

**Forward as Family**  
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**GFC- 2/14/2021**

We are in a series called "Forward." This week I prayed and felt led to preach on Forward as Family. But I wanted to preach a sermon that touches everyone – singles, families, blended families, broken families.

So, I started in Genesis and looked for biblical examples of families moving forward together. I saw Abraham moving with his family to Canaan. I saw Jacob moving his family to his home. I kept going through the books of the Old Testament until I came to the book of Ruth.

By the way - the book of Ruth contains one of the greatest passages on love ever written. Since it's Valentine's Day I want to read it - Ruth 1:16-17 says:

*Don't ask me to leave you and turn back. Wherever you go, I will go; wherever you live, I will live. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God. Wherever you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord punish me severely if I allow anything but death to separate us!*

These powerful words of commitment are probably some of most quoted verses in weddings. And that is very appropriate. But many people do not know that these words are actually spoken by a daughter-in-law to her mother-in-law!

The story found in the book of Ruth is about a traumatized family moving forward together. From it we find principles that impact our relationships today. And these principles are for everyone. Here's how it goes. Ruth 1:1-15 says:

*In the days when the judges ruled in Israel, a severe famine came upon the land. So a man from Bethlehem in Judah left his home and went to live in the country of Moab, taking his wife and two sons with him.*

*Then Elimelech died, and Naomi was left with her two sons. The two sons married Moabite women. One married a woman named Orpah, and the other a woman named Ruth. But about ten years later, both Mahlon and Kilion died. This left Naomi alone, without her two sons or her husband.*

*Then Naomi heard in Moab that the Lord had blessed His people in Judah by giving them good crops again. So Naomi and her daughters-in-law got ready to leave Moab to return to her homeland.*

*But on the way, Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go back to your mothers' homes. And may the Lord reward you for your kindness to your husbands and to me. May the Lord bless you with the security of another marriage."*

*Then she kissed them good-bye, and they all broke down and wept. "No," they said. "We want to go with you to your people." But Naomi replied, "Why should you go on with me? Can I still give birth to other sons who could grow up to be your husbands? No, my daughters, return to your parents' homes, for I am too old to*

*marry again. And even if it were possible, and I were to get married tonight and bear sons, then what? Would you wait for them to grow up and refuse to marry someone else? No, of course not, my daughters! Things are far more bitter for me than for you, because the Lord Himself has raised His fist against me."*

Remember this passage about bitterness – it will come up again later.

*And again they wept together, and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law good-bye. But Ruth clung tightly to Naomi.*

### **1- Not everyone will move forward with you!**

When you're building anything – relationships, business, church – not everyone will go the distance with you. As we saw in the sermon Stopping Short of the Jordan – there were Israelis who left Egypt who did not go the distance to the Promised Land.

There were people who started following Christ who did not go the distance with Him. Listen – if people didn't go the distance with Jesus – don't be surprised when they don't go the distance with you.

This can be a very painful lesson to learn. It was for me. I always think everyone is going to stay forever – but they don't.

We must learn to handle this like Jesus. When the rich, young ruler turned from following Him – Jesus let Him go. When some of His disciples stopped following Him – He let them go. In fact - John 2:23-25 says:

*While He was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many people saw the miraculous signs He was doing and believed in His name. But Jesus would not entrust Himself to them, for He knew all men.*

Now – none of us have that level of knowledge – so we should be extra careful who we trust and who we commit ourselves to! But I'm going to help you today by giving you some biblical keys to help you develop discernment in your relationships.

Here's the first one - I found this to be true over the years – those who are quick to commit are usually quick to quit! Why is that? Because they make emotion-based decisions!

- They come to a church and like one service and they say they are going to join and get involved – but after a while they disappear.
- Or they meet you and instantly say they are going to be your friend forever – but as soon as there's a little conflict – they leave.

Beware who you entrust yourself to, because not everyone will go the distance with you.

Now, in the case of Naomi and Orpah – it was not wrong for Orpah to go back to her family. But Ruth went the distance with Naomi. Ruth 1:14 says:

*Orpah kissed her mother-in-law good-bye. But Ruth clung tightly to Naomi.*

Now I want to bring out a couple points here that don't totally apply to Naomi and her daughters-in-law – but they are truths I felt led to share.

## **2- Beware of those who kiss without clinging.**

I'm talking about those who want physical affection without commitment. Young people – beware of those who are pressuring you into a sexual relationship without the commitment of marriage. Single person – beware of those who want to kiss without clinging.

I'm going to give you a good way to weed out someone you should not trust from someone you should. Watch how they respond when you say no to their physical advances. If they get mad or pouty or continue to pressure you – get out of that relationship! “Well, Pastor Joe, if I don't give in, they will leave me.” That's the point! If they will leave you over that – let them leave. Beware of those who kiss without clinging.

## **3- Beware of clingy people.**

Clinging is good but clingy is not. When I say clinging I mean commitment. When I say clingy I mean overly needy.

Listen closely – clingy people expect you to be god in their life and you're doomed to fail in that role!

- They expect you to meet their every need – but God is the only one who meets our needs according to His riches in glory.
- They expect you to be there for them at any hour – but they are never really there for you.

This is not a mutual relationship where you meet each other's needs. This is a one-way relationship where one person does all the taking and another person does all the giving.

And if you ever set a boundary or refuse to meet one of their needs – they will either threaten to hurt themselves or turn on you in anger. Here's a good way to discern an overly needy clingy person. Just tell them no and see how they respond.

#### **4- Moving forward as family requires worshipping the same God**

Ruth 1:15 says: *"Look," Naomi said to her, "your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods. You should do the same."*

The Moabites did not worship the God of Israel. They worshipped idols. And Orpah went back to those false gods. But Ruth did not just choose Naomi – she chose Naomi's God! Remember what she said in Ruth 1:16 – *Your God will be my God.*

Listen – believers should only date believers because believers should only marry believers. 2 Corinthians 6:14-17 says:

*Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and the devil? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. "Therefore come out from unbelievers and be separate," says the Lord. "Then I will welcome you."*

Remember – everyone worships something. And if people don't worship God – they usually worship themselves. That's not someone you want to be in a close relationship with.

#### **5- Moving forward as a family requires unconditional commitment**

This is where Ruth says in Ruth 1:16-17 says:

*Wherever you go, I will go; wherever you live, I will live. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God. Wherever you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord punish me severely if I allow anything but death to separate us!*

This is the kind of love and commitment that is required to take a relationship forward – a family forward.

Many relationships don't work today because people give up too easily. I know there are biblical reasons for divorce, but they are much fewer than most of the reasons people give today. One of the big problems is lack of commitment. Perhaps the wedding vows should be changed to:

"I promise to love, honor, and quit whenever I want to."

"I promise to love you as long as you make me happy."

"I'm committed as long as you meet my needs."

But God is more concerned about our character than our comfort. Our faithfulness than our fulfillment. Our dying to self rather than living for self.

Our submitting to His will rather than our own will.

The divorce rate would actually be much higher but many people do not even bother to get married anymore – they just live together without commitment. And most of those relationships fail. In fact, did you know that couples who live together outside of marriage have an 80% greater chance of divorce than those who don't? If you go into a relationship without commitment, it won't work.

We must realize that our commitments determine our destiny. When you make a commitment you're choosing how you're going to invest your life, how you're going to spend your time, who you're going to become and who you will spend your life with. And every commitment has a price tag to it. But it also has a huge payoff!

I encourage you today - choose commitment. Build your marriage and family and friendships with commitment. Build your life with commitment. Powerful things can and do happen when people are committed. Nations have been born, businesses have been built, wars have been won, and progress has been made because of people who were committed to do whatever it takes.

We must learn from Ruth and totally commit to our families. After this expression of commitment - Ruth 1:18-22 says:

*When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her. So the two women went on... When they arrived in Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them, and the women exclaimed, "Can this be Naomi?" "Don't call me Naomi," she told them. "Call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter. 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."*

In Hebrew – the name Naomi means pleasant and Mara means bitter.

## **6- Moving forward in life requires overcoming bitterness.**

Admittedly – Naomi went through an extremely difficult time. She went through a famine and then her husband and both sons died. This was an extremely hurting woman and a totally devastated family. Unfortunately – Naomi allowed these hard circumstances to make her bitter and to turn her against God. She started blaming God for all her troubles. That's a very common response but a very wrong response. Because when you turn on God because of tough circumstances, you turn on the only One who can get you through those very circumstances.

And when you are bitter you cannot move forward as family. Hebrews 12:15 says:

*See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no root of bitterness springs up, causing trouble and by it, defiling many.*

When you fall short of grace – bitterness is always the result because you are no longer trusting in God. That bitterness will cause troubles. Don't blame God for those troubles – rather – get back under God's grace. If you don't - you will defile everyone around you with your bitterness. Ephesians 4:31-32 says:

*Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.*

Bitterness is usually the result of unforgiveness – either not receiving forgiveness from God or choosing to not forgive others. If you don't deal with bitterness you will stay stuck forever! So – choose to forgive and move forward as family.

### **7- Moving forward as a family requires considering future generations.**

I don't have the time to read this whole story, so I'll read Ruth 2:1-3.

*Now Naomi had a relative on her husband's side, from the family of Elimelech, a man of standing, whose name was Boaz. And Ruth the Moabitess said to Naomi, "Let me go to the fields and pick up the leftover grain behind anyone in whose eyes I find favor." Naomi said to her, "Go ahead, my daughter." So she went out and began to glean in the fields behind the harvesters. As it turned out, she found herself working in a field belonging to Boaz, who was from the family of Elimelech.*

When Boaz found out who Ruth was – he protected her because going into the fields as a single woman was dangerous. Gleaners were poor people who went behind the harvesters to pick any of the crop that was left behind. Boaz told the workers to leave extra for Ruth. Not only did Boaz protect Ruth and provide for her, but he fed her and sent food home to Naomi. Ruth 2:19-20 says:

*Then Ruth told her mother-in-law about the one at whose place she had been working. "The name of the man I worked with today is Boaz," she said. "The Lord bless him!" Naomi said to her daughter-in-law. "He has not stopped showing his kindness to the living and the dead." She added, "That man is our close relative; he is one of our kinsman-redeemers."*

A kinsman-redeemer is a male relative who, according to Old Testament law, had the responsibility to act on behalf of a relative who was in trouble or in need. This included redeeming or buying back lost property and marrying a relative whose husband had died so the family legacy could live on. And that's what Boaz did. Ruth 4:9-10 says:

*Then Boaz announced to the elders and all the people, "Today you are witnesses that I have bought from Naomi all the property of Elimelech, Kilion and Mahlon. I have also acquired Ruth the Moabitess, Mahlon's widow, as my wife, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property, so that his name will not disappear from among his family or from the town records."*

Boaz married Ruth and they had a son they named Obed. The story has a great ending and this family moved forward because Boaz understood the importance of future generations. Here's where it gets interesting. Ruth 4:17 says:

*They named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.*

So, Ruth became David's great-grandmother. And it gets even more interesting. Matthew 1:1 says:

*A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham:*

Then you get to verses 5 and 6.

*Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab, Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth, Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of King David.*

Boaz was the son of Rahab the prostitute who was instrumental in Israel's victory over Jericho. So – in the genealogy of Jesus we have Rahab the harlot and Ruth the Moabite. Deuteronomy 23:3 says

*No Ammonite or Moabite or any of his descendants may enter the assembly of the Lord, even down to the tenth generation.*

Yet Ruth the Moabite became the great-grandmother of King David!

And she and Rahab were in the genealogy of Jesus Christ.

Thank God that His family is all-inclusive!

Thank God that He does not discriminate against people based on race!

Thank God that He does not exclude us because of past mistakes!

Rahab the harlot became part of the family tree of Jesus! Talk about a second chance!

One who lived in sin became an ancestor to the One who saves from sin!

One who lived for the devil became an ancestor to the One who destroys the works of the devil!

One who was under a curse became an ancestor to the One who redeems from the curse!

One who was on the verge of death because ancestor to the One who gives eternal life!

One who was an outcast became part of the royal family of God!

What I want you to know today is this:

Regardless of your past, Satan cannot dictate your future!

Regardless of where you came from, Satan cannot control where you are going!

Regardless of your origination, Satan cannot dictate your destination.

Jesus wants to bring restoration to our devastation and give a new destination to future generations!

Have you sinned? Have you messed up? Do you need a second chance?  
Well - all of us are in that boat!  
But the family of God is a second-chance family!

Thank God that while we were sinners – while we were messed up – while we were enemies of God – He still loved us so much that He sent His son to die on our behalf so that we could be forgiven and saved!  
You can move forward as family by joining the family of God today!