

HOW TO MAKE SPIRITUAL DECISIONS

SERIES: BROKEN DREAMS | WEEK 2 | 2.16.2020

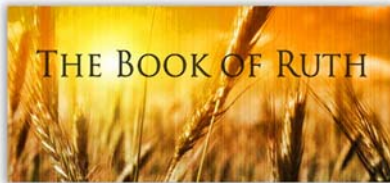
So at Calvary it's all about who? [Congregation: "Jesus!"] Do you believe that? [Congregation: "Yes!"] Do you know what, that's the battle in our lives every day; it's me, Jesus, me, Jesus, and we gotta keep on pulling it back to Jesus. And so that's one of the main takeaways of what we're gonna share today.

Welcome

By the way, good morning. [Man in audience: "Good morning!"] Thanks for being here. If you're joining us by Livestream, welcome. It's so cool that even when you're out of town or out of the country or wherever you're at, you're sick, you're able to jump onto Livestream, so we love having you on there; appreciate the pastors that are communicating with them.

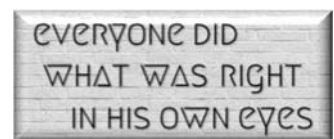
I know that many of you woke up this morning and said, "I need to be in church today." So thank you for being in church. If it's your first time with us, we want you to feel welcome, we want you to feel loved here. We would love to connect with you and one of the best ways to do that, there's a little card in that pocket in front of you there in the chair in front of you, if you fill that out and put it in the bucket that we pass around after the message for the offering, that would be just awesome. We want to get to know you. If you're part of this church and you're not part of a group yet or you want to serve, you can also fill out one of those cards or you can go onto our app or onto our website and do those same things because we want to just get everyone dialed in and a part of it.

I want to ask you this question this morning: Have you ever been at the spot, maybe you're at this spot this morning, where your thought process is this: *God! Help me! I need help right now. I don't know the answers. God, where are You? Are You out there? Can You hear me? God, if You're listening, would You do something? Can You do it now? God, God help.* Anyone out there like that right now, you're just like calling out for Him? And then oftentimes it's added to that some conditions like, *God, if You would do that right now, then I would...* And even in the midst of that sometimes we start doing that only to step back from doing that.



We're looking at a story in the Old Testament of our Bible, it's the story of a lady by the name of Ruth. It really starts with a family whose father is a guy by the name of Elimelech and when it begins telling us about this story it tells us when it took place, and really, it was a time just like this. It was a time where—actually, the book right before it, the book of Judges—ends

with this phrase, like, in those times everyone did what was right in their own eyes.¹ That's what the very last verse of the book of Judges says. They did what they wanted to do. They did sexuality their way. They did finances their way. They did relationships their way. Basically, they did life their own way. And what ended up happening is they got to this place because they did it *my* way, they did it the way *I* wanted to do it, they got to this place in their life that things spiraled down because we just – we're sinners and we just don't get it right. So when they hit rock bottom they scream, *God!*



**HITTING
ROCK
BOTTOM**

God help! Help! I need help right now! Do something! Do something! And God's like, He sent these people, men and women, individuals, one at a time, they called them judges but they were deliverers who would come and help God's people and get them out of this tough spot. And then they'd start getting their eyes back on God and start following God's Book and it would get better and better. And then guess what? That deliverer, that judge, would go off the scene and they'd spiral back down again.

¹ JUDGES 17:6 & JUDGES 21:25: *In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did as what was right in his own eyes.*

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And that's where a lot of us find ourselves. We want to do it God's Way. We do it, we start doing it, we start finding the blessing in that, we see the joy in that, and then all of a sudden as we forget and we get away from that, we just think, *Man, I can't do that.*

DECISIONS

The story that we're reading today is exactly in that time where their people were doing things that were right in their own eyes. A guy by the name of Elimelech, he's living in a town called Bethlehem, same town Jesus was born in, and even though the town's name meant "place of bread," probably a lot of bakeries in that town, even though it meant that they were going through a famine. And this guy looks at life and he says, *I need to take care of my family. I need to take care of my kids. I need to take care of my wife. I can get work, there is not a famine over in this place by the name of Moab. I need to sell everything and I just need to move. It's time to go.* And so they began to do that. They have all the parties, they sell everything off, and they head out.

The piece of the story though that's really important in this is God had always told his people you don't go to Moab because in Moab they worship different gods and they didn't follow the one true God. And God knew that if His people went and mixed with these people they would become like those people and they would be drawn away from God, and so God had always forbidden that.

And this guy, though, he's sitting in a situation—and each one of us understand this where the thought process is this: *What am I gonna do? I've got to take care of business. If I don't go and I don't go now we're gonna go hungry, we're gonna starve. I know God said not to go there but there wasn't a famine in the land when God said that, things have changed, times have changed; that was then, this is now. I've got to do what I've got to do. I'm sure everything will be fine.* And out of pure practicality they step out and they head to Moab.

And so in the course of their time there not only did the boys play with other Moabite boys and hang out with the Moabite kids and this kind of thing, eventually the text tells us both boys end up getting married so there's some time that has elapsed. They get married and then guess what? The very thing that they went over there to avoid hits their family, the dad dies, Elimelech dies. So the very thing he set there to avoid he ends up dying and then the text tells us and goes another step further and tells us in the story that both these boys end up dying. And we ended our time together last week just talking about grief and spending time thinking through that, but what we saw as we ended were three women, very different ages, very different backgrounds—alone. And in that time that was a huge deal because they didn't have a social security system, the boys were that, and they were sort of sitting there very, very vulnerable depending on other people. And it was in that moment that word comes back from Bethlehem that God had provided food there.



ELIMELECH AND NAOMI TRAVEL TO MOAB WITH THEIR TWO SONS

If you have your Bibles opened to this story, the book of Ruth in the Old Testament of your Bible. If you start at Genesis and start moving right it doesn't take long to get there. I would love for you to go down to verse 6. I would love for you to underline it, highlight it, exclamation point it. When I was a kid I wasn't to write in my Bible, so write in your Bible if you write in your Bible, and write right there on verse 6 at the end of it, here's what it says:

⁶ Then she arose with her daughters-in-law to return from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the fields of Moab that

— listen to this —

the Lord had visited his people and given them food.

~ RUTH 1:6 (ESV)

Now, I want to stop there for a second because just a couple things to capture here—God provided. God provided where things looked rough—capture that, circle that, circle *the Lord*.



It wasn't the people had finally figured it out, the Lord provided. But also capture this in your mind: If you think about it, if Elimelech was right, all the people would be dead there because they had famine. That's why he had to leave, that's why he had to go away from what God had told him to do, because everyone was gonna die. So you do what you gotta do. But evidently everyone hadn't died. He died. His kids died. The people there didn't die. And as she looks at this she says, *I need to go home. I now can go back because the Lord has provided.*

Here's what I want you to hear this morning: That no matter what you're going through, whatever your famine is, whatever your harsh reality is, whatever it is the thing that is pressuring you like you've never been pressured before today, I want you to know there is One who provides and He'll provide for you in the same way that He provided for these dear people in a dark time spiritually in their generation twelve hundred years before Jesus was born. God will provide for you. And that's why He puts this in His Bible so you and I know **it is God that provides**. And while He provided then in the midst of hard ethical decisions they had to make, hard spiritual decisions they had to make, He's going to provide for you today in the midst of difficult decisions that you have to make.

So here's what I want to do. I'm want to pause for a moment because I'm going to share with you a number of times today that a lot of these things come down to real spiritual decisions that we have to make. What we're gonna decide is: Am I gonna do it God's Way or am I gonna do it my way. And some of you are in the middle of some really tough spiritual decisions. You're in some tough, just, it feels like *I have to decide this, me*. This is about me right now. And I just want to take you—you've come here this morning because you know *No, I do know it's about God, it's just that wrestling that I have*.

So I'm gonna invite you right now, would you just in this moment bow your head and I would just like you to take a moment and bring that thing, your famine, whatever that is, your hard decision that you have to make, the hard spot you find yourself in right now where you're crying out God help, would you just give that to Him right now? This is a beautiful place to do it knowing that everyone in this room is doing it. It's a powerful moment. Just give it to God quietly in your heart and your mind, just pray to Him.

Lord Jesus,



I want to pray for each person that right now has lifted up that hard thing that has them twisted in a knot right now. I know they're here because they know you're God and they really want to trust You with it, but for some of them it's been long and for some of them it's been hard, for some it's very dark. Lord Jesus, I pray that the truth of your Scripture of verse 6 will scream out to each one of us that You provided. That You, the Lord, have provided, and even though we don't see it yet, Lord, I pray that we'll be able to grab onto that by faith today. That each person in this room will have hope and encouragement that You've got this. We trust in You this morning, dear Jesus.

It's in your Name that we pray. Amen.

Now I mentioned a minute ago that three ladies that you would have never seen getting together, a woman from Bethlehem, two Moabite girls, and they are now bonded together because of a family connection, because of their boys; and because of the death of each of their husbands, there is a relational connection there, but they are still nonetheless single and alone. And as I mentioned that was very difficult in their time because those boys would have been her safety net and they are gone now.

I want to talk to this morning and sort of back up a minute and just take a broader look at this. We're told that in America almost half of our population today is single. Now, in the church that's not the case. Unfortunately the reason why that's not the case is because a lot of single people feel rather uncomfortable in a church setting because understand singleness bridges all the way from someone who's never been married, just out of the home, to someone who was married for 65 years and their partner passed away, so you have a lot of different scenarios in that range.

In their time most people got married between 12 and 16; if by the time you were 20 you weren't married you were considered "accursed." Understand what that looks like by the time Jesus is born and Jesus doesn't get married. He bucked the system. Scripture says that in Heaven there is no giving in marriage. The Apostle Paul was not married and he said as a result of not being married he could do more. And so I want to recognize something in this room today that there are married people in this room, there are single people in this room, and we all belong in this room. And God has brought us to a given point in our lives and that is not to be seen as a bad point in our life. Each reality comes with it the opportunity to be a blessing, to minister, to serve, and God can use it in a powerful way.

Each reality comes with it the opportunity to be a blessing, to minister, to serve, and God can use it in a powerful way.

What's unfortunate is a lot of people that are married say, "Well, if I was single, I would have more time to, I would have more freedom to, I would be able to." And the single person is saying, "If I was just married, I would then be . . ." — and the reality is we need to step back and say, *Hey wherever God has placed me today, I am going to fulfill what He has called me to do.* Now we as a church, what our hope would be is that we can recognize that oftentimes in the church because we talk a lot about family, we hold family high here, we hold marriage high here, we hold children high and youth high here, and oftentimes what that does is it takes that person that is single, whether they're single by choice or not by

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choice, whether they've been single for a long time or their entire life, it puts them in a place where they feel like *Maybe I'm not whole* or *I'm not complete*. The word *single* actually has in it in its very definition the definition of wholeness and completeness. And so the fact of seeing themselves as not whole or complete or not part of this body is incredibly unfortunate. We need those who are single in this church.

And here's why I wanted to talk about it for just a moment here today. Because we have a lot of groups and those groups oftentimes are made up of couples, oftentimes made up of couples with children, because we talk about marriage and family an awful lot and we hold that high, oftentimes a single person in this church feels less than. When they go to one of those groups they feel like, sort of like a fifth wheel, like *I don't know if I be long here. I don't know if I can be comfortable here*. Oftentimes they come into this room and they see whole families sitting down in a row and they love that, but then they sit and there's no one – there's two over that way and two that way – and it's just a little bit awkward and they're not quite sure what to do with it.



A number of years ago God began to move in our church and really brought about a lot of change as far as our church being a place that was open for people of every language, from every country, of every skin color, and it has become a beautiful thing. It's more than just being welcomed. It's been one of those things where we have this way of reaching out to each other and loving each other and connecting with each other. It's become part of the tapestry and the beauty of this place that those to attend here step back and say – *I love that. I want that* – and they sort of reach out rapidly to people that look different, sound different, have different cultures and backgrounds together. And one of those groups that are very much part of that is to say to anyone who has a different marital status than us, they're single, to be able to go to them and draw them in and pull them in.

I have to tell you after last service, I can't tell you how many people came up to me that were single and said, *Oh, thank you*. I had people that were young and single saying, *I just wish I could have a group of people just like myself*. I had people coming up to me that were single mothers saying, *I just wish I could find some of the other single mothers; I just can't seem to find them*. We are in a spot here where we as a church need to say we don't necessarily know how to address this. It's not one of those things we can set up a program; not one of those things where you can say, "Here are the five things you need to remember when we're going to try to receive those people." Here's what we do, we do the same thing we do with all of us, we accept each other where we're at and we try to learn what each other needs and how to best be there for each other and how to best love each other and the best care for each other because we are a community together.

And it's just an awesome moment when we look at these three women alone to just pause for a moment and say we will be a church that single people love coming to, and we're going to just try to figure it out. Some of those single people love coming to the groups with the married couples, and I had a couple tell me that today. They just have the best of experience in there. And some said, *I just wish I could get together with a group of people my own age that are single*. And so there's a whole range of possibilities there, but I just wanted to remind us as a church let's reach out and love those who are single in this church. Some of them would prefer to sit alone. And if they let us know that, it's cool, but some of them wish they had a place to go to lunch today. Some of them wish that they had a place to go come Easter for Easter dinner, they don't have anywhere to go, they don't have family, and they just wish someone would invite them over. And you and I are sitting there going *I don't know if they want to*

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be invited and I don't know if they have family. Ask them and care for them, invite them over. And I've had so many singles already today say, *Thank you, we needed that.* I just hope that that begins to change where we're at as a church, as we begin to care for each other.

I think of where Naomi's at in this moment of God providing her hearing that there's now food back in Bethlehem and here she sits in Moab. She's a lady without a husband and she's living in the midst of great confusion. I have a feeling she's asking herself the questions: Did I miss make a mistake? Should I have followed him? Was he right? If I would have stood up and said no at that time, would that have been better? And she had a million questions questioning herself throughout this entire process, but in the midst of this God begins to move and I'd like to just begin to take us down that path. She says to the girls, *I've got to go back to Bethlehem,* and she leaves for Bethlehem. As we read these verses beyond verse 6 starting at verse 7, what it tells us is that the girls went along with her, Orpah and Ruth left with her from Moab to head back to Bethlehem.

For those of us reading the text and those of you reading through the Bible this year, I hope that you are, and maybe even began at the beginning and going through the one-year program, one of the things that's hard as we read through the Bible, we read these little things we're just like *Okay, they were all headed back to Bethlehem.* As we begin to study the culture what we learn here is in that time if someone was to leave your house you would leave with them and you would go part way with them.

Way back before GPS I remember we used to have to give instructions to a main road and it wasn't worth it. So what you did is you just said *Hey, you know what, I just follow me and when we get to that sign I'll point out the window.* Do you remember those days? And you just pointed to the entrance to the freeway and you waved and off they went. That doesn't happen anymore. Today they walk out your door, you wave at them, and you see them in their car for the longest time pushing buttons trying to find their address and then finally they back out and they always find their way because (unless they weren't able to get a connection with GPS) off they went and they hit the turnpike and they were where they needed to be.



In that time what would happen is if someone was leaving you walked partway down the road with them. You went a few miles with them and then you turned back and said goodbye and you went back to where you're going. And that's what happens with Orpah and Ruth; they head down the road with Naomi as she's headed back to go back to Bethlehem to her ancestral home to where her people are at, and as they get to this place it appears that Naomi stops and says, *Girls, this is the end of the road, you need to go home now, you need to go back.* And it's fascinating as you read about this in verse 8, she says to the girls, she says you need to go back to your mother's home.

⁷ So she set out from the place where she was with her two daughters-in-law, and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah. ⁸ But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go, return each of you to her mother's house. May the Lord deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me."

~ RUTH 1:7-8 (ESV)

Now commentators tell me that we should have been alerted when we saw that, that normally in that time you would have seen the wording like "go back to the home of your father's," that would have been in the natural wording. But that when we read they go back to your mother's home, this should alert us to the fact that there probably was not a father in that home. You'll remember Moab was a place where

sexual promiscuity was celebrated and many of those people were going down paths that they should have never gone down. It's very possible that these two girls didn't grow up with a daddy and there wasn't a dad in their home, and that's why Naomi's telling them to go back home and be with their mother.



NAOMI, RUTH, AND ORPAH

The girls push back and they begin to talk about being with her. You have to understand there were cultural ramifications at that time, and we're going to learn a little bit more about this as we move forward, that you ended up marrying based on family connections not necessarily running back home and finding another cute dude and marrying him back there. So they're like, *We probably need to stay connected here to the family*, and Naomi's going *Yeah, you probably don't want to do that. You probably want to go back home. I know what*

it's like leaving my homeland, going someplace that I don't know, someplace that I never should have been. You don't want to do that, don't come along with me. But then there was also that connection that they felt, the three of them, had been through a lot together. Can you imagine the boys meeting the girls and them getting to know each other, and then dad dying, and then the marriages, and then the boys dying, and them coming together trying to figure out how to get food and this kind of stuff from strangers, and try to just keep a subsistent living going on. These girls had grown close.

And so it's in that moment as she's encouraging them to go back she said, *Girls, go back, go back home.* And Orpah does that and you read that in that text, if you've read the story, she goes back and she turns around and she heads out. And by the way, that's what you would expect. It's not a surprise that she does that. You would anticipate that would be her choice, but that that is her choice. But Ruth sees it a bit differently. Ruth says *I don't want to do that.* And the text where she states her thoughts and what she wants to do is one that is very well known. You may even have it on a plaque in your home somewhere, but it's found in verse 16. It says:

16 But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God."

~ RUTH 1:16 (ESV)

And that in itself is a powerful statement because here's a girl that had been raised in a very different spiritual environment. Her gods were not our God. And I think that's an important distinction to make. Oftentimes you'll hear people in our time, a time where everyone does what's right in their own eyes, go, *Well, that's your God, this is my god. After all you see Him this way, I see him this way, it's all the same God.* It's not the same God. So for her to say I am leaving my allegiance to my gods and I am going to follow your God, that was a moment of decision. That was a huge moment.

Here's what I see that I think's fascinating. So it's a cultural thing to walk down that path a few miles or however far it was on the way to Bethlehem for these two girls, but all of a sudden what was a cultural decision gets turned upside-down and there a few miles outside of Moab Ruth makes a spiritual decision. And I think that's an important discussion. I started out with these words—is it gonna be God's way or my way? Is that gonna be God or is it going to be me? There are decisions that we make everyday that we're being pressured on to make them based on what our culture asks us to make them. And it's not as clear where we sit that we're being pushed into cultural decisions. I mean, sometimes it's

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just because everyone's doing it when we're reading about it on social that we just assume that's the right way to go. We may even have asked them on social *What would you do about that?* And we all follow along. But there's another moment where we step back, it's a moment of a decision that it appears that Ruth had here where she makes a decision that I need to respond to this in a spiritual manner. And she realizes this is a choice between gods and the one true God. And from that moment on she says *I want the one true God to be my God and I want to follow that God. And I'm going to go wherever that God leads me.* It's a powerful piece of this story and it is the very thing that sets up the rest of the story that begins to change the trajectory of this all. And even though Naomi and Elimelech, it looks like maybe they had gone away from what God had wanted, they knew better, they shouldn't have lived in that, there were ramifications to living in that, we're gonna hear what Naomi says about that in a moment, despite that it appears that evidently Ruth knew that these people were worshippers of the one true God. She heard something different, she saw something different, even though they messed up some stuff.

And it's just this ongoing reminder to each one of us in our homes to keep on sharing the Word of God with each other, to continue talking about it. You'll hear me talk all the time—let's have spiritual conversations, let's talk about spiritual things, let's pray in our homes, let's talk about the Word of God, talk about what you've learned today. If there's just something that just grabbed you here in this time, talk about it with your kids on the way home, talk about it when you're with your friends at lunch, have spiritual conversations, even though many of us—all of us—will make goofball decisions that we should have never made that are against God. There is this thing that continues to call us back and when we get called back we come back to what God's Word we say, *Wait a minute, I'm gonna make a decision based on what God wants, not what I want.* And people around us see that, our friends see that, our kids see that, daughters-in-law see that, and we never know what thing that they're watching will become the seed for a change in their life.



So now Ruth goes home with her, heads to Bethlehem with her. And here's what I want you to picture them arriving in Bethlehem. The text is gonna talk about what Naomi presents as to the people that see her there, I mean, these people haven't seen her for at least 10 years, but she comes back with a girl that's a Moabite and she stands out in that place. She doesn't know anyone, she doesn't know anything, everything about that place is new and fresh, and she is beside Naomi. Now when Naomi arrives everyone seems shocked, jaw on ground, because this wasn't the Naomi that left. Do you remember what Naomi's name meant? It meant "pleasant." In fact, I saw someone else refer to her name as meaning "sweetheart" this week, so in light of Valentine's Day I thought I'd run with it. Her name was Sweetheart. Evidently when she got back, life had shown its toll on her face and this wasn't the same lady that left 10-12 years before, and everyone's going, *Is that Naomi?* And we read this at the end of verse 19 and going into verse 20 it says:

¹⁹ . . . And when they came to Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them. And the women said, "Is this Naomi?" ²⁰ She said to them, "Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me."

~ RUTH 1:19-20 (ESV)

She said to them, *Don't you call me Naomi*—it doesn't sound like a sweetheart move, doesn't sound like a pleasant response, don't you call me Naomi—*call me Mara*, she says, *for the Almighty has dealt*

bitterly with me. Back when she was talking to the girls on the trail she made that very same statement. She said back in verse 13:

13 would you therefore wait till they were grown? Would you therefore refrain from marrying? No, my daughters, for it is exceedingly bitter to me for your sake that the hand of the Lord has gone out against me.”

~ RUTH 1:13 (ESV)

No, my daughters, it's extremely bitter for me for your sake that the hand of the Lord has gone out on me—and there's just this reminder when you read that she knew God knew she knew God was aware of everything, and there's this reminder for us that God has never been absent in the midst of this. We may have put our hand up and said it'll be my way, but He was there. He was aware. The question may be—and it's why she sort of says the Lord had a strong hand on me, or in this case, call me bitter because I am a bitter lady because the Almighty's hand is on me—you ask the question and I hear this question oftentimes when tough stuff has happened, the question will be: Did God know this was gonna happen? Answer: Yes. Why didn't He change it then? Have you ever asked that question? If He knew this was gonna happen, He could have stopped it. He absolutely could have stopped it. Or do we back up and we realize, *Wait a minute, yeah, I've made my decisions, I've gone down certain paths.* But God is very actively involved and there are things going on behind the scenes that He's going to use to bring about His purpose that we never saw coming.

That's why I'm gonna just tell you, please come back next week and the week after because where this book goes that is so important is to lay this foundation of broken dreams, to lay this foundation of pain, to lay this foundation of people going and doing things they should have never done and yet watch God's grace and His blessing and His mercy be just poured out over this thing. And yet, what I love about the Bible as this lady shows up she's hurtin' and there's no safer place to be hurtin' than when you're in your own community, when you're with your own people. And it's in this moment she begins to tell her story they're going, *Is that you? What happened?* This is written all over her face. It doesn't look good. And here's what she says in verse 21, she says:

21 I went away full, and the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi, when the Lord has testified against me and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?”

~ RUTH 1:21 (ESV)

Let me just walk through this again. Why'd she go away? Because they felt like we're gonna have empty stomachs and if I go away I can get a full stomach. She goes I went away and I was so full, everything was so perfect in my life. That tree over there I used to sit and watch the kids play on that swing and push each other on that swing. They used to play over there in that wash and among that stream, they loved it. Over there I still remember Elimelech going over there to work every day and I used to wait until he'd come home for lunch and we'd eat lunch together. Oh, the kids would play and they would giggle, and you remember that they'd run over there, wow, it was so much fun. I went away full. It was like everything was perfect. Elimelech was strong. He was powerful. He was a big-time businessman in this town, that's why he was able to sell everything. That's why we were able to go. We looked like we were on the top of the world. And I come back, I'm alone, and I don't have my boys and nothing's the same. This isn't how it was supposed to be. This isn't what we had mapped out.

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Can I just leave us with a moment of hope right now? That's why we're together. That's why we keep on inviting you to jump into a group, to stay in community, to stay here afterwards and just sit around the tables, to invite someone to lunch, to make sure that you get connected, because in these moments yeah, life hits and it's hard and we tell our story and we can reply going, *Yeah, I've been there. Let me tell you my story.* And there's something that takes us back to remind us and it's why the Bible is here to remind us, wait a minute, I know, I know, I know, but God provided.



I want you to take this moment and allow God to just fill your heart with hope right now. Would you bow your head, I know we just keep on praying through this message, but I think sometimes we're doing spiritual business we have to just come before God. I can talk, talk, talk, we need to do business with God. Would you just say *God, I'm Mara, I'm bitter. I – it didn't turn out the way it was supposed to. I'm alone. I'm scared. I'm angry. I'm hurt. But I believe You'll provide. I'm not gonna fix this on my own, I'm gonna let You, Jesus, come into my life and do something powerful for me. Come, come into my life, I want to do like Ruth said even after all she had seen, she goes God, You're the only One. There's just one God.*

O Jesus,



For each person that's just pouring their heart out to You right now saying, "God, I need You, I'm alone, I'm scared, I – show up." I pray that You will in a powerful way to each person in this room right now. Let them know that You love them so much. I pray that they'll feel your warm embrace, that they'll know of your love here, that You wrote this so they could see, yeah, it doesn't matter how much yuck has happened, You are there and You love them.

[Pauses]

Bring healing, we ask in Jesus' Name. Amen.

Hey, just one more thing, before we finish this text. I mentioned things like the first phrase of the book of Ruth where it says in the days of judges, we just sort of blow by that and we realized that had big meaning. I talked about the two girls heading down the path, we could blow by that and we realized that had big meaning. There's a last phrase in this first chapter that just feels like information, like, who cares, why'd you say that, and it's really, really powerful. Let me read it to you:

²² . . . *And they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest.*

~ RUTH 1:22b (ESV)

Like, I wouldn't even know what to do with barley if you gave me some barley, so I don't know why it matters that we have to harvest the stuff. And what I want you to know is those words are huge. They are the beginning of what God's about to do that is big and powerful that's going to have ramifications.

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This is what's crazy, those couple words have ramifications that last to this morning. You'll understand if you come back and you keep coming back. What I want you to know is this morning there is something going on in your life; if you'll mark this moment, noon on Sunday, the end of the weekend, the beginning of the week, when I was sitting next to—, when I was on the third row, when I was up on the balcony—this is the moment something's about to begin if you'll let God. And I'm just going to tell you, God brought you here this morning to say: I'm doing something in your life.

They arrive back at Bethlehem because they're hear there's food, but there's more than food. So many of us are just trying to survive. So many of us are just trying to make it through the week to the next paycheck, to make it through that next appointment till we get that next medical test back, and God says, *Oh, no, it's bigger than that.* Hey, guys this is the beginning of barley harvest. There's something going on. We don't know what it is yet, but it's big.

Jesus,

I pray that people in this room will believe that. I just thank You that You have provided your son Jesus and I pray that we'll grab onto Jesus this morning and put Him first in everything in our lives.

In Jesus' Name we pray. Amen.

Hey, while we sing this next song I'm gonna just give the ushers the opportunity to pass the buckets to you. I know a lot of you have come in prepared to give back to God. When you know that He does the providing, it doesn't matter how much or how little you have, you just boldly give to Him and just know that He provides and you're just gonna be excited when you're involved in spiritual things and giving is a spiritual thing. Whether you're giving here, whether you're giving to someone that you love, whether you're giving of your time, God says listen, when you're giving you're doing what I did. God gave His Son Jesus so that we can have life and we give back generously this morning, so thank you for giving right now. And let's just sing this last song, it's a powerful moment as we shout out the truths that we've been talking about.

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