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Ruth's Difficult Journey – Ruth 1:18-22

A Devotion for Women by *Stephanie Little*

18 When she saw that she was determined to go with her, she stopped speaking to her.

19 Now the two of them went until they came to Bethlehem. And it happened, when they had come to Bethlehem, that all the city was excited because of them; and the women said, "Is this Naomi?"

20 But she said to them, "Do not call me Naomi¹ call me Mara,¹ for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me.

21 I went out full, and the LORD has brought me home again empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the LORD has testified against me, and the Almighty has afflicted me?"

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

In our previous study of a woman transformed, we saw Ruth make an amazing statement of commitment to her mother-in-law, Naomi and more importantly, to Jehovah, God. Ruth and Naomi were literally at a crossroad where Ruth's choice could have been eternally devastating. She could have returned home like her sister-in-law, Orpah and forever "walked off the pages of Scripture." But, instead, Ruth stepped out and moved forward toward the land of promise and a life of godly possibilities. However, as we read verses 18-22 of chapter one, we see Ruth's journey with Naomi couldn't have been an easy one. In verse 18, we notice Naomi's reaction to Ruth's beautiful declaration of devotion—she simply "stopped speaking to her."

You can almost picture the two of them, widows, dressed in the customary dark heavy robes of mourning, huddled together on the dusty road. At the height of emotion, after watching Orpah leave and hearing Ruth's words, Naomi silently turns and faces her homeland. Ruth rises and follows. Verse 19 says, "Now the two of them went until they came to Bethlehem." As we read this sentence we have to understand the context to fully grasp the magnitude of their journey. Ruth and Naomi traveled about 70 miles, down from the high elevation of Moab, into the Jordan Valley and back up through the hills of Judea into Bethlehem. They traveled together for at least a week, on foot. Verses 20-21 give us an indication of what the trip was like for Ruth. Naomi's attitude and outlook are reflected in the contrast of her names. In the midst of her friends rejoicing to see her, the elder widow tells them not to call her *Naomi*, which means *pleasant*; but to call her *Mara*, meaning *bitter* because she believed God had dealt bitterly with her in the loss of her husband and sons. Bitterness. Naomi carried the bitterness of her circumstances with her all the way from Moab. Ruth not only endured the difficulty of the terrain as they traveled; but she also experienced the difficulty of companionship with bitterness. Yet, scripture says in verse 22, "So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabitess her daughter-in-law with her, who returned from the country of Moab." Ruth remained with Naomi. She made the hard journey, undoubtedly, encouraging her mother-in-law along the way. Ruth demonstrated the kind of love that only comes from a heart changed by God. It was Ruth's commitment to Jehovah and her belief in His Word that allowed her to love Naomi, even in her bitterness.

You may be traveling life's journey with a bitter companion today. If so, what kind of traveler are you? Are you allowing God's love to flow through you, providing encouragement and support along the way? Or, do you want to run away and leave your bitter companion behind in their misery? A heart transformed by the love of God is willing to endure, to remain, to encourage and to follow through to the end. Ruth was a strong woman, that's evident; yet it wasn't her strength that kept her going. It was the strength of Almighty God, the same strength we can rely on today. If you are traveling the road with someone who is bitter, ask God to allow you to sense His strengthening hand, helping you demonstrate His love as you continue on the journey.