



Generations

Part 1 – When Tragedy Strikes, Does Your Family Have a Plan?

Pastor Ted Cunningham

So we're going to jump right into this series and as we do, I just want to share with you one of my favorite stories out of the No Wake Zone series. I had a great time with this series. My friend, Brian Crawford, is an elder at Mission Community Church in Phoenix, Arizona. He and his family went on a five-week, 6,000-mile road trip with a camper. Their first stop was here in Branson, Missouri at Treasure Lake. They sat here the first Sunday of No Wake Zone, Memorial Day weekend. We had a lot of fun that weekend. We ate popsicles together, played games together, and launched into this rest period for our church.

He took it seriously. He's an athlete. He's a runner, bike rider... Why we're friends, I have absolutely no idea, but he's got a bad knee. He's 46 years old and he went on a run that morning with his daughter. He has two teenage daughters.

That afternoon, he said "Man, I just needed to get away by myself. I went on just a simple easy eight, nine-mile bike ride out of Treasure Lake." He ended up on Sycamore Church Road. He sent his wife this picture. This is him. He said "I got to a place where the road was washed out. I stopped and I looked down. It was a rock bed and there was just the clearest water running through there. It was way too tempting not to get in. So, I laid down between these two pipes and I was there forever, just enjoying it. I got to that place where my face was showing just this much. I texted my wife, telling her what a great time I was having. The cool water felt so good. I'm sitting there as rested as I've ever been. All the sudden, I heard this beep, beep, beep."

A truck was going to dump all that rock on top of him. I told him, "Brian, we would have never found you." He jumped up. The driver got out and he looked like he had seen a ghost. He said, "I've never seen anything like this before."

So, the No Wake Zone almost claimed one life, but it was worth it. I had to share this. I told him he had to send me pictures; that's too good of a story not to share.

As we enter into this great Old Testament book... How many of you like those movies where you end the movie by saying to the people you went to the movie with, "Woah, I did not see that coming"? The one movie I thought of this week... And if you can think of a movie to top this, I'll use it in the second service, but this is the most "I did not see that coming" moment in a movie I've ever seen. The Sixth Sense. Does anybody remember that?

At the end, we were all in the parking lot and in our cars going, “No, there had to be mistakes.” And we all went and watched again to try to prove the ending wrong, right? We were into that. I love those movies.

I spoil movies for my family because my goal, as we watch movies together, is to call the ending early. So a love story is developing between two people and I always love to go, “He’ll be dead at the end.” Or, it will be like he’s not going to be dead, but it’s not going to work out. I can just tell. They’re kind of foreshadowing too much. They’re giving too much away in the first 30 minutes. I love a “I didn’t see that coming” moment. Now if you watch Hallmark Movies, you don’t know what we’re talking about. I can call a Hallmark Movie in about the first 60 to 90 seconds. They all have the same ending.

The Book of Ruth is the short book that’s right after one of the darkest books in the Old Testament, the Book of Judges. We looked at this book two years ago. It’s one of the darkest periods of time in the Nation of Israel, but this story has one of the best in all of scripture, one of the best “I didn’t see that coming” moments.

Ruth, a widow committed to her mother-in-law, travels to a foreign land away from her family after great tragedy hits their family. I don’t want to spoil it, but I do want to encourage you if you’ve never read the Book of Ruth, read the book this week. You can read it this afternoon. We’re going to do a chapter a week for the next four weeks.

I don’t want to give it away, but I will. Out of her devotion and commitment, that we are going to see today, that she has for her mother in law, she travels to a land that she is unfamiliar with. She finds herself in the royal bloodline of King David and ultimately King Jesus. So you move in this story from tragedy and pain to redemption. It’s one of the best love stories in all of scripture. This whole book and this series, for you and for me, is about love, family, tragedy, and redemption.

Honestly, as I thought about it this week, I thought *I hope and pray there are many in here that have an “I didn’t see that coming” moment in their family.* Like tragedy has gripped your family for years, decades maybe. Maybe there’s a family member you’ve given up on. It seems like I can’t talk to a person without them mentioning to me a family member that they’ve given up on. They’re like, “You don’t know her. She’s been this way her whole life.” But, wouldn’t it be something, as you and I pray, as you and I lead, as we try to influence, to have, weeks or months or years from now, an “I never saw that coming” moment.

I have some introductory thoughts before we jump into this book.

There will always be people pressures and problems pulling your family away from the living God.

There will always be moments in your life where you look back and say, “That was a dark time.” This is the book that we are entering into. It’s a dark time, but it’s a great story that comes out of it. It’s tragedy, but it’s a beautiful story of redemption and love that flows out of it.

Today you are dealing with choices you made yesterday. I can’t wait to teach this point in our hangover service because you all go, “This doesn’t really do anything for me.” But when I say this

statement in the next hour there will be so many going, “Whew, you couldn’t be more righter. It was a rough night.” And this morning, you’re dealing with dumb decisions you made last night. Some of you are sitting here going, “I can’t believe I’ve done this.”

I’ll get to this in a second in the message, but I’m just going to introduce it here. Some of you moved to Branson this year and you’re going, “What have I done? A big city boy in this small town. What have I done? The only thing this town is excited about is a Ferris wheel. There are other things in life we have to work on.” You’re sitting here wondering what you have done, but today, you find yourself in Branson, dealing with choices you made yesterday, last week, last month.

This is also true. Today some of you are dealing with choices others made yesterday. You’re putting up with people and decisions they made and you’re like “Why is there so much drama in my family? I prefer a drama-free family, but I’ve got this one person who is constantly making choices, constantly doing the wrong thing, constantly dragging our family into their bad choices.” I just want you to begin to think about your family. I don’t want you to just think about your family that’s still living. I want you to think about decisions that maybe family has made in the past because that’s where this book starts. The first six verses are going to spell out for us clearly decisions that were made by people who were no longer with them.

I want to show you a picture of my family. This is my mom’s side of the family. I love this shot. This is my Great Grandma Cadigan and that’s me right there. Yeah, am I not the cutest little boy you’ve ever seen? It wasn’t until my parents’ generation that people started smiling for pictures. Does anybody know what I’m talking about? I don’t know what it was about our grandparents, but anytime a camera came out, they got this serious look on their face.

My great grandmother was a widow for 28 years. This is my grandma Mary Jane; she was a widow for 34 years. My favorite part of the picture though is my uncle who is holding a cigarette down out of the picture. He’s keeping that down so nobody can see it. My dad is hiding his beer back there behind my Aunt Jan. Just kidding.

When I look at this... I’m going to confess something to you and don’t leave our church and don’t get mad. This isn’t a political statement. It really isn’t. As a communicator, I was enjoying watching the conventions this week and last week. This is not a political statement. But, I appreciate good communication. I have to be honest with you, I choked up three times at Bill Clinton’s speech. Shush, this is not a political statement. It was a brilliantly written speech, no matter what side of the aisle you fall on. It was beautifully written. Amy walked in on me. I felt like I was doing something wrong. I wasn’t doing anything wrong. I said it was right because I was watching it on Fox News so it kind of redeemed it somehow. I wasn’t watching it on CNN or NBC; I was watching it on Fox.

Some of you are like, “I’m leaving the church.” Don’t leave the church because I cried over Bill Clinton’s speech. I was choked up because... Do you know why it was brilliant? He told a story and put his wife’s resume in it. He told their love story. It was kind of a little awkward, but it still... That part is awkward and you kind of go, “Really?” But, when he started talking about his daughter, I choked up. Amy comes in and asks if I’m crying. My very first thought was *Do not tell my dad*.

I was already studying and I was already looking at this picture and thinking through the story of my life and of my family. I want you to just go there for a little bit. My life is deeply influenced today by these two women. I barely knew Great Grandmother Cadigan. I remember sitting down in a rocking chair next to her and rubbing her arm and reminding her that I was her favorite great grandchild.

I think part of the reason I loved the speech so much is because our two primary candidates... They really don't know how to tell a story. I think if one of them would get good at telling a story, a narrative, we would be sucked in. Instead of all this name calling, etc. This is not a political statement. But, I was emotional because I was thinking about family. As crazy as some of the people in the spotlight are right now, I could see how they got to where they are today because of family, because of where their family brought them. There are so many times that I tell my kids stories about my Grandma Mary Jane and they go, "Dad, I see her in you."

I go, "You do... And you didn't know her all that well."

I just want you to know you're shaped by your family. This is so important. But, you are not defined by your family. Your family has influence to where you are today. I've got to tell you something. I don't think Woodland Hills would be here today if it wasn't for these two women. Well, physically, that's true, but just spiritually and emotionally, I just think of the impact that was passed on. I want you to really get a grasp, Steve McMath, you're old now, you have more yesterdays than you do tomorrows. That's a line I stole from Bill Clinton's speech. But you are probably in the most defining moments of your life right now.

I watched a special on Ronald Regan last night on the flight coming home. I was choking up again. Remember when he pinned the letters about his Alzheimer's? He said, "I go now into the sunset of my journey." I'm sitting there and Amy's going "Pull it together, man!" They took the narrative of Ronald Regan's childhood. I was never able to link why he hated communism so much. I mean I hate communism, but he hated communism. It's because he met Nancy when her name was put on a list of who the Screen Actors Guild considered a communist. That's how they met and fell in love and got married. Now it makes sense. He fought for it when he was an actor and come the 80s... Look at what 40 to 50 years of shaping in the family does. And you're here today, the sum total, the shaping and the influence of your family, but I want you to get this because this is what this book is going to do for you. You are not defined by it. Shaped, influenced, molded, but it's not ultimately who you can be.

We're going to jump into this book. To set it in the scene... Some of you are totally checked out because I said I liked Bill Clinton's speech. I want all of you back right now. Ruth is set in the time of the Judges as we are going to read in Verse 1 of Chapter 1.

Judges 21 says, [25](#) In those days there was no king in Israel; all the people did what was right in their own eyes.

This week, I've been processing after watching two conventions and watching two candidates name call each other. If I were there parents, I would ban them from social media because I don't allow my children... Anyway, I was watching... We live in a culture now where this is still true. Everyone wants to

do right in their own eyes. “I’ll decide what’s right. I’ll decide what’s wrong.” It’s a dark period in the Nation of Israel. You’ll remember when we studied it two years ago, if you were here. Everyone did what was right in their own eyes, but God sent Judges. When he sent a judge, he would send that judge to rescue them. When the judge died and they would turn back to their ways, the scripture says they went even deeper into darkness. They went even deeper into rebellion. They went even deeper into sin.

Let’s jump into Ruth 1. Today, I’m going to set up the story, set up the tragedy, but you’ve got to stick with the series to see the “I didn’t see that coming” moment.

1 In the days when the judges ruled... That’s the context of this whole book. ***...there was a famine in the land.*** Right? “You turn from me and affliction will fall upon you. I’ll send a judge and he’ll rescue you. When that judge dies and you go back to your ways...” There are consequences for the way we live. There was a famine in the land. We don’t know the severity of it. Honestly, in this text, we don’t know the exact when. Commentators argue back and forth and discuss it back and forth as to the exact period and they narrowed it down a little bit, but that’s not the focus of this text. We’ve got to see the tragedy that comes out of decisions made.

So a man from Bethlehem... I want you to remember it for this series. Bethlehem actually means “house of bread.” So there’s a famine in the House of Bread. ***...in Judah, together with his wife and two sons, went to live for a while in the country of Moab.***

I love that line, “they went to live for a while.” This is going to fit what’s going on for many of you today. I was sharing it with the band earlier. I said, “I want you to focus today for a while because I’ve met a lot of people in Branson that when they initially moved here it was for a while.” Russell was telling me, “Yeah, I moved here for two years.” Do you know how long Russell, our sound technician... He’s the number one St. Louis Cardinals fan in this church. Russell said, “I moved her for a period of two years.” Do you know how long Russell’s been here? He’s been here 22 years.

They moved for a while. He’s going to protect his family. He going to provide for his family. He thinks it’s best, as an Israelite, to leave the Promised Land, to leave the land that God promised he would bless and flee to a pagan land to provide for his family.

2 The man’s name was Elimelek, his wife’s name was Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Kilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem (House of Bread), Judah. And they went to Moab and lived there. Not only is Moab in a pagan land, it’s an enemy of Israel.

3 Now Elimelek, Naomi’s husband, died... Isn’t that great. I told Amy this is a great story and he gets two and a half verses. He moves his family... People ask if it is a right or wrong decision that they moved out of Israel to go to Moab. You can argue both sides on the yes or no, but, at best, we can say it’s questionable that you would leave the land that God promised he would bless to go to another land. We can say it’s questionable, but we can say his motives are good because he, as a husband and father, is wanting to provide for his family. So wherever you land on that debate, he left for a while and he ends up dying. ***...and she was left with her two sons.*** **4 They married Moabite women, one named**

Orpah and the other Ruth. After they had lived there about ten years, 5 both Mahlon and Kilion also died, and Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband.

Now you have three widows. To be honest with you, in this day, fending for themselves meant deprivation and despair. More than we would experience today. The responsibility of the widow to be cared for by the family is still true today. I need you to know that. We live in a country that we have Social Security, but, ultimately, you are responsible for the widows in your family. Let me say that again, just so we're clear. And I'm not running for any office right now when I make this statement. You are responsible for the widows in your family. You are responsible to meet their physical, emotional, relational, and financial needs. In 1 Timothy 5, Paul points this out to Timothy, a young pastor, very clearly. He says, "If you don't do this, you are worse than an unbeliever." A person who won't provide for their family... The responsibility for parents in their later years...

I'm going to talk about this more next week as I've been asking the Lord for a new message on this and I'm going to just introduce it here briefly. When your child is born, they bring zero percent to the relationship. Does anybody know what I'm talking about? They don't offer anything physically for the family or financially or emotionally. You could argue that they bring you so much joy, but they bring zero. The parent brings 100 percent.

But at the end of life, it's flipped. We're even seeing this in our family as I'm watching my mother-in-law, the child who was being taken care who is now 100% over her 91-year-old father. I'm watching this. I tell my parents... It's kind of a joke when they're wondering what to do. I always say, "Hey, we're watching because however you care for him is how we'll care for you. If you want a real nice place, you better put Grandpa in a real nice place."

But what's interesting and what I'm trying to ask the Lord for a fresh perspective on, as I work with teenagers who are disrespectful to their parents... I say, "Do you know what? These two cross at some point. I meet 40-year-olds who still want to put 100% of the relationship burden on their parents. It's time for you to bring something to the relationship. That's next week. We're going to show you that in a graphic if I can figure out how to do it.

They lived there about ten years and now we're dealing with three widows. This is important to understand. I'll go back to Elimelek for a second. Your decisions that you make effect your whole family. I'm trying to help my son understand this. I'm trying to help my daughter understand this. As a dad, I don't get to make decisions for Ted Cunningham anymore. When I make decisions, I have to think about the entire family.

We just took a ten-day trip. We did three events in ten days. It's exhausting. Some of you that do multiple families together on a trip, that's exhausting because now if you're the decision maker for the family, you're trying to make decision not for everybody else, but with everyone else in mind. This is what adults do. Mom and dad, you're making decisions today for your family, but not just for you. You thinking *I need a nap*. Yeah, you need a nap, but you can't just say, I'm going home and going to bed because you have a one-year-old. You have to make a decision with that in mind.

We sat down on a plane and Amy and Corynn were in the seats next to us and it was me on the aisle and then Carson and then there was this guy who I thought was sleeping, leaning up against the window. I entered into a parenting moment. Does anybody know what I'm talking about when I say a parenting moment. It was lecture time. My 11-year-old said he wanted this summer to be a summer of maturity for him. I said alright, that means a lot of lectures. That's what a summer of maturity means. I was telling him to look around the airport, look around the store, look around a restaurant. Most people aren't thinking about the people around them. When they walk in and out of doors and they walk down hallways, they're thinking just about themselves. Part of the mature adult is thinking about other people when you make decisions. It's not just thinking about yourself. My tone must have been... I was fiery, I was going at it and Carson was just sitting there going "Okay, I got it. I got it. I got it."

We watched a movie together on the flight. We got off the plane at DFW and the guy who I thought was sleeping walked up to me outside of the gate and he handed me this note. He said, "I hope you receive this." I took it out of his hand. My first thought was *I can't go anywhere without people handing me notes with their opinions on it.* I get them all the time. If it's not signed, I don't read it and tear it up, just so you know. If you write an unsigned letter, there is word for you. We call you "chicken." Be man or woman enough to sign your name. I took it. I wasn't in the mood to read it. I stuffed it in my pocket. I don't need no help on parenting today, right?

Once we got to the next gate, I read it. I was able to relax a little bit because it was positive. I'm not going to read it to you. It's a private letter. It's none of your business. At the beginning he said, "I appreciate the way you parent your son. Then he gives me a list of book recommendations to do my job better. That's what the whole letter is about. I was shocked none of my books were on it.

This is what we are trying to help people understand. Some of you are here today because of decisions others made for you. I bet Elimelek wanted to meet the immediate needs of his family, not thinking about his death. But you know you have to think about that. This isn't about living in fear. This is about making decisions based on faith, which is where we are going to go to next.

6 When Naomi heard in Moab that the Lord had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them, she and her daughters-in-law prepared to return home from there. They are going to go back because that's at least Naomi's home town. She knows she will be received there. She can be provided for there. We are going to see that in Chapter 2 next week. The three widows set out together.

7 With her two daughters-in-law she left the place where she had been living and set out on the road that would take them back to the land of Judah. Now you're going to see... It's not really a flip flop, but Naomi is thinking about the wellbeing of her daughters-in-law and she's wanting them to be provided for and she thinks the best thing to do is to bring them with her. But now watch how she changes.

8 Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go back, each of you, to your mother's home. May the Lord..." Now this is a prayer of blessing over them. ***"...show you kindness, as you have shown kindness to your dead husbands and to me. 9 May the Lord grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband."*** Now she's thinking *Wait a second; maybe going back to Israel is not best for you Moabite women. What would be best for you is your physical needs to be met by a new man.*

That's a very important change in the story here because you need to see that Naomi is now going to start to be driven by practical solutions to her problem.

As followers of Jesus, we understand we walk by faith, not by sight. We are to make practical decisions; we make them all day long. We would probably use the term *common sense*. We are supposed to use common sense when we make decisions, but we walk by faith, not by sight. Now watch what happens. She prays a blessing over them.

Then she kissed them goodbye... This is where you see their affection for one another. They are family. Even though they're not blood family, they were brought together and it says, ***...and they wept aloud...*** They deeply cared for each other and desired to be with each other. ***10 ...and said to her, "We will go back with you to your people."*** Now Naomi is going to become even more practical. She's going to spell this out from a practical and physical needs-met perspective.

11 But Naomi said, "Return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me? Am I going to have any more sons, who could become your husbands? 12 Return home, my daughters; I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me—even if I had a husband tonight..." Now she's going to boil this down and get out whiteboards and markers and charts and explain it. ***"...and then gave birth to sons— 13 would you wait until they grew up?"*** She's getting very specific in meeting the practical needs. Again, without a husband in this day, a woman was more susceptible; it's deprivation and despair. ***"Would you remain unmarried for them? No, my daughters."*** She answers for them. She was asking them the question, but she already had the answer. ***"It is more bitter for me than for you, because the Lord's hand has turned against me!"***

This is very important. There's a commentary that I read from almost every week after I prepare the notes. I have about three standard commentaries that I go to. One that I really deeply respect and follow... He's influenced much of the teaching of this church. His commentary didn't line up with the other two this week. He actually had a very, very negative tone toward Naomi in this text, unlike the other two. It was funny to me because he even said when he first read this story in seminary class, he actually referred to Naomi as a witch. I was shocked. Whatever you think about Naomi from this point forward... She's not done with her statement. She's got some more strong statements coming. Her sorrow over the tragedy of losing her husband and her sons is going to pour out of her. Here is what we can at least say about Naomi. She understands God's plan. She understands God's sovereignty. She may not be experiencing it right now. It may be hidden. His plan may be hidden to her, but she understands she is in this place because she knows God is in control. She says that. "He has turned against me."

Here's where we are going and we are going to take this turn. **God is involved in the details of my life and my family.** Even when it's hidden and even when I don't know. That's what this whole book is going to show us. His sovereignty... Sovereignty means on the throne, in control, in charge, boss, omnipotence, all powerful, has all strength. **His sovereignty is not threatened by my choices.** God still works his plan through my choices. This is why we are looking for that "I didn't see that coming" moment.

While I was studying for this, something hit me and it was a divine appointment, a defining moment, whatever you want to call it, two weeks ago, when I had my septic tank pumped. You're supposed to do it every three to five years. I called the septic tank pumping company and the guy showed up. He was one of the most charismatic septic tank pumping guys I've ever met in my life. He was a Jesus lover, high energy. This going to be in context, so don't leave because I used this word. For a guy who deals with crap all day, he had such a great attitude.

I have a two tank system. I opened the thing and I pulled it out and we're standing there. I don't know... Men do this. I don't think women do this, but we had a great moment around my septic tank. The first thing he did was compliment it. I'm not going to go too far with the details on this, but when he said, "Hey, your system looks good," I'm like, "Oh, well thank you. I really appreciate that."

He gets in there and doing all of this and he's like "You know what? You're doing this right." The men in here who take care of their homes know exactly what I'm talking about. When you're complimented like people walk in and say, "Your air conditioner seems to be working." You're like, "Well, thank you," like you had anything to do with the fact your air conditioner is working right, but it just means it's not broken. Can I get an amen from the men? We are tired of fixing things.

He said I was doing every three to five years and that's all this system needs and he was really proud of me. He sucked the whole thing out, sprayed it... This moment I was not prepared for. He got down on his knees and stuck his head in it and looked around. That's when I kind of jumped up. When he got up, my first words to him were, "Bro, can I tip you or something? I've never had a man stick his head in my septic tank."

He said, "I was looking for roots and everything, but you're good. I like that you're not afraid to deal with this." He said, "Here are the calls I can't handle. People will call and say they have sewage coming up in the house or sewage coming up in the shower. Then we ask them if they have checked their septic tank and here is the answer we get often: 'Where is it?' I tell them I don't live in your house; you should know where your septic tank is."

That's because people live by this out of sight, out of mind, I don't want to know about it... If that's you, would you just raise your hand. He said, "It's amazing to me the people that are involved and the people that are making good choices and moving forward and the people who are not."

As he said that, we had a great moment with the Lord together. I know this sounds crazy, but we had a moment. I said, "Isn't this true of the church today? Bad things are happening to everybody. Tough times happen. Tragedy has hit everyone. There are some who want to figure it out. There are some who want to stay on top of it. There are some who want to make better choices. There are some who don't want to hear about it and they don't want to know." Here's what I thought. God's sovereignty and omnipotence is working in the lives of both people. Have you ever thought about that? He's working in the ones who are choosing to make good choices and the families that are moving forward, but he's also working in these families where good choices were questionable.

Here's where Naomi, as a widow, kind of goes off of the faithfulness, not sovereignty and omnipotence, but the faithfulness of God. Here's what we need to be reminded of from the story. **Practical decisions are best made in light of biblical truth.** We have to make practical decisions all day long. We have to make choices all the time. Here, Naomi is allowing, just a little bit, the practical to outrun the spiritual. She's saying it would make more sense for them to go back. Now we're getting to verse 15 which is the most disturbing verse of this chapter for sure and maybe the whole book. Here's what she says.

14 At this they wept aloud again. Again, the thought of separating was just too much. ***Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye, but Ruth clung to her.*** Now Verse 15 is the most disturbing verse. **15 "Look," said Naomi, "your sister-in-law is going back..."** This is like her third appeal. This is her appeal to her and now she is going to use the peer pressure. "If you won't buy the fact that you need a husband to take care of you, at least follow the wisdom of your sister-in-law. She understands, she gets the importance of staying with the people she knows." But, here's where no godly Israelite would ever encourage anyone to return to paganism. No godly Israelite would turn someone away from the only living true God. She says, ***...to her people and her gods. Go back with her.***

This is where you have to say, "Naomi, now your concern for your physical need is running just a little bit ahead of that of your daughters-in-law. They've already seen your concern. They've seen your faith."

16 But Ruth replied, "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay." Now look at the commitment and the confession of trust that she makes. ***"Your people will be my people and your God my God."*** Here's a great lesson on borrowed faith. You can't live off someone's faith. You can't, as a child, live off of your parents' borrowed faith forever. At some point, your parents' faith must become your faith.

17 "Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried." "I am with you, Naomi. I'm committed to you. I've seen your God through you. I'm going with you and your God will be my God." ***"May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely..."*** Now this is in line with how they made covenants back then. She has just made a commitment to Naomi. ***"...if even death separates you and me."***

18 When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her. This the lesson I take out of this. More than anyone, your children have front row seats to your faith. When tragedy strikes your family, we're asking in this message "Do you have a plan?" I want you to know more than anything when tragedy, when hardship, when death hits your family, your children are watching. Your children are watching how you respond to it. I have watched my dad deal with the death of his parents. I've watched my mom deal with the death of her parents. I've watched Amy deal with the death of grandparents. I've watched Linda deal with the death of her mother. I've watched Denny deal with the death of his father. I've watched this with my children, their grandchildren, their great grandchildren.

When Denny's dad died, I remember a chaplain told me, "Carson is seven years old and he's not going to ask a lot of questions, but when he does ask them, they are going to be quick and while playing Legos, and you've got to be ready." And I was. Carson didn't ask a lot of questions, but now that he's 11, he goes back to that. I didn't think he remembered everything, but he has so many of the details in his head.

Mom and Dad, if there's anything we struggle with as parents it's when we teach and instruct and we model. We look around at our kids and think they're not getting it. Raise your hand if you've ever looked at your kid in the last week and said "They're not getting it." Can I just tell you as you pastor, they're getting it. It may not be applied right now. It may not be going out, but it's going in. They are seeing it.

I told Amy that one of our important retirement plans that I don't think we're thinking through clearly is we've got to take good care of our parents. Our kids are seeing that and I want to be taken care of well when I'm in my 60s. My dad is our chicken watcher while we're out of town. I give him gift cards to watch them. My dad would do it for free, but I want Corynn to see me hand Papa a gift card. I get in the car and say, "Did you see that? I'm not as much into Cracker Barrel as I am Leve 2, so I want you to be prepared to give me Level 2 gift cards."

We say this all the time around here. Your children have a front row seat to your marriage, they have a front row seat to your faith. I love what Andy Stanley in Atlanta says about the election right now. They are watching how you handle these elections. You have faith, you believe in the sovereignty and the omnipotence of God between now and November. This is what Andy Stanley says, "Stop it. You're scaring the children." All they see is you up in arms over stuff. Relax, trust; God's working even in our country. There are folks that say "No, he's not. Not with these two Bozos." I'm just quoting what I'm hearing. People are going "I don't know. I'm going to have to hold my nose to vote." Be careful what you are saying around this time because during the period of the Judges, he sent judges to rescue them... We have to also be careful here as we get to this next part in Verse 19 because we can bail God out. We've got to stop, as followers of Christ, bailing God out. He doesn't need us to bail him out. We don't need to offer trite statements about who God is and how his sovereignty and omnipotence works. That's not my job.

19 So the two women went on until they came to Bethlehem. When they arrived in Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them, and the women exclaimed, "Can this be Naomi?" Who went away for a little while, but was gone for a long period of time. ***20 "Don't call me Naomi," she told them. "Call me Mara (which means bitterness) because the Almighty has made my life very bitter.*** You can look at this and say she is complaining and whining, but I want you to really see, in this text, that she understands God's plan, she understands God's hand and control over her life. There are people that will say "God didn't do this. God didn't cause it." They make these really strong statements about what God is doing or what God is not doing. I want to focus on the choices I made and make in light of biblical truth and trust that God is always a work in my life.

We have to be careful because I can point around in here to people and ask the question, "Do you remember a time where God emptied you?" You can look back now and know that God did that. "God emptied me, but then he filled me." We want to bail God out.

I came to Branson 15 years ago for a little while. The first year here was trouble and chaos and frustration and I don't if I'd use the word tragedy, but it was close to tragedy. I wasn't fired, but I was close to being fired. Some of you here chased dreams to Branson. You chased big dreams to Branson and then you got here and went bankrupt. One of my ministries in this country is going around to

entertainer friends that I met in Branson. I go visit them in Vegas or Florida or California, and other places. I was just with a friend recently who spent some time in Branson. I asked him how he was doing and he said, "To be honest with you, I still have a little owie in my heart over Branson."

I told Amy, "This is kind of cool that God can use us to let people see that they are where they are today and Branson was part of that story." Don't rip on us. Don't tear us apart. We feel God used us to crush your dreams. Look at where you are today. I told one of my friend who is doing very well, "Look at where you are today. Would you be there without Branson? Okay, send us a little tithe; that's all I'm saying."

Ask a mature believer in this church today, "Tell me about a time that God drained you, that God emptied you, but then tell me about how you were filled."

21 I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The Lord has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me." 22 So Naomi returned from Moab accompanied by Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law, arriving in Bethlehem as the barley harvest was beginning.

That's where we are going to pick it up next week with Chapter 2, but I have a couple of practical thoughts out of this as we try to understand the decisions that you need to make today for your family out of the tragedy that may have hit. For some of you, it wasn't that Branson crushed your dreams and you went bankrupt and you left mad. Some of you came here following a boyfriend or girlfriend and a month later you broke up. You came her for a little while. Some of you came here for a job and you got fired. Some of you came here on the promise of a job that didn't pan out. Some of you came here to get married and within a year were divorced. By the way, I'm sharing stories of people I know.

We even have Ruth and Naomi stories in this church. I wish I could share and maybe we can as the series unfolds. There are many of you in here that planned your retirement to Branson. You retired to Branson and your spouse passed away. This was not at all what you had planned, but years later, you're seeing how God has provided for you, how he cares for you, and you have found a family at Woodland Hills. These stories are in our ministry here called Grief Share, led my Mona and many others that really minister to people who are saying "I didn't see this coming at all and now I'm waiting. What is the plan?" Right now you feel like you're in a foreign land, Branson, Missouri, but Woodland Hills has become your family.

This is what we take out of this. **Your tragedy is part of your story, but not your primary identity.** Don't let it be your primary identity; let it be part of your story. It shapes you, but does not ultimately define you.

This is very important. **What you do today is more important than what you did yesterday.** Again, I can't wait to share this with the 11:00 service. What do I mean by that? Yesterday, you said "Ted, the sin I committed, you can't even begin to believe." We used to sing this hymn. Remember "Grace, grace, God's grace, greater than all our sin."

Repentance is the decision you make today. Turning to Jesus... What you do today outweighs whatever you did last night. Yeah, you're going to be dealing with consequences, but what you do and the decisions you make with those consequences is more important than what happened yesterday.

This is also important. **What you do today is more important than what happened to you yesterday.** What someone else did to you yesterday. This is what we take from Chapter 1 of Ruth. **You do not have ultimate control over what happens to you and your family in this life,** this is where we want to go with this great book, **but you have complete control over your faith.**

This doesn't make sense to some of you. "Did God do this to Naomi and Ruth or what?" "Did God bring the famine?" And you can start to question. "God wouldn't do this. Only the nice things that happen to us in life we would give to God, but we would never give any of this." "I need to know what happened in our country 15 years ago, did God bring that?" You can start asking all these questions, but this is one commentary that I follow and love. When he said this, it put a bow on the whole package for me of Ruth 1.

"We do not submit lamely to a vengeful or capricious deity. That's not what it means to follow the one true God, the living God, but actively cooperate with the God of all power, all wisdom, and all love, who is working all things together for the good of those who He loves."

The bottom line is this and I hope you leave today with this one thought. This is the last thought. **God is always at work in your family.** We believe that. It may be hidden. You may not see it now, but one of the nice things... I look around at some of the seniors in here who do have more yesterdays than tomorrows and they are able to go "Wow, I can tell you about ten "I didn't see that coming" moments. I can tell you about those as we are going to see as this book unfolds."

Here's what I want to encourage you to do. As we go through this series, be open, pray, walk by faith, not by sight, don't live in the past, don't think of all the reasons why this person can't change or your family can't be healed or your story is done and you need to write a new chapter with someone else. No, I want you to stop, pause, pray, and begin to ask the Lord, "What is my 'I didn't see that coming' moment?" I'm praying for it right now. Call people by name. People in your family that you want to say, "God, you bring food to those in famine. You bring husbands to those who are least expecting them because they are relying too much on sight and not on faith." I pray that you would walk by faith through this series as we go through the next few weeks.

Father, it's in the name of Jesus that I pray for our widows. We have many widows and we take ministry to them seriously. We want to provide for their needs. We want to provide for them physically, emotionally, spiritually, relationally, and financially. I pray for the working adults in the room that they would take seriously their responsibility to provide for their parents and to care for their parent as we'll see next week.

I pray that we would take seriously the responsibility of family and our role in it. That we would take seriously the fact that our tragedies and our hurts and our past and all of that make up our story, but they are not our primary identity. For those who have placed faith in Jesus, we find our identity in you

as followers of Jesus Christ. I pray during this series that families will be healed. I pray that prodigal children will confess their sins before their mom and dad whatever their age may be. I pray that rebellious teenagers will confess their rebellion to mom and dad and begin to place faith in you.

I pray the cheating husbands will confess their sins to their wives and marriages will be healed. I pray emotionally detached wives who are considering affairs and considering someone else would confess that to their husband and find healing. I pray for the grandma and grandpa that aren't talking to the mom and dad or the grandchild. We could list stories and go on and on with this, but I just pray for healing. I pray that they would see that the tragedy isn't where it ends and that they would ultimately hold out for the redemption. That we would not feed our regrets, but we call out to you now, asking you to redeem our remaining days.

It's in the name of Jesus that everyone agreed and said... Amen.