



THROUGH THE DARKNESS

WONDER
DISCOVERY
PASSION

When tragedy strikes, it can feel like we're walking through total darkness. In this three-week series we'll discover the way through the darkness to the other side, to healing, by trusting the One who is leading us.

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TEACHING OUTLINE

THROUGH THE DARKNESS | WEEK 2

BOTTOM LINE

WHEN IT COMES TO TRAGEDY, BE A FRIEND NOT A FIXER.

SCRIPTURE

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" (Ruth 1:16 NIV).

"I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty" (Ruth 1:21a NIV).

"Praise be to the Lord, who this day has not left you without a guardian-redeemer. May he become famous throughout Israel! He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth" (Ruth 4:14-15 NIV).

In this passage we see Naomi walk through a tragic season of life. While we don't know what Naomi's life would have been like if Ruth left her side, we do know that with Ruth, Naomi was eventually able to see the other side of her darkness situation. And Ruth didn't try to say all the right things or fix the situation for Naomi; she just stuck by her side. Ruth's example is one we can follow when faced with a friend dealing with a tragic situation.

GOAL OF SMALL GROUP

To help students see the importance of simply being there for people who are going through a tragedy, even if they don't know what to say.

TEACHING SCRIPT SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

When a tragedy hits, there's a group of people who are *directly* impacted by it, which is kind of like when a rock lands in the lake.

TENSION

Everybody in the ripples of a tragedy just wants to fix things for the people who are affected.

We're going to look at a story that paints a beautiful picture of how to be a friend through pain.

TRUTH

Obviously, Naomi's world was rocked. She had been a wife and a mom, then it all changed.

When Naomi told the girls to *leave*, it didn't mean she wanted to be *alone*.

This ending doesn't discount Naomi's previous pain, but it does give promise to an end. Naomi found some joy, healing, and recovery.

God used Ruth to help Naomi heal and walk through her darkness.

It wasn't because Ruth said or did all the right things to fix the situation. All she did was stay by Naomi's side.

APPLICATION

You don't have to figure out how to fix it, make it better, or make it go away. When it comes to tragedy, be a friend not a fixer.

LANDING

Think about who you know that may be experiencing a dark time. God may want to use you to help them. And you can.



TEACHING SCRIPT

THROUGH THE DARKNESS | WEEK 2

BOTTOM LINE

WHEN IT COMES TO TRAGEDY, BE A FRIEND NOT A FIXER.

INTRODUCTION

1 Minute

Have you ever seen a lake that was perfectly still? Like, it looked like glass? When my friends see a beautiful, still body of water, they want to sit and admire it. Not me. My first thought is to grab a rock and chuck it in! Why? Because something cool happens when you throw a rock into a lake, especially one that's perfectly still: after the splash comes the ripples—rings spreading across the lake—and that's my favorite part. (I admit, it doesn't take a lot to entertain me!) *(Communicator Note: Consider illustrating this with a clear container of water and a rock.)*

In this series, we're talking about walking through the darkness—the tragedies of life. It's not a fun topic, but it's an important one. When a tragedy hits, there's obviously a group of people who are *directly* impacted by it, which is kind of like when a rock lands in the lake. But then, there are a bunch of people who are *AROUND* that person, and they are impacted by the ripples.

Today is all about them.

TENSION

3 Minutes

Here's the deal: Being caught in the ripples of someone who is going through the darkness can be very difficult and confusing as well.

I have a friend who lost someone very close to her. She was devastated. And not just for a week—for months. And I didn't know what to do. Sure, I was sad, but not like she was. I hadn't lost someone that I loved deeply. So I found myself with all kinds of questions:

- How long will she feel like this?
- How long *should* she feel like this?
- How long before she gets back to normal?

- What should I do?
- What in the world should I say?

I bet some of you have been in the exact same situation. You weren't struck directly by a tragedy, but someone close to you was. And you had a lot of the same questions I had. And you probably felt more helpless than you did helpful. Because when it comes to pain that people close to us are facing, most of us don't know what to do. I sure didn't. So we usually respond in a few ways:

1. **We try to act normal.** Often, when we aren't sure what to do, we do nothing. We try to act normal,



even when things don't *feel* normal. We pretend like everything is okay, even when it's not. And we hope that maybe by acting normal, they'll get back to normal, too.

2. **We talk.** We think, *maybe if I can just say the right thing, they will feel better and get past it.* But then we start talking and think, *I'm not sure what I'm saying, but I don't think I'm helping.* We say things like "I know how you feel," when we don't. Or, "Keep yourself busy," when we know they're already exhausted.
3. **We go silent.** Out of fear of saying or doing something stupid, many of us just get out of the way completely. We let the person facing tragedy move toward us instead of moving toward them. We tell ourselves things like, "If they really need me, they'll reach out to me." We keep our distance because it's too uncomfortable to get in the middle of their

darkness. And we hope that with enough space, things will just get better.

Ultimately, everybody in the ripples of a tragedy just wants to fix things for the people who are affected. That's what a friend does, right? They make things better.

Well . . . not exactly. I've learned the hard way that "fixing" is not what my friends need from me in the middle of their darkness. But what do they need?

Today we're going to look at a story that paints a beautiful picture of how to be a friend through pain. And I'm telling you, you *have* to pay attention to this. Because if you're not next to someone going through a time of darkness today, you will be one day. And what you do is a big deal. In fact, the people around you won't be able to heal or find hope nearly as fast *without* you as they will *with* you. I want to help you help them. And I think this story shows us what to do when we're in the ripples of someone's tragedy.

TRUTH

5 Minutes

This story is found in the book of Ruth. It's a story that has its own tragedy.

Even though the book is named Ruth, the story starts with a woman named Naomi. Naomi lived in Bethlehem. She was married and had two sons. But during this time period, the food situation got pretty bad. It got so bad that they decided to move to a land called Moab. But not too long after the move to Moab, Naomi's husband died. Eventually her two sons married, but after ten years, they also passed away, leaving Naomi and her daughter-in-laws—Ruth and Orpah—now widows themselves. (And yes, Orpah was her actual name.)

Obviously, Naomi's world was rocked. She had been a wife and a mom, then it all changed. She went into grieving mode. Even worse, food was still low and she was starving. People around her were dying because of it. But right about that time Naomi, Ruth, and Orpah heard that there was food again in Bethlehem, the place they had originally moved from.

But as they're heading back, Naomi tells Ruth and Orpah to do something crazy: to abandon her. She tells them that staying with her would do them no good. They could get remarried and have children. It would be too much for them to take care of an old lady while they traveled and looked for food.

Maybe you've seen someone else react this way when they've been hurt. They want people to go away. They create a bubble around themselves. No one can get close. Nothing you say helps. And that's how Naomi felt.

But thankfully, her daughter-in-law Ruth knew better. When Naomi told Ruth and Orpah to leave, Orpah did. But Ruth was stubborn. Ruth knew that what Naomi was saying wasn't exactly what she wanted or needed. **When Naomi told the girls to leave, it didn't mean she wanted to be alone.** And that is where we pick up her story.

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" (Ruth 1:16 NIV).

So Ruth and Naomi travel together back to Naomi's homeland, the place where she had lived with her husband and two sons. It was a lengthy period of time filled with a lot of grief. In fact, Naomi was in such pain that she tells people to call her *Mara*, a name that meant "bitter" (not exactly a catchy nickname). When Naomi and Ruth arrive in Bethlehem, the whole town was saddened by the sight of her. Some of them even wondered if it was really Naomi. Her pain had changed her. She looked and sounded different. She even called herself a different name.



How do you begin to respond to someone in so much pain? The people from her town were stunned. She told them, “I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty” (Ruth 1:21a NIV).

Naomi is the picture of being in the darkness. And things got worse before they got better. Have you noticed that with people who are going through pain? They have some good days, only to wake up one morning feeling like it all happened just yesterday. They hear a song on the radio, see an old picture, or recall a memory. All of a sudden, they seem to be going backwards instead of getting better.

The book of Ruth goes on for several more chapters. Eventually, Ruth fell in love again, got married, and had a baby boy—a baby that ends up being an ancestor of Jesus Himself! Naomi had been like a mother to Ruth, which made Ruth’s baby like a grandson to Naomi. When the women of the town saw this, they said:

“Praise be to the Lord, who this day has not left you without a guardian-redeemer. May he become famous throughout Israel! He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth” (Ruth 4:14-15 NIV).

This ending doesn’t discount Naomi’s previous pain, but it does give promise to an end. Naomi found some joy, healing, and recovery.

And you know who played the biggest role? Ruth. God used Ruth to help Naomi heal and walk through her darkness. In fact, she walked through it with her. And here’s the important part: It wasn’t because Ruth said or did all the right things to fix the situation. **All she did was stay by Naomi’s side.** She didn’t perform an intervention or quote a bunch of Bible verses. She didn’t post on social media with the hashtag #HelpNaomi. She just showed up day after day and walked beside her.

APPLICATION

2 Minutes

And that’s what you do when you find yourself next to someone going through the darkness. You don’t have to figure out how to fix it, make it better, or make it go away. Because you can’t fix it. All you can do is be there.

But Ruth’s story shows us what people in tragedy need most, and it’s this . . .

When it comes to tragedy, be a friend not a fixer.

Just be a friend, and keep on being a friend. Be a friend today, tomorrow, next week, for the next three months, maybe even for the next two years. Just keep showing up.

Here are four ways that you can be a friend to someone going through a dark time:

1. **Be there for them.** Show up in their lives. Sit with them at lunch. Call them or text them every day. Go over to their house for no reason at all. Just to be there and love them as they’re struggling. Fight for them to have loving friends around.
2. **Love them.** Encourage them. Write them a note.

Give them a ride. Have their back in a conversation. Take notes for them at school.

3. **Be patient.** Healing takes time. Romans 12:12 says to be *patient in affliction* (NIV)—or suffering. Getting through hard times, however big, small, or personal they may be, requires us to be patient with people as they work through them. It almost always takes longer than we think it should. There’s only one way to get to the other side, and that’s to just keep going. Keep showing up, and help them keep holding on until one day, they’ll realize that they’ve actually moved forward.
4. **Listen.** Whenever they want to talk, be a great listener. You don’t have to have answers or solutions. In fact, in the middle of Naomi’s pain, Ruth doesn’t try to say anything to cheer Naomi up. She doesn’t say things like, “Just trust God,” “God is in charge,” or, “Don’t worry.” Those phrases aren’t bad, but sometimes the right words at the wrong time can be frustrating. And people don’t need a lot of words—even *true* words—when the pain is raw. They just need someone to listen.



LANDING

1 Minute

In Naomi's story, no one could make her feel better and move on. This was something she had to do herself. But eventually, it happened. Eventually she was able to laugh again, smile again, and see the other side of her tragedy. She didn't get through the darkness because someone said the right words. She got through it because she wasn't alone; Ruth was close by.

As you leave here today, think about who you know that may be experiencing a dark time. God may want to use you to help them. And you can. Not by being an expert, but by just being a friend. And when people around you are walking through darkness, remember: **Be a friend, not a fixer.**



TRANSITION INTO SMALL GROUPS