

Growing Resilience

NAOMI'S LIFE HAD NOT BEEN EASY. The names of her two sons, Mahlon ("sickly") and Chilion ("wasting"), suggest that they were born with chronic illnesses. When famine shrunk their resources, Naomi and Elimelech moved to Moab to give their sons the best chance of survival. But Elimelech died, and Naomi was left alone in a foreign land. She found the best Moabite wives for her sons and prayed for healthy grandsons who would secure the family's inheritance. Sadly, the two young men died without heirs.

Childless and widowed, Naomi was bitter and distraught. She could have let these multiple tragedies overwhelm her and break her spirit. But she kept trusting the God who cared about her, and eventually she found hope and joy again. Naomi's life is a story of resilience.

TRAGEDY HAPPENS

Ministry families also experience unexpected tragedies, broken dreams, and the challenge of living in unfamiliar places. Today we face different famines—the shortage of friends or a lack of people who are willing to walk beside us through our pain. What can we learn from the story of Naomi?



“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.”

Matthew 5:4

LOVE GOD

Keep growing your relationship with God. The more you have experienced His love, the easier it is to hold onto His reassuring hand as He walks with you through the pain. When I need to immerse myself in God’s loving character, I always turn to Psalm 103 or Psalm 145 and focus on these vibrant portraits of God’s love. Naomi didn’t have the comfort of David’s psalms, but she must have talked about God’s loving character because Ruth was so eager to accept her faith (Ruth 1:16, 17).

KEEP PRAYING

Talk to God honestly about your experiences and listen to His words of strength and comfort. He is big enough to hold all your questions and to absorb all your tears and challenging emotions.

TRUST GOD

Naomi couldn’t see what God was doing behind the scenes. But she continued to do the best she could and trusted God to do the rest. Maybe the family’s migration to Moab and connection to Ruth was God’s way of correcting a genetic weakness that had developed in Elimelech’s family? Naomi never knew that she was the “great-grandmother” of a king (Ruth 4:16, 17), or that she would play a walk-on part in the lineage of Jesus.



LOVE OTHERS

Strengthen your relationships with your friends and family. Be there for them through their hard times, and they will be more likely to support you through your challenges. Ruth, Naomi, and Orpah must have cried together when their husbands died, and Naomi must have been a very loving and caring mother-in-law. Ruth’s dedication to Naomi and willingness to follow her into a vulnerable and uncertain future demonstrates their supportive relationship (Ruth 1:16, 17 and 4:14, 15).

KEEP TALKING AND LISTENING

Talk honestly about your challenges, hopes, and fears. Naomi was not afraid to be honest about her bitter feelings (Ruth 1:20, 21). Paul tells us to mourn with those who mourn (Romans 12:15), and Jesus says that those who mourn will be comforted (Matthew 5:4). When your family is overwhelmed by pain, make space for each person to talk about their feelings. Take time to comfort each other.

BE PREPARED

The most resilient families anticipate future challenges and prepare for them. Naomi and her family moved to a foreign land so they could feed and care for their sons. She arranged for them to marry good local women, hoping they would produce heirs. As a widow, Naomi realized she needed to return to her family in Bethlehem and then find a husband for Ruth to give them both security.



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Imagine your family life in a year, five years, or ten years. Pray for God's wisdom to help you anticipate and prepare for the needs of family members. Take a parenting course, teach your children essential life skills, or prepare wisely for retirement.

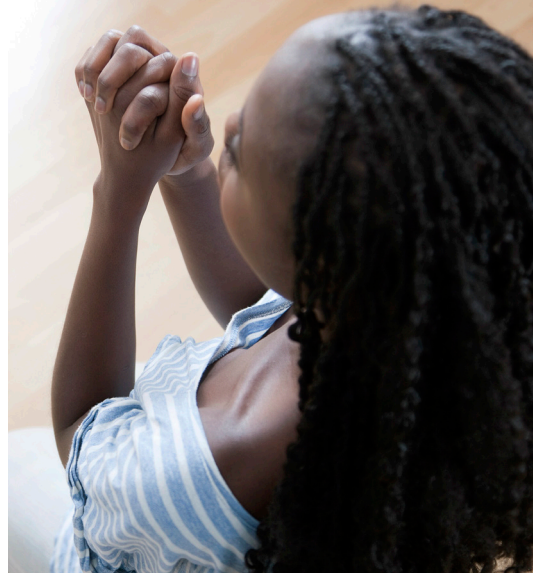
BE RESOURCEFUL AND FLEXIBLE

Naomi and Ruth had nothing. They were poor, vulnerable women. But Ruth was willing to gather the fallen stems of the barley harvest to give them something to eat. Find out if any resources, charities, support groups, or books might help your family through your current life challenges.

BE CREATIVE

Think creatively. Turn your situation upside down and look at it from every angle. Naomi's matchmaking plans seem bizarre from a 21st-century perspective! But she was searching for creative solutions to their serious problem of poverty and insecurity. Without a male relative, they would be very vulnerable in their society.

Ask God to help you see your life from His perspective and to show you creative solutions.




REMEMBER GOD'S CARE

We faced challenging situations in our own ministry—profoundly critical church members; miscarriages; unbelievable tragedies; traumatic transitions; and long-term, misdiagnosed illness. But, when the fires burned down and we sifted through the ashes, we always found some grains of gold. Now we can see how God was growing us, shaping us, refining us, and giving us unexpected gifts and experiences that developed our empathy for others and provided us with all kinds of resources.

It's hard to notice the diamonds when your life feels like dust. But God is still scattering them along the path. Become a diamond hunter. Find at least one sparkling moment in every day. Write it in your journal. Focus on every scrap of evidence of God's love for you, however small (Philippians 4:8).

Make a timeline of your life and record all the ways God has cared for you in the past. Look for the patterns of His loving presence, sometimes hidden in the tapestry of darkness, but always there in threads of gold (Deuteronomy 31:6).

KEEP GROWING

Although most of us would never choose the tragedies that tumble into our paths, God will use them to grow us in amazing and unexpected ways, if we let Him. Like Naomi, we may feel bitter for a while, but He will lovingly bring us to a place of peace and joy (Jeremiah 29:11). 

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