

**Introduction** (p. 751)

When we read the pages of the Bible, one of the things we have to appreciate is the lengths God goes to in order to love his people. One of the ways we see this is through the prophets of the OT who carried God's message to his wayward and rebellious people. God often called them, not only to speak his message but also illustrate his message through some astounding acts. Jeremiah marched around with a yoke on his back. Ezekiel was commanded to act like someone fleeing war and was even told to not mourn when his wife died. But now we come to Hosea and the most shocking illustration of all. Hosea served God during a time of material wealth but spiritual impoverishment.

**"Best Marriage Ever"  
Hosea 1:1-3:5**

Today I want to us to think about the Best Marriage Ever by diving into a story that, on the surface, appears to depict the WORST marriage ever. But I believe in the midst of this irony, God will teach us great things about himself, his relationship with us, and how we should relate in marriage.

*Read 1:1-3...*

Hosea marries a "wife of whoredom." Whether Gomer was already sexually promiscuous, which is my current lean, or if this points to her future unfaithfulness, the message is clear: God wanted the story of Hosea's marriage to illustrate his faithful love to his unfaithful people, Israel. Hosea's life and marriage served as a living parable.

Faithful Hosea marries unfaithful Gomer and they have children of whoredom who are all named appropriate to the situation in Israel: Jezreel (which seems to point to the conflict between God and Baal in Israel), (Lo-ruhama) No Mercy, and (Lo-ammi) Not My People. God named these children as a picture of Israel's unfaithfulness.

**The Point: God designed the covenant of marriage to display his exclusive loyalty to his people.**

Probably one of three camps (four/five?) seeking marriage, strengthening marriage, or saving your marriage...

**I. Build your marriage on the foundation of covenant love (1:1-3:1).**

*Read 3:1*

What do we mean by covenant?

- **Covenant refers to a relationship bonded together by God through mutual promises.**
- The entire OT is the background for what is happening in the Book of Hosea.
- God had entered into covenant with Israel, through Abraham, Moses, and David, but the people consistently failed to be faithful to God. **Hosea 8:1** bears this out: **"Set the trumpet to your lips! One like a vulture is over the house of the Lord, because they have transgressed my covenant and rebelled against my law."**
- Here's the deal. Generally speaking, people approach marriage in one of two ways: as covenant or as a consumer.

- *Consumer mentality* says, “What’s in it for ME?” I’ll take that. And that. And that. And so, fulfillment happens when I receive.
- *PIC*: Has anyone been to Assembly Row? Consumers dream!
- BUT a *covenant mentality* says, “What’s in it for THEM?” They could use that and that and that. Paradoxically, my desire for love is fulfilled not when I receive, but when I give.

T: Let me give you three characteristics of covenant love from this story.

### **Covenant love is unconditional love.**

I want us to think about the significance of Wedding Vows on a wedding day.

- The essence of wedding vows is the promise of future love.
- As Keller says, **“A wedding should not be primarily a celebration of how loving you feel now—that can safely be assumed. Rather, in a wedding you stand up before God, your family, and all the main institutions of society, and you promise to *be* loving, faithful, and true to the other person in the future, regardless of undulating internal feelings or external circumstances.”**
- I’ve had this modeled for me so well. My parents are here today, always love when they visit; they have been married 41 years (they married young okay! My dad took the initiative and somehow, by the grace of God, my mom responded, and they didn’t even hear Jon’s sermon last week!). My grandmother, Nancy Gordon, also here today!, was married 61 wonderful years to my grandfather.
- They have fulfilled, however imperfectly, vows that say, “I’m in this thing with you until we die.”
- Now, I want to encourage married couples to reflect on your vows. Whether you wrote your own vows like Marsha & I did or simply said traditional vows, I want you to dust that moment off in the cobwebs of your mind, and I want you to tell yourself that the most important thing about those promises is today!
- Today!
- You got that? Listen to our vows, alright, get your tissues out alright . . .
- Not July 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2006, but Septmber 28, 2014. Ok?

Why is this so important?

- Let me allow **Stanley Hauerwas**, professor at Duke University, says this: **“We never know whom we marry; we just think we do. Or even if we first marry the right person, just give it a while and he or she will change. For marriage, being [the enormous thing it is] means we are not the same person after we have entered it. The primary problem is . . . learning how to love and care for the stranger to whom you find yourself married.”**
- Annihilate phantoms...

### **Covenant Love is Relentless Love**

- Did anyone get up to see the sunrise this morning? (Yes, it rose at 6:38am) Here’s the good news: if you missed it, it will also rise tomorrow at 6:39am. And if you’re really a slacker, you’ll have another opportunity on Tuesday morning at 6:40am
- Do you see where we’re going? God’s love is that sure. **“Come, let us return to the Lord . . . Let us know; let us press on to know the Lord; his going out is sure as the dawn.” (Hosea 6:1-3)**

- Now, why is this so important? Because there will be times when your spouse doesn't measure up, even when their sin is heinous and egregious.
- Marriage, like no other relationship, has the ability to expose the best in us AND the worst in us. Spouses see who you are, behind the curtain . . .
- What happens when your spouse doesn't measure up?
  - While we should never sweep sin under the rug, even that of our spouses, the first step in conflict resolution is to realize that none of us measure up!
  - That's the whole point of Hosea. That's why their actions are described as adultery and prostitution. That's the whole point of the Bible. We are idolaters. We willfully give our highest affections to things other than God. That is why we need grace.
  - So before you pop off toward your spouse, first look in the mirror and remind yourself that you too have been down the adulterous and idolatrous path.
  - Then you will be in a better place to seek forgiveness and biblical reconciliation. Receive counsel and support in community.

APP: I realize many of you have suffered from broken marriages. Some of you experienced great pain because of the sin of your spouse and perhaps your own sin, but there is hope in God. There is freedom through the love of God.

T: That's major stuff.. What about the small stuff? What about the little moments of marriage? You may be surprised to discover, the little details of marriage require the third characteristic of covenant love . . .

### **Covenant Love is Powerful love!**

- Our love should be strong and fierce everyday.
- **Tim Chester** says, "**Daily thoughtfulness matters more than grand gestures.**"
- Listen, marriage is hard work because it requires action daily.
- But my husband, knows I love him, I don't have to show him. I don't need to respect him. My wife, she gets it, I don't have to wine and dine her anymore. If anyone thinks like that this morning, I have to tell you: "You are a fool!"
- Love is a VERB. Love is not static. Love moves. Love acts!
- I find the words of one OT scholar regarding Gomer extremely challenging: "**The tragedy of Gomer is . . . the shriveling of her capacity to love. . . . As the muscles of the legs will shrivel if we do not walk, so too will the muscles of love shrink if they are not exercised in the true and profound forms of loving.**" - Peter Craigie
- Your love will either shrivel from a failure to practice daily thoughtfulness, or it will grow stronger through daily action.
- If you want to strengthen your love for your spouse, here's my advice: Stare the love of God in the face and go and do likewise: Check out God's words to faithless and adulterous Israel in Hosea 2:14-15. Is God going to do away with her forever? Is he going to cast her out?
- *Read 2:14-16 & 23 [Unpack!]*
- So if God loves like this and says, "As I have loved you, so love one another," will you place limits on your love, or will your love be effusive, ebullient, and bountiful like God's love for us?
- It is love that drives covenant commitment!

T: Build your marriage on the foundation of covenant love. #2

## II. Experience the blessing of covenant marriage by dwelling together in inseparable unity (3:2-5)

Read vv. 2.

- I want to ask two questions to take us deeper into the heart of God on the heart of marriage. The first question we naturally ask is: . . .

### Why did he have to do this?

- Perhaps Gomer had accrued some kind of debt after running away from Hosea, but it is also possible, painfully possible, that she engaged in temple prostitution and had lost her freedom. Thus, Hosea may very well be paying the price to buy her back out of slavery.
- Whatever the case: Hosea scrounges together all he can to redeem her. [Fifteen shekels of silver, and about 9 bushels of barley. Hosea can't even pay with cash in full.]
- In a radical and shocking act, Hosea buys her back.

T: But there is a larger question looming here?

### Why would he want to do this?

- Look at what it says in *verse 3*: "And I said to her . . ."
- Can we just stop right there? Picture this moment. She has been sleeping with another man, probably many men! And he looks at her in the eyes, doubtless with tears in his own eyes, and he looks at her in all of her shame, in all of her disgrace, and says, "You must dwell as mine for many days. You shall not play the whore, or belong to another man; so will I also be to you."
- What does this scream? Covenant Marriage! God's original design. We will dwell together!

It sounds like Genesis 2:24: **"Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh."**

- What does this mean? The husband/wife relationship is the priority relationship for the married person. This is strong language! Leave and hold fast. Some translations say "cling."
- The Hebrew carries the idea to be glued together. The marriage relationship is the preeminent relationship in life, which means no other relationship (not parents, not children, not friends) should ever eclipse or supersede.

Excursus:

- Now, in light of God's design for marriage in Genesis 2:24, let me clearly state here that we believe God's design for marriage is to be between one man and one woman. We see Jesus clearly affirming this in Matthew 19 and his apostles affirming this through the NT. Consequently, our understanding of God's Word is that any sexual relations outside of marriage, including homosexuality is outside of God's design. It is sin.
- We find no room in the Scriptures to conclude God permits homosexual acts or marriage between homosexuals as ordained by God. Though we love those who take different views, we believe you have to perform some fancy footwork with the Bible to conclude otherwise.
- At the same time, let me also say with the loudest possible voice we understand many people in our culture not only disagree with this, but live contrary to God's design for marriage. So

how do we respond to those people? Our neighbors, coworkers, FRIENDS? We love them! Everyone in our Community is welcomed in this church.

- I have invited many practicing homosexuals in our community to Redemption Hill. I pray that people with same sex attraction would know this is safe space to find community and wrestle with hard questions surrounding our sexual desires and our identity as people.
- We should always be gracious, humble and patient when dialoguing around this topic. We should also never compromise what we believe to be truth because of our emotions or experiences.

T: SO what does it mean for two people to become ONE?

- Some people portray a distorted picture in marriage by essentially saying: You do your thing & I'll do mine. You do you, and I'll do me. Ok, let me say it again: not two. One!
- Is this a mystery? Absolutely. It is harder to explain but easier to observe. Let me give you an example.
- I've known Jim & Margaret Costello for about 18 months. The first time they came to RHC was March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2013. Bam! I know something very important about them: I know they love each other. How do I know that?
- It's not because I've interviewed them; I haven't asked them to take a multiple choice test. I know they love each other because I've watched them, we've done life together (they were in our CG – not too late to join), we are friends. Now, here's the funny thing: I can hardly think of Jim without thinking of Margaret, and I can hardly think of Margaret without thinking of Jim. Why? Because God has made them one! That's why.

Ray Ortlund says **“One flesh’ is essential to the biblical view of marriage. It means, one mortal life fully shared. Two selfish me’s start learning to think like one unified us, sharing one everything: one life, one reputation, one bed, one suffering, one budget, one family, one mission, and so forth. No barriers. No hiding. No aloofness. Now total openness with total sharing and total solidarity, until death parts them.”** - Ray Ortlund

Let's break this down . . .

- **Physically & Sexually**
  - Clearly, physical intimacy is part of God's design for both procreation & pleasure. We will cover that more next week!
  - But how you manage your home, finances, life circumstances can all be filtered here.
- **Emotionally**
  - When your spouse experiences joy, sorrow, or pain, no one should be more emotionally invested than you.
- **Relationally**
  - There should be intimate companionship in marriage. How you communicate is crucial. Do you handle conflict well?
  - Do you use words that build up? Your words have unique power in marriage because as **J.R.R. Tolkien** once said: **“The praise of the praiseworthy is beyond all reward.”**
- **Spiritually**
  - Don't assume your husband or wife is thriving spiritually because they appear to be.
  - Because you are one, your heart before God will necessarily influence your wife.
  - One of my favorite aspects about marriage is the partnership it brings.

- The purpose of your marriage is the same as the purpose of your life (singles included as we saw two weeks ago): to glorify God and enjoy him forever.
  - In marriage, two people say to one another: **“Glorify the Lord with me; let us exalt his name together.” (Psalm 34:3)**
  - Every marriage exists for God’s glory, to radiate his radiance.
- **In everything!** Share it all!!!

Let me explain how Satan wants to attack your marriage? Satan will try to drive a wedge in your marriage by attacking the fundamental nature of your oneness with your spouse:

- Concerning your Physical and sexual oneness, he will lie to you and say: “You don’t have to reserve all of your sexual desire for your spouse. Just take another look. Turn on your electronic device and view porn like most men and women in America, no one will know and it won’t destroy your soul.”
- Regarding your emotions he will lie by saying: “They can get support from their friends. You don’t need to really enter into their pain.”
- Relationally he will say: “Turn on the TV. Spend an hour on Facebook. Don’t have quality conversation about things that really matter. Superficiality is the norm today.”
- Spiritually he will say: “You prayed at church and you were sitting beside your wife, wasn’t that enough? You know it was. Sportscenter, man! Pray for a Sox win, not with your wife!”

T: Do you hear those lies? Yes, I know you do. You have heard those lies, believed those lies and lived those lies, and so have I.

That is why we must go to the cross. The gospel provides the *foundation* for marriage, because to have Christ in common is to have all things in common. The gospel provides the *framework* for marriage because God’s love is the pattern for our love. The gospel provides the *fuel* supplying us with everything we need. And the gospel is the *finish line* for marriage, because our goal in marriage is to point people to the gospel. This is what Paul says in his great passage on marriage **Ephesians 5:32: “This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church.”**

*Conclusion:*

As we wrap up our time, to those are find yourself married today, let me ask you a simple question: Are you daily exercising, in the strength God supplies, unconditional, relentless, and powerful love to your spouse? Would you pause and ask God to enable you to love your spouse with his love?

But let me ask everyone, married, single: Are you daily exercising unconditional, relentless, and powerful love to God? Would you pause now and ask God for his grace to empower you to love him as he has loved us?