



The very title of the book of Ruth often makes us consider her the main character, but sometimes I wonder if it isn't actually Naomi. The story begins with Naomi's family leaving the land of Judah to sojourn in Moab during a famine. Then, Naomi's husband, Elimelech, dies. Their two sons marry Moabite women, then Naomi's two sons die.

Imagine Naomi's grief. She is far away from home. Her husband has died. Her sons have died. Yet, she wants to care for her two daughters-in-law, to do right by them, so she seeks to send them back to their own families in Moab who will be able to provide for them far better than she will. Orpah goes, but Ruth refuses to be parted from Naomi. So, Naomi takes Ruth back with her to the land of Judah.

I am struck by Naomi's pain when she tells the people of Bethlehem to no longer call her Naomi (which means pleasant or delightful), but to call her Mara (which means bitter). Naomi says that she left the land of Judah full and has returned to it empty. Consider that. Naomi's family leaves because of a famine, yet that time was a time of fullness and abundance to her because she had her family. Now, she returns and there is plenty of food, but her family is depleted.

In Judah, Naomi remains responsible to her daughter-in-law Ruth. She must find a way to care for her, and in that culture and context, finding Ruth a fitting husband was the most appropriate way to ensure Ruth's care.

Ruth goes to pick up the scraps from the barley harvest and meets Boaz. Naomi hears of this and works to secure the marriage of Ruth and Boaz, for he is in a unique position to redeem and repossess the ancestral land of Naomi's family since he is a close relative.

Naomi closes out the story with a grandson on her lap, a baby boy whose own grandson will be King David.

Sometimes in life, we feel empty like Naomi did. Sometimes the roles and responsibilities we love are taken away from us. Sometimes things change, and those transitions are always difficult.

In the midst of such transitions it is almost impossible to see what God is up to. We might feel hurt, confused, angry, or like Naomi—bitter. But God has a way of calling us into something new, into new relationships, new responsibilities, new roles. For Naomi, that was being the nurse to her grandson Obed. What a delight and joy! And from Obed comes an unparalleled dynasty. Among Obed's descendants are King David, King Solomon, and the King of Kings: Jesus.

If you are going through a transition or you can see one on the horizon, remember that God has a longer view in mind. It is okay now to grieve, to be upset, to cry or yell or lament. But remember Naomi, and how God turns bitterness into delight again.