



On your marks

In recent times the news has been dominated by stories of people from the Middle East who have been forced to leave their countries and look for a new home somewhere in Europe. Sadly this is not a modern problem. The story of Naomi and Ruth in the Old Testament has much to teach us about how God welcomes and cares for those who, as refugees, face the loss of family and familiar surroundings. This simple retelling of the story in the book of Ruth is suitable for use with a small group or as part of all-age worship.

Get set

This storytelling version of the book of Ruth links the two main characters to Jesus' assurance that God cares even for the tiny sparrows that fall to the ground (Matthew 10:29). A picture of a sparrow or a small toy bird would be an ideal starting place for this idea.

Other useful visual aids would be a pair of walking boots, linked to the journeys that Ruth and Naomi make; two black armbands, linked to their experiences of bereavement; and some wheat, linked to Ruth's experience of picking up the throwaway grains of wheat in the field belonging to Boaz.

A Key Stage 2 version of the story can be found in *The Barnabas Children's Bible* (Stories 103-106, pages 96-99).

As you tell the story, encourage your group or congregation to join in with the repeated phrase '*How low can you go?*'

You may also need to explain, with reference to the sad stories in the news, the words shown in bold in the story: **refugee**, **foreigner**, **widow** and **beggar**.

This idea is written by Fay Garrett, who works in schools in Essex, and is used with her permission.

Go!

Show a picture of a sparrow, or a toy bird that looks like a sparrow.

Introduction:

What are people's favourite birds? Talk about the birds that people see in their gardens.

According to the 2016 RSPB Garden Watch, sparrows are on the increase again. They are one of the most common of British garden birds, but they are also found in other countries. They were common in the time of Jesus and most people didn't pay any attention to them at all. They were literally 'two a penny', and Jesus uses that phrase when he is trying to help his disciples to understand that even this most insignificant and least colourful of birds is important to God. If God cares for the sparrow,



how much more does God care for you and me, however low we may fall?

'Aren't two sparrows sold for only a penny? But not one of them falls to the ground outside your Father's care' (Matthew 10:29, NIRV).

The story:

Here is a story that shows us how much God loves everybody,
however you start out,
wherever you end up.

The first 'sparrow' that we meet is called Naomi.
She is a happy lady.
She has a husband.
She has two sons.
She lives in God's promised land.

When famine strikes and food is short -
so short that the family have none left -
they decide to leave.

They walk to another country,
far away -
a land belonging to other people -
so they are **refugees**.
And people think: *How low can you go?*

But the family settle down.
They make a home among strangers.
The two sons find beautiful ladies.
They get married.

Their wives are happy,
but they have married **foreigners**,
men from another country.
And people think: *How low can you go?*

Soon disaster comes to the family.
Naomi's husband dies.
She is now a **widow**.
She has nobody to care for her.
And people think: *How low can you go?*

Then more disaster comes to the family.
Naomi's sons both die.



She has no sons to carry on the family.
And people think: *How low can you go?*

Now there are just three people left in the family:
all ladies,
all **widows**,
all without a son,
all alone.

And people think: *How low can you go?*
And people say: *How low can you go?*
And people mock: *How low can you go?*

Naomi thinks.
Naomi decides.
She tells the two wives that she is going home -
back to her own country,
back to her own people,
back to her own family.

One of her son's wives decides to stay.
One of her son's wives decides to go with Naomi.

This wife is called Ruth.
She is our second 'sparrow'.
She is brave.
She is kind.
She decides to go with Naomi and be a **foreigner** in a strange land.
She takes no notice when people say: *How low can you go?*

Instead Ruth looks at Naomi and says:
'Where you go, I will go;
where you stay, I will stay;
your people will be my people;
your God will be my God.'

And off they go,
back to Naomi's home land,
two ladies together.

Once they are home, they find a house,
but they have no money.
They are both very poor -
very poor,



in poverty.

And people say: *How low can you go?*

So Ruth goes out to find some food.

She picks up the dropped wheat ears in the fields of others.

She is a **beggar**.

And people say: *How low can you go?*

She is in danger -

a lady in a field

all by herself,

no husband or son,

in danger of being attacked by wicked men.

And people say: *How low can you go?*

But Ruth takes no notice.

Ruth has kept her promise.

She has gone with Naomi.

She has stayed with Naomi.

And now Naomi's family become Ruth's family.

Ruth picks up wheat in the fields of Boaz - a cousin of Naomi.

Ruth marries Boaz,

a man who is brave enough to marry someone

who is a **foreigner** and a **widow**.

He sees that Ruth is devoted to Naomi

and has chosen to stay with her and care for her,

trusting in Naomi's God to look after them both.

He doesn't care that people say: *How low can you go?*

Ruth keeps the last part of her promise to Naomi:

'Your God will be my God.'

God's reward for this loyalty and faithfulness is far-reaching.

Boaz is very happy;

Ruth is safe and happy;

Naomi can feel secure and becomes a grandma.

And her grandson?

Well, Ruth and Boaz name him Obed.

Obed has a son called Jesse;

Jesse has a son called David;

and David brings blessings on the whole world through his words and through his family many



generations later - Joseph and Mary.
Jesus is that blessing.

Two small 'sparrows',
one amazing blessing.

No one is too small,
too insignificant,
too unwanted
for God to use them, to choose them and to bless others through them.