



Near and Now

When My Calling Is Exhausting and Produces Burnout – Naomi

By Linnea Peterson

Warm-up Question

Have you ever felt like God has led you in the wrong direction or used you in a way you regret?

What was that like?



Photo by Kat J on [Unsplash](#).

Discussion Questions

1. What do you see in this image?
2. What do you feel looking at this image?
3. What stories from your own life does this image bring to mind?
4. What stories of the world does this image bring to mind?

The Almighty has dealt bitterly with me

Read [Ruth 1:19-22](#).

Bible Story Reflection

In Christian contexts, there is often a sense that blaming God is unbiblical and un-Christian. I used to have a Facebook friend who frequently, even when he felt uncertain or discontented with his life, would post things like, “God is good. Always. To me. Always.” Yet when we really read the Bible, we find that blaming and questioning God is a common biblical practice. On the cross, Jesus cries out to God with the words of Psalm 22: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46).

Here, Ruth’s mother-in-law, commonly known as Naomi despite her attempt to rename herself Mara, criticizes God multiple times in just a few verses: “the Almighty has dealt bitterly with me,” she says, and then, “the Lord has dealt harshly with me, and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me” (Ruth 1:20-21). There is no record of an attempt to gloss over her struggles and insist that God is good to her in spite of the evidence and her feelings. Naomi/Mara allows herself to lament the deaths of her husband and sons and to blame God for her extreme misfortune.

Of course, it’s possible to go too far in blaming God for our circumstances, just as it is possible to go too far in blaming our parents, systemic inequities, bad bosses, or other factors in our lives. We live in a world that is not fair, and many of us have experienced myriad traumas that were not our fault. That is true. And, at the same time, there are other times when we do have a hand in our own suffering.

Either way, the question arises: What do we do next? I often find it helpful to take stock of the situation and understand how I got where I am. Which parts of my situation are of my own creation, and what can I learn from them in order to avoid winding up here again? What parts of my situation are *not* of my own creation, and what do I need (validation, apologies, distance) in order to let go of the pain and anger I feel? It may be counterintuitive, but denying the past can often make moving on harder, not easier. Reckoning with the past, while messy and painful, is an important step toward moving forward--even if it means spending time lamenting first.

Discussion Questions

1. How did you arrive at your current vocation? Did a sense of God’s call have anything to do with it?
2. Have you ever felt that God has dealt bitterly or harshly with you? Was that in a vocational context or somewhere else?
3. Have you heard that questioning or blaming God is un-Christian? Were you surprised by Naomi/Mara’s language here about God?

4. Without getting into specifics, have you ever felt like God has called you to something that went badly or that you regretted doing? Having seen how it turned out, do you still think God led you there?
5. How do you decide who to blame when things go wrong in your life? When do you know it's time to accept responsibility, versus when do you know that others are to blame? Do you ever blame God? When?
6. When trying to figure out how to move on from something difficult, do you generally try to ignore the past or reckon with it? How does that usually go? Would you like to try something different?

Activity Suggestions

Taste foods and beverages that are bitter, like black coffee, kale, dark chocolate, and Brussels sprouts. Who likes them? Who doesn't?

Give each person a cup of water and a small towel. Encourage people to write bitter things in their lives on the table with water. Dry off the words with the towel, erasing them.

Prayer Concerns

Parents who have lost children, people who have been shamed for their lament, and all who feel that God has dealt bitterly with them

Closing Prayer

Sometimes, O God, life is full of sorrow, and my heart aches. Hear my cries, and lift me up again. In the name of +Jesus, Amen.

