

RUTH AND NAOMI

- How many of you have someone you care about or love? (...)
- When they hurt, do you hurt for them as well? (...)
- When they struggle, do you feel their struggle or their pain? (...)
- Do you wish you could do something about it? (...)
- How many of you are going through that now with somebody that you care about? (...)

-I want to encourage us today by looking at two characters in the bible. They are going to help us understand that some of the struggles we may be facing are not totally out of God's purpose or plan.

-But first, how many of you know the hymn "Rejoice In The Lord, He Makes No Mistake"? (...)
This hymn was written by a man named Ron Hamilton while he was going through cancer.

-It starts with the words "God never moves without purpose or plan, when trying His servant and molding a man." What do you think this means? (God has a supernatural purpose for things He allows in our lives. He uses it to mold us and shape us for a greater purpose, His purpose.)

-If you know the story of Ruth and Naomi, God's purpose prevailed in the midst of their own trying tragedy. God molded Ruth and Naomi through it all and because of that, we are reading their story today, thousands of years later, and being encouraged by it.

-Let's look at their story and begin to study it together. Can anyone tell me how their story begins. It can be found in the book of Ruth in the Bible.

(-Naomi had a husband and two sons and they lived in Bethlehem.

-There was a famine in the land of Judah so her husband took her and their two sons to live in the land of Moab.

-There her husband died and her sons married 2 Moabite women.

-10 years later, both of her sons died as well in the land of Moab and all she was left with was 2 daughter-in-laws that she did not know how to take care of.)

-Here, we have a woman in a strange land, with those that were once closest to her passing away, and now she is left in a strange place that was not her real home with 2 daughters-in-law that she could not take care of.

-How do you think she must have felt? (Worried, Scared, alone, forsaken, etc.)

-How do you think it feels to be in an unfamiliar place and tragedy strikes? (Awful and Alone!)

-How many of you have felt that way? (...) Would you like to share a time when that happened?(...)

-Do you think she felt responsible and awful for her daughters-in-law as well? (I am sure she did because she loved them.)

-Now, let's see what happens in verse #1 on our verse sheet. Let's read it together out loud: (Ruth 1:8-9: "Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, 'Go back, each of you, to your mother's home. May the LORD show kindness to you, as you have shown to your dead and to me. May the LORD grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband.'")

-What did Naomi do for her daughters-in-laws according to these verses? (...)

-She blessed them and encouraged them by praying that the Lord will show kindness on them and grant them rest in the home of another husband.

-Wow! That would be hard when you just lost your two sons! She was praying for them at this moment, understanding that they were hurting as well. In a time of her own struggles, she was lifting them up.

-How can we use her example in our own lives today when tragedy strikes? (We can encourage each other to look to the Lord!)

-Now, let's see how God's plan unfolded in this struggle that Naomi and her daughters-in-law were facing.

-Let's read our next verse together #2: (Ruth 1:16 "But Ruth said: 'Entreat me not to leave you, Or to turn back from following after you; For wherever you go, I will go; And wherever you lodge, I will lodge; Your people shall be my people, And your God, my God.'")

-What do you think may have made Ruth want to stay with Naomi? (Maybe she saw something in Naomi and her faith in God that she did not see in her own people. Maybe it was because Naomi showed her love and kindness and shared God's love for her, etc.)

-All we do know is that God opened Ruth's heart to love Naomi. She chose to be with her over her own people.

-From this, we can learn that God can open the hearts of individuals all around us according to His plans and purposes. Sometimes it just takes time.

-Now, back to our story. The two broken women traveled back to Naomi's hometown of Bethlehem and are asked painful questions about why they were back and what happened.

-Let's stop here for a moment and let me ask you, have you ever been in that situation where you have gone through something tragic or painful and people ask you questions about it, bringing it up over and over again, where you have to talk about it? (...)

-Even though people are well meaning, it can be challenging to say the least.

-Let's look at Naomi's response since it sheds a lot of light on how she is feeling at this moment. Let's read together verse #3: (Ruth 1:20-21 "But she said to them, 'Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the LORD has brought me home again empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the LORD has testified against me, and the Almighty has afflicted me?")

-How is she feeling? (Bitter, angry, rejected by God, etc.)

-Do you ever feel like crying out to God like that sometimes? "Lord, I am in pain, I don't understand why you are allowing this to happen!" (...)

-Even in the midst of terrible pain, we need to try to remember that God is listening to our cries. Even though it may feel like He isn't, He is working His greater purposes and plans out in our lives and also all those around us as well, to fulfill His ultimate plan for each of us while here on earth and beyond into eternity.

-Know this, it can still be hard at times.

-This woman, Naomi, was in great pain. She changed her name from Naomi, which means "pleasant", to Mara, which means "bitterness".

-She is struggling greatly, along with her daughter-in-law, Ruth, whom I am sure was in great pain as well. Neither one knew what the future held for them.

-Have you ever felt that way as well, not knowing what the future holds for you? (...)

-Let's look at what God had in store for them to be encouraged. Let's read verse #4 together: (Ruth 2:1-3 "There was a relative of Naomi's husband, a man of great wealth, of the family of Elimelech. His name was Boaz. So Ruth the Moabitess said to Naomi, 'Please let me go to the field, and glean heads of grain after him in whose sight I may find favor.' And she said to her, 'Go, my daughter.' Then she left, and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers. *And she happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech.*")

-Notice the last sentence where it says “she *happened* to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz...”

-Do you think God’s hand was in the field that she chose to go to? (Absolutely. Just as His hand is on our own lives and those we care about it!)

-Outwardly it may seem by chance, but the unseen hands of God were shaping her course, divinely guiding her to Boaz.

-God is doing that for you and me as well.

-There are several verses that talk about this in the Bible. Let’s read them together in our next set of verses on our Verse Sheet, #5: (Jeremiah 10:23, Psalm 37:23, Proverbs 20:24, Isaiah 58:11 “O Lord, I know the way of a man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps.” “The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord...””A man’s steps are of the Lord. How then can a man understand his own way.” “*The Lord will guide you continually...*”)

-What do those last 6 words say? (“The Lord will guide you continually.”)

-Do you think that God’s hand is in the field of your own struggles, gently guiding you through even though you may be in severe agony? (...)

-According to His Word, this is His promise to us.

-Sometimes the fields where they gathered in those days were sparse, just like the ones Ruth was gleaning from. She was just getting the leftovers from other people who had already gleaned there.

-Here is a question we can ask ourselves from this section: “Do you feel like that sometimes, that you are just getting the leftovers from other people or barely enough to get you through the day?” Or maybe you feel that is happening to a loved one? (...)

-Naomi was probably feeling that for Ruth as she went out to glean that morning.

-Do you think Naomi was praying this whole time about God’s intervention for both of them? (I’m sure she was!)

-You may be praying that prayer for someone right now.

-Let’s see how God was orchestrating a powerful plan that these women did not know anything about as an encouragement for all of us.

-As we continue through the story of Ruth, does anyone know who Boaz was? (Boaz, was their kinsman. Kinsmen at that time were to marry the widows in their families and were suppose to take care of them and their families.)

-Now, to get to our point of how God orchestrates His plan in tough situations, let’s shorten the rest of the story from chapters 2-4 of Ruth. Can anyone remind us what happened after Boaz met Ruth?

(-Boaz fell in love with Ruth and wanted to marry her.

-Eventually he was able to marry her and was also able to take care of Naomi as his mother-in-law.

-Soon they had a child named Obed)

-Let me read to you what happened from God’s Word: Ruth 4:13-16 “So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. When he made love to her, **THE LORD ENABLED HER TO CONCEIVE, and she gave birth to a son. The women said to Naomi: ‘Praise be to the Lord, *Who this day has not left you without a guardian-redeemer*. May he become famous throughout Israel! He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth. Then Naomi took the children in her arms and cared for him. The women living there said, ‘Naomi has a son!’ And they name him *Obed*. *He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.*”**

-God took this daughter-in-law, had her love her mother-in-law, had her stay with her and travel with here to live in a foreign land, had her meet Boaz and marry him so he could take care of both of them and God gave them a child to mother together.

-So, did God really forget about Naomi and Ruth and their pain? (...)
-Was His hand guiding them this whole time in the midst of a very painful situation? (...)
-Did He bring them comfort and peace in the end? (...)
-Do you have faith that He will do that for you as well? Whether here on earth or in heaven with Him? (...)
-Remember, His plan is working even in the midst of your circumstances. His plan is also working out for the eternal benefit of many around you.

-To help us understand this, does anyone remember who was Ruth's great-grandson, which was Naomi's great-great-grandson? (David)

-Does anyone know what was so special about this great-grandson of Ruth's named David? (He became the king of Israel!)

-But most important of all, who was in the line of King David that changed history for all mankind? (Jesus, who saved us from our sin!)

-You see, God has a plan for the struggles we face and also for those that we love. They are greater than what we can ever know or could ever understand. Through Naomi and Ruth's tragedy, the line of Jesus was set up. They never saw it, but we did and all the world benefited from it. So, when we may not understand what is happening, just trust that through God's mercy and strength, we all can make it through the trials. Trusting that God has a plan and a purpose for each one of us that is far better than we can ever imagine! Let's put our hope in His redemptive plan for all of our lives!

RUTH AND NAOMI VERSE SHEET

- 1. Ruth 1:8-9** “Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, ‘Go back, each of you, to your mother’s home. May the LORD show kindness to you, as you have shown to your dead and to me. May the LORD grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband.’”
- 2. Ruth 1:16** “But Ruth said: ‘Entreat me not to leave you, Or to turn back from following after you; For wherever you go, I will go; And wherever you lodge, I will lodge; Your people shall be my people, And your God, my God.’”
- 3. Ruth 1:20-21** “But she said to them, ‘Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the LORD has brought me home again empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the LORD has testified against me, and the Almighty has afflicted me?’”
- 4. Ruth 2:1-3** “There was a relative of Naomi’s husband, a man of great wealth, of the family of Elimelech. His name was Boaz. So Ruth the Moabitess said to Naomi, ‘Please let me go to the field, and glean heads of grain after him in whose sight I may find favor.’ And she said to her, ‘Go, my daughter.’ Then she left, and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers. And she happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech.”
- 5. Jeremiah 10:23, Psalm 37:23, Proverbs 20:24, Isaiah 58:11** “O Lord, I know the way of a man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps.” “The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord...” “A man’s steps are of the Lord. How then can a man understand his own way.” “*The Lord will guide you continually...*”