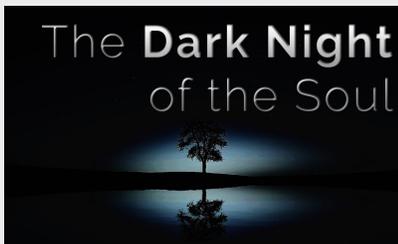


# HOPE

## A 50 Day Spiritual Encounter & Renewal

### Dark Roads in Life

Welcome to **Day 43 in a 50 day journey.** We have often heard that it is darkest just before the dawn. So how is your spirit in the midst of these troublesome times? Are you gloomy, worried, excited? Emotional highs and lows are typical in the spiritual journey. F. Scott Fitzgerald once said, "In a real dark night of the soul, it is always three o'clock in the morning, day after day." The reference to "Dark Night" probably comes from John of the Cross who around 1580 AD wrote a poem and treatise entitled the "Dark Night." **Dark Night** is a description of his experience through resistance, hardship and trouble that led to a spiritual refining. Does this sound familiar to your own life story?



## A Story of Despair to Delight

So much can happen in the course of a season of 50 days — new habits can be formed, new spiritual trends embraced. In fact, your whole world can change; you could turn from despair to delight. On this 50 day journey, a key truth emerges for us — God can work wonders in the dark! Tucked away in the Hebrew Bible is a tiny book consisting of a mere 4 chapters and 85 verses. Yet, the truth it contains is crucial to godly faith — **RUTH**. The story is clearly set during the growing cycle of Passover to Pentecost of both the harvest of Barley (Ruth 1:22) followed by the harvest of Wheat later (Ruth 2:23). In the book, a widow and now childless woman named Naomi is disorientated and feels a bitter betrayal. She is fully convinced that God is against her (Ruth 1:13). She lost! BIG! Due to a severe famine, her family made a hard move from her homeland near Bethlehem in Israel to the area of Moab — God's land flowing with milk and honey was not flowing at that time. Within a decade or so, she found herself alone — her husband and two sons had died. Her pain

## This Week ...

- **Write/draw brief entries in your 50 Day Journal.**
- **Dig Deeper in Your Bible.**  
Read the book of Ruth daily.
- **Bake something** this week. A loaf of bread, muffins. Share.
- **Share posts** of pictures/ comments on Facebook, #AwakenMDCOC
- **Facebook Live** Sundays @ 10:30 AM on Merrick Drive's Page.

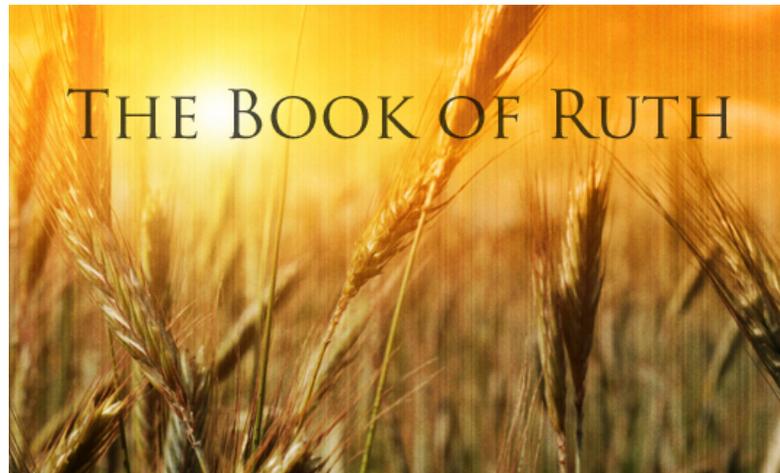
## Soul Shaping Questions

- Describe a time when you felt like Naomi – heartbroken, completely empty?
- Can you name a person in your life that reminds you of Boaz, of Ruth and of Naomi?
- How can the ending to the story of Ruth inspire you?
- Describe a time when God surprised you with an unexpected blessing?

## A Prayer Blessing for You...

May you find hope in our God who works below the surface, in our dark places, to bring new life. May His new blessings and opportunities exceed your greatest imagination. God is working even now in your darkness.

was so deep that once she decided to leave Moab, she tried to talk her daughter-in-laws out of following her back to Israel. In Orpah's case, she even encouraged her to return to her own gods. It must be pretty dark if you practice reverse evangelism — feel a bankrupt faith. In the emptiness, we all say and do desperate things. Trouble and pain do a number on our psyche. Naomi was no exception, she was deeply hurting, heartbroken, disillusioned and hopeless. But ... God was working under the surface, in the dark soil to bring new possibilities.



## New Beginnings

As stories go, Ruth is a very concise entrance into the roller coaster of life with all its hopes, dreams, anxieties and fulfillments. **50th day** after Easter — the day of Pentecost. The Hebrew people refer to this as *Shavuot* — the feast of Weeks being the conclusion of seven weeks of counting days to observe the work of God. God changed Naomi's bitter story of tragedy into a story of Joy. You see, God had "planted" beneficial teachings in his Word that would converge upon three desperate people: Naomi, Ruth and Boaz. First, a teaching on hospitality required landowners to leave the edges of their fields for the poor and foreigners (Lev. 23:22). Naomi & Ruth will lean upon this kindness. Second, God had a provision in his Guide Book for occasions such as the death of close relatives (Deut. 25:5-10). Once the possibility is seen, a determinative spirit emerges. Naomi, though bitter, finds hope in a combination she never saw coming — Boaz & Ruth. Just see how the story ends in Ruth 4:16-17. Why is that ending so inspiring? Precisely because God does great things through broken people.