

“Scandalous Love” // The Book of Hosea

Announcement

Veronica and I have four kids, and every single one of them has been blessed immensely by our family ministries team. Veronica and I say, **only half-joking**, that if I lost my job here we wouldn't leave the church because that team is so integral in our family development. That team is probably the single greatest value-add we receive from the Summit.

You need the right community and partners to raise your kids well. **And summer** is a great time to connect your family if you aren't plugged in already.

Overview of Series

For the next few weeks we're going to dive into a collection of books you've probably skipped right over in your Bible reading... They contain difficult names like “Habakkuk” and “Haggai” and “Malachi,” that great Italian prophet.

In the Hebrew Bible, the 12 minor prophets constitute ONE book, often referred to simply as “the 12.”

Works Cited:

“A Strong Love in the Same Direction,” Tim Keller

“The True Bridegroom,” Tim Keller

“Hosea,” Bryan Loritts

God Loves the World,” Judah Smith

Hosea, James Montgomery Boice

Most people skip over them, because first, they are called “minor,” so you think, “Well, how important can they be?” And second, they can sound pretty gloomy and doomy.

But these **12 books are not called “minor”** because they are unimportant, but because they are *short*. (And we **all like short things**, right? Prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah wrote these long books; the Minor Prophets were more like the most-read blog posts of the day.)

They were mostly written after Israel had turned its back on God, and in them God lays out his plan of restoration for Israel, pointing to a coming Messiah who would heal and redeem what their sin had messed up.

- *The good news in that is that **if you want to know how to put back together a life after your sin has messed it up, or want to know how to pursue healing in relationships that you have broken, **these books are for you.*****
- **(Plus, like I've told you**, if you're a Christian, one day in heaven you're sure to run into Nahum or Habakkuk and they are going to say, 'How'd you like my book?' and if you've never even read it, it's going to be embarrassing and awkward. So, I'm **trying to save you** from that.)

Hosea is the **first of the 12** because he sets the stage for all that is to come after him.

- **In his book, he gives us one of the most bizarre, yet riveting, illustrations**, of what God's love for his people is actually like.
- It is **scandalous**.

But let me get into it through a story of my own.

Introduction

I had fly to Florida this week, and on my flight there I got bumped up to first class. When I walked up to my seat, this guy was in the seat next to me: **PIC of me and MH FROM PLANE**

For those of you listening in on podcast, that is Mike Huckabee, former Gov of Arkansas, 2x presidential candidate, talk show host... and **I know who he is**. I watch every presidential debate. But I didn't have my filter on for Mike H sitting next to me on a plane. A guy sitting in an untucked shirt slouching next to me. So, I thought, I recognize that guy... and I thought, "I think it might be one of my former seminary professors, or maybe one of our church members at a campus I haven't seen in a while." And the worst thing to do in that situation is act like you don't know the person, so I said, "Hey man! Good to see you! How's it going?" He looked at me, confused, and said, "Hi there?" As soon as the words came out of his mouth, I knew, "You idiot. That's Mike Huckabee."

Then I thought, I hate when somebody finds out I'm a pastor on a plane and they ask me like a bazillion questions and won't let me read or rest, but now I get to be *that guy* with him. It's someone else's turn to be annoyed. "So, talk to me about HC. And what's going on with DT?" **Turns out he was super gracious.**

- I found out **every Sunday morning he drives the golf cart** at his church ferrying people from the parking to the church. He's their Chuck Reed! *Oh yeah, you are too important to volunteer. Mike H is on the parking team.*
- "You look like Mike H." Yes, ma'am, I've heard that. "You sound like Mike H." "Are you Mike H?" Well, yes. "No, you're not."

Anyway, we had a great conversation. Of course, I'm not trying to publicly endorse the politics of Mike Huckabee, **just to say that when**

it comes to celebrities, a lot of people don't know how to act. We tend to be groupies.

Groupies are people who pay a lot of attention to some celebrity who doesn't know or pay attention to them at all.

Some people are like that with movie stars or singers. There's a lot of young teenage girls today in love with Ryan Gosling or Bruno Mars or or Branan Murphy. (**And, you adults, don't judge**—some of you ladies were you in MS you had been convinced you were going to marry Donnie from NKOTB.)

You were going to go to the concert and stand in line with all the other girls wearing tube tops and parachute pants and when he walked by you'd scream 'I love you, Donnie!' and your hope was that he'd turn to you and say, "You got the right stuff, baby, you're the reason why I sing this song." And then you were going to get married.

But **unless your name is Kim Fey or Jenny McCarthy**, or whoever he is married to now—I **don't keep up with him *that much***—that never happened.

- Instead, you married Phil from accounting, a **responsible man** who is slightly overweight, balding, and wears penny loafers.

And now you probably look at middle school girls dreaming about Bieber or Timberlake and you think, *Sorry, sweetheart, it ain't ever goin' to happen.*

- **And maybe you say that with a hint of bitterness**, but that's ok, because part of discipling the next generation is teaching them to live on planet earth.

Life is too short to be a groupie. **A groupie expresses inordinate amounts of love toward someone who shows no interest in them.**

One of the most mind-blowing things in Scripture is that we see God taking this posture with the sinful human race.

Not, of course, in the sense that he is enamored with our greatness, but in the sense that **from the first pages of Genesis to the last chapters of Revelation, we see God reaching out incessantly to a group of people who pay him little attention.**

Which brings us to the book of Hosea. Hosea gives us the most mind-blowing view of the love of God—one that is almost too difficult to believe.

Hosea 1:2

Hosea was a prophet to the Northern Ten Tribes of Israel, and he **has to go down in history as the man who received the worst ministry assignment ever:**

Go and marry a prostitute, and have children with her. (Hosea 1:2)

- You seminary students, how would you like to get **that** assignment upon graduation? All your friends are getting assigned to ministry positions and you are told to go and marry a prostitute?

This will illustrate how (the Northern ten tribes of) Israel has acted like a prostitute by turning against the Lord and worshipping other gods.

Spiritual adultery is the primary biblical illustration of sin. It's a gripping analogy, because few things tear your heart out as much as adultery.

- **Adultery is a betrayal of love.**

¹ **A. W. Pink:** "All religion is in effect love. Faith is thankful acceptance, and thankfulness is an expression of love. Repentance is love mourning. Yearning for holiness is love seeking. Obedience is love pleasing. Self-denial is the mortification of self-love. ... The affections of

- Adultery is when you give **to someone else what you should find in your spouse.**¹

Interestingly, one of the primary sins God identifies in Israel is that she looked to other nations for help instead of God (5:13).²

- **When Israel felt afraid**, or faced financial worries, rather than turning to God, they ran down to Egypt or Assyria and said, "You've got to help us!"
- **That may not sound that immoral, but see**, something else had replaced God as their trust.*

Our primary sin is that we've let other things take the place God is supposed to occupy in our hearts.

So, ask YOURSELF: Where do you **turn when you are worried?**

- **For example, say you are single and you really want to be married**, do you patiently look to God, doing things his way, or do you take things into your own hands, and do them your way?
 - **We have people who come to our church every week** who are living with someone they are not married to because they don't want to do it God's way, so they've taken matters into their own hands.
 - **The primary immortality here is not** the premarital sex, it is your refusal to trust God with your future.
- **Where do you turn when you're stressed?** Alcohol? Shopping?
 - The primary sin is not in the drunkenness or excess spending, but in the fact that turn to something else for comfort beside the promises of God.
- **Or, one more: take your finances**—What do you most look to **for financial security?**

man cannot be idle; if they do not go out to God, they leak out to worldly things. When our love for God decreases, the love of the world grows in our soul."

² John Sailhamer, *NIV Bible Study Commentary*, Loc. 4921.

- **One of the reasons Scripture makes such a big deal** about tithing your firstfruits back to God is it reveals who or what you really trust with your future.
- **We were supposed to trust God with our future**, which meant we joyfully gave away our first 10% as a way of saying, “I trust you to take care of me!”
- **But if you trust primarily in money for your security**, of course we feel like you can’t give money away. That’s all you depend on for the future!
- **And when you say that, you reveal your real immorality**—the real immorality is not in withholding the 10%; the real immorality is that the trust you should be putting into God you have put into money.

God was to be our joy, our delight, our confidence, and our trust! But Israel, like this prostitute, sought those things in something or someone else. And our **betrayal of God** broke his heart.

And God said to Hosea, I want to illustrate that for everyone, so go love a woman who will be unfaithful to you.

[3] So he went and took Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son.*

- To make matters worse, the girl’s name “**Gomer**.” If you are looking for biblical names for your daughter, I would not suggest “Gomer.”
- (I only know of one other Gomer, and it was a dude. (The goofy Marine guy on Gomer Pyle.)
- **Hosea didn’t just go through the formalities**, either. He genuinely tried to love her and start a family with her.

But, shortly thereafter, **Gomer returns to her old ways**. She said, “I will (again) go after my lovers...” (2:5)*

- She does it in broad daylight where everyone asks, “Isn’t that Hosea’s wife?”
- Eventually she leaves Hosea for some man who pays her for sex. To make matters worth, this new guy abuses her.

Hosea pleads with her to come back, but, insanely, she won’t.

- **(2:8)** He even gives the man she is living with money to take care of her!

Eventually, this new “lover” gets so tired of her that he tries to sell her back into the sex-slave trade.

..And then God appears to Hosea with a second assignment: “Go again, love this woman who is... an adulteress...”

- **Keep in mind, will you, that Hosea is a real person, just like you or me.** **What had to be going through his mind?** “Buy her back? But, God she humiliated me. After giving her everything, she scorned me and embarrassed me. Why would I go after her again?”

But God was trying to make a point: *even as the LORD loves the children of Israel, though they turn to other gods.” (**Hosea 3:1**)³

And so, Hosea went to the auction.

- **Scholars say Gomer would have been stripped naked** so that potential buyers could see what they were bidding on.
- And here, in the midst of a crowd of men who only want to take advantage of her body, stands Hosea, who just wants to love and protect her.

Which leads me to the first reflection on the love of God:

³ Bring this up with the previous part of the verse, one slide.

1. God's love (if we really see it the way it is) scandalizes us

- **Any of us** in Hosea's situation would have felt perfectly justified in walking away.
- Sometimes we wonder things like how God could have the audacity to judge us, as if God's anger toward our sin is too harsh.
- But **any time we are put into a position similar to what** he is in, we rage with righteous anger.
 - And **yet God kept coming** for us.
- **What Hosea was doing, by the way, was not required by Hebrew law**—in Leviticus 20, God had said that a man in that situation could divorce his wife, even have her stoned for her unfaithfulness!
- It was a divinely appointed loophole.
 - **But God wasn't looking for a loophole.**
 - **His** love drove him beyond the legal requirements of the law.

He could very easily have walked away—and been fully justified, but inexplicably, he set his love on us.

11:8 might be the most remarkable verse in the OT: "Oh, how can I give you up, Israel? How can I let you go? My heart is torn within me! (Hosea 11:8)"

I love that verse, because it shows us something absolutely staggering about the love of God: God had so united his heart with us that he can't let us go!

- **I recently talked with a theologically minded** guy who didn't like the phrase we sing "you didn't want heaven without us" that we sing in the song **"What a Beautiful Name It Is."** He said it makes God sound needy, like God needs us to be happy.
- **And I understand the concern**—but LOOK AT this verse! How can I give you up? How can I let you go?

According to this verse, God has bound up his happiness in ours. That's how you feel when you love someone. Your happiness is bound up in theirs.

- **(Never be happy again?) This is how God feels about us.**
 - But what is amazing is that we weren't his children. We were his enemies.
 - **In the Ephesians series I told you...**
- **Theologian J.I. Packer:** "By his own free voluntary choice, God will not know perfect and unmixed happiness again till he has brought every one of his children to heaven."⁴
- **I've heard it compared to adoption:** When a family adopts, it's not that they were unhappy *before* they adopted the child, but *from that point forward*, they bind their happiness to the happiness of that child.
- **In one sense, my friend was right: God didn't need us. God was happy before he made us;** we would have been justified had he destroyed us after he sinned; but God so wrapped up his emotions up in our pain so that he could not be happy until we were happy.

Gomer's name may not sound pleasant to our ears, but it means "completion" in Hebrew.

- Hers may not be a beautiful name, but it teaches a beautiful truth: God will not be complete in happiness again until he has fully redeemed and restored us.

Here's the 2nd thing we learn about the love of God...

2. God's love eviscerated him

- (Sorry for the SAT word—I couldn't come up with a better one—it meant it cut his heart out)
- **Purchasing Gomer** this second time evidently broke Hosea financially.

⁴ J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, 125.

- Here's how we know: *So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and a homer and a lethech of barley. (3:2)
- Scholars say **30 shekels was the going price of a slave** in those days. The fact that Hosea could only come up with 15 and had to pay the rest in kind indicates he didn't have the rest.
- This pointed forward to Jesus, who was not financially eviscerated, but literally eviscerated to save us. He poured out his own blood so we could be restored.
 - One of our pastors said that he was born to a single mom who was a drug addict. He said, "My grandmother pled with my mom to stop because she was destroying not only her life but mine also. Eventually it became clear that my mom was not going to change her ways.
 - She could have turned her in.
 - Put us up for fostering or adoption.
 - Cut her daughter off.
 - But it would have removed the possibility of reconciliation.
 - And she didn't want to remove the possibility of reconciliation from her mom.

So, in her late 60's she took us in, and kept the lines of communication open. She prayed for my mom.

Eventually, God broke through. My mom got off drugs. I was restored to her. Our family is reconciled because my poor grandmother literally held the door of reconciliation and redemption open.

- **This is what Jesus did on the cross.** He took the consequences of our sin into his body, holding the gates of heaven open for us, if we would just receive it.
- And what a price he paid! The cat of 9 tails; the nails, the crown of thorns—This is what he went through because he didn't want heaven without us.

The only way to respond to this love is total.

- Reject him as a phony and fraud and walk away, or fall down on your knees in adoration and surrender.
- But **please, please don't patronize God with half-hearted commitment** or lethargic worship. He's worthy of more than that.

3. God's love persists until the end

3:1 is the recurring theme of Hosea: (*"Go again, love this woman who is... an adulteress... **Hosea 3:1**) And again. And again.

- Don't give up on her, because I'm not going to give up on you, either.
- **Throughout the book, Hosea points to two events**—one in the past and one in the future, as examples of God's salvation.
 - The one in the past is the Exodus: where God redeemed Israel out of slavery to foreign gods from Egypt.
 - That, Hosea says, serves as the pattern for how he will deliver his people in the future.
 - Again, he says, "out of Egypt I called my son." Hos 11:1, cited in Matt 2:15
 - Matthew cites this prophecy as being fulfilled when Joseph and Mary and Jesus had to escape to Egypt shortly after Jesus was born because Herod was trying to kill all the little boys under 2 years old. Several months (maybe years) later God brought Jesus back up out of Egypt.
- It's an **amazing prophecy**. But the takeaway for you is this. God did not give up on Israel when Israel failed him. In Hosea, he says, "I redeemed you the first time, and you forgot about me. But I'm coming back for you. And this time I'll purchase you with my own blood."
- **This is how God continues to feel about you.**
 - **When you fall back into sin, God says to his Son, "Go again."**
 - When you forget him, he says, "Go again."
 - When you fall back into those same sins God delivered you from the first time, Go again.

- When you are feeling the pain and heartache that comes from stupid, sinful choices you have made: *Go again. Go again. Go again!*

Now maybe you ask, “What if you keep rejecting him?”

- Yes, he **won’t force** himself on you. Scripture says we can harden our heart to him and reject him.
- But friend, the last voice you’ll hear as you step off into the abyss is God saying, “You don’t have to do that, just turn back to me.”
- **All you have to do is look up** and he stands ready to receive you. **Even right now!**
- **Listen**—your sin, your bad habits, your struggles, your past—none of these things send you to hell; only your unwillingness to look up and receive grace does.
- **The grace is there, just look upwards in faith!**

4. God’s love is power, not reward*

- **Don’t miss that Hosea’s love was offered to this woman** *while* she was a prostitute, and again when she was an adulterer.
 - She **didn’t have to free herself** from prostitution and clean herself up first in order to merit his love. He offered it to her unconditionally, freely, while she was a prostitute.
- And this teaches us **how we can escape the bondage of sin**. Most people think they have to **clean themselves up and make a bunch of changes** and then God will receive them.
- **In Christianity, however, acceptance and forgiveness and unconditional love** come first—and then change follows.
- **One of the most riveting examples** of this is Jesus’ own encounter with the woman caught in the act of adultery in John 8. Jesus encountered his own Gomer. **JOHN 8:11.**

- He knew she’d **never have the power** to break the addiction to the attention of guys until...
- **God’s love is the power that liberates us from captivity, not the reward for having liberated ourselves.**
- **You see, you sin because you feel like you are missing something. And you are**—the eternal love of God for which you were created.
- The gospel is that **in Christ, God offers you...**
 - Complete forgiveness—Jesus took the penalty for it all;
 - His righteousness—he not only takes away your sin, he gives you his position of righteousness. **Illus.** You handed in his answers to the test.
- **This is all a gift—it’s what we call “gift” righteousness.** It will give you the power to change.
 - **Luther: talked about how much he hated the phrase** “the righteousness of God.” Because he thought it was the standard God used to judge him.
 - *“But at last, by the mercy of God... I began to understand that the righteousness of God is righteousness with which the merciful God justifies us by faith. Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates.”⁵*
 - **That freedom**, Luther said, replaced hatred for God in his heart with love for God, and snapped his attraction to idols.
 - **The gospel of God’s grace, he said, did in my heart what no law could ever do.** It changed my heart.
 - **He went on to say: The only ones who get better** in the Christian life are those who know their acceptance does not depend on them getting better.

⁵ That gift turns haters of God into lovers of God. Luther: I hated that word ‘righteousness of God,’ which I had been taught to understand is the righteousness with which God punishes the unrighteous sinner... (hated God, too). Luther, *Preface to the Latin Writings*, 1545.

5. God's love turns "Gomers" into "Hoseas"

- God not only **wanted Hosea to learn about his love for his people**, he wanted him to become a giver of that kind of love.
- **So, he says to Hosea, "Go again, go again, go again, Hosea...** because that's what I do with you every time."
- He wants us, who have experienced his outstretched arms, to **become the outstretched arms of Hosea... So**
 - To the **parent** who has been forsaken by their child...
 - To the **husband** who feels neglected...
 - To the **minority** who has been sidelined,
 - **the boss** who feels misunderstood...
 - To the **friend** who has been forsaken...
 - The **wife** who has been taken for granted...
 - Go again, go again, go again, Hosea...
- **I'm not saying your outstretched arms will always change the Gomers in your life.**
 - Sometimes Gomers (*like the one in this story, don't change. Hosea prophesied to the Northern tribes, and they never repented.*)
- **But I can guarantee doing this will change YOU.** It'll make you more like Jesus. And that's been God's **objective** for you from the beginning
 - For whom he foreknew, he predestined to be conformed to the image of his son... All things now work together that good, to them who are called according to his purpose (Rom 8:29, 28).
 - *Your situation is not that dramatic—but we all have Gomers in our lives... people who mistreat us, take us for granted, treat us unkindly... the Gomers in your life are there to make you more like Jesus, God's greatest plan for you.*

MUSIC

Donald Grey Barnhouse: The pursuing love of God is *the greatest wonder in the spiritual universe*. When we see this love at work through the heart of Hosea we may wonder if God is really like that. **But he is.**

Think about it: Many years later he would give man the ability to form the iron in the ground he had given him into nails, and to fashion the trees in the field he had created into a cross... Then he stretched out his hands upon that tree and allowed us to nail him there, and in so doing he took our sins upon himself. *This is our God, and there is no one else like him.*⁶

Amen? And when you see that, you'll start to become like him. You'll become a Hosea to the Gomers in your life.

Maybe the hymn writers say it best:

And can it be...

*I stand amazed in the presence of Jesus the Nazarene, and wonder how he could love me, a sinner condemned unclean? He took my sins and my sorrow, and he made them his very own; he bore my burden to Calvary, and suffered and died alone! **How marvelous, how wonderful, and my song will ever be, how marvelous how wonderful, is my Savior's love for me!***

Let me **invite you to stand**, and release yourself to this love, in total abandonment and respond to God like people who really believe it!

⁶ Donald Grey Barnhouse, "Epistle to the Romans," Part 37 (Philadelphia: The Bible Study Hour, 1952), 1841.

Luther: to progress is always to begin again! Or, in the words of Chance the Rapper, *"Y'all this ain't just the intro, it's the entrée."*

