

The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly: Receiving Care from Others

Bible Study • Leader's Guide

Please provide a copy of this study and a Bible for each participant.

Opening Prayer: Dear Lord, bless our time together as we study Your Word. Thank You for the gift of sisters in Christ and for the faculties to listen and to learn more about You. May our discussion and reflection time today be guided by Your Spirit. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

As much as situations in our country and lives have taught us about working together for the greater good, they also have taught us the cost of losing independence. As Christians, we collectively continue to recognize how much we need our God, one another, and our truest redeemed selves to show up unabashedly and consistently.

Just as our Lord Jesus Christ *grew in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man* (Luke 2:52), so do we. As a nation, we share experiences. As a church, we share prayers. We include countless petitions surrounding topics such as natural disaster recovery and relief, criminal justice reform, a salve for social unrest, healing for the sick, patience for the broken, hope for the hurting, as well as for the continued preaching and proclaiming of the Gospel to those who are still lost.

We have all experienced the good, the bad, and the ugly of life. It has added to our wisdom, yet also has tested our reliance on God and on one another. In a country where rugged independence is written into the very fabric of the laws that support our nation, one cannot help but to value it as well. When we do encounter times where we have no choice but to rely on others, we then are confronted with a loss of independence.

In today's study, we will explore what it looks like not to **give** care but rather to **receive** it. We will delve deeply into God's Word to gain a deeper understanding of:

- Reluctance of receiving care
- Acceptance of receiving care
- How God uses His promises in Scripture for caregiving
- How God uses the Book of Ruth to explore caregiving

Being a “Helper”

“When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news,” Mr. Rogers said to his television neighbors, “my mother would say to me, ‘**Look for the helpers.** You will always find people who are helping.’” This famous quote from the beloved Fred Rogers aptly explains the God-given desire to help others.

1. **How do you “look for the helpers” in your life? How do helpers behave when scary things are happening?**

Helpers are those who are responsible to care for us (parents, children, healthcare professionals, mental health counselors, pastors, deaconesses, teachers, etc.). Helpers remain calm, provide solutions, and ensure we have what we need.

2. **Read Matthew 25:37–40. How is helping and giving care to others connected to our relationship with God?**

When we serve others, we are serving God.

3. **Describe a meaningful experience where you were able to give ongoing care or help to another person. Did it nurture your faith? Why or why not?**

Participants may share an experience from their past or present lives. Faith may have been nurtured, as in their caregiving, they were reminded of how God cares for them.

Caregiving and Care Receiving

When help with life’s disasters is needed, we are quick to offer a helping hand, a warm meal, a big hug, a bed, financial assistance, or a listening ear. This works for quick fixes or short-term things, but for deeply rooted issues or where long-term care is needed, we are often called upon to give more of ourselves. We take on the identity of caregiver and learn to stretch time in ways we previously thought unimaginable.

4. **Who are the people for whom you are responsible to care for in this life?**

Parents, children, students, work-related, volunteer clientele.

5. **Does thinking of serving them as if you are serving Christ our Lord change the way you treat those whom you are called to serve? How so or how not?**

Allow participants to share opinions; you may want to “jump in” first.

When we think of those who give us care, we may be reminded of times when we needed and benefited from it. This may call to mind a recovery after an accident or surgery, time spent with parents or in-laws, after delivering a baby, living through chronic illness, or perhaps living as a differently-abled person who from time to time needs the assistance of others.

6. Who are the people who care for you in this life? What are their notable characteristics?

Family, friends, etc. Allow participants to share openly about those people in their lives.

Diving into the Scriptures

The Bible has some poignant examples of what it looks like to care for others and to be cared for by others. This story focuses on a woman who went through immense gain, followed by immense loss, only to be surprised by who ended up helping her. She gives us great perspective into how being able to “accept” care can be a meaningful experience even in the face of our desire for independence.

Read Ruth chapter 1 in its entirety.

7. Ruth and Naomi’s relationship has grown into a deeper level in this chapter. What caused the change?

The commitment to staying together even after disastrous circumstances.

8. Take a look at Ruth 1:4–5. Here we see Naomi after a huge loss. How might this huge loss affect Naomi physically and emotionally?

Her economics will change. Where she lives will shift. She is a widow now which has major implications. Emotionally, she will struggle perhaps with finding joy and purpose without the joys of being a wife and mother.

Naomi is affected spiritually as well. Grief over a major loss weighs on the human spirit and may lead to blaming God or harboring bitterness. Look ahead to verses 20–21 to gain a deeper view on how it affects Naomi. God reminds her later in the Book of Ruth of His immense love for her. Naomi, like many of us, goes through a painful time and is brought through it by God’s grace and continued commitment to His goodness in our lives, even in the face of sin and death.

Responses to Caregiving: Reluctance and Acceptance

In the next portion of Scripture, Naomi reacts to Ruth’s desire to give care.

Read Ruth 1:9–18.

9. How does Naomi direct her two newly widowed daughters-in-law to move forward?

She asks them to return to their people. Help participants see how this is pushing people away in a time of need. So often we desire not to be a “burden,” feeling it would be too difficult, thus not allowing another to glorify God in his/her service.

As a newly widowed and mourning mother, Naomi needed care in her time of deep grief. She did what many of us do and tried to push others away. In verse 12 she considers remarriage an impossibility due to her age. In verses 11 and 13, she frames the future as bleak if her daughters-in-law remain with her.

- 10. Describe how the response of Orpah differs from the response of Ruth as outlined in verses 14–18.**

Orpah returns to her family of origin, but Ruth chooses to stay. Ruth does not allow herself to be pushed away and truly seeks to convince Naomi that this is an act of service to God. Help participants to understand this is often how the Holy Spirit shows up in our lives.

- 11. When Naomi realizes in verse 18 that Ruth is determined to stay, she *said no more*. How does this relate to how we receive care from those who offer it to us?**

Helpers come when care is needed. As one in need of care, accepting help can be a way to show love. Instead of fighting for independence, maybe our time of need is a way for us to realize our utter dependence on God.

Far too often, we respond to care being given to us by pushing helpers away, insisting on our own independence, showing others how they are “missing out” on life by being with us, or in many other ways.

- 12. How can Naomi’s response show us what we are missing when we block care from others?**

Independence versus interdependence. We miss the blessings of deepened relationships and opportunities to love God anew.

Toward the end of chapter 1, Ruth and Naomi arrive in Bethlehem together.

- 13. How does the town respond (Ruth 1:19–21)? How does Naomi respond to the women of the town?**

The town is surprised. Naomi speaks of her experience and name change.

Our God Cares for Us

The heart of how God provides for us lies in Ruth 1:16–17. He uses people to show us how He loves us. Ruth declares she will not leave Naomi’s side, and she will worship, live life, and provide mercy to Naomi throughout her life

- 14. Naomi allows Ruth to care for her and to walk alongside her. Have you experienced this sort of care in your past? Do you predict that you may need to allow others to care for you in the future?**

Thinking about our lives from infancy through old age, we can point to caregivers who have served us in many ways. Allow time to share.

- 15. How can your attitude and disposition for those caring for you be an opportunity to share God's love as proclaimed in Matthew 25:40?**

We are the hands and feet of Jesus by His command and by His power alone.

Closing Prayer: Father in heaven, You are our provider who sees us when others do not. Help us to remember that in our receiving and giving of Your gifts, we serve You. Give us patience and hope as we view our current circumstances knowing that our future is held in Your hands. Thank You for the gift of caregivers in our lives and for granting us the profound gift of life in Your Son, Jesus Christ. It is in His name, we pray. Amen.

Bible verses are taken from the ESV translation unless otherwise noted.

The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly by Janine Boling
Published by the Lutheran Women's Missionary League, 2021
lwml.org