

Prayer

Lord God, bless us when our lives are hard,
meet us when we do not understand the way,
heal us when our bodies are scarred by illness,
comfort us when our hearts are numbed with pain,
and in the midst of each and every trial and hardship,
become so real that we will boast forever of Your Love!

AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

Prayer ideas

Pray out loud today, and speak to God as one truly present with you, in whatever you are doing

On-going prayers

- **Pray for those who preach.** *Many churches have their own elder or pastor in the pulpit, but not all. Pray for those who decide who preaches*
- *Thank God for the work of God's people amongst the poor*
- *Pray for Russia and its many peoples and vast land mass*

Meditation

The freshness of each glorious day anticipates God's blessings
He gives His amazing spiritual gifts to all who will receive Him:

The treasure of cherished moments reading the sacred Word;
The riches of quiet times and peace to revitalize the soul;
The opportunity to love again, where yesterday we failed;
The chance to be creative each day in discipleship and faith;
The challenge of sustaining work that it is important for us to do;
The excitement of always knowing that there is more to find in life;
The privilege of following Christ, and seeking to serve the poor;
The freedom to pray with others about our troubles, hopes and joys;
The wonder of resting in God at the end of a working day.

Is it possible for us to give adequate thanks to God for all He's done?
It is; and the more we do it each day the more we will know His peace.

Bible passage – Hosea 2:9-15

⁹ 'Therefore I will take away my grain when it ripens, and my new wine when it is ready. I will take back my wool and my linen, intended to cover her nakedness. ¹⁰ Now I will expose her shame in the sight of her lovers; no-one will deliver her from my hands. ¹¹ I will put an end to all her revelry: her yearly feasts, New Moons, Sabbath days, all her appointed feasts. ¹² I will ruin her vines and her fig-trees, of which she said, "These are my pay from my lovers!" I will make them a forest, and wild animals will devour them. ¹³ I will punish her for the days of Ba'al worship when she burned incense and decked herself with rings and jewellery, she pursued her lovers and forgot me,' declares the LORD.

¹⁴ 'So I will now entice her; I will bring her into the desert and speak tenderly to her. ¹⁵ After this I will give her back her vineyards, and will make the 'valley of trouble' into a 'doorway of hope'. She will be responsive there, as in the days of her youth, when she came up out of Egypt.

Bible Study

Review

Although these words come from a time long past ago and speak of a world to which we are only connected by history and literature, there is little doubt about what they mean. None of us can read this passage and not feel the pain of a husband searching his heart to find a way to deal with his unfaithful wife. The cruel details of Hosea's marriage have already been laid bare (Hosea 1), and this passage reflects the heartbreaking consequences. Yet as we read these words, we are only a hairsbreadth away from reading about God's relationship with Israel. Such is the power of prophecy.

In the first four verses of our passage, Hosea speaks of withdrawing from Gomer the provision he would normally make for her (2:9), and then exposing her shame (2:10). By this, he means taking away the benefits of her profession as a prostitute. He describes preventing her from worshipping the Ba'als, for it was at these events that she practiced prostitution (2:11), and then destroying the possessions she had accrued from those who used her services, specifically, vineyards and agricultural land (2:12). In Israel, such land had to be tended or it would quickly revert to the wild.

Yet the remarkable fact here is that Gomer has been given land and property. This gave her privileges far beyond other women of the day, and we can begin to see why Gomer found it so hard to accept marriage. By her prostitution, she had made an independent life for herself with greater material benefits than a normal woman would enjoy except through her husband. Yet because Gomer was unwilling to accept her place as Hosea's wife, she would be punished. Hosea did not want to be rid of her but to restore her as his wife, 'as in the days of her youth' (2:15). By right, he could have his wife denounced for adultery and in the right circles, he could have had her stoned (Lev 20:10); he could at least have divorced her (Deut 24:1f.). Hosea, however, was not interested in divorce; remarkably, in the face of the evidence of his wife's sin (the birth of two children by adultery – see Hosea 1), Hosea remained interested only in restoration.

Verses 14 and 15 express Hosea's hope, and we read of the care and desire of a devoted man, trying to love again a woman who was steeped in prostitution. He imagined taking her away from others '*into the desert*' to love her himself, and turn a corner in their relationship. A beautiful Hebrew phrase that is not always translated well speaks of turning the '*valley of trouble*' (often translated the '*valley of Achor*') into the '*doorway of hope*' (2:15), to re-establish a true, responsive marriage.

These words are not merely the description of Hosea and Gomer. They are prophecy. These words were spoken by Hosea from his own experience in order to highlight the relationship of God with Israel, and his prophecy is clear. Israel's unfaithfulness was beyond dispute and an affront to God, so God would now punish Israel and shame her; but not to dismiss her, only to try and win her back. Later on in Hosea's prophecy we meet the awful reality of Israel's inability to respond, but for now, the message is about God's anguished desire to regain His relationship with Israel. He will do this by removing Israel's self sufficiency and shaming her in the sight of other nations (2:9,10), He will put a stop to their worship of the Ba'als, and the land she has acquired from other nations will be turned into wilderness (2:11,12). The Lord will lead His people back '*into the desert*', a reference to the Exodus, in order to restore their relationship.

Here we have a simple demonstration yet again of the heart of God, which is utterly just and yet completely loving. Today, as then, some would resolve such an impasse by suggesting that the one who has been sinned against should break the relationship and satisfy justice; and Hosea was probably surrounded by men who suggested that he do this, and rid himself of Gomer. As a Prophet, however, Hosea offers a message that says God is not satisfied with justice alone because He loves His people. Despite all, God is still a God of love.

Discipleship

Questions (for use in groups)

1. What does this passage of Scripture tell us about the nature of God and people, and how does this affect us today?
2. Are God's people still dominated by the things of this world rather than the things of God, and what are the consequences of this?

3. How does God show His love for His wayward people today, or is this picture one that is not relevant?

Topics covered by this text

- *The sins of God's people*
- *The nature of God and His love*
- *The nature of renewal and restoration*

Personal comments by author

You, like me, may have found yourself in a quandary, not knowing which way to turn; to be correct or to be lenient. In simple matters of discipline we face this microcosm of the dilemma faced by Hosea in his marriage. Of course, the stakes are higher in marriage than they are with more trivial matters, but we will often try and find ways of fulfilling both the need to be correct and a human desire to be gracious. It seems to be not just the character of God to be loving in the face of justice, but something he has placed within humanity too. We must not ignore this aspect of our very nature.

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *Have a look over the newspapers today, and observe the way in which decisions have been taken. To what extent have they shown 'justice' and to what extent have they shown 'mercy'? How do you respond to what has been decided? Do you naturally want to see one or the other?*
- *Write down a list of those things you feel are wrong with the church today. How many of them can be considered sins, and how many of them are merely matters of fashion or preference?*

Final Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ; You can see the truth within all that happens to us today, both in our work, in our homes and in those things that remain private. Forgive us for our inability to perceive what is right, and by Your Spirit, teach us to be more sensitive to the moral teaching of Scripture and the guidance of Your Spirit. Lead us into all truth, we pray: AMEN
