

GET INTO THE STUDY



DISCUSS: Draw attention to the picture on **PSG page 102** and ask **Question #1: Where do you see extreme loyalty in today's world?**

GUIDE: Direct attention to the wedding vows in **The Bible Meets Life** on **PSG page 103**. The words spoken and the promises made have special meaning, but the test of the couple's commitment comes when circumstances change.

SAY: "Loyalty and faithfulness should be qualities evident in the life of everyone who follows Jesus."

Reinforce **The Point** on **PSG page 103: Christ-centered living chooses commitment, not convenience**.

PRAY: Begin the Bible study with prayer. Ask God to teach us about the depth of commitment required for Christ-centered living.

SESSION 3 RUTH: ALL-IN COMMITMENT



The Point

Christ-centered living chooses commitment, not convenience.

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.

The Passage

Ruth 1:8-17

The Setting

The Book of Ruth is set in the period of the judges. The promised land experienced a devastating drought. A man named Elimelech moved his wife, Naomi, and their two sons from Bethlehem to Moab, east of the Dead Sea. In time, Elimelech died. The two sons married Moabite women, Orpah and Ruth. After about 10 years, the sons died. Naomi was bereft of immediate family members, with only her daughters-in-law with her. The three widows' situation was precarious.

Ruth 1:8-10

8 Naomi said to them, “Each of you go back to your mother’s home. May the LORD show kindness to you as you have shown to the dead and to me.

9 May the LORD grant each of you rest in the house of a new husband.” She kissed them, and they wept loudly.

10 They said to her, “We insist on returning with you to your people,”

KEY WORD: Kindness (v. 8)—The Hebrew word means “goodness,” “mercy,” “loving kindness,” “loyal (covenant) love.” It is close to the New Testament word for *grace*.

Our commitments should be an expression of God’s commitment to us.

1 ► Sometime after her two sons’ deaths, Naomi decided to return to Bethlehem in the territory allotted to the tribe of Judah in the promised land. News had reached Moab that the drought in Canaan had ended. This welcome relief was attributed to God’s being aware of the Israelites’ need for water and of providing it for growing crops that served as food and grass for animals. The phrase “paid attention” (1:6) literally is “visited.” It does not mean God had been absent and then came to stay awhile. It has the sense of God’s being active to meet His people’s needs—to bless them. In the Old Testament, God could visit (be active) in judgment or in gracious help. In 1:6, God blessed His people by sending rain; He acted for their good.

Early in their understanding of God and their world, the Israelites viewed God as the direct cause of everything. They had no concept of secondary causes. Thus, when the crucial rains came, God provided them so crops would flourish.

Naomi left her home in Moab, accompanied by her daughters-in-law. The three widows set out on the road that led back to Judah and Bethlehem. For three women traveling alone, the journey would not be easy. Initially, Orpah and Ruth were willing to leave their families and familiar surroundings to go with Naomi. Their going with her likely evidenced their affection for her, their good relationship with her, and their determination to help care for her. ◀

STUDY THE BIBLE

Ruth 1:8-10



10 minutes

SUMMARIZE: Before reading the passage, set the context by summarizing the information in **The Bible Meets Life** and **The Setting** on page 110.

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 1** to provide more background information.

GUIDE: Refer members to the paragraph on **PSG page 104** that summarizes the Book of Judges. Read the concluding verse: “In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did whatever seemed right to him.” (Judges 21:25)

LEADER PACK: Point to **Item 8: Map Overview** to show where these events occurred.



SAY: “But into this dark period the Book of Ruth—a story of faithfulness, commitment and endurance—stands as a testimony that even in the worst of times God is committed to preserving His people.”

LEADER PACK: Point to **Item 9: Ruth** for an overview of the story of Ruth.



READ: Read or ask a volunteer to read Ruth 1:8-10.

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 2** on this page and page 113 give further insight to verses 8-10.

2 ▶ **Verse 8.** Naomi evidently considered the costly decision her daughters-in-law had made. They were giving up the comforts of their families to go with her into uncertainty. They were leaving the familiar for the unfamiliar; they would be strangers in a strange land. Naomi graciously suggested that **each** of the two young widows return to her **mother's home**. In a culture in which men had multiple wives, Naomi meant each specifically should go back to her mother. If Orpah and Ruth chose to turn back, Naomi would continue alone on a precarious journey. Naomi combined compassion for her daughters-in-law with courage to go on.

The journey from Moab to Bethlehem would be about 50-60 miles. The trip would be physically taxing and extremely difficult. If she joined a caravan, her travel would be much easier. Either way, she faced some degree of peril as a woman unaccompanied by a man.

Naomi expressed a blessing with a note of certainty for her daughters-in-law. She was confident her God would provide for them. She prayed that *Yahweh*, Israel's covenant God, would demonstrate **kindness** (loyal love, loving kindness) to the two younger widows. God had been loyal and gracious to His people; He had fulfilled His covenant obligations. Naomi wanted Orpah and Ruth to experience God's goodness and graciousness—the same kind of goodness and graciousness the two women had demonstrated **to the dead** and to Naomi. The two younger women had been faithful and gracious to their husbands—Naomi's sons—and to their mother-in-law. Evidently, the family unit had been and continued to be closely knit.

Verse 9. Naomi continued her prayer for Orpah and Ruth. In the culture of that time, it was essential for women to have men to provide for and protect them. Fathers, brothers, husbands, and other male relatives filled that role. Naomi was confident **each** of the young widows would find a **new husband** who would provide **rest** or security for them. The the young widows' returning home might provide them the opportunity to marry kinsmen from their families.

Naomi **kissed** Orpah and Ruth, a gesture of affection and farewell. Then all three women **wept loudly** (wailed) in an expression of grief. Their separation would be devastating loss for each of them.

Verse 10. Orpah and Ruth protested that they would not leave Naomi and return to their homes. They would

accompany her to her **people** in Bethlehem. The two young widows' decision was not easy. They faced sharp changes dictated by a new culture. They would have to adapt to a new kind of life. ◀

Ruth 1:11-15

11 But Naomi replied, "Return home, my daughters. Why do you want to go with me? Am I able to have any more sons who could become your husbands?"

12 Return home, my daughters. Go on, for I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me to have a husband tonight and to bear sons,

13 would you be willing to wait for them to grow up? Would you restrain yourselves from remarrying? No, my daughters, my life is much too bitter for you to share, because the LORD's hand has turned against me."

14 Again they wept loudly, and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.

15 Naomi said, "Look, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods. Follow your sister-in-law."

Commitment endures hard times.

3 ▶ Verse 11. In answer to Orpah and Ruth's protest that they would not turn back, Naomi repeated her appeal. The phrase **my daughters** expressed tender affection and close relationship. Orpah and Ruth had become as daughters to Naomi. Her question concerning the reason they wanted to accompany her likely was designed to prompt them to realistically assess their situation. Unspoken was the implication of the difficulties the two young widows would encounter in the land of Israel. One distinct possibility was poverty. Their main problem, however, would be finding husbands. In Judah and among Israelites, the two widows would not have expected the benefit of levirate marriage. Naomi's sons had no brothers to marry the younger widows. Naomi's question concerning having more sons who could

GUIDE: Refer members to **Key Words** on page 111 (PSG p. 104) to give insight into the word "**Kindness.**"

DISCUSS: Question #2 (PSG, p. 105): **What character traits in a person inspire your loyalty?**

(Alternate: Why is mutual loyalty so important in relationships?)

TRANSITION: "In the next verses we will see Naomi again urged her daughters-in-law to return to their families."

STUDY THE BIBLE **Ruth 1:11-15**



10 minutes

READ: Read or ask a volunteer to read Ruth 1:11-15.

GUIDE: Refer group members to **PSG pages 106-107** to show how Naomi made it clear to her daughters-in-law that to return with her to her home land was volunteering for a life of difficulty. Ask someone to read Luke 14:25-33 to show that Jesus said the same kind of things would come to those who followed Him.

The nature of the Christian life is that we are always giving things up:

- *Our preferences*
- *Our rights*
- *Our plans*

DISCUSS: Question #3
(PSG, p. 106): **What characteristics separate “fair weather” friends from relationships that endure?**

(Alternate: Between your preferences, your rights, and your plans, which one is hardest to surrender to Jesus? Explain.)

marry her daughters-in-law called for a negative answer. Literally, she asked, “Have I yet sons in my womb?” The implication is that she could not bear sons who would fulfill the levirate law and marry Orpah and Ruth.

Verse 12a. Naomi repeated her urgent plea that Orpah and Ruth **return home**. No doubt, Naomi’s letting them go was an extremely difficult decision for her. She continued her emphasis that she would not be able to put the levirate law into effect. She was too old to remarry and to bear sons again.

Verses 12b-13. Naomi strengthened her counsel that Orpah and Ruth return home where they had a good possibility of remarrying. Even if Naomi entertained the **hope** of finding a **husband** immediately and beginning the process of bearing **sons**, would the daughters-in-law **be willing to wait** until the sons were of marriageable age? Would the young women spurn marriage offers during a rather long wait? The implication was that to do so would be difficult at best and likely not possible for them.

Naomi’s use of the word **no** (literally, “not”) repeated her urgent counsel that Orpah and Ruth turn back and go home. Again calling the two women **my daughters** is evidence her tone was tender and kind. She loved them and had their best interests at heart. She did not want them to face what she faced. She described her life as being **bitter**. Literally, she said: “It has gone much more bitterly with me than with you.” Later, when Naomi and Ruth arrived in Bethlehem, Naomi’s people recognized her and called her by name. In response, she said: “Don’t call me Naomi. Call me Mara ... for the Almighty has made me very bitter. I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the Lord has opposed me, and the Almighty has afflicted me?” (1:20-21).

Naomi viewed her situation as God’s doing. She stated, **The Lord’s hand has turned against me**. The phrase **the Lord’s hand** employed a human term to express God’s activity. To Naomi, that God’s hand had been against her indicated God now was her enemy. Even as an army was deployed with hostile intent, so Naomi felt God had reached out to afflict her. She referred to the deaths of her husband and sons. Because she—and other early Israelites—viewed God as the direct cause of everything, she attributed the deaths to Him. Likely, she believed the loss of her husband and sons and her resulting dire circumstances were

punishment for sins she had committed, even if she could not identify those sins. As a result, her life had become reduced to a wretched state. Emotionally, Naomi was hurting deeply. ◀

4 ▶ Verse 14. The women again wailed in grief. In a gesture of farewell, Orpah **kissed** Naomi. Ruth, however, **clung** to her mother-in-law. That is, she stayed close to Naomi in an expression of loyalty and affection. Her determined commitment also expressed her great courage.

Verse 15. Naomi directed Ruth's gaze to Orpah as she turned back and began her journey home. Orpah was returning to her mother's house and to Moab's **gods**. The term **gods** could be singular and refer to Chemosh, the area's chief god. Scripture emphasizes the one, true God; He is the actual, sovereign God. The Scriptures recognize, however, that various people groups worshiped numerous gods. Naomi urged Ruth to go quickly to join her sister-in-law and accompany her back to Moab, where both widows would have the security of their homes and the best possibility of finding husbands. To Naomi's great credit, she stubbornly held their welfare as her priority. She was willing to deal with her bitter circumstances alone.

Orpah has received more than her share of bad press for turning back toward home. She has suffered in comparison with Ruth. Orpah has gotten little credit for her willingness to go to Judah with Naomi. Only after Naomi's strong urgings did Orpah do as her mother-in-law advised, and she did so with Naomi's blessing. She decided to do as her mother-in-law counseled, and Naomi wanted Ruth to follow suit. Ruth, however, chose to stay with Naomi. ◀

Ruth 1:16-17

16 But Ruth replied: "Don't plead with me to abandon you or to return and not follow you. For wherever you go, I will go, and wherever you live, I will live; your people will be my people, and your God will be my God.

17 Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD punish me, and do so severely, if anything but death separates you and me."

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 3** on pages 113-115 to give further explanation to:

- *The tender relationship between Naomi and her daughters-in-law*
- *They would face poverty*
- *No hope for levirate marriage*
- *Naomi describing her life as bitter (Ruth 1:20-21)*
- *The Lord's hand has turned against me.*

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible Commentary 4** to give further explanation to the departure of Orpah.

TRANSITION: "Orpah's decision to return to her family came after much urging from Naomi. The focus of the book now turns exclusively to Ruth."

STUDY THE BIBLE **Ruth 1:16-17**



15 minutes

READ: Read or ask a volunteer to read Ruth 1:16-17.

OPTIONAL ACTIVITY:

Ask group members if the pastor who performed their wedding quoted Ruth 1:16-17, a daughter-in-law's pledge of commitment to her mother-in-law, in their ceremony.

GUIDE: Refer group members to the following paragraph on **PSG page 108:**

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. We also find the strength and resolve of our own commitments through our actions. In these verses we find three tangible commitments demonstrated through Ruth's actions—actions we can carry out to demonstrate our own commitment.

- *I will be present with you.*
- *I will believe with you.*
- *I will press on with you.*

SUMMARIZE: Use **Bible**

Commentary 5 to explain the following phrases:

- *Don't plead with me to abandon you or to return and not follow you*
- *Wherever you go, I will go*

Commitment is demonstrated by our actions.

5 ▶ **Verse 16.** Ruth refused to go with Orpah back to Moab. Her profession of devotion to Naomi is one of the most beautiful, well-known, and quoted passages in Scripture. Pastors often use Ruth's words in marriage ceremonies to stress the devotion, faithfulness, and commitment essential to the covenant of marriage. The words' poetic form conveys the deep emotion of Ruth's commitment to Naomi.

We have no way to know Ruth's tone of voice when she **replied** to Naomi, but I like to think she spoke with firm tenderness. **Don't plead with me** has the sense of asking Naomi to cease her repeated requests that Ruth return home. The word **plead** basically means "to meet" either in kindness or hostility and then "to encounter with request." Ruth kindly asked Naomi to quit barraging her with urgings to return home. In Ruth's mind, to turn back would be to **abandon** or forsake Naomi. It would leave Naomi to face her bleak future alone and unaided. The phrase **to return and not follow you** defined abandonment for Ruth.

A great deal is wrapped up in Ruth's pledge, **wherever you go, I will go**. As mentioned previously, Ruth was going to a land unfamiliar to her, a place where she would be a stranger with no friends, knowing only Naomi. It was a land with a new God and new religious rules to follow. She would have to learn new customs in a new culture. Ruth did not make her firm decision hastily and without thought. She was well aware of what she faced.

The Hebrew word for **live** basically means "to lodge," "to pass the night." Figuratively, it means "to abide," "to remain." Ruth would put down stakes and settle wherever Naomi chose. She would share Naomi's life conditions. The two widows would make their way together.

Ruth was leaving her people to go with Naomi. In effect, Ruth was severing ties with family members, extended relatives, friends, and acquaintances. Ruth would adopt Naomi's **people** as hers.

Arguably, Ruth's final declaration in 1:16 was her most significant pledge: **Your God will be my God**. She committed to worship and serve the one, true God. Previously, she probably had worshiped Chemosh, the chief God of Moab. She probably had some religious standards. Her care for and allegiance to Naomi were evidences of a basic goodness by which Ruth lived. Possibly, Ruth had seen in Naomi a deeply held faith in *Yahweh* and the exemplary

lifestyle such faith produced. Perhaps she had been leaning toward accepting Naomi's God for some time, and in her pledge to Naomi solidified her decision. Her statement may have signaled that she embraced Naomi's faith fully. ◀

6 ▶ Verse 17. Ruth made clear her commitment to Naomi was binding and permanent. She would remain with Naomi as long as her mother-in-law lived. Then Ruth would live out her life in Naomi's land and **be buried** there. Ruth's commitment to Naomi had no conditions and no loopholes. Her commitment was life-long.

With the use of an ancient formula, Ruth took an oath by the God she now worshiped. She asked that God punish her **severely** if she did not keep her pledge to Naomi of faithful, devoted companionship.

How would you define the term *commitment*? At root, it signifies a binding pledge or promise a person makes. Sadly, lasting commitment seems to be in short supply in our culture. Too often, pledges of faithfulness in marriage are broken easily and almost casually. Friendships and partnerships dissolve for lack of determined commitment. Most significantly to me, Christ's redemptive work through His church suffers because of too many believers' lack of strong commitment to Him and His mission. Perhaps at the front end, when people make professions of faith and become members of local churches, we need to make clear that what they are doing is making life-long commitments to Christ that issue in exemplary living and selfless service.

Ruth remains a shining example of determined, lasting commitment. The Scriptures offer other models of commitment that challenge us. The women followers of Jesus not only provided material support for Him and His disciples but also remained loyal to the end of His earthly life. Luke 23:49 notes that the women who ministered to Jesus in Galilee were among the people who viewed His crucifixion from a distance. They demonstrated courageous commitment. Ruth and other biblical personalities challenge us to continuing commitment as Christ's followers.

Ruth identified closely with Naomi, and that identification issued in a lifelong commitment. One application for us as believers is that Christ identified with us so we can be identified with Him. A second is that even as Ruth placed Naomi's needs before her own, so our love for Christ and people He has brought into our lives leads us to place their needs before our own. ◀

- *Wherever you live, I will live*
- *Your people will be my people*
- *Your God will be my God*

DISCUSS: Question #4

(PSG, p. 109): How do your friends and family help you stay committed to Christ in difficult times?

SUMMARIZE: Use Bible

Commentary 6 to explain the following phrases:

- *Where you die, I will die and there I will be buried*
- *May the Lord punish me, and do so severely, if anything but death separates you and me*

DISCUSS: Question #5

(PSG, p. 110): In what ways do the elements of Ruth's commitment to Naomi parallel our commitment to Christ?

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

DO: Encourage group members to complete the activity "**Levels of Commitment**" on **PSG page 110.**

LIVE IT OUT

5 minutes

GUIDE: Emphasize **The Point: Christ-centered living chooses commitment, not convenience.**

REVIEW: Review **Live It Out (PSG, p. 111)**; (see text to the right). Encourage each group member to follow through this week with at least one of the applications.

WRAP IT UP

GUIDE: Emphasize that commitment and loyalty are virtues that are not always apparent in our culture. These qualities are highly valued in the church and in the kingdom of God.

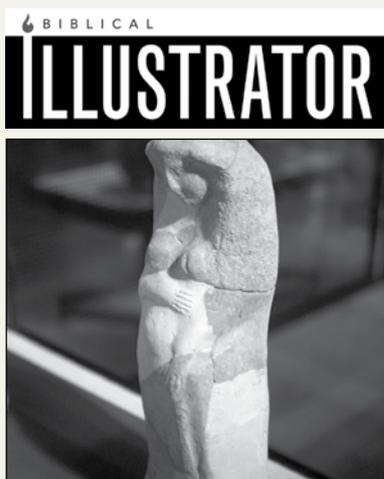
PRAY: "Father, help us to demonstrate high levels of commitment and loyalty to you and to our brothers and sisters in Christ in our group and in our church."

LIVE IT OUT

Commitment has, in large part, 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. We must be the people for whom it is second nature to commit ourselves to God and each other no matter what the cost.

- ▶ **Write.** Who has committed all-in to you and stuck with you through thick and thin? Write that person a thank you note for maintaining such steadfast commitment.
- ▶ **Pray together.** What is 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 have committed yourself. It may be a spouse, a friend, or a pastor. Make an appointment to meet with him or her to make sure there's no doubt you are "all-in" committed to the relationship.





Terra-cotta figurine of a woman, pregnant; this type figurine was common in Israel and Judah in the Iron Age. The prominence of the figurines and their exaggerated feminine features have caused speculation about whether ancient peoples believed the figurines could affect fertility and pregnancy.

Within Ruth's plot line are many themes that link this memorable little book with the rest of Scripture. The story of Ruth is not about famous people, but it's about common people going about their lives in the unremarkable town of Bethlehem. Unlike the Israelites in Judges, in Ruth the main characters regularly appeal to God in their speech and faithful acts.

Boaz was faithful to laws about leaving the gleanings of his field for "the poor and the foreign resident" and performing the role of "family redeemer" (Lev. 23:22; 25:25-26), although Boaz's generosity greatly exceeded all legal requirements. Boaz did not exploit foreigners or mistreat widows (Ex. 22:21-22) like Ruth and Naomi; instead, he blessed and protected them.

The final word of Ruth's story of devotion resonates in the reader's heart and mind: the name "David" (Ruth 4:22). God rewarded Ruth's amazing faithfulness by including her among the ancestors of the great King David. Then more than a thousand years later, due to God's enduring faithfulness to His covenant with David and His people, "Jesus Christ, the Son of David," was born (Matt. 1:1).

The excerpt above is from the article "Old Testament Themes in the Book of Ruth" (Winter 2016-2017), which relates to this session. More *Biblical Illustrator* articles are available that relate to this session. See page 7 about *Biblical Illustrator*.

SHARING THE GOOD NEWS

All-in commitment to follow Jesus wherever He leads is the true mark of a Christian. When we confess "Jesus Christ is Lord" we choose commitment over convenience.

Each week, make yourself available either before or after the session to speak privately with anyone in your group who wants to know more about becoming a Christian. See the article, "Leading Someone to the Greatest Decision of All," on page 2 for guidance in leading a person to Christ.

Remind group members that **page 2** in the **PSG** offers guidance in how to become a Christian. Encourage believers to consider using this article as they have opportunities to lead others to Christ.



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