

life groups' sermon guide

picture perfect - out of focus



Life Groups exist at Kingsway to provide authentic relationships for the life application of the Core 4 elements of worship, grow, serve, and share.

When you place your creator where He belongs - at the very center of your day and your life - the rest of your priorities will fall into place.

William Law

Cursed is the ground because of you, through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life.

Genesis 3:17 (excerpt)

In the days when the judges ruled in Israel, a severe famine came upon the land.

Ruth 1:1

To Elimelech, Adam's curse was more than words in the Bible. It was palpable. Dust instead of grain. Hunger instead of feasting. Here he sat in the promised land - a land that was supposed to flow with milk and honey - starving. His wife, starving. His young sons, starving.

Stay or go. Those are his two choices. Stay in the land of promise, or go where food - and hope - seems assured. The choice seems obvious at first - go where there is sustenance, where there is something he can provide for his family. But there is a problem. The place is Moab. It is home to gentiles, worshippers of idols, and enemies of Israel. Joshua had even warned them about it:

But if you turn away from him and cling to the customs of the survivors of these nations remaining among you, and if you intermarry with them, then know for certain that the Lord your God will no longer drive them out of your land. Instead, they will be a snare and a trap to you, a whip for your backs and thorny brambles in your eyes, and you will vanish from this good land the Lord your God has given you.

Joshua 23:12-13

So what is a father to do?

So a man from Bethlehem in Judah left his home and went to live in the country of Moab, taking his wife and two sons with him. The man's name was Elimelech, and his wife was Naomi. Their two sons were Mahlon and Kilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in the land of Judah. And when they reached Moab, they settled there.

Ruth 1:1-2

[Q] Was Elimelech right in taking his family to Moab? Why?

[Q] What was Elimelech putting first? Was there a problem with his priorities? Why or why not?

[Q] What did it cost him, both in the short and long term?

[Q] What are some of God's promises that we are fearful of trusting when our families well-being is on the line?

Then Elimelech died, and Naomi was left with her two sons. The two sons married Moabite women. One married a woman named Orpah, and the other a woman named Ruth.

Ruth 1:3-5

Now we fast forward a bit. Elimelech dies. His sons have married Moabite women, a direct contradiction of Joshua's warning, and contrary to the Law given to Moses on Mt. Sinai. This is probably not what Elimelech was hoping for when we left for Moab. Then, he was thinking about providing food for his family. Whether he was thinking of the long term spiritual impact on his family is unknown. All we know is what the outcome was.

[Q] Regardless of his intentions in settling in Moab, what level of responsibility does Elimelech bear in his sons' breaking of God's commands by marrying Moabites? What justifications do you think could have been made when he was making his decision to settle in an enemy country?

[Q] Do we make similar justification when we put our families before God? What are they?

It is probably safe to say that Elimelech did not set out east hoping for moabite grandchildren. However, in a moment of seeming wisdom - providing for his family - he made a grave mistake by not putting his trust in God, and not obeying his Word. It ended poorly for his family.

[Q] What are the situations in our lives where the short term needs tempt us to put our family first instead of God?

[Q] What can be (or has been) the outcome of putting our families before God?

But about ten years later, both Mahlon and Kilion died. This left Naomi alone, without her two sons or her husband.

Ruth 1:4-5

Fast forward again, about 10 years this time. Now Elimelech's sons have both died, leaving their wives and mother childless widows. Elimelech fled Israel, only to find death of his family line in Moab.

[Q] Elimelech's plan did not turn out as he intended. How can our seemingly well thought out plans for our family fail when we neglect to put God first in those plans?

[Q] How do we insure that God is at the head of our plans?

But after her son's death, we begin to see a turn around with Naomi. She decides that it is time to leave Moab, and take her daughters in law with her.

Then Naomi heard in Moab that the Lord had blessed his people in Judah by giving them good crops again. So Naomi and her daughters-in-law got ready to leave Moab to return to her homeland. With her two daughters-in-law she set out from the place where she had been living, and they took the road that would lead them back to Judah.

Ruth 1:6-7

But this is no land for Moabites. Here there is no toleration of their idols. Here there is no love for Gentiles. Naomi knows the law offers her a meager sustenance, and offers even less for them, certainly no promise of a husband or family. So she tells them to stay in Moab.

But on the way, Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go back to your mothers' homes. And may the Lord reward you for your kindness to your husbands and to me. May the Lord bless you with the security of another marriage." Then she kissed them good-bye, and they all broke down and wept. "No," they said. "We want to go with you to your people." But Naomi replied, "Why should you go on with me? Can I still give birth to other sons who could grow up to be your husbands? No, my daughters, return to your parents' homes, for I am too old to marry again. And even if it were possible, and I were to get married tonight and bear sons, then what? Would you wait for them to grow up and refuse to marry someone else? No, of course not, my daughters! Things are far more bitter for me than for you, because the Lord himself has raised his fist against me." And again they wept together, and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law good-bye.

Ruth 1:8-14

As we see, Orpah agreed with her Mother-in-law's assessment. But Ruth did not.

But Ruth clung tightly to Naomi. "Look," Naomi said to her, "your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods. You should do the same." 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. 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!" When Naomi saw that Ruth was determined to go with her, she said nothing more.

Ruth 1: 14-18

[Q] Was Orpah's choice the right one? What would have been the logical choice for Ruth to make?

[Q] When are we prone to choose the seemingly logical choice over the will or promise of God?

What situations in our life bring up these dilemmas?

Ruth tells Naomi, in no uncertain terms, that she will stay with her. She will abandon her people, her land, her gods. In their place, she will become a Jewess. A Israelite. A follower of the one true God. She does this without any promise of support or hope in material provision. She chooses what seems to be irrational at the time, but ends with her becoming a servant of God, and having a much larger role in history than just that of an anonymous Moabite woman.

[Q] How does Ruth's decision compare with that of her Father-in-law Elimelech?

[Q] What was Ruth's priority?

*Salmon was the father of Boaz (whose mother was Rahab).
Boaz was the father of Obed (whose mother was Ruth).
Obed was the father of Jesse.
Jesse was the father of King David.*

Matthew 1:5-6b

Ruth was the great grandmother to King David, and an ancestor of Jesus. And here we see the redemption of God. Elimelech broke the Law of Moses. His sons broke the Law. But God used it to bring the blood of Israel's enemies into the veins of Jesus Christ. In the same way, God can redeem our mistakes and our misplaced priorities for His glory.

[Q] How did Ruth's decision impact your family? What about Elimelech's?

Application

[Q] What is the legacy you are building with your family?

[Q] Where are the areas where your family absolutely comes before everything, even God?

[Q] Where are the areas in your life where God does come first? How are these situations different from the ones where God does not come first? How can you learn from this disparity to put God first in all areas?