

COME, LET'S RETURN TO *THE LORD*

unit 14 | session 3



CHRIST CONNECTION

Hosea's relationship with Gomer reminds us of God's relationship with the people of Israel and with us. Even though we are unfaithful and love many other things more than Him, God still loves us. God's love sent Jesus to die on the cross for our sin to bring us back to Him.

UNWAVERING LOVE OF GOD

This week, we're covering the passages and main points below. But we encourage you to dig in and read all of the content on this timeline.

Hosea 1–14

GOD'S LOVE IS CONSTANT

HOSEA 1:1-3

1 The word of the LORD that came to Hosea, the son of Beeri, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel. 2 When the LORD first spoke through Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea, "Go, take to yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the LORD." 3 So he went and took Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son.

HOSEA 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'S LOVE IS SURE

HOSEA 6:1-6

1 After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him. 3 Let us know; let us press on to know the LORD; his going out is sure as the dawn; he will come to us as the showers, as the spring rains that water the earth." 4 What shall I do with you, O Ephraim? What shall I do with you, O Judah? Your love is like a morning cloud, like the dew that goes early away. 5 Therefore I have hewn them by the prophets; I have slain them by the words of my mouth, and my judgment goes forth as the light. 6 For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings

HOSEA 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.

MAIN POINT.

God pursues us even when we're unfaithful.



THEOLOGY CONNECTION

BRIDE OF CHRIST

The church is described as the bride of Christ, faithfully waiting for the day when Christ will return and heaven and earth will be one. Made up of all believers from all languages and nations, the church is the bride that Christ redeemed. The picture of a bride also speaks to the permanence of Christ's relationship with the church, for marriage was intended by God to be a lasting covenant between a man and a woman (Gen. 2:24; Matt. 19:5).

DISCUSSION

GOD'S LOVE IS CONSTANT

HOSEA 1:1-3; 3:1-5

- Are you shocked to read God's command to Hosea (1:2)? What could God's purpose be in this?
-  • How has Israel been like an unfaithful wife? How are we?
-  • How does Hosea's purchasing Gomer back (3:2) mirror what Christ has done for us? What was her responsibility (3:3)—and ours?

GOD'S LOVE IS SURE

HOSEA 6:1-6; 14:1-4

- How does not being able to depend on someone you love make you feel?
-  • How is God's love (6:3) contrasted with Israel's love (6:4)? Honestly examine your love for God. How would you describe it?
-  • Based on these passages, what did God want from Israel? What could Israel be sure of in return?



WHY DO WE SOMETIMES FEEL LIKE WE CAN'T RETURN TO THE LORD WHEN WE STRAY? HOW CAN YOU TAKE STEPS TO RETURN TO HIM NOW?

CULTURAL CONNECTION

Think about it: Would we really want to serve a God who didn't care if we're unfaithful to Him? What would it show about God's character if He was okay with us saying we love Him yet not living like it? What would it say about His own love for us? We wouldn't be okay with a spouse being unfaithful to us, yet we make excuses to justify our unfaithfulness to the Lord. It simply doesn't make sense that we hold a spouse to a high standard of faithfulness and then justify lowering expectations for our faithfulness to the Lord. The truth that God demands our faithfulness is proof of His own faithfulness. God is love (1 John 4:8). His very nature is to love us perfectly. And because of this, God wants us to love Him in the same way. Even though we can't ever be perfect, we can be faithful. God keeps all of His promises to us, and He desires for us to keep our vows to Him. This is only proof of God's absolute goodness.



DAY ONE

LUKE 15:11-24

Have you ever had a horrible day and treated others unkindly because of it? They didn't do anything to deserve it, but they became the target of your bad mood. We've all been there, and we usually do this to the people we love the most. Maybe this is because deep down we realize they'll still love us afterwards; we know they'll forgive us even after they see our worst moments. In a way, we take for granted their kindness and love.

Jesus told a parable—a relatable story that teaches a truth—about a father and his sons. The passage is typically titled something like, “The Parable of the Lost Son.” Many of us probably identify with this lost son. He was careless; he wanted his inheritance in advance and then wasted it with reckless living. He got offtrack for a while; he lost his way and wasn't sure if his father would ever let him come home. In his shame, the son formed an argument ahead of time to convince his father to take him back. But maybe the parable should be titled, “The Parable of the Forgiving Father,” because it revealed so much about our Father in heaven. The son approached his home shamefully, but the father stood watching for the son's return, straining his eyes to watch for him. And when the son “was still a long way off” (v. 20), the father ran toward him and embraced him. This is the heart of God. When we get offtrack and stray from Him—like Israel did so often—we can return in repentance. When we approach God with repentant hearts, He embraces us. As His children, we can't do anything not to be His children. His love for us is secure, and through the blood of Christ, our salvation and identity are secure.

- **WHEN HAVE YOU ACTED LIKE THE LOST SON?**
- **HOW DOES THIS PASSAGE SHAPE YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF GOD'S CHARACTER AS A FATHER?**

PRAY

FATHER, THANK YOU FOR CALLING ME BACK TO
YOUR HEART WHEN I STRAY FROM YOU. THANK
YOU FOR LOVING ME WITH A LOVE THAT IS SECURE.
THANK YOU FOR MAKING ME A PART OF YOUR
FAMILY THROUGH YOUR SON'S SACRIFICE.



DAY TWO

JOEL 2:12-13

Have you ever realized someone's apology wasn't sincere? Or maybe you made an apology that wasn't sincere. Apologizing with our words but not our hearts is easy. We might even do all the things that come with sincerely being sorry, like crying. But if change doesn't accompany the apology, then it's only an outward show.

The prophet Joel urged the people of Israel to apologize sincerely. Sure, it might have been easy to appear sorry. An outward expression of repentance in ancient Jewish culture was the act of tearing, or rending, one's garment; doing so conveyed a sense of grief and sorrow over sin. But Joel made an important point for Israel: God, who sees the heart, isn't impressed by outward shows of repentance. Instead of directing the people to tear, or rend, their clothes, Joel urged them to tear their hearts. In other words, Joel explained the necessity of heart change that must take place when we repent. Here's the truth: We can't trick God into thinking we're sorry. He sees past our outward expression and into our heart; He knows if we're sincere. And though we may convince other people that we're sorry for our sin, our inward brokenness matters to the Lord—our broken and humbled heart (Ps. 51:17). Notice what Joel said, "Yet even now"—even now, when you've strayed so far; even now, when you've bowed before idols; even now, when you've trusted in false gods; even now, when you've not kept your promises—"return to me with all your heart." God's plea to Israel is the same plea He makes to us to return to Him with all of our heart.

- **HOW CAN YOU TELL WHEN SOMEONE IS TRULY SORRY?**
- **WHAT WOULD IT LOOK LIKE FOR YOU TO "REND YOUR HEART" WHEN IT COMES TO REPENTANCE?**

PRAY

GOD, I'VE BEEN GUILTY OF REPENTING WITH MY ACTIONS AND NOT MY HEART. I PRAY THAT MY HEART WOULD BREAK OVER MY SIN. CHANGE ME FROM THE INSIDE OUT.



DAY THREE

1 JOHN 4:8-10

Love is a word we hear constantly. Pay attention next time you're scrolling on social media or watching television. In our culture, we claim to love a lot of different things. We love certain movies and songs; we love teams and athletes; we love specific brands and foods. Honestly, we love to use the word love. And because we overuse it, we often misuse it. In movies and television shows, characters fall in love after only a few days. And though this might be entertaining, it also contributes to our cheapened understanding of love.

God's love is richer than any love we experience here. We can't adequately compare it to human love. Even thinking of God's love as similar to parents' love for their children doesn't quite capture it; though our parents' love for us is deep, it's still imperfect. It still comes short of God's perfect love for us. John described God's love as this: He sent His Son to be a sacrifice for our sin (v. 10). God sent His Son to take our place. He loved us before we could love Him in return—despite the fact that many of us would reject Him. He loved us when we were still living in rebellion. He loved us though it was for our sin that Jesus bled, suffered, and died. John put it this way: God is love. We've cheapened it to mean so many other things. We've reduced it to an emotional response or to a strong like for something. But love is God Himself. It's sacrificial. To be sure, we're blessed to experience love from people here. It's an imperfect glimpse though. Love here points us to a greater love—the love of God, which we can see reflected in Jesus.

- **HOW WOULD YOU DEFINE "LOVE"?**
- **WHY DOES JOHN DESCRIBE GOD AS LOVE? WHAT DOES THIS MEAN TO YOU?**

PRAY

**FATHER, THANK YOU FOR SHOWING ME WHAT
PERFECT LOVE LOOKS LIKE THROUGH THE LIFE
AND DEATH OF YOUR SON. THANK YOU FOR BEING
PERFECT LOVE.**



DAY FOUR

1 JOHN 4:15-19

Let's think about something that is reality for many of us but something we don't want to think about: People who say they love us sometimes leave. Sometimes, parents choose something else over their children. Sometimes, friends betray us. Sometimes, people who love us make hurtful decisions. If you've experienced anything like this—and maybe almost everyone does—then it can alter the way you understand love. It can even make you feel hesitant or distrusting. Worse than that, being hurt by someone we love can cause us to fear that God's love may fail us one day too.

In this passage, John continued to paint an accurate view of God's love for us. Yesterday, we read about how God is love—perfect love. He loved us before we could love Him in return. But we must understand what His perfect love is like. In today's passage, John explained that God's love remains with us. It stays. God's love never, ever leaves. John also explained that God's love gives us confidence because it's not rooted in judgment. In fact, because Christ took the punishment we deserved on Himself, we get to enjoy freedom from condemnation. John also pointed to the truth that God's love casts out fear. Fear has no room in our lives because God's love is so sure, so kind, so sacrificial. We don't have to fear that His love for us will run out or lessen if we mess up. Instead, being loved by Love Himself motivates us even more to love Him in return. We love because He loved us first. When we look at love in this light, we see the ways human love pales in comparison. We see that God's love for us is dependable, like the rising of the sun. Next time you're hit with the reminder that love here on earth sometimes hurts, be also reminded that your Father in heaven loves you perfectly.

- **HOW HAS LOVE HERE AFFECTED YOUR VIEW OF GOD'S LOVE, POSITIVELY OR NEGATIVELY?**
- **WHAT DESCRIPTION OF GOD'S LOVE IN THIS PASSAGE AFFECTS YOU THE MOST? WHY?**

PRAY

GOD, KNOWING THAT YOU LOVE ME WITH A LOVE THAT IS DEPENDABLE GIVES ME SECURITY AND PEACE. I PRAISE YOU THAT I CAN LOVE YOU IN RETURN. I CAN REST KNOWING YOUR LOVE WILL NEVER LESSEN OR LEAVE.



DAY FIVE

2 TIMOTHY 2:11-13

Have you ever done something that wasn't in your normal character? For instance, maybe you're really shy, but you sang in front of a huge crowd. Or maybe you're normally terrified of roller coasters, but you rode the tallest, wildest one at a theme park. Maybe you normally have integrity, but you cheated on a test in a moment of panic. Sometimes, we do things that don't match up with who we are on most days, and like these examples, this can be good or bad.

Our character shifts sometimes, meaning we don't always stay true to who we are. Our character traits are not absolutes; they aren't certain or without fail. For instance, we may be mostly honest, but even if we have one moment of dishonesty, then we're not absolutely honest. We may be mostly kind, but even if we're unkind only once, then we're not absolutely kind. We let circumstances and the people we're around affect our decisions. Even those of us who try really hard to be authentic still sometimes shift. We make mistakes and slip up. But God's character is absolute, meaning He never shifts or changes. He is absolutely loving, absolutely kind, absolutely righteous. And in the passage today, we read that God is absolutely faithful. As believers, we still fall into sinful behaviors. While we may try to be faithful, we will be unfaithful at times. But God is faithful in a way that is perfect. Even when we are unfaithful to Him—even when Israel was unfaithful to Him—He simply cannot be unfaithful because it's not even a possibility for Him. His faithfulness is sure and steady; we can count on it in the same way we can count on His love. God will be faithful to His own character and to us.

- **WHEN HAVE YOU ACTED AGAINST YOUR TYPICAL CHARACTER, MAYBE IN A GOOD OR BAD WAY?**
- **WHY DOES IT MATTER THAT GOD'S CHARACTER IS ABSOLUTE? WHAT WOULD IT SAY ABOUT HIM IF IT WASN'T?**

PRAY

**GOD, IT'S DIFFICULT TO EVEN WRAP MY MIND
AROUND THE TRUTH THAT YOU NEVER SHIFT; YOUR
CHARACTER NEVER CHANGES. I TAKE COMFORT IN
KNOWING THAT YOU'RE ALWAYS FAITHFUL EVEN
WHEN I'M UNFAITHFUL.**