

Ruth (Part 1)

(Ruth 1)

Introduction

Do you have a best friend? Did you know that a good friend is a gift from God? They are precious. God wants us to pick friends that are good for us. What makes a person a good friend? [Teacher, lead the children in a discussion of friendship.] Friends are loyal and faithful. They love you and stick with you, no matter what. Friends listen to you and you listen to them. A good friend helps you make good choices!

It's been said that if you want to have good friends, you need to *be* a good friend. God wants us to be a good friend to the friends that He brings into our lives. What do you think you need to do to be a good friend to someone?

Today we will learn about two women who were very good friends, Naomi and Ruth. And we'll find that the reason they loved each other was because they were both unselfish.

Opening Prayer

Father, You want us to pick friends that are good for us and You want us to learn how to be good friends to them. I pray that this morning You will give us hearts to hear the message that You have for us because we want to please You with our lives. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Memory Verse

A friend loves at all times. (Proverbs 17:17)

Lesson

We just finished our studies in the book of Judges. We learned that the period of the judges was a sad period of time in the lives of the children of Israel. The people did not have a strong leader, so they didn't have strong faith in God. These were dark days for Israel, when "everyone did as he saw fit" (Judges 17:6; 21:25).

But during those dark and evil times, there were still some who followed God.

The next book in the Bible is the book of Ruth. This is a wonderful love story that takes place during the time of the judges that shows us that not everything was bad and hopeless. Ruth is a beautiful example of loyalty, friendship, and commitment to God.

Sometime during the time of the judges, Israel suffered from a famine. It had not rained for a long, long time in the land and the crops were dead and the grass and trees were dying. There was no food for the people to eat. So, some of the people went over to the other side of the Dead Sea to the land of Moab where there was plenty of food to eat.

A woman named Naomi, her husband, and two sons were among those who moved to Moab.

Ruth 1:1

In the days when the judges ruled in Israel, a severe famine came upon the land. So a man from Bethlehem in Judah left his home and went to live in the country of Moab, taking his wife and two sons with him.

While they were living there, the two sons grew up and married a couple of Moabite girls, one was named Ruth.

Then a sad thing happened. For some reason Naomi's husband and both of her sons died. This made Naomi and both of her daughters-in-law widows; they were left all alone.

Now what was Naomi to do? Life was difficult for widows and she missed her friends and family that she had left behind back home in Bethlehem, people who loved the God she loved. When Naomi heard that the famine was over and that God had blessed His people with good crops once again, she decided it was time to go back home.

Ruth 1:6-7

Then Naomi heard in Moab that the LORD had blessed his people in Judah by giving them good crops again. So Naomi and her daughters-in-law got ready to leave Moab to return to her homeland. With her two daughters-in-law she set out from the place where she had been living, and they took the road that would lead them back to Judah.

But, after they began their journey, Naomi stopped in her tracks and decided to tell her two daughters-in-law not to come with her, but to return to their own homes and families.

Ruth 1:8-9

But on the way, Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go back to your mothers' homes. And may the LORD reward you for your kindness to your husbands and to me. May the LORD bless you with the security of another marriage." Then she kissed them good-bye, and they all broke down and wept.

Naomi only wanted what was best for her two daughters-in-law. She knew that they would be well cared for back in their own homes. She encouraged them to stay in Moab, even though this would mean she would have to travel to Bethlehem alone, a very dangerous thing for a single woman.

Naomi was not a self-centered person, was she? She was thoughtful and kind, looking out for her daughter's best interest. Like Naomi, we must consider the needs of others and not just our own.

Ruth and the other daughter-in-law had to choose whether to go with Naomi or remain in their homeland where false gods were worshiped.

God loved them very much and wanted them to leave their sinful ways. He wanted to bless them with good things. But, they had a very important choice to make. Would they leave their false gods and follow Naomi to the land where they worshiped the one true God? Or, would they remain in Moab with their families?

Naomi knew that her daughters-in-law would have little chance of finding another husband in Bethlehem because they were foreigners so she again urged them to turn back and stay in Moab.

The one daughter-in-law did return back to her fathers' house in Moab but Ruth still had not made up her mind.

Ruth 1:15

"Look," Naomi said to her, "your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods. You should do the same."

Ruth alone had to choose whether she would go back to her father's house in Moab or go to Bethlehem with Naomi, and put her trust in the God of Israel.

Ruth chose to go with Naomi even though this meant that she would probably never have a family. Ruth was willing to give up the possibility of getting another husband and having children in order to care for Naomi. Again, she is an example to us of someone who is unselfish and other-centered. She was a friend in deed!

Naomi did not force Ruth to go along with her back to Israel. Ruth made a choice to put her trust in the God of Israel.

A good friend is someone who lays down their life for someone else. Jesus did that for us. Jesus said, "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends." (John 15:13)

Jesus came down from heaven and lived a life among men so that we could get to know God personally. Then, He allowed Himself to be crucified on the cross to pay the penalty for your sins and my sins. He did that because He knew it was our only hope of ever getting to heaven. He died on the cross for our sins and rose again to prove that He really was God. What a friend we have in Jesus! He laid down his life for us. And the apostle John said, "There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends." (1 John 3:16)

What do you think it means to "lay down your life" for someone? (To not be selfish; to think of the other person's needs and wellbeing first. To give up what might be good for you, because it isn't the best for your friend.) Can you give me an example of this in your life?

Ruth gave up everything to follow Naomi and her God; she was a very good friend.

Ruth 1:16-17

But Ruth replied, "Don't ask me to leave you and turn back. Wherever you go, I will go; wherever you live, I will live. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God. Wherever you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD punish me severely if I allow anything but death to separate us!"

Naomi could see Ruth had made up her mind. So Naomi gave up trying to talk Ruth into going back to Moab

Ruth 1:18

When Naomi saw that Ruth was determined to go with her, she said nothing more.

And so they returned to Bethlehem.

Ruth 1:22

So Naomi returned from Moab, accompanied by her daughter-in-law Ruth, the young Moabite woman. They arrived in Bethlehem in late spring, at the beginning of the barley harvest.

Ruth was a Moabitess; the Moabites were enemies of God. But although Ruth was a Moabitess, she was blessed because of her faithfulness. She became a great-grandmother of King David and a direct ancestor of Jesus.

Ruth was a very good friend to Naomi, wasn't she? Wouldn't you like to be that kind of friend to someone?

Closing Prayer

Father, thank You for the wonderful friends that You have given us. Let us always treasure the good people that You have put into our lives. Help us to be loyal and faithful friends to them. Amen.

Learning Activities

Craft Corner

Game Center

Stick Together Relay

Divide your children up into teams of two. Give each team a balloon. Tell your children that they have to get the balloon down to the other end of the room around a chair and back to the beginning to the line, but they can't use their hands, arms, mouths, or feet except to pick up

and place the balloon at the beginning of the game. Tell your children they can decide where they want to place the balloon, but they must do it as a team and remember to "Stick Together" just like Naomi and Ruth did in the Bible lesson. They may want to place the balloon between their arms, on their hips, between their shoulders, etc.

Or, use the following questions in a game of your choice:

1. Why did Naomi and her husband and two sons move to Moab? (There was a famine in the land and the children of Israel went over to the East side of the Dead Sea to find food.)
2. What sad thing happened to Naomi and her two daughters-in-law when they were living in Moab? (Naomi's husband and her two sons died, leaving the three women as widows.)
3. Why did Naomi decide to go back home to Israel? (She heard that the famine was over and that God had blessed His people with good crops once again.)
4. After she started her journey back to Israel, what did Naomi suddenly tell her daughters-in-law? (Go back to their own families in Moab.)
5. Why did Naomi tell both of the daughters to go back to Moab and not to travel with her to Israel? (She knew the girls would have a better chance to get re-married among their own people. She only wanted what was best for the girls.)
6. Why do you think Ruth decided to go with Naomi instead of returning to her own family? (She had put her trust in the God of Israel. And she loved Naomi and wanted to care for her.)
7. What do you think it means to lay down your life for someone? (To not be selfish; to think of the other person's needs and well being first. To give up what might be good for you, because it isn't the best for your friend.)

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