

Lessons from Hosea

Around 750 BC, God called upon the prophet Hosea to marry a promiscuous wife named Gomer. Sometime after they were wed, Gomer left him to live with another man. The Bible says she even engaged in prostitution—and Hosea, under God's direction, goes and buys her freedom and brings her home.

Most Bible scholars agree that Hosea was a real person, that these events are historical, and that these events were directed by God as a lived-out object lesson for Israel at that time—but also as an object lesson for us. As the apostle Paul wrote,

Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. Do not be idolaters, as some of them were (1 Corinthians 10:6, 7).

And just a few verses later, Paul emphasizes these things were written for those at the end of time:

These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfilment of the ages has come (1 Corinthians 10:11).

What are the lessons for us today from the life of Hosea and his unfaithful wife?

I have read various Bible commentaries that suggest that the experiences of Hosea were to demonstrate what we sinners have done wrong, help us to empathize with how it makes God feel when we are not faithful to Him, and to demonstrate God's love for us in pursuing us and sacrificing Himself to redeem us.

I certainly agree that these lessons can be derived from the events recorded in the book of Hosea, but I think there is a deeper lesson, one not merely about what we have done wrong but about what is wrong that leads us to do wrong—and God's solution for all of it.

The object lesson in these events has Hosea enacting the role of Jesus (the groom) and Gomer enacting the role of the church (the bride).

What Comes First

According to the story, what came first in the life of Hosea and Gomer: their marriage or her promiscuity and prostitution?

When the LORD first spoke through Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea, "Go, take to yourself a wife of whoredom" (Hosea 1:2).

When the LORD first spoke through Hosea, he said to him, "Go marry a prostitute" (Hosea 1:2).

Her prostitution came before their marriage!

This is an important point to recognize in our lives of sin and God's plan to save and heal us. In every human life since Adam and Eve sinned, what comes first: our being united in marriage with Jesus—or our sinfulness, our fear, selfishness, and having other "loves" that we value more than Jesus?

Is the problem for Hosea that he married a loyal, mature, faithful, and healthy in heart, mind, and spirit wife, who, after being bonded in faithful love to him, is then tempted and falls from a position of virtue and righteousness into prostitution?

Or is it that he marries a person with a history of unfaithfulness, of infidelity, of promiscuity; a person who is already seriously damaged, broken, insecure; someone who comes into the relationship with emotional, psychological, and spiritual wounds; someone with habit patterns of self-gratification, negative thinking, impulsive and emotional decision-making; a wife who enters the marriage feeling so ugly and dirty about herself that she couldn't believe anyone would really love her, that she doesn't deserve to be loved?

Is it possible she didn't feel cherished, valued, beautiful, pure, or precious when Hosea married her but struggled with guilt, shame, unworthiness, and distrust because of her past? And wouldn't it be likely that these past behaviours and practices developed not only harmful behaviour habits but also negative thinking and emotional processing habits?

Do we really think that before Hosea married Gomer, she thought what she was doing was healthy, virtuous, good, righteous, holy, and mature, that her prostitution caused her to be ennobled? Or is it a virtual certainty that she knew that her lifestyle and choices were not good, not healthy, not elevating, not restorative but destructive, yet she found herself helpless in her ability to free herself from the bondage of her choices?

So, was Hosea's act of marrying Gomer intended to show her that her behavior as a prostitute was wrong, or did she already know this? Thus, the object lesson for us must not primarily be about showing us what we are doing wrong. No, the lesson is about what is actually wrong, that there is something wrong in our hearts and minds. And our hearts and minds are already wounded, broken, and infected with fear and selfishness before we come to Christ. We come to Christ like Gomer came to Hosea: sinful, dirty in heart, mind, and character, with long-standing habits of behaving, thinking, and feeling that need to be changed in order for true and loving unity with our Groom can occur.

The Human Sin Problem

Understand how it is that we became sinners. We were born this way! We are born in sin, conceived in iniquity (Psalm 51:5). None of us chose to become sinners. All humans after Adam and Eve sinned are born with this terminal sin condition of fear and selfishness.

Consider an HIV-infected man and woman having a baby born infected with HIV. What did the baby do wrong? Nothing! The baby has no guilt for its condition, but the baby still has a terminal condition that, without remedy, will manifest various symptoms, ultimately resulting in death. This is the condition of every one of us! We are born with a condition that, without remedy, will have various symptoms and ultimately result in death.

But what if the HIV-infected child grows to the point of accountability and a free remedy, free antiviral meds, are offered yet refuses them? Is it their fault they have the infection? No. Is it their fault for refusing the remedy? Yes, and what will happen if they refuse the free remedy—will the doctor who provides the remedy be forced by law to kill them? No, they will die of the untreated and unremoved infection while the doctor mourns because it didn't have to be this way. This is an accurate metaphor of our sin problem, with which we are born.

And that birth defect is being born with a spirit, an animating and motivational energy, of fear and selfishness (2 Timothy 1:7; Psalm 51:5). This motivational spirit of fear leads us to form our sense of self, beliefs, practices, and habits that are selfish, that gratify and protect self, the survival drives. This is why we must be reborn with a new spirit, the Spirit of God (John 3:3). And it is through the indwelling Spirit of God that love and trust are restored in

us, built upon truth and liberty. With this new motive of love and trust built upon truth and liberty, we choose to think new thoughts, form new beliefs, and act in new ways, and those choices form new habits (rewire our brains), and we are transformed, not by our power, strength, or wisdom, but by the divine power of our Creator God of love as we choose to trust Him and follow His truth for our lives.

This is the actual story of Hosea and Gomer. Hosea marries a prostitute, a person who has embedded beliefs, methods, and motives of fear, selfishness, betrayal, and disloyalty, and an inability to love and trust in her heart and character. And such attributes bear inevitable fruit—her sinful behaviour. Her disloyalty to Hosea is the fruit, the natural result, the outgrowth of watering the seeds of fear and selfishness throughout her life. Thus, the problem isn't what she is doing; what she is doing is the fruit of the problem.

Let's be clear: Her dysfunctional and destructive choices do reinforce the problem, strengthening the unhealthy habits, confirming her distorted self-image, and strengthening the guilt, shame, and feelings of unworthiness. But while her actions are not without consequence, they are not the root, the source, the primary issue.

What Gomer needs is to be converted in heart, to have the fear and selfishness replaced with a new life, a new identity, a new spirit of love and trust; and love and trust cannot be restored into a person through law, through legal declaration, through rules, through directives to love, through a marriage license, through power, might, or external control. No, love can be restored only when the person experiences the truth that they are loved by a trustworthy and loving person, and then they choose to respond to the truth and love by being fully truthful in love themselves. They do this by choosing to act upon the motives of love and truth, and they choose to trust rather than distrust which has been based upon fear and selfishness. They choose to open themselves up fully in trust, opening their secret inner self, their true self, by their choice to be honest, to surrender self, and to love and trust their spouse. And when this is done with a Christlike spouse (in other words, their trust is not misplaced), they experience acceptance, love, joy, and peace, which inspires them with greater love, devotion, loyalty, and intention to be ever more faithful. It is only when we first experience God's love and know His goodness, kindness, mercy, and trustworthiness that we feel "safe" enough to stop trying to protect and promote self and surrender to Him. This is why the Bible teaches that God's love and kindness lead us to repentance (Romans 2:4).

A Love That Transforms

Hosea acts the role of God, who is love and truth. And in this object lesson, Hosea takes a broken and damaged wife, a wife of unfaithfulness, a wife who comes to the relationship dirty, unworthy, insecure, full of doubt, a wife whose history is impulsive, selfish, and whose life is filled with harmful choices. He takes this wife for the purpose of pouring his love upon her, and, despite her old self rising up and leading her to betray him, Hosea goes after her and redeems her, loves her, with the goal of leading her to realize her value, her worth to her husband, and ultimately repent, surrendering her old life of fear and selfishness, internalizing the love of her husband, and becoming a loving and trustworthy wife.

Hosea models Christ, who pours out His healing truth and love into the lives of all those who accept Him as Savior and spouse, and despite our woundedness and dark histories, His truth and love, manifested over time, and especially after our biggest betrayals—like

David's sin with Bathsheba and murder of Uriah or Peter's public denial with cursing—when we are fully exposed and no longer able to pretend to ourselves that we are not this sick in heart, that we see Jesus, His love, His patience, His kindness, His concern, His infinite sacrifice to redeem us from the sin-sickness with which we were born, that we are finally won to love and trust and open our hearts to Him fully and die to self, die to fear and selfishness, and are reborn with a new heart and right spirit. It is then, in this surrendered trust to Jesus, based upon His love and trustworthiness, that we are purified and become righteous and are truly united with Him.

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Christ's sacrifice was not done to legally claim we are righteous while we remain unrighteous; it was provided in order to make us righteous; it was to remove the fear, selfishness, insecurity, guilt, shame, feelings of doubt, ugliness, and unworthiness and restore in us His righteousness so that we are reborn, recreated, renewed, rebuilt with a new life, a new spirit, a new motivating animating energy, the love of Christ, built upon trust in our faithful Groom.

For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again (2 Corinthians 5:14, 15).

When we experience the love of Jesus and are won to trust, we open our hearts to Him, die to the old life of fear, and are reborn with a new life, a new spirit, a new animating motivating energy, which is the love of Christ. And that love motivates, moves, animates us to think new thoughts, watch and read noble things, sever ties with destructive people and things, and begin living our lives in harmony with God's design laws, the law of health that He built life to operate upon. It is by receiving His life, His love, into our hearts that we are recreated as new people; and it is by choosing daily to love Him and act upon the motive of love and trust that He renews and cleanses us, purifying us, and uniting us with Him:

Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless (Ephesians 5:25–27).

This cleansing of our hearts and minds from fear and selfishness and renewing us in love and trust is the reality-based, design law understanding of the sin problem and God's solution for it. Understanding that we are born in sin and dying of sin and that refusal to be restored to love and trust in God severs our connection with Him and causes us to die of unremedied sin gives insight into how God must feel when His people betray Him.

God's Heart for the Sinner

Jesus does not respond to betrayal and adultery like a sinful human husband who feels hurt, angry, bitter, resentful, and thinks, "How could you do this to me?" No, Jesus is not concerned with Himself; His concern is for you and me! He knows that adultery injures the adulterer, sears their conscience, hardens their heart, fills them with guilt, shame, and feelings of ugliness and unworthiness, and makes it harder for them to see and believe that they are loved, that they are precious, cherished, and valued. Our sin, our betrayal of God, makes it harder for us to come home to Him, to believe He will still love us. Our sin makes it harder for us to trust, and Jesus and His Father in heaven weep over all our sins,

all our betrayals, because they love us and see us injuring ourselves and running away from them into greater fear, guilt, and shame, and they long so deeply for us to stop, to come home and trust them so they can heal us.

And, thus, Jesus is pictured in heaven standing before the Father and pleading His heart out to you and me to come home. His pleas of love and longing for us are brought to us by the Holy Spirit (John 16:13). Jesus is pleading, “Don’t you realize that your rejection of me, your betrayal, and your going after other gods sears your conscience, hardens your heart, warps your character, and destroys your soul? O, don’t you realize how much I love you? My heart breaks when I see you destroying yourself. Please turn around, please hear me, please stop running from me—come home and I will heal you! You are precious to me, and I have already forgiven you; just come home, and I will cleanse your heart and purify your mind and love you as my precious spouse, doing everything to build you up and make you whole.”

Jesus demonstrated this forgiving love and longing to reach the hearts of the most hardened betrayers when He prayed at His crucifixion, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34).

This is reality! Sin destroys, like cancer destroys, and God hates sin because it destroys the sinners that He loves. The book of Hosea is a powerful object lesson of how much God loves His wayward people, and it documents how God hates losing His people but that love cannot be forced—so all God can do for those who insist on giving their hearts to other gods is to let them go:

My people are obsessed with turning away from me; they call to Baal, but he will never exalt them! How can I give you up, O Ephraim? How can I surrender you, O Israel? (Hosea 11:7, 8).

God’s heart is for us! He doesn’t want to lose anyone. He doesn’t want to let anyone go to eternal destruction. He longs to bring every person home and heal all the damage from sin in their lives.

I encourage you, if you haven’t already done so, to stop running from Jesus, let Him bring you home, open your heart fully to Him, and let His love transform you, cleanse you from all unrighteousness, and heal all your inner wounds. Then choose to live your new life motivated by truth and love as you trust Jesus with your whole heart. And day by day, you will be transformed to be like Jesus.