

When we think of looking after the most vulnerable of society, it brings to mind the messages of Christ about care for neighbour. This idea that our human lives and relationship are things that we share as a community of faith can be found in Wesley's hymn 'thou God of truth and love' (StF620) which says:

'Didst thou not make us one,  
that we might one remain,  
together travel on,  
and share our joy and pain.'

Many hymn writers reflect on our shared identity as followers of Christ, particularly in our communion hymns. Bernadette Farrell writes about how sharing in bread and wine can 'lead us to one another' (StF 577). It reminded me of my ordination retreat where the group who led had many different ways of expressing their theology, but had committed to always try and move towards the other. I have found that idea of moving towards another is something that has stuck with me in ministry.

### Closing Prayer

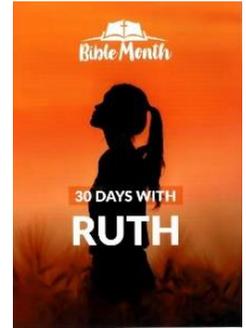
Loving God, we give thanks that you are a God of vulnerability. Help us to be prepared to share our own vulnerabilities as well as responding to the vulnerability of others. We pray especially at this time for all those who are faced with impossible choices, all of which are risky. Help us to be aware of the things we can do to empower people to have more positive choices available to them. We offer these prayers in and through the name of the vulnerable Christ whose victory over the vulnerability of death is our hope and our joy. Amen.

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## Bible Month Bible Study – Ruth 3

### To start our thinking

How have you been finding the book of Ruth so far?  
What themes are beginning to emerge for you?  
What has stayed with you from what you have read so far? You may like to jot down your thoughts as we prepare to look at the next Chapter.

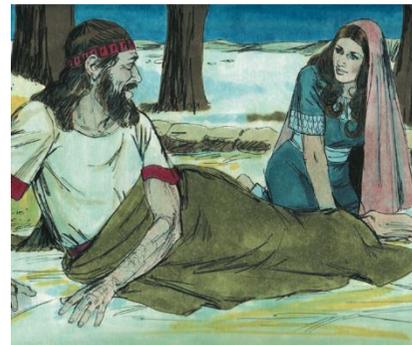


### A prayer

Loving God, once again, 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.

### Introducing Week 3 – the story of Ruth

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



Naomi, anxious to find a home for Ruth, encouraged her to go to the threshing floor and lie at Boaz' feet to request marriage. As there was a closer relative, Boaz first needed to offer him the chance of marrying Ruth. Boaz protected Ruth that night and sent her home with a supply of barley.

### Today's Reading – Ruth Chapter 3

As with the previous week, 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

I do find this chapter of Ruth a little uncomfortable in some ways, talking as it does of some private and sensitive moments in a very public way. I can almost sense the tensions present in the different characters as I am reading it and it reminds me of the importance of understanding the context of what we read in the Bible.

The risk Ruth takes in going to Boaz should not be underestimated, but nor should we neglect to recognise the precarious position she is in anyway. A modern saying for that might be that Ruth is between a rock and a hard place.

On the one hand she is in the triple threat situation of being a woman, a widow and an outsider. All of these things mean her position in society is at best precarious and at worst leaves her in serious danger of being forgotten or even abused by society and unable to access the very basics of life – food, water and shelter.

On the other hand, she remains under the pressure of social conformity that expects certain behaviours. Ruth and Naomi both recognise though that unless they do something, it will not end well for them. So, they risk the little they have, their reputation, to change their story. What a choice to have to make.

## Further Questions based on this passage

- What did you notice about the character of Ruth in this story?
- In the notes for Bible month, Rachel Starr notices that although Boaz seems flattered by Ruth's approach, he also puts up a barrier initially. What barriers might we put up? What barriers might there be for others in society? Are there any barriers that we might put up in a church context?
- The theme of vulnerability emerges in this chapter. What have been your experiences of being vulnerable? What vulnerabilities do you see in others? Where do we see vulnerability in our local communities?
- In verse 9 Boaz asks Ruth 'Who are you'? It's a question that has come up before in the chapters we have read and speaks to the theme of identity? If you were asked, what would you say your identity was? What does your identity as a Christian mean to you? What does our identity as a community of faith mean to us, and to other people?

## Hymns and Songs that help us reflect

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

Again this week, it was a John Bell hymn that came to mind when I was thinking about vulnerability. He reminds us that our faith needs to inspire us to respond to such vulnerability in the world around us:

'Heaven shall not wait  
for the poor to lose their patience,  
the corned to smile,  
the despised to find a friend:  
Jesus is Lord;  
he has championed the unwanted;  
in him injustice confronts its timely end .' (StF 701)