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Dealing With Naomi Moments

Ruth 2

Prayer: *Father, we just want to thank you and praise you for who you are, for what you have done, for the gift that you have given to us in your Son, for the gift that you've given to us in your word that we have the privilege of opening up and examining. And again, Lord, as we enter into the book of Ruth this morning again, I pray for the presence of your Holy Spirit, I pray that you would guide us, direct us, open up your word to us, give us the ability to take it in and to once again make it a permanent part of our lives. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well we are in the book of Ruth, and just to recap where we are in this story, a famine has wracked Bethlehem. And so Naomi and her husband Elimelech along with her two sons have abandoned Bethlehem and have entered and lived in the godless city of Moab. Now in all likelihood they were a prominent family in Bethlehem who felt they had no choice but to leave or face starvation. Well after ten years in Moab, Naomi loses both her husband and her two sons. She is without resources in a culture that has very little to offer

widows. In addition she has the care of her two sons' surviving wives, Orpah and Ruth, both who are not Jews, they are Moabites. And so Naomi has decided to return to Bethlehem having heard that the famine there has ended. And so we pick up the story at a highly emotional time when Naomi is parting with her daughters-in-law to go back to Bethlehem. This is *Ruth 1:6*. It says: *Then she arose with her daughters in law that she might return from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the country of Moab that the LORD had visited his people by giving them bread. Therefore she went out from the place where she was, and her two daughters-in-law with her; and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah.*

Naomi and Ruth start out on the journey back to Bethlehem but then Naomi stops and she begs them to go their separate ways. Her daughters-in-law, Orpah was there as well, her daughters-in-law insist on continuing on with her. This is verse 8, it says: *And Naomi said to her daughters-in-law, "Go, return each to her mother's house. The LORD deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. The LORD grant that you may find rest, each in the house of her husband." So she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept. And they said to her, "Surely we will return with you to your people."* Well Naomi knows that returning to Bethlehem with two Moabite women would be disastrous

culturally and economically. And so she begs her daughters-in-law to stay and she convinces Orpah. This is verse 11, it says: *But Naomi said, "Turn back, my daughters; why will you go with me? Are there still sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands? Turn back, my daughters, go -- for I am too old to have a husband. If I should say I have hope, if I should have a husband tonight and should also bear sons, would you wait for them till they were grown? Would you restrain yourselves from having husbands? No, my daughters; for it grieves me very much for your sakes that the hand of the LORD has gone out against me!" Then they lifted up their voices and wept again; and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.*

Now Naomi is not being hard hearted here. She's clearly a broken person and this parting is heart-wrenching for all the parties involved. But Ruth remains unconvinced and she insists on clinging to Naomi. Verse 15 says: *And she, that is Naomi, said, "Look, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law." But Ruth said: "Entreat me not to leave you, or to turn back from following after you; for wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die, and there will I be buried. The LORD do so to me, and more also, if anything but death parts you and me."*

Well last week we focused in on this exchange pointing out just what ten years in Moab had done to Naomi and her faith. You see, Moab was an exceedingly wicked place. It was a place that worshiped pagan gods who demanded child sacrifice. And we spoke last week about how the enemy is constantly at work incrementally driving us away from the kingdom. We saw the effect of the enemy's work in Naomi's exchange with Ruth. I mean Naomi actually entreats her daughters-in-law to return not only to their people, but also to their people's gods. And this is a stunning development and it points to how effective the enemy is in turning hearts in tiny little steps that we are not even aware of. I mean Naomi certainly knew that there was one true God and that the gods of the Moabites were evil but it didn't stop her from insisting that her daughters-in-law, whom she clearly loved, pursue those gods. And when Ruth insists on following Naomi and Naomi's God and she pours her heart out, proclaiming, *"Your people shall be my people and your God my God,"* Naomi has this incredibly bizarre response. It's verse 18, it says: *When she saw that she was determined to go with her, she stopped speaking to her.* I mean this wasn't just a momentary pause on Naomi's part in order to kind of collect her thoughts. This was a studied, determined icy silence. Iain Duguid's commentary on Ruth says this: *"Literally, the Hebrew says, 'When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped talking to her.'* Having listened to one of the most emotionally moving

speeches in the whole Bible, in which Ruth pledged herself completely to Naomi, she could make no response other than a hard silence." See incrementalism had certainly made inroads into Naomi's spiritual understanding, but there was more going on than simply that, and the dialogue that ensues next points that out. This is verse 19, it says: *Now the two of them went until they came to Bethlehem. And it happened, when they had come to Bethlehem, that all the city was excited because of them; and the women said, "Is this Naomi?" But she said to them, "Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me."* Well now we understand Naomi's clearly a person of influence in Bethlehem, I mean it's been ten years that she's been gone and yet the entire city is excited that she's coming back. She says she no longer wants to be known by her previous name, which means "pleasant," but now she wants to be known by the name Mara, which means "bitter." Verse 21, she said: *"I went out full, and the LORD has brought me home again empty. Why do you call my Naomi, since the LORD has testified against me, and the Almighty has afflicted me?"* Life had not been kind to Naomi. And the loss of her husband and her two sons had indeed been a bitter blow. She was coming back to Bethlehem broken, bereft of family and fortune and bringing with her a Moabitis, someone completely outside the covenant community. I mean Naomi is completely convinced that God is sovereign, that he's absolutely in control of her life. She is

not convinced at all though that God is loving and kind. I mean she and her husband Elimelech had foolishly left Bethlehem for Moab and her sons had married Moabite women, so it's no wonder she thinks she's gone out full and come back empty, I mean, God is clearly in her mind punishing her. And her theology lines up with many, if not most, of the folks that I know, including many believers. Deep down, they believe that God is a cosmically angry parent who can't wait to extract vengeance on those who disobey, I mean even Jesus's disciples thought if you get on God's bad side then bad things are just going to happen. When the disciples encounter a man who has been born blind from birth, they question Jesus this way in *John 9*. They said, "*Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?*" See, the disciples could not imagine somebody being born blind without somebody being at fault. *Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him."* Naomi clearly identifies the struggle in her life with God afflicting her for her actions. In verse 20 she says: "*The Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me.*" In verse 21 she says, "*The LORD has testified against me, and the Almighty has afflicted me.*"

Naomi could not have been more mistaken. You see we have a huge advantage over Naomi, I mean, we can just flip the pages of the book. We can go to the end of the book of Ruth and we can see the

blessing and the promise that Naomi couldn't possibly have been able to see. Everything in her life, from her poverty to her estrangement from her culture and country, to her inability to raise up an heir is going to be turned 180 degrees right side up. But right now life couldn't possibly get worse, she thinks. And worse still, she thinks all of this is from the hand of God. And one part of that is true, all of it is from the hand of God. The part that she's gotten wrong is the part that we often get wrong as well. It's thinking that God's love for us is based primarily on our performance. *Proverbs 3:35* says: *The wise will inherit honor, but fools get disgrace.* In Naomi's mind her foolishness has now received the disgrace she felt she had earned and that she thought God was quite willing to dole out.

So walking down that road to Bethlehem as a guilt ridden Naomi bitterly convinced that she is merely reaping what she has sowed. Ten years in Moab has not only incrementally captured her understanding of the God of the covenant, it has also dulled her ability to even begin to imagine anything beyond the misery of her circumstance. Well, two things come immediately to mind that are mistaken about Naomi's thinking. One we referred to last week has to do with the idea of God's discipline and ours. The false notion that I think we all tend to have is that somehow or other we are capable of surprising God with our sin. I mean as easy it is to

surprise and disappoint a parent or a loved one with our sin, so it is with God an impossibility. *Isaiah 46* says: *Remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done.* See before you and I were ever born, God knew the worst thing that we would ever do and he still elected to love us. I think when we think of discipline we think of the times we've surprised and disappointed those who have disciplined us. And as good as that discipline may have been, it's always rooted in some type of discovery. Someone or something has tripped us up and it needed to be addressed. It's hard for us to even imagine a God who chooses to love us knowing the deepest, darkest secrets of our heart far better than even we know it. I mean just think of Jesus and his relationship with Peter. He's with Peter for three years, he's instructing him, he's correcting him, he's patiently putting up with Peter's bragging and all the while he's grooming him, he's growing him as a leader in the church. It's only when Peter begins bragging about his faithfulness that Jesus chooses to reveal to him something he's known before the day Peter was even born. And that is on the night when Jesus was betrayed by Judas and slapped around by the Sanhedrin and well on his way to his torture and death, he would actually hear his beloved Peter deny him three times. So Jesus tells Peter what he's about to do and the only one who's truly

shocked by the accusation is Peter. He insists that's not going to happen. Obviously we see it unfold exactly as Jesus said it would only hours later. But here's the point. There was never a time in all of Jesus' interactions with Peter that he didn't know exactly what was going to happen that night, because there's no surprises with God. And yet it had no effect whatsoever on the way Jesus interacted with Peter. Now does God discipline us? Yes, he does. But it's unlike any form of human discipline that anyone can imagine. I mean God does say in *Proverbs 3:11*: *My son, do not despise the LORD'S discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the LORD reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.* You see God's discipline differs from ours in one very critical aspect. It doesn't have the emotional component that all human discipline has. Because God knows things, all things from beginning to end, his discipline is void of the surprise, the disappointment and even anger that we humans have when we discipline. And thus God is free to do exactly what God wants discipline to do and that is to correct and to strengthen. But all of this has escaped Naomi. She can't help but think of God in a human sense. I mean she's messed up and now God is getting even with her by making her life miserable. And she doesn't even appear to be angry or upset. Rather she seems to accept this understanding of God's discipline as her lot in life. But it's all based on a misunderstanding on the love of God and his discipline.

The second part of Naomi's misunderstanding is the A plus B equals C thinking that all of us are so prone to. See, so much of the Christian life is based falsely on the simple formula A plus B equals C. A is if I believe right, and B is if I try my best to do right, well then C, things are going to go right for me. And you know, I'd be the first one to say there is scripture that seems to back that up. If you look at *Psalm 5*, it says: *For you bless the righteous, O LORD; you cover him with favor as with a shield.* *Psalm 1* says: *Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.* Well, Naomi reasoned that God is sovereign and in control and she was 100 percent correct in that. She also probably reasoned that God was paying her back for her foolishness, which we'll see as the book of Ruth unfolds was a hundred percent incorrect. Naomi's experience is something most Christians wrestle with.

So how do we deal with a Naomi moment? You see a Naomi moment happens when life or sickness or sin or pressure or any other element of human fallenness reaches a critical stage and you just

feel ready to pack it in. Or just like Naomi you see a future that holds no promise whatsoever, a past that's full of mistakes and a present that is absolutely hopeless. And you find at those times that the enemy is much closer to you than you ever imagined. He starts whispering. He starts telling you God doesn't care, he starts telling you God is angry and punishing you or that God doesn't even exist and you find yourself turning those thoughts over in your mind more times than you'd ever imagined you would. Now if you've never had a Naomi moment, trust me, eventually you will. The pages of scripture are filled with people having their own Naomi moments. David had his when he was on the run from Saul. David was an innocent man chosen by God to lead but relentlessly pursued by a crazed ruler intent on taking his life and he couldn't understand why God would allow that to happen. In *Psalm 69* he says: *Save me, O God! For the waters have come up to my neck. I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing; I have come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me. I am weary with my crying; my throat is dry; my eyes fail while I wait for my God.* We see the psalmist in *Psalm 73*, this is a righteous man, he's despairing of the prosperity of the wicked and he says in *Psalm 73:13*: *All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence. For all the day long I have been stricken and rebuked every morning. If I had said, "I will speak thus," I would have betrayed the generation of your children.* I mean what he's

actually saying is if I told you how I really felt about the way God's treating me, your kids would be scandalized. Paul had this Naomi moment while he was ministering in Asia. He said this: *For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself.* I mean these were all folks who, from the outside looked like they were giving the lie to the scripture that seems to say A plus B equals C. They believed right and they behaved right but things sure didn't seem to go right. Well the problem lies in understanding what God means by those scriptures. *Psalm 5 says: For you bless the righteous, O LORD; you cover him with favor as with a shield.* Well, Naomi had no idea what favor and what shield she was under when she had her moment.

So what does God's favor look like? Do you win the lottery? Do you have perfect health, do you get that job, that house, that spouse? Well, not necessarily. Well, then what do you get? You get something far more precious than that. God says in *Isaiah 43: When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through the fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.* Now you notice in this passage God does not say he will take you around the waters, the river, or the fire. Rather he says that he

will be with us and he will take us through whatever it is that life throws at us. That's a vastly different understanding of A plus B equals C and it is thoroughly biblical. I think sometimes we just can't see the forest for the trees. You know perhaps the most quoted scripture in all of the Bible is the 23rd Psalm and it too contains the very same message, though I think we often miss it. I mean David is in the midst of one of his Naomi moments and he's talking about the blessing he's receiving in it from God and he says: *Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.* Those five words "*for you are with me*", they really say it all.

Let me give you an example of how this works. As most of you know, we were on vacation in Florida last week and Janice and I met up with her sister and my brother-in-law. We're best friends, we were roommates in college, we married sisters, so I've known him for years. We had ten kids, they had nine kids. We have 19 cousins between the two of us, so we hang out a lot. And we traveled around the panhandle in Florida before meeting up with Janice's family in Jacksonville. There was eleven of us there and this is just a brief aside, this is just how God continues to work and humble us. We went -- one day we went to St. Augustine which is the oldest city in the United States, touristy, it's a really neat

place and I had been there four years ago 'cause my daughter Lydia lived in Jacksonville, we were down there visiting, and I remember going to St. Augustine. And one of the things that they have in touristy type cities, they have this Ripley's Believe it or Not! fake train. It's like a tram and it's got a little hokey train printed on the front of it, and it's just filled with very old people who are touring Florida, and they're winding through the streets and the guy's on a bullhorn. Four years ago I'm with my daughter, I'm looking at this, I said, "That's Florida. It's just old people and tourists." This year I was on that train. So they all made a decision, well, let's go on the train. I said, "I'm going to take pictures of everybody and use it to blackmail you."

Well, one of the most memorable of our days was a day that we spent at the Kennedy Space Center. You have a couple of pictures up there. Janice hates being in pictures but I said I need you there just to get the scale of how huge this thing is. If you ever have the opportunity to just spend a day there, it is absolutely worth it, it's a little pricey but it's an incredible place to visit. I mean, we got to see the very rockets that these incredibly brave men went up in. And they also had one of the shuttles there that was on permanent display. And one of the most moving displays to me was for Captain Rick Husband who was the commander of the space shuttle Columbia. And what I learned that day was Mr. Husband was

a committed believer. His display, the display's on the wall, his display contained an open Bible with *Proverbs 3:5-6* underlined which says: *Trust in the LORD with all of your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct your paths.* His display also had a picture of him kind of gathered around with all of his fellow astronauts in prayer. So I started reading up a little bit about him and found out he's an incredibly godly man, absolutely dedicated to his wife and family. Rick's wife Evelyn wrote about her husband's videos that he sent to his kids from the shuttle every day. This is what she said. She said: "What he prized more than anything was time with his family, so he wanted to spend 'time' with the kids while he was in space, and he wanted to make the time worthwhile for them. Rick couldn't think of anything better than telling them about the God he desperately loved. God wasn't the 'man upstairs' to Rick; he was the Lord of his life. Jesus wasn't a kind character with good morals out of a book; he was the son of God who loved Rick so much that he left heaven to live on earth for 33 years before dying on the cross for him. Jesus wasn't a fictitious character; he was real to Rick. Rick wanted more than anything on earth for his children to have a relationship with him that was real."

You see, for all intents and purposes Rick had the A part down pat,

I mean he certainly loved the Lord, and the B part he had as well, not only was he a godly man but he was one of those people that had the right stuff, he had discipline, he had charisma, he had courage, he believed the right stuff and he did the right stuff but in the end things did not go right for him at all. It was the C part that made me think of Naomi. You see Captain Husband was the commander of the shuttle that broke apart upon reentry, killing the entire crew. That group of astronauts that we all saw gathered in prayer, they all perished in that accident. A small chunk of one of the heat tiles had broken off at launch and it damaged a part of the wing and the awful fact was the entire crew was damned and they never knew it. Upon reentry the damage caused the wing to heat up enough to melt the infrastructure, and it caused the shuttle to break up and disintegrate over a number of states. The display that I saw was part of a memorial to the 14 astronauts who had died during the shuttle's deployment.

And so I was thinking, how do we square Rick Husband's faith journey with the scriptures that I just read that suggest that we should expect $A + B = C$? I mean is Naomi's moment in which she acknowledges God's sovereign control over her life but not his love, his care, or his blessing, is that accurate? Is God's love and care only reserved for those whose performance is exceptional? Or do we find in Naomi's lamented Ruth a moment in time when Naomi

was just overwhelmed by circumstance? Does God or does God not bless the righteous? If he covers them with his shield, then how do things like shuttle disasters happen? Well, I found out that Rick Husband's wife Evelyn had written a book about her experience with the disaster and its aftermath. It's entitled: *"High Calling: The Courageous Life and Calling of a Space Shuttle Columbia Commander Rick Husband."* There's a picture of it up there. So thanks to Kindle, I downloaded and read the book. And the book opens with a quote from Rick's journal that gives us a hint of what God would give to Rick and his family in the aftermath of this disaster. Rick said -- quote -- "faith doesn't give us the power to change things -- it gives us the ability to cope with the tough things that come our way." I also thought of the Bible passage that Commander Husband had underlined that was on display in the space center because it's those very words that give us the key to handling our own Naomi moments. God tells us in Proverbs 3:5-6 two things that we need to do when we are overwhelmed. They were two things that Naomi had forgotten. *Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct your paths.*

You see, one of the first things that happen when you have a Naomi moment is that the enemy springs into action. He sees tragedy, difficulty and stress and he sees these things as springboards

designed to give him a hearing he never has when things are going well. I mean remember Satan's dialogue with God over Job? Satan tells God that all he has to do is remove the hedge of protection from Job and "and he will curse you, God, right to your face." See, every time life itself strips us of what we thought was our protection, we can hear his voice telling us what he told Naomi, and Naomi says: *"For the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the LORD has brought me home again empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the LORD has testified against me, and the Almighty has afflicted me?"* Well it's going to take us to the end of Ruth to really get a sense of how mistaken Naomi actually was. You see she thought she was the victim of an angry God's discipline. She just couldn't see what God was doing. Evelyn Husband had to struggle with the circumstances that seemed to shout that God was either uncaring or powerless to affect things as well. Both women had their husbands taken from them and both had their Naomi moments. Naomi's has been recorded in scripture; Evelyn's in her book. This is what she writes, she says: "I have lost all sense of politeness with God. I have cried and wept and yelled at him, but I know he's big enough to handle it. He has drawn me closer than I ever thought possible. He has held me close to his heart and let me cry for as long as I've needed."

You see, the two things that Naomi needed to do and each of us need

to do when we have a Naomi moment is, number one, *trust in the LORD with all of your heart*. You can rightly say, okay, how do I do that? Well, we look to scripture. We look to see how others did it in the midst of their heartache and crisis, and we find that the best way to trust God is to draw back, to get ahold of the big picture. Where am I now? Where was I when I first encountered God? What has God done for me in the past? And based on what he has done for me, will I be confident that he'll do this good move in the future? That's precisely what David did. In *Psalm 63* he says: *When I remember You on my bed, I meditate on You in the night watches. Because You have been my help, therefore in the shadow of Your wings I will rejoice. My soul follows close behind You.* In *Psalm 40* he says: *I waited patiently for the LORD; and he inclined to me, and he heard my cry. He also brought me out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my steps.* This is exactly what Evelyn Husband did. She writes: "People have asked me if I blame God for what happened, and I always tell them no. God has a plan for each person's life; I may not understand the plan, and it may grieve me, but I am not bitter toward God. He has been too good to me, to Rick, and to our families. I have a long history with God, and I cannot turn my back on that history of God's faithfulness, provision and grace. He has always loved me when I was unlovable and continues to love me today through the greatest sadness of my

life. He has carried me through dark times and continues to carry me through the darkest of days without Rick." She did exactly what David did. The first thing that she did was she trusted in God. And then the next thing we do is we distrust.

Number two is *lean not on your own understanding*. And David again in Psalm 40 reaffirmed that when nothing makes sense, when the enemy is whispering lies, it's time to mentally double down and trust not in circumstance or situations but in the God of all circumstance and situation. The psalmist says in *Psalm 40*: *Blessed is that man who makes the LORD his trust, and does not respect the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies*. Well, Evelyn Husband did just that as well. She goes on to say: My sweet sister-in-law, Kathy, told me on February 1 that God would walk me step-by-step through this sorrow, and he has. Time and again, what the Lord said in the Bible has proved faithful and true. Isaiah 53:3 tells us that Jesus was a man of sorrows and acquainted with our grief. He really does know how I feel. Psalm 147:3 declares that God "heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds." Revelation 21:4 says: "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain" in heaven. Matthew 11:28 states, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." Psalm 56:8 reminds us that God keeps track of our sorrows. He has collected all my tears

in a bottle and has recorded each one in a book. Verse after verse reflects God's love for me and helps carry me through painfully dark days. Although I am lonely for Rick and will be for the rest of my life, I am never alone; I will never be alone. God is always with me. I know that I will see Rick again in heaven, but I still mourn for him and miss him terribly. There are days that my heart feels it's literally going to break because the pain is so deep, but because I have put my hope in Christ, I am assured of the eternal hope of heaven."

Folks, this is as real as it gets. I mean take it from someone who's been there and done that. And what she's saying is God will be with you. And what confounds and confuses us as outside observers is the grace that God gives only to those who desperately need it. As I've said many, many times, you don't get boiling oil grace until you're thrown into boiling oil. And one of the things that I've noticed over the years is that all of us are in effect rubberneckerers at grace. You know, a rubbernecker is someone who's not involved in some kind of awful event but he can't help but crane his neck to try and see what in the world is going on, hence the term "rubbernecker." A grace rubbernecker is someone who's not at the center of whatever tragedy or heartache is unfolding and is trying like crazy to figure out how such a thing could happen and how somebody possibly could cope with it. But here's the thing.

God gives his grace not to rubberneckers but only to those who are at the center of the storm. Only to the ones who are experiencing it, and they alone know that God's promises are true. I mean I know 'cause I've been there. And many of you have been there as well. They understand exactly what Rick Husband meant when he wrote something that he never thought would be so prophetic. Again, he said, "Faith doesn't give us the power to change things -- it gives us the ability to cope with the tough things that come our way."

Well tough things had certainly come Naomi's way. I mean she was convinced this was God punishing me. And if you ever thought the very same thing about tough times that have come your way, God wants you to know you are mistaken. *We love him because he first loved us.* God wants you to know that he has gone as far as even God could go. He gave his life on a cross for you. It is not unreasonable to think that he is already firmly in your corner. And Paul knew all about Naomi moments as well. Again he said: *For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: That we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life.* What did Paul do? Well, he lifted himself out of that by doing exactly what God tells us to do. He tells us both to trust and distrust that little voice of misunderstanding that lies within all of us. Again, *trust in*

the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding. Well Paul did just that. This was his conclusion. He says: *Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead, who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that he will still deliver us.* I mean Naomi really had no idea what God had in store for us and really neither do we. Neither did Evelyn Husband. I can tell you having read the book, it needs to be packaged with a box of Kleenex. It is a heart wrenching story but it's a wonderful testimony of where God was in her Naomi moment. And she ends her book with this thought. She said: "I stood at the door of the new year and I said, 'Give me a light that I might see my way safely into the unknown.' But a voice came to me and said, 'Instead, step into the darkness and take the hand of God -- for it will be to you better than light and safer than a known way.'" God says: *Blessed is that man who makes the LORD his trust, and does not respect the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies.* Let's pray.

Father, I suspect there are people here this morning who are having Naomi moments as well. I suspect there are folks who are despairing about their present, guilt-ridden about their past and feeling hopeless about their future. Lord, I pray that you would be near to them. I pray that they would take the example of Evelyn

Husband and that you would just use the distress and the struggle and the strife that she went through and the way she acknowledges your incredible presence with her at every moment of that struggle. Use that to encourage all those who are struggling this day. Be near to them, I pray, in Jesus name. Amen.