



WOMEN OF EXCELLENCE
BIBLE STUDY
BLOCK 5: LESSONS 3 & 4
WEDNESDAY MAY 18th AND 25th

BLOCK 5 LESSON 3 – LOYALTY: RUTH

The popular animated children’s film Toy Story released in 1995 and featured a theme song titled “You’ve Got a Friend in Me.” The song was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Original Song and the Golden Globe Award for Best Original Song.

In the Toy Story movie, this song reflects the sweet friendship between a boy and his toys, especially his beloved cowboy doll, Woody. The lyrics reflect the loyalty between the two—sticking together through good times and troubles.

Loyalty is a highly valued commodity in family relationships, friendships, the workplace, and even on sports teams.

How would you define the word loyalty?

What does loyalty look like in action?

Think about your own life. What’s the greatest act of loyalty that you’ve experienced?

SET IN REBELLIOUS TIMES

When we look to the Bible for examples of loyalty, Ruth catches our eyes. Her story is found in a short book that bears her name. But Ruth stands tall as a model of loyalty, through her words and actions.

Ruth’s story takes place during the time of the judges, a time of rebellion and disorder when “everyone did whatever seemed right to him” (Judg. 17:6) with little regard for God and His laws. Against the bigger timeline of the Bible, the period of the judges reached from the conquest of the land led by Joshua until David’s rise as king. Bible scholars are uncertain of when the Book of Ruth was written, but they suggest the writing likely happened during or after King David’s reign.

As we look into the story, we will see that Ruth and Naomi made hard decisions in the face of challenging circumstances.

When have you felt forced to make a hard decision because of a challenging circumstance?

THEN THE PLANS UNRAVELED

Read Ruth 1:1-5.

These early verses tell us that a man named Elimelech, his wife Naomi, and their two sons left their home in Bethlehem because of a famine and moved to the pagan land of Moab. What might have been intended as a short-term solution to famine turned into a long-term stay. Eventually, Elimelech died and his two sons married Moabite women named Orpah and Ruth. More time passed and Naomi's two sons also died, leaving Naomi with her two daughters-in-law.

When have your plans taken an unexpected turn?

How did you respond when your plans didn't go as expected?

Did someone show loyalty to you during that time? How so? What was the impact of their faithfulness?

HABITS OF LOYALTY

Read Ruth 1:6-14.

When news that the famine back home had eased, Naomi decided to return home to Bethlehem (she'd been in Moab ten years). Naomi blessed her daughters-in-law and encouraged them to return home and possibly remarry someday.

Naomi praised Orpah and Ruth for the kindness they had shown to her whole family (v. 8). Ruth's habits of loyalty and love had apparently been lived out over a long period of time.

How and where can you establish habits of loyalty and love? In your family? In your community?

What shape could these habits of loyalty take? What would they look like in action?

Following Naomi's urging, Orpah returned home to her people. But Ruth decided to stay with Naomi and head to Israel. Ruth "clung to" Naomi (v. 14)

A BOLD DEMONSTRATION OF LOYALTY

Read Ruth 1:15-18.

In these powerful words of commitment, Ruth bound herself to Naomi in life and even until death. Even more striking, this woman from the pagan land of Moab committed herself to Naomi's God, Yahweh. The promise to die and be buried where Naomi lived was considered the greatest possible commitment in the culture of that time.

Write out Ruth's words of loyalty in verses 16-17 below:

Who in your life needs you to be like Ruth to them—loyal, faithful, committed? Explain.

THE FAMILY TREE

Cultivating a legacy of loyalty can have an impact across generations. We see the impact of Ruth's loyalty to Naomi when we look at some of the genealogies in the Bible. While our study of Ruth's loyalty to Naomi focused on the first chapter of the book, if you read the remaining three chapters, you'll find the rest of the story. After returning to Bethlehem with Naomi, Ruth met and married Boaz, a relative of Ruth's late father-in-law. Ruth and Boaz had a son named Obed.

Read Ruth 4:18-22. Who was Obed's grandson?

What appears to be simply a wonderful story of loyalty tucked away in the Old Testament was actually part of God's greater plan—for the people of Israel to have a king named David and for the world to have an even greater King, the King of kings.

Read Matthew 1:5-6.

In Matthew 1:1-16, we see a fuller listing of the genealogy of this family line. Ruth's son Obed is there, and he was King David's grandfather. But this list concludes with the birth of Jesus.

Isn't it like God to use the most unexpected people and the most surprising plans at times to bring about the work of His kingdom? The short story is that Ruth was loyal and faithful to Naomi during challenging circumstances. The long story is that God included Ruth—an outsider from Moab—as a part of the family line of King David and ultimately Jesus Christ.

When have you seen God work through unexpected people or surprising plans to bring about His purposes in your own life?

IN YOUR OWN WORDS: Reflecting on the story of Ruth, how would you define loyalty?

IN YOUR OWN LIFE: What next steps could you take toward building a legacy of loyalty?

BLOCK 5 LESSON 4 – LOYALTY: JONATHAN AND DAVID

Jonathan and David—they could easily have been fierce rivals. Jonathan was the king’s son. David would become the next king. One young man possessed the bloodline and rightful claim to the throne. The other young man was God’s choice for the next king. So how did these two potential rivals become such close friends? Loyalty was a huge factor.

Do you think loyalty is viewed as outdated or impractical in our culture today? If so, why?

A COMMITTED LOYALTY

Read 1 Samuel 18:1-4.

This description of Jonathan and David is recorded in the biblical narrative right after the account of David defeating Goliath. You quickly get a sense of the love and loyalty between the two young men in verse 1: “Jonathan was bound to David in close friendship.” Both had already demonstrated great courage as warriors—Jonathan in defeating the Philistines in battle and David in slaying the Philistine giant, Goliath. Either one of them alone was a strong and capable young man. Yet they must have seen the value in working to build a loyal relationship with each other. Their actions show they valued the “we” over the “I.”

In what ways did Jonathan demonstrate his loyalty to David in this passage?

Who has been a loyal friend to you? How does that person show you loyalty?

This passage also tells us that Jonathan loved David “as much as he loved himself” (v. 1). That phrase can also be translated “as much as he loved his own life.” The words imply selflessness and self-sacrifice. President Woodrow Wilson, in a 1916 address, stated:

“Loyalty means nothing unless it has at its heart the absolute principle of self-sacrifice.”

What comes to mind when you think of ...

Selflessness:

Self-sacrifice:

Here's how Merriam-Webster defines these words:

Selflessness: having no concern for self

Self-sacrifice: sacrifice of oneself or one's interest for others or for a cause or ideal

Both words carry the idea of putting the needs of others before your own. Some in our culture might view these characteristics in a negative light, or at the least as not-so-positive traits. Maybe the idea of selflessness is wrongly associated with being a human doormat. But in God's kingdom, traits like selflessness and self-sacrifice are highly valued.

Would you use either of these words—selfless or self-sacrificing—to describe yourself? Why or why not?

Why is it difficult to consistently live out these traits?

For all of us, our natural bent is to ourselves. Only with God's help can we truly put the needs of others ahead of our own.

Verse 3 tells us Jonathan sealed their friendship by making a covenant with David. In those days, a covenant was an oath-bound promise. We don't usually think of our family relationships and friendships today in terms of covenants in the way that they did in the ancient world. The Hebrew word used translated as "covenant" in verse 3 technically means "to cut a covenant" and refers to the two people making ritual sacrifices as part of their promise to each other. With the covenant described in verse 3, Jonathan also gave David gifts—his robe, tunic, sword, bow, and belt. With these gifts, the king's son was acknowledging David's royal role as the next king of Israel.

How is loyalty sometimes costly?

LOYALTY BUILT TO LAST

Sometimes being loyal means choosing the more challenging path over the easy road. Over time, King Saul grew jealous of David and gave the order to have him killed (1 Sam. 19:1-3). Ignoring his father's instructions, Jonathan instead warned David that Saul wanted him dead. Jonathan even devised a plan for David to go into hiding. In doing so, he made the difficult choice to stand against his father to try to protect his friend.

Jonathan then advocated for David before his father, reminding Saul of how David had faithfully served the king. In doing so, Jonathan was temporarily successful in talking his father down from his plan to have David killed (1 Sam. 19:4-7).

Jonathan and David's loyalty to each other was tested in this moment, and would be tested again by King Saul's jealous anger. Yet their loyalty withstood the pulls and strain of family jealousy.

What factors or circumstances might strain the loyalties you currently hold with family? With friends? With Christ?

How can you cultivate strong relationships built to withstand the test of time and challenges?

LOYALTY MULTIPLIED

David's loyalty to Jonathan extended even beyond Jonathan's death. In 2 Samuel 9:1, David raised the question, **"Is there anyone remaining from the family of Saul I can show kindness to for Jonathan's sake?"** The answer was that Jonathan had a son named Mephibosheth who was living in hiding. David found Mephibosheth, returned land to him that had belonged to his grandfather Saul, and invited him to eat at the king's table. David treated Jonathan's son like his own son.

Loyalty has a way of multiplying like that. David could have viewed Jonathan's son as a potential rival, seeking to gain the throne. Instead, reflecting his loyalty to Jonathan, David looked for ways to help Mephibosheth.

When have you seen the benefits of loyalty overflow into other relationships and other areas of your life?

Could there be situations where a person should not stay in a relationship simply for the sake of old loyalties? Explain.

How do you know when it's time to step back from a relationship? In what ways do you use God's Word as a guide for all your relationships?

Let's be clear, there perhaps are (or will be) relationships you need to step back from or end because they are not healthy or safe. Or perhaps your loyalty to Christ should supersede a relationship that draws you away from God and His purpose for you. At that point, health and spiritual priorities trump loyalty. Seek God's wisdom in these relationships and situations. You absolutely want to be a loyal family member and friend, but not at the expense of your health or your relationship with Jesus.

OUR LOYALTY EXAMPLE

Think about Jesus' life and the ways He modeled loyalty. Consider:

- His loyalty in His relationship with the disciples;
- His loyalty in His friendships with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus;
- His loyalty in following His Father's plan;
- His loyalty even to those who rejected Him.

How would you describe the loyalty Jesus displayed?

How has Jesus shown loyalty to you?

Are you currently leaving a legacy of loyalty? If so, how? If not, what needs to change for you to have a loyalty like that of Christ?

IN YOUR OWN WORDS: How would you describe the loyalty evident in Jonathan and David's relationship?

IN YOUR OWN LIFE: Where in your own life could you work toward that kind of loyalty in your relationships with family and friends?

This block, we've examined generosity from both ends of the economic ladder—one person with little, one person with much—in the stories of the widow with two coins and the Shunammite woman. We saw how God can use what we have in powerful ways when we make our hearts and our resources available to Him.

We've also explored loyalty in the family relationship with Ruth and Naomi and in a friendship with Jonathan and David. These stories showed us how God uses loyalty to bind people's hearts together in both comfortable and challenging times. We saw that the loyalty between two people can even overflow to bring blessings to others around them.

When we think about legacy characteristics like generosity or loyalty, we see the best versions of these ideals in the way God interacts with His people. God showed generosity and loyalty to us, even when we were far away from Him. His generosity and loyalty are an outflowing of His love for us.

Think of ways you've seen God at work in your life, and list some examples in the space below:

I've seen God's generosity expressed in my life through ...

I've seen God's loyalty expressed in my life through ...

When we are more aware of how our lives are blessed because of God's generosity and loyalty, then a natural next step is to look for ways to touch the lives of those around us with the overflow of that generosity and loyalty.

LIVE GENEROUSLY

Try starting each day thanking God for His generosity toward you. Like water flowing downstream, generosity flows easily out of a thankful heart. So begin the day with the proper heart attitude of thankfulness for all God's good gifts, and then look for opportunities to live generously. Remind yourself that generosity is not just about dollars and cents. Generosity is also reflected in how we use our time, energy, resources, and talents.

Where could you make a difference this coming week through your generosity?

Where will you look for fresh opportunities to live generously, building a legacy of generosity in the days ahead?

WEAR LOYALTY LIKE A NECKLACE

The Book of Proverbs is a helpful "life manual" concerning our relationships with each other and with God. **Proverbs 3:3** teaches us,

"Never let loyalty and faithfulness leave you. Tie them around your neck; write them on the tablet of your heart."

This is such a great reminder that so many of these legacy qualities are not just things we pick up or discard based on our own convenience or comfort. Rather these legacy qualities—like loyalty—should be evident in our lifestyle and reflected in our heart attitudes. As you go through the day, picture yourself wearing loyalty like a necklace, so that your family members and friends are blessed by that loyalty on display in your life.

What steps could you take right now to write loyalty "on the tablet of your heart"?

In what ways might others around you see that loyalty in your words and actions?

Commit the following Scripture verses to memory to help develop the godly characteristics of generosity and loyalty.

"Freely you received, freely give." - MATTHEW 10:8

"Never let loyalty and faithfulness leave you. Tie them around your neck; write them on the tablet of your heart." - PROVERBS 3:3