



STUDY GUIDE: April 12, 2026

Message Series: When Life Gets Hard
Message Title: Is God Still There
Teaching Pastor: Brian Hughes

Warm-up/Icebreaker: (10 min.)

Would you rather take a carefully planned trip with a detailed itinerary, or a spontaneous road trip with no plan at all? Why?

Pray:

Heavenly Father, Thank You for bringing us together today. Thank You for the chance to pause in the middle of busy lives and turn our attention toward You. As we spend time in Your Word and in conversation with one another, we ask that You would quiet distractions and help us be present in this moment. Help us listen well, share honestly, and grow closer to You and to each other through this time. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Get Started: (30 min.)

Pastor Brian shared the story behind the hymn *It Is Well With My Soul*, written after Horatio Spafford lost his daughters at sea. In the middle of deep grief, he chose to trust God.

When you hear stories of deep loss like that, what questions or emotions rise up in you?

Read Ruth 1:1–5.

- Why do seasons of repeated hardship sometimes make people question whether God is still present?
- What are some ways people today experience spiritual famine?

"When life is full, it's easy to believe God is present. But when everything is taken, when all you're left with is grief, you don't need explanations. You THINK you do, which is why in those moments - which come to all of us - we ask 'Why?' But Why is not helpful. What IS helpful in times of trauma is the one question Naomi DID ask: Is God still there? He didn't show up where she wanted, but he DID show up, and that's the point". -Pastor Brian Hughes

Reflect and Commit: (40 min.)

Read Ruth 1:19–21.

*"When we face overwhelming loss, we want God to give us the whole plan. We want the explanation, the timeline, the guarantee that it's all going to work out but God rarely gives that. Instead, He gives us something much smaller, harder, but more potent: a next step. And it's a major application for us: **When you can't see the whole plan, take the next step....** Naomi's next step was to go home. She was taking her next right step. But her heart was still broken. Deeply broken. Not just from the loss of her husband and both of her sons, but with a deep disillusionment with God. And this is why I love the Bible so much - because it's often unflattering. It's so real that we can see ourselves in it." -Pastor Brian Hughes*

- What does Naomi's response teach us about being honest with God in seasons of pain?

*"Naomi takes the step, but let's not clean it up and try to make it pretty and churchy and fit our nice polite spiritual mold. The truth is that Naomi does take the next step, but Naomi is still broken. Still grieving. Still confused. Still a little angry at God. She literally says: 'The Almighty has made my life bitter. He sent me away full, but He brought me back empty.' That's in the Bible. Which means this: You can be moving **toward God** while still wrestling **with God**."* -Pastor Brian Hughes

- Why do you think it's sometimes hard to be honest with God about grief, anger, or disappointment—and what changes when we are?
- When have you experienced a time where you kept following God even while carrying questions or disappointment?

Read Ruth 1:22.

"Did you see it? There is a harvest coming. There is a harvest coming. In spite of her pain and loss, the author hints to something good that's about to happen, all because Naomi chased after God even when she didn't feel like it. She took her next right step, and it yielded a glimpse of hope, because there is a harvest coming. You can take the step that IS right and still not FEEL right. And some of you need to hear that. Because you've believed the lie that if your faith was strong enough, you wouldn't feel this way. But Naomi did. And she still walked. And because of it, there is a harvest coming." -Pastor Brian Hughes

- What does this small detail suggest about what God might be doing behind the scenes?
- Where might God be preparing a "harvest" in your life that you cannot yet see?

Read James 1:2–4.

- How can perseverance shape our faith during difficult seasons?
- Take 30–60 seconds of quiet reflection and ask: "Lord, what is my next step?"

"This kind of faith is not theoretical. It's not just something we read about in the pages of Scripture. It's something we see today, in our lives, around us, right now, in real people. There are people who have walked through diagnosis after diagnosis, heartbreak after heartbreak, tragedy after tragedy. Loss that didn't let up, and somewhere along the way, though they had every reason to give up, every reason to get stuck, Every reason to say, 'God, You're against me.' They didn't. Not because it was easy, but because they chose, again and again...one step. The next right step. Then another. Then another." -Pastor Brian Hughes

Gather prayer requests. (5–10 min.)

Pray:

Father God, Thank You that You are working even when we cannot see the whole picture. Thank You that we don't have to understand everything to trust You. Give us courage to take the next step You are calling us to take. Help us follow You honestly—even when we are grieving, questioning, or unsure. Remind us that a harvest is coming and that You are faithful in every season. Strengthen our faith, grow our perseverance, and teach us to trust the next chapter because You are the author of our story. In Jesus' name, Amen.