

1. Self-Pity is All About Self

- a. you get the feeling that Naomi and Ruth have not spoken since Ruth's insistence on staying with Naomi
 - i. Narrator refers to them now as “the two of them” rather than “Naomi and her daughters-in-law” of vv6-8
 - ii. The last scene ends with “she said no more”
 1. You get the impression that Naomi remains silent the rest of the trip up to Bethlehem
 2. There is a booming silence between them, either because Naomi is frustrated with Ruth’s loving insistence, or preoccupied with her loss
- b. The town rejoices to see Naomi return
 - i. Lit. the town was “stirred up, or agitated”
 - ii. Get the idea of “buzzing with excitement”
 1. This word almost always indicates joyful shouts, echoes, a good thing
 2. Most likely not negative, or even passively aware, but joyfully passing word around
 - 1 Samuel 4:5, joyful shouts “echoed”
 - 1 Kings 1:45, rejoicing so that the city was in an “uproar”
 - Led to Naomi’s opposing outburst: she is not pleasantly returning, but emptily returning with bitter sadness
- c. women recognize Naomi, but something is different
 - i. This is Naomi?
 - ii. no family
 - iii. with a Moabite woman
 - iv. The bitterness and self-pity read on her face to show how different she is at present in the story than she was when she left

2. Self-pity (bitterness) Distorts our View of God

- a. Naomi hears the talk and responds with heart-felt bitterness
 - i. Can you imagine being Naomi and walking into your old hometown?
 1. “There is where little Machlon used to chase girls around Jael’s fig stand! Oh my, there’s Jael!”
 2. “That’s the gate the Elimelech used to use to avoid the rush hour before the Sabbath”
 3. “Chilion used to love to go to the market with me.”
 - ii. Every sight, sound, voice, would remind you of what you have lost.
 1. Like a widow, whose house seems darker, emptier, haunted by all the memories of what was and now is not.
 2. The markers of memories bring them back with vivid colors and smells, opening up wide again the wound of our loss.
 - iii. Naomi’s response is bitter, hard, and faithless
 1. The Scriptures are like no other ancient book of divinity
 - They continually present God’s chosen people as faithless, fallen, self-destructive people
 - Because the Bible is about God and His faithfulness, not the supersainthood of His people
 2. I am a Naomi, too, when my loss overwhelms my faith in God’s promises
 3. Self-pity is *dwelling* on my loss until I cannot see anything else
 - Like looking into the sun so that it blinds you to everything else
- b. Naomi (pleasant) vs. Mara (bitter)
 - i. Naomi draws on the meaning of her name: “pleasant one”
 - ii. Contrasts this with how she really feels: “bitter one”

- iii. Snaps at the women in the town in her selfish myopic heart's eyes
 - c. She blames the "Almighty" (Shaddai) for her bitterness
 - i. the One who rules and is powerful (Heb. 'shadad')?
 - ii. from 'shad', which means "breast"?, the idea of sufficiency
 - iii. LXX translates it:
 - 1. transliterated (Ezek 10:5)
 - 2. "the God of the heavens" (Ps 91:1)
 - "the Heavenly King" (Ps 67:15)
 - 3. "ruler of all" (Job 34:12;35:13)
 - 4. "God" many times
 - 5. "Lord" (Job 31:35)
 - 6. "sufficient" (Job 31:2)
 - 7. See Job, where Shaddai is used most frequently and it indicates the ruling One, making judgments and executing His will
 - Job 6:4; 8:3,5; 11:7;13:3; 15:25ff; 21:20; 22; 23:16; 24:1; 27; 31:35; 34:10,12; 37:23; 40:2
 - Ps 68:14; 91
 - Isa 13:6
 - Joel 1:15
 - iv. One who cannot be resisted
 - v. She feels under the heel of the Supreme and Sovereign God, whom she also feels has dealt bitterly with her but cannot be resisted
 - d. fullness vs. emptiness
 - i. her family loss, severe
 - 1. She sees that it was her family that made her full
 - She accepted that famine wasn't what made her empty
 - She left Bethlehem in the famine, but she left it "full"
 - 2. She sees that the loss of her family was the loss of everything
 - We feel that, too, don't we?
 - To lose a member of the family is devastating, let alone your entire family
 - Her grief is real, genuine, and the Lord does not call her out on it here, though it is faithless
 - i. The difference between Naomi and David (Ps 18) is that Naomi is not crying out to God here, but rather crying out *against* God, accusing Him
 - ii. She sees that He has judged her situation, though she does not see nor understand His testimony against her
 - ii. She labels the one who brought her back empty as the LORD (YHWH)
 - 1. She blames God again
 - LORD (YHWH) testified against me
 - Almighty afflicted me
 - 2. Notice the discrepancy of Naomi's practical faith:
 - She says it was "I" who went out full
 - But it was "YHWH" who brought me back empty
 - See any problems?
 - 3. Her theology suffers because of her feelings, her suffering
 - I did fine in fullness and family
 - God took everything away from me
 - He is only sovereign over the bad, not the good
 - i. "Why is there evil in the world?"
 - ii. "Why is there good in the world?"
 - iii. Is she empty, though?

1. Has she gained anything at all?
 2. What has Lord graciously done for her in all of this?
 3. There is still much to come in this story, thus trusting in the Lord
3. Self-Pity Blinds Us to the Good that God Has Graced Us With
- a. Self-Pity Makes Us “Forget” the Promises of God
 - i. Naomi has “forgotten” the promises of God
 1. Not always to forget literally, but rather to not believe
 - ii. Deut 10:18
 - iii. Deut 14:28-29 – God promises protection and provision for widows at the same level as the Levites when it comes to food
 - iv. Deut 16:11 – widows rejoice at the end of the harvest with everyone else
 - v. Deut 24:19 – widows were allowed to glean fields for food, too
 - vi. Later, from Naomi’s great-grandson: Psalm 68:5
 - b. Self-pity Makes Us “Forget” the Present Blessings of God
 - i. Naomi doesn't recognize, nor present, Ruth as a blessing to her
 1. the narrator has to "remind" us of the obvious fact that Ruth, the Moabitess, is:
 - her daughter in law
 - is "with her"
 - returned from Moab with her
 2. With a beautiful proclamation of devotion and camaraderie!!!
 - ii. Naomi only sees her bitterness and suffering, but not the blessing or love of Ruth
 - iii. Self-pity has blinded Naomi to the wonderful blessing of Ruth’s devotion and commitment to her
 1. Ruth’s wonderful statement of faith and commitment is contrasted with Naomi’s statement here of bitter accusation against God
 - iv. You can see how Naomi would justify not celebrating in Ruth’s goodness, can’t you:
 1. “She’s a foreigner, what help is that?!”
 2. “She’ll never get a husband, so what help is that for me?!”
 3. “It’s another mouth to feed!”
 4. “She’s stubborn and pushy!”
 - v. How do you justify your faithless self-pity?
 - c. Self-pity blinds us to God’s present provision and reasons to praise Him
 - i. Narrator drops this line in: and it was the beginning of the barley harvest
 1. food in Bethlehem
 2. house of bread has bread again
 3. God has provided!!
 - ii. they made the beginning of the harvest
 1. the wheat harvest would follow, too
 - iii. Though David’s bed was soaked with tears, his hope in the Lord was always near and his praise of the LORD was before the congregation (Ps 6; 35)
4. God Has Blessed Us Tremendously in Jesus Christ!
- a. Self-pity reveals where we have pursued and lost (or are losing) something that we feel will bring us ultimate joy
 - i. This is not the same as grief
 - ii. 1 Thess 4:13-14
 - b. Self-pity is hopeless and self-centered
 - i. John of Landsberg quote from *A Letter from Jesus Christ to the Soul that Really Loves Him* (GT, p.62)

One thing I have to warn you of especially is that your constant tendency to grow fainthearted under the weight of your faults and oversights and an inclination almost to despair when a sudden lack of confidence reduces your firm decisions to nothing. I know those moods when you sit there utterly alone, eaten up with unhappiness in a pure state of grief. You don't move towards me but desperately imagine that everything you have ever done has been utterly lost and forgotten. This near-despair and self-pity are actually a form of pride. What you think was a state of absolute security from which you've fallen was really trusting too much in your own strength and ability. Profound depression and perplexity of mind often follow a loss of hope, when what really ails you is that things simply haven't happened as you expected and wanted. In fact, I don't want you to rely on your own strength and abilities and plans, but to distrust them and to distrust yourself, and to trust me and no one and nothing else. As long as you rely on yourself you are bound to come to grief. You still have a most important lesson to learn: Your own strength will no more help you to stand upright than dropping yourself on a broken reed. You must not despair of me. You must hope and trust in me absolutely. My mercy is infinite...

1. I want control and I don't have it!
2. I don't trust God with His control or His goodness towards me
- ii. Self-pity is simply a loss of hope in one's own control/ability AND a loss of hope in God's control/ability/willingness
 1. We can't make life work on our own terms, so we lose hope...even in God's ability to help
 2. When we lose hope we are really saying to Jesus: Your blood and righteousness and life are not enough for me.
- c. Godly grief is hopeful and God-centered, and never leads to despair
- d. 2 Corinthians 4:7-10
- e. So, when we recognize that self-pity overwhelms us, we need to ask:
 - i. Where does my hope come from?
 - ii. What do I think I need to be fulfilled and joyful?
 1. What do I want: nearness to the LORD, or my pseudo-Savior?
 - iii. What am I trusting as a pseudo-Savior?
 1. I was created to love God and be loved by God
 2. Can this person ultimately fulfill my joy?
 3. Can this reputation ultimately fulfill my joy?
 - Career reputation ("he sure is successful...better than so-and-so")
 - Family reputation ("he sure is a great dad. She sure is a great mom")
 - Spiritual reputation ("he's very wise, or holy, or spiritual")
 - Intellectual reputation ("he is so smart and intellectual")

Conclusion:

Look to Jesus and see how greatly He has blessed you, even in the midst of your rightful crying out to Him in your suffering. We are "sorrowful, yet always rejoicing" so we cry out, not merely in general terms, but TO HIM!! To Him who desperately loves you with such a love that "though He was rich, He became poor *for* you, so that through His poverty you might become rich." It is the LORD who has blessed you with every spiritual blessing in Christ. EVERY...SPIRITUAL...BLESSING. There is nothing more than Him that will fulfill your desire for holiness and meaning. You were made to love Him and to be loved by Him, and only in that reciprocal relationship will you find peace, even when the terrors of your cross surround you.

Don't fall into self-pity, for it really is only about you. In self-pity you have elevated yourself to God's place and sit in judgment of Him. Let Him rule, for He rules with greater mercy and wisdom than you and I. Get your eyes off of yourself and place them upon Jesus, loving Him for His beauty and glory, and serving His people with reckless abandon.