

- Family service, mother's day

## Shoulder to Shoulder 1: Word Grid

- Bible doesn't hide the fact that life is often tough for God's people
  - but it also shows us that God is still there to support us when things are hard
- Today we hear the story of two women who discovered this for themselves
- But before we get stuck into the story, lets see if we can remember some other people in the Bible who knew God with them in a difficult time:
  - Clue 1: he was scared to meet his brother. God wrestled with him the night before the brothers met - **Jacob**
  - Clue 2: he was scared to do what God wanted. Swallowed by a big fish, he called out to God - **Jonah**
  - Clue 3: his enemies were so furious about what he preached about Jesus that they stoned him to death. As he died, he saw God the father and Jesus in heaven - **Stephen**
  - Clue 4: he preached at a time when Jerusalem was surrounded by an enemy army. The king had him thrown down a big pit, but he knew God was with him - **Jeremiah**
  - Clue 5: he was thrown in prison and faced death, but an angel rescued him - **Peter**
  - Clue 6: she was sad and lonely because she had no children. In the meeting tent she pleaded with God for a child and he answered her prayer - **Hannah**
- Spells out **Joseph** - another one whose life was hard but who knew God with him!
  - everyone on that list could see no good reason why life was tough
  - but later they discovered that **God was not only with them**, but was also able to **bring something good out of it**
  - **this was also true in Ruth's life**

## Shoulder to Shoulder 2: Timeline

- Part one - timeline, using pictures and roll of backing paper, and description from page 74
  - volunteers to come and hold the ends...
  - putting pictures up as the story unfolds...

### Picture1

- Naomi and Elimelech and their young sons leave Bethlehem to travel 70km SE to Moab - other side of the Dead Sea
- hadn't wanted to leave, but there was a shortage of food in Bethlehem

**Picture2**

- at first things were OK, but soon they took a turn for the worse - much worse than Naomi had hoped
- first of all Elimelech died - Naomi was all alone in a foreign country with no relatives
- what's more, in the country of Moab, very few people worshipped the true God

**Picture3**

- in time her two sons grew up and got married - they looked after Naomi

**Picture4**

- but then things got tougher still!
- first one son, and then the other, died - now Naomi was all alone with the two women her sons had married
- none of them had a man to support them - which made life very hard
- no one cared for them - Naomi felt very unhappy
- **why had God let this happen?**

**Picture5**

- finally, news reached Naomi that the famine in Bethlehem had passed - there was food to spare there
- and if she went back, she would at least be amongst people who knew her, and who worshipped the same God...
- so she decided to travel home
- her daughters-in-law said they'd come with her - but Naomi realised what it would be like for them to be widows in a strange land - and said they should stay in their own country
- one, Orpah, stayed in Moab
- **but Ruth came with Naomi to Bethlehem**
- *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. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me." (vs.16-17)*
- so they travelled back to Bethlehem, where everyone was interested to see Naomi and how she was
- she had gone through tough times - calling herself no longer Naomi (**pleasant, delightful**) but Mara (**bitter**)
- **she reckoned God had turned against her**
- but what she was to discover was that, even though she had indeed been through a tough time, God had been with her. Indeed, Ruth had come to befriend her and support her and had promised never to leave her
- **God was going to bring good out of tough times - that's what he's like!**
- more on how that happened next week...

## So where are we going?

- *Brief conclusion...*
- This is a story about a journey
  - journey's have destinations, imply a direction
  - to something, away from something...
  - Naomi first journeyed from Bethlehem to Moab, and then later back the way she'd come
  - from place of God's people, of family, of home to place of idol worship, of strangers, of bitterness and pain
  - return... *to what?*
- Chapter 1 is an unfinished story:
  - *but invites us to ask ourselves where we are heading?*
  - *are our lives heading to Moab*, turning away from God's plans for something that seems good, safe, secure... but may not turn out quite as good as it looks?
  - *or are our lives heading back to Bethlehem*, even in the midst of pain and suffering? Turning again to God?