



SESSION 1 of 4

## Naomi

### MEETING AIM

To explore issues around loneliness and grief, and to discuss how we can support those who struggle with being alone.

### BIBLE PASSAGE

Ruth 1

### BACKGROUND

Unsurprisingly, the book of Ruth focuses on the eponymous character: Ruth. Yet her story was not lived out in isolation. The choices she made involved others, most notably her mother-in-law Naomi. This story begins with Naomi being left with nothing and facing a life of loneliness without the family she once had. The reading and this session explore what it means to stand with those who are alone as they struggle with grief or loneliness.

### 5 CIRCLE TIME

As you begin the session, gather the children together in a circle. Invite them to share refreshments together and talk about their recent news or experiences. Ask the group to think about family members and friends. What does it mean to look out for someone? Who looks out for you? Who do you look out for?

### 5 INTRO ACTIVITY

**You will need:** pictures of famous double acts  
Before the session, print out pictures of well-known double acts (each person on a separate card), such as Batman and Robin, Wills and Kate, and Kim and Kanye. As the children arrive, give each one a card and challenge them to find their partner.

### 10 BIBLE STORY

**You will need:** a large road map; six play figures (such as peg people or Playmobil figures)  
Gather the children together and ask them to sit in a circle around the road map on the floor. The places shown on the map are unimportant; it is simply a tool to demonstrate the travelling and a sense of being away from home. Decide which two points you will use on the map to represent Bethlehem and Moab, and begin by placing four figures in 'Bethlehem'. Then begin the story:

Long, long, long before Jesus was born, here in the town of Bethlehem there lived a family. Elimelech, his wife Naomi and their two sons Mahlon and Chilion. One year their harvest failed, so they decided to move to Moab to start over. *Move the figures on the map.*

They lived here for many years and experienced the ups and downs of life. Elimelech died here. *Remove his figure.* Their sons grew up and got married to two women from Moab named Ruth and Orpah. *Add the two extra figures.* Then, sadly, both Mahlon and Chilion also died. *Remove these figures.*

Naomi had seen so much change in her life. She had gained two daughters-in-law but had lost her husband and sons. When she heard that the situation back home had improved, she decided to travel back to Bethlehem. The three women packed up everything they had to travel together, but Naomi didn't want Ruth and Orpah to be stuck with her. She wanted them to be free to find new husbands and begin their lives again. Orpah agreed to return home to her own family. *Remove one figure.* But Ruth wouldn't leave Naomi's side.

Naomi was still grieving for everything she had lost. She was sad and lonely, and it would take a long time for that to heal. But the two women travelled together back to Bethlehem, where they were welcomed back to Naomi's home. Here they could start again and build a new life.

### 10 CHATTING TOGETHER

Ask the children these questions, encouraging everyone to take turns to contribute:

- How do you feel about this story?
- How would you have felt if you were Naomi?
- What would you like to say to Naomi?
- What would you like to say to Ruth?
- What challenges you about this story?
- What do you want to say to God about Naomi's situation?

### 10 CREATIVE RESPONSE

**You will need:** a selection of coloured cards and envelopes; a wide variety of craft materials  
Set out all the craft materials so everyone is able to access them. Explain to the group that we probably all know someone who is struggling like Naomi. Perhaps they are dealing with the death of someone they loved very much, or perhaps they have moved to a new area and don't know many people yet. Or perhaps they are feeling lonely, even though there are lots of people around them.

Invite the children to make an appropriate card to give this person to encourage them and to let them know they are close by, just as Ruth was there for Naomi. Encourage the children to use the resources in whatever way they wish rather than creating carbon copy cards. Help them find appropriate words to write in each card as a message.

As they create their cards, give the children the opportunity to discuss the issues raised by this session, talking about the friends and family members they can support. They may also open up about their own struggles with loneliness. Take time, as you create together, to address any issues raised.

### 5 PRAYER

Gather the children together in a circle and invite them to hold hands if they are comfortable doing so, or perhaps to link elbows, as a symbol of what it means to be together in community and not alone. Pray aloud over the group:

"Lord God, you are always with us. You are there when we are happy and life is going well, and you are there when we feel down, sad and alone. Help us to remember that you are always with us. Today, we remember our friends [encourage the children to name in their minds the friends they have been thinking about]. Help us to be a Ruth to them, standing by them in their struggles. Amen."

As you draw the session to a close, make yourself available to talk through any specific situations that may need further practical support.

### BECKY MAY

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## SESSION 2 of 4

# Elijah

### MEETING AIM

To explore the idea that even when we feel as though we have failed, God can set us on our feet to start again.

### BIBLE PASSAGE

1 Kings 19

### BACKGROUND

Elijah, one of the great fathers of the faith, is brought low in this passage. We discover his vulnerability, his sense of failure, his desire for physical rest and recovery, and his need to start again. This session explores how even when we feel that we have failed God can set us back on our feet, ready to walk a different path with him.

## 5 CIRCLE TIME

As you begin the session, gather the children together in a circle. Invite them to share refreshments together and talk about their recent news or experiences. Ask the group to think about how we measure success or failure. What recent successes have they enjoyed (for example scoring a goal for the team or getting a place in the school choir)? What about failures? Do we like to share these, or do we prefer to keep them to ourselves?

## 5 INTRO ACTIVITY

**You will need:** the song 'Get back up again' from *Trolls* and the means to play it (it is available on YouTube and other streaming services)

Explain to the group where this song is played in the film. Despite all the danger the trolls are facing, Princess Poppy, the eternal optimist, goes off on her solo journey in a quest to save the trolls. Play the song and challenge the children to think about whether Poppy's attitude is realistic or helpful. Explain that we are going to be looking at the story of one character in the Bible whose response was not what we might expect.

## 15 BIBLE STORY

**You will need:** materials to create a cave, such as a table, blankets, rugs and cushions; a large rug, blanket or sheet; a large pot plant

Before the session, build the cave in one corner of your space. Lay out the rug or blanket to make the 'desert' in the middle and put the plant on the edge of the desert furthest from the cave. If you have lots of time, you could get the children to help you do this at the start of your Bible time. Gather the children in the desert and tell this story:

Elijah, God's messenger, was on the run. He had delivered a message from God to the people and the people hadn't liked it. The queen had threatened his life and he had run away. He found himself alone in the desert, exhausted, scared and feeling let down by God. He found a large bush, lay under it and begged God to let him die! Then he fell asleep. *Invite the children to sit beside the plant.*

Suddenly, an angel woke Elijah up and gave him some water to drink and some bread to eat. The angel cared for Elijah until he was ready to move on, out of the desert. Elijah soon felt better, so much so that he walked across the desert for 40 days. He finally reached Mount Horeb and rested in a cave. *Walk the group around the desert and then sit down by the cave.*

God called out to Elijah: "What are you doing here?"

Elijah was still feeling hurt and frustrated. He told God how he felt let down, and how wrong it was that God would let these people turn against him even after all he had done to serve God. Why didn't he punish them and protect Elijah? Elijah wanted to stop being God's messenger.

But God didn't want Elijah to stop working for him. Besides, he had looked after Elijah. He had sent the angel to care for him, given him safe places to rest in the desert, and given him the rest he needed.

Here at the mountain, God gave Elijah the chance to share his frustrations. Then God appeared to Elijah, not as someone he could see, but as a gentle whisper that Elijah could feel. He was reminded that God was right there with him.

God said he would give Elijah new work to do, and a helper to go with him. Elijah was struggling, but he was not beaten. God was with him.

## 5 CHATTING TOGETHER

Ask the children these questions, encouraging everyone to take turns to contribute:

- What is your favourite part of this story?
- What challenges you about this story?

- How would you have felt if you were Elijah?
- What would you like to say to Elijah?
- If you were Elijah, what would you say to God?

## 10 CREATIVE RESPONSE

**You will need:** Lego and Lego baseboards; marbles; sticky labels, pens

The children could work together in pairs or small groups to complete this activity. Distribute the Lego baseboards and Lego, then invite them to create marble mazes. Give them a marble to test out their mazes before exchanging with one another to test them out.

As you create, improve, develop and test your marble mazes, talk about how we sometimes feel stopped in our tracks, as the marble is in the maze, and as Elijah was in the story. Does life ever feel like a dead end? What things might we struggle with along the way? Give the children sticky labels and pens, and ask them to label some of the 'dead ends', either with the things Elijah came up against or with some of their own feelings of reaching the end of a track.

Remind the group that God didn't allow Elijah to stay stuck in his 'dead end'. Talk about how God set Elijah back on track again. Ask the group what this might mean for us.

## 5 PRAYER

As you pray, invite the children to create actions for the words 'struggle', 'dead end', 'rest' and 'new path'. Then pray this prayer:

"Father God, sometimes life feels like a struggle. We may feel like we've reached a dead end, worn out by the challenges that bring us down. Help us to rest in you. Set us on a new path, following the life you want us to live. Amen."

Make yourself available to talk about any particular challenges the children may be facing, to pray about these and to support them in getting any further help they need.

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## SESSION 3 of 4

# Job

### MEETING AIM

To encourage the children to share their struggles with God in an honest way.

### BIBLE PASSAGE

Job 3

### BACKGROUND

Job is one of the most uncomfortable and challenging stories of the Bible. It doesn't fit with our image of a loving God, and we often hear our own voices mixed in with those of Job's friends as they question everything he believes to be true. This session explores the idea that often there are no easy answers to difficult questions, but it also reminds us that we can take our challenges and struggles to God and be honest with him about how we respond to stories of suffering in our world.

## 5 CIRCLE TIME

As you begin the session, gather the children together in a circle. Invite them to share refreshments together and talk about their recent news or experiences. Ask how they are feeling. What sort of week have they had? What have they enjoyed about it? What has been more difficult to deal with?

## 5 INTRO ACTIVITY

**You will need:** a selection of newspapers (*First News* is specifically designed for children and may be the most appropriate choice)

Explain to the children that we hear bad news stories every day. Some can seem far away and mean very little to us, but sometimes big news stories hit home and we somehow encounter some of the nasty stuff in the world.

Your group or local community may have been affected by a recent event, which they might want to talk about here. Alternatively, make the newspapers available and invite the children to tear out and gather together some of the stories of suffering in the world. Then invite the children to share some of the things they have noticed. Where do they see people hurting or suffering in the world? Explain that we will be looking at some of these things today, and that we can take these issues to God.

## 10 BIBLE STORY

**You will need:** Bibles

Gather the children together and introduce the character of Job. Explain that Job's story is one of great heartbreak and suffering. In a way that your children will be able to understand, explain that this story raises many questions, but also reassures us that we are not on our own when we are suffering. Our experiences are not wrong or our fault, but rather they represent the fact that the world suffers because of sin and Satan's involvement in the world.

Introduce the story by telling the children that, while we get to read the first part of Job's story, he didn't know that this was what had happened. Job was a faithful follower of God, always doing the right thing before God. Satan saw this and didn't like it. He told God that Job only served God because he had never had his faith tested. He claimed God had given Job an easy life, so Job had no reason to doubt God!

God agreed that Satan could test Job. Satan wanted to see what would happen to Job if he took away the things that mattered to him. As a result, Job lost his children, his wealth, his home and his health. His protected life had been shattered, but would he lose his faith in God?

Ask someone to read Job 3 from an easy-to-read translation, such as the Good News Bible or the Contemporary English Version. Encourage the reader to rehearse beforehand and to perform the passage as a monologue, calling out to God in angst. Depending upon the age and understanding level of your group, you may wish to shorten the passage a little.

You may wish to share the ending of Job's story with the group later in the session, but not at this point, as it will distract the children from what you want them to discover and undermine the opportunity to explore where God is in our suffering. Come to this later as a reminder that God is with us and continues to offer hope even in our darkest places.

## 5 CHATTING TOGETHER

Ask the children these questions, encouraging everyone to take turns to contribute:

- How does this story make you feel?
- Which parts of Job's speech can you most relate to?
- What might you have said to God in Job's situation?
- What would you want to say to Job?
- What questions would you want to ask God?

## 10 CREATIVE RESPONSE

**You will need:** lining paper; marker pens; paint; paintbrushes; cover-up and clean-up equipment

Before the session, cover a wall in lining paper to create a blank surface. Remind the group that just as Job needed to shout out to God in his despair, there will be situations and circumstances where we will want to do the same.

Explain to the group that the blank wall is a graffiti wall where they can come and write, draw, paint or graffiti their shout-outs to God. It may be a whole prayer or letter, like Job's, or it may be a single word. It may be a picture that represents their struggles, or it could simply be sticking up a story they have found in the paper.

As you work, allow the children to add their responses discretely while also giving them the opportunity to talk about the challenging times in life when we can't make sense of the hurt that we, or those we love, are facing. Remind the children that we can take all those feelings and reactions to God, and shout them out to him.

## 5 PRAYER

**You will need:** the graffiti wall from 'Creative response'

Gather the children in front of the graffiti wall and invite them to spend some time standing quietly, thinking through all the thoughts and questions written on it. Encourage them to talk to God about some of these things.

Bring this time of quiet to a close, praying aloud for all the children, and for all the struggles they are facing. Thank God that he is big enough to handle our difficult questions, and that he is with us in every circumstance we may face.

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SESSION 4 of 4

# Jeremiah

## MEETING AIM

To explore how Jeremiah struggled with his calling and what this may mean for us.

## BIBLE PASSAGE

Jeremiah 20

## BACKGROUND

Like Elijah earlier in this series, Jeremiah is wrestling with his calling from God in this passage. Unlike Elijah, Jeremiah does not have the privilege of encountering God in the gentle breeze. Rather, he articulates here the internal wrestling occurring as he cries out in anger and frustration but also acknowledges the awesome authority of God.

## 5 CIRCLE TIME

As you begin the session, gather the children together in a circle. Invite them to share refreshments together and talk about their recent news or experiences. Ask the group what they might want to be when they are older. Do they ever think about what God may have planned for them?

## 5 INTRO ACTIVITY

Invite the children to pair up with someone who is roughly the same size and explain that you are going to conduct a 'thumb war'. Using their right hand, they should grip one another's fingers and say the rhyme: "One, two, three, four, I declare a thumb war!" At the same time, they should move their thumbs from side to side. Once the rhyme is complete, each player should try to use their thumb to pin down the thumb of the other person for a count of three.

You can repeat for extra rounds if you so wish, or hold a knock-out competition to find an overall winner. Explain that during this session we will be exploring the story of someone who was wrestling with himself and with God.

## 10 BIBLE STORY

**You will need:** printouts of Jeremiah 20:7-18 from an easy-to-read translation, such as the Good News Bible or the Contemporary English Version; felt-tip pens

Explain that we are going to hear a story about Jeremiah, who was a messenger from God. God had chosen Jeremiah before he was even born to be his prophet

and share his messages with the people. Jeremiah often struggled with this, pointing out his weaknesses to God and facing many problems along the way.

Then tell this story:

One day, Jeremiah warned the people that God was very unhappy with the way they were living. He said that punishment was coming. But rather than changing their ways a priest arrested Jeremiah and had him put in the stocks, where he was punished and humiliated. After he was released, Jeremiah cried out to God.

Give out copies of the Bible passage and pens. Ask someone to read Jeremiah 20:7-18 and invite everyone else to follow along. As they read Jeremiah's prayer, ask the children to draw emojis all over the passage, plotting Jeremiah's feelings. You may need to read the passage more than once and allow time afterwards for the children to finish marking up their copies of the passage.

Once everyone has finished, invite the children to share how they think Elijah would have been feeling at the various points of his complaint.

## 5 CHATTING TOGETHER

Ask the children these questions, encouraging everyone to take turns to contribute:

- How does this story make you feel?
- Which parts of Jeremiah's speech can you most relate to?
- What would you have said to God in Jeremiah's situation?
- What might you want to say to Jeremiah?
- How do you think God might respond to this prayer?

## 10 CREATIVE RESPONSE

Divide the children into two equal-sized groups and line them up in separate lines facing one another with a gap in-between. Ask for a volunteer or choose a leader to play the part of Jeremiah, and ask this person to stand at one end of the two lines. Explain to the group that you are going to act out an activity called 'Conscience Alley'. The two lines of children represent Jeremiah's conscience. One line represents all the positive thoughts and ideas, while the other represents all the negative thoughts and ideas.

On the signal to begin, Jeremiah steps forward, standing between the first two players. The player to his left should tell him something negative, reminding him of a challenge he is facing and why he is

feeling so down. The player to his right will then remind him of something positive about who God is and what that would mean to Jeremiah.

As Jeremiah continues to walk through the two lines, those on either side take turns to chip in with a comment they want to make to him, according to which side they are on. When he reaches the end, you could ask him to feed back any conclusion he may have come to, depending on who you have chosen to walk through.

As a follow-up to this, remind the group that no matter how low we are feeling about ourselves and the things we are not able to do, God is still God and his goodness remains. It's OK for us to vent our frustrations at God, but that doesn't change who he is.

Depending on your group, you could repeat this activity with a twist. Ask for a volunteer who is prepared to walk through the alley. As they walk along, they should call out something negative they are feeling, but this time someone from the two lines calls out a truth about God for that person to hold on to. Repeat with other volunteers as appropriate.

## 5 PRAYER

Gather the children together and lead them in this prayer, perhaps inviting the children to call out the response:

"Father God  
Even when we are struggling, you are there for us.  
Even when we are questioning what is true, you are there for us.  
Even when we can't hear or see you, you are there for us.  
Amen."

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