



DEAN WELCH – TEACHER



RUTH 1: 14-22

# WEEKLY SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

DECEMBER 13 2009

LESSON #2 FROM THE *MASTERWORK* SERIES STUDY OF:





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RUTH 1: 14-22

*The bar was set at 9-inches higher than Michael Stone's personal best. He began to get nervous. Fear would be a more accurate description. The stands were still filled with about 20,000 people even though the final race had ended an hour earlier. The pole vault is truly the glamour event of any track-and-field competition. It combines the grace of a gymnast with the strength of a body builder. Michael had been looking forward to this moment since his was a child. He was now one of the final two competitors in the pole-vaulting event at the National Junior Olympics. Michael needed to clear this vault to win. Would Michael be able to go above and beyond the bar?*

Today we conclude Week Two of our Bible study from the Book of Ruth—based on the book by Pastor Ralph Douglas West called *Finding Fullness Again*—about starting over. This week's lesson is based on the last half of Ruth 1, verses 14-22. Today, we're talking about the extraordinary. We are talking about the type of person who would set the bar 9-inches higher than he had ever set it before. We aren't talking about the type of person who just **accepts** increased risks—no. We're talking about a person who would go above and beyond, for the sake of love. Are you that type of person? Am I that type of person? Who would go to extreme lengths to show love to another person? To your spouse, children, a friend, a person in the church who you know has a need, or a neighbor who does not know Christ? There is a fork in the road this morning—on one side is the ordinary, the expected, the safe. On the other side is the extraordinary, the risky, the surprising.

Now, I know what some of you are thinking today. "Dean, I just don't have anything left to give—I'm exhausted. There are only 11 shopping days left before Christmas. I'm running on empty and can't handle one more problem. Let's face it: This is the season to feel overwhelmed. What to buy a spouse or parent you can never

think of a gift for? How to deal with those quirky family members you manage to avoid the rest of the year? Traffic tie-ups near the malls, crowds out everywhere, office Christmas parties, picking out a Christmas tree, putting up decorations. Are you feeling overwhelmed yet?

And if we can rise above our own personal circumstances enough to see the bigger picture, we feel even more overwhelmed. We see problems far bigger and more complex than our ability to figure out. The war on terror, the conflict with Iraq, 30,000 more soldiers for Afghanistan, the health insurance crisis, poverty and homelessness here in the US. Are you feeling overwhelmed yet?

**How do you handle things when you feel as if you're running on empty?** Remember our memory verse from last week—**Philippians 4:19? Who can repeat it?** *"My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory through Christ Jesus."* As we begin, let's go back and refresh our memories of what happens in the first thirteen verses of Ruth 1. Anyone want to give us a quick recap of the events? [THE STORY IS SET DURING THE TIME OF THE JUDGES, AND THERE IS A GREAT FAMINE IN THE LAND. ELIMELECH'S FAMILY TRAVELS TO MOAB TO FIND FOOD WHERE ELIMELECH DIES. HIS SONS MARRY MOABITE WOMEN AND THEY RETURN TO SOMEWHAT NORMAL LIFE FOR 10-YEARS, AND THEN THE SONS DIE. NAOMI DECIDES IT'S TIME TO RETURN TO BETHLEHEM AND THE DAUGHTERS-IN-LAW AGREE TO GO WITH HER. NAOMI OBJECTS, TELLS GIRLS TO STAY. ORPAH DECIDES TO STAY, BUT NOT RUTH.]

Let's continue with our story, so turn to **RUTH 1: 14-22 (NCV)** and follow along: *"<sup>14</sup>The women cried together out loud again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law Naomi good-bye, but Ruth held on to her tightly. <sup>15</sup>Naomi said to Ruth, "Look, your sister-in-law is going back to her own people and her own gods. Go back with her." <sup>16</sup> But Ruth said, "Don't beg me to leave you or to stop following you. Where you go, I will go. Where you live, I will live. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God.<sup>17</sup> And where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. I ask the Lord to punish me terribly if I do not keep this promise: Not even death will separate us." <sup>18</sup> When Naomi saw that Ruth had firmly made*

*up her mind to go with her, she stopped arguing with her.<sup>19</sup> So Naomi and Ruth went on until they came to the town of Bethlehem. When they entered Bethlehem, all the people became very excited. The women of the town said, "Is this really Naomi?"<sup>20</sup> Naomi answered the people, "Don't call me Naomi. Call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very sad.<sup>21</sup> When I left, I had all I wanted, but now, the Lord has brought me home with nothing. Why should you call me Naomi when the Lord has spoken against me and the Almighty has given me so much trouble?"<sup>22</sup> So Naomi and her daughter-in-law Ruth, the Moabite, returned from Moab and arrived at Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest.*

This morning's text begins with more weeping. This reminds us that these women truly loved each other. Verses 14 and 15 are about Orpah's path. Her kiss to her mother-in-law is a kiss good bye. She returns to her Moabite relatives, as Naomi asked her to do. Now, think about this for a moment: Both Orpah and Ruth were in the same "boat" and had agreed to go back to Bethlehem with Naomi. **So, why do you think they responded differently?** Do you think it was a question of Orpah's commitment?

*The story is told about a college man who walked into a photography studio with a framed picture of his girlfriend. He wanted the picture duplicated. This involved removing it from the frame. In doing this, the studio owner noticed the inscription on the back of the photograph: "My dearest Tom, I love you with all my heart. I love you more and more each day. I will love you forever and ever. I am yours for all eternity." It was signed "Helen," and it contained a P.S.: "If we ever break up, I want this picture back." How many of you think she was NOT totally committed to that relationship? Was that Orpah's problem? Maybe she'd had enough and knew things would be better at home with relatives and her own friends.*

Look at verse 15 again: *<sup>15</sup>Naomi said to Ruth, "Look, your sister-in-law is going back to her own people and her own gods. Go back with her." Why do you think Ruth refused to join her sister-*

**in-law?** One of the Commentary writers said that Naomi was trying to cover up; Orpah had given up, but Ruth was prepared to stand up! Ruth refused to listen to her mother-in-law's pleas or follow her sister-in-law's bad example because she had come to trust in the God of Israel. Look down at **RUTH 2:11-12 (NIV)** for a moment and follow along: *<sup>11</sup>Boaz replied, "I've been told all about what you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband—how you left your father and mother and your homeland and came to live with a people you did not know before. <sup>12</sup>May the LORD repay you for what you have **done**. May you be richly rewarded by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take **refuge**."* Ruth had experienced trials and disappointments, but instead of blaming God, she had trusted Him and was not ashamed to confess her faith.

Verses 16-17 (NIV) are classic. We hear these words even today at weddings, don't we? Look at them again and tell me what you think Naomi must have thought after hearing these words from Ruth? *<sup>16</sup>But Ruth replied, "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. <sup>17</sup>Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me."*

WOW! Now we are back to the **extraordinary**. We are back to the bar being set 9-inches higher than it has been set before. We see a risky decision, a bold decision, a beautiful decision. Orpah did the expected and Ruth the unexpected. Ruth could have said, "I will make sure you make it to Israel, and then I will return to Moab." She could have said, "I will stick with you as long as you are alive, but when you die, I will return to Moab." But what does she say? "Where you go I will go ... Your people will be my people ... Your God, my God, ... where you die I will die. And may curses fall upon me if anything makes me break my vow."

**Would you say this kind of commitment is rare to our day today? Why?** So many people today just want to make a

contribution, not a total commitment. The difference in a contribution and total commitment is usually the difference in failure and success. Unfortunately, many of our "friends" are like Orpah. When we find ourselves in trouble, these fleeting "friends" give us a little kiss as they are waving "good bye." But perhaps you have a few "friends" are like Ruth. The word "end" is in the word "Friend." Ruth would be a friend until the end, like we see in a story about former Congressman and Speaker of the House from Texas, Sam Rayburn.

*Sam Rayburn served for more than 48 years in the US House of Representatives, including 17 years as speaker of the House. At the height of his career he was one of the most powerful men in the world. But he was known as a good friend, who never outgrew a friend. He was known for honesty. He chose not to amass wealth, and died with only \$15,000 to his name. One night, a friend's teenage daughter passed away. Early the next morning the man heard a knock on the door and when he opened it, there was Mr. Rayburn standing outside. "I just came by to see what I could do to help," said Rayburn. "I don't think there is anything you can do, Mr. Speaker," said the broken father. "We are making all the arrangements." "Well, "Mr. Rayburn said, "have you had your coffee this morning?"*

*The man replied that they had not taken time for breakfast. So Mr. Rayburn said that he could at least make coffee for them. While he was working in the kitchen, the man came in and said, "Mr. Speaker, I thought you were suppose to be having breakfast at the White House this morning." "Well I was," Rayburn said, "but I called the President and told him I had a friend who was in trouble, and I couldn't come."*

That's what I call commitment and that's the example we see in Ruth's decision too. Ruth was committed to Naomi's God as well as to Naomi. Do you think that we are to be committed to people as well as to God? Give me an example. [MARRIAGE; FAMILY] Thinking outside of marriage and family, how committed should we be to a

friend? Listen to the words about a friend from **PROVERBS 17: 17 (NIV): *A friend loves at all times.***

*Tony Campolo tells about a friend of his who was on a train traveling out of Victoria Station in London. Across from him in the compartment were two men in their early thirties. Twenty minutes out of the station, one of them had an epileptic seizure. Perhaps you know how frightening such a seizure can be. The man stiffened and fell heavily out of his seat. Immediately, his friend took off his own jacket, rolled it up and put it behind his friend's head. He blotted the beads of perspiration from his brow with his handkerchief, talked to the stricken man in a quiet manner and calmed him. When the seizure was over, he lifted his friend gently back into his seat.*

*Then he turned to my friend and said, "Mister, please forgive us. Sometimes this happens two or three times a day. My buddy and I were in Vietnam together, and we were both wounded. I had bullets in both my legs and he had one in his shoulder. The helicopter that was supposed to come for us never came to pick us up." "My friend picked me up, mister, and he carried me for three and one-half days out of that jungle. The Viet Cong were sniping at us the whole way. He was in more agony than I was. I begged him to drop me and save himself, but he wouldn't let me go. He got me out of that jungle, mister. He saved my life. I don't know how he did it and I don't know why he did it."*

*"Four years ago, I found out that he had this condition, so I sold my house in New York, took what money I had, and came over here to take care of him." And then he looked at his friend and said, "You see mister, after what he did for me, there isn't ANYTHING I wouldn't do for him."*

Think about the decision by Ruth. **What might this decision have cost Ruth?** Ruth makes a real decision for God. She says, "I accept the poverty. I accept being an outcast. I also accept the fact that I will remain a widow the rest of my life." She was willing

to accept all of that in order to take a stand for God. She makes her decision to go back to Bethlehem with Naomi.

Look again at **verse 19** and let's look at Naomi when she first arrives back home. Think about what we learn about Naomi from this verse: *"So the two women went on until they came to Bethlehem. When they arrived in Bethlehem, the **WHOLE TOWN** was **STIRRED** because of them, and the women exclaimed, "Can this be Naomi?"* Now, continuing with **verses 20-21 (NLT)**, how do you think Naomi is feeling about finally being home? <sup>20</sup>*"Don't call me Naomi," she responded. "Instead, call me Mara, for the Almighty has made life very bitter for me. <sup>21</sup> I went away full, but the Lord has brought me home **empty**. Why call me Naomi when the Lord has caused me to suffer and the Almighty has sent such tragedy upon me?"*

What's wrong with Naomi? Why the bad attitude, especially since she's back at home? Recall the words from **PROVERBS 3: 4-5 (NIV)**: <sup>5</sup>*Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; <sup>6</sup>in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.* When a Christian gets away from the Lord and lives disobediently, his or her life goes from pleasant to trouble and bitterness. Sin robs us of the sweetness of life. Sins sweetness soon sours our life, our hopes, and dreams. That's what happened to Naomi.

**Is Naomi right to feel the way she does? Was she really empty?** Do you realize that as a Christian, when we are acting depressed, we are really insulting God? Think about it. **How should we react when we feel as Naomi feels? What are we to say or feel or do?**

Listen to these powerful words of reminder from **PSALM 59:16 (NLT)**: *But as for me, I will sing about your power. Each morning I will sing with joy about your unfailing love. For you have been my refuge, a place of safety when I am in distress.* Did you know that these words by David were written at the time Saul sent soldiers to watch David's house in order to kill him?

What about those times, like in the life of Naomi, when we feel that God doesn't understand—that maybe He's not interested and we're at the end of our rope? What should we do then? *Some years ago a man living in Wales had the misfortune of being involved in a mining accident which necessitated the amputation of his right leg. After a period in the hospital, he went to a prosthesis maker to be supplied with an artificial leg. When the appendage had been strapped to the stump, which was all that remained of the injured leg, the attendant requested that the patient get up and walk across the floor. Awkwardly, the man struggled to his feet and staggered across the room. Then, dragging himself painfully back to his chair, he slumped into it, utterly exhausted and discouraged. "That's not how to do it," said the attendant. "Watch this!" Then he walked gracefully across the floor. "Ah," exclaimed the patient, "It's all very easy for you because you don't have any disability." "Oh, haven't I?" replied the attendant. "Look." Pulling up the legs of his trousers, he disclosed that he was not wearing just one artificial limb, but two!*

Too many times we doubt or we get depressed and discouraged and we are inclined to say, "Jesus, it was easy for you. You were God and could not sin. You never tasted the abundance of daily temptation, toil, and frustration. But, please remember the words of **HEBREWS 4:15 (NIV)** in those times: ". . . *we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are-- yet was without sin.*"

The next time you find yourself doubting you can finish the race, look to Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. The next time you're depressed about giving up things for God, look to Jesus who gave up even more. Or the next time you're discouraged, remember the ultimate sacrifice—Jesus bearing the sins of the world on the cross as God turned His back, to say "I love you" to us.

I began today with a story about Michael Stone. Now, for the end of the story: *Michael Stone carefully picked up his pole. He felt his*

*heart pounding. He was sure the crowd did, too. The silence was deafening. When he heard the singing of some distant robins in flight, he knew it was his time to fly. As he began sprinting down the runway, something felt wonderfully different, yet familiar. The surface below him felt like the country road he used to dream about. The rocks and chunks of dirt, the visions of the golden wheat fields seemed to fill his thoughts. When he took a deep breath, it happened. He began to fly. His take-off was effortless. Michael Stone was now flying, just like in his childhood dreams. Only this time he knew he wasn't dreaming. It was either the eruption of the people in the stands or the thump of his landing that brought Michael back to earth. On his back with that wonderful hot sun on his face, he could only envision the smile on his mother's face. Michael was immediately swarmed with people congratulating him on the greatest accomplishment thus far in his life. 17 feet 6 inches: a National and International Junior Olympics Record.*

*Michael's Stone raised the bar. He beat his personal best by 9 inches. He had gone above and beyond what anyone expected. Was it easy, no? It would have been easier to never have tried, especially for Michael Stone, especially since Michael Stone is blind.*

What about you? God calls us to go above and beyond! What is that extra 9-inches for you? How do you live when you are running on empty? It's all about Him!

**Let's Pray.**



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**SESSION TWO**  
**DECEMBER 13, 2009**

- RUTH 1: 16-17 (NCV):** "But Ruth said, "Don't beg me to leave you or to stop following you. Where \_\_\_\_\_ go, \_\_\_\_\_ will go. Where \_\_\_\_\_ live, \_\_\_\_\_ will live. Your people will be my people, and your \_\_\_\_\_ will be \_\_\_\_\_ God. And where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. I ask the Lord to punish me terribly if I do not keep this promise: Not even \_\_\_\_\_ will separate us."
- Ruth had experienced \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, but instead of \_\_\_\_\_ God, she had \_\_\_\_\_ Him and was not ashamed to confess her faith.
- PROVERBS 17: 17 (NIV)** says, "A friend \_\_\_\_\_ at all times..."
- Ruth makes a real \_\_\_\_\_ for God. She says, "I accept the \_\_\_\_\_. I accept being an \_\_\_\_\_. I also accept the fact that I will remain a \_\_\_\_\_ the rest of my life." She was willing to accept all of that in order to take a \_\_\_\_\_ God.
- When a \_\_\_\_\_ gets away from the Lord and lives disobediently, his or her life goes from \_\_\_\_\_ to trouble and \_\_\_\_\_. \_\_\_\_\_ robs us of the sweetness of life. Sins sweetness soon sours our life, our hopes, and dreams.
- PSALM 59: 16 (NLT),** "But as for me, I will \_\_\_\_\_ about your power. Each morning I will sing with \_\_\_\_\_ about your unfailing love. For you have been my \_\_\_\_\_, a place of safety when I am in \_\_\_\_\_.
- The next time you find yourself \_\_\_\_\_ you can \_\_\_\_\_ the race, look to \_\_\_\_\_, the author and perfecter of our faith. The next time you're \_\_\_\_\_ about giving up things for God, look to Jesus who gave up even \_\_\_\_\_.