



## Focus of week 8

The Book of Ruth ends by breaking the chains of the past. It is through the intentional and ongoing act of *hesed* that Naomi and Ruth find redemption, rest and reward. Ruth commits to the hard work of *hesed*. This week, you'll discuss the ongoing steps you will take to make *hesed* part of your daily routine that will last beyond this sermon series.

## Connect

1. What is a hobby, interest or spiritual practice you have committed to for more than a year? Why did you start it and continue it?
2. What made that endeavor successful?
3. How does faithfulness to something naturally impose limits on other things?

## Learn

Ruth chapter two had left readers wondering what would come of Naomi's hopes and what would happen to Ruth. Similarly, the end of Ruth chapter three leaves the reader asking if and when Boaz would keep his word. Despite all of Ruth's *hesed*, her situation has not changed.

The natural human inclination is to be minimalist when it comes to obeying God's ways. That's what Boaz was doing when he "allowed" people to glean in his field. His compliance with the letter of the law may well have contributed to his reputation as *hayil*—a man of noble character. Ruth follows the spirit of the law<sup>1</sup>, she pursues God's *hesed* and lives it out for Naomi. It is through long-term faithfulness to God's ways that Ruth and Naomi's situation is ultimately changed.

### Ruth 4:9-12

<sup>9</sup> Then Boaz said to the elders and to the crowd standing around, "You are witnesses that today I have bought from Naomi all the property of Elimelech, Kilion, and Mahlon. <sup>10</sup> And with the land I have acquired Ruth, the Moabite widow of Mahlon, to be my wife. This way she can have a son to carry on the family name of her dead husband and to inherit the family property here in his hometown. You are all witnesses today."

<sup>11</sup> Then the elders and all the people standing in the gate replied, "We are witnesses! May the Lord make this woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, from

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<sup>1</sup> There is a theme in the Bible of juxtaposing the "letter of the law" and the "spirit of the law", what God has said and what God has intended. It is human nature to find loop holes in rules and expectations to alleviate their perceived burden or their limitations imposed by truth. These efforts usually follow the "letter of the law" but miss God's intent for the law. This is seen in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5, where he gets down to the heart of God's ways.

whom all the nation of Israel descended! May you prosper in Ephrathah and be famous in Bethlehem. <sup>12</sup> And may the Lord give you descendants by this young woman who will be like those of our ancestor Perez, the son of Tamar and Judah.”

The blessing the elders pronounce on Ruth is remarkable. They ask that God would make Ruth like the matriarchal sisters Rachel and Leah, the wives of Jacob/Israel who gave birth to the twelve sons that would give rise to the nation of Israel. In other words, may this lowly Moabite outsider stand in line with those most highly respected in national history. The chains of her family history and past have been broken, they’ve been fully redeemed through God’s *hesed*.

Ruth’s decision to respond to and live out *hesed* did not result in an immediate transformation. It was her daily decision to faithfully live out *hesed*. This short book can be deceiving in its brevity, as if Ruth’s situation moves from crisis to resolution in a matter of days. At a minimum, Ruth suffers several months, but more likely, her journey spans a couple of years. How does God break Ruth’s chains? Through the *hesed* she does, through her choice to continually do *hesed* and her faithfulness to the hard work of *hesed*.

In John’s account of Jesus’ life, Jesus states, “Now that you know [the ways of God], God will bless you for doing them.”<sup>2</sup> James, Jesus’ brother, picks up on this partnership of faithfully walking in the truth-filled ways of God: “Keep on being obedient to the word, and not merely being hearers who deceive themselves.”<sup>3</sup> While there is a heavy emphasis on doing, or walking in the ways of God, what makes Ruth’s journey telling is the duration of her faithfulness before seeing God’s faithfulness. Faithfulness necessitates a long-term focus. Frustration sets in when we view walking in God’s ways as a means to get our way, in our own timing.

#### Galatians 6:7-10

<sup>7</sup> Don’t be misled—you cannot mock the justice of God. You will always harvest what you plant. <sup>8</sup> Those who live only to satisfy their own sinful nature will harvest decay and death from that sinful nature. But those who live to please the Spirit will harvest everlasting life from the Spirit. <sup>9</sup> ***So let’s not get tired of doing what is good.*** At just the right time we will reap a harvest of blessing if we don’t give up. <sup>10</sup> Therefore, whenever we have the opportunity, we should do good to everyone—especially to those in the family of faith.

Living *hesed* is tiring work. To remain faithful to God and extending faithful kindness and love to others is no small task. It is seen when you serve others in humility without expectation of reciprocity; when you forgive for the umpteenth time; when you turn the other cheek; when you’re there for the widow, the orphan and the foreigner; when you stand by your promises and commitments; and the list could go on. With each of these comes the reality that apart from faithfulness to God they seem like losing endeavors, thankless tasks at the risk of self. In Galatians 6, God promises that what seems counter-intuitive is, in fact, the way of God. He promises those who faithfully commit to the way of God’s *hesed* will reap a harvest of

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<sup>2</sup> John 13:17, New Living Translation. Another example of Jesus’ teaching regarding faithfully committing to the ways of God can be seen in Matthew 7:24-28.

<sup>3</sup> James 1:22, International Standard Version

blessing—it will break the chains of addiction, deception, lies, family pain, abuse and sin. Not only are Ruth’s chains broken, but Ruth’s *hesed* for Naomi reverses her emptiness.<sup>4</sup>

## Apply

1. What does Boaz commit to in Ruth 4? Why are Boaz’s actions considered redemptive?
2. How does this story result in restoration? Are there things that you feel are still unaddressed?
3. Breaking free from the chains that hold you back (family history, addiction, bad decisions, selfishness, sin, etc) requires commitment to the ways of God. Why do you think following God’s ways is difficult?
4. When have you found “doing good,” as Galatians says, to become tiring? What helps you keep going?
5. What is one area where are you currently struggling to follow God’s ways—you need God to break the chains? What hope does Galatians 6 offer?

## Series Wrap-up

Go around the group and have everyone share one thing that stood out to them from this series and what difference that take-away has for them.

## Prayer

As you conclude this study take a few minutes to focus on prayer together as a group. Naomi, Ruth, and the whole town seem to celebrate God’s work in Ruth chapter four. Focus your prayers with this question: What can you thank God for?

May this prayer time serve as a celebration and prayer of gratitude for what God is doing.

## Homework

Memorize and meditate on Galatians 6:9.

<sup>9</sup> So let’s not get tired of doing what is good. At just the right time we will reap a harvest of blessing if we don’t give up.

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<sup>4</sup> There is an antithetical parallelism between chapter one and chapter four. It is in this final chapter that the author intends for the reader to discover God’s faithfulness and his redemption of Naomi and Elimelek.