

Hosea 11:1-11 God Loves You

As the new year gets underway and we get ready to share vision at the end of the month, we need to remind ourselves of the fundamentals of God's goodness to us, starting with perhaps the most obvious but also the most profound: that He loves us.

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If you're a Christian, you're used to hearing that God loves you but there remain nagging doubts in many of us: "I know He loves me, but He must have some reservations, mustn't He? Given that He knows everything about me." Human loves are like this, even the best of them. Hosea 11:1-11 is a speech God makes to His people when they have been sinning against Him, and it shows us what His emotions are towards His people.

God often uses the closest of human relationships to describe His love for us, and here He focuses on that of a parent. He recounts His rescue of Israel from Egypt, calling them His son (verse 1), just as he told Pharaoh they were (Exodus 4:22). The "yoke" of slavery (verse 4) was the power that Egypt had over them, which God set them free from (Exodus 6:6). He "taught them to walk" and "led them" (verses 3 and 4) through the parted Red Sea and by a pillar of cloud and fire (Numbers 9:18). He healed them when they were sick (verse 3), naming Himself the "the Lord your healer" (Exodus 15:26). He "fed them" (verse 4) miraculously with manna for 40 years (Exodus 16:4-35). Why was He so good to them? Deuteronomy 7:7-8 tell us plainly that He loved them because He is loving, not because they were lovely (see also Exodus 34:6-7). Israel was to see the miraculous events of their rescue from Egypt as permanent evidence of His love, and the same was to go for the day-to-day blessings they experienced in the land He gave them: rain and sun, life and harvest, community and kin (e.g. Psalm 147).

Israel did not respond in kind, as Hosea 11:1-11 tells us. This brought terrible punishment upon them: exile (see also Deuteronomy 21:18-21 for how rebellious children like Israel were to be treated). Would they become just another footnote in history, a people you've never heard of because they died out long ago? This is the knife edge of Hosea 11:7 and 8, where God shares with us His thoughts and emotions. Israel is not going to be punished as it deserves because God is holy.

The story of Hosea 11 is retold by Jesus as the prodigal son (Luke 15:2, 7, 10-32). This experience of compassionate welcome and love is available for everyone who turns to God. But we still might have doubts and fears about God's love because we have done wrong and failed to do right. The solution is to look at Jesus from the perspective of Hosea 11:1, which Matthew quotes it in his gospel as being also about Jesus (Matthew 2:15). There are no reservations or qualifications or complications in the relationship between God the Father and God the Son. For all eternity they have known each other perfectly, loved each other

perfectly, delighted in one another (see for example, Matthew 3:17, John 8:49, 10:30, 12:28, 14:31, 17:5). This incomprehensibly perfect and passionate love overflows to envelope others.

Not only are we saved because of God's love (John 3:16, Galatians 2:20, Ephesians 1:4-7) but we are brought into the love of God the Father and Son. John 17:23, 26 makes this incredible truth plain. God's love for us isn't grudging, changeable, impersonal, or anything else we might deserve, expect or fear; it is a sharing of the eternal love that He has for Jesus.

This is possible because Jesus has united Himself with us; He's taken our sin and shame and given us His perfect relationship to the Father (2 Corinthians 5:21, see also Romans 3:23-24, 1 Corinthians 1:30, Ephesians 2:8-9, Philippians 3:9). Being loved by God in this way really isn't about what you've done, and what you're like (Romans 8:35-39).

We need to tell ourselves about His love again and again, reading about it and singing about it and thanking Him for it. Then we can see every other blessing He chooses to give us as a reminder and reiteration of this (James 1:17). Even during hardships, the love of God is being poured out on us by the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5). Even when those times may make us doubt whether He loves us, His love towards us doesn't cool or reduce one bit. Even in the moments of our worst sins, as Hosea 11 showed us, God will be loving us. It will be true every day of this year because it has been true forever: He loves us.

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Recommended reading

Dane Ortlund, *Gentle and Lowly*
Michael Reeves, *Christ Our Life*

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Questions for small group discussion

- What makes you less sure about God's love?
- What did Hosea 11 tell us about God and His love that you found surprising or challenging?
- "The gospel is this: We are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe, yet at the very same time we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope." Which side of this formulation by Timothy Keller are you more likely to fall on – lack of awareness of your sinfulness or of God's love you in Christ?
- Are there things you do that particularly help you to be aware of God's love?
- How can this small group be a community defined by a full of God's love?