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Analyzing The Grief of Naomi in The Book of Ruth

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Abstract

This article analyzed the grief of Naomi in the book of Ruth by using the six stages of grief by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross and David Kessler. Although Naomi could be an inadequate model in dealing with her grief, her attitude resonates with many people in dealing with their griefs. It makes this study is noteworthy. This article analyzed how Naomi dealt with her grief in the six stages of grief, namely: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance, and finding the meaning and then take the implication for the ministry during the pandemic of Covid-19. The study showed that anger and depression are visible in the story of Naomi. Acceptance is not explicit. There is no denial, bargaining, and finding the meaning stages in Naomi's grief. She was still struggling with her grief, although she could accept the new situation with the marriage of Ruth and Boaz and the birth of Obed. Today many people struggle with grief during this pandemic. Therefore, it is essential to pay attention to vaccines and medication and notice the need for psychological help and therapy for the bereaved families.

Keywords: grief; Naomi; the book of Ruth; Covid-19 pandemic; Elisabeth Kübler-Ross; David Kessler; bereaved family; psychology

INTRODUCTION

During pandemic Covid-19, many peoples experienced the death of their loved ones, such as family members, friends, colleagues, etc. So naturally, the death of a loved one causes grief. Furthermore, Covid-19 death victims exemplify “bad deaths.”¹ “Bad deaths” initiate devastation dan complicated grief, particularly for bereaved kin, because they block family members from having significant final dialogues and settling “unfinished business.”² How do we grieve the millions of dead victims of this pandemic? Unfortunately, many people in families, communities, churches, and nations do not have the skill to grieve in healthy ways.³ Understanding the anatomy of grief is very important in the current situation. It also helps us understand the impact of Covid-19 on bereaved families and how to help them.

Dealing with grief is very personal, but we can learn from others. This article describes the story of Naomi, who experienced multiple losses, and analyzes her in dealing with her grief. Although Naomi

could be an inadequate model in dealing with her grief, her attitude resonates with many peoples in dealing with their griefs. Therefore, it makes this study is noteworthy.

Naomi is one of the main characters in the book of Ruth, besides Ruth and Boaz. She was frequently compared and contrasted to Ruth. Savran writes that the book of Ruth describes the relationship between Naomi and Ruth on very favorable terms.⁴ Both women portrayed the role of women in the patriarchal society. He highlights Ruth’s assertiveness, loyalty to Naomi, and her determination to seek out food for herself and her mother-in-law. On the other hand, he also represents the positive and supportive attitude of Naomi to her daughters-in-law. Naomi was the symbol of a woman who experienced enervated despair and seemed unable to control her fortune, but she tried to survive in the face of tragedy.⁵ Yong Lu writes about the lead characters of Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz.⁶ Lu describes Naomi’s leadership characters have fidelity to God, discerning value within, pa-

¹ “Bad” deaths mark physical discomfort, social isolation, psychological distress, being treated without respect or dignity. Deborah Carr, Kathrin Boerner, and Sara Moorman, “Bereavement in the Time of Coronavirus: Unprecedented Challenges Demand Novel Interventions,” *Journal of Aging and Social Policy* 32, no. 4–5 (2020): 425–431, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08959420.2020.1764320>.

² Ibid., 425–427.

³ Charlotte Donlon, “A Lonely Grief,” *Christian Century*, 2020.

⁴ George Savran, “The Time of Her Life: Ruth and Naomi,” *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women’s Studies & Gender Issues* 30, no. 30 (2016): 7–23, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2979/nashim.30.1.01>.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Yong Lu, “Leadership Characters in the Book of Ruth: A Narrative Analysis,” *Journal of Corporate Responsibility and Leadership* 3, no. 3 (February 1, 2017): 55–71, accessed April 22, 2021, <https://doaj.org>.

tience, and survival.⁷ However, he also remarks on the negative side of Naomi in dealing with her grief. Naomi emphasized earthly prosperity (Ruth 1:11ff) and ignored the need to trust the God of Israel. Otherwise, Ruth is different. Ruth is a faithful follower.⁸ Safeguard employs character analysis and finds the complexity of each character in the book of Ruth.⁹ She considers that Naomi's character is complex. Her names demonstrate an ambiguous character. Naomi means pleasant, but Mara signifies bitterness. She cried out about God in laments and sank in her self-pity. She seemed to worry about the wellbeing of her daughters-in-law, but she was in silence at the presence of her daughter-in-law. She was also in her silence when the women of Bethlehem praised God at the end of the book of Ruth. It raised whether she has abandoned God because of her experience that God has abandoned her.¹⁰ Andrew R. Davis writes about the numerous instances of disagreement in gender between a pronoun and its antecedent in Naomi's speeches. This gender discord which consists of a masculine pronoun standing for a feminine

noun plays an integral role in the characterization of Naomi and her relationship with Ruth.¹¹ The 'slips' of gender discord may be read as clues to Naomi's inner turmoil after her loss and longing for her husband and sons.¹² Decker applies character analysis and contrasts the three characters in Ruth's book, Orpah, Ruth, and Naomi. He has a negative assessment of Naomi. He considers Naomi is more like a pagan than a Jewess and the representation of bitterness in emptiness.¹³ Branch writes about how Ruth handling her life crisis admirably.¹⁴ Ruth was considered as an excellent example in dealing life crisis. However, it is very different from Naomi. Naomi was an imperfect example in dealing with her life crisis. She got angry, bitter, and silent.¹⁵

No article analyzes the story of Naomi with a psychological approach, especially her dealing with her grief. This article describes the story of Naomi, who experienced multiple losses, and analyzes how she handled her grief. Naomi was an imperfect model in dealing with her grief, but her attitude echoed many people's grief. Some peoples struggle with their grief until

⁷ Ibid., 55.

⁸ Ibid., 64.

⁹ Kristin Moen Saxegaard, *Character Complexity in the Book of Ruth* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010).

¹⁰ Ibid., 103-104

¹¹ Andrew R. Davis, "The Literary Effect of Gender Discord in the Book of Ruth," *Journal Biblical of Literature* 132, no. 2 (2013): 495-513.

¹² Ibid., 501.

¹³ Timothy L. Decker, "Contrastive Characterization in Ruth 1:6-22: Three Ways to Return from Exile," *Old Testament Essays* 32, no. 3 (2019): 908-935, <http://ref.scielo.org/xxsx8k>.

¹⁴ Robin Gallaher Branch, "Handling a Crisis via a Combination of Human Initiative and Godly Direction: Insights from the Book of Ruth," *In die Skriflig/In Luce Verbi* 46, no. 2 (2012): 1-11.

¹⁵ Ibid.

the end of life. Some people cannot win throughout it. Naomi's story is not idyllic, so it makes the effort of analyzing Naomi's grief is noteworthy.

RESEARCH METHOD

This article aimed to examine the story of Naomi in the book of Ruth. This article will apply the narrative analysis by Shimon Bar-Erfart.¹⁶ Bar-Erfart's narrative analysis contains five components, namely the narrator and modes narration, the character analysis, the structures of the plot, the setting (time and space), and the details of style.¹⁷ However, this article will focus on the character analysis by giving intention to the direct description of the character by the narrator, the action, and the character's speech.¹⁸ This article will explore the character of Naomi from the book of Ruth chapter one to four by examining the action and speech of Naomi. Then there is an exploration of the result of character analysis to examine how she dealt with her loss and grief. This article will analyze Naomi's grief with the six stages of grief.¹⁹ This article tries to understand Naomi better with

the help of psychology, especially the psychology of loss and grief. This study will enrich the study of Naomi as one of the main characters in the book of Ruth and help many peoples understand and deal with their grief.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Six Stages of Grief

Elisabeth Kübler-Ross and David Kessler describe five stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.²⁰ These five stages are tools in framing and identifying the feeling of grief, and not everyone has to go through these stages or in a prescribed order.²¹ Denial is not the denial of actual loss but the feeling that the loss is too much for his or her psyche. This is the psyche's protective mechanism.²² This is the notion of shock and disbelief that the loss has happened.²³ Anger is angry with the reality that someone we love is no longer here.²⁴ The stage of anger is a necessary stage of the healing process. Anger opens the inner feelings.²⁵ This anger can extend to ourself, others, and also to God.²⁶ Underneath the anger is the pain of the loss.²⁷ In

¹⁶ Shimon Bar-Efart, *Narrative Art in the Bible* (Decatur: The Almond Press, 1989).

¹⁷ Ibid., 11.

¹⁸ Ibid., 47-86.

¹⁹ Elisabeth Kübler-Ross and David Kessler, *On Grief and Grieving*, Scribner (New York, 2015); David Kessler, *Finding Meaning. The Sixth Stage of Grief* (New York: Scribner, 2019).

²⁰ Kübler-Ross and Kessler, *On Grief and Grieving*, 7-27.

²¹ Ibid., 7.

²² Ibid., 8-10.

²³ Kessler, *Finding Meaning. The Sixth Stage of Grief*, 1.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Kübler-Ross and Kessler, *On Grief and Grieving*, 12.

²⁶ Ibid., 13.

²⁷ Ibid., 15-16.

the bargaining stage, someone is lost in a maze of “if only...” or “what...” statements and thinks that he or she could have done differently. It also accompanies guilt.²⁸ In the stage of depression, someone experiences empty feelings, guilt, and sadness deeper. Someone feels that he or she has no reason to live and do some things.²⁹ The stage of acceptance is not all right or okay with what happened. It is an acceptance that this new reality is the permanent reality.³⁰

Kessler writes another book to complement the five stages of grief. The sixth stage of grief is to find meaning.³¹ He argues that the five stages of grief are not final. He adds one more stage which is essential for the healing process, namely finding the meaning. In this sixth stage, the grief will decrease in intensity over time. Although the grief may never end, this stage will allow someone to alter grief into something precious and gratifying.³² Someone who can discover the meaning tends to have a much easier time grieving than who is not. This is because he or she can keep growing and discovering the pathways to occupy a better life.³³

This study applies these six stages as tools in framing, identifying, and dealing

with the grief of Naomi. These stages are not in sequence, chronological or consecutive. It means that the stage of denial is not the first stage, or the stage of anger is not the second stage, and so on. It also does not propose that Naomi should go through all stages in dealing with her grief.

Analyzing the Grief of Naomi with the Six Stages of Grief

The book of Ruth began with Elimelech and Naomi's family, who migrated from Bethlehem to Moab because of the famine in Israel. After the passing of Elimelech, their sons (Mahlon and Chilion) married the Moabites girls, namely Orpah and Ruth. Unfortunately, about ten years later, Mahlon and Chilion died. Thus, Naomi lost not only a loved one but three loved ones. Thus, she experienced a considerable loss.

After hearing that God had helped the Israelites from famine, Naomi decided to go back to Bethlehem. In her grief and pain, Daniel Block writes that Naomi could still hear good news about God's action.³⁴ Naomi advised that her daughters-in-law could go back to their home. However, Decker considers that Naomi's reason for asking her daughters-in-law to return to her

²⁸ Ibid., 17-19.

²⁹ Ibid., 19-20.

³⁰ Ibid., 22-23

³¹ Kessler, *Finding Meaning. The Sixth Stage of Grief*.

³² Ibid., 2.

³³ Ibid., 2-3.

³⁴ Daniel I. Block, *Ruth. Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 83.

home is not for the benefit of her daughters-in-law, but the desire to avoid the embarrassment of her sons to intermarry with the Moabites.³⁵ Naomi explained to her daughters-in-law that her lost experience is exceedingly bitter to her and bitter than them because God has gone out against her (Ruth 1:11-13). Therefore, she considered herself a victim of divine punishment.³⁶ Block mentions that Naomi was indeed a bitter woman who blamed God for her crisis and thought that God is the source of her troubles.³⁷ Orpah accepted her advice, but Ruth resisted following Naomi. When they arrived at Bethlehem, the whole town was surprised, and the women said, “Is this Naomi?” Then she answered them. “Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty, has dealt very bitterly with me. I went away full, and the LORD has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi when the LORD has testified against me, and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?” (Ruth 1:19-21, ESV). The alter of Naomi’s name was very important. Naomi’s rhetoric

not only articulated a manifestation of agony and frustration, but it also represented how her previous identity is detached from her present experience.³⁸ Naomi’s profound spiritual and emotional suffering was shown in her cry. She lost the loved ones, but she also lost her basic human security and economic viability associated with being married and a mother rather than widowed and childless.³⁹ She went to Moab with her husband and two of her sons, but she returned to Bethlehem “alone,” although Ruth was with her. Naomi has no personal negativity towards Ruth, but she sees neither any benefit nor a place for her within Bethlehem society.⁴⁰ Because her worldview is theistic, so she blamed God for her calamity.⁴¹ Naomi charged God indirectly with responsibility for her change in circumstance and her grief.⁴²

If we analyze the story of Naomi in chapter 1, we can see how Naomi dealt with the loss. Describing the impact of the loss of a loved one, Kübler-Ross and Kessler write, “... the death of a loved one is unmatched

³⁵ Decker, “Contrastive Characterization in Ruth 1 : 6 – 22 : Three Ways to Return from Exile,” 914-915.

³⁶ Sarvan, “The Time of Her Life: Ruth and Naomi,” 10.

³⁷ Block, *Ruth. Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament.*, 90.

³⁸ Katherine Southwood, “Will Naomi’s Nation Be Ruth’s Nation?: Ethnic Translation as a Metaphor for Ruth’s Assimilation within Judah,” *Humanities* 3, no. 2 (April 9, 2014): 117, accessed May 19, 2021, <http://www.mdpi.com/2076-0787/3/2/102>.

³⁹ Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, “At the Threshing Floor : Sex, Reader Response, and a Hermeneutic of Survival,” *Old Testament Essays* 15, no. 1 (2002): 172, <http://hdl.handle.net/10520/EJC85511>.

⁴⁰ Saxegaard, *Character Complexity in the Book of Ruth*, 86.

⁴¹ Danna Nolan and David M. Gunn Fewell, “‘A Son Is Born to Naomi!’: Literary Allusions and Interpretation in the Book of Ruth,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 40 (1988): 101.

⁴² Block, *Ruth. Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament* 101.

for its emptiness and profound sadness. Your world stops. No one can give you words to make you feel better.”⁴³ Naomi experienced multiple losses. She lost her husband, two sons, and a dream. In multiple losses, the anger is more intense, and the sadness and depression are deep.⁴⁴ These comments help us to understand better the emotional condition of Naomi. Naomi suffered deep grief. How do we frame and identifying the feeling of her grief? Which stages do we position her grief? The narrator tends to imply the characters through their speech and actions rather than reporting them directly.⁴⁵ Based on Naomi’s speech, someone can classify Naomi in the anger stage.

Naomi responded negatively to the question and comment of the women of Bethlehem. It is not clear that she was angry with herself or with others, but it was evident that she was furious with God.⁴⁶ She did not express her anger directly to God, but she considered that the cause of her loss was God. Lau considers that it is healthy for Naomi to express her blame to God honestly.⁴⁷ People usually know about suppressing

anger rather than feeling or expressing it.⁴⁸

Kübler-Ross and Kessler consider the anger to God is not an unusual experience and no need to be suppressed.⁴⁹ Anger means someone is progressing that he or she is allowing the feelings that were too much to come to the surface. Anger is usually at the front line as feelings of sadness, hurt, and loneliness.⁵⁰ Anger is the immediate emotion before finding other emotions, such as pain and guilt.⁵¹ However, Kübler-Ross and Kessler also warn that anger can isolate someone from friends and family.⁵² So in Ruth 1, we can see that Naomi was in the stage of anger, especially angry with God. It was important for Naomi to deal with her anger, so she could continue her life and did not sink in sadness, hurt, and loneliness.

Ruth chapter 2 begins with the request of Ruth to glean at the field. Ruth is active. However, Naomi is passive. She only gave permission to Ruth, but she did not give some recommendations on where to go or warned her about dangerous situations in the field.⁵³ Is it that tragedy incapacitated

⁴³ Kübler-Ross and Kessler, *On Grief and Grieving*, 26.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 172.

⁴⁵ Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, 18.

⁴⁶ Naomi’s anger is probably not directed towards Ruth, but it is directed towards God. Saxegaard, *Character Complexity in the Book of Ruth*, 86.

⁴⁷ Peter H.W. Lau, *The Book of Ruth. Risky Kindness* (Singapore: Genesis Books, 2012), 8.

⁴⁸ Kübler-Ross and Kessler, *On Grief and Grieving*, 9.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 8-10.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 10-11.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 10.

⁵³ Saxegaard, *Character Complexity in the Book of Ruth*, 95-96.

Naomi's desire to act?⁵⁴ Ruth accidentally gleaned at the field of Boaz. Boaz was the landowner who had a good relationship with his employees. After asking his supervisor, Boaz knew about Ruth and her background. Boaz knew that he still had family ties with Ruth from Elimelech's side. Boaz showed his kindness to Ruth. She returned from gleaning with a good amount of grain.⁵⁵ Naomi seems more active after seeing that Ruth brought a good amount of grain. When Naomi knew the field's owner where Ruth gleaned, she informed Ruth that Boaz is still relative. She asked God to bless Boaz as the agent of *hesed*.⁵⁶ She also advised Ruth to glean at Boaz's field and remain attached to young women of Boaz. From being passive and silent, Naomi was the one who took the initiative.⁵⁷ Now Naomi saw there is hope. She considered Boaz as an embodiment of divine grace. He was the redeemer (*gō'ēl*).⁵⁸ At the beginning of chapter 2, Naomi was passive, but she was more active at the end of this chapter. In the beginning, she forgot the important thing, namely the existence of Boaz. Only

after seeing the return of Ruth with a good amount of grain, she started to recall the existence of Boaz. She saw there was a new hope. Which stage of grief was Naomi now?

There are many different stages in framing Naomi's grief in Ruth chapter 2. We did not see the anger of Naomi, but we could detect the passiveness of Naomi. Naomi's silence may be read as an expression of her condition, as resignation and great sorrow.⁵⁹ Is it a sign of her depression? The stage of depression causes someone to withdraw from life and ignore daily activities.⁶⁰ After losing the loved one, depression is a normal and appropriate response.⁶¹ Depression is one of the many crucial stages of healing. When someone allows herself or himself, it will leave as soon as it has served its purpose in the process of healing. It makes someone rebuild himself or herself from the ground up. Depression is normal for someone who experiences sadness. However, depression in the long term or excessively depressed state requires professional help.⁶² So we have to give space and time for Naomi to be depressed. We

⁵⁴ Fewell, "'A Son Is Born to Naomi!': Literary Allusions and Interpretation in the Book of Ruth," 101.

⁵⁵ An ephah of grain is about six gallons. Block, *Ruth. Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament*, 142.

⁵⁶ Yoo-ki Kim, "The Agent of *Hesed* in Naomi's Blessing (Ruth 2.20)," *Biblica* 95, no. 4 (2014): 589–601.

⁵⁷ Saxegaard, *Character Complexity in the Book of Ruth*, 96.

⁵⁸ Block, *Ruth. Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament*, 146.

⁵⁹ Saxegaard, *Character Complexity in the Book of Ruth*, 86.

⁶⁰ Kübler-Ross and Kessler, *On Grief and Grieving*, 15.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*, 16-17.

have to understand the passiveness and silence of Naomi at the beginning of Ruth chapter 2.

Fried et al. state several signs of depression, such as depression, powerlessness, sleeping disorder, unhappiness, loneliness, unfriendly, poor appetite, sadness, etc.⁶³ By comparing Fried's description, the signs of Naomi's depression are also apparent. She felt that she did not have any positive future. She wanted to bury herself in her grief and did not want another person to accompany her. The stage of depression is clear. Fortunately, Ruth, one of her daughters-in-law, persisted in being with her. Although Ruth was with Naomi, she seemed initially not to appreciate Ruth's decision. Ruth's presence in the life of Naomi helped Naomi to fight her loneliness after her huge loss. Ruth's company liked social support for Naomi. Although social support plays a significant and distinctive role in shaping one's feeling of loneliness, that feeling is not formed exclusively by the quantity or quality of one's social support networks.⁶⁴ So it depended on Naomi's attitude toward

Ruth. Naomi could not feel lonely because of Ruth. However, she could feel lonely, although Ruth was with her. After seeing the result of Ruth's activeness, Naomi started alive. We can see that she was more active at the end of Ruth chapter 2. She tried to manage her life again with Ruth. She attempted to accept the reality of her loss and restart her life with Ruth.

In Ruth chapter 3, the narrator portrayed Naomi as more in action. In verse one, she expressed her concern for Ruth's security. Then the story continues that Naomi proposed Ruth to prepare herself both bodily cleansing and by her manner of dress, and then to approach Boaz at the threshing floor. She planned to match Ruth to Boaz.⁶⁵ She concocted for Ruth a daring plan. She was the initiator of this scheme. If the plan failed, things could go terrible, but if it were accomplished, Boaz would provide security for Ruth.⁶⁶ Naomi's plan would cause significant risk for Ruth's security and reputation.⁶⁷ Her plan was indeed both risky and clever.⁶⁸ She arranged how Ruth approached Boaz at the threshing floor.

⁶³ Eiko I. Fried et al., "From Loss to Loneliness: The Relationship between Bereavement and Depressive Symptoms," *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* 124, no. 2 (May 2015): 256–265, <http://doi.apa.org/getdoi.cfm?doi=10.1037/abn0000028>.

⁶⁴ Rebecca L. Utz et al., "Feeling Lonely versus Being Alone: Loneliness and Social Support among Recently Bereaved Persons," *Journals of Gerontology - Series B Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences* 69, no. 1 (2014): 85–94.

⁶⁵ Sakenfeld, "At the Threshing Floor : Sex, Reader Response, and a Hermeneutic of Survival," 165–166.

⁶⁶ Block, *Ruth. Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament*, 163–164.

⁶⁷ Timothy Curtis Snow, "Agricultural Dimensions of the Book of Ruth," *The Catholic University of America*, 2017, 74. <https://search.proquest.com/docview/1871291161?accountid=9645.4>.

⁶⁸ Saxegaard, *Character Complexity in the Book of Ruth*, 99.

Ruth followed Naomi's plan and had an opportunity to ask Boaz about her redeeming. Boaz had an interest in Ruth, but he knew that he was not first in line to redeem Ruth. Therefore, he asked Ruth to wait for his action in handling this matter. After Ruth returning from the threshing floor, Naomi asked Ruth about the result of that meeting. Then she advised Ruth to wait for Boaz's action. Thus, we can conclude that the narrator describes that at the beginning and the end of Ruth chapter 3, Naomi was very active in scheming the encounter between Ruth and Boaz.

Ruth chapter 3 represents the vital role of Naomi in encountering Ruth and Boaz. It appears that Naomi did not look at the stage of depression again. It seems that Naomi has accepted the loss and arranged the plan for her daughters-in-law. They should continue their lives. At the acceptance stage, someone starts continuing the journey of life and making new connections or new meaningful relationships. Someone begins to live again, but they cannot do so until they have given grief its time.⁶⁹ Naomi was very active. She did not show her anger or depression again. Instead, she tried to help Ruth for having a better life.

⁶⁹ Kübler-Ross and Kessler, *On Grief and Grieving*, 23-25.

⁷⁰ Block, *Ruth. Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament*, 234.

⁷¹ This is the only record in the Bible that describes the love of daughter-in-law for her mother-in-law.

Ruth chapter 4 tells how Boaz dealt with his will to redeem Ruth. Boaz, who was not first in line to redeem Ruth, decided to talk with another nameless kinsman-redeemer nearer to Elimelech than himself. Boaz assembled ten of the elders and the unnamed kinsman-redeemer at the city gate to discuss these issues. Finally, Boaz had the right to redeem Ruth because the unnamed kinsman-redeemer could not fulfill his obligation. Boaz married Ruth, and they had a son. To see this matter, the women of Bethlehem responded with a spontaneous outburst of praise to God for restoring Naomi, a prayer for the baby, and encouragement for Naomi.⁷⁰ They also applauded Ruth, who was considered better than seven sons. The women of Bethlehem reminded Naomi that Ruth, her daughter-in-law loved her.⁷¹ They also referred this newborn son to Naomi. The women of Bethlehem declared 'A son is born to Naomi' as the highly unusual attribution of the child to Naomi.⁷² Although someone can see the cheerfulness of women of Bethlehem, it was shocking that Naomi seemed more passive and silent. She only took the baby and laid him on her lap and became his nurse.⁷³ She spoke nothing. Saxegaard explains that in this last scene,

Branch, "Handling a Crisis via a Combination of Human Initiative and Godly Direction: Insights from the Book of Ruth," 10.

⁷² Sarvan, "The Time of Her Life: Ruth and Naomi," 18.

⁷³ Ruth 4:14-17.

Naomi has a minor but decisive role. By laying the baby on her lap and becoming his nurse, Naomi was no longer lonely and bitter but caring and lovable.⁷⁴ Fewell and Gunn saw differently in Naomi's manner. Naomi was silent. Her silence was bitter-sweet. Because of the birth of a son, Naomi was no longer 'empty.' She has restored her hold on the patriarchal system, but it happened because of Ruth, the Moabite woman.⁷⁵

Does the final chapter of the book of Ruth inform the acceptance stage of Naomi? It seemed that the narrator did not describe Naomi as active in words and deeds. Naomi seemed to be passive and silent. Did she return to the stage of depression? Did she accept her current condition and move forward? Was Naomi still in her grief? We could not answer these questions straightforward because the narrator does not give us enough information. The narrator only describes that Naomi was in silence. Kessler writes that acceptance does not happen all at once. Someone will be back and forth between the various stages of grief for some time to come. Acceptance grows slowly.⁷⁶ Kessler's comment helps us more to understand the condition of Naomi. I ar-

gue that Naomi was still in her grief because of her tremendous loss. She could only accept the new and better situation in silence. She could not express her joy because of the marriage of Ruth and the birth of Obed. Her grief restrained her. We cannot blame her because of her attitude. Each grief has its imprint, distinctive and unique. It seemed that Naomi was still in grief, although she could accept her condition.

The experience of the loss and the grief that be tied with it are very individual. Someone stands alone in the experience of the loss and its unique pain.⁷⁷ When someone compares losses, sometimes it may seem bigger or smaller, but all losses are painful. Losses are very particular, and comparisons never apply.⁷⁸ I believe that the experience of the loss and the grief of Naomi is also very personal, but we can learn many important lessons from it. After examining the book of Ruth, one can discover that not all of the six stages occur in the story of Naomi. Anger and depression are visible in the story. Acceptance is not explicit. There is no denial, bargaining, and finding the meaning stages in Naomi's grief. It could be that the author of the book of Ruth does not write every detail about

⁷⁴ Saxegaard, *Character Complexity in the Book of Ruth*, 99.

⁷⁵ Oh, how we hate to be saved by Samaritans. Fewell, "'A Son Is Born to Naomi!': Literary Allusions and Interpretation in the Book of Ruth," 107.

⁷⁶ Kessler, *Finding Meaning. The Sixth Stage of Grief*, 67.

⁷⁷ Kübler-Ross and Kessler, *On Grief and Grieving*, 26.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 27.

Naomi's grief. It could be that Naomi did not need to deny her multiple losses. She admitted the death of her beloved ones. She could not bargain with God and others because she might realize the death of her beloved ones as God's deed for her family sins. Her family moved to Moab from the promised land. Her sons took the Moabite women as their wives. It is not clear that Naomi could find the meaning from her losses and grief because the final chapter of the book of Ruth describes Naomi as a bit of bit passive. The best assessment for Naomi's condition was that she was still in grief, but she could accept this new and better situation in silence.

Implications for Today's Situation

Naomi lived in the old days when there was no psychologist or psychiatrist. She had to deal with her grief in her way. We can conclude that she was still struggling with her grief, although she could accept the new situation with the marriage of Ruth and Boaz and the birth of Obed. We could not blame her because she could pass the final stages of grief, namely finding the meaning from her multiple losses.

The current situation is very different. Psychology is common in society. There are many psychologists, therapists, and

psychiatrists. This condition can help peoples better in dealing with their grief and loss. The pandemic Covid-19 causes many deaths and griefs. We need to grieve. There is no right way to grieve, but we need to grieve.⁷⁹ The six stages of grief can give guidance in the grieving process. Many factors influence someone to deal with and overcome grief. Some people can walk through these six stages. However, some people cannot surpass all of them. Some peoples still deny the existence of Covid-19 and the victims. Some peoples are angry with the situation, the government, or the origin country of the Covid-19. Some people felt depressed because of the losses. Some people are still difficult to accept the losses. So, in handling the pandemic of Covid-19, peoples do not need only vaccines and medicine, but also psychological assistance for the peoples in dealing with the loss and the grief. To ignore the psychological problem of loss and grief can cause humanity problems in the future.

CONCLUSION

The six stages of grief help us to understand how people deal with their losses and grief. By analyzing Naomi's grief based on Ruth's book, we can conclude that Naomi did not surpass these six stages. We

⁷⁹ Reggie Williams, "Unfathomable Loss," *Christian Century*, 2020, 25.

only can find the stage of anger, depression, and silent acceptance. Naomi was not flawless in dealing with her grief, but God still could act good things by uniting Ruth and Boaz and bestowing Obed. Naomi was indeed the imperfect model, but her attitude resonates with many peoples in dealing with their griefs. Many people struggle with grief because they lost family members, friends, and colleagues during this pandemic. We need to take notice of the importance of psychological help and therapy for bereaved families.

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