



Focus of week 6

Hesed requires relationship. There is no *hesed* without a giver and a receiver, a subject and object. This week, you'll discuss how God intends *hesed* to operate in this world. One of the greatest acts of *hesed* came in the person of Jesus, who laid his life down for you. But *hesed* doesn't end there, God has called you to partner with him in extending *hesed* to the world around you.

Connect

1. Where have you been seeing *hesed* over the past couple of weeks?
2. Where do you need additional *hesed* in your life right now?

Last week, you discussed the small, but radical, step of *hesed* that Ruth took. Were you able to take a small step toward extending practical and active *hesed* to someone else?

Learn

The second portion of Ruth 2, verses 8-23, introduces Boaz and hope for Ruth's situation. The author sets us up for this interaction by referencing Boaz in Ruth 2:1 as "a wealthy and influential man...who was a relative of Naomi's husband." Despite the introduction, a lot of questions remain. If he is a man of means, why has he made no offer to help? If he is a kinsman, why has he made no effort to see her?

Instead, Ruth takes all the action in this narrative to show Naomi *hesed*. She undertakes the risky task of gleaning and commits to it all day long. When Boaz returns to his fields, the reader's anticipation is further heightened by his greeting offered to the workers— "The Lord be with you!" This expresses gratitude for the end of the famine, but it also indicates, that unlike Elimelek, Boaz stayed in Bethlehem choosing to trust in God. Here, Boaz puts God directly in the mind and thoughts of his men, reminding them that they do not prosper by their own power and might. He is more than a wealthy landowner; he leads his men to honor God.¹

With gratitude to God in mind, Boaz notices Ruth. Ruth 2:11-12 tells us that it was the report of her *hesed* that prompts him to show her favor. He goes above and beyond the written law to feed her and Naomi. With all of Boaz's wealth, position and influence, he is never assigned *hesed*. Through his partnership with Ruth, *hesed* is able to break the cycle of Israel's history.

Ruth 2:8-11, 17-20

⁸ Boaz went over and said to Ruth, "Listen, my daughter. Stay right here with us when you gather grain; don't go to any other fields. Stay right behind the young women working in my field. ⁹ See which part of the field they are harvesting, and then follow

¹ Leon Kass and Hannah Mendelbaum, *Reading Ruth* (Paul Dry Books: Philadelphia, 2021), 44.

them. I have warned the young men not to treat you roughly. And when you are thirsty, help yourself to the water they have drawn from the well.”

¹⁰ Ruth fell at his feet and thanked him warmly. “What have I done to deserve such kindness?” she asked. “I am only a foreigner.”

¹¹ “Yes, I know,” Boaz replied. “But I also know about everything you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband. I have heard how you left your father and mother and your own land to live here among complete strangers. ¹² May the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge, reward you fully for what you have done.”

¹⁷ So Ruth gathered barley there all day, and when she beat out the grain that evening, it filled an entire basket. ¹⁸ She carried it back into town and showed it to her mother-in-law. Ruth also gave her the roasted grain that was left over from her meal.

¹⁹ “Where did you gather all this grain today?” Naomi asked. “Where did you work? May the Lord bless the one who helped you!”

So Ruth told her mother-in-law about the man in whose field she had worked. She said, “The man I worked with today is named Boaz.”

²⁰ “May the Lord bless him!” Naomi told her daughter-in-law. “He is showing his kindness to us as well as to your dead husband. That man is one of our closest relatives, one of our family redeemers.”

It becomes clear that Ruth’s partnership with the God of Israel leads to *hesed*. In turn, Boaz partners with God through the prompting of Ruth’s *hesed*. In the time of the Judges, where everyone did what was right in their own eyes, Ruth and Boaz break trend. They partner with God and do what is right in his eyes.

This is the remarkable story of the Bible. The Bible reveals the God of *hesed*, who has opened the door of his life to you and me. Though we were enemies of his ways (Romans 5:10-11), cursed him and chose to live our what was right in our eyes, he chose to demonstrate his love for us in his death long before we might have accepted him (Colossians 1:19-23; Ephesians 1:11-14). We have no right to expect anything from him (Ephesians 2:8-9). Yet he has extended himself to us, has invited us to enter into his world, and has made our story a part of his story.² The history of the Bible consists of God’s desire to partner with humanity for the restoration of all creation—Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Israel, Moses, David, and others.

Ultimately, it is through Jesus, the fullness of God, that *hesed* finds its fullest expression in the world. In a shocking parallel with Genesis 2, Jesus’ life, death and resurrection result in a recreating of humanity (Romans 5:12-21; 2 Corinthians 5:17). Then in Acts 1, God breathes, as he

² Michael Card, *Inexpressible: Hesed and the Mystery of God’s Loving Kindness* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2018), 19.

does in Genesis, his breath—his *ruach*, spirit—into humanity. This recreation of humanity through Jesus is followed by a command, much like that given to Adam and Eve, to extend God’s rule of *hesed* to all of creation.

This comes up multiple times in the message of Jesus. In his most famous Sermon on the Mount, he doubles down on the role of his followers—those who have his spirit and truth inside of them.

Matt 5.14-16

¹⁴ “You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

In John’s account of the life of Jesus, John provides a window into Jesus’ heart and hopes for his followers (John 13-17). It ultimately culminates in Jesus commissioning his followers who occupy a place in this world that he no longer will. With Jesus’ death and resurrection, he passes along the responsibility of spreading his message of *hesed*.

John 17:13-19

¹³ I am on my way to you. But I say these things while I am still in the world, so my followers will have the same complete joy that I do. ¹⁴ I have told them your message. But the people of this world hate them, because they don't belong to this world, just as I don't.

¹⁵ Father, I don't ask you to take my followers out of the world, but keep them safe from the evil one. ¹⁶ They don't belong to this world, and neither do I. ¹⁷ Your word is the truth. So let this truth make them completely yours. ¹⁸ I am sending them into the world, just as you sent me. ¹⁹ I have given myself completely for their sake, so they may belong completely to the truth.

Apply

1. What impresses Boaz about Ruth? How is this different from the impression she’s made on others?
 - 1a. What impresses you about Ruth?
2. What impresses Ruth about Boaz?
 - 2a. What impresses you about Boaz?
3. Ruth experienced Boaz’s kindness and generosity, but she kept working all day long. What does this say about Ruth’s character?

4. *Hesed* for Naomi defines Ruth's character. *Hesed* shines a light in a time of national and personal despair. Why do you think God chose to bring light through a person, rather than just simply dropping the solution out of the sky?
5. What stands out to you from John 17:13-19? Why?
6. What do you think Jesus meant by saying he was sending his followers into the world?
7. What does it look like for you to be sent out by Jesus? To partner with God?
8. Boaz didn't merely accommodate Ruth's basic needs. He went far beyond normal practice to provide for her. How can you use your position in society to bless others as Boaz did?

This Week's *Hesed* Habit

Will you give *hesed* a home? Identify a way that you can partner your position in this community to transform this community through *hesed*.

Homework

Memorize and meditate on Acts 1:8.

⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."