

Welcome

Happy Mother's Day!

Today we honor and celebrate all the ways that Mothers make our lives **richer, fuller, and better!**

Today I want to celebrate my Mom...I mean, I didn't get the card in the mail soon enough so that she will have it on time (but—in all fairness—I did say that I am celebrating my Mom “today”... not “I'm celebrating my mom earlier enough in the week to ensure that a card could make it to her by mail on time for Mother's Day...”),but you know what—I'm sure she is watching online because she knows I am preaching today...so [*read and sign card*]*—Nailed it!*

You guys, my Mom is Awesome! When I was a kid, my mom had what seemed like superhero powers!

- She knew where everything was and where everything went. If you needed to find something you just had to ask mom! And, if mom was making you put something away, she could tell you exactly where it was supposed to go!
- She could make food!! She could take a bunch of raw ingredients like flour and eggs and sugar and turn it into things like pies and cakes and stuff...she made like real food too, but I really remember the pies and cakes and stuff most.
 - I remember one time we didn't have any mayonnaise, so she just made some in the blender—she MADE mayonnaise out of ingredients!

- She was never surprised at the gifts that Santa brought us at Christmas—dad was almost always surprised, but it was like mom knew what it was going to be even before we opened the gifts!
- Mom knew when my brothers and I were **about** to break something! (It was like she could see into the future!) She would say “If you boys don’t stop horsing around, you are going to break something!” And we didn’t stop horsing around, and sure enough, we would break something!
- My mom is AWESOME!

So, all week I have been thinking about all the lessons that my mom taught me...and about all the other wise and Godly women who have spoken into my life and shaped who I am...those “spiritual mothers” along the way that celebrated me and supported me and corrected me and inspired me... I am so thankful for all the moms in my life and all the ways that they have been a blessing!

And as I thought about the lessons I have learned from my mom, I started to think about the lessons that we learn from some of the moms in the Bible...and I was drawn to one particular story that has a mom as a central character... this morning I want us to consider **Lessons from Nomi**

We find Naomi’s story in the book of Ruth...and there are some really brilliant “mom moments” in this story, but in order for us to walk through them together, I am going to have to tell you the whole story...So if you have your Bibles with you, open up to the book of Ruth (The 8th book of the Bible) and lets get started.

The story of Ruth opens up this way:

- *In the days when the judges ruled in Israel, a severe famine came upon the land. So a man from Bethlehem in Judah left his home and went to live in the country of Moab, taking his wife and two sons with him. -Ruth 1:1*
 - You really can't have a much worse start to a story in the Bible...
 - The days when Judges ruled was a dark time in the history of Israel—The book of Judges chronicles a time when there was no King or prophet in Israel and the people did whatever they thought was best—and they got it wrong a lot!
 - On top of that, there was a famine in the land—times of famine were devastating to the ancient cultures that depended on each year's harvest to make it through.
 - As a result, a man from Bethlehem left his home and sought shelter in the land of Moab—but Bethlehem is in Israel (the Land of Promise) and Moab is outside of Israel—a land of idols and pagan worship.
 - So, during what could be considered the worst historical period in the Bible... there was a time of famine...and a man took his wife and 2 sons out of the land God had promised to His people in order to seek shelter in a pagan country...This is not going to be a happy story of rainbows and unicorns!
- While they were in Moab, the man died, and his wife Naomi was left alone with her 2 sons.
- Soon her sons both got married to women from Moab...but tragically, about 10 years later, both of her sons also died.
 - I told you that opening verse was setting us up for a rough story!
 - So, by verse 5, Naomi is left as a widow, in a foreign country, and her 2 widowed daughters-in-law are the closest thing she has to any kind of family or support.

- But then Naomi heard that the LORD had blessed the people of Judea with good crops again—the famine had ended—so she decided to go home accompanied by her 2 daughters-in-law (Ruth and Orpah).
- But while they were still on the way, Naomi stopped and urged the young women to go back to their homes in Moab...there were no realistic prospects for them to start a new life back in Judea—they would have a better chance if they went back to their own homes and returned to their own families.
 - One of her daughters-in-law—Orpah—tearfully choose to go back home.
 - But, Ruth vowed that she would stay with Naomi for life!
 - And it is here that we find what is probably the best-known section of the book of Ruth—Ruth’s beautiful and poetic vow to stay with Naomi...
 - “Where you go, I will go...Where you live, I will live...You people will be my people and your God my God...May the LORD punish me if anything but death separates us.”
- And it is at this point in the story that we see the first 2 lessons that Naomi will teach us today start to come into focus...

I. **Lesson 1: Naomi teaches us that love should transcend all barriers!**

- A. One of the most remarkable things about this story is the loyalty and love shown between these 2 women.
 1. There are a million reasons that they should give up on each other...
 - a. Ruth is from Moab, Naomi is from Israel...
 - b. They have been raised with different cultures, with different customs, they have worshiped different gods...they have different traditions, and different beliefs...
 - c. There are no biological family ties between them...

2. But the love that they share just overwhelmed all those barriers and tied Ruth and Naomi together for life.

a. The love that bound them together crossed every biological, racial, and ethnic barrier put in its way!

B. This Mother's Day, I pray that you realize that the kind of love and loyalty that we are honoring and celebrating is not just about who shows up on your family tree or in your Ancestry.com[©] report...it is about allowing ourselves to swept up in the power of God's all-embracing love for others and making space in our hearts and lives to truly and genuinely love everyone we have the opportunity to!

1. This is not just about the love of mothers for their children, or the love of children for their mothers...as beautiful and important as that love is.

2. This is a call to the kind of radical, disruptive, cross-cultural and cross-generational love that Naomi and Ruth demonstrated for each other despite all the barriers that stood in their way!

II. **Lesson 2: Naomi teaches us that love is willing to make sacrifices...**

A. Naomi is left with only these 2 young women in her life...but when she realizes that it would be better for them if they went back to their homes, she urges them to go no matter what it cost her!

1. She must have known that if they left her, she would be truly all alone...

2. She has lost everyone and everything, but she is still willing to put the needs of Orpah and Ruth above her own. What an amazing act of sacrificial love!

B. This is a classic example of an act of motherly love—to sacrifice to meet the needs of the next generation.

1. This is what we celebrate about moms on Mother's Day...that they are always ready to sacrifice for the good of their kids and grandkids!

2. And this is the kind of thing that the story of Naomi (and the example of countless mothers throughout the years) calls us to replicate and imitate in our own lives.
- C. Love people! Love people enough that you are willing to make sacrifices! Love people enough that you are willing to put their needs above your own!
- We pick up the story when Naomi arrived in Bethlehem. It was in the Spring—at the beginning of the barley harvest. When the people saw her, they were excited that she had returned home. But Naomi gave vent to her sorrow and frustration by telling the people not to call her Naomi (a name that means “Pleasant”) but rather to call her Mara (a name that means “Bitter”) because she insisted that God had caused her to suffer greatly, and He had brought her home empty.
 - At the start of the second chapter, we meet a new character in our story...There was a wealthy and influential man in Bethlehem named Boaz...and he was a close relative of Naomi’s late husband.
 - Now Remember that Ruth and Naomi were all alone and they had no way to generate any income or provide for themselves in any meaningful way.
 - But Ruth and Naomi were back in Israel—back in the Kingdom of God, and God had already made provision for people who were alone and desperate!
 - In those long sections of dry and boring legal regulations that you skip over when you are doing your Bible reading we find this bit...*“When you harvest the crops of your land, do not harvest the grain along the edges of your fields, and do not pick up what the harvesters drop... Leave them for the poor and the foreigners living among you. I am the Lord your God. -Leviticus 19:9-10*
 - God made provision for people just like Ruth and Naomi!
 - So, Ruth went out into the fields to work behind the harvesters in order to gather up any grain that had been left behind.

- It just so happened that Ruth found herself in the fields of Boaz.
- When Boaz came to check on his workers, he noticed Ruth and he asked his foreman about her.
- Boaz had already heard about the kindness and loyalty that Ruth had shown to Naomi, and in turn, Boaz showed incredible kindness to Ruth.
 - He invited Ruth to stay in his fields throughout the harvest and he assured her that she would be protected with his workers.
 - He gave her permission to drink the water that had been provided for the harvesters.
 - At the meal time, Boaz gave Ruth a generous portion of food—enough that she had her fill and even had some left-over.
 - He even instructed his harvesters to intentionally drop a little extra grain for her to pick up.
 - By the end of that first day, Ruth had gathered up about 5 gallons of grain!
- When Naomi saw how much grain Ruth had gathered along with the left-over food from the meal, Naomi wanted to know who had been so generous with Ruth.
 - When she found out it was Boaz, she insisted that Ruth stay in his fields—both because of his generosity and because his assurance of safety.
 - So Ruth worked in the fields of Boaz through both the barley harvest and the wheat harvest.
- And here we see Naomi’s third lessons ...

III. **Lesson 3: Naomi teaches us that love offers wise council.**

- A. Naomi is older, wiser, and this is her home turf. She understood thing that Ruth would easily miss.

1. She was at home with all the customs...She knew how the family worked...She understood the culture.
 - a. Naomi may not be able to see everything about how this story is unfolding, but she understood that Ruth had found a good thing in the fields of Boaz, and Naomi was going to make sure that Ruth didn't miss this opportunity.
 - b. The fact that Boaz was a close relative is going to become more important as the story develops, but for now, Naomi knew that just his family loyalty was a valuable advantage that they must not squander.
- B. I wonder, who can you love by sharing your wisdom and good advice?
 1. Who is someone not as far along on the journey that you can help along the way?
 2. What are the experiences and hard-won lessons that you have that can be entrusted to those who are just starting out?
 3. How can you communicate the things you clearly see and understand with those who lack your perspective or your knowledge?
- C. Love calls us to be generous with our good advice, our council, our wisdom and our perspective.

Back to the story...

- *One day Naomi said to Ruth, "My daughter, it's time that I found a permanent home for you, so that you will be provided for. -Ruth 3:1*

IV. Lesson 4: Naomi teaches us that love always hopes.

- A. Naomi understood that while Boaz was being incredibly generous with Ruth during the harvest time, there was no real future in their current situation. But Naomi also realized that Boaz had the power to change everything for Ruth....

1. OK, here is the big history lesson that I have been trying to avoid...
 - a. To really appreciate this story you have to understand that the land was incredibly important to the people of Israel.
 - i. This was the land that God promised them...
 - ii. and then gave them...
 - iii. and then carefully and specifically divided up to each individual family.
 - b. And so there was a provision in the law that if anyone ever fell on hard times and had to sell his ancestral land, that land could always be redeemed—it could be bought by a relative and given back to the original owners.
 - c. Not only that, but if a family line ever died out, it too could be redeemed by a close relative too.
 - i. One of the ways this worked is that if a man died without having a son to pass his land on to, his brother (or the closest relative) was duty-bound to marry his widow, but their first son would carry on the late brother's name and family line.
 - d. What this meant was that Boaz could have the opportunity to buy all of Naomi's husband's land and to marry Ruth. If he did, and they had a son, that son would automatically inherit all of the family land—which would be a source of provision and security for both Ruth and Naomi. And, even if they did not have a son, Ruth would be taken care of by Boaz.
 2. Naomi had an incredible, improbable, impossible, but wonderful dream for Ruth's future!
- B. Who do you have an incredible, improbable, impossible, but wonderful dream for?
1. Who do you believe in?
 2. Who do you cheer for?
 3. Who do you support and hope for and never lose faith in?

4. Who do you want to win in life more than you want to win yourself?
5. Who do you never give up on?
6. Love always hopes! It never stops believing in or wanting the best for others!
 - a. (Man, that just kind of sounds like a Mother's Day card right there doesn't it?)

Back to the last bit of our story...

- So Naomi told Ruth the plan...
 - That night Boaz would be winnowing the barley—and he would be in a good mood.
 - Naomi told Ruth to take a bath, put on perfume and wear her nicest clothes.
 - It turns out that moms have been saying “You have to take a bath” and “You aren’t going to wear that?!” for hundreds of years!
 - Then Ruth was to sneak in and while Boaz was asleep, she was told to uncover his feet and then lay down beside him. Naomi assured Ruth that Boaz would understand what this meant, and he would know what to do.
 - Ruth did exactly as she was told and around midnight Boaz woke up to find his feet uncovered and a stranger laying beside him.
 - Ruth asked Boaz to “Spread the corner of your covering over me, because you are my family redeemer.”
 - Boaz was pleased that Ruth had asked this of him, and he assured her that he would take care of everything...there was just one problem. There was a closer relative who was ahead of Boaz in line for the right to redeem the property...and marry Ruth.
 - But once again, Boaz assured Ruth that he would take care of everything.
 - In the morning, Ruth got up early while it is still dark, Boaz filled her cloak up with 6 scoops of barley and sent her home to Naomi while he set off for the town gate.

- At the gate, Boaz found the other family redeemer and pulled him aside with 10 of the town leaders...(This would be like asking someone to get their accountant and meet you at your lawyer's office...something official is about to happen!)
 - Boaz offered to allow the closer family redeemer to buy all of Naomi's family land, but if he was not interested, then Boaz was ready to make the purchase.
 - When the family redeemer said he was willing to purchase the land, Boaz reminded him that by redeeming the land, he would also have to take Ruth as his wife.
 - At this, the closer family redeemer realized that the risk to his own family's estate was too great, and he must pass on this opportunity.
 - So Boaz buys all of the land and property from Naomi's family...and in doing so, he agrees to marry Ruth—with the understanding that Ruth's first son would carry on the name of Naomi's son and inherit all the family property.
- This is the way that the story ends...

¹³ So Boaz took Ruth into his home, and she became his wife. When he slept with her, the LORD enabled her to become pregnant, and she gave birth to a son. ¹⁴ Then the women of the town said to Naomi, "Praise the LORD, who has now provided a redeemer for your family! May this child be famous in Israel. ¹⁵ May he restore your youth and care for you in your old age. For he is the son of your daughter-in-law who loves you and has been better to you than seven sons!"

¹⁶ Naomi took the baby and cuddled him to her breast. And she cared for him as if he were her own. ¹⁷ The neighbor women said, "Now at last Naomi has a son again!" And they named him Obed. He became the father of Jesse and the grandfather of David.

-Ruth 4:13-17

- Ruth had a son, and that son unlocked the most unlikely and spectacular path to redemption!
 - Ruth and Naomi were secure and safe again...so much of what was lost had been restored.
 - And Ruth didn't just have any son...her son was Obed, and he was the father of Jessi, and Jessi was the father of David—and David became the great King!
 - You could not have asked for a better ending to this story!
- And that brings us to our final lesson from Naomi...

V. **Lesson 5: Naomi teaches us that love always longs for redemption.**

- A. From that horrible start to the story we find our way all the way back ...
1. Back home to Bethlehem...back with family...back with a secure future...
 2. Naomi went away full but she came home empty and bitter...But by the end of the story, she is whole again.
 3. This is a story of redemption! This is a story about broken pieces being put back together to form something surprising and beautiful and extraordinary!
- B. And I wonder...Do you need a story of redemption in your life?
1. Do you find yourself in need of redemption?
 2. Does your family need redemption?
 3. Are there broken and impossible places in your life right now?
- C. If there are...listen carefully to the final lesson from Naomi—**love always longs for redemption**...and God loves you!
1. God tells good stories! God tells good stories of redemption...about restoration and about hope!

2. If you have broken and impossible places in your life, take them to God...because He is the only one who can start a story with: *"In the days when the judges ruled in Israel, a severe famine came upon the land..."* but end it with: *"Praise the LORD, who has now provided a redeemer for your family!"*

Conclusion

This morning, we honor and celebrate Mothers and we learn from the brilliant "Mom moments" in the story of Naomi.

- **Love transcends all barriers**—allow yourself to be swept up in the power of God's all-embracing love for others
 - **Love is willing to make sacrifices**—Love people enough that you are willing to sacrifice for them!
 - **Love offers wise council**—be generous with your good advice, your council, your wisdom and your perspective.
 - **Love always hopes**—never stop believing in or wanting the best for others!
 - **Love longs for redemption**—Take your broken and impossible places to God, because He turns our broken stories into stories of redemption!
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- **PRAY**