

*Text of messages delivered by Aidan Wivell at Windsor Park Baptist Church on Sunday 13th July 2025.
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Hosea: Shocking Love

Hosea's life and ministry exposes the shocking sinfulness of Israel, and yet the shocking love of God that relentlessly reaches out to His people.

It's great to be with you today as we continue to explore the ancient voices of the Minor Prophets. Two weeks ago Grant introduced us to these prophetic words and last week we heard the challenging call of Amos to let justice roll on like a river. One thing we'll keep repeating this series is that contrary to popular understanding, the primary role of the prophets was not to predict the future. As Grant said in week one, the prophets "weren't crystal ball gazers as much as they were confronters of present reality."

And in order to confront present realities God often asked them to do drastic things. These were not your run-of-the-mill teachers with a 3-point sermon and a polite prayer. They were here to shake things up. To rattle some cages. And sometimes things got a bit weird. Enter Hosea.

Israel in Hosea's Day

Hosea's lived and ministered around 700 years before Jesus was born. At this time the 12 tribes of Israel had separated into what is known as "The Divided Kingdom". Two southern tribes were known as Judah and the 10 northern tribes as Israel. They had separate kings and capital cities. The first verse of Hosea helpfully gives us this timestamp:

The word of the Lord that came to Hosea son of Beeri during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and during the reign of Jeroboam son of Jehoash king of Israel

(Hosea 1:1)

- Hosea speaks primarily to the Northern Kingdom which he often refers to as Ephraim.
- The King of Israel, Jeroboam, had set up two golden calves at either end of the country and these are specifically denounced in Hosea.
- The book often cites the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah, and lesser known Admah and Zeboiim, as examples of God bringing judgement on wicked cities.
- Israel was bordered on the West by Egypt and on the East by Assyria. Two large empires which clashed during this time and Israel was often tempted to make political alliances with these superpowers of the day.

And it was into this context that Hosea spoke.

But his story began not with his **choice of words** but with his **choice of wife**.

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 1:2)

Wow what a start to your ministry! This is a shocking call from God. I think of the life and ministry of Hosea, like a **defibrillator**, intended to shock Israel from their sin. Because despite the political uncertainty described, they were for the most part living in comfortable economic times. Interest rates were low, petrol was cheap, there was plenty left to spare.

Also because of the ongoing influence of the surrounding nations, they were so deeply engaged in Baal worship that they no longer saw a problem with it. It was just part of culture, and hey, things were good.

It was into this complacent and compromised culture that God spoke through Hosea. Now, the book of Hosea is actually one of the longest minor prophets at fourteen chapters, so we'll focus on the two key themes:

1. The shocking sin of Israel.
2. The shocking love of God.

Shocking sin and shocking love. We'll start with the sin.

Shocking Sin

God through Hosea consistently compares Israel's sin to marital unfaithfulness. Through Hosea's words, but even more impactfully, through his marriage to Gomer. His life becomes a metaphor. A painful one. Hosea's marriage to Gomer is a prophetic demonstration for his hearers. But it must impact Hosea himself even more. Hosea is known for the powerful emotive language he uses on God's behalf (we'll hear some later), and this ability to feel some of God's pain, comes from his own experience of Gomer's unfaithfulness.

This is a prophet who lives it. Breathes it. Feels it.

It's raw. It's confusing.

It's shocking.

So what is the sin Israel is being called out for here? All the prophets will make accusations against the people and call for repentance, but how have they been unfaithful in this context?

Firstly, their sin is **not truly knowing their partner**.

In chapter 4 Hosea starts to outline the charge of God against the people and the first thing he says is: *"There is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgment of God in the land."* 4:1b And then in verse 6 *"my people are destroyed from lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also reject you as my priests".*

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To be in a marriage requires genuine and intimate knowledge of the partner. Not head knowledge. Not knowing about them. But knowing them personally. Knowing their values, what brings them joy, what breaks their heart, knowing them below the surface of what they present to others. Israel no longer knew God like this.

They no longer acknowledged Him and this is related to another aspect of their sin, preferring other lovers. Consistently Hosea charges Israel with worshipping the gods of the nations around them, particularly Baal.

- *They slash themselves, appealing to their gods for grain and new wine, but they turn away from me. (7:14)*
- *Samaria, throw out your calf-idol! My anger burns against them. How long will they be incapable of purity. (8:15)*
- *But when they came to Baal Peor, they consecrated themselves to that shameful idol and became as vile as the thing they loved. (9:10)*

Israel had been shocking unfaithful to their husband – Yahweh. **They had stopped turning to Him and consistently, and unquestioningly, looked elsewhere for security and provision.**

And then even when they did appeal to God, it was short-lived. Chapter 6 describes the process. The first time I read through Hosea I got to this section and I thought we'd turned a corner. I thought they finally got it and were going to genuinely repent. It sounds so sincere! Let's have a read and see what God makes of their "so called" return.

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. After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will restore us, that we may live in his presence. 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." (6:1-3)

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God's response:

"What shall 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." (6:4)

Like a spouse having an affair who when caught swears they will stop, only to continue once the heat dies down. Or a partner caught watching pornography, who swears they are sorry and will stop, only to continue once the coast is clear. Israel wanted a quick fix without true repentance. They hoped God would revive them "after two days", but God said their love was as transitory as the morning mist.

So to summarise Hosea's first point:

- Israel's sin was shocking.
- They were an adulterous wife.
- They no longer knew God.
- They preferred other lovers.
- And their displays of love were fake.

This is a marriage partner no one would want.

Yet God's love is even more shocking than Israel's sin.

Shocking Love

God first demonstrates this by calling Hosea to take back his unfaithful wife Gomer:

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 God's and love the sacred raisin cakes." (3:1)

Hosea was well within his rights to divorce her according to Jewish law. That's what everyone expected, his friends would have advised, what Gomer would have known was coming, and what she deserved. But instead, he graciously restores her. It's shocking. But this is the relentless love of God.

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Earlier I mentioned Hosea uses some of the most expressive emotive language for God in the Bible. Reading Hosea cover to cover chapter 11 stopped me in my tracks. At this point God switches from the husband-wife metaphor to that of parent and child. As someone raising a 7-month-old, this struck me right on the nose.

*When Israel was a child, I loved him,
and out of Egypt I called my son.
But the more they were called,
the more they went away from me.
They sacrificed to the Baals
and they burned incense to images.
It was I who taught Ephraim to walk,
taking them by the arms;
but they did not realise it was I who healed them.
I led them with cords of human kindness,
with ties of love.
To them I was like one who lifts
a little child to the cheek,
and I bent down to feed them. (11:1-4)*

By the time we reach verse 8 God seems to be almost overcome with emotion for his child:

*“How can I give you up, Ephraim?
How can I hand you over, Israel?
How can I treat you like Admah?
How can I make you like Zeboyim?
My heart is changed within me;
all my compassion is aroused.
I will not carry out my fierce anger,
nor will I devastate Ephraim again.
For I am God, and not a man.” (11:8-9)*

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This is the shocking love of God. The love that takes back an unfaithful partner again and again. The love that runs to prodigal sons when they are still far off. The love that has met me and restored me at my lowest, ugliest moments. The love that reaches out to each of you today, however unlovable you may feel, however shocking your sin, God's love is always more shocking.

When I really think about the relentless, shocking love of God, and my unworthiness – it's hard to find words. A couple of years ago I attempted to write a spoken word to express what I wanted to say to God from my deepest being. As I sat in Raglan looking out over the estuary on a beautiful morning, aware of both my brokenness and beloved-ness – God's love felt so good it was unfair – this is some of what I wrote about the unfair love of God:

Unfair Love

*Sitting here,
with free entry,
to Your gallery,
in awe of Your artistry,
tell me how can it be
that The Artist
has called me friend?
has called me son?
has called me
enough.*

*Truly, it's madness this thing between us,
so absolutely one-sided.
The seesaw we play on impossibly unbalanced,
Your love
so utterly undeserved,
so unevenly requited.*

*I think what I'm trying to say is:
Thank You and
I'm sorry and
I'm here and finally,
I surrender.*

*Jesus,
Teach me to let You,
love me, unfairly.*

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The book of Hosea is a defibrillator that shocks us back to life. Shocking us with the extent of our sinfulness. Our unfaithfulness to God. And shocking us even more with God's relentless love, even unto us.

In a moment we are going to close our time together with the song, Clean. As you listen sing or listen to this beautiful song on the cleansing work of Jesus, I have three challenging questions for you to reflect on in response to Hosea's prophecy. You don't need to work through all of them, perhaps just one will resonate for you today.

1. Is there an area of your life where you have become comfortable with your sinfulness?

Ask the Holy Spirit to bring, not condemnation, but fresh conviction.

2. When was the last time you were shocked by the gospel?

Ask the Holy Spirit to open your eyes again in wonder at His audacious love.

3. Would anyone be shocked by the way you love others?

Ask the Holy Spirit to empower you to love others as you have been loved.

I know these are piercing questions but we can ask them with full assurance of Jesus' great love for us. Knowing that on the cross He defeated our sin and restored us to relationship with the Father. Knowing that as another prophet Isaiah says, though our sins are as scarlet, they will be white as snow.

Let's Pray.

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These questions are intended to help you think more about this message. We hope they might enable conversation, encouraging you to wrestle with how God might be challenging us to apply what we have heard/read.

Reflecting on Sunday 6th June 2025: Last Sunday Pastor Grant gave us a challenge to put in our diaries. What did you do on Thursday at 4pm to live out Amos' challenge to put justice and worship into action?

Questions from this week's teaching:

1. **Hosea accuses Israel of idolatry through Baal worship and more obscure references to "sacred raisin cakes"!** What might be some modern equivalents that we are tempted to worship? How do cultural norms sometimes mask spiritual compromise?
2. **Read Hosea 4:1-3.** What strikes you about God's initial charge against Israel?
3. **The story of Hosea and Gomer is confronting.** What emotions or questions does it bring up for you?
4. **How can the church today embody "shocking love" in a world quick to cancel or condemn?**
Are there specific people or groups God might be calling us to love more radically?

If you'd like to chat with someone about your spiritual journey or anything else going on in your life, please contact us at care@windsorpark.org.nz; **we're better together and no perfect people are allowed.**

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Below are some further resources that may take the message further and deeper and enable you to explore other viewpoints on the same theme. We also encourage you to engage with the preacher if there are further questions you have or if you'd like clarification on anything. Email info@windsorpark.org.nz and we'll direct your query to the appropriate person.

1. The Bible Project has excellent videos on each Minor Prophet. You can watch **Hosea** to recap this week and explore **Micah** ahead of next Sunday.
<https://bibleproject.com/videos/hosea/>
<https://bibleproject.com/videos/micah/>
2. The **YouVersion Bible App** is the world's leading Bible App. Download the app and create your own account and then set Windsor Park Baptist Church as 'My Church'. Each week we recommend a short devotional plan (you'll get a notification about a new plan each week). This week we'll recommend **Hosea: His Redeeming Love**.
<https://www.youversion.com/the-bible-app/>
3. Windsor Park provides free access to **RightNow Media** who serve the global Christian church with a mission to provide high-quality, Bible-based video content for the purpose of discipling people on their faith journey. To access RightNow Media and to create a free login go to the Windsor Park website here, <https://windsorpark.org.nz/resources>, and scroll down to the bottom. When you have a login, you'll see a curated library called **Prophetic Words: Ancient Voices, Modern Hope** with several resources you may want to browse.