

**15** Then I will return to my lair  
 until they have borne their guilt  
 and seek my face—  
 in their misery  
 they will earnestly seek me.”

### **Israel Unrepentant**

**6** “Come, let us return to the Lord.  
 He has torn us to pieces  
 but he will heal us;  
 he has injured us  
 but he will bind up our wounds.

**2** After two days he will revive us;  
 on the third day he will restore us,  
 that we may live in his presence.

**3** Let us acknowledge the Lord;  
 let us press on to acknowledge him.  
 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.”

**4** “What can I do with you, Ephraim?  
 What can I do with you, Judah?  
 Your love is like the morning mist,  
 like the early dew that disappears.

**5** Therefore I cut you in pieces with my prophets,  
 I killed you with the words of my mouth—  
 then my judgments go forth like the sun.[a]

**6** For I desire mercy, not sacrifice,  
 and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings.

Truth or Dare? You remember that game. You can either reveal a deeply kept secret that would be painful to reveal or accept an outrageous challenge. You can probably imagine playing that game with friends but what about with God? That might be a boring game because God already knows all of our deeply guarded secrets and the only dare that he would make would be in line with his word. So I can't imagine sitting down for to play truth or dare would be all that exciting for God but then we have our lesson.

It seems as Hosea sat down with God for a game of truth or dare and he ended up having to speak a harsh truth to God's people and he did it in such a way that many would consider a triple dog dare. God tells Hosea to marry a prostitute and speak the truth to my people. Can you imagine how hard that must have been for Hosea? Love an unfaithful woman who will run off after her lovers. Love her and the children that will be born to her though they may not be your own. Ouch.

God has dared us to be different from the world. He expects us to love the world that will be unfaithful to us and yet we are to live selfless lives of service not only to God but to others and that too can be a painful experience. But the truth is that God has dared to enter our world and take our place.

But the truth seems to have lost its awe factor. We are among the minor prophets. It's not that they were small in stature but their books are short. God called one prophet after the other to speak the truth to his people. He was trying to get through to them but they weren't listening. God calls Hosea to graphically speak the truth to his people. Hosea 1:2 - *"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 married Gomer. It's not that this poor girl was caught up in a bad situation. She had no intention of changing her ways. She is unfaithful to Hosea. She continued in her trade and had children named, "Jezreel, No Mercy, and Not My Children." You can almost imagine the prophet crying out in the street as if someone dared him to do it, "No Mercy and Not My Children, it's time to eat. Come home."

This was not a dare, but a command, but it was also a proclamation of the truth. Hosea's personal life and preaching proclaimed God's Word to God's people. Hosea represented God and Gomer represents unfaithful Israel. The Lord loved Israel like Hosea loved Gomer. He had committed himself to her through the promises made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God has been faithful to her but his marriage but it has been entirely one sided. Israel is like a whore, Hosea proclaims, "You're only interested in what you can get." Israel has turned away from God to other gods. They refer to Baal and the Lord in the same sentence. They have turned to other nations and not to their God for help.

As a result of their actions God has allowed them to suffer. *God comes like a Lion to tear them apart. Like a lion to Ephraim, like a young lion to the house of Judah. I will tear apart and carry them off and no one will stop me. I will return to my place until they acknowledge their guilt and seek my face. Will they return? God has walked away from them. He's torn them to pieces. Like a married couple fighting for their family and yet one partner is uncommitted and uncaring. Finally we hear from the guilty party, "Let us acknowledge the Lord; 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."* That sounds good but they do not acknowledge their guilt. There is no confession. They weren't sorry for their sins. They were just looking for God to get them out of their mess.

God's response makes us wonder if they were sincere, *"What can I do with you, Ephraim? What can I do with you, Judah? Your love is like the morning mist, like the early dew that disappears."* Their love is here one second, gone the next. They called out to God in their suffering, they went through through the motions, but simply to leverage God, like leading a donkey with a carrot. Their love will not last but rather like Gomer, they'll be gone before the honeymoon is over.

Hosea dares to speak the truth to Israel. He dares to speak the truth to us. God has not commanded us to marry an unfaithful spouse. In pre-marriage counseling we try to keep people who will be unfaithful from marriage. We do not find ourselves in the place of Hosea and yet like Israel God has committed himself to us. He calls us his children.

But are we faithful? Or are we only focused on what we can get from God? Do we imagine if we just drop to our knees in prayer God will restore our nation and make things better? Do we treat prayer as a way to hedge our bets and manipulate the almighty God? Do we use our love as a leverage tool; "If you do this I will do..." (what I already should be doing.) Such a spouse has no desire to repent and admit guilt but are only looking for whatever may benefit themselves.

Is this marriage all about us? That comes with the assumption that God will always have me back. But such thinking fails to realize just how much we need him and are dependent on God. It thinks that

through the right words and works we can appease God. That is one sided marriage won't last. We are fooling ourselves that all is well between us as long as I say the right words, pray my prayers, and do my duty to God and others. Your duty is to be faithful. To dare to be different. The truth hurts. The truth is that this image of an unfaithful woman still serves as an example of what God has done for us. Even at my very best I am worse than an unfaithful wife, a prostitute who does not deserve to be brought back and forgiven by God. That's the truth which is not always so graphically spoken.

At some point in an abusive, single sided relationship divorce looks like the only option. Cut your losses and move on but at this point God doubles down.

God instructs Hosea to take Gomer back. But, she's been unfaithful to him. She has run after her lovers. She is in debt and being sold as a slave. Gomer is a shadow of the woman he's married. She's been used, abused. Then the bidding starts, three shekels, five, eleven, and then that voice calling from the back - "Fifteen!" Her husband Hosea has come to buy her back. Hosea's name comes from the same root as Hosanna. It's the same root that we get the name, "Joshua" - you're more familiar with the greek name, "Jesus." Hosea means salvation and Jesus is salvation. God was demonstrating to his people he doesn't give up so easily. He will redeem them when they are sold in slavery. Even if they suffer now it's because God is concerned about their relationship. God doesn't want any other god to get in the way. Sometimes he has to practice tough love.

Just as Hosea loved his unfaithful wife who prostituted herself, so also the Lord loves you. He gave his Son to redeem you, a price that none of us could pay. He has married you with his promises and washed you in the water and word of Baptism. He presents you as a bride beautiful dressed, clothed in the gown of Jesus' righteousness.

You and I are not Hosea. We are all Gomer. While we were in the arms of another. While we were still playing the whore. *While we were still sinners, Christ died for us* (Romans 5:8). He rose for us and he returns every week, every day and welcomes us back. God hasn't left. At times it can seem like God doesn't care; that he wants to see you suffer. Sometimes he does send hardship. The tough love that is shown is because he cares. He'd rather we suffer in this world than for eternity in hell. God wants even those bad days to turn us toward him, *acknowledge our guilt and seek his face*.

Jesus came to seek and to save the lost. To lead them back to God. *Jesus was cut apart in our place. He was abandoned by God for us*. Through his word, he confronts us, convicts us, cuts, and condemns us under the law but then he also redeems us from that very law and reminds us through Peter, *"Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you have not received mercy but now you have received mercy (1 Peter 2:9-11)*.

Because of this we can behave like Hosea. We can love others who are completely unworthy of our love. Even though they mistreat us, mock us, take advantage, squander our help, and don't show an ounce of appreciation we can still love them. They deserve anything and the truth is neither do we. We are unworthy of God's love. But come to know our redeemer and his work for us, we will see service to him more than just our duty, we will want to be more like him and learn more about him. God's Word isn't just a book we read, it is our joy, our hope, our salvation. It tells us of God's commitment, work, and love.

Love for God above all, and love for our neighbor. This is what our husband, God wants of us. He says, *"I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings"* (Hosea 6:6). And that is what he produces in us as we seek to know him better and better.

You don't have to sit down and play truth or dare with God. He already knows what you've done. You don't need to do anything foolish to prove your love. He's already forgiven you. He's committed to you. Dare to know his love more and more as you learn the truth about his work for you, for all. Amen.