

kick around, scream, and get tantrums until they get what they want. Adults are expected to be calm and cool-headed when dealing with such unexpected things. But many adults react like kids when dealing with disappointments. The way we process things internally defines the quality of our adulthood/maturity.

Proverbs 14:10 says, “Each heart knows its own bitterness, and no one else can share its joy.” It’s very easy to be bitter when constantly encountering one disappointment after one another. And the evil thing about it is it slowly gnaws at your soul and due to its gradual and steady nature, right before you realize what’s happening, it has turned you into a bitter person. The Bible counsels us to ask God to enlighten our hearts and thoughts. *“Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me and lead me in the way everlasting.” (Psalm 139:23-24).*

Some people might not feel comfortable when dealing with emotion, they tend to brush it off. Some dwell on it and get crippled by their emotion. Neither of them are healthy ways when dealing with any kind of brokenness in this world: a broken relationship, the loss of beloved ones, injustice, shattered dreams. Things happen in life, to anyone of us. And an unguarded heart leads us to bitterness.

God says, “Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.” (Isaiah 41:10). Christians believe we can choose not to be bitter because we have the God who’s in control and strengthening and helping us. We are never left alone when we enter our own brokenness, as long as we invite God and let Him wrap us in His safe and healing embrace.

When Naomi and Ruth entered Bethlehem creating a stir in town, Naomi pronounced the bitterness and brokenness she’s been through. She publicly changed her name from Naomi which means pleasantness in Hebrew into Mara meaning bitter. She who left because of famine of food now is coming back with the famine of spirituality. *“Call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life bitter. I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The Lord has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me.” (1:20-21)*

Ruth and The Less Traveled Road

Nobody should challenge the fact that Naomi has been through a lot in her life. Nevertheless, God doesn’t let his people be defined by their failures and brokenness. In His unfathomable ways He works in all things for the good of those who have been called according to His purpose. In a critical moment of Naomi’s life, Ruth steps in and kindles the light of hope for hopeless Naomi. Ruth says, *“Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me.” (1:16)*

Orpah -one of Naomi’s daughter in laws- chose to go back to her mother’s home, but Ruth did not. She chose to stick with Naomi instead. Ruth’s brave statement is remarkable. It conveys

faith, courage, compassion, faithfulness/loyalty, and hope. Notice that Ruth is a Moabite. In the history of Israel and other nations, Moab ruled over Israel for generations (Judges 3:14); this turned the relationship between the two nations into enmity. Ruth could have chosen a more convenient life – packing up her stuff and going back to her mother’s home like Orpah did. She could have left her mother in law alone in all her misery and desolation. Ten years living with people who don’t share many values like hers should have relieved Ruth somehow. She could have gone back to her own culture (don’t need to cross the culture and getting a safer life without severe judgement or the potential of being misunderstood from people who are not hers). And if she was lucky enough, she could get someone to marry her. Nevertheless, Ruth didn’t take that road. **She chose the less traveled one.**

Jesus once said, “But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.” (Matthew 7: 14) We live in the world that worships fame, wealth, and self-comfort. The broad road is very attractive, yet it will never take us to life. We are prone to the self-centered choices that will serve our own comforts and benefits. But the way to life is never about self-centeredness. Jesus says that whoever tries to keep their lives will lose it, and whoever loses their life will preserve it (Luke 17:33).

How does taking the less traveled and narrow road bring life to the story we read?

For sure, the journey Ruth embarks on is far away from la-la land. Right after she and Naomi entered Bethlehem, she was treated as a nobody by Naomi, who perceived that her life was empty. Yet, Ruth courageously took initiative to labor in a potentially threatening place for a foreign woman like her. Imagine what it must have been like for Ruth as she sustained her life and her mother in-law in a territory which she barely knew about.

Hope works counter-intuitively against the bitterness and the brokenness of the world. Like a night turning dawn, slowly but surely it permeates the darkness and brings light to its full capacity. Like yeast in the dough, its insignificant amount yet powerful effect brings about transformation. It’s invasive and empowering. It rolls down the hill and attracts people to join in.

Ruth happened to be working in a field belonging to Boaz, who was from the clan of Elimelek - her late father in law. She caught Boaz’s attention and sympathy. Her courage to leave her home and come along with Naomi in a foreign land impressed Boaz. He blessed her saying “May the Lord repay and richly reward you.” Fast forward. At the end of story we learn Boaz marries Ruth.

The story of Ruth starts with desolation and ends with restoration. In between we see how hope works in the fallen and broken world ignited by a simple faith embodied in a brave woman named Ruth.

Proverbs 20: 6, “Many claim to have unfailing love, but a **faithful** person who can find?” Hope blooms in faithfulness. Naomi who is consumed by bitterness in the story has learned that transformation happens when a faithful friend chooses a less traveled road, sticks around and provides companionship.

Hope & Faithfulness

Psalm 27:13-14

I remain confident of this:

I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.

Wait for the Lord;

Be strong and take heart

And wait for the Lord (Psalm 27:13-14)

I enjoy writing songs, going deeper into my own thoughts and feelings, embracing the pain that sometimes they bring out. That's how I wait for the Lord. Sometimes I get carried away with while singing with my guitar. As I am doing that, my soul captures the beauty in the midst of melancholy. But I am not boasting about melancholy; I'm boasting about the hope that is inflicted in my imagination. In Christ, as I go deeper and embrace the pain of brokenness, I always find grace comes like torrential rain. It washes away all fears and turns a discouraged heart into a hopeful one. We will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living and actually we are now!

When Ruth insisted that she would stick with Naomi no matter what, I'm sure that it wasn't a glib answer, even though she might have been trembling when she uttered that remark of faith. Our God who works in all things, upheld Ruth and made her a channel of His great purposes. Ruth reminds us of courage and faith (in it there are elements of sacrifice, compassion, and faithfulness). These are commendable and pleasant things before the Lord and He credits them to us as righteousness (Gal 4:6).

In the broken and fallen world where we live, hope is critically needed. In my August sermon I shared about the importance of exercising hope by returning to God every time. This time we learn that hope is carried within people and passed on to others as we are faithful to what God is trusting us with in the present.

I want to share a song that my friend Colin wrote. It speaks of this rebirth of hope.

Glory and Grace By Colin Wolgemuth

There's a new song in my mouth

There's a stirring in my heart

I will leave behind my doubt

I will meet you at the start

And my Lord I'll see you come

Full of glory for us grace

You will fill this house with love, You will fill this house with praise

There can be no fear in love

There can be no pride in grace

Lord please melt our hearts of stone

Lord please let us see your face
Though we wander far away
You have called us back by name
There is none who can compare
Full of glory full of grace

Prayer:

God of all hope, we give You our lives. Thanks for sticking with us in the midst of our tribulation and ordeals. Your gentle presence and compassion are what lifts us up higher with You. We also want to thank You for the hope that You provide through Your people – the brothers and sisters of Christ around us. Thanks for rekindling the light of hope through their lives, through their faith and courage that inspire us to trust again in Your higher purposes. We pray for courage and faith to take the less traveled road, so we become persons that bring hope to disheartened and discouraged hearts. We love you, Jesus. In your name we pray. Amen.

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