



## Focus of week 7

This week, the story of Ruth reaches its climax. Naomi sees a solution to their problem and initiates a plan. When you consider the history of the Moabites, it becomes clear that Ruth chapter 3 is laced with sensual overtones. The audience is expecting Ruth and Boaz to act in a self-serving way. However, they both limit themselves. They prove to be persons of *hesed* who have noble character (*hayil*; of Boaz see, Ruth 2:1; of Ruth see, 3:11). This week, you'll discuss how *hesed* heals when you limit yourself.

## Connect

Grab your story cards, or go to <https://anthology.study/story-cards>, and use them to get the conversation started this week. Ask:

1. Which picture best represents something you are grateful for?
2. Which picture best represents how you have changed in this current season of your life?

Last week, you talked about partnering with God and how God needs you—*hesed* needs a home. What did it look like for you this past week to partner with God? How did you let your light of *hesed* shine for God?

## Learn

Chapter 2 ended with what seemed like a missed opportunity. Now, Naomi decides to take the initiative. Despite Boaz's attention to Ruth in the fields while she gleaned, it seems neither of them have romance or marriage in mind until Naomi orchestrates their meeting at the threshing floor. Ruth, we recall, had chosen lifelong friendship with Naomi over the prospect of remarriage back in Moab.

Naomi's plan uses several words that are tantalizingly ambiguous and replete with suggestive sexual innuendo—these include, the location of the meeting, the time of the meeting, her instructions to dress up, uncover Boaz, to lie down with him, and to lie down at the place of his feet. The reader, bearing in mind Ruth's Moabite family history and the story of Lot and his daughters in Genesis 19, is wondering if Ruth will be true to her family origins.<sup>1</sup> Will Ruth take advantage of his good cheer and contentment?

Ruth, the Moabite, is *not* repeating the illicit and unsavory practice that gave birth to her Moabite ancestor. "Naomi intends it to be a classic bed trick, to trick Boaz into sleeping with Ruth...Ruth changes the plan at the critical moment, reveals her identity, and turns the scene

---

<sup>1</sup> Leon Kass and Hannah Mendelbaum, *Reading Ruth* (Paul Dry Books: Philadelphia, 2021), 64.

into a betrothal story.”<sup>2</sup> Although making herself sexually available, Ruth breaks from Naomi’s instructions and practices full self-command, her thoughts fixed on a higher purpose. In return, Boaz responds by blessing Ruth’s noble character, her act of *hesed*, and promises to repay her in full. Not by taking advantage of the situation, but honoring her through the promise of marriage. He returns *hesed* for *hesed*. He protects her dignity by practicing self-control. It’s an incredibly ironic twist. Boaz now instructs Ruth regarding what’s next. Instead of sexual innuendos, the Hebrew verbs change, leaving no sexual connotations and removing all ambiguity. “It signaled that, thrown together in the crucible of temptation, the two proved themselves righteous by placing integrity above passion.”<sup>3</sup>

In a moment when mystery, deception and selfishness are expected, Ruth chooses truth and self-control. As has been discussed over the past several weeks, *hesed* is a difficult to define and translate into one English word. Part of this is due to the enormous influence this word has. One of the fascinating features of *hesed* is its tendency to draw other words to it. *Hesed* enlists other words to help convey its meaning. One of the most frequent words that *hesed* is partnered with is “truth”—in Hebrew, *emet*.<sup>4</sup>

This Hebrew word, *emet*, is often translated faithfulness or truthfulness. Both of these terms are limiting terms. They designate boundaries. To be faithful to someone or something necessarily entails a disavowing of other things, particularly those things that would cause you to break faithfulness. Similarly, truth or truthfulness sets a standard by which other things are weighed and evaluated. Ruth and Boaz view their actions and weigh their relationship through the lens of *hesed* and *emet*—loving kindness (or, grace) and truth.

Truth and truthfulness refer to those things that are dependable and reliable. When truth is connected to God, it often speaks of God’s intentions for creation and humanity. When God form creation in Genesis 1, he established reliable limits between heaven/earth, water/land, day/night and so on. God goes so far as to set limits between work and rest. For these things to be called good, as God calls them, they must operate within the boundaries defined by the purpose and intention for which they were created. *Hesed* and truth operate in tandem, they act as a balance to one another. Devoted love thrives with truth, in fact, for *hesed* to exist it has to operate within the boundaries of what is true, reliable—the intended purposes of God who establishes the concept of *hesed*.

Ephesians 4:17-5:2

<sup>17</sup> So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. <sup>18</sup> They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the

---

<sup>2</sup> There is a great excursus about Ruth, Lot and his daughters, the parallels and antitheses of their stories in William A. Tooman, *(Re)reading Ruth* (Cascade Books: Eugene, 2022), 97-101.

<sup>3</sup> Robert L. Hubbard Jr., *The Book of Ruth*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 218.

<sup>4</sup> Genesis 24:27, 49; 32:10; 47:29; Exodus 34:6; Joshua 2:14; 2 Samuel 2:6; 15:20; Psalm 25:10; 40:10; 57:3; 61:7; 69:13; 85:10; 86:15; 89:14; Proverbs 3:3; 14:22; 16:6; 20:28; Hosea 4:1. In the New Testament, *emet* is often translated with the Greek term, “*aletheia*”, again “truth” in English. This combination is of *hesed* and *emet* are found in the opening words of John’s gospel, when he described Jesus as “full of grace and truth” in John 1:14.

hardening of their hearts. <sup>19</sup> Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed.

<sup>20</sup> That, however, is not the way of life you learned <sup>21</sup> when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. <sup>22</sup> You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; <sup>23</sup> to be made new in the attitude of your minds; <sup>24</sup> and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

<sup>25</sup> Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body. <sup>26</sup> "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, <sup>27</sup> and do not give the devil a foothold. <sup>28</sup> Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need.

<sup>29</sup> Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. <sup>30</sup> And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. <sup>31</sup> Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. <sup>32</sup> Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. 5 <sup>1</sup> Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children <sup>2</sup> and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Paul in Ephesians states that in Jesus we were taught what is true, this truth leads to a life that is full of *hesed*. It is in self-limiting and God-imitating, that we learn to walk in the way of love. *Hesed* is a **Seeker of Truth** and a **Setter of Limits**.

## Apply

1. Naomi seems different, doesn't she? How would you describe her attitude at the beginning of this chapter?
2. What about Naomi's plan makes sense to you? What about the plan makes you uncomfortable?
3. Where is God in chapter 3? In what ways is God working?
4. Why did Boaz characterize and praise Ruth's actions as *hesed* ("kindness" in 3:10)?
5. In what ways did Ruth and Boaz limit themselves?
6. How does seeking truth help lead to healing? How does setting limits lead to healing?
7. What stands out to you from Ephesians 4:17-5:2? Why?

8. Where does truth and limits factor into Ephesians 4:17-5:2? Which ones do you find the hardest to implement?

### This Week's *Hesed* Habit

Healing comes through seeking truth and setting limits. *Hesed* means that we are faithful to the things of God. As you commit to his ways, *hesed* takes root in your life and begins to transform your relationship. What do you need to limit in your life that does not reflect the *hesed* of God?

### Homework

Memorize and meditate on Ephesians 5:1-2.

<sup>1</sup> Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children <sup>2</sup> and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.