

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Culture often presents a skewed idea of commitment. People have no problem expressing their loyalty—or even love—to others, but if those relationships encounter difficulty or something more appealing comes along, they quickly transfer their loyalty. In other words, their faithfulness and commitment are anything but faithful and committed. The Bible describes the love of God, though, as a faithful, committed love. As His children, then, we were to relate to others with commitment and loyalty.

► **Where do you see examples of extreme loyalty in today's world?**

INTRO

It's pretty easy to feel inspired after seeing our favorite guitarist thrill an audience with his musical prowess. However, a few weeks in, when our fingers bleed from the hours of pressing the steel-strings, the excitement wears off and we're left to work through the strength of our commitment. Many commit to following Jesus in a moment of excitement or conviction, and later realize a disciple's life isn't always convenient. Life is full of many other, smaller commitments as well: an agreement to go see a movie with friends, to do a chore for your parents, to be at practice on time. We live in a world where talk is pretty cheap, but for Christians who serve a God who unfailingly fulfills His promises, following Jesus means following through on our word—not as a matter of convenience, but of commitment.

RUTH 1:8-10

Orpah and Ruth were left with a decision. They had already experienced an immense amount of grief, and remaining faithfully loyal to their mother-in-law meant there were no guarantees. They would likely live in need and poverty, without the securities afforded those without such loss and struggle. No one would blame them if they simply went their separate ways, right?

The world is characterized by promises made flippantly and backing out just as carelessly. But Christians are called to reflect God in the ways we live, and He never turns away from His children, even when we fail Him. By following through, even when it's difficult, we are a picture of God's character.

► **Why is mutual loyalty so important in relationships?**

RUTH 1:11-15

Naomi loved her daughters-in-law deeply, but she also realized it may be better for them to return to their families. Staying meant the possibility of poverty, and she wanted Ruth and Orpah to fully count the cost. In the same way, Jesus calls people to count the cost before choosing to follow Him. Devoting our lives to Jesus means giving up:

- **Personal preferences** that may be contrary to His purposes.
- **Our rights** concerning what we may think we deserve.
- **Future plans** about what we want for our lives.

Ruth because of her deep devotion to Naomi, chose to remain no matter the cost. Followers of Jesus are called to this same *all-in* mindset.

► **What characteristics separate "fair weather" friends from relationships that endure?**

RUTH 1:16-17

Ruth pledged her all-in commitment to her mother-in-law. Ruth committed the following:

- **I will be with you.** Ruth said to Naomi, "Wherever you go, I'll go."
- **I will believe as you do.** Ruth committed not only to Naomi, but also to the God of Israel.
- **I will press on with you.** Ruth declared that, no matter how difficult things became, she would endure with Naomi.

God has given us the gift of relationships with the church, and ultimately with Him, that we would share in blessings and joys. However, He's also called us to love and encourage, to support and endure together in tough times. Ruth backed up her commitment with real-world devotion and steadfast love toward Naomi, even when it cost her everything. For you and me, a sure sign of genuine faith is enduring devotion to Jesus, no matter the cost.

► **In what specific situations can we honor Christ by choosing commitment over convenience?**



LIVE IT OUT

▶ CHRIST

Because Jesus loves the Father, He surrendered to the Father's will and committed His life to the Father's purposes—and Jesus is the perfect example of all-in commitment. We are called to follow Jesus' example in fully committing ourselves to Him.

➤ **In what ways has your commitment to Christ been half-hearted?**

➤ **What practical steps will you take this week in demonstrating an all-in commitment?**

▶ COMMUNITY

The church as a community of believers means that we are unified by things we have in common. In fact, Colossians 3:14 teaches that, "above all," we are to love one another in a way that binds us together in unity, which is a powerful sign to the world that the church is different—and real!

➤ **In what ways does breaking commitments affect this type of unity?**

➤ **How does keeping commitments, especially when it involves sacrifice, affect the love and trust that exists among believers?**

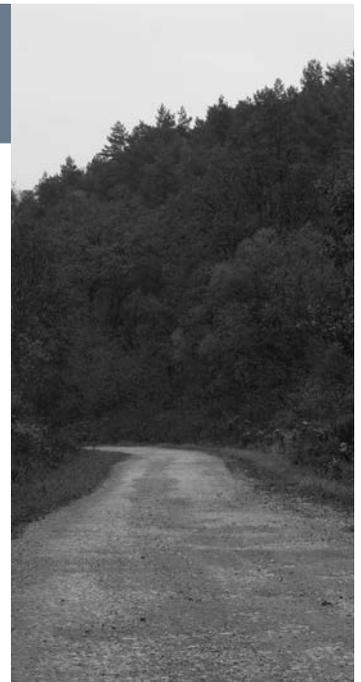
▶ CULTURE

"A man is only as good as his word." This is a phrase that, in generations past, was highly characteristic of the American value system. Today, however, it seems many value convenience over following through on our promises.

In what ways have you experienced this recently?

Have others let you down? Or have you failed them in the same way?

List some ways you can grow in order to be a picture not of the world's values, but of God as it relates to fulfilling promises?



BIBLE READING PLAN

DAY 1
RUTH 1:1-5

DAY 2
RUTH 1:6-22

DAY 3
RUTH 2:1-13

DAY 4
RUTH 2:14-23

DAY 5
RUTH 3:1-18

DAY 6
RUTH 4:1-12

DAY 7
RUTH 4:13-22