



## Naomi

### Book of Ruth

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**Opening Prayer:** “God, help us to learn more about you from Naomi’s story of being used to help fulfill your plan. We pray that we may be encouraged and then become encouragers through her story. Amen.”

#### Naomi Monologue

I am Naomi. I am King David’s great-great grandmother. That was my purpose in fulfilling God’s plan. After many sad years of famine and loss, I thought God had all but abandoned me. Now I can see that, of course, could never happen.

My husband died. Then, both of my sons. My sons’ wives had no children and the three of us were left to figure out what to do. Ruth and Orpah were wonderful to me. When I decided to return home, they left theirs to come with me. I immediately began worrying, as a mother will do. I couldn’t ask these girls to leave all they knew to keep me company. So, I stopped them and insisted that they return to their own mothers, find new husbands, and make a life for themselves. I know that some relationships between mothers-in-laws and daughters-in-laws can be difficult. Not my girls. They were beautiful and kind.

Poor Orpah. I could see all over her face how torn she was. She missed her home so much. I assured her that it would be okay to leave. Oh, she gave me the biggest hug and we cried! She went on her way to be with her own family.

Then, I looked at Ruth. Ruth was different. She loved me as if I were her very own mother. From the moment I met her I felt like I had known her all of my life. She truly was the daughter I never had. I only wanted what was best for her and at that moment in my life I could not see how staying around this bitter, lonely woman could help her.

There were many times Ruth’s kindness overwhelmed me. None more than that day when she refused to leave me. Her love for me was deeper than I had ever known. And, maybe her need to have me in her life was stronger than I had realized as well. She would not go home and even told me that she would stay with me until the day I died.

So, I took Ruth back to my home with me. She was truly a stranger in a strange land. But, for the most part, people were very nice to her. Everyone was so impressed with her loyalty to me that they took her in like she had been raised there.

I naturally felt responsible for her and I wanted to help her. After she told me about working in the field of Boaz, I arranged a private meeting for the two of them. I’ll be honest, I knew that it was in my best interest as well for Ruth to find a husband to take responsibility for our land and such – we called him a redeemer. I also really wanted Ruth to find the security and happiness that she deserved. And, I’d known Boaz all my life. I knew he deserved that too.

And that man has been so good to both of us. I have wanted for nothing and the family they have given me has been the greatest blessing in my life. All of my friends called Obed, Ruth’s and Boaz’s son, “Naomi’s baby boy!” I know that by blood I am not really his grandmother, but we have been as much of a family as anyone could be.

I’m proud of that. I tried to listen to God and help Ruth. Because of that, some great children were born, including David. Somehow, I know God brought me to the right time and place to use me, an old bitter woman, to make sure that happened. Yes, I am certainly proud of that.

### **Discussion Suggestions (Naomi):**

(Provide a chalkboard and chalk or a large piece of paper and felt-tip marker.)

Ask: “As you recall Naomi’s story, what were some reasons she grieved, felt bitter, and wondered whether God had abandoned her?”

Invite women to brainstorm situations that may cause people to feel bitter and abandoned by God in such a time as ours. As women mention situations, list these on a chalkboard or large sheet of paper.

Ask: “In the midst of Naomi’s grief and loss, what were some sources of encouragement for her? Even in her grief how did Naomi offer encouragement to others?”

Encourage women to discuss each of the following:

What can we learn from Naomi’s story about God’s kindness and faithfulness?

What have you learned from your own experiences about God’s kindness and faithfulness?

What does Naomi’s story tell us about God and persons working together to accomplish God’s plan?

How might we be called to work alongside God to accomplish God’s plan for such a time as this?

Refer to the list of situations that may cause persons to feel bitter and abandoned by God. As you point to each situation, ask for suggestions about how we can work with God to offer encouragement and fellowship to persons in these situations. You may want to make specific plans to carry out one or more of these suggestions.

Invite women to offer sentence prayers related to the situations listed and our opportunities to work with God to offer encouragement to these persons. Close with a prayer: “Thank you, God, that you are always kind and faithful to us. Thank you for calling us to join you in accomplishing your plan in our time. Help us to extend your kindness and faithfulness in encouragement to others. Amen.”



## Mary Magdalene

Luke 8:1-3; 24:1-13; Matthew 28; Mark 16; John 20:1-18

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**Opening Prayer:** “God, as we listen to Mary Magdalene tell her story, help us to see, hear, and feel what she experienced. Help us listen for your call to us in this time and place. Amen.”

### Mary Magdalene Monologue

I am Mary Magdalene. I loved Jesus with my whole heart, my very being. I even watched as they killed him. I held his mother’s hand. It was the most heartbreaking moment, I think, in my life.

He had done so much for me. I had many problems when he met me. He treated me with love and respect. I would even go as far as to say that he healed me from within. I was welcomed into his community of followers. I became a disciple and did all I could to learn how to be more like him. I told others about the love of God as we were learning what it really meant from him.

Then, they killed him. We were all so devastated. None of us knew what to think or feel. And, we were scared. We had watched such horrors over those few days.

Because of how they had handled everything – the trial, the crucifixion – we weren’t able to prepare his body properly for burial. You see, they did everything under the cloak of darkness and he wasn’t buried until the Sabbath had begun. It was against everything we had ever been taught. So, on Sunday morning, I insisted on going to the tomb to prepare his body. It was all that I could do for him at that point.

Some others went with me, and we headed toward the tomb. Now when I think back to that day, I wonder what we were thinking. We knew that there was no way we could move the stone from in front of the tomb. I wonder now if we were called there for purposes we could not even see at the time. I wonder this because it all seems pretty silly now. I wonder what we were thinking.

Pretty soon, though, it didn’t matter what we were thinking. The whole world turned upside down when we arrived at the tomb. He was gone. He was gone! Our minds raced with possibilities. Had the Romans moved him so we couldn’t perform our religious rituals? Had someone stolen the body? What had happened to him?

We were in shock. I was a complete wreck and went off into another section of the burial grounds. That is when it happened. Someone spoke to me. Thinking it was the gardener, I asked him if he knew where Jesus was. Then, he called me by name.

Have you ever had someone know you so well that it resonates throughout your being every time they call your name? When he called me by name, something shot through me that was truly amazing. There are no words to describe this feeling. It was just how he said my name and the look in his eyes when he called out to me. All I can tell you is that at that moment I knew my Savior was alive! I hugged him and cried. Then, he asked me to go tell the other disciples.

Of course, when I told them, they had their doubts. I guess it was easy for them to dismiss me as an emotional woman. I tell you, though, when those men realized it was true, they became emotional, too.

I told everyone I knew that the Lord was Risen. I feel honored to have been used in such a way. I was one of the first witnesses to the Resurrection. And, I am so happy to have been called to such a time as that!

### **Discussion Suggestions (Mary Magdalene):**

(You may want to print each of the situations below on a separate index card or strip of paper. Make arrangements for using the hymn "He Lives.")

After a few moments for reflection, encourage women to talk about the following:

What did you see, hear, and feel as Mary Magdalene told about Jesus' healing her and her following Jesus?

What did you see, hear, and feel as Mary told about Jesus' death and burial?

What did you see, hear, and feel as you discovered with Mary that Jesus was gone from the tomb?

What did you see, hear, and feel as Jesus spoke the name "Mary?"

What did you see, hear, and feel as you told people the wonderful news that Jesus is alive?

Comment: "We have walked with Mary Magdalene and tried to see, hear, and feel what she experienced. Now let's try to put ourselves in the place of some people today. Let's try to feel what they may be feeling. Then ask God's guidance in knowing how to call the person's name and encourage her or him with the good news that Jesus is alive." (Ask the women to form groups of two or three and talk about ways to respond to God's call by sharing the encouragement of Jesus' resurrection with one of the following):

Sheila's husband died suddenly last night.

Rhonda and Mark have just learned that their baby has a severe disability.

Nell's doctor has told her that she has a terminal illness.

Claire feels that God is calling her to be a pastor.

Nancy who is only a few months from retirement will lose her job and pension because the factory where she works is closing.

Sue's teenage son has become addicted to drugs and is involved in other destructive behaviors.

Invite each group to tell how they could respond to God's call and offer encouragement to the person because Jesus is alive.

Close with a time of worship. Use the hymn "He Lives" as a group song, solo, or from a cassette tape or CD. Then ask women to pray silently for those who need to be encouraged by experiencing as Mary Magdalene did that Jesus is alive. Invite women to silently thank God for the difference Jesus' resurrection makes in their lives.

Encourage women to share aloud, one at a time, what difference it makes to them that Jesus is alive. After each response all will join in the joyous affirmation: "Jesus is alive!"



## Priscilla Acts 18

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**Opening Prayer:** “God, help us as we hear Priscilla’s story. May we be inspired for such a time as ours by both her words and example. Amen.”

### **Priscilla Monologue**

My name is Priscilla. I’ve lived my entire life asking myself, “What is God calling me to do right now?” I know that God uses each of us to work with God in order to complete divine purposes. I witnessed the effects of these calls time and time again. I never dreamed that I would be a leader of those early believers. It wasn’t something that my husband, Aquila, and I set out to do. We just worked hard making tents, trying to keep our business going. And, we prayed every night for God to always shine a light on the way that we should follow. That way led us straight to Paul.

Yes, that Paul. The one bold enough to call himself, “The Apostle.” Most people don’t know, but he called us that, too. Each of us in our own way were working diligently to spread the good news that we had come to live. There wasn’t one place Paul walked into that he didn’t speak the name of Jesus before he left. That is why he was in so much trouble all the time.

We had such vision back then! We didn’t just want to call on Jesus’ name, get folks excited and then leave. We wanted them to truly understand, believe, and then become witnesses themselves.

We gave up a lot for that work. Paul, Aquila, and I moved to Ephesus because we heard God calling us there. Aquila and I settled in to work with the Ephesians while Paul moved on. He was always on the move with a fire to spread the word to as many people as he could.

We stayed in Ephesus and met Apollos who was young and energetic. He had good intentions, but didn’t know the whole story. So we taught him about the Resurrection and what the life of Jesus truly means for all of us.

I could never have been a part of such teaching before. It would not have been allowed. I always tell others how resurrection for each of us is not just something to look forward to in the next life. I see my life working to spread the gospel as a resurrection of sorts. I have known all my life that I was called to teach the love of God. Before, I found ways to do this with my women friends or children, but because of Jesus, I was able to fulfill this call in a way that became meaningful to me. Our services of worship became a bright light in my life as I was able to stand and lead others in worship of our very Creator. It truly felt like a new life, like breath had blown fresh through me. I believe Jesus made that possible, gave me the opportunity to stand side by side with Paul, with Aquila, to teach Apollos. And, I watched as other young women began doing the same thing.

I’ve lived my whole life asking myself, “What is God calling me to do right now?” And each answer took me on a new adventure of seeing God use me to proclaim God’s message. My prayer is that this touched others in such a way to help them go out and do the same. But, what I know is that this God-given life has touched me, and I will always proclaim that truth. Jesus has brought resurrection into our lives in the eternal realm, but also right here and right now. I am eternally grateful for that.

### **Discussion Suggestions (Priscilla):**

(Provide a chalkboard and chalk or a large sheet of paper and felt-tip marker.)

Encourage women to discuss: “How does Priscilla’s question, ‘What is God calling me to do right now?’ relate to our theme: ‘For Such a Time as This: Reaching Out to Serve?’ In what ways is Priscilla’s question ‘What is God calling me to do right now?’ also your question?”

Invite the women to respond to these questions: “What are some ways Priscilla sought and discerned God’s call for her? Who may have been encouragers to Priscilla as she sought God’s will for her life? As Priscilla responded to God’s call, in what ways was she an encourager to others? How do Priscilla’s words about wanting to help people truly understand, believe in Jesus, and then become witnesses themselves relate to her ministry of encouragement and proclamation?”

Encourage women to brainstorm ways we can continue Priscilla’s ministry of encouragement and proclamation today. (List these on a chalkboard or large sheet of paper.)

To help women discern God’s call for such a time as this, guide them in the following prayer experience:

Review God’s guidance in your life. Recall areas where you have especially felt God’s blessing and leadership. Offer thanks to God.

Prayerfully consider your interests, abilities, and spiritual gifts and how these relate to God’s call in your life.

Think about the needs of persons in your community and the world. How might God be speaking to you through these needs?

Thank God for persons who have encouraged you. How could their words of encouragement help you become aware of ways God is calling you right now?

Thank God for Jesus’ resurrection which makes possible new life and new opportunities for ministry.

Ask God, “What are you calling me to do right now for such a time as this?” Listen prayerfully and allow God to speak to you.

Encourage women to share their responses: “How has Priscilla’s example and our time of prayer inspired you to answer God’s call for such a time as this?” After each woman’s response to the question, invite all to join you in praying aloud: “Thank you, God, for your call in our lives.”



## Lydia

### Acts 16:1-15

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**Opening Prayer:** “God, we thank you for stories in the Bible of women you used to accomplish your purpose. Encourage us to join these women of faith in serving you for such a time as ours. Amen.”

### **Lydia Monologue**

My name is Lydia. I am a member of the Christian community in Philippi. I have witnessed God using someone to be at a particular place and time. I’m sure after all I’ve seen that God has even used me in such ways, but it is always hard to see that kind of thing in yourself. At least, it is for me.

What I think of is that day when Paul and Timothy and their travelling companions just showed up at our weekly prayer meeting. I still don’t know the full story of what brought them there that day, but it changed my life forever. And, do I even have to say that I mean it changed my life for the better?

Oh, it isn’t that my life was so bad before. I knew God. I had a nice home and a very successful business in fabrics. I had great friends and things were going along pretty nicely. I never even imagined it could get any better.

Paul marches into our meeting. I have to admit that at first I was a little put off by him. I couldn’t believe this man’s rudeness to interrupt and basically take over our meeting. But, soon something began to change within me. I started to really listen to what he was preaching and suddenly I felt that I was getting to know God in a whole new way. Through the Risen Christ, my life changed. An empty space from within, that I had not even known was there, became filled. From there, I began opening my home to all the missionaries coming through. Many people came to know Jesus right there in my home. What an exciting time!

Now, I’ll be honest with you. My involvement in the early church brought with it some consequences. There were certain customers who didn’t want to buy fabric from me anymore. There were friends and family who no longer would speak to me. But, the new friends and the family of the Messiah made up for all of that. It may sound silly, but it is true. It isn’t that I was not sad about those things. It is something that is hard to explain. You really have to experience it. But, there truly was a peace and fulfillment that came over me and it made the hardships easier than they would have been otherwise.

So, Paul followed where God called him. He said he had a dream of a man in our area calling him to come and help. The next day he got up and headed our way. And because of that I met Jesus and took my faith to a new level of understanding as well as of service.

These are the eternal consequences, the ones that really matter. My business is very important to me, as are my family and friends. But, my life as part of the church in Philippi is what took all the good things and shined a new light on them, the light of the Messiah. That light certainly makes everything in my life brighter and better than ever.

I’m so happy that Paul paid attention to that dream. Maybe somehow that empty space in me was calling out to him for help. Thank God for such dreams!



**Discussion Suggestions (Lydia):**

(You will need for each woman a pen or pencil, an envelope, and enough 3 by 5-inch index cards for herself and every other woman in the group. For example, if you have 10 women in your group you will need 100 index cards.)

Invite women to talk about the following: “How do you respond to Lydia’s statement that even though we’ve seen God use someone else in a particular time and place, it is often harder to see how God is using us for God’s purposes? How have you found this to be true in your life?”

Ask: “In what ways did Lydia allow God to use her before she met Paul? How was God able to use her in even greater ways after she came to know the Risen Christ? How has your life been changed since the Risen Christ touched your life? Who can recall a time when you felt that God was using you to accomplish God’s plan?”

Guide the following activity to affirm and encourage women to understand that God is using them to accomplish God’s purpose for such a time as this.

Give each woman a pen or pencil, an envelope, and enough 3 by 5-inch cards for herself and every other woman in the group. If your group is large, you may want to ask the women to form circles of 6-8 women in each circle.

Ask each woman to write her name on the front of her envelope and pass the envelope to the person on her right.

Suggest that because we may wonder how God is using us, this is an opportunity to tell each woman in the group how you see God using her in this time and place to accomplish God’s purpose. On an index card each woman will write a note to the woman whose envelope she is holding about how she sees God using her. Encourage women to be as specific as possible.

Guide each woman to pass the envelope she is holding to the person on her right and write a note of encouragement for the woman whose envelope she receives. Continue in this way until every woman is holding her own envelope.

Invite each woman to silently read the words of encouragement others have written about her. Then suggest that each woman write on a card, “I believe God is using me right now to . . .,” complete that statement, and then add it to her envelope. Encourage women to keep these words of encouragement to read whenever they wonder how God is using them for such a time as this.

Invite women to offer sentence prayers as a response to Lydia’s example and the affirmations they have received.