

LOYALTY, THE HIGHLY ESTEEMED ATTITUDE

Would you say you are a loyal person? Would your friends call you loyal? Do you have a loyal friend?

Loyalty is something that is so highly prized in society. Why is that? Probably because there is not a lot of it. Anything that is highly prized is highly prized because there is not much of it. Look at how highly prized a diamond is. Loyalty is a diamond in character. It is something we all need to work toward. It is something that we need to do and be in the most difficult of situations. People usually need you the most when they are in places that are very difficult for them. When you are loyal to them then, they never forget it. "You were there when I really needed you." I once knew about a man raising money for a political cause in Texas. He needed the money and he could not get it. He thought, "I am going to New York City and get it out of some of the politicians involved in this political PAC. I am going to talk to them." He went and talked to them. They said, "Why should we help you in Texas." He said, "Because when you were in great trouble financially, Texas helped you out." So, the man said, "You are right. I will help you." Loyalty is highly prized in all aspects of life.

Today we are going to talk about the book of the Bible called Ruth. Can you imagine being a woman and the whole book of the Bible has your name on it and is about you. Esther is another book that has a woman's name on it. Never think that only men really served God in roles of leadership. That has never been true. God has used whomever who called. It was His plan and His idea, and no one stopped it.

This one is so interesting because it has a surprising wonderful end to it. I am sure when Ruth was doing what she did, she never had any idea of the consequences. In Ruth 1:14-16, "Again they wept together and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye, but Ruth clung tightly to Naomi. 'Look' Naomi said, 'your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods. You should do the same.' But Ruth replied, 'Don't ask me to leave you and turn back. Wherever you go, I will go. Wherever you live, I will live. Your people will be my people, and your God my God.'" That is such a powerful thing to say. Do you know who was listening that day? God was. Who were these Moabite people? How did this situation get set up? I will give you some background about Moab. The Moabites were the people that remained in the land when Jacob and all his family went down to Egypt. There was a great famine going on then but there was fertile land in Moab. Moab is a plateau that is about 3000 above the Mediterranean Sea. It is a fertile plateau that has limestone going up to it. It is a really good place for sheep to graze and a lot of Bedouin live there today and raise their sheep. Another interesting thing is the north end of Moab is where they think Moses went up into the mountain and was never seen again. It might have been the burial place of Moses. These Moabites worshiped foreign gods. They got into the worship of foreign gods. They did not worship Jehovah. These two women were Moabitesses. That shows you there can be really good people in strange religions and in really strange situations. These were good women. What connected them with Naomi to begin with? Naomi had a husband and two sons. Naomi could have gotten married at 14, had a baby at 15, and she could have had sons 20 years old. Maybe they got married at 15 or 16. She could have been 35 to 40 years old, not very old really. There was a tremendous famine in the land of Israel and they had to do something. It was so serious that they had to do something. So, Naomi, her husband, and her two sons went to Moab. They lived there about 10 years. Eventually the boys married girls from Moab, Ruth and Orpah. I heard Oprah Winfrey say once, "My name was really supposed to be Orpah, like the lady in the Bible, but my family misspelled it and I ended up Oprah." There is a story in the Bible about Bala and his donkey. The Moabites were scared to death of all the Israelites coming from Egypt. The king was especially afraid. He hired a man to curse them, and the man said, "I could use the money." God said, "Who do you think you are? These are my people." So the man went back to the king and told him that he could not do it. The king gave him some more money and told him to do it. The man tried to do it again and God said, "I will kill you." The man said, "What do you mean?" The donkey that he was riding even saw an angel and even talked. The donkey talked to Bala. You might say, "That can't happen.

Animals cannot talk." If God said it happened, then it happened. The man would not curse these Israelites. All he could do was bless them. That is the people that were in the Bible. As they all settled into their lands and began to marry, these two men intermarried with these two women who did not serve God. In time, those men died. Can you imagine being Naomi? Her husband was dead, and she had all of the grief from that. Then all of her children died. Everything she had in the world died. How hard would it be to handle that? I knew a lady that happened to. That woman was a real witness to me of how she handled her life. Naomi loved these girls, and these girls loved Naomi. One of them went on her way.

Naomi told her to do it and she chose to do that. Ruth said, "I can't do it. I can't leave you. I want to stay with you." What is one of the attributes of loyalty? Determined love, a love that will not quit, sticky love.

Love that sticks through thick and thin. What a loyal person she was. You might be surprised for people to have that kind of a relationship – for a woman to have that with her mother-in-law. You think she would

have that relationship with her mother, but she really only knew her mother-in-law after the time that she got married. Ruth loved Naomi.

Another thing about Ruth was that she understood that this woman had had a lot of hard things happen to her and felt like God had abandoned her. When they got back to the land of the Israelites, they said "Naomi is back," but she said, "Don't call me Naomi, call me Mara which means bitter". We are going to talk about being loyal to people who are going through such a hard time that they become bitter.

Are you a sweet person? Jesus can make you sweet. You might say, "Are you kidding? I have run a bar, I could beat up people." One of the amazing things about Jesus is that He can make you sweet. In this character that this woman had, what were the signs of this great loyalty? One was determined love.

Another was that she won her way into her mother-in-law's heart. She was a decisive kind of person, besides being determined. She was modest and courteous and responsible. Out of those three, which do you think most identifies with loyalty? I would say responsible, wouldn't you? Doing what needed to be done whether you felt like it or not because it was the right thing to do for the person you were being loyal to.

How did she set examples of loyalty that we can follow? The first is as a young widow. She did not abandon her mother-in-law. The other woman did, but Ruth did not. I have a step-mother. My mother passed away when I was 22. My dad was married to this woman and I think the world of her. We have been together 30 years, longer than she was married to my dad because my dad died. I just wanted to stay with her. I think it has been a loyal relationship on both sides.

What was the next thing she did to set an example of loyalty? Everything she did for this woman was in the spirit of love. You can be loyal, "Oh well, I am going to hang in there with you." That is not the same as "I am going to hang in there with you. It is going to turn out okay." That is the kind of loyalty Ruth had.

Another way Ruth showed her loyalty was she was willing to do the lowliest of tasks in order to provide for Naomi and herself. She gathered up the grain that was left for the poorest of the poor. That would be leftovers. That was not the good grain. It probably had rocks and dirt in it. Yet, she was willing to do that in order to make sure they did not starve. She did whatever it took to take care of her mother-in-law.

Again, I want you to remember, she had a good attitude. She had a glad heart in all that she did to remain with Naomi. She also trusted her mother-in-law. Loyalty is built on trust. If people are there for you and you see their character for a long period of time, and you go through a lot with them, it makes you become more and more loyal to them.

Are you still friends with friends you have had for years. I really try to be. I am still friends with my high school friends. We have reunions and they are such great people that I cannot wait to see them. I have friends from grade school, even from kindergarten still. It is very important to me that I make the effort to stay in touch with those people, whether I knew them in college or in different places we have lived. I think it is God's heart and maybe that is why I do it. I just like to do it and I am not going to quit doing it.

Someone has to be the one that is determined to be loyal. You have to make the effort, and there is a price to pay, and you have to do it.

We are going to look at another scripture, but before we do, I want to do a little history for you. Naomi and Ruth got back to Israel. Ruth was not married and Naomi was getting older. There was a law in Israel that if a man died his next of kin could marry the woman and give her children so that the family name would not die that way. There was a very wealthy, older man named Boaz. You can tell he is older because he tells Ruth later, "You stuck by me when you could have gone for the young men." That is loyalty again.

Boaz was a very rich, prosperous man, who owned a lot of land, and was highly esteemed in the community. Do you know who his mother was? She was Rahab the harlot. You can look in the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1 and it is there. Rahab was the mother of Boaz, and Boaz was the father of Obed. As Ruth was in this field, she began to notice Boaz, too. She told her mother-in-law about him, and the mother-in-law came up with a strategy, which mothers and mothers-in-law the world over are good at. In Ruth 3, it says, "One day Naomi said to Ruth, 'My daughter (they had really moved into closeness because she is calling her daughter now) it is time that I found a permanent home for you so that you will be provided for. Boaz is a close relative of ours and he has been very kind by letting you gather grain with his young women. Tonight he will be winnowing barley at the threshing floor. Do as I tell you. Take a bath, put on perfume and dress in your nicest clothes. Then go to the threshing floor but do not let Boaz see you until he has finished eating and drinking. Be sure to notice where he lies down, then go and uncover his feet and lie down there. He will tell you what to do.' 'I will do everything you say' Ruth replied."

Ruth did not rush to put herself on Boaz, but she trusted the relationship she had with the woman who now called her daughter and she did what she said. That was a scary thing to do. You have to put yourself in that situation. She did not know what that man would do. She did not know him. She had noticed him and he had noticed her, but certainly nothing like this. She did not rush to push herself on

Boaz. She worked quietly at her task, she did good work, and she was noticed for it. Once I had a man say, "I have probably had thousands of men work for me. I never remember the bad ones, but you never forget the good ones." Loyalty is rewarded in the work situation. Loyalty is rewarded in the marriage situation and with friends. It is a highly prized character quality and you want it said of you.

What about modern day loyalty? Do we see it today. Yes, we do. In this first picture, we have a female police officer. That woman is loyal to her call as a police officer. She will go into bad situations to help people. She will go into dangerous situations to help people. She will do whatever it takes to be loyal to the oath that she took. Who all takes an oath in their profession today, and then remains loyal to them? Doctors do, I know veterinarians do, police do. I wonder how much emphasis or weight they put on that. You watch what they do and that is how you will know how important it is.

Look at this picture of a loyal married couple. They are older and they have been together a long time, but they do not have one of those old sourpuss marriages. They have one of the marriages where they are still laughing and enjoying each other. In our travels, we are often in picturesque places and people are having a good time. One of my favorite things to see is an older couple walking down the street not paying attention to anyone else and they are holding hands. They are just in their world enjoying life and enjoying each other. That is a picture of loyalty. Did it make an impression on me? Yes it did. Did I know them? No I did not. Your loyalty can affect people you do not even know. You never know when what you are doing profoundly affects someone and you will not even know until you get to heaven.

Who else has loyalty? What about soldiers in the war. They are loyal to their country even when there are people in the country saying things and making them feel like "Why am I out here doing this?" I have heard soldiers say, "We are out here working so hard to protect the right of people to protest." Even with fear they are loyal. You can see this all through the years. What are the war stories you enjoy hearing about in World War II, or maybe a war that happened in your county's past history? Do you enjoy hearing the stories about how loyal someone was, someone who went back under fire, got their buddy and would not give up until they drug him back to safety and the man lived? Loyalty can be trained into you. Did you ever think about that? When you go through military training, one of the main types of training that they do is to stress loyalty to your buddies. If you all go in, you all come out, one way or another.

Do not let go of your friends. Who do you need to call that you used to have such a good friendship with? You just need to call them and say, "I have been thinking about you and I wanted to tell you I miss you and I love you. You have been a great person in my life." You might change someone's day; you might change their life. You have to love people and be determined to be their friend even when they do wrong. That is probably the highest loyalty that you can have. Jesus is like that to us. Jesus is loyal to us, and we are certainly doing wrong. But, He is still loyal. He would not give up on His love for us. In fact, He went to the cross and the Bible says, "While we were yet sinners Christ died for us." He did not wait for us to get all cleaned up. He does not wait for anyone to get all cleaned up. He says, "If you will come to Me, I will be your forever friend. I will never leave you, I will never forsake you. I will always be here." No matter how good a friend is to you that is a human, things can happen and things can change. I know what the Word of God says. There is one person who will never change and that is God. He says, "I will never leave you. I will never forsake you."

I told you earlier that Naomi called herself bitter to her friends. She told them, "Don't call me Naomi anymore, call me bitter," because she had been through so much bad stuff and she was so disillusioned. What if she had stayed there? What if Ruth had said, "This is a little too hard. I think I am out of here." It would have been hard to live with a bitter person. Ruth did not do that though. She hung in there, and guess what happened. She married Boaz and she had Obed. Who was Obed? He was the grandfather of King David. What if she had not done what she did? Look at what a payoff loyalty was for Ruth. She got to be the great-grandmother of King David. What an honor.

How are you going to do it? When does loyalty really start? I think it really starts when things get hard and difficult, when everyone is tired or discouraged or everyone is in a very difficult situation. Maybe it is a dangerous situation. Things can change though. How do you do it? I think you do it by prayer. I think you do it by thinking about it. I think you do it by thinking, "What would I like somebody to do for me? What do I need?" You do it by thinking, "They are not going to be loyal to me if I am not loyal to them. Why should they be?" You are loyal by not yielding to fear or pressure. What if your friend is someone who has done something really bad, something dishonorable or dishonest? Are you supposed to be loyal? Yes you are, but you are not supposed to be involved. There really comes a place where you look at someone in that kind of a situation and say, "I love you and you are my friend. I do not think what you have done is right. I do not agree with it at all and I do not want to be a part of it. I do not want to encourage you in any way in it, but I want you to know I love you and you are my friend and I am still here."

I want to tell you the end of the story of Ruth. Naomi had this grandson. She must have still been pretty

I want to tell you the end of the story of Ruth. Naomi had this grandson. She must have still been pretty young because the Bible says she nursed the baby. The grandmother nursed the baby. It can happen by stimulating the milk glands, and she was not really that old. She nursed the baby and they said, "Naomi has a son." That is a benefit that came out of loyalty. She actually got to have a child that she took care of. Remember, for loyalty to be real, it has to cost you something. Maybe it is your time or your energy, maybe it is relationships, maybe money or beliefs. The best definition of a loyal friend is the one who walks in when everyone else walks out. Do you have some friends like that? You do not have to have very many of them. I have two that I know for sure would be that way for me. I think I probably have more than that. I know there are two friends I have and we have been through thick and thin together, and we are still there loving each other. I thank God for that friendship.

Jesus wants to be that kind of friend to you. Ask Him to come into your life and save you and be that kind of a friend. God bless you.

QUIET TIME QUESTIONS

1. What does being a loyal friend mean?
2. In Ruth 1:14-16 how did Ruth show her loyalty?
3. What are the signs of great loyalty?
4. What scripture reference shows God's loyalty?
5. How do you show your loyalty to God?

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