

“ME, TOO!”  
by Rom A. Pegram (5/21/17)

Writer Anne Lamott has said that the most powerful sermon in the world consists of two words: **Me, too!** I don't know about you, but I think Lamott is on to something here!

Folks, when you're in the midst of a Plan B-type situation, dealing with unmet expectations, or when you're hurt or doubting, questioning or crying, *there's nothing more healing than knowing ... someone else has been there*. When you're going through those types of emotionally-challenging times in your life, there's nothing more comforting than hearing someone say, “I know what you're going through” and mean it! “Me, too!” That's the words we long to hear—knowing there's someone who understands and will stand beside us as we go through our Plan B situation in life...

I don't know how long it's been since you've read the OT Book of Ruth, but if you've been longing for that story, *today's your lucky day*, because that's where we're headed! There's a woman in the Book of Ruth who's a major player and her name is *Naomi*. Naomi kind of reminds me of Joseph in the fact that her life seems to be one Plan B situation after another—never letting up! Let me take just a few moments to share her story with you ... and then we'll get into the scripture for today:

Ruth is a book that's about the subtle ways God works in the lives of people. It's a book for those who wonder where God is in the midst of their Plan B situations in life—especially those who've gone through *serious reversals* in their lives. In fact, that's exactly where the Book of Ruth begins—with the predicament of a good woman named Naomi who lives in the land of Judah. Naomi's family is going through a very rough time. An economic depression has hit ... and her husband loses his job. The family ends up losing everything they have, so—*out of desperation*—they move to a foreign country called Moab. (*If you're wondering where Moab was, your pastor was there this past January; it's in modern-day Jordan...*)

Now, Naomi is not only dirt poor at this time, but she's now living amongst a people who speak a different language; she's absolutely thrown head-first into a culture that is unfamiliar to her—*strange*, if you will. The whole situation is a major Plan B for her. But, at least she has her family around her—her husband and her two boys—to watch over her and care for her. That is ... *until her husband suddenly gets sick and dies!*

Can you imagine what a blow this is to Naomi? She's not only lost everything and had to move to a foreign country, but now she's lost the love of her life (*not to mention her primary means of support!*) Thank God she at least still has her two sons to help her!

Naomi has a bit of a reprieve in her life; over the next 10 years, both her boys find wives and marry—life seems to settle down just a bit. Naomi's still a poor widow, living in a foreign land, but at least she has the comfort of a growing family. She gets along well with her daughters-in-law, Orpah (*not Oprah, but Orpah!*) and Ruth—looking forward to being a grandmother someday...

Then, once again, the unimaginable happens to Naomi! Naomi's two sons, the boys who mean everything to her, also get sick and die—just like their father. You can just imagine the crying out to God that took place after that! “Why me?”

Folks, Naomi has experienced economic devastation, lost all her possessions, and she'd been forced to move to a foreign land. Now, she's also lost her husband and her two sons. She a widow living with her two daughters-in-law, who are now also widows themselves. *She's been stripped of everything that could possibly bring her HOPE!*

Here's how the story ends: At the end of her rope, Naomi decides she's going to move back to Judah, the land where she came from. But, she's moving back to nothing. As a widow, you see, she has no name, no identity, and no rights. She probably knows at this point that she'll live out the rest of her life as ... *a beggar*. (Naomi was in such despair here that she even changed her name to ... *Mara*, meaning *bitter*.)

*Who can blame Naomi for this?* She's lost everything that means anything to her. *But, she hasn't lost her ability to care about others' needs.* Before she leaves Moab, she sits down with her daughters-in-law and has a serious conversation with them. She tells them they should return to their homes and families and try to start over. She tells them that they're young, they can find new husbands, and they shouldn't tie themselves down to her miserable excuse for a life. But, look what happens next (Ruth 1:11-18, NLT):

But Naomi replied, “Why should you go on with me? Can I still give birth to other sons who could grow up to be your husbands? <sup>12</sup> No, my daughters, return to your parents' homes, for I am too old to marry again. And even if it were possible, and I were to get married tonight and bear sons, then what? <sup>13</sup> Would you wait for them to grow up and refuse to marry someone else? No, of course not, my daughters! Things are far more bitter for me than for you, because the LORD himself has raised his fist against me.” <sup>14</sup> And again they wept together, and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law good-bye. But Ruth clung tightly to Naomi. <sup>15</sup> “Look,” Naomi said to her, “your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods. You should do the same.” <sup>16</sup> But Ruth replied, “Don't ask me to leave you and turn back. Wherever you go, I will go; wherever you live, I will live. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God. <sup>17</sup> Wherever you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD punish me severely if I allow anything but death to separate us!” <sup>18</sup> When Naomi saw that Ruth was determined to go with her, she said nothing more.

*Here, folks, we see the first signs of HOPE in this story!* And, it comes through God's gift of COMMUNITY! In Naomi's darkest hour, when all hope seems to be absent, God gives Naomi ... *Ruth!* (Yes, community can be just one person—whoever is willing to stand alongside you in the midst of your deepest pain or struggle!) God gives Naomi someone who knows—without a doubt—her pain and loss, but can still point her toward *the hidden hope* in her situation. God gives her someone who can say ... “Me, too!”

Interestingly, *I don't think Naomi actually realizes what an incredible gift God has given her in Ruth!* When they return together to Judah (in Israel) all the women recognize Naomi, and she begins to share with them in vv. 20-21a: "Don't call me Naomi," she responded. "Instead, call me Mara, for the Almighty has made life very bitter for me. <sup>21</sup> I went away full, but the LORD has brought me home empty...." *Yet, Ruth was standing right there beside her...* How could she miss that?

At this moment, Naomi is blind to the amazing grace of God in her life. She underestimates, in the midst of her Plan B, just how precious the gift of community really is! (And you and I tend to do the same thing when our life is scripted ... and things aren't turning out the way *we* wrote our story!) But, here, *Naomi almost misses the gift God had given her for this particular time in her life!* And this is a lesson for us, too: **DON'T DO IT!**

- *Don't* allow your pain, as deep as it may be right now, to keep you from fully embracing the gift of community!
- *Don't* let your disappointment, as devastating as it might be, keep you from hearing (or saying!), "Me, too!"

Folks, in order to be able to hear a healing "Me, too!" *there're a couple of things we must do in order to receive God's gift of community. The first is this: we have to be real about what's going on with us*—where we're at this very moment! We have to be *authentic* in order to experience community, so hear this:

### **AUTHENTICITY IS A REAL KEY TO EXPERIENCING GOD'S GIFT OF COMMUNITY.**

The truth is, both our *culture* and our *Christian communities* set standards we can't live up to! I'm convinced that it's primarily due to our inability to be authentic—or real—that keeps us from recognizing the gift of community God offers us. But, I also believe our culture (including the Church) often sets standards that are impossible to live up to consistently; so, what do we do?

- We hide...
- We pretend to be something we're not...
- We immerse ourselves in a false reality...
- We 'fake it 'til we make it,' as the saying goes, pretending to be a winner ... even though we're pretty sure we're not...

*It's hard to have authentic community when we're not willing to be who we really are at any given moment...*

There's a story told about a dad who took his little boy to the city pool one day. As his son was playing in the 'kiddie pool,' dad was busy reading a book—a book he'd wanted to get into for quite some time. As the dad tells it, his son—who had a bladder the size of a peanut—came up to him and told his dad he needed to pee ... *again*. So, his dad—enthralled in his book—simply brushed off this request with a sarcastic answer. He told

his little boy, “Oh, why don’t you just go and pee in the pool (probably not his proudest moment of parenting)!”

About 30 seconds later, there were gasps all around the pool! Dad looked up from his book to see his son standing by the pool, trunks around his ankles, urinating in the pool. He threw down his book and he yelled, “No ... you can’t do that!” By this time, everyone around the pool had gotten very quiet. So, when his son yelled back at him, it kind of echoed ... “But Dad, you told me to.” Busted...

*Have you ever found yourself in a situation in life where you didn’t really want to admit to anyone (including yourself) who you really are? It’s only in reality that we can experience true, authentic, healing community with others. When we choose *not* to admit who we are and what we’re really going through, we’ll probably miss the HOPE God offers us through the gift of community...*

We have to break through the world’s standards so we can *be known!* **Please know this:** *You can only be loved to the extent that you’re known ... or that you allow yourself to be known!* Also...

**SURRENDER IS YET ANOTHER KEY TO EXPERIENCING GOD’S GIFT OF COMMUNITY.** When we think of *surrender*, we tend to think of a *white* flag; but actually, *being authentic means surrender*—a position of strength not weakness!

There is a group in a community I used to pastor in that’s a reflection of the community we’ve been talking about today: *Compassionate Friends*—a ‘community’ specifically called together to support those who’ve lost children. There’s no way any one of those who attend their monthly meetings or annual time of worship and remembrance would come ... unless they had surrendered to their emotions—unless they were willing be real or authentic about where they’re at in life. It’s only through surrender to who they are and the situation they’re in that they are ready to reach out and accept God’s gift of this community in their lives! (A couple from this congregation had lost a child ... and led this group...)

Folks, *are you ready to be totally real about your life—about your Plan B circumstance?* If you’re not, like Naomi, you may just miss out on the incredible gift God offers you in community; again, *you can’t have real community unless you’re willing to be totally honest about your Plan B and surrender your circumstances to God!*

Let me end here today: So many deep friendships are formed in the midst of Plan B situations. *It’s amazing how quickly you can make a deep connection with someone who’s shared your same struggle.* **“Me, too!” is a powerful sermon;** it’s really a description of one of God’s greatest gifts—COMMUNITY. Dallas Willard says it this way:

God’s aim in human history is the creation of an all-inclusive community of loving persons with himself included as its primary sustainer and most glorious

inhabitant. He is even now at work to bring this about. You have been invited, at great cost to God himself, to be part of this radiant community. You, right there in your life.

Do you feel like part of a 'radiant community' *right there in your life*—in the midst of your Plan B situation? *Are you experiencing the comfort that "Me, too!" can bring?* Folks, don't ever doubt it: This is who God is calling us to be as a congregation! This is being the Church! This is truly loving one another as Christ has called us to love! Let's be a place where "Me, too!" is heard often...