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THE LOOKOUT

MARCH 2023

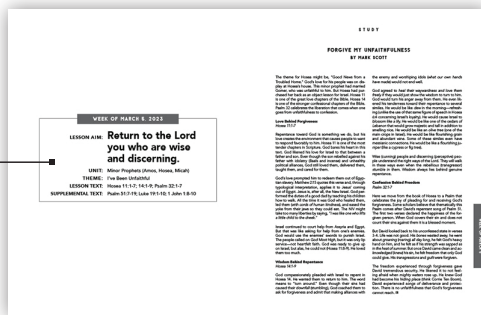
Unit: Minor Prophets (Amos, Hosea, Micah)

Theme: I've Been Unfaithful

Overview: *Unfaithfulness* is a painful word. It is painful for the wounded party, for sure, but it is also painful for the one who wounded. Recognizing one's unfaithfulness just might be the first step toward grace. The earlier of the Minor Prophets—Amos, Hosea, and Micah—will help us understand that. These eighth-century BC Minor Prophets cried out against Israel's (and Judah's) unfaithfulness. God's punishment for his people's unfaithfulness would come from Assyria and Babylon. Students will learn the progression of returning to God by seeking God's forgiveness and mercy, getting help for one's brokenness, and getting back on the trail of righteousness.

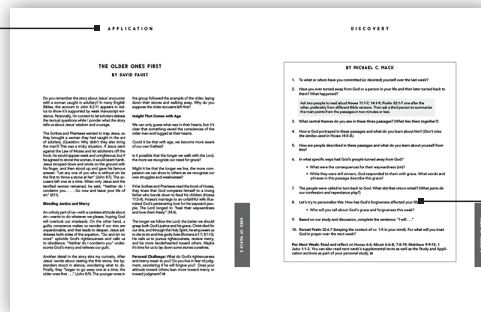
HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.



Tabs indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery**.



Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

WEEK OF MARCH 12, 2023

LESSON AIM: **Love mercy and walk humbly with our God.**

UNIT: Minor Prophets (Amos, Hosea, Micah)

THEME: I've Been Unfaithful

LESSON TEXT: Hosea 6:6; Micah 6:6-8; 7:8-19; Matthew 9:9-13;
1 John 1:1-2

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Psalm 25:4-9; Zechariah 3:1-5; Ephesians 2:4-7

GRANT ME MERCY

BY MARK SCOTT

People who have been unfaithful need mercy, and *mercy* truly is a redemptive word. Paul often began his Epistles with the sanctified wish of grace, mercy, and peace. Someone said, “We need grace when we feel worthless, we need mercy when we feel helpless, and we need peace when we feel restless.” Early in the history of the church, the believers said (or sang), “May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, and bring us to everlasting life. Lord, have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy on us.” Mercy is that empathy in God that causes him to express his loyal love for his people.

Mercy Shown*Micah 7:8-19*

The eighth-century BC prophet Micah (like his counterparts Amos and Hosea) prophesied against the northern and southern kingdoms. Micah cried out against idolatry, immorality, leadership crises, and family deterioration. But his prophecy had some bright spots—like in 4:1-2, where Micah predicted a time would come when the mountain of God would be established as the highest mountain and the nations would stream to it; and like in 5:2, where it says out of a little town called Bethlehem a ruler would emerge to shepherd God’s people.

Micah urged his people to wait for the God of his salvation to act (7:7). Two things would result when God showed his mercy. First, Israel would be victorious over their enemies. Therefore, the enemies should not *gloat* (rejoice). Micah prophesied that God would raise his people up (v. 8a), would be their light (v. 8b) and bring them into the light (v. 9b), would plead their case and uphold their cause (v. 9a), and would cover the enemies with shame and trample them *like mire in the streets* (v. 10). This victory, he said, would allow God’s people to build their walls and extend their boundaries (v. 11). The enemies (Assyria and Egypt), he said, would actually flock to Israel (v. 12). Israel would feed in enemy territory—Bashan and Gilead (v. 14). God would defeat the enemies as he did in Egypt long ago (vv. 15-16), and they would *turn in fear* of Israel (v. 17).

The second result of God showing his mercy was that God would extend his forgiveness to his people. Micah’s name means “What is God like?” So, what is God like (v. 18a)? He *pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant*. He puts his anger on hold (v. 18b). God will *delight to show mercy*, express compassion, and put the people’s sins under his feet or in the ocean (v. 19).

Mercy Embraced*Hosea 6:6; Micah 6:6-8*

If God’s people receive mercy, then they should embrace mercy in a visible way that others can see. The goal here is to capture the heart of God, which goes beyond mere obedience. Burnt offerings, baths of olive oil, and taking care of *firstborn* responsibilities were not all that God was looking for. No amount of hoop jumping would get God to like the people more.

The way to know if God’s mercy has been embraced is the famous Micah 6:8. What was on God’s desired checklist? Three things—acting justly (according to God’s standards), loving mercy (God’s loyal love), and walking *humbly* with God—serve as genuine proof that mercy has been embraced. The religious hoops are not bad; they are just inadequate.

The widely known Hosea 6:6 is added to the mercy embraced section. God would rather have mercy embraced and God acknowledged than to have all the sacrifices and burnt offerings in the world. Obedience is never enough when left alone.

Mercy Came*Matthew 9:9-13; 1 John 1:1-2*

The stark reality is that mercy showed up in person and in time and space. God’s mercy was on 24/7 display with the coming of Christ to the world. One place where the mercy of God “broke out” was Jesus calling Matthew to be a disciple. Matthew’s humility was evident by not describing his calling until the Gospel’s ninth chapter; the apostle’s boldness was displayed by his accepting Jesus’ call even though he was conscious of his reputation as a tax collector.

When Jesus called Matthew, the latter left his tax booth (remembering to take his pen!) and followed Jesus. Matthew wanted to spread the joy about his calling to all his friends, so he invited them to a party. When he was criticized by the religion police for celebrating the mercy of God, Jesus justified it by quoting Hosea 6:6. This Old Testament text occurs twice in Matthew (cf. Matthew 12:7).

The reality of mercy coming was underlined by John in his first Epistle. Jesus *appeared*, and people heard him, saw him, and touched him. He was no illusion. Mercy really came (cf. Titus 2:14). ■

APPLICATION

A GUIDE FOR THE JOURNEY

BY DAVID FAUST

Last fall I led a group on a Holy Land tour, but I should qualify the word *led*. My job was to lead devotions, encourage travelers, and provide biblical insights along the way. But our group also needed a leader who knew the customs, language, and traffic patterns of Israel and Jordan. We needed a guide! Fortunately, we had well-qualified guides who made our journey safe, fun, and educational.

Which Road?

In Jordan we walked through a 3,900-foot gorge (the Siq) at ancient Petra, a city carved out of red sandstone. One side of the path was paved with rough stones laid during the time of Christ, while the other side was paved with smooth modern concrete.

Our guide quipped, "You can walk on the 2,000-year-old path or the 12-year-old path. It's your choice!" I wondered, *Do we "ask for the ancient paths" (Jeremiah 6:16), or take whatever road seems easier?*

Which Values?

In a Bethlehem gift shop, our guide advised us to buy authentic olive wood, not waste money on knock-off trinkets made in other countries. Likewise, competent spiritual leaders help us distinguish godly values from cheap, misleading counterfeits.

Micah 6:8 mentions some authentic spiritual treasures. A Christian woman I know considers it her favorite verse in the Old Testament. There was a time in her life when serving God seemed like a burden. The demands of being a mother, a minister's wife, and an active church member made her feel like God required more than she could give. Exhausted and overwhelmed, she almost gave up. Then one day in church, the worship leader introduced a song that refreshed her soul like spring rain after a long drought. The words of the song came from Micah 6:8: "And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." My friend thought, *With God's help, I can do*

those things! By guiding her toward the timeless values of justice, mercy, and humility, the Lord refreshed her to continue on the journey of faith.

Which Cause?

Our tour group visited the mountaintop fortress of Masada, where in the early 70s AD a determined band of Jewish zealots held off advancing Roman legions before the zealots decided to choose death over slavery. On that hilltop I asked myself, *What am I willing to die for?* Many today are passionate about politics and money. Are we zealous for things that matter most to God? Romans 12:11 says, "Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord."

Which Leader?

When we arrived at the Garden of Gethsemane, the Garden Tomb, ancient Jericho, and other sites, our guide would step off the bus and say enthusiastically, "C'mon. Let's go." Our job was to follow him, just as the first-century disciples followed Jesus.

We toured the remains of a first-century synagogue in Magdala, northwest of the Sea of Galilee. It was easy to picture the Lord teaching there, for we know "Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues" (Matthew 4:23). A famous woman considered Magdala her hometown. Jesus freed Mary Magdalene from demon possession and later she became a witness of his resurrection. She needed the Lord to guide her, and so do we.

"For this God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even to the end" (Psalm 48:14).

Personal Challenge: On a piece of paper or in your personal journal, write three areas of your personal life where you need the Lord's guidance right now. As you pray about these issues, ponder these words from Isaiah 58:11: "The Lord will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land." ■

DISCOVERY

BY MICHAEL C. MACK

1. With whom did you share God's grace and forgiveness last week?
2. What should we take with us when we go to worship God?

Ask two people to read aloud **Hosea 6:6; Micah 6:6-8; 7:8-19; Matthew 9:9-13; 1 John 1:1-2** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to summarize the main points from the passages in two minutes or less. .

3. After reading and hearing these passages, how would you answer the questions in Micah 6:6?
4. What do you learn about God's nature from these passages? (*And how does Jesus embody God's nature?*)
5. *Justice* and *mercy* are more than just biblical concepts. They took on flesh in Jesus. How did Jesus personify both justice and mercy in Matthew 9:9-13?
6. What do you learn about yourself, especially regarding your relationship with God, from these passages?
7. The God of mercy (see especially Micah 7:18-19) desires mercy from us (Hosea 6:6; Micah 6:8). How will you act justly and show mercy to another person as you walk humbly with God this week?
8. Jesus' first disciples saw and heard Jesus, and then they testified (proclaimed) to others about him. How will you use the passages we've studied today to proclaim to others the eternal life Jesus came to give?
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "I will . . ."
10. Conclude your time together by rereading Micah 7:18-19 as a group prayer. To go deeper, allow others to add to this prayer in their own words.

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Amos 9:5-15**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study.