Interacting with God’s Story and Vision

A. How to treat your in-laws (for married folks)
Comedians take great delight in making fun of mothers-in-law. Here is an opportunity to celebrate our positive interactions with our in-laws. Read and discuss Darling’s comments and questions under Living God’s Story and Vision (ABS, pp. 66–67). Share your funny and positive stories. Then draw up guidelines that promote healthy in-law relationships.

Form into two age groups: the younger group suggests how their parents-in-law should treat them, and the older group offers advice on how their children-in-law should honor them. Share your ideas. On a more somber note, acknowledge that not all in-law relationships are positive or healthy. If there is estrangement, be compassionate and understanding without judgment. Respect confidentiality if someone chooses to be vulnerable.

B. Women empowering women
Share your experiences of giving and receiving care from family, friends, and the church community. If your experiences were not positive, tell what you would hope for when you require care. Talk about ways you can support and empower each other as women. Make suggestions for caring for the more vulnerable women in the community.

> What are the risks and benefits of having deep intimate connections with other women?

Check out Mennonite Women (www.mennonitewomen.org) to learn about Sister Care workshops designed to help women help each other. If your women’s group is aware of this, invite someone to give information about it.

C. Modern-day scenario
Create a skit or story that brings the message of this text to our present era. Our marriage laws are different, and we have more options when widowed. Yet many widows live below the poverty line. Think outside the box as you create your characters and storyline. A modern-day Naomi may be a grieving widow, or possibly suffering from dementia or a physical disability. Her daughter-in-law may have a full-time job and no other family to provide support. How will your story play out to illustrate the theme of the Scripture text—compassionate care, deep devotion, and loving kindness between two women?

D. Develop an action plan for the congregation
What programs are in place to provide care for those who are single, elderly, vulnerable, or lonely? What happens informally? Are there folks who fall between the cracks when it comes to support and care, especially those who have no family nearby?

Invite seniors to express how they experience care from the congregation and what they would like to have happen. Think of specific ways our church can honor and celebrate the gifts that seniors, especially widowed folks, bring to the community. Encourage small individual actions: visit a senior later today, invite a single person to lunch, write a note to a housebound individual, offer to take someone grocery shopping.

E. A modern-day Ruth
Ruth was a young widow who came from an ethnic background that was different from that of the family she married into. She chose to move away from home to accompany her widowed mother-in-law. Ruth’s promise of love and loyalty to Naomi is often used as part of wedding ceremonies. She meant what she said and made the oath in God’s presence. She was not required or expected to do this. Yet she is remembered for her deep devotion and loyalty to Naomi.

Make a list of the qualities of character that make Ruth such a memorable woman. Note which characteristics you have that are similar and which ones you admire in her but do not share.

Do you think you could do what Ruth did? For example, if your mother-in-law was from another country (or even another part of this country), would you consider returning with her to the place of her birth and living with her there for the rest of her life?

> How would you go about making such a decision?
> Where would you find the strength to do what Ruth did?
> On a less drastic note, under what circumstances would you make personal sacrifices to provide compassionate care for an in-law?
> Who would you rely on to offer you support?

Share examples of loving kindness and exemplary caregiving.