

Growing in God's Love

A Story Bible Curriculum

Naomi and Ruth



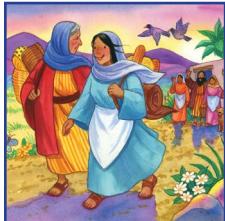
Growing in God's Love

A Story Bible Curriculum

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New Life in Bethlehem
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Connecting

Goal: To explore the meaning of home through the story of Ruth and Naomi.

Connecting with the Biblical Text

As you read the biblical text, note textual elements that belie Naomi's deep faith. Pay attention to the meaning of names as clues about the arc of the story: Naomi means "pleasant," Elimelech means "my God is King," and the names of their sons are Mahlon ("sickly") and Chilion ("frail"). They live in Bethlehem, which literally means "house of bread." They leave as a family to immigrate to Moab, a different country, because there was no bread, no food available in Bethlehem because of the drought.

Notice how many times you read the word *return*. This is a story about turning and returning—physically, emotionally, and spiritually. What did Naomi return to? What turning did Ruth experience?

Finally, pay attention to Naomi's words to Ruth and Orpah when she decides to return home to Bethlehem. She tells them to return to their mother's homes, which is curious because men were considered to be heads of household, not women. What do you think this means?

For additional reading about this text, visit bit.ly/GLRuth1.

Connecting with the World

- Who in your community works to welcome and support the relocation of refugees? In what ways is your church involved in helping to resettle people in their new home?
- Presbyterian Disaster Assistance (PDA) helps with resettlement of refugees. They also train volunteers to provide active response when people are dislocated because of environmental disasters. Read more about their work at bit.ly/GLPDAResponses.

Connecting with the Spiritual Lives of Children

This story highlights many themes relatable to children—loss, change, the strength and love of family, faith in God, hope. Children know what it's like to lose something or someone. They experience change and transitions in many ways. Through it all, the sustaining presence of family and extended family—and their church family—can help them see and know love and faith. Faith in God looks like people helping out when something bad happens. Faith in God looks like love and hugs at bedtime after reading a story like this. Faith in God looks like sharing food or clothes or shelter with someone who needs it.

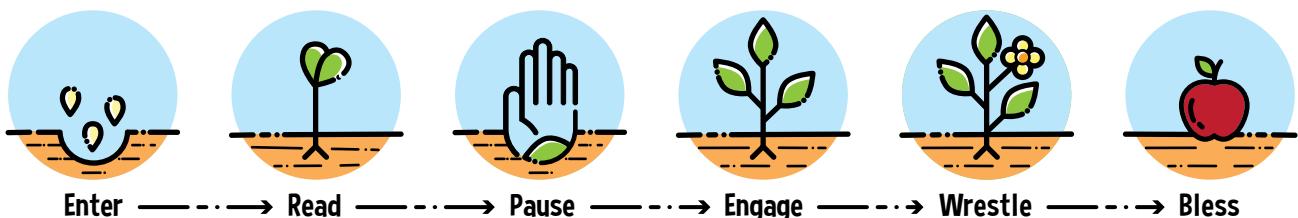
Faith in God becomes real in the life of a child when it is experienced, just as Ruth and Orpah experienced with Naomi.

Connecting with the Spiritual Lives of Adults

As we have read in this story, Naomi was both pleasant and bitter. We see both sides of her in this story of leaving, loss, and returning. We also get a glimpse of her faith in God and her judgment about God. We hear her blessings for Ruth and Orpah. And we read Ruth's promise to Naomi.

When have you wanted to blame God for something difficult or tragic that happened in your life? When and how have you expressed your confidence in God's abiding presence? These are both questions evoked by these women's story. Naomi was certainly a blessing in the lives of Ruth and Orpah. Who has been a blessing in your life, a woman who has believed in you, loved you, modeled what it means to wrestle with their faith and to confirm it in their words and actions? Give thanks for their presence in your life.

God of comings and goings, of turns and returns, help us to trust you with the faith of Ruth and Naomi. Amen.



Leading

Gathering Supplies

Based on your choices, you will need:

- ✓ *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible*
- ✓ Pillows, cushions, or carpet squares
- ✓ Battery-operated candle
- ✓ Copies of Resource Page 1
- ✓ *Where Is Home, Daddy Bear?* by Nicola O'Byrne (Flyaway Books, 2019) or internet-connected device
- ✓ Internet-connected device
- ✓ Newsprint
- ✓ Large construction paper
- ✓ Glue sticks

Preparing to Lead

Read Ruth 1:1–19a in your Bible. Think about the following questions:

- ✓ If you are familiar with this text, how so? Was it a part of your Sunday school lessons or children's worship, or is this a text familiar to you as an adult?
- ✓ How does this text speak to you right now?

Read "Leaving Moab" from *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible* (p. 60). Imagine hearing this story for the first time as a child. Be prepared for some of the children's questions that may arise through conversation and this session:

- ✓ The context of women in biblical times (the reality of the life of a widow, women living with their families before marriage, and so on.)
- ✓ The potentially overwhelming amount of death in this story
- ✓ Modern-day questions around immigration

As you prepare to lead, remember the names and faces of the children you will encounter. What do you know about them and their life situations? Pray for them, that they may feel safe, loved, and ready to learn in your group.

If you are unsure or uncomfortable in pronouncing the names of the characters in the story, consider performing an internet search for their pronunciation.

As children gather, invite volunteers to make a comfortable seating area with items such as floor pillows, cushions, or carpet squares in a circle.



Enter into sacred space together.

Greet the children as they arrive and invite them to take turns sharing about something meaningful they did recently with their family.

Consider carefully the language that you use around families throughout this session and the rest of the unit. As the story of Ruth and Naomi shows us, families come in all different configurations. Children's family configurations could include a mom and a dad, single parents, same gender parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, foster parents, and so on. All families are good families!

Once everyone has arrived, turn on your candle as a way to mark this time and space as special, set apart, important, and holy. Tell the children that God is with us everywhere, and lighting a candle is a way to remember God is here with us right now.

Pray the following prayer, inviting the children to repeat after you as you pray:

Holy God, /
thank you for always being with us, /
even when hard things
happen to us or our families. /
In those hard times, /
help us to be able to feel
the big love you have for us. /
Amen. /



Read a story of God's people.

Wonder together about a time when the children's families have done a difficult thing together. Use some of the following questions for conversation:

- ✓ Have you moved to a new place before where you did not know anyone?
- ✓ Has your family changed in some way? A new sibling? A divorce? A death in the family?

Explain to the children that today's Bible story is about a family that changes shape because of some hard things that happened to them, just like some of the situations they shared.

Leading

Read aloud the story “Leaving Moab” from *Growing in God’s Love: A Story Bible* (p. 60).



Pause to let God’s Word enter into hearts and minds.

Invite the children to take a few moments to quietly reflect on the story of Ruth and Naomi leaving Moab. Encourage the children to wonder about where God is in the story.



Engage curiosity and imagination with God’s story.

This story is ripe for discussion with the children, especially because of children’s willingness to emotionally engage with the experiences of people in the Bible. Engage the children in conversation using the following questions:

- ☞ Why did Naomi want to go to her hometown, Bethlehem?
- ☞ Who might be waiting for her in Bethlehem?
- ☞ After Ruth’s husband died, were Ruth and Naomi family anymore? Why or why not?
- ☞ Why did Ruth decide to follow Naomi?
- ☞ What did Naomi hear in Ruth’s words that made her sure that Ruth wouldn’t change her mind?
- ☞ What do you wish you knew more about in this story?
- ☞ Where is God in this story?

It is important for children to hear their wondering ideas welcomed and reflected back by adults.

Refrain from praising answers as good or bad, right or wrong. All thoughtful wondering is good wondering. Feel free to ask clarifying questions to push children to reflect more deeply.

○ Worries and Celebrations

- ☞ Comment that today’s story has several ups and downs. Ask the children what one “down” or sad thing and one “up” or happy thing was that happened in the story.
- ☞ Hand out copies of Resource Page 1. Have the children write words or draw pictures of the worries or celebrations present in today’s story. Tell them to write or draw the celebrations on the mountaintops and the worries in the low valleys.

☞ Then invite the children to imagine that they are Ruth or Naomi. Ask:

- What worries or celebrations would they have had or felt that were *not* mentioned in the story. Some ideas might be worrying about how far Bethlehem is from Moab or celebrating going home to a familiar place.

☞ Invite the children to share about their own worries and celebrations. Tell the children that God was with Ruth and Naomi in their worries and celebrations and that God will remain with us too!



Wrestle with our place in God’s story.

The story of Ruth and Naomi leaving Moab is a story some of the children in your group may have experienced themselves: leaving a beloved home under hard circumstances in order to find a more hopeful situation. Transitions of any kind are difficult for children, but a transition as big as moving can be overwhelming.

Invite the children to share their experiences of moving and transitioning to a new home. Ask:

- What was hard about it?
- What was easy?
- How did the new place eventually feel like home?
- What was that process like?

Choose one or both options:

○ *Where Is Home, Daddy Bear?*

- ☞ This book introduces the idea of the emotional weight, especially for children, of moving to a new place.
- ☞ As a group, brainstorm ideas about what home means. Write out the children’s ideas on sheet of newsprint.
- ☞ Tell the children that they will hear a story about a little bear who finds out that sometimes moving doesn’t go as planned and learns what *home* really is!
- ☞ Read aloud *Where Is Home, Daddy Bear?* by Nicola O’Byrne or show the YouTube video “Where Is Home, Daddy Bear?” By Nicola O’Byrne” (bit.ly/GLHomeDaddyBear, 5:09).

Leading

- leaf Have the children look back at their definitions of home. Invite them to share any new ideas or ways they would like to change their definitions. Ask:
 - How did the story help your understanding of what makes a house a home?
 - What makes your house a home?

If your group of children incorporates a wide range of ages, invite an older child to read the book or take brainstorming notes on the definition of home.

○ Making a Home

- leaf Draw a large, simple outline of house on a sheet of newsprint. Explain to the children that they will create a new home in this house. Invite the children to take turns drawing or writing words inside the house to represent what they would need to make this house their new home.
- leaf Be prepared to encourage the children to consider what goes into a home besides “stuff,” such as laughter, excitement, and comfort.
- leaf Once the children think that the house is now a home, discuss together what the house *really* needed to become a home. Ask:
 - Is there anything that can be taken out?
 - Is there anything that is missing?



Bless one another with God's grace.

Gather the children in your gathering space and reflect on the story of Ruth and Naomi leaving Moab together. Recall what were some of the big feelings and the worries and celebrations in the story. Ask the children what they decided is really necessary for a place to become a home.

Tell them that God was with Ruth and Naomi in their hard times and their good times and that God is with us in these times too.

Close with the following prayer, inviting the children to repeat after you as you pray:

God of worries and celebrations, /
thank you for being with us in hard times /
and in good times. /

Thank you for the people who love us /
and help us feel at home. /
We love you. /
Amen. /



Grow with more.

○ Immigration and Welcome

- leaf Tell the children that people who move to a new country to find a home are called immigrants. They have not left their home because of war or violence, such as people who are refugees and seeking refuge in a new place. Immigrants may have moved to a new country because of no jobs for them where they lived, a natural disaster, or family circumstances, like Ruth and Naomi. Many, like like them, move to a new place without much money, a home to go to, or the supports they need. They go to a new place for better opportunities.
- leaf Show the YouTube video “Kids Talk Immigration” (bit.ly/GLKidsTalkImmigration, 2:53).
- leaf After the video, ask:
 - What did you learn about immigration?
 - What surprised you?
 - What would it be like to move to a new country, where probably you don't know the language or ways people do things?
- leaf Comment that sometimes people don't want others who are different from them, like immigrants, in their community so they make the immigrants feel not welcome. Tell the children that one way they can let others know that all are welcome is to make signs to post in windows or doors of their home or church.
- leaf Invite the children to use large pieces of construction paper paper to write in large letters “We Choose Welcome!” Encourage them to decorate their signs.
- leaf If you want to provide signs in different languages, Go to bit.ly/GLPCUSARefugeeMinistry and click on the link “We Choose Welcome Signs.” Follow the next link to download the signs and print them. Have the children glue the sign to a piece of large construction paper.

Celebrations



Worries

