

STUDY GUIDE

FOUR SESSIONS

# NAOMI



When I Feel Worthless,  
God Says I'm  
*Enough*



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Jada Edwards

Nicole Johnson



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STUDY GUIDE | FOUR SESSIONS

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Nicole Johnson

*With Karen Lee-Thorp*

ZONDERVAN

*Known by Name: Naomi*

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# How This Study Works

## Naomi: Down, Maybe—But Not Out

Loss. Grief. Trauma. Seclusion. Most of us have experienced one or more of these to some degree. How do we thrive in difficult times without being overcome by bitterness? There's a woman in the Bible who faced that question, struggled with it, experienced a whole range of emotions, and eventually took the action she felt she needed to take to get to the other side of her broken down, bitter self. Her name is Naomi. Can you relate? Have you been there too?

When we first meet Naomi, she is fully wallowing in her victim status. Her heart is exposed and raw to the touch. She has lost everything that made her life worth living: her husband, both of her sons, her home. Broke and with no source of income, she is facing an unknown future. But with the help of her daughter-in-law Ruth, who is a widow too, Naomi starts to make choices that give God room to work behind the scenes on her behalf. Her life starts to change.

We see through Naomi's story that when we go through heart-break and loss, and we're just "so done," God is not done. He can

and will redeem everything in our lives. Through her story we can learn to go beyond platitudes about trusting God into a place where trust makes sense to us, and faith is a more natural by-product of our pain.

*Naomi: When I Feel Worthless, God Says I'm Enough* is a study for women who want to get into the real, messy parts of our lives that are usually under wraps. Through each video session, we will engage with a Bible teacher, a Christian counselor, and an actor portraying present-day scenarios. These leaders will help us explore the human perspective of Naomi: how she felt, how she saw herself, and how others saw her. They will also show us how we can all relate to aspects of Naomi and her story. We will discover God's perspective: how God sees Naomi and how God sees us. Through these perspectives, we will find our own stories in the pages of Scripture.

## A Typical Session

A session of the study will go like this:

**Check In.** In Session 1 you'll introduce yourselves. In later sessions you'll have a chance to share something you discovered about yourself in-between sessions.

**At a Glance: Naomi.** This is a quick snapshot of an age-old problem we still deal with today, Naomi's age-old solution or mistake, and a taste of God's wisdom on the subject.

**Watch The Video.** Each video segment is 20-25 minutes long. It opens with a drama and then moves into a fast-paced teaching. Session 1 begins with all three of the presenters together, talking about the theme of the series. This study guide contains space for you to take notes on what you see in the video.

*Group Discussion.* The heart of the study is your conversation with the other women in your group. You'll be talking mainly about the real experiences of your lives. However, because this isn't group therapy, we strongly recommend that you commit yourself to the group ground rules discussed below.

*Closing Prayer.* End with your group leader or a volunteer reading aloud the prayer suggested in this section. Of course, any offered prayer is acceptable.

*Keep This Close.* These are a few short, memorable lines from the video that you may want to copy into your phone to go back to during the week.

*On Your Own.* Finally, you'll find five or six activities you can select from to carry your exploration of the topic deeper during the week. There is one verse of Scripture you can memorize and come back to over the remaining sessions of the study. There are journaling ideas. You can read Naomi's story in the Bible. You can pray or reflect on the drama. Do whichever of these activities you find helpful. Don't feel pressure to do more than you have time for. You'll have a chance to share something you got out of these activities when your group gathers next time. You'll also have a chance to recite your memory verse together.

## Group Ground Rules

This study gives you more of an opportunity to open up about your real life than most studies. You won't be pushed, but you will be invited, to talk about how you see yourself and how you live. But your group is not a therapy session. It's not led by a counselor. If you need professional counseling or a forum to share the story of your past, ask your group leader or church leaders to recommend resources.



The following ground rules will help you stay on track. You should go over them in your first meeting to be sure that everyone understands and agrees.

*Confidentiality.* Everything shared in the group must stay in the group. Don't repeat to outsiders what others share, even if you are all friends. If a group member misses a meeting, don't bring her up to date by sharing what others said in her absence. If something happens in the group that upsets you, don't discuss it with someone outside your group. Go to your group leader.

*Disclosure.* This should be a safe place to tell the group the difficult truths of your past. However, the group does not need all the ugly details. Give your group the four-or five-sentence summary of your situation. If you need someone to hear the whole story, ask your group leader to help you get connected with a counselor. She can help you find the person on your church staff who has the names of counselors in your area.

*Tears.* It's often good to cry when you share something hard. You're not embarrassing the group. If someone in your group cries, avoid words and actions that attempt to fix her sadness or solve her problem. Comfort is good; fixing is not. Don't let tears derail your time together. Keep going. The woman who has tears will be better sooner if the conversation carries on.

*Shared Airtime.* Everyone in the group needs an equal chance to talk. Avoid telling long stories, especially about your past or about what you are struggling with today. If you have a lot on your mind that needs to be said, ask your group leader to help you get connected with a counselor.

discussion, concentrate on talking about who you are today, shaped by your past, but not living in the past. Don't ask the group to sit through an account of what you went through. That's for counseling.

*Advice:* Avoid giving advice to other group members. If someone reveals a problem she is having and doesn't seem to know what to do about it, it can be tempting to suggest solutions. Avoid doing this. You can give her the gift of listening to her and accepting her as she is, and you can pray for her later on your own. Likewise, you should avoid asking the group to suggest solutions for situations you are facing. If you feel out of control and need help, ask your group leader to help you find a counselor.

## What Materials Are Needed for a Successful Group?

- ➔ Television monitor or screen
- ➔ DVD player
- ➔ Four-session DVD
- ➔ One study guide for each group member (you will be writing in the study guide, so you will each need a copy)
- ➔ Bible(s) (at least one for the group, but encourage all members to bring their Bibles)
- ➔ Pen or pencil for each person






SESSION 1

# When Hard Times hit



In chaos,  
**GOD** is our  
*constant.*



**T**imes of misery are inevitable in this life. Even in our society, with its advanced medical science, people still suffer and die. Sometimes death hits unexpectedly. Sometimes an illness persists for years with surgeries, treatments, symptoms, and perhaps the worst: uncertainty.

Other losses can be just as devastating: unemployment, divorce, rebelling children, unexpected expenses, substance abuse, disability, incarceration—the possibilities are endless. Such losses make us feel like we’re wading through mud in an unknown territory and can’t get our bearings. If you haven’t yet experienced something that feels like a huge loss, you’re probably familiar with smaller ones that can sting just as badly in the moment.

Have you felt like God is silent in these times? We wonder how he could allow such disasters. If God is so powerful and so good, why doesn’t he change our circumstances or find a way to end our suffering? It’s the age-old question, “Why does a good God allow bad things to happen?” But the truth is that in this broken world, in his sovereignty and grace, he allows suffering to afflict lots of people every day because he knows the end of the story—the good and perfect and whole end.

In this study we’re going to be introduced to a woman named Naomi who lost her husband and both of her sons to death. She was so distraught she tried to change her name to “Bitter.” But through a strange, yet sovereign, turn of events, Naomi found a way of dealing with her suffering without giving up her commitment to a God who was real and good. It took time. Things didn’t get better overnight. But she found a way forward and went for it. She didn’t stay stuck.



Welcome to the first session of *Naomi: When I Feel Worthless, God Says I'm Enough*. To get started, give everyone a chance to do the following:

- ➔ Say your name, unless everyone in the group knows you. Then, share just three or four sentences about something or someone you've lost or some experience that has left you feeling worthless.

Take a minute on your own and write down your response to these questions (you won't have to share your answers):

- ➔ Think of your emotional and spiritual life like your gas tank. On a scale of 0 to 5, with 0 being empty and 5 being full, how full is your tank today? Mark where you are on the measuring line below.



- ➔ If your tank is not very full, how much *hope* do you have of its being full one day in the future? Can you look forward to a day when things will be a lot better than they are now, or do you see emptiness as far as the horizon? Mark your level of hope on the measuring line below.



# At a Glance: NAOMI

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**Where in Scripture:** Ruth 1–4

**Age-old problem:** Loss and grief

**Age-old mistake:** Blaming God

**God's timeless wisdom:** Give voice to the depth of your pain, and keep trusting God at the same time. Consider how the Psalmist claims his pain and struggle. He is honest about his frustration with God's lack of response — or so he thinks. He is basically calling God to the carpet but then it's as if he remembers or recalls just who it is he is calling out to — God. Just a momentary lapse of reverence for who God is keeps us from trusting what he is capable of. *"O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, and by night, but I find no rest. Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel"* (Psalm 22:2–3 ESV).



Play the video segment for Session 1. It's about 26 minutes long, and you will be introduced to three speakers. As you watch, use the following outline to record thoughts that stand out to you.

## DRAMA: *Nicole*

An art teacher moved cross-country after a divorce, and when she opened the boxes, everything was broken. Was God punishing her for ending her marriage?

## TEACHING: *Jada*

Sometimes God will allow pain in your life to push you out of a place you shouldn't have been in to begin with.

In her hardest time, Naomi is still representing God well.

Does your life, even when it doesn't feel great, still make someone else want to choose God?

## TEACHING: *fasey*

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A trauma to your brain is any time the experience is greater than your reality.

Let yourself lament. To lament is just to say out loud what you feel.

Pain is God's way of preparing us for our purpose and revealing his promise.

**GOD** doesn't  
buy our affections  
with *blessings*.

Leader, read each numbered prompt to the group.

**1** What stood out to you most from the video?

**2** Kasey talked about lament. When we lament, we put words to the deep, internal grief we feel over the loss of something significant. How hard is it for you to lament? Have you ever allowed yourself to speak or write about your deepest feelings of sadness, loss, loneliness, fear, etc.?

**3** Have you received help from believing Christians in painful past seasons? What feeling triggers at the thought of trusting Christian people with your pain?

4 Jada said God sometimes uses pain to push us out of a place that isn't good for us. What are some examples of situations that God might want to push us out of? How might pain be the thing that gets us out of those situations?

5 Naomi modeled faith in God so well that her daughter-in-law Ruth decided to abandon her culture and go with Naomi to follow this God. Think of the people who have modeled faith in God to you. What have they said, done, and been that has made God attractive or compelling?

6 Why do you suppose people often distance themselves from God when life gets hard? What assumptions about God and suffering does this distancing reflect?

A decorative background featuring thick, horizontal pink brushstrokes that frame the central text area.

## Select a volunteer

to read the following:

Some people think God exists to make them happy. They commit to him with the expectation that he will bless their health, their loved ones, their job, and everything else in their world. Yet, when he allows something to go horribly wrong, they feel betrayed.

While it's true that God does involve himself in our lives and that he will empower us to make good choices, he isn't necessarily interested in making sure our lives go smoothly according to our standards. Like a loving parent, God is much more interested in helping us become strong in character, loving toward others, and trusting toward him. Because we live in a world riddled with sin, he often allows us to endure terrible losses without giving us reasons why. Suffering happens to other people; why not to us? God doesn't buy our affections with blessings. He wants us to love him for himself regardless of our losses. Jesus is God in the flesh, and he came to earth and suffered horribly, partly so that we would know that he knows exactly what it's like to be human in a broken world. He understands what we're going through, and he's right here with us.


7

What reasons do we have for staying faithful to God even when life is really hard?



8

How do you respond to the idea that if you're going through a dark season, you need to go to your local church and surround yourself with people who know God? How helpful does that sound to you, and why?



*In preparation* for the coming week,  
write one thing you want to gain from  
your study time:

*(ex.: hope for my future, a better understanding of who I am...):*

# Closing Prayer

Ask for a volunteer to read this prayer aloud:

Jesus, you know all the intimate details of the losses each one of us has suffered. You have allowed us to suffer in many ways with many unanswered questions. And yet we know that you are good and you hold our good in your heart. We also know that you have been on earth where we are and endured worse suffering than we can imagine. You know what it's like to be betrayed. You know what it's like to lose loved ones to death. You know what terrible physical suffering is like. You willingly endured the burden of the sin of every person on earth and the feeling of your Father's absence that this involved. And you are with us now in the midst of what we're going through. Please strengthen us to hold onto our faith and empower us to make good decisions. Help us to trust you, even when we can't see the future. Please go with us, and lead us to the other side of what we're going through. In your name we pray, amen.

## Keep This Close

As you go on your way this week, here are some thoughts from the video that you may want to save in your phone or write on a sticky note so you can refer back to them:

- ➔ Does your life, even when it's not great, still make someone want to choose God?
- ➔ When life is chaotic, God is your center point.
- ➔ Let yourself lament with the people who know your real name.





## SESSION 1

# *On Your Own*

**E**ach session of this study also includes activities you can do each day between group meetings. These will help you work through and into a deeper understanding of both the Bible and how it relates to your personal life. **Don't feel you need to do all of these activities. Choose those that are helpful to you. The goal is to grow and develop a stronger relationship with God.** There will be time at the beginning of your next meeting to share whatever you've learned from these activities.

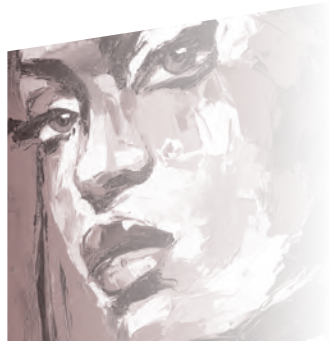


# Memory Verse

*There are many good techniques that may help you memorize Bible verses. Here are some of them:*

- 1. Write out the verse by hand on paper, along with its reference (in this case, Psalm 81:10). We remember as much as 80 percent more of what we write by hand than what we type electronically. That's because handwriting stimulates a more helpful part of the brain than typing does.*
- 2. Even better, hand write the verse and reference five times.*
- 3. Read the verse aloud and act it out in an exaggerated way. Proclaim it dramatically. Actors have learned that the dramatic use of your body and voice will create associations in your brain.*
- 4. Go for a walk and recite the verse and reference aloud. Walking increases memory formation.*
- 5. Copy the verse and reference into your phone or onto a card you can keep with you.*
- 6. Return to the verse three times a day to rehearse it. Say it aloud. Do this for all four weeks of this study.*

*Learning the verse with its reference will help you find it in the Bible if you want to read the larger story around the verse.*



One thing we really hope you'll do is memorize a verse of the Bible. Committing verses to memory enables you to deeply internalize their truth and to have them with you when you need them. Here is the memory verse for this study:

*I am the LORD your God,  
who brought you up out of Egypt.  
Open wide your mouth and I will fill it.*

(PSALM 81:10 NIV)

The point of this verse is that Naomi starts the story empty (Ruth 1:21), but she will end it full. So will we.

The psalmist is reminding his listeners of the way God rescued and provided for their ancestors. When their ancestors were slaves in Egypt, God did miracles to free them and bring them into a land of their own. God wants to provide for us in the same way. All we need to do, he says in verse 9, is to keep from bowing down to other gods. There are so many other tempting gods we could worship, like comfort, or money, control, sex, relationships, drugs. But all of these, if we make gods of them, will let us down. God pleads with us to believe his promise that he will provide for us if we worship only him. You'll have a chance to discuss this promise further in Session 2.



# In Real Life:

## DRAMA ACTIVITY: Broken, Part 1

The drama was about an art teacher who moved across the country after a divorce. When she opened the moving boxes, everything was broken. She wondered: was God punishing her for ending her marriage? But then she remembered that God knew how hard she had tried to save her marriage. Still, though, when she looked at all the broken pieces of her life, she couldn't help thinking, *I wish I could fit in one of those boxes and just get thrown away.*

- 1 Have you ever wondered if God was punishing you? If so, what led you to wonder that?

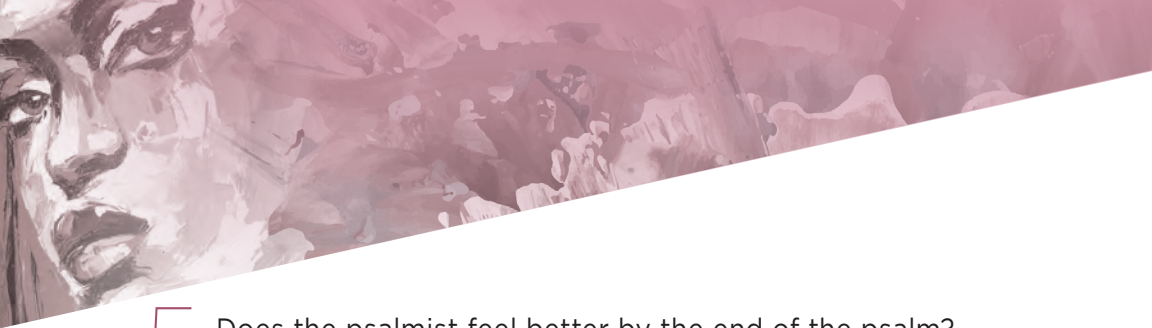
Jesus took on himself the punishment we deserve (Romans 5:6-11). God doesn't send suffering on us to punish us; he allows it to remind us of who we really are. Jesus is in the fire with us—experiencing the flames with us. He mourns with us, hurts over our sufferings with us, and celebrates our victories with us. The hotter the flames burn, the closer he gets (Isaiah 43:2). Suffering shows our faith is genuine. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold “*so that the tested genuineness of your faith . . . may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ*” (1 Peter 1:7 ESV).



2 Have you ever felt something like, “I wish I could fit in one of those boxes and just get thrown away”? Who is God to you when you are feeling like that? Is God someone you move toward or away from in a situation like that? Why?

3 Read Psalm 88. This is a psalm of lament. There are lots of psalms of lament in the book of Psalms, because the Jews thought that lament was important for individuals and for the gathered community of God’s people. Which statements of lament in this psalm are especially meaningful for you?

4 How would you describe this psalmist’s attitude toward God? What does he say *to* God and *about* God? Does he move toward or away from God?



5 Does the psalmist feel better by the end of the psalm?  
What does this say to you about the process of lament?  
About God's view of people who are lamenting?

6 Many psalms of lament contain expressions of trust in  
God and/or shouts of praise to God that he will deliver  
us. But this one doesn't. Why do you suppose a hundred  
percent lament is included in the Bible?





# Coping with Loss

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## TEACHING ACTIVITY

In the video, Kasey named two effective ways to deal with loss and suffering: lament (on your own and with others) and spending time with God's people, who will help you stay pointed toward God. There are lots of other ways people try to deal with loss—some of them are constructive, and some are destructive. In this exercise, you'll have a chance to reflect on how you currently handle loss and what you want to do in the future.

- 1 First, describe the *feelings* and *thoughts* you are having in a season of loss or suffering. Feelings are things like anger, sadness, fear, joy, confusion, and numbness. If you're not sure what you feel, try probing around and putting words to it. You may be feeling several things. You may be feeling numb because your coping strategies are designed to tamp down unpleasant feelings. Complete these sentence starters and use the additional space if necessary.

I feel \_\_\_\_\_.

I feel like \_\_\_\_\_.

I want to \_\_\_\_\_.

I wish \_\_\_\_\_.

I'm hungry for \_\_\_\_\_.

I think \_\_\_\_\_.

God seems like \_\_\_\_\_.

2 What are some of the things you have done to try to cope with loss or suffering? List as many as you can think of. For example, maybe you eat, post or read on social media, get together with a friend, crawl into a cave, and so on.

3 Which of these coping strategies have been truly helpful?

4 Looking back, which strategies have been less than helpful, or downright harmful?

5 Do you seek numbness, an absence of negative feelings? If so, do you believe it's moving you forward? Explain.



Make an appointment with a friend to share your lament with her. Ask her if it's okay if you just pour out your heart uncensored about what you're going through. Don't have a friend you can talk to like that? Ask God to reveal her to you, because he promises she is there. Until then, consider talking with a professional counselor. Your group leader may be able to help you connect with one.

# Naomi in The Bible

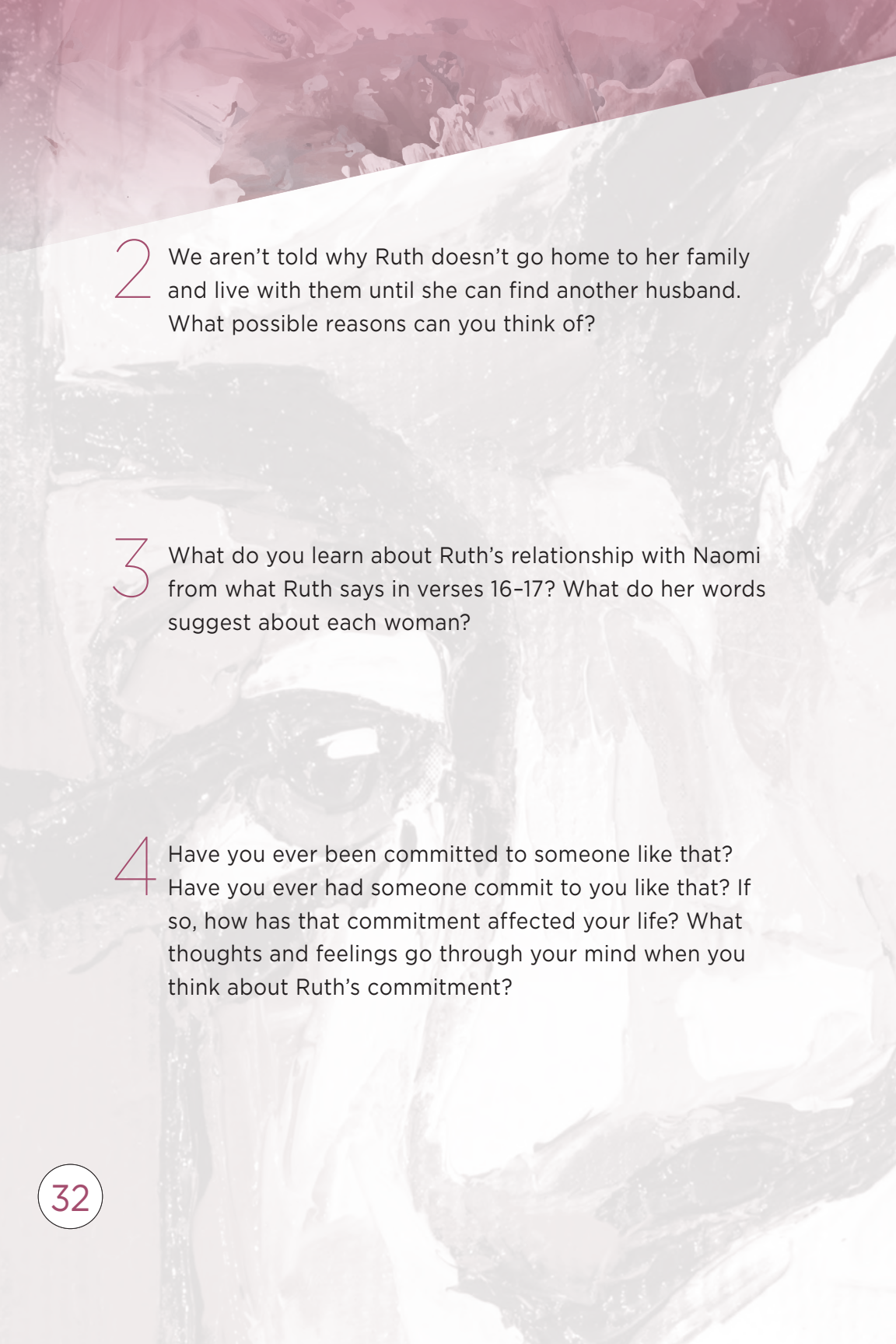
## SCRIPTURE ACTIVITY

Look up Ruth chapter 1 in your Bible and read it.

This story takes place many centuries before the time of Jesus, when the nation of Israel was just getting started. Israel had not yet had a king. Instead, various parts of the country were ruled by people called judges (verse 1).

1 In both Moab and Israel at that time, there were few opportunities for women to work outside the home. Most women were supported by their male relatives. A widow without sons was looking at poverty. How do you think this fact influences what Naomi says and does in this chapter?





2 We aren't told why Ruth doesn't go home to her family and live with them until she can find another husband. What possible reasons can you think of?

3 What do you learn about Ruth's relationship with Naomi from what Ruth says in verses 16-17? What do her words suggest about each woman?

4 Have you ever been committed to someone like that? Have you ever had someone commit to you like that? If so, how has that commitment affected your life? What thoughts and feelings go through your mind when you think about Ruth's commitment?



5

In verse 20 Naomi says, “Don’t call me Naomi,” which means *pleasant*. Instead, she says, “Call me Mara, which means *bitter*, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter.” To what extent do you think God is responsible for the bitterness of her life? Why?

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6

What is your personal takeaway from this chapter of Ruth?

# Journal Time

If you are going through something painful or are trying to come to terms with past suffering, it can be enormously helpful to pour out your thoughts and feelings on paper. You don't have to write it so that somebody else understands it; you just put down what's in you however it comes out. You don't have to share any of it if you don't want to.

Choose *one* of the following topics to journal about:

- ➔ Have you ever felt like God had turned against you? Do you feel like that now? If so, describe the situation that is making you feel that way, and describe what you are feeling toward God. It's okay to say exactly what you feel, even if you're angry at God.
- ➔ Has God ever used pain to push you out of a place where you didn't need to be? If so, describe the place you were in and how God worked in your life to move you to a better place. Focus on how he used pain to motivate you. If you're in the situation right now, and you feel like God is trying to use pain to push you out of it, describe where you are and what better place you might go to.
- ➔ What is the loss or hardship you are currently struggling with? Describe what you're going through and the feelings you're having. If there's a history to it and it will help you to lay out the history, include that. If you have questions about what you should do, write those down.

Whichever topic(s) you choose, finish up by writing about this question: What will you do differently in your day-to-day life as a result of this reflection? Use extra paper if necessary.





# Listening

## PRAYER ACTIVITY

For many of us, thoughts buzz around in our heads like flies, hard to capture and harder to quiet. For others, we have no idea what the thoughts in our heads do, because we're distracted all day long with people, tasks, entertainment, phone notifications, and social media. Our attention span is shorter than our pinky nail, and we feel comfortable only when something is occupying our attention.

God, however, seems to speak in the quiet. His voice is soft and low, so we don't hear him unless we're paying our full attention for a period of time. Giving our full attention is a skill that takes practice. We have to choose to slow down and endure the silence. At first, the silence can be uncomfortable. Thoughts and feelings arise that we might not want to deal with. Our minds run off on rabbit trails. We itch to grab our phones. However, if we persist in offering our stray thoughts to him, and settle back to listen, eventually we can learn to listen.

Take some time now to allow God the opportunity to speak to you. Find a quiet place where you can be alone. Turn off your phone—or better still, leave it somewhere else so it doesn't draw your eye and your thoughts. Lay before him your thoughts and feelings about your losses. Then let the busyness of your thoughts go.

If you find your mind drifting, easily distracted, or struggle to find downtime in your life, try reading Psalm 31, and listen to what God is saying to you there. God speaks to us in his Spirit. The Spirit is activated through the stimulus of truth. Don't be discouraged if you don't hear an audible message from God. He is always speaking to you through his Holy Word.

Sometimes it helps to read aloud or change up your surroundings. Take a walk, sit on the porch, head to the nearest park bench, or simply sit in your car alone for a few minutes if necessary.