Reflections [3 - 9 November 2024](https://www.rootsontheweb.com/lectionary/2024/134-november-december-2024-bc/proper-26)

[Love, actually](https://www.rootsontheweb.com/lectionary/2024/134-november-december-2024-bc/proper-26)

**Ruth 1:1-18**

**Begin with an opening prayer**

As we gather, may what we read
be treasured in our hearts
and inspire us to share God’s Word
in our lives, so that we may turn
the written word into action in the world.
**Amen.**

**Read the passage**

*Consider different ways to read the text. For example, hearing it in more than one version of the Bible.*

**1**In the days when the judges ruled,[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ruth%201&version=NIV#fen-NIV-7129a)] there was a famine in the land. So a man from Bethlehem in Judah, together with his wife and two sons, went to live for a while in the country of Moab. **2**The man’s name was Elimelek, his wife’s name was Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Kilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem, Judah. And they went to Moab and lived there.

**3**Now Elimelek, Naomi’s husband, died, and she was left with her two sons. **4**They married Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other Ruth. After they had lived there about ten years, **5**both Mahlon and Kilion also died, and Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband.

**6**When Naomi heard in Moab that the Lord had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them, she and her daughters-in-law prepared to return home from there. **7**With her two daughters-in-law she left the place where she had been living and set out on the road that would take them back to the land of Judah.

**8**Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, “Go back, each of you, to your mother’s home. May the Lord show you kindness, as you have shown kindness to your dead husbands and to me. **9**May the Lord grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband.”

Then she kissed them goodbye and they wept aloud **10**and said to her, “We will go back with you to your people.”

**11**But Naomi said, “Return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me? Am I going to have any more sons, who could become your husbands? **12**Return home, my daughters; I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me—even if I had a husband tonight and then gave birth to sons— **13**would you wait until they grew up? Would you remain unmarried for them? No, my daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you, because the Lord’s hand has turned against me!”

**14**At this they wept aloud again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye, but Ruth clung to her.

**15**“Look,” said Naomi, “your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her.”

**16**But Ruth replied, “Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. **17**Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me.” **18**When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her.

**Explore and respond to the text**

*Start by reading the Bible notes below. You may want to read them more than once or pause after each paragraph to reflect on what you have read.*

**Bible notes**

Biblical scholar Paula Gooder suggests that ‘The book of Ruth is the ultimate love story. Love in the Old and New Testaments is much more about what you do than how you feel. Ruth has *hesed* (steadfast love) not because she talks about her emotion of love towards Naomi but because the whole of her life is lived out in expression of that love’1. It is also an unusual love story, set in the violent times of the Book of Judges. The stories of Judges show the disaster that came about when God’s people turned away from God. By contrast, Ruth shows the blessing that came to a foreigner who turned to Israel’s God, and so became part of his faithful people. It also shows how those of different ethnicities and cultures can live together harmoniously. It has a lot to say to the times we live in. The land of Moab was to the south-west of Israel. The two fought often and Moab also raided and looted Israel when she had been defeated by other enemies. A Moabite woman would have been regarded as the lowest of the low (a bit like the Samaritans at the time of the Gospels). Knowing that life could be hard for her as a widow and even harder still for Orpah and Ruth as both widows and foreigners, Naomi urges her daughters-in-law to return to their homes. Orpah and Ruth make different choices. While Ruth becomes the central figure of the book and celebrated for her choice, it is interesting to note that there is no criticism of the choice that Orpah makes - a reminder perhaps that when it comes to big family decisions, it is often a case of different choices rather than right or wrong ones.

1Paula Gooder, Everyday God, Canterbury Press, 2012, p.46

**Reflection**

*Spend a few moments thinking about what stands out for you from the Bible reading. This idea may help.*

In both Psalm 146 and the Book of Ruth, God’s particular care for the most vulnerable is very apparent – for the hungry, strangers, orphans and widows; for those returning home or seeking safety in another land. In the discussion of the great commandments (Mark 12:28-34), it is clear that love is for all. There is no ‘charity begins at home’ mentality or Britain or any other nation first. If there is any bias at all it is one in favour of the ‘other’. To paraphrase Jesus, those in need will always be with us, so today’s texts provide an opportunity to explore how we love those in need and remind ourselves that the *hesed*love that is at the heart of the story of Ruth and the agape love that washes through the pages of the New Testament are  fundamentally about the choices we make in the interests of others.

**Questions for reflection**

*You may wish to use these questions and the picture to help you think about or discuss issues arising from this week’s Bible passage.*



**Questions**

* What is refuge for you?
* How are refugees received in your community?
* In what ways can we follow the examples of Ruth and Naomi, and show ‘love, actually’ to other people?
* **A prayer to end the Bible study**
* Thank you, steadfast God, for your forgiveness
and for your assurance that: where we go, you go;
where we stay, you stay. Though we may turn our back on you and
begin to walk away, you are always there to embrace, affirm and to
call us back, in life and in death. In Jesus’ name.
**Amen.**