

Spiritual Depression Part 3: Out of the Blues cont

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Book of Ruth

By Ty Blackburn

Bible Text: Ruth 3:1-5

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Providence Church

2146 Buford Hwy

Buford Hwy, Duluth, GA 30097

Website: www.providenceduluth.org

Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/providencechurch

Please turn with me in your Bibles to the third chapter of Ruth, Ruth 3. I want to thank those of you who prayed for our elder deacon retreat and it was a real blessing to get away with the men and wives, elders and wives and deacons and wives were together in the mountains for some time together to talk and to pray and to seek the Lord's leading to deal with this issue, spiritual issues, and the issues of leading the church that God has called us to. So thank you for your prayers. It was a very profitable time. It's just wonderful to be with God's people always and we have opportunities to get away and to be with God's people and that's why we need to fellowship more with opportunities like that. But I am excited about the things the Lord is directing us to and we'll be sharing more of those as we go forward.

Today, Ruth 3. The title of the message is once again "Spiritual Depression: Out of the Blues." This is part 3 of the series "Spiritual Depression" which we began looking at at the end of chapter 2 and we looked at again last week, "Spiritual Depression," and I gave that subtitle, "Out of the Blues," from Dr. Mack's book. Spiritual depression is a serious issue and it's one that will afflict many of us at times during our lives; almost all of us will go through periods of blues and some of us will go through what can be characterized or the world characterizes as clinical depression and it's not something that Christians are immune from. In fact, we shared last time how so many well-known believers have experienced that. I'll just remind you, you know, Martin Luther was known to experience severe depression. One particular time, the Lord gives you what you need and your wife, his wife, Luther remember, had been a monk and who when he took his vows as a monk, vowed to be chaste, to be unmarried and, of course, when he came to understand the Gospel, the Gospel of salvation, he was set free from all of those unbiblical traditions that the Catholic Church had imposed upon its people and even its priests, really binding them up in works and so he came to understand he could be married and so he married a woman, Katharina von Bora, Anyway, Luther was experiencing one of his times of depression, bouts of depression, when he came into the house and Katy was dressed in black and Luther said, "Why are you dressed in black? Who died?" And she said, "Apparently God did from the way that you've been acting lately." A very powerful way to tell him it was time for him to take his focus off his circumstances and remember who God is.

Well, Luther was one of those people that struggled with depression. We mentioned Charles Haddon Spurgeon was one. William Cowper, the great hymn writer, struggled with tremendous depression throughout his life; had to be encouraged continually. I mentioned the book by Bob Somerville, Robert Somerville, "If I'm a Christian, Why am I Depressed?" Dr. Somerville's dealt with severe depression through difficult times. In fact, he's going through a tough time right now with just issues with his wife and his health and continue to pray for him, but he describes in his book the symptoms of depression. Now, I didn't share these last time and I want to share them with you today, symptoms of those who are depressed.

He mentioned that if you're in the blues and down-and-out really for more than two weeks then it can tend to be what's called clinical depression. Listen to what he says about this. He says in his book, "If I'm a Christian, Why am I Depressed?" "You may have lost the joy of your salvation. You may not even feel like a believer. I did not believe that I was saved. How can anyone be a genuine Christian and be thinking the thoughts of despair, the thoughts of suicide that I was thinking? Worship songs and messages that had moved my heart seemed meaningless and hopeless. I could no longer believe they really applied to me."

Then he lists a number of symptoms, 10, and I'm going to hit these. He says sometimes there is a numbness and complete lack of positive feelings about anything. There is nothing in the future that appeals to you. He said you may have lost interest or pleasure in what used to interest you. You may have trouble concentrating, find it impossible to make decisions. You may see that your thoughts and movements have been slowed down. You feel like your brain is fuzzy and working in slow motion. All of this negative thinking can easily produce thoughts of death and suicide. He wrote, "I prayed for God to take my life." You're constantly fatigued and yet at the same time you're restless and irritable. To some people, food becomes tasteless; they lose their appetites. Others comfort themselves with eating and eat too much but still without the enjoyment. You may even have unaccounted for pain. He goes on to say there are no words to adequately describe the anguish that you can feel. You don't know where to turn. It seems hopeless. How can you go on? "I wondered if my feelings would ever become normal and natural again. This is only a partial description of the despair that consumed me. You believe that God has cut you off completely and you have no peace and are without hope." David also described the agony of this desperate state in the Psalms when he said, "My bones wasted away through my groaning all day long." The mental pain is excruciating and there seems to be no way of escape, not even in your sleep. When combined with physical pain and exhaustion, it can be a true horror.

That's what depression can be and so this is something that is a real danger that we can face and when that comes along, what do we do? How do we help one another through difficult times to come out the other side of that kind of depression? That's what we're going to look at this morning: Spiritual Depression: Out of the Blues. And I want to read again those first five verses of chapter 3 which really what we see in these verses is Naomi's just altered, dramatically different outlook on life; her attitude, her energy level is different because she's come out of the blues that she was in. She's come out of a

period of depression. She's come out the other side into the broad sunlit uplands as she moves on in the Christian life, from the dark and dreary time, and you see it evident in these five verses.

Chapter 3, verse 1,

1 Then Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, "My daughter, shall I not seek security for you, that it may be well with you? 2 Now is not Boaz our kinsman, with whose maids you were? Behold, he winnows barley at the threshing floor tonight. 3 Wash yourself therefore, and anoint yourself and put on your best clothes, and go down to the threshing floor; but do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking. 4 It shall be when he lies down, that you shall notice the place where he lies, and you shall go and uncover his feet and lie down; then he will tell you what you shall do." 5 She said to her, "All that you say I will do."

Let's pray.

Our Father, we thank you for the preciousness of your word. We thank you that it is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path, that it is the entrance of your word that gives light and we pray that you might give light and in your light we might see light in our lives, in our circumstances and we pray this all for the glory of your Son. Amen.

Now, coming out of the blues, out of spiritual depression, we saw that there is this dramatic change. Naomi had had symptoms like we read in the book a moment ago: she lacked energy; she lacked initiative; she thought that everything was against her; she was self-focused even and unconcerned about others; she had no sense of spiritual vision that things would get better. And yet we see in these verses evidence that that has changed. She now is concerned about her daughter-in-law and she has great energy and she has put together a plan, a well thought out plan that in itself is energetic. We noted last time nine different imperatives: wash yourself, put on your best clothes, go down to the threshing floor, don't make yourself known to the man, notice where he lies down, go, uncover his feet, lie there beside him and then wait for him to tell you what you will do.

So she has this transformation of her own mental outlook and how did that happen? We noted that the turning point is clearly chapter 2, verse 20, or it is evident in chapter 2, verse 20. Chapter 2 is the turning point when Ruth comes home with the barley that she has gleaned and beaten out and she brings home that really almost enormous amount of barley, at least two weeks' provision. Naomi sees that, then she gives her bread that has already been prepared and she asks her, "Where did you glean today and where did you work?" And Ruth tells her she worked with a man named Boaz and when she hears the name Boaz, it's suddenly she's struck with the fact of God's kindness to her and she says to her daughter-in-law, she exclaims, "May he be," this is 2:20, "May he be blessed of the LORD who has not withdrawn his kindness to the living and to the dead." When she hears the name Boaz, everything changes and she sees now because she understands what we already know when we read the narrative, the narrator had told us things about Ruth's

adventure that Naomi just is finding out about. We know that Boaz is a close relative and Naomi then seeing that begins to see God's plan suddenly come together. It's like for a moment she sees, I mentioned before the way we see our lives, the way we see our circumstances is like looking at the backside of a tapestry. The back side of a tapestry is a chaotic mess. You've got pieces of thread just together. It's not meant to look at this side of it but when you look at that you see that and it looks like, "What in the world? What has happened to this fabric?" Well, you turn it over and you see a beautiful work of art.

Well, God sees the work of art, we see the backside of a tapestry. Our circumstances, we can't make sense of them. We can't make sense of the details of our lives but every now and then it's as if the Lord turns a little bit of the tapestry over and this is what happens here. She sees, "Wait a minute. God's hand is not against me. He is working for me." She had really been convinced that the Lord was against her and she had said that a number of times. She said to her daughters-in-law, "It's better for you basically to go away." Verse 13, "for the hand of the LORD," this is chapter 1, verse 13, "You need to leave me because the hand of the LORD has gone forth against me." Then when she comes into Bethlehem she says, "The LORD has dealt very bitterly with me. The Almighty has afflicted me. The Almighty is doing evil to me. The Almighty is dealing bitterly with me. The Almighty is against me." That's the essence of spiritual depression. Now suddenly with the name Boaz and the provision that's happened, she sees, "Wait a minute. God's not against me."

And I think we see in her life principles that we can use to come out of spiritual depression. I really shared one primary principle last week that we really focused on in a major way and it was that one of the reasons we're spiritually depressed, one of the reasons that we can find ourselves going down into despair, is that we don't like our circumstances and we have not yet embraced God's sovereign right to lead. That was the main point last week, that if you want to come out of spiritual depression you have to embrace God's sovereign right to lead. That is, when you sign up as a Christian, when you enter into a covenant with God and you accept Jesus Christ, you repent of your sins, you place your faith in Christ in a saving way, it means you don't just get fire insurance, you don't just pray a prayer so that you go to heaven, you surrender to your Lord and Master, and so in surrendering to him, you commit to follow him.

And these are the terms of what it means to be a Christian: you are committed to follow Christ and so that means that he gets to choose where you go. We would like to choose where we go. "I would like this circumstance to happen," but the Lord leads you a different way and when that happens, we can sit there and focus as we are on the path that he has placed us in because we can't make ourselves get over there, but it's like we want to sit there and look over there and think that's where we should be and we become embittered. So one of the things that we saw last week is one of the ways out of spiritual depression is to embrace God's sovereign right to lead. "Wait a minute. He is Lord. He is the Master. He is the Shepherd. I am the sheep. I am the servant. So wherever he leads, I'm going to follow." And you stop kicking against the goads. So much are you in it when you waste your energy kicking against the goads it's hurts and so you make the pain worse.

So that's what we saw last time. Last week's message was really focused on that. Today, I want us to look at the next thing that is a key in helping us come out of spiritual depression. Last week we said: embrace God's sovereign right to lead. This is the theme of the message I'm going to give you today. This week: enjoy God's kind provision along the way. We want to learn to enjoy God's kind provision along the way. Now, we're on ways, paths, that we don't want to be on. We're going through circumstances and if you happen to be today in a circumstance in which you like being in, you like the way your life is going, well, praise God, enjoy it while it lasts. There will be times where he leads you down areas you don't want to go and when he does, first of all, embrace his right to lead, but secondly, don't let this principle escape you. This is what we're focusing on today: enjoy God's kind provision along the way. Though he leads you places where you don't want to go, you must remember that he will always provide everything you need along the way.

He is faithful. We heard earlier, Philippians 4:19, "my God shall supply all of your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus." Wherever he leads, he provides and so rather than be frustrated about the fact that we're not on the path that we want, we need to surrender to the path and enjoy his amazing provision to sustain us on this path we'd rather not be on, and when we start enjoying the provision that God gives us along the way, we start understanding more and more his path is better than the path I wanted to be on. It's always better. He doesn't make a single mistake with a single one of his people. Every one of us who belong to Jesus Christ, you can know that God's path for you is different than his path for me, is different from his path for the person beside you, it's different from the path of every other believer in history. There is uniqueness about each particular path that he's on but the path that he has set before you is the perfect and best path for you and one of the things that you're going to experience along the path that you are on is you're going to experience prescription, perfect, measured provision at each step of the way. That's what we see in Naomi's life.

So we want to enjoy God's kind provision along the way, that's the theme. Really in a sentence, that's the message. I want to consider what that really means and what it looks like by looking at two points and the two points, the first point is: our problem. The first point is our problem. We have a problem and our problem is the same problem as Naomi's problem. Our problem, that's our first point.

Our problem in enjoying God's provision along the way is that we don't see it. We're blind to it and it's hard to enjoy what you don't see. Now, the reality is we enjoy lots of things we don't see all the time. We enjoy God's kindness every moment of every day. His kindness is over all of his works. His blessing is upon us and we don't see it but to really enjoy it fully, you enjoy it more when you do see it, when you take time to notice it. It's kind of like eating food, you can have a wonderful meal that your wife has prepared or that someone that you love has prepared for you and it's delicious but you can eat it so fast that you hardly taste it, can't you? Have you ever done that? You say, "I can't wait to eat this," and you just inhale it and it's all gone and you're saying, "Wow,

that was great," but isn't it better when you stop and you chew? You pause and you breathe between bites? Yes, it so much more delightful.

Well, that's a picture of what it is in our lives when we stop and we reflect on the blessings of God. When we stop and reflect on them, we enjoy them, we enjoy his provision along the way, we experience it, we taste and see that the Lord is good, Psalm 34:8, and in doing that, praise him and we gain strength from that exercise that sustains us. It's like it's more nourishing. You know, when you chew your food properly, your body is blessed in the whole digestive process and when your body is working properly and you're chewing properly, there's all the digestion happens when we eat something. You know, we have the saliva breaks things down; the teeth chew things up; then the acid in the stomach, etc. all the way through the process. Well, when everything's working properly, nourishment comes to the cells of our bodies. When we're not doing something correctly, there are problems and sometimes that can even be as basic as just not chewing your food enough. You're not getting the full nourishment. We need to learn to do that.

So our problem though is we're unaware of it, so there are two parts of this problem. Why are we unaware of it? First of all, the first sub point under our problem is we tend to focus on the things we cannot change. We tend to keep looking back across at the path we'd rather be on. "Man, I wish I was over there." And so imagine you're a sheep and you're going along this hard path up into the mountains and you're thinking, "Boy, that looks like an easy path over there. Look at that rolling hill and green meadow over there. That's where I wanted to go but here I am and my knees are sore, my feet are sore, and I'm here with all these other stinking sheep just like me and we're making our way up the hill. Don't even have a good view from here. I mean, I can see that place over there, maybe again I'm just remembering it. I saw it a while ago. I can't even see it anymore. I wish I was over there." And so we stop for a moment, the shepherd stops us and we all lay down here and I'm thinking to myself, "Man, I wish I was on that other path," and I don't even realize that he has stopped me and I'm laying on this wonderful bed of grass. And as I'm thinking about the fact that, "I wish I was over there," I'm not even aware of the fact that there's a bubbling sound in my ears because there's a brook that runs right beside the path there.

You see, the shepherd knows what he's doing, he knows how to provide along the way, but I'm so busy upset that he's not taking me the way I want to go that I'm not even enjoying his provision. Naomi is like that. I mean, that's what we see in her life up to the point of the transformation that happens. She's so focused on the fact that her husband and her sons are gone, you see, that wasn't the path she wanted. She never envisioned a path of her life where she would spend the last decades of her life without her husband and without her two sons and so when she comes to Bethlehem she says, "Call me not Naomi. Don't call me Pleasant One," that's what her name Naomi means in Hebrew, "Don't call me Pleasant, call me Mara, call me bitter because the Lord has dealt very bitterly with me." You see, she's thinking about the other path she wants to be on and because of that, she can't even see the provision right there with her. She says, "I went out full but came back empty." "What do you mean, Naomi, who is that beautiful girl with you?" "What are you talking about? I lost my husband, I lost my two sons. Don't talk

about this girl." She's not even noticing, I mean obviously she's noticing but she's not tasting God's provision in Ruth, this woman that has left her homeland, the land of Moab, made this hard arduous journey with a woman whose prospects appear hopeless. They are pooling their resources of hopelessness where Ruth, a beautiful young woman, could have stayed in Moab, found a husband, found rest. Orpah did. But she has chosen for some reason to come with Naomi. What is that? Well, God has redeemed her. God has saved her and God has given her the mission of ministering kindness to his servant Naomi, his sheep. Ruth's calling is to minister to Naomi. So the Lord has provided for Naomi through Ruth but Naomi is not even thinking about it.

We tend to focus on the things we can't change and we also, another sub point of this first problem, our problem remember is we can't see, we're unaware of what God, his provision that's right there and we said first we tend to focus on the things we can't change, we also tend to focus on our pain. We tend to think about our pain. "This hurts so bad." Mara, "I'm bitter. Look how painful my circumstances are. Look how awful this is." And we just keep looking at that and we keep thinking about that and we keep looking at that and we miss the balm that the Lord has ready for us, the salve that he's ready to apply. He's over there ministering to the other sheep and I'm over here thinking about how bad I hurt and the shepherd is over there caring for the sheep. If I just walk over there, he would care for me. She has concluded God is against her. She doesn't expect anything good from the Lord so the focus on the pain, the complete lack of awareness, that's our problem.

Now I want to look at the solution. The second main point: the solution. Our problem is we can't see so what we need to do is we need to be able to see. So I'm going to mention four sub points under this. The solution is to see but how does that happen? Four sub points. Now, God opened Naomi's eyes and even before she asked him to, he did, and sometimes God is going to do that for you and me. He's going to do it before we ask but generally his way of doing it is you have not because you ask not and so we need to ask him. That first point is: ask God to open your eyes. You might say: fervently ask God to open your eyes.

There are blessings all around you. This is the thing, there are blessings all around you that you cannot see. His hand, if you belong to him, it's true even for the unbeliever, there are blessings all around every person in this world that they cannot see and that they're not seeing. There are many people who and their circumstances may be bad compared to ours in lots of ways, but even in the worst circumstances in the world there are tokens of God's amazing kindness there but people don't see it. His common grace is over all his works. In Acts 14:16 he says, Paul is preaching to a group of Gentiles and he says, "In the generations gone by He permitted all the nations to go their own ways." He's preaching to all these Gentiles who don't believe in the God of the Bible. They're asking, "Is God good?" And he says this, so he says among all the nations that he's allowed to go their own ways, they didn't have a witness of the Gospel, even there, he says in verse 17, "yet He did not leave Himself without witness," to those people. He was testifying to them about himself in every place, in the darkest corner of the world. At the darkest time, God did not leave himself without witness. What does he go on to say? "In that He did good

and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness." The Lord has always shown his kindness. Matthew 5:45 when Jesus says, "Be like your Father in heaven, love your enemies. Pray for those who persecute you." What does he say? He says, "Be like your Father who causes it to rain on the just and the unjust." God is kind. His common grace, that is, his grace that he extends to all people which is distinguished from his special or saving grace that is upon his elect. But he's kind to all people.

So ask God to open your eyes to this. The world doesn't see it and we don't either. We still have messed up vision even after God has given us a new heart and given us eyes to see and ears to hear. Our eyes are still dim and our ears are still stopped up a lot of times. We just don't see what's real. We don't see what's there.

One of the wonderful Old Testament examples of this that we don't see what's really going on around us is 2 Kings 6, the familiar story of Elisha the prophet. Remember Elisha the prophet, the one who came after Elijah prophesying in Israel and he was helping the king of the northern kingdom of Israel to avoid the enemies of God's people, particularly the king of the Arameans or the Syrians, and so the Arameans were trying to destroy Israel and they were trying to set traps for them and every time they would set a trap for the army of the nation of Israel, Elisha would warn the king of Israel and say, "Don't go that way or do this instead." So they kept escaping from all the traps that the Arameans had set for them and so the king of the Arameans says to his war council, he's got his advisers kind of like the President's Cabinet, there he has them and he says, "Hey, which one of you is betraying me to the king of Israel because every time we run a plan, we have a plan to capture them or to defeat them, something happens and they escape it, how is that?" One of his advisers says, "None of us is betraying you but it's Elisha the prophet of Yahweh. He knows what you say in your bedchamber. He hears what you're saying..." It's like you're walking around, maybe you don't do this, maybe just a few of us do this but anyway, you know how you talk to yourself? Some of you do that. I know I do that. "What have I got to do? I've got to do this?" Or you say something like that. It just helps to say it out loud or whatever as you're thinking, you know, and so he says, "Whatever you say in your bedchamber like that, Elisha the prophet hears." How is that? God is revealing it to him.

And so he decides, "Well, if I'm going to defeat the nation of Israel, I'm going to have to defeat and kill Elisha the prophet." So he sends out his spies to find out where is Elisha and he's in the town of Dothan and so he surrounds this little walled city, little small town of Dothan, he surrounds it with his army. And Elisha has gone to bed that night before and he wakes up in the morning to the sound of his servant who has gotten up early, I guess, to make the coffee, start the bacon. Not the bacon. No, no bacon. Sorry about that. Eggs. Eggs but no bacon. Anyway, so the coffee is on and the eggs are on and the servant as the morning mist lifts, as the light of the sun begins to dry up that morning mist, the servant looks off into the surrounding area and he sees that the entire city is surrounded by the army camp of the Arameans. It's not just like a little detachment came, the entire Aramean army has come after Elisha. You can see the respect that the king of the

Arameans had for Elisha. Now, it's a foolish respect because he thinks an army will help. No, an army is not going to be enough either.

So the servant says to his master Elisha, "Elisha, Elisha, wake up!" Basically, "We're dead! The Arameans are here! The army has surrounded us!" And Elisha says, "Greater are they that are with us than they that are against us." And his servant thinks, "I don't know what kind of...you didn't do very well in math. This is terrible. No, there's no way. What are you talking about?" And Elisha prays, "Lord, open his eyes." And at that moment, his eyes are opened and he sees that beyond...Dothan is in a hilly area of Israel and so he sees that though Dothan is surrounded by the Aramean army, that the mountains that surround Dothan are filled with the angels, the angelic host of heaven; that the armies of God have actually in fact surrounded the Aramean army. That's what was really true but he didn't have eyes to see it.

So the same thing is going on in our lives. There are spiritual realities we can't see but even more obvious things that we miss like his hand. Blessings that come, we look at them and we see a material blessing or some kind of circumstance or we call it a coincidence but it's the hand of God that has moved that but we can't see the hand of God apart from faith, apart from the opened eyes of faith.

And it's all around us. One of my favorite verses is, my favorite passage is Isaiah 6 where you see the glory of God filling the temple and one of the profound things that the seraphim say. Remember, the seraphim are calling out, "Holy, Holy, Holy is the LORD of hosts," and they continue this cacophony of praise. "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, The whole earth is full of His glory." The whole earth is full of his glory but people are saying, "Where is God? Where is the glory of God? Where is the evidence of God?" The angels say the evidence of God is everywhere. The problem is not with an insufficiency of evidence, the problem is the blind eyes of sinful man. When we get saved, we come to faith, we have a heart change but we still have that old sin nature and we need grace to be actively operating on us. We need the word of God to be trusting in so that we will have eyes to see and ears to hear.

So you have to ask God to open your eyes. That's the first thing but it's not just enough to ask God to open your eyes, secondly, the solution is not just asking God to open your eyes, secondly it's diligently look for evidences of his provision. Pray and act. Pray, "Lord, in my circumstance, I feel like you've abandoned me. I feel like you've forgotten me." Like the Psalmist says, "How long, O Lord, will you leave me in this place?" Well, it's good he's praying, he's asking God that but you've got to go beyond just that. That's not enough. Ask the Lord to open your eyes but start looking for evidences of his provision. Start looking around you.

Naomi had done this earlier, she had prayed, "Lord, I feel like you're against me. I feel like you don't love me. I feel like somehow I'm under your judgment. I feel like you're punishing me but I don't believe that's true because you've set the sacrificial system here, you're telling us that someone is going to bear our sins, a Messiah is going to come somehow and take away my sins so I believe that because of your grace, that you're not

against me but show me evidence of it. Open my eyes to see it and help me see it." And then start looking. "I think you're not against me," and start looking for evidence of God's hand at work in your life.

First evidence, Exhibit A: Ruth right there beside her. A Moabite who is now a follower and lover of Yahweh. Wow. Remember we talked about how Boaz could see that. When Boaz first meets Ruth, he sees things that Naomi didn't see. Naomi's not even talked about, "Hey, let me tell you about my daughter-in-law. She came to faith." There's none of that when she gets to Bethlehem, is there? When Boaz meets her, he says, "I've heard about you and I'm amazed that you have left the land of your fathers, your father and your mother, and the land of your dwelling and you've come under the wings of Yahweh to find refuge." He saw it.

Anyway, we ask the Lord to open our eyes and start looking. Start looking for the blessings because we know that they're there. Start looking for the provision. "You've said, Lord, my God will supply all of your needs according to your riches and glory so wherever I am on this journey, you will supply my needs." Psalm 23 says that, "You will make me lie down in green pastures. You will lead me beside still waters. You will give me the food I need, the spiritual food I need. You will give me the spiritual drink I need. You will give me the support I need. So let me see it." And so often what happens is we're looking in the wrong places. We're looking for something a prescribed way we think it ought to come and God has a way of always coming in different ways than you expect. He just confounds our expectations. He knows that we tend to...once we get a formula, we want to run that formula and we tend to then not pray as much as we should. "Oh, I know what to look for. I know where it's going to come from because I've been through this before." And we're looking there and we're looking there and we're looking there and we don't see anything happen, we don't see anything happen, we don't see anything happen and the Lord is like saying, "Hey, it's over here." It's a different blessing than you were expecting but it's exactly what you need.

You know, we'll have a problem and we think that the answer is, okay, I've got some kind of physical malady and it's appropriate when you've got a disease or you've got some kind of painful circumstance, you pray and ask the Lord to remove it. That's appropriate, yes, and many times he does but perhaps more often than not he doesn't. And when he does it, what does he do? He will provide the grace you need to bear up under those circumstances. He'll give you what you need and it comes in ways that if we're not looking and we're not thinking and we're not prayerfully asking, we miss.

Sometimes they're more obvious. Just kind of a neat thing that happened in our lives, this is the kind of way that you see how God's hand is at work. God's hand is at work and you start recognizing it, you start rejoicing in it and you find strength from it. Patty had a kidney stone a couple of years back really for about two years that she would have these seasons of more intense pain, a couple of times really bad where she said those two times were worse than childbirth and my wife had both of our children without any epidural, the first time by choice, the second time because the baby came too quickly. So she knows what physical childbirth is all the way through and she said that the kidney stones,

the two bouts she had were worse, these two like an hour or two hour moments that she went through, it was worse and I think partly because with the baby at least she knows it's going to be over at some point, right? But the pain was agonizing.

So anyway it would come and go and it wasn't like it was constant at all. It would happen and then it would go away and come back and sort of a dull ache all the time. But anyway we finally decided we're going to have to deal with it. She was trying to deal with it naturally, drink lemon juice, do all kinds of different remedies, you know, and try to do it naturally and it didn't work and so she had to go to have the lithotripsy where they break up the stone and they use sound waves and so it's a procedure at the hospital but you've got to go and be put out and everything. So you have something like that and you have this much pain, she was a little nervous about it, anxious about, just a little bit of anxiety about going in for that kind of procedure. Is it going to make it worse? Because it can. It breaks it up but then you've got to pass them so there could be a lot more pain.

Anyway, we go to the hospital that day and we're waiting in the waiting room to be called back and out walks Barbara Grant and she says, "I'm your nurse today, Patty. I'm going to be taking care of you, getting you ready for the procedure." And I know that made me feel great but it really ministered to my wife. She was like, "Wow." And she said she just felt just a sense of just relief and freedom and, "Wow." And God loved me enough to orchestrate the fact that I'm going to a doctor at a hospital where a dear friend is going to be my nurse and I didn't even know it and the Lord had her on the shift at the right time and aware of what was happening and here she is. What is that? That's the love of God. That is the kindness of God. That is the hand of God.

I would rather have been, "Hey, make these miraculously go away. Kidney stone, be gone!" That's not the way the Lord works. It's foolishness. I mean, the "be gone" part, that's what I'm saying is not the way the Lord works. You pray and the Lord might remove it, yes, but normally he doesn't do it that way. But he shows his kindness and his love in more unexpected ways but which are really more precious, really more wonderful. We get to help each other walk through difficult circumstances and that makes us love one another more and it makes us love our God more who is caring for us in a so much bigger way. We think the bigger thing is the miracle. This is because we as men are just foolish. We want the bang and the glitz of the big miracles but the bigger miracle is God governing every single molecule and bringing the timing to bear in such ways as things like this.

So you look for evidence of his provision and when you see it, so first fervently ask God to open your eyes, that's the first part of the solution, to see his kind provision. The second is you diligently look for evidence of his provision. You start looking around you. And thirdly, you gratefully enjoy his kind provision. Gratefully enjoy it. Taste and see that the Lord is good. Savor it. In enjoying it, you draw strength. It's like you're chewing your food better. This is a principle we can apply in our lives in so many ways. I mean, even like you're going through a hard time and you're walking to your car to go maybe to a meeting, you've got to go somewhere and deal with something, got to go to the doctor or something for a checkup or whatever, something that you don't really want to do and

as you walk to the car on a day like yesterday, you notice how beautiful the leaves are as you walk to the car and you stop and say this is a common grace that people all over the world, not all over the world, not in California where you're from, they're not seeing this. Anyway, a lot of places in the world are seeing it. Sorry for that side road.

Anyway, you see the leaves and you say, "Wow, isn't it amazing what God has done?" And if you reflect on it a little bit and I learned something that helps me reflect on the leaves a few years ago recently, actually my daughter taught me this as she was working through school. She said that, "You know, dad, the reason that some leaves are red and some are yellow is that that's the nature of the tree itself and you see the true colors when the chlorophyll leaves the leaves." I probably learned that somewhere along the way but I had forgotten it. So that the reason they're green is because the life giving chlorophyll is filling them throughout for the spring all the way to fall and that green overwhelms the color. When do you see the true color of a tree is when it is moving toward sleep or almost how you could say death, the life is leaving it you see the true color. Isn't it amazing the God has in a fallen world orchestrated his creation in such a way that we would see the true color of the leaf as that's happening and the beauty of that, and even that has something to say about maybe, "Wow, as I get older and my strength is ebbing and leaving me, is it not true that the true color comes through even more?" It should be. Well, it is and hopefully that color is something that looks like Jesus.

But you stop and you reflect on that, "Wow, Lord, thank you for the beauty of fall. Thank you for the coolness of the air. Thank you for your amazing kindness." And you start recounting the blessings. This is really what you're doing. Gratefully enjoy his provision is like counting your blessings. "Look at all the things that you've done for me."

I mentioned that guy, Craig Samples last week, the man that was incapacitated, in bed for between 15 and 20 years before he died, unable to do anything, unable even to speak after a period of time, communicating through hand motions and things like that. You could say look at the path, you would never choose that path. I'm sure he never wanted to choose that path. He probably spent a lot of time on that path thinking he wished he was on the other path that he had seen for himself. "God, where is your evidence of your love for me? You must be against me." Like Naomi, "You must be against me because look what you're doing to me and you're not changing my circumstance and I've been praying for years that you would change my circumstance. Where is the evidence of your kindness and love to me?" And the Lord says, "Look at your wife serving you faithfully." And another man who might be in the same situation says, "Where my wife left me." Well, look at the people that are there still with you.

God loves us through one another. This is what we see in Ruth. God is working in these big ways to do amazing things but it comes in the midst of mundane realities of everyday life and we have to learn to stop and appreciate that and as we're going through difficult circumstances, we will be less apt to be overwhelmed by depression when we celebrate and savor and enjoy his kind provision. Everything that he's given.

I mentioned earlier that verse from Acts 14, he has given food to satisfy. I mean, God made food so that it tastes like it tastes. I mean, all the different tastes that we have. Isn't it amazing? We were eating some kind of candy the other day and we were, "What in the world is that spice?" It wasn't that good. Whatever the spice was, the candymaker liked it, I did not. But still, somebody likes that candy or they wouldn't be making it so my palate is just not trained for that, right? But isn't it amazing how many different flavors there are in the world? And how if you mix certain flavors together it's just off the charts? Wow! Who thought of that? Where does that come from? We have 10,000 taste buds. Who orchestrated that plan? That is the loving benevolent kindness of Yahweh, the one true God. And he not only gave us the taste buds, but then he gave us all these different spices all over and all these different textures of food and all these different kinds of food so that we could enjoy them. And when you eat something and you take time to savor it and if you can then thank God for it, it completes the enjoyment and it completes the strength that you get from it.

Gratefully enjoy his kind provision in every circumstance and, listen, and what's funny, I mentioned earlier about Patty going to the hospital so now this is how you and I will think about that: the next time you go to the hospital for a procedure, you'll be looking for Barbara Grant or somebody like that and you'll be thinking, "Hey, I've heard how you do this, Lord." I'm looking for God to work that way. And he may not. You'll hear someone say, "I was going through this circumstance and somebody came and they ministered to me and they ministered to me in such an amazing way." And then you say in your mind, "Well, they haven't done that for me. Lord, why are you letting me down?"

And sometimes his provision is that there is no obvious provision at that moment humanly speaking. You'll be in that situation where there is nobody there to lean on. Is he still leading? Yes. Because he made a mistake? No, he cannot have made a mistake so in this situation, he must be teaching me something else. "Jesus, I need you to be with me." Like Paul said, sometimes there were people standing with him as he mentioned in the passage earlier, the Philippians were ministering to him, but at other times when he was dealing with opposition, there was no one who stood with him. He says that in one point. "No one stood with me but the Lord stood with me." When was he most aware of the Lord standing with him in his life? I would submit to you it was at that moment when no one else was standing with him. Was that not good of God to let him experience that kind of the presence of Jesus Christ? Of course it was.

Gratefully enjoy his kind provision. You know, when we learn to do that, we begin to experience his love and his kindness in the fullest way possible. I want to turn to Ephesians 3 and this says something to us too also about how not just when we're going through difficult times, it tells us really how we can minister to one another and the power of our ministry to one another. When you go and show kindness to a believer, the Lord may be using it in a way you could never imagine. You're being his chesed, remember that's mercy and love and kindness all wrapped into one. You're being his hands and feet.

In Ephesians 3, the Apostle Paul says in verse 14, "I bow my knees before the Father," and so he's praying for the people and he says, "I want for you," in verse 16, "to be strengthened with power through God's Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love," verse 18, "may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge." He says, "I want you to have an experience of God that is so full that it's four dimensional. I want you to have an experience of God, his love, that you see that his love doesn't just have height and depth and width, but has length. It has four dimensions. It's not just three dimensional, it's four dimensional. It's mind blowing."

But how does that happen? You say, "How do I know God loves me when I'm in circumstances?" I think what he's telling us here in this passage is that you're going to...when will you comprehend that God's love is four dimensional? You will comprehend it when you are with all the saints. That is, you will comprehend it corporately. You will have your greatest experience of the love of God through the people of God and the Lord has ordained that, that he wants us to experience the love of Christ to its fullness which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God, he says in verse 19, but how it happens is through the people of God. God loves you through his people.

So what we want, we would like the Lord to come down and wrap somehow his heavenly arms around us and show us himself and this would be mind blowing too but we have this mindset of wanting something so supernatural but the Lord does something better than that, he sends somebody with skin on to hold your hand and to pray with you and that's him loving you. And so as you walk along the path that you don't want to be on, what you need to do is to embrace God's sovereign right to lead and enjoy his kind provision on the way. He's going to give you everything that you need and ultimately everything that you need is met in the person of Jesus.

We're going to talk about this more next time but let me just say this: what turned for Naomi in verse 20 was the kindness of God, the chesed of God she saw, but what it set her doing was seeking redemption. She understood that Boaz in verse 20 she says, is a close relative. Actually, the Hebrew word "goel" could be translated as "kinsman, close relative or redeemer," and I actually like the NIV best in this particular instance because it translates that word "goel" as "kinsman redeemer." It captures both aspects of it. It has the idea of relation and function. Relation, it's a kinsman. It's the closest male relative. When a man dies and he's married and his wife has no children, the man who has died, his closest relative is the goel, the kinsman redeemer, and the goel is supposed to come in and marry that woman and raise up, have a child with her, a son with her, that can carry on the inheritance and provide for her and so it's the kinsman's responsibility to come into the circumstance and to bring blessing and provision and protection.

What was God doing in that? Why did he orchestrate all of his plan? Put it in his word? Because we need a kinsman redeemer in our circumstance when we are walking through those dark valleys, when we are puzzled by what God is doing, we don't see any evidence

of his love and we're asking him, "Lord, show me. Give me eyes to see. Help me to see evidence of your provision. But even as I do, Lord, and I'm trying to enjoy the provision, what I want most of all is your ultimate vision, that is the Redeemer. I want Jesus, my kinsman redeemer, the one who is so close to me." And the kinsman redeemer when a man died, first it would be his brother, then his uncle, then his cousin. That was the order and then cousins out from that. You know, first cousin, second cousin, third cousin, etc. Boaz is not the brother, of course, of Elimelech. That would have been more obvious. Probably not even the first cousin, maybe a second or third cousin. But when Naomi hears the name she remembers God's promise, "Yes, he's made promise through a redeemer to fix our circumstances even and I'm going to trust God's word and look to that." And it was all, the reason the Lord orchestrated all of that was to say we all need a kinsman redeemer to come into our circumstance, to meet us in our need, who is like us. He's flesh of our flesh and flesh and blood Savior Jesus who came into the world, lived a perfect life and died an atoning death to pay what? Why did he shed his blood? He paid the redemption price. He paid the price to deliver you from your hopelessness and your despair and to bring you into God's presence and to give you an inheritance for eternity.

So God's ultimate purpose is always and whatever our circumstances are, as we walk along the path, he's wanting us to fix our eyes more firmly upon our Kinsman Redeemer. Our Shepherd is not just a shepherd like with sheep that can't understand him. Our Shepherd is one who became a sheep and who understands everything you're going through and he will meet you in that need and support you and strengthen you with tenderness, but he is Lord and he insists on being followed, but when you follow him you will find that that's the most wonderful place that you could ever be.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Father, we thank you for your faithfulness. We thank you that you truly know each one that belongs to you perfectly. You know what we need at every moment of our lives. You're never distracted like we are with our children. You've never failed to plan like we sometimes do. You never over-correct. You always do everything you do absolutely perfectly. What a delight it is to be your children, your servants, your sheep. And Lord, we marvel that you sent your Son into the world to be truly the Good Shepherd, that he could be even more tender, even more patient, even more understanding with us because everything that we will experience, he has experienced. He is a sympathetic high priest. God, you are so good. Help us to be more faithful. Help us to repent of our unbelief, our anger with you. Help us to throw it all away, confess it as sin, turn from it and turn more fully to you, surrendering to you joyfully and lovingly. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.