

## Part E) How can I help Myself???

Ruth 1:1-5 Now it came about in the days when the judges governed, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the land of Moab with his wife and his two sons. <sup>2</sup> The name of the man *was* Elimelech, and the name of his wife, Naomi; and the names of his two sons *were* Mahlon and Chilion, Ephrathites of Bethlehem in Judah. Now they entered the land of Moab and remained there. <sup>3</sup> Then Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died; and she was left with her two sons. <sup>4</sup> They took for themselves Moabite women *as* wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. And they lived there about ten years. <sup>5</sup> Then both Mahlon and Chilion also died, and the woman was bereft of her two children and her husband.

- The historical account called the Book of Ruth begins with a struggling family of four relocating from Bethlehem area to about fifty miles southeast to the country of Moab. Their names were Elimelech the father, Naomi the mother, Chilion and Mahlon the two sons. Naomi lost her husband Elimelech and she was survived by her two sons, Mahlon and Chilion. They ended up marrying two Moabite women named Orpah and Ruth. They lived as a family in Moab.
- About ten years later, without any explanation, Orpah lost her husband Chilion and Ruth lost her husband Mahlon. In a little more than ten years there were three deaths resulting in three broken hearts of three widows. To further complicate the situation, the following was true.
  - Naomi was in a foreign land. She was not among the people of her lineage and risked being permanently absorbed into an alien culture.
  - Naomi had no surviving male descendents. Women could not be property owners according to the Law. To return to Judah meant that she would not be able to claim the land of her family.
  - Naomi was extremely poor. Money does not make the world go round, but it certainly makes things a little easier. From some of the many clues revealed in the ensuing texts, we can see that they were not a people of wealth.
  - Naomi was extremely old. For her to remarry really was not an option in the world that she came from. The odds were great that she would die alone when her time came.
- It is with the distress of three widows that we find the setting for the lesson, “How can I help myself?” Those who experience a death of a loved-one often are left with a sense of hopelessness and helplessness. The pain is great, the sorrow is real and the prospects seem few. There are also certain responsibilities that we all face in struggling with the loss of someone dear to us and the Book of Ruth reveals some of these in principle form. We must answer the question, “How can I help myself in the grieving process?”

Ruth 1:6-13 Then she arose with her daughters-in-law that she might return from the land of Moab, for she had heard in the land of Moab that the LORD had visited His people in giving them food. <sup>7</sup> So she departed from the place where she was, and her two daughters-in-law with her; and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah. <sup>8</sup> And Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, “Go, return each of you to her mother's house. May the LORD deal kindly with you as you have dealt with the dead and with me. <sup>9</sup> “May the LORD grant that you may find rest, each in the house of her husband.” Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept. <sup>10</sup>

And they said to her, “No, but we will surely return with you to your people.” 11 But Naomi said, “Return, my daughters. Why should you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands? 12 “Return, my daughters! Go, for I am too old to have a husband. If I said I have hope, if I should even have a husband tonight and also bear sons, 13 would you therefore wait until they were grown? Would you therefore refrain from marrying? No, my daughters; for it is harder for me than for you, for the hand of the LORD has gone forth against me.”

### I can help myself by realizing the need to move on.

- All three analyzed their present grievous positions of life and came to the conclusion that it was time to move on. Initially they were all heading in the same direction for the scripture stated, “...they went on the way to return to the land of Judah...”, but this plan would be altered. Naomi reasoned with Orpah and Ruth that it would be better for them to return to their parent’s home and possibly marry another since they were still young enough. As hard as this sounded, it was the truth.
- The three widows wept together as each struggled with the loss of their husbands and the realization that all must move on to another plan, for life dealt them circumstances that made it so.
  - Orpah would start a new life at her mother’s home.
  - Naomi had to relocate back to the land of Bethlehem.
  - Ruth had to take new employment of gleaning fields.
  - These were all adjustments made in the process of moving on.
- It would serve us well to keep this point in mind for the present and future suffering that is to come. I can help myself by coming to the realization that I must move on. Rarely does a death of someone close to leave us with unaltered plans for the future. Perhaps we must come to the realization that we...
  - ...might have to relocate from one place to another.
  - ...might have to take on a different job to make ends meet.
  - ...might have to adjust the ways that we will be living in the future.
  - ...might hire out some of the responsibilities.
  - ...might need to be involved in areas that might make me feel uncomfortable.
  - ...might have to seek counseling and advice.
  - ...might have to develop new friendships and acquaintances.
  - ...might have to make a different life plan.
  - ...might have to learn to drive, manage the books or fill out the forms.
- What made that loved-one so special was that their life was intertwined with our own in so many ways. Their loss is not merely the loss of a body, but a life. Death is often a trumpet that calls for a realization to move on in a different direction. We do not always know all the steps of that moving-on, but we must recognize that it is here and is real and must be faced. I can help myself by coming to the realization that I must move on.

Ruth 1:14-18 And they lifted up their voices and wept again; and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her. <sup>15</sup> Then she said, “Behold, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and her gods; return after your sister-in-law.” <sup>16</sup> But Ruth said, “Do not urge me to leave you *or* turn back from following you; for where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people *shall be* my people, and your God, my God. <sup>17</sup> “Where you die, I will die,

and there I will be buried. Thus may the LORD do to me, and worse, if *anything but* death parts you and me.”<sup>18</sup> When she saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her.

### I can help myself by allowing others to help me.

- After further weeping, Orpah went back to her people, but Ruth clung to Naomi. The word for “clung” is a powerful word, meaning *following hard* or *overtaking*. This is one of the more touching moments in all of scripture, an old widow woman walking on a path with only a few possessions and a young Moabite widow following close behind, crying and begging not to leave her behind. It adds power to already powerful words of commitment, for Ruth desired to suffer their loss with her and not apart from her.
- Even though Naomi was bitter in her circumstances, she ultimately gave into Ruth’s fervent request by no longer asking her to go back. It is also important to note that Ruth was suffering as well and that they would now both suffer together. There is much to be said in this book about allowing others to come to the aid of the hurting.
  - It was Ruth and Orpah that came to aid of Naomi and vice-versa in 1:8.
  - It was Ruth coming to help Naomi by going into the fields to glean wheat for food in chapter 2.
  - It was Naomi coming to the aid of Ruth through advice about the kinsman redeemer process in 3:1-5.
  - It was Ruth asking for the help of Boaz in 3:9
  - There seems to be an understanding that the suffering should allow others to help them in their hour of need.
- There is a tendency to become tough and hardened when losing someone close to us. Certain grieving emotions tend to make us want to push others away and go suffer alone in the corner. This is not healthy and ultimately can lead to being overcome with sorrow.
- That leads to the following questions:
  - Who was or who is your Ruth for your suffering?
  - Who was that special someone or group of people that have come to you and said, “I am here for you in your time of suffering.”
  - What did or will you do if that is so? Did you allow them to be there for you?
  - There is a firm belief in Christianity that God often works through His people to accomplish His will. Who are the “Ruths” that God has sent your way to minister to you?
- When that time comes, you can best help yourself by allowing yourself to be helped by others. It might be humbling in the beginning, but it certainly will help.

The summary of chapter two of Ruth unfolds with both of them arriving back to Bethlehem during the start of the barley harvest. It was here that Ruth would embark on the welfare system of the day, the gleaning of fields. This was a back-wrenching job that involved bending over for hours a day, gathering up the individual heads of grain that fell to the ground during the reaping of crops. This was the food stamp program during this time period.

2:3 states “...*she happened to come to the portion of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech.*” When Boaz first saw Ruth gleaning in the field, he extended his kindnesses to her, allowing her to glean with his female workers. He also invited her to the table for lunch

breaks and water breaks. He even secretly told his reapers to intentionally drop handfuls of grain to make it easier for her. That day she brought home ten days worth of grain. Not bad for a gleaning Moabite widow. When Naomi saw the great prize for the day, she inquired where Ruth had gone to glean. When Ruth said it was in Boaz's field, she could see a bigger picture.

Ruth 2:20-23 Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, "May he be blessed of the LORD who has not withdrawn his kindness to the living and to the dead." Again Naomi said to her, "The man is our relative, he is one of our closest relatives."<sup>21</sup> Then Ruth the Moabitess said, "Furthermore, he said to me, 'You should stay close to my servants until they have finished all my harvest.'"<sup>22</sup> Naomi said to Ruth her daughter-in-law, "It is good, my daughter, that you go out with his maids, so that *others* do not fall upon you in another field."<sup>23</sup> So she stayed close by the maids of Boaz in order to glean until the end of the barley harvest and the wheat harvest. And she lived with her mother-in-law.

### I can help myself by trying to see the big picture.

- We must always be trying to see the big picture when it comes to dealing with the loss of a loved one. Things were starting to come into focus for Naomi and Ruth. Initially it had to do with the bigger picture of building a supply of grain for the days to come. That must be the big picture, right?
- By the end of the harvest, a bigger picture evolved into the proposition of marriage. Ruth 3:1-5 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?"<sup>2</sup> "Now is not Boaz our kinsman, with whose maids you were? Behold, he winnows barley at the threshing floor tonight."<sup>3</sup> "Wash yourself therefore, and anoint yourself and put on your *best* clothes, and go down to the threshing floor; *but* do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking."<sup>4</sup> "It shall be when he lies down, that you shall notice the place where he lies, and you shall go and uncover his feet and lie down; then he will tell you what you shall do."<sup>5</sup> She said to her, "All that you say I will do." By 4:12 Boaz and Ruth are ready to be hitched. This is the big picture, for Ruth is no longer a widow and has escaped poverty!
- *Ruth 4:13-15 So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife, and he went in to her. And the LORD enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son.*<sup>14</sup> *Then the women said to Naomi, "Blessed is the LORD who has not left you without a redeemer today, and may his name become famous in Israel."*<sup>15</sup> *"May he also be to you a restorer of life and a sustainer of your old age; for your daughter-in-law, who loves you and is better to you than seven sons, has given birth to him."* Ruth has born a son in Mahlon's family name, hence the lineage of Naomi is preserved. Finally, the big picture!
- *Ruth 4:22 "and to Obed was born Jesse, and to Jesse, David."* This David would eventually become the most well-known King in all Israel. Matthew chapter one further explains in this genealogy that Boaz's mother was Rahab the Harlot from Jericho. When you follow the seed line, you end up at the cradle of Christ. Amazingly God turned the tragedy of the widows Naomi and Ruth. God showed us how He was able to take a widowed Moabite woman named Ruth and the son of a harlot named Boaz, intricately weaving them into the royal seed line of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. That is the biggest picture of all, that God can turn tragedy into triumph through His Son Jesus.
- When we lose someone in our lives, it is a must to see the bigger picture, for it is what keeps us thinking in the positive and not being swallowed up in sorrow. It might only be

part of a bigger picture or it could be a large part of the bigger picture. Either way, trying to see the big picture is what keeps us going in the right direction.

### Closing Story

#### Remembering Ian Miller: 12-year-old Boy Scout helped others after death

By LARA BRECKLE, The Patriot-News

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At the moment he died, 12-year-old Ian Joshua Miller left behind a final gift to his grieving parents and hope to strangers. Ian, who died Jan. 16 in a sledding accident in Coudersport, was the only child of Ron Miller and Holly Wastler-Miller, of North Coventry Twp., Chester County. The seventh-grader was on a trip to Ski Denton with his Boy Scout troop and became separated from the group on the final sledding run of the evening, his mother said.

On his last trip down the hill, Ian struck a ski lift pole. The blow to the back of the head killed him instantly, the coroner said. Tucked into Ian's ski boot was a Bible verse, from James 1. "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance," it read. "Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."

It was more than a coincidence," Holly said. She'd only seen her son do something like that once before. Last summer, as he was preparing for camp, she saw him tuck a piece of paper in his shoe. She asked him what he was doing and he told her. Having the verse helped him, he'd said.

But there was no way their son could have known the verse that comforted him would have a healing affect on his parents, too. Knowing their son's deep faith, their next decision, to donate his organs, came naturally. After all, Ian had told his parents, he thought organ donation was a good idea because he wouldn't need them anymore.

On the way home from the hospital, Holly said she had a comforting thought. "I said 'Ian's heart could be beating this very day,'" she said. "That's huge. He was a healthy, athletic boy. No illnesses or anything. We're sure it was a very healthy heart and we just hope it was helpful to someone."

This family is trying to see the bigger picture, something we all would do well in keeping in mind when facing a loss such as this.

How can I help myself when facing a death of a loved-one? Three principles from Ruth:

1. I can help myself by realizing the need to move on.
2. I can help myself by allowing others to help me.
3. I can help myself by trying to see the big picture.