

Tuesday, July 14, 2026

Ruth 1:18

When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her.

If you have time, read Ruth 1:8-22.

The reality of joy is that it can be elusive. I can't count the number of times I've been told happiness and joy are different things. Cognitively, I understand the difference. Happiness is temporary and fleeting. Joy is rooted more deeply and doesn't depend on current circumstances. And yet, when going through difficulty, while I can acknowledge in my head that God provides my joy, I still might feel pretty miserable. I still might feel despair. I still might feel like all hope is lost.

Naomi and Ruth are in this emotional place as they move from Moab to Judah. Naomi has lost her husband and two sons. Ruth has lost her husband before having a child. Neither one has much hope for future prospects regarding leaving a legacy behind. Naomi can barely see joy (if she can see it at all), saying in verse 21, "the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me."

And yet, these two women are the joy of the Lord for each other. In Ruth, Naomi has a daughter-in-law who states in verse 17 that only death will separate them. For one who has already experienced so much death, this may be cold comfort, but the reality is that Naomi had every expectation that she would be alone for the rest of her life. God gives her the joy of an unwavering and determined companion. Naomi seemingly does not gain much happiness from Ruth's insistence on staying with her, but God is clearly providing her with a source of joy, a sign of his faithfulness.

Meanwhile, Ruth, whose own suffering gets a bit lost in the depths of Naomi's despair, makes a choice that builds her joy in the Lord. She decides to follow God's leading into helping another person even though she has every right to want help for herself. Despite all common sense arguing for her to stay in Moab, Ruth decides that she will be Naomi's family. Where Naomi goes, she will go. Where Naomi stays, she will stay.

The joy of the Lord can be counterintuitive. I would have guessed that Ruth would find joy in others blessing and comforting her. Instead, God gives her joy through her determination to bless and comfort her mother-in-law.

When we follow where God leads and bless whom he calls us to bless, we experience his joy, even in the midst of difficulty.