

### *Reading with Imagination*

*This is an approach to Bible Study in the Ignatian tradition and this exercise in engagement with Scripture is offered by John Goldingay, the David Allan Hubbard Professor of Old Testament in the School of Theology of Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California.*

### *Introduction*

The Bible appeals to the imagination, and one way of reading it involves imagining our way into a story. This approach works well with books such as Ruth and with the Gospels. It means becoming a participant in the story, becoming part of the scene. We hear people speak the words they speak and imagine the feelings they represent and the feelings they arouse in other people in the story.

*Note that imagination is a two-edged sword. It can give us access to the text but it can also mean we may be tempted to simply impose things on the text.*

### *Using this approach with the Book of Ruth*

Here are some examples of how we might read the Bible with imagination from the Book of Ruth. Read through the book as whole and then get each member of the group to select a character outlined below and become part of the story. Re-tell the story to one another through the eyes of the characters you choose.

**Be Elimelech** Maybe you have an experience of losing your job or having to move for job reasons or economic reasons (or you know someone who had that happen). Does that experience help you see the significance of Elimelech's story, or does his story help you look at that experience?

**Be Naomi** Do you have an experience of losing your spouse (or has anyone near you had that happen)? Does it help you see the significance of Naomi's story, or does her story help you look at that experience?

**Be Orpah** Do you have an experience of having to decide not to move from a commitment to one family or people or religious commitment to another (or has anyone near you had that happen)? Does it help you see the significance of Orpah's story, or does her story help you look at that experience?

**Be Orpah's mother** What would you think about your daughter's marriage and her subsequent story?

**Be Ruth's mother** What would you think about your daughter's marriage and her subsequent story?

**Be Ruth** Do you have an experience of deciding to move from a commitment to one family or people or religious commitment to another (or has anyone near you had that happen)? Does it help you see the significance of Ruth's story, or does her story help you look at that experience?

**Be Boaz** Are there ways in which his role in the story resonates with aspects of your life, so that it helps you see the significance of his story or so that his story helps you look at yours?



**Be the other potential family guardian (restorer/redeemer)** Do you have an experience of having to make a tricky decision like his (or has anyone you know had that happen)? Does that experience help you see the significance of his story, or does his story help you look at that experience?

**Be Obed** How do you imagine him looking back at his parents' story? How does his story make you reflect on yours?

**Be David** It might be shocking to know that your great grandmother was a Moabite. How do you imagine him as king looking back at this part of his family history? How does that make you reflect on your family history?

**Be Jesus** What would the story mean for him as a story about one of his ancestors?

**Be a reader of Matthew** What does the story mean for such a person? How would it make you reflect on Jesus' background? How does the Ruth story illumine Matthew 1:1-17?

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