

Three Widows

We join these three widows somewhere near the Dead Sea, on the 80 mile road that leads from Moab to Bethlehem. They are discussing options for their future. The last few years have been tough for them. Naomi lost her husband and her two sons. Ruth and Orpah their husbands. The future for childless widows was bleak and uncertain. Naomi felt so powerless as she shared her heart with her two daughters-in-law: "May the LORD grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband" (Ruth 1:9). They agreed that it was now time to change, to do something, to go somewhere. Perhaps one of their choices may be similar to one you currently face!

Naomi – returning to the right place

Following her husband's initiative, Naomi had left Bethlehem and chosen to make their home in Moab. It was a risky decision, but at the time it seemed a sensible thing to do: there was work and food in Moab. They were not the only ones who were leaving famine stricken Judah in order to seek a better life. But now, ten years later, the decision to exchange life in the God-given land – albeit with its difficulties - for the possibility of material prosperity in an idolatrous land did not seem so wise. With thoughts similar to that of 'the prodigal son', Naomi decided that enough was enough, that it was now time to return home, to where she really belonged. So "she left the place where she had been living and set out on the road that would take them back to the land of Judah" (Ruth 1:7). Have you left your marriage partner... your home? Are you fugitive from some difficult situation at work or at church? Is it now time, like Naomi, to prepare to return?

Orpah – returning to the wrong place

For a few years Orpah had experienced something of the God of Israel through the life and witness of her husband and of Naomi. She had grown to love Naomi deeply. In an emotionally charged moment she even joined Ruth in promising: "We will go back with you to your people" (Ruth 1:10). But the God of her husband, the God of Naomi remained *their* God not hers. Eventually we all follow our heart. So did Orpah. After weeping and kissing, Orpah got up and returned "to her people and her gods" (Ruth 1:15). Demas is another example of this. As one of Paul's fellow-workers he must have trafficked much among Christians and experienced something of God. But his heart was elsewhere. Referring to him in his last letter, he remarks: "Demas, because he *loved this world*, has deserted me..." (2 Tim. 4:10). Who do you consider are 'your people'? Is your heart true towards God?

Ruth – embracing God and a new future

Like Orpah, Ruth's knowledge of the God of Israel was limited. But unlike Orpah, she had chosen to embrace the God of Israel, to follow Him, to trust Him, to see her future among His people. Her reply to Naomi makes this abundantly clear: "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*" (Ruth 1:16). Ruth knew little about Israel and her God, but enough to trust Him and to step forward in faith. Perhaps you have embraced God in order to be forgiven and to receive from Him eternal salvation. Can you also trust Him with your tomorrow? Like Ruth, are you now being called to take a step forward in faith?

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