

\*\* I wanted to start out today with a big Thank You to all of you for last week's surprise celebration for our 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of leading Foothills Church. You guys blew us away. That was so amazing and generous. The words of appreciation, the video from our kids...OMG. And the book of memories was so rewarding and fueling read...thank you so much. I can't believe how all of you kept that surprise a secret all that time. You all are very sneaky. Phil said, well now you know when the coup happens, you'll never see it coming. 😊

I just want you to know it has been the highest privilege to have journeyed with you all these past 25 years. We've been through some stuff. And we've overcome some stuff. And we've accomplished much more than many would imagine. One man calls our church "The little church that could," after the story book "The little engine that could."

You guys celebrated us last week, but we've made this journey together. So, I want to celebrate you this week. Without all of you and our amazing staff, I could not have made it 25 years, and Foothills Church would not have had the tremendous impact it has had. So, thank you so much.

**Introduction:** Today we come to the conclusion of our series in Ruth we've been calling "Profound Provision." In this series wrap up message, I want to do a couple things.

1. This story has some really helpful lessons for us in our lives. I want to revisit a few of those because I don't want us to miss them.
2. Secondly, I want to take a look at the last few verses of our story and take note of the reality that God's profound provision for the characters in this story is a foreshadowing of God's ultimate provision for you and for me.

**[Transition]** - The first lesson I want us to reaffirm is the truth that God's profound provision is always, always at work in your life.

**God's profound provision is always at work in your life.**

Let's think back together about Naomi's and Ruth's journey. Naomi's life was subject to struggle, and multiple tragic losses. In a new land and in an unfamiliar culture, Naomi's husband Elimelech dies. Losing a spouse is never easy. And it's multiplied pain when you are in a foreign land.

I can't imagine the feelings of loneliness. The feelings of fear and anxiety about the future. She must have thought what now? Then if that wasn't enough for one woman to bear, both her sons die. It's a pain like no other when you lose a child, no matter how old they are. Any one of these losses would have been a huge burden to bear. Now, Naomi has the weight of all three losses.

When multiple losses and heartaches pile up, it's tough on the soul. Lying in bed at night...mind spinning...heart aching...what was she thinking? Was she thinking back over her life and fighting anger at Elimelech for taking her and the boys away from Bethlehem...the house of bread...the place of provision...to this foreign land where there has been nothing but tragedy?

Was she stressing about what her future might look like now in her old age? How was she going to cobble together any sort of subsistence living now? Did she wonder, "Where's God?" "What's he doing...does he even care?" "Has he abandoned us since we're living in the land of Moab?" "Does even notice us here in all this tragedy?"

One of the things we've learned in this series, and I want to highlight it again for us today in this wrap up message because it's super, super important for our lives. God stops at nothing to get to you and to get your heart back in alignment with his.

It doesn't matter if you've made foolish choices or were subject to foolish choices. However it happens...when you're at your worst, God's at his best! Here's the profound news in this story: *God is always at work to bring you close! He literally works through ANY AND ALL circumstances.*

[Illustration] - Here's the reality: Our lives are like a tapestry. Here's what God sees {show front of crown tapestry} But...here's what we see. {Show backside of crown tapestry}. Life might look all crazy and random to us, but God stitches our lives together with no loose threads or errant stitches.

Corrie Ten Boom wrote this about our lives as tapestries:

*My life is but a weaving  
Between my God and me.  
I cannot choose the colors  
He weaveth steadily.*

*Oft' times He weaveth sorrow;  
And I in foolish pride  
Forget He sees the upper  
And I the underside.*

*Not 'til the loom is silent  
And the shuttles cease to fly  
Will God unroll the canvas  
And reveal the reason why.*

*The dark threads are as needful  
In the weaver's skillful hand  
As the threads of gold and silver  
In the pattern He has planned*

*He knows, He loves, He cares;  
Nothing this truth can dim.  
He gives the very best to those  
Who leave the choice to Him.*

-Corrie ten Boom

I want you to know...you can't wander too far...or too long...and you can't wander too many times. God is always working behind the scenes and in ways we often don't notice to get you back close to him and in step with his heart.

I suspect there might be a few of you in the room today who know you've been wandering out in the weeds from God. You've made some choices that have taken you away from his ideal for you. And it's maybe not the first time you've drifted away from him. Maybe you've lost count of the number of times you wandered away.

And I suspect you have some pretty strong feelings of uncertainty about whether God still believes in you, if he still cares, or if he even wants you back. It's a sickening feeling to question whether God's given up on you or not. But, that's how you're feeling today.

You may have given up on you...but God has never and will never give up on you. Provision is closer than you think. Remember what Naomi does when she wakes up to the dead-end road she's on. She drives a stake in the ground, she makes a firm decision to get back on the road that leads to Bethlehem. In effect, she does a 180 degree turn and gets back on the road that leads to Bethlehem...the house of bread...the place where God's presence and provision are most available. And the moment she made that choice...all sorts of things began to change in her life.

There's a huge spiritual lesson in that. *The moment you realize you're on the wrong road in life and going the wrong direction, the moment you wake up to the reality of your wandering, that's the moment you need to repent.* Repentance means, an about face. Repentance means, you stop going in the direction you're going, and you turn around and you head back towards God and his best for you.

Naomi got support, encouragement and help from Ruth in that journey. And you'll likely need the same. So, guys...phone a friend...call a sponsor...enlist an accountability person...join a group. Take advantage of every source of help available to you. And reset the course of your life. And when you do things will begin to change.

And for some of you that means surrendering your life to God today. Because it's not a coincidence that you've been listening to these messages in this series and that you're here today. God's been working tirelessly to get you back. He's been relentless in his orchestration of the smallest of details in your life to get your attention and to get you back close with him. He loves you that much! Will you lean into him today?

**[Transition]** - I hope you will because here's another valuable lesson layered over this. And I want to make sure you take away from this series. Though God's methods may change, his faithfulness will not.

**Though God's methods may change, his faithfulness will not.**

Again, think about what we've seen in this story. God uses the good, the bad, the hard, and the ugly to knit together his plan of provision for Naomi and Ruth.

He used loss and hardship to yield a heart. He used Ruth in Naomi's life. He used Boaz in Ruth's life which also blessed Naomi. He killed two birds with one stone as they say. Boaz blessed both these women. God even used the self-absorption of Mr. So & So...all to work out his perfect plan for provision.

Though his methods may change, his faithfulness will not. You and I can never predict how God's going to get done what God wants to get done in our lives. You may be in a situation, and you don't see a way out. You don't see a way through. And in time, discouragement has begun to settle in on you. You may have started to feel hopeless...just like Naomi.

You may have started to make some good decisions and come back to God but then now you're in a situation, you're facing a huge challenge, and you're totally uncertain about how God's going to take care of you or work things out in your life. But, known this...while you may be at a loss for how to overcome the challenge, God's never at a loss. He's infinitely creative, infinitely resourceful, and infinitely powerful. Remember, there is nothing in all of creation that is beyond his power to control, manipulate, or create.

**[Illustration]** - Back in the time when the nation of Israel was divided, Israel to the north, and Judah in the south. Israel to the north had 0 godly kings. As 1 Kings reports it, one king would be succeeded by another, each more feeble, weak, godless than the one before him. Israel was circling the drain spiritually.

At one point a man by the name of Ahab became King and the text says, *"Ahab son of Omri did more evil in the eyes of the Lord than any of those before him."*<sup>1</sup> Sinning in the most grotesque way was trivial to him, and he even married the dastardly pagan, Ba'al worshiping woman Jezebel, daughter of the king of Sidon. Among other offenses to God, he had the audacity to set up an altar to Ba'al inside the Temple and the text says, *"He did more to provoke the Lord, the God of Israel to anger than did all the kings of Israel before him."*<sup>2</sup>

Elijah the prophet pronounces a judgment on Ahab for his evil. No dew or rain for the next several years until God relents. Of course, that meant some hardship for everyone in the land, including Elijah. But God directs Elijah to a remote place where God lets him know he can drink water from this little brook. But what about food? How will he get food? Well, God instructs the ravens to feed him. They brought him bread and meat

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Kings 16:30.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Kings 16:33.

in the morning and bread and meat in the evening, and he drank from the brook.

Later the brook dried up. Oh no...what now? Well, God directs Elijah to the region of Zarephath and he uses a widow to supply Elijah. Well, the widow doesn't have much, but that's not too hard for God. Each day he supplies her with just enough oil and just enough flour until the Lord once again brought rain.

Later the woman's young son died. Oh no...what's God going to do now? Well, God instructs Elijah to stretch himself out over the boy three times while praying for his life to return. And suddenly, boom...he starts breathing again.<sup>3</sup> Though his methods kept changing...his faithfulness never, never, ever failed.

*Here's the truth: When you're linked up with God, there are limitless possibilities. And you know what that means? It means hope is always alive. Solutions will emerge out of nowhere. Circumstances will change at just the right time. The course of your life will turn in a direction you never saw coming. And you'll see a way through. You'll see a way over. You're hope will be reignited. Because God's faithfulness never, ever, ever changes.*

**[Transition]** - Now, as the book of Ruth closes, there is one final movement in this grand story of God's profound provision and faithfulness. Look with me at the capstone verses of chapter 4 as the writer brings this story to a stunning resolve. Read verses 13-15

### **The birth of a son gives give Elimelech's family hope.**

The birth of this son is the capstone to this whole saga, the exclamation point on God's profound provision. Notice, verse 13, *"And God enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son."* Again the emphasis is on

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<sup>3</sup> 1 Kings 17.

what God is doing behind the scenes. This isn't just reporting out on the natural sequence of events. God is on his throne. God is in the driver's seat. God is orchestrating all these events.

And now he has brought untold hope to the family line of Elimelech. Not only did he provide for Naomi and Ruth, but he made provision for Elimelech's family line to be preserved. Everything in these closing verses is designed to highlight the redemption God provides...for Elimelech but more specifically for Naomi. It is all designed to be a contrast to how the whole story starts and with Naomi's proclamation when she returned to Bethlehem, "I went away full but the Lord has brought me back empty." These verses describe the fulfillment of God's faithfulness as her redeemer.

Notice how the child who was born, is celebrated in verses 14-15. *"May he become famous throughout all Israel. He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth."* Naomi who was empty in many ways, is now full and restored. She who was hopeless and full of despair is now full of joy and hope for the future.

**[Transition]** - And to be sure, this child would be renown. Look at verses 16-17. *"**16** Then Naomi took the child in her arms and cared for him. **17** The women living there said, "Naomi has a son!" And they named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David."*

**[Transition]** - Now...I hope you're seeing this...this story is not just about the characters in it. It's incredible how God has orchestrated the events of this story to impact Naomi, Ruth, and Elimelech's whole family line. But you know what's even more profound than that? *How God has orchestrated the events in this story to impact your story!*

We now come to the kicker in this whole story. We now learn the events in this story set the stage and put the pieces in place for God's greater story ...God's greater provision. Look at verses 16-22.



## **Not only does the birth of this son give Naomi and Ruth hope...The birth of this son gives you hope.**

When we started this story, Naomi was empty...but now, she is full. Ruth's son is not just any son. He will become the grandfather of the greatest king there ever was over Israel.

Remarkably, the original focus of the story is now extended beyond showing God's providence and care in the life of one family. It now concerns the life of the entire nation, and even the world because in the son born to Naomi and Ruth the history of God's rule through David has begun. And even more remarkable, God's rule through his ultimate ideal king, a son of David and God's own Son will come through Naomi's son.

**[Illustration]** - In the atrium today I have a poster that usually hangs outside my office. On your way out I'd encourage to stop and take a look at it. It is a diagram of a genealogy that starts with Adam and about midway through comes to the characters of our story in Ruth—Elimelech, Boaz, Obed, Jesse, and David—and then several generations later it culminates in Joseph, Mary and Jesus! That's right. Naomi who started out empty, is now full. And her family that has been preserved are in the direct line of the Messiah Jesus, sent from God.

You see what this means? This story...impacts you directly. It's Naomi's story. It's Ruth's story. But it's also your story. The pieces are now in place...for what will occur several hundred years later:

*"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, (That's the clan of Elimelech and Boaz) though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times." - Micah 5:2*

*For to **us a child is born**, to **us a son is given**, and the government will be on his shoulders. **And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.** - Isaiah 9:6*

## **Conclusion:**

So, as we wrap up...let's remember...

1. God's provision is always at work in your life. We see the back of the tapestry and it looks messy and random. But, God's faithful love is weaving together a beautiful picture in our lives. You can trust him.
2. Though God's methods may change in your life, his faithfulness will not. You can trust him.
3. The son born in this story points to God's Son born at Christmas. He is God's ultimate provision, the redeemer of our lives, and our sure, and grounded hope for our futures. I hope you will open your heart to him and trust him.

Have an awesome Thanksgiving...and be sure to thank God for his provision of his Son who saves us from our sin, leads us in our lives, and is the source of our eternal hope.

Next week we begin a new series for Christmas we're calling Christmas hope. I hope you can be with us.