



Welcome the Stranger

(based on Ruth 2:1-4, 14-23; 4:13-22)

Naomi and Ruth had been on a long journey. They had traveled all the way from the land of Moab to Naomi's home in Bethlehem. Naomi tried to stop her daughter-in-law, Ruth, from coming with her.

"You will miss your family," she explained to Ruth.

But Ruth refused to leave Naomi.

"Do not try to send me home," Ruth insisted. "I promise I will never leave you. I will go wherever you go. I want to live with you, wherever you live. I will love the people you love. And I will love your God."

After a long hard journey, the two widows finally reached Bethlehem. They quickly settled into their new home. It wasn't easy at first because they did not have enough money to pay for food and other things.

One day, Ruth had an idea. In that time, it was the custom for farmers to let the women pick up the grain that dropped during the harvest. Ruth went out to the fields of a farmer named Boaz.

Boaz had heard about Ruth's kindness. He knew that she had left her home in Moab to come to Bethlehem with Naomi. He was aware that her life was hard. Boaz welcomed Ruth into his fields.

"You are welcome to pick up grain here," Boaz told Ruth. "When you get thirsty, please help yourself to the water in my water jars."

Boaz wanted to make sure that Ruth found enough grain. "Make sure you look after Ruth," he ordered the farm workers. "When you cut the grain, leave plenty behind for her to pick up."

At lunchtime, Boaz called Ruth over to sit in the shade of a big tree. He made sure that she had plenty of food to eat.

Ruth worked hard in the field until evening. When she came home that night, she had a huge basket of grain. Naomi was amazed! Where had it all come from? Ruth told Naomi how kind and welcoming Boaz had been.

Ruth went to Boaz's fields every day to gather grain. Eventually, Ruth and Boaz got to know each other, and they decided to get married. Boaz welcomed Ruth and Naomi into his house. It wasn't long before God blessed Ruth with a beautiful baby boy. Ruth and Boaz were overjoyed. They named their son Obed.

Naomi loved her grandson and helped take care of him. She thought about everything that had happened and gave thanks for God's love and care.



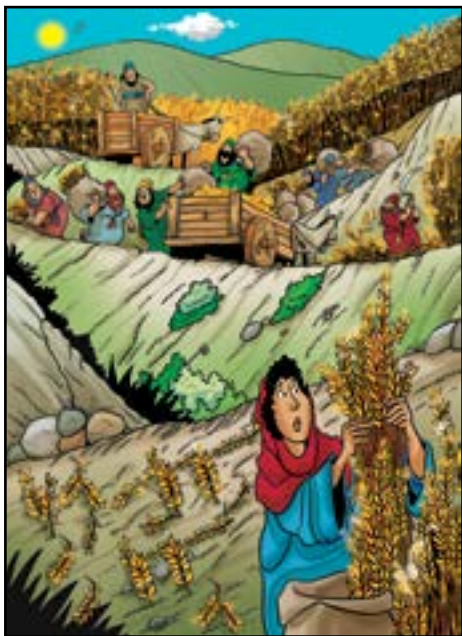
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Use one or more activities from each section to explore grace and gratitude with your children this week.

Recognizing God's Grace

- Read and enjoy the story with your children—imagine and wonder.
- Have you ever moved? Moving can cause us to worry, but eventually, the new place feels like home. Give thanks to God for taking care of you and your family during the move.
- Naomi received unexpected kindness from Ruth, and Ruth received unexpected kindness from Boaz. Ask your children for stories of unexpected kindnesses they've received, and share some of your own stories.



Responding to God's Grace

- Think of ways to make new neighbors welcome in your neighborhood.
- What Ruth did was called *gleaning* the field. This still occurs. Do an internet search on "gleaning" and see what you find. Then go to presbyterianmission.org/hunger and explore the Presbyterian Hunger Program. Are there ways you can help hungry people?
- Boaz made it possible for Ruth to be successful by gleaning his fields. Help your children practice helping others by holding the door for people, carrying items, helping prepare supper, and sorting laundry by color.

Celebrating in Gratitude

- The ancient meaning of *Bethlehem* is "house of bread." Make bread or biscuits together, emphasizing the connection between grain, flour, and bread.
- Make a bread cloth for placing on the table or in a basket for when you have bread at a meal. Obtain a plain cotton towel or a piece of plain cotton fabric. Use fabric markers or crayons to decorate the edges of the cloth with images representing grain and bread, or the things needed to make bread: sun, rain, hands, and hearts.
- Pray this prayer:

Thank you, God, for your love and care. Help us to show kindness to others. Amen.