

Ruth - Hero of the Bible

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[0 : 00] So today we're learning from the life of one of my favourite women in the Bible. And I hope that this morning you will be just as inspired as I am by her, especially by two characteristics that she has, which is difference and dedication.

And I hope that today you can ask yourself, how can you develop those two characteristics in your own life? But before we do dig a little bit deeper into the life of this great woman of the faith and why she has earned that title, Great, let's do a quiz.

And let's see how well you know some of the most influential women of modern history. So can I have the first picture please? Amelia Earhart.

Earhart, Earhart. Well Earhart, she was a pilot, but I think it's Earhart. So she was the first female aviator to go across the Atlantic. She said this, Never do things others can do and will do if there are things others cannot do or will not do.

And one of the sad things about this particular lady is that she had an ambition to circumnavigate the globe, to go around the whole world. And unfortunately she crashed in the Pacific and she was sort of lost.

[1 : 17] Until recently where they found the remains of a woman on an island. And they've sort of put the pieces together with some other bits that they found and recordings, the May days, all that kind of stuff.

And they reckon that this lady, she probably survived for about at least a week after crashing on an uncharted, abandoned island. That's pretty hardcore.

Surviving a plane crash is hardcore anyway, but also surviving on an abandoned island post that. So I think she's got these characteristics we just spoke about.

Let's try the next one. This is Catherine Switzer. Now this lady is the first woman to run the Boston Marathon. But not only was she the first woman to do it, she wasn't allowed to do it when she was doing it.

And this picture, these people are literally trying to pull her out of the race. But apart from the one next to her, who's the partner at the time, who the story goes basically takes out the other guys so that she can keep running.

[2 : 22] But yeah, if you ever see someone running a marathon, a lady, and you think, oh, it's just another person doing a marathon. Actually, she set the tone and changed the mentality to women doing things like running marathons.

And if you think about the Tour de France at the moment, I don't want to drop any political comments or anything, but the Tour de France is still a race that men only can do. So if you were enjoying that, feel a bit guilty.

But yes, another woman, dedicated and different. She said, All you need is the courage to believe in yourself and put one foot in front of the other. And this lady's still alive, still speaking, still running marathons.

Amazing woman. Okay, let's go for our next one. Emily in Pankhurst. This is the lady whose work meant that the women had the right to vote. In the UK, massive suffragette.

Legend. There was a bit of controversy around her, but I think you can understand her dedication and her difference, especially when this was one of the quotes she said, My parents, especially my father, discussed the question of my brother's education as a matter of real importance.

[3 : 36] My education and that of my sister's was scarcely discussed at all. So another lady that decided actually, no, no. Go on then, let's go for the next one.

Mother Teresa. When you dig into these people's lives, you actually find out that pretty much all of them have a little bit of controversy. And you kind of want to go, do I want to put them up?

Because there's always somebody who goes, well, actually. But it's another lady who, absolutely incredible, dedicated her life to the other. And she founded the Missionaries of Charity.

4,500 sisters in 133 countries. And we know she's someone who wasn't afraid to touch the untouchables. And to put her life at risk on a daily basis.

Because there are others that were being written off. And she said, your true character is most accurately measured by how you treat those who can do nothing for you.

[4 : 35] Gosh. I've got a great story from a book called The Irresistible Revolution. And a guy called Shane Claiborne went to see this lady. And he noticed that her feet were all, like, damaged and crumpled and crippled up.

And he asked why. And it turns out that people are always giving her new shoes. Because they see her feet all crumpled and crippled up. But she gives them away. She always gives the new pair away.

And just makes do with whatever ones are left. Amazing woman. Difference. Dedicated. Okay, let's go for our final one. Rosa Parks.

She was quite an influential, important person, right? She was the one who was sat on a bus, already segregated, and asked to move for a white person.

And went, actually, no, not today. Great woman. She said this. I have learned over the years that when one's mind is made up, this diminishes fear.

[5 : 42] Knowing what must be done away with does away with fear. So this is, yeah. She was a civil rights activist known as the first lady of the civil rights. The mother of the freedom movement.

And because of her, you know, the rights of black people in America greatly improved. Still lots of work to be done. Still lots of work to be done even in the UK. But people like this who decided, no.

Great woman. So let's go to our final picture. This is called Google Search Ruth. As you can imagine, Ruth is a... There's not many pictures of Ruth in Google.

And funny enough, there's a lot of white pictures of Ruth. But let's not go there. Ruth was a Moabite. More likely dark-skinned than a white, blue-eyed person. And she's our lady of today.

And I want to tell you a little bit about her before we have the reading. And she's one of only two women in the Bible to have a book named after them. She's also one of only four women in the genealogy of Jesus.

[6 : 49] She's a Moabite, which means she's a descendant of Lot. On a weird family weekend. She was married to an Israelite who dies and left her with nothing but a mother-in-law and no future.

Sometimes can be interchangeable, those two. She is our woman of today. She is the lady we're going to look at. And if we could have our reading now, that would be... So that passage is just a really short part of a very short book.

But there's so much meatiness in there. And you could ask the question, Why does Ruth of the Bible, this lady part of a patriarchy and a widow, how does she end up being classified as one of the greats with the ladies that I showed you before who have done these massive, incredible feats of challenging the social injustice of the world we live in?

And actually, I think that Ruth is exactly the same as those ladies because she embodies that same determination. She's dedicated and she's willing to be different.

I love her response to Naomi. I wonder if any of you have ever had that sort of dedication to someone else or to a cause.

[8 : 31] Ruth is an early example of someone who refused to quit. And where logic would say, Go back to the safe zone. She refused. Ruth saw an impossible mountain to climb.

She saw famine. No future. No security. And instead of turning back to the safety of Moab, where she could remarry, live well, eat, she chose to stick with Naomi and a life of uncertainty.

Poverty. Danger. To live as a foreigner in a hostile land. To be a Moabite in Israel when it was just, at that period of time, was not an easy thing to do.

The path she chose seemed impossible. And yet within it, her dedication and her difference led her down the path God had planned for her.

God had planned to bring about a blessing on them both. But the road they needed to walk was filled with challenges. And yet Ruth was different.

[9 : 33] Different to Orpah. She was different to many others who in Scripture we see crumble at challenge. Ruth was dedicated. Committed.

She was dedicated. She was dedicated and committed to the cause and the path, no matter where it was going to lead and how hard it would be. I wonder how you feel hearing all that.

I personally often think I can take on a challenge. I can gear myself up. I can get excited. But then I get stifled by the potential weight, the burdens, the challenges, and whether I will be able to carry them.

But let us wonder, is it really down to us to carry it alone? Was that true for Ruth? Was that true for our great inspirational women?

Were they left to carry it their own? When the challenge comes for us, are we left to carry it on our own? I want you to think about that. One of the many things I love about Ruth and find so inspiring about her is that we see in her strength.

[10 : 47] But it was a kind of strength that didn't cause her to escape from all the stuff that was going on. But rather she continued with all those difficulties. But found that strength to actually carry on and go into even yet more potential difficulties.

Knowing that that inner strength, that invisible strength that God gave her, would enable her to do anything. The thing is, sometimes in life we have to carry heavy burdens.

We have things going on in us. And Ruth had no shortage of stuff going on in her life right then. Life was pretty, pretty challenging to say the least. But she didn't just take the easy option and make her prayer, God, just take everything that's wrong away from me.

No, she knew that what she needed was God's strength so that she could have that stickability and do what she did. And sometimes in our own lives we can be tempted to make our prayer, Lord, just take all this stuff away from me.

Sometimes God does that miraculously. But very often he doesn't. But what he does do is he gives us the strength to carry on. And one of my favourite verses is from the Psalms.

[12 : 01] From Psalm 118, which simply says this. The Lord is my strength and my song. He has become my salvation. The Lord is my strength and my song.

He has become my salvation. I've got it written on this piece of paper. You see, the thing is, is that God doesn't always remove those burdens from us.

But he does promise to give us strength. Let's remember those words. The Lord is my strength and my song. He has become my salvation.

Because when that happens, when that happens, the burden may still be there. But suddenly it becomes light.

Ruth didn't make her prayer the sort of prayer that you and I perhaps feel tempted to pray when things are going difficult. Lord, take this away. She knew that she could do anything if God could give her that strength.

[13 : 00] Which he can. And he did. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.