

## Friendships in the Bible

Have you got a best friend? Or maybe several best friends? Friends are great – they are the ones we like to have fun with, play and laugh together, and who are there for us when we are sad. Often, we also have the same hobbies and interests, but we can also be friends with people who like different things from us – and we can share the things we like and introduce our friends to them.



There are a lot of stories about friendships in the Bible, too. Here, we'll see a few examples.

In one of the books of the Old Testament, the Book of Ruth, we find the story of Ruth (after whom the book is named) and Naomi. It starts with a famine in Israel. When they didn't have enough food, many people went to different countries, to see if they could find food there. One family who moved into the neighbouring country of Moab was that of Elimelek and Naomi and their two sons Mahlon and Kilion from Bethlehem. They settled down in Moab, and the two boys grew up and got married to two women, called Orpah and Ruth. Eventually, Elimelek, Mahlon and Kilion all died, and Naomi decided to return to her hometown of Bethlehem. Orpah, one of her daughters-in-law, then returned to her own family's home. Ruth, the other daughter-in-law, had become really close friends with Naomi, and didn't want to leave her by herself. Ruth didn't know Israel at all, but she decided to stay with Naomi, and go with her to Bethlehem. She made her a promise that has become famous: 'Wherever you go, I will go, and wherever you live, I will live; your people will be my people, and your God will be my God'. So because they had become such good friends, Ruth decided to leave her own home and family behind and go with Naomi, so that Naomi wouldn't be alone. Ruth cared for Naomi and made sure she had enough food and all that she needed.

In another Old Testament book, the Book of Samuel, we find another story of a friendship, that between David and Jonathan. (David was Ruth's great-grandson.) David had been a simple shepherd, but a prophet had told him that he would become king of all of Israel, and he had started to serve the current king, King Saul. This King Saul had a son called Jonathan – and as usual, Jonathan was supposed to follow his father to become king after him. But when David and Jonathan met, they really liked each other, and became great friends. They shared everything they had – and Jonathan even gave up his right to the throne, so that David could become king instead of him.



In the New Testament, we can find stories of Jesus and his friends. Two of his friends were sisters, named Mary and Martha. Both of them were always looking forward to Jesus visiting them, and they showed their happiness in different ways: every time Jesus came for a visit, Martha would make sure that the house was all clean and tidy, that there was enough of his favourite food, that everything would be really welcoming for him. Mary didn't worry so much about the house or food, she just wanted to spend time with Jesus and hear his stories.



There are also lots of stories of Jesus and the twelve disciples, who were Jesus' closest friends and travelled with him. Sometimes, they would argue about who of them was the best, and then Jesus would remind them that they all needed to be simply themselves, and do their best to do good in the world. Even when they did silly things, Jesus would just tell them how to behave better, but he wouldn't get upset or cross with them – he always remained their friend. At some point, he needed the disciples to go to different places, to help him tell people about God and his love. When he asked them to do that, he would send them in pairs, so that none of them would be alone, and that they always had a friend with them.

So as we can see in these examples, friendships can be between very different people: boys and girls, men and women, between people of the same age or different ages; friends don't need to be too similar, or even come from the same country. The examples also show us that we can express our friendship in different ways.

Even if we sometimes fall out with our friends, the stories can remind us that God is always our friend, that God cares about us, and helps us, that God likes us just the way we are. God is always there for us and even if we don't do everything right, God will never get cross or upset with us, but will always give us a chance to try again. So can we be good friends to our friends, too?