

A Mom in All Seasons

Judges 21-25

Today my message is a Mother's Day message, "A Mom in all Seasons." The mom that I'm going to use as a representative mother is found in the book of Ruth.

For a number of reasons, I found that it's not always easy to select a text for Mother's Day. For one thing, the audience is about equally divided between men and women and I certainly don't want to leave out and miss one half of the audience.

Then the women that are here, are divided into mothers and non-mothers.

Now of the mothers here today, there are mothers of growing children and mothers of grown children. Then there are mothers that look back on positive relationships with children or children who look remember positive relationships with mother.

On the other hand, there are some who do not look with gladness at their association with mother or mothers who have feelings of grieving in respect to their own children. There may be happy mothers here today and there may be grieving mothers.

I realize that Mother's Day is great for some and very tough for others.

Now I try, on Mother's Day, to avoid two extreme temptations that are always present in sermons.

1. One is to wax eloquently with poetic idealism on motherhood and quote a lot of syrupy poems on motherhood that give us all a warm feeling, and yet we know that they mostly miss the reality of life.
2. The other thing that I try to avoid is using Mother's Day as a pastor to club women into being better mothers – go out there and do a better job sort of a thing.

So, I found this mother in the Bible that I think we all can identify with. Her name is Naomi. She's actually a mother-in law as we find her in scripture.

Now my mother-in-law passed away pretty early into my marriage so I don't have as much experience as some of you may have gone through. I don't have any mother-in-law woes because she was a loving mother. Here also is a great mother-in-law whom we will see is a representative of a mom in all seasons. She is found in this short book of the Old Testament that is quite a romance story.

I use Naomi's life story as a universal application to all of us (men, women, married, single, parent). Today we will see Naomi in the four seasons of life. (Spring, Summer, Fall, and Winter). When we open to the book of Ruth we find Naomi, I believe it's the Summertime.

SUMMERTIME

The book opens with the phrase *“In the days when the judges rule there was a famine in the land.”* In Palestine, a famine is especially going to become evident in the summertime when the spring rains have not occurred so there’s been no growth of the spring crop. The scorching summer sun and the barren soil have combined to make life exceedingly difficult.

It’s in that life season of Summer, kind of a scorching time, a time of famine, when the judges are ruling that we find this mom in all seasons – Naomi.

She lived in a time when there was economic disaster. There are mothers here who have lived through times of economic disaster and some may be going through present personal times of economic disaster. It’s not easy to look in the refrigerator and see that there’s no food for your family or yourself. That was the situation Naomi was in. It was certainly a down time. A time of depression in the midst of a famine in the land.

Not only was it bad economically but it was a bad time politically.

The time in which Naomi lived was a time in which the judges reigned. The last verse of the book of Judges, the verse right before the book of Ruth begins says;

Judges 21:25 (NKJV)

In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

Certainly with a famine on hand and with political and moral collapse in the country it was not a good time to have young children. Poor Naomi did not have most of the Christian resources we deem essential today for child rearing. No Christian schools, no church programs, no religious story books, no Bible, no religious DVD’s, and Dr. James Dobson wasn’t even around. It was a severe time.

People have said to me, I don’t want to become a parent because of the bad times in which we live. They are too chaotic and uncertain for us to have children.

I think when people say those kind of things we’ve got blinders on our eyes to history. For history has always been chaotic and uncertain. If people had put off having children because the times were uncertain or bad or difficult, none of us would have ever been born.

Naomi, is in her summertime of life. It’s a hard and turbulent time. Yet she is in the midst of her hard life, She is married and will have children. Life is moving on even though it’s difficult and uncertain.

I like what historian Will Durant said: *“Civilization is a river with sandy banks. The water is sometimes filled with blood from people killing, stealing, shouting and doing the things historians usually record. Yet along the banks, unnoticed people build homes, sing songs, write poetry and even whittle statues. The story of civilization is really the story of what happened on the banks. Historians are pessimists because they ignore the banks for the turbulence of the river.”*

We can be that way in our lives as well.

We can focus on all the terrorism and the financial and political problems in the world but meanwhile life is going on day after day. On the banks the ordinary avenues of life continue.

God is aware of what's happening in the everyday of Naomi's life. He's aware of it in your life and my life as well. So in her Summertime of moral and political chaos and turmoil and a time of economic collapse we find this Godly Mom.

FALL

However, she soon becomes a woman in Fall.

I think of Fall as the leaves and grass browning, the warmth of the day is replaced with the chill of night, the days are getting shorter, winter is approaching. For Naomi it is the graying of the hair time. Her youth is farther away than her old age.

Naomi has the typical four seasons of life we all have yet for her, three of them are negative. Her Summer, which we just saw, her Fall will be hard and her Winter.

Naomi's husband now gives that dreaded announcement, a wife who likes to have security and has lived in the same place a long time with friends, connections, roots, never wants to hear...We're moving. (*Men always seem easier to move.*) Her husband says we're relocating to Moab. We're pulling up stakes, leaving family, friends, leaving all the familiar faces.

This event in Naomi's life is a story of paradox.

On the one hand the place which she is leaving, Bethlehem, means literally House of Bread. Now that place as a mother and wife had always been her source of strength, her home. However, the house of bread has become a place where there is literally nothing in the pantry.

There are distressing things that happen to us in our lives. One of them may be a physical relocation. Maybe someone here today has come from what to you has been a Bethlehem. You have arrived in your Moab – Arizona, disconnected and unplugged. You know how Naomi is feeling. Physical relocation can be extremely distressing.

I want to also say in our modern day, divorce is another one of those things which involves leaving the House of Bread. Broken dreams of a future. Loss of security.

From the names Naomi gave to her two sons, where they were born, Bethlehem or Moab we're not sure, but it's evident that there is a downward spiral going on in those fall days of her life.

Now she and her husband had names rich with meaning and imagery. Her husband, Elimelech, meant “My God is king.” What a wonderful, dignified, reassuring name. And her name, Naomi, meant “Pleasant, lovely, delightful.” Another blessing of a name.

But when her son Mahlon came along, his name means “weak, sick, afflicted.” Her second son Chilion means “Failing, annihilation, consumptive.” Can you imagine Mahlon and Chilion telling people their names? Yikes.

Now in this season of Fall, as Naomi and Elimelech move to Moab, they don’t appear to be God’s people of faith and delight. When the going gets tough, they leave.

Now before we start judging and giving Naomi advice on being God’s woman of faith and power, remember that if the Lord had condemned her for her life choices, we would not be reading her story today in His word. I think as Christians many times we’re much harder on people than even God is.

WINTER

So Naomi, now in Moab, becomes the woman of Winter when her husband dies. “My God is king,” – the man with the noble name is dead.

So now she is stranded in a foreign country. Her two sons grow up and marry non Israelite women which had to be a grief for her. Her sons had married outside the faith. Then before either of them had a chance to bear children they each die and now she is left all alone, without sons, without any grandchildren. (v.5)

There had to be some bitterness enter into her life at that point. I mean really, she had plenty of reason. Yet she continues being a mother to her daughters-in-law even in the midst of her winter.

Ruth 1:12-13 (NKJV)

Turn back, my daughters, go—for I am too old to have a husband. If I should say I have hope, if I should have a husband tonight and should also bear sons, would you wait for them till they were grown? Would you restrain yourselves from having husbands? No, my daughters; for it grieves me very much for your sakes that the hand of the Lord has gone out against me!

Naomi adds up her life experiences and its not been pleasant. Things have gone from bad to worse. She is bitter that God has dealt with her roughly.

It’s interesting that we all find it so easy to do what Naomi did and that is to equate the negatives in our lives with God’s direct action. If this terrible thing is happening to me in my life it’s because God said I’m going to do this to you.

It’s a very human tendency.

However, we should not always equate those down times as some action of God in judging or punishing us. Down times are just a part of life. There are many tears in our life that the Lord didn’t put there.

Naomi has a lot of tears in her life. Yet, she still is being a mother to the one daughter-in-law who refused to leave her.

Ruth 1:19-21 (NKJV)

Now the two of them went until they came to Bethlehem. And it happened, when they had come to Bethlehem, that all the city was excited because of them; and the women said, "Is this Naomi?" 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?"

Winter had definitely been tough on Naomi.

I'm conscious of the fact that there are people here this morning who know what that is like. What it means to be describing those kind of things about your life experiences.

I wonder, if I had been Naomi's pastor, if I had been her friend, how would I have offered her help?

Some things I would not have done... I would not have agreed with her when she said, call me Bitter. I'd have put my arm around her and said, I know you don't feel good right now but I'm always going to call you Pleasant, Delightful, Lovely.

When people are down we should lovingly decide not to be down on them.

I also would not have judged some deep dark sin in her life. Obviously, all this tragedy has happened to you because you got away from God. While that may sometimes be the case, for Naomi it wasn't. It's wrong to make that a universal principle to apply to everybody struggling in faith.

I think also that I would not have offered her an instant solution. Just do 'this' and all the bad will suddenly disappear. We're great at the instant cures.

What Naomi needed at that moment is someone to come alongside of her and help her, someone to affirm her and say, *"I know some things have gone wrong but you've done some things right. You've come back and you've still got your faith in God. It may be a little weakened but it's there. You haven't started following the other gods. You're still a servant of Jehovah. Not only that but there must be something lovely still in your life or your daughter-in-law, Ruth wouldn't have come all those long miles if you'd been a caustic, bitter, nasty person to get along with. The fact that she's with you says there's a lot of love in you."*

Then I think I would have tried to give her some hope in the story of Jacob. Genesis 42:36 - Jacob cries, *Everything is against me.* Yet, if Jacob had only known, everything wasn't against him. His lost son Joseph was second in command in Egypt and everything was about to go right for him.

We're not to judge anyone's life until the Lord is finished with them. We don't know if a negative is sent by God but we do know that God is working good in the negatives of every Christian life.

God was working good in Joseph's life through slavery and prison and God is working good in Naomi's losses and negatives.

We have the testimony in scripture (Romans 8:28) that God is working for our good even in our winters of life.

SPRING

That's why it's so neat that Naomi exits from scripture as a woman and mother of Spring.

Normally we see life as a typical cycle – spring, summer, fall and winter. But with the child of God who loves Him and clings to Him and serves Him, one exits life not on the down of winter but on the up of spring. Naomi has this moment where she comes back to being Pleasant and Lovely.

Look at the three ways we know it happens to her.

First we see her changing and beginning to refocus on the hope of the present and the future, rather than on the negative of the past.

We see that in her, when Ruth comes back from the fields where she has picked up the pieces of grain that have been left by Boaz's servants. When Ruth brings back all of this grain, Naomi says *"The Lord has not stopped showing his kindness to the living and the dead."* (2:20)

Probably if there's one statement of scripture we ought to underline and keep before us it is that one. *"The Lord has not stopped showing kindness to the living and to the dead."*

If Naomi had been a completely bitter person she would have reacted negatively to Ruth's news of Boaz's kindness. She'd have said, *"Everything else in my life has gone wrong, this is going to go wrong too."* But she did not let herself get stuck in the winter of life. She picked herself up with God's help and said, *"we're going to move into the future."*

Secondly, Naomi would become Pleasant and Lovely again and her faith grew strong enough to support Ruth. There came that moment when she needed to give Ruth encouragement. Naomi encouraged Ruth in getting Boaz to propose to her. She helped Ruth indicate to Boaz, who has feelings of inferiority because he's an older man and Ruth is a younger woman, that she's interested in marrying him.

When he finally becomes aware of that fact he says, *"I am going to try to acquire all the property that belonged to your husband and his brother and father in law."*

When Ruth comes home and tells Naomi all that is happening, Naomi comes alongside Ruth and gives encouragement and strength. Through this marriage the Lord redeemed Ruth and Blessings come to Naomi's life.

Thirdly, we see in the very last verses of the book where it says after the marriage of Boaz and Ruth, Ruth gave birth to a son.

Ruth 4:14-16 (NKJV)

Then the women said to Naomi, "Blessed be the Lord, who has not left you this day without a close relative; and may his name be famous in Israel! And may he be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age; for your daughter-in-law, who loves you, who is better to you than seven sons, has borne him." Then Naomi took the child and laid him on her bosom, and became a nurse to him.

By the way, there's some tremendous truth and parenting in that phrase.

Naomi took the child. Naomi made a decision to accept the child.
She laid him in her lap. She made a decision to love the child.
And cared for him. She made a decision to nurture the child and care for him.

Ruth 4:17 (NKJV)

Also the neighbor women gave him a name, saying, "There is a son born to Naomi." And they called his name Obed. He is the father of Jesse, the father of David.

I'd like to suggest that Naomi's life does not end in bitterness. It takes four generations to pass before it is even understood what God is up to in her life. It is finally through her great grandson that a king named David comes to Israel.

God in all the negatives of life was working out a tapestry, taking a bad and making it into a good. Using the negatives of Naomi's life – the relocation, the death of her husband, the death of her sons to pull through that circumstance, this young Moabite woman Ruth who would marry the older bachelor Boaz to whom would be born a child Obed, whose name meant *Worshiper*. Through whom would come king David.

I think Naomi's story eloquently suggests to us that no matter what season we're going through in life, even if it's a down time, we take occasion to say, *God, I want to find your purposes in this and look for good and for hope. Surely this isn't how ultimately you intend for things to turn out. The sad and bad have occurred but Lord you have a greater plan.*

Now realize that Naomi had to return home for this to happen or she would have missed it all. If she had not come back, Ruth would not have come with her. They would have never met Boaz.

I'm suggesting through this that it may be possible that someone here today is away from home and maybe the relocation which you've gone through is a spiritual relocation.

You have moved away from your home in God. If you want to see God work his perfect purposes in you that last not only through your generation but in the generations to come, return home in Faith.

I think that's what Christian parenting is all about.

I am benefiting from the decisions that were made by my grandparents, a God following grandfather, whom I never met, yet I owe so much to. I have benefited all my life from decisions they made.

Mother's Day is about honoring generational impacts on children. How do we make an impact upon our children and upon our children's children?

When our heart is right with God. If we are at home with him. If his mission and purpose for us is central to our life and ultimately theirs. If we are dead center in the middle of his will, God will work for the good in our life and our children.

Naomi came home and she found God's purpose lived out in her because she was home. If in any way your heart is away from God today let this mother's day be a day in which you come home.

Let us Pray

Father, for this beautiful example of a Godly mother, Naomi we give you thanks. For all the beautiful mothers here today we give you thanks.

Lord, we recognize that some of us may be in the seasons of life where we're going through stress and change and loss and it hurts and we cry... a lot.

*There are sleepless nights and discomfort and a feeling even that you are unaware or you have brought this about,
In spite of how much we pray and we confess there are times we don't see things change overnight. Help us, Lord, in those seasons of life to be true to you and to realize that even when our spirits get a little bitter and out of sync with you, that you have not abandoned us or left us alone to our own purposes but you are walking along with us in life.*

Bringing us home to you, I pray.

Today there are mothers whose hearts ache for children that are away from home. Even though they're grown, they're away from home spiritually. I pray that by the Holy Spirit you would draw each one of us to the home in you today. Lord I pray that you would give to each one of our families a great blessing of unity and togetherness in you.

That where there are difficulties in families, you would help us work through those difficulties so that we might see your purposes being lived out in our lives and beyond us to the next generation. Where there are divisions in families we pray that you would work to heal.

Where there are family members who do not know you, who have not come to personally relationship with you as Lord and savior, we take a moment in our mind as we pray now to identify that family member and ask that you would bring that person home to you.

We pray that we would be your person in all the seasons of life, whether times are good or whether they are bad, whether we're up or down, let us be your person, live out your will in us, Lord Jesus, I pray...Amen.