follow her God?

**Somewhere beyond the written Word was a life worth following...
a life a of faith in a God is is faithful even when life is hard.**

Naomi was more than Ruth's mother-in-law. She was her mentor, her confidant and her friend.

"16 But Ruth replied, "Don't ask me to leave you and turn back. Wherever you go, I will go; wherever you live, I will live. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God. 17 Wherever you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord punish me severely if I allow anything but death to separate us!" Ruth 1:16-17 (NLT)

Engrained on the heart of every Christian is the desire to inspire others to want what we have... to live such a life that when others see us, they are drawn to Christ.

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Reflect for a moment on who it was that pointed you to Christ? Share what it was about his or her life that inspired you to surrender your life to Christ. _____

There are times when we are having a hard time clinging to our own faith that we think others don't know it exists. It is so easy to feel unworthy when we know our faith is weak, our strength is gone and we feel like God has forsaken us.

Yet, somehow Ruth saw in Naomi what she forgot existed in herself. Perhaps it was the courage to be brave enough to move on alone. Or maybe it was the deep love expressed by her willingness to set them free to embrace the life Naomi had once treasured but could never regain.

This was a day like no other. A day of decision. A day when a life of one's influence is put to the test.

Ruth clung. Orpah did not.

The net we cast with the legacy of our lives is strategically strung with openings large enough for those who wish to escape, small enough for those who wish to cling. Whether one flees to her own family and her own gods or clings to you and yours can not be decided by you.

Yours is to cast the net wide with the way you live your life.

To cast the net wide for your children, for your lost husband, for your family, for your friends, for your co-workers. Yours is to take on the mantel of a mentor and pray like crazy they will long to cling.

Who are you casting the net for today? Would you take a moment to list their names and pray for them now? _____

Wielding our lives as weapons of grace in the Master's hands isn't always easy. We aren't always at our shiniest or sharpest. Sometimes we feel just plain useless and unworthy of being used.

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But then God whispers through a life that clings reminding you of what you've known all along. It is really Him they see... and He uses you, not just in spite of what you've been through and how you have walked through it, but *in light* of what you've been through and how He has carried you through it.

Feeling Forsaken

Your pain. It's real.

Don't let anyone tell you it's not.

What you've been through. It's real too.

No one should minimize your experience or your pain.

Pain has a way of changing people, beckoning them to stay where they were only meant to visit. Depression. It's a natural response to life-altering events. Part of dealing with the pain and coping with the loss is allowing yourself to go there, but at some point, staying there becomes a choice.

Naomi was familiar with pain. She knew what it felt like to suffer loss. Much like Job, she lost it all.

Whether grieving the loss of a loved one, dealing with disappointment, failure or fear, it's easy to feel like God has forsaken you.

Naomi did.

When releasing her daughters-in-law back to their own homes and families, Naomi insisted, *"Things are far more bitter for me than for you, because the Lord himself has raised his fist against me."* Ruth 1:13 (NLT)

And when Naomi and Ruth reached Bethlehem and an excited group of friends and family gathered around to welcome them back, Naomi spouted out, *"19 So the two of them continued on their journey. When they came to Bethlehem, the entire town was excited by their arrival. 'Is it really Naomi?' the women asked. 20 'Don't call me Naomi,' she responded. 'Instead, call me Mara, for the Almighty has made life very bitter for me. 21 I went away full, but the Lord has brought me home empty. Why call me Naomi when the Lord has caused me to suffer and the Almighty has sent such tragedy upon me?'"* Ruth 1:19-21 (NLT)

There's a play on words I don't want you to miss.

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In Hebrew, Naomi means *pleasant or my pleasantness*. Mara means *bitter*. The woman who left Bethlehem may have been pleasant but the woman who returned was bitter. She may have left with high hopes and big dreams, but she returned broken-hearted and empty-handed, feeling forsaken, broken, and bitter.

If you haven't noticed, our lives are lived in cycles. Ecclesiastes 3 reminds us that there is a time and a season for everything. No one is immune from certain seasons of this life. Life, death, joy and sorrow. At some point in this life we live, we will face it all.

Read the verses below and circle the words *not forsaken* or the words that express that concept in each one.

"And those who know Your name will put their trust in You, For You, O Lord, have not forsaken those who seek You." Psalm 9:10 (NASB)

"We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed" 2 Corinthians 4:8-9 (ESV)

"Be strong and courageous, do not be afraid or tremble at them, for the Lord your God is the one who goes with you. He will not fail you or forsake you. The Lord is the one who goes ahead of you; He will be with you. He will not fail you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed." Deuteronomy 31:6, 8 (NASB)

"Then David continued, "Be strong and courageous, and do the work. Don't be afraid or discouraged, for the Lord God, my God, is with you. He will not fail you or forsake you. He will see to it that all the work related to the Temple of the Lord is finished correctly." 1 Chronicles 28:20 (NLT)

"I will bring the blind by a way they did not know; I will lead them in paths they have not known. I will make darkness light before them, And crooked places straight. These things I will do for them, And not forsake them." Isaiah 42:16 (NKJV)

"I will not leave you as orphans [comfortless, bereaved, and helpless]; I will come [back] to you." John 14:18 (Amplified)

We've all looked for God to show up, wondered where He was, wished we could somehow see Him, touch Him, feel Him. We've all longed for a tangible hug from Heaven, been bewildered by our circumstances, and felt forsaken... even in only for a moment.

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But He does not forsake His people.

*Feeling forsaken and being forsaken are two worlds apart.
Faith is not about what we feel, it's about what is true regardless of how we feel.
Truth does not change just because I can't feel it.*

You may feel forsaken today, but He is right there with you, precious sister... every. step. of. the. way!

Words of Wisdom from a Woman Who Knows

When you read through the book of Ruth you can't help but notice how Naomi's words of wisdom were exactly what Ruth needed to fulfill her God-given destiny.

Speaking life into the lives of others is something we are all called to do.

*Make no mistake about it, Naomi was playing matchmaker
and she was playing for keeps!*

Naomi was well aware of her husband's kin and the custom of their culture that would woo the godly man to the heart of her daughter-in-law Ruth.

Read the following passages and underline every instruction or words of encouragement that Naomi gave to Ruth:

19 And her mother-in-law said to her, "Where have you gleaned today? And where did you work? Blessed be the one who took notice of you." So she told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked, and said, "The man's name with whom I worked today is Boaz." **20** Then Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, "Blessed be he of the Lord, who has not forsaken His kindness to the living and the dead!" And Naomi said to her, "This man is a relation of ours, one of our close relatives." **21** Ruth the Moabitess said, "He also said to me, 'You shall stay close by my young men until they have finished all my harvest.'" **22** And Naomi said to Ruth her daughter-in-law, "It is good, my daughter, that

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you go out with his young women, and that people do not meet you in any other field.” Ruth 2:19-22 (NKJV)

“1 Then Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, “My daughter, shall I not seek security for you, that it may be well with you? 2 Now Boaz, whose young women you were with, is he not our relative? In fact, he is winnowing barley tonight at the threshing floor. 3 Therefore wash yourself and anoint yourself, put on your best garment and go down to the threshing floor; but do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking. 4 Then it shall be, when he lies down, that you shall notice the place where he lies; and you shall go in, uncover his feet, and lie down; and he will tell you what you should do.” 16 When she came to her mother-in-law, she said, “Is that you, my daughter?” Then she told her all that the man had done for her. 17 And she said, “These six ephahs of barley he gave me; for he said to me, ‘Do not go empty-handed to your mother-in-law.’” 18 Then she said, “Sit still, my daughter, until you know how the matter will turn out; for the man will not rest until he has concluded the matter this day.” Ruth 3:1-4, 16-18 (NKJV)

Naomi knew what Ruth did not. The Law required a kinsman to redeem the bloodline of a relative who had died. (Deuteronomy 25:5-10) Boaz was a good man. A godly man. A man who would willingly fulfill the role of a kinsman redeemer. A man who would be the kind of husband she knew her dedicated daughter-in-law deserved.

Perhaps the whole *laying at the foot of a man in the middle of the night to propose to him* didn't make sense to Ruth. It certainly doesn't make sense to me! But it was the custom of the day for the bereaved widow to look to the next of kin to stand in the gap, to man-up, and to assume the rightful role of the kinsman redeemer.

Some people are worth listening to because their life validates their words and you know they want what is best for you.

These are the women who speak life into our lives.

These are the women we long to be.

These are the women whose words of wisdom help us step into who we were created to be.

Lean in and listen.

It'll will be worth it. I promise!

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There's Always Hope - You Are Not Forsaken

Morning Glories. They bloom when the sun rises, at least for a while.

But when the heat of the day weighs heavy with haze, they withdrawal until morning dawns with the beauty of a new sunrise.

The sun was rising for Naomi once again and hope loomed largely in her heart. It was almost as if you could see her beginning to bloom before your very eyes.

Just after Ruth returned from gleaning in the Boaz's field, Naomi's hope was revived and the God she thought had forgotten her was the God she was praising once again.

Oh sweet sister, read Ruth 2:20 and underline, circle, or highlight the words "not forsaken."

"20 Then Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, "Blessed be the of the Lord, who has not forsaken His kindness to the living and the dead!" And Naomi said to her, "This man is a relation of ours, one of our close relatives."

Maybe you feel like God has forsaken you in some area of your life. As a testimony to the truth that He has not, will you fill in the blank below regarding the area in which you know He has not forsaken you even though you feel as though He has?

Blessed be the of the Lord, who has not forsaken His kindness to me in the area of _____

Don't miss this final verse because there really is a storybook ending to this epic story. They really do live happily every after.

***13** So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife; and when he went in to her, the Lord gave her conception, and she bore a son. **14** Then the women said to Naomi, "Blessed be the Lord, who has not left you this day without a close relative; and may his name be famous in Israel! **15** And may he be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age; for your daughter-in-law, who loves you, who is better to you than seven sons, has borne him." **16** Then Naomi took the child and laid him on her bosom, and became a nurse to him. **17** Also the neighbor women gave him a name, saying, "There is a son born to Naomi." And they called his name Obed. He is the father of Jesse, the father of David." Ruth 4:13-17*

With a grand baby in her arms, Mara got lost somewhere between those cute chubby cheeks and that cuddly little baby boy.

Naomi was back.

She really hadn't gone anywhere.

She just forgot who she was. A woman not forsaken.

That's who Naomi is. And that's who you are, sweet friend. If you know Jesus... yes... that's exactly who you are!

WHAT THIS MOMMA LEARNED FROM THAT MOMMA: _____

HOW I CAN APPLY IT TO MY LIFE: _____

MEMORY VERSE:

“I will not leave you as orphans [comfortless, bereaved, and helpless]; I will come [back] to you.” John 14:18 (Amplified)

PRAY ABOUT IT: *Lord, life can be so hard. Sometimes, my mind says what my heart knows is not true. You have never forsaken me even when I've felt like You have. You are for me. You love me with an everlasting love. You know the number of hairs on my head and the thoughts of my heart. You have inscribed me upon the palm of Your hand and my ways are ever before You. You will not leave me or forsake me. Ever. Thank You Lord! Oh, thank You SO much!*

