

“Finding Our Way Back”

Living Wisely in an Unwise World

Ruth 1 :6-23

Pastor Jeff Stivason

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Jeff: Heavenly Father, we thank You for this day. We thank You for it because it is a day from Your hand. You have made it. And You’ve made it for us and for Your kingdom. And Father, we pray that as we go forth from here this morning that You will bless us and strengthen us and enable us to live faithfully in it.

Father, as we come to You, we know that we need to depend upon You for every good thing. We need to seek Your help to believe all that You have said. Father, we need Your help to be able to stand in the midst of the day when we need to stand. So we pray for that this morning.

And there are reasons that we need to pray that make life difficult and make standing all the more difficult. So we think about Frank and his physical problems, his hip. We pray for him. We ask that you’ll bless him and strengthen him. We pray that You’ll give him courage as he faces this problem. But we also pray that You’ll give the doctors solutions.

And Father, we pray for Sandy, and we ask that Your hand would be upon her as she continues to struggle and battle this cancer. And we pray, Father, for the victory. You’ve asked that we pray according to our will and yet trust in Yours for the final outcome, and so we pray for that today. We pray that You’ll make her well and heal her body.

Father, we pray for ourselves. We need it. And we ask that Your enabling grace and sustaining grace would be with us. And we know that it is because we stand in Jesus Christ. Lord, let us draw near to You that we might understand that grace. And we ask it in His name. Amen.

Men: Amen.

Jeff: All right. Well you don’t have Power Point today. But you do have an outline. I do want to tell you something, though, as we begin. I did add a point. So there’s an introduction, and then right after the introduction I’ve added a point, and you can just write it in now. It’s called *A Key Concept: Repentance*. So it’s right after the introduction if you’re going to be using the outline.

So let me just go over the outline today with you before we get started. I do want to talk about some introductory things that I think will be important for us to set the stage and to sink our teeth a little bit more into what we’ve been thinking about with regard to Ruth, and especially how we’ve been thinking about decision making as we look at Ruth through that lens. And then I want us to think about what is going to be a key concept. I actually had this in another place and I moved it because I wanted it to be a bit more central up front. And that is *repentance*. This is going to be about repentance. And one of the things that I want you to think about is that when we leave the boundaries of God’s law, of His moral will, one of the things that we have to do is that we have to find our way back within the boundaries. And a key concept to finding our way back is repentance. And we’ll talk about that in just a minute.

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But then I want us to ask a question, a very simple question, one we can all answer. And that is this. Why do we leave those boundaries anyway? And then I want us to think about how it is that we find our way back. So I want us to think about those three points this morning, including the introduction IV. And let’s do that. But let’s do that first of all by reading the text. And today I want us to read verse 6 through the end of the chapter. I know that I’m including some stuff in there that we’ve looked at from last time. But that’s okay because we’re going to be looking at this text. We’re going to be covering some features from 1-5 this morning without reading it anyway. So we’re going to return to almost the entire chapter. So let me read to you out of chapter 1, from verse 6 to the end of the chapter. Listen because this is the word of God.

“Then she arose, and her daughters-in-law, to return from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the fields of Moab that the LORD had visited His people and given them food. So she set out from the place where she was with her two daughters-in-law. And they went on the way to return to the land of Judah.

“But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, ‘Go, return each of you to her mother’s house. May the LORD deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. The LORD grant that you may find rest, each of you, in the house of her husband.’ Then she kissed them. And they lifted up their voices and wept. And they said to her, ‘No, we will return with you to your people.’

“But Naomi said, ‘Turn back, my daughters. Why will you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb, that they may become your husbands? Turn back, my daughters, go your way. For I am too old to have a husband. If I should say I have hope, even if I should have a husband this night and should bear sons, would you therefore wait till they were grown? Would you therefore refrain from marrying? No, my daughters, for it is exceedingly bitter for me for your sake that the hand of the LORD has gone out against me.’ Then they lifted up their voices and wept again. And Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.

“And she said, ‘See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods. Return after your sister-in-law.’ But Ruth said,

*‘Do not urge me to leave you,
Or to return from following you.
For where you go I will go,
And where you lodge I will lodge.
Your people shall be my people,
And your God my God.
Where you die I will die,
And there will I be buried.*

May the LORD do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you.’

“And when Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more. So the two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem. And when they came to Bethlehem the whole town was stirred because of them. And the women said, ‘Is this Naomi?’

“And she said to them, ‘Do not call me Naomi. Call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went away full, and the LORD has brought me back empty.

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Why call me Naomi when the LORD has testified against me, and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?’

“So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law with her, who returned from the country of Moab. And they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest.” All right.

Participant: The word of the Lord.

Men: Thanks be to God.

Jeff: Several years ago I got into doing my genealogy. And there are a couple of things that have a way of putting a damper on that kind of work. *(Laughter)* It’s not that hard. You know, doing genealogy work is not that hard. You can easily piece together the skeleton. But it’s putting the stories onto the skeleton that’s really difficult. I mean you have to really dig deep. I mean if you have the right tools, you can easily piece together a skeleton.

And so the first damper is digging deep. I mean you have to read through all kinds of boring stuff like church records in order to find the good juicy stuff about your relatives, right? *(Laughter)* You really do.

The second thing that puts a damper on this—and I’m just going to mention this and go back to the first—the second thing that puts a damper on it is that you find out all the horse thieves and all kinds of other things. *(Laughter)* It’s really true, you know? I mean, you know, I’ll tell you what. I’ll just tell you. Do you know Peter Stivason?

Participant: Yes.

Jeff: Some people would call him the first dictator of New York. *(Laughter)* However, the thing about that is that it appears that I come from a little fraternizing between his son and a maid in the house. *(Laughter)* So the line isn’t too pure. *(Laughter)* Anyway, oh well.

Participant: Can you explain that?

Jeff: No! *(Laughter)* No I can’t. *(Laughter)* All right. Let’s go back to the first.

So it’s easy to find somebody’s name that has “Reverend” in front of it. But when you do a little digging, it’s really difficult to find out why they became a Reverend. What about their call? Where did they serve? What did God do in their lives? What was it about their ministry that was effective and long lasting, if anything at all? You see, those are the things that are really difficult.

And when you come to a story like the one we have here, you come to a story where you’re told very, very few things. So we’re told that there was a famine in the land. But we’re told all of that in five verses. Five verses wrap up more than a decade, more than a famine. And we’re supposed to glean from that. But what?

And so we need to be really careful, because we’re walking in a story where we can do one of two things. This is the only image that I had today and I’m sorry that it’s not up there. But it’s an easy one for me to explain to you. It’s the difference between *exegesis* and *isogesis*. You know the term; I can tell already. *(Laughter)*

The term *isogesis* means to read into the text. Now let me tell you what I mean by that. If I were to say to you, “Here, I want you to take this notebook and I want you to take this book of Ephesians. I want you just to record. I want you in your prayer time and

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in your study time just to record everything that you think about the book of Ephesians. And then when you're done, give it back to me.”

So you finish up and you bring back the journal. And I take the journal from you and I say to you, “Now let me ask you a question. When I sit down and I read through these notes, am I going to learn more about Ephesians when I read them, or am I going to learn more about your own thought? Am I going to learn more about you?”

Now today, because we have a tendency to read the Bible, asking where am I in this story, we may in fact learn more about the individual than we do about the book of Ephesians. And that would be an example of isogesis—reading into the text my experience, and reading into the text my place in the story. That's an example of isogesis. I'm reading into the story.

Exegesis is when we do our best to read out of the text what is in fact there.

Now when we come to a story like this one and we have five verses, and we're told that there's a famine in the land and ten years is summarized as it is, we need to do our best to do exegesis, because we could do a lot of isogesis here. So what I want to do is that I want to lead you through a couple of things that I'm hoping will help set the context for some of the difficult things that I'm going to say this morning.

And the first thing I want you to notice is this. I want you to notice—and if you have your Bibles, you can just sort of look through with me and you can see the things that I'm going to say. The first thing I want you to notice is in verse 1. We are told that “*they sojourned in the land.*” This is Elimelech. This is Naomi. This is the family. They sojourn in the land.

Now you know what's happening. We have the bare basics. The basics are that there is a famine in Bethlehem. The basket of bread has no bread. And so they leave and go down to Moab.

Now we know the boundary markers. We've already talked about those. We'll talk about some of those later. But here's the point. The point is that they sojourn in the land.

Now that word *sojourn* means *temporary*. That's not the exact meaning; you understand that. But the idea of sojourning means a temporary stay. It doesn't mean a permanent stay in the land. It means that it has the idea of temporary, short-term, not staying, not permanent, that idea. That's the first clue that we get when we try to weave together something of the story.

The second thing I want you to notice is in verse 1 as well. And it's the word *country*. Do you know that word can also be translated *field*? And so when you look at Ruth chapter 1, it says this. “*In the days when the judges ruled there was a famine in the land. And a man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the field of Moab.*”

Now when you read that, you automatically get the idea that this temporary stay in Moab was an exchange of one field that was not producing for another field that was producing. There was obviously produce in the land of Moab. And so Elimelech decided to go where the produce was happening.

So in one sense it's as simple as a temporary solution. And when we think about it that way, when we think about it as a temporary solution,—and we even mentioned this last time,—we could think about Abraham, who went down to the land of Egypt. Not that that

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example should be definitive in our thinking. Ah, Abraham went; I may go too, because we talked about the problems that he incurred by going down into Egypt. But at least he had an example.

And so there’s a sense in which we might say, “All right; we get it, at least.” It doesn’t excuse, but it does explain. We understand what’s happening.

The third thing I want you to notice is this. I want you to notice that the sojourning in the field of Moab in verse 2 transitions just a bit. It says that they remained there. They went down into Moab and they remained there.

Now that’s not sojourning. And you get the sense that sojourning has come to an end. And they are there.

And then when you look at the text this way, from the temporariness to the field that becomes remaining there, if you read it this way, you get the sense—and you may not agree with me; I understand that. I’m reading out of the text, hopefully. But you may say to me, “I don’t agree with that.” That’s fine; I totally understand that. You’re wrong, but we’ll work that out later. (*Laughter*) We could read what happens next as a consequence. Elimelech dies.

I’m not saying it’s a consequence. I’m just saying that the way that the narrator builds the narrative that we might read it that way. Now if you were to pin me down and say, “Are you saying that’s a consequence?”, I would say to you, “Boy, I’m not saying that’s what God meant,” because I think that it’s really difficult to read history infallibly.

You know, infallibility comes really hard. (*Laughter*) Write in pencil, because infallibility is really difficult. And we’re not even really told that this is a consequence. But it reads as though it might be a consequence.

And that’s one of the things that was happening. That’s one of the things that happened as a result of them going down. But then there’s this. One of the things that we find is that while they were down there, something else happened that wasn’t simply a geographical transgression of the boundaries. But while they’re down there, there’s a moral transgression of boundaries.

You say, “What is that?” Both sons marry two Moabite women.

Now whatever we said about the boundaries last time, (and we did talk about the boundaries the last time.) And we even said that, you know, I’m not really sure that going down to Moab was a transgression of the boundaries. It says that they can’t come up and worship with us. And we know why that was.

But here is one of the reasons. Of course, they didn’t permit them to have rest and refreshment as they were making their way out of exodus. The land of Moab didn’t. But you remember that while they were doing that, it was the Moabites that enticed and seduced their young men to enter into relationships with their young women, which led them into idolatry.

And one of the things that we have here is the transgression of a moral boundary. They had married outside of the covenant people of God. And here’s the thing that you grab, and I’m going to talk about this more the next time we get together, because I don’t really want to stay here. But I just want you to think about this. Here is Naomi saying to her

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daughter-in-law Ruth, “Look. You see Orpah going home to her family and to her gods. You go as well.”

Now I think that at the very least it’s safe to say that an evangelistic zeal did not rest in the breast of Naomi. *(Laughter)* But I think that we can also say that there is a moral transgression of a boundary here. The sons marry two pagan women.

And then this. And then the story tells us at the end of the five verses that they remained there ten years. Anything temporary, anything about sojourning, anything about using a field that happened to be productive is gone. They’re there for a decade.

Okay, so that’s the situation. I think that as we do our best to read out of the text what is there, I think that sets us up for what we’re going to deal with this morning. I think that we have to understand that this is a bad situation that we find ourselves in. And this is a bad situation that Naomi finds herself in.

Now I just want to say this. And then I’ll open it up for any questions. Of course I know you guys, and you know that it’s open for any questions, as any time you want it to be, which I totally agree with. But I want to say this to you. This is one of those things that I think is difficult for our female counterparts to hear. Now I’m serious. Women love Naomi. I don’t know what it is.

So I’ve got a book on this that I’m working through, okay? And I got the text completed. I’m in the process of working it. Any time I’ve ever spoken on this in the past, one of the things I have always encountered—and this is why I love doing this with you guys!—*(laughter)*—any time in the past that I’ve talked about this with women, oh man, they’re in a bunch!

The funniest one, though,—and you know, you’ve got to be careful—the funniest one

Participant: Do you want to turn off the recorder? *(Laughter)*

Jeff: Don’t you touch that! *(Laughter)* I’m not going to say it, then. Thanks, Ted; I appreciate that reminder. *(Laughter)*

Participant: We can edit it out. *(Laughter)*

Second Participant: I think we’re going to edit out Sig’s earlier comments. *(Laughter)*

Jeff: All right. Any questions? *(Laughter)*

Participant: That was a really good explanation. *(Laughter)*

Jeff: All right. Anything?

Participant: You need to explain. You need to finish that. *(Laughter)*

Jeff: Finish what? *(Laughter)*

Participant: Finish what, Sig? *(Laughter)*

Jeff: Okay. So I was—*(Laughter)* So I taught on this one time and I did two sessions on it. And I thought to myself, “This is going pretty well, you know?” And at the very end I had a lady who was a missionary who was home on furlough. She just pulled out the old double barrel and gave it to me. Right on the spot I was a bleeding mess, you know? And I found out that there was a lot of emotional response to it.

The second one—and this is the funny one—is that I was doing a series elsewhere. I won’t tell you where. And I was talking about Naomi. And this woman said to me, “Elimelech made her go.”

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And I said, “Well you know, I understand why you would think that. There’s reason for thinking that with headship, and so forth. But you say it so dogmatically. Why are you saying it like that?”

She said to me, “Because I went to Sight and Sound, and I saw the whole thing.” (*Laughter*) You know Sight and Sound putting on the play?

Men: Yeah. Oh, yeah.

Jeff: Now as a pastor, that’s isogesis. As a pastor, you know, you have to handle that very carefully. I’m just saying that’s not the best source. All right. So seriously, do you have any questions about the last part? Yes?

Participant: Just to follow the woman just a little bit, though.

Jeff: Yes.

Participant: You know, she was playing the part of a submissive wife.

Jeff: Yes.

Participant: Immediately the situation affects her.

Jeff: Yes.

And she’s feeling the consequences, and she’s not alone.

Jeff: I know. But do you know what we’re doing when we do that? We’re reading Ephesians 5 and Proverbs 31 back into a time when everyone was doing what was right in his own eyes. Now that doesn’t necessarily say that Naomi and Elimelech were doing what was right in their own eyes at the time. But it sure does in some ways seem like they were doing—

Participant: I appreciate that.

Jeff: Yes, but going down like that.

Participant: (*Unclear*)

Jeff: To me that’s the deal clincher. That’s the nail in the coffin. Yes?

Participant: I thought it was interesting that the sons did not marry Moabite women until their father was dead.

Jeff: Well, isn’t that interesting? I mean yes, there’s some—

Participant: And even though he was in the land,--and granted, I’m reading into it,--but I’m wondering if there was some influence in the fact that they knew that they shouldn’t do that. And Elimelech was telling them.

Jeff: I know what you mean. And there is a bit of conjecture about how that all unfolds. But she seems to be there quite a while after her husband dies to allow this.

Okay. Well let’s talk now about a key concept that we’re going to need to think about. Let’s talk about *repentance* for a minute.

I don’t know if you notice this or not. But look at your text. From verse 6 all the way down to the end of the chapter, there is a word that occurs in the Hebrew that doesn’t always occur the same way in the English. But it’s the word that’s predominantly translated *return*. Have you seen it? It’s verse 6, *return*. Verse 7, *return*. Verse 8, *return*. Verse 10, *return*. 11 is *turn back*. 12 is *turn back*. 15 is *gone back*, but it’s the same word. *Return again*, 15. 16, *return*. 21 is *brought me back*, but it’s the same word. 22 is *return*.

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Now one of the things that we need to be aware of is this. The Holy Spirit is cluing us in to the fact that one of the major themes that we ought to be thinking about when we think about this particular text is *repentance*.

Participant: Amen.

Jeff: Because this word for *return* is not just about a geographical return. But it's the Old Testament's favorite word for repentance.

Now here's the thing that I want you to understand when we look at this word. When we look at this word, one of the things that you need to understand is that *our repentance oftentimes is broken, and it limps*. And so sometimes we need to repent of our repentance. Okay, right? Sometimes our repentance needs repenting of. And so I think that's one of the lessons that we're going to learn here.

I mentioned to you the last time that here is Naomi offering up a prayer. And she's offering up a prayer and she's saying, “May it be that the LORD grants you *chesed*, grants you rest, and grants you husbands.” And by the way, may it all be in the land of Moab, the land of curse. And if it's under your gods, then so be it. May you find the loving-kindness of the LORD in the land of Moab. May you find the rest that God promised in the land of Israel in the land of Moab. And may you find a nice pagan hubby.

When you look at it, it's Biblical language. *Chesed* is that word that any Israelite would have known. It's one of those key words that perk up your ears, that kind of thing. *Rest*, another one of those words.

But though it was theologically laden with the right words, it was totally misdirected, because it was aimed at the land of Moab, where she was sending these girls. And so one of the things that I want you to notice is that when Naomi returns, we are being told that Naomi is repenting. And we see that in her response.

She is repenting. She understands what most contemporary women don't understand when they read this text. She understands that God has stood in judgment over her. And her experience is a bitter one. And so her return has something to do with repentance.

And yet what we're going to find is that her return is even broken. She needs to repent of her return, just like we need to repent of our repentance. And so I think that one of the things that we need to understand is that a key concept about what we're looking at today is *returning to the boundaries of our God*.

Participant: What do you mean by “repent of our repentance?”

Jeff: Well what I mean is this. Sometimes, Sig, when somebody offends—well, let's put it this way. Let's create a scenario here, okay? So let's say that I've been offended by person A., okay? And let's say that person A. comes to me and wants to repent. But person A. has repented to me a number of times, and I know their shenanigans. However, person B. who is very dear to me is also dear to A. And A. is dear to them.

And so person B. comes to me and says, “Hey, did person A. come to you? Has he come to you in repentance?”

And you say, “Yes, he did.”

And he says to you, “Oh, I think something's happening. I think something's happening there that we haven't seen in a long time.”

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And you’re saying in your head, “I’m not sure this is genuine. And I know the Lord requires me seventy times seven, and I’m going to do it. But I’m not sold out on this. In fact, his repentance was not a particular repentance of a particular sin. It was this general repentance that I’ve heard before. I know I’m being carried along down the same road as I’ve been 500 times.” You know, that sort of thing.

But you say to yourself, “Because B. is dear to me, or because B. has a reputation,” or any one of those things, “I’m going to forgive A.”

Well that’s not why you ought to forgive A.

Participant: That’s right.

Jeff: And so I forgive A. But I need to repent even of that offer of forgiveness. I need to repent of that. Do you see what I mean?

Participant: Because of—

Jeff: Because of my motives.

Participant: Your motives.

Jeff: Yes, because of my inward motives, right? I mean this is why I’ve said to you guys before that Christianity is impossible. You know, it’s impossible with a natural, humanistic kind of religion, because it’s not just about externals. It’s about internals. And with those internals, when I stop and really think about my own heart motivations, I’m in a bad situation. It’s a good thing Jesus saved me.

And I wish I had a slide there. I’m sorry I don’t. But it’s following on Sig’s heels. This is Luther’s very first thesis of his 95. His very first thesis says this. *“When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said ‘Repent’ in Matthew 4:17, He willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.”*

Faith and repentance are lifelong fruits of conversion. They continue to grow and flourish. And I mean that they are fruits of conversion. Because I don’t want to rile up my brother Bill, I’m going to say this. I’m trying to lay eyes on my brother Bill. There he is, over there. *(Laughter)* Regeneration is monergistic. It is God’s work and God’s work alone. But when that tree begins to grow, it produces fruit. And the fruit that it produces is *belief and repentance*. And those are lifelong fruits.

And so the fruit of belief and the fruit of repentance needs to always be coming forth from my life. It’s always good for us to read back over the ancient creeds and say, “I believe these.” We remind ourselves. I believe these. Turn these into prayers and conversations with God. It’s always good for me to repent daily of my sins and to repent of my particular sins particularly, to use the phraseology of the Westminster Confession.

So I want to stress that this is a fruit of conversion. It’s a fruit of God’s grace in my life. However, we need to talk about what that is. What is it?

Well let me tell you what it is. And again I’m reminding myself of how many things that I wish you could see. I have a math problem here, okay? Something plus something equals something. That’s the formula, all right?

The first something is this: *the odiousness of sin*. What is true repentance? True repentance is understanding, having a sense and a sight of the danger of sin, of the odiousness of sin. Sin is disgusting. And if you don’t think that sin is disgusting, then you have not captured the odiousness of sin. Sin is odious.

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Now here’s the problem. The problem is that especially those of us who love the Puritans get ourselves into some bad cycles because we say that sin is odious. Yes, it is! And do you know what is even worse than the odiousness of sin? My deceptive heart. I don’t know if I really think that sin is odious. I can’t trust me. You know, I think that sin is odious, but I can’t trust myself. And if I can’t trust myself, how can I know that God is really showing me mercy? Oh, I am a reprobate! That’s the way that Puritanism gone awry works.

That’s not the way the Puritans worked, because this is a Puritan equation. If you look at the Westminster Confession, this is their math. This is the best of the Puritans. So how is it that they work it out?

They say that you’ve got to have the odiousness of sin. But then you have to add to that an apprehension of the mercy of God found in Christ Jesus. In other words, after looking at my sin I need to look up and see the mercy of God revealed in Jesus Christ. When I was yet a sinner He sent His Son to die for me. And that equals a turning from my sin to Him. And as the Confession says, *“and endeavoring to new obedience.”* That’s what repentance is.

I think that’s a wonderful formula for thinking about what repentance is. I have an apprehension of the odiousness of sin. I have an apprehension of the mercy of God. That equals a turning from my sin. Yes, Don?

Don: I believe that it was Robert Murray McCheyne who said that for every look that you take at your sin, take ten looks at Christ.

Jeff: Yes. Richard Baxter said the same thing in a different context. He was talking about meditating upon our sin. But it’s a great quote. I love that quote.

And let me say this to you, brothers. This is crucial. You will have people talk to you about internal reflection, self-reflection, self-evaluation. And I am all for it. But I want to tell you something. If you are a believer in Christ, never, never, never do your self-reflection apart from Jesus Christ.

Participant: Amen.

Jeff: It’s as simple as that.

All right. So what leads us beyond the boundaries? Well let me just say it like this. *What leads us beyond the boundaries?*

Jonathan Edwards had resolutions that were really important to him. He actually wrote them down over the course of his life. And then once a month he would reread them. He wanted to make sure that these resolutions were deeply embedded in his mind. One of his resolutions was this. It’s very important, one that stayed with me for a long, long time. He said, *“When I sin, I resolve to discover the root of that sin.”*

Now he said it in a much more flowery way in three- or four hundred pages. No, I’m just kidding. *(Laughter)* But he did say, “I want to uncover the root of my sin.” Why did he want to uncover the root of his sin?

You know why. When you were out in the yard, and you were down on your hands and knees, and your dad was telling you, “Hey, make sure you get the root!”, you know? You’re ripping off the weeds at the top. Your dad’s going, “You’re not getting to the root.” Why? Because it’s going to grow back. You’ve got to get it at the root.

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And so Edwards was saying, “I need to get it at the root.” And that’s what I want us to think about.

Now again, here we are. I’m sorry about this. But I went to James and I’ve got two columns here for you. And you can write it down this way. In the one column, when we think about James, we think about the cycle that leads to death. And when we think about the other, we think about the cycle that leads to life.

Now what is the cycle that leads to death? Let’s do life first. What’s the cycle that leads to life? There’s *testing, endurance, maturity* and *life*. Testing leads to endurance, which leads to maturity, which leads to life.

Now that’s an important one. But it’s the next one that I want us to focus on. *Temptation opens us up to lust—inward desire—which opens us up to sin, which leads to death*. So temptation, lust or desire, sin, death.

Now here’s the interesting thing about that list. James says that temptation doesn’t have to be sinful, does it? Look, if I’m walking down the street and I see a woman walking down the street, and my mind moves in a lustful direction toward her, she is not a sinful thing, is she? She’s a woman walking down the street. Through no fault of her own, my inward desires turn her into an object of my desire, right? And when that happens, what? I am led into sin. And when that cycle repeats itself, I eventually die. Okay?

Now I want you to think about something. Famine is the result of sin. But when we think about it, famine is not sin. Famine is a circumstance. And here they are. It’s just like anything else in our lives, right? Here these people encounter famine. And the question is what are they going to do with that circumstance?

They have inward desires. What are those inward desires going to produce in the face of that famine? The question is this. Are they going to go to the elders? Are they going to talk to the elders and say, “What are we going to do?”

And the elders say, “We’re not going to do anything. We’re all doing what’s right in our own eyes.” Whew!

And so they go, “All right; we can’t rely on the elders. What are we going to do?”

They get together a faithful group because there’s always a remnant in Israel. They get together with a group of the faithful and they say, “Look. We know that this is happening because of the curses in Deuteronomy. God is cursing us because of disobedience. So what do we need to do? I’ll tell you what. Let’s all get together and let’s pray daily for repentance. And let’s pull our food resources in the meantime and let’s wait this one out. God will save His people.”

Now that’s one way. That’s one response you could have offered. Or you could have said, “Hey, let’s head down to Moab for about a year.” You know what I mean? You could have done that. And that’s what they did.

But my point is that what leads us beyond the boundaries are the inward sinful desires. And they are responses to things that are sometimes hardships external to us.

And so one of the things that we have to do then is that we need to take hold of ourselves. We have to get a grip on ourselves. You know, we have to say this to ourselves

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before we get into this situation. I need to get hold of myself before I get into this, because if I ever need to think rightly, it's now. Okay?

What leads us back to kingdom borders? I want to jump to this. What leads us back to kingdom borders? Well, the grace of repentance leads us back. You jot these two verses down and you can take them with you. Acts 5:31 and Acts 11:18 are both examples of the grace of repentance.

Transcriber's Note: Acts 5:31. NKJV. *“Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.”*

Acts 11:18. *“When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, ‘Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life.’”*

Jeff: The text talks about God granting repentance to people. Repentance is a grace. It's a converting grace that arises from God's action in us. So it's a grace. So coming back is a grace.

But God doesn't repent. I repent. And one of the things that we see is that we see Naomi repenting. And I just want to point that out to you for a minute.

Participant: What was the second reference in Acts?

Jeff: 11:18. I want you to see this. The whole town gathers together. And Naomi says, “Don't call me Naomi. Call me Mara, Bitter.” *“For the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went away full, and the LORD has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi when the LORD has testified against me, and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?”*

Those words *testified against me, the Almighty*, the Almighty is a name that has the idea of a mountain judge. And He has testified against me. The mountain judge has found me guilty. And He has brought calamity into my life.

Now you could look at this as if Naomi is speaking in an accusatory way to God. But I don't think that that's necessarily the way that we have to take it, especially since the narrator is telling us that there's repentance going on here. The way that I think we could look at this is that we could see that Naomi is acknowledging the error, the sin of her ways, and the consequences that she's finding along her path, to be very bitter.

So we don't have to think of it as that she is accusing God. We can think of it as that she is reflecting upon what she did in light of who God is. And she says, “Yes. There are consequences to what I did. And my path is a bitter one.” It's another way of rendering it. Bill, go ahead.

Bill: I think you're pretty kind in that situation, because her response to the people indicates her root of bitterness in herself. She's bitter about God being bitter towards her.

Jeff: That's right. And here's—

Bill: If she were truly repenting, she wouldn't be bitter about God's bitterness towards her. She would be sitting there and saying, “I understand that I have consequences for this, and God is working out His plan sovereignly.” But she's not saying that, is she? She's bitter about the bitterness that God has given, which leads me to believe that she's not truly repentant.

Jeff: Yes. Well I think she's getting to that point. Right now she's got some repenting to do of her repentance.

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Bill: You’re reading into the text. *(Laughter)*

Jeff: I think that right now she’s uncovering a number of things. I think, for instance, that right now she’s recognizing the odiousness of her sin. I think that’s part of what’s going on. And when we do that, we recognize that our sin stinks.

Secondly, I think that here is what she is recognizing. I think she’s recognizing that she left for bread and she returned for bread. And because of bread, she lost an immense amount, right?

Think about that. When your life is bookended by bread, and you’ve lost your husband and your two children as a result, and your land, and you’re coming back poor, you recognize that God has the power to bring bread any time He wants to. And I returned for that bread, and I never had to leave. And maybe if I wouldn’t have left, I wouldn’t have lost. I think that’s the bitter path that she’s experiencing.

The last thing that I want to say to you guys is this. I want to give you a challenge, a parting challenge. And I want to jump to this because I want you to hear this. Let me look up the verse here. If you want to jot this down, it’s in 6:35, and I’ll read another verse, 6:51. Listen to these.

Participant: Which book?

Jeff: John. Sorry. John 6:35 and John 6:51. Jesus says, *“I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to Me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in Me shall never thirst.”*

And then 51 is very much like it. *“I am the living bread that came down from heaven.”*

Now look. Here’s the thing that I want to say to you. The thing I want to say to you as a parting challenge is this. *There is never a famine in our Bethlehem if we’re in Christ Jesus.*

Participant: Amen.

Jeff: And oftentimes we’ll get into situations where we feel like there’s a famine in our Bethlehem. We’ll feel as if God has left us, departed from us, left us alone struggling. But we need to remember passages like John 6:35, which says that the basket of bread is always full in our Bethlehem, as we stand in union with Christ. It is never empty. And if we think it’s empty, it’s because we’ve gone to Moab in our thinking or in our doing. We went to Moab. And it’s time to return to where the bread is.

As I thought about this text, I thought to myself that this is a helpful way for me to think about it. I need to always remember that there’s bread in the land as I stand in Jesus Christ.

Participant: Amen.

Jeff: Let me pray with you. Father in heaven, thank You for this day. Bless our time together and strengthen us by Your grace. And Father, always remind us that there is bread in our Bethlehem, for we ask it in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Men: Amen. *(Applause)*