



Focus of week 4

With so many definitions of *hesed*, there is a common theme that ties them all together: Loyalty. Long-term commitment to a way of acting toward another for the benefit of another. Ruth declares her loyalty in Ruth 1:16-17. This picture of loyalty has inspired and challenged generations. This week, we'll take a look at loyalty, devotion and faithfulness.

Connect

1. How would you define loyalty?
2. How would you know if someone was being loyal? In other words, what does loyalty look like?
3. Who in your life would stick with you no matter what? Why?

Last week, the *hesed* habit was to pray for someone (potentially an “enemy”) by name. How did that experience go? What did you discover about yourself or the process?

Learn

Through Ruth, it becomes evident that *hesed* is more than feeding the hungry, helping the poor or welcoming the foreigner. *Hesed* is what bonds individuals. The Bible Project translates this type of *hesed* as “Loyal Love”.¹ It’s not about emotion, but devotion. It is the relational glue that holds people together.

The legal and cultural ties that would have bound Naomi and her daughters-in-law together have been broken with the death of Naomi’s sons. As Naomi decides to return to Bethlehem, Ruth and Orpah follow her. This is not just a courteous act of seeing Naomi off. They are attached to Naomi through familial grief and drawn to her noble character. Naomi breaks the silence of their long walk back to Bethlehem, and tell Ruth and Orpah to return to their own mother’s house. To return with Naomi would leave Ruth and Orpah as permanent outcasts, unprotected, impoverished, unmarried, childless and despised.²

Ruth’s story captivates the reader, both original and contemporary, because it depicts a relationship of ultimate and unlikely loyalty. She makes the choice “to be responsible for another, to care for and be faithful to persons whom they are under no legal or familial obligation to support.”³ By its very definition, loyalty implies a faithfulness that is steadfast in the face of any temptation to renounce, desert or betray. For this reason, it is not surprising that 26 times the Bible repeats the refrain, “For he [God] is good, his *hesed endures forever*” (1 Chronicles 16:34,

¹ <https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/loyal-love/>, accessed 9/29/2022.

² Leon Kass and Hannah Mendelbaum, *Reading Ruth* (Paul Dry Books: Philadelphia, 2021), 20.

³ Tooman, William A., *(Re)reading Ruth* (Cascade Books: Eugene, 2022), 36.

41; 2 Chronicles 5:13; 7:3; 20:21; Psalm 100:5; 106:1; 107:1; Ezra 3:11; Jeremiah 33:11, to mention a few). To understand *hesed* we must add that it is eternal, everlasting and indestructible.

Without this facet, *hesed* would not be *hesed*. If it were based on a whim or a momentary feeling, it would not be *hesed*. If time could wear it down or wash it away, it would not be *hesed*. But it lasts forever, is ultimately reliable. It never changes. It can always be trusted in, relied upon, asked and hoped for.⁴

Ruth powerfully portrays God's eternal *hesed* when she not only leaves her home but also as she sticks with, provides for and selflessly serves Naomi. This type of *hesed* commitment captures hearts. It's what psychologists call "attachment". Attachment is the strongest force in the human brain. It runs deeper than emotion, although it is felt strongly. Attachment is the glue that holds relationships together. It produces an enduring care for the well-being of another. It is a life-giving forever bond.⁵

Scholars have long noted that the covenant vows made to Abraham in Genesis 12 and 15 are one-sided. They rest on God. God vows to extend *hesed* to Israel and all of creation. Lamentations 3:22 says, "The steadfast love (*hesed*) of the Lord never ceases." No matter how many times Israel disobeys, fights against or turns from God, he extends *hesed*, draws them back in and gives them healing (consider the analogous relationships of Hosea and Gomer). The theme of *hesed* in Ruth is jaw dropping commitment.

Ruth 1:11-17

¹¹ But Naomi replied, "Return home, my daughters. Why do you want to go with me? Am I able to have any more sons who could become your husbands?" ¹² Return home, my daughters. Go on, for I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me to have a husband tonight and to bear sons, ¹³ would you be willing to wait for them to grow up? Would you restrain yourselves from remarrying? No, my daughters, my life is much too bitter for you to share, because the Lord's hand has turned against me." ¹⁴ Again they wept loudly, and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her. ¹⁵ Naomi said, "Look, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods. Follow your sister-in-law."

¹⁶ But Ruth replied:

Don't plead with me to abandon you
or to return and not follow you.
For 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.

⁴ Michael Card, *Inexpressible: Hesed and the Mystery of God's Loving Kindness* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2018), 49.

⁵ Jim Wilder and Michel Hendricks, *The Other Half of the Church* (Moody: Chicago, 2020), 81.

¹⁷ Where you die, I will die,
and there I will be buried.
May the Lord punish me,
and do so severely,
if anything but death separates you and me.

Apply

1. Why do you think Ruth had chosen to return with Naomi?
2. Remember Ruth's background as a Moabite and her position. What does Isaiah 56:6-8 tell us about why and how God responds to Ruth?
3. Why and how does God respond to people in similar situations today? (See Acts 10:34-35.)
4. Paul goes to great lengths in Romans 8:18-39 to demonstrate that nothing can separate us from the great love of God. Why do you think Paul felt the need to spend so much time on this point?
5. What from these verses resonates with or leaves the biggest impact on you?
6. What are the implications today of God's *hesed* being everlasting and eternal?
7. What kind of confidence might be born in our hearts and minds if we trusted that God's love, mercy and kindness will never fail us in a lurch?

This week's *hesed* habit

Romans 8 talks about being conformed into the image of Jesus, God's son. This means, like Ruth, you are called to live out *hesed*—loyal devotion, committed and enduring loyalty.

This week, identify a relationship that you need to fully commit to. Take a few minutes to write down what full commitment to that person might look like, then tell the individual of your desire to more fully commit.

Homework

Memorize and Meditate on Lamentations 3:22-24 (CSB)

²² Because of the Lord's faithful love we do not perish, for his mercies never end.

²³ They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness!

²⁴ I say, "The Lord is my portion, therefore I will put my hope in him."