

Letters to the Church



JANUARY '25

DEARLY BELOVED IN THE LORD,

There are seasons when all the vibrant colors of our lives seem to turn gray. The thought of taking another step forward feels exhausting. What once seemed promising now seems hopeless. Despair has entered in, and the haunting expectation is that tomorrow will be just like today.

Naomi found herself in a season of despair like this when tragedy stripped her of all that she held dear. She became a shell of the woman she once was, “left without her two sons and her husband” (**Ruth 1:4**). The song of her life fell into a minor key. All the best felt behind her now, and, in her sorrows, she even left her name. She told the women of her town, “Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me” (**Ruth 1:20**). In Hebrew, Naomi means pleasantness, but that didn’t feel like the woman she was anymore. Mara means bitterness; in her despair, this felt like the woman she would now be until her dying day.

One of the challenges in a season of despair is that we can lose perspective. The pain of the present can cast a shadow over all of our hope for the future. We become pessimistic, our thoughts and words become biting, and we feel we are the only ones being realistic about how full the glass of our life actually is—*there’s barely any water left in there*.

It’s not true, but it sure *feels* that way, doesn’t it? Left long enough walking down the hallway of despair, we don’t *feel* anything at all.

In moments like this, I turn to the Psalms. I’ve learned to let their words of lament become my language for prayer. As I do, my numbness gives way to pain, which gives way to tears, which gives way to comfort. I remember my God again. I recall His goodness. He has not abandoned me to bitterness; he has given me hope.

And his hope gives me eyes to see again the perspective I’d lost of eternity. Yes, there is grief in this life, but only in this life, not in the life to come. We will outlive every tragedy, every heartbreak, and every season of despair. One day, our God will redeem every loss and wipe away every tear. All our present suffering is not worthy of comparison to the eternal glory awaiting us. (**Romans 8:18**)

And this hope also gives me eyes again to see the perspective I’d lost of this life as well. Yes, there is grief in this life, but *not only* grief. God is still God, and God is still good, and God is still working for good, even here and now. Though it might *feel* like he is far away, he is not. Though it may *feel* like he is silent, he is not. Though it may *feel* like he has forsaken me, he has not. Though it may *feel* that he took away all that was pleasant and has left me only bitterness, it’s not true – that’s just how it *feels*.



I need to let my feelings follow my faith. I cannot let go and allow the season of despair to swallow me whole. Often, I need to let someone who loves me in close enough to strengthen my hand in God again (**see 1st Samuel 23:16**). As we often do, in her sorrows, Mara intended to shove everyone away and resign herself to a life of withering. But in her daughter-in-law, she had someone who loved her and believed that her God was still good, even when Mara didn't. Ruth provided the proper perspective when Mara lost it. Eventually, the gray gave way to colors again, her cup was looking far from empty again, and despair gave way to hope again.

Ultimately, all our despair will be redeemed by resurrection, but God will also work his good in our lives until that day. In Mara's case, in perhaps a little more than a year's time, the women were calling her Naomi again. God hadn't abandoned her to bitterness. He gave her a grandson who would grow to become "a restorer of life and a nourisher" for her in her old age. He gave her a daughter-in-law who loved her and was more to her "than seven sons" (**Ruth 4:15**). Don't allow seasons of despair to cause you to lose hope (like Mara did). God is still good, and He is still working all things together for good (**Romans 8:28**). In fact, all the pleasantness that God has in store for Naomi has only just begun, just as her great-grandson sang:

The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot. The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance.

PSALM 16:5-6

YOUR PASTOR & SERVANT,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be the initials 'JMW' or similar, written in a cursive style.