



*Welcome to our reflection on Ruth Chapter 1,  
for the first week of Bible Month 2020...*

This is the first of a series of four reflections for Bible Month, which this year focusses on the book of Ruth. Each will reflect on one chapter of the book from a different perspective. The material for these reflections has come from the '30 days with Ruth' Bible Month material, offered by the Leaders of Worship and Preachers Trust. Today's reflection is inspired by, and directly draws on, resources prepared by Charlotte Hendy, Discipleship and Evangelism Enabler for Girls' Brigade Ministries.

[The phrases in " " come from her material in '30 days with Ruth']

As we begin, find a comfortable place to sit or lie...you probably need about half an hour when you hope you will not be interrupted...you might also want to have with you those things which help you to reflect...you might choose to have a notebook and pen handy, or some paper and coloured pencils...a holding cross...or a lit candle...whatever helps you to be both relaxed and attentive to God and to yourself...

This week we use our imaginations to reflect with Ruth Chapter 1. "The book of Ruth features a number of different characters. Some, like Ruth and Naomi, are featured throughout, and some, like Orpah, receive just a small mention. However, they all have something to teach us, for when we put ourselves in somebody else's shoes we always learn something – no matter how minor they may be.

Imaginative Contemplation helps us to do just that.

Typically used with the gospel accounts, it's a method of looking at the bible that was developed by St Ignatius of Loyola in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. It invites you to enter into a

biblical story and imagine yourself as one of the characters within it. You move from reading the account to participating within it, for example becoming a person in the crowd, a disciple, or the boy with the loaves and the fishes.

Not only does this method allow you to look at the Bible in a fresh way, but it also reminds us that it's a living text, and always has something new to teach or show us."

So as we begin, let us pray...

*Gracious God, as we pause in your presence and in the company of scripture, we trust to your care all those people and situations which are on our minds...help us in this time to be attentive to the words we encounter, to those things which you will help us to see and hear, to our own inner voice...help us to learn and grow as we reflect. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*

We are going to spend some reading, Ruth Chapter 1. We have it here from the New Revised Standard Version, which is a modern translation of the Hebrew text, and from 'The Message', which is a paraphrase where we hear scripture in language which tries to reflect the way we speak and use language today. You may also like to read from another translation or paraphrase.

### Ruth Chapter 1 (NRSV)

In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land, and a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went to live in the country of Moab, he and his wife and two sons. The name of the man was Elimelech and the name of his wife Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion; they were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They went into the country of Moab and remained

there. But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons. These took Moabite wives; the name of one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. When they had lived there for about ten years, both Mahlon and Chilion also died, so that the woman was left without her two sons or her husband.

Then she started to return with her daughters-in-law from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the country of Moab that the LORD had had consideration for his people and given them food. So she set out from the place where she had been living, she and her two daughters-in-law, and they went on their way to go back to the land of Judah. But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, 'Go back each of you to your mother's house. May the LORD deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. The LORD grant that you may find security, each of you in the house of your husband.' Then she kissed them, and they wept aloud. They said to her, 'No, we will return with you to your people.' But Naomi said, 'Turn back, my daughters, why will you go with me? Do I still have sons in my womb that they may become your husbands? Turn back, my daughters, go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. Even if I thought there was hope for me, even if I should have a husband tonight and bear sons, would you then wait until they were grown? Would you then refrain from marrying? No, my daughters, it has been far more bitter for me than for you, because the hand of the LORD has turned against me.' Then they wept aloud again. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.

So she said, 'See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law.' But 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.

Where you die, I will die—  
there will I be buried.

May the LORD do thus and so to me,  
and more as well,

if even death parts me from you!’

When Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her,  
she said no more to her.

So the two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem.  
When they came to Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred  
because of them; and the women said, ‘Is this Naomi?’ She  
said to them,

‘Call me no longer Naomi,  
call me Mara,  
for the Almighty has dealt bitterly with me.

I went away full,  
but the LORD has brought me back empty;

why call me Naomi  
when the LORD has dealt harshly with me,  
and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?’

So Naomi returned together with Ruth the Moabite, her  
daughter-in-law, who came back with her from the country  
of Moab. They came to Bethlehem at the beginning of the  
barley harvest.

## Ruth Chapter 1 (The Message)

Once upon a time—it was back in the days when judges led Israel— there was a famine in the land. A man from Bethlehem in Judah left home to live in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons. The man's name was Elimelech; his wife's name was Naomi; his sons were named Mahlon and Kilion—all Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They all went to the country of Moab and settled there.

Elimelech died and Naomi was left, she and her two sons. The sons took Moabite wives; the name of the first was Orpah, the second Ruth. They lived there in Moab for the next ten years. But then the two brothers, Mahlon and Kilion, died. Now the woman was left without either her young men or her husband.

One day she got herself together, she and her two daughters-in-law, to leave the country of Moab and set out for home; she had heard that GOD had been pleased to visit his people and give them food. And so she started out from the place she had been living, she and her two daughters-in-law with her, on the road back to the land of Judah.

After a short while on the road, Naomi told her two daughters-in-law, "Go back. Go home and live with your mothers. And may GOD treat you as graciously as you treated your deceased husbands and me. May GOD give each of you a new home and a new husband!" She kissed them and they cried openly.

They said, "No, we're going on with you to your people."

But Naomi was firm: "Go back, my dear daughters. Why would you come with me? Do you suppose I still have sons in my womb who can become your future husbands? Go back, dear daughters—on your way, please! I'm too old to get a husband. Why, even if I said, 'There's still hope!' and

this very night got a man and had sons, can you imagine being satisfied to wait until they were grown? Would you wait that long to get married again? No, dear daughters; this is a bitter pill for me to swallow—more bitter for me than for you. GOD has dealt me a hard blow.”

Again they cried openly. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law good-bye; but Ruth embraced her and held on.

Naomi said, “Look, your sister-in-law is going back home to live with her own people and gods; go with her.”

But Ruth said, “Don’t force me to leave you; don’t make me go home. Where you go, I go; and where you live, I’ll live. Your people are my people, your God is my god; where you die, I’ll die, and that’s where I’ll be buried, so help me GOD—not even death itself is going to come between us!”

When Naomi saw that Ruth had her heart set on going with her, she gave in. And so the two of them traveled on together to Bethlehem.

When they arrived in Bethlehem the whole town was soon buzzing: “Is this really our Naomi? And after all this time!”

But she said, “Don’t call me Naomi; call me Bitter. The Strong One has dealt me a bitter blow. I left here full of life, and GOD has brought me back with nothing but the clothes on my back. Why would you call me Naomi? God certainly doesn’t. The Strong One ruined me.”

And so Naomi was back, and Ruth the foreigner with her, back from the country of Moab. They arrived in Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest.

Now we have begun to become familiar with the story, choose one of the characters to focus on...maybe Naomi, Orpah or Ruth...put yourself in the shoes of your character and picture the scene as the events of the chapter unfold...you may find it helpful to begin by making yourself comfortable again and taking a few deep breaths...maybe by closing your eyes...

Enter into the world of the story. Wonder about what you can see, hear, smell, taste and touch as your character...is warm or cool around you...what is the landscape like...what can you see, is there a far horizon or are you hemmed in...who else is with you...is it busy, quiet, isolated...?

You might also wonder about feelings...are you hungry, thirsty or full...are you content or afraid...sad or happy...do you feel lonely...afraid...secure...?

What is your role within the story...within the scene you are focussing on...?

Is there anything unique you learn from this perspective? What might reflecting on Jesus' character say about this person's situation?

Pause as you need to as events unfold...you may need to put down your sheet or to re-read the text...you may need to keep silence...to write or to doodle...you may need to talk with God...or talk with someone else...

When you are ready, begin to move your body...to return from the place of imagination to the here and now...

Your reflective time may be complete for now...or you may choose to return to the story as a different character...to notice what you see from a different perspective...

As you prepare to return to the things of this day, you may choose to pray, inspired by what you have discovered...or to draw this time to a close by praying the Lord's Prayer...

Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy Name;  
thy kingdom come;  
thy will be done;  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation;  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom,  
the power, and the glory,  
for ever and ever.  
Amen.