

Date: March 8, 2026

Title: Bringing God's Peace to a Bitter Heart

Passage: Ruth 1:19-22

Speaker: Jim Newheiser

Dr. Newheiser is Director of the Christian Counseling Program at Reformed Theological Seminary in Charlotte, NC. He also serves as Executive Director of the Institute for Biblical Counseling and Discipleship (IBCD). He and his wife Caroline have been married for forty-six years and have three adult children.

Key Truths:

- God is always working redemption through His beloved children. God is always in control even when we don't understand our circumstances.
- For most people, most depression is spiritual.
- When you're depressed, you need to stop listening to yourself and start talking to yourself.

Application:

- Rebut lies with 8 key truths:
 - God is for me.
 - God offers me hope.
 - God is always with me.
 - God is all I need.
 - God forgives and restores me.
 - God is just.
 - God cares about me.
 - God gives me Jesus' righteousness.

Possible Discussion Questions:

- What point(s) in the sermon did the Lord most impress upon you?
- What's a takeaway from the sermon you can apply to your life?
- What next steps will you take in response to the truths you have heard or seen?

Introduction

Depression - intense sadness.

- Many situations may cause depression.
 - Very common today

1 Corinthians 10:11

Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come.

- special truths may be found throughout the Old Testament.

Context of Passage

Book of Ruth

- Big picture: Story of redemption concerning a woman from Jerusalem, Naomi.

Ruth 1:1-5 (Naomi Widowed)

In the days when the judges ruled there was a famine in the land, and a man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons. The name of the man was Elimelech and the name of his wife Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They went into the country of Moab and remained there. But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons. These took Moabite wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. They lived there about ten years, and both Mahlon and Chilion died, so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband.

- In the Old Testament, each family had a plot of land. But it was tied to the male.
 - Naomi - has since lost her husband and both sons. Therefore, her family would be obliterated.
 - She is a woman in desperate need of redemption.
- Later in the book, Naomi does experience redemption with the marriage of her daughter-in-law Ruth and has a grandson (Obed).

- Out of Bethlehem come three redeemers:
 - Obed (redeems Naomi's family),
 - David (Israel's forthcoming redeemer as these were days of judges where horrible is happening but David would make Israel great)
 - Through the lineage of David would come the great Redeemer, Jesus Christ.

Ruth 1:6-18 (Ruth's Loyalty to Naomi)

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 the LORD had visited his people and given them food. 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. 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. The LORD grant that you may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband!" Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept.

And they said to her, “No, we will return with you to your people.” But Naomi said, “Turn back, my daughters; why will you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb that they may become your husbands? Turn back, my daughters; go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. If I should say I have hope, even if I should have a husband this night and should bear sons, 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.” Then they lifted up their voices and wept again. And Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.

And she said, “See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law.” 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. Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the LORD do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you.” And when Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more.

- In today's passage, Naomi was in Moab but hears Jerusalem's famine has ended and wants to return.

Passage:

Ruth 1:19-22

So the two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem. And when they came to Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them. And the women said, “Is this Naomi?” She said to them, “Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. 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?”

So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabite her daughter-in-law with her, who returned from the country of Moab. And they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest.

EXPOSITION

Ruth 1:20

She said to them, “Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me.

Naomi

- typical picture of depression (sadness over loss)

Ruth 1:21

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?”

- Naomi's severe depression was because of the great loss of husband and two sons.

The Almighty has brought calamity upon me?

- Naomi did believe in God's sovereignty.
- Nothing occurred by random chance but for a reason.

But note: Naomi's bad choices

- Naomi and her husband left Jerusalem due to famine.
 - But not everyone left Jerusalem.
- A famine indicated there was covenantal disobedience and sign of God's punishment of the nation.
 - Naomi was part of that
- Naomi's sons ended up marrying Moabite women.
 - Naomi allowed something that was forbidden in the Law (see Deuteronomy 7)

Ruth 1:22

So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabite her daughter-in-law with her, who returned from the country of Moab. And they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest.

- Naomi reflected a person in depression in terms of her worldview.
 - A depressed person can't see the good thing that God is doing.
 - Here: God was still doing good things.

And they came to Bethlehem

- Good thing from God ignored by Naomi:
 - Two women arrived safely.
 - In ancient times, it was dangerous for women to travel.

Psalms 68:5

Father of the fatherless and protector of widows is God in his holy habitation. at the beginning of barley harvest.

- Good thing from God ignored by Naomi:
 - The famine was over.

Deuteronomy 24:19

“When you reap your harvest in your field and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands.

I went away full, and the LORD has brought me back empty.

- Good thing from God ignored by Naomi:
 - She is not alone but actually is accompanied by Ruth, who later gleans the fields to find food for both of them.

God is always working redemption through His beloved children. God is always in control even when we don't understand our circumstances.

Jeremiah 29:11

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.

Genesis 50:20

As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.

Romans 8:28

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

Question: How do you counsel someone in depression (or yourself)?

- Depression: a state of darkness.
- Ex: Psalm 42, Psalm 88

Psalms 42:3

My tears have been my food day and night, while they say to me all the day long, “Where is your God?”

Proverbs 18:14

A man's spirit will endure sickness, but a crushed spirit who can bear?

- For a friend counseling:
 - Be patient and compassionate.
 - Can't simply say "Just smile."
- For most people, most depression is spiritual.

When you're depressed, you need to stop listening to yourself and start talking to yourself.

- Don't listen to every thought in your mind as can spiral down into depression.

KEY EIGHT TRUTHS

- to remember in the midst of sadness (Psalm 42)

Lie: God is against me.

- **Truth: God is for me.**

Romans 8:31-32

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

Romans 8:38-39

For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

James 1:17

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.

Psalms 145:9

The LORD is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made.

Lie: My situation is hopeless.

- **Truth: God offers me hope**

1 Peter 1:3

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

Jeremiah 29:11-14

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you, declares the LORD, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, declares the LORD, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.

Romans 8:28

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

Lie: I am all alone

- **Truth: God is always with me**

Hebrews 13:5

Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

Psalms 27:10b

but the LORD will take me in.

Psalms 23

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even 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...Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

Lie: I can't live without what I desire

- **Truth: God is all I need**

Jeremiah 17:7-8

"Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose trust is the LORD. He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit."

Isaiah 55:1-2

"Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food.

Psalms 107:9

For he satisfies the longing soul, and the hungry soul he fills with good things.

Lie: I have ruined my life by sin

- **Truth: God forgives and restores me.**

Psalms 32:5

I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah

Psalms 32:1-2

Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.

Isaiah 55:6-7

“Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

Philippians 1:6

And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

Lie: My life is unfair

- **Truth: God is just**

Psalms 73:16-17

But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task, until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I discerned their end.

Romans 12:19

Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.”

Hebrews 12:4-11

In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons?

“My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.”

It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

Lie: God doesn't care

- **Truth: God cares about me.**

1 Samuel 1:19

They rose early in the morning and worshiped before the LORD; then they went back to their house at Ramah. And Elkanah knew Hannah his wife, and the LORD remembered her.

Isaiah 49:15-16

“Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are continually before me.

John 3:16

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Lie: I am no good

- **Truth: God gives me Jesus' righteousness**

Philippians 3:9

and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith

1 Timothy 1:15-16

The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.

When we are sad and tempted to believe in the lies and give up:

- God is the God of hope and grace and redemption. He can and will help you. God has proven He has loved us by giving us His Son.
 - If we have trusted Jesus, we can then trust in God.
 - God is in control. He loves us as His people.
- There is always help and hope in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
 - Don't camp in the valley.
 - Walk with your Shepherd.
 - Contact someone in the church to help walk alongside you.

God remains sovereign over all

1 Chronicles 29:11

Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours. Yours is the kingdom, O LORD, and you are exalted as head above all.