

GET INTO THE STUDY



5 minutes

SAY: “In our last session, we looked at Solomon and his unfailing wisdom. Today we look at Ruth and her all-in commitment.” Invite members to turn to **page 3** in the **Personal Study Guide (PSG)** and review session titles.

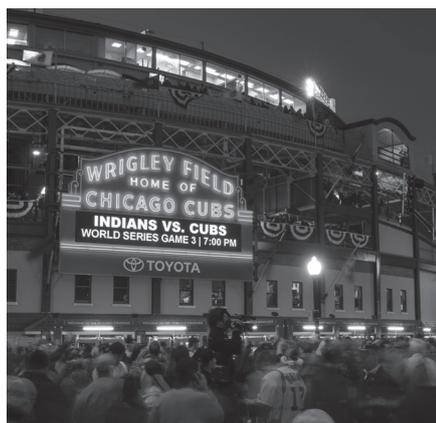
DISCUSS: Draw attention to the picture (**PSG, p. 102**) as you introduce **Question #1: Where do you see examples of extreme loyalty in today’s world?**

OPTION: IN ADVANCE, prepare to show the three-minute video clip “I Play for You.” The link to this video can be found at BibleStudiesForLife.com/AdultExtra.

TIP: You may choose to use the video before the question to prompt the group or play it as follow-up to the question.

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 And Naomi said unto her two daughters in law, Go, return each to her mother's house: the LORD deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the dead, and with me.

9 The LORD grant you that ye may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband. Then she kissed them; and they lifted up their voice, and wept.

10 And they said unto her, Surely we will return with thee unto thy people.

KEY WORD:

kindly (v. 8)—The Hebrew word means “goodness,” “mercy,” “kindness,” “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. The Israelites believed this welcome relief came because God knew they needed water and provided it through rain so that they once again could grow the crops that served as food for them and grass for animals. Spreading the news that “the Lord had visited his people” (Ruth 1:6) did not mean God had been absent and then came to stay awhile. It indicates God was active to meet His people's needs—to bless them by “giving them bread.” In the Old Testament, God could visit (be active) in judgment or in gracious help. Here, God blessed His people by sending rain; He acted for their good.

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, both Orpah and Ruth were willing to leave their families and familiar surroundings to go with Naomi. Their going with her likely demonstrated their affection for her, their good relationship with her, and their determination to help care for her.

GUIDE: Direct attention to **The Bible Meets Life (PSG, p. 103)**. Highlight the author's example of the commitment required for a strong marriage.

Reinforce the importance of commitment to Christ by reading **The Point** on page 110 (**PSG, p. 103**): **Christ-centered living chooses commitment, not convenience.**

PRAY: Ask for God to strengthen our resolve to follow Him. Thank Him for the example of Ruth's all-in commitment.

STUDY THE BIBLE

Ruth 1:8-10



10 minutes

GUIDE: Before reading the passage, set the context by summarizing the information in **The Setting** on page 110.

READ: Ask a volunteer to read Ruth 1:8-10.

LEADER PACK: Direct the group's attention to **Item 8: People & Places** to give context for Moab's location.

PEOPLE & PLACES



GUIDE: Use **Bible Commentary 1** on page 111 and this page, and **DIGGING DEEPER (PSG, p. 105)** to set the historical context of Israel and Moab and the longstanding difficulties between them.

SUMMARIZE: 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 (**PSG, pp. 104-105**).

During the days of the judges, Elimelech and Naomi took

Verse 8. Early in the journey, Naomi evidently had considered the costly decision her daughters-in-law had made. They were giving up relative security and 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 the two young widows return **each to her mother's house**.

If Orpah and Ruth chose to turn back, Naomi would continue alone on an even more 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. If Naomi planned to walk, the trip would be physically taxing and extremely difficult. If she intended to join 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 **the LORD** would **deal kindly with** the two younger widows. Naomi wanted Orpah and Ruth to experience God's goodness and graciousness—the same kind of goodness and graciousness the two women had demonstrated **with the dead, and with Naomi**. The two younger women had been faithful to their husbands—Naomi's sons—and gracious to their mother-in-law. 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 prayed that **each** of the young widows would find **rest ... in the house of** a new **husband** who would provide security for them. The levirate law was operative not only among the Israelites but also was a custom throughout the Middle East, an area that included Moab. The levirate law required a childless dead man's next of kin to marry the widow. The first son born to the union would be considered to be the dead man's son to continue his name or line. No brothers of their deceased husbands awaited them in Moab; however, by returning home, the young widows' might have an opportunity to marry kinsmen from their families.

Naomi **kissed** Orpah and Ruth, a gesture of affection and farewell. Then all three women **wept** 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. **We will return with thee unto thy people** in Bethlehem. The two young widows' decision was not easy. They would have to adapt to a new kind of life dictated by a new culture. Also, they would be leaving their god behind to enter a land with a different God. In that time, each land area had its own god; to leave that area was to leave its god behind and to enter territory thought to be ruled by a different god.

Ruth 1:11-15

11 And Naomi said, Turn again, my daughters: why will ye go with me? are there yet any more sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands?

12 Turn again, my daughters, go your way; for I am too old to have an husband. If I should say, I have hope, if I should have an husband also to night, and should also bear sons;

13 Would ye tarry for them till they were grown? would ye stay for them from having husbands? nay, my daughters; for it grieveth me much for your sakes that the hand of the LORD is gone out against me.

14 And they lifted up their voice, and wept again: and Orpah kissed her mother in law; but Ruth clave unto her.

15 And she said, Behold, thy sister in law is gone back unto her people, and unto her gods: return thou after thy sister in law.

Commitment endures hard times.

2 ▶ 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 but present under the surface 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,

their two sons to live in Moab, far from their home in Bethlehem. After Elimelech and their sons died some time after, Naomi and her two Moabite daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth, were alone.

Naomi planned to return home, but she thought Orpah and Ruth would have a better chance by returning to their families.

Would Orpah and Ruth remain committed to their mother-in-law, or would they choose the way of convenience?

Naomi urged her daughters-in-law to go home, but they pledged to stay with her.

LEADER PACK: Direct the group's attention to **Item 9: Ruth** as you teach this session to give a visual progression of the events that took place in the Book of Ruth.

RUTH

BOOK OF RUTH TIMELINE

1:1 - A famine in Judah forced Elimelech to take his wife, Naomi, and his two sons to go live in Moab. Elimelech later died there.

1:4-5 - Elimelech and Naomi's two sons, Mahlon and Chilion, married Moabite women, Ruth and Orpah. Within ten years, both sons died, leaving Naomi, Ruth, and Orpah as widows.

1:8 - Naomi encouraged Ruth and Orpah to go back to their family in hopes of remarrying and gaining financial stability.

1:15 - Orpah chose to return to her homeland and family, but Ruth refused to leave Naomi.

1:22 - Naomi and Ruth returned to Bethlehem, Naomi's homeland.

2:8 - Ruth meets Boaz, a wealthy relative of Elimelech, while gathering fallen grain from his harvested barley and wheat fields.

3:13 - Boaz promised to marry her if a closer male relative moved his own right to marry her.

4:9-10 - Boaz buys all of the property that was owned by Elimelech, Mahlon, and Chilion, thereby gaining the right to take Ruth as his wife.

4:13 - Boaz and Ruth were married.

4:13-17 - Ruth gave birth to a son, Obed. Later, Obed would become the father to Jesse, who would become the father of David. Jesus is a descendant of David.

DISCUSS: Question #2
(PSG, p. 106): What character traits in a person inspire your loyalty?

(Alternate: Who comes to mind when you hear the word “commitment”?)

TRANSITION: “In the next verses we see the daughters-in-law struggle with the choice before them.”

STUDY THE BIBLE
Ruth 1:11-15



10 minutes

READ: Ask a volunteer to read Ruth 1:11-15.

GUIDE: Using **Bible Commentary 2** on page 113 and this page, explain the difficulties Ruth and Orpah would face if they went with Naomi.

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 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. ◀

Verses 12-13. Naomi repeated her urgent plea that Orpah and Ruth **turn again** and go home. No doubt, letting them go was an extremely difficult decision for Naomi. She continued to stress that she would not be able to put the levirate law into effect. She was too old to remarry and to bear sons again.

Naomi strengthened her counsel that Orpah and Ruth return home where they had a good possibility of remarrying. Even if Naomi had the **hope** of finding a **husband** immediately and bearing more **sons**, would the daughters-in-law **tarry for them till they were grown?** Would the young women spurn marriage offers during a rather long wait?

Naomi answered her own questions by crying **nay, my daughters**. Again calling the two women *my daughters* demonstrates she loved them and had their best interests at heart. She did not want them to face what she faced. She remarked that **it grieveth me much for your sakes**. 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: “Call me not Naomi, call me Mara: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the LORD hath brought me home again empty: why then call ye me Naomi, seeing the LORD hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me?” (1:20-21).

Naomi viewed her situation as God’s doing. She stated, **The hand of the LORD has gone out against me**. The phrase rendered *the hand of the Lord* employed a human term to express God’s activity. Even as an army was deployed with hostile intent, so Naomi felt God had reached out to afflict her. Because she—and other early Israelites—viewed God as the direct cause of everything, she attributed the deaths of her husband and sons 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.

Verse 14. The women **wept again**. Then, in a gesture of farewell, Orpah **kissed** Naomi. **But Ruth clave unto** her mother-in-law. That is, she stayed close to Naomi in an expression of loyalty and affection.

Verse 15. Naomi directed Ruth's gaze to Orpah as she began her journey **back unto her people, and unto her gods**. The term *gods* could be singular and refer to Chemosh, Moab's chief god. Scripture emphasizes the One, true God; only He is sovereign. The Scriptures recognize, however, that various people groups worshiped numerous gods. Naomi urged Ruth, **return after thy sister in law** and go with 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 as well. Ruth, however, insisted on staying with Naomi.

Ruth 1:16-17

16 And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God:

17 Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the LORD do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me.

Commitment is demonstrated by our actions.

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 often-quoted passages in Scripture. Pastors often use Ruth's words in wedding ceremonies to stress the devotion, faithfulness, and commitment essential to the

SUMMARIZE: Naomi wanted to make sure her daughters-in-law understood they were committing themselves to an uncertain future and possible poverty. They were choosing to walk beside her down a road filled with difficulty. She wanted them to count the cost (**PSG, p. 107**).

DISCUSS: Question #3
(**PSG, p. 107**): **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.)

SUMMARIZE: To walk the road with Jesus, Christ-followers must embrace the reality of enduring hard times. The nature of the Christian life is that we are always giving things up: (**PSG, pp. 107-108**).

- **Our preferences.** *We are not to cling to what we prefer.*
- **Our rights.** *As followers of Christ, we are to give up what we think we deserve.*
- **Our plans.** *Christians are to give up our own plans.*

TRANSITION: “The next verses demonstrate how Ruth’s commitment was supported by her actions.”

STUDY THE BIBLE

Ruth 1:16-17



15 minutes

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

GUIDE: Use **Bible Commentary 3** on page 117 to explain the meaning of biblical commitment.

DISCUSS: Question #4 (PSG, p. 109): How do the elements of Ruth’s commitment to Naomi parallel our commitment to Christ?

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 as she replied to Naomi, but we can imagine she spoke firmly yet tenderly. **Intreat me not to leave thee** indicates that Ruth asked Naomi to cease her repeated appeals that Ruth return home. The word translated *intreat* basically means “to meet” either in kindness or hostility and then “to encounter with request.” Ruth kindly asked Naomi to quit pelting her with advice to return home. In Ruth’s mind, to go back would be to *leave* or abandon Naomi. It would leave Naomi to face her bleak future alone and unaided. **To return from following after thee** would have defined abandonment for Ruth.

A great deal is wrapped up in Ruth’s pledge, **whither thou goest, 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.

Not only would Ruth follow Naomi, but she also committed, **where thou lodgest, I will lodge**. The Hebrew word for *lodge* basically means “to pass the night.” Figuratively, it means “to abide,” “to remain.” Ruth would put down stakes and settle wherever Naomi chose. The two widows would make their way together.

Ruth was leaving her people to go with Naomi: **Thy people shall be my people**. Ruth was severing ties with family members, extended relatives, friends, and acquaintances.

Arguably, Ruth’s final declaration in 1:16 was her most significant pledge: **Thy God will be my God**. She committed to worship and serve the One, true God. She likely had been worshiping Chemosh, the chief God of Moab. Her care for and allegiance to Naomi were evidences of a basic goodness by which Ruth lived. Possibly, Ruth had seen Naomi’s deeply held faith in the Lord God and the exemplary lifestyle such faith produced. Perhaps she had been leaning toward accepting Naomi’s God for some time, and her pledge to Naomi solidified her decision. Her statement may have signaled that she embraced Naomi’s faith fully.

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.

3 ▶ With the use of an ancient formula, Ruth took an oath by the God she now worshiped: **the LORD do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me.** The picture we might have today if a person made such a statement would be of drawing a finger across the throat or putting a finger to the head as if to say death would be the only proper punishment for failing to keep such a pledge.

How would you define the term *commitment*? At root, it signifies a binding pledge or promise one person makes to another. Sadly, lasting commitment seems to be in short supply in our culture. Too often, pledges of faithfulness in marriage are broken easily, if not casually. Friendships and partnerships dissolve for lack of determined commitment. Most significantly to me, Christ's redemptive work through His church suffers because too many believers lack 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 it clear that they making life-long commitments to Christ that issue in exemplary living and selfless service. A stanza of a favorite hymn describes commitment well:

"I am resolved to follow the Savior
Faithful and true each day;
Heed what He sayeth, do what He willeth,
He is the Living Way."

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. All these biblical personalities challenge us to continuing commitment as Christ's followers. ◀

Aristarchus assisted Paul in his ministry. He was with Paul at the end of the missionary's third journey, as they carried a collection from Gentile churches to the church in Jerusalem (Acts 20:4). After Paul was arrested and jailed, Aristarchus accompanied the apostle on the voyage to Rome (27:2), and he was with Paul in prison in Rome (Col. 4:10; Philem. 24). He remained faithful even in difficult circumstances.

Christ identified with us so that we can be identified with Him. Even as Ruth placed Naomi's needs before her own, so our love for Christ and people He has brought into our lives

SUMMARIZE: In these verses we find three tangible commitments demonstrated through Ruth's actions—actions we can carry out (PSG, pp. 108-110):

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

DISCUSS: Question #5 (PSG, p. 110): What are specific circumstances in which we can honor Christ by choosing commitment over convenience?

(Alternate: As a group, how can we help one another demonstrate commitment?)

DO: Invite volunteers to share their responses to the activity on PSG page 110: "Commit and Don't Quit."

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 it's always easier to do the convenient thing, but believers are to remain committed no matter what.

PRAY: "Father, give us the strength to follow through on our commitment to You."

NOTE: Remind group members that **PSG pages 6-9** are there to journal one another's prayer requests.

leads us to place their needs before our own.

LIVE IT OUT

How will you demonstrate commitment to others this week? Consider the following applications:

- ▶ **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.

BIBLICAL
ILLUSTRATOR



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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Free additional ideas for your group are available at

BibleStudiesforLife.com/AdultExtra