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THE LOOKOUT

MARCH 2023

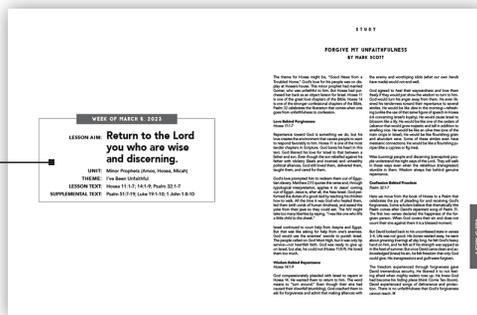
Unit: Minor Prophets (Amos, Hosea, Micah)

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.

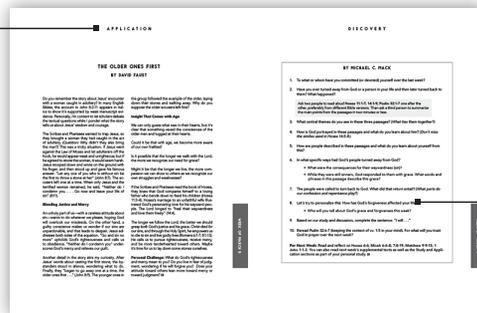
HOW TO USE

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 5, 2023

LESSON AIM: **Return to the Lord
you who are wise
and discerning.**

UNIT: Minor Prophets (Amos, Hosea, Micah)

THEME: I've Been Unfaithful

LESSON TEXT: Hosea 11:1-7; 14:1-9; Psalm 32:1-7

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Psalm 51:7-19; Luke 19:1-10; 1 John 1:8-10

FORGIVE MY UNFAITHFULNESS

BY MARK SCOTT

The theme for Hosea might be, “Good News from a Troubled Home.” God’s love for his people was on display at Hosea’s house. This minor prophet had married Gomer, who was unfaithful to him. But Hosea had purchased her back as an object lesson for Israel. Hosea 11 is one of the great love chapters of the Bible. Hosea 14 is one of the stronger confessional chapters of the Bible. Psalm 32 celebrates the liberation that comes when one goes from unfaithfulness to confession.

Love Behind Forgiveness*Hosea 11:1-7*

Repentance toward God is something we do, but his love creates the environment that causes people to want to respond favorably to him. Hosea 11 is one of the most tender chapters in Scripture. God bares his heart in this text. God likened his love for Israel to that between a father and son. Even though the son rebelled against his father with idolatry (Baals and incense) and unhealthy political alliances, God still loved them, delivered them, taught them, and cared for them.

God’s love prompted him to redeem them out of Egyptian slavery. Matthew 2:15 quotes this verse and, through typological interpretation, applies it to Jesus’ coming out of Egypt. Jesus is, after all, the New Israel. God performed the duties of a good dad by teaching his children how to walk. All the time it was God who healed them, led them (*with cords of human kindness*), and eased the yoke from their jaws so they could eat. The NIV might take too many liberties by saying, “*I was like one who lifts a little child to the cheek.*”

Israel continued to court help from Assyria and Egypt. But that was like asking for help from one’s enemies. God would use the enemies’ swords to punish Israel. The people called on *God Most High*, but it was only lip service—not heartfelt faith. God was ready to give up on Israel, but alas, he could not (Hosea 11:8-9). He loved them too much.

Wisdom Behind Repentance*Hosea 14:1-9*

God compassionately pleaded with Israel to repent in Hosea 14. He wanted them to *return* to him. The word means to “turn around.” Even though their sins had caused their *downfall* (stumbling), God coached them to ask for forgiveness and admit that making alliances with

the enemy and worshipping idols (*what our own hands have made*) would not end well.

God agreed to *heal their waywardness and love them freely* if they would just show the wisdom to turn to him. God would turn his anger away from them. He even likened his tenderness toward their repentance to several similes. He would be like *dew* in the morning—refreshing (unlike the use of that same figure of speech in Hosea 6:4 concerning Israel’s loyalty). He would cause Israel to *blossom like a lily*. He would be like one of the cedars of *Lebanon* that would grow majestic and tall in addition to smelling nice. He would be like an *olive tree* (one of the main crops in Israel). He would be like flourishing grain and abundant wine. Some of these similes even have messianic connections. He would be like a *flourishing juniper* (like a cypress or fig tree).

Wise (cunning) people and discerning (perceptive) people understand the right ways of the Lord. They will walk in these ways even when the *rebellious* (transgressor) *stumble in them*. Wisdom always lies behind genuine repentance.

Confession Behind Freedom*Psalm 32:1-7*

Here we move from the book of Hosea to a Psalm that celebrates the joy of pleading for and receiving God’s forgiveness. Some scholars believe that thematically this Psalm comes after David’s repentant song of Psalm 51. The first two verses declared the happiness of the forgiven person. When God covers their sin and does not count their sins against them it is a blessed moment.

But David looked back to his unconfessed state in verses 3-4. Life was not good. His *bones wasted away*, he went about *groaning* (roaring) *all day long*, he felt God’s heavy hand on him, and he felt as if his strength was *sapped as in the heat of summer*. But once David came clean and *acknowledged* (knew) his sin, he felt freedom that only God could give. His *transgressions* and *guilt* were forgiven.

The freedom experienced through forgiveness gave David tremendous security. He likened it to not feeling afraid when *mighty waters* rose up. He knew God had become his *hiding place* (think Corrie Ten Boom). David experienced *songs of deliverance* and protection. There is no unfaithfulness that God’s forgiveness cannot reach. ■

APPLICATION

THE OLDER ONES FIRST

BY DAVID FAUST

Do you remember the story about Jesus' encounter with a woman caught in adultery? In many English Bibles, the account in John 8:2-11 appears in italics to show it's supported by weak manuscript evidence. Personally, I'm content to let scholars debate the textual questions while I ponder what the story tells us about Jesus' wisdom and courage.

The Scribes and Pharisees wanted to trap Jesus, so they brought a woman they had caught in the act of adultery. (Question: Why didn't they also bring the man?) This was a tricky situation. If Jesus went against the Law of Moses and let adulterers off the hook, he would appear weak and unrighteous; but if he agreed to stone the woman, it would seem harsh. Jesus stooped down and wrote on the ground with his finger, and then stood up and gave his famous answer: "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her" (John 8:7). The accusers left one at a time. When only Jesus and the terrified woman remained, he said, "Neither do I condemn you. . . . Go now and leave your life of sin" (8:11).

Blending Justice and Mercy

An unholy part of us—with a careless attitude about sin—wants to do whatever we please, hoping God will overlook our misdeeds. On the other hand, a guilty conscience makes us wonder if our sins are unpardonable, and that leads to despair. Jesus addresses both sides of the equation. "Go and sin no more" upholds God's righteousness and calls us to obedience. "Neither do I condemn you" underscores God's mercy and relieves our guilt.

Another detail in the story stirs my curiosity. After Jesus' words about casting the first stone, the bystanders stood in silence, wondering what to do. Finally, they "began to go away one at a time, the older ones first . . ." (John 8:9). The younger ones in

the group followed the example of the older, laying down their stones and walking away. Why do you suppose the older accusers left first?

Insight That Comes with Age

We can only guess what was in their hearts, but it's clear that something vexed the consciences of the older men and tugged at their hearts.

Could it be that with age, we become more aware of our own frailties?

Is it possible that the longer we walk with the Lord, the more we recognize our need for grace?

Might it be that the longer we live, the more compassion we can show to others as we recognize our own struggles and weaknesses?

If the Scribes and Pharisees read the book of Hosea, they knew that God compares himself to a loving father who bends down to feed his children (Hosea 11:3-4). Hosea's marriage to an unfaithful wife illustrated God's persevering love for his wayward people. The Lord longed to "heal their waywardness and love them freely" (14:4).

The longer we follow the Lord, the better we should grasp both God's justice and his grace. Christ died for our sins, and through the Holy Spirit, he empowers us to die to sin and live godly lives (Romans 6:1-7; 8:1-13). He calls us to pursue righteousness, receive mercy, and be more tenderhearted toward others. Maybe it's time for us to lay down some stones ourselves.

Personal Challenge: What do God's righteousness and mercy mean to you? Do you live in fear of judgment, wondering if he will forgive you? Does your attitude toward others lean more toward mercy or toward judgment? ■

DISCOVERY

BY MICHAEL C. MACK

1. To what or whom have you committed (or devoted) yourself over the last week?
2. Have you ever turned away from God or a person in your life and then later turned back to them? What happened?

Ask two people to read aloud **Hosea 11:1-7; 14:1-9; Psalm 32:1-7** 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. What central themes do you see in these three passages? (*What ties them together?*)
4. How is God portrayed in these passages and what do you learn about him? (*Don't miss the similes used in Hosea 14:5-8.*)
5. How are people described in these passages and what do you learn about yourself from this?
6. In what specific ways had God's people turned away from God?
 - What were the consequences for their waywardness (sin)?
 - While they were still sinners, God responded to them with grace. What words and phrases in this passage describe this grace?
7. The people were called to turn back to God. What did that return entail? (*What parts do our confession and repentance play?*)
8. Let's try to personalize this: How has God's forgiveness affected your life?
 - Whom will you tell about God's grace and forgiveness this week?
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "I will . . ."
10. Reread Psalm 32:6-7 (keeping the context of vv. 1-5 in your mind). For what will you trust God in prayer over the next week?

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Hosea 6:6; Micah 6:6-8; 7:8-19; Matthew 9:9-13; 1 John 1:1-2**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. 📖