

# Spiritual Depression: Out of the Blues

*Book of Ruth*

By Ty Blackburn

sermonaudio.com

**Bible Text:** Ruth 3:1-5  
**Preached on:** Sunday, November 6, 2016

**Providence Church**  
2146 Buford Hwy  
Buford Hwy, Duluth, GA 30097

**Website:** [www.providenceduluth.org](http://www.providenceduluth.org)  
**Online Sermons:** [www.sermonaudio.com/providencechurch](http://www.sermonaudio.com/providencechurch)

I ask you to turn with me in your Bibles to the book of Ruth. We're looking at Ruth 3 this morning. The title of the message is "Spiritual Depression Part 2." Two weeks ago we were looking at the last section of Ruth 2 and we titled that message "Spiritual Depression." We see that Naomi, the main character in the book of Ruth though the book is named after the second most important character in the book, well, the third most, the most important is God but Naomi as we've seen is really the main character humanly speaking of the book, and so Naomi is coming through a period of spiritual depression and we looked at that last time, two weeks ago, and then last week, of course, I preached on the Reformation in light of Reformation Day. So we come back and the title of the message "Spiritual Depression Part 2." If you wanted to subtitle it, "Out of the Blues," borrowing Dr. Mack's title from his book on depression, "Out of the Blues."

So what we see in this passage is she really comes out of a prolonged period of spiritual depression. She has manifested certain symptoms that show us that she was really struggling spiritually under the weight and burden of a time of depression, but she comes out and so we want to look and learn from her example. This idea of spiritual depression, the difficulty that comes to us through depression, is something that so many people can relate to. I was reading some statistics this week: 8% of Americans according to the statistics, 8% of Americans are currently experiencing major depression. That's 1 in 12, almost 1 in 12. And it's also postulated that 25% of all American people will experience a major depression in their lives. What does a major depression look like?

I left a book over there. Yes. Thank you. My helper, my assistant here. Thank you.

A wonderful book on depression is the book, well, "Spiritual Depression" by Martyn Lloyd-Jones is great, "Out of the Blues" by Dr. Wayne Mack which I kind of borrowed from both of them in my title, but another book is, "If I'm a Christian, Why am I Depressed?" by Robert Sommerville. Dr. Sommerville has been here a number of times, "If I'm a Christian, Why am I Depressed?" He answers for us really what are the symptoms of deep depression and he asks this question in his book, he says, "Just what are the symptoms of deep depression, what the Puritans called melancholy and what the medical community calls clinical depression or major depression?" He says, "If you are extremely sad and anxious or you are feeling hopeless most of the day for at least two

weeks or longer, you probably don't need anyone to tell you that you are in depression. Everyone feels sad and blue at times but typically these feelings pass in a few days, however if you are in a major depression, your mood is severely depressed and your activity level is as minimal as possible over an extended period. This even greatly interferes with your daily functioning, impacting all those around you." Two weeks or more of melancholy, deep sadness that impacts your daily functioning and those around you. So it said 8% are currently experiencing that in America, and 25% of all Americans and the books that we are reading are written because that afflicts so many Christians; so many of us have experienced or will experience depression.

So how do you deal with that? It's something that we see throughout the history of God's people. You see it in the Scriptures. Elijah suffered through a very serious time of depression. Job, a prolonged period of depression. Jeremiah. The Psalmists. Then in church history, greats like Martin Luther. We just sang his, "A Mighty Fortress is Our God." The man used to spark the Protestant Reformation, he was known to experience periods of deep depression. Charles Spurgeon struggled with this. Missionary David Brainerd. William Cowper, the hymn writer. We could go on and so it's something that has happened to so many through church history, through the history of the people of God, and so in our passage we have what is essentially a case study in spiritual depression in the life of Naomi.

You will recall that she has experienced profound pain in her life and so often depression is set off by some event or series of events. Sometimes physical pain. Sometimes emotional pain. Relational pain. She has experienced profound pain in that she has experienced the pain of loss, the pain of bereavement. She has experienced the death of her husband followed in close succession by the death of her two children, her only two children, her two sons. So she has gone through threefold bereavement, deep emotional agony. She has moved into what some have called the dark night of the soul. On top of the emotional pain and agony, she has the very real pain in her day, much more poignant than in our day; to lose the men in your life was to lose the physical prospects for well-being, her physical circumstances. No man means no future. So along with the death of her dreams and her hopes, she now worries about her own physical well-being. Will she have something to eat?

So we have seen this in her attitude that spiritually she's struggling. She said in chapter 1 to her daughters-in-law as she encouraged them to leave, "Return, my daughters. Why should you go with me? Return, my daughters, Go, for the hand of the LORD has gone forth against me." She not only has experienced hardship and one of the things that we are going to see is depression is not inevitable when you go through bereavement, when you go through tragedy, when you go through prolonged physical pain. Depression is not an inevitable inescapable reality. I mean, you're going to feel sad, you're going to feel overwhelmed, you're going to weep, you're going to mourn, but depression is something more than that. It's when that mourning comes into the soul in a deeper way and you lose your view of God. So depression is not what happens to you, it's not a result of what happens to you, but it is a result of how we respond to what happens to us. It is a result of how we respond to what happens to us. You can weep and mourn and not experience

what we're talking about here as depression. You can be sad and experience some level of melancholy where it doesn't affect the way that you function, you're still able to glorify God and to serve him.

So we see though in Naomi's life symptoms that she really has gone from just going through bad circumstances, she has entered into a depression. She really believes God is against her. Remember when she goes into Bethlehem, when she finally gets home to Bethlehem, the ladies say, "Is this Naomi?" Remember Naomi, the name literally in Hebrew means "pleasant one." So it was like they were calling her pleasant. I mean, if your name was Pleasant, that would be what it was like. In English today, if you named your child Pleasant, that would be like naming her Naomi in her day. So they say, "Is this Pleasant that has come home?" And she says, "Stop calling me Pleasant, call me Mara, that is, call me bitter. I don't want to hear anymore of this Naomi stuff. Call me Mara for the Lord has dealt very bitterly with me and the Almighty is against me."

So she's angry with God, she's in the throes of depression but she comes out and we see the evidence of coming out in these first five verses of chapter 3. Let's read God's word together. Ruth 3:1-5,

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 [Ruth says to her mother-in-law], "All that you say I will do."

Let's pray together.

*Our Father, we ask that you might take the word of God and apply it to the hearts of your people, everyone here, you might draw us to yourself, those that do not know you might become truly the people of God today, and those that belong to you might become more fully surrendered, joyful, loving servants of our great Shepherd. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Out of the blues, spiritual depression. We have a case study of someone who comes out of depression. Now, I'm going to gather our thoughts around three questions: what, when and how. Those are the three major points of the message. What, when and then how, and we're going to look at the "what" first which is the change that happens to Naomi. I mean, we're getting ready to go into the fulfillment of this love story. It started in chapter 2, the sparks, the romantic sparks were beginning to be seen and evident in Boaz and Ruth's encounter, and it becomes clear now that what you have in chapter 3:1-5 is Naomi's plan for Ruth to propose marriage to Boaz. This elaborate plan that she has which includes

eight imperative commands that she gives Ruth: you go to the threshing floor, basically stay out of sight, he's going to be threshing the barley, and then after it's all done, you go lay down at his feet and he'll tell you what to do. This was basically the way to propose marriage and this was appropriate, it's right, it's not manipulative. It's basically faith in action. We're going to see that. It's faith in action and so what has happened is Naomi has gone from being a person that was paralyzed by depression to now being actively pursuing the promises of God. And I want you to see, look at the change, what is the change that we see? What? This is the question: what is the change that we see?

Two weeks ago I shared with you the three symptoms of spiritual depression that we see in Naomi's life and what we're going to see as we look at each of these symptoms is they have been erased, reversed even. Not just erased, she's not gone back to 0, she's gone from -10 to not to 0, to +15. Let me share with you those three, remind you. So this first one, "what," has three sub points and the three sub points are going to be three symptoms of spiritual depression that are now reversed.

The first thing: she now has renewed initiative. Renewed initiative. We said that one of the symptoms of spiritual depression is a lack of initiative; listlessness; low energy; it's hard to get out of bed; it's hard to want to do anything and Naomi was demonstrating that. We saw before, remember in chapter 2, Ruth is the one who has the initiative to say, "Naomi, let me go glean in the fields." Naomi is the one who should have been thinking that way. Naomi knows the laws of Israel. She's home in her hometown. She's the one who is responsible as the mother-in-law for the well-being of this girl. She should be taking the initiative but she's not taking any initiative. In fact, when Ruth tells her that, she just says, "Go, my daughter." No instructions. No help. "Listen, this is what the word of God says when you go and you glean, you're supposed to go around the outer fields because you need to be careful, you do this according to Scripture." She doesn't do that. There is no initiative. She is just waiting. But here you see tremendous initiative, as I mentioned, eight imperatives. She says, "Behold, he winnows barley at the threshing floor tonight. Wash yourself. Anoint yourself. Put on your best clothes. Go down to the threshing floor. Don't make yourself known. When you see him lie down, you shall go and uncover his feet and then wait for him and lie down and then wait for him to tell you what to do." The energy in even what she's saying to Ruth, it's not like she's like, "You know, maybe you ought to go down to the threshing floor and have a conversation with Boaz."

She's got a plan and she's got the initiative and it's interesting too, this is the kind of thing that is so helpful when you read the Scriptures to stop and kind of ask questions as you're going along. In verse 23, I want you to watch the flow from chapter 2 into chapter 3. Now, remember at the end of chapter 2 Ruth has come home with that big 5 gallon bucket basically of grain. It was like a 10 day wage for a worker that would work in the field. She has gleaned this amount. Obviously Naomi out of her depression sees that and it had impact. And then Ruth, remember, pulled out the bread that she had saved for her, there is already cooked bread leftovers from lunch here. "Mom, here are some leftovers." Naomi has a meal ready. She's got this.

She asks, "Where did you glean today?" And she says, "Boaz." Then she gets excited about that and she says some things, and then you have this summary statement in verse 23, "So she stayed close by the maids of Boaz in order to glean until the end of the barley harvest and the wheat harvest. And she lived with her mother-in-law." Now, when you're reading a narrative like that, you tend to...the author has moved us in time quite a bit here. They arrived in town at the beginning of the barley harvest, we are told at the end of chapter 1. This is where we need to read some notes in the bottom of your Bible that will help you because the original readers hearing barley harvest and wheat harvest automatically saw it as time indicators. We don't see that. Barley harvest, wheat harvest, I have never harvested barley or wheat. I have barely harvested anything: some tomatoes, some corn, green beans. Yeah, I've done some of that for my grandfather and my father-in-law was a great gardener and when I started dating Patty I got the blessing of harvesting, but we never harvested wheat or barley. I can tell you though that bean harvest is around the first of July, corn harvest is around the first of August here in Georgia. So now, if I was talking to my family, they would know that. "Hey, remember it was when we were planting green beans or when we were picking green beans." "Oh yeah, around the first of July." "Or it was when we were picking corn." "Oh, that's obviously August."

Okay, the barley harvest and the wheat harvest were like that for the people of Israel. It always happened around the same time. In fact, the barley harvest was associated with one of the festivals, it was associated with Passover. The barley harvest happened late March, early April. The wheat harvest happened around, it was associated with another one of the feasts, the feast of Pentecost. So they were harvesting wheat around Pentecost, harvesting barley right at the beginning of the barley harvest was Passover. So that means barley harvest, late March, April, May, wheat harvest, late May, early June. Do you see that? About 6 to 8 weeks between the beginning to the end of those two harvests.

Now, when you read out of chapter 2, you have just heard her summarize, she stayed and gleaned with the maids of Boaz all the way through the barley harvest and the wheat harvest and she lived with her mother-in-law. When do you expect the next thing that you're going to hear is talking about, this conversation? "Then Naomi said to her daughter"? You would think right off the bat it's after the wheat harvest or during the wheat harvest. It's somewhere after that. They've already done the harvesting. But look carefully, it's actually during the barley harvest when she says, "Now is not Boaz our kinsman, with whose maids you were? Behold, he winnows barley at the threshing floor tonight." She has gone back to the March/April time period. She went ahead and told us, I mean the author not she, the author whoever the author is, went ahead and told us about the fact that, "Look at how well God has provided for them. She was able to experience the barley harvest and the wheat harvest and God was providing both for them. Isn't that wonderful?" But she goes back to show us now, or the author goes back to show us that Naomi acted on this immediately once Boaz's name came up and she saw God's hand. She didn't think about this for weeks and then do it after the wheat harvest, she takes the initiative, it might have been the next morning even. It certainly was in the next week or so because the barley harvest would have been passed and once it has passed, the winnowing is over. You harvest the barley, then you thresh the barley, then you winnow

the barley, which winnowing is throwing it up in the air, the grain kernel so that the chaff is separated, everything that is not grain is separated. They throw it up in the air and the wind blows and they do it at night because at this period of time in Israel, during the day they don't have wind very often, March, April, May, June. They have more winds at night so they do the winnowing at night. So anyway the point though is Naomi acted quickly. She acted quickly. She has recovered, renewed initiative.

Secondly, the second symptom that she had that is now reversed is she has renewed concern. A revived concern. Look at what she says, "My daughter, shall I not seek security for you, that it may be well with you?" Actually in the Hebrew the word ordering is the first thing she says, "My daughter, shall I not seek for you security," or rest. It's actually the same word that she prayed or she blessed with in chapter 1, verse 9 when she said to her daughters-in-law, "May you find rest in the home of your husband." She says now, "May I not seek for you rest and well-being or goodness for you," and it is bracketed with "for you, for you." It's a big change from how we've seen her treating Ruth previously because when you are spiritually depressed, one of the symptoms is you don't think about other people. When we're in pain, it's hard to think of others and when we focus on our pain, it adds the person who is going in a depression is apt to do when you focus on your pain, you keep looking at yourself and how much you're hurting, you don't think about others. You remember we saw this in the fact that when Naomi comes into town she says, they say, "Naomi, is this Naomi?" She says, "No, call me Mara." She goes on to say, "I went out full but I came back empty. I went out full, I had a full blessing, I had a full family and now I've got nothing. I've got nobody." "Naomi, who is that lady with you?" "Oh, she's nobody." She didn't bring her up. She's not even thinking about Ruth being there. She's just saying, "I had everything, now I've got nothing." Remember there is the irony at the end of the book we're going to see that the women are going to say to Naomi after God does this miracle, "Ruth is better to you than seven sons. You left with two sons, you came back with zero. You left with two, you really came back with better than seven." But, you see, she doesn't see it. And so her concern, she's not thinking about Ruth, she's thinking about herself and now though that something has happened, the depression is lifted, she's thinking about her daughter-in-law. "I want you to have rest. I want you to have well-being."

The third symptom that has been reversed is Naomi's renewed spiritual vision. She couldn't see God's hand at work in this. I mean, she knew that God was sovereign but she saw nothing of God's goodness in her life and once she sees, here's the name Boaz in chapter 2 and she sees that God is working to bring a relative, a redeemer, she recalls, this recalls that exclamation in chapter 2, verse 20 where she says, "The man is our relative, he is one of our redeemers," and then she hatches this plan which, as I said, it really is not, it can look like it's female manipulation if you look at it and don't read it in light of Scripture. Man, this is a pretty impressive plan. You're catching a son-in-law for your daughter-in-law. But it's really not that at all. She's actually acting on the promises of God. She is acting on what Deuteronomy 25:5-10 teaches about Levirate marriage. She has seen God put her in touch with a near kinsman and that reminds her of the requirements in Leviticus for the redeemer to buy back property, to restore the land to the name, to the family, and what it says in Deuteronomy 25 about Levirate marriage that

when a man dies, a man is married, he dies without a male heir, that his brother or near kinsman is obligated to take that woman and to marry her to produce offspring to keep the name of the dead man alive and the inheritance in the family. So she's acting on that. This is faith in action.

So she has spiritual vision. She can see that God's at work in this and she's getting on his agenda. So she has renewed initiative, renewed concern, renewed spiritual vision so it's a dramatic transformation from hopelessness and helplessness to active trust and faith. That's what we see. We see her come out of the depression. We see her clearly out of the blues.

Now, secondly, when did the change happen? The second question, the second major point: when does the change happen? Where do we see a clear turning point? We see it in chapter 2 actually, verse 19, when Ruth says, "The name of the man with whom I worked today is Boaz." We saw how the suspense builds in that passage until Ruth tells her the name Boaz, and when Naomi hears the name Boaz, it's like a lightning bolt pierces into the dark night of her depression and lights it up. You know, she's been thinking God is against her, "God is not for me. God is orchestrating my circumstances against me. I'm under his oppression. I'm under his judgment. He has judged me and he is punishing me." And when she hears the name Boaz, after seeing this evidence of God's supernatural working in this amazing haul of barley, the bread, the joy in Ruth's heart, she sees that and then she hears the name Boaz and it's like a lightning bolt that pierces down and she senses God's hand, "God is at work to bless me," because she says, "May he be blessed of the LORD who has not withdrawn his kindness to the living and to the dead," chapter 2, verse 20. She understands now that the Lord's chesed, his lovingkindness, sometimes translated steadfast love. And I mention the word "chesed," such an important word in the Old Testament, it brings together love, mercy, kindness, grace, all captured up in this wonderful word of who God is. Naomi has believed he's sovereign but she's not believed that he has been kind to her. She's looked at her circumstances and she's interpreted who God is and what God is like toward her by her circumstances and she's basically concluded, "You took my husband. You took my sons. You cannot love me or be for me." And in this moment and thinking like that has led her to deeper and deeper depression. In this moment she sees, "Wait a minute, I see the hand of God at work. God is doing something in this circumstance."

So what happens really is she stops looking at herself. When does the depression lift? When she stops looking at herself and her brokenness and her broken circumstances and she starts looking at God. That's the turning point. She looks from her shattered dreams, her emotional pain and anguish, and she looks at the God who holds her life in his hand and who is himself loving and good and that's the turning point. Really, it always comes down to that, to stop looking at ourselves and our circumstances, to stop looking to ourselves or to things in this world, and to start looking at God and start looking to God.

Now, we looked at "what" and we looked at "when," we come to the third point and that's "how." We've talked about "what." We had this transformation of Naomi's outlook, her emotional well-being. She's gone from spiritual depression to renewed sense of purpose.

Then we said, "When did it happen?" It happened when she saw the Lord's hand, the Lord's chesed, she saw the Lord's heart in her life. Now how? How does real change happen? How do you and I apply this? How do we get out of spiritual depression? Now, it's important to remember how do you get in. I mentioned earlier it's not inevitable or unavoidable when bad things are going to happen, that's inevitable, that's unavoidable. But depression, debilitating depression is not unavoidable, it's not inevitable, it is a result of how we respond to what happens to us. When we respond in a certain way, that results in depression. When we respond in the way that God would call us to, that's the way out.

Now so we don't look at ourselves, we look to God. I think there are three things that I would like to encourage us to all do that really help us because this is an area where I think we are all plagued with elements of this. Even if you don't have major depression, you and I have pockets of depression in our lives. As I explain this, I think maybe you'll see this and there are three things that we need to understand. These are three sub points under "how." We looked at "what," we looked at "when," we're now looking at "how." How does real change happen? How do you get out of the blues? Three things. The first thing is you embrace God's sovereign right to lead you. You embrace God's sovereign right to lead you. Now, it's one thing to say this intellectually. Naomi believed God was sovereign and if you had pressed her, she would have said, "I believe he has a right." But she was not applying her theology to her life. She was not really living. That's why I say embrace. It's not just admit or accept, it's embrace God's sovereign right to lead you.

This is something I think that affects a lot of us. I know it has affected me in different ways in my life and as I understand this more, I see, wow, blind spots in my life and I see this in talking with other believers, sharing, helping folks that are dealing with depression or discouragement. So often we're depressed because what we wanted or what we thought God was going to give us, he's not delivered. And often we have a lot of good Scripture to support us in it. You know, for example, is it wrong for a woman who is getting married or a man who is getting married to want to have a God-honoring happy marriage? Is that wrong to want that? Of course not. Will it glorify God if we have a God-honoring happy marriage? Yes. Ephesians 5:22-33 is a picture of how a marriage relationship lived like that, walking in the Spirit, wife submitting and respecting her husband, husband loving his wife as Christ loved the church, what is it? It's a picture of the Gospel. Your marriage is an invitation to accept Christ. It can be that. Is that something that's wrong to want? Of course not, unless you want that more than you want to obey God. What happens is we take good things and we turn them into things that we want more than we want to follow Jesus.

So you want a good marriage, it's okay to want that, it's okay to pray for it, in fact, it's okay to labor for it. In fact, it's not only okay, it's required of you to obey God's word but in the final analysis, it's up to Jesus whether or not you're going to have the kind of marriage that you want because it takes two people to tango and if you follow Christ and you're a godly wife, the Lord may not give you a godly husband. If you're a godly husband and you follow the Lord, he may not give you a godly wife or he may give you circumstances that are just much different than you expected. "We thought we would be able to travel because we would have such-and-such happen. Or we would be able to do



this or we'd be able to do that. And we were going to honor the Lord because we were going to have more time to go and do mission trips and, Lord, you didn't let that happen. We had such a wonderful vision for our future but you allowed this debilitating disease to strike one of us and now the path that we're on is one spouse caring for the physical, daily, mundane, menial needs of another." It's easy for depression to set in because God didn't give me what I bargained for. The problem is we're just thinking so unbiblically when we think like this.

What is the call of discipleship? The call of discipleship, how did Jesus call his disciples? What did he say? "I love you and have a wonderful plan for your life and let's negotiate. You pick out what your best life now is and I'll come along and help you find it." Did he say that? He said, "Come follow me." And he said, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow me." So if the Christian life is a call to discipleship which is to follow Jesus and if the Christian life is, as we read earlier from Psalm 23, "The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want. He leads me beside still waters. He guides me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake." It is a part of the covenant we enter into that he determines where I go, not me. And my call is to follow him and to cling to him no matter where he leads me. That has such profound implication, doesn't it?

So back to marriage, I know I'm called, you're called to have a godly marriage and you work through the premarital counseling and you're thinking about the joy of it and excitement of it and so you labor at that and then you try the best you can to be a godly wife or a godly husband but your spouse for some reason just doesn't follow the Lord like they should and eventually even leaves you. You can be depressed. I mean, you should be broken-hearted of course. You could be grieved over the damage that that's done to the name of Christ, yes, but you shouldn't be wrapped up in spiritual depression because you still have the same calling, the same terms of the agreement you had the day you met Christ and that is follow Jesus along this path. What does the Lord ask you to do? He's asking you to follow him in dealing even with an unfaithful spouse. Will you do that? Is he worth it?

This is one of the things that really shows the true believer from the false believer. Now, all true believers struggle with that because we don't like it to go the way we don't want it to go but the true believer will persevere in following Christ. They may depart for a time but they will...the most important thing is to follow Jesus and no matter if I get what I want because really what I want is Jesus, it doesn't matter if I don't get what I want over here.

It applies in every area. I mean, you think about do you want godly children. Of course you should want godly children. Malachi 2:15 says that the purpose of marriage was the Lord wanted godly offspring. But if your children don't all follow Christ, are you going to reflect continually on how that didn't happen? And even your failures, I mean, we're a part of making so many of these bad things happen, aren't we? This is one of the hard things that sometimes the reason a marriage breaks up is we look and we say, "Look how much I failed. I sinned here and here and here and now I wish I could go back and fix that but I can't." Now, you can repent and you can confess your sin to your spouse even if it's

a former spouse, you can confess and say, "I didn't do what I should have done before Jesus Christ. Would you forgive me for being less than I should have been sinning against you?"

But there even the sovereignty of God is a comfort to us because think about this: no matter how you've failed in a circumstance, there have been other people who have failed like you did or worse without the same result. Say you weren't as loving as you should have been as a husband, you neglected your wife and so she got fed up and she left you and you can say, "I look back on it and I was a workaholic. I didn't tend to her like..." Well, there are other guys who are worse than you and they're still married. What is that? It comes down to it, it's the sovereignty of God. It's up to God.

You see, we are not God. We don't come into the Christian life to call the shots. Jesus does not say, "Hey, come along. Let's walk together and you tell me where you want to go." He says, "Come follow me." And when we embrace his sovereignty, I mean, he created us, he redeemed us, he is the one who knows where we need to go, he knows what he's doing, of course we've got to follow him. And when you embrace his sovereignty and you say, Naomi needed to see this, "The Lord has taken away my husband and he's taken away my two sons. He has left me bereft and, humanly speaking, helpless." But he's still God. His promises are still faithful. He will be faithful to his promises. "He made provision for me. In his word, he's made a way for me to have food by gleaning in the field as the poor were allowed to do according to Leviticus. He's even made a way for me to see the inheritance of my husband carried on through a son born this way." And so she begins to act on it. If you follow God's word, he will lead you even through the darkest valleys and darkest places.

You know, I mentioned earlier this is something I think afflicts us more than we realize. I think there are times where we probably are bitter against the Lord that we don't even consciously think about it that much and we need to pray and ask the Lord, "Search me, O Lord, and know my heart. Try me and know my thoughts." And he will begin to uncover things for us. They show us like, for instance, maybe you're struggling over the fact that you didn't get promoted and someone else got promoted ahead of you. You had a vision for something you wanted to do, success you wanted in your chosen work, and the Lord has not given that to you and you were heading a certain direction and you thought God was going to do this and he didn't. And you can maybe even look back and say, "Well, I messed up here and there and there." But again, the sovereignty of God is over that. God didn't have to let you even fail like that because how many times does God not let us fail when we would apart from his grace? We would have sinned had we been given this particular opportunity but he didn't give you that menu option because he knew. You see, he's that sovereign and so we can't blame our sins on him. No, we're responsible for every one of our sins but we have the comfort of knowing that we serve a God who is working in everything his plan and his will.

One of the verses that really is encouraging to think about is Ephesians 2:10. This is after those wonderful verses in chapter 2, verses 8 and 9, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so

that no one may boast." Verse 10, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them." He's saying that the whole course of your life if you're a Christian, the whole course of your life has been laid out by God and he says, "I'm going to take you this way and your call is follow Jesus. And I'm going to take you that way." Remember when we were at the end of John's Gospel? We saw what Peter said. Remember when Peter was walking with Jesus and Jesus told Peter, "Hey, when you were young, you used to go where you wanted to go, you girded yourself the way you wanted to, you dressed the way you wanted to, you went where you wanted to go, but when you're old, somebody else is going to tell you what to wear and they're going to take you where you don't want to go and you're going to stretch out your hands and follow me." He understood that he was going to be crucified just like Jesus had been. This was after the resurrection of Jesus.

And he looks back and he sees John walking behind him, his friend, and he says, "What about him? Hey, I want to know what the terms are for him." And Jesus says, "What is it to you if I leave him until I return? You follow me." So much of our problems come because we compare with other people. We say, "Lord, why can't I have what they have? Why can't I not have what I have here? Why can't somebody else have this?" And Jesus says, "The terms of the agreement have not changed, you follow me." Accepting that is so freeing. We are a lamb following a shepherd. We don't have to make it all work out, we just do what he tells us to do.

You know, I mentioned earlier a story that really had blessed me is a friend, I forget his first name but his last name was Samples and really more of a friend through Dave. I prayed for him through the years. But this gentleman had a debilitating disease for I think about 20 years where he has been bedridden in his home for at least 15 years, cared for by his wife on a daily basis, unable to speak, but this is a man and a woman who love Jesus Christ and they have borne faithful testimony to the Lord. And somehow he's able to communicate at some level, I forget exactly how that's gone through the years, it's been different over time, but they both testify to the faithfulness of Jesus Christ. What's happened? God called them to walk down a different path, a path that they never would have chosen but the question is: will you follow Jesus? Will you trust him? Will you follow him? If you will, no matter how dark the path, you will have joy unspeakable, full of glory. There will be times of sorrow, yes, but you will have a joy that swallows up as Paul said, always sorrowful yet rejoicing.

So embrace the sovereignty of God, then the last two points real quickly: trust God's perfect wisdom to lead. Not only embrace God's sovereign right to lead, trust God's perfect wisdom to lead. He knows best. He knows the best thing. We think as we're heading towards...it's like we're sitting in the backseat and we're thinking, it's like you're teaching your kid to drive and sometimes you're sitting in the passenger seat then and you're knowing, "Hey, this is not a good decision we're about to make right here." And you're right, maybe, okay? But, so kids, listen to your parents as they're teaching you to drive, but we like to sit in the backseat and tell Jesus he's making mistakes. "Why are we going here? This is not, oh this is not good." We think we know better.

This is what Peter was doing in Matthew 16, actually a couple of verses before the verse I quoted a little while ago where he says in Matthew, I think verse 26, he says, "If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow Me." In verses 22 and 23, 24, in there, Peter tells Jesus, Jesus has told him he's going to suffer at the hands of sinners and die and be raised the third day. Peter takes him aside privately and says, "This shall never happen to You, Lord." What's he doing? He's backseat driving. No, that is a bad plan. "You don't know what you're doing here. Let me help you out."

And the cross, humanly speaking, looked like a terrible plan. I mean, this can't be good. The King of glory is here and you're going to allow yourself to be crucified on a cross? How can that be good? It was the moment in which the greatest evil that the world has ever known was poured out, the greatest evil that was ever done was the crucifixion of the Son of God and we would have been there with Peter saying, "No! Don't do that." And if we had, we would have lost out on everything because the greatest evil was also, more than that, the greatest glory and the greatest love and the greatest justice and the greatest victory that the world has ever seen. The wisdom of God is greater than our wisdom and he knows what is right.

So if it's true in the cross, if Jesus becoming sin, bearing our sins in his body on the cross, experiencing the wrath of God, experiencing all that evil had against him, if that is the means of salvation, which it is when you place your faith completely in his finished work, that God vindicated by raising him bodily from the dead on the third day and you place your faith and you surrender to Christ, then you're saved forever. If that which looked like the most awful thing is the most wonderful thing, how is it not true in our lives continually? It is. Everything that happens in the life of the believer is the best thing. It's the best thing. Even when you sin, that's not the best thing that you sin but what God does in response to you will be the best thing for you.

Trust God's perfect wisdom and lastly, rejoice in God's perfect love. If he loved me enough to send Jesus, then what he's doing here is perfect love. He knows what he's doing, he wants my best and he has the absolute right to do what he wants to do. When I know that and I apply that, think about that, apply that in your circumstance, you're wondering why this thing is not happening the way that you wanted it to happen, "Why have I wasted so much time doing this?" Apply God's word. "You've led me down this path. Maybe I need to turn course and I need to change course," and we're supposed to do that. We're supposed to plan our way but the Lord directs our steps. The main thing is to keep our eyes on Jesus. Keep loving him and, "Lord, where I am right now, how can I honor you? I wanted to have this situation in my life and now I don't, but where I am right now, what does following Jesus look like right here?"

It's like that couple I mentioned, the Samples family. That woman said, "What does it look like to follow Jesus with a man who can do nothing for himself for 15 years?" It means you wash him. You feed him. And you love him. You encourage him. You keep pointing him to Jesus. And the wonder of it was, he kept pointing her to Jesus and in that he is glorified. How many people have been touched by that? How many unbelievers

looked at that and said, "That is something that the world cannot do. Let me hear about the one that you follow."

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

*Father, we pray that you would help us to truly apply your word to our hearts and our lives. We second guess you. Even in our foolish pride, we don't always do it outwardly but in the secret place of our hearts, we even condemn what you've done. Help us to see how wicked that is, how foolish it is. You never do anything except that which is perfect, that which is loving, that which is good. Lord, help us to be people who gladly follow you through no matter what happens in our lives. We're going to keep our eyes on our Shepherd and walk the course that he has before us. We pray for those that are here today that don't know Christ, that they would see that there's nothing in this life that compares with following a Savior that died for them. Give them grace to repent and believe and give us all grace to keep repenting and keep believing. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*