



Focus of week 5

Hesed requires a break from routine. In Ruth chapter 2, *hesed* causes Ruth to respond in ways that a Moabite would stereotypically respond. Her reaction is atypical. To see *hesed* break into our lives and transform our relationships, we have to break from the past. We have to move from reaction to intentional action. This week, you'll discuss life-giving *hesed*.

Connect

1. What stood out to you from Sunday's message? How did it impact your understanding of God or faith?
2. What definition or picture of *hesed* has stuck with you most so from through this series? Why?

Last week's *hesed* habit was taking a step to greater commitment. What step have you taken this past week to show your commitment and loyalty to God? What about to a family member, a friend or a stranger?

Learn

Naomi and Ruth are confronted with their new reality. Apparently, the morning after arriving in Bethlehem Naomi is engulfed in grief and hopelessness. She's convinced that God's *hesed* for her has evaporated. From Naomi's perspective, God has destroyed her past and stolen her future. Naomi shuts down. They have returned to Bethlehem, where the famine has ended, but being widows, landless and childless they remain without security or sustenance. Ruth has promised loyalty, but they will not survive on promises, they need provisions.

Now, Ruth takes center stage. She makes a plan and executes that plan. It is the simplest of steps, but a humiliating one. "In an ancient Near Eastern shame-based culture, gleaning was a source of shame. It was a public display of poverty."¹ Not only was it a source of shame, it wasn't enough to sustain. "The gleaning of fallen grain was a subsistence living, much like trying to eke out survival today by recycling aluminum cans."² Ruth's actions however, partnered with God's *hesed*, results in amazing abundance. She doesn't return home with a handful of grain; she returns with several pounds of grain plus the promise of a stable source of food.

Hesed is not just love, it's life-giving loyalty. Ruth steps out of her comfort zone and into a dangerous environment to ensure that Naomi has what she needs to survive. For the reader, the unexpected aspect of this story revolves around Ruth being a Moabite. "Moabites don't do this! They don't show *hesed*!" Jesus uses a similar rhetorical device when telling the story of the

¹ James, Carolyn Custis, *Finding God in the Margins* (Lexaham Press: Bellingham, WA, 2018), 52.

² Robert L. Hubbard Jr., *The Book of Ruth*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 138.

good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). A “Samaritan” may have a positive connotation today, but in Jesus’ time, “good Samaritan” was an oxymoron. Two descriptors that did not go together. To be a Samaritan in Jesus’ day was to be seen as a godless, unfaithful, culturally and ethnically polluted. Samaria, from which the term Samaritan is derived, was a region in northern Israel that was taken captive by Assyria around 722 BC. The prophetic books of Amos and Hosea rail against Israel for their dependence upon Assyria for national support against Egypt, instead of relying on God. Northern Israel’s kings suppressed and exploited their people. They set up temples in their land, instead of following God’s instruction for one temple. They had rejected God’s law, worshipped other gods and ultimately inter-married with Israel’s enemy. And yet, Jesus says, the Samaritan fulfilled the law of God to love their neighbor.

If you recall Luke 10, the Samaritan responds with action. Just like Ruth. This gets to the heart of what the letter of James says,

¹⁴ What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? ¹⁵ If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? ¹⁷ So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

¹⁸ But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. (James 2:14-18)

In both stories, the least likely person acts most like God. Ruth the Moabite and the Samaritan break the stereotypes and stigmas of their people and their past. Doing *hesed* was not only life-giving to whom it was shown but it became life-giving to the one who showed it.

Ruth 2:1-7

¹ Now Naomi had a relative of her husband's, a worthy man of the clan of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz. ² And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, “Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain after him in whose sight I shall find favor.” And she said to her, “Go, my daughter.” ³ So she set out and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers, and she happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the clan of Elimelech. ⁴ And behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem. And he said to the reapers, “The Lord be with you!” And they answered, “The Lord bless you.” ⁵ Then Boaz said to his young man who was in charge of the reapers, “Whose young woman is this?” ⁶ And the servant who was in charge of the reapers answered, “She is the young Moabite woman, who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab. ⁷ She said, ‘Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves after the reapers.’ So she came, and she has continued from early morning until now, except for a short rest.”

Apply

1. Now in Judah, the story shifts its focus from Naomi, who is back in her homeland, to Ruth, who is a stranger here. What do you learn about Ruth in the opening verses of Ruth 2?

2. Ruth and Naomi are contrasted with Boaz. What is your first impression of Boaz? What do we not learn about him?
3. We saw in chapter 1 that “the whole town was soon buzzing” about Naomi and Ruth. And yet gleaning was humbling work. How can showing *hesed* be humbling?
4. Ruth doesn’t just promise loyalty, she provides life-giving loyalty. Why do you think faithfulness and action so important to *hesed*? What happens when these two aspects get out of balance?
5. Not only was it humbling to glean, but Ruth’s Moabite origins provided further stigma. How might someone’s family or personal history impact their ability to respond and act with *hesed*?
6. Breaking with the past requires radical honesty. Ruth acknowledged and responded differently than one would expect from a Moabite. How does God’s *hesed* help break the cycle of the past and promote radical honesty that leads to a life of *hesed*?
7. Ruth took a series of steps: “she said”, “she went”, “she came”, and “she gleaned”. These aren’t dramatic steps but they weren’t what was most convenient or natural. What step is God calling you to take to break the cycle of your past and to offer life-giving *hesed* to another?

This week’s *hesed* habit

Take time this week to reflect on what God is challenging you to break free from. Is there something in your history, a recurring struggle, an identity or a fear that keeps you from receiving God’s *hesed*?

As you focus on receiving God’s *hesed*, really taking in his love and making a decision to break from the past, what small step do you need to take to extend life-giving *hesed*?

Homework

Memorize and meditate on Hosea 10:12 (NLT).

I said, ‘Plant the good seeds of righteousness, and you will harvest a crop of love. Plow up the hard ground of your hearts, for now is the time to seek the Lord, that he may come and shower righteousness upon you.’