



the
narrative
of
grace

#3 Women of the Narrative



The Narrative of Grace
“Women of the Narrative”
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Why are genealogies important?

Why did they matter so much?

Today, you can essentially come from any family, and be anything you want. You do not have to be defined by your parents, or locked into their way. Of course, there will be a set of challenges that come with any upbringing, but you don't have to be defined by it.

Your parents could be poor, and you can grow up to be successful. And that would be *your* success.

A wealthy person can have a wayward son who ends up on the streets.

I have heard countless stories of socio economic divides even amongst family. Where some members of the family are cozied up around a fireplace inside their home on Christmas morning, while one of their daughters was spent the same Christmas only a few miles down the road, in a shelter for homeless teenage mothers.

Those types of things were far less common back then.

In those days, a person put essentially their entire identity in their family. Where they came from matters. It told a story of who *they* are. There was significance connected to the place you came from, and it highly effected where you were going.

Your families story, was your story.

So throughout the bible, you will see many sections that it start by saying “These are the generations of _____”

The word generations is the word "*toledot*" and it means "to give birth to" or to beget." Some of the old english translations like the King James Version put it like this "Abraham begot Isaac. Isaac begot Jacob..." Even the earth and sky and world that God created had a begetting recorded in Genesis 2:4. After we read about how God created the heavens and the earth in six days and on the seventh day he rested, we read:

"These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens."

Where you came from, mattered.

In fact, in that culture, your worth was wrapped up in where you came from.

and typically, all the eggs went into one basket. And that was the first born son.

The First Born

So what is the deal with the first born? Because if worth was wrapped up in family, then why is it such a big deal to be the first born?

Because typically it secured your spot in that genealogy, and here is why.

The first born son got everything.

It isn't like today, when most parents will whatever they have when they die, to all of their children to divide amongst themselves... Now, the thought is, "everybody gets the same amount, and what they do with it is in their hands to create whatever life they are able. This is the inheritance, the rest is up to you!"

That is not the way that it worked back then. The first born received the inheritance because everything in that culture was family driven, not individual driven. And if you divide 1,000,000 dollars between 4 siblings, your family status just dropped from being a prominent family with wealth, to four families who are definitely doing well but over time their family wealth would diminish if not properly stewarded and invested.

It was all about the family. Individual success was not on most of their radars. The legacy was built solely around the family.

So the first born son would be given all of it, and he would be responsible to make sure that his siblings are taken care of.

It is the way that a family maintained its place in society.

Now, if you were a woman in that culture, you relied heavily on your family as well. When you married into a family, you were taken care of by that family. Before you marry, you are taken care of, financially, by your Father.

Women were not listed in genealogies.

It just wasn't the way that genealogies went. It listed the Father, and the son, and typically, it was the first born son. But what makes this genealogy so interesting, is the first names on that list: Abraham was the Father of Isaac... Isaac, not a first born, Ishmael was Abrahams first born son. Isaac the Father of Jacob... Jacob, not the first born, Esau was Isaacs first born son. Jacob the Father of Judah... Judah, not a first born. Reuben was Jacob's first born son. Judah was actually the 4th son born to Jacob.

and if I had a couple extra weeks I would do a whole message on the first born, but essentially, the big idea that I believe Matthew is trying to convey here, is that God can work through anybody. He can work through the second son. He can work through the fourth son. He can work through anyone.

The entire top of the lineup in Jesus genealogy was filled with people who were not the proper heir in their families.

And after we get to Judah, something even stranger happens:

(Matt 1:3) and Judah the Father of Perez and Zerah **by Tamar**.

Suddenly, this timeline just took an even stranger twist. He goes out of his way to show who the mother of these twins is. And at that, we are

introduced to “The women of the narrative.” Names who will forever be remembered as playing crucial roles in the family line of Jesus Christ. The only problem is, almost all of the names on the list are scarred by sin.

Salmon the Father of Boaz **by Rahab**. Rahab is the prostitute that hid the Israelite spies in Jericho. Even when the book of Hebrews is talking about faith, it lists her... it says (Hebrews 11:31) By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies.”

The next in the line says Boaz the Father of Obed **by Ruth**. and two generations later it says “David was the father of Solomon **by the wife of Uriah**.”

We know what that means. David committed adultery with Bathsheba, and Solomon is the result. Why go out of the way to name Uriah, and not Bathsheba? Why list the person who *was cheated on* in place of the person who actually birthed the child?

This entire genealogy is a total mess.

And that is why we are studying it. Because all too often, we, today, look at our lives and we think that all of the things that we have done have distanced us from God, or have disqualified us of being used by God.

Well this list of people is incredibly messy. It is the narrative of God showing up in the areas that no one else could clean. And today, we are going to see, that things got really, really messy.

We are going to start today by looking at two verses, one that you likely know, and one that you maybe have never heard. And they may seem strange. So if you would, open your bibles to Hosea 4:14, and then we will look at James 1:27. I am reading it of the NIV bible today.

Hosea 4:14 (NIV)

“I will **not punish** your daughters when they turn to prostitution, **nor your daughters-in-law when they commit adultery**, because the **men**

themselves consort with harlots and sacrifice with **shrine prostitutes** - a people without understanding will come to ruin.”

and

James 1:27 (NIV) says “Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: **to look after orphans and widows** in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.”

So here is a dilemma.

Christians, often, put so much effort into keeping the second part of this verse, that what they do is shelter themselves from a lifestyle that would put them in strategic positions to do the first part of it. And I have done this too.

It is easy to not be polluted when you avoid the polluted areas. The only problem is, the polluted areas tend to be the ones with the most needs. The polluted areas tend to be the ones with the people who need Christians the most and Christians are abstaining from them out of concern for the safety of their own soul.

But part of being a Christian means that we position ourselves in places that allow us to be involved in justice. To defend justice.

It means we work for Justice.

Now, do not confuse the word Justice with the word Vengeance. They are not even remotely the same. I have, in recent months answered questions about what I believe the church should be, and what I believe is important, by talking about Justice. And often when I start talking about that, people get a bit uncomfortable. They are not quite sure how to respond to me, because they don't understand what I am talking about. They think I mean vengeance.

It is very easy to confuse the two. Vengeance, in Hebrew is the word “*naqam*” which essentially just means vengeance, - Holmans Bible

Dictionary tells it slightly differently when it defines it as “to avenge” or “to be punished”

The idea is to get back at someone... to make them hurt more than you hurt because what they did to you hurt.

It is an anti-gospel that many of us at times have adopted when we allow our emotions *or our politics* to shape our convictions rather than the truth found in the word of God.

But if you were to ask me, “What is important to you?” and I were to answer “Vengeance” - run. Any pastor who would say that, get as far away from them as you can.

Vengeance is a poison.

The bible says we must never, ever take vengeance. It says vengeance is the Lords (Romans 12:19) but it says that we must seek and defend Justice. Isaiah 1:17 says “Learn to do good; **seek justice**, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, **plead the widow’s cause.**”

In bible times, the widow’s, and the orphans were the LEAST OF THESE. They were the marginalized. They were the ones who had their backs against the wall in society, their hands were tied and they relied completely on the generosity of others.

And two of the four women in the genealogy of Jesus Christ were widows at very young ages. Tamar, and Ruth. We are going to look at both, today.

Ruth

The more familiar of the two widows is the story of Ruth.

The story of Ruth is the story of a young widowed Moabite woman who displayed incredible loyalty to her Mother-in-law, Naomi. Naomi had, in the course of ten years, lost her husband, and both of her sons. And there is this moment in the early part of the story, where she tells Ruth and Orpah who were the widowed wives of Naomi’s sons, to go back to their

homeland, and to their families. But both of these women respond saying that they will stay with Naomi.

So Naomi pleads with these girls and says to them that it makes no sense for them to stay with her, because she will not have any more sons for them to marry and even if she were to eventually get married and get pregnant again, there is no sense in these girls waiting all that time for another child not yet even born, to come of age.

So Orpah kissed Naomi, and left.

But not Ruth.

Ruth told Naomi that she is with her to the end. It is one of the most famous moments in all of scripture. Songs have been written about it. Naomi tells Ruth to do what her sister in law did... to return to her people and to her gods (Ruth 1:15)... and Ruth responds by saying this: (Ruth 1:16-17)

“For where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the LORD do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you.”

That is loyalty.

That is sticking it out with someone who desperately needs you even when there is nothing in it for you.

Ruth had the opportunity to go back to her homeland, and be amongst her own people where she had a relatively decent chance at starting a new life and turning out ok. Instead, she ventured with Naomi into a FOREIGN land. They were strangers. They were immigrants. They were Moabites now living in Bethlehem. And there was not a lot of inter mingling that went on in those days.

I wish that we could spend more time on Ruth today, but there are just a couple of things that you need to know to understand where we are going with this.

First of all:

When Israel first began, and they settled in the promised land, each family received land. They all had an equal amount in the very beginning. Every family had something, and nobody really had more than anybody else. But what happens now happened then... and through one persons greed and another persons bad choices, land started switching hands. Land that would have been in a family for generations, could suddenly be handed off to settle a debt to someone else, and before long some families had a lot of land, and others had none.

Naomi, with the death of her husband, followed by the death of her two sons, was teetering on the reality that she would lose her land, and she had no heirs. Everything about her families story, was about to end.

Essentially, her name was about to be blotted out in history. Her family line would end with her, unless someone redeemed her family.

And so along comes a man named Boaz, and Boaz clearly takes a liking to Ruth, and looks out for her and tells the men in his field to not harm her (because she was foreign and of a despised race), and suddenly it was revealed that he was *one of the few people left* who actually had the power to redeem their family. So Ruth did something completely unconventional in that day.

She proposed to him.

A woman, proposing to a man.
In that culture.
Completely unheard of.

She straight up asked him if he would become what is called her families "kinsman-redeemer."

A Kinsman-Redeemer was a person who, if He chose to be generous with what money he had, *he possessed the right* to buy back the land which their family had originated with, but had lost or is losing.

It basically meant that he would re-establish their family in Israel.

Had another person previously bought the land, they would have no say in the matter, if the Kinsman-Redeemer chooses to redeem them, they had to sell the land back. But it took a lot on the part of the Kinsman-Redeemer.

It would be an incredible act of grace on the part of Boaz toward Ruth and Naomi, especially because according to the law, he couldn't just buy back the land.

He also had to marry Ruth.

Who was a foreigner, a Moabite.

Interracial marriage was not exactly accepted in that culture either.

and I don't have time to get into the details, but Boaz eventually does it.

He marries this broken woman, and he redeems her family.

And it just so happens that by Ruth marrying Boaz, she was marrying into the family line of Jesus.

Because Boaz was Rehab's son.

Rahab. The prostitute that hid the Israelite spies in Jericho.

Grace broke through the life of a prostitute, and birthed a Kinsman-Redeemer.

A person who would literally give his entire life to a stranger. An outcast. A foreigner.

It is the very essence of grace.

We talked last week about how Abraham entertained strangers, and what it opened up for him and Sarah. Boaz took this to another level completely.

The only way to give justice to Ruth and Naomi was the pay the bill himself. The whole bill. He had to pay for the land, and he had to marry the girl. And the girl came with the mother-in-law, and they were all *strangers*.

What a package.

They were both foreigners trying to make their way in a new land and they never would have survived if it wasn't for the grace of God working through the prostitutes son.

But there is something very peculiar found at the end of the book of Ruth.

Boaz redeems Ruth, and all of the witnesses there begin acknowledging their marriage and they begin to say a blessing over Ruth. They say things like (Ruth 4:11) "May the Lord make the woman, who is coming into your house, like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel."

"May you act worthily and be renowned in Bethlehem." (Ruth 4:11)

and then they say this: (Ruth 4:12)

"May your house be like **the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah**, because of the offspring that the LORD will give you by this young woman."

Judah and Tamar

Suddenly, the book of Ruth, an encouraging, exciting story of redemption and grace, throws us back to the book of Genesis, and into a much darker story that is mostly ignored because truthfully, it is a very awkward story to tell. So lets tell it. Because this is a narrative of grace.

The first woman listed in this family line is Tamar. And this story is one of the strangest, seemingly screwed up stories in the entire bible. We read the passage in Matthew a few minutes ago, It reads in Matthew like this:

(Matt 1:3) and Judah the Father of Perez and Zerah **by Tamar**.

Genealogies never said this. They never listed the mother. Sarah is not listed. Rebecca is not listed. Leah is not listed. The first truly unconventional thing that Matthew does is this right here, he goes out of his way to make sure we know, “this is not just Judah’s story. We have to remember Tamar.”

So this is essentially what happened with Judah and Tamar.

Tamar married a man named Er. Er was Judah’s first born son. But for whatever reason, the bible says that Er was wicked, so the LORD put Er to death, making Tamar a very young widow.

One of the main reasons that the bible speaks so strongly about the way that we take care of widows, is because in their culture, a widow was just about the most vulnerable of all people in society. It was unlikely that they would re-marry on their own (they were not exactly the top picks), and because women didn’t work, they would have nobody to care for them. They could return home, and be under the care of their Father again, but when their Father dies, what then?

So there was a *law* put in place in that day called “The Levirate marriage law.” (lev-er-ate) (you can read about it in Deuteronomy 25) - it comes from the word *levir* which means brother-in-law.

and this was the law.

For the sake of carrying on the family name, AND Because widow’s had no way of taking care of themselves, it was the job of her Father-in-law to provide for her, by giving her another of his sons in marriage.

One of the things that Naomi told Ruth when she tried to send her away after they all became widows, was that there was no reason for her to stay with Naomi, because Naomi would not have any more children. She herself had lost her husband and there was nobody in her family that could be given to Ruth. So she tried to release Ruth because she knew her family could not offer what the levirate marriage law typically provided for widows.

It was very important in that culture, otherwise the widow would almost certainly end up on the streets.

So Judah provided Tamar with his second born son, Onan. But wouldn't you know, Judah really knew how to raise these boys, and the bible says that Onan, like his brother Er, did what was wicked in the sight of the LORD (you can read on your own what it was that he did, Genesis 38:9) so the LORD put Onan to death as well.

Now, Judah had one other son, named Shelah. Shelah was still young, and of course, Judah thought for sure by the second son, that Tamar was obviously the problem. His sons were dropping like flies every time one of them marries this girl. But the bible makes it abundantly clear, Tamar was not the problem, Judah's sons were both wicked... so what Judah did was he asked Tamar to return home, to her Father's care, until Shelah was of age, at what point Judah would give him to Tamar. So Tamar returned to her home, where she waited.

And waited.

And waited.

Until finally she realized, "Shelah is of age, and I haven't heard a word from Judah.

Judah had left Tamar to fend for herself. He completely abandoned her.

There was no redemption. There was no redeemer.

So she she came up with a very disturbing plan to *redeem herself*. Because without Judah, Tamar was pretty much out of luck.

Now, the bible says (Gen. 38:12) that after some time passed, Judah's wife passed away, and shortly after Judah had finished mourning her death, he took a trip with his friend (Hirah the Adullamite) to a place called Timnah to his sheepshearers.

And word got back to Tamar that Judah was on this trip.

When she heard where he was going, the bible says that she took off her widows garments (Gen. 38:14), covered herself with a veil and waited for him on the the road to Timnah.

The bible actually says this: (Gen 38:15) “When Judah saw her, he thought she was a prostitute, for she had covered her face.” - and having no idea that she was actually his daughter in law, he made arrangements to sleep with her.

The price they agreed on was a young goat from his flock, but he had to arrange to have it sent her her so she told him that as a pledge, he needed to give her his signet and his cord and his staff. It was basically like leaving his social security card and maybe the keys to his car.

And with that, they did their thing.

Now, that is some pretty messed up stuff, but here is where it gets really interesting.

Judah sends the goat to her, but nobody can find her. Judah’s friend went to the town looking for her and asked, “Where is the **shrine prostitute** who was here?”

Does anybody recognize that term? Shrine prostitute? You have heard it once before already today.

and all of the people answered, “no shrine prostitute has been here.”

They had no idea what the man was talking about.

So Judah counts his stuff as lost and moves on. He tells his friend, “we will be the laughing stock of the town (Genesis 38:23) if we make a big deal about this.” So Judah moves forward like the whole thing never happened.

But Tamar is waiting, pregnant.

Three months later, word gets back to Judah, that his daughter-in-law has been “immoral,” is guilty of prostitution and in fact is now pregnant. and do you know what Judah says? It is incredibly disturbing.

“Bring her out, and let her be burned.”

Judah says this.

The same Judah who three months ago was perfectly content sleeping with a random prostitute on the way to his sheepshearers.

Why?

He knew, this was the easy way out. He didn't want to give another son to this woman. This way he could have her killed without being criticized for not keeping the levirate law, and he could arrange for his son to marry someone else. He probably burned with hatred for her himself because he had lost two sons, which he clearly blamed both losses on her even though the bible makes it clear that it was not her fault.

He wanted revenge on someone that did nothing to harm him.

So he said to them “bring her out.” This was going to be a public execution.

But of course, her plan culminated here... The whole thing was being orchestrated by Tamar. Judah thought he had won this one, but in reality Tamar held ALL THE CARDS.

The bible says that “as she was being brought out” (Gen. 38:25) - literally, she was on her way to be burned to death publicly... she sent word to Judah saying “By the man whom these belong, I am pregnant. Please identify whose these are, the signet, and the cord, and the staff.”

She is asking Judah, “Do you recognize *these*?”

and I imagine at that moment, he realized that this ordeal that he had decided to make very public, was about to fall down on him, publicly. It was about humiliate him, publicly.

This week I saw this random little image online, it was one of those little text boxes that normally say something encouraging to try and motivate you to go ride a horse or climb a mountain or something of that nature... but this one said this: "EVERYONE (in caps) has a chapter in their life they don't read out loud." And its totally true.

Even the most honest, transparent people have things buried deep down that they would do just about anything to protect it from getting out... But the bible tells us that (Luke 8:17) that there is nothing hidden that will not be brought out into the open. And for whatever that is for you, when that day comes, you are going to need grace, just like Judah was going to need in this moment.

Because this was that chapter for Judah. And in that moment, his world must have come crashing down on him. He has had two sons that were both married to this woman die because of *their* wickedness, and I can only wonder if maybe he began to see in that moment that their wickedness perhaps was a reflection of *him*, rather than *her*.

So he receives these items, and of course, Judah knew immediately what had happened. The whole scenario must have played out in his mind, from the moment he developed a plan to not give her the third son, to condemning his own daughter-in-law to death for a crime that he had just committed himself, to suddenly, on the day that he thought he was going to do away with her once and for all, the tables completely turn on him.

and he says this, and this is where we will park:

Genesis 38:26 "She is more righteous than I, since I did not give her to my son, Shelah."

What this woman did was repulsive.

It was a low down, dirty, disgusting trick and never in a million years would I ever tell you that anything even close to this is even close to OK. But this is the truth that the bible tells us *clearly* in this story:

Judah thought he was sleeping with a *prostitute*. **Bad.**

Tamar **KNEW** she was committing incest. **WORSE.**

but the bible says that Judah, not taking care of the widow he was responsible for... **WORST.**

And, for most of us, especially for the extremely conservative Christians in the place, that is almost impossible to wrap your mind around.

Please notice this... He gives the reason she is more righteous, and it is not because He was guilty of the same crime... which he was. It takes two to get pregnant, and he was half of *that* equation. Both of them partook in a sin that is highly condemned literally all throughout the bible.

But it was the injustice that destroyed him. and here is why:

Because of the way that the society was built, he literally held her world in his hands.

He had turned his back on one of the most vulnerable members of society, whom the law actually required him to defend.

You see Boaz did not need to redeem Ruth. Yet he did.

Judah was lawfully obligated to redeem Tamar.

but instead he cast her out and sentenced her to death for a crime that he also had committed as an escape from having to care for her, so she had to take matters into her own hands.

and though her methods were distorted her motive was just.

Justice is Something Judah had robbed Tamar of, and she had a right to get it back. This was NOT vengeance. Judah sentencing Tamar to burn, that was vengeance. Tamar on the other hand, though her methods unconventional and sinful, her objective was simply justice.

Remember Mary's song? The Magnificat? We said this last week about it, "God is doing something, and it is going to bring injustice to its knees." He is going to level the playing field. The person who is rich is going to be sent away empty... because if you have the means to meet the needs that are in front of you, and you don't meet that need, that is injustice. And this is what it looked like for Judah. He had something that he under NO circumstances should have withheld from Tamar, yet he did withhold it, and suddenly, the playing field gets leveled.

So he says this: "She is more righteous than I"

The entire line, "she is more righteous" is one Hebrew word, and that word is *tsadaq* - and do you know what *tsadaq* means?

"Justice."

it literally means "to have a just cause, OR to be in the right, or WHAT IS RIGHT..."

Justice is **the right thing to do**.

That's the definition.

Sometimes it masquerades itself as revenge. Sometimes it masquerades itself as war. But those things aren't justice. Justice is simply the right thing to do.

What Tamar did was wrong, but it was *right*. And even though she took the wrong road, she got the right result,

and because God's heart is so close to the outcast...
because His heart is so close to the marginalized.
AND Because His heart is so close to the WIDOW...

He held Judah guilty, and though Tamar was guilty too, He held her guiltless:

Lets look one more time at the first verse we read today, Hosea 4:14 (NIV)

“I will **not punish** your daughters when they turn to prostitution, **nor your daughters-in-law when they commit adultery**, because the **men themselves** consort with harlots and sacrifice with **shrine prostitutes** - a people without understanding will come to ruin.”

You see the difference between the story of Ruth and the story of Tamar, is Justice found Ruth, Tamar had to find Justice.

But both, in the end, got what was right.

The playing field was leveled.

And this was something that I took away from this, and maybe this is just for me, or maybe this will resonate with you. But I have read the story of Judah and Tamar before, several times. And there are a few funny lines in there that I have made jokes about, (like “I bet you didn’t know that the bible said THIS!!!”) but overall, I have always read the story and just concluded that this Tamar chick is just awful. She is dirty. She is foul. And it never even mattered to me or really even occurred to me that it says that she was the more righteous of the two of them.

and I realized recently looking back, that for most of my life, I didn't really have a clue what justice was.

I knew all about sin. I knew what that was. I knew all about what was wrong.

But I didn’t really know much about what was right.

What was actually, truly, right. And that is why when I read this story I would think so negatively about Tamar. Because it was so blatantly wrong to me.

My entire life growing up was always about abstaining. What am I *not* doing? Am I pure? Do I lust? Do I sin? and there is absolutely no justifying sin, there is no justifying what Tamar did, or what Rahab did, or what David and the wife of Uriah did... There is no justifying sex in any context outside of a marriage, there is no justifying doing any of those things, but I have

found, *for me*, in all my efforts to *not do things*, I didn't do *much of anything* for other people, at all.

In my little "mission" of staying away from the sinful things I got so caught up in that, that I didn't notice people who were hurting.

I always noticed people when they were sinning. I was really good at that. I always knew when people were doing what they weren't supposed to be doing.

But I didn't notice the stranger.

I didn't think about the stranger. I thought about my friends. I didn't entertain angels. I entertained my friends! I entertained people who knew me and had something to offer me, and who made me feel comfortable.

and though those things are all great, if your life is limited to only that, then that is not the right thing.

You know, the bible is full of stories of people who did the *wrong* thing. Paul talked about it constantly. He said he always did what he didn't want to do...

King David and the wife of Uriah, they did the wrong thing. And an affair lead to a cover-up, and then lead to murder. But even King David's mess of a life culminated at grace. It culminated at God looking at him and saying "That is a man after my own heart.... a man who does ALL that I say"

Every instance of people doing the wrong thing all throughout the bible is met with grace.

Because the entire gospel of Jesus Christ is that:
We are people who do the wrong thing.

Yet the bible speaks over and over of a God who is extremely gracious to people who do the wrong thing.

But He is far less gracious toward the people who do NOT do the right thing.

The people who ignore justice, when it is right in front of them. The harshest judgments are set aside for them. James 4:17 puts it mildly when it says that “for him who knows what he ought to do, to not do it is a sin.” And Matthew 25 speaks of the harshest judgments going to the ones who ignore injustice.

Yet we focus on the sin part.

That is why when I would read things like Genesis 38, and even the story of Ruth, I never realized that I was reading a narrative of grace. So I pulled out the junk and I locked in on how screwed up everyone is, and how I should never be like them, and I totally missed the point of every one of the stories.

That every one of them culminates at grace, every single time.

Look at the way that the story of Ruth ends: with Boaz marrying Ruth, and then the two of them conceiving a son, and then it says this: (Ruth 4:14-17)

Then the women said to Naomi, “Blessed be the Lord, who has not left you this day without **a redeemer**, and may his name be renowned in Israel! He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age, for **your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons**, has given birth to him.” Then Naomi took the child and laid him on her lap and became his nurse. And the women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, “**A son has been born to Naomi.**” They named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.

Boaz was Ruth’s grace, but Ruth was Naomi’s grace. Ruth was more to Naomi than seven sons would have been, and even though we all know that Obed was the child of Ruth, look at what the people said:

“A son has been born to Naomi.”

Naomi’s family continued, because of Ruth.

The same Ruth that had every right and reason to abandon Naomi when she had become a widow, but instead said “Where you go I’ll go, where you stay I’ll stay. Your God will be my God.”

Ruth’s life culminated at grace.
Naomi’s life culminated at grace.
and Tamar’s life culminated at grace.

as suddenly, through less than ideal circumstances, Tamar found herself with twins.

and one of these twins was a son that she named Perez. Once again, not Judah’s first born son. Judah’s first born son was wicked... he was married to Tamar, and he died childless.

But she gave this boy the name Perez, which means to burst forth, or “breakthrough.” The bible says it this way “What a breach you have made for yourself” (Gen 38:29)

Because in the midst of such an awful sin being done against her, by the grace of God, justice broke through in her life.

And through “Breakthrough” the genealogy of Jesus Christ continued.

And at the end of this broken, messy, narrative of grace, another child breaks through. Another redeemer comes on the scene.

And His name is Jesus.

And He changes everything.

He changed everything for me, and he wants to change everything for you. He was born into one of the messiest families in history, if for no other reason than to show you that nothing you can ever do could ever separate you from his love. He lived a perfect life, and he died for your mess, so that you can one day join him in a place where there are no messes, and so you can be a part of Him cleaning up some of the messes here and now.

So for for us here and now, in this mess that is the world, in this mess that is Detroit, lets do the right thing.

Lets give ourselves to the cause of bringing justice to these kids whose Fathers are in prison this Christmas. Lets give ourselves to the cause of bringing Justice to the least of these, whether they enter our church, or we see them on the corner, or we hear their stories from our families while we sit by warm fires this Christmas knowing that some of them are out in the cold, and we realize all it takes is letting them.

Lets be like Boaz this Christmas. Lets throw ourselves in the middle of a broken world, because who knows? Maybe we are the only one that can redeem them.

Lets look for the needs this Christmas season, and lets live the perfect love of Jesus in our community.