

- Have you ever had times in your life when it feels as if things just aren't going well? What helps you at those times? What role does your faith play at difficult times?

## Hymns and Songs that help us reflect

*From the Circuit music for Ruth resource, collated by Peter Clarkson*

The hymn by Sydney Carter 'One more step along the world I go' (StF 676) picks up on the theme of resilience with its idea of taking another step and then another.

'One more step along the road I go...  
and it's from the old I travel to the new,  
keep me travelling along with you.'

Andrew Pratt's hymn 'Best of all is' (StF610), based on the final words of John Wesley links with the theme of family and love that we see in this first Chapter of Ruth. Verse 1 says:

'Best of all is God is with us,  
God will hold and never fail.  
Keep that truth when storms are raging,  
God remains though faith is frail.'

Another theme of this passage is suffering. Matt and Beth Redman talk about the presence of God even when things are difficult in their song 'Even though I walk through the valley' (StF626). For them, God doesn't let go when things are hard. Like Naomi though, we may find that hard to hold on to at times.

## Closing Prayer

Loving God, thank you that you continue to speak to us through the lives of the characters in the Bible. Where we have difficult choices in the week ahead, help us in discerning the next step to take. Thank you for those who have journeyed with us in life or are still journeying with us. May we continue to encounter you in each step we take. Amen.

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## Bible Month Bible Study – Ruth 1

### To start our thinking

What do you know about the story of Ruth already?

Make a note of any details you think you remember.

Who were the different characters in the story? Where were they? What happened? Keep these notes handy

so that you can see whether different things stand out about the story this time. If you don't know the story at all then why not jot down a few thoughts about what you are looking forward to about exploring one book of the Bible more carefully.



### A prayer

Loving God, as I come to think more about the book of Ruth on my own and yet also alongside others I pray, open my heart to your word and your word to my heart. Amen.

### An Introduction to Bible Month

*Written by the circuit planning group, based on the Bible month booklet*

Bible Month seeks to help churches and groups of churches engage deeply with Scripture through focusing on a single biblical book over a calendar month. While churches regularly preach on passages of Scripture, the distinctive feature of Bible Month is drawing all within the church to focus on a book of the Bible intensively over a four-week period.

Bible Month 2020 focuses on the book of Ruth, a short and sometimes overlooked story that shows God's faithfulness to a Moabite who travels to Israel. Each week we will look at one of the four chapters of Ruth and a particular character in that Chapter to see what insights we might build over our month of study and reflection.

### Why is Ruth important?

*Written by the circuit planning group, based on the Bible month booklet*

Ruth is a story about finding home and hope. Often read as a romantic comedy which begins, more or less, 'once upon a time' and ends, more or less, 'and they lived happily ever after,' those who spend time with it

come to see how it resists interpretation. Unsettling and transformative, Ruth offers new models of relationship, and provokes fresh insights into what it means to live out faith in the God whose generosity generates yet more life and love.

Ruth explores the human need for bread and belonging. It makes visible the lengths to which individuals will go to ensure the survival of themselves and their loved ones. And it suggests that, through loving kindness, God is present.

## Introducing Week 1 – the story of Orpah

*Written by the circuit planning group, based on the Bible month booklet*

*Picture from the Bible Month booklet*



At the time of 'Judges', there was famine in Bethlehem. Naomi was alone after the death of her husband and sons. She travelled to Israel with Orpah and Ruth, her daughters-in law. On the way Orpah

was encouraged to return home but Ruth went on with Naomi. When they arrived in Bethlehem, Naomi declared she was now named Marah as God had made her life bitter. The barley harvest was just beginning.

## Today's Reading – Ruth Chapter 1

You might find it helpful to read this in a couple of different versions of the Bible if you have access to them. Contact Lorna if you have no Bible and she will get a copy of the readings to you.

## Opening Questions from Lorna

Our opening questions will be the same each time and are there to help us see what we noticed about the text we read.

- What words or phrases stood out to you most from the passage you have just read?
- Was there anything new or surprising?
- Anything you found difficult?
- Are there any themes emerging?

You may like to read the passage again at this point and see if there is anything else you want to note.

## A brief reflection from Lorna on the passage

There are times, aren't there, when for us or for people known to us it seems as if one thing comes after another and everything just becomes so overwhelming. Perhaps some of you have felt that during the current crisis. Certainly, the extent of the grief and loss the three women we encounter in the first part of the story is what struck me.

Reading on though, I found it interesting to think about Orpah. She isn't the most well known of the characters and had the Bible month material not led me to think about her, I may not have paid her much attention. Yet once I did turn my mind to her, I was struck by how clearly the decision not to go with Naomi was a painful one. She seemed genuinely torn between going back to her own family or staying with Naomi. I saw, perhaps for the first time, the strong bond between these two people who had both known great sorrow.

Yes, Orpah did make a different choice to Ruth, but it was not made quickly or lightly and I found the story of her parting moving. It's times like this when I do wish there was more detail in the Bible. What happened to Orpah? Was she happy in the end? Did things get better for her? I hope so.

## Further Questions based on this passage

- There is a clear theme of companionship emerging in Ruth. Who are your companions with whom you find the way?
- Bring to mind a time when you have had to make a difficult choice. How did you work out what to do? What helped you to make your decision in the end? What influence did those who journey with you have? Where do you think God was in that?
- Think of any encounters you might have had where you don't know how the story ended for someone. Perhaps there is a friend from school you lost touch with. Perhaps you helped a stranger in some way and have always wondered if they were okay.