

When you feel empty in life and bitter toward God, you must turn from seeking fullness by the world's ways of selfish expediency and self-pity, and turn to seeking fullness by God's ways of sacrificial loyalty and faith, where you will immediately recognize glimmers of hope through union with Christ.

Introduction – How to preach on finding fullness in such a prosperous country?

I. Our Profound Need for Fullness

A. God created us to live in fullness (Gen 1:26-31; 2:18, 21-25)

The biblical meaning of “fullness.” Prosperity, blessing, fruitfulness, happiness, satisfaction, pregnant(!), filled up, overflowing with goodness, wholeness, to know and be known, *shalom*.

B. Meeting basic human needs provides a measure of fullness (Ps 128)

1. Abraham Maslow, a 20th century psychologist, famously observed that basic human needs may be understood as a hierarchy, with each level of needs resting on a necessary foundation of more basic needs—1st survival, 2nd safety, and 3rd love and belonging.
2. Family, Marriage, Children, Provision, Protection, Stability, Community, Friendship, Labor and Rest. Needing these, Naomi, Ruth, and Orpah were deficient in all three foundational levels.

C. We yearn for fullness and mourn the loss of fullness (vv. 8-9; 20-21)

1. Becoming a widow in the ancient world was the equivalent of financial and relational ruin. Widows almost always lived in crippling poverty. People either took advantage of them or ignored them. This is why God has particular concern for widows, and expects his people to provide widows with emotional and economic support. God's law instructed the nearest relative of the dead husband to care for the widow (levirate marriage; cf. Dt 25:5-10).
2. The three women were not merely weeping loudly because they will miss each other after parting. This wailing was characteristic in their culture for bemoaning a tragedy. Naomi cannot provide for Orpah and Ruth, and she also cannot provide them levirate husbands since she herself has no husband and no sons.

II. The Elusive Nature of Fullness

A. The good things in life provide only a fleeting fullness (vv. 8-9, 11-13a, 19)

1. Naomi's words to her two daughters-in-law are technical language for bringing an end to a relationship. She is expressing her utter hopelessness to provide *hesed* for Ruth and Orpah. In effect Naomi is formally releasing her daughters-in-law of any obligation to her.
2. The women know they need the fullness that marriage and family provide. Will they turn to the LORD for lasting fullness, or turn back to emptiness and bitterness? Naomi chides both Ruth and Orpah to stop following her because doing so is senseless. Naomi wanted to wake them up from their dream of happy marriages through connection with her.

B. The resulting emptiness of life hinders us from pursuing fullness (vv. 13b-14a, 20-21)

1. Often logic and common sense work against finding fullness (Heb 11:1-2). Naomi's final plea to Ruth and Orpah is a hypothetical case, assuming that she still has a shred of hope left. The hypothetical case suggests an unreal situation, thereby stressing the utter hopelessness of their real situation. What if I married tonight? What if I bore several sons tonight? Their future fullness was hopelessly lost if left to mere human orchestration.
2. This is the "bird-in-hand" principle—Why pass up the realistic opportunity at hand to marry and find fullness in exchange for a future, humanly impossible hope? In Naomi's mind, although God has dealt harshly with her so far (famine, exile, bereavement, childlessness), this might be just the beginning of her bitter life! That is why she wanted her identity changed from Naomi (meaning "pleasant, lovely") to Mara (meaning "bitter").

III. Where to Find Fullness

A. Not in the world's ways

1. Positive: Selfish expediency. Orpah sought fullness in the good things of life by way of the familiar. Good things that meet your basic human needs cannot and will not give you true fullness because emptiness is primarily a spiritual problem.
2. Negative: Selfish pity. Naomi sought a "fullness consolation prize" by soliciting sympathy for her emptiness. This is also a common way to pursue fullness.

B. In sacrificial loyalty to God's people (vv. 10, 14b-16a, 17-18)

Ruth is loyal and godly compared to Orpah. Ruth is courageous, faithful and full of youthful hope compared to Naomi. Her words represent her complete conversion as a worshiper of the LORD, and they recall the central covenant promise (Ex 6:7; 2 Cor 6:16b). Ruth understood that she must renounce all familial ties for the sake of the kingdom of God.

C. Through faith in the Lord of the Covenant (vv. 8-9, 16b, 21-22)

The Lord is God of the haves and the have-nots. He invites us leave Moab and its paltry measure of fullness, and return to the Promised Land where God and his blessed people dwell in true fullness. Ruth united herself in faith to the LORD. She clung to Naomi and Naomi's God.

D. Embodied in Jesus Christ, who emptied himself for our fullness (vv. 22b)

1. Jesus emptied himself to give fullness to his church (Phil 2:1-11; Eph 1:22-23). Naomi needed more than Ruth—she needed Jesus. Jesus is the greater Ruth. He has transformed our bitterness into blessing. For all those united to Christ by faith, he has changed our name from bitter to pleasant, from empty to full, from Mara to Naomi.
2. Jesus is the fullness of grace and truth. We receive fullness and blessing from him (Ps 16:10-11; Jn 1:16)! It is not a coincidence that Naomi and Ruth find themselves returning to the Promised Land at the harvest. When you turn from the world's ways of finding fullness and turn to God's ways, your union with Christ and all his benefits is immediately apparent.

Conclusion – Paradoxically, the way to find fullness is to empty yourself—for God and neighbor (Mt 10:34-39). Ruth understood that fullness could only come through radical, no-turning-back, covenant loyalty to Israel's God. Naomi had trouble believing God would give her fullness again and so she pouted and solicited pity. Orpah chose a measure of worldly fullness in the familiar at the expense of true fullness. Whose life does yours resemble? In whom will you trust for fullness?