

## Couples in the bible - Hosea and Gomer

### The Preacher and the Prostitute

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Hosea was a young preacher in the nation of Israel, the kingdom had split in two, north and south, and Hosea was a preacher in the Northern Kingdom. He was a contemporary of the prophets **Isaiah** and **Amos**.

Jeroboam was the king of the Northern Kingdom at the time and he was one of the 'wicked' kings of Israel, (and here wicked is not good, it's referring to a lack of godliness). As far as the spiritual temperature goes, when Hosea was preaching the nation was going through a pretty low time. People were "living it up" and didn't have much time for God. They wouldn't have admitted that out loud, of course, it's just that...

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So God raises up this young preacher. Hosea was his name and preaching was his game! God came to him and said –

"Hosea, beside every great preacher stands a great preacher's wife!"

So Hosea decides to go to Bible College, do a bit of study and find himself a preacher's wife. (Things were no different then, than they are today.)

Hosea tucks his bible under his arm and heads off to the nearby Bible College, sits in the class and gazes out over a sea of suitable young godly women. They all had long hair tied up in buns; their modest length skirts complementing the golden glow of their halos hovering above their heads. He sits there thinking oh boy! I am spoilt for choice.

Hosea's heart began to pound as he pondered the possibilities,

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- or maybe that one with the pretty hair who is playing the piano, we can marry and she can be our musician -
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Then God says Hosea, I want you to look across the street. God drew his attention to the other side of the street and there stood a woman who obviously wasn't a Bible college student.

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Hosea, says, "I see her God; is she waiting for her sister who is attending the Bible College."

"No Hosea, That's the one I want you to marry!"

And to top it all off, her name was "GOMER." How was Hosea going to preach God's Holy Word with a prostitute named Gomer for a preacher's wife?

And all God said was - "You'll see!"

### God's plan

Wouldn't it be nice if God, prior to stepping into our lives and turning it upside down would take the time to explain the plan to us. When we hit those tough or uncertain patches in our lives, do you wonder why God doesn't fill us in on what He is doing in our lives? It can be somewhat frustrating when God's only response to the "Lord, what is happening" question is – 'you'll see'.

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*<sup>2</sup> When the LORD began to speak through Hosea, the LORD said to him, "Go, marry a promiscuous woman and have children with her, for like an adulterous wife this land is guilty of unfaithfulness to the LORD."*

Hosea was very puzzled by God's strange command. But he wasn't the first person in the bible to be puzzled by God,

- Adam and eve – don't eat from that tree
- Noah and the boat
- Moses – and the plagues
- Abraham and God's command that he take his son and sacrifice him.

God does seem to do some strange things at times, things we don't always understand, things we can't categorize or put into nice neat boxes, things that don't fit into what we think we know of Him. Personally I hate it when that happens, I like logic, I like common sense, and do you know what I have discovered – God love me anyway and works with what he has got and occasionally stretches me. But anyway, this is one of those strange requests.

What God is doing is inviting Hosea to enter into, or identify with God's own heart by **entering into a relationship which he knows will not be reciprocated**. God wants Hosea to love someone—not just legally marry them, but truly love them—in the knowledge that his love will not be returned.

I wonder if you ever been there? Trying to love someone when you are not loved back. Probably not on purpose, but it would have to be one of the most emotionally painful things. I haven't been there. From birth I have been in very caring and nurturing relationships. But as we all know - it happens - in marriages, parent/child relationships, wider families, sickness or mental illness.

Hosea 1:3-5

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It seems the early days of their marriage were beautiful as their love grew and began to blossom. And God blessed their union with a son. Hosea would have been pleased as punch – a boy. His marriage would be better than ever with this little one to brighten their home. God named the baby, for his name was to have prophetic significance to the nation. He called him Jezreel.

It was after the birth of Jezreel that Hosea seems to have noticed a change in Gomer. She became restless and unhappy, a bit like a bird trapped in a cage. He continues on preaching and encouraging the wayward nation to turn from its sin and trust God. "Return to the Lord!" was the theme of his message, and he preached it repeatedly with power.

Meanwhile Gomer grew less and less interested in his ministry. In fact, she may have grown to resent it. She possibly accused Hosea of thinking more about his preaching than he did of her. She began to find other interests to occupy herself. Soon Hosea was feeling pangs of suspicion about her faithfulness to him.

His suspicions were confirmed when Gomer got pregnant again.

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Hosea was convinced that this baby girl was not his. At God's direction, he called her Lo-Ruhamah, or "unloved," implying that she would not enjoy her true father's love. Again the name was symbolic of Israel's wandering from God's love.

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This third child symbolized Israel’s alienation from God, but it also exposed Gomer’s sinful antics. This told everyone that this child born in Hosea’s house was not his.

It was all out in the open now. Everyone knew about Gomer’s affairs. The entire **second chapter** of Hosea describes God’s relationship with his unfaithful wife Israel. But it is obvious that the feeling grows out of Hosea’s relationship with Gomer as it is sandwiched smack in the middle of Hosea’s sad story.

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- He threatened to disinherit her (2:3). But still she ran off with her lovers because they promised to lavish material things on her (2:5).
- He tried to stop her (2:6), but she continued to seek her companions in sin (2:7).
- Hosea would take her back in loving forgiveness and they would try again. But her repentance would be short-lived and soon she would be off again with another new lover.
- Then the final blow fell. “I’m leaving for good this time. I’ve found my true love. I’ll never come back again.”

Hosea loved her deeply and grieved for her. His friends were probably saying, “Good riddance to her, Hosea. Now you’ll be through with her disloyal ways once and for all.” But Hosea did not feel that way. He longed for her to come home.

### Undying love

Here we see the reason that this book is part of God’s story to us. We cannot escape the message of his *undying love*. Hosea wasn’t thinking good riddance. Hosea wanted to see Gomer restored to his side as his faithful wife. And he believed that God was great enough to do it.

One day word came that Gomer had been deserted by her lover. She had sold herself into slavery and she had hit bottom. Surely Hosea had forgotten her. But no. He could not give her up. And God spoke to him:

**3** The LORD said to me, “Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another man and is an adulteress. Love her as

the LORD loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods and love the sacred raisin cakes.”

<sup>2</sup> So I bought her for fifteen pieces of silver and about ten bushels of barley. <sup>3</sup> Then I told her, “You are to live with me many days; you must not be a prostitute or be intimate with any man, and I will behave the same way toward you.”

You may ask, “How could anyone love that deeply?” The answer was right there in God’s instructions to Hosea, “Love her as the Lord loves.” (v1) Only someone who knows the love and forgiveness of God can ever love this perfectly. Only one who has experienced His loving forgiveness cannot help but love and forgive others.

Sadly when people think about Christian marriages they always want to talk about who is meant to submit to whom. The real discussion should be around love for one another. Husbands are commanded to love their wives as Christ loved the Church (Eph. 5:25), and Hosea is an outstanding biblical example of that kind of love.

God says; “Go, show your love to your wife again”. (v1) So Hosea begins his search for her, driven by that divine love, a love that never ends. And he found her, unkempt, abused, sick, chained to an auction block in a slave market, a shadow of the woman she once was.

How anyone could love her now? But Hosea bought her from her slavery and said to her, “You will live with me, be faithful to me, and I to you.” (v3)

He paid for her, brought her home, and restored her to her position as his wife. While we do not find anything else in Scripture about their relationship with each other, I like to think that God used Hosea’s supreme act of forgiving love to melt her heart and change her life and they lived happily ever after!

### God’s forgiveness

How many times should a husband or wife forgive? Some would argue:

- “If I keep forgiving I simply affirm his pattern of sin.”  
Or “If I keep forgiving, she’ll think she can get away with anything”
- Others say, “If I keep forgiving, it’s like putting my seal of approval on his behaviour.”  
Or “I can’t take another hurt like that. If he does that one more time, I’m out of here.”

Those are human, maybe even natural responses.

Listen to what Jesus would say. You see, Peter had asked Jesus this same question:

*Matthew 18:21-22*

*<sup>21</sup> Then Peter came to him and asked, "Lord, how often should I forgive someone who sins against me? Seven times?"*

*<sup>22</sup> "No, not seven times," Jesus replied, "but seventy times seven!"*

That's a whole lot of forgiveness. In fact, Jesus was simply saying that there is no end to forgiveness, so don't bother counting.

Sometimes it might be just the little insults and daily frustrations that need forgiveness, and it's 'easy come and easy go'. Or maybe it's a more significant offense, like Gomer's, and we can never forget it. We try to forgive, but a few days later it's right there again, consuming our minds. Big wounds take longer to heal. They will come back to our minds. There is no way to avoid it. But every time they do, we must gently remind ourselves of the decision to forgive, maybe remind ourselves how much God has forgiven us, then ask Him to heal the wound and slowly take the unforgiving thoughts out of our minds.

**Forgiveness does not necessarily mean that we must suffer in silence.** The need for open and honest communication may demand that we share what we think and how we feel, what the wrong has done to us.

**Neither does forgiveness necessarily mean we cannot take steps to guard against the wrong recurring.** That might sometimes require some external help; it might demand an honest review of personalities or habits; it might mean a change in life-style or even a relocation. The process of forgiveness is not just feeling 'warm fuzzies' or spiritual mumbo jumbo. It is incredibly practical and will include steps that will help us avoid these same pitfalls in the future.

Recently our small group was going through a DVD series on 'what's so amazing about grace' and Philip Yancey was talking to some bloke about forgiveness and he said when you forgive;

- You surrender the right to get even.
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God can use forgiving love to melt hardened hearts and change callused lives quicker than anything else in this world. That is the lesson of Hosea and Gomer, the lesson of forgiveness.

God's love and forgiveness permeates Hosea's entire prophecy. However, be careful not to misunderstand God's forgiveness. God hates sin; it grieves His heart; His perfect righteousness and justice demand that He deal with it. But He still loves sinners and diligently seeks them out and offers them His loving forgiveness.

As you to read through the rest of Hosea you will discover despite Israel's unfaithfulness, God never stopped loving them. And because He never stopped loving them, He never stopped pleading with them to return to him:

We need to love like that. We need to forgive like that. We need to drag the hurt we have been holding on to, to the cross of Jesus—where we once found God's loving forgiveness—and we must leave them all there. When we fully forgive, our minds will be released from the burden of resentment, and we shall be free to grow in our relationship with God and with each other.

Communion

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