

## **A MOM FOR ALL SEASONS**

### **Dr. George O. Wood**

Today my message is a Mother's Day message, "A Mom for all Seasons." The mom that I'm going to use as a representative mother is found in the eighth book of the Bible – the book of Ruth. Rather than read an extended passage I'll make reference to the little four chapter book as the message proceeds today.

I found that in speaking on Mother's Day it's not always easy to select a text for Mother's Day. There are a number of reasons. For one thing the audience is about equally divided between men and women and I certainly don't want an occasion to go by in which I miss one half of the audience. Then the women that are here, you are divided into mothers and non mothers. Then of the mothers here there are mothers of growing children and mothers of grown children. Then there are mothers that look back on positive relationships with children or children who look on positive relationships with mother. On the other hand there are a small number of people but nevertheless real who do not look with warm glow at their association with mother or mothers who have feelings of grieving in respect to their own children. There may be happy mothers here, there may be grieving mothers here. Mother's Day may be great for some and very tough for others. I try, on Mothers Day, to avoid two extreme temptations that are always present in ministry. One is to wax eloquent and poetic idealism on motherhood and quote a lot of syrupy poems on motherhood that give us all a warm glow and we probably know that they miss real life. The other thing that I try to avoid is using Mothers Day as a pastor to club people into being better mothers – go out there and do a better job sort of a thing.

So I found this mother in the Bible that I really identify with. Her name is Naomi. She's actually a mother-in-law. I never had a mother-in-law so I don't know what experience some of you may have gone through. But here is a great mother-in-law whom I've selected as a representative mom for all seasons. She is in this little book of the Old Testament that is a tremendous romance story. Her story, Naomi, has universal application to all of us. If you were a color coordinator you could probably locate her in the four seasons of life. I'm going to do that as we move through today.

She is a woman of summer. That's where we'll begin. A woman of fall, a woman of winter and a woman of spring.

When we open to the book of Ruth we find Naomi, I think it's the summertime. The book opens with the phrase "In the days when the judges rule there was a famine in the land." In Palestine a famine is especially going to become evident in the summertime when the spring rains have not occurred. There's been no growth of the spring crop. The scorching summer sun and the hundred degree plus days and the barren soil have combined together to make life exceedingly difficult. It's in that kind of a scorching time, a time of famine, when the judges are ruling that we find this mom for all seasons – Naomi.

She not only lived in a time when there was economic disaster and there are mothers here who have lived through times of economic disaster and some may be going through present personal times of economic disaster. It's no fun to look in the refrigerator and see that there's no food there. That was the situation Naomi was in. It was a down time. A recession on a depression on top of a recession.

## A MOM FOR ALL SEASONS

Not only was in bad economically but it was a bad time politically. The time in which Naomi lived was a time in which the judges reigned. The verse right before the book of Ruth begins, the last verse of the book of Judges, says “In those days Israel had no king. Everybody did as he saw fit.” Or everyone did what was right in his own eyes. This was a time, before Naomi came along, of four centuries of political and moral relativism and instability. Certainly with a depression on hand and with political and moral collapse in the country it was not a good time to have children. Naomi in fact did not have most of the resources we deem essential today for child rearing. No Christian schools, no church, no religious story books, no Bible, no religious videos, and Dr. James Dobson had not yet begun to write.

It was a severe time. People sometimes say, I don’t want to become a parent because of the times in which we live. They’re such chaotic and uncertain times. I think when we say those kind of things we’ve got blinders on our eyes to history. History has always been uncertain. If people had put off because the times were uncertain or bad or difficult all the children of the world, which we once were, would have never been born.

Naomi look at her summertime. It’s a turbulent time. But she is on the venture of life. She has a husband. She will have children.

I like what historian Will Durant said on an occasion: “Civilization is a stream with banks. The stream is sometimes filled with blood from people killing, stealing, shouting and doing the things historians usually record. Along the banks unnoticed people build homes, sing songs, write poetry and even whittle statues. The story of civilization is the story of what happened on the banks. Historians are pessimists because they ignore the banks for the river.”

We can be that way in our day as well. We can look at all the terrorism and all the problems in the world. But meanwhile life is going on, on the banks, on the ordinary avenues of life. God is aware of what’s happening on the ordinary level. He’s aware of it in Naomi’s life. He’s aware of it in your life and my life.

So in a time of moral and political chaos and turmoil and a time of economic collapse we find this woman.

She soon becomes the woman of Fall. I think of fall as the leaves and grass browning, the days are getting shorter, winter is approaching. For Naomi it is the graying of the hair time. She has four seasons of life and three of them are negative. Her summer, her fall, her winter. Her husband gives that dreaded word to a wife who likes to have security and had lived in the same place a long period of time with friends, connections. Men seem easier to move. The husband says we’re relocating to Moab. Pulling up roots, leaving family, leaving familiar faces.

It’s a story of paradox. On the one hand the place which she is leaving, Bethlehem, means literally House of Bread. And that place as a mother and wife had always been her source of strength, her home. But the house of bread has become a place where there is nothing.

There are distressing things that happen to us in life. One of them may be a physical relocation. Maybe someone here today who has come from what to you has been a Bethlehem. You have arrived in Moab – southern California, disconnected and unplugged. You know how Naomi

## A MOM FOR ALL SEASONS

feels. Physical relocation can be extremely distressing. In our day divorce is another one of those things which involves pulling out from the House of Bread.

It is evident from the names Naomi gave to her two sons whether they were born in Bethlehem or Moab we're not sure, but it's evident that there is in her life kind of a downward spiral going on in those fall days of existence. Her and her husband had names rich with meaning. Her husband, Elimelech, meant "My God is king." Wonderful, dignified name. And her name, Naomi, meant "Pleasant, lovely, delightful."

But when her son Mahlon came along, his name means "weak, sick." Her second son Chilion means "Failing, piling, annihilation." Consumptive. Can you imagine Mahlon and Chilion telling people their names?

Naomi and Elimelech as they move into Moab and the fall season of their life appeared not to be God's people of faith and power. When the going gets tough, they leave. But unless we leap into judgment and start giving Naomi advice on being God's woman of faith and power, remember that if the Lord had condemned her we would not be reading her story today. I think many times we're much harder on people than God is.

Naomi soon in Moab became the woman of Winter. Her husband dies. "My God is king," – the man with the noble name is dead. And she is stranded in a foreign country. Her two sons grow up and marry non Israelis which had to be a grief for her. Her sons had married outside the faith. Then before either of them had a chance to bear children they each died and she is left now without sons, without any grandchildren.

1:5 "Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband." It had to be some bitterness enter into her life at that point. She may have had reason. I think too she is bitter at God. In her winter she turns to God, 1:13, she says to her daughter in law "It is more bitter for me than for you because the Lord's hand has gone out against me." She adds up her life and its not been pleasant. Things have gone from bad to worse. God has dealt roughly.

It's interesting that we all find it easy to do what Naomi did and that is the equate reverses with God's direct action. If this terrible thing is happening to me in my life it's because God looked down and said you're next, I'm going to do this to you next. It's a very human tendency.

We should not always equate those down times as some action of God in judging or punishing us. Down times are part of life.

I came across an Erma Bombeck story that I thought especially expressed some down times are not from God's hand but they simply happen as a course of things: When the good Lord was creating mothers he was in his sixth day of overtime when the angel appeared and said, "You're doing a lot of fiddling around on this one." The Lord said, "Have you read the specs on this order? She has to be completely washable but not plastic. Have 180 movable parts all replaceable. Run on black coffee and leftovers. Have a lap that disappears when she stands up. And have a kiss that can cure anything from a broken leg to disappointed teenager's crushed heart. And six pairs of hands." The angel shook its head slowly and said, "Six pairs of hands! No way!" "It's not the hands that are causing me the problem," said the Lord. "It's the three pairs of eyes that mothers have to have." "That's on the standard model?" asked the angel. The Lord nodded. "One pair that sees through closed doors when she asks, 'What are you kids doing

## A MOM FOR ALL SEASONS

in there?’ When she already knows. Another in the back of her head that sees what she shouldn’t but what she has to know. And of course the ones here in front so she can look at a child when he goofs to say, ‘I understand and I love you,’ without so much as uttering a word.” “Lord,” said the angel touching his sleeve gently. “Come to bed. Tomorrow...” “I can’t,” said the Lord. “I’m so close to creating something like myself. Already I have one who heals herself when she is sick. Can feed a family of six on one pound of hamburger and get a nine year old to stand under a shower.” The angel circled the model of the mother very slowly and sighed, “It’s too soft.” “But tough,” said the Lord excitedly. “You cannot imagine what this mother can do or endure.” “Can it think?” “Not only think but it can reason and compromise,” said the creator. Finally the angel bent over and ran its finger across the cheek, “There’s a leak,” the angel pronounced. “I told you, you were trying to put too much into this model.” “It’s not a leak,” said the Lord. “It’s a tear.” “What’s it for?” “It’s for joy, sadness, disappointment, pain, loneliness and pride.” “You’re a genius,” said the angel. The Lord looked somber, “I didn’t put it there.”

Lots of tears in our life the Lord didn’t put there.

Naomi has a lot of tears in her life. She says, “The Lord has dealt bitterly with me. It’s time to change my name. I’m no longer pleasant and lovely, - that’s what the name means, Naomi – call me Mara.” 1:21 she arrives home and she says (Moffett translates it this way), “Call me Mara because the almighty has cruelly marred me.”

Winter had been tough with her.

I’m conscious of the fact that there are people here who know what that is, what it means to be describing those kind of things. If I had been Naomi’s pastor, if I had been her friend, how would I have offered her help? Some things I would not have done... I would not have agreed with her when she said, Call me Bitter, I’d have put my arm around her and said, I know you don’t feel good right now but I’m always going to call you Pleasant, Lovely. When people are down we can lovingly agree not to be down on them.

I would not have tried to say, There’s some deep dark sin in your life. Obviously, all this tragedy has happened to you because you got away from God. That may sometimes be the case but for Naomi it wasn’t. It’s wrong to make that a universal principle to apply to everybody.

I think too I would not have given her an instant solution. Just do ‘this’ and all the bad will suddenly disappear. We’re great at the instant magic cures.

What Naomi needed at that moment if someone was going to come alongside of her and help her is someone to affirm her and say, “I know some things have gone wrong but you’ve done some things right. You’ve come back and you’ve still got your faith in God. It may be a little warped but it’s there. You haven’t started following the other gods. You’re still a servant of Jehovah. Not only that but there must be something lovely still in your life because you wouldn’t have gotten Ruth to have come all those long miles if you’d been a caustic, bitter, nasty person to get along with. The fact that she’s with you says there’s a lot of love in you.”

Then I think I would have pointed her to the scripture she had. She knew the story of Jacob. I would have given her some hope. Genesis 42:36 where Jacob says, Everything is against me. If

## A MOM FOR ALL SEASONS

Jacob had only known, everything wasn't against him. Joseph was number two in command in Egypt and everything was just about to go right.

We're not to pass judgment on the person's life until the Lord is finished with them. We don't know if a reverse is particularly sent by God. But we do know this: God is working good in the reverses of life. God was working good in Jacob's reverses and God is working good in Naomi's reverses. I spare the judgment on whether God sent directly the reverse. But we have the testimony in scripture that God is working for the good in our winters of life.

It's kind of neat that Naomi passes from scripture as a woman of Spring. Normally we see life as a cycle – spring, summer, fall and winter. But with the child of God who loves him and clings to him and serves him one exits life not on the winter note but on the spring note. Naomi has this moment where she comes back to being Pleasant and Lovely.

There are three ways we know it happens to her. One is we see her changing and beginning to refocus on the present and the future, rather than on the past. We see that in her when Ruth comes back from the fields where she has gleaned, picked up the straw pieces of grain that have been left by Boaz's servants. When Ruth brings back all of this grain, 2:20, she says "The Lord as not stopped showing his kindness to the living and the dead."

Probably if there's verse we ought to underline and keep it before us it is that one. "The Lord has not stopped showing kindness to the living and to the dead." If she had been a totally bitter person she would have reacted negatively to Ruth's news of Boaz's kindness. She'd have said, "Everything else in my life has gone wrong. This is going to go wrong too." But she did not let herself get stuck in life. She picked herself up with God's help and said, we're going to go into the future. Naomi would become Pleasant and Lovely again.

And her faith grew strong enough to support Ruth. There came that moment when she needed to give Ruth encouragement. That this daring venture of getting Boaz to propose to her had finally reach the point that she has a mid eastern way of indicating to Boaz who has probably feelings of inferiority because he's an older man, she's a younger woman. So Ruth kind of has to let him know she's interested. When he finally becomes aware of that fact he says, "I, as near kinsman, am going to try to acquire the property that belonged to your husband and his brother and father in law." It's obvious Boaz has been thinking about doing something in marrying Ruth because when she makes the suggestion to him he already knows who's in line top buy the property and therefore acquire her. He says, I'm the second in line.

When Ruth comes home and says to Naomi, He's going to try to acquire the right of kinsman redeemer today, Naomi's response to Ruth is "The man will not rest until the matter is settled today." 3:18. She comes alongside Ruth and gives encouragement and strength.

Blessings come to her in life. We see in the very last verses of the book where it says the women living there after the marriage of Boaz and Ruth, Ruth gave birth to a son. "Naomi took the child, laid him in her lap and cared for him." By the way, there's some tremendous realm of truth and parenting in those phrases.

Took the child. Naomi made a decision to accept the child.

Laid him in her lap. She made a decision to love the child.

And a third thing. She made a decision to nurture the child and care for him.

## A MOM FOR ALL SEASONS

“Naomi took the child, laid him in her lap and cared for him. The women living there said, ‘Naomi has a son,’ and they named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse the father of David.” I’d like to suggest that Naomi’s life does not end in bitterness. Neither is it understood from within the context of her years on earth alone. It takes four generations to go by before it is even begun to be understood what God is up to in her life. It is finally through her great grandson that a king named David comes to Israel. God in all these reverses of life was working out a tapestry, taking a negative and making it into a good. Using the reverses of Naomi’s life – the relocation, the death of her husband, the death of her sons to pull through that occasion this young Moabite woman Ruth who would marry the older bachelor Boaz to whom would be born a child whose name meant *Worshiper*. Obed – Worship. To whom would come David.

I think therefore Naomi’s story eloquently suggests to us that no matter what time we’re going through in life, even if it’s a down time, we take occasion to say, God, I want to find your purposes in this for healing and for life and for good and for hope. Surely this isn’t how ultimately you intend for things to turn out. The reverses have occurred but Lord you have a greater plan. He’s going to repeal and role back all of the reverses.

Naomi had to return home for this to happen or she would have missed it all. If she had not come back Ruth would not have come with her. They would have not met Boaz. I’m suggesting through this that it may be possible that someone here today is away from home and maybe the relocation which you’ve gone through is not a physical relocation at all. But a spiritual relocation. You have moved away from your home in God. If you want to see God work his perfect purposes in you that last not only through your generation but in the generations to come. I think that’s what parenting is all about. I am benefiting from the decisions that were made by grandparents, three of whom I never met. I have benefited all my life from decisions they have made.

Mother’s Day is about generational impacts on people. How do we make an impact upon our children and upon our children’s children? We make it if our heart is right with God. If we are at home with him. If his mission and purpose for us is central to our life. If there’s nothing between him and us. If we are dead center in the middle of his will he’ll work for the good in our life.

Naomi came home and she found God’s purpose lived out in her because she was home. If in any way your heart is away from God today let this mother’s day be a day in which you come home.

Father, for this beautiful woman Naomi we give you tanks. For all the beautiful mothers here today we give you thanks. Lord, in this service we recognize that some of us may be in the seasons of life where we’re going through stress and change and loss and it hurts. We cry a lot. There are sleepless nights and discomfort and inconvenience. And a feeling even that you are unaware or you have brought this about. In spite of the fact that we pray and we confess. Yet there are times we don’t see things change overnight. Help us, Lord, in those seasons of life to be true to you and to realize that even when our spirits get a little edgy and out of sync with others and with you, you have not abandoned us or left us alone to our own purposes but you are walking along with us in life. Bringing us home. There may be children here today that are away from home. Even though they’re grown up and shouldn’t be home because they’re adults, they’re away from home in a spiritual and psychological

## **A MOM FOR ALL SEASONS**

sense. I pray that by the help of your Holy Spirit you would draw each one of us to the home that we should be in, in you today. I pray for every one of our families here that you would give to each one of our families a great blessing of unity and togetherness in you. That where there are difficulties in families you would help us work through those difficulties so that we might see your purposes being lived out in our lives and beyond us to the next generation. Where there are divisions in families we pray that you would work to heal. Where there are family members who do not know you, who have not come to personally confess you as Lord and savior, we take a moment in our mind as we pray now to identify that family member and ask that you would bring that person home to you. We pray that we would be your person in all the seasons of life, whether times are good or whether they are bad, whether we're up or down, let us be your person, live out your will in us, Lord Jesus, I pray. Through Christ we ask. Amen.