

CoreGroup Guide | Shift Happens - Part 1

Written by Christopher Burford and Jenny Huffman

A Note from Pastor Charity

As we step into 2026, I want to share a few rhythms that will help us stay grounded and connected to Jesus in this new year:

- During each sermon series, we will highlight one of our [Six Shared Practices](#). Our practice for this series is **Prayer**. Click on the link above to review the Start, Grow, Stretch for Prayer, assess where you are right now, and choose a next step.
- You are invited to a new monthly gathering called **Prayers of the People**, a simple service of prayer, silence, and contemplation. We'll pray individually and communally, and we'll practice different methods of prayer together.
Prayers of the People | Second Tuesday of every month | 7:00pm | Clayton Site
- This semester, each CoreGroup guide will include a **memory verse** you can choose to learn on your own or together with your group. To see the recommended verse for this series, scroll down to the Going Deeper section of this guide.

Thank you for continuing to show up and practice the way of Jesus together as a CoreGroup!

Welcome

Hello friends, and welcome to the first week of our new sermon series called *Shift Happens: When Life Doesn't Go As Planned*. This tongue-in-cheek title is in reference to the times in life when we encounter significant change. That change could surface in a relationship status, the death of a loved one, or the loss of a job to name a few. The significance of the change can vary from person to person as the impact is deeply internal. Our discussions will not focus as much on the changes themselves, but rather on how our responses and reactions to these shifts can be a faithful step towards spiritual fulfillment and wonder. Let's start our discussion with a prayer.

Opening Prayer

God, your steadfast love for us is a true comfort in times of uncertainty. Thank you for that comfort and for the grace you offer when our attention to you is distracted. Please guide our time together today and open our minds to thoughtful conversation. It is in your name we pray, amen.

Ice Breaker

Have you ordered something recently, maybe over the holidays, only to be informed that item is sold out? Maybe it was an online order or maybe it was something at a restaurant. What was the item? What did you do? How did that feel?

The Head

Our Bible verses this week come from the Old Testament Book of Ruth. Now, there are all kinds of twists and turns in this story. First, the Moabites; that is, the people from Moab. They are a featured people in this story. Historically, Moabites worshipped idols and many gods, but not our God. Ruth, our title character, was a Moabite. Sourcing food was difficult at this time so migration was common. Life expectancy was also young by today's standards. Focus on Ruth in this reading and see how she responded to all of the challenges that came her way.

Ruth 1:1-19

1 In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land. So a man from Bethlehem in Judah, together with his wife and two sons, went to live for a while in the country of Moab. 2 The man's name was Elimelek, his wife's name was Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Kilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem, Judah. And they went to Moab and lived there.

3 Now Elimelek, Naomi's husband, died, and she was left with her two sons. 4 They married Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other Ruth. After they had lived there about ten years, 5 both Mahlon and Kilion also died, and Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband.

6 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. 7 With her two daughters-in-law 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.

8 Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "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. 9 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 aloud 10 and said to her, "We will go back with you to your people."

11 But Naomi said, "Return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me? Am I going to have any more sons, who could become your husbands? 12 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— 13 would you wait until they grew up? 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!"

14 At this they wept aloud again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye, but Ruth clung to her.

15 "Look," said Naomi, "your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her."

16 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. 17 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." 18 When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her.

19 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 women exclaimed, “Can this be Naomi?”

- Between verses 1-5 above, so many unplanned things happened. Which significant life events can you identify for Ruth and the other people in her life?
- How would you describe Naomi's faith in God at this time?
- Prayer is not referenced directly in this passage, but what would you expect the prayers of Naomi, Ruth, and/or Orpah to look like?
- There are several moments that led to weeping in this story. What familiar emotions do you think were being experienced through these tears?

The Heart

Even during some major shifts in her life, Ruth responds by following a path of trust, love, and devotion. If we read a bit further in the Book of Ruth, we see how that choice eventually led to a new marriage and blessings. Even more, Ruth and the son she would have in that new marriage would be direct ancestors of Jesus following in his lineage. Ruth's embrace of change led to future grace, promise, and salvation.

The fact is, shift always happens. Change is inevitable and sometimes it's hard for us to imagine what is on the other side of that change. But, we need to remember that God meets us where we are, even in the hard times, and promises to be there for us.

- Recognizing that all life events are not equal, what makes coping with a significant life event difficult, beyond the unknowns suggested above?
- Much work has been accomplished in the field of understanding grief and just like we are created beautifully unique, our grief is individualized too. If you are comfortable sharing with the group, in what ways have you navigated grief in the past?
- Have you ever experienced something traumatic like Ruth only to realize the blessings that followed? Share your experience.
- Not all shifts are negative. What positive shifts have you experienced?

The Hands

So how can we look at a story like Ruth's and carry that forward into our own lives? It's interesting to realize that Ruth's origin story didn't begin with a relationship with God, from what we can tell. It's most reasonable to think that her introduction to God was through marriage and her relationship with Naomi. But once that spark was lit, Ruth carried forward peace, unwavering loyalty, and a confidence that God was the way forward, even if that wasn't readily recognized at that time.

- This is not easy, no matter where your faith is at this moment, but what would placing your trust in God look like when shift happens?
- Not all of us are called to be like Ruth with her noble, resolute confidence. Maybe our journey is more like Naomi; scared and broken, but with a faith that has been with us for some time. How might we rekindle the light we know is there?
- Reflect again on the relationship between Naomi and Ruth. What does it look like to come alongside someone else in the midst of a major shift?
- In light of this week's discussion, how can your CoreGroup be praying for you?

Closing Prayer

Hey God, Thank you for your redeeming presence even when our faith waivers. Your love for us is a constant reminder that you are near even when times are tough. Please forgive us when we fall short. Please keep our hearts and minds focused on a path forward with peace, unwavering loyalty, and a confidence that you are the way. It is in your name we pray, amen.

Going Deeper

This semester, each CoreGroup guide will include a memory verse you can choose to learn on your own or together with your group. The recommended memory verse for the *Shift Happens* series is Isaiah 43:19 from the Common English Bible (CEB):

“Look! I’m doing a new thing; now it sprouts up; don’t you recognize it? I’m making a way in the desert, paths in the wilderness.”

Here are three simple ways to practice memorizing a verse:

1. **Write it** (one time a day on a notecard, in your notes app, or on your mirror).
2. **Say it out loud** (at the same time daily - driving, brushing teeth, before bed).
3. **Pray it** (turn the verse into a one sentence prayer for yourself or someone you love).