

Unit III: Called to God's Work of Justice

Measure Up!

DEVOTIONAL READING: Deuteronomy 8:11-20

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Hosea 11-12

PRINT PASSAGE: Hosea 11:1-2, 7-10; 12:1-2, 6-14

Key Verse—Turn thou to thy God: keep mercy and judgment and wait on thy God continually. (Hosea 12:6, KJV)

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You must return to your God; maintain love and justice, and wait for your God always. (Hosea 12:6, NIV)

Lesson Aims

As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do these things:

- Compare prosperity as a worldly goal with the godly virtues of love and justice.
- Regret occasions when one has adopted prosperity as a key goal.
- Practice love and justice as key virtues.

*Key Terms

Baals (11:2)—Hebrew: *Ba'al* (bah'-al): a Phoenician deity; a heathen god; plural: "Baalim" (KJV).

Burned Incense (11:2)—Hebrew: *Qatar* (kaw-tar'): made sacrifices upon; turned into a fragrance by fire, especially as an act of worship.

Ephraim (11:8)—Hebrew: *Ephrayim* (ef-rah'-yim): a son of Joseph's; also, his descendants and their territory.

Love (11:4 [Background Scripture])—Hebrew: *ahabah* (a-hab-aw): love; lovesick; lovingly.

Return (11:5 [Background Scripture])—Hebrew: *shub* (shoob): to turn back; "repent" (NIV).

Wealth (12:8)—Hebrew: *hon* (hone): sufficiency; "substance" (KJV).

*(Word Study Supplement—Refer to page 2)

Introduction

The challenge to "measure up" can drive some people to make decisions that can have either adverse or positive results in their lives. For the less mature, being told to measure up or that they don't measure up to a particular standard can lead to low self-esteem, fear of trying, resentment, and even physiological harm. On the other hand, those who are more mature may accept being told to measure up or that they don't measure up as their catalyst to prove their worth. We live



The Biblical Context

The title of the book of Hosea is derived from its author. His name means “salvation” and is the same as “Joshua” and its Greek equivalent “Jesus.” The only real information about the prophet is found in his book. Hosea’s ministry was extensive, through the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah of Judah, and Jeroboam II of Israel. Most likely a native of the Northern Kingdom, most of Hosea’s prophecy was against it. God’s call of Hosea occurred when Israel was outwardly prosperous with no outward signs of political or economic demise. Inwardly the kingdom was characterized by religious corruption, social injustice, moral decay, and escalating political anarchy following the death of Jeroboam II. Hosea’s unpleasant and heartbreaking personal life (chapters 1–3) was used by God as an object lesson of His relationship with Israel (chapters 4–14). The picture of a loving husband hurt by an adulterous wife mirrored the broken heart of God because of His adulterous children. This lesson’s text is excerpted from the second division of Hosea’s book that describes Israel’s guilt, her subsequent punishment, and future restoration.

in an extremely competitive environment that affects all areas of society: home, school, business, and religious institutions. The aggressive behavior that results from competitiveness affects relationships among people at all levels of the social ladder. Often, society measures the worth of individuals by their material prosperity. In order to reach the top rung of the social ladder, some will engage in illegal activities, forfeit integrity, and even put their trust in humankind rather than in God. This is not a new phenomenon, even for the people of God. Among their sins against God was the claim by Israel that their material prosperity had been achieved by their own efforts and not God’s provision. This attitude persisted in the Northern Kingdom (Israel/Ephraim) during the prophetic ministry of Hosea. God’s great love for Israel was based on His faithfulness to His covenant. The material prosperity they enjoyed caused them to take their focus off of God and put it onto themselves. This led to acts of injustice and covenant infidelity. While they sought to measure up to the social standards of material prosperity, they failed to measure up to God’s standards of obedience, devotion to Him, social justice, and righteousness.

ANALYSIS OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT

An Ungrateful Child (*Hosea 11:1-2, 7*)

KJV

WHEN ISRAEL was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt.

2 As they called them, so they went from them: they sacrificed unto *Baalim*, and burned incense to graven images.

.....

7 And my people are bent to backsliding from me: though they called them to the most High, none at all would exalt him.

NIV

“**WHEN ISRAEL** was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.

2 “But the more they were called, the more they went away from me. They sacrificed to the *Baals* and they burned incense to images.”

.....

7 “My people are determined to turn from me. Even though they call me God Most High, I will by no means exalt them.”

The final four chapters of Hosea switch to God’s intense love for Israel despite their ingratitude. God recalls Israel’s past to reveal how His love for them was like that of a parent’s for a stubborn child (**verses 1-2**). From the beginning, His relationship had been like that of a father to a son (see Exodus 4:22-23). Yet, like Hosea’s unfaithful wife, Gomer, they pursued and prostituted themselves to other gods in violation of their responsibilities (see Exodus 20:3-5). The very intent of their hearts was to resist and spurn His love for them (**verse 7a**). It was now too late to return to Him without punishment for their adulterous apostasy. Even if they called out to Him at this point in their estrangement God would refuse to hear them (**verse 7b**). Inescapable judgment was coming in the form of military defeat and exile. In fact, the discipline they faced was because of His intense love for them. God’s love for humankind, the crown of His creation, was demonstrated when He, while we were still sinners, gave His Son to die to reconcile us back to Him. Like ungrateful children, God’s people often repay His love by pursuing their own selfish agenda, their own gods: food, sex, entertainment, money, success, achievement, romance, family, and self (Idleman, Kyle. *Gods at War: Defeating the Idols that Battle for Your Soul*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013). We should be thankful that we have an advocate in the Holy Spirit who will help us measure up to God’s expectations of us by daily interceding on our behalf. Praise and thanksgiving should be given to God even when He disciplines us, because it is an expression of the love He has for His children.

? **What Do You Think?** **What factors can you suggest as causes of attitudes of ingratitude to God, our spiritual Father?**

A Compassionate Father (Hosea 11:8-10)

KJV

8 How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together.

9 I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim: for I am God, and not man; the Holy One in the midst of thee: and I will not enter into the city.

10 They shall walk after the LORD: he shall roar like a lion: when he shall roar, then the children shall tremble from the west.

NIV

8 “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.

9 “I will not carry out my fierce anger, nor will I devastate Ephraim again. For I am God, and not a man—the Holy One among you. I will not come against their cities.

10 “They will follow the LORD; he will roar like a lion. When he roars, his children will come trembling from the west.”

Again, Hosea abruptly shifts to a message of salvation for apostate Israel because of God's love for them. God speaks directly to Israel in these verses, words in response to His threatened and irrevocable judgment and the suffering they would have to endure while in exile. As the loving Father to His child Israel, God reflected on the severity of the judgment that His wrath would inflict on them and asked four rhetorical questions. The answer to these questions indicates that God would never desert Israel and would not completely destroy them as He did the cities of Admah and Zeboim along with Sodom and Gomorrah (see Genesis 10:19; 14:2, 8) because of His compassionate love for them (**verse 8a**). Real love is complex and arouses conflicting emotions at times. The thought or prospect of completely abandoning Israel aroused God's compassion to its fullest (**verse 8b**). He could not bear giving Israel up. Therefore, His decision was to temper His wrath by punishing them as they deserved but not totally annihilating them (**verse 9a**). This was a sure promise because it was based on who He is (**verse 9b**). Because of His holiness, transcendence, and infallibility He does not and will not administer punishment like humankind. **Verse 10** forecasts the future restoration of Israel. God's judgment was like the roar of a lion, but He would also roar again to bring them back from their future exiles in Assyria and Babylonia. Today, the people of God are the beneficiaries of His divine mercy. His mercy is often explained as our not receiving what we deserve because we are not measuring up to His standards as we should. Humankind deserves the full extent of His divine justice, but because of His compassionate love, He desires that none perish or be destroyed (see 2 Peter 3:9). In mercy, He withholds what we deserve and restores our fellowship with Him through repentance and faith. His redeemed children can rest in the assurance that He will never let us go and allow anything to separate us from Him (see John 10:28; Romans 8:31-39).

? **What Do You Think?** What effect should the knowledge of God's intense love for His people have on their daily lives and their relationships with others?

An Irrevocable Indictment (*Hosea 12:1-2, 6-14*)

KJV

EPHRAIM FEEDETH on wind, and followeth after the east wind: he daily increaseth lies and desolation; and they do make a covenant with the Assyrians, and oil is carried into Egypt.

2 The LORD hath also a controversy with Judah, and will punish Jacob according to his ways; according to his doings will he recompense him.

.....

6 Therefore turn thou to thy God: keep mercy and judgment and wait on thy God continually.

7 He is a merchant, the balances of deceit are in his hand: he loveth to oppress.

8 And Ephraim said, Yet I am become rich, I have found me out *substance*: in all my labours they shall find none iniquity in me that were sin.

9 And I that am the LORD thy God from the land of Egypt will yet make thee to dwell in tabernacles, as in the days of the solemn feast.

10 I have also spoken by the prophets, and I have multiplied visions, and used similitudes, by the ministry of the prophets.

11 Is there iniquity in Gilead? surely they are vanity: they sacrifice bullocks in Gilgal; yea, their altars are as heaps in the furrows of the fields.

12 And Jacob fled into the country of Syria, and Israel served for a wife, and for a wife he kept sheep.

13 And by a prophet the LORD brought Israel out of Egypt, and by a prophet was he preserved.

14 Ephraim provoked him to anger most bitterly: therefore shall he leave his blood upon him, and his reproach shall his LORD return unto him.

NIV

EPHRAIM FEEDS on the wind; he pursues the east wind all day and multiplies lies and violence. He makes a treaty with Assyria and sends olive oil to Egypt.

2 The LORD has a charge to bring against Judah; he will punish Jacob according to his ways and repay him according to his deeds.

.....

6 But you must return to your God; maintain love and justice, and wait for your God always.

7 The merchant uses dishonest scales and loves to defraud.

8 Ephraim boasts, "I am very rich; I have become wealthy. With all my *wealth* they will not find in me any iniquity or sin."

9 "I have been the LORD your God ever since you came out of Egypt; I will make you live in tents again, as in the days of your appointed festivals.

10 "I spoke to the prophets, gave them many visions and told parables through them."

11 Is Gilead wicked? Its people are worthless! Do they sacrifice bulls in Gilgal? Their altars will be like piles of stones on a plowed field.

12 Jacob fled to the country of Aram; Israel served to get a wife, and to pay for her he tended sheep.

13 The LORD used a prophet to bring Israel up from Egypt, by a prophet he cared for him.

14 But Ephraim has aroused his bitter anger; his Lord will leave on him the guilt of his bloodshed and will repay him for his contempt.

Hosea returns to the theme of Israel's unfaithfulness (see 11:12–12:2) with a concluding indictment against the nation (see 11:12–13:6). Social injustice and foreign alliances with Assyria and Egypt characterized Israel's acts of unfaithfulness (**verse 1**). The worthlessness of these alliances was described as the impossibilities of feeding on the wind and chasing after the east wind. God expected His people to practice justice and equity for all and to depend solely on Him as their defense and deliverer. Judah was also indicted for her sins and was facing judgment for her rebelliousness (**verse 2**). Some ascribe Hosea's message in verses 2-6 to Judah, but it can be applied to the entire nation. Hosea reminded them that like Jacob, their father, they needed to repent and return to their covenant God and live by love and justice (**verse 6**). These expectations required a reversal from their current economic dishonesty and insensitivity to this sin. Israel believed that their prosperity was a sign of God's approval and failed to think about how they had obtained it (**verses 7-8**). God does not and cannot overlook sin, especially the blatant disobedience and ingratitude He observed in Israel. As their punishment, Israel would be forced to live in tents while in exile as their ancestors had done in the wilderness (**verse 9**). Israel was without excuse because they had been warned repeatedly by God's prophets but refused to hear them (**verse 10**). The undeniable proof was the many idolatrous altars they had erected in the cities of Gilead and Gilgal that would be destroyed in the coming Assyrian invasion (**verse 11**).

Reflecting on the humbleness of their beginnings—epitomized by Jacob’s wanderings in Syria and Israel’s enslavement in and deliverance from Egypt—should have led them to acknowledge God and His power as the source and sustainer of their nation (**verses 12-13**). The nation’s obstinate pride and refusal to do right only stirred God’s wrath and led to the indicted, unforgiven, and inevitably punished posture of His people (**verse 14**). How does this apply to God’s people today? If we agree that all have sinned and are still challenged by its power, then we should be willing to repent and commit to love and practice God’s standards—specifically justice in this context. In addition, our dealings with others must be characterized by honesty, integrity, and the recognition of God as the only source of our successes and prosperity. Finally, the people of God must demonstrate that they have heard His Word by living godly in an unjust and perverse world.

 **What Do You Think?** What indictment can God justifiably bring against His people today regarding His expectations of them?

A Closing Thought


Measuring up to God’s standards is a matter of obedience in gratitude for His compassionate love. Though He loves intensely, it will not negate or hinder His divine judgment of sin. He will, however, temper His judgment with mercy when there is genuine repentance. Those who eventually measure up to His standards after failure to do so can expect necessary discipline, but never total separation from His love.

Your Life

This lesson should remind us of how much God loves His own even when they do not measure up. It should motivate us to examine the quality and depth of our love and commitment to His commandments (see John 14:15, 21, 23; 1 John 5:3; 2 John 6).

Your World!

This world is the embodiment of the internal conditions of Israel during Hosea’s ministry: economic dishonesty, intentional social injustice, moral corruption, and spiritual bankruptcy. The danger of allowing these conditions to influence His people’s relationship with Him must be recognized and addressed. Like Israel was in Hosea’s time, this world is on an unalterable course headed into irrevocable divine judgment. The challenge is to heed His Word and remain faithful to Him by embracing love and justice.

 **Closing Prayer** Father, thank You for reminding us of the depth of Your love for us through the daily blessings You bestow on us despite our failure to measure up. We commit to express our gratitude to You by living as You have commanded us. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

Conclusion (Preparing for Next Week’s Lesson)

Next week’s lesson begins a new quarter of study. The topic for next Sunday is “Godly Wisdom

