

LifeWay Family Bible Series for Feb. 6: Thankfully, God is the God of second chances_20705

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Thankfully, God is the God of second chances

Hosea 1:2-11, 3:1-5

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Most people have asked in anger or frustration, especially in difficult and troubling times, "Does God really love me?" Burdens on the backs of believers may seem like a series of plagues. Trouble can be like bananas and comes in bunches.

Often a Christian will expect a life free of painful experiences as a reward for a faithful life. The Christian is not immune to struggle or even questioning the loving character of God. It seems the evil and wicked have more worldly successes and are spared traumatic difficulties more than the committed Christian.

One of the great truths of life is that we learn the most when we struggle the most. Gain comes with pain. Our struggles and misfortune become a

vehicle for God's ministry to us and testing of us. God took the horrible experience of Hosea's marriage to a prostitute to teach the world that love has a quality of commitment so profound and intense that it can endure the lowest depth of rejection and reach the majestic height of redemption.

Hosea was a prophet of the Northern Kingdom. He lived in the worst of times following the Golden Age of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Evil, corruption, superstition, hypocrisy and violence were becoming more rampant and Israel ultimately would fall to Assyria in 722 B.C. (2 Kings 17:6, 18). Seeing first hand the drift into political and social chaos, the debauchery of cultic Baal worship and the decline of morality in his homeland, Hosea was touched by the call of God to speak forth.



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Speaking from experience is always a powerful word. The prophet became the prophecy. God revealed to Hosea through his heartbreak over Gomer's prostitution that God was heartbroken over Israel's disobedience and sin. How Israel treated God was pictured by Gomer's treatment of Hosea. Hosea was overwhelmed that his nation was like his unfaithful wife and his steadfast love for her was like the love of God for Israel. Experiencing in his marriage what he experienced with Israel, he would personalize his prophecy to his people. Filled with deepest emotion, Hosea sobs his way

through his message to victory.

The message is that the ruination of a marriage by sin and the wicked failure of a nation can be rectified by holy judgment and the loyal love of God. Both Hosea's anguish over Gomer and God's broken heart over the idolatrous ways of Israel were overcome by a persevering, undaunted, steadfast love. Prophesying the destruction of Israel, Hosea tenderly magnified the forgiveness of God and called the adulterous Israel back to her first love.

The book of Hosea is one of the Minor Prophets (minor because it is short) and records the struggle of Israel to be a people pleasing to God. The message of the prophets is as relevant and current as today's newspaper and speaks against our own world of wickedness and injustice. The more things change, the more they stay the same. Hosea was a common name in Israel, related to Joshua and Jesus, meaning "salvation, savior or deliverer."

The book of Hosea is a foretaste of the New Testament experience of God's redeeming love that paid the ransom price of sin through Christ's crucifixion. The theme of Hosea and these lessons is the steadfastness of the enduring love of God in spite of the rebellious behavior of rejection by the people of God. The grief of God over man's sin would clearly demonstrate his determined love and redemption.

Love's dilemma (Hosea 1:2-9)

Love's dilemma was made obvious when Hosea looked at his own marriage. How should one respond to the person or people who betray one's trust and turn to a wicked and unfaithful life? God's word to Hosea to "go take to yourself an adulterous wife and children of unfaithfulness" (v. 2) presents a troubling moral crisis with the character of God. Why would God tell anyone to marry an adulterous woman?

Without looking at the three usual approaches (literal, allegorical,

proleptic) to interpreting this passage (since there is no consensus among scholars), let us assume the proleptic view which sees Hosea as simply looking back on the past experience of his marriage. This assumes that Gomer, living in a culture of cultic worship involving prostitution or with an inclination toward sexual immorality, became adulterous after she married Hosea.

Whether he married an immoral woman or she became immoral after the marriage does not detract from our study of Hosea's coping with this crisis nor does it detract from the credibility of Hosea's ministry. Canaanite worship of Baal had merged with Israel's worship of Jahweh so that an Israelite would go so far as to call God Baal (2:19). This cultic fertility worship would involve worshippers engaging in sexual orgies by both temple prostitutes and congregants who would participate. The statement "the land is guilty of the vilest adultery in departing from the Lord" (1:2) would indicate Israel had slipped so far in that direction that it would have been very difficult for Hosea to find a wife who was not contaminated by such experiences and superstition both before and after marriage.

At the same time, this analogy of marrying someone already a prostitute would not be unlike the love of Christ who died for us "while we were yet sinners" (Romans 5:8). "So he married Gomer ..." (Hosea 1:3) begins the experience of obedience and heartache. The hurt and pain brought upon the family by Gomer's "whoring" brings about a crisis of love. Singles should be careful about choosing a partner with a shady background and one who might have a tendency toward a racy lifestyle.

Israel's wickedness, not Hosea's marriage, became the center of attention with the naming of three children born to this dysfunctional union. Their names would describe the judgment of God upon Israel. The first child is a son conceived in their intimacy and God instructed Hosea to name him "Jezreel," meaning "God scattered." The significance of the name is in the prophetic announcement, "I will soon punish ...," "I will put an end to the

kingdom of Israel,” and “I will break Israel's bow in the valley of Jezreel” (vv. 4-5). From the time that Jehu treacherously overthrew the house of Omri in the city of Jezreel, God would turn his back on Israel, the Northern Kingdom, in shame and condemnation but even more to purge Israel of Baalism. The Assyrians would later destroy the army of the last king of Israel, Hoshea, in the valley of Jezreel.

The second child is a girl. It is not clear if this child is Hosea's or one of Gomer's lovers. God instructed Hosea to name her “Lo-Ruhamah,” meaning “not loved,” “not pitied” or “no mercy.” God was saying he had reached the end of his patience and would “no longer show love to the house of Israel, that I should at all forgive them” (v. 6).

The third child, another son, Hosea named by God's instruction “Lo-Ammi,” meaning “not my people” for “you are not my people and I am not your God” (v. 9). The name of each succeeding child showed the growing decay in the relationship of Israel with God. The rebellious nation has broken the covenant and God had enough of their wickedness and the relationship was severed, done, ended, kaput. Now, the judgment of God would be executed as punishment, the consequence of their infidelity.

Love's discipline (Hosea 1:10-11)

Immediately following the judgment, God's love projected that Israel's head and heart would be changed, turned back to their covenant relationship of promise to make of them a great nation “like the sand on the seashore, which cannot be measured or counted” (v. 10). “Yet” looks to a new day after judgment and discipline takes place.

Love “always hopes” (1 Corinthians 13:7) and brings affirmation of God's purpose and intention for restoration and a better day. God's intention was to see the two kingdoms of Judah and Israel come together as one (Hosea 1:11) under God's leadership and achieve his holy plan. Just as strongly as

judgment was symbolized through the names of the children, God's love reversed that concluding judgment from "you are not my people" to "they will be called sons of the living God" (v. 10). God could express tough love through his judgment and discipline to restore his people to their place as the people of God. As Israel would be redeemed because of God's love, Hosea's undying love would save his marriage.

Chapter 2 ignores the divorce of Hosea and Gomer while continuing the description of God's relationship with Israel who was like the adulterous wife. God desires redemption and not destruction. The suffering of Israel is part of God's judgment and effort to redeem them. Sin and unfaithfulness does not keep him from loving people and working for our reconciliation. Hosea 2:14-23 is a beautiful and powerful statement of God's love and his desire to be a "husband" (2:16) to his bride.

Love's deliverance (Hosea 3:1-5)

The story now turns again to the saga of Hosea and Gomer. Apparently, in the passage of time, Gomer deserted the family for her other lovers and sensual behavior or was ordered out of the home by Hosea, who was devastated and heartbroken over her chosen lifestyle. Hosea could not change her or her ways and went on with his life. God interjects himself into Hosea's life insisting that Hosea "again" go to Gomer and love her "as the Lord loves the Israelites" even though "she is loved by another and is an adulteress" (v. 1).

Having spent several years teaching a class in divorce recovery, I know how difficult this must have been for the offended Hosea. Unfaithfulness drives the pain to the very core of anger, hurt and hatred. The emotional effort to take this action must have beckoned every ounce of courage and compassion. Seeing the love of God for Israel and being obedient to Jehovah, Hosea went and paid the ransom for Gomer's release from slavery (v. 2) to give her another chance.

This second chance involved her living with Hosea for “many days” without being “intimate with any man” (v. 3). No doubt, Hosea wanted to see if she could live up to his offer and if she wanted the relationship again with him. We do not know if she came up to this expectation and can only assume his love brought deliverance from her sinful ways into a meaningful marriage. Israel is likewise expected to prove herself and “come trembling to the Lord and to his blessings in the last days” (v. 4-5).

God is the God of the second chance. There are many definitions of love but none with the unique quality and depth of character as God's redeeming love, a love that never quits and never gives up. Love is more than feeling. It is a commitment of the will. God never stops loving us regardless of the mess we make of our lives and the suffering we go through. The key phrase is “love ... as the Lord loves” (v. 1).

Discussion question

- ◆ Why is it that commitment to God, marriage or anything else appears to be a scarce commodity in our society?
- ◆ Take inventory of your life-how is your faithfulness to God and his teachings measuring up?
- ◆ How can we go about “loving as the Lord loves”?

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