



A Worship Study Guide for Individuals, Groups and Families: For the week of November 20, 2016

WEPC small groups meet in homes across Richmond every week to participate in Jesus Christ's mission to Richmond, enjoy fellowship, study God's Word, pray together, and explore the fruit of the Gospel on our lives. Simply put, these groups are small enough to be the church to one another, and they serve as bridges between WEPC and the community where God has planted us. It is a place where the church can go deeper in the worship of God and further in Christ's mission.

Note to Discussion Leaders: Have members read the Bible passage in the group meeting. This is a "worship discussion" guide, and our reflections and applications are grounded in Scripture. Read through this guide before meeting with the group. You do not need to work through the whole guide. Decide which points would be most helpful for the time of meeting together, and use them as a starting point for your time together.

Ruth 1:19-22, "Bitter"

¹⁹So the two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem. And when they came to Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them. And the women said, "Is this Naomi?" ²⁰She said to them, "Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. ²¹I went away full, and the LORD has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi, when

the LORD has testified against me and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?"

²²So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabite her daughter-in-law with her, who returned from the country of Moab. And they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest.

- 1.) When are you tempted to become bitter?
- 2.) Why did Naomi ask the people in Bethlehem to call her "Mara" (v.20)? Was she justified to do so?
- 3.) Have you ever struggled, like Naomi, not to be done with God?
- 4.) What might be going through Ruth's heart & mind during this introduction to the women of Bethlehem?
- 5.) God is not done with Naomi (and Ruth), even though Naomi is pretty much done with God. How is that comforting/challenging to you in your own circumstances this week?
- 6.) Ruth is not just Naomi's daughter-in-law, she points us to Jesus Christ. How does Ruth's testimony lead you to Jesus?

Going A Step Further...

- Each week in worship, we confess our sins and then hear a Scripture verse that encourages us with the Good News that Jesus loves and forgives sinners. **You can read this week's Confession of Sin & Words of Encouragement [here](#).** This corporate confession of sin was designed to summarize the spiritual dynamics of becoming short-sighted and bitter, even in the face of God's greatest blessings. Read the confession of sin together, take time to confess to the Lord the ways you have personally wrestled with bitterness, and read the heart-renewing promise of Jesus Christ in [John 7:37-38](#).
- Each week in worship we read another Bible passage to complement the sermon text. **This week's New Testament Reading comes from [Hebrews 13:5-6](#).** This brief passage is a powerful picture of how knowing the Lord frees us from sin & self. As we head into Thanksgiving week, share ways that you are thankful for God's provision and protection.
- As a part of worship [we sing songs and hymns](#) that further amplify each Sunday's message. **This week, we sang Jean Sophia Piggot's great hymn, "Jesus, I Am Resting, Resting",** a hymn of gratitude to God in light of the rest and peace Jesus gives His Church. [Read, listen to,](#) or [sing](#) the hymn, and enter into a time of prayer thanking Jesus for the rest He provides and asking Him for the rest we need.

Questions about this week's study guide? Contact Kevin Greene, kevin@wepc.org
To hear sermons and access past study guides visit www.wepc.org/archivedsermons

Sermon Notes

This week, Steve Shelby preached on Ruth 1:19-22.

Empty?

- "Weary or bitter or bewildered as we may be, God is faithful. He lets us wander so we will know what it means to come home." (*Marilynne Robinson, Home*)
- "And often enough, when we think we are protecting ourselves, we are struggling against our rescuer." (*Marilynne Robinson, Gilead*)
- "I experience religious dread whenever I find myself thinking that I know the limits of God's grace, since I am utterly certain it exceeds any imagination a human being might have of it. God does, after all, so love the world." (*Marilynne Robinson, When I Was a Child I Read Books*)
- The Text
- Is Naomi returning 'empty'? We hear Naomi's complaint. However ringing in her ears should be Ruth's word of commitment to her. Has the LORD really brought Naomi back empty? Based on Ruth's words we already know that Naomi is not alone and will not be.
- Who is returning? A cursory reading of the text might lead us to believe that of the three women in this story (Naomi, Orpah and Ruth) two are actually returning home. Verse 27 is really "So Naomi returned, along with Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law, who returned from Moab".
- When are they returning? "At the time of the barley harvest"; The famine is over.

A Theology of Complaint

- Naomi, which means "sweet" or "pleasant" responds to the cries of delight from the ladies of Bethlehem with a change in her name. Call me Bitter.
- Naomi is unshaken and sure about three things: God exists. God is sovereign. God has afflicted her.....
- "Not only is complaint tolerated by God, but it can even be the proper stance of a person who takes God seriously. Anyone who ascribes full sovereignty to a just and merciful God may expect to encounter the problem of evil and suffering, and to wrestle with that problem is no sin even when it leads to an attempt to put God on trial." (*E.F. Campbell*)
- [Job 23:1-17](#) "Today also my complaint is bitter..."

Where or What or Who is your Home?

- It is good to offer our complaints to God
- What about hope?