**GROWING TOGETHER:** FOR OLDER CHILDREN

Session 1 of 4

# Naomi

### MEETING AIM

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

### BIBLE PASSAGE

Ruth 1

### BACKGROUND

This session plan is intended for use either in-person or online, depending on how you’re meeting. Adapt the activities to fit your situation.

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

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### STARTING OUT – 5 mins

Start your time together with some simple refreshments. Ask the group to think about their family and friends. What does it mean to look out for someone? Who looks out for you? Who do you look out for?

### INTRO ACTIVITY – 10 mins

**You will need:** pictures of famous double acts

Before the session, print out a selection of pictures of well-known double acts (each person on a separate card), such as Batman and Robin, Prince William and Kate, Ant and Dec etc. As the group arrive, give each child one card and challenge them to find their partner, without revealing their own ‘name’ or showing anyone their picture.

### BIBLE STORY – 10 mins

**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 the sense of being away from home. Decide which points you will use on the map to represent Bethlehem and Moab and start by placing four figures at ‘Bethlehem’. Begin the story:

Long, long, long before Jesus was born there, here in the town of Bethlehem, there lived a family. Elimelek, his wife, Naomi, and their two sons: Mahlon and Kilion. One year, their harvest failed and 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. Elimelek 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 Kilion died too. *Remove these figures.*

Naomi had seen so much change in her life. She had gained two daughters-in-law, but she had lost her husband and her sons. When she heard that the situation back home had improved, she decided to travel back to Bethlehem. The three women packed up all 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 go back home to her own family. *Remove one figure.* But Ruth would not 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 to Bethlehem, where they were welcomed back to Naomi’s home. Here they could start again and build a new life.

### CHATTING TOGETHER – 5 mins

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?

### CREATIVE TIME – 10 mins

**You will need:** a selection of coloured cards and envelopes; wide variety of craft materials

Set out all the craft materials so that everyone is able to access them. Explain to the group that we probably all know someone who is struggling like Naomi was. Perhaps they’re 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 to that person to encourage them and to let them know that they are close by, just as Ruth was for Naomi. Encourage the children to use the resources however they wish, rather than creating carbon copy cards, and help them to find appropriate words to write in each card as a message.

As they work to create their cards, give the children the opportunity to discuss the issues raised by this session, talking about the friends and family that 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.

### PRAYER – 5 mins

Gather the children together in a circle and invite them to hold hands, if they are comfortable, 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, alone and sad. 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 that 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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