

RETURN TO LOVE AND JUSTICE

Lesson Scripture: Hosea 11-12

Focus Scripture: Hosea 11:1-2, 7-10; 12:1-2, 6-14

*Key Verse: Hold fast to love and justice, and wait continually for your God.
Hosea 12:6 (NRSV)*

HOSEA 11:1-2, 7-10; 12:1-2, 6-14 (NRSV)

Hosea 11:1-2

1 When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.

2 The more I called them, the more they went from me; they kept sacrificing to the Baals, and offering incense to idols.

7-10

7 My people are bent on turning away from me. To the Most High they call, but he does not raise them up at all.

8 How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, O Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I treat you like Zeboiim? My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender.

9 I will not execute my fierce anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim; for I am God and no mortal, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath.

10 They shall go after the Lord, who roars like a lion; when he roars, his children shall come trembling from the west.

12:1-2

1 Ephraim herds the wind, and pursues the east wind all day long; they multiply falsehood and violence; they make a treaty with Assyria, and oil is carried to Egypt.

2 The Lord has an indictment against Judah, and will punish Jacob according to his ways, and repay him according to his deeds.

6-14

6 But as for you, return to your God, hold fast to love and justice, and wait continually for your God.

7 A trader, in whose hands are false balances, he loves to oppress.

8 Ephraim has said, "Ah, I am rich, I have

HOSEA 11:1-2, 7-10; 12:1-2, 6-14 (KJV)

Hosea 11:1-2

1 When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt.

2 As they called them, so they went from them: they sacrificed unto Baalim, and burned incense to graven images.

7-10

7 And my people are bent to backsliding from me: though they called them to the most High, none at all would exalt him.

8 How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together.

9 I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim: for I am God, and not man; the Holy One in the midst of thee: and I will not enter into the city.

10 They shall walk after the Lord: he shall roar like a lion: when he shall roar, then the children shall tremble from the west.

12:1-2

1 Ephraim feedeth on wind, and followeth after the east wind: he daily increaseth lies and desolation; and they do make a covenant with the Assyrians, and oil is carried into Egypt.

2 The Lord hath also a controversy with Judah, and will punish Jacob according to his ways; according to his doings will he recompense him.

6-14

6 Therefore turn thou to thy God: keep mercy and judgment, and wait on thy God continually.

7 He is a merchant, the balances of deceit are in his hand: he loveth to oppress.

8 And Ephraim said, Yet I am become rich, I

gained wealth for myself; in all of my gain no offense has been found in me that would be sin."

9 I am the Lord your God from the land of Egypt; I will make you live in tents again, as in the days of the appointed festival.

10 I spoke to the prophets; it was I who multiplied visions, and through the prophets I will bring destruction.

11 In Gilead there is iniquity, they shall surely come to nothing. In Gilgal they sacrifice bulls, so their altars shall be like stone heaps on the furrows of the field.

12 Jacob fled to the land of Aram, there Israel served for a wife, and for a wife he guarded sheep.

13 By a prophet the Lord brought Israel up from Egypt, and by a prophet he was guarded.

14 Ephraim has given bitter offense, so his Lord will bring his crimes down on him and pay him back for his insults.

have found me out substance: in all my labours they shall find none iniquity in me that were sin.

9 And I that am the Lord thy God from the land of Egypt will yet make thee to dwell in tabernacles, as in the days of the solemn feast.

10 I have also spoken by the prophets, and I have multiplied visions, and used similitudes, by the ministry of the prophets.

11 Is there iniquity in Gilead? surely they are vanity: they sacrifice bullocks in Gilgal; yea, their altars are as heaps in the furrows of the fields.

12 And Jacob fled into the country of Syria, and Israel served for a wife, and for a wife he kept sheep.

13 And by a prophet the Lord brought Israel out of Egypt, and by a prophet was he preserved.

14 Ephraim provoked him to anger most bitterly: therefore shall he leave his blood upon him, and his reproach shall his Lord return unto him.

INTRODUCTION

One Bible scholar said of Hosea 11, that in it "we penetrate deeper into the heart and mind of God than anywhere in the Old Testament." In this passage, the prophet used the parent-child relationship imagery to highlight the relationship between God and God's people. In the infant years, the child is helpless and fully dependent on the care of the parent(s). A good parent feeds, clothes, and protects the child. In return the child respects, honors, and obeys the parent(s). Generally, when the child follows the guidance of the parent, life goes well. When the child, with limited knowledge and understanding, disobeys and gives in to impulses, life gets more

difficult. Sometimes parents have to discipline their children. The correction measures may be mild or severe. But, the good parent always applies the "rod of correction" in love.

This story of the relationship between God and the Israelites had all these elements. When Israel was small and helpless, God cared for the nation and guided it out from a harsh life in Egypt to a blessed land, the Promised Land. When Israel thought it had become "of age," it rebelled and fell into idolatry and injustices. God, out of love and justice, had to call Israel to account. Even in times of judgment, God's love for Israel always shone brightly.

TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

The importance of the book of Hosea is reflected in its many New Testament cross-references. For example, Hosea 11:1 mirrors Matthew 2:15. Also, in Hosea 12:8, we see how prosperity can lure people into dangerous self-delusion which ends in idolatry. The same thought is found at Revelation 3:17. In the story, the prophet, at the prompting of God, noted that when Israel was in a helpless stage, God loved and cared for the nation. But when the nation grew stronger and prosperous, it forgot God and aligned with idol-worship. Still, because of the God's unflinching love and God's promises to the nation's ancestors, God stuck with Israel. God led and shielded Israel when that was needed.

However, the nation was ungrateful and did not show the respect and worship due to their eternal Father.

When Israel found itself under threat by its enemies, it again insulted God. Rather than look to the ever-faithful God, the Israelites looked for security in frail human allies. It seemed like all God did for the people was not enough to gain

their respect and loyalty. So God had to act to show the nation the level of evil in it. God was about to chastise the nation. This correction was not designed to destroy the nation. Ultimately, it would pull the nation back to God. Oh, how God lamented the lies, deception, and injustice that ran rampant throughout Israel! As a footnote, it was noted that Israel's sister, Judah, was no different. Both were "drinking milk" from idols.

“ God was calling them away from widespread fraud, corruption, and the delusion which flowed among them.

In the passage, we can see that God was really hurt by Israel's and Judah's ungodly behavior. This was especially so because they had an example to follow in their father, Jacob. They could have used Jacob's experience to keep on track and gain favor from God, the same way Jacob did. Again,

because of God's deep love for Jacob's children, God pleaded for the nations of Israel and Judah to return to a proper relationship with God. God was calling them away from widespread fraud, corruption, and the delusion which flowed among them. Israel and Judah obviously did not learn from the punishment which God had served in the past to the peoples

who had turned their backs on God.

SANKOFA

When we look at parent-child relationships in African societies, we see some features that have already disappeared from many other societies. As highlighted in a study in Ghana (shared on Brill.com), the hallmarks of these relationships are respect, reciprocity, and responsibility. Both the child and the parents are expected to follow the customs which revolve around these three Rs. But in African culture, these three Rs extend beyond the biological parents into the wider society. Therefore, the wider community takes much responsibility for raising children in the right way. This is a major point in the book by Hillary Clinton, *It Takes a Village*.

As believers, we can learn a lot by thinking about the metaphor of the child-parent relationship used in Hosea 11 and 12. Despite our adult status in the physical sense, we are but babes in relation to God and the overall wisdom of life. Just like little helpless babes, we

need God so desperately to look out for us. For without God we make an unholy mess of our lives. And, like in the context of African society, we have a whole heavenly community looking out for us. The major players in that community are the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They are joined by all the heavenly hosts. Yes, there are those who want us to succeed within God's definition of success. We must remember this in tough times. We are not on our own.


CASE STUDY

We make the assumption that all participants in this lesson know well the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15, as a descriptive example of love. As said in the Shakespearean play, *Macbeth*, let us make sure – doubly sure. Here's *The Message*

version of "The Lost Son":

Then Jesus said, "There was once a man who had two sons. The younger said to his father, 'Father, I want right now what's coming to me.'

"So the father divided the property between them. It wasn't long before the younger son packed his bags and left for



For without God we
make an unholy mess of
our lives.

a distant country. There, undisciplined and dissipated, he wasted everything he had. After he had gone through all his money, there was a bad famine all through that country and he began to hurt. He signed on with a citizen there who assigned him to his fields to slop the pigs. He was so hungry he would have eaten the corncobs in the pig slop, but no one would give him any.

"That brought him to his senses. He said, 'All those farmhands working for my father sit down to three meals a day, and here I am starving to death. I'm going back to my father. I'll say to him, Father, I've sinned against God, I've sinned before you; I don't deserve to be called your son. Take me on as a hired hand.' He got right up and went home to his father.

"When he was still a long way off, his father saw him. His heart pounding, he ran out, embraced him, and kissed him. The son started his speech: 'Father, I've sinned against God, I've sinned before you; I don't deserve to

be called your son ever again.'

"But the father wasn't listening. He was calling to the servants, 'Quick. Bring a clean set of clothes and dress him. Put the family ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Then get a grain-fed heifer and roast it. We're going to feast! We're going to have a wonderful time! My son is here – given up for dead and now alive! Given up for lost and now found!'

And they began to have a wonderful time."
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And God in a display
of perfect love must
allow us to make our
own choices under the
free will God gave us.

The only story that depicts the child-parent relationship better than that is Christ on the cross at Calvary. We gave this modern translation to highlight this "home run" in a language we probably understand best. Left to ourselves, we might make a mess of most things. And God in a display of perfect love must allow us to make our own choices under the free will God gave us. Oh, how the Father's heart breaks when we in disobedience run wild and ruin our lives, and the lives of others connected to us. Thanks be to God, our Father is forever looking, ever yearning

for us to return. And, although we return with the hurts, scars, and the stench of sin, our Father receives us and makes us ready for the party of all parties; the party of eternal life. Oh, what a joy to know we have a home to which we can go. And, the doors are always open!

LIFE APPLICATION

In the text, we saw that prosperity caused the people to drift away from God. This tells us we must keep material prosperity in a proper context. Consider this and discuss it with friends where possible. Consider how a Christian should view and use material prosperity. What safeguards can a Christian put in place to ensure that wealth does not lead to idolatry? (Please note, an idol is anything or anyone we put before our duty to worship God.)

Consider the credit due to God for the prosperity we may enjoy. Further, note that some people today have an enlarged sense of entitlement. They tell themselves they are *entitled* to certain houses, fine foods, cars, designer clothes, and even Broadway shows. Look at how we should balance any sense of entitlement we hold with a sense of thanksgiving. Try to see

why, for example, we should give God thanks for the paycheck for which we worked hard.

People, even among faithful Christians, hold varying views of God. Some see God as a cruel taskmaster eager to punish them for mistakes. Others see God as totally loving, always ready to bless them, in spite of their faults and shortcomings. What is your view of God? Where does God sit between those two extremes of stern judge and sweet Savior?

QUESTIONS

1. Why is the parent-child analogy a suitable way to explain our relations with God?
2. Using that analogy, what is our primary responsibility to God?
3. What similarities do you see between the text for this lesson and the parable of the Prodigal Son?

CLOSING DEVOTIONS

Prayer: Dear Father, we recognize that all we have is worthless unless we have you. And, with you we lack nothing.

Pray Psalm 23.

Amen

“What safeguards can a Christian put in place to ensure that wealth does not lead to idolatry?”

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS**May 25-May31**

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| Monday | Genesis 28:10-17 (Receiving a New Vision of God) |
| Tuesday | Acts 15:10-17 (Justice for Gentile Believers) |
| Wednesday | Deuteronomy 28:1-6, 15-19 (The Up or Down Choice) |
| Thursday | Matthew 2:13-15 (Jesus a Migrant from Egypt) |
| Friday | Hosea 11:3-6 (Ephraim Spurns God's Love and Suffers) |
| Saturday | Philemon 8-21 (Once a Slave; Now a Brother) |
| Sunday | Hosea 11:1-2, 7-10; 12:1-2, 6-14 (Respond With Love and Justice Daily) |