

Dr. John Oswalt, Hosea, Session 5, Hosea 5,

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Tonight we are looking at Hosea chapter 6. Thus far in our journey through the book, we've seen how chapters 1 to 3 set the book up with the lived out metaphor of Hosea and his prostitute wife, Gomer. Chapter 2 gives us an explanation of the metaphor, applying it to Yahweh and to Israel. And then chapter 3 returns to the metaphor with Hosea buying Gomer back from the slave bloc and betrothing her to him again.

So, we see this picture of God's passionate love for his people, of their back-and-forth relationship where, yes, yes, they love him in one way, but in another, they want their own way. And so, in the same way, we see the picture of a pure love, a fully committed love, and a love that is partial and divided and given not only to the husband but to other lovers as well. Then we saw in chapters 4 and 5 what I entitled no knowledge of God.

These three words, knowledge, love, and faithfulness, the Hebrew word *da'at* is knowledge, the word *hesed* that we've talked about a lot before, and the word *emet* and *emunah*, two words, both of which can be translated as truth, both of which can be translated faithfulness. So, I said that although the book really doesn't have a clear outline after 3, we can divide it into sections on the basis of calls to repentance or expressions of God's patient love. The first of those expressions of God's patience and his love and the call to repent comes here in chapter 6 in verses 1 to 3. So that's why I designated chapters 4 and 5 as no knowledge of God.

I'll say more about that in just a moment. Then 6:4 through chapter 10, verse 15, we're calling no love for God. And we're going to use that word *hesed* again.

We'll talk about it more in just a moment. But 6:1 to 3 then is the bridge between no knowledge of God and no love of God. I ask you on your lesson sheet to choose a title for chapter 6, verses 1 to 3. In your Bible study, titling paragraphs and chapters can be very helpful in that it focuses your attention.

Just what is this paragraph really about? How can I sum up what it's talking about? Now, there's no absolute, oh, that's the right title, and that's the wrong one. It's not that. It is simply a device whereby you're figuring it out.

So, the title that we might give to chapter 6, verses 1 to 3, we might call it Let Us Return to the Lord. That's the very first thing you see there. You might also say, in verse 3, Let Us Know the Lord.

Another possibility would still be that He Will Revive Us. So, all three of those are simply ways of trying to capture what's in our minds. What's the key idea here? Let us return to the Lord. That call, we should go back to Him.

We should turn around. Hosea is speaking for the people here and speaking to the people. So, it's a call.

At the same time, what is it to return to Him? Return to what? It's a return to a loving relationship with Him. That's what knowing the Lord is all about. We've talked about this before, but repetition is the soul of education.

What is it to know God? It's not to know about Him. It's not to know certain ideas. Now, I should say, yes, it is to know about Him.

It is to have a sense of content. Who is He? What is He like? What does He do? Yes, but that's only the doorway, as it were. The house is a living, loving relationship with Him.

So, Hosea is saying, come on, let's turn around. That's the meaning of return in the Old Testament. It is to turn around.

Let's stop going toward the idols. Let's turn around and go toward the Lord. And turn around in what sense? Turn around in the sense of renewing our loving relationship with Him.

To know Him. As you will remember, in the Hebrew Bible, know is a term for sexual embrace. Adam knew Eve, his wife, and she conceived and bore a son.

So again, it is speaking of intimacy. God doesn't just want to save you from the guilt and the condemnation of sin. God wants to save you from that alienation that separates you from Him and to call you back into that close, intimate relationship.

He will revive us. Yeah, what are these verses about? They're about what will happen if we turn around, if we are determined to know Him again and anew. What will be the result? He will give us life.

Notice verse two. After two days, He will revive us. Give us life.

On the third day, He'll restore us. Now that's a Hebrew way of talking tomorrow, and the next day is the future. He'll restore us.

Why? That we may live in His presence. In another context, I suggested that this is actually walk and that's often the case in modern translations that they will explain the metaphor of walk with the word live. But that's not true here.

It is live. He will give us life. He will renew our life in His presence.

We're dead. Dead in our sin. Dead in our rebellion.

But He is going to restore our life. And that life will be literally in His face. Where is life to be found? In this universe.

In fellowship with the creator of the universe. Cosmologists today wrestle with the whole question of life. There has to be life on other planets with the millions of galaxies that have been identified and in each galaxy millions of stars and with each star the possibility of planets.

There has to be life somewhere else. Well, maybe so. But if it is, it is just like life on this planet.

It is a life that is a gift of the living God. And it's not merely the life of the body. I've been thinking about this recently and the whole issue of the body, the spirit, and the King James working actually from the German language uses the word soul.

And it's translating a word that is in Hebrew, like many of the Hebrew words, as we've talked, which has a very big pool of meaning; it's the word nephesh. And nephesh can mean self. I spoke to my nephesh.

I spoke to myself. Or I myself did that. It can mean the self.

It can mean personality. It can mean energy. I've been thinking about that.

What is it that finally defines you and me and makes us who we are? Oh yes, our bodies. I have a distinctive body. And yes, unless the body is enlivened by a spirit, it's just a corpse.

But behind all that is me, you. That's where real human life is. And so, Hosea cries out, Oh, stop going in the ways of death, worshiping this world.

This world has no life in it. The only life that exists is in I Am, Yahweh, the being who lives forever and gives life to us. So, he says, come, let's return.

Let's turn around. Let's go back to the source of our life and let us plunge into that intimacy. Not how far from Jesus can I live and still go to heaven.

No, how close can I live to the one who died for me? Now notice, come, let us turn to the Lord. He has torn us to pieces, but he will heal us. The reason for turning back to God is that he will heal.

He will revive us. It may take a day or two. We in America are hung up on instant.

We want the results right now. If you return to the Lord after having lived in sin, yes, he'll receive you. But reconstructing your life, putting it back together again may be a matter of a day or two.

Why should we return to the Lord? Because he will heal us. He's broken us. And we're going to say more about that in succeeding verses.

He's broken us. He's broken us into pieces. Oh man, what kind of a God is that? But he will heal us.

I heard the story of a missionary doctor in Africa. A little boy came to him, and his arm was sort of a zigzag. And the little boy said, Doctor, can you make it straight? And he said, What happened? He said, Well, I was climbing in a tree after a monkey, and I fell out.

And oh, my arm hurt so badly for so long. But finally, it got better, but like this. The doctor said, Yes, I can make it better, but I'll have to hurt you to do it.

I'll have to break your arm again to make it straight. That's what's happening here. God is saying, Yes, in order to restore you, in order to give you back your true life, it's going to hurt.

But I hurt you only for the goal of healing you. That's so important for us to genuinely believe. God will never hurt us just for the fun of it.

God will never hurt us simply as an expression of his rage. If God hurts us, it will be in order that he might heal us. So, I hope you remember my frequent statement.

God's intended last word is never destruction. It may be his last word, but that's up to you. It is never his intention.

Now, this marks me as a Wesleyan Arminian. There are brothers and sisters in the church who believe that God has elected some persons to destruction, and he's elected others to salvation. I don't believe that's what the Bible teaches.

I think the Bible teaches that he does not will and that any should be lost. His last word that he speaks into your life is never intended to be destruction, but it may be. And that's what Hosea is talking about here.

That's what he's saying. God doesn't want to destroy you. God doesn't want to kill you.

God wants to restore you. God wants to heal you. And if he sends you into exile, and remember, remember what we're thinking about here in terms of dates.

Hosea is speaking sometime between 750 BC and 720 BC. In those 30 years, the Northern Kingdom had five kings. Four of them died by assassination.

It was a bloodbath. It ultimately ended in exile, the destruction of Samaria in 722, and the captivity of the leadership of the artisans of the craftsmen, leaving just the poorest of the poor behind and taking those people off into captivity. So Hosea is looking at this.

He's preparing the people in some ways, those who are righteous, preparing them. Why did God do this? God must hate us. God wants to destroy us.

No, if he hurts us, it is in order that he might heal us. It is in order that he might restore us. So that's the picture that is going there.

As surely as the sun rises, he will appear. He will come to us like the winter rains, like the spring rains that water the earth. Israel has no big river like the Euphrates or the Nile to use for irrigation.

If they are to have a good crop, then they've got to have the winter rains, that is November and December. They've planted their grain in the soil. Now they've got to have that rain so that the seed will germinate.

Then they've got to have the spring rains in February and March so that the grain, having risen, will now head out. I don't mean by that leave. I mean, the grain heads will appear.

So here again is this: why will God come to us? He'll come to us as the life-giving rain. But the question is, will we turn around and let him do that? So the whole challenge here in these three verses is, let's repent after he has destroyed us in order that he may give us life. In fact, that was what was going to have to happen for both Israel and Judah.

Ultimately, the only hope for them was the exile. Only those who were carried off first to Assyria and then later to Babylon, only would preserve their true faith and

then bring it back and plant it again in the land. The exile became the fertilizing element for biblical faith.

We can only imagine what might have been the case if there'd been no exile. Given who these people were, given their predilections, would biblical faith simply have disappeared? Well, I think not. I think God would have found a way.

But in the context, it is the hurt, the pain, the tragedy of the exile which in fact then brought them to their senses, if you will, and let them hear this message and say, oh my goodness, yes, yes, we need to turn around. We need to allow God to take us home again. In that sense, the exile is like the slave block for Gomer.

It is only when she's on the slave block and then bought back by her loving husband that she's willing to live with him in a faithful marriage. So those opening verses, no knowledge of God, chapters four and five, and then no love for God, chapters, the remainder of chapters six, seven, eight, nine into ten, and the middle between them is these verses six, one to three—verse four.

What can I do with you, Ephraim? What can I do with you, Judah? Now notice, Hosea is a prophet both to the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom. Amos, who prophesied about 750, maybe a little earlier, his address is to Israel, the northern kingdom. But Hosea is speaking to both.

And what he's doing here is he's saying, Judah, don't think you're better off than Ephraim. Remember what I've said before: Ephraim is the dominant tribe in the northern kingdom. And so, when he speaks about Ephraim, he's speaking about the entire northern kingdom, not just that tribe.

Judah basically, is only one tribe, the tribe of Judah. But there was a tendency for the Judeans to think, well, those northerners, they've made idols, bull idols of Yahweh. My goodness, what sinners.

But we've got the temple, we don't have an idol in there, we just have the covenant box, the Ark of the Covenant, and we're okay. Yeah, they're going down to destruction. We can see it coming.

And almost certainly after it had happened, they were saying, yeah, what'd we say? Yeah, they had it coming to them. Hosea says, don't you believe it. You're on the same track.

And unless you repent, unless you turn around, and that's a word for us evangelicals. It's easy for us to point our fingers at the mainline denominations and say, well, look at that. Yes, of course.

That's the way they've been going. That's the way their seminaries were going. Yes, of course.

Of course, they are diminishing and disappearing. Good for them. What is God saying to us? Is he saying to us, as Hosea was, you're on the same track.

You're just a few years behind. What do we need to take into account as we look at our own lives and our own behaviors? How are we indeed on the same track? And so he says, what can I do with you, Ephraim? What can I do with you, Judah? Your hesed, your love, is like the morning mist, like the early dew that disappears. Now remember, hesed, that passionate undying devotion of a superior to an inferior, especially when undeserved.

We're talking here about a passionate undying devotion of us to God, but also of us to others. You remember what Jesus said? In that you've done it to the least of these, you've done it to me. And so, he says, your hesed, your hesed to the poor among you, your hesed to the broken and the downcast among you, your hesed to the immigrant, is like mist.

It has no staying power. It has no solidity to it. And in the same way, then, your hesed toward me.

Once again, let me remind you that this word is not primarily something you feel. It is something you do. If I say I love my garden, I'm not talking about hesed.

No, hesed is an act of undeserved kindness. In that same way, then, hesed can speak of our devotion to God. It is primarily the action of a superior to an inferior, but on the broadest level, it is simply doing the best for someone at all costs.

I have used the terminology in the past: to love is to choose the best for another at whatever cost to yourself. That's hesed, or in New Testament terms, agape. Self-giving, self-denying love.

And God says yours is like mist. You don't love me, and therefore you don't love others. This is why, he says, I cut you in pieces with my prophets.

I killed you with the words of my mouth. What? How do prophetic words kill us? How do they slay us? Well, we might be reminded, the word of God is like a two-edged sword, dividing between the joint and the marrow. Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

God's word, someone said, if you're enjoying it, you aren't reading it very carefully. God's word calls us to account. God's word says, wait a minute, look here, look what you're doing.

And it's the same principle that I spoke of a few minutes ago. The word kills in order that it can give life. I grew up on a farm, and we always had kittens.

There were kittens all over the place. They were not very intelligent. One, in particular, did not quite understand that it was not a good idea to try to eat food out of the dog's dish while the dog was eating.

And in this case, the dog just reached over and snapped at the kitten and took off about half of its face. And it ran away. We assumed it had gone away to die.

But in about three days, here it was back again. And that terrible wound was all covered over. And I said to my mother, hey, that kitten is back.

It's going to be okay. She went out and looked at it and shook her head. She said, no, honey.

That is proud flesh. What a vivid term. Combination of pus and dirt and everything else and all sort of hardened on the outside.

She said it was going to die. I would have to clean that out with peroxide, and that would kill it. It's going to die.

And it did. The Bible is peroxide. The words of the prophets are peroxide, cutting, killing, killing the proud flesh, killing the characteristic behavior of ours that stands in the way of life that leads to death.

And so, he says, I've sent these prophets. My students remember that I have said to them that the way you tell the difference between a false prophet and a true prophet is false prophets say nice things about you. Yes.

Oh, it's going to be fine. God loves you. It's all right.

God forgives you. It's okay. Don't feel bad.

You need to have a good self-image. The Bible says that's a false prophet. The true prophet says you're on the road to destruction.

Keep that up, and you're going to separate yourself from God. Don't do that. That is disgusting to God.

Stop that. That's true, prophet. And that says something to us in the field of theological education.

It's probably not the way to build a big church, but the prophet says it's the way to life. I killed you with the words of my mouth. Then my... Now this text says judgments.

It's another word that I've talked with you about numerous times. Hebrew, my mishpatim. Mishpat is God's pattern for life.

This is a plural ending here. Now, why do we translate that judgments? Perhaps a better word would be directions. This is the way I made the world.

This is the way I made the world to operate. I made the world to operate on the basis of the golden rule. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

And so, I've given you directions. And if you don't obey those directions, there are going to be some results. So, he says, I killed you with the words of my mouth that my mishpatim, my way of living, my plan for life, my guidance for successful living might go forth like the sun.

They couldn't go forward when you're living for yourself when you are living a self-serving, self-aggrandizing, self-promoting life. Then my directions are going to be judgments because you're not living according to God's pattern for life. Verse 6, For I desire hesed, not sacrifice, and knowing God rather than burnt offerings.

That, of course, goes all the way back to Samuel when Saul covered up his failure to obey God. The Amalekites had tried to destroy Israel when they were coming out of Egypt and God said the day will come. It's not here yet, but the day will come when their sin will be such that the Amalekites will be destroyed.

He commanded Saul to go do that. Saul allowed the soldiers to bring back spoils. That's the way soldiers get paid.

The best of the cattle, the best of the cattle. And he himself brought back the king undoubtedly to be his butler. And when Samuel confronted him, Saul said, oh well, the men brought those animals back to be sacrificed.

Samuel said God wants obedience more than he wants sacrifice. So here, God wants hesed. You see, religion is very handy.

I want to be on God's good side. So, I go to church. So, I give some money.

Not very much, but some. I read the Bible every once in a while. I have lots of Bibles in my house.

So, God owes me. God says, I really don't care about that stuff. I want to know whether you have an intimate fellowship with me that changes the way you live.

I want to know whether you have experienced my hesed so deeply that you have hesed to give away. Now, if that's all true, I love your church going. I love your songs.

I love your Bible reading. I love your gifts. But if that's not true, if you don't really know me, as demonstrated by the way you treat people, your church services make me sick.

Isaiah says, I hate iniquity and solemn assembly. Yes. Yes.

I don't want your religious behavior unless it is an accurate reflection of your heart condition. If it is, well and good. I'm glad to have a physical representation of your spiritual condition.

It's a good thing to do that. But if your spiritual condition is rotten, I don't want to see you in church. Now, again, I'm a theological educator.

Does a pastor say, I don't want to see you in church? Verse 7 is a bit of a, I was going to say, controversy. I don't know that it's a controversy, but I am uncertain about how it should be read. Verse 7, in many translations, will say, like Adam, they have broken the covenant.

They were unfaithful to me there. What I have here happens to be the New International Version. It says, as at Adam.

Adam is a city or a village in the Jordan Valley. Remember, we've talked about Gilgal, the spot where the Hebrew people made their base when they were conquering the land. Adam is a village named Adam, which is fairly close to Gilgal.

So, it's possible that that's what we're talking about. Again, it is some ancient site that has all of these wonderful, holy memories about it. And Hosea is saying, forget the holy memories.

Question is, what are you doing now? That's one possibility, as the New International Version has it. The other one, like Adam, they have broken the covenant. Now, this gets a little complicated.

There is what is called covenant theology. This theology sees covenant as the theme of the entire Bible. And so, it says, there was an original covenant between God and Adam.

And when Adam and Eve sinned, Genesis 3, they broke that covenant. Others, and I'm one of them, say no. There's nothing about a covenant in the text.

Covenant is, as I understand it, and I'm not alone here. Covenant is God's method of dealing with our sinful condition after the fall. It's a device. It's a method that God has used to deal with the issues.

And we don't have time to talk about all of that here. So, if that were true, if it is like Adam, they broke the covenant. I think what it's saying is the Israelites were unfaithful to God. Adam was unfaithful to God.

Not that he broke a covenant that was stated or anything of that sort. He was simply unfaithful to God. And so, the Israelites were.

So, we can take it either way. I tend to agree with the NIV translators that we're talking about a place on the pattern of Gilgal and Bethel and the other places that he says are not places of holy memory. They're places where you are now sinning and you shouldn't go there.

All right. Notice what comes next. Verse 8. I think that supports this argument that Adam is a place.

Gilead is a city of evildoers stained with footprints of blood. It's not quite clear why he picks out Gilead here. It was a very important site and a site of a good deal of bloodshed.

So that may be what's going on. The highway of the kings came up along the edge of the desert out to Damascus. So, the trade from the Red Sea came up that road and Gilead was located about here and it was an important crossroads because a branch of that road came then out the Jezreel Valley up to the Mediterranean here.

So, controlling that crossroads it's also called Ramoth-Gilead the heights of Gilead. Controlling that road was important. This was where Jehu was with the Israelite army when the prophet anointed him as king to destroy the house of Ahab.

So, it may simply be that point. It's a bloody place. The whole nation is a bloody place like Gilead is.

Gilead is a city of evildoers stained with footprints of blood. As marauders lie in ambush for a victim, so do bands of priests. They murder on the road to Shechem, carrying out their wicked schemes.

Oh, my goodness. Well, now again, a little geography here. The road from Beersheba up to Jerusalem is pretty easy.

It basically follows a single ridge line, but north of Jerusalem, the ridge line is more broken up, and along the way, you have Shechem, the place where Jacob's well was located. Mount Gerizim to the south, Mount Ebal to the north, Samaria out here. So Shechem then is access to the capital city and it is of course also on the road to Bethel the very important sanctuary. So, on that road between I think ultimately Samaria and Bethel are these priests.

Are they murderers? Are they actually killing people on the road? I suspect not. He has talked before. We saw it in chapter 4 especially as well as chapter 5 about how the priests have failed in their task.

Their task is to teach the Torah. Their task is to represent God to the people. Instead, they're collecting more and more sacrifices because it's through sacrifices that they get their income.

It's to their advantage for the people to sin more. So, I suspect that what Hosea is saying is these people are spiritually. These priests are spiritually murdering their people because they're not teaching Torah because they're not helping them to avoid sin. They're actually leading them into sin, and they are, in fact, murderers. Again, we have to apply this to our own situation.

Can a pastor be a murderer? Yes. Yes. If a pastor is in this profession for his own interests if a pastor is not faithfully showing people their sin if a pastor is not leading people into deeper and deeper discipleship again not a comfortable topic to talk about but this book of Hosea is not merely about 8th century Israel.

It's about today. I have seen a horrible thing in Israel. There Ephraim is given to prostitution.

Israel is defiled. All the way through, Hosea is going to use this love language, sexual language, because what we're talking about in biblical religion is relationship. God is a God of relationship.

Unfortunately, a lot of evangelical religion today focuses on position focuses upon status. Are you saved? Have you been saved? Are you justified? Status. Position.

Well, hear me. Do I believe in the necessity of being born again? I absolutely do. Do I believe in the necessity of conversion? Yes, I do.

But conversion from what to what? New birth from what to what? And I want to say that God is calling us to walk into a way of living. He is delivering us from that alienation from him which kills us and delivering us into a life changing transforming relationship. So, he doesn't say well Ephraim they've all become idol worshippers.

He doesn't say Ephraim they're all covenant breakers. He doesn't say Ephraim is guilty. He says they're committing prostitution.

They have broken their relationship with God. They have denied their marriage to him, and they have gone into another false kind of relationship. A relationship that is based on pleasure.

A relationship that is based on getting something for a payment. A relationship that is in the end not life giving but destructive. So here it is again.

This is not merely worshipping false gods. It is entering into a relationship that is false and a relationship that is not only unproductive, it is death-dealing. They're committing prostitution.

Again, we need to look at our own lives here. Am I in a life-giving relationship with God? Or is it actually a prostitution relationship where I'm trying to use him? Am I in other relationships in my life with things that are not God? St. Augustine is very famous for saying to worship and not worship. If I worship a thing that should be used, I am engaged in false worship, and if I use him who should be worshipped, I am in death. One more thought, and I'll let you go.

Also, for you, Judah, a harvest is appointed whenever I would restore the fortunes of my people. Now we've talked about the difficulties in Hosea's text, and some believe that whenever I restore the fortunes of my people, it is actually the beginning of the first verse of chapter 7. Others say no, and the current chapter division would say that. So, it raises this interesting question for you, Judah, our harvest is appointed whenever I would restore the fortune of my people.

What's happening there? Harvest seems negative. Yes, you're going to reap what you've sown, and you have sown the wind, and you're going to reap the whirlwind. But how do we relate that to I would restore the fortunes of my people? Well, I think it's exactly where the chapter began.

I can't restore the fortunes of my people until their sin has been allowed to have its negative results. Now, I don't want to make that an absolute statement. God is infinitely creative in the way He works.

But again, and again we do not know our need for salvation until we've come to the end of ourselves. As long as life is working nicely and beautifully, who needs God? I'm doing fine. But it's when life has fallen in upon us that we suddenly say, wait a minute, wait a minute I'm not enough.

I can't solve this problem. What's happening here? God, where are you? The line, of course, is that there are no atheists in foxholes. So yes, Judah, there's a harvest coming but my purpose in that harvest is restoration.

So, it is in your own life. If your life is falling apart, if things are not working this is an opportunity. An opportunity to look to the God who longs to restore, who longs to renew, who longs to revive.

Let's pray together. Oh Father, thank you that this is your heart. Thank you that your heart is always to have mercy.

Always to reach out to us with hesed. Thank you that you wish to use the tragedies of life for good. Even that you permit these things to come for good, for our good.

May that happen. May we be enabled to turn to you in these hours. To turn with faith, believing that you indeed can restore, renew, revive, and that you will use these experiences to bring us to that place where we can say, yes, I know the Lord. In your name, we pray. Amen.