Kindness in our everyday lives

Week 1: Kindness in Loyalty

WELCOME

Spend time relaxing and sharing together.

Each of us has things that we feel an allegiance or loyalty towards. Encourage people to share examples of people, organisations, sports teams, causes etc. to which they feel (or have felt) an allegiance or loyalty.

Which of the things mentioned are rightly deserving of our loyalty, and which are not?

WORSHIP

"Know therefore that the Lord your God is God, the faithful God who maintains covenant loyalty with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations" Deuteronomy 7:9 NRSV.

Take time to reflect on this verse as you praise and thank God for His unending loyalty and love to each of us.

WORD

The story told in the book of Ruth happened at the same time as the events recounted in Judges, yet the direction of travel of each couldn't be more different. In Judges, as the people of Israel continue to stray from the Lord, matters just go from bad to worse. Ruth, on the other hand, begins in difficult times but ends on a high as God sets the lineage that leads to David, and thence to Jesus.

Difficult times in a foreign land

Read Ruth 1:1-7

1. Do you think Elimelech and Naomi made the right choice in moving to live in Moab? If they had asked you for your guidance when they were deciding to move or not, what would you have said?

   You may find it helpful to look at Deuteronomy 7:3-4 and 23:3-6, Numbers 14:8 and Proverbs 3:5-6.

2. What evidence can we see that indicates that Naomi still believed in the Lord despite her challenging circumstances?

The return to Judah

Read Ruth 1:8-22.

3. Soon after the three women set off, Naomi tells Orpah and Ruth (v8) to return to their mother's home. Why do you think that she does this?

   You may find it helpful to look at verses 8-10.

4. After Naomi makes a second attempt to try to convince Orpah and Ruth to return home, Orpah relents (v14). What might this tell us about Orpah and how do her actions challenge us?

You may find it helpful to consider what Naomi says in verse 15 and contrast it with Ruth's words in verses 16 and 17.

5. In verse 16 Ruth urges Naomi to stop asking her to leave, before continuing to make a notable statement of loyalty and commitment. What strikes you about that statement and in what ways does it challenge our faith?

   You may find it helpful to look at Hebrews 10:23.

6. Like all of us, there are times when Naomi's witness for the Lord is less than perfect (v13b). With that in mind, how might Ruth's words to her in verses 16 and 17 nonetheless encourage us in our walk with the Lord?

7. How would you describe Naomi's attitude as she arrives in Bethlehem? Did she really come back as empty as she says in verse 21?

WHAT NEXT?

God is full of compassion and kindness towards each of us (Psalm 103:8-10) and His love for us is so great that it can be hard to grasp (Ephesians 3:17b-18). Moreover, despite how we can sometimes feel when times are hard, He promises will never leave us or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). When Ruth makes her statement of faith what she says comes from deep within her heart. As she declares her undying loyalty to the Lord it's as if her sense of God wells up inside her, causing her to echo God's unending loyalty, love, compassion and kindness as she makes her undying commitment to Naomi. As we picture that moment, it rightly challenges our faith and how we live for God.

How might our society be different if everyone was more like Ruth? How might we be more like Ruth and what practical expressions of God's unending loyalty, love, compassion and kindness to us might God be calling us to do, either as individuals or as a church?

Personal reflection

As Ruth made her undying commitment, she stepped out in faith with boldness, unsure what would happen next. As you reflect on what Ruth did, could there be something that God is asking you to do that requires you to do likewise?