

Inside Terry's Office	1
Camz Counsel	2
Michelle's Musings	3
Ministry Updates	4-5

Inside Terry's Office: The Book of Hosea – God Contemplates Divorcing Israel

I've met many husbands and many wives who find themselves in the same situation that God is illustrating for us in the book of Hosea; contemplating divorce. To illustrate His dilemma, God has Hosea find and marry an adulterous woman. I've tried to imagine how Hosea would go about that. In my mind, Hosea would be looking for the most wounded and confused woman he could find. And, it turns out ... his search was a success; Gomer could not stay faithful to Hosea long enough for him to even know for sure which, if any, of the children were his.

It seems that we are left to assume that Hosea was a good husband who showed love to his wife Gomer, as the Lord showed love to Israel. The entire book becomes an invitation to join God in trying to figure out how to best love Gomer (Israel).

There are NO easy answers.

Hosea discovers that if he offers expensive gifts to Gomer she will use them in pursuit of her next lover. So, should he try to limit her possessions in order to limit her access to her next lover? When she runs out of money and her lover kicks her out, should he welcome her home? If/When he welcomes her home, should he be responsible for her children and her debts? Should he be sensitive to her feelings and try to win her love or expect her to make amends to him for her adultery? Should he try to limit her social activities or trust her to return to her friends and activities? AND, above all other questions; "Can Gomer ever really believe that Hosea really loves her after all she has done?"

In a recent sermon, my pastor stated, "If we are condemned it won't be because of our sin but because we don't believe in His love for us." He quoted Henry Nouwen; "One of the great tragedies of our lives is that we constantly forget who we are." These statements reminded me of God's dilemma with us; How does he show us love in ways we can believe in without facilitating our sin?

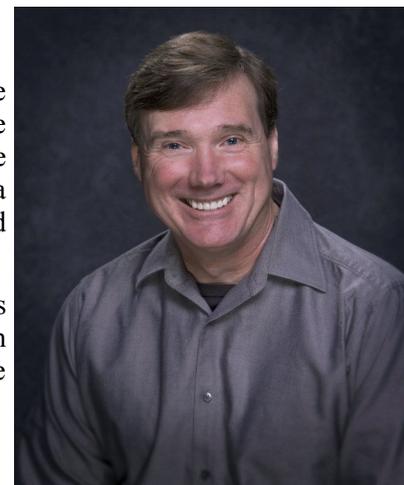
You see, I tend to believe in God's love for me most when I'm getting what I want, achieving my goals, and others are impressed with me. Yet, isn't all of that idolatry?

Maybe not, but it sure could be.

Ultimately, we can see that our relationship with God is a delicate thing. He is willing to pursue us and show us His love for us. Yet, the way we want to be pursued may feed our carnal nature and jeopardize our love for him. Sooooo, what is a righteous God to do? What is a cheated on and/or abused spouse to do? And, YES we have cheated on and abused God.

Well, what God does in the book of Hosea is to invite us in to His struggle and ask us to understand the dilemma we sometimes put Him in. What happens next? ... Let's keep reading (beginning with the book of Joel) and see what the Lord does next!

In His Grip, TWE



“I long to redeem them but they do not cry out for me from their hearts but wail upon their beds.” Hosea 7:13, 14

How appropriate it is that Hosea is temporary as eventually the unprocessed anger seems to come out in the book we are on for February 2016. Here is Crabb’s description of God’s love depicted in Hosea from *Love Letter Twenty-Eight, Hosea, (66 Love Letters)*:

I [God] love you with a love stronger than My desire to quickly end My pain, a love more powerful than the hatred My holiness requires Me to feel. It was that kind of love I provided Hosea the opportunity to illustrate to My people. I want you to love like that, to feel the pain when someone hurts you, to embrace the anger that condemns their wickedness and is roused to curb their sin, and then to identify the most dangerous and divine emotion of all, a love that cannot give them up [Hosea 11:8-9].

This makes me think of John 15:13, “There is no greater way to love than to give your life for your friends.” (The Voice) In the preceding verse you see that Jesus asks us to “love others as I have loved you.” Other translations use, “lay down your life” as opposed to “give your life.”

“True Love”

I believe *laying down your life* would encapsulate the above description of love from the Hosea love letter. In Hosea we are told that in order to love like this and to be able to give ourselves to others, we must repent. We have to “**cry from our hearts!**” “**True repentance of real sin lets you experience the real joy and true love.**” (Larry Crabb, 66 Love Letters)

A former client called me a couple of weeks ago to update me on her husband’s condition. She was struggling with all the emotion she was feeling and not feeling loving toward her husband. She was finding herself overwhelmed by the level of care he will require and the lack of care he can provide her. It is quite a quandary we find ourselves in when we love someone so much and yet find ourselves hating either what they have done or the circumstances they are in that causes us pain. Similarly, I am helping some moms process the angst of strong emotion they are feeling toward their children with behavioral issues—loving their child and yet hating the behavior. It is this kind of quandary that makes anger one of the stages of grief.

In my own life I struggle to know what it means to be gracious in the midst of conflict. I have been inclined toward believing that to be gracious means holding the disappointment in to keep the peace. This peace,

however, is only some passive aggressive way at best and at worse a rupture of irrational emotion. What I am discovering from this outcome is that my definition has been more self-serving than loving and more relationally damaging. It is a love motivated by a desire to quickly end my pain and puts me in the category of “wailing from my bed.” “Crying from heart” allows me to lay down my life—lay down my need to be seen as gracious motivated by my sin, and frees me up to be spirit-motivated to be gracious!

Let us not run from acknowledging our sin motivations but embrace them as a means of grace, a means of true love. May we all continue to put ourselves in an environment where we are encouraged to “cry from our hearts” to God.

~

Amen!



SOFT HEARTS?

This month, we're focusing on the book of Hosea. As I was reading, *this passage grabbed my attention*: I said, 'Plant the good seeds of righteousness and you will harvest a crop of love. Plow up the hard ground of your hearts, for now is the time to seek the Lord that He may come and shower righteousness upon you.'" Hosea 10:12 NLT.

What might be hindering this? Sometimes, when people come in for help, their hearts have become hardened. The disappointments, sorrows, grief, and traumas in life, without healthy ways to process through them, have led to hopelessness and despair. Often, the logical solution is to harden the heart to protect from further hurt. Scripture tells us, though, to plow up the hard ground of our hearts. It doesn't say that we won't experience hardness of heart. It tells us what to do when we do experience it. So, how do we do it? What does it mean to seek the Lord? And, what does it mean to plant the good seeds of righteousness so that we can harvest a crop of love? The context of the chapter is the Lord's judgment against Israel because of their idolatry. Verses 1-11 deal with the condition of their hearts and His judgments against them. Verse 12 gives instruction on what to do to turn back to the Lord, and verses 13-15 tell us what will happen because they didn't. Verse 13 says, "But you have cultivated wickedness and harvested a crop of sins. You have eaten the fruit of lies--trusting in your military might, believing that great armies could make your nation safe." Interesting. Eating the fruit of lies.

So, what do we do about that? How do we unpack it and make application in the context of counseling and daily life? First, I think we have to look at idolatry. Miriam Webster dictionary online defines idolatry as 1) the worship of a physical object as a god, or 2) immoderate attachment or devotion to something. My definition of idolatry: trusting in something other than the Lord for satisfaction, soothing pain, comforting the heart, protection from pain...you get the idea. Could it be that, when we harden our hearts, we are erecting an idol of self protection? Essentially saying, "God didn't do a good enough job so I will do it better"? Often, it comes from believing lies the enemy furnishes us with at the point of pain. He offers a solution and we take it.

So if hardness of heart is idolatry, and it comes from believing lies, what is the antidote? Repentance. Changing our minds. How do we change our minds? Believe the truth. How do we believe the truth? Offer up the lies we've bought into up to the Lord in exchange for His perspective. Then we embrace His perspective. A side note on seeking Him: A few years ago, I read Isaiah 55:6 "Seek the Lord while you can find Him. Call on Him now while He is near." (NLT). I started asking the Lord what it meant to seek Him. One day, on my morning walk, the answer came. As I was walking, I was thinking, "I really miss my dad. I wish he would come by just to see me." Just then, the Lord said to me, "That's what it means to seek me. That longing you have in your heart for your dad...have that longing for me." I've never forgotten that moment.

To wrap up then...God's heart is for us. He desperately wants us...longs for us. It grieves Him when we walk away, reject Him, and look to other things. He goes to great measure to invite us to come back to experience intimacy with Him. Our part is to ask Him what lies we are believing, allow Him to expose them, ask Him for His perspective, and believe what He tells us. This, I believe, is how we plant seeds of righteousness, harvest a crop of love, plow up hard ground in our hearts, and seek the Lord. He loves us immeasurably more than we can ever know or grasp.

Struggling, Striving, and Growing,

Michelle Elliott



Hosea's Love

When and where have you lost sight of your love? When did you forget the rush of emotion you experienced when your love walked in the room? Or how could you forget the excitement of anticipating your next meeting. How could you have lost the treasure of joy that came from knowing the beauty that you are blessed to possess, a gift from God alone?

We were given a gift of love. If we are fortunate enough to still have that gift at our side, I ask you this; can you reach back and grasp that same intensity of love and care of joy and passion that you had in the beginning? Your love deserves that from you, because your love was a gift from God.

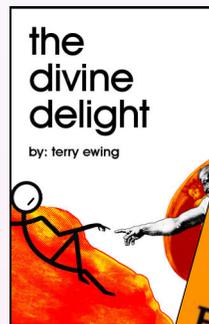
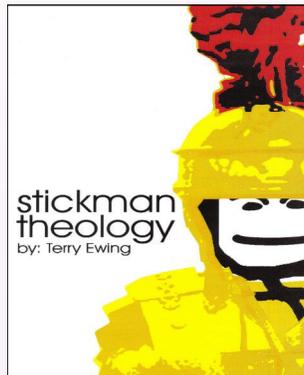
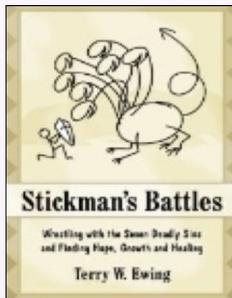
Hosea had a gift of love from God. But his was different than ours. His came with special instructions. His was to be an analogy of the relationship between God and Israel. God loved His people, from the very beginning. They were His chosen people, and He provided for them and gave them everything that they ever needed. He loved them. But they turned away from Him. They worshiped idols made of wood.

God told Hosea that his wife would turn away from him to be an adulteress and a prostitute. Also his children would turn away from him as the Israelites turned from God. But God told Hosea to still love his wife, and his children. And when Hosea's wife had left him, and lived in adultery and prostitution, Hosea went after her, brought her home, and loved her. God loved the Israelites. And God loves us.

As we think about the example of Hosea, I hope we have a renewed appreciation for the Love God has given us. Hosea was obedient in love even in a difficult circumstance. Are you obedient in Love, in your circumstance?

+Chris Pirtle

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Financial Snapshot	December 2015	January-December 2015
Average Hours Serving Clients	435	5,220
Contribution Income	\$21,938	\$154,602*
Operations Expenditures	(\$20,360)	(\$166,197)*
Surplus (Deficit)	\$1,578	(\$11,595)*
*includes 20 th Anniversary income/expense		

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