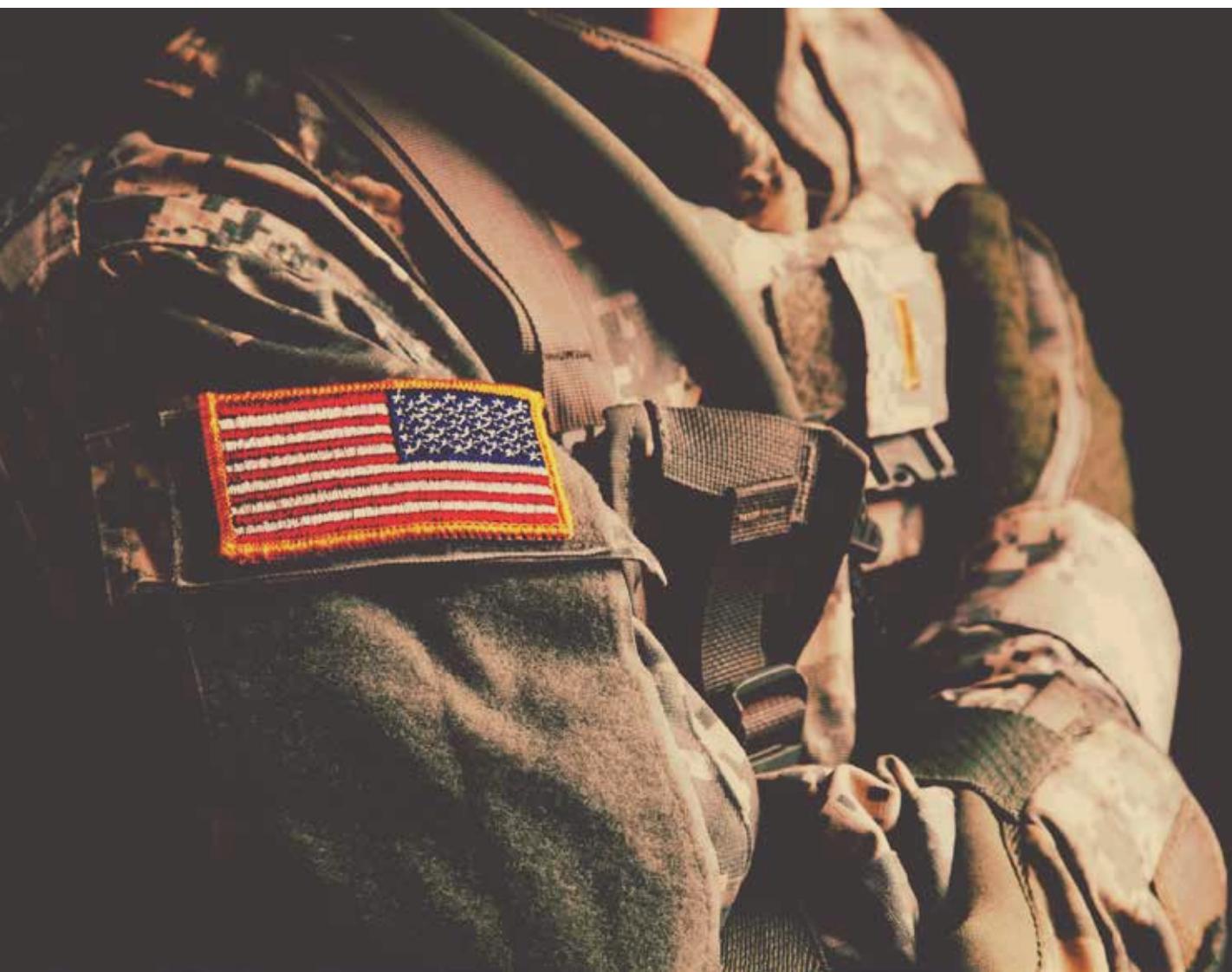


3

RUTH: ALL-IN COMMITMENT



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

QUESTION #1

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*Christ-centered living chooses commitment,
not convenience.*

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

"For better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, until death do us part."

We've all sat through a wedding and heard those words spoken. Many of us have spoken those words ourselves. There at the altar, the starry-eyed couple makes a promise to each other, to the congregation, and to God. Though they say the words, most couples think their life together will always be better, or richer, or healthy.

That kind of talk comes easy on wedding days when the sun is shining, everyone is beautiful, and the occasion is joyful. But the day will come when the circumstances change and that commitment is put to the test.

Marriage is just one form of commitment. The Christian life is filled with other commitments—to our friends, to our local churches, or even a simple promise we make to someone else. We live in a world where talk is pretty cheap, but loyalty and faithfulness should be second nature to those who follow Jesus. As His disciples, we must choose to live lives of commitment, not convenience.



WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Ruth 1:8-10

⁸ But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, “Go, return each of you to her mother’s house. May the LORD deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. ⁹ The LORD grant that you may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband!” Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept. ¹⁰ And they said to her, “No, we will return with you to your people.”

The Book of Ruth is a ray of hope in an otherwise dark time for God's people. It's a story of faithfulness, commitment, and endurance, and it stands as a testimony that even in the worst of times, God is committed to preserving His people.

Ruth's story reads like a tragedy in the beginning. During the days of the judges, Elimelech and Naomi took their two sons to live in Moab, far away from their home in Bethlehem. Elimelech died some time after, as did their two sons. That left Naomi and her two Moabite daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth, alone and unsupported. Naomi could see a spark of hope by returning home to Bethlehem, but what about Orpah and Ruth? She thought they would have a better chance by returning to the homes they left when they married into Naomi's family.

This left Orpah and Ruth with a choice. Would they take the road of commitment to their mother-in-law, or would they choose the road of convenience?

Who would blame them if they simply went home? After all, they'd already experienced more than their fair share of grief and hardship. Along those same lines, who would blame us for leaving a marriage? Or for leaving our church? Or for walking out on a friendship? Surely none of those relationships is without difficulty. We have ways of justifying to ourselves and to others why it's best for all concerned if we simply walk away.

What character traits in a person inspire your loyalty?

QUESTION #2

As disciples of Jesus, we need to remember that God's faithfulness ultimately fuels our commitment to others. We can stay instead of leave. We can endure instead of abandon. We can persevere instead of run. (Keep in mind, we're not referring to abusive relationships—those that are harmful or detrimental to us.)

We can do all this not because of our own willpower, but because we know our God stays, endures, and perseveres. He is committed to us!

Ruth 1:11-15

11 But Naomi said, "Turn back, my daughters; why will you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb that they may become your husbands? 12 Turn back, my daughters; go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. If I should say I have hope, even if I should have a husband this night and should bear sons,¹³ would you therefore wait till they were grown? Would you therefore refrain from marrying? No, my daughters, for it is exceedingly bitter to me for your sake that the hand of the LORD has gone out against me." ¹⁴ Then they lifted up their voices and wept again. And Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her. ¹⁵ And she said, "See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law."

Naomi loved her daughters-in-law, but she wanted to make sure they had their eyes fully opened to the truth. If they indeed remained with her, they would be committing themselves not to a life of ease and security, but to a life of poverty and need. They would be choosing to walk beside her even though the road before them would be filled with difficulty.

Given those realities, Naomi wanted them to count the cost.



COMMITMENT TROUBLE

Using the list below, draw a circle around obstacles that have hindered your commitment to the important people in your life. Draw a square around obstacles that have hindered your commitment to God.

Busyness

Fear

Uncertainty

Apathy

Past experiences

Self-doubt

Temptation

Selfishness

Expectations

Anger

Vulnerability

Other: _____

What level of commitment do you hope to experience with others? With God?

Jesus also called us to count the cost. (See Luke 14:25-33.) In fact, it's the nature of the Christian life to give things up:

- ▶ **Our preferences.** We're not to cling to what we prefer. Whether in church, in friendships, or in the home, we are dying daily to our preferences in favor of what is most needed by others, as Jesus did. (See Phil. 2:3-5.)
- ▶ **Our rights.** As followers of Christ, we're to give up our claim on what we think we deserve. That's because, as sinners, the only thing we truly and undeniably deserve is eternal punishment. Because of God's grace toward us, we willingly turn the other cheek and stand with joy under suffering. We set aside whatever rights we once held dear for the sake of others.
- ▶ **Our plans.** In our arrogance, we often presume upon the will of God, make plans that suit us, and *then* we ask the Lord to bless what we want to do anyway. To follow Christ is to submit to *His* plans, not our own.

Orpah counted the cost as spelled out by Naomi, and she chose to go home. Ruth heard the same speech from Naomi, but she stood her ground. She truly was all-in.

Answering the call of commitment to Jesus means abandoning all else in order to follow Him. The great irony of following Jesus is that we end up with far more than we sacrifice. We find ourselves confessing, as Peter did: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (John 6:68).

What characteristics separate fair-weather friends from relationships that endure?

QUESTION #3

Ruth 1:16-17

¹⁶ But Ruth said, “Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. ¹⁷ Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the LORD do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you.”

Ruth counted the cost, too. She was willing to endure the hard times before her, but she still had to put action behind those words. In these verses we find three tangible commitments demonstrated through Ruth’s actions—actions we can also carry out to demonstrate our own commitment.

- ▶ **I will be present with you.** Ruth pledged to Naomi that wherever she went, Ruth would also go. And wherever Naomi settled, Ruth would also settle. This was a pledge of commitment to be present. It’s a pledge we can imitate—one that means choosing to put your own agenda aside and truly invest in the person God has put in front of you.
- ▶ **I will believe with you.** Ruth wasn’t just making a commitment to her mother-in-law; she was making a commitment to the God of Israel. As Christians, we can come alongside other Christians and support them in our shared faith. We do this most simply—and most powerfully—when we pray fervently with another believer.
- ▶ **I will press on with you.** Ruth went so far as to say nothing would end her commitment to Naomi but death. That’s endurance, which is more spiritually important than we sometimes think. For example, Paul exhorted Timothy, his son in the faith, simply to keep going. To endure. Persevere. Stay in the fight until the end. (See 2 Tim. 2:12.) And such endurance is easier when we stand together. (See Eccl. 4:9-12.)

When the church cares practically for its own, supporting them when they are too weak to support themselves, we show our commitment to press on in faith together—to the very end.

How do the elements of Ruth’s commitment to Naomi parallel our commitment to Christ?

QUESTION #4

What are specific circumstances in which we can honor Christ by choosing commitment over convenience?

QUESTION #5

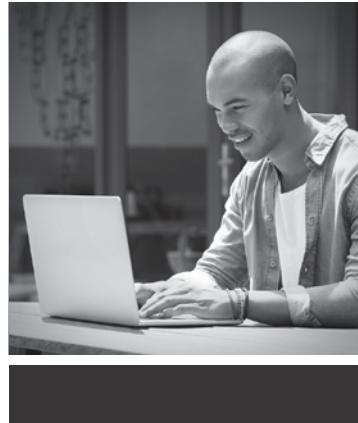
LIVE IT OUT

How will you demonstrate commitment to others this week?

Consider the following options:

- ▶ **Write.** Who has committed all-in to you and stuck with you through thick and thin? Take time to write that person a thank-you note for maintaining such steadfast commitment.
- ▶ **Pray together.** What's one commitment you have been wavering on? Share that commitment with your group so they can pray with you.
- ▶ **Express commitment.** Think of one person to whom you've committed yourself. Make an appointment to meet with him or her to make sure there's no doubt you are "all-in" committed to that relationship.

Commitment has mostly fallen out of style. It's simply too hard—and too inconvenient—to commit ourselves to a person, a church, or even faith. But for Christians, this kind of all-in commitment is more than an ideal; it's part of who we are. It's second nature.



My thoughts

Share with others how you will live out this study: #BSFLsecondnature