

Woman to Woman

Sharing the Story of Ruth and Naomi...

This four week curriculum is designed with several purposes.

- Reading the Book of Ruth and studying the Word in context.
- Using the experiences and highs and lows in the life of Ruth and Naomi to develop a deeper understanding of a woman's life in biblical times, while relating it to our own
- Developing bonds between women and having fun in a Christ-centered community

The women will be asked to bring whatever stacks of pictures they would like to put in a scrapbook, as well as whatever scrapbooking supplies they would like to contribute.

The women should be encouraged to participate in discussion and readings, but may be intently working on their own projects. The leader can decide if the group will work during the discussion, or take breaks in the curriculum to work on their own scrapbooks.

We will be using the Message: the bible in Contemporary Language for this group. It's a paraphrased translation, but I believe it to be helpful in understanding Old Testament stories. Women are to be encouraged to bring a bible along, in a different translation, so that differences among the texts can be noted and discussed.

Background Commentary is from:

Ruth and Esther: A Feminist Companion to the Bible. edited by Athalya Brenner. Sheffield Academic Press, England, 1999.

Meeting 1: "Hello, my name is Bitter"

) Open with prayer

) Share Highs and Lows for the week

Each woman should share a high point and a low point of their week. Getting to know one another on a deeper level and praying for the other women helps to develop a Christ-centered community ideal for discussion and sharing the gospel.

Background for Leaders:

"Everyday story of ordinary country people as the protagonists, with everyday events like harvests and threshing, legal transactions and family life... conceals- despite the apparently idyllic setting- the experiences of suffering and great misfortune, hunger and death, for the main characters of the story. The wonderful part of the story is that they do not collapse under their tribulations but instead become subjects of their own life stories." (Brenner, 95)

) Read Ruth Chapter 1

What did Naomi lose?

What did Ruth lose/give up?

What did it mean to not have a husband or father in that time?

Background:

"Three women without even one man; that was in those times almost a catastrophe. Without a man, a woman was not only poor, without work and without substance; she was also practically without any rights. Above all, she belonged to nowhere. In a world where women are recognized only as daughters, mothers, and wives, a childless widow is practically nothing and no one." (Brenner, 98)

Does it still mean the same thing today?

Where is God in all of this? More importantly, where does Naomi think God is?

) Questions to ponder...

How are we identified by others? How do we identify ourselves?

Where do we draw security from? Our possessions? Our relationships? God?

) Share a picture with the group of what security means in your life...

) Share a picture with the group of someone (something?) you have lost...

Were you bitter or angry with God?

How can we support women in crisis, both friend and stranger?

How can we as a church, and as individuals, help those in crisis?

What programs does our church have implemented for such times?

How can we help?

) Prayer for those women we know experiencing loss

Meeting 2: "Who's that Girl?"

) Open with Prayer

Briefly share last week's discussions/ideas for those who did not attend

) Share Highs and Lows for the Week

) Faith Time Line

Have some extra paper on hand for the women to chart out their lives, (or just the last 10-15 years) noting events and crises. Have them also note when in their lives they have felt particularly close to God or far from God. Share these with a partner.

) Read Ruth Chapter 2

How do Ruth and Naomi go about gaining security for themselves?

How does Boaz treat Ruth? Why does he treat her this way?

Where is God in all of this? More importantly, where does Naomi think God is?

) Share a picture or story of someone in your life who has treated you with this unexpected kindness

) Questions to ponder

How do you show kindness to your friends and family or to complete strangers?

Looking back on your faith time line, does it look like Naomi's? Did you feel closer to God when times were good and farther from God when times were bad?

) Work on Scrapbooks

) close with Prayer

Meeting 3: "Girls Gone Wild"

) Open with Prayer

) share Highs and Lows for the week

) Read Ruth Chapter 3

What are Ruth and Naomi's Goals?

How do they accomplish their goals?

Background :

"The deliverance of Ruth and Naomi through marriage and the birth of a son, was always a bone of contention for me: it was too much like a fairy tale: The solution seemed locked in the gender politics of a patriarchal society." (Brenner, 106)

What social norms of that time period do Ruth and Naomi break?

What would you say about a woman who acted as Ruth did?

What was Boaz's reaction?

How do Ruth and Naomi look out for one another?

Background: Ruth as Biblical Parable of Feminism...

"As a whole, this human comedy suggests a theological interpretation of feminism: women working out their own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in them. Naomi works as a bridge between tradition and innovation. Ruth and the females of Bethlehem work as paradigms for radicality. All together they are women in culture, women against culture, and women transforming culture. What they reflect, they challenge. And that challenge is a legacy of faith to this day for all who have ears to hear the stories of women in a man's world." (Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978, p. 196)

) Share a picture of someone you look out for

) Questions to Ponder

Have you ever taken a risk to achieve a goal? How did it work out?

) Work on scrapbooks

) close with Prayer

Meeting 4: "A Woman's Worth"

) Open with prayer

) Share Highs and Lows for the week

How are our scrapbooks coming?

) Read Ruth Chapter 4

What did Boaz do? What could he have done?

Why did Boaz fall in love with Ruth?

What do Naomi's neighbors have to say?

What is Ruth's role in story of Jesus? Can we see any parallels to Mary?

How does Ruth continue to take care of Naomi?

Background:

"God redeems Naomi through the *hesed* (goodness, devotion, and love) of Ruth and Boaz. Naomi is led from death to life through love, first in the form of grains, the bread of life, and finally in the form of a child." (Brenner, 95)

) Questions to ponder

What are your reactions to this story as a whole?

What can we learn from the story of Ruth and Naomi?

How did Ruth and Naomi's faith grow?

How has your faith grown through experiencing crisis and loss?

If God is our ultimate security, what if we don't feel like we're being taken care of??

) share your scrapbook with the group

) close with Prayer

NOTES FOR LEADERS...

For those lyrically-minded leaders, like myself, I recommend some mood music. This can be played either before the meeting, as women gather, or while they're busy working on their project... Just some ideas!

"Storehouse Full" – The Poolboys

Lift my hands lift my voice give it all away
Nothing here is mine I'm a steward to my pay
I will go the extra mile to show my love for Thee
Storehouse full Your floodgates pour as You delight in me

"Faithful To Me" – Jennifer Knapp

All the chisels I've dulled carving idols of stone
That have crumbled like sand 'neath the waves.
I've recklessly built all my dreams in the sand just to watch, them all wash away.

"I've Always Loved You" – Third Day

Greater love has not a man
Than the one who gives his life to prove
That he would do anything
And that's what I'm going to do for you

"I Will Trust In You" – Erin O'Donnell

I will trust in you
I will hold to what is true
That You see the weakest through
Every trial
I will cling to you
Each day I pledge it new
My imperfect gratitude
From now on

"I Will Be With You" Julie Miller

I will be with you
Wherever you are
I will be with you
Thought the world may leave a scar
They can never take you from my heart

"Let Go" The Poolboys

Just let go and let God

Everything will change

If you live your life for him you'll never be the same

Examples of Pictures to share – each photo has a story behind it, let the women tell their stories...

Picture(s) of things that brings me security – the photos of the antique cabinets my mom and I rescued from my grandfathers house and refinished ourselves, and the photos of my mom's garden

Picture(s) of things I have lost – My grandfather, in the pictures of me moving into a dorm room, died last Christmas. Also, its trivial, but the car in that same set of pictures was my first car. It was totalled last October.

Picture of someone who has shown me kindness – My old college roommate, Bob, shown at the end of the album... for many and various reasons, he was a life-saver during those years

Picture(s) of someone I look out for – My two younger sisters are all over the album! Being the eldest, I feel quite a bit responsible to them.