

IT Matters – Loyalty

6/21/26

2 Samuel 15:13-22 | 18:2

Sunday AM

Faithless is he that says farewell when the road darkens. J.R.R. Tolkien

These words capture the heart of loyalty. Loyalty isn't about recognition, making headlines, or trending on social media. It's about the quiet tenacity behind a thriving marriage, a deep friendship, and a successful team that never gives up, gives in, or gives out.

Sadly though – we live in a world of disposable commitments and disloyalty. People switch jobs quickly, abandon relationships easily, leave churches casually, and walk away when things get hard.

Yet deep w/in each of us is a longing for someone who'll stay. Someone who'll keep their word and stand beside us when circumstances become costly. Someone who'll be there when the road darkens.

Which brings us to loyalty – loyalty is doing what we said we would do. It's faithfulness w/ skin – and settled conviction that says, *"You can count on me when it would be easier to leave."*

So, whether things are easy or hard, favorable or not, whether the future is bright or uncertain – loyalty says – I will stand w/ you and you can count on me.

One of the clearest pictures of this is Cal Ripken Jr. For over 16 yrs, he showed up every day, playing 2,632 consecutive games for the Baltimore Orioles. He played when he felt good and when he didn't, when the team was winning and when it wasn't, when the season was exciting and when it was ordinary. His streak wasn't built on one heroic moment, but on thousands of ordinary decisions to keep showing up.

Loyalty usually looks like this. It's not flashy or dramatic and it rarely gets applause in the moment. In fact, most of the time, it simply keeping your word, showing up, staying steady, and standing beside someone long after the emotion have worn off.

This is exactly what we see in **2 Samuel 15**. David's road had gone dark. Absalom had stolen Israel's heart, the kingdom was unraveling, and David was fleeing for his life. He wasn't ruling from a throne; but running for his life. Yet in that moment, he life intersected w/ a foreign commander named **Ittai the Gittite** – who David gave permission to leave.

"Go back. Stay w/ Absalom. You came only yesterday. Why should you wander w/ me when I don't even know where I'm going?" IOW – David gave Ittai a way out – and exit if you will. But Ittai refused to take it.

Instead, He said – *As YHWH lives, and as my lord the king lives, wherever my lord the king may be, whether for death or for life, there also your servant will be.*

This is loyalty. Not convenience. Not comfort. Not fair-weather friendship. But a settled allegiance that says – *when the road darkens – you can count on me.*

Today, as we continue talking about character, I want us to see how loyalty matters by looking at (4) items:

I Loyalty **CHOOSES** People Over Position

The king said to Ittai, "Why should you come along w/ us? Go back and stay w/ Absalom. You're a foreigner, an exile from your homeland. You came only yesterday. And today shall I make you wander about w/

us, when I don't know where I'm going? Go back, and take your people w/you. May the Lord show you kindness and faithfulness. 15:20-1

The setting is heartbreaking. Absalom had started a coup to steal the throne from his dad and to take David out. Thus, David's kingdom was imploding and Jerusalem was in turmoil. It had gotten so bad, David had to flee for his life – and as he left the city, he met w/ Ittai the Gittite.

This is important b/c while Ittai wasn't an Israelite, he was a believer in YHWH. Ittai was from Gath – the hometown of Goliath – and possibly a descendant of the Big-G. Even more remarkable, David basically said to him: "*Listen, you just got here, yet b/c this is neither your circus nor your monkeys. You don't have to stay. Please go and take care of your army/family.*"

SEE – Ittai was a newcomer. Likely a mercenary – and he owed David nothing. To our knowledge, he had no real history w/ Israel. No covenant obligations or long-standing relationship. So, David gave him a way out. "*You don't have to stay. Go to Absalom. Choose the winning side. It's okay if you protect yourself.*"

But loyalty always reveals itself when convenience offers an easier alternative.

Ittai had a choice – follow the crown or follow the king. Follow power or follow principle. Follow success or follow conviction. And he chose David. Not b/c David was winning; but b/c David was God's king.

Real loyalty always chooses people over position. It stays when sickness replaces health, popularity fades, seasons grow difficult, and criticism comes.

Truth – anybody can support a winner; whereas loyalty reveals itself more so when someone is losing. **See** – anyone can stand w/ David in the palace; but it takes character to stand w/ David in the wilderness.

II Loyalty is **ROOTED** in Conviction not Convenience

Look at Ittai's response – *As YHWH lives, and as my lord the king lives, surely wherever my lord the king may be, whether for death or for life, there also your servant will be.*

Notice what he didn't say. He didn't say: *I'll stay as long as things improve or if the polls shift. I'll stay so long as we win and I feel safe.* No. His commitment wasn't attached to outcomes, but to his conviction b/c his loyalty wasn't conditional – it was covenantal.

In many ways, his words echo Ruth's commitment to Naomi in **Ruth 1:16** – *Where you go, I will go. Where you stay; I will stay. Your people will be my people...*

Listen – both were outsiders who chose God's people. Both stepped into uncertainty – and both became examples of extraordinary loyal faithfulness.

This teaches us that loyalty isn't blind allegiance – or blind agreement. It's not enabling sin or ignoring truth. And it's certainly not supporting wrongdoing. True loyalty is a submission first to God. For Ittai, he followed David b/c David was God's anointed king.

Truth – loyalty w/out truth becomes idolatry. Truth w/out loyalty becomes cruelty. But loyalty holds them together b/c loyalty is a formation – not a moment. It's a determined posture and lifestyle.

Faithfulness isn't holding the fort. It's storming the gates of hell. Mark Batterson

IOW – Biblical loyalty isn't passive. It's not sitting still for the sake of comfort. It's courageous allegiance to Christ and truth that's willing to get its hands dirty.

III Loyalty **EARN**S Trust

David sent out his troops, 1/3 under the command of Joab, 1/3 under Joab's brother Abishai, and 1/3 under Ittai the Gittite. The king told the troops, "I myself will surely march out w/ you." 2 Samuel 18:2

The story doesn't end at the Kidron Valley. By the time David prepares his forces for battle against Absalom, he's divided the army into (3) commands – one under Joab, one under Abishai, and one under Ittai the Gittite. Think about it. The foreign mercenary who'd pledged his loyalty is now entrusted w/ leadership over 1/3 over Israel's army b/c his loyalty generated unwavering trust.

SEE – David recognized something every leader eventually learns: Talent is valuable. Skill is helpful. Potential is exciting. But faithful loyalty is indispensable – b/c the loyal become trustworthy when they consistently prove themselves dependable.

In God's kingdom, influence isn't built on pedigree, platform, or personality but faithfulness. Loyal faithfulness is the soil where trust grows.

Jesus said it this way to His disciples – *He who is faithful w/ little is faithful also in much.* Luke 16:10

Ittai's **little** was a decision on a dusty road. His **much** was leadership over an army.

Point – the most influential people in your life probably aren't the most talented, but they are the most dependable. The people you trust are the people who keep showing up. They answer the call. Keep the promise. Stay thru the struggle. Remain when others leave. So, your trust gravitates toward their loyalty.

IV Loyalty **REFLECTS** the Heart of God

Ultimately, Ittai's story points us beyond Ittai. It points us to God. The O.T. repeatedly uses the word **hesed** to describe God's covenant love.

This is a steadfast, loyal, and faithful love. It's a love that continually shows up and refuses to abandon – and it always keeps its promises.

The central basis of Christian assurance isn't how much our hearts are set on God, but how unshakably his heart is set on us. Tim Keller

This is the foundation of biblical loyalty. We're not steadfast b/c we're naturally strong but b/c God is steadfast and immovable w/ us.

We experience this loyal love in God Himself. He pursued Adam after the fall, remained faithful to Israel despite their rebellion, kept every covenant promise, and ultimately stepped out of heaven in the person of Jesus to die for our sins.

Simply put – Jesus perfectly embodies loyalty. He was loyal to the Father, loyal to His mission, loyal to the truth, and loyal to His followers.

I think of John 13:1 – *Having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.*

Even when they failed Him. Even when He was doubted. Even when they abandoned Him – Jesus remained. Even more, He went to a cross for all of us who could never repay Him – b/c loyalty is who He is.

So how do we cultivate loyalty?

- 1 – We decide our allegiance before the crisis comes. Ittai’s heart was already settled before things got hard.
- 2 – We practice faithfulness in small things. We keep our word, show up, follow thru, and learn to be dependable when nobody is watching.
- 3 – We put Jesus above every other loyalty b/c every earthly allegiance must flow from our loyalty to God.
- 4 – We stay when it’d be easier to leave. Loyal people stay and engage – and they run thru the tape.
- 5 – We tell the truth in love b/c biblical loyalty never enables sin; it lovingly calls people toward God’s best.

This is what Ittai did. As David stood near the Kidron Valley w/ his kingdom collapsing around him – and he gave Ittai an exit ramp – *go back! This isn’t your problem.* David gave Ittai permission to leave, yet b/c of loyalty, he stayed. Ittai stayed b/c he understood that loyalty isn’t tested when the road is easy and the team is winning. Nor do they stay when the benefits are obvious and the future feels secure. Loyalty is tested when life gives you a way out – an exit ramp – and you don’t take it.

I promise, when things in life get tough – in your marriage, your family, your career, and even in your faith – an exit ramp will suddenly appear. In these moments, the question isn’t, “*Is there an easier way?*” There usually is. The question is, “*Who am I loyal to?*”

Now – before we leave this story, ask yourself: ***Where am I most tempted to take the exit ramp?*** Is it in my marriage b/c things have become hard? Is it in a friendship b/c disappointment has created distance? Is it at church b/c things didn’t go as you thought? Or even in following Jesus, where obedience now costs more than you expected?

B/c the exit ramp often sounds reasonable. It feels justified. But loyalty asks a deeper question: *Am I leaving b/c God is leading me, or b/c staying has become costly?*

Loyalty is never about convenience or emotion. It’s not fair-weathered friendship. Loyalty is settled fidelity that says, “I’ve already decided where I stand.”

Ittai refused the exit ramp for David, but more importantly, Jesus refused the exit ramp for us. At Gethsemane, w/ the cross before Him, He could’ve turned away. He could’ve called legions of angels. He could’ve walked away from the suffering, shame, and the sinners who’d fail Him, but He didn’t. Jesus stayed the course – *He demonstrated His love for us in this way – in while we were yet sinner, Jesus died for us.*

So, may it be said of us: b/c of Jesus, they kept their word. They stayed their course. They stood w/ Jesus. They were loyal.

B/c **loyalty** matters.