

# Small Group Guide

Week of April 21, 2024

Speaker: Mark Delaney

The Hope of Grace



## Icebreaker



- If you could create your own "Chopped" basket of ingredients for a chef to cook with, what bizarre items would you include?
- Share about a time you went grocery shopping on an empty stomach.



## Discussion



- Have you ever found yourself in a situation where you were spiritually "hungry" or emotionally drained, and it affected your decision-making? How did you handle it?
- Even when the darkness seems unending, God is actively at work. Can you share a time when you experienced God's presence and purpose during a difficult season of life?
- Ruth's decision to cling to Naomi was a profound expression of faith. What does it mean to you to have a faith that is genuine and profound, even when the journey is tough?
- How can we guard against reducing our faith to a transactional relationship with God?
- Naomi allowed her pain to redefine her identity, calling herself "Mara" (bitter). Have you ever struggled with letting your circumstances or emotions define you? How can we remind ourselves of our true identity in Christ?
- The sermon likens our bitter situations to the bitter waters of Marah, which were made sweet by throwing in a piece of wood (a symbol of the cross). How has the cross of Jesus transformed your life or brought sweetness to your circumstances?



## Thought for the Group



Naomi was a woman who had experienced deep heartbreak – the loss of her husband and both sons, leaving her a widowed foreigner in Moab. Her daughter-in-law Ruth made the incredible decision to cling to Naomi and stay with her.

Ruth's choice was an act of amazing faith. She chose to leave her past behind in Moab and follow the one true God, committing herself fully to Naomi and the God of Israel.

When they arrived back in Bethlehem, Naomi was so overcome with bitterness from her tragic losses that she asked to be called "Mara" which means bitter. Her pain had redefined her identity.

But, we are reminded that even when we face profound bitterness, the cross of Jesus has the power to transform it. Just as Moses threw a piece of wood into the bitter waters which became sweet, the cross is the solution for our bitter situations. When we bring our suffering to Jesus, He can exchange it for His boundless grace.

The story transitions from a season of famine to one of harvest, pointing to the truth that though we may face difficulty now, God promises to bring fruitfulness in His perfect timing.

God doesn't erase our problems, but He transforms us through them as we surrender to Him. The cross allows us to give our heartbreak to our Savior so He can bring forth hope.



## Next Steps



- Spend some time in prayer, honestly bringing the difficult situations, pain, or bitterness you are facing before the Lord. Make a conscious choice to surrender those things, asking Jesus to transform them through His grace and redemptive power.
- Find an accountability partner, and ask them to check in with you periodically about how you are handling the difficulties you face. Allow them to lovingly point out if your responses seem to be coming from a place of spiritual hunger rather than spirit-filled wisdom.