

An Immigrant Story (Ruth 1)

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[0 : 00] Let's turn to the Old Testament. Ruth chapter 1. I hope you guys know where that is. Okay, I'll be reading from NIV, so follow along.

In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land. So a man from Bethlehem and Judah, together with his wife and two sons, went to live for a while in the country of Moab.

The man's name was Elimelech. His wife's name was Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Malon and Kilian. They were Ephratites from Bethlehem, Judah.

And they went to Moab and lived there. Now Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died, and she was left with her two sons.

They married Moabite women, one named Opah and the other Ruth. After they've lived there about ten years, both Malon and Kilian also died.

[1 : 00] And Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband. When Naomi heard in Moab that the Lord had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them, she and her daughters-in-law prepared to return home from there.

With her two daughter-in-laws, 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. Then Naomi said to her two daughter-in-laws, Go back, each of you, to your mother's home.

May the Lord show you kindness as you have shown kindness to your dead husbands and to me. May the Lord grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband.

Then she kissed them goodbye, and they wept loud and said to her, We will go back with you to your people. But Naomi said, Return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me? Am I going to have any more sons?

Who would become your husbands? Return home, my daughters. I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me, even if I had a husband tonight and then gave birth to sons, would you wait until they grew up?

[2 : 06] Would you remain unmarried for them? No, my daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you, because the Lord's hand has turned against me. At this they wept aloud again.

Then Orpha kissed her mother-in-law goodbye, but Ruth clung to her. Look, said Naomi, your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her. But 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. Where you die, I will die. And there I will be buried.

May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me. When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her.

So the two women went on until they came to Bethlehem. When they arrived in Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them. And the woman exclaimed, Can this be Naomi? Don't call me Naomi, she told them.

[3 : 07] Called me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter. I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The Lord has afflicted me.

The Almighty has brought misfortune upon me. So Naomi returned from Moab, accompanied by Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law arriving in Bethlehem as the barley harvest was beginning. Cool. Thank you, Barry. Hi, everyone.

How is everyone doing? Good. All right. So, yeah, we've come a long way this year, haven't we? So we've done a huge series in 1 Corinthians.

And I think we also touched on the book of Habakkuk earlier. And then we have done a series about our church mission, right? And we finally arrive back again at the Old Testament, all right?

[4 : 30] So now this is a book of love and destiny. So, okay, hang on.

Let's actually show you Ruth. There she goes. So now you will find this little gem nestled between the books of Judges and Samuel.

Judges back then was a time where Israelites often lapsed into anarchy and chaos. And Samuel was a time where the Israelites started their monarchy reign.

So, why is Ruth so pivotal? Now, imagine a world without the book of Ruth. We might not have the history of Israel's monarchy.

We have no kings, okay? And the Bible would have stopped after the book of Judges. Done.

Nothing else. And if we take that thought a step further, no Ruth would mean no Jesus.

[5 : 42] It's that simple. By the way, is it possible to turn the echo a little bit down for the microphone? Would that be okay? So, testing again, testing again.

Yep, I think it's better. Thanks, Johnson. So, you can see Ruth is a key player in the history of Israel. And by extension, the history of salvation itself.

But why? You have to immerse yourself into the story to find out why. Now, just to, you know, set the scene, okay? I'm not going to give you any spoilers in the story.

Okay? So, treat this like a Netflix series or something, okay? I won't give you any sneak peek about, you know, what comes next, you know? Because when we usually start a new book series, you know, people, I mean, preachers usually give you, like, an overarching ideas.

But I try, I refrain to do that, okay? So, if you want the full drama, you have to read the book yourself. All right? Trust me, it's worth the read. Now, the story of Ruth may seem ordinary at the first glance.

[7 : 02] But, my friends, it's anything but. It's a story that draws you in. No battles. No villains. No epic struggle between the good and evil.

And for those of you who fancy a good romance, the book of Ruth might just be your cup of tea. Now, even though our main character is Ruth, the lessons woven through the story are for both men and women, for everyone.

So, you're going to find your role in the story, too. Now, the Bible isn't just a collection of teachings that points us towards being good humans, telling us how to get to heaven or get eternal life.

No, it's far more. The Bible invites us to its story, into the story of God and humankind. It calls us to put ourselves into the shoes of those characters, to feel deeply what's going on in their lives.

And maybe through that process, our lives can be transformed. Now, the book of Ruth starts off as an immigrant story.

[8 : 21] That's why my first life was an immigrant story. And I know most of you here are second-generation Kiwis, right? I'm probably the only exception here.

Okay, so are there any actually first-generation immigrants here? Yes, I see a few hands, right? So, you may experience what you experience as a first-generation.

I mean, not easy. Not easy. Now, for most of us here, you probably have a very, very vague idea of how your parents brought you in New Zealand, maybe when you were very, very young.

Or maybe you were born here. So, migration isn't something you have experienced. But let's imagine one day. You pick up your life and plunk it down elsewhere.

Look, there is a sort of scale in terms of moving or migrating to a new place.

[9 : 26] So, let's start with something easy. Do you know where it is? It's hard to guess, I guess. Right?

Like, there's no landmark building. But this is one of our cities. Does anyone know? Christchurch? Someone says Christchurch.

Pardon? Hamilton. Yes. Bingo. Now, if you're moving from Oakland to Hamilton, it's hardly a move you would call migration.

It's just like packing your bags from one spot to another. It's just a little bit down the road. Yeah? So, surely there might be a few differences. Maybe the hustle and bustle of the traffic feels different.

Maybe the cafes and parks have a different buzz about them. But really, at the heart, these cities are like two pieces in the same pot, culturally speaking.

[10 : 28] Now, imagine you are hopping across the ditch. From New Zealand to the Aussie shores. Yes.

Yes. Yes. Yes. You probably need to adjust yourself to some new slang, new accents. But, yeah, also you need to brace yourself for the super hot summer.

You know, like 35 degrees would be pretty much the norm there. You know, burning hot. But even then, you're still within the warm embrace of that familiar Western English-speaking environment, which is generally easygoing and welcoming.

There's no jaw-dropping surprises in terms of lifestyle. Right? But what if you're migrating from our peaceful New Zealand to Afghanistan?

Now, that's almost like a whole different planet. Especially for the ladies. Imagine having to wave yourself in cloth from top to bottom with burqas and hijabs.

[11 : 45] And you would look like a Martian if you speak English on the streets. No one is going to understand you. And if you're a Christian, you are stepping into a land where talking about your faith openly could lend you a prison term.

So, in this tale of Ruth we are talking about today, our main cast, Elimelech and Naomi, they've got their own epic tale of change to tell.

They're not just hopping cities or skipping across the ocean. They're going from Bethlehem in Judah to the foreign terrain of Moab.

Now, that's not just a change of scenery. They're experiencing a sea change of new norms and expectations that can be quite mind-boggling. Now, let's talk about Moab.

So, when the Bible talks about places, they're not just dots on a map. They are laden with history, significance, the good and the bad.

[13 : 03] Now, we know Bethlehem in Judah, right? So, it is the heartland of Israel. You know, worshippers of Yahweh. So, even in the chaotic era of the judges, you know, the people there, sometimes, yes, they might forget about Yahweh, the Lord.

But God somehow finds a way to nudge them back. Now, on the flip side, Moab. It is a place where Yahweh's name wasn't honored.

So, instead, they bowed to a deity called Chemosh. So, what comes to mind for Israelites when they read this Bible, when they think about Moab?

Now, it turns out the Moabites come from a bit of a dodgy background. Now, you see back in Genesis, Abraham's nephew, whose name is Lot, poor chap.

His wife turned into a salt, a peeler of salt, because she looked back to Sodom's destruction. Very tragic.

[14 : 15] So, then, Lot's daughters, thinking about how they could keep their father's legacy, they end up, well, let's say, taking the matter into their own hands.

And they make their father drunk. And that led to the birth of Moab. So, yeah, not quite the most glorious beginning of a people, right?

Also, if you look at Numbers 25, there is another Moab episode. The Israelites were wandering in the wilderness, passing through the plain of Moab.

And there was a bit of a row and a confrontation. So, what did the Moabites do? The Moabites women lured the men of Israel into sexual sin, into a trap, getting them to worship their God instead. And just like that, Israel's men fell right into their snare, offending Yahweh, the Lord, who saved them out of Egypt. And the result?

[15 : 31] A plague that took 24,000 lives. Can you picture this? When you mention Moab to an Israelite, they'll be like, Moab?

This sounds like trouble. You better stay clear. Now, you can see it's easy why the Israelites might think of Moab as a place of ill repute, somewhere synonymous with vice and debauchery.

And yet, for Naomi and Elimelech, it was their destination. What an adventure. And this is where our story begins.

So, you could say that Elimelech and Naomi are taking a bold gamble with their migration. It's not just leaving their own kin and their homeland behind, but they might be also leaving behind their faith, heading to a place where people would consider totally out of place.

somewhere you just wouldn't go. So, we'll have a look at Ruth chapter 1. Okay, you can skim through the chapter 1.

[16 : 53] You will notice that it keeps bringing up the word Moab. It's like the story writer wants to hammer home to the reader. Look where they're heading, you know, to such an unlikely place.

They're really going down the drain. Now, check out verse 4. So, the two sons marry Moabite's women. And look, this is an instant red flag, reminding us the plague during the wilderness of the book of Numbers.

So, it's like, hey, those girls are bad news. And seriously, you're taking them as wives. And then, verse 22, here's this again.

In case we have forgotten. So, the story writer mentioned Ruth, the Moabite woman, one more time. So, it is a story, they want us to understand, look, she's not from the chosen people. She's not someone that should have even featured in God's story. Can Ruth do something good? Very unlikely.

[18:10] And of course, we know the story turns out totally differently. You see how astonishing, how unexpected the opening of the story is?

That's our book of Ruth. Now, consider some unthinkable scenarios from today's perspective. You wouldn't migrate to a country, say, North Korea.

Wouldn't you? And similarly, if you choose a spouse, you wouldn't venture into shady territories.

Right? So, the author is setting us up with a story of consecutive mishaps.

A wrong era, a wrong place, and wrong characters. Everything that could go wrong, did go wrong. It is a total mess. And with that, that could be only one possible outcome.

A seemingly hopeless dead end. So, if you look back to verses 1 to 5, Naomi is literally living through this hopeless situation.

[19:20] They moved to a place like North Korea, so to speak. Her husband dies, and both her sons die. And every shred of support has turned into dust.

All their hope is gone. So, you see her second son's name, Killian, right? Killian is an interesting word. It actually means coming to an end, or game over in Hebrew.

So, couldn't be more fitting. Now, brothers and sisters, haven't we all faced moments in our lives that we feel, oh dear, that's it.

That's game over for us. Would there be some illness? Would there be some illness? Maybe you just lost your job? You got into, you know, a really heartbreaking situation with your relationships? Or maybe some various natural or man-made disasters? Do we still remember this at the beginning of our year?

[20:36] Yeah, just the other day I was driving and I was listening to the radio. So, a caller shared how the flooding earlier this year left their house totally damaged and unlivable.

So, the insurance claims are still pending. There's no money coming inside. But, they still need to pay the mortgage as well as the insurance.

And not only that, they still need to pay the rates. Outrageous. And more on top of their trouble. They're not living in the house.

They're still paying the water bill. So, they try to complain to, you know, to the radio, to the government, but, they just keep delaying, delaying, delaying.

There's just no end in sight. What would you say? Would you say it's a game over scenario? Pretty hopeless, right? Now, we know that Naomi's situation is far from over.

[21:44] God's grace actually has never left her alone. Home. So, let's go back 10, so, a decade ago, ago, Naomi and her husband left the land of Judah.

And 10 years later, her situation totally changed. They've died. Right? And when Naomi returns, she's accompanied by her two daughters-in-law, and again, just to find food.

They left to find food, right? And now, they want to return home to find food again. So, three women with no one and no one close to them, they are alone.

They only have each other for protection. And the journey ahead is long, the path is arduous, and they'll be thinking, there's no hope inside.

And let's see what life brings us when we get to Judah. We don't know. So, if we look closely at verses 6 to 8, we can assume that they've actually picked up their belongings and set off from their home.

[23:03] They're already on their way. How far they've walked, we don't know. But it seems Naomi suddenly had an epiphany, a change of heart.

So, she urges her daughters-in-law, why not return to your mother's home? May the Lord show you kindness as you have shown to my dead sons and to me.

The Lord grants each of you rest. In a new home. Just go find a new husband. Look, in verses 8 and 9, we see that even though Naomi has been in Moab for so long, right, she could have switched her religion, but she never abandoned her faith in the Lord.

At most, she was saying God was disciplining her, but never that the Lord was no longer abandoning her.

She even uses his name to bless her daughters-in-law. Now, dear friends, life is a series of ups and downs.

[24 : 21] We may complain to God sometimes, we may even blame him, but look at the Psalms. You can see the Psalm writers, they complain to God, they cry to God, Lord, when are you coming back to save us?

We are in an impossible situation, right? But the Psalmists don't abandon their faith, they simply shared their sorrows and complaints with God.

So, despite the despair and losing loved ones, Naomi held fast to her faith. So, what is it today that could possibly give us, I mean, make us give up our faith?

So, let us not abandon our faith in the Lord. Otherwise, we might truly lose our last chance to turn things around. So, in verse 8, Naomi's words reveal her deep appreciation for what her daughters-in-law have done for her and her sons.

She says, may the Lord show you kindness just as you have been kind to my sons and me. The original word for kindness here is *chesed*, which represents a special kind of love, a loyal love, which is enduring, constant, and unchanging.

[25 : 57] So, Naomi recognizes that God is the source of such love, and she acknowledges that this profound love also flows in her daughters-in-law.

love, and she is a testimony to their faith, their action, and their character, far from the Moabized women stereotypes that we would expect.

So, Naomi, think about their future, urges them to leave, but they refuse. So, after all, who could bear to abandon a somewhat elderly or middle-aged woman, you know, in the middle of nowhere, facing the wild?

Now, can you see the depth of their bond? They're willing to sacrifice for each other's good. Now, what follows is a somewhat perplexing statement or plea from Naomi.

we'll see how she tried to convince her daughters-in-law to leave her side. Have a look at verse 11.

[27 : 09] My daughters, just go back. Why would you come with me? Could I possibly have more sons to become your husband? Very puzzling, right? Now, let's wrap our heads around the social customs of the time.

We need to go back to Deuteronomy chapter 25, where there is a rather unique regulation for the Israelites. So, the men back then are supposed to continue the lineage for any deceased brother by marrying their brother's wife.

I know it is very mind-boggling for our 21st century minds. But, the Old Testament is also very clear. It stands against any incestuous relations. Leviticus chapter 18 talks about a lot of different prohibitions against this relationship.

So, specifically, 18, 16 says, do not have sexual relations with your brother's wife. That would dishonor your brother.

[28 : 22] brother. So, you can see the rules there are there to protect the sanctity of the family relationships from destructive desires.

others. However, hang on. Ah, I forgot to change it to English.

Okay. Sorry about that. Now, despite of this, there's an exception in the Old Testament law. Is it here?

No? Oh, my goodness. What happened? I changed it. Maybe I downloaded the wrong version.

Yeah, yes, really, really sorry about this. But you can always look up your English Bible. So, Deuteronomy chapter 25 verses 5 to 10 specifies a unique role.

[29 : 22] If a married man dies without leaving a son to carry on their family's name, it is the responsibility of his brother to marry the widow. And the first son born of this union would carry on the deceased husband's name, and when he grows up, he would continue to bear the name of the deceased brother.

And not only that, he would also take care of the feud which his assets, or his lot in the promised land. father. So, yeah, we have to understand that the working of the ancient societies are miles apart, you know, from our 21st century systems.

Here we have social security, we have inheritance law, and so on. But back then, properties had to be born under the man's name, and wouldn't just pass to a widow.

So, in order to protect those assets, especially the productive land, they required to have a male family member to carry on that legacy.

Now, I don't know whether you have, wait, why is this not working? There you go. If you have ever lived or been to Hong Kong, you may have heard something called ding-ok.

[31 : 00] Okay? So, these houses are built in villages where the indigenous Hong Kong people live. So, only the indigenous people who are male are qualified to build these ting houses within the village.

That is a concept quite controversial, even in our modern society. property. So, important assets like a house can only be passed on to male descendants.

I know it looks kind of out of place in our 21st century, but here we go. This practice is still being carried on in different societies around the world.

So, yep, back to Deuteronomy 25. Look, it is assumed that the brother taking on this duty was unmarried.

So, we can't use this exception to justify or to promote polygamy, which is having more than one husband or wives.

[32 : 04] Now, what is the essence behind such a law that seems so bizarre to us? There are two main purposes behind the law and tradition.

So, first, if there was a male in his family, it was his duty to look after and provide for the family's widows until her death.

And second, he was to carry on the lineage and protect the land of the deceased brother. Now, switching back to the book of Ruth, we should understand why Naomi spoke to her daughter's in-law in this way.

So, in plain terms, she's saying, I can't have more sons. There's no one else to carry on our name. Our family's property is as good as dead.

Gone. We are destitute. And I'm finished. If you follow me, I'm not going to bring any good to you.

So, it might just be better for you to return to your own family in Moab.

[33 : 11] So, Oprah, one of the daughters-in-law, makes what seems to be a totally sensible choice.

She listens to her mother-in-law and returns to her homeland. But on the other hand, in verse 14, Ruth makes a decision that defies logic.

She decides that she will follow Naomi even until her death. So, many English Bibles usefully translated as Ruth clung to Naomi.

If you take a closer look at the original text, it means to hold on tightly to something. Can you imagine a scene? So, three women, they were all crying.

you can imagine Ruth holding on to Naomi declaring, I will go where you go. Your God will be my God. I'll share your fate until death leaves us apart.

[34 : 24] At verse 16, we see Ruth not only showing great loyalty to her mother-in-law, but also making a profound statement of faith.

So, she says, your God is my God. As her sister-in-law returns to her parents and embraces the gods of the Moabites, Ruth turns away from the darkness to light and boldly renouncing her Moabites religious roots to proclaim Yahweh as her God.

This is extraordinary. Remember, the text reminds us that time and again, Ruth is from a despised root and reviled nation, yet she becomes the hero of this big story of God.

Her deep affection and resolute faith shines like a beacon, bringing light to the entire story. Ruth even make a solemn vow in verse 17.

Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it so severely, even if death separates you and me. So, Naomi knew Ruth's mind was made up and there's no turning back for her.

[35 : 53] What Naomi didn't realize was that it wasn't only Ruth who was clinging to her. It was also the Lord God.

Ruth's kindness is the very essence of chesed, the term Naomi uses to describe her, I mean to describe God's love in verse 8.

So, could it be that Ruth clung to Naomi, it was also God himself showing his unchanging love to her? And for the original readers, the shock might have been that God chose a maw by women, seemingly the least and the most rejected to fulfill his unwavering faithfulness and love.

So, dear friends, could it be that God also uses people we least expect to hold us close to him, to remind us that he has never left us.

And no matter how dire our circumstances are, his loyal, everlasting love is like roots always clinging to us, accompanying us every step of the way.

[37 : 14] So, we arrive at the final scene of our story, and our characters finally make their return to Bethlehem. As they enter the city, it was all abuzz.

Imagine that. People haven't seen Naomi for ages. You can picture the locals, right, rushing out to the city gates to see her, welcoming her back.

You know, after 10 years, how are you Naomi? You know, how is she looking like? they were probably thinking, why is it just you and this young woman here?

And maybe thinking one step deeper, they know instantly they shouldn't ask any further. It's tragic.

So, Naomi addresses the crowd in verse 19, saying, don't call me Naomi.

No more Mrs. Happy, no more Mrs. Pleasance, okay? call me Mara. You should call me Mrs. Miserable. For the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me.

[38 : 27] I went away full and the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The Lord has afflicted me and the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me.

This is where the original text plays with words. Naomi mocks herself about her own name. You think I'm happy? I'm pleasant?

No, I'm miserable. It's quite a dark humor there. Now, besides this, Naomi also contrasts going away full with coming back empty.

Have any of us here experienced life's rollercoaster? from having everything to nothing, enduring all the challenges that we have to endure.

But remember, in God's eyes, this is not the end of your story. As long as you are alive, return to God, His loving kindness and faithfulness will work wonders beyond your wildest dreams.

[39 : 34] If the book of Ruth were a Netflix series, the final shot of our episode here would show Ruth, our main character, standing unassumingly to the side.

But we know that this isn't the end of the story. The name Ruth is destined to go down in history, even earning its own book in the Bible.

The last image of today's episode pans over to a field of golden barley.

In the distance, farmers and women are starting to harvest, painting a very beautiful picture here.

The bountiful barley harvest actually answers back to verse 6, when Naomi was still in Moab and had only heard about the news that the Lord had come to the aid of his people by providing food.

Now, they can see the faithfulness of the Lord right before their eyes, knowing that, yes, we might be poor, but we won't be starved to death.

[40 : 53] We have food. So, after a long and arduous journey, returning home, they finally see a glimmer of hope. So, my friends here, has your glimmer of hope appeared?

Is it perhaps time to set out and return to God's household? The story of Ruth in the first chapter gives us a glimpse into Naomi's journey from not having enough to eat for their family to losing her husband and sons.

Basically, a descent into despair. And just when she thought God had abandoned and forgotten about her, Ruth reached out, holding on to her.

It turns out God was extending his grace through an unlikely person to Naomi. So, brothers and sisters, let's put ourselves in Ruth's shoes.

No matter how humble your origins or how unworthy you may feel about yourself, if you recognize the Lord as your God, He will work through you to accomplish more than you could ever imagine.

[42 : 12] Are you the Ruth today? Are you ready to overcome all obstacles and to be loyal, loving, and faithful to God? He wants to use you to bless others.

Or perhaps today you're feeling more like Naomi. Naomi's journey is a tale of migration from a place of lack to a supposed place of better stability.

But tragically for them, things didn't turn out better, only for the worse. people have been lost. What is your story here, my friends?

Have you ever made an important move in life where you ended up worse? want us to think a level deeper? Where have we migrated spiritually?

Naomi moved from a place that recognized Yahweh to a place that rejected him. Could it be a reflection of our own spiritual condition? salvation? And we know that in the New Testament, the

title Yahweh or the Lord now fully rests upon Jesus Christ.

[43 : 27] And through his sacrifice, he reconciled us with the Father. And through his resurrection, he confirms God as the Lord of life and who is still active in our lives today.

So, in essence, have we migrated to a spiritual state where we embrace Jesus Christ or one or the other spiritual state that we would neglect or reject Jesus Christ.

So, let's think about it. What are you facing, my brothers and sisters? Any, yeah, just like a friend asked us any highs and lows today.

You may be enduring a lot of hardships. Maybe you're suffering from constant illnesses or depression that don't seem to heal. maybe you're feeling a bit lost not knowing who you are or what place you have in the church family.

Maybe you're constantly fretting about what you should do. Maybe you have gone through heart breaks in relationships, even betrayals by loved ones. Maybe you're struggling to find work after long periods, just burning through your savings.

[44 : 45] Maybe you're having family problems that seem unending and unsolvable. Maybe you're suffering from different forms of addictions. You just can't pull yourself out.

Maybe you feel trapped in these desperate situations. But God says, you can come back to me. I'll never give you up.

I'll reach out to you in unexpected ways, through people you would never anticipate. If you're willing to take heart and embark on a journey to the promised land, I'll look after you there.

I'll guide you out of your predicaments. Look, God wants to hold on to us, just like Ruth holding on to Naomi. The famous Psalm 23 says, surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.

His goodness and mercy will also follow those who belong to Him. That's why we can confidently entrust our life to Him.

[45 : 59] If you have migrated spiritually away from Jesus, or you have been ignoring Him, it's time to return. And for those of you who may not have met Jesus, would you entrust your life to Him?

Would you like to experience God's goodness and mercy following you for the rest of your life? Let's no matter how chaotic our current situation is, you can still find a ray of hope in you because you never abandoned us.

Some of us here may have been away from you for a long time and today is the day of turning back.

So Lord, I pray that you take hold of us today who are faltering in faith and let us know that your grace and mercy have never left us and give us the courage to return to you and once again experience your abundance, grace in our lives.

We pray this in the name of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.