

God's Hand is Against Me (Part 2)

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Date: 31 May 2020

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- [0 : 0 0] Okay, nobody's sitting on this side today. So if I look this way, who am I talking to?
- Okay, so just so you know. Oh, thank you. Thank you. Oh, good. Bless your hearts. And feel a little more balance. I already had to straighten the cross because it was five degrees off.
- So thank you. Balance is important to me. Not to you, but to me. I'm going to sit in the middle because I showed my giant.
- In 1990, that's a long time ago, isn't it? 1990, God sent me to pastor a church in Illinois in the Midwest.
- I was not a Midwest kind of guy. I grew up in the Bay Area of California, an extremely radically different culture. Okay?
- [1 : 0 3] So I went there and experienced some new unforeseen battles, which led to a shattered dream of mine and deep depression that lasted for 12 years.
- Let me explain some of that in the chapter in my book that happens to deal with Ruth.
- After four years of pastoral ministry in the Midwest, mostly filled with discouragement and depression, God finally released me to leave.
- I had done all I knew to do. I even sought out a biblical counselor who specialized in pastors in crisis. After two full weeks of intense counsel, he confirmed that it was time for me to leave.
- He told me that in 30 years, excuse me, 30 years of counseling, he had only said that one other time. I had addressed and confronted the leadership of the church with the issues I had with them, and there was virtually no response.
- [2 : 1 5] Nothing was going to change. I had agonized in prayer for months about what to do, and finally sensed God saying to me that basically it would take faith to leave when I had nowhere to go.
- It would be a walk of faith to see how God would provide, so I resigned from the church. I wondered if I would ever return to ministry.
- I was so disheartened and disillusioned by the whole experience. I believed I was on the verge of a very deep depression. For now, I felt totally defeated.
- I was stuck in limbo. I had no ministry leads nor employment leads. I found it exceedingly difficult to seek the Lord in word and prayer. I lacked any clear direction or motivation.
- But the deeper issue haunting me seemed to be my character. I felt like I was worse off for the experience. I had less patience, less trust of others.
- [3 : 2 4] I was angry and resentful. Is this what God wanted? I felt like a complete failure in handling all the trials. I beat myself up asking, could I have handled it better?
- What should I have done different? Did I expect too much? I felt like I had gone to the Midwest full of hope and purpose, and had come back empty.

It was God who led me there, and I had come away bitter, angry, and depressed. I had dreams and expectations of fruitful ministry, of being greater use for the master.

And he leads me into a wilderness of what felt like barrenness and being of very little use. God had shattered my dreams of ministry.

How do we recover when dreams are shattered? Even dreams you think are God-given, God-directed, and then he wipes them out.

[4 : 38] How do we recover when it seems like God is actually against you? When you are full and going forward, and then now you are empty, broken, shattered.

What is God's purpose in all of this? I asked this for years. What was your purpose in that? Where was God in Naomi's tragedy?

She certainly is venting the same kind of feelings. Where is God? When life becomes bitter, how do we heal from this?

What perspective can we take? Are there things such as chance, luck, fate, coincidence, karma?

Do things just happen for no reason? Apart from God's sovereign will?

[5 : 46] Here's what the scriptures say. From him, and through him, and to him, are some things.

No. All things. All things. In Proverbs, it says, the Lord has made everything for its own purpose, even the wicked, for the day of evil.

Isaiah says, I am the Lord. There is no other. The one forming light and creating darkness. causing well-being and creating calamity.

Oh, calamity is not from the Lord. Evil is not from the Lord. God just said, I create well-being and calamity. I am the Lord who does all these things.

If calamity is from the Lord, what do we do with this? Is God really God?

[6 : 54] Is God really sovereign? Does God just allow things to happen or does God intend for things to happen? What's your view of God? Are you as serious about God as Naomi was?

Naomi took God serious. She was a believer, but she was an angry believer. God has done this. God has done this. God has done this.

So we come to chapter one of Ruth, first act. We see Naomi's ruin, her shattered dreams. How is God working behind the scenes?

Last time we looked at the five gloomy shadows of providence in the first five verses. We see there's economic depression, a famine, no food, no work that led to a forced relocation.

They're uprooted. They go to another land where there is food. They go to Moab, an unknown place, unknown people, new situation. Verse three tells us when they're there, suddenly Naomi's husband dies, Elimelech.

[8 : 06] they remarry, or not remarry, they marry foreign wives, Moabite women. So there's some hope. She's not lost everything.

She's lost her husband, but she has two sons and now she has two daughter-in-laws and there's hope of family, children. This will bring things back. And then we're told suddenly in verse five that after about ten years, both of her sons died.

Died. A loss compounded. Both sons. Now she's lost everything. Now she's alone. And she's bereaved, left without.

She's deprived, literally, of her two sons and her husband. God has taken them away. God determines when we live, when we die, how long we live.

God has taken these sons. What is her view? How did it impact her? We see it. We will see it today in verse 13.

[9 : 13] It is exceedingly bitter to me for your sake that the hand of the Lord has gone against me. And then as she comes home to Bethlehem in verse 20, she says, It's God who has made me bitter.

Shaddai has deprived me, emptied me, shattered me. So, that's the scene.

That's the setup. Now we come to scene two and three of the first act. Scene two being verses six through 18.

The journey. On the journey back to Jerusalem and the dialogues that happen there. And then the final scene, verses 19 to 22, which is their arrival in Bethlehem and how they're greeted and the dialogue, again, that happens there.

One of the best things about this story is that the author has created the drama by giving us dialogues. He doesn't tell us how she felt. We get to hear her from her.

[10 : 17] We get to hear how they felt and what their emotions were and what they wanted and what they didn't want through the dialogue. So it makes it very real.

And so in these second and third scenes here in chapter one, we get two glimpses into sovereign grace behind the darkness.

They're on a journey. The word return happens 12 times in these verses. The word walk happens eight times. So they're on this journey. They're on this walk.

And how does God work for us even when it seems like he's working against us? When times are dark, when times are gloomy, when times are just downright hurtful and painful, how do we see God?

What is God doing even that we can't see right away? Well, this chapter gives us two answers. One answer comes on the journey.

[11 : 24] One answer comes when they arrive at Bethlehem. So let's take each of those answers in its place. So the first answer in verses six to 18 is what we see in Ruth is that God is drawing out genuine faith.

Through this tragedy, God is drawing out faith. And it's remarkable faith as we look at what Ruth chooses. Why would anyone choose what Ruth has chosen?

It's absolutely extraordinary. It's a true conversion. So let's see how this progresses. There's three dialogues here.

The first dialogue, verses eight through ten. They start on their journey. They come to a crossroads and Naomi stops them in verse eight and begins to implore and appeal to them to go return to their own homes.

Go back to Moab. Go back to your mothers. daughters. She says to her daughters-in-law, Go return each of you to your mother's house. That's interesting because usually you talk about go to your father's house.

[12 : 34] She's talking about go to your mother's house because that's where the wedding plans go. Mom plans the weddings. So go back to your mother's house because she's concerned that they remarry.

Look at what she says. May the Lord... Now look at what... She's blessing them, praying for them. May the Lord deal kindly with you as you have dealt with the dead and with me.

As you have dealt with my sons who died and you have dealt with me. May God deal with you in kind. Verse nine. May the Lord grant you that you may find rest.

Where? Each of you in the house of her husband. See, I want you to go get remarried. Your best opportunity for that is back home. That's where your connections are.

Your mother will set you back up. She'll handle it. I go back. Then she kissed them and they lifted their voices and wept.

[13 : 30] They wept because they're parting and they did love each other. They did have affection for one another. They'd been together 10 years. And they had shared the same grief.

And now Naomi's thinking of them. Go. Go. Go. That's your opportunity. And what's their response?

Verse 10. They said to her, No. No. We will return with you to your people. No. We love you. We want to go with you. No.

So, second dialogue, verse 11. Naomi's got to crank it up a little bit here. She says to them, Turn back, my daughters.

Now she's going to reason with them. Why? Why would you want to go with me? Why? Have I yet sins in my womb that they may become your husbands?

[14 : 37] Are you going to wait? Turn back, my daughters. Go your way. I'm too old to have a husband. If I should say I have hope. I don't have hope. But if I said I had hope, and I even had a husband right now, and should bear sons, would you still wait till they're grown?

Come on. That's going to take too long. It's not going to happen. It's unreasonable. It's insensible. It's impractical. It's impossible. What are you thinking?

Don't. Would you refrain from marrying? No, my daughters. Here comes the real emotion. For it is exceedingly bitter to me, for your sake, that the hand of the Lord has gone against me.

See, it's one thing for God to embitter my life, but it's affecting you too. It's coming out on you. And I don't want you to keep being burdened and bittered and saddened because you're hanging on to me.

Go back and find some happiness. Go while you still have a chance. Don't come with me. There's no hope with me. I got nothing. I got nothing.

[15 : 51] So go. Make the sensible choice. Do what's reasonable. Do what's safe. Do what's practical. Do what's practical. Do what's better.

Then we come to the third dialogue. Well, we come to their response then in verse 14. Then they lifted up their voices and wept again. Very emotional at this point. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law and apparently left because we get that in the next verse.

So one decides to go. One is persuaded. Okay, I'll go back home. But Ruth. Ruth clung to her. Clung to her.

Holding tight to her. Not gonna go. So third dialogue. Verse 15. Naomi says to Ruth now.

See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods. Return after your sister-in-law. Be reasonable, Ruth. This is better for you. This is sensible. This is safe for you.

[16 : 56] I want your happiness. Go. By the way, I think there's more than Naomi. I think genuinely wants happiness for her daughters-in-law because she loves them. But I think, too, there's part of her that just wants to be alone.

I think she just wants to be alone. I don't want anyone going with me. And them coming with her will increase her bitterness. It will increase her burden.

That's just part of our mixed motives as human beings. We do things out of love, but there's some self-interest always in there, too, isn't there? Maybe I'm too corrupted, and I'm reading that into poor Naomi, but I think by the way she talks, there's a little bit of something else going on.

By the way, I love the way she talks. She is honest. She is. I love that. That goes with our theme for worship today. We're coming to the house of the Lord.

We're sending up to the... And the first thing we ask for is, Lord, deliver us from deceitfulness. Give us a true tongue. Give us... Take us away from lying so we can come honestly to talk to you. Not fake.

[18 : 03] Not pretense. Yes. Well, Naomi is all real. So she says to Ruth, verse 15, your sister's gone back.

You should go back. What's Ruth's response? And the following verses are some of the most beautiful, poetic words in the whole Bible.

There are words that often get used at weddings. You know, they kind of end with the till death do us part picture even too there.

Where you go, I will go. And so this is Ruth. Ruth, first of all, Ruth commands her and says, do not urge me to leave you or to return from following.

She stands up and fights back. No. Don't tell me to go. Don't make me return from following you.

[19 : 03] And then comes these beautiful words. Where you go, I will go. Where you lodge, wherever you live, I will live too.

And it gets deeper than that. Your people shall be my people. I'm adopting your people. I'm renouncing my people and I would adopt your people. It all goes further than that.

Not just your people, my people, but your God. Your God. My God. Which is remarkable because she knows about this God. Your God, my God.

No longer will my God be Kamesh. My God will be Yahweh. Yahweh. Elshaddai. The one God.

Where you die, I will die. See, she's not just committing herself to Naomi. As long as you live, Naomi, I'm with you. Till death do us part. No, watch.

[20 : 07] She goes beyond that. No, where you die, I will die. There I will be buried. I will be buried there. It's till my death. Not just to your death, but to my death. I will be buried.

I'm committed for life. May the Lord. Then she invokes an oath. An oath or an oath. Both are strong. And she uses the word Yahweh.

Now she's using the word. Not just saying you're God, but Yahweh. May Yahweh do so to me and more if anything but death parts me from you.

And when Naomi saw that she was determined to go, she said, no more. So what a remarkable choice that Ruth makes.

It's an impractical choice. It's an insensible choice. Some would say it's a foolish choice. Why wouldn't you go back where you can have happiness and life and have a dream?

[21 : 10] Why? Why would you renounce your whole culture and your people and your gods and choose this God? By the way, names mean something in this book.

Because Naomi makes a big deal about her name. Don't call me Naomi. Pleasant. Lovely. Don't call me that anymore. Call me Marah. Bitter. So what's the meaning of Ruth's name?

She's a very important character in this. What's her name mean? Remember, Naomi's husband's name meant Elimelech. God, my king. Eli, my God.

Malek, king. So in the time of no kings, he's named God as my king. I don't need a human king. So what's Ruth's name mean? Friendship.

Friendship. What does friendship look like? What do you think a friend is? How would you define friend? Where you go, I will go. Where you live, I will live.

[22 : 13] Your people, my people. Your God, my God. I will never leave you. A friend sticks closer than a brother. A friend is loyal.

A friend is committed. A friend, that's the kind of friend I want. I remember when I was going through some tough times here at Little Log earlier, early in the ministry.

I had a friend. I said, I'm your friend, but I can't watch you go through this hard stuff. I'm going to leave. I said, then you're not my friend. No, I'm your friend.

I just can't watch it. Well, then you're not my friend. If you're my friend, you hang in here and back me up. See, what's a friend?

But here's the more important question. Ruth makes these statements. She makes this grand commitment. She's all in. There's one question that's not answered.

[23 : 11] Why? Why? Why would she renounce all? Why would she convert? And here's the \$100,000 question.

Why would she convert to a God who brings bitterness into lives? Why would she commit to be with a woman who's bankrupt and bitter and angry and...

Because that's not fun to be around. Yes, she loves her. There's no doubt she loves Naomi. She understands. She's sympathetic. But why commit to a God who, by Naomi's own admission, has caused my bitterness?

Whose hand is against me? Why? Because she was drawn. You say, well, how?

Now I want you to remember who this family is. Who is this family? Who is a limelight? Well, he's an Israelite.

[24 : 22] Okay. Yeah, he's an Israelite. Where does he live? Bethlehem. Okay, Bethlehem. Where's Bethlehem? What land is that? Judah. Judah. Okay, that name goes pretty far back. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Oh, these are Israelites. So they're descendants of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and Joseph. Judah. And Judah, who is of the tribe that our Messiah comes from.

So she, for 10 years, sat in that family and heard the stories of Abraham. How God had promised to Abraham a son, but Abraham waited, hello?

25 years for that promise. But God kept his promise. God promised to Isaac 20 years. Promised to Jacob another 20 years of suffering and then fulfillment.

And then to Joseph another 20 years of suffering and then fulfillment. But God kept his promise. And then she would have heard of Moses and the Exodus and the Passover. How they had suffered for 400 years.

[25 : 26] And then God kept his promise and delivered them with resounding victory over the gods of Egypt. Then she would have heard of Joshua. Joshua and the conquering of the land.

Again, God triumphing over other foreign gods. Making them look like nothing. So this is the context into which Ruth converts.

She has heard the stories. She's heard, yes, this is a God who is all powerful. This is a God who keeps his promises.

Yes, sometimes those promises aren't on our time frame. And yes, sometimes that means going through hardship. But this is a real God who keeps his promises. And loves his people.

And we're going to see proves that again. Ruth, in this remarkable decision to follow Naomi and to convert to Naomi's people and to Naomi's God.

[26 : 30] Her radical choice, extraordinary choice, foreshadows what real discipleship is. It's the kind of calling Jesus asks us to make when we follow him.

Jesus does not ask us to come and follow on the easy road. He calls us to come on a narrow road. He calls us to come and deny ourselves and take our cross along.

Here's what Jesus says in Luke 14. If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.

What does he mean? Hate. It doesn't really mean. Because we know he talks about you should still honor your father and your mother. But he's talking about comparatively. Comparatively.

Yeah, you love your family. But in comparison to me, it'll look like you hate them compared to how much you follow me. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.

[27 : 29] And see, as Christians, we follow Jesus. We make the same kind of choice that Ruth made. Where you go, Jesus, I go. Wherever you live, Jesus, I live. Your people.

My people. Wait a minute. Did we make that commitment? When we turn to the Lord? I mean, I commit to Jesus. You and me, Jesus. But wait a minute.

Your people, my people? Your father, my father? Yeah. Same kind of choice. Ruth makes the choice to serve Yahweh.

To seek refuge under his wings. As Boaz will interpret her conversion in the next chapter. Ruth would agree with Joshua who said, If it is evil in your eyes to serve the Lord, Choose this day whom you will serve.

Whether the gods of your fathers, your father served in the region beyond the river, Egypt, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.

[28 : 30] We make a choice to follow Him. So how is God working when it seems like He's against us? First of all, He draws out genuine faith. He draws out genuine faith.

He brings people to faith. In the midst of the darkness. Second answer. As we come to the third scene of Act 1, verses 19 to 22.

Now they're arriving in Jerusalem. There's more questions. There's more dialogue. We see Ruth stand out in the first, in the second scene.

Now we see Naomi stand out in this final scene. And the second answer is the same answer we came up with last week in terms of difficulty.

And it's this, that in every dark providence, God will prove Himself good. In every dark providence, in every dark shadow of God's dealings, He will prove Himself good.

[29 : 37] Last week we looked at this more generally, that the end of the story, God shows His goodness. As Naomi is deprived of her two sons, but in her place she's given Ruth, who is better than seven sons.

And she becomes in the line of David. But I want to unpack that a little bit more because even here at the beginning, we already see that God's at work. There's already glimpses that God's at work, even in the middle of the dark time.

So it begins in verse 19. So the two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem. And when they came to Bethlehem, something about Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them.

And the women said, Is this Naomi? Now it's interesting that the women are stirred. The whole house, whole city is stirred. There's an uproar.

There's a buzz. And they are stirred. They recognize Naomi. It's been over 10 years since they've seen her.

[30 : 45] We know that she was there in Moab at least 10 years when the sons took wives, but they were there a little bit before that. And so they say, Is this Naomi?

And notice her complaint right away. She said to them, Do not call me Naomi, pleasant. Call me Marah, bitter.

For the Lord, for the Almighty has dealt bitterly with me. I have a life of bitterness. I went away full, and the Lord brought me back empty. Now I'm empty. I went out full.

In other words, I had all that I needed. I was living the dream. Now, Naomi didn't have a big dream. She had a little dream. She didn't really want a lot. She just wanted family. A husband, sons, some grandkids.

That was her idea of full. I went out full. I had my husband. I had my sons. But then I came back empty.

[31 : 47] My dreams were shattered. And actually, that's the word a little bit later into verse 21, where she says, The Almighty has brought calamity upon me.

That word calamity literally means to be shattered. He shattered me. My dreams are shattered. I'm afflicted. Now I'm a widow without any children and without any hope.

But note the cause. What does she blame for her bitterness? The cause. And please note, there's no false piety here.

There's no nice saying the right words in front of other believers. Oh, Naomi, how you doing? I'm okay. I'm okay. I'm hanging in there.

Oh, no problem. You know, it's gone through a little bit. You know, but I'm okay. None of the false piety from Naomi here. It is bitterness. She gives full vent to her despair.

[32 : 50] She pours out her soul. And what's the cause? It is Shaddai. End of verse 20. Shaddai, Almighty, has dealt very bitterly with me.

It is Yahweh. It is the Lord has brought me back empty. The Lord has testified against me and Shaddai has brought affliction or shattering into my life.

The cause of my bitterness is the Lord. The cause of my emptiness is the Lord. The cause of my shattered dreams is the Lord. God is responsible for this.

He took me out. He brought the famine. He caused us to be uprooted. He caused us to move. He caused my husband to die. He caused my sons to die.

God is the cause of my deprivation and my bitterness. He is Shaddai. He is all powerful. He has power over all.

[33 : 53] That's what sovereign means. Reign, rule, sov, over all. All, all reigning, all powerful, not some powerful.

All. Is your God really God or is he something less? Does he have all power or just some power?

If God is God, he does as he will. Now, Naomi is not the first one to blame God for hardship and bitterness in their life.

Abraham did it. Job did it. Well, one of the most striking ones is the prophet Jeremiah. I want you to hear how he puts it.

and it's in a book that he calls Lamentations. A book that he calls bitter mornings. Just wanted to write down a few thoughts about how horrible my life is.

[35 : 01] Jeremiah, the holy prophet of God. Here's what he said in chapter three of Lamentations. I am the man who has seen affliction under the rod of his wrath.

He has driven and brought me into darkness without any light. Surely against me he turns his hand just like what Naomi said. His hand is against me again and again the whole day long.

He has made my flesh and my skin waste away. He has broken my bones. He has besieged and enveloped me with bitterness and tribulation. He has made me dwell in darkness like the dead of long ago.

He has walked me about so that I cannot escape. He has made my chains heavy. This is Yahweh, Jeremiah, the prophet is talking about.

Though I call and cry for help he shuts out my prayer. He has blocked my ways with blocks of stones. He has made my paths crooked. He has filled me with bitterness.

[36 : 07] He has sated me with wormwood. He has made my teeth grind on gravel and made me cower in ashes. My soul is bereft of peace. I have forgotten what happiness is.

You've been that discouraged? I even forget what happiness is. I don't even remember the last time I knew what that was. so I say my endurance has perished.

I'm done. And so has my hope perished from the Lord. And then two verses later this is what Jeremiah writes. But this I call to mind and therefore I have hope.

What? This I call to mind and therefore I have hope. The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. His mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning.

Great is your faithfulness. The Lord is good to those who wait for him. To the soul who seeks him.

[37 : 19] It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord. Oh my gosh. God how does Jeremiah take that perspective after he's just written for 20 some odd verses about how bad his life is and how God has done it all.

And then he can still say but this I call to mind. See it's a mind change. It's not a soul change. The soul if you follow your soul not good.

Mind. This I call to mind. I remember. No, no, no, no, no. He has promised. My steadfast love never ceases. Even in the darkness you can't see me but I'm there.

My mercy's still there. You don't see it but my mercy's still there. Do you believe me? Do you trust me? I will never leave you or forsake you. Do you believe that? I don't feel you. It doesn't matter what you feel.

Do you trust? Do you believe? Do you take my word seriously? And this is Naomi's issue too in verse 22.

[38 : 32] She has come back bitter, angry, hurt, broken and she can't see any good. She can't see any good.

I'm alone. Is she really alone? I'm alone. I'm bereaved. I'm nothing. Look at how the author puts it in the last verse.

Just very simply. So Naomi returned and Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law, with her. With her.

Is she alone? Is she empty? No. She has something that the Lord has given her that is precious. She has a woman of excellence.

She has a woman who is a real friend. She has someone who will not abandon her, not forsake her. Someone, dare I say, like Jesus, who loves her and committed to her to death.

[39 : 35] who the women of Bethlehem will say at the end, you lost two sons, but man, she's better than seven sons.

She puts them to. She can't see it, though. She's so bitter, she can't see anything. She's too absorbed in her pain.

Have you ever been there? Been so absorbed in your pain that you can't see any good? I've been there. I have been there. I get that. Especially in depression, you kind of whirlwind down, down, down, down, down.

The more you're miserable, the more you think about your misery, and it gets more miserable. It's just a never ending, and you can't see anything. And then the other hint, the very last line of verse 22, here's the other hint, that God is working behind the scenes.

Not only does she come back not empty, not alone, but notice the timing when they came to Bethlehem, which by the way, Bethlehem means house, Beth, Lachem, bread, the house of bread.

[40 : 45] And so when the famine came to Bethlehem, the house was empty. now God's restocked the house of bread. So they come back when?

At the beginning of barley harvest. Just so happened that they came right at the beginning of barley harvest, which will be followed by the wheat harvest.

God has refed the people. We heard the whole reason she returned in verse 6 was that the Lord had visited, look at the way he puts that. The Lord had visited, he came and visited his people and gave them bread.

It's been dry now. Here comes some bread, here comes some mercy, just when you needed it. And he brings back Ruth and Naomi to Bethlehem right at the beginning of harvest, so that they're not going to miss any of the harvest.

And we're going to see in the next chapter Ruth, being the excellent woman that she is, she'll go out and get some work, she'll go out and work in the field and she'll just so happen, just so happen to go into a field that just so happens belong to Boaz, who just so happens to be Elimelech's relative and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.

[42 : 02] And I think the writer is just smiling as he puts this, just happened. As we read it, we go, no, no, that's not a just so happen, that's not karma, that's not luck, that's, I see there's Yahweh behind it.

So in dark times we see glimpses of God's grace. Do you see it when you're in dark times? Do you see it? Now I start to look for it. Now I start to look for it, for glimmers.

It might be a person, like a Ruth, might be a person. Could be just an event where the cash you needed just happens to come in when you need it.

You know, something like that. Or the doctor's appointment takes a little twist and it's like, oh, I can breathe again. I don't know. There's things, little glimmers of hope that happen.

For me, in my depression, I came to Little Log Church and you know what? you people were that glimmer of hope. Because I could be real and honest about my depression and I was not rejected.

[43 : 18] I was not put down. I was not, I even offered to the elders at the time to withdraw if they felt I was unfit. And they said, no, brother, no, let us pray with you.

Let us, and the people here in Little Log were like that. The men in the men's group were like that. They said, no, let's pray with you. Let's walk with you. You know what kind of kindness that is?

Because if I had been rejected, I won't go there. I don't know. When God shatters our dreams, he will replace them with his own vision, his own purposes.

Naomi lost two sons. God replaced them with a woman who loved her and is better than seven sons. We learn in these times that it's not about us, it's about him.

his purposes are bigger than ours. So I mentioned that my dream was shattered at the beginning of the message. My dream, which I thought was a good dream at the time.

[44 : 17] I thought that's where God was leading me, to a bigger ministry. My dream was really about me and what I hoped to do. His purpose is about something bigger than that, bigger than me.

It involves more people than just me. It looks much different than I imagined. For me, the dream was about a bigger ministry, a greater impact for God, preaching in bigger venues, being recognized as a, oh, he's a good preacher, which made me look important and significant.

For God, it wasn't the plan. It really wasn't about me. Imagine that. For God, it was about through my humbling, depression, others, in pain, could be comforted.

It was about a deeper faith, learning obedience through suffering, which could speak more powerfully to others who suffer because it has credibility and transparency. Sharing about my depression does not make me look good.

It makes God look good. And in the end, that's what matters most. It shows that God is bigger than our experience of depression, that he is still working in our lives, that he has a purpose for our times of darkness and depression, that he will work through us for his glory.

[45 : 42] Larry Crabb, who wrote the very helpful book, Shattered Dreams, God's Unexpected Path to Joy, which kind of was loosely based on the story of Ruth, writes this.

Shattered dreams open the door to better dreams. dreams that we do not properly value until the dreams that we improperly value are destroyed.

Shattered dreams destroy false expectations, such as the victorious Christian life with no real struggle or failure. They help us discover true hope.

We need the help of shattered dreams to put us in touch with what we long for most, to create a heartfelt appetite for better dreams.

And living for the better dreams generates a new, unfamiliar feeling that we eventually recognize as joy. Joy. Oh, that's what joy is.

[46 : 42] Oh, that's what joy is. It's not happiness. It's joy. It's much deeper, much more profound, much more soul-felt. That's another message.

In every dark providence, God will prove himself good. Let us pray. Father, we thank you for your word.

I thank you, Lord, that you write, or you have your word written in such a way that it's so real. So even in the raw emotions, we see it, feel it, and can identify.

And we see people like Naomi who are real people, just like us. No false piety, just raw and real. And it draws us in because we can, we felt the same kind of thing.

And we want the same kind of healing that she gets. And so, Father, in these weeks to come, give us eyes to see that you do work behind the scenes, that you are continually giving new kindnesses every day.

[47 : 51] Help us to have the eyes to see it and the faith to endure. We pray in Christ's name. Amen. Amen.