

5

Ruth

The Cost of Loyalty

Ruth 1—2

A university student wrote to J. R. R. Tolkien after reading *Lord of the Rings*, “You have made loyalty and courage more meaningful to me.”

Loyalty doesn't get much press today. It's present in the lives of many, but it isn't heralded like it used to be when people signed their letters “Your loyal friend.”

GROUP DISCUSSION. What does loyalty look like in a person?

What keeps us from being loyal to our family and friends—and even to God?

PERSONAL REFLECTION. How would you define loyalty?

The book of Ruth is a simple story about the cost and value of loyalty. It takes place during the period of the judges (c. 1380-1050 B.C.), which were dark and turbulent days for Israel. It provides a glimpse into the lives of ordinary people who show care and loyalty for each other that reflects God's character. *Read Ruth 1.*

I. What turbulent circumstances brought Ruth, a Moabite woman,

into Naomi's family?

2. What issues did Ruth most likely face in a crosscultural marriage?

3. What are the practical implications of the choice Ruth makes in contrast to the choice Orpah makes?

4. What evidence do you see that Ruth's choice involves more than attachment to Naomi?

5. What choices have you made that are similar to Ruth's?

6. Read *Ruth* 2. Naomi and Ruth arrive in Bethlehem at the time of the barley harvest (1:22). What does Ruth's willingness to be a gleaner tell us about her?

7. How does the regard that Boaz has for Ruth and her position in Israel (2:11-12) differ from Ruth's concept of herself?

8. Put yourself in Ruth's place. How would it feel to be a foreigner, needing to work hard to support your mother-in-law?

9. What do you think motivates Ruth's hard work and her loyalty to Naomi?

What motivates your own loyalty?

10. What loyalties are important to you as a Christian, regardless of cost?

How could you encourage those loyalties?

We tend to think first of ourselves; pray that God will strengthen your own commitment and loyalty to others.

Now or Later

Ruth's story is not all told in this study. The following study, focusing on Naomi, tells the rest of the story. Read *Ruth* 3 and 4 in preparation for the next discussion.