

LifeWay Explore the Bible Series for December 2: Exposing a broken relationship

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Humans were created for relationship. Genesis 1-2 describe the creation of humanity in terms of relationships. Humanity was created from the dust of the ground with the task of tending the land exercising dominion over the animal kingdom, placing us in relationship with the rest of creation. Woman was created from the rib of the man as a complementary partner placing us in relationship with fellow humans.

We were created by a loving God who carefully crafted us as a potter and walked and talked with us placing us in relationship with God. Relationships certainly are the most rewarding part of life, but they also can be the most challenging to maintain. They are broken easily when trust is violated.

Genesis 3 tells the story of how human sin broke all human relationships. Adam and Eve immediately clothed themselves signifying a break in their relationship with one another. The ground was cursed breaking man's relationship with creation.

People were expelled from the immediate presence of God. This break in our relationship with God created a longing in the human heart to reconnect with that relationship beyond the physical world.

Perhaps no Old Testament book portrays the relationship between God and humanity better than Hosea. Here that vital relationship is presented as a marriage in which humanity as a faithless wife has broken the relationship with the faithful husband, God, by violating the covenant and pursuing

other lovers. Yet as a loving husband, God holds out the possibility of reconciliation.

As we study this book, we find both the source of the longing we feel in that broken relationship as well as the answer in the restoration offered by God.

Unfaithfulness of humanity (Hosea 1:1-2)

While many prophets performed symbolic acts to illustrate their message (see Jeremiah 27), Hosea's entire adult life served to illustrate his message against the people. Here, the prophet stands in the place of God and the people are represented by the wife Hosea is called to marry.

God tells Hosea to marry a woman known to be a harlot. To strengthen the correlation between the specific message of judgment, it is possible this woman, Gomer, was a sacred prostitute in the temple of Baal. Just as Gomer had sought many different lovers, the people of Israel had sought to serve other gods despite their covenant commitment to God. God had established a covenant with them in which the people vowed to serve God alone but had proven to be unfaithful to that vow by worshipping pagan gods. Yet knowing the tendency of the human heart to stray, God had freely entered into this relationship because of God's great love for humanity. Today, we may not feel the temptation to worship pagan idols, but anytime we allow anything to assume a place of priority over our relationship to God, we are guilty of unfaithfulness that breaks that relationship.

Consequences of unfaithfulness (Hosea 2:2-5)

Hosea 1:4-9 report that Hosea and Gomer had three children. As products of this relationship which symbolized the one between God and the people, God instructed Hosea to give them names which symbolized God's judgment on the people because of their unfaithfulness. The names were No Mercy, Not My People and Jezreel, which was the name of a valley where judgment would be carried out.

God wanted the people to understand there were consequences for their unfaithful behavior. Those consequences would take the form of judgment in which the people would lose their place as God's people and God would have no mercy in executing punishment.

Though the names clearly announce this coming judgment, the children are encouraged to plead with their mother, Gomer, to give up her former lifestyle of seeking other lovers and be devoted to her husband. The people apparently had pursued other gods for so long they even had begun to give those gods credit for the blessings which God had given.

Through this image, God was pleading with the people to give up the other gods and return to their true God. If they refused, judgment would not only fall on them, but their children would also suffer.

Today in the church in the United States, it can be easy to fall into comfortable complacency. We often emphasize God's love so strongly we forget that love demands personal holiness on the part of the human object. Just as we seek to teach our children about consequences, we should never forget our actions in relation to God also have consequences including punishment for unfaithfulness.

Possibility of reconciliation (Hosea 3:1-5)

Despite humanity's tendency to wander away from God, God continues to love humanity and desires reconciliation above all else. Out of God's great love for humanity, he not only is willing to take individuals back who return, God has acted in ways intended to draw people back to God. The entire Bible is a record of God's countless attempts to restore the broken relationship. Even when God punishes, it is intended to correct behavior and lead the individual or group back to God.

Verse four is a description of God's ultimate punishment in driving the people out of the Promised Land and into exile. This was the one step which

the people thought God never would take since the land had been such a central part of God's promises to Abraham. Yet God did use the Assyrians and Babylonians to remove the people from the land.

Verse five describes the return of the remnant to the land following the exile. As one looks at the history of the people following the exile, the people never again worshipped false gods. Though it cost the people a generation out of the land, reconciliation was achieved through God's grace.

God's desire is that judgment never should be the final word. All the true prophets in the Bible proclaimed hope along with judgment. That promise is the same today. All the unfaithful followers who are willing to repent always can come home.