



Focus of week 3

This week, the focus shifts to extending *hesed* in the midst of our messy world. You'll take a look at some of the historical background of Israel and the Moabites. Their communities were consumed by half-*heseds*. Half-*heseds* dehumanize others, where *hesed* humanizes—it gives them a name. They no longer become “those people”. As you humanize others, the *hesed* of God comes to life and it transforms everything.

Connect

Use this connect time to fill each other in on what's happened this week.

1. What was one high point in your week?
2. What was one low point in your week?

Last week, you talked about how *Hesed* shows up in the midst of our mess. As a group, follow up on last week's conversation by asking, “Where did you see God's *hesed*?”

Learn

Hesed not only breaks into the midst of our mess, but it transforms relationships. Ruth 1 opens by making several brief historical references. The crisis that Naomi has is heightened by the people she surrounds herself with—Moabites. Naomi is part of a long tradition of biblical patriarchs driven by famine to sojourn in a foreign land or being homeless (Genesis 12:10; 26:3; 47:4). Additionally, Israel lived outside of the land as foreigners for large periods of time. Most notably, their period in Egypt (Exodus 12:40–41), their captivity by Assyria (2 Kings 15:29), their captivity by Babylon (2 Kings 24).

In each exile and sojourn, Israel came into contact with those tribes and nations who did not practice the ways of Yahweh, Israel's God. This put them in conflict ethical, culturally and socially with the nations in which they found themselves. Naomi, at the loss of her husband and sons, finds it best to return to their hometown of Bethlehem. We do not know how well they became integrated in Moab, but it appears Moab will not care or provide for her. Yet this historical and cultural hatred between enemies—Israel and Moab—is overcome by the joining of Naomi the Israelite and Ruth the Moabite.

Hesed becomes the linchpin in reconciling enemies. The problem in Israel's history was a lack of *hesed* leaders, those who would extend God's *hesed* in a divided and broken world. Throughout history, humans have drawn lines regarding who's in and who's out. Who deserves respect and dignity, and those who do not. Those who can be saved and those who are damned.

In Ephesians 2:14-19, Paul states that this division should not be.

¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, ¹⁵ by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶ and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. ¹⁷ He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸ For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

¹⁹ Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household

Much of Jesus' ministry focused on loving and extended *hesed* to "those people". The ones who have been neglected, condemned socially, identified as enemies, or culturally different. He went even further by eating in the homes of "sinners"—those the religious elite would consider unclean and beyond God's reach (Matthew 9:10-13; Mark 2:15-17; Luke 5:29-32).

God is seeking to unify and heal a divided and broken world through the *hesed*-work of Jesus and under Jesus' leadership. In Jesus, there is no partiality, his *hesed* extends to all (Romans 5:6-11). This naturally raises frustrations with many, even within the religious community.

Jesus challenges his followers to be *hesed* leaders, who are focused on the ministry of reconciliation—extending *hesed* to even our enemies (Matthew 5:43-48). This is how *hesed* humanizes: it extends God's love to those who are different from us, it seeks understanding and it builds relationships.

Ruth 1:6-14

⁶ When Naomi heard in Moab that the Lord had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them, she and her daughters-in-law prepared to return home from there. ⁷ With her two daughters-in-law she left the place where she had been living and set out on the road that would take them back to the land of Judah.

⁸ Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go back, each of you, to your mother's home. May the Lord show you kindness, as you have shown kindness to your dead husbands and to me. ⁹ May the Lord grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband."

Then she kissed them goodbye and they wept aloud ¹⁰ and said to her, "We will go back with you to your people."

¹¹ But Naomi said, "Return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me? Am I going to have any more sons, who could become your husbands? ¹² Return home, my daughters; I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me—even if I had a husband tonight and then gave birth to sons— ¹³ would you wait

until they grew up? Would you remain unmarried for them? No, my daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you, because the Lord's hand has turned against me!"

¹⁴ At this they wept aloud again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye, but Ruth clung to her.

1. What do you think caused these two enemies (a family from Israel and a family from Moab) to become so close?
2. What have you seen to be most effective in bringing together uncommon friends or reconciling enemies?
3. When was the last time you changed your mind about someone? What helped make that possible?
4. Why can a person's past often make it hard to extend grace and *hesed*? What risks are involved with extending *hesed*?

Read 2 Corinthians 5:14-21

5. What is it that compels us to serve as *hesed* leaders?
6. How does Jesus empower us to love those least like us or those we consider our enemy?
7. What do you need to do to tap into that power?

This week's *hesed* habit

Hesed humanizes. Jesus says to love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. You will become a *hesed* leader when you focus on reconciliation. To do this, you need to take a step toward reconciliation—seeing others the way God sees them. This week, build the *hesed* habit of praying by name and extending *hesed* to those you find most challenging or most difficult.

Who will you be praying for: _____

Homework

Memorize and Meditate on Romans 12:14-17

¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. ¹⁷ Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all.