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**Do Not Call Me
Pleasant;
Call Me Bitter**

732-A

Series: God's Living Legends (Part 1)



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Do Not Call Me Pleasant; Call Me Bitter

Our parade through the world of Biblical history passes now beyond the life of Samson. Onto the stage of Scripture comes a very special woman of God named Ruth. Ruth lived during the time when the judges ruled Israel. The story took place probably very early during that time, but in all likelihood, the book bearing her name was penned as much as 500 years later. It was perhaps written by Samuel or even later in history by Isaiah. We do not really know for sure. One thing we do know for sure is the fact that the book of Ruth is the first book of Scripture to carry no prophecy or no direct message to the people of Israel. But what a message it carries for us. It is only four chapters in length. There are only 85 verses in all. Yet this small book communicates rich portraits of spiritual truth and demonstrates for us beautiful illustrations of the character of God and once again the character of man. It is a love story to be sure. Those of us from my generation love these love stories. But woven into the fabric of every line of this love story is the tender love God demonstrated for us at Calvary. We might well call this “The Gospel according to Ruth”. We will see unfold great pictures of character both at the positive and negative end of the spectrum.

This lesson will look more at the negatives as we look first at Naomi. The title for this lesson is “The Bitter Root”.

We begin our reading with the book of Ruth 1:1. We will be covering the entire first chapter.

Now it came about in the days when the judges governed,
that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of
Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the land of Moab
with his wife and his two sons. (Ruth 1:1 NAS)

Verse one tells us several things. First of all, it pinpoints the time in history when the incidents recorded took place. They took place during the time of the judges. Secondly, it opens the door to a story of disaster followed by deliverance. We see this in the phrase “*Now it came to pass in the days of,*” which is used five times in Scripture. In each case, it denotes impending tribulation

followed by deliverance and joy. It is used in Genesis 14, Esther 1:1, Isaiah 7:1, Jeremiah 1:3 and now here in Ruth. In every case the pattern is the same. So verse one tells us of the time and the tempo of what is about to unfold. Further, it broadcasts in living color in the opening scene, the trauma that precedes the trial. We read that in those days there was a famine in the land. So we know the nature of the trial that God is allowing His people to endure. Verse one also introduces the head of the household from which the story unfolds. It says a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons. So on camera in scene one, there is a man, his wife and his two boys trudging to Moab to find food and to escape the drought or famine that was engulfing their native land.

Now famines in Scripture seem to always denote the judgment of God. You may want to read II Samuel 24:13, Psalm 105:16 and Isaiah 51:19. They are examples of that. There are 13 famines recorded in Scripture. They spread across the pages of the Word from Abraham's day in Genesis 12:10 all the way to Paul's day in Acts 11:28. Usually, when we read of a famine, God was bringing judgment to bear upon the people or nation. Nearly always, His process of deliverance is evidence that He had a great purpose in mind to glorify His name. So it was a famine that creates a crisis that uproots our family in verse one. They sought salvation from starvation in another land. This other land belonged to the enemies of God. As verse two begins to unfold, our family is identified and the story begins,

And the name of the man [was] Elimelech, and the name of his wife, Naomi; and the names of his two sons [were] Mahlon and Chilion, Ephrathites of Bethlehem in Judah. Now they entered the land of Moab and remained there.

(Ruth 1:2 NAS)

So we see the man who came to dinner in Moab was Elimelech. His name means "my God is King". His wife was named Naomi, which literally means "delightful one or pleasant one". Their boys were named Mahlon which means "sickly" and Chilion which means "one who pines". The inference in verse 2 is that they came not only for food or survival but they continued there or settled there as one who has relocated his family and established a new home. So we see our family settled in Moab. Elimelech was employed there. The children grew up there and made their friends there. Now they are transplanted Moabites. Then, in verse 3, there arose the tragedy. This was the kind of tragedy that was only a preview of further tragedies to come.

Then Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died; and she was left

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with her two sons.

(Ruth 1:3 NAS)

So verse 3 leaves us with a visual image of Naomi burying her husband in a strange land, miles away from her people and the worship of her God. You see at her side, two young boys left now for her to finish raising by herself. Verse 4 sounds a little happier.

And they took for themselves Moabite women [as] wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth.

And they lived there about ten years. (Ruth 1:4 NAS)

So now Naomi's boys have grown up and they have intermarried with two Moabite girls. One girl was named Orpah which means "fawn". The other girl was a young girl named Ruth which means "beauty". So some of the emptiness left by Elimelech's death is filled with her two new daughters-in-law. Naomi's life is beginning to take on a happy note again. Then comes verse 5 as Naomi's joy turns to grief.

Then both Mahlon and Chilion also died; and the woman was bereft of her two children and her husband.

(Ruth 1:5 NAS)

I know it is hard for most of us to really fathom Naomi's grief. A few of you can. In ten years she had lost her husband and both of her sons. She had journeyed to Moab to escape a famine only to see grief piled upon grief. Now she was alone except for her two daughters-in-law who lived with her. Then comes news from home (which was Bethlehem) that God has visited His people and the famine had ended. This grieving, weary widow packs her bags and heads for home,

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 how that the Lord had visited his people in giving them bread.

Wherefore she went forth out of the place where she was, and her two daughters in law with her; and they went on the way to return unto the land of Judah. (Ruth 1:6,7)

Now picture the woman and her recently widowed daughters-in-law trudging back to Judah. It was home for Naomi, but the girls were heading to their husband's homeland, a land and a people they had never seen before. As they begin their journey, a gracious, but somewhat embittered mother-in-law, turns and urges the girls to remain behind and go back to the land of their fathers and begin again. Now let's read the remainder of this story beginning with verse 8,

And Naomi said unto her two daughters in law, Go, return each to her mother's house: the LORD deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the dead, and with me.

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The LORD grant you that ye may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband. Then she kissed them; and they lifted up their voice, and wept.

And they said unto her, Surely we will return with thee unto thy people.

And Naomi said, Turn again, my daughters: why will ye go with me? are there yet any more sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands?

Turn again, my daughters, go your way; for I am too old to have an husband. If I should say, I have hope, if I should have an husband also to night, and should also bear sons; Would ye tarry for them till they were grown? would ye stay for them from having husbands? nay, my daughters; for it grieveth me much for your sakes that the hand of the LORD is gone out against me.

And they lifted up their voice, and wept again: and Orpah kissed her mother in law; but Ruth clave unto her.

And she said, Behold, thy sister in law is gone back unto her people, and unto her gods: return thou after thy sister in law.

And Ruth said, Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God:

Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the LORD do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me.

When she saw that she was stedfastly minded to go with her, then she left speaking unto her.

So they two went until they came to Bethlehem. And it came to pass, when they were come to Bethlehem, that all the city was moved about them, and they said, Is this Naomi?

And she said unto them, Call me not Naomi, call me Mara: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me.

I went out full, and the LORD hath brought me home again empty: why then call ye me Naomi, seeing the LORD hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me?

So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter in law, with her, which returned out of the country of Moab: and they came to Bethlehem in the beginning of barley harvest.
(Ruth 1:8-22)

This is a story so often told that its words stir up immediate recognition from most of us. The bitter and the sweet of it are the subject of this lesson and the next, the bitterness of Naomi and the sweetness of Ruth. These two attitudes combine to teach us

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a lot about our responses to the traumas of life. Naomi's spirit to her daughter-in-law is one of unselfishness and tenderness. "You have been good wives, good widows. Your hearts have been turned towards my sons and towards myself," Naomi gratefully states, "Therefore, stay in your homelands, remarry and begin your lives again." But verse 10 indicates both girls answered, "No, we will go back to Bethlehem with you." At that, Naomi turns to them and reminds them that she has no more sons to give them in marriage and if she were to marry tomorrow and raise a family, what good would that do, the girls would not want to wait around 20 years for her new sons to grow up. Naomi urges them to remain behind. She then makes this revealing statement,

Would ye tarry for them till they were grown? would ye stay
for them from having husbands? nay, my daughters; for it
grieveth me much for your sakes that the hand of the LORD
is gone out against me. (Ruth 1:13)

What Naomi is saying in verse 13 is this: "Girls, I've caused you enough grief. You are suffering because God is angry with me." So now we see drawn to the surface the edges of a bitter spirit. "The hand of the Lord has gone out against me," Naomi cries, "and you have reaped the consequences." Then upon her arrival in Bethlehem, Naomi was scarcely recognized by her own her people. She shakes her verbal fist towards the heaven and blames God for the turn of events in her life. She begins by saying in a somewhat sarcastic tone, "Don't call me Naomi anymore. Naomi means 'pleasant' and my life is not pleasant any more. Call me Mara which means 'bitter' because the Lord has dealt bitterly with me." She proceeds to build a case for her bitterness predicated on her circumstances. She said, "I went out full and I came home empty. God has testified against me in this way and He has afflicted me, so I am bitter."

Now it is important that we pause here and examine Naomi's heart and try to understand her thinking. We can understand her grief. We can understand her loneliness. Apparently life had dealt her two swift but devastating blows until her very countenance had been changed. Her former neighbors were not sure it was really Naomi. You have seen people who have endured tragedy after tragedy until the very lines of their faces and the sadness of their eyes were a running commentary of the very grief and pain in their lives. We can understand the grief. But her problem was not a natural result of her grief; it was a result of her bitterness.

Grief is a condition resulting from circumstances, but bitterness is an attitude or response that may or may not accompany the grief. Bitterness is resentful of the circumstances and always looks

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for a scapegoat. The problem is that the baton of responsibility ultimately ends up in the hands of God. Your life is a mess, but it was your parent's fault, you say. But who gave you your parents? So you quietly develop a bitter spirit. It was an unavoidable tragedy you say, but God could have intervened. Why did He allow this to happen to you? "I wanted so badly to marry that person", you say, "And God knew that but it didn't work out. Why did God take her or him away from me?" "I wanted to be accepted in that school." "If only I had received that honor or promotion." "If only my marriage had turned out differently." "If only my children had turned out differently." "Oh, the hand of the Lord has gone out against me. Call me Mara," you say in your spirit, "for the Almighty has dealt bitterly with me." So the roots of bitterness curl their ugly, gnarled tentacles around your heart and though you may say all the right words in all the right places, a bitter spirit spreads like cancer through your system and your spiritual vibrancy begins to wither and die.

What is a bitter spirit? Let's define it. A bitter spirit is the unnecessary agony of spirit that is the result of attributing the work of Satan, the work of sin, or the work of self, to either God, or somebody else. Now you do not need to spend much time counseling people to realize that many, if not most, marriage problems are the result of a bitter spirit. Many emotional problems and a high percentage of spiritual problems have at their roots a bitter spirit toward God or others. "Why did God make me this way? Why did God let that happen? Why did God single me out to suffer? Why me, oh, Lord, why me?" The amazing thing about a bitter spirit is that those who seem to have the most to be bitter about often seem to have no bitterness at all. Others, meanwhile, whose setbacks seem to an outsider to be disappointing but not devastating, may be carrying on their shoulders a backpack full of bitterness that causes their spiritual shoulders to stoop and eventually their knees to buckle under the load. So it isn't the depth of the circumstances that cause a bitter spirit, it is the depth of our response to those circumstances. Hebrews 12:15 is a verse that is familiar to many. Paraphrased, the Holy Spirit warns us of this,

Look after each other so that none of you will fail to find God's best blessings. Watch out, [be on the look out] that no bitterness take root among you, for as it springs up it cause deeps trouble hurting many in their spiritual lives.

(Hebrews 12:15 TLB)

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In other words, pay close attention to your own life and those about you if a bitter spirit begins to take root, or it will choke out the garden of the fruit of the spirit.

So quickly, for we don't want to leave ourselves frustrated with Naomi's bitterness indefinitely amidst the blessing of Ruth's sweetness, let's look at the symptoms, the cause and the cure for a bitter spirit.

THE SYMPTOMS

There are too many to mention all of them, but here are a few. If you read the book of Job you will come up with most of them.

1- A bitter spirit is characterized by a negative, complaining attitude toward life. It was Job who cried out in chapter 7:11 "I will complain in the bitterness of my soul." Behind many a grumbling, negative tongue lies a murmuring soul that is desperately angry at life's turn of events and in turn at the God he or she deems to be behind it all. Are all of your symphonies sung in the minor key? Do your friends call you Mary the Murmurer? Or George the Grumbler? Your whole personality may be infected with the venom of bitterness. For your sake and the sake of the rest of us, your infection must be stopped. A negative spirit is the first symptom.

2- A bitter spirit cannot seem to love or be loved. Colossians 3:19 pits two opposite truths against each other as conflicting alternatives in a marriage. It says, Husbands love your wives. It then gives this startling antithesis, but do not be bitter against them. In other words, if you really love, you can't be bitter and if you are really bitter you cannot love. The man or the woman who cannot love or refuses to be loved often suffers from a bitter spirit.

3- A bitter spirit sees God as unapproachable and unavailable. Job, in the midst of his anger, cried out in Job 23:2, "I am bitter, how I wish I could find God." In other words Job is saying, "I wish God were available so that I could argue my case and He could see that I am right." The bitter heart may pray but it all seems so distant, so impersonal.

4- The bitter spirit wears a mask of self-righteousness. James 3:14 paraphrased says this, Here is the worst possible kind of life, to brag about your goodness while harboring a bitter spirit. Bitterness often seeks religious clothes to wear. It loves to surround itself with activity to prove its worth to God enough to solidify its basis for bitterness.

5- A bitter spirit left unchecked may well lead to thoughts of suicide. Job had to deal with that in chapter 3:20. He questions God, Why does God leave us alive? To suffer in our bitterness? The Psalmist echoed the same frantic despair on a number of occasions. Even if a man's bitterness does not lead to thoughts

of physical self-destruction, the end is spiritual self-destruction to be sure.

So much for the symptoms. It is good to review them but most of us know our bitterness. Proverbs 14:10 reminds us, *The heart knows its own bitterness*. What lies behind the symptoms? What lies of Satan that are behind the symptoms is the key to it all. So let's look at the traumas of life and their potential effect if the enemy has his way, and listen to the enemy's lies,

"It wasn't my fault, so it must be God's. I am the innocent victim of the society in which I live and God controls the society. Therefore, God was either powerless to help, or He did not care, or He chose not to get involved, or He delights in seeing me suffer. I deserve a better lot in life than this. I have a basis for bitterness." Do you see how the argument works? The enemy, through the world, offers three solutions. The first solution is to shift the blame. "It wasn't my fault. Blame somebody else. Ultimately, blame God." The second is, if shifting the blame doesn't work, then ease the pain. Take something or do something that will erase the pain. Thirdly, strike back, get even with God and get even with man. It will make you feel better.

God's answers however as always, are diametrically opposed to Satan's lies. He says, first of all, that sin is responsible for all of life's ills. You name any one of the things in your life that you use to substantiate your bitterness and I can guarantee that you will draw two conclusions. The first is that it never existed before the fall of man. The second is that it will not exist in heaven.

Let's take death as an example. The source of bitterness for many Christians is the "untimely" death of a loved one. Death never existed until sin came into the world. Death will not exist when heaven is complete, it will cease to be. Until then, "it is appointed unto man once to die." Therefore, there is no such thing as an "untimely" death. Even God's own Son lived to be only 33 years old. He was sinless; but sin, *our sin*, cost Him His life. Death is the direct result of sin. Don't shake your fist at God. He has arranged for us a day of reunion when death and sin will be swallowed up.

You can apply that same yardstick to all the other "enemies" of happiness. Pain: there was no pain in the garden. There will be no pain in heaven. Immorality, conflicts, misunderstandings, sufferings, shattered expectations, the things that cause us to be bitter were not in the garden. Sin is responsible, not God. You want to be angry? Be angry with Satan. That makes sense. Not only is sin responsible for our circumstances, Satan is responsible for sin. He started it all. His was the original declaration of independence from God. You have a right to be angry with Satan.

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So sin is responsible, Satan is responsible and, thirdly, we are responsible. We live in a world that we created. We took God's beautiful paradise and turned it into global conflict. We are reaping the fruits of our own rebellion, personally and collectively. What right have we to be angry with God? He ought to be angry with us. But He is not.

Fourthly, God is grieved. See Jesus weeping over Jerusalem and you see the heart of God. He is not happy over our grief. His grief is greater than ours. When you weep at the grave of a loved one or cry out in anguish and pain, God cries, too. For this is not the world that He intended for us. Man simply chose to go his own way and God is grieved.

But beloved, fifthly, God, though He must allow sin to run its course, has good news. It need not take its toll spiritually. The spiritual is all that is eternal. Those blows from life's hammer must not leave bruises of bitterness. The penicillin of God's grace can flood your spiritual bloodstream and God will work those trials into triumphs, spiritually. He may not see the disease checked or the wealth returned or the pain cease, but the miracle of spiritual transformation will overcome the grief. The very tool that Satan uses for bitterness, God will use as vessels for blessings. You can hear Naomi's argument. She didn't cause the drought. She didn't choose to go to Moab. She couldn't help her husband's death. She couldn't help her sons' deaths. She saw the progression of catastrophic events one upon the other as God's personal judgment on her, or rejection of her. Therefore, she said she had a right to become bitter because God had treated her unfairly.

God's perspective on the other hand was that the drought was at best the circumstance of nature that falls on the just and the unjust alike. At worst it is an act of judgment of God against a nation, not an individual. Secondly, that trip to Moab may have been an act of disobedience, but either way it was their choice. Thirdly, the decision of their boys to marry Gentile girls was an act of disobedience, but God used even that to bless them. Fourthly, death is a common lot to all mankind and though her lot seemed uncommonly traumatic, God was not to blame. Instead, God elected to use the common lot of man, the common circumstances of her age to bless Naomi, to bless Ruth, to bless Boaz, to bless us.

Naomi had experienced a series of life's "bad deals." So did Joseph. So have many of you. The question is, do we accept these "bad deals" in life as a part of the "all things in life", as part of the rain that falls on the just and the unjust, or do we shake our spiritual fist at God and choose to be offended at Him? Do we begin to be offended at Him for personally attacking us unjustifiably or unfairly and then begin to question whether He is a God of love at all?

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Praise God there is a cure for a bitter spirit. It does not need to run its ugly course. If your life is showing signs of bitterness, now could be a dawning of a new day for you. Job found the answer and so can you. We don't mean to make a formula out of it, but the principles are eternal.

THE PRINCIPLES

1- If you want to rid yourself of bitterness, go take another look at God. That is what Job had to do. God said, "Job, sit down for a spell and take a look at who I am. Where were you when I laid the foundations of the world, Job, when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy? Job, were you there? Job, I am not at all like you described. You fashioned a god with your own mind and the bitterness of your own soul. Job, you don't even know who I am. I didn't inflict that pain on you," God said, "Satan did. I allowed him to, not because I was angry, but because I love you and I trusted you and because I wanted you to know who I really am. You don't know who I really am yet, Job." My friend, if your heart is a heart filled with bitterness you don't know who God really is.

2- Saturate yourself with the Word of God. God said, "Job, now hush and listen to what I have to say." Let's see what God said in Job 40,

Moreover the LORD answered Job, and said,

"Shall he that contendeth with the Almighty instruct him?
He that reproveth God, let him answer it."

Then Job answered the LORD, and said,

"Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine
hand upon my mouth.

"Once have I spoken; but I will not answer: yea, twice; but I
will proceed no further."
(Job 40:1-5)

Once you realize that you have a bitter spirit, tell God it is sin and then hush your mouth. Now it is time to listen to Him. The world says to talk it out. The Word says to throw it out.

Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and
evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice:

(Ephesians 4:31)

Replace bitterness with the Word of God. Memorize portions of God's word, and as it enters the bloodstream, it will begin to cleanse the soul of bitterness, that is if you do step three.

3- Humble yourself before God and repent. Admit that your

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bitterness is unjustified and that your bitter spirit is (now here's that word again) sin. Only when Job did that, did his bitterness finally disappear.

Then Job answered the LORD, and said,

I know that thou canst do every thing, and that no thought can be withholden from thee.

Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge? therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not.

Hear, I beseech thee, and I will speak: I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me.

I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee.

Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.

(Job 42:1-6)

When Job called sin, sin, when he ceased blaming God for being unfair and accepted the responsibility for his bitter spirit, the Great Physician began to release him from the hospital ward of bondage to circumstance, which leads us to step four.

4- Bury yourself and concern yourself with other people. Job 42:10 places the final caption of Job's bitterness,

And the LORD turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends: (Job 42:10a)

When Job was able to lose his self-pity and begin to pray for the very ones to whom he had transferred his bitterness, his bitterness vanished. God then restored him to a greater level of usability than he had ever known before.

5- Allow yourself to become vulnerable and accept the love of others. Let's go back to Ruth 1. Here was Naomi, caught up in a web of self-pity and bitterness. She felt unloved and unaccepted by God. So God sent her a package of love she couldn't refuse. We read it earlier,

And they lifted up their voice, and wept again: and Orpah kissed her mother in law; but Ruth clave unto her.

And Ruth said, Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God:

Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the LORD do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me. (Ruth 1:14-17)

How could a bitter spirit survive in the face of love like that? In the next lesson, we will look more closely at Ruth's beautiful statement of commitment. We are then going to look for a moment at the lost art of loyalty. But in closing this lesson, we are going to look at Ruth's response to Naomi's bitterness with two thoughts in mind.

RUTH'S RESPONSE TO NAOMI'S BITTERNESS

1- If you live with someone or minister to someone who is bathed in bitterness, commit yourself to love them unconditionally. They will be difficult to love, for they may be negative, untrusting and angry at God. Let God love them through you unconditionally, as Ruth did. It will change them and it will change you.

2- Ruth's commitment to Naomi is but a portrait of God's commitment to you. If you do not have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, maybe you have even seen Him approach you to walk with you back to Bethlehem, and you have urged Him to go His own way, this is the good news of the gospel. He wants to give you His Spirit. Whither thou goest, He will go. Wherever thou lodgest, He will lodge. His people will become your people. His Spirit will control your spirit. When you die, He will be there, for He will have already died for you. You can receive Him right now as your personal Saviour. He will never leave you or forsake you. He will be your Ruth for all eternity. He will walk with you. He will stand beside you. He will live inside you forever. He is doing all the seeking, and all He asks is for your to let him go with you back to Bethlehem. You can do that right now by quietly opening the door of your heart and asking Jesus Christ to come in and cleanse you of all the bitterness of the past and make you new.

If you are a Christian, but you have allowed a bitter spirit take control of your life and lock you in a vise of anger, God wants to set you free. He is not the kind of God you have envisioned at all. Perhaps the circumstances in your life have been devastating. Don't be angry with God. Sin is responsible. Satan is responsible. We are responsible. God is placing arms of comfort around you right now and wants you to take a fresh look at who He really is. Then He wants you to take His hand and begin again, burying your bitterness and accepting His love. He does not want to call you "bitter". His desire is to call you "Pleasant One". He says to you softly, "Your circumstances may not change, but I will go with you through the circumstances and you can be changed. For whither thou goest, I will go, wherever you stop to rest, I will stop too. All My people are yours for the asking. They will love you as I love you, if you will let them. Even death will bring us but closer together."

So, is there cause for bitterness? Are we justified to hold in

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anger and contempt One who cared so much that He died? Is there cause for bitterness when life's sorrows overflow? Can we shake our fist at God, crying out, "He does not know just how grieved and hurt I am. He does not know all the anguish that I bear." Do we have the right to say, "God, I just don't think that you care." God replies,

IS THERE CAUSE FOR BITTERNESS?

"You don't think I care?
Oh, my child, cannot you see,
All I owned, I gave for you,
Nailed upon that awful tree.

"Sin's to blame for all your grief,
Satan orchestrates it all,
None of life's prevailing pain
E're existed 'fore the fall.

"Neither will those stripes you bear
Ugly, stains and scars of sin
E're exist again, my child,
Once My Son has come again.

"Be not bitter, child of Mine,
Let Me turn your heart around,
Let Me bathe you in My Word,
Where My joy and love are found.

"Trust Me, I alone can know
How to take that trial and test
Weave it into life's design
And make it turn out for your best.

"Is there cause for bitterness?
Oh, no, My child, not ever.
Jesus Christ your "Ruth" remains
He has vowed to leave you never.

"He will turn the fires of life
Into joy and into praise.
He will take your hurt and pain;
He'll transform those weary days.

"Let Him take complete control,
Let Him conquer all your fear.
Give Him all your bitterness
He will make it disappear."

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For Focus and Application

1- Using the Scriptures found on pages four, try to do a survey and list the things God used famines to accomplish with His people. Do you think He will ever do that again? What kinds of things does He use in our day?

2- Can you imagine Naomi's grief? She had lost a husband and two sons. How sensitive are you to those about you who have lost loved ones? Do you know how to enter into their grief?

3- What was Naomi's reasoning when she encouraged her daughters-in-law to remain behind? What made Ruth's allegiance so incredible?

4- What was Naomi's bitter cry in chapter 1, verses 20-21? Have you ever accused God like that? How does this kind of reasoning conflict with God's picture of affliction in Job and other places?

5- What is the difference between grief and bitterness? Is grief normal? If so, how can you prevent bitterness from following?

6- Review the definition of bitterness on page eight. Why is that word "why" so significant?

7- Review the five symptoms of a bitter spirit found on pages nine and ten. Examine your own life in the light of those symptoms. On a scale of 1-10, how much bitterness lingers in your heart? To what degree do you think that bitterness is interfering with your walk with God?

8- We get angry with God when things don't go our way. Who should we be angry with? Who caused it all?

9- When was the last time you spent a month just looking at God? When was the last time you examined the things you are bitter about in the light of who God is? If God is perfect love, perfect holiness, perfect righteousness, and perfect grace, then how could we accuse Him of being unfair or uncaring or incapable of changing our circumstances, should He choose? If God is sovereign and omnipotent, how could anything happen to us that is not best for us and For His glory?

10- Why is seeing bitterness as sin a necessity for cleansing? Have you ever done that? You will not have victory until you stop clinging to the bitterness as though God could have done better.

11- How easy is it for you to give your life away to others? How normal is it for you to accept love? Examine your ability to love in the light of any bitterness that might be in your heart. Ask God to cleanse you so He can use you to love and to bless others.

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