



Focus of week 1

Welcome to The *Hesed* Habit. Over the next eight weeks, you will better understand, experience and extend *hesed* through the book of Ruth. *Hesed* comes up when we least expect it but when it is needed most, often times during trouble or tragedy. It is truly the heart of the Gospel, as we understand *hesed* we discover the good news of what Jesus has done.

Each week, you will take time to **connect** with each other, **learn** through a discussion on selected biblical passages and topics, and most importantly, **apply** what was discussed. It is through building the habit of *hesed* that *hesed* comes to life. You will be challenged each week to live out one aspect of *hesed*. In doing so, you will begin to better discover God's character and see your faith, family and relationships changed.

Connect

Story Cards (Select one. Appoint a time keeper to ensure everyone has a chance to share.)

1. Pick a card that captures what's going on in your life right now. Why did you pick the card you picked? (2 min per person)
2. Pick a card that captures your relationship with God right now. Why did you pick the card you picked? (2 min per person)

The book of Ruth is about God showing up to transform a tragedy to a triumph, to move life from a mess to a miracle.

1. Can you think of a time when God showed up in the middle of your mess? What did that look like for you?
2. Can you identify one characteristic of God that is important to you? Why is that one important to you?

Learn

Hesed (חסד) is a power word in the Bible and the most important word in the book of Ruth. It only occurs three times in Ruth, but its principle runs through out and is the driving force behind most of the actions—not only by the characters, but also of God.

These next eight weeks, you'll become acquainted with the concept of *hesed*. It is the lens by which God relates to his people and the defining characteristic of how we are to relate to others.

So, what is *hesed*?

There is no one-for-one equivalent of *hesed* in English. There are nearly 250 uses of this word in the Hebrew Bible, with the majority (127) occurring in the Psalms. In the King James Version, the translators use 14 different English words for this one Hebrew word. The New Revised Standard Version uses 20 different English words.

“A smorgasbord of words like ‘kindness,’ ‘mercy,’ ‘loyalty,’ ‘loving-kindness,’ ‘loyal,’ ‘steadfast, unfailing (or just plain) love’—words that certainly touch on what *hesed* means but by themselves don’t begin to do justice to this powerful richly laden word. As a result, we easily skim over references to *hesed* without realizing we have just stumbled over one of the most potent words in the Old Testament...[*Hesed*] is the way God intended for human beings to live together from the beginning—the ‘love-your-neighbor-as-yourself’ brand of living, an active, selfless, sacrificial caring for one another that goes against the grain of our fallen natures”.¹

Hesed is the governing principle by which God relates to his people and the template for how his people are to relate to others. If there are not two parties involved, there can be no *hesed*—it cannot be seen, known or shown without a subject and an object, an I and Thou. In context, *Hesed* usually occurs, “when the person from whom I have a right to expect nothing gives me everything.”²

It can be born out of obligation, but more often than not, the individual’s response to that obligation exceeds its requirements. In other words, the individual responds not on the basis of the letter of the law but in accordance with the spirit of the law. Similarly, God, responds above and beyond what is expected of him.

To get the conversation started, let’s begin by looking at one of the key moments in the Bible where God reveals his character to Moses.

Exodus 34:5-10 in the New International Version (NIV) reads,

⁵ Then the Lord came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the Lord. ⁶ And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, “The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in **love (*hesed*)** and faithfulness, ⁷ maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation.”

⁸ Moses bowed to the ground at once and worshiped. ⁹ “Lord,” he said, “if I have found favor in your eyes, then let the Lord go with us. Although this is a stiff-necked people, forgive our wickedness and our sin, and take us as your inheritance.”

¹ Carolyn Custis James, *The Gospel of Ruth: Loving God Enough to Break the Rules* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 115.

² Michael Card, *Inexpressible: Hesed and the Mystery of God’s Loving Kindness* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2018), 27.

¹⁰ Then the Lord said: “I am making a covenant with you. Before all your people I will do wonders never before done in any nation in all the world. The people you live among will see how awesome is the work that I, the Lord, will do for you.

Watch this 5min video commentary on Exodus 34:5-10:

<https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/character-of-god-exodus/>

1. What English words do other translations use for *hesed* in Exodus 34:6? (³leader note)
2. Why do you think there is so much variety? What do all these different English translations of *hesed* try to convey?
3. How does *hesed* help make sense of the bible?
4. Why do you think *hesed* is so important to the character of God?

Hesed finds its way into the New Testament, which is written in Greek, at several different points. Many scholars believe that the New Testament authors choose the Greek word, *eleos* (ἐλεός), or mercy/compassion, as their primary word for translating *hesed*.

Study Ephesians 2:1-22

5. How does God’s mercy in Ephesians 2 reflect this concept of *hesed* that we read about earlier: “when the person from whom I have a right to expect nothing gives me everything”?
6. What effect does “mercy” (*hesed* or *eleos*) have on those who are far off from God?
7. Through mercy God extends his loyal, covenantal love to those who are least deserving and unable to earn it. Share a time when God showed up in the midst of your life when you felt undeserving. This may be that moment when the message of Jesus finally “clicked” for you, you decided to follow Jesus or when you gave your life to following him.
8. Look again at Ephesians 2:8-10. What task does God’s act of “mercy” have upon those who have received it?

This week’s *hesed* habit

The *Hesed* Habit can only begin to take root in your life as you better understand God’s *hesed*. Since this principle runs contrary to our natural response, it is only through God’s *hesed* that we can grow in *hesed*—*hesed* begets *hesed*.

³ Other English translations, or versions, use Loving kindness (ASV, Amplified); Faithful love (CSB); Great Loyalty (CEB); Grace (CJB); Great love (CEV, GNT); Steadfast love (ESV, LB, RSV); Abundant goodness (KJV); Abounding in faithfulness (NASB); Loyal love (NET); Abounding in love (NIV); Unfailing love (NLT).

Each day this week, read the scripture in the Grace App. These passages will be focused on seeing God's *hesed* in the bible. After reading, take a few minutes to meditate on God's *hesed* (his love, loyalty, and faithfulness). Then conclude with this prayer, "God, infect me with *hesed*."

Homework (Optional)

It is through memorizing and meditating on scripture that we grow closer to God and become better equipped to face challenging times.

Memorize Exodus 34:6-7a

"The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness,⁷ maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin."

- Or -

Memorize Ephesians 2:4-5

⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved.