

Ruth 1:19-22

The Bitter Road to Recovery

Just like eating bitter food leaves a bitter taste in your mouth, enduring bitter circumstances can leave a lasting impression that may take time to recover from. During the time of recovery, we will be tempted to allow the bitterness of life to cause us to become bitter in spirit. While the road to recovery may be bitter, but we do not have to be.

I. The City's _____ (*Ruth 1:19*)

- The danger that Elimelech feared was not as great as he thought. We must never allow _____ to control our lives. (*2 Timothy 1:7*)
- There is suffering in life, and enduring that suffering is one way that we identify with the _____ who suffered for us. (*1 Peter 2:20-21*)
- If God sends a trial your way, don't look for a way of _____. Walk through it with the Lord and you will come out better for it.

II. Naomi's _____ (*Ruth 1:20-22*)

- The first step that Naomi took was _____ the circumstances that she had been through, to herself and others. (*Exodus 15:23*)
- Naomi also took the step of _____ God in her trial, but not as positively as she should have. (*Job 1:21; Genesis 50:20*)
- Naomi also revealed that she had _____ her perspective on life as a result of her trials. (*Proverbs 3:5-6; Psalms 37:23*)
- Naomi _____ God's rebuke. A rebuke is when the truth is delivered to a situation that needs to change. (*Hebrews 12:6*)
- Naomi _____ that God had broken her. (*Psalms 34:18; Psalms 51:17; James 4:6*)

III. Our _____

- But even though life can be _____ that does not mean we have to be bitter. (*James 1:2; John 16:33; Hebrews 12:15*)
- Bitterness is a spiritual _____ that harms the person infected and the people around them.
- How do we cure bitterness? First, we must accept our responsibility to make right _____ in response to bitter circumstances.
- We must then acknowledge the sovereign _____ of God. (*Genesis 50:20*)
- If there is sin in our life, then we must accept God's rebuke and _____.
- Finally, we must walk in _____ submission.

Conclusion

Naomi endured over a decade of hardship, so it is no wonder that she did not recover fully overnight. The road to recovery is sometimes bitter, but by making right choices and taking the right steps, the child of God can recover their spiritual strength and return to the place where they can _____ in God's blessing. The road to recover may be bitter, but we do not have to be.

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There are lots of things about the human body that are amazing. Take for instance, the taste buds. Your body takes particles that dissolve in your saliva and translates their substance into a sensation when they contact and contact particular cells on tongue. Your brain recognizes those tastes as sweet, salty, bitter, sour or savory. Some people lose their taste when they get certain sicknesses or as a side affect of certain treatments. Eating would not be nearly as enjoyable if we didn't have taste buds.

More importantly, think of how much danger we would be in if we didn't have taste buds. Your ability to taste things gives you warning before you ingest something. If something tastes bad to you, generally it is because it is bad for you. Not all food follows that rule, but many do. There is one particular taste that is a big warning sign and that is bitterness. "Bitterness is the most sensitive of the tastes, and is perceived by many to be unpleasant, sharp, or disagreeable. The ability to detect bitter-tasting, toxic compounds at low thresholds is considered to provide an important protective function." God designed us so that most things that are toxic to us taste bitter to us. It is the sensation of bitterness that causes us to stop eating or drinking what is not good for us and then avoid it.

There are going to be many times in your life when encounter circumstances that are unpleasant and disagreeable to you. They might range from merely uncomfortable to debilitatingly painful. Your instinct will be to get out of those situations as soon as possible and avoid any like them in the future.

But just like eating bitter food leaves a bitter taste in your mouth, enduring bitter circumstances can leave a lasting impression that may take time to recover from. The pain of trials does not instantly disappear when the trial is technically over. During the time of recovery, we will be tempted to allow the bitterness of life to cause us to become bitter in spirit. We can become bitter against others for what they have done to us. We can become bitter against ourselves in the form of consuming regrets and self loathing. And, most dangerous of all, we can become bitter against God who allowed use to experience a bitter trial. The road to recovery may be bitter, but we do not have to be.

I. The City's Shock

Ruth 1:19 So they two went until they came to Bethlehem. And it came to pass, when they were come to Bethlehem, that all the city was moved about them, and they said, Is this Naomi?

Ruth made her choice to stay with Naomi and to place her faith in the Lord. When they arrived back in Bethlehem, the town immediately responded with shock and amazement. The word translated "moved" means, "to distract, ring again, make a (great) noise, murmur, roar, discomfit." Bethlehem was not a large town, but it is still noteworthy that Naomi's arrival made such an impact. We do not know what positions her husband or she had before they left, but it is apparent that she had some measure of fame and notoriety for her return to be front page news.

We must not overlook another important detail. All these people that greeted her when she came back were still in the city where they had been ten years prior. They didn't die in the famine and they didn't pack their bags and move away into the heathen lands. They stayed where God wanted them to and God met their needs. The danger that Elimelech feared was not as great as he thought. We must never allow fear to control our lives.

2 Timothy 1:7 For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.

This sets up an important contrast between Naomi and the residents of Bethlehem. Naomi had such a hard time over the last decade that it seems her old friends barely recognized her. They said, "Is This Naomi?" That word "they" is feminine. It was the ladies that were asking this question, the ladies whom Naomi had no doubt spent much time with, and they are now shocked at how Naomi had changed. There was no denying that she has seen some hard times.

We cannot deny that Naomi had been through hard times. She lived in Moab for a decade, lost her husband and two sons, and is now returning to her home where there is nothing but uncertainty for her future. We should not deny our hard times either. In our pride we might try to pretend like things don't hurt or put up a facade to give the illusion that we are so spiritual that trials don't affect us. We shut ourselves off from the grace of God when we do that. There is suffering in life, and enduring that suffering is one way that we identify with the Savior who suffered for us.

1 Peter 2:20-21 For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. [21] For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps:

There were are the people that stayed put and endured the famine shocked at how bad Naomi looked, the one who left with her husband to try and escape the difficult circumstances. This is another example of the truth that trusting yourself always has bad consequences but trusting God always results in blessing. If God sends a trial your way, don't look for a way of escape. Walk through it with the Lord and you will come out better for it.

II. Naomi's Summary

Ruth 1:20-22 And she said unto them, Call me not Naomi, call me Mara: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. [21] I went out full, and the LORD hath brought me home again empty: why then call ye me Naomi, seeing the LORD hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me? [22] So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter in law, with her, which returned out of the country of Moab: and they came to Bethlehem in the beginning of barley harvest.

Naomi had a long road of recovery to travel, both literally and figuratively. There are several indicators that she had been deeply affected by her trials and she had not regained her full spiritual strength. She made a good decision to return to Bethlehem, but only a continued series of right choices would take her all the way back to where she needed to be in her relationship with God. In these verses we see some of the steps and missteps that she took on the road to recovery.

The first step that she took was admitting the circumstances that she had been through, to herself and others. When the ladies of the town addressed her by her proper name, she asked them not to call her "Naomi" but "Mara." The Name Naomi means "sweet, pleasant." The name "Mara" means "bitter." (see Exodus 15:23) In this request of a name change Naomi was recognizing how much her life has changed since she left Bethlehem. When she left, she felt like her life was sweet and pleasant, but now she can no longer say that. She feels like her life had been and still is unpleasant and disagreeable.

She also took the step of acknowledging God in her trial, but not as positively as she should have. She states at the end of verse twenty that "the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me." In this statement, she is recognizing the providence of God in the matter, but fails to acknowledge God's hand of protection on her life. She blames God for her trial, but doesn't bless God for it.

Blessing God for trials is a mark of spiritual maturity. It takes a lot of spiritual strength to acknowledge both the sovereignty of God in our trials and the goodness of God through our trials. Thankfully, we have encouraging examples in scripture of people who were able to do just that.

Job 1:21 And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.

Genesis 50:20 But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.

You must realize that God is the one who is in control of your life and even when other people make bad decisions that affect you in a God way, God is the one who has allowed it and will protect you through it. He wants to use the situation to make you better.

Naomi also revealed that she had adjusted her perspective on life as a result of her trials. In verse twenty one she states that she "went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty." She does acknowledge that it was God who brought her home, but she is still struggling with intense sorrow. She left with a husband and two sons and she came back with just one daughter-in-law and the memory of three funerals. Her husband thought that they were empty and they needed to go to Moab to get filled up. Now Naomi recognizes that when they left they were really full because they had the things in life that were most important. She had the family whom she loved. She had the people of God of whom she was a part. She had God whom she served. She had the knowledge of being in God's will. All of these things are more important than the feeling of security, but they were given up in a vain effort to guarantee a less troublesome future.

How we view God determines how we view everything else. And since we are sinful creatures, our view of God is in constant need of adjustment. God uses trials to teach us more about Himself and ourselves so that our perspective can be adjusted accordingly to come in line with the truth. This is why we must trust God and not ourselves. We can be wrong about anything, but God is right about everything.

Proverbs 3:5-6 Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. (6) In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.

Psalms 37:23 The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way. (24) Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the LORD upholdeth him with his hand.

One other very important step that Naomi took on her road to recover was to accept God's rebuke. She said "the LORD hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me." The word testify has the idea of a witness on a stand, giving his testimony before a jury. Matthew Henry said of this concept, "When God corrects us he testifies against us and contends with us." (see Job 10:17) God had testified to Naomi that she was in the wrong place and needed to go back home. She accepted that truth.

A rebuke is when the truth is delivered to a situation that needs to change. Sometimes it is harsh and sometimes it is gentle, depending on the severity of the sin and the urgency needed to correct it. But loving rebuke is one of the best things we can receive because it gives us the opportunity to correct what is wrong in our lives so that we can be right with God. God rebukes us because He loves us.

Hebrews 12:6 For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.

Naomi went on to say, "the Almighty hath afflicted me." That word afflicted can carry the idea of being broken. She was admitting that God had broken her. We sometimes pride ourselves on being independent and self-willed, but what God wants from us is brokenness and humility.

Psalms 34:18 The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.

Psalms 51:17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.

Sometimes God allows these hard times to bring us to a place of brokenness so that he might draw us closer to Himself. "But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble." (James 4:6) When we see trials in this light, it is truly a

remarkable thing. To think that the God of the universe would love us so much to orchestrate a series of complex circumstances involving an untold number of people and elements just so that our pride can be broken down and He can be closer to us. God loves us that much.

It is evident that though Naomi was on the road to recovery, she was still stumbling along the way. She had not fully healed. Her faith was still weak in some areas. But God's grace was going to continue to work in her life and soon she would rejoice again at the blessings of God.

III. Our Situations

You are going to be hurt by bitter circumstances, the trials and hardships that come from living in a world affected by sin. But even though life can be bitter that does not mean we have to be bitter.

James 1:2 My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations;

John 16:33 These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.

Whether you will recover and be better as a result of trials or become a bitter, unpleasant, miserable person all depends on how you respond to hardships. There is a great danger in becoming a bitter person, because a bitter spirit doesn't just hurt you. It hurts you and it hurts those close to you.

Hebrews 12:15 Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled;

The word "defiled" has the idea of infected. Bitterness is a spiritual infection that harms the person infected and the people around them. How do we diagnose personal bitterness? Evaluate how you view people and circumstances. If you are often angry towards a person for a wrong they have done and are unwilling to truly forgive, that is bitterness. If you, like Naomi, can only talk about the bad things that happened and not mention the good that God has done, then you are bitter about it. If you blame God and don't bless God, then you are bitter. If you focus on the bad and ignore the good in life, then you are bitter. And like any infection, if it is not treated, it will continue to get worse until it consumes you.

How do we cure bitterness? First, we must accept our responsibility to make right choices in response to bitter circumstances. What we think, say, and do is up to us. No tragedy is a legitimate excuse to sin.

We must then acknowledge the sovereign goodness of God. The truth is that God is in control of everything and He uses everything for our good and His glory. Even the pain we experience is intended by God for our good. (Genesis 50:20)

If there is sin in our life, then we must accept God's rebuke and repent. If that sin is unforgiveness, then we must also make it right with the person who wronged us. The root of bitterness thrives in the soil of a sinful heart.

Finally, we must walk in humble submission. Rather than demanding an explanation from God before we trust Him, we must recognize that God's ways and thoughts are so much higher than ours that we should trust Him no matter what happens or how we feel.

Conclusion

Naomi endured over a decade of hardship, so it is no wonder that she did not recover fully overnight. The road to recovery is sometimes bitter, but by making right choices and taking the right steps, the child of God can recover their spiritual strength and return to the place where they can rejoice in God's blessing. The road to recover may be bitter, but we do not have to be.