

An Unfaithful People Receive Love

SESSION IN A SENTENCE: God faithfully loves His people even when His people are unfaithful and fail to love Him.

BACKGROUND PASSAGE: Hosea

In most fairy tales, there are two main characters: a lovely princess and a handsome prince. The prince goes out to seek this princess, primarily for her beauty but sometimes also for her talents and magical powers. And it is a good thing he goes after her—because she is always in need of rescue. Every great princess finds herself captured by someone evil and powerful, and only a heroic and courageous man can set her free.

 What are some fairy-tale stories or movies that fit this pattern?

Group Time

Point 1: God's love remains steadfast toward His unfaithful people (Hos. 2:16-23).

¹⁶ “And in that day, declares the LORD, you will call me ‘My Husband,’ and no longer will you call me ‘My Baal.’ ¹⁷ For I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth, and they shall be remembered by name no more. ¹⁸ And I will make for them a covenant on that day with the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the creeping things of the ground. And I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land, and I will make you lie down in safety. ¹⁹ And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. ²⁰ I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know the LORD.

²¹ “And in that day I will answer, declares the LORD, I will answer the heavens, and they shall answer the earth, ²² and the earth shall answer the grain, the wine, and the oil, and they shall answer Jezreel, ²³ and I will sow her for myself in the land. And I will have mercy on No Mercy, and I will say to Not My People, ‘You are my people;’ and he shall say, ‘You are my God.’”

The Lord called the prophet Hosea to act out through his life and marriage a picture of God and Israel. So Hosea sought out Gomer, a woman of promiscuity, and married her, made his home with her, and bore children with her (1:1–2:1). God wanted Israel to see that He didn’t just call them to be His people because He wanted servants who obeyed out of rigid duty; He called them as a wife to draw near to Him in love.

Hosea’s marriage was far from perfect. In fact, sometime after marrying and having three children, Gomer left Hosea and returned to her life of promiscuity, now adultery. But God would soon command Hosea to pursue Gomer once again. To prepare Hosea for this call, the Lord told him more about His love for His people and how He loved them though they turned again and again to other lovers, whoring after other gods. And one day, His love for His people would transform them into a faithful bride.



What are some ways God’s people today demonstrate unfaithfulness to God?

Point 2: God's love pursues His unfaithful people and purchases them out of slavery (Hos. 3:1-5).

¹ And the LORD said to me, "Go again, love a woman who is loved by another man and is an adulteress, even as the LORD loves the children of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love cakes of raisins." ² So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and a homer and a lethech of barley. ³ And I said to her, "You must dwell as mine for many days. You shall not play the whore, or belong to another man; so will I also be to you." ⁴ For the children of Israel shall dwell many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or pillar, without ephod or household gods. ⁵ Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the LORD their God, and David their king, and they shall come in fear to the LORD and to his goodness in the latter days.

God commanded Hosea to go to Gomer and *show* love to her. Gomer had run off to a lover, but it appears her status had sunk much lower. Hosea couldn't just find Gomer and take her home because in her pursuit of other lovers, she had fallen to the status of a slave. The only way to get Gomer back was to purchase her. A cost had to be paid to redeem her from slavery, which resulted from her promiscuity, her sin. Hosea's love for Gomer cost him something: he had to seek her out and pay the price for her freedom.

God Is Love: The imperfect love that human beings share between one another is a _____ reflection, a sign that points to the perfect love that resides within God. The greatest act of love by God toward humans isn't the giving of earthly goods but the giving of Himself in _____ so that we might become _____ to Him.

Hosea restored Gomer as his wife, and he desired a holy covenant with her. He wanted *all* of her affection committed to him and him alone. He wanted her united to her husband and faithful to him so that she could be his and he hers. God had rescued and would rescue Israel once again out of their slavery for the same reason—not so they could live as they pleased but so they could finally be free to worship Him alone.




What does the purchase price of Christ that God paid to redeem sinners reveal about His love for humanity?

Point 3: God's love invites His unfaithful people to repent (Hos. 14:1-4).


¹ Return, O Israel, to the LORD your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity. ² Take with you words and return to the LORD; say to him, "Take away all iniquity; accept what is good, and we will pay with bulls the vows of our lips. ³ Assyria shall not save us; we will not ride on horses; and we will say no more, 'Our God,' to the work of our hands. In you the orphan finds mercy." ⁴ I will heal their apostasy; I will love them freely, for my anger has turned from them.

The Lord took the initiative in the repentance of Israel by calling on them to return to Him. All the words that He had spoken to Hosea and the actions Hosea had carried out were to show Israel that they were stumbling in their sin and needed to return to Him. To truly return to God, Israel had to do two things: **1) confess and turn away from the idols she had trusted in and 2) turn back to God with a heart full of trust.**

Amazingly, God invites sinners to repent and offers the promise of compassion, healing, love, and a turning of His anger.

 What characteristics mark true repentance of sin?

It is important to notice that Gomer never initiated in their relationship; Hosea was the one who pursued. The only time we see Gomer initiate was when she ran off with other men. The only hope that Hosea and Gomer's relationship would last was that Hosea would never give up on pursuing her. And so it is with God in His relationship with His people: God initiates, God pursues, God never gives up on His people, or there is no hope.

 How does God's work in our salvation attack our pride?



Voices from Church History

"O to grace how great a debtor Daily I'm constrained to be! Let Thy grace, Lord, like a fetter, Bind my wand'ring heart to Thee: Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, Prone to leave the God I love; Here's my heart, Lord, take and seal it; Seal it for Thy courts above."¹

—Robert Robinson
(1735-1790)

Daily Study

Day 1: Read Hosea 1:1-11

More than any other part of His creation, God created humankind to behold, enjoy, and display His glory. The fall, however, broke us entirely. We still long to worship, but rather than worship God, we bow down to anything and everything else. This was happening in Israel.

Out of all the nations of the world, God had revealed Himself in special ways to these people whom He had formed into a special nation. He had given them His law, His covenants. He had shown them His character and placed His name upon them. Yet with all of this, Israel was still seeking to bow her knees before false gods. Every human heart was made to worship, and the sinful tendencies of our hearts will always cause us to drift away from worshiping God to worshiping created things.

In His great love, God will not allow His people to continue in unfaithfulness. He will show His people the idols that they worship and how they fail. Hosea came to prophesy to Israel that her idols would always fall short and only God could save and satisfy them. God will do the same in our hearts. He will do all that is necessary—trials, suffering, failure—to expose what we are worshiping other than Him. And in His love, He will bring us back, helping us see that no idol can substitute for His grace and goodness. Only Jesus—God in the flesh—can save and satisfy the deepest longings of our hearts.



When was a time that God revealed to you that you were hoping in something (e.g., people's approval, money, food) other than Him to save and satisfy you?

Day 2: Read Hosea 2:1-23

One of God's indictments against Israel was that the people had taken what He had given them—grain, oil, silver, and gold—and they had offered these gifts up to false gods. And we do this all the time as well.

Everything we have belongs to the Lord—He is the giver. Our bodies, our time, our talents, our money, our thoughts, our efforts, our relationships, our homes, our food, our very breath. Every single thing we have is from the Lord. Yet we regularly take all of these gifts and spend them on our own pleasures instead of offering them to God in worship.

But just as with Israel, when we are unfaithful, God remains faithful. He pursues our hearts, and in His kindness, He draws us back to Himself. Only by His patience and grace are we able to turn and once again take everything and offer it back to Him.



When has God pursued you in kindness and enabled you to turn and offer something to Him in worship that you had previously used for selfish purposes?

Day 3: Read Hosea 3:1-5

Gomer had left Hosea and run off to a lover. According to Mosaic law, Hosea could have had her stoned for infidelity (see Deut. 22:13-21). He could have written her a certificate of divorce and married a more faithful woman (Deut. 24:1-4). But in the middle of Gomer's adultery, God commanded Hosea, "Go get her."

Hosea would have been justified to be finished with Gomer, even to deal her harsh consequences. But through Hosea, God was showing His love for His people. In our sinfulness, we turn and offer our worship to people, to comfort, to fame and fortune, and to other gods. By all rights, we deserve His wrath and to be completely cut off from Him forever. But in His great compassion and love, God bought us out of our slavery to sin. He married us to Himself and claimed us as His own. Though we continue in our adulterous ways and sin against Him each day, He continues to forgive, pursue, and restore us to Himself, not because we are worthy but because He is mighty in compassion and grace.



What are some ways you trample upon God's grace in your life?

Day 4: Read Hosea 4:1-14

“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge” (v. 6). Israel, of all nations, was called to know the Lord. Not just to know a list of facts about Him, but to know Him in a deep and intimate relationship. Israel’s story was primarily one of God offering Himself to her. When they were miserable in their slavery in Egypt, He brought them out demonstrating His power and might. He covenanted Himself to Israel and made great and lavish promises, through which He proved Himself time and again to be faithful. But Israel had forgotten.

The people had turned to any god whose name they knew, assuming that each was powerful and cared enough to rescue them. They put faith in nations with strong armies and chariots. God was a distant thought from their minds rather than the all-captivating love of their hearts. He brought trials into their lives because He wanted them to come back. He wanted them not just to know about Him but to be in an intimate, covenant relationship with Him.



How would you describe your relationship with Jesus? Do you merely know many things about Jesus or do you know Him personally by faith?

Day 5: Read Hosea 14:1-9

God desired the repentance of Israel. He wanted them to confess fully that they had put their trust in other gods and to turn back to Him knowing they would receive compassion. God’s promises about how He would act toward Israel when she repented were full of hope: He would heal, He would love, His anger would turn. The same is true for everyone who repents, turns away from idols, and comes to the cross.

But repentance isn’t just a one-time experience when we first turn to Jesus; it’s a daily action, a regular confessing of all the ways that we forsake God and trust in idols. And we, like Israel, can run to God expecting to receive forgiveness and compassion no matter how far we’ve strayed. The finished work of Christ on the cross has paid the full debt of our sins. Every day, we can confess our sin and run back to Jesus knowing that He will heal, He will love, and He holds no condemnation for us (Rom. 8:1-4).



When you are convicted of your sin and confess it to God, how do you think He receives you back? Do you primarily see a God with disappointment holding you at arm’s length or do you see Him free from anger and waiting with open arms of love?

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General Editor—*The Gospel Project*
AUTHOR OF MULTIPLE BOOKS, INCLUDING
*This Is Our Time: Everyday Myths in
Light of the Gospel*

The prophetic books of the Old Testament can be confusing, both to the newcomer to the Bible and the longtime reader.

Where do these prophets fit in the overall narrative of Israel and Judah? What messages did they communicate? What was God doing in and through their work? The benefit of this volume of *The Gospel Project* is that it gives you a glimpse of the prophets right at the point their message was going forth to God's people. We can ask questions of God with Habakkuk, look forward to the coming Suffering Servant with Isaiah, stand amazed at the stunning picture of relentless love in Hosea, and learn something of God's extravagant love with Jonah.

As you work through the sessions in this volume, keep an eye on all the different ways God reveals Himself and communicates His messages of judgment and grace. Fall to your knees in awe, and then stand up and boldly proclaim the love of this great God, who inspired the prophets to deliver His word.

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