

# SUMMER B1 - God's Kindness in Suffering

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] We might like to turn back to Ruth chapter 1, which is what we'll be looking at tonight, and hopefully you had a chance to grab one of the outlines as you were coming in.

You might find that helpful as well. Well, I'm not sure if Andrew mentioned this, but the reason we are looking at Lamentations and Ruth together is because in the Jewish Bible they are part of the five scrolls.

Or the Migaloth, which is Hebrew for scrolls. So, Chris, on the next slide we have a list of the five books that are made up of these five scrolls in the Jewish Bible.

And we'll just leave that up there for a moment. And Andrew's plan, I believe, is that when we come to an Old Testament year like this year, next year is New Testament, and I think he mentioned Revelation.

I'll be away for that. And then the Old Testament after that is to keep working through these scrolls. And so the other scrolls there are Esther, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs.

[ 1 : 0 6 ] I'll be away for that one too. But these five scrolls became books that were read at five major Jewish festivals during the calendar year.

They were like lectionary readings. And the order reflects the order of the Jewish calendar. So if you've got your outlines there, on the back side of it, there is a bit more of a list.

And it also tells you the festival that it was read at and the corresponding month in our calendar. So do you remember the Passover marked the beginning of the Jewish calendar, Exodus 12, verse 1 and 2.

And Song of Songs was read there. And Ruth was read at the Feast of Weeks or the Shavuot, which means weeks. And so what would happen is the first day of the harvest, Deuteronomy says as soon as the sickle goes to the grain, you are then to count off seven weeks or 50 days.

I'm not sure how they worked that out with their maths. But seven weeks, 50 days, 49 plus one. And then at the end of that, you would have this celebration, this festival of weeks.

[ 2 : 1 7 ] And you would read the book of Ruth at that point. And then the other ones, Lamentations, was read during the mourning period, the three weeks mourning period, as they remembered the exile and the destruction of Jerusalem and so on.

And the others are there for you to look at. But the point is that Ruth was often, was in the Jewish Bible, lumped together with these other scrolls and read at this occasion as a reminder of God's kind provision for them at harvest time.

Now, as I said, these five scrolls are placed in the section of the Bible called the writing. So on the next slide, I think, there we are. So you've got the sections down the left-hand side. You've got the books in the order that they are in the Jewish Bible.

You've got the other names for it on the other side of the screen. But Ruth was not always placed in this order. So if you're just looking at that slide there, sometimes Ruth was moved in front of Psalms, for example.

In fact, Ruth has been one of the most movable books in the Old Testament canon. So in one Jewish tradition, as I said, it was placed before Psalms as a kind of introduction to King David.

- [ 3 : 32 ] You might remember that Ruth ends with King David mentioning his name. And so they thought it was a good introduction to King David. So they put it before the Psalms. Another tradition places Ruth after Proverbs.

Because Proverbs ends in chapter 31 with that great description of a wife of noble character. Do you remember? And so they put Ruth after that as an example of a wife of noble character.

Still another tradition which follows the Septuagint, which is the Greek Old Testament, places Ruth after Judges. Like we have in our English Bibles.

In fact, the Jewish historian named Josephus seems to have counted the book of Judges and Ruth together as one book. Because he thought they went together, so much so.

Now why am I telling you all this? Well, because Ruth's journey to find a resting place in the Old Testament canon tells us something about its journey of interpretation.

- [ 4 : 30 ] After all, God does not speak at all in the book of Ruth. And so perhaps Ruth is primarily a book, not so much about God, says one interpretation, but about a godly wife whose loyalty and kindness we can all learn from.

Some have thought that and so they placed it after Proverbs. Or perhaps Ruth is primarily here as an introduction in the Bible to the greater one, the greater person, King David.

Or perhaps Ruth is primarily about God's kind provision. And if so, putting it together with the five scrolls and reading it during the festival of weeks around harvest time makes good sense.

Or perhaps Ruth is primarily about history, and in particular salvation history. And in this case, putting Ruth after the book of Judges makes sense because it's explaining what it's around the time of the Judges.

Now of course there is some truth in all of these suggestions, but for my money, and I'm guessing for yours too, it's a combination of the last two. It's talking about God's provision, his kind provision and salvation.

- [ 5 : 40 ] Ruth is a story about God's kindness in providing salvation for one person, Naomi, through her daughter-in-law, Ruth. You see, although God is silent in the book, he is still graciously at work.

And as we'll see, he works to move Naomi from emptiness to fullness, from bitterness to joy, all through Ruth. And in so doing, Naomi is saved from her predicament.

But what God does for Naomi, he will also do for his people Israel through King David. And ultimately for us, through Jesus Christ.

But I'm jumping ahead a bit to the final talk, and we're missing out on what else the book has to teach us. So instead, I want to pray again for us, and we'll start at chapter 1. So let's pray.

Father, again, we pray that you would help us to look afresh at this well-known story. This story that celebrates your provision and your salvation, your kindness to us.

- [ 6 : 46 ] Father, help me to speak clearly and faithfully, and help us to listen well on this warm evening. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Now, I realise that some of you may have heard these talks a while ago.

Although I've tweaked them a bit. But you need to remember that we, as people, forget things, don't we? We often remember illustrations, which is very frustrating.

Because, well, I'm going to use them again anyway. But we forget the main points. And so as Paul says to the Philippians, it is no trouble to write the same things to you again, and it's a safeguard for you.

So if some of these talks sound familiar, it is no trouble for me to say the same things to you. And it's a safeguard for you. So with that in mind, let me begin, as I did before, with some music from a movie.

Now see if you can guess which movie this is from. Now, even the older folks will recognise that, I'm sure.

[ 7 : 51 ] What's it from? Star Wars. Star Wars. Okay. Not said with very much enthusiasm, I might add. It's one of my childhood favourites. Okay, what about this one? You'll need to listen.

This one's a bit softer, but... Here we go. You recognise that one? Where's it from?

Jaws. Okay. I've never seen Jaws, but everyone recognises the music from it. Now, these pieces of music are heard at the beginning of each movie, and when you hear these pieces of music, they sound different notes, don't they?

The Star Wars music sounds a note of triumph. And the music from Jaws sounds an ominous note of danger. Each piece of opening music sounds a different note.

And as the story of Ruth begins, the first sentence is like its opening music. It sounds a note to the situation we find ourselves in. But is it more like Star Wars, or is it more like Jaws?

[ 8 : 58 ] Well, let's see. Your Bible's there. Have a look at the first sentence. The first verse. Verse 1. In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land. So a man from Bethlehem in Judah, together with his wife and two sons, went to live for a while in the country of Moab.

Now, here in verse 1, we are told that the story of Ruth took place during the time of the judges. Now, in the book of Judges, you might remember, there's a cycle of people sinning, then God punishing, then the people repenting, then God saving through a judge.

And then it would repeat. People sin, they repent, God saves through a judge, and so on. So I think on the next slide, Chris, is the cycle there from the book of Judges.

And here in Judges, it's more a downward spiral, actually. It actually gets worse as the book goes on. And if you look in your Bibles, just across the page, to the last verse of the book of Judges, verse 25 there, it says this.

Now, this verse here in your Bibles is more than a statement of facts that Israel had no king.

[ 10 : 18 ] It is also an indictment on Israel. You see, while it is true that Israel had no human king, they had God as king, did they not?

Yet instead of obeying God as king, everyone did as they saw fit, it says. They lived as though they had no king, not even God. This verse describes a terrible state of affairs.

These are the days in which the story of Ruth takes place. And so the mention of Judges isn't a good note to start on. But it gets worse.

The first sentence also mentions famine in the land, doesn't it? Even in Bethlehem. And the irony is that the name Bethlehem means house of bread. But there is no bread.

There is famine. And so which part of this, if you go back, sorry Chris, which part of the cycle do you think we're in at the opening of Ruth? You can call out this, okay.

[ 11 : 20 ] Yeah, punishment. That's right. We're at an ominous note, this opening verse, isn't it? The music is more like Jaws than that of Star Wars.

It sounds a very ominous note, a note of danger. But as we know from the cycle in Judges, tough times were meant to move Israel to repent, to turn back to God, so that famine might stop.

But as the story of Ruth commences, we focus on one family and a man who decides to flee the famine and go away from God. So we're at point one in the outlines and verse two.

He says, well the end of verse one says, But the thing is, Moab had been enemies of Israel in the past.

And so on the surface, this may have seemed like a good idea at the time. After all, Moab presumably had food. And it seems Elimelech planned to stay only for a while. But it's not actually a good move.

[ 12 : 48 ] The whole point of living in the land of Israel was that this was the promised land. This was the place God had set aside for his people to live. This was the place where God would be their God.

And so to move away from Israel was in effect to move away from God and his kingdom on earth. Remember the cycle? If things weren't going well, they were supposed to look at themselves and see if they were sinning.

And if so, they were to repent, turn back to God who was their king, who forgives and saves. He had done it before. He could do it again. And even if they weren't sinning, then they were still to trust in God to provide.

Either way, they were to flee to God, not from God. But Elimelech doesn't do this. Instead of turning to God as king and trusting in him, he decides to turn to Moab and trust in them.

Even though they had been Israel's enemy in the past. And again, there is irony because Elimelech's name means God is king. But Elimelech doesn't act like it, does he?

[ 13 : 54 ] He doesn't seem to live up to his name. In fact, the book of Ruth begins and ends with a whole series of names which carry meaning. Some live up to them, but others like Elimelech do not.

But he leaves his land and essentially God as his king. Now, perhaps we're being a bit too harsh on him, but Elimelech is not presented in positive terms.

I mean, just look at the names Elimelech gives his two sons in verse 2. Marlon and Kilion. These were not Jewish names. They were Canaanite names.

From the peoples they were not meant to mix with. And so whether deliberately or not, we already see Elimelech moving away from God and away from his people by giving his sons foreign names.

Now, to move away from God is not only sinful but foolish. I mean, do you know what Marlon and Kilion mean? They mean sick and failing.

[ 14 : 54 ] It's like calling your two sons hepatitis and swine flu. It's foolish, isn't it? And this move away from God's land and God's people and ultimately God himself, well, it may have seemed like a good idea at the time.

But it was foolish, to say the least. Now, I've mentioned this to a morning congregation a couple of years ago. You might remember the story of Larry Walters.

Larry always wanted to fly ever since he was a boy, but his poor eyesight disqualified him from becoming a pilot in the Air Force. So one day he thought it would be a good idea to buy 45 weather balloons from the Army Depot store, attach them to his lounge chair with some sandwiches, a six-pack of beer and a pellet gun.

And his plan was to slowly float up about 30 feet above his backyard, enjoy a few hours floating around, and then use the pellet gun to shoot the balloons and slowly drift back down.

But when his friends cut the rope, which was tied to his car, he actually shot up into the air. Not 30 feet, not 300 feet, but 1,600 feet.

[ 16 : 03 ] And at that height, he didn't think it was safe to shoot any balloons. And so he stayed in the air, cold and frightened, for 14 hours until he drifted into a primary approach corridor of LAX, where the approaching airplane pilots radioed the strange sight.

I think we've got a picture of him on the next slide. There he is, lawn chair pilot. Eventually he got up the nerve to shoot some balloons and slowly descended, only to get caught in some power lines, and he shorted out a whole suburb.

It's a true story. He finally made it down, where he was arrested by the LAPD. And on the next slide, there he is, Larry Walters, lawn chair pilot.

It seemed like a good idea at the time. But it was foolish, to say the least. Elimelech's move away may have seemed like a good idea at the time, but it was foolish.

To flee from God rather than to God, even in difficult times, is foolish. And for this family, it was also disastrous. From verses 3 to 5, we read this.

[ 17 : 13 ] Now Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died, and she was left with her two sons. They married Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other Ruth.

After they had lived there about 10 years, both Marlon and Kilion also died, and Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband. And notice that sadly, the sons live up to their names of sick and failing.

But it's a huge tragedy for Naomi, is it not? For Naomi, there's famine at home. Her husband is a fool. Then he dies. And instead of going home, her sons stay and intermarry, even though God has said not to do that.

Otherwise, they may lead you astray to worship foreign gods. And then the sons die as well. And so Naomi is left in a foreign country, who has been hostile to Israel in the past, with no one to provide for her.

It's a massive tragedy. There were no welfare systems in those days, no center link payments for widows. Women in those days were especially dependent on the men to provide for them.

[ 18 : 24 ] And at the end of verse 5, we literally read, and the woman was left without her two sons and her husband. The narrator calls Naomi the woman. After using so many names, the narrator makes Naomi nameless, as though she has even lost her own identity.

Such is the greatness of her suffering. Now, some people think that Naomi's suffering was because of her sin. Certainly, Israel was suffering famine because of their sin.

But not all of our suffering is a result of our own sin, as you know. Sometimes it's the result of other people's sin, like Elimelech for Naomi. And of course, sometimes it's the result of living in a fallen world.

And here, either way, Naomi suffers disaster because of the sin of the men in her life, her husband and then her sons.

In fact, the first decision that Naomi makes on her own is actually a good one, for she decides to return home, which brings us to point 2 and verse 6. And as I read verse 6 to 15, it's a large chunk, I want you to listen for what word keeps popping up.

[ 19 : 36 ] No English translation actually translates every word the same, so I'll read it a little bit more literally. But see if you can pick up the word that's repeated. So from verse 6.

And when she heard in Moab that the Lord had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them, Naomi and her daughters-in-law prepared to return home from there. With her two daughters-in-law, she left the place where she'd been living and set out on the road to return to the land of Judah.

Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, Return, each of you, to your mother's home. May the Lord show kindness to you as you have shown to your dead and to me. May the Lord grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband.

Then she kissed them and they wept aloud and said to her, Will you go back with you? Sorry, we will go back with you to your people. But Naomi said, Return home, my daughters.

Why would you come with me? Am I going to have any more sons who could become your husbands? Return home, my daughters. I'm too old to have another husband. And even I thought there was still hope for me.

[ 20 : 39 ] Even if I had a husband tonight and then gave birth to sons, would you really wait until they grew up? Would you remain unmarried for them? No, my daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you because the Lord's hand has gone out against me.

At this they wept again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye. But Ruth clung to her. Look, said Naomi, Your sister-in-law is returning to her people and to her gods. Return with her.

And on it goes. You got the word right? Return, yeah. It actually continues through the rest of the chapter. Naomi is returning home.

She's telling Orpah and Ruth to return to their homes, but they are saying they will return to Naomi's home. The theme of returning home is quite strong in this first chapter. The word return occurs 12 times in these 22 verses.

I didn't read them all out. It's more than every second verse, really. You see, when you wander from God or are led astray from him, as in Naomi's case, the wise move is always to return back to God.

[ 21 : 45 ] For God is a forgiving God, slow to anger and abounding in love. And it seems God has indeed forgiven the Israelites because Naomi hears that famine back home has finished.

So she decides to return home back to her people, back to the promised land, back to God's rule. Notice, though, in verses 8 and 9, that Naomi never lost her belief in God.

Did you notice that? She still believes in God, but she's not living under God's rule with God's people in God's place. And so Naomi returns back. But did you also notice verses 11 to 13, that her return is marked by bitterness?

Naomi says she cannot have any more sons to give Orpah and Ruth as husbands. And even if she could, would they really wait for them to grow up? No, they must return home because they are young enough to find another husband who will provide for them.

They still have hope, in other words. But Naomi says in verse 13, I've no hope. It is more bitter for me, she says, than for you, for the Lord's hand has turned against me.

[ 22 : 56 ] And so while she rightly acknowledges that God is in control, she blames God, it seems, for her husband's foolishness and can only see suffering from God's hand.

She's actually blinded by bitterness. In fact, if you turn the page and have a look with me at verses 19 to 21, you should see what she changes her name to.

So verse 19, pick it up there. So the two women went on, that is Ruth and Naomi, until they came back home to Bethlehem. When they arrived in Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them.

And the women exclaimed, Can this be Naomi? Don't call me Naomi, she told them. Call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter.

I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The Lord has afflicted me. The Almighty has brought misfortune upon me.

[ 23 : 55 ] You see, Naomi wants to change her name from Naomi, which means pleasant or sweet, to Mara, which means bitter. You can see it in the footnotes of your Bibles. She sees God's hand at work, yes, but only for misfortune, only to bring bitterness.

She doesn't see any kindness from God. And when we suffer, it is easy to feel this way, isn't it? You see, while it is right to lament, as we heard last week, even to cry out to God and ask why, we can overstep the mark and complain about God in bitterness, as Naomi seems to be doing here.

We can overstep the mark and even accuse God of injustice, of doing a bad job, which is what I think Job ends up doing. And so to answer a question that was asked last Sunday night, when do we cross the line in lament?

Well, I think we cross it when we move from questioning to accusing, from crying out why and for help to becoming bitter. But as I said, it's an easy thing to do.

I remember one time, not long after I'd left university, I heard about a 19-year-old guy who'd become a Christian through the Christian group on the campus. And it wasn't long before this guy was telling others about Jesus.

[ 25 : 13 ] And they were becoming Christians. I tell people about Jesus and nothing happens. This guy was doing it and they were becoming Christians. It was amazing. He was a gifted evangelist. He could say to people, mate, if you don't want to end up in hell, you've got to believe in Jesus.

And he'd get away with it. They'd go, oh, tell me more. We try that and we get bopped on the head. As I said, people were becoming Christians left, right and centre. But a few months later, he drowned while swimming at a beach in Wollongong.

And I remember talking to one of the AFES Christian workers at uni and we couldn't work out why on earth God would let this happen. And my feeling of bewilderment went from crying out to God, why, to accusing of God, are you stupid?

Of course he's not. And I came bitter towards God. You see, when tragedy strikes, it is right to cry out to God to lament, to mourn, to weep.

But we can overstep the mark and accuse God of incompetence like Job did, like I did. We can overstep the mark and become bitter towards God as Naomi does here.

[ 26 : 28 ] And in doing so, she actually completely misses God's kindness to her in Ruth. Look at the verses we skipped over. So from verse 16 to 18.

So the last verse on the first page there. But Ruth replied, Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go, I will go.

And where you stay, I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die. And there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me.

When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her. Ruth's loyalty here is amazing, isn't it? It's almost like those wedding vows, you know, for better, for worse, till death do us part.

Ruth is not going, Ruth, sorry, is going to a foreign country and she has no idea where she'll live, what she will eat or how she will survive. At face value, she's much better off going back to Moab.

[ 27 : 34 ] But Ruth doesn't act on face value. Despite the situation, she commits herself not only to Naomi, but to Naomi's God as well. And her commitment, her loyalty and faith stand in stark contrast to Naomi's bitterness, doesn't it?

Even the way the events take place and are ordered by the narrator here highlights Ruth's behavior as a model to follow. And so I think on the next slide, Chris, in the first, in this last section, you've got Naomi's bitterness, 11 to 15, and then at the 19 and 21, you've got Naomi's bitterness again and sandwiched in the middle as if to highlight it is Ruth's loyalty.

You see, Ruth acts in stark contrast to Naomi, doesn't she? Even though Ruth has no idea how she'll survive, even though she's going to a foreign land, she demonstrates a greater trust in God, in Naomi's God, than Naomi does herself.

And it's as though Ruth is held up as a model, a model for us to follow, that no matter what the situation, we have to trust in God. But Ruth is not only a contrast to Naomi's bitterness, she's also a model of God's kindness, as I mentioned.

In fact, if you have a look at verse 8 there, Ruth is said to have shown the same kindness to a dead husband as God has shown to his people. Verse 8 says, Go back, each of you, to your mother's home.

[ 29 : 05 ] May the Lord show you kindness as you have shown kindness to your dead husbands and to me. And the word for kindness here is that word that Andrew has already taught you about, the word *chesed*, the word which describes God's abounding, loving kindness.

That's exactly what Ruth has already demonstrated. And she's again demonstrating to Naomi here in verses 16 to 17. But Ruth not only contrasts Naomi's bitterness and is a model of God's kindness, Ruth is also actually God's provision of kindness to Naomi.

And in case we don't see God's great kindness in giving Ruth to Naomi, listen to the way Ruth is described at the end of the book. In chapter 4, verse 15, the women are gathered around, it's the happy ending, and the women of the town say to Naomi of Ruth's child, he will renew your life and sustain you in your old age.

And then notice this, for your daughter-in-law who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons has given him birth. Your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is better to you than seven sons.

Now in those days that's high praise. Ruth is God's kindness to Naomi, you see. Even in Naomi's suffering, God is still showing his kindness.

[ 30 : 34 ] He gives Ruth to her, who displays God's very character and is worth more than seven sons. But doesn't Naomi see this? No, she's blinded by her bitterness.

And so she says back in chapter 1 verse 21, I have come back empty. Why call me Naomi? The Lord has afflicted me, the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me.

She says, I've got nothing. And the irony is, who is standing right next to her when she says, I have nothing? Ruth. I wonder what Ruth would have thought of Naomi's comment at this point.

You see, Naomi's bitterness blinded her to God's kindness. What's more, look at verse 22, the last verse of the chapter. It says, So Naomi returned from Moab, accompanied by Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law, arriving in Bethlehem when?

As the barley harvest was beginning. And not only does she come back with Ruth, who is better than seven sons, and she also, coincidentally, comes back at harvest time, when there would be plenty of food in Bethlehem, the house of bread.

[ 31 : 45 ] If the first sentence of the chapter sounds an ominous note like the music from Jaws, then this last sentence ought to sound a triumphant note like the music from Star Wars. For as Naomi returns home, God has not only provided Ruth to help her, but it seems will provide food for Naomi as well.

You see, even in suffering, God is working to provide for his people who return to him. Indeed, that is what God is doing throughout the story of Ruth. For through Naomi's suffering and her return home with Ruth will come the son Obed.



And as we'll see by the end of the book, God brings Naomi from emptiness and bitterness to fullness and joy. In other words, we'll see that God was indeed working for her good, despite her suffering.

But more than that, God is working not only for Naomi's good, but also for the good of his people Israel. For from Obed will come King David. And he's working for our good because from King David will come the Lord Jesus Christ.

And it's through Jesus, as you know, that God will provide what we need most, forgiveness, so that all who believe can return home to him and find fullness and joy.

[ 33 : 01 ] See, God does work for the good, even through suffering. So let me wrap up. What lessons are there for us from this chapter of Ruth, our final point?

Well, three quick things. Firstly, if you have wandered away from God, or God is not really central in your life, then return to him.

Trust in Jesus that you might find forgiveness and life to the full. I want to keep saying that even though I'm guessing everyone here has already done that.

But we need to keep hearing that message because we often wander, return, return home and find forgiveness. And so the second application for those who already trust in Jesus is this.

When tough times hit, don't flee from God, but to God, trusting in him. Whether we are suffering because of our sin, as was the case for Israel during the time of judges, or whether we are suffering because of living in a fallen world, either way, we are never to flee from God, but to God.

[ 34 : 08 ] He knows what it is like to suffer. After all, he gave up his only son for us. And so he knows suffering better than we do, actually. He understands.

What's more, we've already started to see with Naomi and Ruth that God is working for the good of those who love him. As Paul said in Romans chapter 8, we know that in all things, including suffering, God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

And don't forget verse 29. People remember verse 28, but they forget verse 29, that we've been called to be conformed to the likeness of Jesus. That's our good.

That's our ultimate good. God is working even through suffering to make us more like Christ. Third thing to remember is when tough times come, we're to be careful that bitterness does not blind us to God's kindness.

In fact, Paul continues in Romans chapter 8 to say, if God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also along with him graciously give us all things?

[ 35 : 21 ] And so nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ, not even suffering. You see, even in suffering, we can still know God's loving kindness, his chesed to us in Jesus.

For God has not only given his son for us, but will also graciously give us all things we need to make it to heaven. Some time ago, a friend of my wife and I, whom we'll call Beth, was visiting us from Sydney because her father, who was in hospital in the city, in Melbourne, had a bleeding brain and needed emergency surgery.

What's more, he was also suffering from cancer and so it complicated things. Before the operation, Beth spoke with her mum, who was very bitter and depressed about it all.

Her mum is not a Christian, you see, though she was quite happy to blame God for it. But then Beth went to visit her father in the hospital. He became a Christian about four years ago and so he was in hospital with cancer, a bleeding brain, about to have surgery from which he didn't know whether he'd survive or not.

And he said to his daughter, Beth, I've just got so much to be thankful for. God has given me so much. How can he say that in that situation of suffering?

[ 36 : 42 ] Cancer, bleeding brain, how can he say that? Well, because his suffering did not blind him to God's kindness in Christ.

He still saw that nothing could separate him from God's loving kindness. He still remembered that God's kindness to him meant that God gave up Jesus, his only son, even though he didn't deserve it.

He still knew that God would be working through him for his good to change him to be more like Jesus and would bring him home to heaven. And so he said, I've got so much to be thankful for, even in suffering.

So, even in suffering, the third point of application is don't let bitterness blind you to God's kindness in Christ. Well, there's lots more to learn from this lovely story, so I hope you keep coming along, Sunday at 6, and then the following Wednesday at 7.45.

But for now, how about I pray for us? Let's pray. Let's pray.