

When life really hurts
a meditation based on
Ruth 1

Edward F. Campbell summarizes Ruth chapter 1. “Tragedy is added to tragedy in rapid succession.” Naomi is “faced with a series of blows which seem inexplicable.” She is “bereft of those things which provide her security and she cannot comprehend why.” As the story unfolds, Naomi responds to these tragedies step by step. She is a lot like another Old Testament character by the name of Job. We are all meant to ask that old, old question when bad things happen. “Why God? Why has this happened to me?” The answer Job's friends gave was quite simple. Job must have done something wrong, something terribly wrong. God came in at the end and said that Job's friend had it all wrong. We may be tempted to believe the same about Naomi. We had best be careful not to jump to any conclusions!

Step by step we hear of Naomi's reponse. “*No, my daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you, because the LORD's hand has gone out against me*” (Ruth 1:13). The LORD, Naomi laments, has actually slapped me hard, hard, hard in the face. He is against me; no doubt about it!

This is not the first time in the Bible that someone has had this happen. Think about the Joseph cycle of stories in Genesis. Favoured by father, hated by brothers, dreamer of becoming royalty, Joseph is thrown into a pit, sold as a slave. That's not the story that got back to Joseph's father, however. The story he heard was that a wild animal had attacked his youngest son. There was even evidence to prove it! So Jacob grieved the loss of his son. *All his sons and daughters came to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted* (Gen 37:35).

The story continues with similar realities. A famine came and drained the land. Jacob heard that there was food in Egypt, so he sent his sons there. When they returned, one of them, Simeon, was not with them. He was being held in Egypt, until they returned with the youngest son of all, Benjamin. This was too much for Jacob. *Their father Jacob said to them, “You have deprived me of my children. Joseph is no more and Simeon is no more, and now you want to take Benjamin. Everything is against me!”* (Gen 42:36).

“Everything is against me!” “The LORD's hand has gone out against me.” There is something very normal about stories like these. “God's activity is intimately bound up with the mundane affairs and interrelationships of human beings” (E.F.C.). Jacob's reaction, and Naomi's too, tell us in story form that it is okay to speak this way. Hear this: anyone who takes God seriously must come to God with their questions. When

life really hurts, God **wants us** to bring the pain to him.