

# Handfuls On Purpose

## Studies in the Book of Ruth

### Chapter Six

#### **The Pathway of Blessing through the Graveyard of Pride**

“<sup>18</sup> When she saw that she was steadfastly minded to go with her, then she left speaking unto her. <sup>19</sup> So they two went until they came to Bethlehem. And it came to pass, when they were come to Bethlehem, that all the city was moved about them, and they said, *Is this Naomi?* <sup>20</sup> And she said unto them, Call me not Naomi {Naomi: that is, Pleasant}, call me Mara {Mara: that is, Bitter}: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. <sup>21</sup> I went out full, and the LORD hath brought me home again empty: why *then* call ye me Naomi, seeing the LORD hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me? <sup>22</sup> So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter in law, with her, which returned out of the country of Moab: and they came to Bethlehem in the beginning of barley harvest” (Ruth 1:18-22).

Most people make some kind of New Year’s resolutions and plans for each new year. They want to start the new year off with renewed goals. This is going to be the year they finally do what they have wanted to accomplish for many preceding years but have never gotten around to it. These people face the New Year excited by its potential. It is almost like getting a brand new start on life.

It could be a new start if it wasn’t for the failures of the previous year they will drag into the new year like a ball and chain on their leg. We just can’t seem to escape some of these failures and struggles of life. Like unpaid bills and broken relationships, they just continue to haunt us.

We can only start new when we are willing to confront our past failures head on and begin to deal with the behavioral problems that caused them. Otherwise new starts always conclude with the same old endings.

There is the story of the zoo preparing a new Polar Bear exhibit. They were supposed to have a big, beautiful, natural environment built when the Polar Bear arrived, but when it got there it was not finished. So they put a cage in the middle of this new area until the new environment was completed. The cage was just large enough to take three paces one way, stand up, turn around and take three paces back. For six months that is where and how that Polar Bear lived. The natural environment was finally completed all around the cage and the cage was removed. What do you suppose the Polar Bear did? That’s right, three paces one direction, stand up, turn around and three paces in the other direction.

We establish patterns of living that are harmful to us, sometimes when we are not even aware of it. God is actively involved in our lives to change those harmful behavior patterns. Sometimes the pathways are beaten in pretty hard. That is where we pick up our story in the book of Ruth.

Naomi (typical of backslidden Israel) has disobeyed God, moved to Moab and her husband has died in Moab. Her two sons marry Moabite sisters and they die in Moab. Naomi decides to return to Bethlehemjudah because God’s chastisement of famine is over. Even though this family tried to escape God’s chastisement, they could not. God was intent on change. Not just a change in action, but a change of heart (motivation).

According to Ruth 1:13, Naomi was filled with bitterness toward God about what had happened to her. She recognizes that what had happened came from the chastising “hand of God.” She was not yet willing to recognize why God’s hand of chastisement was upon her. Her heart was broken by the conditions of her chastisement, but her heart was not yet changed. She was yet unwilling to face up to the cause of her chastisement. She (Israel) had sinned. She was not yet repentant about it; otherwise she would not have been bitter about it. God’s chastisement was about to lead her back to the place she was supposed to be, but her heart was still in Moab (in rebellion). The cage was removed, but her patterns of life still needed to be dealt with. God will begin to show her the blessing of obedience to His Word, even in adversity.

**Naomi gives up on trying to convince Ruth to stay in Moab (Ruth 1:18).** Naomi's mindset is still earthbound and temporal. This has always been Israel's main spiritual problem. It is obvious Naomi is still being motivated by her pride.

Why do you suppose Naomi didn't want to take these Moabite women back to Bethlehem with her? Ruth and Orpah would be a walking testimony to Naomi's (Israel's) disobedience to God. Pride not only can motivate us to do some pretty foolish things, pride can keep us from doing the right thing. Pride is not a character attribute. Pride is part of our sin nature and we need to recognize it for what it is, i.e., a motivator to sin. One of the central purposes of God's chastisement is to break the stranglehold pride has on our lives.

“<sup>14</sup> But if ye will not hearken unto me, and will not do all these commandments; <sup>15</sup> And if ye shall despise my statutes, or if your soul abhor my judgments, so that ye will not do all my commandments, *but* that ye break my covenant: <sup>16</sup> I also will do this unto you; I will even appoint over {Lit., upon} you terror, consumption, and the burning ague {fever}, that shall consume the eyes, and cause sorrow of heart: and ye shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it. <sup>17</sup> And I will set my face against you, and ye shall be slain before your enemies: they that hate you shall reign over you; and ye shall flee when none pursueth you. <sup>18</sup> And if ye will not yet for all this hearken unto me, then I will punish you seven times more for your sins. <sup>19</sup> And I will break the pride of your power; and I will make your heaven as iron, and your earth as brass: <sup>20</sup> And your strength shall be spent in vain: for your land shall not yield her increase, neither shall the trees of the land yield their fruits” (Leviticus 26:14-20).

**I believe the United States stands upon the brink of a similar experience with God.** When God says “I will make your heaven as iron” (v 19), He is referring to a rainless sky. When God says He would make “your earth as brass” (v 19), He is referring to a barren, crop less ground. Together these two things result in famine because no food is produced.

God says the purpose of this chastisement was to break the “pride of your power,” or the holding power of pride. When Ruth 1:1 says “there was famine in the land,” God is telling us His intent was breaking the holding power of the pride of Israel that kept her from admitting her sin before God and others (repentance).

**Pride is at the root of most sin and it is the sin that keeps so many people from God's blessing and fellowship (even from getting saved).**

“<sup>1</sup> Why standest thou afar off, O LORD? *why* hidest thou *thyself* in times of trouble? <sup>2</sup> The wicked in *his* pride doth persecute the poor: let them be taken in the devices that they have imagined. <sup>3</sup> For the wicked boasteth of his heart's desire, and blesseth the covetous, *whom* the LORD abhorreth. {blesseth . . . : or, the covetous blesseth himself, he abhorreth the LORD} <sup>4</sup> The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek *after God*: God *is* not in all his thoughts. {God is...: or, all his thoughts are, There is no God} <sup>5</sup> His ways are always grievous; thy judgments *are* far above out of his sight: *as for* all his enemies, he puffeth at them. <sup>6</sup> He hath said in his heart, I shall not be moved: for *I shall* never *be* in adversity. <sup>7</sup> His mouth is full of cursing and deceit and fraud: under his tongue *is* mischief and vanity. {or, iniquity} <sup>8</sup> He sitteth in the lurking places of the villages: in the secret places doth he murder the innocent: his eyes are privily set against the poor. <sup>9</sup> He lieth in wait secretly {Lit.; in the secret places} as a lion in his den: he lieth in wait to catch the poor: he doth catch the poor, when he draweth him into his net. <sup>10</sup> He croucheth, *and* humbleth himself, that the poor may fall by his strong ones. <sup>11</sup> He hath said in his heart, God hath forgotten: he hideth his face; he will never see *it*” (Psalm 10:1-11).

God cannot be in any of the thoughts of the person filled with pride because pride fills us with our self until there is room for nothing else.

“*When* pride cometh, then cometh shame: but with the lowly *is* wisdom” (Proverbs 11:2).

This is where Naomi is in this part of the book of Ruth. She is filled with pride and shame is at the doorstep of her life (Ruth 1:19).

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

The last “they” in the above Ruth 1:19 is in the feminine gender. “They” refers to the other women of Bethlehem, Naomi’s peers. “They” say, “Is this Naomi?” Naomi had been a woman of wealth and influence, but now she is a widow without children, which was the worst state of destitution a Jewish woman could be in. To make the matters even worse, she has a Gentile daughter-in-law with her as a testimony to the disobedience of her sons.

These women of Bethlehem remembered Naomi as a beautiful rose in an expensive vase. Now the rose is withered and the vase is tarnished and cracked. Pride brought her to the place of shame, but this was a good place to be if you look at her circumstances from God’s perspective. It is here, in the time of shame that pride is brought to its knees in humility before God and others.

Pride is a yoke of bondage that shame forces us to confront and deal with. When a person struggles to keep his pride, he is actually struggling against the work of God in his life in that God is working in our lives to remove pride. **Pride is one of the three central sources of sin.**

“For all that *is* in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world” (I John 2:16).

God uses chastisement to bring pride to shame and uses shame to bring the prideful sinner to humility. Only the humbled will be willing to publicly acknowledge (confess) their sin.

“<sup>20</sup> And she said unto them, Call me not Naomi, call me Mara: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. <sup>21</sup> I went out full, and the LORD hath brought me home again empty: why *then* call ye me Naomi, seeing the LORD hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me” (Ruth 1:20-21)?

Proud people will refuse to acknowledge their failures before anyone. Just like the Polar Bear, even when the cage of chastisement is removed, they will continue in the same old pattern of bondage. Before genuine repentance can ever come, the issue of pride must be confronted head on. Before anyone will ever deal with the pride in his life, he must be enabled by whatever circumstances necessary to recognize pride as harmful and sinful.

**The pathway to blessing always goes through the gateway of humility into the graveyard of pride.** The very root of arrogance and pride is our refusal to consider God’s will and respond to Him Biblically. Instead, the arrogant, prideful person just goes on his way thinking God will accept and bless him apart from an obedient relationship with Him.

Pride is usually the fountain head of all quarreling, jealousy, anger, factions, slander, gossip and most other sins of this nature. The great difficulty in ever dealing with the sin of pride is that pride refuses to allow us to even look at it as the source of a problem. Pride is a stubborn and arrogant alter-ego that bullies and manipulates us into always looking somewhere else or at someone else. Isaiah 14:12-15 tells us it was the pride of Satan which was the cause of his fall into sin.

“<sup>12</sup> How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer {or, O day star}, son of the morning! *how* art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! <sup>13</sup> For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: <sup>14</sup> I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. <sup>15</sup> Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit.”

Therefore, pride is the root cause of all evil and all sin.

“<sup>4</sup> And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: <sup>5</sup> For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. <sup>6</sup> And when the woman saw that the tree *was* good for food, and that it *was* pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be

desired to make *one* wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat” (Genesis 3:4-6).

The only means to overcoming the crippling sin of pride is to accept God’s crutch of humility. Either we see ourselves stumbling in the darkness and humble ourselves before God or God will humble us with chastisement and shame. He will do that because He cannot bless us and use us until we deal with the sin of pride in our lives.

“And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted” (Matthew 23:12).

The word “abased” is from the Greek word *tapeinoo* (tap-i-no'-o). It means to be brought low. The idea is that the person who lifts himself up in pride will be humiliated or brought down in shame. The person who humbles (same word, *tapeinoo*) himself, God will exalt to a position of prominence. James says almost the same thing.

“Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up” (James 4:10).

Always have pity on proud people. Their arrogance is destined for the humbling hand of God on their lives just like it was on Naomi’s. It is not a matter of *if*. It is a matter of *when*. I Peter 5:5-7 gives us wise instruction on how to escape the prison of our own pride. We would be wise to listen and obey.

<sup>5</sup> Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all *of you* be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. <sup>6</sup> Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: <sup>7</sup> Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you. <sup>8</sup> Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: <sup>9</sup> Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world” (I Peter 5:5-9).

If we want to succeed in our commitments to Christ and our resolutions to change, we will need to learn to humble ourselves before the Lord. If you will not do that, I Peter 5:8 applies especially to you. Expect your life to be *lion meat*. Lions attack the lame and crippled first. Anyone who refuses to deal with pride as sin is already crippled by it. That person should just hang a sign around his neck: *LION MEAT*.

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## The Pathway of Blessing through the Graveyard of Pride

1. According to Ruth 1:21, what was Naomi “full” of when she “went out”? \_\_\_\_\_  
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2. What was she “empty” of when the Lord brought her “home again”? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. If we are not willing to confront our past failures head on and begin to deal with the behavioral problems that caused them, how will all *new beginnings* conclude? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. According to Ruth 1:13, what was Naomi’s attitude toward the LORD, for His attempts at changing her heart through chastisement? \_\_\_\_\_  
Was she still acting in pride? \_\_\_\_\_
5. According to Ruth 1:18, what was probably the central reason why Naomi didn’t want Ruth to go back to Bethlehem with her? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. From Leviticus 26:19, what was God’s intent in his chastisement here? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. What two things does pride keep us from in our relationship with God?  
A. BL \_\_\_\_\_ G  
B. FEL \_\_\_\_\_ P
8. From Psalm 10:4, why is God not in ANY of the thoughts of the prideful? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. According to Proverbs 11:2, what will always be the end result of pride in a person’s life? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
A. Compare your answer to Ruth 1:19. Was this the result of Naomi’s pride? \_\_\_\_\_  
B. Is shame a bad thing if it accomplishes its purpose? \_\_\_\_\_  
C. Can shame and pride exist together in a person’s life? \_\_\_\_\_  
D. What is the only reason shame can continue to exist? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. From I John 2:16, what are the three central sources of all temptation and sin?  
A. \_\_\_\_\_  
B. \_\_\_\_\_  
C. \_\_\_\_\_
11. What happens in Ruth 1:20-21 to show that Naomi was humbled? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

12. What is the great difficulty in dealing with our pride? \_\_\_\_\_

13. Does pride ever recognize itself, even when it is obvious to everyone else? \_\_\_\_\_

14. According to Matthew 23:12, what is God's solution to pride? \_\_\_\_\_

A. Do you regularly practice this? \_\_\_\_\_

B. Today, will you decide to make this a regular practice of your life? \_\_\_\_\_

C. Have you ever considered yourself to be *Lion meat*? \_\_\_\_\_