

Why Naomi's Bitterness Was Actually Admirable

So [Naomi and Ruth] went on until they came to Bethlehem. When they came to Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them, and the women asked, "Is this Naomi?"

But she said to them, "Do not call me Naomi. Call me Mara, because the Almighty has brought great bitterness to me. I was full when I left, but the Lord has caused me to return empty. Why should you call me Naomi when the Lord has opposed me? The Almighty has brought misfortune upon me!"

So Naomi returned from the land of Moab with Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law. They came to Bethlehem at the start of the spring barley harvest (Ruth 1:19-22).

Although admittedly bitter against God after the death of her husband and sons, Naomi decided to leave Moab and return home to God's people and presence. One of her daughters-in-law, Orpah, returned to her people and religion in Moab at Naomi's urging, but Naomi's other daughter-in-law, Ruth, was determined to leave her people and religion to worship Naomi's God and live with God's people. Leaving all she had ever known for the complete unknown, Ruth is an example of incredible faith.

Leaving Moab, Ruth and Naomi made the roughly 50-mile journey to Bethlehem, a place pregnant with meaning, as it was where Jesus would later be born, as promised (Mic. 5:2). There, Ruth spent her time at the equivalent of a food bank trying to get enough to eat to keep Naomi and herself alive. To make matters worse, as a Moabite, she likely faced intense racism, and as a non-virgin, she was likely mistreated and abused by men. Nonetheless, Ruth shines forth as one of the godliest and most

loyal, humble and exemplary women in all of human history.

In this scene, the heart of Naomi is revealed as her view of God and her emotions spill out. Despite the fact that her deceased husband's poor leadership and foolish decisions were responsible for much of the devastation in her life, she rightly confesses that even the darkest days of her life were not lived apart from God's providence. Indeed, everything either passes from or through God's hand of providence, which is a great mystery we all struggle with at times. In this, we can identify with the pain of Naomi, who doesn't have her questions answered by God, but continues to seek His presence and people as an act of faith amidst her pain.

Upon their arrival, the women in town who hadn't seen Naomi for many years were abuzz and curious to know how she had fared. Naomi informed them that though her name meant *pleasant* or *sweet*, God's providential hand had made her life hard and her disposition Mara, or *bitter*. Many have criticized Naomi's bitterness and stood at a distance to criticize her emotional state. But, if we're honest, we must confess that at varying seasons of our life, we can sympathize with the emotional state of Naomi. She married a fool who led her to Moab where she had no family, friends or fellowship. She hadn't been to a worship service with God's people or gotten much, if any, Bible teaching in a decade. Her husband died, her sons married godless women, and then her sons died as well, leaving her without a single grandchild. Naomi had descended from a position of affluence to life as a devastated, broke, bitter old woman with no chance of remarriage, children or job skills to even put food on her table—a picture of desperation and loss rivaling Job. Nonetheless, Naomi is to be admired for her brutal honesty.

Unlike so many religious types whose religiosity doesn't allow them to accept reality, Naomi spoke frankly and truthfully about her heart. Furthermore, she did so publicly in hopes of being helped and healed by the *hesed* of God's people and

presence. In Naomi, we see that although we each will likely arrive at a place of bitterness because of our brokenness, God invites us to be honest with Him and others if there is to be any hope of our lives being healed. This way, our future has the hope of not repeating our past.

Naomi was bitter against God when Elimelech was largely responsible for her situation. Are you at all bitter against God for something that someone else did? In your past or present? How might you heal up from that hurt as Naomi did?
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