

NO EMPTY WORD:
Relentless Pursuit

A Study on Hosea

by Paula Miles



©2024 Paula Miles

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How to Use This Study

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

– 2 Timothy 3:16-17

These are not just idle words for you—they are your life.

– Deuteronomy 32:47a (NIV)

Content

God's Word is breathed out by Him and gives us life. It is through the living and enduring Word that God brings our dead souls to life (1 Pet. 1:23-25) and then continues to nourish us with His life-giving words (Matt. 4:4) as we walk with Him. His Word is written for us, and so it is my prayer that through this study you will grow to love His Word more and learn how to glean from it on your own.

Each Week

Each week you will move through a portion of the book of Hosea in personal study. You will be asked to carefully read each passage and pray for the Spirit's help. As you look at the text, you can expect to find three different types of questions:

- **Observation** – This is the *what* of the text. Most of these answers you will be able to lift off the page, and they will help you determine what is happening in the passage. Observation is noticing or paying attention to something or someone. It is taking a careful or patient look in order to gain information and often record it.
- **Interpretation** – This is the *so what* of the text. You will be asked things such as what does this mean, or why do you

think this was said? You may be asked to look at other places in Scripture to gather insight into the text. Interpretation is the explanation of something that is not immediately obvious. We begin to understand at a deeper level what is being said to us.

- **Application** – This is the *now what* of the text. The purpose of Bible study is never just information; it is transformation. By the work of the Spirit, we want to be changed. How will my life look different as a result of being in His Word? Application is putting something into operation, bringing something to bear, using it for a particular purpose. It is implementing or exercising something into our everyday lives. What will this practically look like in my life?

Allow the Spirit to teach you as you spend time in the Word and answer the questions prior to reading the summary found at the end of each lesson.

Prayer: Prayer is a means of grace and vital as you study God’s Word. Begin each week asking the Lord to reveal Himself to you, to teach and transform you by the power of the Spirit through His living and enduring Word. This is a prayer He loves to answer.

At the end of each lesson, you will find a “Let’s Pray.” The purpose of your study is not just information but transformation, to be changed from the inside out, applying God’s truth to every area of your life. We need His help. In the first four lessons, I have modeled prayers that flow out of the Scripture for that week. The last four lessons end with prayer prompts to aid you in praying as a response to what the Lord has shown and taught you.

Teaching Videos: These are available for each lesson and may be a valuable resource for gifted teachers as they lead you. As another option, I encourage you to watch these videos after completing each lesson. You may choose to view these individually or with your group.

Community

You can walk through this study individually, but I want to encourage you to meet with a group of gospel-friends to learn and grow together. The biblical model of discipleship we read about and see in Scripture is certainly Word based, but it is also relationally driven. It is the content of the gospel taught in the context of covenant relationships that validates the gospel. It is here that God grows and matures us, and we learn more fully what it means to love, worship, and glorify Him.

Throughout God's Word, He calls us into community. His story has always been about a people. Gather with other believers to discuss your lesson. You will grow as you listen to the things the Lord is teaching others in your group. Discussion, encouragement, prayer, and accountability should be a part of your meetings. Most of the *so what* and *now what* questions in each lesson have been marked with an asterisk (*). Focus your discussion with your group around these questions.

In Ephesians 4:1-16, we are told that as we place ourselves under Word ministry in the context of relationships, we grow and mature. Growing up essentially means looking more and more like Jesus. As we grow, the body of Christ is built up. We are healthier and so are our churches. What a joy it is to watch God do this great work of transformation! Be expectant of what God might do as you study Hosea.

Lesson 1

AN UNLIKELY BRIDE

HOSEA 1–2:1

Hosea was a prophet during the second half of the eighth century BC who spoke to the northern kingdom of Israel prior to their being taken captive by Assyria. God's people had experienced prosperity, peace, and expansion, but with this also came spiritual decline. They began to trust in other things, and hypocrisy marked their lives. There was no access to the Temple in Jerusalem but ready access to the Canaanite altars and pagan worship. Thus, a blending of religion, culture, and thought occurred known as *syncretism*. Throughout the book of Hosea there is tension between God's judgment for His people and restoration by His grace. The warnings of judgment magnify God's grace and glory.

James Montgomery Boice noted Hosea is the “second greatest story in the Bible.”¹

Day 1 – Read Hosea 1–2:1

Thank God for His Word. Ask the Spirit to teach you as you study the book of Hosea. Pray for transformation, not just information.

If you have not already done so, prepare for this lesson by reading the introduction.

¹ James Montgomery Boice, *The Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002), 13.

1. What do the first five words remind us about the Scriptures?

The book of Hosea is not just the words of a man, but words inspired and breathed out by God through the Holy Spirit. Second Timothy 3:16 reminds us that all Scripture is God-breathed and is useful in our lives to teach, correct, rebuke, and train us in righteousness so that we may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. We believe this about every part of Scripture. It is important for us not to go just to Scripture that is easily understood or to verses that make us feel better, but instead immerse ourselves under the whole counsel of God. These are not just idle words; they are our life (Deut. 32:47a).

2. As we study Scripture, we want to try to understand it first in its historical context. Read 1 Kings 12:26-29; 2 Kings 14:24; 15:9, 18, 24, 28; 17:21-23. Summarize “the times” in which Hosea prophesied.

3. What did God tell Hosea to do in verse 2, and why?

When the LORD first spoke through Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea, "Go, take to yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the LORD." – Hosea 1:2

4. Circle the word that is repeated three times in verse 2.
*What emotion(s) does this word evoke in your heart and mind?

If you do a Google search for the word *whore*, the second definition given is “a person willing to do anything to get a particular thing.”² One of the definitions the American Heritage Dictionary gives for *whore* is “a person considered as having compromised principles for personal gain.”³ As shocking as the use of the word *whoredom* may be to us, these definitions give us a glimpse into what the Lord meant to reveal to His people in Hosea’s day. But there is clearly something here for the church *today* as well. There is clearly something here for you and me.

We should begin this study by asking ourselves some difficult questions. *Do you know what it is like to be willing to do anything to get a particular thing? Do you know what it is like to walk away from your first love, falling for all the other things that seem attractive and begging for your worship? Do you know what it is like to forsake the One who is totally and completely devoted to you? Do you know what it is like to be a spiritual whore?* Take some time to think about these things.

Day 2 – Read Hosea 1:3-10

5. What were the names and meanings of the three children born to Gomer?

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-
-

² Google Dictionary Search, Definitions from Oxford Languages, <https://www.google.com/search?q=definition+of+whore&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8&hl=en&client=safari>.

³ *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, Fifth Edition (2022), <https://ahdictionary.com/word/search.html?q=whore>.

This is a hard place to pause, but it is helpful to sit here briefly. What are you thinking or wrestling with?

As we move throughout this study, we will continue to feel the tension of reconciling these strong warnings and judgments with other aspects of God's character that we know to be true—His mercy and compassion for His people, His steadfast love

These warnings and judgments are not irrevocable statements but are being poured out for the purpose of drawing God's people to repentance and reconciliation.

and kindness. It is important to remember that these warnings and judgments are not irrevocable statements but are being poured out for the purpose of drawing God's people to repentance and reconciliation. He wants to restore His relationship with His people.

Day 3 – Read Hosea 1:1-11

8. Hosea is considered an allegory. (This does not mean it is not factual!) What is an allegory?

9. *In this allegory, Hosea represents God, and Gomer is an illustration of His people. How was Hosea like Christ? How was Gomer like us? How do you see this in the text?

A covenant is a binding promise that has a condition attached to it. If the condition is met, the promise is kept. Yahweh is a covenant-keeping God who lives in a covenant relationship with His people. (If you are unfamiliar with the idea of covenant, please go back and read the introduction to this study.)

10. What does chapter 1 of Hosea teach you about this covenant relationship?

11. Throughout Scripture, God’s covenantal promise to His people is that He will be their God (Jer. 24:7, Zech. 8:7-8 and 2 Cor. 6:16). The condition of the covenant is faithfulness. Given what you know so far, why might the promise be in jeopardy?

12. According to the names of the children born to Gomer, what was at stake for Israel’s unfaithfulness?

<i>Child’s name</i>	<i>What was at stake?</i>

As you look at God's message through the naming of Hosea's children, write three words that summarize the culture of His people at that time. How does this inform your perspective about God's warnings?

*How do your summary words resonate with the culture of the church today?

What would it be like if God gave us what we deserve? Mercy is not getting what you deserve. What if God were a God of no mercy? What if He said, "I've had enough. I'm done with you! You're not mine"? What if there were no gospel—no good news—no grace—no getting what you don't deserve? What if He threw up His hands and gave up on us? What if we were not His people and He was not our God? Take some time to think about these things.

Jesus is the Root of Jesse who stands as a banner for His people, to whom all the nations will rally and whose place of rest will be glorious (Isa. 11:10). He will make a way for the remnant of His people. We see this as we move throughout redemptive history in His Word. I love that these New Testament letters to churches refer to them as the scattered, God's elect who are strangers in this world. In a sense, all of us who are His Bride were exiles who were scattered and have been gathered, sown or planted, into the kingdom of the Son He loves (Col. 1:13). The picture we see in Revelation 7:4-12 is glorious and should cause us to join with those around the throne saying,

*“Amen!
 Blessing and glory
 and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor
 and power and might
 be to our God forever and ever.*

Amen!”

– Revelation 7:12

Lesson Summary

As parents of four children, we (like most parents) were very thoughtful about each of their names. It felt somewhat daunting to pick a name they did not choose that would identify them all of their lives. We love family names and thought it would be special if our children knew the heritage of their individual names. Two of my children's names were chosen in my mind and heart before I was even married, but with each pregnancy, my husband and I looked at our family trees. We wanted their names to have significance, to give them a sense of legacy, family, and faith. And so, we have Wimberly Victoria, Janie Engelmann, Clary Corbett, and Judy Gaines—names that we love for many reasons but may seem unusual to you. Throughout their lives, my children have often laughed when I ask them if they like their names. They usually just smile and say, “Yes, Mom.” I think each of them appreciates and values their names coming from a

place of deep meaning.

This first chapter of Hosea opens with the forming of a new little family. There's a dad and a mom and three children. Sounds like a happy story, right? Well, pretty quickly the story turns dark—and it does so as the children are christened with names that are not as hope-filled as we might expect. In fact, each child receives a name that should make us cringe. Why? Who would do such a thing?

Good question. And we need to dig into it a little before we can understand what the prophet Hosea, through the Spirit of God, wanted us to hear as he spent years living out before God's people the message which was given to him. God instructed Hosea to give his children these names because He wants them to have deep meaning for the people of God.

It is important, as a foundational truth, to remember that Hosea was speaking to the people of Israel (1:1). Scripture tells us the people of Israel were God's chosen people. That means they were His family, His children. They had lived with Him for centuries by the time Hosea came on the scene. The family dynamics were well-rehearsed, and they knew how life with God was intended to work. The words recorded in this book we are studying together are written to people who considered themselves to be good members of God's family. They considered themselves to be spiritual people. They were visibly part of God's Church. That's important for our understanding of Hosea's message.

Within that context, we understand that for many years God had blessed His people. He prospered them materially and spiritually. He provided for them and cared for them. But they began to live for their own pleasure. They had abandoned hard work, morality, and integrity. They began to trust in other things, and hypocrisy marked their lives. This shift probably happened subtly at first, with what they thought were small, inconsequential compromises encouraged by their foreign neighbors who worshiped foreign gods. Such seemingly negligible drifting likely seemed to be no big deal, when it actually was a great wickedness, a great affront to their God.

As we enter the story, we are meant to see ourselves in such a description. It is not difficult to draw parallels between the people of God in Hosea's time and the family of God today. When we are able to appreciate the historical setting and see ourselves in the story, the message of Hosea—which immediately jumps off the page in shocking fashion—becomes much clearer and more poignant.

The story opens as the Lord instructs Hosea to take a “wife of whoredom” (v. 2). I assume I'm not alone in the shock I feel when I read those words, particularly the word “whoredom.” Three times! (It's actually found four times in the original Hebrew!) While it is disturbing to us and seems incongruent with what we expect from Scripture, there is great value in the Spirit using powerful, hard, even culturally unacceptable language to draw our attention to the seriousness of the situation—of our situation. This is a very big deal.

Two important truths are helpful as we move forward. The first is that Hosea's and Gomer's very real lives are meant to be an allegory that illustrates for Israel and for us God's redemptive work on our behalf. Hosea, whose name actually means “salvation,”⁴ acts radically, dramatically, to demonstrate God's love for His wayward, whoring people. Gomer does nothing to merit Hosea's affection. Hosea steps into her life and chooses to make her his own. For better or for worse, Gomer is the picture of Israel at the time, and in many ways, the people in our churches today. She's a picture of you and me.

The second truth to undergird our study is, while the original community around Hosea and Gomer did not have the benefit of the unveiling of the full gospel, the New Testament, and the finished work of Jesus, this story (and every story in the Old Testament) is meant to point us to Christ. In every chapter, we will see shadows of what we know from our New Testament scriptures about the Messiah. As we read these verses, we want to always have our eyes and ears tuned to things that may help us

⁴ M.G. Easton M.A., D.D., *Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, Third Edition (Thomas Nelson, 1897). Public Domain. Available at <https://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/hosea/>.