



HOSEA DEVOTIONAL

By Pastor Phil Emerson

NAME: _____

OUR DISCIPLESHIP FLOW

At Emmanuel Church, we are passionate about living out the call to be disciples of Jesus Christ, and make it our goal to see His Kingdom come in our lives and the world in which we live. We recognise that in Biblical times, a disciple was someone who followed a teacher or rabbi, not simply to gain head knowledge to pass an examination, but to be fully immersed in the life of the rabbi, and *learn his ways*, so that they in turn could replicate this to the world around them. As Christians, we are now those who have been invited to ‘follow’ Jesus and all of His ways, and we therefore call ourselves His disciples.

“This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.” 1 John 2:5,6

We therefore want to take seriously the words of Jesus in Matthew 28:19-20 to make disciples and also commit to an ongoing journey of teaching and discipleship together.

We all have differing personalities and learning styles. At Emmanuel, we recognise this diversity within the church body and therefore desire to support and journey together as we relate with God and each other in some of the following environments:

- **Public (20+)**

In the Bible, we see Jesus seeking to make disciples as He engaged with larger numbers of people, e.g., His interaction with the crowds (Matthew 4:25; Luke 14:25), and the 72 (Luke 10:1-24).

At Emmanuel, we want to use each of our **larger gathered environments** as an opportunity to make disciples, e.g., **Sunday services, Friday Youth/Kids’** environments, **men’s/women’s** gatherings.

- **Social (10-15)**

Jesus demonstrated the necessity for **smaller accountable relationships** as an essential part of the life of a disciple. He did this by teaching and doing life with his twelve disciples (e.g., Matthew 10).

At Emmanuel, small accountable relationships are offered through:

Lifegroup 12s

These are **gatherings of 10-15 people** who meet bi-weekly in homes or around specific interests, e.g., crafts, football.

- **Personal (2-5)**

As well as having smaller accountable relationships amongst His twelve friends, Jesus also seemed to go to even deeper levels of trust with three in particular – Peter, James and John (Matthew 17; Mark 9). At Emmanuel, we seek to do this through:

Lifegroup 3s

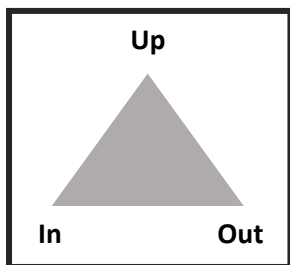
These are smaller **gatherings of 2-5 people** who are committed to transparent and accountable relationships in order to grow together in following Jesus. The aim for these groups is that after 1-2 years, each person in the group would be able to lead a smaller number of people themselves and replicate the process... **disciples making disciples!**

- **Intimate (1-1)**

Jesus regularly withdrew to spend time alone with the Father. This is the ultimate goal of discipleship, that each member of our church family would increasingly spend time alone with the Father and grow in devotion and desire to see the Kingdom come.

A TOOL TO USE

As stated previously, 1 John 2:6 makes it clear that for those of us who call ourselves disciples of Jesus, our goal should be to daily walk in the ways of Jesus, our Rabbi. As we examine the New Testament we see that Jesus lived His life based on three relationships: **Up** – with His Father; **In** – with His chosen followers; **Out** – with the hurting world around Him. This is illustrated in the following triangle:



Jesus taught and modelled out to His disciples how to live into each of these areas in life.

Up

Jesus frequently left the disciples to spend personal time with the Father (Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16). He taught them the significance of prayer, and how to pray and communicate with the Father (Luke 11:1-13). When comparisons with one another or insecurities presented themselves, He spoke into it in love and challenged them into a greater depth of living (Mark 9:33-37; Matthew 18:1-5).

In

Jesus had significant relationships with others in which He intentionally invested (12s and 3s). When He went to engage with the Father He brought the three with Him (Matthew 17:1). He taught them and modelled out the significance of Sabbath and rhythms of rest (Mark 6:31). He demonstrated with His life the significance of generosity and sacrificial love for others (John 13:1-17).

Out

Jesus personally lived a life that engaged with the crowds and the broken world around Him. He healed the sick (Matthew 8:1-4), fed the poor (Mark 6:30-44), and cast out demons (Matthew 8:28-34). But with the people who were closest to Him, He challenged them to do the same (Mark 6:37), and when they took risks themselves He critiqued and gave honest feedback to call out more for them (Luke 10:17-20).

As we spend time alone or together in this devotional, we want to help and encourage you to engage in each of these ways – UP, IN, and OUT.

HOW TO USE THE BOOK

First

If you haven't already done so, please take a second to fill in your name on the inside of the front cover. There'll be a lot of identical books floating around, and we don't want yours to get lost.

Prepare

Get ready for each session by spending some time to invite the Holy Spirit to speak to you. The Bible is a written word (logos), which becomes a living word (rhema) as the Holy Spirit breathes upon it and speaks directly to our lives through it.

Commit

Commit to the journey. Discipleship is not a commitment to a moment, but to a lifetime journey. As you personally commit to journeying with God daily, commit to others by sharing what you are learning (possibly in Lifegroup 12s or 3s), and in this way encouraging one another in what God is saying.

Reflect & Respond

Each day, as you spend personal time with God, we encourage you to ask the following two questions:

- 1) What is God saying to me?
- 2) What am I going to do about it?

This is how we become doers and not just hearers of what God is saying.

INTRODUCTION TO HOSEA

It is exciting to begin the study of another book of the Bible, especially one with a well-known story and a powerful message, such as Hosea. I tend to wait until I finish writing on a book before I write the introduction, the reason being that by the time I'm done, I feel like I've got to know the writer and maybe even got into his head and heart a little. Well, today I want to introduce you to one of the most spectacular human beings I have ever had the privilege of writing about – Hosea. His breath taking, risk taking, overexuberant love for God puts me somewhat to shame.

Hosea marries a temple prostitute called Gomer and she bears two sons and a daughter. The second two children were of questionable parentage and Hosea sums up the book in the meaning of their names. The people that were "not loved" (Lo-ruhama) would be loved once again, and "not my people" (Lo-ammi) would be reunited with their God again in a new spiritual betrothal.

The book of Hosea consists of two sections. The first three chapters are an autobiography. The remaining eleven chapters deal with the religious and social collapse that called for God's punishment of His people. The book concludes with a plea to the people to return to God, who, in His abiding love, will be reconciled with them.

This is an amazing wee book. So, get comfortable. Bible, journal, and a cuppa at hand, and off we go. See you at the end!

Huge prayers.

Phil

Read

Hosea 1

Live

So, here's a shock: Hosea's marriage to a prostitute named Gomer was at the command of God! The basic message of Hosea arises from the tragedy of this marriage. The relationship between Hosea and his wife was symbolic of the relationship between God and His people. Israel had gone astray and worshipped other gods. God condemned her, yet appealed to her to return and accept His love. It took great courage for an Israelite to be obedient to God and marry an unfaithful wife; it went against every fibre of his moral being and every spiritual sense in his body. An Israelite expected to marry a virgin daughter of Israel so his offspring would count as worthy to continue his ancestral heritage.

After her marriage to Hosea, Gomer became pregnant and verse 3 records, "*she bore him a son*", proving Hosea was the father. If you compare this with the report of the second child, there is a small difference that is easy to miss. It simply says that Gomer conceived and had a daughter. The same is said of the third child, a son, whose birth is reported in verse 8. Later in his prophecies, Hosea calls these two "*children of adultery*". With this confirmation of their conception, is it any wonder Hosea gave his next two children names beginning with the Hebrew word for 'no'? The daughter was named 'No Mercy' and the son 'No Pity', each with a corresponding prophecy from the Lord that He would no longer have mercy on Israel (verse 6) and that He no longer calls Israel His people (verse 9).

The balance of judgment and love is characteristic of Hosea's prophecies and colours all his later work. What happened with the birth of his children affected Hosea for the rest of his life as a prophet, and God used the extreme mixture of emotions experienced by this courageous man to deliver the message of His own heart to His people.

Pray

Father, thank You that You hear my prayers even before they are formed in my mind. Mould my life into the pattern of Your great will both for me and also for all humanity. May I be fulfilled in my inner spiritual life and in my relationships with others. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Read

Hosea 2

Live

We must remember there is a connection between Gomer's actions and Israel's sins. Hosea pleads with his second and third children, but not the first, to "*contend*" with their mother to put away adultery. It is a heart-breaking plea. Perhaps these two children, who do not know who their father is, can shame their mother into admitting her sinfulness. As we read on, we will hear more prophecies about what God will do to Israel and what Hosea will do to Gomer, but the message is becoming clear. Israel may think she can do what she wants, but God is in control; He will protect His name and His plan for the salvation of the world. Hosea speaks of withdrawing the provision he would normally make for Gomer and then exposing her shame, yet the remarkable fact here is that Gomer had land and property. This gave her privileges far beyond other women of the day and we begin to see why Gomer found it so hard to accept marriage. By her prostitution, she had made an independent life for herself with greater material benefits than a normal woman would enjoy except through her husband.

I love how Hosea imagines taking Gomer away from others "*into the desert*" to love her himself and turn a corner in their relationship. A beautiful Hebrew phrase speaks of turning the "*valley of trouble*" often translated "*valley of Achor*" into the "*doorway of hope*", to re-establish a true, responsive marriage. Here we have a simple demonstration of the heart of God which is utterly just and yet completely loving. The Lord will remake the marriage covenant with Israel. If anyone ever wanted a chapter to connect the God of the Old Testament to the God of the New Testament, this is it. This whole prophecy speaks to the very heart of the gospel and is really powerful, reaching far beyond the times of the man who spoke it.

Pray

Father, draw me to Your perfect love, and as I seek to be like You, keep me mindful of my humanity – of where I have come from as well as where I am going. May I learn from Your powerful and compassionate love how I can remain true to my calling throughout my life. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Read

Hosea 3

Live

I love this passage of Scripture in which Hosea is called by God to show love for his wife far beyond any measure of the human capacity to love. Of course, this was symbolic of the demonstration of God's love for Israel, a people who had so utterly rejected Him in favour of the gods of this world that they had become prostitutes, both figuratively and literally. That's right, as part of their worship of the fertility gods of Canaan, they were having sex with prostitutes! At the end of this prophecy, the Lord said that His people would indeed return to Him in the future.

The connection between the prophecy and the man Hosea still shocks us today. It is so hard to think how a man can love a wife who has rejected him for prostitution. The Lord told Hosea clearly to persist in love; the word "*persist*", often translated "*again*", is the key to the whole passage. At the point where all others would give up, Hosea is called to *persist* in order to prophesy about God's love. He has to gather the extraordinary strength and courage to summon his wife back from the arms of another man.

After this chapter, we no longer read personal details about Hosea and his marriage, and we are left wondering about him and Gomer. I really do want to know, what happened to their marriage? Whatever happened, Hosea continued to prophesy about the sins of Israel. He maintained a conviction that God's love would not fail despite rejection by others. His words are powerful. We stand in awe of this great prophet who was able to rise above his own extreme circumstances to tell us more about God's love than his own pain. His core message is that God has suffered because of the religious adultery of His own people, but He will not stop loving. Hosea lays a foundation for our understanding of the love of God that would be shown to the world one day through Jesus on the cross.

Pray

Father, Your will contains the secrets of the universe; its origins, workings, and future. Show me how I am placed within Your plan for the world and give me inner peace. Thank You for the inexhaustible AGAPE love You displayed to Israel through Hosea, and to me through Jesus. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

In this passage, we do not read much about God's love, though as we read the whole book of Hosea, we will find that he always balances God's absolute justice with a conviction that God will never cease to love; He acts upon that love with both justice and mercy. Here in Hosea's first major prophecy, he tells us that the relationship between God and His people has broken down. We read about the sins of priests and how they behaved, leading God's people astray. All in all, Hosea's picture of the degraded worship of gods is far removed from the true worship of God as described throughout the Bible.

Just like the ancient people of Israel, we need to keep a pure relationship with our God or suffer the consequences. But thank God we have Jesus. We can take all these problems to Him and He can lead us through them. These Old Testament stories always challenge me personally, especially when I read of the people of God who played with religion at their peril. In our own times, we must be challenged by Hosea to question the loose manner in which this happens today. Religious prostitution stands nearby in a world where 'anything goes' and freedom is mistaken for license. In addition, we should be careful to identify those who bring God's wrath on our heads with as much courage as Hosea had, a man who defended women as victims in a culture where men did as they pleased.

The more you examine Hosea's prophecies, the more you find. Let's not be a people who think we can abuse the grace of God. Yes, His grace is boundless and knows no comparison, but sin always has consequences, even forgiven sin. Remember, God is not to be mocked, for whatever a person sows, they reap. It's an age-old established law and divine principle of the Bible.

Pray

Father, today I pray with the psalmist of old and say, *"Turn and answer me, O Lord my God! Restore the sparkle to my eyes, or I will die. Don't let my enemies gloat, saying, "We have defeated him!" Don't let them rejoice at my downfall. But I trust in Your unfailing love. I will rejoice because You have rescued me. I will sing to the Lord because He is good to me."* In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Hosea's prophecies demonstrate the spirit of a man who has been moved by God to speak out against the godlessness within Israel. There is no doubt about the target for these prophecies; they are directed against the priests of Israel. These people were supposed to serve Israel by acting as intermediaries between the Lord God and the people of Israel by performing sacrifices on their behalf. Over time, however, they had developed practices that had more in common with the original people of the land.

Here we see the heart of Hosea. He had been insulted by the unfaithfulness of his own wife, Gomer, and now he perceives the true nature of the insult Israel was committing against her God. It is with a grieved spirit that Hosea continues to prophesy about the state of Israel. These God-called ones had slipped into such depravity. Gibeah, a town in the region of Benjamin, was renowned for the most atrocious rebellion in the history of Judaism against the moral standards of God's people. The story of the rape and murder of the Levite's concubine in Gibeah (Judges 19–21) remains the most woeful story of moral depravity within the entire Old Testament. Ramah, a nearby city of Benjamin, was the home of Samuel but had a deep association with tragedy. When King Herod killed all the children of Bethlehem after Jesus was born, Matthew quotes the harrowing prophecy of Jeremiah 31:15, *"A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping."*

All these things paint a tragic picture of Israel warring against her own God. What will God do with His people who rebel against Him like this? He declares, *"I will pour out My wrath on them like a flood of water"* (verse 10). God is not ignorant of what happens on earth, and He will meet rebellion with its consequences.

Pray

Father, enter my heart and change me. I do not know how You will change me or what You will do with me, but I welcome You and I am willing to risk all for You. Come and do Your work of grace in my life *now* so that I waste no more time thinking about living for You, but do *now* what I know to be right and true, according to Your light and revelation. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

The first three verses are among my favourite Old Testament prophecies – one that I think is worthy to stand alongside any other great New Testament text about healing. Now, let's not forget the context of why and where these three verses lie. Remember, Hosea is dealing with the unfaithfulness of his own wife, Gomer, who just happened to be a temple prostitute. He would take her back again and again, but her unfaithfulness seemed to remain in spite of Hosea's love. I find it disturbing to read these first three verses about healing and then to read the response of the people as God says, *"Your love vanishes like the morning mist"*. Our God is merciful and loving, and He will heal and restore His people, but He cannot do this for those who do not love Him because they have chosen to reject Him.

There are two mammoth lessons portrayed in this chapter. Firstly, there is a promise of healing for those who are faithful. Secondly, there is a warning that those who seek the Lord unfaithfully set themselves up for God's wrath. How sad it is to read a passage in which virtually everything is negative and the Lord God has to speak again to His people about sin and its consequences. Hosea says that the covenant relationship between humanity and God has been broken by all people who are *"like Adam"*. Hosea was horrified at the divisions of Israel and their worship of various gods, and we must surely agree that the divided nature of the Christian Church today continues this awful tendency. Yet, despite all the problems of human sin, God will reap a harvest from His people. This is Hosea's prophecy of God's sovereign work. God raised up Jesus, our Messiah, from His Old Testament people and He will raise up His own people when Jesus comes again in glory to judge the world in equity.

Pray

Father, lead me in a pathway of honest and righteous living. I do not want to be the kind of person who is caught out by my own arrogance or found out because of my pride. Keep me in that place of spiritual need where I know that You are not just my Saviour but my eternal Lord – all the time. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Not only had crime increased, but even the priests were ambushing and murdering people, as we saw at the end of chapter 6. Whether it was because people were travelling towards Jerusalem or going to Shechem, a city of refuge, I'm not sure. Regardless of the priests' motivation, it was a heinous crime. God makes a statement in verse 2 that I find disturbing, *"They do not consider that I remember all their wickedness."* There are some things that God may overlook, but sin is not one of them. God cannot forget sin. It is not enough to simply turn over a new leaf or make a new start. If a person tries to become religious and starts living right, it may decrease the number of sins that they commit, but it cannot wipe the past. It is necessary that Jesus' blood wash away our sins in order to be forgiven of God. Then, and only then, does God declare that He will not remember our sins anymore.

The people's passion for wickedness is compared to a baker's oven which burns everything placed inside of it. Such imagery! Then God compares them to a silly dove which is easily caught in a net. They have no sense of self-preservation, no instinct which tells them to turn away from what will be their end. They run headlong towards destruction. When they did experience the judgment of God, they would weep, but theirs were not tears of repentance. The Bible talks of two kinds of sorrow. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 7:10, *"godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death."* There is godly sorrow and worldly sorrow. When difficulty arises and many tears are shed, it doesn't always mean there is repentance; sometimes people are just sorry they got caught. The problem with this is that it does not bring God's mercy but leads to judgment. God is the most loving and tender Bridegroom who cherishes a most unlikely and ill-deserving bride ... us!

Pray

Father, forgive me for foolishly thinking there's some other person or relationship or set of circumstances that can satisfy the restlessness and emptiness in my heart. I know I was made for You, designed to be fulfilled and completed only by You. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

We humans can be so fickle. Today, we see that when judgment was coming, the people would cry out to God, *"Help us, for You are our God!"* But their actions proved that they did not know Him at all. In Matthew 7:22-23, Jesus tells us there is a day of judgment coming when, *"Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you who practice lawlessness.'* I lay massive emphasis on the "we" in that verse. In the final day of judgment, God will not judge us for the things we did collectively, rather, He will be fixed on us personally.

In contradiction to every other religion in the world, God cannot be made by man. The calves the people were worshipping were not God and anyone with conviction or half a brain should have recognised that. Sowing and reaping is a common illustration in the Bible. When you sow, you receive back much more, you can expect to reap, and these Israelites were going to reap okay. Little did they know that Assyria was coming and would accomplish the judgment of God.

It's tough when God describes Israel as a vessel in which no one delights. I'm a fussy spot when it comes to cups or mugs. Do you have a cup or bowl in the cupboard at your house that no one wants to use? The cup is getting old and gross, with the picture half worn off and so chipped no one wants it. This is how Israel was becoming in the sight of the nations around her. They knew the Word of the Lord but it was regarded as something strange. How many people today have a Bible in the house? How many hotel rooms have Bibles in a drawer? And yet, the Word is still considered strange.

Pray

Father, all of history is the unfolding story of Your commitment to redeem Your family and make all things new through the work of Your Son, Jesus. Nothing will keep You from magnifying the excellencies of Your glory through the work of Jesus. Magnify Your name in this hour. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

God was disgusted at the sensuality and selfish things that made the Israelites happy. Strange, although they lived in sin, they continued to practise their traditional feasts and make sacrifices, supposedly to God, but He would have no part of it. The bread they offered to the Lord was like mourners' bread. Anything that came in contact with the dead or their mourners was deemed unclean, defiled, and polluted. This was how God viewed their sacrifices, as unclean.

It's kind of weird how a people can go on with the ritual of religion and yet God is not only absent but is actually abhorred by the whole sham. The sad thing is it has travelled down through the centuries and is still prevalent today. Folks, let's never ever play church. Get hold of God in relationship and never let go.

Hosea tells us five things about a false prophet: he is a fool; he is mad; he is a snare and a fowler in all his ways; he is the cause of hatred in the house of God; and he is deeply corrupted by sodomy and perversion. Can I fire out a solemn warning today? People of God, listen to me. Watch, watch, watch! For these people are still around. They don't love God and they don't love His house. All they love is themselves; they want power, popularity, and money. They will dance to the piper, lift their hands in worship, have the right clichés and language but have hearts that are turned inwards to self and not to God or to you. I find it daunting that verse 15 tells us where all this idolatry began – Gilgal! This was the first stop where they crossed over Jordon to take the Promised Land. Talking about getting off on the wrong foot! If you start wrong, it is always difficult to correct.

Pray

Father, no one gives more freely or more un-begrudgingly than You do. I humble myself before You and I own the need that You alone can meet. Just as grace runs downhill to the needy, so it flows freely to others. To whom would You send me today? Freely I've received from You, freely I will give. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

This is really sad. It makes one wonder what these people were thinking. God points out that the more they received in blessing, the further they turned from Him. They would make promises and oaths to get back in God's favour, but He could see their true hearts, that their promises were worthless. The Israelites worshipped an idol that would be carried away, which didn't really say much for the idol! It makes me ask myself, what kind of gods do I have in my life and can they be stolen away? We are not good at acknowledging our "other worship" of things and even people. This is challenging stuff.

Verse 10 says Israel had a "double guilt". I'm reminded of Jeremiah 2:13 *"For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, to hew for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water."* In other words, they had first forsaken the Lord, which is damning enough, but to add insult to injury, they turned to idols as substitutes.

One can understand the broken heart of Father God here. God's appeals to the nation can be summed up in verse 12 with three lessons that are timeless. We would do well to note them. Firstly, *"Sow with a view to righteousness"*. This means to stop sinning and start doing what is right in all things. Secondly, *"reap in mercy"*. This means to accept and appropriate the mercy given to us by God. Sowing in righteousness and reaping in mercy are both our responsibility. Thirdly, *"break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the Lord"*. God's desire is to bless a repentant people and, again, it is our responsibility to break up the hardness of our hearts. Fallow ground was ground which was ploughed but not yet sown. If left unused, it got hard and crusted. Our hearts and wills must be broken for Him.

Pray

Father, every day is an experience of living the hymn 'O Love That Will Not Let Me Go' for You love me and you pursue me constantly. As hard as it is to imagine, You desire fellowship with me more than I do with You. You actually enjoy being with me and You constantly delight in me. I believe, Lord, help my unbelief. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

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RESPOND

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Live

The Lord reminds them that early in the days of Israel, He had called them out of Egypt. Verse 1 probably sounds familiar to you; it is quoted in Matthew 2:2 as a prophetic fulfilment when the Magi arrived in Jerusalem and asked Herod, *"Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?"* Herod, in supreme jealousy, commanded that all the male children two years and younger in Bethlehem and the surrounding areas should be killed. Matthew saw the prophetic parallel of how Israel and Christ went into Egypt in their infancies, and then in their youth were called out by God. Unlike Jesus, Israel did not walk in sinlessness after departing from Egypt but turned to idolatry.

Just as God had called Israel out of Egypt, He used the prophets to call them out from their sin, but the more the prophets called them to the Lord, the further away they went. They forgot that it was God who nurtured and cared for them in their infancy, preserving them against all odds. God, through Hosea, compares it to being forsaken by the child you taught to walk, the one you healed when he was sick. Israel were like an animal you cared for and relieved of its burden that then turned on you. Like a rebellious child or an ungrateful animal, Israel refused to know that God had cared for them. They instead turned to their idols, giving false gods credit for their blessings.

As angry as God is over their sin, He still agonises over His love for them. He doesn't want to judge, after all, 2 Peter 3:9 tells us that He does not wish any to perish but all to come to repentance. He doesn't enjoy bringing judgment upon the people He loves. Yet, He must administer justice. He will not destroy Israel completely, but they will be judged. As the chapter concludes, we are reminded they will be gathered together again one day. God will show kindness to them, but a stern kindness where they will tremble at His roar.

Pray

Father, it's because You love me that You confront me and discipline me. All of Your rebukes are life-giving, and when You discipline me, though it's painful, it's always for my good and for my freedom. It's Your kindness that leads me to repentance. You'll never humiliate me, only humble me. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

We are reminded of the futility of feeding on the wind, chasing it all day long. How could you hope to pursue it? Israel, going after their idols, is likened to someone pursuing the east wind. Usually this wind is hot, dry, and stormy. I sailed a barge on Lough Neagh for years and this east wind was our worst wind. It's unbelievable that Israel thought they would find victory in their false gods and worldly alliances with the likes of Assyria and Egypt. Remember that the Jews were the descendants of Jacob. As you look at Jacob as a man, he was untrustworthy from the first day of his life. He was a conniver, a con man, a trickster. God renamed him *Israel*, which means 'Governed by God'. The Lord is pointing out that the nation is like Jacob in his early days. He tells them, 'Judgment is coming upon you. However, if you weep and seek My favour like Jacob did, you will once again be Israel, governed by God, and you will see the blessing with which I blessed Jacob.'

From ancient times, balance scales were used to measure weight. And ever since their beginning, dishonest people have been working on ways to tip the scales in their favour. Even in our own time, the person who puts his thumb on the scales is used as an example of dishonesty. God describes Ephraim as a merchant with false balances, a rich man who loves to oppress the poor. Yet, he is shrewd and has not left a paper trail or evidence to convict him of his wrongdoings. But what Ephraim didn't remember was the spiritual truth which says there is no sin hidden from the Lord. Their dirty dealings were open and obvious to Him. He promises that although they were secure in their fine houses, they would once again live in tents, just as they did in the wilderness wanderings and in the days of the Feast of Tabernacles. God spoke to them many times, giving them His Word, proclaiming His faithfulness, but it seems they never listened!

Pray

Father, there's no question about Your commitment to love me well in every season of life. You will never leave me or forsake me, and there's no ebbing or flowing with Your compassion. You stick much closer than a brother, because You're so much more than a brother. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

If chapter 11 deals with God's love for Israel and chapter 12 with Israel's sin, then this chapter clearly deals with God's anger. God had warned them over and over again in the Law to love God and Him only. These people would have known that from the great commandment. The Lord had warned, 'Worship false gods, get snuffed out' (paraphrased!) but they had not listened, so like clouds or dew that evaporates, like smoke that is blown away, they would soon be gone. God had cared for them, but the problem was they had stopped caring about Him. The more they were blessed with, the less reliant on Him they became. And so, He is bringing judgment, comparing Himself to three ruthless predators of their land: the lion, the leopard, and the bear. Scary stuff. God is not going to be messed around.

In 1 Samuel 8, we see that the people demanded a king. They were no longer happy being led by the Lord through His prophets. They felt that they would have better protection with a man on the throne. The problem now is that man would not be able to save them from a God who was judging their sin. The Lord often illustrates truths with the analogy of labour and childbirth. The suddenness of labour pains, the danger that both woman and child face in the birthing process, and the intense pain and emotion that accompany these things make for powerful illustrations. Although the pain of judgment was upon them, the Jews had postponed their repentance. Today, a baby in such a predicament is born by Caesarean section, but in times past, the baby would certainly die and like that baby, the Jews were in danger of dying. Although sin brought death, God has power over death. It has no sting or victory for the one in whom God delights. That is why having a saving relationship with Jesus Christ is so important. Jesus told Mary in John 11:26 *"He that believes in Me shall never die."* Oh how I love this stuff.

Pray

Father, only You know the broken cisterns of my choices, my idols and the many things to which I turn to find life somewhere else than in You. Yet You pursue me, welcome me, and love me, and You are changing me. What a wonderful, merciful Father You are. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

I love this last chapter as all the sin and adultery and flying in the face of a holy God ends with a plea to return to their God. In spite of their stubbornness, God continues to call them to repentance and relationship. Hosea calls them to see that Assyria cannot save them and strength will not deliver them. They must know that the idols they carve are not gods at all. God speaks prophetically of the day they will repent and He will heal them, love them, and no longer be angry with them. He will bless them abundantly.

Right now, as we close this powerful book, you may find yourself in a state similar to that of the Israelites. Maybe evil practices have even begun to take root in your life. You hear the Word of God being spoken, addressing your problems and warning you of the consequences of sin, but you haven't yet made the step of repentance. You want just a few more days of sin, just a little more enjoyment of what you know is wrong. But the Lord is calling you now. You know that God's way is the right way. You know that you are being called to walk in righteousness. Will you walk in it? Or will you stumble and fall? The choice is yours.

Isn't it amazing how the world can warp love to become something that is selfish, giving just to get? Or worse still, not giving until you get. But God's love is the highest form of love. It's known as *agape*, which is sacrificial love. *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son"*. Real love always costs and is more than a feeling; it's a decision. I've lengthened our 'Pray' time today to allow you to consider your return to Him.

Pray

Father, I am reminded that the Law didn't revive me; it condemned me. It didn't give joy to my heart; it brought terror to my soul. The Law wasn't the sunshine lighting my way; it was a searchlight exposing my sin. I'm now learning to love Your Law as Fatherly instruction to Your beloved children, as a revelation of the good, the true, and the beautiful, not as a formula for merit, acceptance or favour. It's grace that saves me, not the Law. What a life-giving, liberty-fuelling difference the finished work of the cross makes! In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

