

I Think I'm Gonna Like It Here

Learning to Love Again: A Study of Hosea

Hosea 14

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Orphan Care

Today is Orphan Sunday. Orphan care is important to us at First Free. Many people like Justin and Emily are involved in foster care. Others have adopted children in need of care or provided respite care for foster parents. Maggie and I have been involved too.

We became Diamond's legal guardians four years ago. Her mom was homeless and couldn't care for her. And just a few months ago we became legal guardians of Neaveha. Yes, we have a two-year-old again! We've been involved with her mom for five years. She asked us to take Neaveha when she realized she wasn't going to be able to care for her. This is joyful work. These girls have enriched our family in every way. But it's also hard at times.

More people are needed to engage in this work at all levels. But what motivates orphan care? Is it simply a desire to do good? That's part of it. We're called to do good to all people (Gal. 6:10). And doing good involves looking after widows and orphans in their distress (Jas. 1:27). But that's a motivation from the law. And that kind of motivation is not entirely sustainable. We need to be motivated by grace, not simply rules; by the gospel, not simply law.

There are two kinds of orphans in this world. There are spiritual or vertical orphans—those who are separated from their heavenly Father. And there are literal orphans or horizontal orphans—those separated from their parents. In order to do gospel-centered horizontal orphan care, we need to understand that all of us at one time were spiritual orphans. All of us were separated from our heavenly Father. But God, who loves the fatherless, made a way for us to become adopted into his family in Christ. The only way we'll ever do joyful and sustainable horizontal orphan care is if we come to a deep understanding of our spiritual adoption in Christ.

And our text this morning deals with this deep reality. This passage deals with our spiritual orphan status. And it deals with our restoration to relationship with God.

Hosea 14:1-9¹

*¹Return, O Israel, to the LORD your God,
for you have stumbled because of your iniquity.*

*²Take with you words
and return to the LORD;*

*say to him,
"Take away all iniquity;
accept what is good,
and we will pay with bulls
the vows of our lips.*

*³Assyria shall not save us;
we will not ride on horses;*

¹ Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® unless otherwise noted.

*and we will say no more, 'Our God,'
to the work of our hands.
In you the orphan finds mercy."*

*⁴I will heal their apostasy;
I will love them freely,
for my anger has turned from them.*

*⁵I will be like the dew to Israel;
he shall blossom like the lily;
he shall take root like the trees of Lebanon;*

*⁶his shoots shall spread out;
his beauty shall be like the olive,
and his fragrance like Lebanon.*

*⁷They shall return and dwell beneath my shadow;
they shall flourish like the grain;
they shall blossom like the vine;
their fame shall be like the wine of Lebanon.*

*⁸O Ephraim, what have I to do with idols?
It is I who answer and look after you.
I am like an evergreen cypress;
from me comes your fruit.*

*⁹Whoever is wise, let him understand these things;
whoever is discerning, let him know them;
for the ways of the LORD are right,
and the upright walk in them,
but transgressors stumble in them.*

This is the Word of the Lord.

The main call in this passage is a call to repent. But it's grounded in a promise of restoration. So to divide our time this morning, we're going to look at three things: a plan for repentance, a promise of restoration, and a prudent response.

A PLAN FOR REPENTANCE (1-3)

Let's begin with the plan for repentance.

Like I said earlier, this passage deals with our spiritual orphan status. And it deals with our restoration to relationship with God. But there's a breakdown to the analogy between spiritual orphans and literal orphans that becomes clear in the first lines of our passage.

A literal orphan in an orphanage in Africa or Asia, or a child in the foster care system in America, is not an orphan by any fault of their own. They lost their parents through death or poverty or even abandonment. It's not their fault! But all of us are spiritual orphans because of our sin. We've rejected God in our life. It's our sin that puts us out of relationship with God. Therefore, repentance is needed to come back into relationship with God. That's not the case in horizontal orphan care and adoption.

I grew up without a father in the home. I had a lot of bitterness about this as a young man. But when I heard the gospel I realized that the bigger issue in my life was I was estranged from my heavenly father. And that was nobody's fault but my own.

In Hosea, Israel finds herself estranged from God. The metaphor Hosea often uses is the metaphor of marriage. Israel had left their first love, God, and had run after other lovers; they had run after idols. And so Hosea predicted that they would be destroyed and carried off into exile—away from God. Hosea also uses the metaphor of a father and his children to describe this separation. Because of Israel's sin, God says his children Israel will be called "Not My People," and "No Mercy."

But Hosea not only predicts the fall of Israel. Hosea also predicts the restoration of Israel. He predicts that Israel will be restored to God like a bride to her husband. And he predicts that "Not My People" will be called "You Are My People." Our passage this morning talks about this restoration. But before restoration can happen, real repentance must happen. Verse 1 says, "Return, O Israel, to the LORD your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity."

We know the Bible calls each of us to repent. But what is repentance? Verses 2-3 give us a picture of repentance, even a plan for repentance or a prayer to guide our repentance. The first part of verse 2 says, here's a prayer for you to pray as you repent. Here's a pattern for repentance. Take with you [these] words. This is how you return to the Lord. This is what you say to God. And the prayer involves three things.

Request Forgiveness

First, request forgiveness for your sin. "Take away all iniquity; accept what is good, and we will pay with bulls the vows of our lips." Repentance begins with acknowledging we're sinners before a holy God. It's our sin that separates us from God. And we must admit that.

For Israel their sin involved going after other gods, placing their trust in things other than God to provide for them. They had to acknowledge this and ask for forgiveness. They also had to offer a sacrifice of bulls along with their confession. We don't have to offer a sacrifice of bulls. We place our trust in the all-sufficient sacrifice of Christ. But we still have to confess our sins and ask for forgiveness.

Renounce False Gods

The second part of repentance is renouncing false gods. Repentance is not only being sorry for sin. It's also turning from sin. You can't have it both ways. You can't have both the experience of forgiveness and the ongoing pleasure of sin. You have to renounce sin and your trust in other gods. And this involves (positively) choosing to rely on God and him alone to provide for your needs.

For Israel this meant renouncing three things: trust in politics, military might, and idolatry. "Assyria shall not save us; we will not ride on horses; and we will say no more, 'Our God,' to the work of our hands."

There's nothing wrong with engaging in politics. I hope most of you voted last week. There's nothing wrong with military. Today we're thankful for our veterans who've helped to secure our freedom as a country. And there's nothing inherently wrong in many of the things we make into idols. The problem is when we trust in these things to deliver us or let them take the place that only God should take.

Some in this room this morning, if they are honest, have placed their trust in politics. It consumes their thoughts and emotions more than the gospel. Some have placed their trust in the strength of our country. Many have placed their trust in the false gods of education and career advancement to provide for their material and social needs. And many have found satisfaction in sexual immorality and materialism. Our hearts are idol factories as John Calvin once said.

Repentance is all about Lordship. It involves asking the question, who's in charge in my life? What's driving my life? Is it God? Or these false gods? To repent truly, we have to renounce sin and idolatry and to rely solely on our God.

Recognize We Need Mercy

Third, we have to recognize we're orphans in need of God's mercy. The last line of the prayer says, "In you the orphan finds mercy." In order to repent fully, we have to recognize that we're spiritual orphans. And that God shows mercy to the orphan.

I think Israel was in denial about what was going to happen to them. Hosea predicted they would be destroyed. But how could that be? They after all were the *chosen* people of God. But just because they were descendants of Abraham didn't mean they were good to go. They needed to *walk* in relationship with God to *benefit* from the promises of God. And they had failed to do that.

So they were in fact orphans! They were "Not My People." And they would receive "No Mercy."

But God had not changed. God is still the God who loves the fatherless. And the one who shows mercy to the orphan. If they would but realize they were spiritually orphaned, they could appeal to God for mercy. If they would but repent, they could be restored to relationship with God. They could become his people again.

How does this apply to us? I wonder if some people who grew up in the church struggle to realize that we're all spiritual orphans apart from Christ. Maybe they assume they're in the family of God. But growing up in the church doesn't make us the people of God any more than being a descendant of Abraham made Israel the people of God.

Each one of us has to realize that we're a sinner. And our sin separates us from God. We're spiritual orphans. And it's only when we come to realize that, that we can be restored to God.

The only way to be restored to God is through falling on God's mercy and repenting of our sins. Restoration to God may be *found* in the church or in your family, but it's not *based* on your church or your family. It's based only in Christ. Each one has a personal responsibility to repent and turn to Jesus in faith.

The call in this passage is to repent, to truly repent—through asking for forgiveness, renouncing false gods, and recognizing who we are and who God is. But what will motivate us to repent? It's the promise of restoration, as seen in verses 4-8.

THE PROMISE OF RESTORATION (4-8)

One of our family's favorite movies is Annie. Maggie loved Annie as a little girl. She loved Annie so much that she got a perm to look like Annie. She had Annie birthday parties. And of course dressed up as Annie for Halloween.

One of our favorite songs in Annie is “I Think I’m Gonna Like It Here.” It contrasts life as an orphan in New York City during the Great Depression with life under the roof of America’s richest billionaire. It contrasts life under Miss Hannigan (an alcoholic, kid-hating, wench) with life under Oliver Warbucks.

The scene begins with Mr. Warbuck’s secretary, Grace (a fitting name), asking Annie what she would like to do first. Annie responds by saying she’ll start by cleaning the stairs and the floors. She thinks she needs to earn her keep. But Grace tells her that she doesn’t have to do anything. She’s not there as a servant! She’s there to be served. Then the song begins.

Cecile will pick out all your clothes
Your bath is drawn by Mrs. Greer
Annette comes in to make your bed
“I think I’m gonna like it here!”

The swimming pool is to the left
The tennis court is in the rear
Have an instructor here at noon
“I think I’m gonna like here!”

When you wake, ring for Drake
Drake will bring your tray
When you’re through, Mrs. Pugh
Comes and takes it away

No need to pick up any toys
No finger will you lift my dear
We have but one request
Please put us to the test
“I think I’m gonna like it here!”

“Used to room in a tomb
Where I’d sit and freeze
Get me now, holy cow
Could someone pinch me please”

“I know I’m gonna like it here!”

This song gives a modern example of the vast difference between life as an orphan and a life of flourishing. And although it’s hard to see it on the surface, that’s exactly what’s going on in verses 4-8. These verses are contrasting life under sin and idol worship with life in a restored relationship with God.

Restoration is Rich

God promises that if his people will repent from their idol worship that he’ll restore them. He says, “I will heal their apostasy; I will love them freely, for my anger has turned from them.”

Then he describes what life under his love and restoration looks like.

⁵*I will be like the dew to Israel;
 he shall blossom like the lily;
 he shall take root like the trees of Lebanon;
⁶his shoots shall spread out;
 his beauty shall be like the olive,
 and his fragrance like Lebanon.
⁷They shall return and dwell beneath my shadow;
 they shall flourish like the grain;
 they shall blossom like the vine;
 their fame shall be like the wine of Lebanon*

This picture of flourishing is an ironic picture. The reason Israel was going after other lovers, serving idols, and worshipping the Baals was because they believed those idols would bring them flourishing. The Baals promised dew and blossoming and roots and shoots and beauty and fragrance. But Israel's idolatry had left them high and dry; withering, not flourishing. God's saying, "The only way to true flourishing is through a restored relationship with me!"

Restoration is richer than idolatry. This is meant to motivate Israel to repent. Life in God's house is better than life in the spiritual orphanage.

That's one of the reasons we do orphan care at First Free. We hate the picture of kids suffering in under-resourced orphanages. We want them to have forever families. We hate to see kids suffering in broken homes, without adequate food and nurture. We want them to be loved.

And that's why God pursues us as well. He hates to see us suffering under the bondage of our other lovers. He hates to see us under the tyranny of our idols. He wants us to see that we're gonna like it a lot better under his roof, in his rich and loving arms.

Do you believe that? Do you believe that life is better in God's house? Or are you ensnared by the enticements of the spiritual prostitutes (of our day) that offer you pleasure in their embrace? Or do you believe the false promises of the false gods (of our day) that offer prosperity and security?

Friends, these false gods will ultimately leave you spiritually hungry and emotionally drained. Why would you want to live under Miss Hannigan's roof when you can come and stay with Daddy Warbucks? God wants you to see how much better you'll like it at his house! Jesus wants you to see that the thief comes to kill and steal and destroy, but he has come to give you life to the fullest (Jn.10:10).

As your pastor, I have but one request of you this morning—please put God to the test. I think you'll like it better with him!

Restoration is Relational

But it's not just the picture of a rich restoration that God wants us to see. It's also a relational restoration. Many commentators have pointed out that the imagery (vv. 4-8) not only contrasts the false promises of the Baals with God's promises. The imagery is also intentionally alluding to the Song of Solomon.²

² Douglas K. Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, World Biblical Commentary; and David Allen Hubbard, *Hosea*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentary

This is an important observation. It teaches us that the picture of flourishing here is not really about God providing material wealth to his people. It's really about his enriching love. It's not mainly about agricultural husbandry; it's about God as his people's husband.³ God is singing a love song to them in the wilderness to woo them back to him.⁴ The restoration is a picture of riches. But it's all about a rich relationship with God. It's a picture of restored intimacy.

This is all designed to motivate repentance. A fitting conclusion to a book that has been all about returning to relationship with God.

And speaking of a conclusion to the book, let's now look at verse 9 which serves as the official conclusion to the book. Here we find a prudent response to this passage.

A PRUDENT RESPONSE (9)

This is what it says:

*Whoever is wise, let him understand these things;
 whoever is discerning, let him know them;
 for the ways of the LORD are right,
 and the upright walk in them,
 but transgressors stumble in them.*

The book ends with an appeal to wisdom. Wisdom literature regularly puts forward two ways to live. There's the way of the wise, who lives in right relationship with God, others, and the world. And there's the way of the fool, who lives in wrong relationship to God, others, and the world.

Hosea's ending his book by saying there are really only two ways to respond. To either walk or stumble. As he started out in verse 1, Israel has been stumbling because of their iniquity. But they can follow a different path. There is a prudent response. They can walk in the way of the Lord.

What will you choose? Will you live a life of repentance or will you continue in your sin? Will you renounce your false gods or will you continue to rely on them? Will you realize that God loves the orphan and return to his house or will you continue to believe life is better with Miss Hannigan? Will you shack up with your spiritual lovers or will you return to your first love?

Jesus said there are only two ways: the wide gate that leads to destruction or the narrow gate that leads to life. You can build your house on the sand and have it washed away. Or you can build your house on the rock that will stand.

Friends, the only way to come through the narrow gate, the only way to build on the rock, is to come through Jesus. Ephesians 1 reminds us that it's only through Christ that we can be adopted into the family of God; it's only through the blood of Christ that we can be redeemed and forgiven; It's only in him that we have a promised eternal inheritance sealed by the Holy Spirit.

Those who have the Son have life; those who don't have the Son don't have life (1 Jn. 5:12). There are only two ways to live. The way of life and the way of death. How will you respond today?

³ Hubbard

⁴ Duane A. Garrett, *Hosea, Joel*, The New American Commentary