

LOVE STORY
WEEK 2 DISCUSSION GUIDE
“CLEANING UP THE MESS”

READ

As we learned last week, Hosea’s life served as a metaphor for God’s relationship with Israel. Hosea married an unfaithful woman to symbolize God’s love for His people in the face of their sin and rebellion. As Hosea’s story continues, we see him condemning his wife, Gomer, for not behaving like a faithful wife. He talks about rejecting her because of her unfaithfulness. This parallels God’s threat to withdraw his hand of protection from Israel, as the nation used the things He blessed them with to worship false gods.

Hosea 2:2-8

*“Rebuke your mother, rebuke her,
for she is not my wife,
and I am not her husband.
Let her remove the adulterous look from her face
and the unfaithfulness from between her breasts.
Otherwise I will strip her naked
and make her as bare as on the day she was born;
I will make her like a desert,
turn her into a parched land,
and slay her with thirst.
I will not show my love to her children,
because they are the children of adultery.
Their mother has been unfaithful
and has conceived them in disgrace.
She said, ‘I will go after my lovers,
who give me my food and my water,
my wool and my linen, my olive oil and my drink.’
Therefore I will block her path with thornbushes;
I will wall her in so that she cannot find her way.
She will chase after her lovers but not catch them;
she will look for them but not find them.
Then she will say,
‘I will go back to my husband as at first,
for then I was better off than now.’
She has not acknowledged that I was the one
who gave her the grain, the new wine and oil,
who lavished on her the silver and gold—
which they used for Baal.*

God’s reprimand is severe. However, we soon find out that His end goal is not to punish, but to redeem and restore Israel to a right relationship with Him. Once Israel has suffered the calamity of a godless existence, God’s plan is to win her back.

Hosea 2:14-15

*"Therefore I am now going to allure her;
I will lead her into the wilderness
and speak tenderly to her.
There I will give her back her vineyards,
and will make the Valley of Achor a door of hope.
There she will respond as in the days of her youth,
as in the day she came up out of Egypt.*

The idea of God withdrawing his protective hand is found throughout the Bible. We are going to look at a couple more examples. King Solomon described this kind of withdraw in the following prayer.

2 Chronicles 6:24-27

"When your people Israel have been defeated by an enemy because they have sinned against you and when they turn back and give praise to your name, praying and making supplication before you in this temple, then hear from heaven and forgive the sin of your people Israel and bring them back to the land you gave to them and their ancestors. "When the heavens are shut up and there is no rain because your people have sinned against you, and when they pray toward this place and give praise to your name and turn from their sin because you have afflicted them, then hear from heaven and forgive the sin of your servants, your people Israel. Teach them the right way to live, and send rain on the land you gave your people for an inheritance.

Solomon anticipates that God will withdraw from his people because of their sin, and that the end result will be restoration. In the New Testament, we actually see this approach played out by the Apostle Paul.

1 Corinthians 5:1-5

It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that even pagans do not tolerate: A man is sleeping with his father's wife. And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have gone into mourning and have put out of your fellowship the man who has been doing this? For my part, even though I am not physically present, I am with you in spirit. As one who is present with you in this way, I have already passed judgment in the name of our Lord Jesus on the one who has been doing this. So when you are assembled and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord.

The idea of "handing this man over to Satan for the destruction of his flesh" comes along with an end goal. The objective is not wrath, revenge, or rejection, but rather the sinful man's salvation. The hope is that by releasing this man to suffer the consequences of his sin, and by allowing him to live outside of the grace that he himself rejected, he will suffer sin's consequences in a way that eventually restores him to God.

This is a principal known to Bible scholars as “redemptive withdrawal”. When a person lives in disobedience and rebellion, God’s final attempt to save them, is to release his hand of protection, and allow them to reap what they have sown. We sometimes say that a person has just “hit rock bottom.” But God’s intention is always to restore people into a right relationship with him.

DISCUSS

When you were younger, did a parent or teacher ever let you “learn your lesson the hard way” by allowing you to suffer the consequences of your choices?

Have you ever had to withdraw from someone in the hope that they would somehow benefit from your decision?

Have you ever known someone who went through a “rock bottom” experience, and ended up closer to God because of it?

When we encounter someone who is experiencing God’s redemptive withdrawal, we tend to be judgmental toward them. We see an individual who is getting what they deserve. We see a lost soul who is suffering the consequences of their own bad choices. But it is likely that God is lovingly allowing this person to suffer a certain path, hoping that it will eventually lead to restoration. Does this perspective change the way that you view people who are far from God?

Do you know anyone who may be experiencing God’s “redemptive withdrawal” right now? If so, how might you be instrumental in helping to restore that person?

PRAY FOR YOUR GROUP

Pray for the people we know personally, who have “hit rock bottom”. Pray that we will see them with an understanding that God wants to redeem people no matter how messed up they are.

PRAY FOR FCC

Pray that FCC will be a place for those who have hit rock bottom. Pray that we will have hearts that don’t seek to judge, but to connect people with a Savior who desperately wants to redeem them.

PRAY FOR OUR GLOBAL PARTNERS

Please pray for our team traveling to India in the coming weeks. We lift up each of them and pray for good health, safekeeping, and for the impact the people of India will have on them, and the opportunities they will have to share the love of Jesus with everyone they meet.