

Persistent Love: Hosea 11v1-11

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[0 : 00] I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love. I lifted the yoke from their neck and bent down to feed them. Will they not return to Egypt?

And will not Assyria rule over them because they refuse to repent? Swords will flash in their cities, will destroy the bars of their gates and put an end to their plans. My people are determined to turn from me.

Even if they call to the Most High, He will by no means exalt them. How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel?

How can I treat you like Adma? How can I make you like Zebulun? My heart is changed within me. All my compassion is aroused. I will not carry out my fierce anger, nor will I turn and devastate Ephraim.

For I am God and not man, the Holy One among you. I will not come in wrath. They will follow the Lord. He will roar like a lion.

[1 : 06] When he roars, his children will come trembling from the west. They will come trembling like birds from Egypt, like doves from Assyria. I will settle them and their homes, declares the Lord.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. ults. Amen. Amen. Amen. Yes. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Thanks very much, Sam.

Before we have a look at this passage, I want to draw your attention to something on the inside of your new sheet, which is under the title Reason for Hope in association with the Christian Union's Ireland.

[2 : 21] So a more fuller notice is the one that I'm holding up here and there on the table as you came in.

If you wanted to have two of the world's best apologists, those who can help us understand big questions like, does God exist and what about God in science, then these are the two very best people you could possibly have.

And they're coming to Cork. You'll see the details there, the 21st of March and the 28th of March.

But I want to explain very carefully that it's not just for people who know God and love God to go.

The idea or the purpose is that you would go by bringing a friend with you. So somebody who you might know, who maybe they claim, they say they're an atheist, they don't believe in God.

How do we know God exists? So that's the kind of person you might like to bring along to this.

There'll be no singing, there'll be no praying, just a straightforward talk and discussion.

[3 : 36] So I commend them both to you and to think about who you can invite. So don't just turn up, but turn up with someone. So those are two great events that are coming up I'd like to draw your attention to.

Well let's turn to Hosea chapter 11 and we're going to pray and ask for God's help as we look at this together.

Thank you God that we can come to you and speak to you as our Father.

Father, and we come to you as children, asking that you would speak words of truth and comfort, challenge and reassurance into our lives.

And we ask, Father, would you give to us hearts that are receptive to what you say to us? Hearts that accept your truth.

[4 : 59] And would you change us so that we may be people who love you more, delight in you, enjoy you, and walk with you faithfully.

Father, please help us. And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. For the last time that he saw his son was ten years ago, the day of his 18th birthday.

Despite numerous attempts to get in touch, writing letters, sending gifts, phoning friends, there was never any response. The father sat down on the couch and in the silence he lifted down a photo album from the shelf.

Each page was a memory of his treasured son. The day he was born. His first wobbly steps. The plaster on his head after he fell off the swing. Every picture brought a smile to the father's face. The last of the pictures was his son's 18th birthday.

[6 : 26] Standing alongside his boy with pride, they posed with arms around each other. Tears filled the father's eyes.

His heart ached. There were no more photos. Just memories of the past. He reached for the phone, dialed the number that was etched in his memory, waiting anxiously.

But there was no answer. With his head in his hands, he cried out, Son, will you please come home?

Well, that's the cry of Hosea chapter 11. Son, will you please come home?

The metaphor may have changed from a marriage relationship to a father-son relationship, but it still reflects God's longing for his people to return to him.

[7 : 33] Chapters 5 to 10 have detailed graphically the persistent sin of God's people. But now in chapter 11, we see the persistent love of the father towards a rebellious, wayward child.

This is God's cry to us and to the world. Son, will you please come home?

We're going to see this cry of the father's heart, the longing, the aching for the child to come home. First, the father's gracious love.

In three pictures, God reminds his people of his gracious love towards them. It's like pictures of a photo album. Look at the first picture.

God rescued them. Verse 1. When Israel was a child, I loved him. And out of Egypt, I called my son. Remember what it was like for you as a child.

[8 : 42] You were in Egypt. You were slaves under the control of a cruel oppressor called Pharaoh. But I rescued you. I brought you into freedom. And I gave you a good and a beautiful land.

I adopted you in as my son. I loved you. And then it's as if God shows them another picture.

Remember how I healed you. Verse 3. It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by the arms.

But they did not realize it was I who healed them. Just as a father helps the son.

And just as a father picks up his child when he falls and puts a bandage on his cut knee. So God is saying, I was there for you.

[9 : 36] I held your hand as you took those first steps. When you failed, I picked you up. When you fell away, I came running after you. I restored you.

I healed you. He shows them. He shows them something else. Verse 4. That he delighted in them. I led them with cords of human kindness and with ties of love. Just as a father holds his child securely and tight in his arms.

So God has bound himself to his people with ties of love. It's such an intimate picture of delight. Look at the rest of verse 4.

I lifted the yoke from their neck. Now just in the reading of this, the translation isn't really very clear. Because the word for yoke, if you notice, can also mean child.

[10 : 37] So the image, the picture that we have here is of a father bending down and lifting up his child towards his neck. Almost cuddle-like.

And then as he picks up the child, he puts them down. Look at the end of verse 4. And bent down to feed them. Here is the picture of a father who delights in his child.

And he longs to be with them. And so these pictures show us the heart of the father and his gracious, tender love. But most importantly, it reveals the gracious love of God towards people like you and me.

Look back to verse 1. He says, When Israel was a child, I loved him. And out of Egypt, I called my son.

Egypt, you remember from the other week, is a place of slavery. A place of oppression and death. And Hosea is taking us right back to that time.

[11:50] In fact, he's taking us back to when God spoke to Pharaoh. And it's recorded for us in Exodus. You see it there on the screen. As God spoke to Pharaoh, this is what he said.

This is what the Lord says. Israel is my firstborn son. And I told you, let my son go so that he may worship me.

It's the first time that God speaks of himself as a father and his people as his son. God longs to bring his child home to himself so that they might worship him.

And that's God's desire for us. For years later, God's true son, Jesus Christ, would find himself as a young baby, a young child, as a refugee in Egypt.

Escaping from the cruel threat of Herod. Matthew tells us what actually happened. Have a look at Matthew chapter 2.

[12:55] Keep your finger in Hosea. And just go forward a few pages to the first book of the New Testament, Matthew chapter 2. Matthew chapter 2, verse 14.

So here Matthew is recording how Jesus ended up as a refugee in Egypt in some ways, you know, away from home.

Chapter 2, verse 14. So he, that's Joseph, got up, took the child Jesus and his mother Mary during the night and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod.

And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet, the prophet Hosea. Out of Egypt I called my son.

You see, Jesus is the true son. He is the true Israel. The only son who loved God fully and faithfully.

[14:06] The son that the father treasured and delighted in. And God called him up out of Egypt. And the point is that through Jesus, as we trust in him, you and I have been called up out of Egypt to be his son.

Jesus has called us out of our slavery to sin and death. He's rescued us from our cruel oppressor, Satan. He has healed us by forgiving us of all our sin and restoring that right relationship with him. Through Jesus, the true son, we become sons of the living God. We become his children, treasured and loved and delighted in.

Or as we were reminded from Romans 8, we can now cry out, Abba, Father. We are now bound to him by his strong arms of love.

This is the father's gracious love towards people like you and me. And what's so amazing is this love of the father is a love he has for a runaway child.

[15:24] Look at verse 2. Back to Hosea chapter 11, verse 2. But the more I called Israel, the further they went from me.

Now we've all experienced or at least seen a little child running away from their father. They see the gate is open and they're away. And immediately the father calls out, Come back!

Come back! And there's an initial pause in their run. And then they take off again. Come back! But they just keep on running.

And then there's a point when the thrill and the excitement of the child as he's running away turns to fear. They fear going back for what the father might do.

So they keep on running. And it seems that is exactly what we are like. Look at verse 7. My people are determined to turn from me.

[16:37] They're determined to keep on running. Even if they call to the Most High. And in the context here, the Most High is referring to the gods, to the Baals, to other places of worship.

Even if they call out to other gods, they will by no means exalt them. There will be no answer from them. It seems that in the same way, we are determined to run.

We run after other gods, after other lovers, seeking our joy and our happiness away from the father. But of course, there is nothing to fear by returning to the father.

He longs for us to come home. He delights in us. There is no fear in running back. The only fear we should have is in running away.

Look back at verse 5. Will they not return to Egypt? And will not Assyria rule over them because they refuse to repent?

[17:48] Swords will flash in their cities. Will destroy the bars at our gates and put an end to their plans. Because they keep on running away, God will bring his discipline upon them to bring them back.

Assyria, the great nation, will come. And their running will come to an end. Not because God wants to hurt them, but because the father loves them.

And sometimes, God must discipline us. It's God's cry to his wayward child. Come back, my child. Come back. And if you've been running from the father like a runaway child, then hear these words. If you are seeking your joy and happiness in other places, rather than in the delight of the father, hear these words. My son, my son, do not despise the Lord's discipline and do not resent his rebuke because the Lord disciplines those he loves as a father, the son he delights in. [19:15] hear the call of the father. Hear the call of the father to your heart today. Come back, runaway child. Come back to the father's gracious love.

Not only is there the father's gracious love, but there's the father's persistent mercy. Surprisingly, incredibly, the father does not give up on his son. He is merciful towards him. Again, we're given these pictures and images. First, God's persistence.

Look at the beginning of verse 8. How can I give up on you, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I treat you like Adma?

How can I make you like Zeboim? Adma and Zeboim were two cities that God had destroyed because of the persistent sin of the people and their evil ways.

[20:21] And now Israel, God's son, are doing exactly the same thing. They are persisting in their rebellion. But the father cries out. He says, How could I do that to you, my son?

You're my child. He does not give up on them. He persists with them. He persists with mercy. Look at the rest of verse 8. My heart is changed within me and all my compassion is aroused. God the father knows what they deserve.

The evidence has been built up year after year of their runaway lives and it stands in evidence against them. But the father is cut to the heart.

This is my son. And as he agonises over what he must do, his compassion moves him not to treat his son as he deserves.

[21:24] The father has mercy upon his guilty son. Incredibly, God relents.

Look at verse 9. I will not carry out my fierce anger. Nor will I turn and devastate Ephraim. While the son continues to turn and run from the father, as the son is running away, notice what the father does in verse 9.

The father himself turns from his anger towards his son. As the son runs away, the father runs after. The father turns away from his anger. The father had warned. The father had told his child what would happen. But now he relents.

[22:25] He turns back from what he said he would do. It's not what we expect. For if someone persistently turns against you in one of your closest loving relationships, if you are continuously hurt by their actions, the natural response is one of anger and bitterness and revenge.

But the father does not do that. Why? Well, look at the rest of verse 9. For I am God and not man. The Holy One among you. I will not come in wrath. God is holy.

God is set apart from us. God is not like us. He is among us, but he is not like us. He does not respond to us in the same way that we respond to each other.

Because if God were like me, then he would not persist. He would give up. If God were like me, he would not show mercy.

[23:46] If God were like me, he would not relent. For I am God and not man. Thankfully, God is not like us.

God is not like us. Well, as we look at this text, as we look at the Father's heart, we might be forgiven for being somewhat confused.

Because it seems that the Father is struggling to make up his own mind. One moment he tells us that he must punish his people.

So let's look again at verse 5. He says, Will they not return to Egypt? And will not Assyria rule over them?

Because they refuse to repent. Swords will flash in their cities. I will punish them. And then the next moment he tells us that he's going to relent.

[24:48] Verse 9. I will not carry out my fierce anger. So which one is it God? Are you going to come and punish sin?

Or are you going to come and be full of mercy? Well the answer is both. God will judge.

And God will save. How does he do that? Well, again just keep your finger there in Hosea. And go back to Deuteronomy.

Chapter 21. It's right towards the beginning of your Bible. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy chapter 21.

And verse 18. This is something that God is speaking about his people and how they should live.

[25 : 59] Deuteronomy chapter 21 verse 18. If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who does not obey his father and mother and will not listen to them when they discipline him, his father and mother shall take hold of him and bring him to the elders at the gate of his town.

They shall say to the elders, this son of ours is stubborn and rebellious. He will not obey us. He is a profligate and a drunkard.

That is, he is reckless and wasteful. Then all the men of his town shall stone him to death. Now that seems a bit harsh.

He would stone this son. But there was a reason. Look at the rest of verse 21. You must purge the evil from among you.

And all Israel will hear of it. And be afraid. You see, the picture there is of a family unit of this reckless, wasteful son who is destroying and breaking down the family home, breaking down the relationships.

[27 : 20] He is saying they must be removed. They have been warned. He will not turn away. But it wasn't just individual sons.

God is saying, you Israel as a nation are that rebellious son. You are that runaway child who will not listen.

And God was so serious about Israel's sin that he needed to purge the evil from among his people. He could not tolerate it.

They could not live with him with this kind of behaviour. And so Assyria did come as God promised. Assyria did come and wipe the nation out.

Israel or evil was destroyed. Judgment fell. The evil was purged. Go back to Hosea.

[28 : 22] You see, the problem is, it's not just Israel the nation that are the rebellious son. We too are that same rebellious son.

And God must purge our sinful lives from this world. He cannot tolerate and put up with our persistent sin, the reckless, wasteful living.

So how can God both punish my sin on the one hand, and remain true to his promise, what he's telling us here in verse 9, I will not carry out my fierce anger.

Which is it to be? Well, the answer is both. And we see it both happening at the cross where the tension is fulfilled.

The father's true son, the only faithful, loyal son, the true Israel, Jesus Christ, is treated as the rebellious runaway child for you and for me.

[29 : 36] And if Jesus is led out through the gates, away from the city, to his execution, so he carries with him the sin of the world, my sin and your sin.

And as we place our trust and our confidence in him, so we are purged from the sin and the evil within our hearts. Our disobedience is removed from us and placed on his son.

And instead of God's fierce anger falling on us, it falls on his own son. How can God be so merciful towards you and I?

Well, look at the middle of verse 9. For I am God and not man. I do not treat you the way you treat each other.

I do not treat you as you deserve to be treated. God is merciful towards wayward children like us.

[30 : 48] And God does all of this so that we might stay home, that we might return home with him.

It's because of his persistent mercy that the son does return home. Look at verse 10. They will follow the Lord.

He will roar like a lion. When he roars, his children will come trembling from the west. They will come trembling like birds from Egypt, like doves from Assyria.

They say that the roar of a lion on the safari can be heard from five miles away. It's a roar that every creature within the vicinity can hear.

Well, God the Father has let out the roar. A roar that travels the world to all peoples and to all nations. A roar that cries out, Come home, my son.

[31 : 53] Come home. Your sin has been dealt with. Grace and mercy are yours in abundance.

And in time, God did bring his people back from exile.

But that bringing back from exile was just a picture of a greater homecoming. The homecoming of people like you and me. You see, as the good news of Jesus Christ is declared, so runaway children are called home to the Father.

As you and I begin to speak the good news of Jesus to family and friends, as we proclaim the mercy of God displayed on the cross, we are showing other people, this is the way home.

This is the path. Look at the end of verse 11. I will settle them in their homes, declares the Lord. To come to the Father.

To come to him in repentance. To live a life of repentance and faith is to truly come home and stay home.

[33 : 08] This is where we belong. A place of joy and peace and happiness. A place at the Father's table. A home where we are loved and treasured and delighted in.

A home where we receive grace and mercy and abundance. A home where we can cry out, Abba, Father. This is where we belong.

And one day, there will be that final roar. And we will be called home to our eternal home. Home at last.

With the Father. In his presence. Delighting in him. Enjoying him. Forever and forever and forever. The gracious love. The mercy of the Father towards wayward children. Calling us home every day. Do not run from me.

[34 : 15] But stay close. And you will know treasures and delight. As we close, I want us to reflect on something.

I want to ask a question or two. It's on your little sheets that you have.

And the first question is this. What is it that tempts you away from the Father? Just answer that for yourself. What is it that tempts you away from the Father to leave the place of joy and happiness and peace?

What tempts you to get up from the Father's table to look elsewhere for your joy and happiness?

And the second thing is this.

What is it that will keep you with the Father and beside the Father so that you do not stray? Just as you think about this, reflect on these words that I came across reading this week.

[35 : 40] Listen to these words. And then we'll just have a moment's quietness to reflect. Set your thoughts on the eternal love of the Father and see if your heart is not aroused to delight in Him.

Sit down for a while at this delightful spring of living water and you will soon find its stream sweet and delightful.

You who used to run from God will not now be able even for a second to keep any distance from Him.

Let's just close our eyes. Set your thoughts on the eternal love of the Father. Do not stray.

Let's pray. Let's go on the singing on the leader of the Father of the Father and give us Our Father God, we are so grateful that there is nothing to fear in returning to you.

[37 : 19] For you delight, you stand with arms open wide, ready to welcome us. Father, forgive us for the times this week we have run from you.

We have ignored your call. Come back, my son. Father, we take our place afresh, as it were, at the table with you to enjoy you, to delight in you.

For you are good and trustworthy, and generous. There is nothing to fear in your presence.

Thank you that you are such a gracious and merciful Father. Thank you that we can experience that grace and mercy today through Christ.

thank you that we are your children. And Father, would you help us this week to speak your truth that we may see loved ones, friends and family who are still running away.

[38 : 44] we long and pray, Father, would you please bring them back to yourself. May they love you, know you, and take their place at the table with you also.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. We're going to sing together.

When I was lost, you came and rescued me. when I was lost, we were going to regionally. Anytime day, when I was told the system