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**Ruth:
The Lost Art
of Loyalty**

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Series: God's Living Legends (Part 1)

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The Lost Art of Loyalty

Misplaced loyalties. It is a fact in our generation. Grown men will stand with pigs on their heads for hours at a time and yell, “Go Hogs!” or stand for hours with their second and third fingers broken nearly in two crying, “Hook ‘Em Horns!”, screaming at the top of their lungs. All of this strange behavior has to do with colleges and football and something called “loyalty”. But these same men will stand and blow bubble gum during the pledge of allegiance to the flag to the greatest nation on the face of the earth, or laugh irreverently while the national anthem is sung, or stare curiously at the crowd during the invocation. Misplaced loyalties.

We live in a world where men are more loyal to the Dallas Cowboys than they are to their own wives. We live in a world where women are more loyal to certain television programs than they are to their own husbands. We live in a world where people are more loyal to a product that pleases them than they are to an employer who feeds them. Misplaced loyalties. I believe that the world, including the Christian world, has been so caught up in the machinery of itself that it has completely lost sight of the Scriptural concept of loyalty. Thus, the story we are studying in Ruth, Chapter 1, is like a fresh breeze that comes out of nowhere on a hot day and seems refreshingly new. And yet, it is founded on the essence of a principle that is as old as God Himself. The lost art of loyalty is an art that needs to be rediscovered by Christians today. May God grant us insight into that discovery during this lesson.

Our story unfolds from the book of Ruth, Chapter 1. In the last lesson, we read that story with the purpose of looking at both the bitter and the sweet of it. We looked first at the bitterness of Naomi and at the symptoms, the causes, and the cures for a bitter spirit. This lesson’s goal is to be spiritually transformed by the positive side of that story as we look at the sweetness of Ruth and the lost art of loyalty.

The backdrop of our experience is Ruth’s response. The story

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centers around a Hebrew man from Bethlehem named Elimelech, his wife, Naomi, and their two sons, Mahlon and Chilion. The circumstances that set the stage for this story include a famine that had placed its ugly grip on their homeland and caused them to flee in search of food. Flee they did to the country of Moab. There they found both food and shelter. They also found a new place to settle down. So Elimelech and his family put down their roots in Moab and began to raise their family there.

It was at this point that tragedy struck, and Elimelech died leaving Naomi to bring up her two sons alone. But the boys grew and soon married two Moabite girls. One was named Orpah and the other was named Ruth. Naomi's life began to blossom again; but tragedy struck once more, and the blows came in rapid fire, as both of Naomi's sons were taken from her. So now Naomi, a tired and discouraged widow, hears that God has again visited His people in Bethlehem, and that once again they have food. So she takes her two daughters-in-law and heads back to Bethlehem. So changed was she from the ordeal she had endured, that her friends in Bethlehem were not even sure who it was. "Is this Naomi?" they asked, to which Naomi replied, "Do not call me Naomi. Naomi means pleasant. Call me 'Mara', or bitter, for the Almighty has dealt bitterly with me." It was on that statement that we focused our thoughts in the last lesson.

On the way home to Bethlehem, Naomi had paused and challenged her two daughters-in-law to return home to their own people. Finally upon her insistence, Orpah relented and returned to Moab. Ruth's precious response of love to her lonely mother-in-law rings down through the ages as a perfect pattern of loyalty for God's people. Let's read it again in Ruth 1,

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

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.

And Ruth said, Entreat 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:

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.

(Ruth 1:14-17)

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It was, in essence, a seven-fold act of allegiance. It basically said this, “Naomi, I place myself under your authority and therefore under the authority of your God. So don’t ever ask me to leave you. Wherever you go, I assume your God is sending me. Wherever you stop, your God is saying to me, ‘Ruth, stop here.’ I have a new family, Naomi, it is your family. I now belong to your God. Where you die, when you die, and where you will be buried, I will die and be buried there, too. The Lord can take my life if anything short of death interrupts our fellowship.” That is loyalty. Ruth was totally loyal to Naomi; therefore, Ruth was totally committed to Naomi. Therefore, Ruth was totally faithful to Naomi. That is the logical progression of loyalty. It is a quality we need to recapture in an age of cynical saints and unfaithful followers. So let’s take a look at the lost art of loyalty. First, for the sake of our study, I want to give a few definitions. We will look at the attitude, the act and the activity of loyalty.

THE ATTITUDE: LOYALTY

Loyalty is an “attitude of allegiance that defies obstacles to remain faithful”. An attitude of loyalty usually leads to an act of commitment. Commitment is “the act of professing allegiance to a relationship or a responsibility”. But a commitment should result in faithfulness. Faithfulness is “the activity of remaining in place to fulfill a commitment”. *So loyalty is the attitude that results in the act of commitment which should result in the activity of faithfulness.* Ruth adopted an attitude of loyalty. Her loyalty led her to make a commitment. Her commitment resulted in faithfulness. So loyalty, then, is a basic attitude of the heart that chooses to remain in place, no matter what.

I believe one reason God gave us dogs is to teach us loyalty. Some of you have dogs that don’t fit that category. I understand. Not all dogs are loyal, but there seems to be ingrained in the personality of most dogs the characteristic of unwavering loyalty. Wherever you go, they go. Whenever you stop, they stop. The people you receive, they receive. But those who intend you harm are automatically their enemies. They will stand by you through thick and thin and remain in place. The Scripture tells us to study the lives of the animal kingdom to learn about character. Study the lives of dogs to learn about the lost art of loyalty. Now I don’t want some of you to come in barking; it is the character quality we are after. Loyalty. But most of all, study the Scriptures. Like gems of greatness, there sparkles throughout God’s library

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of Living Legends, men and women whose great character left emblazoned in history, lessons in loyalty. When you have time, read about David in I Samuel 24 and I Samuel 26 as well. Read about Uriah in II Samuel 11, about Ittai in II Samuel 15:21. Read about Hushai in II Samuel 17. Read about David's soldiers in II Samuel 18, about Joab in II Samuel 19 as well as Barzillai. Read about Jehoiada in II Kings 11 and Mordecai in Esther 2. These are but a few whose lives left legends of loyalty. Some of them would never be known at all were it not for the expressions of loyalty in their lives. That is the reason they are recorded in Scripture.

How loyal are you? When you make a commitment to a person or a commitment to a task, do you, if necessary, lay your life or your reputation on the line rather than turn your back on completing your commitment? What is the breaking point of your loyalty? How serious or how devastating an obstacle does it take to cause your allegiance to waver? Are you like some people who are on the side of whoever happens to be winning at the time? Are you committed to whoever is committed to you? Or are you committed to that task until that task gets tough? Are you committed to that person unless they fail to live up to your expectations? Are you committed to that organization only until that organization fails to meet your objectives? How loyal are you? That is what this lesson is all about: it is about our becoming increasingly loyal. You may ask, "Loyal to what? Loyal to whom?" Let's take two areas of our lives and subdivide them and find out how God fashioned our lives to teach us to be loyal. We are going to look at loyalty in relationships and loyalty in responsibilities.

LOYALTY IN RELATIONSHIPS

First we will look at loyalty in our relationships. We are going to break this down into four basic categories. First there is loyalty to your *family*. Second is loyalty to your *marriage*. Third is loyalty to your *friendships*. Fourth is loyalty to your *Lord*.

First let's look at our relationships with our families. This is a tough one. Ruth herself is our cardinal example where families are concerned. While God may not call you to the glowing challenge of committing your life to your mother-in-law, in essence He has. And to your father-in-law. And to your Uncle Ed. And to Aunt Emma. And to Grandpa Gus. And even Cousin

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Charlie. Why is it that Christians are often the last to show up at family reunions and the first to complain that they *have* to get together for Christmas? As a Christian, God has enclosed you in an ever-widening sphere of influence and assigned you the task of loving those within your circle. Your first assignment is Uncle Ed and Aunt Emma and all the other apples, rotten or not, that happen to grow on your family tree.

Christians, because of God's perspective of the family as the center of life, ought to be in the center of activities to draw the family together. We need not to be standing on the outside condescending to appear at an occasional function as a missionary to a pool of pagans. No wonder they are turned off from our four spiritual laws; *they are still waiting for our one spiritual life*. My friends, you and I ought to covenant before God today that by God's grace we will re-establish cords of loyalty to our families. We need to begin with deeper communication, followed by deeper involvement. Many of us have lost the art of expressing love to our families and we have lost an opportunity to express our commitment to Christ in the process.

The second relationship that demands loyalty is marriage. Perhaps Sarah is our best Scriptural example. Marriage, you may remember, was designed by God as a perfect portrait of loyalty. It is a perfect portrait of God's loyalty to us in the form of Jesus Christ. Ruth's commitment to Naomi can and has been on occasion super-imposed upon the marriage vows. Can't you see what is lacking in marriages today? Commitment. Why no act of commitment? Why no activity of faithfulness? It is because there is no attitude of loyalty. Let's read I Corinthians 13:7 from the Living Bible,

If you love someone, you will be loyal to him no matter what the cost. You will always believe in him, always expect the best of him, and always stand your ground in defending him. (I Corinthians 13:7 TLB)

This means no cutting remarks that undermine their character. You say, "Who? Me?" It means that you stand up for them and you stand by them when they are under attack, *even if they are attacking you*. It means that your commitment to them supersedes your commitment to other people, to other organizations and to other activities. Never, ever should your mate have reason to question your loyalty. If they never question your loyalty, they will never question your commitment. If they

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never question your commitment, they will never need to question your faithfulness. If your mate is not a Christian, all the more reason that he or she should never, ever have cause to question your loyalty. So don't gripe about your husband's driving to your neighbor. Don't joke about your wife's bad cooking to your friends. Never question their integrity, ever, before anyone. It is an issue of loyalty and it is vital to your testimony. It is more vital than you will ever know. Some of you may well want to go home this afternoon and just the two of you sit down and open your Bibles and read Ruth 1:16-17 back to each other while you insert the other's name. You may want to re-establish that level of loyalty in your marriage by re-reading it on the first day of every month for the rest of your life. Loyalty. We have lost it.

The third area of loyalty in relationships has to do with friendships. David may well be our best portrait of that in Scripture. A couple of verses you may enjoy are Proverbs 17:17. Paraphrased it says this,

A true friend is always loyal and a brother is born to help in time of need. (Proverbs 17:17)

Proverbs 20:6 adds,

Most people will tell you what loyal friends they are, but are they telling the truth?

How good a friend are you? Do you retain confidences or you do become the neighborhood public address system? Do your friends sense a spirit of loyalty in you that will stand the test of time, or are they wondering what you are saying about them behind their backs the way you said it about somebody else in front of them? Do you build close, lasting friendships? You will, if you learn to develop a spirit of loyalty.

Our most important relationship where loyalty is concerned obviously involves our relationship with Jesus Christ. Although we will discuss it more fully in closing, we will pause here to recognize that the power of our testimony is relative to the level of our loyalty others sense in our commitment to Christ. If we hold up certain standards as being God's standards and then compromise those standards as time goes by, we are saying that His level of life is not worthy of loyalty. For instance, when Christ came into your life and God cleaned up your vocabulary (and He loves to do that), be sure that it *stays clean*. The people where you work took note that Jesus cleansed your tongue. If you now

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slip back to your old kind of conversation, what you are saying is, “My concern for your acceptance of me outweighs my loyalty to Jesus Christ.”

LOYALTY IN OUR RESPONSIBILITIES

So God tests our loyalty in our relationships. But ah, He also tests them in the arena of our responsibilities. As Christians, we have four primary spheres of loyalty that make or break our testimony where responsibilities are concerned. The first is loyalty to your *job*. The second is loyalty to your *country*. The third is loyalty to *other Christians*. The fourth is loyalty to *chosen tasks*.

We need to begin with our job. Basically the issue is this: when you took that job at the Ajax Paperclip Company, you said to God, “I place myself vocationally under the Ajax Paperclip Company’s authority as unto God. I am expecting God to work through Mr. Ajax and all the others to change my life. I am expecting God to work on Mr. Ajax and all the others through my life. Thus, I pledge my unswerving loyalty as an employee to Ajax.”

You may wonder what “unswerving loyalty” means. For one thing, it means that I don’t try to run the business unless they ask me to. That is not my job; that is Mr. Ajax’s job. My job is to support whatever he wants me to do. You may say it is more fun to run it, particularly if you don’t have the responsibility for the outcome. Secondly, it means that I don’t grumble or complain about my company to other people, meaning other employees or otherwise. Thirdly, it means that I am content with my wages, (Luke 3:14). You are to be content because God, who knows your needs, gave you the job and you don’t know all His reasons for paying you what He does, but He does. It may be to teach you contentment. It may be to teach you stewardship. It may be to teach you spiritual priorities. But the powers that be, which are ordained of Him, write out your check and He asks you to be content. Fourthly, it means that you pledge yourself to be the best walking billboard Ajax has. It would never enter your mind to buy a Zebra brand paper clip, not even at half-price. You say, “I don’t believe in the product I make or sell or service.” Then one of two things are true, either you are working at the wrong place or you have the wrong attitude. If I were you, I would start thinking about the latter and then worry much later about the

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former. You say, “Well, I will be the only one in my office with that attitude.” Exactly. Because you belong to a God of loyalty, you must be decidedly different where loyalty is concerned.

The second area of responsibility where a Christian’s loyalty is concerned is his nation. Now listen, the President or Prime Minister of your country is ordained of God. I don’t care if you voted for him or not. He is God-ordained. As such, he represents the authority God chose to run the nation. If you don’t like it, you get another chance in four years. But in the meantime, don’t make fun of him, particularly, don’t make fun of him in front of your children or anyone else for that matter. When you do, you ridicule the judgment of God. That flag is your flag. When it is saluted, every Christian ought to salute. We ought to salute not because we feel “patriotic” but because it represents the emblem of the national authority God chose to place in your life. Respect it. Don’t wear it as a bathing suit or a T-shirt. When the national anthem is sung, sing it. It is an anthem of loyalty to a nation God made your homeland. I bet there are a lot of you who know every word of your school song, but could no more write out the words to the national anthem than you could the Gettysburg Address. Do you know what is lacking? The lost art of loyalty. Quit complaining because your taxes are too high or your welfare program is being cut. God knows your needs. God wants you to be loyal to your nation.

The third area in which loyalty reveals itself is in the accomplishments of tasks. Nehemiah is a good one to study for that. If you took a job in the church or in the community or at school, finish it and finish it well or give it to somebody who will. God always finishes what He starts, just as He promised in Philippians 1:6. His children are to be known by His character. That is why your children and my children need to be taught to finish what they start. They need to re-capture at an early age the lost art of loyalty.

The last area of loyalty to responsibility is loyalty to the body of Christ. I am not talking about the local church organization. We should also be responsible to be loyal there, too. But I mean loyalty to God’s people who make up the body of Christ and your local body in particular. Oftentimes, the world is more loyal to the members of its secret orders than Christians are to other Christians. It means at least three things.

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The first is loyalty to pray. There are so many hurting Christians in the world today. There are so many who are hurting physically. There are so many who are hurting emotionally. There are so many who are hurting financially. There are so many who are hurting spiritually. How can we walk around, business as usual, when brothers and sisters in Christ hurt like that? How can we sleep until we have prayed and prayed and prayed? I don't mean the *exercise* of prayer, I mean the *experience* of prayer, not an emotional experience, but a spiritual experience. How can we rest when those we love are hurting so?

It means loyalty not only to pray, but loyalty to love. People need to know that we weep when they weep. They need to know that we rejoice when they rejoice. They need to feel our arms around them. They need to know that their hurts are our hurts. We don't need to toss up a ten cent, "Bless them, Lord!" on the way home, then head for the television instead of the telephone or the note pad to let them know of our concern. It means loyalty to pray and loyalty to love and loyalty to give. A brother who can't meet his needs but wants to, suddenly becomes your responsibility and my responsibility. I don't care how many trillions of dollars we may send abroad to missions, if we have a brother in need and say to him, "Go, be warmed and filled." but then do nothing to warm him or fill him, the Scriptures says, *How dwelleth the love of God in us?* "All things in common" means that Christians are sharing and caring for one another as part of their calling to be loyal.

Do you see what loyalty is? Do you understand why loyalty is so important? Don't you see that you are not your own, that you have been bought with a price. Now you are under new ownership and your new Owner demands loyalty as a badge of that ownership. He has chosen and placed in your life objects of loyalty: a family, a mate, friends, an employer, a nation, a church. He has commissioned you that *whatsoever you do in word or deed, do all to the glory of God.* That is why you render to Caesar the things that are Caesars, to honor God.

Loyalty to your family is an act of allegiance to God. Loyalty to your mate is an act of allegiance to God. Loyalty to your country is an act of allegiance to God. Loyalty to God's people is an act of allegiance to God. Loyalty to your job is an act of allegiance to God. These things are true because it is the nature of God to be loyal to you.

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Have you ever stopped to think how loyal God is? That is why we need to be loyal. Look at how loyal He is to His word.

Forever, Oh Lord, Thy Word is settled in heaven.

(Psalm 119:89)

The counsel of the Lord stands forever, the thoughts of His heart to all generations.

(Psalm 33:11)

Look how loyal He is to Israel,

I will bring My people again from the depths of the sea.

(Psalm 68:22)

Or how about Ezekiel 11:16-17

Therefore say, Thus saith the Lord GOD, "Although I have cast them far off among the heathen, and although I have scattered them among the countries, yet will I be to them as a little sanctuary in the countries where they shall come."

Therefore say, Thus saith the Lord God, "I will even gather you from the people, and assemble you out of the countries where ye have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel."

Oh, the faithfulness of God to Israel because His Spirit is loyal to His people. Look how faithful He is to His creation. He will not bring the earth to judgment until everyone who will come, has come to Him, as we see in II Peter 3:9 He will one day restore His creation to its original beauty and restore and redeem man to his original state of fellowship and sinlessness. How loyal our God is. Look how loyal He is to the church. He chose us. He called us. He commissioned us. He empowered us to go to preach, to teach, to baptize and to disciple. Look at the job the church has done through the years. Look how soft, how weak its impact has been from time to time. Yet, He has developed no other plan. He remains loyal to those He has entrusted to that responsibility. Oh how we could learn from the loyalty of God.

Look how loyal He is to you. He will never leave you or forsake you (Hebrews 13:5). That is loyalty. No one can ever pluck you from your Father's hand (John 10:28). That is loyalty. All the Father has given Him, He has kept (John 17:12). That is loyalty. His compassions fail not, they are new every morning Lamentations 3:22). That is loyalty. If we confess our sins He is loyal, faithful to forgive us our sins (I John 1:9). That is loyalty. How loyal our God is to us.

You and I need to re-capture the lost art of loyalty. It is an

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attitude. We choose what kind of attitudes we allow to control our lives. But, of course, while loyalty is the attitude, *commitment* is the act. *Faithfulness* is the activity. Part of our problem as Christians is that because of these misplaced loyalties, we fail to fully grasp the high cost of commitment. Commitment to a job. It is a lost art. You don't find many people who are willing to be committed to their jobs. You don't find many people who are willing to be committed to their marriage. Look at the marriages around us. Commitment to a marriage. Commitment to a people. But, of course, all of those are only by-products of the real thing, your commitment to the person of Jesus Christ. What He is calling us to do is what He called Ruth to do: to leave behind all of the commitments to the old life and commit ourselves to a whole new beginning.

Here is what Ruth was doing. She was leaving her family, her friends, her country, her customs, her gods and her goals. She was replacing them with Naomi's family, Naomi's friends, Naomi's country, Naomi's customs, Naomi's God and Naomi's goals. Can you imagine Ruth taking the bus back to Moab every weekend to see what she was missing? Can you imagine her parading around Bethlehem wearing her Moabite Mustangs T-shirt? Do you think she pined for what she left behind? No, because she had made a commitment, an act of loyalty. She gave her life to another person and whatever that person wanted of her was all she wanted. She would live for her, walk with her and die with her if need be. Wherever she went, Ruth went, and that was the only place Ruth wanted to be. Whenever she stopped, Ruth stopped, and those accommodations were always perfect from Ruth's perspective. Naomi's in-laws and out-laws alike were good enough for Ruth. Naomi's God had become Ruth's God, and that gave meaning to everything she did. Ruth laid aside the customs and habits of her former life because her former life had ceased to be. Ruth threw down all of the idols of her former gods. Now she had a Living God. Ruth crucified her former goals and her ambitions to be somebody in Moab's circles of respectability. Moab was a dead issue for Ruth because she had laid her life at the feet of Someone else. She now had a Lord.

That is why Jesus said, *He that is not willing to forsake all that he has cannot be my disciple*. That means that wherever He leads, we go. Whenever He says to stop, we stop. His people, all of His people, become our people. By our loyalty to those He

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gives us to be loyal to, we shout to the world, “We would rather be Ruths than rebels.” All around us the reality of hurting people beckon to us. There are so many serious sicknesses. There are so many people hurting in their bodies. There are so many hurting in their spirits. There are so many hurting in their relationships. It ought to serve as a startling reminder to us that God has called us to things eternal. The enemy rages with the fury of one who knows his days are few. Disease and pain and hurt abound on every side. There simply isn’t time to waver. There simply isn’t time to be like Orpah and go back. There is a world out there that is confused and hurting and lost. It is on its way to Moab where it will never find Living Water or eat of the Bread of Life.

My friend, none of the things we spend so much of our time with, or pay so much attention to, will satisfy either us or them, not television, not recreation, not football, not achievement, not possessions. Only Jesus Christ can give them life. Only Jesus Christ can give us hope. So only Jesus Christ matters, now and in the ages of eternity yet to come. Jesus said the same thing to His disciples that Naomi said to Ruth. He said it in John 6:66-68. From that time it says that many of His disciples turned back and they didn’t walk with Him anymore. Then Jesus said to the twelve, “Do you want to go away, too?” Then Simon Peter answered Him and said, “Lord, where shall we go? You have the words of eternal life and we believe and are sure that You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.”

Simon Peter understood. Because Jesus was God, there were only two choices. He must either be everything, or He was, in essence, nothing. Dear God, by your grace, may we this day understand as well.

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For Focus and Application

1- Examine your heart and grade yourself on your loyalty in the following areas:

- Your family _____
- Your marriage _____
- Your friendships _____
- The Lord _____
- Your job _____
- Your country _____
- Other Christians _____
- Assigned tasks _____

2- What do you think is the relationship between your loyalty or total commitment to Christ and your loyalty in other areas? Can you find Scripture to validate your answer?

3- Read the following passages of Scripture and write a simple statement that describes the loyalty of the Bible characters involved:

- David (I Samuel 24,26) _____
- Uriah (II Samuel 11) _____
- Ittai (II Samuel 15:21) _____
- Hushai (II Samuel 17) _____
- David's soldiers (II Samuel 18) _____
- Joab (II Samuel 19) _____
- Jehoiada (II Kings 11) _____
- Mordecai (Esther 2) _____

4- Take the area in question #1 where you rate yourself the weakest, and ask yourself the following questions:

A- Do you see your absence of loyalty as sin?

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- B- Do you see your absence of loyalty in any of these areas as an absence of commitment to Christ?
- C- What specific steps can you take in the next two weeks to begin to deal with your lack of loyalty in these key areas?
- D- Ask God to sensitize your spirit, especially to your family, your employer, and the Body of Christ. Ask Him to give you His mind and His kind of loyalty. Thank Him in advance for doing so.

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