BOLD Moves:

I'm Coming Home!



by Dr. Jasmin **Sculark**

Dr. Jazz’s

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to women all over the world who are making bold moves every day in every area.

1

I'm Still on the Map!

[1]Now it came to pass, in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehem, Judah, went to dwell in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons. The name of the man was Elimelech, the name of his wife was Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion – Ephrathites of Bethlehem, Judah. And they went to the country of Moab and remained there. Then Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died; and she was left, and her two sons. Now they took wives of the women of Moab: the name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth. And they dwelt there about ten years. Then both Mahlon and Chilion also died; so the woman survived her two sons and her husband.

Then she arose with her daughters-in-law that she might return from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the country of Moab that the LORD had visited His people by giving them bread. Therefore she went out from the place where she was, and her two daughters-in-law with her; and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah. And Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go, return each to her mother's house. The LORD deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. The LORD grant that you may find rest, each in the house of her husband."

So she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept. And they said to her, "Surely we will return with you to your people."

But Naomi said, "Turn back, my daughters; why will you go with me? … Turn back, my daughters, go…" Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her... Ruth said,

"Entreat me not to leave you,
Or to turn back from following after you;
For wherever you go, I will go;
And wherever you lodge, I will lodge;
Your people shall be my people,
And your God, my God." …

So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabitess her daughter-in-law with her, who returned from the country of Moab. Now they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest.

(Ruth 1:1-12, 14, 16, 22, NKJV)

[15]Realizing that their father was dead, Joseph's brothers said, "What if Joseph still bears a grudge against us and pays us back in full for all the wrong that we did to him?" So they approached Joseph, saying, "Your father gave this instruction before he died, 'Say to Joseph: I beg you, forgive the crime of your brothers and the wrong they did in harming you.' Now therefore please forgive the crime of the servants of the God of your father." Joseph wept when they spoke to him. Then his brothers also wept, fell down before him, and said, "We are here as your slaves." But Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid! Am I in the place of God? Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today. So have no fear; I myself will provide for you and your little ones." In this way he reassured them, speaking kindly to them. (Genesis 50:15-21, NRSV)

Jeremiah 29:11 reminds us that God has a plan for our lives. That plan is not to harm us but rather to help us. That plan is to get us to our point or place of destiny. That plan is what we call divine steps.

The Lord says, "I know the plan…" That plan is what we call Divine Destiny, meaning that this plan was established before time. It was established in eternity: *God has a plan for your life.* This is why the Lord can say to Jeremiah, *"Before I formed you in your mother's womb, I knew you."* (Jeremiah 1:5) Before your momma and your daddy got together, *"I already preordained, already established the outcome of what your life would be."* God says to Jeremiah, before your momma and daddy got together, I ordained you to be a prophet.

Now God preordained Jeremiah to be a prophet. Know that before you got here, while you were in eternity, God preordained for you to be something. That's why everybody is born to be something. There is no such person as a nobody in the sight of God. God has a plan for your life, and that plan is a good plan. That's why the Bible says all good and perfect gifts come from the Lord. (James 1:17 paraphrased) The plan that God has for you is not to harm you; it is to help you. It is not to hinder you; it is to build you up.

I want to stay right here, because some of you don't understand the God Whom you are serving. Somebody has lied to you that God is out to harm, that God is out to destroy you and that God is out to kill you. So, when trouble happens, you say, "God, why did you let this happen to me?"

God has a plan for your life and the plan of God is good. In fact, everything God makes is good. When He created the heavens and earth and when He created the birds and the fishes, the Bible says He looks at it and says, “it is good.” But then, when He created man, he says, “it is very good.”

God does not make junk. God does not make accidents. God already preordained and pre-established that we are going to be the sons and the daughters of God. The Bible says it has not yet been revealed what it shall be, but we know that when “He is revealed, we shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is.” (1 John 3:2) God has a good plan for you. God is not trying to frustrate you. God is not trying to kill you. He is not trying to destroy you. God has a plan for your life.

If you think God is trying to frustrate you, kill you and destroy you, then you have God and the devil twisted; you have God and the devil mixed up. The Bible says that the devil is a thief, and he comes to only do three things. The Bible says the thief comes to steal, kill, and destroy. (John 10:10, paraphrased) But Jesus says that I have come so that you may have life and not just life, but you are going to have “la vida loca” kind of life, rolling-in-dough kind of life, got-it-going-on kind of life. God is not out to destroy you – God is out to bless you. God is not out to frustrate you – God is out to encourage you. If anybody told you that God is out to kill you; I don’t know what God they are serving.

The God I serve is the God who said that I am going to have victory in every area in my life. He says that “I come that you may have life” and that you are going to have “la vida loca” kind of life. You are going to have rolling-in-dough kind of life. He says that “I want you to prosper and be in good health as your soul prospers.” (3 John 1:2) God doesn’t get glory in you struggling, God doesn’t get glory in you climbing the rough side of the mountain, God doesn’t get glory in you trying to make ends meet. God wants to enlarge your territory. He wants to bless you indeed.

That’s the kind of God whom we serve. He says He is a good God. And He wants to bless us. God has a plan for our lives. You have to understand that. And because God has a plan for your life, you are not an accident. You were preordained before you came into time, in eternity. God already established you. What you are, who you are, God already planned it. He already ordained it. God has a plan for you and it is amazing. It is been predetermined.

It is been pre-established that we will become the sons and daughters of God. And that is why Joseph could look at his brothers, who threw him in a pit and then sold him into slavery, and

say, “Whatever you meant for evil, God turned it around for my good and for the good of numerous people.” (Genesis 50:20, paraphrased)

Wherever you are right now, it is preordained by God. You have to catch that. Wherever you are, there are some of you are already looking at tomorrow so you can’t celebrate today. I may not be on the top of the mountain; I may not be successful, but wherever I am, God has a plan for my life. There ain’t no devil in hell can stop it, no demon can delay it, no haters can destroy it. I am in the right place. That is so important for you to understand – that you are in the right place. That’s what Joseph said – that the pit was part of God’s plan, the prison was part of God’s plan, the palace was part of God’s plan.

Some of you only shout when you get to the palace. But you need to have a pit praise. That’s a praise when stuff isn’t going in your favor. It is when you don’t have money, when people are hating on you. If you can praise him in the pit, then you can praise him in the palace. You see, God knows that you have a palace praise, not when you get to the palace but when you praise him in the pit. I can praise him in the pit on my way to the palace. I can praise him in spite of it all. Maybe the reason why God has dropped you in the pit is to see what your praise is made of. Perhaps the reason why you are in the pit is that God is fortifying your praise.

Because anybody can praise him in the palace. But can you praise him when your car won’t start? Can you praise him when your money is funny, or can you praise him when your honey walks away? Can you praise him when there is bad news?

I don’t know about you, but I am on my way to the palace – but before I get to the palace, I will praise him in the pit. I will praise him in a hoopty while waiting on a Mercedes. I will praise him in a one-room apartment while waiting on my mansion. I am going to praise him with no money in my pocket until I get a million dollars. Do you have a pit praise? Joseph moved from the pit, and from the pit he moved to the palace, and then, he ends up in prison, and now he is vice president.

Look at your checkbook and prophesize: you aren’t always going to be this broke. Take your wallet out and prophesize: you aren’t always going to be like this. The Lord is perfecting. Sooner or later it is going to work out for my favor. I need you to jump out of your seat and spin around and say it is going to work out in my favor. The pit is going to work out in my favor, the prison is going to work out in my favor. And we know that “all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” (Romans 8:28)

Joseph can look at the brothers who put him in the pit, and he can look at Ms. Potiphar who falsely accused him, and he can say, “Don’t get it twisted, you don’t have that kind of power – it was *the Lord*. The reason I was in the pit is not because of you guys. No, God established it.”

Some of you are giving the devil too much credit. You are giving other people too much power. You are where you are because God allowed it. Joseph said I am in the right place. What you meant for evil, God turned around for my good. I am in the set place, the established place. It doesn’t feel comfortable, it doesn’t feel good, and I don’t understand why I am in this place, but I am in this place. God intended it. He allowed it. He permitted it. That’s why Job can say, “Where I am, God will find me, He will locate me and after He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold.” (Job 23:10)

The challenge for many for us is not that God has a plan for our lives. The challenge is that God has not given us the details – the map. The challenge is that while God has a plan for our lives, He has not given us the maps nor the details.

The road to our destiny can be filled with pitfalls and detours. I am convinced that God has already factored in every poor decision and every poor choice that we have made. He already factored in the pitfalls; He already factored in the detours. He already knew that I was going to eat from the wrong tree. He already knew I was going to take a wrong exit. I was surprised, but God wasn’t. There is nothing that has happened that God didn’t already know. There is nothing that surprises God. It surprised you, but it doesn’t surprise God. He factored in my poor choices, He factored in my detour, He factored in my missteps. He already factored them in.

When we look at the book of Ruth, we see that in spite of the pitfalls, in spite of the detours, Ruth and Naomi end up where they need to end up. This book is one out of only two books named after women, Ruth and Esther, and the context of this story is told that it happened in the days when the Judges ruled.

You have to understand the context of the text. It is written in the time of the Judges. Judges is a very important book. There is a phrase that is repeated over and over again in the book of Judges: “They did what is right in their own eyes.” You must understand this phrase because it tells you how the people in the time of Naomi and Ruth function. At that time, there was no king; no one was ruling. There were only judges, and the people did what was right in their own eyes. That’s not necessarily a negative thing – God is teaching you that when there is

no godly leadership, sometimes you do what is right in your own eyes based on the facts that you have.

When you move out from the book of Judges and drop into the book of Ruth, you see a family who have made a decision based on the facts they had. Fact #1 is there is a famine in the land. There is a recession in the land; there are no jobs, food or money. There is a man named Elimelech, who has 2 sons and is married to Naomi. There is no bread in Bethlehem, Judah – by the way, Bethlehem means *bread* and Judah means *praise*.

Can you praise if you don't have any bread? Is your praise predicated on your bread? Are you thinking, "You are trying to make me shout, but I don't have no bread. I don't have a dime in my pocket and I don't have a dime in my house, and the first of the month is coming and I got more bills than I have income. And, you want me to holler up in here?" Yes, I do!

I want you to praise because "faith is the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen." (Hebrews 11:1) If you learn to shout when you don't have anything, God can give you something. You don't even know what God is about to do by the first of the month. You can't even be in the moment right here because you are thinking about the first of the month. But the Bible says, "*Take no thought of tomorrow, what you should wear or eat or where you should live, for your heavenly Father knows that you have need of these things."* (Matthew 6:25-34)

Seek ye first the kingdom of God and all these things will be added unto you. (Matthew 6:33) Everything you need, He will add it. If you learn to celebrate now, He will manifest. Some of you are biting your nails about tomorrow; you are frustrated about tomorrow. But you don't even know that God has dispatched angels who are taking care of tomorrow. Your haters are about to pay one of your bills. He releases angels. You know my God shall supply all my needs according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:19)

What are you worrying about tomorrow for? Don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will take care of itself. Whatever I need tomorrow, when I step into it, it will be there. If I need joy, it will be there. If I need peace, it will be there. All I have is today. And this is the day that the Lord has made. There is no guarantee that you are going to make it to tomorrow. You might as well praise him while you have today.

All you have is today. Tomorrow is not promised. Tomorrow has its own trouble. Why bring tomorrow's troubles into today? Why bring tomorrow's issues into today? You have to live in the moment. All I have is today. I am going to love today; I am going to dance today; I am

going to have fun today; I am going to be satisfied today. Because God has tomorrow. Older people say, “Many things about tomorrow I don’t seem to understand, but I know who holds tomorrow and the one who holds tomorrow holds my hand.” He has your hand, He has your grocery list, He has everything you need and everything you want. Don’t worry about tomorrow, he already has tomorrow. Take no thought for tomorrow.

Here is Elimelech, and it doesn’t look good. They are living in a place where there was supposed to be bread. Bread represents different things in Scripture. Bread also represents prosperity. In Scripture whenever there is bread, they consider that the favor of God. But there’s no bread in Bethlehem so it is affecting my praise. Because when you have low-level praise, you have to see it before you shout. When you have low-level praise, you have to see the bread before you praise him. If you are waiting and have to see it before you praise him, that isn’t faith, that’s feelings. But is there anybody who can say, “I don’t have to see it, I don’t even have to touch it; I believe the impossible, I can see the invincible.”

So, there is no bread in Bethlehem. I love this brother because he understands that he has to be a BMW – black man working. But in Bethlehem, Judah there are no jobs. There is a famine, there is a recession. A brother can’t get a job. And he knows that he is a provider, and he is a protector of his family. I have to pause here; parenthetically, there is nothing more devastating to a man when he can’t provide for his family. So, ladies, if he is providing, take some time to say thank you. He may not do it like your daddy, but he is providing. He may not be Barack Obama, but he is providing. He is working and doing the best he can. Nothing is more defaming to a man that after coming home and bringing the bacon, you aren’t acknowledging that he is bringing home the bacon. If you have a brother who is providing and protecting, you ought to holler for him; you ought to scream for him. So, you can imagine how Elimelech must be feeling. Every time Naomi looks at him, he is feeling down. He is feeling depressed, because he doesn’t have a job. He is not a lazy man or a sorry man; it is just a famine in the land. Naomi tries to encourage him, but it is hard for a man. This is why most men who can’t provide, go into a cave and shut down. They isolate themselves. It can be a burden and pressure.

The reason why I love this man is because he understands that sometimes you have to make a bold move. After he has looked at everything, he makes a decision that he is going to roll out of Bethlehem. Now I don’t know if this is a family collective decision, or whether he talked to Naomi about it. In fact, I don’t know if the decision was based on fear or faith. The Scripture never tells us. We don’t know if the decision Elimelech made is out of fear or out of obedience.

Have you ever been there? Sometimes when you make a decision, you don't know if the decision is out of faith or out of fear. Fear will make you make some decisions and so can faith. I don't know if Elimelech made the decision out of fear or if it was out of obedience but at least he made a decision.

The sign of headship is providing leadership. You are not the head because you are wearing pants; you are not the head because you have a tie on. You are the head because you provide leadership. Headship without leadership is a sinking ship. By the way, brothers, news flash: Every woman wants you to be the leader. I know we act like we are wonder women and superwomen, but we want you to make a decision. Make one decision, even if it is the wrong decision, make one. Are we going on vacation or not? Are we buying the house or not? Just make a decision. Don't ask us twenty times what our opinion is. Make a decision. You see, we will follow you, if you make a decision. We don't want you to vacillate back and forth. After we give you our opinion, you go on your knees, you go to your closet, flip a coin, go golfing – whatever – but when you come back, tell us that this is where we are going.

You see, headship provides vision for the family. We want to know what your vision is for the family. What is your vision? We want to know what your dream is for the house. Because we have one. Everyone woman has one. Every woman has a back-up plan. And we are just waiting. You allow us to be us when you step to the plate and say, "Listen, I don't know how it is going to turn out in Moab, I don't even know if there is bread in Moab; but pack the boys up. We only can take two suitcases and two pieces of luggage. I am going to get gas, and we are rolling out." Elimelech took his entire family.

Regardless of whether he made the decision out of fear or obedience, the great thing is that he made a decision. Touch that brother and say, "Make a decision. Are we getting married or are we shacking up? Make a decision. Are we having one kid or five kids? I want you to involve me in the discussion, but at the end of the day, when I come back home you ought to have a decision." Elimelech made a decision to relocate the family. And because I believe that this is a godly man – he discussed it with Naomi – and at the end of the day they went into agreement. They said, "Yes, there is nothing good in Bethlehem, Judah, so let's go to Moab."

They relocated. Sometimes you have to reapply. You have to go for another job. Some of you are still in Bethlehem. Sometimes you have to make a little shift. Because insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results. So they made a decision that

they are leaving Bethlehem and moving to Moab. They moved to Moab looking forward to doing better for their family.

But by the time they got to Moab, a bold move becomes a deadly move. They leave nothing trying to find something, and when they get to the place trying to find something, the Bible says that the provider, priest, and protector dies. In Scripture, out of anyone who dies, please do not let it be the head of the house. Death is sad anyhow, but not him, because he is the priest, protector, and provider. That's why brothers need to take care of themselves. Because you represent a three-fold in the family: priest, provider and protector. And when daddies don't protect little girls, pimps show up. Her first dance should not be with him but with her daddy. But God is about to raise up some godly fathers. I will break the spirit of every deadbeat daddy and momma.

Out of everybody, Elimelech dies. I'm sure Naomi was scared and the boys distraught. Have you ever made a decision and it not turn out the way you plan? You thought staying single and not getting married was better. You thought leaving that job or going to the other job was better. You thought leaving your job and starting your own business was better, yet you are still waiting for your first client. Have you ever questioned, did I hear God? Have you ever wondered, did I miss God?

Here is Naomi in Moab, and death was all around. She busted a move and now she is in a fix. Then the sons die. She had to deal with her husband's death and now she has to bury two children. And the text says that Naomi is left alone. She is alone with her thoughts, maybe thinking, "I should have never left. It is my fault. Maybe God is punishing me." Perhaps her thoughts were condemning her. By the time she gets back home, she says, "Don't call me Naomi; call me bitter."

Your thoughts are not who you are. If you don't capture your thoughts, your thoughts can make you become bitter or make you lose your mind. They will destroy and torment you. If you don't bring your thoughts under subjection, they will try to kill you. If it is not a divine thought it must be a demonic thought.

God, who is inside of you, loves you. Just because something bad happened to you does not mean you are bad. The devil does not mess with anybody who does not have something going on. In spite of the negative thoughts, you must know who you are. God is a mind regulator, a heart fixer. He will keep you in perfect peace. You are not going crazy; you won't lose your mind.

All of this happened to Naomi in Moab. Each of you who have ever read this story might assume that Bethlehem is the perfect will of God and that Moab is off the map. You have been told that because you had a detour, devastation, and destruction that you must be off the map – in Moab. You made the assumption that there are places that the Grace of God can't reach. And so, you live in a church culture that tells you that if you get off the wrong exit or take the wrong turn and there is death, devastation, and destruction, you stepped off the map.

But you are still on the map! The reason why you are still on the map is because God put a GPS in you. It is in Psalm 139, *"Where can I go from your Spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in hell, you are there."* (Psalm 139:7-8, NRSV) There is nowhere you can go where God's Grace cannot protect you. It is not a mistake; it is a miracle.

The Bible says that after Naomi buried her husband and her sons, she survived. You are a survivor. You still have a praise, and you still have to praise. You are at the right place at the right time. He hasn't forgotten about you. You are still on the map. And, after He has tried you, you shall come forth as pure gold.

Lost a job, but you are still on the map!

Been through a divorce, but you are still on the map!

People talk about you, but you are still on the map!

"*Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.*" (Job 13:15, KJV)

2

From Shame to Gain

Now it came to pass, in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehem, Judah, went to dwell in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons. The name of the man was Elimelech, the name of his wife was Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion – Ephrathites of Bethlehem, Judah. And they went to the country of Moab and remained there. Then Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died; and she was left, and her two sons. Now they took wives of the women of Moab: the name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth. And they dwelt there about ten years. Then both Mahlon and Chilion also died; so the woman survived her two sons and her husband.

Then she arose with her daughters-in-law that she might return from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the country of Moab that the LORD had visited His people by giving them bread. (Ruth 1:1-6, NKJV)

She said to them, "Do not call me Naomi. Call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the LORD has brought me home again empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the LORD has testified against me, and the Almighty has afflicted me?"

So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabitess her daughter-in-law with her, who returned from the country of Moab. Now they came to Bethlehem in the beginning of barley harvest.

(Ruth 1:20-22, NKJV)

And they came to Bethlehem, when? *In the beginning of barley harvest.*

"For your shame you shall have double, and for confusion they shall rejoice in their portion. Therefore, in their land they shall possess double. Everlasting joy shall be unto them."

(Isaiah 61:7, KJV modified)

I'm moving from shame and I'm about to gain. Our biblical text introduces us to a nuclear family, a family that you and I are absolutely familiar with, a family that many of us have often heard about. It is a nuclear family. There's a husband by the name of Elimelech, there's a wonderful wife by the name of Naomi, and they have two sons, one by the name of Mahlon and one by the name of Chilion. Here is a nuclear family who is living in a place, a familiar place that many of us know from Scripture, and that place is called Bethlehem.

They are living in Bethlehem. Bethlehem means *the house of bread*. It is the place of bread. It is the place where David inhabited. Bethlehem is important because Bethlehem represents the place of bread. Here is a nuclear family. Elimelech is the husband, Naomi is the wife, and they have two sons. The one son's name means *"sickness,"* and the other one's name means *"weakness."* For some reason, I don't know why, they named their sons *"sickness"* and *"weakness,"* but it is still a family.

In all families, there is some form of sickness. In some families, there is somebody who is suffering, physically, emotionally, or mentally. There's somebody who has a son or a daughter that, though you know that the hand of God is on them, he or she is dealing with some form of sickness.

But I'm so grateful that I serve a God who says He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities, and the chastisement of our peace is upon him, and by his stripes we are healed. (Isaiah 53:5) Is there anybody who still believes in the healing power of God, who knows that God can heal any form of sickness, that He can heal cancer; He can heal high blood pressure; He can heal diabetes? Is there anybody who still believes that God is a healer, that by His stripes we can be healed from any sickness? I don't care what the doctor said. I don't care what the MRI said. I don't care what the report says. It isn't over till God says it is over, because we serve a God who is a healer.

Here is Elimelech, whose name means *"my God is king."* He is married to a woman, Naomi, and her name means *"peaceful."* Here they are, a man whose name means "*my God is king*," who is married to a woman whose name means "*peaceful*," and they produce two sons whose names mean "*sickness"* and "*weakness*." Don't miss that. One son is named *sickness* and the other son is named *weakness*.

Sometimes in your family, you are dealing with somebody who either has a sickness or a weakness. The reason why I even shout in the midst of sickness or weakness is because I know that in spite of my weakness, God is still faithful. If it weren't for the Grace of God and the mercies of God, He could have wiped us out a long time ago. Every now and then, you ought to thank God that He still blesses you in spite of your weakness.

When Paul looked at his weakness, he prayed not just once, he prayed not just twice, he prayed three times that God would remove this weakness, this thorn in his flesh. (2 Corinthians 12:7) God said, "I'm going to do better than that. I'm not going to remove it. I'm going to cover it with Grace."

When I wake up in the morning, I am covered with Grace. When I get in the car, I am covered with Grace. When I'm driving on the highway, I'm covered with Grace. The only difference between me and the sinner is Grace. The only difference between me and the drug addict is Grace. The only difference between me and the prostitute is Grace!

There's a husband by the name of Elimelech, which means *my God is king*, and he is married to a woman by the name of Naomi, which means *peaceful*. Even though God is king is married to peace, they produce sickness and weakness. Don't get it twisted. Just because you are saved doesn't mean that sickness and weakness may not show up at your door. Just because you are Holy Ghost-filled, speaking in tongues and rolling on the floor, the reason why it happens is because the devil doesn't mess with anybody who doesn't have anything going on. If the devil is messing with you, it is because you have got it going on or you are about to get it going on.

Elimelech and Naomi produce two sons, and they find themselves in Bethlehem. Bethlehem is *the house of bread*. *My God is king* and *peaceful* produce *sickness* and *weakness*, and they're living in Bethlehem, Judah. Bethlehem means *the place of bread*. Judah means praise. The prerequisite for my praise is I have bread. I don't have to have a Mercedes; I have bread. I don't have to have the best job; I have bread. I don't have to have the biggest house; I have bread. I don't have to have Louis Vuitton or Gucci, but I have bread. Give us this day our daily bread. I was young, now I'm old, and I've never seen the righteous forsaken.

They are living in Bethlehem, the place of bread, which is the prerequisite for praise, and yet the text says there's a famine in the land. A famine means there's a shortage of stuff. There is a lack of something. There is a recession in the land. There is devastation in the land. Because of the famine, because of losing a job, because of the turn of the economy, Elimelech and Naomi find themselves in the midst of a famine. They are children of God, but they are not famine-proof. They're children of God, but they are not storm-proof. The storm did not pass over them. Although they're saved, sanctified, and Holy Ghost-filled, the storm still stopped at their house.

For whatever reason, they found themselves in a famine. They found themselves lacking. They found themselves in shortage. So Elimelech, the father, the provider, the protector of the house, decides that he is going to relocate his family. He is going to move them from the place of Bethlehem, the house of bread, and he moves to a place that all of us are familiar with, and that is Moab. He transitioned them from the east, and he heads west. Wanting to be a great protector and provider of his family, he relocates his family from the house of bread because there is no

bread in Bethlehem, and he takes them some miles to the west and they end up in a place called Moab.

They get there thinking there are going to be better days. Have you ever relocated and trouble followed you? Have you ever gone to a position or a place that you thought was going to be better for your family, and after you get to that place when you see that the trouble follows you? I read that the people who survived Katrina, who relocated from New Orleans to Houston are now mentally going through greater turmoil because it feels like trouble all over again.

But God will keep you in perfect peace, because your mind has stayed on him because you trust in him. (Isaiah 26:3) The devil is trying to make you have a nervous breakdown. The devil is a liar. *Greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world.* (1 John 4:4) Sometimes your shout should just be over the fact that despite all the stuff you lost, you are still in your right mind.

They relocated. They relocated looking for a better place, looking for a better position. They relocated because they were in a place of despair. They relocated because they were in a place of desperation. Whenever you are in a place of despair and desperation, you have to be careful that you don't make deadly decisions. Because the pressure of being in despair and desperation can force you to make some decisions that can derail your destiny and destroy you.

I'm sure that Elimelech thought he was making the best decision. I'm sure he talked it over with Naomi and they packed up and they relocated to Moab. I believe that when they got there, business was booming in Moab. Elimelech was providing for his family like every good man, every good husband, every good father. He is providing, he is protecting, he is making sure that he is the priest in the house.

I don't know how long it took after they got to Moab – maybe after a year of good business – however long it took, the same thing that might have happened in Bethlehem now meets them in Moab, but it moves from bad to worse. Elimelech, the man whose name means *my God is king,* is dead. The provider, the protector, the priest of the family relocates his family and now he is dead. Naomi is left with no provider. She is left with no priest. She is left with no protection.

Well, Naomi really does have protection. She has it in her sons. Now, her sons take on the responsibility of the father. They are now the providers. They are now the protectors. They are now the priests, and they are of an age that they marry foreign women.

Then, after ten years, both sons are dead. They transition from Bethlehem looking for a better life, and assuming that leaving, they were going to have a better life. They moved from desperation, they moved from despair and now they have to deal with death and disappointment.

Have you ever relocated after you prayed and fasted and know it is the will of God, and yet after you relocated you found yourself at the place of death and disappointment? Have you ever changed jobs expecting that this new job is going to give you some amazing opportunity – only to find out that the job is twice as crazy as the one you left? Have you ever stepped out of a relationship and stepped into a new relationship assuming that the new one is going to be better than the last one – only to find out that you left Deborah for Delilah? Have you ever been there? Has it ever moved from bad to worse?

But don't feel bad for Naomi. In fact, don't feel bad for her daughters-in-law, because Verse 5 gives you one minute to shout. Verse 4 and 5 says, *"And the women survived."* I need every woman in here who knows that you have been through something, and in spite of the stuff you have been through, you survived. You survived losing a job. You survived being raped. You survived a divorce. You survived them lying on you.

Three women from different cultures, from different backgrounds, from different situations, but they have got one thing in common: they survive. No husband, no sons, and the text says they survived. Because whenever you are in a famine, whenever there is death and disappointment, you need somebody to lean on. I believe Naomi had gotten a little bit discouraged, because after all she buried a husband and two sons.

When you know you are a survivor, you don't care what people think about you. When you know you are a survivor, you don't care if they look at you funny when you praise God. When you know you are a survivor, you don't care if your mascara runs, you don't care if your makeup is jacked up, you don't care if your shoes fall off of you. When you know you are a survivor, the stuff doesn't mean anything to you. You said, "When I get into the house of God, I'm going to praise Him like I lost my mind."

Despair and desperation now lead to death. Naomi moved from despair and desperation to now death and disappointment. Three funerals, death. Three tragedies, three levels of pain. It is one thing to have to bury your husband; it is another thing to have to bury a son, and not just one son.

Now you are no longer in a festivity mode. You are now in a funeral procession. Death is all around Naomi. Tragedy, struggles, heartaches, and problems. I can identify with Naomi that

after looking at three graves, she concludes that the Almighty has afflicted her. She does what many of us do: judge God based on what we're going through.

You see, her disappointment is three-fold. She is first of all disappointed with her husband. She is disappointed because he got her into this. She followed him. She is secondly disappointed with herself. "I should've known better. After he died, I should have packed on up. I should never have stayed here as long as I did." But thirdly, she is disappointed in God.

I know you don't want to talk about it. I know they tell you it is not spiritual. I know they tell you that you can blame everybody else but you'd better not point your finger at God. I know it is not proper to say it publicly. I know that you feel like Naomi, that it seems like God is blessing everybody but you. It seems like He favors everybody but you. It seems like He is opening doors for everybody but you.

Have you ever been disappointed in other people? Have you ever been disappointed in yourself? Have you ever been disappointed in God? People have been raising the question, why do bad things have to happen to good people? I mean these are saved, sanctified, Holy Ghost-filled people asking. These aren't crazy people. Why does it have to happen to my marriage? Why to my son? Have you ever asked the question?

She is disappointed. Has God ever disappointed you? I said, has God ever let you have it? Has it ever seemed like God has let you down? Has it ever felt like God has abandoned you? Has it ever felt like you can't find God? You've been crying all night long, all day long, and you can't find him. That's what David was saying. That's what Job was saying. He said, "I've been looking all over for him, but I can't find him. Oh, when I find him ... Oh, when I find him, I'm going to ask him why bad things happen to good people."

You see, here is the danger of staying in Moab too long, because Moab is the place of death and disappointment; Moab is the place of sorrow. The longer you stay in Moab, the more bitter you become. I said the longer you stay in Moab, the more depressed you become. The longer you stay in the place of death and disappointment the more frustrated you become.

Can I give you a revelation here? You were not born to live in Moab. You belong in Bethlehem. Bethlehem is the place of abundance. Moab is the place of lack. What are you still doing in Moab? There is bread in Bethlehem!

Death and disappointment: Moab. Say, "I'm getting out of it."

See, the thing that frustrates us about Moab is that Moab often comes when we least expect it. Y'all don't hear me. I wasn't expecting it, because storms come unexpectedly. You

don't foresee it. You don't even know it is coming. It shows up when you least expect it. Moab shows up when you least expect it. But don't ever forget this: Moab is not your final destination. It is just on your itinerary; it is not your destiny. That's why you cannot judge God based on your itinerary. You have to wait until you get to your destiny, when you look back over your life.

Moab is not your final destination. But God sometimes permits those famines in our lives to remind us that He is our real bread. Sometimes God allows famine to remind us that everything we have is just a resource, including the clothes on your back, the shoes on your feet, the house you are living in, and the car you are driving. Each thing is just a resource. Only God is the source of your joy. If you lose it all and you still have King Jesus, you have more than enough to start all over again.

There is despair and desperation. There is death and disappointment. Yet, in the midst of death and disappointment, Naomi got wind: *"They who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount out with wings as eagles. They shall run and not get weary."* (Isaiah 40:31)

There is a wind coming under you. Somebody position yourself; you are about to fly. You are about to soar. You are about to run through a loop and leap over a wall.

Despair, desperation, death, disappointment, and yet she got a ... tweet. She just got something on Facebook: "Bread is on its way." Naomi got wind that there is bread at the bread house. She got up, moved out and moved on.

For some of you, God is telling you it is time for you not just to move out, but it is time for you to move on. The marriage didn't work, move on. The job fired you, move on. The business collapsed, move on.

Here's where you want to really shout: Naomi didn't move on and move out by herself.

Naomi name's mean *peaceful*, but there's no peace in her and she is struggling with finding her peace. Listen to her language. "Don't call me Naomi. Call me shame. Call me bitterness, because the Almighty has afflicted me." Naomi moved from peace into pieces. Life ought to move you from pieces to peace, but sometimes after burying a loved one, you can vacillate. One day you had peace, and the next day you are falling into pieces. One day you have joy, and the next day you have pain. One day you have peace, and the next day you are struggling with problems.

Has anybody ever been there? This is how God sends Naomi deliverance. He yokes her up with another sister, Ruth, whose name means *"refresher."* When Naomi felt like giving up,

God sends her a refresher who said, “Entreat me not to leave you, neither from following after you. Your God will be my God.”

Listen, I just need you to yoke up with one other right person. Make sure you have got the right Ruth. Make sure you have got the right refresher. Make sure you have got somebody who doesn’t mind praying for you. Make sure you have got somebody who’s encouraging you. Make sure you have got somebody you can lean on. Make sure you have got somebody you can depend on. Make sure you have got somebody you can rely on. Make sure you have got somebody who doesn’t mind having your back.

He is about to refresh you. The places where you are broken, the places where you are hurting, the places where you are struggling.

Naomi and Ruth got back *in time for harvest*. They got back in time for the beginning. The refresher goes in the field and she gleans. She gleans from the field and brought it to the house. Naomi never once stepped foot in the field, but she gleaned.

God is about to let somebody bless you! God is about to let somebody glean. God is about to let somebody do it for you. Here’s the prophetic word: *“For your shame you shall have double.”* (Isaiah 61:7)

3

Move Out, Move On, Move Forward!

Then she arose with her daughters-in-law that she might return from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the country of Moab that the LORD had visited His people by giving them bread. Therefore, she went out from the place where she was, and her two daughters-in-law with her; and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah. And Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go, return each to her mother's house. The LORD deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. The LORD grant that you may find rest, each in the house of her husband."

So she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept. And they said to her, "Surely we will return with you to your people."

But Naomi said, "Turn back, my daughters; why will you go with me? Are there still sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands? Turn back, my daughters, go – for I am too old to have a husband. If I should say I have hope, if I should have a husband tonight and should also bear sons, would you wait for them till they were grown? Would you restrain yourselves from having husbands? No, my daughters; for it grieves me very much for your sakes that the hand of the LORD has gone out against me!"

Then they lifted up their voices and wept again; and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.

And she said, "Look, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law."

But Ruth said:

"Entreat me not to leave you,
Or to turn back from following after you;
For wherever you go, I will go;
And wherever you lodge, I will lodge;
Your people shall be my people,
And your God, my God.
Where you die, I will die,
And there will I be buried.

The LORD do so to me, and more also,
If anything but death parts you and me."

(Ruth 1:6-17, NKJV)

Before this season is over, I am getting out.

Let's do a quick recap. Last time, in this book, we were introduced to a family who experienced a famine or hard times… a recession, where they were living in Bethlehem in Judah. Because of these hard times, this family decided to relocate from Bethlehem, Judah to a place called Moab. They relocated to Moab in the hope of finding a better life, in the hope of finding better jobs, a better living. They were hoping that when they left Bethlehem, *a land of bread* – that at the time had no bread – and got to Moab, things were going to get better.

It is true that this family busted a move. They went where they had never gone before, to see what they had never seen before, so that they could do what they had never done before, so that they could have what they had never had before. In spite of them busting a move, and whether they busted a move out of faith or out of fear, the fact of the matter is this man, Elimelech, his wife, Naomi, and their sons, Mahlon and Chilion, leave Bethlehem in Judah and go where they had never gone before. They landed in Moab, which is an Arab country. And when they got there, things moved from bad to worse.

Isn't that how life is sometimes? Life doesn't always go from bad to good. Sometimes it moves from bad to worse, and then good.

They leave Bethlehem, which was bad and end up between the devil and the deep blue sea. The Bible says that the husband, the king, the prophet, the priest of the house, dies. And the wife, Naomi, is left to provide for herself and raise two sons. The sons grow up and end up marrying women from Moab. They married foreign women.

Notice that the text says simply that the sons married women. It does not tell us what kind of women they are because God is more concerned with where you are going than with where you are. Then the Bible says, for an unknown reason, the two sons both died. Three women are now left without a provider, protector and priest.

These three women are from three walks of life, three different stages in life and three different ages in life, but they have two things in common: they have experienced love and they have experienced loss. That's the only thing that is common in life – whenever you encounter people you will experience either love or loss. You see, there are two things that are universal:

love and pain. Whether you are from Trinidad, Alabama, Paris, Mississippi; whether you are Black or White, straight or gay, Republican or Democrat, there are always two things that always show up: love or pain.

You see, we might not be from the same place or have the same color, but we all know what it is to be loved and to love. At the same time, we all know what it is to experience pain. Pain has no color; pain has no boundary; pain knows no discrimination; pain doesn't check out your portfolio; pain doesn't care if you are Republican or Democrat; pain doesn't care if you are Black or White; pain doesn't care if you are straight or gay; and pain doesn't care if you are rich or poor. Pain is universal. Is there anybody who has never experienced pain in their life? Who has never experienced sadness in your life? Of course not; we all have.

There are two emotions that we have all experienced. We know what it is to be loved and to lose; we know what it is to experience joy and to experience sorrow. We know what it is to have happiness, and we know what it is to experience sadness. Those things are universal. It doesn't just happen to the unsaved. The Bible says that the rain falls on the just and the unjust. (Matthew 5:45) Sorrow comes to the just and the unjust. The just and the unjust cry the same way. Death is the same way; struggle is the same way; pain is the same way. Situations may change, and names may change, but the common denominator is all of us.

We all know what it is to have universal love and to know universal pain. That is why we can empathize with the person in Nigeria or Ethiopia. We may not have experienced exactly what they are going through, but we can feel what it is, because we know what it is to experience pain, for while we may not have buried a child, we have buried somebody. We can empathize with somebody who has been through a divorce or who has lost something, because pain and pleasure are universal.

You are not as different from me as you think you are. You may live in the suburb, and I my live in the hood but pain shows up in both places. You may drive a Mercedes, and I drive a hoopty, but pain shows up in the same place. You may be Black, and I may be White, but pain shows up in the same place. You may be straight, and I may be gay, but pain shows up in the same place. You are not as different from me as you think you are. I know what it feels like to feel and to cry like you cry. And while my pain may not be your pain, I still know what pain is.

These three women have experienced love, marriage and joy, and now they are experiencing sorrow; now they are experiencing pain and loss. The last time we saw Naomi, the text said that she survived the deaths of her husband and her two sons. She survived. How can

she survive losing her husband and two sons? She didn't lose her mind, she didn't go crazy. She did not have a mental or emotional breakdown. She survived. She survived burying a husband and two sons.

We have to pause parenthetically and ask Naomi, "What is the secret of surviving a loss?" Naomi's story tells us that the secret is in relationships. Because Naomi did not bear the burden of burying a husband and two sons by herself. There were two people who came alongside her to help her so that she could lean on them. That's the importance of relationship. Relationship is not about people buying you stuff. It is not about people giving you stuff. Relationship is God assigning people so you can lean on them. That is what the church is supposed to be about. The church is about a community of believers who can say to you, "You don't have to face what you are going through by yourself."

You don't have to be alone. God has assigned a body of believers for when you can't pray for yourself, somebody will pray for you. How many of you couldn't have survived what you have been through without some relationships? Thank God for relationship. Thank God for some people who came alongside of you. I don't know where I would have been without relationships. I would not have been able to carry the burden without relationships. Thank God for authentic relationships, because you can't survive tragedy and loss by yourself.

Naomi survived.

It reminds me that when I went through my divorce, I was so depressed over the divorce, I dropped down to 89 pounds. I refused to eat. I didn't want to leave my house. I thought I was a failure. I thank God for a lady by the name of Janie Dukes who came to my house and knocked my door down, took me out of the bed, dropped me in the shower and said, "You will live and not die." I wonder if you have a Janie Dukes in your life, a Forrest Gump in your life. I would not have made it without her.

You ought to thank God for friendships and relationships; that He connected you to people who said that weeping may endure for the night, but joy comes in the morning. (Psalm 30:5) You survived. Naomi survived because she had a sister circle. She had a sorority. Do you have an inner circle? You don't need a lot of people. You just need one or two other people. The Bible says that when two or three are gathered in Jesus' name, there He is in the midst of them. (Matthew 18:20) If you have the right one or two, you can survive anything. Naomi survived because she had an inner circle. Life is difficult, but it is more difficult when you have to face it by yourself. The Bible says that two are better than one. (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12)

Naomi survived burying her husband and two sons. She survived for ten years – one decade – in Moab. Naomi had been mourning the loss of her husband, and then at some point both of her sons died. She is been in the house of despair for ten years – Moab means *house of despair*. I don't know how long grief is supposed to last, but ten years is too long. While Naomi is in Moab, she learns that the Lord has revisited Bethlehem by giving the children of Israel bread. After ten years, Naomi learns that God has revisited Bethlehem and dropped bread in the house. Naomi decides to get up and get out, leave Moab and go back to her future: Bethlehem, Judah.

Some of you have been hanging out in Moab too long. You are about to get back to your destiny. You are about to get to your future. You have been angry and bitter for too long. You are getting out of this. I don't care how long or why you have been in it but this is the last time you are going to be where you are. You are getting out!

Naomi said, "I have to get out!"

You have to get out of that dysfunctional relationship or that deadbeat job. You have to get out of that mental turmoil, the shame, guilt, or frustration.

After ten years, Naomi made the decision. She is going to get out and go back to Bethlehem. She heard there was bread and made up her mind, "I have to go back home." The entire series is homecoming. She is going back to her roots. Home is where you can be authentically you; home is where people aren't going to look at you cross-eyed. People will not judge you because you went to Moab. You don't have to put on a façade. You can let your hair down. Home is where you can be the real you.

Naomi was in Moab. She heard that God has revisited Bethlehem and said, "I have to get out."

There are three steps to successfully get out. Some of you tried to get out one time and went back. The Bible says that whenever you come out of something, and if you try to go back to what the Lord delivered you from, it is like a dog returning to its vomit. (Proverbs 26:11)

That is why the Red Sea had to show up. It was not about killing the Egyptians – it was about making sure that the Israelites did not change their minds. If God does not put a Red Sea between you and that joker or that situation, you will try to go back. This is why God allows some to drown in the Red Sea, because you don't have enough strength to move forward. You got out but you went back.

I want to teach you how to get out and stay out. God said to forget the former things. He said He is going to do something new. (Isaiah 43:19) Try something new. To ensure that you don't just get out but that you remain out, some of you need to change your email or your post on social media.

Naomi did not look back. She got out. If you are going to successfully get out, first you have to move out. When she got word, Naomi packed up and moved out. She moved from the place of despair to the place of bread. Naomi shows us how to move out. She teaches us how to move out successfully.

Naomi not only moved out; she moved on, and she moved forward. Those of you who got out and moved back and failed, it is because you forgot to move on or you didn't move forward.

Notice a couple of things that Naomi did on her way getting out. First of all, she made an announcement. Naomi shows us the power of announcement or the power of confession. She said to her daughters-in-law, "I heard that the Lord has revisited the children of Israel by providing bread, and I am going back."

You are not serious about getting out until you tell somebody you are getting out. When you tell another person you are getting out, they are going to hold you responsible about getting out. If you don't tell anybody, then you don't really want to get out – you just want a timeout. Timeout is not the same as getting out. You are lying to yourself. You are taking time out for 30 days of not communicating or talking to each other. Instead of having the courage to say, "I am getting out," you are just taking timeout. But timeout is not for adults, it is for kids. Only children take a timeout.

Naomi and her two daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth, are on their way to Bethlehem. It is while they are on their way out that Naomi announces, "I am going back to Bethlehem." She doesn't tell them while they are in Moab that she is moving out, moving on, and moving forward. She waits until she got half-way out of Moab to tell them. She knows that if she told them while she is in Moab they would convince her to stay in Moab. Naomi knows human nature.

Some of you are in crazy situations because your friends convinced you to stay, or a prophet or priest lied to you and told you to stay. But the sign that you are mature is when you don't let nobody make decisions for you. If you still stay in a dysfunctional relationship, it is because you want to. The difference between you and an animal is that you have choices. And if

you are going to stay in Moab, let it be *your* choice. Don't let it be out of guilt or shame. Make an intelligent decision. Make your own bed. Don't let your decision be influenced by what people will think about you. If you are moving out, who have you confessed it to?

Naomi's sons' names were Mahlon and Chilion. One name means *sickness* and one name means *weakness*. Most of us stay in Moab because we are sick or weak. Perhaps you are addicted to drama or are drawn to drama. And, because you are used to being in drama, you think it means love. You can't tell the difference between sick love and healthy love. Some of you have not moved out because you are weak. Maybe you are weak because you have been beaten down for so long that you are like an elephant, one of the strongest animals who allows a little chain to keep it tied because in its mind, it thinks it is weak. But if that elephant ever comes into grips with who and what it is…

That's the trick of the enemy – to make sure you don't come to grips with who you are. But if you ever come into grips to know who you are… You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a peculiar person. (I Peter 2:9) If you ever come to grips, you won't settle for where you are. Recognize who you are.

Whenever you are sick or weak, you make choices based on that. That's why some people don't want you healthy because then you won't be dependent on them. When you get healthy, you make healthy choices. Thus, when you are sick, you make sick choices. You are making choices based on being a victim instead of a victor. You attract what you are. Whatever area you are sick or weak in, that is what you attract. If you are tired of attracting sickness, get healthy. Get yourself healthy and know you can't get anyone else healthy, nor rely on someone else's definition of your healthy.

Naomi moved out and took Orpah and Ruth with her. She says to them, "Why go back with me, back to Bethlehem? I may not get married, and if I do get married, I may not have sons. And if I do have sons, are you going to wait until they get old? It seems like the Lord has dealt painfully toward me." She seems to be blaming God for her predicament. The truth is, we really like to blame the devil when we are really mad with God. We have a problem with God.

When I read that, I thought Naomi was blaming God. She says, "The Lord has dealt with me." What she says right here is so powerful. First of all, she is declaring that everything that happened to her in Moab may be possibly the hand of God. This is important to understand. She is saying in Moab, if God is part of the misery, then He has to be part of the miracle. If God is in the misery and if He messed it up, then He can fix it. If He is God in Moab, the God in my mess,

He is the same God in my miracle. This is why Naomi decided that she is going to make a confession. She said maybe the Lord is going to do something. She moved out and she moved on.

Naomi had Orpah and Ruth traveling with her and told them both the same story, yet each of them responded differently. Orpah kissed her and said good bye and Ruth clinged to her.

Now, I owe Orpah an apology. For many years I thought she was trifling to roll out on her mother-in-law like that. But Orpah knew when her season had ended.

Some of you are holding onto relationship yet that season for that relationship has ended. Some people are assigned to you just in Moab and they can't go to Bethlehem with you. There is nothing worse than taking a summer relationship into the winter season. Some people are only to be a summer and not a winter relationship.

Both women are given the opportunity and both of them are given the same story. One of them kissed and said goodbye and one said, "I will not leave you. Where you go I will go; where you live, I will live; your God will be my God and your people will be my people."

We honor Ruth for saying that. We put Ruth on a pedestal. Ruth has this major confession that we use in a marriage; yet it is between two women. It is a younger woman talking to an older woman, "Entreat me, not to leave you. Where you sleep, I will sleep; where you live, I will live. Your God is going to be my God."

Many of us lift up Ruth. We lift Ruth up because we know the end of the story for Ruth. We know that she is going to end up with Boaz. She is going to marry Boaz and they will produce a child, who will produce a child, who will produce a child. Ultimately, out of that relationship will come Jesus. Because of this, we assume that this is the perfect will of God. Don't miss this: it is a perfect will for Ruth not Orpah. Orpah looked at the facts and had to make a decision. Orpah realized she couldn't do what Ruth did.

You have to give people the freedom whether to stay or leave. Two sisters make two different choices. The Scripture never told us the end of Orpah. That means that gives us the liberty to decide where she ended up. She ended up owning her own right to choose. When somebody takes your right to choose, it is no longer a healthy relationship. It is no longer beneficial or a win-win situation

The ball is in your court, the decision is in your hands. *"Choose this day whom you will serve ... as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD."* (Joshua 24:15, NRSV) You have

a choice. Move out, move on, and move forward. Forward in your mind, forward in your spirit, and forward in your attitude. Move out, move on, and move forward!

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4

Coming Home

So the two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem. When they came to Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them; and the women said, "Is this Naomi?" She said to them, "Call me no longer Naomi, call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt bitterly with me. I went away full, but the LORD has brought me back empty; why call me Naomi when the LORD has dealt harshly with me and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?"

So Naomi returned together with Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law, who came back with her from the country of Moab. They came to Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest. (Ruth 1:19-22, NRSV)

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted.

(Ecclesiastes 3:1-2, NRSV)

As long as the Earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease. (Genesis 8:22, NRSV)

I want to teach on the subject "Coming Home."

Naomi decided that she will take a chance, leave Moab, and go back home to Bethlehem. She will go back to her future.

When you leave somewhere, how you leave is important. How you leave home is important. How you leave church is important. How you leave your job is important. How you leave a ministry is important. Because many of us when we leave, we burn the bridge that we crossed over. Because of that, we cannot even go back home. We cannot go back to that job. We cannot go back to that church. And I'm so grateful that every place I have left, I can go back if I want to. There's a right way of leaving.

It is not just leaving that counts, but how you leave. And if you leave the right way, they will leave the light on for you. If you leave the right way, they will remember you. If you leave

the right way, you can always go back home. Sometimes you have to go back home for a season. If you leave the wrong way, God will send you back in the same situation: with a different person and a different name, just because you didn't learn the lesson the first time. So, Naomi left right; and because she left right, she is able to return home.

After being in Moab for ten years, burying a husband and two sons, Naomi packed up her bags. She made a U-turn. She packed up the U-Haul, and she decided she was going to go back to her future. Don't miss this. She went back to her future. It looked like she was going backwards, but she was heading forward.

This is a word for somebody. Perhaps you have been frustrated because you have been feeling like you are going backwards, but God has the ability to take your backward step and make it a forward move. God has the ability to take something that looks backwards and move it forward. Remember that the Bible says, *"All our steps are ordered by the LORD."* (Proverbs 20:24) Sometimes you have to go back so you can move forward.

Naomi packed up her bag, put everything in the U-Haul and rolled out of Moab. To truly get out of Moab you have to move out *and* move on *and* move forward, and then you have to stay out. Because if you go back, it is like a dog going back to its vomit. (Proverbs 26:11) I declare and decree, God wants to give you a new experience. Why do you want the same thing you already had? If God is going to do something, I want Him to do something new in my life. I want to go where I've never gone before; so that I can see what I've never seen before; so that I can do what I've never done before; so that I can have what I never had before.

Naomi went back to her future; she went back home. When we pick up Naomi's story, she is on the outside of her little village, Bethlehem. She rolled up and one of the sister girlfriends asks, "Is this Naomi?" Look how Naomi begins to respond, *"Don't call me Naomi. Rather, I want you to call me Mara."* M-A-R-A, which means *bitter*. *"Because the Lord has dealt harshly with me. I went out full and I'm coming back empty."*

Have you ever felt like that? You started off life this year full, and now you are empty. Your bank account is empty; your emotion is empty; and you are physically drained. How do you live when you are living on empty? How do you function when you are functioning on empty? I'm glad you asked the question. The Lord told me to tell you that just like every car has a reserve tank, so do you.

Every car has a reserve so that even though it says empty, it is not really empty. I was going somewhere yesterday, and my gas tank light popped up and said, "You need to get a refill

because you are running out of gas." And I looked at the dashboard, and it says I had 60 miles to go before I really needed to stop. The Lord told me to tell you, "You may be empty, but you are living on your reserve." What do you think I'm going to look like when I get full?

"Don't call me Naomi, call me Mara. Don't call me *peaceful*, call me *bitterness*." You see, my brothers and sisters, Naomi is back home, but she is different. What we learn is that experiences change us.

You see, God doesn't waste any experience. Every experience you have gone through, it is going to change you. Now, you don't get to decide what experience you go through, but you do get to decide what kind of change is going to happen. You can't control the experience, but you can control your response to the experience. You can't control if you lose your job; you can't control if they walk out on you; you can't control if they dog you. However, while you cannot control the experience, you can decide if you are going to be better or bitter.

You aren't the first or the last to ever have some experiences. You get to decide when you come through the experience if you are going to be better or bitter. I came to declare that I'm going to be better because of the heavy experience. I'm going to have a better joy, a better praise, a better outlook, a better love and a better peace. I refuse to allow the experience to make me bitter.

Experiences change you. Then when you look at your life experience, what has it changed you to? Are you Mara, or are you Naomi? Are you bitter, or are you better? Are you meek, or are you mean? Are you nice, or are you nasty? What have the experiences that you have been through – the divorce, the death, the illness – what have they squeezed out of you? I am convinced that in all of us, there is a little seed of bitterness, and, if we're not careful, the trick of the enemy is to let the bitterness rise while we are in our experiences.

You see, you get to decide. The ball is in your court. Don't allow anybody on social media to take your smile away. Don't allow anyone to tell you that you can't have a victory day. Refuse to allow negative people to have a negative impact on your life.

Naomi said, "Don't call me peaceful, but rather call me Mara." She tells them not to call her Naomi but call me Mara. But throughout the entire story, nobody honors her request.

Everybody still called her by her God-given name and not her situation name. You need some people in your life that when you are a little bit crazy and you try to change your name, they tell you, "We aren't going to call you based on your situation; we're going to call you what

God called you." Those are the kind of friends I want in my life. I don't want you to call me where I am; call me where I'm going.

You need some people in your life to remind you what your name is. I need you to say, "I'm a chosen generation; I'm a royal priesthood; I'm a peculiar person." God deliver us from church folks who shout on Sunday but change their place on Monday. Deliver us from people who smile on Sunday but frown on Monday. If your smile is for real, if your praise is for real, if your worship is for real, whether you are in the church or the club, you still gotta smile.

Oh yeah. Nobody in the text calls her bitter. In fact, this is the only time the name Mara is mentioned. The sister friends said, "Uh-uh, we are not calling you that. Just because you are going through something bitter doesn't mean your name is bitter."

Call me what God called me. Don't call me divorcée just because I've been through a divorce. Don't call me loser because I lost some stuff. Don't call me bankrupt because I've gone through bankruptcy. Don't call me what you want to call me. Call me what God called me, and my name is dark and lovely.

Naomi said the Lord had dealt negatively towards her. She is letting us know that she still believed in God because she said, "Wherever I am, God is involved." Naomi teaches us that life is a series of seasons, and everyone might not make it through all of the seasons with you. With every change of seasons, there is a change in you, and life will not always be the way it is right now.

Life Is A Series of Seasons.

As long as the earth remains, there is always going to be seed time and harvest. Now I know you combine the word seedtime, but in the original, it is seed, it is time, it is harvest. Because there's no such thing as seedtime as a season, it is seed, a time to sow and a time to reap. That's what Ecclesiastes says, *"That there is a purpose and a time for everything under the sun. There's a time to embrace and there's a time to refrain from embracing. There's a time to cry, and there's a time to dance, there's a time to love and there's a time to hate."* It goes through all the times in Ecclesiastes Chapter Three.

This teaches you and me that life is a series of seasons. Now this may jack some of you up, because you have been following these crazy prophets who keep telling you every week that this is your season. You can't always have a season. So next time they send you there – because

you paid $100 and you get on that psychic hotline and they tell you it is your season – I want you to interrupt them and ask, “Is it my on or my off season? Because I cannot have an entire year with just one season.”

Everyone May Not Make It Through All of The Seasons with You.

There are some people who are just assigned to you in your off season. Naomi was in Moab for ten years. She had Ruth and Orpah with her. When Naomi decided to return to Bethlehem, only Ruth went back with her, and most of us have been mad with Orpah because she did not go with Naomi. However, Orpah teaches you and me that when your season ends it is time to say goodbye.

Say, let’s just kiss and say goodbye, because nothing is worse than being on a team where your season has ended. You have to learn to kiss the people goodbye whose season has ended in your life. Let’s just kiss and say goodbye. Don’t miss that word *goodbye*. Don’t forget there’s always a *good* in the *bye*. You know it is a good goodbye because you can kiss them and not curse them. You can kiss them. You don’t have to block them; you don’t have to cast them out, and you don’t have to be angry with them. It is just the season of being together has ended.

Some of you are frustrated because you are trying to take people out of Moab with you into Bethlehem. But some of your friends just need to stay in Moab because they have a bitter mindset. You see, as long as you are broke, they’re always with you; as long as you are disgusted, they’re always with you. Some people can’t handle you when you step into your office. Everyone may not make it through.

Take your phone out. Go through your contact list, and I will tell you how you know who you need to let go. If they fall into any one of these three categories, I want you to send them a kiss and say goodbye. Number one: they’re affecting your progress. If they’re going to stop you from getting your harvest, then you have to say goodbye. Number two: they are hindering your peace. If you can’t sleep because they always calling you – telling you about somebody’s business instead of minding their own business. If they are more about gossip than telling the gospel, then you have to say goodbye. Number three: they’re hindering your praise. You have to say goodbye.

With Every Change of Seasons, There Is A Change In You.

I was not the same last season. You were not the same last season. Seasons change, but more importantly, God sends seasons because God is performing a change in your life. You cannot always stay in the same season.

Life Will Not Always Be The Way It Is Right Now.

Seasons change and life says it real loud: Life will not always be the way it is right now! If you are struggling right now, life will not always be that way. You are not always going to be broke. You are not going to always be unemployed. You are not always going to be struggling. You are not always going to be sick. God is going to flip it on your behalf. Life will not always be the way it is.

You are not going to always be struggling. In fact, a prophet called me this week, and he said, "Dr Jazz, the Lord gave me a word for you." He said, "People have put a period behind your ministry, but God told me to tell you he just put a comma."

It is just a matter of time. Life will not always be the way it is right now. That's why you want to stay around because God is going to turn it around. I want you to jump up and turn around because God is going to turn it around for your good.

If life is good to you right now, you ought to be grateful. I'm looking for some grateful people who say, "When I woke up this morning I was in my right mind. When I woke up in my right mind this morning, I had the activity of my limbs. When I woke up this morning, I was not in intensive care; I was not in the hospital." Let everything that has breath praise the Lord! If you have a little money in your pocket, if you have a roof over your head, if you have clothes on your body, if you have shoes on your feet and if you have gas in your car, life has been pretty good.

I've had some good days and I've had some bad days. I've had some hills that I had to climb. I've had some sleepless nights, but when I look back over my life, and think things over twice, the Lord has been good to me.

Thank you, Lord, for making a way. Thank you for opening a door. Thank you for picking me up. Thank you for healing me. Thank you for delivering me. Thank you for waking me up. Thank you for clothing me. Thank you for shoes on my feet. Thank you for food in my refrigerator. Thank you that I'm in my right mind. Thank you for the blood that runs in my veins. Thank you, thank you, thank you, Lord.

There are people who have it really good who won't even praise God. Does anybody have it good? Let me do a roll call. You have a job? That's good. You have good health? That's good. You are alive, that's good. Let everyone who has food give Him a good praise, give Him a good shout, give Him a good glory, glory. He is been good to me. He is been bread when I'm hungry. He is been water when I'm thirsty. He is been a doctor in my sick room. He is been a lawyer in my courtroom.

Has He been good to you? Has He opened a door for you? Has He made a way for you? Has He saved you? Did He wake you up? Has He done anything for you? Then, the least you ought to do is wave your hand. The least you ought to do is stomp your feet. The least you ought to do is open your mouth and say, "Amen." Let the redeemed of the Lord say so. If He has done something for you, you ought to say so. If He saved you, say so. If He healed you, say so. If He delivered you, say so. Thank you, Lord!

We live in a world where we believe things are either good or bad. When I was working on this book, the Lord told me to shift the people's thinking. He said, "Sometimes life is good and sometimes life is not good enough." When it is good, you should be thankful. But when it is not good enough, you should be hopeful. Because when you are a child of God, you really have only two choices – either good or not good enough.

You might say, "Oh, wait a minute, Pastor Jazz, you don't know what I'm going through. You can't say where I am is good. How do you define good?"

I define good as being alive. You see, I don't have to have money to say, "God is good." I don't have to have a job to say, "God is good." I don't have to have a mansion to say, "God is good." When I woke up this morning and looked at myself, I saw that I wasn't wrapped up in tubes. I saw that I had the activities of my limbs, I said God is good. When I got in my shower, I could wash my own body, and when I started brushing my teeth and didn't need anyone to brush them for me, I said, "God, you have been good." If He has been good, you ought to be thankful. And, if life hasn't been as good, be hopeful.

The Bible says that Naomi got back to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest. She started off in a famine, and now she is about to step into the harvest. She is tired of losing everything; and she is about to gain everything. Hold on a little while longer; the story does not end in Chapter One. *Eyes have not seen and ears have not heard and it hasn't entered the hearts of man what God has in store for you.* (1 Corinthians 2:9)

Say, “My season is about to change. The first half, I was frustrated; the second half, I’m stepping into favor.” I need you to take a step into favor, step into Chapter Two, and say goodbye to Chapter One. *Weeping may endure for a night but joy is coming in the morning*. (Psalm 30:5) Get ready for harvest. You get back in time for your harvest. Get ready for favor, get ready for increase, get ready for prosperity. Open your mouth and say, “It is my harvest season.”

This is the beginning of Chapter 1: famine, frustration, loss. Then Naomi returned to Bethlehem – at the beginning of barley harvest. Listen, she has been gone. She wasn’t there at the beginning. She wasn’t there during seed time. But she got back in time for the harvest.

God told me to tell you He is going to let somebody build the house, and you are going to live in it. He is going to let somebody sow the seed, and you are going to be the recipient of the seed. You are about to get blessed based on somebody else’s seed.

They can sow without you but they can’t reap without you. God has your harvest held. It doesn’t matter if it is going to take ten years; there’s a harvest with your name on it. There’s a building with your name on it. There’s a house with your name on it. There’s a business with your name on it. God’s not going to let anybody else take your harvest. Put one foot in Chapter Two, and keep one in Chapter One, then look down and say, “It won’t always be like this.”

The Lord will perfect.

It is turning around for me. If you know anything about my story, I am the product of a $32.00 seed. I tried to come to this country, and seven times I went to the embassy and they denied me over and over and over again. Miss Didi, a member of my church saw that I was discouraged and losing hope, and she said, “Child, what’s the matter with you? Where’s all your energy?” I said, “Miss Didi, I went to the embassy and look at my passport: denied, denied, denied.” She said, “Go home, pack a bag and meet me at church.” And, I did. My church had a ministry called Mountain Movers, made up of seven elderly people who had never been to school, had no teeth in their mouths, but they knew how to call on Jesus. They said, “Go, go home and pack your bags and meet us in the Upper Room (the waiting room).”

I waited in there, and they shut the door and started praying. They said, “Call on Him.” I said, “Jesus.” They said, “No, call on Him. Jesus.” And I called on, “Jesus.” They said, “Oh, no you are not desperate enough.” They taught me how to intercede, how to shake heaven. I started calling on Him and calling on Him. And she said, “Okay.” And after ... y’all know, I told you

how they locked me in the prayer room. They kept me against my will. I tried to break down the prayer room door and they said, “No.” Then afterwards, they said, “The Lord has answered.”

They said, “Go back to the embassy.” I went back to the embassy. The same man who denied me, the same man who denied me seven times, picked up the denial stamp to deny me one more time. He said, “You know what? If I say no to you, I think I’ll see you next week. So, go to America.” I went back to my little village. I told them in my village... Y’all know I’m from Laventille; it’s a poor place. There were 32 people in my village, who each had one U.S. dollar. Back then, one U.S. dollar in Trinidad is 10TT. So, if you have one U.S. dollar, you can feed your child. You guys take $1.00 for granted, but it is so big. So, they gathered the $32.00, and they came and said, “We may not make it to America, but we’re going to sow into you. When you get there, you make us proud.”

I am the product of a $32.00 seed. They dropped me in New York City, and a $32.00 seed sent me to get my bachelor’s degree at Washington Bible College in Atlanta. My $32.00 helped me get my master’s degree in Columbus, Ohio. This $32.00 got me my own doctoral degree. I didn’t buy it on eBay. It is not the size of the seed; it is the size of the heart behind the seed.

“*For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted.”* (Ecclesiastes 3:1-2, NRSV) The Lord will perfect.

5

I'm Starting from the Bottom

Now Naomi had a kinsman on her husband's side, a prominent rich man, of the family of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz. And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, "Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain, behind someone in whose sight I may find favor." She said to her, "Go, my daughter." So she went. She came and gleaned in the field behind the reapers. As it happened, she came to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech. Just then Boaz came from Bethlehem. He said to the reapers, "The LORD be with you." They answered, "The LORD bless you." Then Boaz said to his servant who was in charge of the reapers, "To whom does this young woman belong?" The servant who was in charge of the reapers answered, "She is the Moabite who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab. She said, 'Please, let me glean and gather among the sheaves behind the reapers.' So she came, and she has been on her feet from early this morning until now, without resting for even for a moment." (Ruth 2:1-7, NRSV)

My brothers and sisters, on Naomi's way back to Bethlehem with her two daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth, Naomi experienced another loss. This time it is not a loss through death, but rather a loss through a decision. Orpah decided that she would go back home to her family. We learned when we looked at Orpah, we shouldn't be hard on Orpah going back home because Orpah teaches us that when your season ends, it is time to say goodbye.

Some people cannot go back to the house of bread with you. Some people can't go to the next level with you. Some people can't go in the next season with you. Some people are in your life for only a season. When that season is over, it is time to say goodbye because nothing is worse than being connected to somebody when their season is over. Nothing is worse than trying to go back to something that God has delivered you from. Nothing is worse than trying to occupy a place or a position that after God has brought you out of it, you try to go back to or into. Orpah decided that she would go back, but Naomi and Ruth decided that they were pressing forward.

I often tell people when I look at Orpah, I ask the question, "Why would Orpah go back to something familiar while Ruth decides she will go to something that she is not familiar with?" Orpah teaches you and me that if she had gone to Bethlehem, perhaps there would have been a

competition between her and Ruth and Boaz. You see, there's only one Boaz. That means that if both Orpah and Ruth had gone back to Bethlehem and gone into the same field they would be in competition instead of complementing each other. So, my brothers and sisters, sometimes goodbye is a miracle.

Sometimes God gives you the Grace for somebody to step out and walk out of your life. Don't be hard on people who have walked out of your life. They're trying to teach you that they understand that their season in your life has ended. When Orpah decided that she would go back home to her family, that had to be a very emotional decision. Now Naomi and Ruth are left to travel to Bethlehem without Orpah. The journey back to Bethlehem is a return.

The journey back to Bethlehem is a return for Naomi because this is home for Naomi. She is been gone for ten years – one decade – but is returning home. She had to be excited. After all, she is going to see familiar faces, interact with familiar women, and to make things even better, she returns at the beginning of barley harvest. She was not there when they planted the seed; she was not there when they watered the seed, but she got back home in time for the harvest. That's a word for somebody. Let me pause parenthetically to let you know they can sow without you; they can water without you, but they can't start the harvest without you.

Say, "I came at the right time, at the right season. I'm in the right place because I am about to step into my harvest season. I'm stepping into harvest." You are about to see things you have never seen and do stuff that you have never done.

It is not when you get here that matters – it is that you are at the right place at the right time – a God-appointed time. When it is harvest season, no devil can stop you, no demon can destroy you. Say, "I'm getting ready for a harvest. I'm about to reap something that somebody else has sown. I didn't sow it, but I'm about to reap it. I didn't plant it, but I'm about to reap it." God said, "I'll give you houses you didn't build; I'll give you land that you can't even afford; I'll give you jobs you are not qualified for."

God holds my harvest up until I get back to where I need to be. You see, the reason why I can shout here is because Naomi has been gone for ten years but the harvest promised to her was not given to anybody else. It was just waiting for her to get back to where she had been. Say, "God has my harvest holding and waiting for me to get back to where I need to be. And I don't care if I took a detour; I don't care if I delayed. Whatever God has promised for me, it is for me."

Naomi got back. She got back at the beginning, not the end. She got back at the beginning. Say, "It is my beginning." She returned just at the beginning of barley harvest. Now,

Naomi returned in time to reap what somebody else sowed. She got back; she has an encounter with familiar faces. The women recognized her, and they were to glad to see her. They said, "Isn't this Naomi?" But Naomi said, "Do not call me Naomi, which means *peaceful*, but call me Mara, which means *bitter*."

But throughout the text, nobody calls her Mara, and nowhere is the name mentioned again in the text. You see, my brothers and sisters, you need people in your life to not call you something because of what you are going through, but to remind you of who you are. Some of you have renamed yourself because of what you are going through. Because you lost your job, you call yourself broke. Because you are sick, you call yourself sickness. Because people walked out, you call yourself divorced.

When I'm in a place and asked, "Are you single, married, or divorced?" I never cross the "divorced" box. I always put "single" because I refuse to allow anybody to call me anything based on what I'm going through. Do not change your name because of what you are going through. I don't care if you lost your job, your name is not "unemployed" – you are just waiting for a new job. I don't care if somebody walked out on you, your name is not "lonely" – you just decided to be by yourself. I refuse to allow the situation to change my name.

Say, "If you going to call me, you better call me what my Daddy calls me." Just in case you forgot what your name is, let me remind you. You are a chosen generation. You are peculiar people; you are the head, not the tail. You are above, not beneath. You are a royal priesthood (I Peter 2:9) I know what my name is. You have to know your name, and you have to refuse to allow anybody to rename you.

You see, my brothers and sisters, it is important for you to always remember that it is not what they call you that matters; it is what you call yourself. It is not what they say about you; it is what you say about yourself. That's why you have to be careful of self-talk, because self-talk is dangerous, which is why you have to always remind yourself of who you are. I'm the head, not the tail. I'm above only, not beneath. (Deut. 28:13) I'm blessed in the city. Blessed coming in, and I'm blessed going out. (Deut. 28:3 & 6)

If you are not careful, you will rename yourself based on your situation. That's why every day my name is Victory. I said, every day my name is Victory. Ain't got no money, but my name is Victory. Lost my honey, but my name is Victory. Ain't got a job, but my name is Victory. Your name is not Victim, it is Victorious. The women refused to call Naomi a different

name based on her situation, and you need some people in your life who remind you of what your Daddy calls you.

As Chapter One closes, Naomi has returned to Bethlehem and the text says she got back at the beginning of barley harvest. She got back just in time to reap what somebody else sowed. Remember, Naomi is returning home, but Ruth is starting over. She is starting over, and she is having a fresh start or a new beginning in their situation. Ruth decided that she would take a risk. She decided to travel with Naomi to go where she is never gone before so she can see what she is never seen before so she can do what she is never done before so she can have what she never had before. Orpah went back to the familiar, but Ruth decided to go after the unfamiliar. Ruth's path is a path of faith, not familiarity.

God told me to tell you don't go back to the familiar. Don't go back to what you are used to. Start afresh. Do something that you have never done before so you can see what you have never seen before so you can have what you never had before. Who needs a fresh start? Who needs to start all over? Who needs another opportunity? Who needs another chance? Who needs another door to be open? Starting over is your opportunity, and I don't care where you started. You started from the bottom, but the bottom is not your destiny.

Everybody starts at the bottom – maybe the bottom of the pile, the bottom of the applications, the bottom of the scholarship, the bottom in your mind, the bottom in your spirit, the bottom in your career, or the bottom in your school. Are you at the bottom now? Maybe you are at the back of the line, behind the eight ball, or in the fourth quarter, but God doesn't care where you started. It is not where you are going to end. Say, "Just because I started from the bottom doesn't mean I'm going to stay at the bottom; it doesn't mean I'm going to live at the bottom; it doesn't mean I'm going to die at the bottom." In fact, I came to declare and decree that the bottom is the lowest you'll ever go. You can't go any lower than this. That means your next step is up. Say, "I'm going up!"

Yes! Ruth started from the bottom. Look at Ruth's story. After losing her husband and saying goodbye to her sister-in-law, Ruth presses away with a mother in law and travels to a place, a people and a God that she perhaps knows nothing or little about. That's the first step in starting over.

If you are going to start from the bottom or if you going to start over or if you going to get up on your feet, you have to at least admit that you need God. Ruth made that admission when she said to her mother-in-law, "Entreat me not to leave you. Your people will be my

people, your God will be my God. You see, in Moab they worshiped the sun god, but Naomi and Ruth realized that that wasn't the God for them. One of the ways that you start over or to start getting back from the bottom is you admit that you need God. You can't get to the top without God. I don't know who you are; I don't care how many degrees you have; I don't care how much tongues you speak; I don't care how many PhDs you have behind your name; the Bible says promotion does not come from the east or west. It comes from the Lord.

If you are already on the top, you are to testify that the only reason you got to the top, the only reason you got to where you are is because God did it. It was not Buddha. It was not Hare Krishna. It was Jehovah. When God elevates you, nobody can pull you down. When God promotes you, nobody can stop you. If God is for you, who can be against you? (Romans 8:31)

The job I got? God did it. The door that is open? God did it. The house I'm living in? God did it. The car I'm driving? God did it. He made a way out of no way. He opened a door for me. He supplied my need. He picked me up, turned me around and planted my feet on a solid ground. God did it!

When God does it, the devil can't stop it. When God does it, demons can't stop it. When God does it, your haters can't stop you.

Ruth teaches you that if you are going to start over, you have to admit that you need God. I was talking to one of my daughters in the ministry, Sabrina. She said, "I wasn't looking for a job, I was looking for a calling." She said she was pastoring for a couple of years, and she left the pastorate. She needed a new thing, and she said, "I wanted to function in ministry, so I didn't pray for a job – I prayed for a calling; I prayed for an assignment." And she got an amazing assignment in the Washington D.C. area. She said she started from the bottom!

If you look at Verse One of Chapter Two, you'll realize that this verse seems out of place. Chapter One ended with Naomi and Ruth returning to Bethlehem, Judah in the time of harvest, then the writer begins to tell us about a brother we know nothing about. The information seems misplaced. What does Boaz have to do with Ruth? Well, the writer is telling you to put a pin right in this spot because God connects people. Boaz is going to be a very important person to help Ruth get to the top. That's a sidebar for you: You can't get to the top by yourself. You need God, and you need other people.

God is about to send some people like Boaz, who are going to leave some stuff in the field for you and open doors for you. God is about to connect you with somebody who is not

intimidated by you; somebody who is not insecure about you, but who is going to invite you from the field into the house.

You can't get to the house without Boaz. Say, "Boaz is on his way." The Bible inserts that particular verse one to tell you that Boaz is going to play a crucial role in helping Ruth get to the top. Sometimes you run across people, and you really don't know their skill set. You really don't know what connections they have. You really don't know what kind of involvement they will have in your life. The Bible says you must be kind to everyone because you may be entertaining angels without knowing it. (Hebrews 13:2) Boaz is somebody who is going to drop favor in the field.

If you are going to go in the field, you have to have the right attitude. That's why I like Ruth. Ruth is a foreigner. She is the least, and she is at the bottom. The others in the field are Jews, but Ruth is an outcast. She is a foreigner, but she got into the field and to the top before any of them got to the top because of her attitude.

Attitude is critical. You are running around cursing your boss, saying you don't like your job. Then you want God to bless your job and give you a promotion. You fail to understand that starting over is not about location, it is about attitude. You can be in the same job and start over just based on your attitude. No, God isn't giving you another job; work where you have to. No, you aren't going to get out of that relationship; work on what you need to. No, you aren't leaving that church; serve where you need to.

So many of us, we want God to give us more, but we fail to understand that until we get the right attitude at the job, we aren't getting another promotion. In fact, tomorrow when you go back to your job, look at your mean boss and say, "It is a victory day." Look at your co-workers and say, "This is the day that the Lord has made." If they ask you for a cup of coffee, say, "Do you want some sugar?" If you can switch your attitude, you can make the field *your* field. Say, "I can't control what they think about me. I can't control what they say about me, but every time I step in that field… every time I step in that job… I'm going to act like I'm the boss because I am the head, not the tail. I'm above, not beneath."

How's your attitude? How is your attitude in the field? How do you go to work each day? How do you treat your co-workers on your job? How do you talk to your employees?

How you do ministry? How are you in the parking lot? How are you as a greeter? How are you serving as an ambassador? Your attitude can determine if God will move you from the field to the house.

God knows what you are going to do on the top based on what you do at the bottom. He knows what you are going to do in the house based on what you do in the field. If you are lazy in the field, you are going to be lazy in the house. If you are late for work in the field, you are going to be late for work in the house. If you are not producing in the field, you aren't going to produce in the house.

The field is God developing your character. That's why God blessed our parents, because even in the field when they were picking cotton – when their nails were being broken – when they were being beaten – when they were called everything but a child of God – even in the cotton field, they still had a praise. You see, if God knows you have a praise in the field, He can upgrade you to the house. I've got field praise.

Can I tell you something about harvest? When you are in the field, you have to make sure that you check your attitude. The only thing that can make your field cursed is your mouth. Stop speaking over your boss saying she is mean; stop saying he is mean; stop saying I have to get out of this job, or I have to leave this field. You are not in the field by accident. God ordained it for you to be in the field. Ruth, the foreigner, worked Boaz's field with the right attitude and work ethics; she worked from morning to night, and Boaz saw this.

Ruth started from the bottom and is on her way up. God will put somebody with the right attitude in the highest position.

6

The Seven Marks of a Man

Now Naomi had a kinsman on her husband's side, a prominent rich man, of the family of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz. And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, "Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain, behind someone in whose sight I may find favor." She said to her, "Go, my daughter." ...

Then Boaz said to Ruth, "Now listen, my daughter, do not go to glean in another field or leave this one, but keep close to my young women. Keep your eyes on the field that is being reaped, and follow behind them. I have ordered the young men not to bother you. If you get thirsty, go to the vessels and drink from what the young men have drawn." Then she fell prostrate, with her face to the ground, and said to him, "Why have I found favor in your sight, that you should take notice of me, when I am a foreigner?" But Boaz answered her, "All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before. May the LORD reward you for your deeds, and may you have a full reward from the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge!" Then she said, "May I continue to find favor in your sight, my lord, for you have comforted me and spoken kindly to your servant, even though I am not one of your servants."

At mealtime Boaz said to her, "Come here, and eat some of this bread, and dip your morsel in the sour wine." So she sat beside the reapers, and he heaped up for her some parched grain. She ate until she was satisfied, and she had some left over. When she got up to glean, Boaz instructed his young men, "Let her glean even among the standing sheaves, and do not reproach her. You must also pull out some handfuls for her from the bundles, and leave them for her to glean, and do not rebuke her."

So she gleaned in the field until evening. Then she beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley. She picked it up and came into the town, and her mother-in-law saw how much she had gleaned. Then she took out and gave her what was left over after she herself had been satisfied. (Ruth 2:1-2, 8-18, NRSV)

It has been a joy traveling with you through the book of Ruth. The overall theme of this book is how to start over or find fulfillment again.

In this Scripture passage, we find Ruth gleaning in Boaz's field. She is in this field and she is gleaning because the law stated that if there is anybody who owns the field, you should not take everything off when harvesting, but leave just enough for the poor. We read in Scripture, *"When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest. You shall not strip your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and for the alien [or the immigrants, or the foreigners]: I am the LORD your God."* (Leviticus 19:9-10, NRSV modified) That means those of you who are rich, you have a responsibility to help the poor. Jesus says that when you provide aid to others, you provide aid to him. (Matthew 25:31-46)

Just because you are going to have seasons of being poor, and just because you have a season of poverty does not mean that you are going to always be poor. Somebody sent me a picture of my first car. It was a beat-down Honda. When I drove over 25 mph, water would come out the bottom and the steering wheel would shake. That's where I started, but that's not where I am now.

I came to this country with $32.00 in my pocket. I washed dishes. I slept on the floor. That's why it doesn't take a whole lot for me to praise God because I started from the bottom, but I'm no longer at the bottom. Say, "I started from the bottom, but I'm not staying at the bottom!"

You see, there are people who haven't started from the bottom; people who are born with a silver spoons in their mouths; people who always had Gucci and people who always had Louis Vuitton. They don't understand why you praise God the way you praise God because they see you now, but they don't understand that you didn't always have it. But thank God! He picked you up and turned you around! That's why you don't have to wait for anybody to tell you to praise Him. When you look back over your life and you know that God delivered you, you can shout all by yourself.

Ruth left Moab and now she is in Bethlehem, Judah. Because Ruth is in a foreign place with no education, she now has to go into the field with the women. She is gleaning in the field. God told me that you are about to prosper in your field; there's favor in your field.

Ruth was in a field, and the text says repeatedly over and over again that she found favor. Favor is looking for you. Favor is on its way. Favor has a miracle with your name on it. Favor

has a breakthrough with your name on it. I break the spirit of frustration, and I release favor over your life. I dare you to shout like you already have favor! You already have it!

She is in the field and she has favor, not frustration. Let me tell you where favor meets you: Favor doesn't meet you when you are playing it safe. Ruth didn't accidentally end up in Boaz's field. There is no accident with God. In fact, when Ruth gets to Boaz's field, she doesn't just go gleaning. She doesn't just go in the field, but rather, she asked if she could go glean. Listen: She asked Naomi if she can go, and Naomi tells her yes. Then when she gets to the field, she doesn't just go in the field. She asks those who are in charge of the field if she can glean. If you do a study of her requests, her study is that she doesn't want to just glean from the back – she wants to glean from the front.

She ends up in the field of Boaz. She gets to Boaz's field, and Boaz begins to engage with her. As I look at Boaz, I see the seven marks of a man. You see, there's a certain man that owns stuff. This field isn't for boys. This field, this favor that God's about to give you, it is not for boys. It is not for mama's boys. It is for a man. You are about to own it. What makes a man a man? How do I know if I've got a Boaz? How do I know it is a Boaz?

Remember in Chapter 1, Ruth is in Moab, and she is married to either *sickness* or *weakness*. We don't know which one she married, but both of them died. She moved from Moab, the place of despair, and in Chapter 2, she is in Bethlehem, Judah, in front of Boaz, whose name means *strength*. She left *weakness* in Chapter 1, and now she is hooking up with *strength*.

The reason why Ruth attracts *strength* is because she has strength. I'm going to walk heavy, because it is not opposites that attract – you attract what you are. If you have sickness around you, you have to get healed because whatever you are is whatever you are attracting. If you have weak people around you, it is because you are weak. But if you want strength and confidence, you have to surround yourself with people who are bold.

Ruth is in the field gleaning and Boaz recognizes her not because of what she said but because of what she is doing. There's a difference between weakness and meekness. Weakness means I don't have any strength. Meekness is I have my strength under control. When you are weak, people who are weak in your circle always rely on you. They always lean on you. They always depend on you. But meekness? Meekness is when I've got strength under control.

She is in this field, and Chapter 2 takes the time to describe the seven marks of a man.

Number One: He Has Prestige

Look at Verse 1: There was a wealthy and influential man in Bethlehem named Boaz, who was a relative of Naomi's husband. Y'all see his prestige? It is right there: He is wealthy, influential, lives in Bethlehem and he is a relative of Naomi's husband, Elimelech.

Another word for that is *kinsman redeemer*. He is the only one who has the ability to redeem Naomi from her predicament. Naomi needs somebody to help her out, and the person according to the Leviticus law that can bring Naomi back into prominent position is someone who's related to her. The person who's the closest related to her is by the name of Boaz. Ruth steps into a field, and this brother is the man who is related to Naomi.

Boaz has prestige and he can help Naomi.

Number Two: He Has Purpose

The mark of a man is that he knows his purpose. How can he pick his mate if he doesn't know his purpose? Because a help mate is not somebody who irons a shirt. A help mate is not somebody who cleans the house. That's just a bonus. A help mate is somebody who comes alongside you so that you can fulfill your purpose. That's why your first date is to find out, "Do you know your purpose? If you don't know your purpose, how do you know I'm the one?"

Y'all know I was married for four years. Great brother. He had it all. He had money. He had influence. He had it all. But the problem is, our purposes conflicted. He was looking for a first lady. I was looking to be a pastor. This was a conflict so there was tension when he wanted to go into ministry. He said the Lord told him the only way that he can go into ministry is that I had to get out of ministry. I wasn't going to do that.

The second mark of a man is that you have got to know what you are here for. What's your purpose? What's your destiny? Because as long as I know your purpose, I can even sleep on the floor in your mama's house. As long as I know you know where we're going, I don't have a problem being in the passenger seat.

Number Three: He Has Possession

Boaz owns the field. He has possession. He has acquired some things in life. He didn't leave his mama's house and move into my house. No, he comes to my house and takes me to his house.

I don't expect you to start off with a diamond, but at least have at least a ring from the bubble gum store. Stuff matters to women. It matters to brothers, too. It matters to women because based on how I see you and the stuff you are bringing; tells me what level you are in. He has prestige, he knows his purpose, but number three: he is got possession.

Number Four: He Has Praise

Here's a mark of a man: his praise. Boaz went over and said to Ruth, "Listen, my daughter, stay right here with us when you gather grain. Do not go to any other field. Stay right behind the women working in the field. See which part of the field they are harvesting and then follow them."

Look at how he praises her. He does not say anything demeaning or devaluing to her.

Now, he could have called her a foreigner. Like the president, he could have said, "Go back home." But a real man can take you from where you are and where you are from and make you feel safe right where you are. He praises her.

He is the richest man, and she is the poorest woman, but he is not condescending. God deliver us from people who look down at us because we started at the bottom. They have amnesia and forgot that they used to be at the bottom also.

How has your partner been talking to you? What are they calling you? Boaz praises her. Look how he talks to her. Remember, before he talked to her, he saw her work ethic. Strong men are not intimidated by strong women. Whenever you have to devalue or downgrade yourself to be with anybody, that isn't the right one. A strong man doesn't mind a female pastoring them because strong men are not intimidated by strong women. A strong man recognizes a strong woman and praises her.

Number Five: He Protects

A fifth mark of a man is he is a protector. Boaz said to Ruth, "Don't leave this field." When you go in the field as a woman, you are in danger of being molested. Look at how he protects her. He calls the other brothers in the field and says, "Leave her alone. Don't touch her."

Here's the number one thing we want as women: security. Little girls need security. Grown women need security. That's why the trick of the enemy is to remove the man from the

picture because only a man can tell you about another man. That's why if you are interested in a man, you ask another man what kind of man he is.

That's why the enemy doesn't want your daddy to come around. He won't mind meeting your mama, but he doesn't want to meet your daddy. Most men will talk to the mama about his plans for you, but they are not going to talk to daddy because daddy is going to know if he is blowing smoke.

Ruth is in a field, and she needs protection. When I was writing this sermon, I was crying because I was saying to myself, "I wonder if my daddy had been around, would I have been raped? I wonder if he saw my daddy around, he couldn't have just rolled up on me. But since he saw just five girls walking in a pack, he thought he can take advantage."

I don't care how strong you are as women. I don't care how confident you are as women. I thank God for a man who will stand in front of a train for you; who will take a bullet for you and who will stand up and protect you! A mark of a man is he protects. It is his natural instinct.

Number Six: He Provides

Boaz provides security. He provides water, and then at lunchtime, he makes sure that Ruth wasn't hungry. Maybe your mate can't take you to Paris, and maybe your mate can't take you around the world, but if you woke up this morning and there was a roof over your head and clothes in your closet, thank the provider. I know women can get deep and say that the Lord provides, but the Lord provides through people.

Number Seven: He Embraces His Past But Doesn't Live in It

Okay, I'm about to liberate every woman who says, "I'm looking for a Boaz, but he'd better not have a jacked-up past. He'd better not have a crazy past. He'd better not have been incarcerated. He'd better not have lost his job." You are not looking for Boaz; you are looking for Jesus because everybody has something in their past that if it wasn't for the Grace of God, you would have lost your mind.

Where is Boaz's past in the text? Matthew 1 tells us that Boaz's daddy is Salmon and his mama is Rahab. She was the prostitute from Jericho.

Can I tell you where the real shout is? Boaz's mama was a prostitute but now Boaz owns the field. He has prestige, purpose, possession, and praise. He protects, and he provides. Boaz

embraces his past but doesn't live in it. His future with Ruth leads to salvation. We read the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1: *"And Salmon, the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of King David ... and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah."* (Matthew 1:5-6, 16, NRSV)

7

Uncommon Favor

At mealtime Boaz said to her, "Come here, and eat some of this bread, and dip your morsel in the sour wine." So she sat beside the reapers, and he heaped up for her some parched grain. She ate until she was satisfied, and she had some left over. When she got up to glean, Boaz instructed his young men, "Let her glean even among the standing sheaves, and do not reproach her. You must also pull out some handfuls for her from the bundles, and leave them for her to glean, and do not rebuke her."

So she gleaned in the field until evening. Then she beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley. She picked it up and came into the town, and her mother-in-law saw how much she had gleaned. Then she took out and gave her what was left over after she herself had been satisfied. (Ruth 2:14-18, NRSV)

Let's consider more about Boaz, whose name means *strength*. He was a man of strength. I just came back from the continent of Africa, and every black man needs to see himself before slavery. You stand a little bit taller. You've got a little bit more confidence. You've got a different kind of swag not because of the clothes that you wear, but because you know who you are.

You need to see yourself before you got on the slave ship. You need to see yourself before you have been "Americanized." In America, they call you arrogant. In Nigeria, they just call you confident. In America, they try to break you. In Africa, they celebrate you. In America, they make you think that you are something because you think you are all that, a bag of chips, and some dip; and in Africa, they want you to have the bag, and the chips, and the dip, because they know who they are. In America, they break you before they celebrate you. In Africa, they don't have to break you because they're not intimidated by you. They have already started celebrating you.

Nothing is more exciting, nothing is more intriguing, than when you see a man particularly – women also – who is operating in their strength. Boaz is not a weak man. He is not a lazy man. He is not a passive man. He is a strong man. He is a BMW. He is a black man who works, and a black man who worships. He has it going on. He has power. He has prestige. He

has possession. He has praise. He is a man of wealth. He is a man of war, and he is a man who knows it all. He knows how to make something out of nothing.

Boaz's name means *strength*, and he owns a particular field. Boaz is a close relative to Naomi. You can understand why Naomi was feeling a little bit bitter. Life had squeezed everything out of her. Life had flipped her up and down. Naomi was in Moab for 10 years after burying her husband and her two sons, and she returns to Bethlehem, Judah, at the beginning of barley harvest.

She returns to Bethlehem not at the end, not at the middle, but she got back at the beginning of barley harvest. Isn't that like God? He will get you back to the place that you have to get to at the right time, at the right season. I mean she could've gotten there after the harvest was over. She could have returned in the middle of the harvest, but she got back at the very beginning.

You got back to the job in the right time. You got back to ministry at the right time. You got back into church at the right time. I don't care how long you have been gone. I don't even care the reason why you have been gone. You don't even have to tell anybody why you left, but you came back.

Whenever you make a U-turn, God always has something for you. Have you ever gone to some places that you shouldn't have gone, but thank God, you had enough sense to make a U-turn and return at the right time?

Naomi returned at the beginning of barley harvest… just in time. She wasn't there when they sowed. She wasn't there when they watered, but she came back in time to reap it.

God told me that you are about to reap somebody else's harvest. You weren't there when they sowed it. You weren't even there when they watered it. But oh, you are about to reap something that you didn't sow. You are about to step out of Chapter One and step into Chapter Two. You are about to go into a field. You are about to go into opportunity. You are about to go into position.

When we get to Chapter 2, we see that Ruth decides to do something about her situation. Naomi and Ruth are back in Bethlehem, Judah, at the beginning of barley harvest, and they are still under the poverty line. Remember, there is no provider; there is no priest; there is no prophet. It is just Naomi and Ruth. They are back in the right place: Bethlehem, Judah. They are back at the beginning of barley harvest, but they are unemployed. There is no provider. There is no protector. There is no king. There is no priest.

Ruth teaches you and me an important lesson. Ruth decides that she will ask permission of her mother-in-law if she can go into the field and glean. Don't miss that. She asked permission of her mother-in-law if she can go get a J-O-B, because you see, while it is harvest season, the harvest isn't coming to you – you have to go get it.

Some of you want God to give you the harvest; you want God to bring the harvest to your house. But God says, "No. I already gave you the job – you just have to apply. I already gave you the house – you just have to go after it." You are missing your harvest, not because there isn't one – you are missing it because you want somebody to put the harvest on a silver platter for you.

Ruth does not stay at home saying, "Woe is me." She does not stay at home having a pity party. She does not stay at home waiting for Donald Trump to give her a green card. She decided she is going to get her a J-O-B. If you have a job, you ought to thank God for it. It may not be the best job but it is paying the rent. You ought to thank God. If you can celebrate what God has already given you, He doesn't have a problem giving you more.

Remember, Boaz is known as a man of wealth. He is known as a man of war, and he is known as a man of wherewithal. He knows it all. On the other hand, Ruth is known for worship, work and witness.

In the beginning of Chapter 2, Ruth makes a bold move asking Naomi, her mother-in-law, permission to go into the field, AKA getting a job so that they can eat. Ruth knew that waiting is passive, but to be active –you have to do something that you have never done before so you can see what you have never seen before; so you can have what you never had before; so you can do what you have not done before.

Don't be mad with the foreigner for taking over your job. Don't be mad because they came over here and are hungrier than you are. The issue isn't them – the issue is you. Don't be mad with the Jamaicans or the Trinidadians, because you think somebody's supposed to always do it for you. They came here, and they'll accept the job you think you are too good to take.

You forgot what poor feels like. You have amnesia because you have two dollars in your pocket. Because you have your own bedroom, you forgot that surviving is not the same as thriving. You have to step from surviving to thriving. Too many African Americans are just glad that they're surviving. But when you leave a country and have only two dollars in your pocket, you aren't trying just to survive – you came to thrive. You are supposed to go where you have never gone so you can do what you have never done so you can see what you have never seen.

Ruth didn't wait for the harvest to come to her; she went after the harvest. Ruth is described as a person who works, waits and worships. Well, out of all of the fields Ruth could have ended up in, she ends up in the field owned by Boaz, the cousin of Naomi. Your current field or career is an indicator of where your destiny lies. In other words, how passionate are you about the field that you are in? You see, every job I have has moved me closer to my destiny and my passion. Whether I liked it or not… whether I liked the boss or not… every job I've had has moved me closer to my destiny, my passion and my purpose.

You see, before I started preaching in the pulpit, I was preaching in the dishwashing room. My first job was washing dishes, and some of my best sermons came between washing them and drying them. I cut grass for a living. Every time I cut grass, I had a sermon cutting the grass. I worked in Macy's and Sears putting on tags, and with every tag I put on, I had a revelation: *You don't wait until you get to the top to get revelation; you have to learn how to praise God while you are on the bottom.*

Some of you are cursing the field that you are in. God said, "Until you learn to celebrate the field you are in, I 'm not giving you another field." Until you learn to thank God for the field you are in – the job you already have – He is not giving you another job.

Ruth traveled to this field. All of us have heard about the seven fields of influence. It is the seven fields of influence or the seven mountains of influence. These designations are very important because they help to tell you what field you are supposed to be in. There are the fields of religion, family, education, government, media & arts, entertainment, and business. There are the mountain of religion, family, education, government, media & arts, entertainment, and business.

Some of you are called into religion, into ministry. Some of you are called to be in the ministry of family. Your ministry is in your family. Some of you are called into the field of education. You are passionate about teaching. Some of you are called into the field of government. Some of you are in the field of media & arts, and some of you are interested in the field of entertainment or business.

We call them the field of possibilities. You can be stepping into any of those fields, and Ruth enters the field of possibility. She moves into this field, and the Bible says that when she gets into the field – don't miss this – she started from the bottom. You don't just become president. You don't just become CEO. You don't just become pastor. You don't just become the top teacher. You start from the bottom.

Everybody you see on the top, from Oprah to Bill Gates, started from the bottom. You are reading something on Twitter. You are just looking at a 60-second snap, and think they have always been on the top but everybody who's on the top started from the bottom.

This is why you can't get discouraged when you are at the bottom. This is why you can't lose hope just because you are at the bottom. This is why you can't pull your hair out just because you are at the bottom. This is why you can't commit suicide just because you are at the bottom. Your next move is up.

If you can shout at the bottom; if you can praise God at the bottom; if you can thank God at the bottom… when the bottom is pulled off… when the bottom is rolled out, then God knows he can trust you on the top.

We started from the bottom, but we're on our way up. Look up in the air and prophesy to yourself and say, "I'm on my way up. I'm on my way up, because promotion does not come from the East or the West. It does not come from the North or the South, but it comes from the Lord."

Ruth enters a field, and she starts from the bottom. She starts from the bottom of the field, from the back of the line, way at the back of the line, because Ruth has two things against her: she is a woman and she is a foreigner. We started from the bottom, but just wait until 2020. We're about to flip the script.

She starts from the bottom. She starts from the back of the line. Yet, all the way from the back, Boaz notices her. She is in the back, and yet Boaz notices her. Boaz notices her and begins to lavish her. He said, "Wait a minute. First of all, who is this person?" They tell him that this is Ruth, who's connected to Naomi, and she is been traveling with Naomi, and she asked if she can glean in the field. Boaz begins to give her lavish things. She is drinking, and now she is eating, and she is having lunch with Boaz. The text said that at the end of the day, she had picked up or collected about an ephah – a little over a bushel – of barley. Now, that might not sound like much to you, but that's a miracle in itself, because the average person who is in the field for a day only collects enough to last for two days. But Ruth gleaned in such a way that she gathered enough to last for a month.

What they collected in a day God didn't just double it – he added to it exponentially. I mean, he just kept on blessing and blessing and blessing Ruth.

Some of you don't think you can make a living or flow in abundance in the field that you are in. You are settling for just a minimal collection. But I'm telling you, you don't have to change jobs, because there is favor in your field.

Some of you, God told me, have been frustrated in your field. I break the spirit of frustration. You don't have to step out of your field; there is favor in your field. When you are in your field, when you are in your field of your destiny, you can thrive and not just survive. When you are in your field, you are going to be thriving and not just surviving. When you are in your field, you are not just going to be moving from paycheck to paycheck, there's going to be a bonus between those paychecks. When you are in your field, money is going to track you down. Favor is going to find you.

For some of you, God has been assigning you to find favor in your field, but you have been so frustrated you can't praise Him in the field. God said when you shout this time, favor is going to locate you.

Yes, Ruth finds favor. She finds favor in her field. Some of you are not prospering in your field because you are pursuing money not mission; you are pursuing profit not purpose. If you ever just follow purpose, profit will follow you. If you ever find your mission, you never have to chase money; money will chase you.

How do I know if I'm in the right field? Here's where you ask the question, "Am I passionate about the field I'm in?" When you are in your field and you are passionate about your field, you don't even feel tired. When you are doing what you are called to do, when you are doing what you like to do, you don't even feel tired. When you are in your field, you are passionate. You are excited.

Ruth goes in the field and diligently works her hand. She stays in the place until sunset, and her diligence does not go unnoticed. Not only does Boaz notice her, he notices her strong work ethic. See, some of you, your fields are cursed because you are lazy in your field. You are in the right field, but you are lazy. You won't just go the extra mile. If you are supposed to be there at 9:00, you get there at 9:00. You are supposed to leave at 5:00, you shut the computer down at 4:45. You are lazy in your field, and then you are mad because these foreigners get there at 7:00 when you don't even get there at 9:00.

You don't understand that a foreigner will pick up a broom. You just do the bare minimum. If they ask you to type this, you just type that. You won't go the extra. You see, you can't get to the top being lazy in your field. Yeah, you want to be the next T.D. Jakes, you want

to be the next Bill Gates, you want to be the next Oprah Winfrey, but you sleep 12 hours. You sleep longer than you are awake. You want to be top of the class, but you are partying 24/7. You are drunk more than you are sober. Come on, I'm going to kill that spirit. You are high more than you are leveled.

I was talking to a man of God. I said, "I still can't figure out why President Trump got in the White House." I said, "You've got to give me a revelation. I've got to match my theology with it." He said, "It is simple: The Bible says, 'I will take the foolishness of this world to confound the wise.'" (1 Corinthians 1:27) That's why you never get ahead, because you think you know it all. You think you've got it going on.

Every time you see that president, God is telling you, "I can take the dumbest, the craziest, the jacked up, and I can use him for my glory. I will take the foolishness of this world to confound the wise. I'd rather use somebody who is a racist than somebody who is so full of themselves that they don't even know they need God. I'd rather use somebody who will trip over themselves so that when a miracle arises, they will not take the glory."

You see, some of y'all, you are taking too much glory. You are taking too much credit. Because you have an education and degree, you think you are all that and a bag of chips with some dip. But when you know that if it weren't for the hand of God… if you know you aren't that smart, you aren't that brilliant, you aren't that gifted, and the Lord still uses you, then you don't have to wait for somebody to tell you to praise Him. You praise Him all by yourself. Perhaps you say, "I'm not even qualified to get the job I have. I'm not even that smart to think the things I think, but God will take the foolishness..." Is there any foolishness in you? Are there any people who ever act foolish? He said, "I'll take the foolishness of this world to confound the wise."

Ruth is in the field and she is prospering. Boaz is pouring out, protection, provision, and praise, and Ruth is trying to figure out what in the world is this. She says, "Why are you showing me such favor when I am a foreigner? Why are you being so kind to me? Why are you purposefully dropping grain? Why are you purposefully, intentional…?"

Now, Leviticus law said that if someone is in your field, you don't have to drop anything – just don't glean everything from your field. Everything Boaz did in Chapter 2 is uncommon. He gives her water. It is uncommon. During lunchtime, he tells her, "Come and sit and eat." It is uncommon. He tells the young men, "Do not touch her." It is uncommon. At the end of it, she has gleaned much and he doesn't take it from her. That is uncommon.

That's uncommon favor. What is uncommon favor? Uncommon favor is when God uses somebody to go above and beyond the call of duty in helping you. Uncommon favor is when God assigns somebody to not just go a mile, but to go that extra mile. Uncommon favor is when somebody not just opens the door, they open the room. Uncommon favor is when somebody not just meets your needs, but also your wants. Ruth is at the top now after starting at the bottom because she is experiencing what is called *uncommon favor*.

We talk about Ruth, we talk about Boaz, and there's a third person in the text who is behind the actions of Boaz. The only reason why Boaz can do what Boaz does is because there is somebody who is behind Boaz. There's someone moving Boaz because Boaz, in and of himself, cannot believe that he is doing what he is doing for a foreigner. He is opening the door for her. He is providing for her. He is protecting her. Whenever you experience favor ... whenever you experience Grace ...Whenever you experience this kindness from anybody, they are not the author of it. They are just the instrument that it is coming through. I said they are not the author of it. Whether you experience Grace, whether you experience kindness or favor, it is because there is somebody behind the person whom God uses to open the door for you. God is the one Who is behind the favor. The only reason why Boaz is doing what he is doing is because God is behind it.

When I was in Nigeria, I got a prophetic word. If you catch it, you are going to shout. If you don't catch it, you are going to sleep on it. The prophetic word is *God is about to send each of you a certain kind of help*. God help me. I said a certain kind of help.

Here's the first help that is coming your way. God said in the next 30 days, He is going to send help from successful people in your life. I said the first help is going to come from successful people in your life. But the second help is going to come from strangers, people you are not associated with, people you are not connected with. God is about to raise up some strangers to bless you.

Boaz is the most successful man in the text, but he was willing to help Ruth. But God told me if you can celebrate over the people who are already successful, if you can celebrate the people who already have the money – who already are millionaires – then God is going to connect you with them.

Before this year is over, somebody successful is coming in your life. They have more money than you. They have more prestige than you. They have more power than you. They have

more gifts than you. But because you are not intimidated by them, you don't mind asking them for help.

Boaz was successful, but workers in the field were strangers. Both of them helped Ruth.

God is going to send strangers, and He is going to send successful people, but catch this – He is going to send unwilling helpers who have to help you. There is somebody who doesn't like you but is going to have to help. There are some people who have been dogging you, but they'll have to help you. God is about to use your haters. People who don't like you are about to give you a job.

"*The young lions suffer and want and hunger, but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.*" (Psalm 34:10, NRSV) Be ready for uncommon favor.

8

From Pity to Praise

Her mother-in-law said to her, "Where did you glean today? And where have you worked? Blessed be the man who took notice of you." So she told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked, and said, "The name of the man with whom I worked today is Boaz." Then Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, "Blessed be he by the LORD, whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead!" Naomi also said to her, "The man is a relative of ours, one of our nearest kin." Then Ruth the Moabite said, "He even said to me, 'Stay close by my servants, until they have finished all my harvest.'" Naomi said to Ruth, her daughter-in-law, "It is better, my daughter, that you go out with his young women, otherwise you might be bothered in another field." So she stayed close to the young women of Boaz, gleaning until the end of barley and wheat harvests; and she lived with her mother-in-law. (Ruth 2:20-23, NRSV)

Let's look particularly at Verses 19 and 20. After asking Ruth, "Where did you glean today? And where have you worked?" Naomi says, "Blessed be the man who took notice of you" and "Blessed be he by the LORD." "Blessed" is a word that is repeated twice in those small verses.

I want to talk from the subject "From Pity to Praise." Isaiah announces, *"The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound ... To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness."* (Isaiah 61:1,3a, KJV)

From pity to praise. You have five seconds to have a pity party because in this chapter, you are going to have a praise party.

Last month, I had the opportunity to minister in four different countries: Nigeria, Ghana, Trinidad, and the U.K. While in Nigeria, I learned that churches in Nigeria have an amazing tradition that I want us to adopt. The churches in Nigeria have what they call "Monthly Thanksgiving Service" at the end of every month.

In the U.S. we set aside a day in the month of November for our Thanksgiving Day. But in Nigeria, on the continent of Africa, they don't set aside just one day out of a *year* to have Thanksgiving Service. They set aside one Sunday out of every *month* to have corporate Thanksgiving.

All of us know that every day ought to be a day of Thanksgiving, but corporately there ought to be set aside a particular day and a particular time, when we, as a corporate body, give thanks to God. The reason why they do it corporately is because they understand that God didn't just bless us individually, he also blessed us corporately.

You see, you are not the only one whom God has been good to. You are not the only one whom God has opened a door for. You are not the only one whom God has blessed in tremendous ways. So, we come together corporately. That's why the Bible tells us, *"And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembly of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another."* (Hebrews 10:24-25, KJV) We are to come together corporately and give thanks.

One Sunday, I was in Nigeria when they were having Thanksgiving Service. It was such a festive occasion! First, they dressed in their best attire. They don't normally dress like that every Sunday; but on that Sunday, they dressed up in their best attire. It was one of their most festive occasions. There was a lot of dancing. There was a high praise. There was a lot of gratitude for thanking God for what He has done in the last 30 days and praising God for what he is going to do in following days.

Maya Angelou says that gratitude should be the pillow on which you kneel to say your nightly prayers. Let me say that again. Maya Angelou said that gratitude should be the pillow where you kneel to say your nightly prayers. This means you should not go to bed without thanking God for all that He has already done.

Gratitude ought to be something that you start off with in the morning. Gratitude ought to meet you in the middle of the day, and when you go to bed at night. Before you start getting on your social media you ought to thank God for keeping you, and for protecting you and for watching over you.

My brothers and sisters, why is gratitude, or why is praise so important? You see, when we focus on all that we have in life, we open ourselves for greater abundance. When we are grateful for what God has already provided for us or when we are grateful for the doors that God has already opened, then we open our lives for greater abundance.

You cannot have a shout and be sad. You can't be pitiful and have praise. You get to decide which garment you are going to wear this morning. You can either wear the garment of heaviness, or you can wear the garment of happiness. You can have the garment of sadness, or you can have the garment of the shouter. You can have a pity party, or you can have a praise party.

You see, I made up my mind this morning that if I step into a new mindset, I am going to put on the garment of praise not the spirit of heaviness. You may not have what you want, but you have everything you need.

I break the spirit of complacency. I break the spirit of always complaining over what you don't have. If God woke you up this morning, you still have your health. You still have strength. You may not have a Mercedes, but thank God you got a hoopty. You may not have a mansion, but thank God you have a bed to lay down in.

When you think of the goodness of Jesus and all that He has done for you, you ought to thank God. The stuff that you went through should have killed you; it should have destroyed you. The plane could have crashed. The car could have crashed. But you are alive. In all that, God has been good to you.

Greater favor only comes to those of you who are grateful. I said greater favor, greater blessing, greater miracle only comes to those of you who open your heart, and you are grateful for what God has already done. As we are stepping from one month into a brand new month, from one season into another, from one year into a new year, let us do so with an attitude of gratitude. I've come to tell you: You have to change your garment.

Where God is taking you, pity won't go there. Where God is taking you, sadness can't go there. Where God is taking you, frustration can't go there. God wants to develop in you a spirit of gratitude. A spirit of gratitude and being grateful is not only a part of the culture of the church in Africa but it ought to be a part of the culture of all children of God. It ought to be a part of the culture in our church.

Gratitude is not only a part of the culture in Africa, but it is part of the culture of the children of Israel. That's why one of the greatest hymns we have is called the Book of Psalms. The Book of Psalms is a book of gratitude. You can't read Psalms and remain sad. You can't read the Psalms and be pitiful.

Psalms is all about the children of Israel who are grateful for all the things that God has brought them through. Psalms remind us that, *"The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He*

maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters" (Psalm 23:1-2, KJV) Psalms remind me that, *"The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?"* (Psalm 27:1, KJV)

Psalms remind me that the Lord is with me. "A thousand will fall on my left and a thousand will fall on my right, and it will not come near me, for he has given his angel charge over me." (Psalm 91:1-2, 7-11, paraphrased) Psalms remind me to, *"Make a joyful noise unto the LORD... Serve the LORD with gladness: come before his presence with singing... Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name. For the Lord is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations."* (Psalm 100:1-5, KJV)

The Lord is good. Is there anybody who can testify that the Lord has been good to you? He has been better to you than you have been to yourself. And you all have a back-up praise. You forgot to praise him in last month so he said, "Back it up." This praise is what he did in the past and this holler is what He is about to do in the future.

Psalms is the Christian hymnal. When you are discouraged you ought to read Psalms 42. When you need God to hear you, read Psalms 61: *"Hear my cry, O God; attend unto my prayer. From the end of the earth I will cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I. For thou hast been a shelter for me, and a strong tower from the enemy."* (Psalm 61:1-3, KJV)

Psalms is the Christian hymnal. You can step into the Psalms feeling pitiful, but by the time you get out you are going to break out in a praise. If pity is part of your life, you need to get into Psalms.

Every day in the coming month I want you to read Psalms 91, because God is going to stir up something in you. The Psalms is where we get our strength. The Psalms remind us of how good God is. The Psalms remind us of how good God has been to us, and how good God has been to our family. We have to be grateful. We have to put on a garment of praise.

In Chapter Two of the book of Ruth, Ruth just came home after her hard day at work. She is been gleaning in the field of Boaz. You see, Chapter Two teaches us that anything is possible. She is stepping into a season where people are about to take notice of her. Now here's the shout. You know, in the field, Ruth didn't even look good. She is dirty and dusty, but Boaz notices her. He acknowledges her. Boaz looks beyond the dirt. He looks beyond her being a foreigner. Boaz

provides everything that Ruth needs because she has a strong work ethic. She gets uncommon favor.

Ruth comes home full and satisfied. She comes home to Naomi, and she does not come home empty. She has enough not just for her, but she has enough for Naomi. Remember, the Bible said after Ruth was satisfied, she fed Naomi, and they had leftovers.

Naomi asked a series of questions, and based on hearing what Ruth says, Naomi moves from pity to praise.

Now remember, the last time we saw Naomi talking extensively was in Chapter One, when she had gotten back to Bethlehem. She told the women, *"Don't call me Naomi. Call me Mara, which means 'bitter.' Don't call me praise, call me pitiful."* Naomi has experienced bitterness in her life. She experienced the loss of her husband and her two sons. Naomi did not see anything lovely about her life. So she tells the women, "Don't call me peaceful and lovely. Rather, call me bitterness because the Lord has been against me. For I went out full and came back empty."

Naomi left Moab in bitterness and heaviness, and she has returned back home at the right time – harvest time. She is amongst her family and her friends in the best season, but she isn't able to recognize it because she is living in a funeral and not a festival. The woman refused to call her bitterness, and despite being back in Bethlehem at the time of harvest in the house of bread, there's a spirit of heaviness on her life.

Naomi is stuck. Many of you are likewise stuck. You are stuck in the spirit of heaviness. You are stuck in the spirit of your past. You are stuck in the spirit of bitterness. You left Moab. You came out ... you came out physically, but you are still there. You are still on Regret Avenue. You are still in that place. You are stuck in the painful experience of your past.

You are living in your yesterday so you can't embrace your tomorrow. You are living in your yesterday so you can't embrace God today. You are living on would have, should have, could have ... Naomi is out of the house of despair – that's what Moab represented. She is in the house of Bethlehem – the place of bread. But physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually she is carrying the residue of her past. Don't be hard on Naomi, because some of you are like that. You are carrying the residue of your past.

You came out of a friendship; you left the friendship, but the residue is lingering. The marriage ended. It is been 10 years but you are carrying the residue of an abusive relationship. You relocated. You moved from Alabama to D.C., but you are still acting like you are in

Alabama. You've shut down the contact with them; you have deleted them off of your Facebook; you have changed your status, but the residue of that last relationship is still lingering.

You can't even praise God for where you are today because you are lingering over what happened in your past. The ministry ended but you are still lingering over it. You changed your church, or you changed your job, but you are still lingering and hanging onto the residue. You changed your phone number; you deleted them; you selected and deleted.

You got a new apartment. You got a new house. You got a new hairdo. You got new nails. You got new shoes. But you forgot you didn't get a new garment.

The residue of your past is lingering, and nobody knows that you are stuck in your past. Nobody knows that you are lingering in your past. I'm telling you, when you open your mouth, we can tell that the spirit of heaviness is on you. Based on how you are talking, we can tell the spirit of bitterness and heaviness is on you. You have more questions than you have answers. You have a more pitiful story than you have praise.

Every time you open your mouth, you have a sad story. Every time you open your mouth, you remind us of what happened last year, and what happened five years ago, and who walked out on you, and who dogged you, and who lied on you, and who ran your name in the street. The only reason why the enemy can remind you of your past is because you don't know your future.

If you can see yourself in the future, you aren't going to have another pity party over your past. *"If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."* (2 Corinthians 5:17, KJV)

You need a reason to hope again. Ruth returns full of favor and with a month's worth of food. Ruth's responds to Naomi's questions: "I was in the field of Boaz." And Naomi shifted from the pit to praise. Ruth's response shifted Naomi from a place of pity and pitiful to a place of praise. Naomi begins to praise God for the favor of God on Ruth's life.

Naomi saw what God did for Ruth. He provided, and He protected. He protected her while in the field, and He provided while she was in the field. Then He provided partnership. When Naomi heard that she shifted from blaming to blessing. In Chapter One, Naomi is blaming God; she says, *"I went out full and I came back empty, Because the Lord's hand was against me."* Chapter One, she is blaming. Chapter Two, she is blessing.

Which chapter are you in? Blaming or blessing?

She said, "Wait a minute. Wait a minute! You were in this field, and this man took care of you?" She said, "Listen, it is not just any kind of man, this is Boaz, your kinsman." She said,

“Wait a minute, you didn’t just end up in this field. You ended up in a field that’s filled with all of these amazing things! You are in the field of Boaz!” And twice she repeats the same word: Blessed.

The text said because Naomi put off the garment of heaviness and the garment of bitterness, then put on the garment of praise ... don’t miss how the text ends ... she stepped into two harvests. It is barley harvest, *and* it is wheat harvest. I had to go all the way to the U.K. for God to give me the revelation of the barley harvest. The barley harvest means that even the poorest person is going to be blessed.

Barley harvest is designed for poor people, but everybody doesn’t have to stay poor. That’s why he adds the second harvest – the wheat harvest is for wealthy people. Now here’s where you really want to shout. Naomi never stepped into the field. The harvest came to her.

I’ll give you the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. Gratitude is an attitude. Chuck Swindoll said, “Life consists of five percent of things that happen to you and 95% how you respond.” Gratitude, or praise, is an attitude.

Don’t complain about your job. Don’t complain about your spouse. God told me to put you on a 30-day non-complaining fast. Don’t complain about the traffic. Don’t complain about your children. If you don’t have anything good to say, be quiet. Don’t post anything negative. I’m putting you on a fast. Don’t complain about the President. *“Is this not the fast that I have chosen: To loose the bonds of wickedness, To undo the heavy burdens, To let the oppressed go free, And that you break every yoke?”* (Isaiah 58:6, NKJV)

Some of you don’t even realize you are complaining. It has become second nature. Furthermore, we are raising a complaining generation. We are raising a generation of children with no sense of gratitude. You get them one thing, and they say, “I don’t eat this. I don’t want that ...”

Pastors who are building an orphanage in Ethiopia asked me to collect the little snack bags of peanuts or pretzels when I travel by plane. They said, “The snack bag is a meal.” I thought, “This little snack bag is a meal to somebody? And we want to super-size everything? We are raising a generation that doesn’t value peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwiches. You are not a good mother because you didn’t buy them the latest iPad and iPhone. We can’t fault them – they heard it from us. God told me this month, “No complaining.”

Each morning you wake up, write down three things that you are grateful for, and don't repeat the same thing. Gratitude or praise is an attitude! Gratitude or praise is contagious! Naomi moves from pity to praise, and we can too.

"Make a joyful noise unto the LORD, all ye lands. Serve the LORD with gladness: come before his presence with singing. Know ye that the Lord he is God; it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name. For the Lord is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations." (Psalm 100:1-5, KJV) *"Be thankful unto him, and bless his name."*

9

Carryout Favor

So, she gleaned in the field until evening. Then she beat out what she had gleaned, and it was *about an ephah of Barley. She picked it up and came into the town, and her mother-in-law saw how much she had gleaned. Then she took out and gave her what was left over after she herself had been satisfied. Her mother-in-law said to her, "Where did you glean today? And where have you worked? Blessed be the man who took notice of you." She told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked, and said, "The name of the man with whom I worked today is Boaz." Then Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, "Blessed be he by the LORD, whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead!" Naomi also said to her, "The man is a relative of ours, one of our nearest kin." Then Ruth the Moabite said, "He even said to me, 'Stay close by my servants until they have finished all my harvest.'" Naomi said to Ruth, her daughter-in-law, "It is better, my daughter, that you go out with his young women, otherwise you might be bothered in another field." So, she stayed close to the young women of Boaz, gleaning until the end of the barley and wheat harvests; and she lived with her mother-in-law.* (Ruth 2:17-23, NRSV)

> *I will repay you for the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the hopper, the destroyer, and the cutter, my great army, which I sent against you.* (Joel 2:25, NRSV)

Let's look at Verse 18 again: *"She picked it up and came into the town, and her mother-in-law saw how much she had gleaned. Then she took out and gave her what was left over after she herself had been satisfied."*

Satisfied. It is a prophetic word that means you have to be involved in it. Put your hands on your stomach – God said He is going to satisfy you with long life. He is going to satisfy you with long life with good health. Ruth picked it up, went home and gave some to Naomi after she had finished eating. Ruth was satisfied.

Ruth is in the field of uncommon favor – in the field of possibilities, in the field of dreams. Favor is when God uses others to go beyond and above the call of duty to bless you. Another word for favor is kindness. Uncommon favor is when God uses somebody to go above and beyond the call of duty to help you or show you kindness.

Ruth is in Boaz's field, and she is experiencing the favor of God in Boaz's field. In spite of the fact that she is a foreigner and a stranger, favor tracked her down. Everything that Boaz did for Ruth is above and beyond the call of duty. Remember, the only thing that people were supposed to do for foreigners and strangers in the time of harvest was simply to leave a little grain on the ground. But when you read of Boaz's action, Boaz has not only left a little grain on the ground, but he goes above and beyond the call of duty. He protected her in the field by telling the men don't you rape her, don't you molest her, don't you touch her. Boaz didn't have to do that – that's uncommon favor. He purposefully provided for her by telling the men to make sure you purposefully drop some grain, and when she begins to pick it up, don't rebuke her – that's uncommon favor. Then he prophesied over her life by telling her that God is going to repay her with a full reward.

All of those acts of kindness are acts of uncommon favor. Favor is when God allows uncommon or unusual people to help you in your field. While Ruth is in the field of favor, she experienced help from at least five people. Favor is what God is also going to send in your life in the next 30 days. Ruth is in Boaz's field and while in Boaz's field, she experiences the favor of God with God using Boaz to do some amazing things for her.

The first help she gets from Boaz is what we will call *successful* helpers. God has blessed Boaz, and Boaz is successful. God uses a successful person to be a blessing to somebody who is not successful. I declare and decree that the next 30 days God is about to send into your life some successful people to help you in your field – people who have more money than you, people who are further along than you, people who are already where you are trying to get to, and because of that they are not intimidated by you. Successful people are going to help you in your field. Ruth not only received help from successful people, but she goes, and she gets help from a stranger. Yes, Boaz has heard about her, but he really doesn't know her.

The second group of people whom God is going to send to bless you in your field are *strangers*: people who don't know you; who don't know anything about your family; who don't know anything about your children and who don't know anything about your financial situation. A stranger is coming to bless you in your field. This is why the Bible says that you must be kind to strangers because you may be entertaining angels unaware. (Hebrews 13:2) The first group that God is going to send into your life, into your field to help you, is *successful helpers*. The second group is going to be *strangers*.

A couple of days ago, I went to get my hair done. I was in a hurry because I had to leave from Maryland and get to Virginia, plus I left late. To top that off, I switched purses and forgot to put my wallet in my new purse. I got all the way to Virginia, parked in the parking lot, got the parking ticket and I got my hair done. Because I have favor, my hairstylist does not charge me. She did my hair and I left. I got back to the parking lot, and as I got ready to exit the parking lot it dawned on me that I didn't have my wallet. I looked through my car, and because I had just cleaned my car, I didn't have a dime anywhere. The ticket says I'm supposed to pay $11.00 but I didn't any of it.

I backed up into the parking spot, went back to the hair salon and asked my hair stylist if I could borrow her credit card. She said, "Pastor, I have bad news for you; I didn't bring my credit card." I said, "Okay, can you lend me $11.00?" She gave it to me. I went back to where I parked my car. I assumed the machine took cash, but it did not. I have $11.00 in my hand, and I said, "God, this morning when I prayed, You told me that You are going to send successful people in my life, and You are going to send strangers. I'm going to stand right here by this elevator, and whichever stranger you point me to, that's where I'm going to go." Strangers were coming in and out the elevator, but no one jumped in my spirit.

But my spiritual senses captivated this one woman. I said, "Ma'am, I'm not going to rob you, I'm not going to ask you for anything. I have $11.00 in my hand. I left my wallet at my house and just need to borrow your credit card so that I can pay and get out of this lot."

I give her my $11.00 and said, "Ma'am, I know I'm a stranger to you. I know people have been asking you for money, but I believe you have been assigned to get me out of this parking lot." She said, "You know, when I woke up this morning, I said, 'God, if you want me to bless anybody, would you drop them at the elevator?'" She said, "You can keep your $11; you don't have to do anything." She paid with her credit card, and I got out of the parking lot. I don't even know the lady's name, but the Lord told me that she was an angel in disguise.

There are some people who you will meet at the grocery store or at the airport, and they will have a credit card with your name on it. Somebody is about to pay your bill. Somebody is about to pay your rent.

Strangers. Ruth finds help in a field. She encounters a successful helper; Boaz is the successful helper, and Boaz is also a stranger. He knows Naomi but he doesn't know Ruth. He knows Naomi. He is her cousin, but he does not know Ruth. Yet he goes beyond being a successful helper, he also becomes a *strange helper*.

The third group of people whom God is going to send your way are who I call *unwilling helpers.* You remember Boaz owned the field, and Boaz has workers in the field. He tells the workers –the unwilling helpers – he tells the unwilling workers in the field, "Whenever you see Ruth, I want you to purposely drop some grain so she can pick it up."

Now listen, if they are the workers in the field, and they have been in the field all day long, they don't even know who Ruth is. They are trying to figure out why in the world Boaz is even talking to her. She is a foreigner; she is a stranger. He gives her some water and he tells them, "Don't you touch her; don't molest her; don't rape her and furthermore," he tells them, "when you are gleaning, I want you to make sure that you drop something in the field." And the emphasis of the word is, *I want you to be purposeful.* Don't just casually drop it; I want you to be intentional. I want you to drop it so she can catch it.

God told me he is about to drop something so close to you that you are going to catch it as soon as it drops. He is going to drop something so close to you that you are going to catch it before it drops on the ground. You see, that's why you have to pay attention to what I'm saying.

Hear this: they are unwilling, but they dropped the grain so that she could pick it up. Unwilling helpers can be people who don't like you, who don't want to help you, but they have to help.

Anybody have some haters? Anybody have some people who don't like you? The more they talk about you; the more God will release favor on your life. They're unwilling, they don't like you, but they have to bless you. They can't stand you, but they still have to bless you. Unwilling helpers. That boss doesn't like you but has to help you. That supervisor doesn't like you but has to help you. That co-worker doesn't like you but has to help you. God is raising up some haters to bless you. They don't like it, but they have to bless you because when the hand of God is on your life, it does not matter what they think about you. If God can use a donkey to bless Balaam (Numbers 22:22-35), he can use your haters. Maybe God is using your haters to promote you.

Boaz is a successful helper and a strange helper. He commands his folks, "I want you to drop something in the field purposefully." It is not going to be an accident that they bless you. It is not going to be an accident that they open their door for you. It is not going to be by chance, it is not going to be by circumstance. God divinely told the ravens to feed Elijah. (1 Kings 17:1-6) God has released some ravens to take care of you. God has released some Ahab and some

Jezebel to take care of you. They may be wicked, but they're going to have to bless you. They're going to have to show you kindness.

Here is Ruth in Chapter Two: she has successful helpers, strange helpers, and unwilling helpers. Boaz tells the workers purposefully to make sure that you drop some grain in the field, and do not rebuke her. These workers of Boaz may not have liked Ruth, could not stand Ruth, but my God, they still have to help Ruth. The Bible says, "The heart of the king is in the hands of the Lord to turn it whatever direction he likes." (Proverbs 21:1, paraphrased)

Each morning when you wake up, you should ask God, "Lord Jesus, would you send me successful helpers, send me strange helpers and send me unwilling helpers." Say, "Lord, I declare and decree, from this day forward successful helpers are coming into my life. Successful helpers are coming into my life. Strange helpers are coming into my life. Unwilling helpers are coming into my life." Put a praise on it, put a shout on it, and some of you ought to put a seed on it.

Now listen, someone knows that you need all three. Ruth experienced the favor of God through Boaz. God used Boaz to protect, God used Boaz to provide, and God used Boaz to prophesy over her life. At Verse 12, Boaz said, "May the LORD reward you for your deeds, and may you have a full reward from the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge!"

I need you to look at your wallet, look at your purse, and speak to it and say, "You will not be empty; you will be full." Your gas tank is about to be full. Your resources are about to be full. Your cup is about to be "pressed down, shaken together, running over." (Luke 6:38, NRSV)

Full reward – that's uncommon favor. What activates that kind of favor? How do I tap in? How many of you want that kind of favor?

Ruth stepped into a season of favor. How do you activate that favor? That kind of favor is not released through a shout. There is some favor that comes out of a shout, but uncommon favor will not come out of a shout. A carryout favor does not come out of a shout. That does not mean that you don't shout; it means that you have to put some substance behind your shout.

I want to share with you four principles that, if you use these principles and apply them in your life, you are going to shift from a season of frustration, from a season of failure, and you are going to step into a field of favor.

Principle Number One: Favor Is A Seed Before It Becomes A Harvest.

The problem is, because you were not there when I sowed the seed, now you are mad over my harvest. All you see is the harvest, but you missed all the seeds that I have sown. It is right in the text: when Boaz began to have a conversation with Ruth he said, "I heard about your kindness to your mother-in-law." Don't miss that. He said, "The only way I know about you is because everybody's been telling me that you left your own family, and you came to a strange land, so that you can take care of your mother-in-law." Remember, another word for favor is kindness. Ruth left her strange land and told Naomi that, "Your God will be my God, your people will be my people. And the only thing that will separate us is death." Ruth relocated so that she could take care of her mother-in-law. By taking care of her mother-in-law, she sowed the seed of kindness. She sowed a seed in the life of her mother-in-law, and Boaz said, "Because of what you sow, you are going to reap."

Galatians 6:7 says: "God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." (KJV) You cannot sow tomato seeds and expect bananas. You cannot sow a mango seed and expect grapefruit. Whatever you sow is what you are going to get. If you want a financial blessing, you have to sow a financial seed. If you want an emotional blessing, you have to sow an emotional seed. If you want love to come in your life, you have to sow love back.

"Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." If you want love, you have to sow love. If you want joy, you have to sow joy. If you want peace, you have to sow peace. And the reason why some of you may not be shouting here is because some of the seed you have sown or planted hasn't come back good to you. You've sown meanness. You've sown witchcraft. You've sown envy.

But God told me if you shout right here, it is going to be a boomerang. God told me if you shout right here, whatever the devil tries to send your way, He is sending it back to the pit of hell. Some of you ought to pull up some bad seed. You sowed some bad seed, but God told me, "I'm going to send a fertilizer. I'm going to destroy that seed so that you can sow better seed."

What kind of seed have you been sowing? A seed before it becomes a harvest is just a seed. It is a principle: what you put in is what you are going to get back. If you put in nothing, you will get nothing. Have you said to yourself, "Church wasn't good today"? Well, what did you put in? Church is always good to me, because I sow a seed. I bring a seed of my own praise.

Before it becomes a harvest, it starts with a seed. How are you treating your in-laws? How are you treating the people who are in your home, who are connected to you? How are you

treating your home? The way Ruth treated Naomi positioned her to receive a seed. The Bible said when you lend to the poor it is like lending to God: "He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the LORD; and that which he hath given will he pay him again." (Proverbs 19:17, KJV) Favor is a seed before it becomes a harvest.

Principle Two: The Seed You Sow Is A Gateway To Financial Favor.

Ruth gleaned in the field of favor from morning to evening, and she reaped about an ephah of barley. That's uncommon favor. You see, the average person in the field for a day gleans enough ephah for two days' worth of living. But Ruth is in the same field, with the same people, and the Bible said she reaps enough for an entire month.

You all know the scripture, Malachi 3:18: "Will a man rob God, will a woman rob God?" And God said, "Yes, you have robbed me." And you said, "God, how have we robbed you?" He said, "In tithes and offerings." Don't miss that. Tithes and offerings. A tithe is ten cents out of every dollar. Whether the dollar comes from a job, whether the dollar comes from playing bingo, whether the dollar comes from your mom giving you a little change, wherever you went, and you got a dollar, ten cents out of that dollar belongs to God.

Malachi 3 says every time you get one dollar in your possession, you have to make sure that you give God a tithe, that's ten cents. That is not the same as offering. A tithe is what I owe, a seed I sow.

A tithe I owe. You are robbing God; but you want favor. You are a thief and you want favor. You won't give God his ten percent, but you want favor. If God keeps giving you favor and you refused to tithe—then you are a robber. If you can't be faithful with the ten cents out of one dollar, why would he give you one million? That will only make you a bigger thief.

So, ten cents out of every dollar is a tithe I owe. He says, in Malachi 3, if you just follow the basic tithing principle of giving God ten cents out of every dollar, there are a couple of things I'm going to do for you. Number one, I'm going to open the windows of heaven. Now, if you don't need the windows of heaven to open up, just keep your ten cents. If you don't need an uncommon favor, a supernatural move in your finances, in your scholarship or on your job, then keep your ten cents. The only people who need to rob God is people who don't have room for any more favor, any more blessings from God. He said, I'm going to open the windows of heaven, and I am going to pour you out – don't miss this – a blessing. It is a little word. I'm going to give you one blessing. And then he breaks down what that blessing looks like.

He said, I'm going to stop the devourer from eating your seed. He said, I'm going to stop the devourer from eating up your finances. The reason why your finances are low, and it feels like there are holes in your purse, and you never have enough is because that devourer has been eating up your finances. The reason why the devourer can step in your life and eat up your finances is because you don't have Godly insurance.

How many of you have insurance for your car? The only way you have insurance is if you pay for it. How many of you have home insurance? How many of you have insurance on your phone? Your tithe is your insurance. Some of you are walking under not being covered because you haven't paid your tithes. The Lord said, "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse…" (Malachi 3:10, KJV) Now where is the storehouse? The storehouse is the place where you are getting fed. If you are a member of the Potter's House, then you take your tithe there. If you belong to First Baptist of Glenarden, then you take your tithes there. You can't take your tithes that belong to the house and give it to a random televangelist. I'm going to kill this spirit. You can't take it to somebody random because when you need help with your mortgage, when you need help with your rent, when you need your storehouse to pray for you, that person is not there for you.

The place that you call your storehouse is where you bring your tithes. Are you a tither? There are some things I'm embarrassed that I've done in my life, but not being a tither is not one of them. You can't make me feel bad because I tithe and you don't. If you want the harvest I have, if you want the blessing I have, apply the principle that applies to everybody. Now, a tithe I owe, but a seed I sow. If I tithe, He is going to add, but if I sow, he is going to multiply.

You get to decide what track you want to run on. If you just need him to add, you just tithe. Ruth ate in the field and was full and satisfied. How are you financially sowing? I want to encourage you to stretch your faith and stretch your discipline. Really, you want to start off with the tithe, and then you move to an offering. It is not offering and tithe, it is not tithes or offering. Listen: "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse ... [and see] if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, and there shall not be room enough to receive it." (Malachi 3:10, KJV)

The seed you sow is a gateway. Window or gate? Which one's bigger? Window or gate, which one do you want? Window or gate? Another word for gate is doorway. It is a doorway to financial favor, supernatural favor, uncommon favor. If you want it, you have to make sure that you follow God's principle.

God told me to tell you about tithing because He is trying to position you for a field of favor. You see, God never sent guilt your way. God is not a God that condemns, He is a God that corrects. And you know, I'm a pastor not because I condemn you, but because I correct you. If you don't know the difference between condemnation and correction, you are going to miss the rest of the revelation. The seed you sow is a gateway to financial favor.

Principle Three: Favor Will Restore In A Day What The Enemy Stole In A Lifetime.

Say it out loud: Favor will restore in a day what the enemy stole in a lifetime.

Look at verse 18: "Ruth leaves the field full and satisfied." Now this is not how she entered the field. She entered the field hungry, trying to survive. But she leaves the field full and satisfied. Not only full and satisfied, but also with a doggie bag, a carryout… something to take home. The Bible says she picked up what she had gleaned, and she came to her mother-in-law and her mother-in-law says to her, "Where have you been gleaning?" Or, where have you been working? The Bible says, after Ruth explains it, she gives Naomi food and the text calls it leftover.

God told me that some of you are in a Job season. You are in Job Chapter One: you have lost everything. God told me that some of you are in a Job season – you lost everything in Chapter One. Some of you are in Job Chapter Two – you want to curse God and die; you have lost it all. You've lost houses, you lost your home, you lost your job. And you say, "Pastor that's why I don't tithe." But you still have time. Because tithe is time, talent, and treasure. Time, talent, and treasure.

Some of you are in Job Chapter Three – you are just ready to throw in the towel. Some of you are in Job Chapter Four – your friends are telling you it is because you have sinned. You think because you have sinned, you did something wrong to bring on this season of famine in your life. Some of you are in Job Chapter 12 – you say, "If I can just see God, He is going to have to explain this to me." You want God to give an explanation of why you lost your job and why you lost your marriage and why you lost your ministry. I've been in all of those.

But you forgot the end of Job. Job went through all of that, and God rebuked Job's friend for giving him bad theology. Then God restored to Job. The Bible said he gave Job twice as much as he had in Chapter One. I need you to put your feet in Chapter Four and say, "He is going to give me twice. He is going to give me double for my trouble. He is going to give it to me pressed down, shaken together." That's why you can't die in Chapter Three. That's why you

can’t be depressed in Chapter Four. That’s why Chapter 42 is what you want to hold onto. Because the Bible said to Job in his latter days, your fifty is going to be better than your twenty-five. This is as low as you will ever be.

Ruth lost some stuff in chapter one. Chapter one, she has a famine, she has a funeral. Chapter two, she moves from a famine, a funeral, to a festival. Favor will restore in a day what the enemy stole in a lifetime.

Principle Number Four: You Will Experience Seasons Of Scheduled Favor.

Put your hands on yourself and say, “There is favor scheduled for me.” In Chapter One, Ruth experienced loss; in Chapter Two, she has favor to carry out. There is no more mention after Chapter Two of any famine. He restored everything she lost in Chapter One, including a man. Her first man was “*weakness”* or *“sickness,”* and she meets *“strength.”*

I declare and decree that no more weak people are going to be in your life. God told me after Chapter Two, only strength is coming. You have hooked up with some weak people whose ego you always have to be stroking because every time you get blessed, they are intimidated by you. But God is about to put some people in your life who are not going to be weak; who are not going to be sick. They are going to be strong.

God is about to send some friends and people in your life who are strong enough that it doesn’t matter what others say about you, they aren’t going anywhere. You will experience seasons of scheduled favor. Like Ruth, you’ll have favor to carry out.