Naomi and Ruth November 21, 2021

**Bible Verses:** Ruth 1:1-18

**Spark Story Bible:** pages 110 to 113

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Overall Lesson Takeaways

* **The importance of love and support, even in tough times.**

More than anything, the Book of Ruth is beloved for its depiction of a loving, supportive relationship between two women going through incredibly trying times. Naomi has lost her husband and sons; Ruth, too, has lost her husband. Despite their grief, Ruth not only maintains the familial connection that was no longer required under Jewish law – she expands it! The most famous verse in the Book of Ruth (1:16) perfectly encapsulates her love and caring: Ruth said, "Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God". Anyone who has been through a difficult time knows how valuable someone else's unshakeable love and support can be… so how can we offer that sort of love and support to others?

* **God wants us to love everyone – not just our family.**

Like the passages we’ve been reading in Genesis, the story of Ruth is first and foremost a family story. But one of the important details that can sometimes be overlooked is that Ruth wasn’t actually from Israel – she and Orpah were from Moab, the country immediately to the east of Israel. Ruth’s deep compassion and caring for Naomi, even when they weren’t technically family anymore, is a reminder that we should always care what happens to other people. In the same way that Joseph’s journey to Egypt began moving God’s promises outside of Israel/Abraham’s family, Ruth’s inclusion into this covenant family – she ends up being King David’s great-grandmother! -

* **The importance of loyalty and faithfulness.**

As the story of Naomi and Ruth continues, the theme of loyalty and faithfulness comes up again and again for all three of the main characters: Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz. There is a Hebrew word which is often used in Rabbinic texts to describe this sort of relationship: *hesed* (pronounced "hess-idd"), which means "steadfast love" or "loving-kindness". That sort of benevolent love is characteristic of God's covenantal relationship with Israel – an unshakeable, unconditional love that continues from the Book of Genesis through Jesus' arrival (and obviously beyond) – and it is the type of love that we should ultimately aspire to as people of God. So, what would it mean for us to hold closer to a spirit of hesed in our lives?

Checking In

**Before the reading:**

* **Check in with the kids – welcoming any newcomers warmly.**
	+ Younger kids: What are you doing for Thanksgiving this year?
	+ Older kids: Share highs and lows from the past week
* **What are some of your favorite Thanksgiving foods? Do you have any special traditions that you do each year?**

Bible Lesson / Discussion

**Reading the Bible:**

* Many of us will gather with our families this week for Thanksgiving – and our Bible passage today is all about family too! We’ve finished with the Book of Genesis, so today we’re going to be reading from Ruth.
* **Read the text together, either in the Bible, or the Spark Story Bible.**
	+ Feel free to stop and ask questions during the reading, if helpful.
	+ Afterwards, take time to explore what that passage might mean, and know there's no one *correct* way to read these passages!

**Questions About the Passage** (see next page for PreK/K questions)

* Ruth didn’t want to leave Naomi alone – who do you count on to always help you? (Family, friends, God, etc.)
* Ruth’s love and caring can be a reminder of the difference that we can make in other people’s lives. How can we show our love and support to family members, our friends at school, or even strangers?

**Connections to Our Lives**

* Ruth is sometimes lifted up as an example of being loyal. What does the word ‘loyal’ mean to you? What are things that you are loyal to, or people that you are loyal to? Why is being loyal important?
* Ruth travelled all the way from a different country to be with Naomi – do you think it would be hard to live in a new country? Have you ever visited a different country? Where might you want to live?

**Biblical/Church Connections**

* Today is Reign of Christ Sunday, which is the last Sunday of our church year… essentially like New Years! What is one thing that you hope will be different in this “new year”? (New church year, anyway)

**Alternate Preschool and K/1st Questions**

Younger ages, particularly those in our preschool class, may have a hard time discussing the biblical text for very long (if at all). My hope is that these questions (and especially the activity) can help with engagement!

**Opening Questions**

* This is a special week for many families when we celebrate Thanksgiving on Thursday – giving thanks for our family, food, and God’s love. What is your family doing for Thanksgiving? Is there anything you’re excited to eat or do?

**Fun Warm-Up Activity – Pick-A-Side**

* Our Bible passage today is about a woman named Ruth choosing to help and show love to someone who was feeling sad and lonely – so I thought it would be fun to practice making choices with the game “Pick a Side!”
* One side of the room will be for one answer, one side for the other – kids should stand up and walk to the side they choose.
* All of these are examples for Fall:
	+ Would you rather: eat ice cream, or pie?
	+ Would you rather: play outside with family, or play a game inside?
	+ Would you rather: pick apples, or pick pumpkins?
	+ Would you rather: go sledding, or go ice skating?

**Reading the Bible:**

* Many of us will gather with our families this week for Thanksgiving – and our Bible passage today is all about family too! We’ve finished with the Book of Genesis, so today we’re going to be reading from Ruth.
* **Read the text together, either in the Bible, or the Spark Story Bible.**

**Bible Discussion/Questions**

* Ruth didn’t want to leave Naomi alone – who helps you when you’re feeling lonely? Have you ever helped someone not feel lonely?
* Ruth is really nice to Naomi and says they’ll always be family – and that makes Naomi really happy. What are things that make you happy? Let’s all say thanks to God together for what we share!

People of Faith

In addition to reading our weekly Bible story, I'd love for our older grade school students to learn more about people whose lives were changed by their faith in Jesus. We'll lift up a new person each Sunday, trying to connect their story to our Bible passage as much as possible!

**Lucretia Mott**

Ruth’s faithfulness and tireless commitment were certainly admirable traits – and those two things can be seen just as clearly in the life and work of the abolitionist and women’s rights leader Lucretia Mott.

Mott was born in 1793 into a deeply religious family of American Quakers, a religious movement that she remained part of her entire life long. When she was 13, she was sent to live in a Quaker boarding school in New York – where she would eventually teach following her graduation.

An excellent teacher and speaker, Mott was able to become a Quaker minister in a time when virtually every other denomination would not ordain women – and she soon began to travel and preach all across the country, speaking out against slavery even in places where it was dangerous for her to do so. She and her husband would later found the American Anti-Slavery Society and a variety of other anti-slavery groups – eventually helping to build and lead a nationwide coalition, even as she was often excluded or shunned as a female preacher.

In the midst of campaigning against slavery, Mott met a fellow women’s rights activist named Elizabeth Cady Stanton – and the two would later host the country’s first women’s rights convention in 1848. Following the conclusion of the Civil War, the two joined with Susan B. Anthony in 1866 to begin the Equal Rights Association – committed to achieving equal voting rights for women. Mott was elected as the first President of this new group.

Although she unfortunately did not live to see the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment allowing women to vote in 1920, a portion of the amendment was eventually named in her honor. As one author later reflected: “When Mott died in 1880, she was widely judged by her contemporaries as being the greatest American woman of the 19th century” – always willing to lead from her deep sense of call and faith in God.

Crafts / Activities

**Naomi and Ruth Heart Craft**

**(Ages 3+, 3-5 mins)**

Supplies Needed:

* Printed Handout
* Scissors/Tape
* Markers/Crayons

Instructions:

* Have kids decorate a few hearts (front and back) and then you can attach these hearts onto a pencil, straw, etc.

**Naomi and Ruth Letter Puzzle**

**(Ages 7+, 3 mins)**

Supplies Needed:

* Printed Handout
* Markers/Crayons

Instructions:

* This puzzle requires kids to follow the instructions on the right side; it’s not bad once you understand what to do, but might be confusing to start.

**Naomi and Ruth Music Puzzle**

**(Ages 7+, 5 mins)**

Supplies Needed:

* Printed Handout
* Pen/Pencil/Crayons

Instructions:

* This puzzle will teach kids a little about music, but it also serves as a sort of secret code to write/translate a handful of letters (A through G)

Biblical Background – Naomi and Ruth[[1]](#footnote-1)

We've officially finished the Book of Genesis, but we still have one week in the Old Testament before we quickly pivot to the Gospels during the season of Advent! Our passage comes from a lesser-known book in the Old Testament: the Book of Ruth. Ruth is only four chapters long and is nestled in between the far longer books of Judges and 1 Samuel, so it's perfectly understandable if you've flipped right past it before! There are a couple of aspects, though, that make it an important text as we make our way to Advent and Jesus’ arrival.

Ruth has taken on newfound popularity in recent years, primarily for its depiction of loyalty, love, and faithfulness in difficult situations. Coming off of several weeks when we were learning about God’s covenant with Abraham and Abraham’s descendants, the Book of Ruth models what these covenantal relationships might look like between people, as well as with God – making it as good of a one-week bridge as any between Genesis and the Gospels!

This text, however, was historically valued for details that come out at the end of the story rather than the section that we read. Ruth and her new husband Boaz give birth to a son named Obed, who becomes the father of Jesse, who becomes the father of David – meaning that Ruth is King David’s great-grandmother! What makes this even more noteworthy is that Ruth wasn't Hebrew by birth – she was a Moabite, the neighbors to the east of Jerusalem across the Dead Sea (modern day Jordan) who weren't exactly beloved in Israel. Bloodlines mean far less to us today than they did in the ancient world (which is certainly a good thing!) but for ancient readers it would have been shocking that David's bloodline included a "foreigner" – which, in turn, means Jesus' bloodline in Matthew's Gospel does as well! This arguably represents an early precursor to the universal nature of Jesus' message, expanding God's people beyond Israel.

Finally, a fun new name notes: Oprah Winfrey’s actual given name is Orpah, named after Ruth and Naomi’s other companion. There are also a great deal of Hebrew meanings behind the names in the story: Ruth – "friend", Naomi – "pleasant", Mara– "bitter", Orpah – "back of the neck" (she turned away from Naomi), Elimelech – "God is King", and Boaz – "In him is strength"

1. Your ability to share this info with kids will vary depending on their age – this section is mainly written for teachers and parents to learn a bit more about the background to each week's passage! [↑](#footnote-ref-1)