

VIRTUE 15

LOYALTY

If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

—Luke 14:26-27

Perhaps the clearest way to define loyalty is: *unswerving in allegiance*. We are all on different paths in life; when you choose to not swerve from the path the Lord has for you, that's loyalty. When you have the opportunity to veer from the path of friendship or marriage but choose not to, you are acting out of loyalty. Loyalty can also be explained as faithful dedication.

Reverend John Newton provides a broader definition of loyalty. Drawing from the book, *Married for Good*,³⁷ he describes four kinds of loyalty that we ought to consider in any type of relationship:

- First, there is *attitudinal* loyalty, which seeks to see the other person from Christ's perspective, concentrating on their qualities rather than their faults.

- Secondly, there is *verbal* loyalty, choosing both how we address other people and how we speak about them when they are not around.
- Thirdly, there is *spiritual* loyalty, which very often amounts to nothing more complicated than respect, releasing people to be themselves rather than having our own agendas for them, loving them for who they are rather than for what we think they might become.
- And fourthly, there is *heart* loyalty, a commitment to stay in relationship with another person no matter what—a willingness to work together on difficulties and to work out differences together.³⁸

Loyalty in all four of these areas is needed in one's life. It is difficult to understand the importance and significance of loyalty until you have been betrayed in any of these areas. I have been betrayed a few times in life by people I trusted. Betraying a trust or a relationship can cause chasms between people that last for years, even a lifetime. It was only after going through the process that I began to understand just how important loyalty is with the relationship I have with the Lord.

Fortunately, we have a Master who understands betrayal like no other. Christ was betrayed by Judas in a way that led to His death. He was even betrayed during his final trial by his best friend, Peter.

Loyalty was one of the key traits of knighthood. Young pages were turned into squires and then knights, all under the king, prince, or baron's castle. The king fed, housed, and trained the knight for years (sometimes beginning at age eight as a young page), so it was a clear expectation of the young knight to use those same skills and fortitude in service for the king.

Because training was costly, kings wanted to make sure that their investment was one that would pay off. If they invested years of training into a knight only to have them run off to another kingdom, their entire investment was lost. As a knight for Christ,

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should we be any different? If the Lord Jesus Himself lived and died for us, shouldn't we commit and give our *all* to Him? He deserves our loyalty in every way, our actions, our words, even our thoughts.

Pay close attention to this next part because it is important. Do you know that God Himself gives preferential treatment to those who demonstrate loyalty through obedience to Him by living an upright and pure life? Yes, God has special servants; knights whom He appoints listen to His prompting and do His bidding. From Mother Teresa and Billy Graham to everyday believers, God has a *special relationship* with those who follow Him daily by locking onto the path of purity. Do you find this hard to believe? Consider Proverbs 3:32: "For the Lord detests a perverse man but takes the upright into his confidence."

What an invitation! How would you like to gain the confidence and trust of the One who created the entire universe? The One who framed the first man and gave him His first breath? Does this sound like an honor? Perhaps honor is an understatement! Likewise, how can the God of the entire universe take a fallen, sinful person *into His confidence*? Consider these similar promises from God's word:

If a man cleanses himself from the latter [wickedness and godless living], he will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work (2 Timothy 2:21).

The Lord confides in those who fear him; he makes his covenant known to them (Psalm 25:14).

I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father

will give you whatever you ask in my name. This is my command: Love each other (John 15:15-17).

Have no misunderstanding—being an upright person does not mean being perfect; it means being upright. In fact, the original language for this term contains the idea of “being straight” and “not twisted or bent.” When professional ice skaters perform, their goal is to *stay upright* until their performance ends. If they fall, they get right back up. Proverbs 24:16 declares the same goal for our lives: “Though a righteous man falls seven times, he rises again, but the wicked are brought down by calamity.” And loyal knights get back on the horse after falling down.

Biblical history gives us many real-life examples of people who were not perfect but were still upright. David was referred to as “a man after God’s own heart” in 1 Samuel 13:14, yet David fell into an affair. But God still took David into His confidence. Jeremiah was depressed, Jonah ran away from God, Paul murdered, Martha worried too much, and Elijah burned out. All these people fell, but through their loyalty to the Lord and their faith, they came back upright until their performance, their lives, ended. God used them and brought them into His confidence.

Finally, consider these examples of how fighting men—knights of old—demonstrated loyalty to God and their earthly king (David), even when others deserted:

Men of Zebulun [were] experienced soldiers prepared for battle with every type of weapon, to help David with *undivided loyalty*—50,000” (1 Chronicles 12:33, emphasis added).

Next to him was Eleazar son of Dodai the Ahohite. As one of the three mighty men, he was with David when they taunted the Philistines gathered at Pas Dammim for battle. *Then the men of Israel retreated, but he stood his ground and struck down the Philistines*

till his hand grew tired and froze to the sword. The Lord brought about a great victory that day. The troops returned to Eleazar, but only to strip the dead (2 Samuel 23:9-10, emphasis added).

Next to him was Shammah son of Agee the Hararite. When the Philistines banded together at a place where there was a field full of lentils, *Israel's troops fled from them. But Shammah took his stand in the middle of the field.* He defended it and struck the Philistines down, and the Lord brought about a great victory (2 Samuel 23:11-12, emphasis added).

David's fighting men were so loyal to him that they even risked their lives to bring him a cup of water from behind enemy lines:

During harvest time, three of the thirty chief men came down to David at the cave of Adullam, while a band of Philistines was encamped in the Valley of Rephaim. At that time, David was in the stronghold, and the Philistine garrison was at Bethlehem. David longed for water and said, "Oh, that someone would get me a drink of water from the well near the gate of Bethlehem!" So the three mighty men broke through the Philistine lines, drew water from the well near the gate of Bethlehem, and carried it back to David. But he refused to drink it; instead, he poured it out before the Lord. "Far be it from me, O Lord, to do this!" he said. "Is it not the blood of men who went at the risk of their lives?" And David would not drink it (2 Samuel 23:13-17).

Among all these examples, however, we see no greater example than Christ, who when faced with a painful death met the challenge

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with: “Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done” (Luke 22:42).

REFLECT

When charity, loyalty, integrity, justice, and truth grew weak in the world, then there began cruelty, injury, disloyalty and falseness. Thus error and trouble came into the very world where God had planned for man to know, love, serve, fear, and honor Him. Fortunately, however, no sooner had laxness in enforcing the law first arisen than fear in turn caused justice to be restored to the honor in which she was formerly held. Therefore, all the people were divided by thousands. Out of each thousand, there was chosen a man more notable than all the rest for his loyalty, his strength, his noble courage, his breeding and his manners.³⁹

—Ramon Lull

RESPOND

1. When do you find it the most difficult to be loyal to your relationship with Christ? With friends? With family?
2. Describe a recent occasion where you had the opportunity to be disloyal but chose to be loyal.
3. How has someone’s disloyalty impacted your life?
4. How does one become more loyal?
5. Christ was loyal to the death out of obedience to His Father. How does this encourage you to be loyal in the daily choices of your life?

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