

FORGIVING YOUR GOMER

HOSEA 3:1

When the Prophet Hosea and his bride-to-be, Gomer, were dating, they had a heart-to-heart talk...

Hosea said, "Honey, I confess, I have an obsession with golf. Whenever I drive past a golf course I drop whatever I'm doing and tee it up. I've missed work and forgotten family commitments to play golf. I'm worried my habit will cause some problems in our marriage."

Gomer didn't seem to mind. She responded, "*That's okay. But since we're on the subject I also have a confession. Hosea, you should know I'm a hooker.*"

Without any hesitation Hosea replied, "Is that all? Don't worry. If you'll adjust your grip, and bring your top hand over the club, it'll straighten that hook right out."

Well, the real Hosea was not a golfer, but the real Gomer was a hooker. Here's the ultimate odd couple...

The prophet and the prostitute. In my opinion this is one of the most bizarre storylines in all the Bible.

I'm surprised Hollywood hasn't turned Hosea's story into movie. Imagine the titles: **[SLIDE] "The Minister and The Madam", "The Man of the Cloth and the Lady of the Night", "The Street Preacher and the Streetwalker", "His Light - Red Light"**. This is the type of movie you'd expect to see run on television during *sweep's week*.

But this story is more applicable to us than we might first assume. It's an amazing story of the power of forgiveness. It strikes at the heart of every marriage.

Here's the story in a nutshell... God tells Hosea to marry a prostitute. They even have children together.

Hosea's marriage is an illustration of God's dealings with Israel. God loved the nation even when they went after other gods and were spiritually unfaithful to Him.

In fact, even after Hosea marries Gomer she reverts back to her evil ways, and God asks him to forgive his wayward wife. It's an amazing example of forgiveness.

I think the reason many marriages come off the rails is unforgiveness. Spouses commit far less grievous acts than Gomer's

sexual promiscuity, but the offended spouse just won't forgive, and it stunts the marriage.

In Chapter 1 God gives Hosea a strange command.

Here it is out of *The Living Bible*, [SLIDE] "Go and marry a girl who is a prostitute, so that some of her children will be born to you from other men. This will illustrate the way My people have been untrue to Me, committing open adultery against Me by worshipping other gods."

This was definitely not a minister's first choice for a mate. Hosea wanted a faithful, happy family life, where his kids would be taught to love the Lord and obey the Scriptures. Hosea needed a *godly*, not a *gaudy* gal.

Yet Hosea obeyed. "He... took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son."

Perhaps their early years were good ones. Maybe Gomer was touched by her husband's tenderness.

It could be she was even drawn to God...

But it didn't take long for her superficial faith to deteriorate, and for her to revert back to old habits. The couple has three children, and Hosea names his last, "Lo-Ammi" or "not my child." He realized he wasn't the boy's father. By this time, Hosea knows that *he's sharing a bed with a woman who's sleeping around.*

Finally, Gomer leaves. Hosea comes home one day to three unsupervised children. She'd just walked out.

Chapter 2 implies that Gomer's reasons for flying the coop were materialistic. Rather than live in a *cul-de-sac*, Gomer wanted to live in the *fast lane*. Hosea was a man of humble means. Gomer traded *love* for *luxury*. Go-go girl, Gomer, was more *hip hop* than *house wife*.

Of course, no matter her reasons, it didn't shelter Hosea from a broken heart. He really loved his wife.

When Gomer left, Hosea let her go! He didn't try clamp down. He let her go, **but he didn't give up**. I'm sure he prayed, and hoped that one day she'd return.

And that day finally came. Hosea heard the news that his wife was up for sale at the slave auction.

Gomer had hit rock bottom. She ended up in a slave market. You hear a lot today about sex trafficking, but it's nothing new. Here it happened to a pastor's wife.

How [SLIDE] Gomer fell so far we don't know. She must've sold herself to a pimp who used and abused her until there was nothing left... But when word got to Hosea that his wife was up for sale, God spoke to his heart...

Listen to 3:1. God speaks to His servant, Hosea, [SLIDE]"Go again, love a woman who is loved by a lover and is committing adultery, just like the love of the Lord for the children of Israel, who look to other gods..."

Hosea went to the market, and cried as he watched his precious bride inspected like a head of cattle.

Historical sources tell us these slave markets were barbaric, brutal. Humans were treated like livestock. [SLIDE] [SLIDE]

Slaves stripped on the auction block and sold naked.

Imagine, watching your wife standing naked in front of a courtyard full of rowdy men. Pastor Hosea could barely watch as his wife make her appearance.

Chapter 3:2 tells us Hosea entered the bidding and bought *Gomer* for a *homer*. Actually, he paid 15 shekels and a homer-and-a-half of barley. Exodus 21:32 tells us this was far less than the normal 30 shekels paid for a slave. *It seems sin had taken its toll.*

When Gomer bailed on her marriage and family she thought it would make her life better and happier. Just the opposite resulted. She now was a walking corpse.

A shell of the woman who'd been Hosea's bride.

Imagine, Hosea approaches the platform, [SLIDE] puts his cloak over her shoulders covering her nakedness, dries her tears, loosens her chains, wraps his arm around her, and escorts her through the jeering crowd.

Gomer comes home. Here's pure forgiveness.

The only example I can think of as powerful, is when Jesus brought me home from the slave market of sin.

Realize, according to that day's custom, Gomer is now Hosea's slave. He can do with her as he pleases.

I read of a woman in Georgetown, Guyana who found her husband in bed with another woman. Her husband physically attacked her. She took him to court.

The judge punished the man by sentencing him to be his wife's slave for two weeks. He told her, "For two weeks your husband is at your beck and call. He is your slave. Anything you want him to do he has to do."

Husband... wife... what would you do if your spouse was made your slave for two weeks? Would you make them pay you back for the way they've treated you?

What form of slow, painful torture would you devise?

How would you seek to make their life miserable?

I've heard forgiveness defined as [SLIDE] "Having the ability to repay a hurt, yet foregoing my right to do so."

This was the situation between Hosea and Gomer.

She was his slave now. He could do to her whatever he pleased - and guess what he did? *He forgave her!*

True forgiveness is having it within your power to pay someone back for the evil they've done, and instead show them mercy. One author defines it, [SLIDE] "Forgiveness is surrendering my right to hurt you for hurting me."

If you haven't discovered it yet, the biggest key to a successful marriage is learning to bury the hatchet.

Husbands and wives have to forgive!

It's been said, [SLIDE] "Every marriage is made up of two sinners. A good marriage is made up of two forgivers."

Once a man said to his friend, "Often my wife goes berserk, she completely loses it, she gets historical."

His buddy said, "*You mean hysterical.*" "Well that to, but I mean historical. She starts digging up the past."

Why is it we have a hard time forgiving our spouse?

One day the disciples came to Jesus and asked Him, "How often should we forgive? Up to seven times?"

They thought seven times was above and beyond the call of duty. But Jesus said, [SLIDE]"I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven."

In other words, don't worry about keeping count!

And this is how we need to forgive our spouse... *"But Pastor Sandy, if I keep forgiving him, he'll think he can get away with whatever he wants."* Or *"If I keep forgiving, its like putting my seal of approval on what he's doing."* Or *"I just can't take another hurt. If I forgive him; then I can no longer justify my plans to leave him."*

We can list all kinds of excuses for withholding forgiveness from our spouse, but none of our excuses would be as legitimate as what Hosea could muster.

Yet God spoke to him and told him, "Go again, love a woman..." And perhaps God is speaking this morning the very same instructions to you, *"Go again, forgive your spouse - love them again and work things out."*

Don't misunderstand, forgiveness isn't pretending that nothing happened. Hosea didn't forgive Gomer, bring her home, and try to take up where they'd left off.

Much damage had been done and time was needed to make repairs. It would take months, if not years, for Gomer to prove the genuineness of her repentance, and rebuild the trust she had lost through her sin.

Hosea's willingness to forgive didn't mean that he was ready to rush in and start over from scratch.

In 3:3 Hosea lays out some ground rules to Gomer, [SLIDE] "You shall stay with me many days; you shall not play the harlot, nor shall you have a man; thus I will also be toward you." He's saying, at first we're not going to sleep together. I've been hurt, and I need time to heal.

Hosea's forgiveness didn't exclude Gomer from having to prove her faithfulness to him, and show him her sincerity. It just allowed her an opportunity to do so.

Forgiveness doesn't mean you have to stay with an *abusive spouse...* or God expects you to tolerate an *adulterous spouse...*

but it does mean that you need to be willing to show mercy to a truly *repentant spouse*.

True forgiveness is saying, *I'm going to give you an opportunity to show me you're sincere. I'll stick with you while you re-groove some new patterns in your life.*

Listen to the testimony of a woman who refused her husband a second chance. She writes, [SLIDE]"I caught my husband making love to another woman. He swore it would never happen again. He begged me to forgive him, but I could not - I would not. I was so bitter I could think of nothing but revenge. I was going to make him pay and pay dearly. I would have my pound of flesh.

[SLIDE] I filed for divorce, even though the kids begged me not to. After the divorce, my husband tried for two years to win me

back. I refused to have anything to do with him. He struck first; now I was striking back.

All I wanted was to make him pay.

[SLIDE] Finally my ex-husband gave up and married a lovely young widow with a couple of small children. He began rebuilding his life - without me. I see them occasionally, and he looks so happy. They all do. And here I am - a lonely, old, miserable woman who allowed her selfish pride, and foolish stubbornness to ruin her life."

It's been said, [SLIDE] **"To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover all the while that prisoner was you."**

Let me say, at times forgiveness isn't just tough, it's impossible. This is why we need the Holy Spirit.

Notice, what God told Hosea, "Go again, love a woman who is committing adultery, just like the love of the Lord for the children of Israel." Only God has this kind of love in abundance, and He'll share it with you.

[SLIDE] He wants to see your marriage *succeed* - and thus, He'll supply all the love-help your marriage *needs!*

A proud man once said to John Wesley, "Sir, I never forgive." Wesley replied, "Then, I hope you never sin."

We who have been forgiven so much, so freely; how can we withhold forgiveness from someone else.

Husband, forgive your wife!

Wife, forgive your husband!

Let the love of Jesus rise up within you and drown out the painful memories. *If Hosea could forgive Gomer* - I dare say, that you can forgive your spouse!