

Ruth and Naomi

Tammy: Hello, my friend! Welcome to *Women of Hope*. I'm Tammy, and Carol is here too. Today we're simply going to listen to a story. Do you like stories? This one is a very ancient story about two women.

Carol: Yes – many women have loved this story over the years. It's about love...and about losing what is precious to you...

Tammy: ...about disappointment...and loyalty. Are these things that you think about sometimes? I wonder if you've been disappointed by something that's happened to you? How did it make you feel?

Carol: ...and did I mention love?

Tammy: Yes Carol you did! It's a story about a mother and her very special daughter in law.

Carol: ...and it's also about the love of a man and a woman for each other.

Tammy: This is a true story from God's word. We've been hearing stories about the Israelites finding a home in the land that God promised them. Wasn't it wonderful to hear that they finally arrived and settled in?

Carol: Well...this story happened about a generation later. We have a special guest with us today to tell us this story. Welcome Nancy!

Nancy: Thank you Carol...and Tammy...and hello to *you*... I hope you're comfortable and ready to listen. I LOVE telling stories...especially stories from God's word. So, listen well!

(Ruth Chapter 1-4)

This is a story about Naomi. She was a woman who had a very full life. She was married and had 2 sons. She and her family had always lived in Bethlehem. But there was a terrible famine in Bethlehem and there was not enough food for everyone. So, Naomi and her family decided to leave Bethlehem and go to Moab, a nearby country, to live for a while. Both their sons married girls from Moab.

Some time later Naomi's husband died...and ten years later, *both* of her sons *also* died. She and her two daughters-in-law were left alone.

One day Naomi heard that the famine was over in her homeland. She heard that God had blessed his people with a good harvest. So she got ready to leave Moab with her daughters in law. They started out together, but on the way she said to them, "No, you should go back, each of you to your mother's home. You have shown so much kindness to me and I pray that you will find the same kindness. I also pray that you will find husbands."

They started crying and said, “No...we will go with you to your people.”

“No, my daughters,” Naomi insisted, “I am too old to have any more sons for you to marry. Even if I could have more children, would you wait around for them to be old enough for you to marry?”

So one daughter-in-law turned back but Ruth, the other one held onto Naomi and would not leave. Again Naomi insisted, “Go back to your people and your gods.”

But Ruth replied, “Where you go I will go and where you live, I will live. Your people will be my people and your God will be my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. I promise before God that nothing but death will separate you and me!”

When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she said nothing more. They traveled together until they came to Bethlehem. When the people in the town saw them coming they were excited and said, “Is this really Naomi?”

Then Naomi told them, “God has made my life very bitter. I left Bethlehem very full but I have come back empty. God has brought misfortune upon me.”

It was springtime, and the barley harvest season was just beginning in Bethlehem. God’s law said that the poor could follow the harvest workers and pick up the grain they left behind (Lev 19:9). So Ruth said to Naomi, “Let me go and gather some of the grain.”

Now there was in Bethlehem a rich and important land-owner named Boaz – who was a relative of Naomi’s husband. It so happened that Ruth went to his field.

Boaz noticed Ruth and asked the harvesters, “Who is that young woman?” The harvesters said, “She came from Moab with Naomi and her name is Ruth. She asked us if she could pick up the leftover grain. She has worked very hard all day.”

Boaz came to Ruth and said, “Listen my daughter, stay right here with us when you gather grain. Don’t go to anyone else’s field. I have told the men not to touch you. If you get thirsty, please drink from my water jugs.”

Ruth bowed down; “Why have you been so nice to me? She asked, “I am not from this country.” Boaz replied, “Some of my workers have told me how kind you have been to your mother-in-law. How you left your father and mother to come and live with people you did not know. I pray that you will be blessed and rewarded by God, as you have come to take shelter under his wings.”

Ruth said to Boaz, “You have been so kind to me and I appreciate all you have done for me and my mother-in-law Naomi.”

Boaz gave Ruth some extra food, and she returned to Naomi and told her all about what had

happened and that she was working in a field that belonged to Boaz.

“The Lord bless him!” exclaimed Naomi. “God has not abandoned us! Boaz is a close relative of ours and is one of those responsible for taking care of us.”

“And what’s more,” said Ruth, “he told me to come back and stay in his fields until the end of harvest.”

Ruth continued to work alongside the other women in the field. She gathered grain with them until the end of the barley harvest. Then she worked with them through the wheat harvest too. Summer came, and all this time she lived with her mother in law.

Tammy: Here on *Women of Hope* we’re listening to the story of Naomi and her daughter in law Ruth. Naomi came back to Bethlehem thinking that God had abandoned her. But to her delight she discovered that God had prepared the way for her and Ruth.

Carol: Yes – God led Ruth to the field of a close relative of her mother in law. As Naomi’s husband had died, Boaz had a responsibility to take care of them. Let’s find out what happened next in the story...

Nancy: One day Naomi said to Ruth, “Ruth, it’s time that I find a home for you where you will be well provided for. Boaz is a close relative of my husband. Go and wash, put on perfume and your best dress. Then go to the open area where they clean the grain. Don’t let Boaz know you are there until he has finished his meal. When he lies down, go over and uncover his feet and lie down there. Boaz will tell you what to do after that.”

Ruth said, “I’ll do whatever you tell me to do.” She trusted her mother in law who knew the customs of these people. So that night Ruth went down to the place where they cleaned the grain and did everything her mother-in-law told her to do.

When Boaz had finished eating, he lay down beside the heap of grain and went to sleep. Ruth came quietly, uncovered his feet and lay down.

In the middle of the night, something startled Boaz. He turned and discovered a woman lying at his feet. “Who are you?” he asked. “I am your servant, Ruth. Spread the corner of your cloak over me, since you are a close relative, responsible to take care of me”

“The Lord bless you,” Boaz said to her, “You have shown great family loyalty in coming to me. Don’t be afraid, I will do all you ask. Everyone in the village knows that you are a woman of noble character. But there is one problem, there is another man more closely related to you than I am. In the morning I will ask him if he wants to take care of you but if he doesn’t, then as surely as the Lord lives, I will do it.”

The next morning Boaz went to the town gate and took a seat there at the public meeting place. He found the closer relative and told him about Naomi and how she had come back to Bethlehem. Naomi

had a piece of land to sell. Boaz asked the relative if he would like to buy the land. The relative agreed to buy it back.

“But of course”, said Boaz, “if you buy the land from Naomi you will also have to marry Ruth, the widow from Moab. That way she can have children who will carry on her husband’s name and keep the land in the family.” (Deut 25:5-10)

“Then I can’t buy it back, he said, “because it might put my own estate in danger. You buy the land. I can’t do it.”

Then Boaz called on the leaders and the crowd to witness that he was buying the land and that he would take care of Naomi and Ruth. So Boaz took Ruth to be his wife....

Later, Ruth became pregnant and had a son. Naomi and the other women in the town rejoiced together. “God has not forgotten you,” they said, “See how he’s blessed you. Your daughter in law is better to you than seven sons!”

Carol: We’ve been listening to Nancy telling us a story from God’s word the Bible...the story of Naomi and her daughter in law, Ruth who showed her great loyalty and devotion. Let’s see what we can remember together- because you might want to tell this story to someone else...|

Tammy: Naomi and her husband and their two sons had to leave their homeland. Why?...because of a famine. And do you remember what happened there?...|

Carol: ...That’s right, Naomi’s husband died, then her two sons died as well. How sad Naomi and her two daughters in law must have felt! It can be really hard for widows who are left alone. You might know how that feels. |

Tammy: Later, when Naomi heard that the famine was over in her homeland, she decided to return. Her daughters in law set off with her. Can you remember what happened next?...
That’s right, she told them to go back home, but Ruth told Naomi that she would never leave her didn’t she?

Carol: She even said that she wanted to follow Naomi’s God, and that she would stay with her until she was dead and buried.

Tammy: What loyalty and devotion she showed her mother in law! Do you remember what happened next?... Tell us Carol...|

Carol: Yes – it was harvest time and Ruth, following the local custom, offered to join the other women in the barley field and gather grain. They had no other way of providing food for themselves. And this is where the story becomes very interesting isn’t it?

Tammy: Oh yes – |God led her to the field of a close relative. Remember his name? ...Yes – Boaz.

He made sure she got enough grain and was safe in his field.

Carol: And because he was a close relative he was one of those responsible to take care of Naomi and Ruth.

Tammy: Ruth then did just what her mother in law told her to do...do you remember what that was?

Carol: She made herself beautiful and went to Boaz to remind him of his duty to her family. Did you wonder what she meant by asking him to put the corner of his cloak over her? |

Tammy: It's not something we would do where I live!

Nancy: No, but in *their* culture this was a proper way of asking him to marry her to preserve the family name and property. | Did Boaz agree to do this?

Tammy: Yes ...but there was a problem. He was not the closest relative was he?

Carol: No – so Boaz had to give this closer relative the opportunity to buy Naomi's land and marry her daughter in law. How do you think he was feeling? Do you think he wanted to marry Ruth – this loyal, hard working girl, who had not chased after a younger man? He liked the fact that she had accepted the local custom, which was actually part of God's law to provide for those in need. |

Tammy: I wonder if he was relieved when the closer relative said, "No – I can't marry Ruth."? How did *you* feel about it? |

Carol: Well I was sure hoping that he would say 'no' and that Boaz would be able to buy the land and marry Ruth. |

Tammy: And he did! And of course before long they had a son. Wasn't Naomi delighted? Imagine her going to the other women in the town and showing them her grandson.

Carol: The women were so happy for Naomi.

Nancy: They were! Let me finish the story from God's word... | They said to Naomi, "Praise be to the Lord, who has not left you without someone to take care of you in your old age. For your daughter in law who loves you, and is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth." | Then Naomi took the child, laid him on her lap and cared for him. And the women said, "Naomi has a son." ...

And do you know...that baby son was the grandfather of King David, who was an ancestor of Jesus himself. God had a very big plan in mind!

Tammy: Now let's think about what this story means to us. It is in God's word for a purpose! |

Carol: What did *you* think about the way Ruth, Naomi and Boaz treated each other? Did you like it?...

Tammy: It sounds as though they were very loyal to each other, and careful to do their family duty in an honorable way according to God's law and their customs. Mother-in-law and daughter-in-law chose to love and serve each other - and I know that doesn't always happen! Boaz was impressed by Ruth's devotion to Naomi, and Ruth was impressed by his behavior as a kind and honorable man. And did you notice how Naomi planned for Ruth's future?

Carol: It sounds as though *God* was pleased with this, and rewarded them for it. In other parts of the Bible he tells his followers to take good care of their families, especially the widows and those who are in need (1 Timothy 5:8,16). So we need to think about how well we do our duty to our family. We are not independent... we should not just live for *ourselves*. There are times when we need to care for others, and *other* times when we need to accept care from *them*.

Nancy: Did you notice how the people in the story had to make choices? Often they didn't know how those choices would turn out, and they had to do what they knew was right and then trust God. It's like that for us, too, isn't it?

Tammy: I was thinking about the two daughters-in-law; they made *different* choices, didn't they? One went back to the beliefs and ways of her people and she missed out on God's blessing. But Ruth made the most important choice - not just to stay with her mother-in-law, but to commit herself to follow the true God. Did you know that God welcomes people from any nationality, when they choose to worship and follow him? (Rom 2:11) Ruth had learned about God from Naomi and decided to trust in him.

Carol: Yes, she did - and Boaz said God would bless her since she had taken shelter under his wings. That is a beautiful picture. What do you think that means? ...

Nancy: I don't think he meant that God was a big bird! (laugh) No, he was thinking about how a mother bird protects her chicks, and they run and hide under her wings when they're frightened. Is that something you do - go to God for help when you are frightened...or in need? You can always pray to him, and take comfort in his presence and his promises.

Tammy: Ruth made a lot of choices, when you think about it. To go with Naomi... to be brave and go out to work in a place that was strange for her, so she could provide food for herself and Naomi... To ask Boaz, the relative, to marry her instead of looking for a younger man in the village... Just as she had taken shelter under God's wing, she asked Boaz to take her under his wing - I love that!

Carol: And Boaz made the choice to do the right thing by all his relatives. Our choices really matter, they shape our future.

Nancy: Think about Naomi for a moment. She had lost so much! How did she feel when she went back to Bethlehem?... Bitter, disappointed....

Tammy: ...feeling that God had abandoned her...and I guess that would be natural. We can sometimes feel that way.

Carol: But he hadn't forgotten! And she came to see that God *does* keep his promises. Her life became sweet again - that's what the name 'Naomi' means...beautiful, pleasant, delightful! God blessed her in many ways - and I think that baby grandson was just a very special gift for her, a woman who had lost her own children.

Tammy: It really gives me a new understanding of how we can trust God, even when we feel hopeless and we wonder if God cares. Through this love story we see so much of God's loving heart. I really want to trust God more in my life. I don't want to give up hope and not ask, or expect, God to care for me.

Nancy: I know God understands how hard it is sometimes when we are in the middle of a desperate situation. God loves you and cares so much about you. He wants to give you hope. He says so in his word, the Bible. (Jeremiah 29:11 NLT) "For I know the plans I have for you" says the Lord. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope."

Carol: Those are some of our favorite words from the Bible, Nancy. We often say them on *Women of Hope*. I hope that you remember them always.

Tammy: Thank you Nancy for being our story-teller today. Thank *you*, my friend, for staying with us. I hope you will remember this story and share it with someone else, because it's a beautiful story and it gives us a lot to think about.

Nancy: And remember what we have seen about God in this story: he blesses us as we choose to follow him as our God, and follow his ways. He can be trusted. Goodbye for now.

Carol: We always love to hear from you - you can contact us at this radio station... Good bye.

Tammy: Goodbye from all of us and God's blessings on you.