

Grey hairs and knowing not

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[0 : 00] Hosea chapter 7. So Hosea chapter 7, we're going to read from verse 8 through to the end of verse 12.

Now hear God's word. Ephraim mixes himself with the peoples. Ephraim is a cake not turned. Strangers devour his strength, and he knows it not.

Gray hairs are sprinkled upon him, and he knows it not. The pride of Israel testifies to his face, yet they do not return to the Lord their God, nor seek him for all of this.

Ephraim is like a dove, silly and without sense, calling to Egypt and going to Assyria. As they go, I will spread over them my net.

I will bring them down like birds of the heavens. I will discipline them according to the report made to their congregation. Amen.

[1 : 25] Amen. If you have Hosea chapter 7 in front of you, As you make your way there, you will be reminded of the fact that God has continued to show love and patience towards his people.

He's shown many other things. He's put many other circumstances their way. Hedge of thorns, walls, purposes to bring his people home.

He wants his people to come home. And here again, we see God demonstrating love and patience. You don't see it as demonstrated, but as much as God waiting on his people to return.

The focus of chapter 7, however, is more to do with the fact on what God's people don't see, and what they fail to see.

The first stage of learning is the most difficult stage of all. Because when a person knows that they don't know, they're able to learn.

[2 : 49] I know that I don't know this. I know that I need to know this. And then they begin learning. But when a person doesn't know that they don't know, then they don't bother finding out.

It's the worst position to be in. To not know that you don't know, because you don't see any need to do anything about it. Well, it is possible for God's people to actually get to that place.

And then how do you move out of it once you're there? It's very, very difficult. Because you don't know that you don't know that there's anything there that you should be worried about.

That's a very difficult place to be in. But it also explains why God's people can be in a place where they make no progress whatsoever.

Because they don't know that they don't know. Well, God's people here in chapter 7 have got themselves into that very position.

[3 : 54] And God demonstrates love and patience towards his people still. But that explains why they're not coming home. Because they don't know.

Because they don't know the trouble they're in. And they don't know that they don't know how much trouble they're in. It's a real difficult situation.

Full of ignorance. Willful ignorance. We can imagine what God is doing perhaps in more familiar terms through this chapter. Imagine a child who tries to get something from their father.

And then goes to their mother because they couldn't get it from their father. Or the other way around. They come to the dad because they couldn't get it from mum.

And then you begin to understand why they make that shift. What are they doing when they do that? What is a child trying to do when they ask one parent and the answer is no.

[4 : 51] And then they go to the other parent to ask the same thing. Why do they do that? And what are they trying to achieve by doing that? Well, it's a divisive move.

It's able to split parents. Hopefully not in a serious way. But small things lead to big divisions. But of course when parents stick together.

And they sing off the same hymn sheet. The child is then going to be shaped by the parent's decisions. Because both parent agrees that this is the decision.

And that's it. So it doesn't matter which one you ask. This is what we are sticking with. And the child begins to learn whether they realize it or not. That they are being shaped by the decision of their parents.

Because it's the same tool being used. In the same way when a child is sat on the step in a moment of discipline.

[5 : 50] You know, they need to be taught they're not there to learn how to count. But they're there to learn how to be a person. They're there to learn the difference between right and wrong.

They're there to learn how to repent. And ask for forgiveness. They're not there to learn how to count. And so the question is not, how long do I need to sit here for? As long as it takes for you to become the person I want you to be.

And now we begin to see the kind of patience that God has with his people and why. As long as it takes for you to be the person I want you to be.

When a father sends his son out to work in the field. Even though the work doesn't necessarily need completing today. The father isn't really thinking about the need for the work to be completed.

As much as he is thinking about completing his son into a man. The focus is not so much on the work. As it is on his boy becoming a man.

[6 : 54] The son doesn't see it that way. The son sees it as, well why do I have to dig a hole for? Because I'm training you to be a man. It builds character.

Being told what to do shapes a person. Doing things that you don't like doing shapes a person. Being told that you're to do it when you don't want to do it. Shapes you.

And so on the surface it looks like, why does this work need doing? Well the focus from the father's point of view isn't actually on the work. It's actually on the completion of the son. Not the work.

And God in exactly the same way treats his people like that. When he causes certain things to happen. And he gets us to do certain things. And he removes some things.

And sometimes the answer is no. And at other times the answer is yes. What is he doing? Well he's shaping you. He's training you. He's making you complete.

[7 : 53] He's getting you to the person that he wants you to be. And yet too often we draw our attention to what it is that we're doing. What it is that we're missing out on.

What is it that we have and that we don't have. But God doesn't see it from that point of view. In the same way a parent doesn't see it from that point of view. I'm training you to be a person.

Now when you understand that on a human basic level. It becomes fairly easy then to see that God is doing the same thing. And the same type of relationships exist between God and his people.

The same type of interactions. But instead of these people going to God the Father for what they need. They're going somewhere else. They're going to the neighbor's house.

And they're going to the neighbor's house because at least they'll get what they want there. And what they want has become more important to them than being shaped by the no's and yes's of their father.

[8 : 52] They just want things. And so we'll go elsewhere to get them. They have gone off to Egypt and Assyria.

They've gone back to the very people that God saved them from. Egypt being the place where they're held in captivity. And the Egyptians and the Assyrians are opposites.

They're enemies themselves. And yet here they have God's people making alliances with not only the enemies of God but the enemies of each other.

What a predicament they've got themselves into. And why do they do this? Well they do it simply because they want. And if they can't get what they want from here they'll go somewhere else until they get it.

And it almost doesn't matter where they get it from. It almost doesn't matter who the person it is that will give it to them. They'll commit to anyone as long as they get what they want.

[9 : 54] But now they're in a position where these people don't know what to do because they don't know what to do. And what do you do as a person when you need to do something but you do not know what you need to do?

I mean life has to continue. Decisions still have to be made. And so what decision do you make when you don't know what decision to make? What happens when a person has ignored God for long enough that they've gone into this place of willful ignorance and ended up in the place where they don't know that they don't know?

They don't actually see the trouble that they're in. They don't actually see just how far they have declined. They don't see just how far they have deteriorated in their spiritual walk because now they've got to the place where the blindness is set in, where the ignorance is set in.

And so at a point early on when they realize that, you know, my spiritual disciplines are not what they used to be, when you begin to notice that, it's because you recognize that at the beginning that, you know, that you're slacking in your spiritual disciplines, reading of God's word and praying.

But when you've not done it for a long time, you get into this place of willful ignorance. You've got there by willful ignorance. And now you're blind in your death to the things of God. Now you don't actually see just how far away you really are.

[11 : 25] And you have people praying for you to come back. But you can't talk with these people. You can't reason with these people because they don't see what you see anymore. They're too far away.

They don't know that they don't know. And they got there by willful ignorance. And yet God, in his love and his patience, still waits for them to come home.

He doesn't abandon his people ever. They're miles off spiritually as well as physically in a number of things. And yet God is here patiently waiting for his people to come home.

It's a level of ignorance that is so deep and so wide that no person can ever get out of it themselves. God must do something.

Well, here's a summary then of the few verses or chapter 7 that we have looked at. God's generosity can always be experienced. And it's always experienced by his people if they would come to him.

- [12 : 34] But they don't come to God. They go elsewhere to have their needs met. They don't call upon the Lord. But rather they call upon others. They make alliances here in verse 11 with Egypt and Assyria.

They believe that there's strength in numbers. They believe that if we join Assyria and Egypt, we'll become strong because we are many. They also believe that control and power over life and circumstances and the country that you live in is actually found in the political realm.

That my life will be better if I can control the political realm of life. But if I can get myself into positions of power, then I will escape the difficulties of those who don't have power.

You know, the weak will suffer what they will at the strength of the political powers.

That's the difficulty. And they understand that. They are putting themselves into a position of political power. But all that they are doing is desiring evil rather than good.

- [13 : 48] All that they are doing is desiring foolishness rather than sensibleness. And so God describes them, verse 8 to 10, like a half-baked cake.

Not fit for the purpose that it was made. You're not fit to be eaten. You're not fit for anything. You're a half-baked cake.

And then in verses 11 and 12, you are a silly dove. Senseless. There's no rhyme or reason to your behavior. You're just senseless.

And then in verse 16, they are a treacherous bow. And these people have gone elsewhere other than God, seeking strength. But when a person seeks strength in someone else other than God, and security somewhere else other than God, there is no security.

Whenever a person trusts in something else for security other than God, there is no security. Whenever a person commits their way to something else other than God for safety, there is no safety outside of God.

- [15 : 05] And the reason there is no safety outside of God is because these people now put themselves against God. Now you're up against God.

Now you're marching for the other army. Now God is actually coming against you, rather than you being safe in his arms.

God is the one who will bring discipline and judgment. You're not able to stand against God. God is the one who will bring it down. You're not able to find security in something other else, because God will bring it down. And this is the point that God is making here.

You join forces on earth. You make political alliances. You seek strength in numbers, because you think your greatest threat comes from other people.

But it doesn't come from other people. It comes from God. And that's what God's people have forgotten. They think if we join with this gang or that gang, we've got nothing to worry about.

- [16 : 08] Strength in numbers. Our greatest fear are the Greeks. It's not the Greeks. It's God. Our greatest enemy is the Romans. It's not the Romans. It's God.

And so, any time God's people seek political strength and power by joining another force other than God, they're leaving security.

They're leaving safety behind. They think they're becoming strong when they're actually becoming vulnerable. They think they're becoming powerful when they're actually becoming weak.

their very decisions is causing the very opposite of what they're actually seeking to achieve. In other words, if the whole world stood together against God, not a single person could stand.

If the whole world stood in opposition to God this evening, no person would be left standing. Because there is no safety and security and power and authority and strength outside of God.

[17 : 15] None. And yet, why is it that so many people come to believe that very thing? And so, God's people have got themselves so deep into the problem through a willful ignorance.

And they are so proud that they won't admit that they're wrong. They're so proud that they will not change their mind. They will keep going because they know you can't prove them wrong.

But God will prove them wrong. They're not acknowledging their sin or seeking God's face. But neither are they able to notice their own decline. Verse 9, gray hairs are sprinkled upon him and he knows it not.

In other words, God is going to have to wake his people up. They are so spiritually out of it. So spiritually dead. So spiritually willfully ignorant.

Not knowing that they don't know that God must do something really quite dramatic to bring his people around. They need a shot of some kind.

[18 : 29] God's people are declining. They're in a constant state of decline. It's not that they're having good days and bad days. It's not that they're having ups and downs.

They're having constant downs. This is a constant state of decline morally and spiritually. They're heading off only into one direction and they don't see how fast they're getting there.

All because of the commitments that they've made. That are not commitments to strengthen their walk with God. Commitments that don't enable them to obey God's word.

Commitments that don't enable them to strengthen themselves in their spiritual disciplines. They make other commitments and some of them may not actually be wrong. But they are a distraction from the commitments that we all need to be making to keep ourselves strong.

In other words, eating certain foods isn't necessarily bad for you. But if you're not eating the foods that you need to be eating, then you're not having the goodness that you need.

[19 : 40] And so you miss out on the necessary strength. Not because you're necessarily doing too much wrong over here, but because you're committing to eat potato in chip form rather than in boiled form.

It's the decisions that you're making. So God's people are in the position where they cannot help but lose out. And this is an area of focus, losing out.

One of the things we notice is through this chapter is that God's people, as I said, are in a constant state of loss. They think like a gambler. They think that they will win his money back by doing the very thing that caused him to lose all his money in the first place.

Well, I'll just keep playing because I'll win. It'll be my turn sooner or later. The tides will turn for me at some point. If I just keep plugging this with money, then at some point I will get my money back.

And it doesn't dawn on him that he's doing the very thing that caused him to lose his money in the first place. And this is what God's people are like.

[20 : 53] They're making commitments that causes them to lose and they think, well, I'll carry on this way because I'll win my way back. But there is no way back when you're investing in the wrong thing.

When you're investing in the very thing that actually caused the loss in the first place, further investment doesn't bring any in return. No return whatsoever.

And God's people are not investing in God. They're investing in Egypt. They're investing in Assyria. They're investing in idols. They're investing in other things. And they think, if we do more of this, we'll get a profit.

But they get more loss. They're constantly losing out. It devours their strength and they know it not. They're aligning themselves with people who they think will make them strong that are actually making them weak.

And they don't recognize it. They don't actually see what's happening to them. Everyone else sees it. But no one doing it sees it for themselves. They're seeking to become strong and they become weak.

[21 : 56] In their willful ignorance, they commit themselves to the wrong things and they're giving their strength away. You know, men are told not to do that, aren't they, in Proverbs. Men are told quite specifically how they can give their strength away and why we shouldn't do it.

You don't give your strength away. As they decline, excuse me, they continue to decline without ever truly understanding why it's happening.

Downward they go and they see their strength being taken from them simply because they're being committed to the wrong things, making commitment to the wrong things. And it devours their strength.

The next thing is the willful ignorance and what it leads to. Gray hairs and knowing not. I don't know if you've ever noticed that God often gives signs and symbols to tell us things.

You think for a moment of feelings. We can laugh and we can cry. And we can cry bitterly. And we can laugh joyfully.

[23 : 09] And God gives us these feelings to tell us things. To tell us what makes us happy. To tell us the things that make people sad.

And he gives us these signs and these symbols of feelings to indicate these truths. We hear a joke and it makes us laugh because we get the punchline and we enjoy the happiness that it can bring.

And then we hear sad news and in a moment we can be crying. God gives us these feelings to let us know right from wrong, good from bad.

Ups and downs of life. And we should never reject them. We should never say they're not from God or they're just you know they're just there. No, they're sent from God to tell us something very important.

But in God's people here they have declined so much that they have become senseless. Verse 9 we learn that they've got their strength devoured and they don't know that it's devoured.

[24 : 12] They're becoming weak and they don't understand why. They don't join the dots. They don't make the connection between what they are doing and why they're becoming weak. Their strength is devouring and they know it not.

They have grey hairs and they know it not. Now there's a sign if there ever was one. You're getting old. The grey hairs is to tell you you're getting old.

Your grey hairs is to tell you don't put your strength in yourself put it in God. Your grey hairs is to tell you don't put your strength your trust in your strength you're getting old put it in God.

when God gives you grey hairs he's telling you don't put your trust in your flesh in your mind in your body you're getting old don't do it. And God here gives his people grey hairs and they don't figure it out.

We'll carry on like this forever. We're strong enough we're brave enough we're smart enough no you're not. God is telling you you're not by putting a few grey hairs in your head you're getting old.

[25 : 26] I think there's absolutely nothing better than for children to grow up around old people. I think God designed the church for every family to be together and for children to be amongst old people to sit next to them to talk with them.

But they don't make the connection do they? Children you need to learn that one day you'll be like this. Look at the people around you. Look at how they walk and how they talk how they sit down and drink tea rather than run around the building.

This is what you will become. This is God's way of telling you what's in the future for you. And it's a good thing for young children to be around old people because they don't make the connection at first.

But it is a constant reminder that these old people who trust God are leading the way. They're not trusting in their strength. They're not trusting in their mind.

They're not trusting in their abilities. They're trusting in God. They recognize the ages and stages of life and how God gives us these signs and these symbols to cause us to realize that we can't trust in our life and succeed.

[26 : 41] We're not strong enough. And so God's people here are given gray hairs and they don't make the dots. They don't connect the dots. They don't work it out that they're getting old.

They don't work it out that their strength is evaporating from them. That they're declining morally, spiritually and physically. And yet it's a constant story that God is telling his people.

Those wrinkles, those gray hairs, those aches, those pains, do you know what they're telling you every day? They're telling you to trust God.

They're telling you to put your trust in God. They're not just telling you you're getting old. They're telling you that God is strong and you're not.

They're humbling signs, but at the very same time they are messages from God. Gray hairs, you know what it means, but many don't.

[27 : 43] I'll live forever. I'll do this and I'll do that. Only the thing is you won't. You're not built to do that.

God has built you and God will bring you home. And yet God's people here don't make the connection. They don't join the dots.

They live in ignorance and they cannot interpret their own decline. Gray hairs and they know it not. Their strength is disappearing from them and they know it not.

They live in absolute ignorance and that ignorance is costing the way that they're living. A dear cost. Now we can notice this ignorance in perhaps a slightly different way.

Imagine it like this. A person has been made by God for a communion. A person has been made by God to pray, to talk with God through reading his word, to have God speak to him.

[28 : 47] If you read Psalm 1 where it talks about him meditating on the word day and night, what he's actually doing, if you were to read and study some of the Hebrew and I could give you some of my books to help you, is that he doesn't just meditate on it, he speaks the word of God out loud to himself so that he can hear the word of God.

God, he's not just reading it in, he's hearing it in. When a person, a Christian, feels uncomfortable praying and feels uncomfortable in a prayer meeting and feels uncomfortable studying God's word and feels uncomfortable doing these things, and yet these are the very things that God has made us for, do you know what it means?

Or is it like grey hairs and you know it not? You should not feel uncomfortable with these spiritual disciplines, but if you do, it could be that you're further away than what you think you are.

They should be second nature to us, part of our very nature, disciplining in them. When you've lost what you should be, when you've lost who you are, it's normally because you've taken your eye off what God is telling you you are, and what God has actually made you for.

The reason a person doesn't see decline is because they don't see what they are for. They just think they're going in a direction. So they don't see decline as decline, they don't see upwards and upwards, downwards and downwards, they just see it as I'm doing my own thing, I'm going in my own direction.

[30 : 30] only they're not. And so God has to introduce circumstances to wake his people up from such ignorance.

But here's a few considerations then as we draw this to a close and the exhortation to follow. When God's people turn back to God, they'll recognize just how blessed they would be.

but like children who are told by their mum, how about us going to the park today or going to the beach today? Oh, I don't want to go, it will be boring.

I don't want to go, I've never been there before, how do I know what will it be like? And then when they get there and you tell them that it's time to leave, they don't want to. Well, we have to go already? Well, if you came when I asked you, we would have spent another hour here.

But you didn't want to come and now that you're here, you don't want to leave. And children are almost like a good example of what we can become spiritually where we can't imagine how good it is until we're there.

[31 : 39] Once we're there, we don't want to leave. But to get us there, the difficulty to convince a person that God is better shouldn't be that difficult. And yet people in their willful ignorance find it incredibly difficult to be convinced just how good it is with God.

They've lost all spiritual sensitivity. They've committed themselves to idols and they've become deaf and blind to God and his blessing just like idols are.

They cannot join the dots, they cannot make any sense of their decline, they're losing their strength, they're getting old, and they don't see their own spiritual deterioration.

so God must do something. He must wake them up. Here's the exhortation. Don't you find it amazing that here we have a God, God who is powerful and sovereign, with complete authority, creating the world, able to keep track of every drop of water as we said earlier this evening, able to keep track of every grain of sand, not just able to know how many there are, but where they all are.

Not just able to know how many stars in the night sky there are, but where each star is. This is the God that we belong to. Not just able to know how many hairs are on our head, but where all those hairs are.

[33 : 14] This is the God who created the world and has numbered how many days we'll have on this planet. He is the God who covered the world in a flood.

He is the God who threw over nations with plagues, winning battles, and giving his people a land flowing with milk and honey. This is the God who created the universe, a great God, a mighty God, a loving God, a patient God.

And here he is, patiently waiting. God who can do all of that is waiting on his people. God who can do anything properly understood is waiting on his people to turn to seek him and acknowledge their sins.

Why does he care? Why is he so patient? Why is he so loving? Why doesn't he just move on and have done with us?

Well, that's not who he is. And this is the message that Hosea must come and preach to his people. But not only must he preach it, he must understand it. He must understand that this is the love and patience of God.

[34 : 35] That as I said in the beginning of the series, we are too quick to say that things are dead and buried and forget we belong to a God of resurrection. We are far too quick to say that it's dead and it's over.

And yet we know we belong to a God of resurrection. We know that that's who we belong to. So what does this mean? Well, it means this, and you heard this a couple of weeks ago in the Pharisee and the tax collector.

We are not to live our lives judging them on how far up from the bottom we are, but rather how far down from the top we are. It's not how much better we are than people below us, but it's whether or not our lives actually meet the standards of God and whether or not we actually want to live according to the standards of God.

The issue is not how far up we've got ourselves, but how far away we actually are from God, whether or not we have come home in acknowledging our sin, repenting and believing.

We don't want to become a person who doesn't know. We don't want to get ourselves into the position where through willful ignorance we don't know that we don't know that we're in a constant state of decline.

[35 : 50] We don't want to get there. You're able to notice those who are there because you're not there yourself, but you don't want to be there. Here's the final thought.

Now we begin to see even clearer why the patience of God is so necessary. Why God waits. He waits because he wants his people to come home.

He waits because he loves his people. He waits because he wants his people to come back in the right way, acknowledging their sin, seeking his face, turning to him.

And God sends a whole load of circumstances so that the providence of God can work through all of them to bring his people home. people. And we begin to notice very, very clearly that God is not trying to get his people to do something.

He's trying to get his people to be something. He's not trying to get them to do something. He's trying to get them to be someone. Someone different from what they are.

[36 : 59] And everything that God has put in place is not put there so that we would do it. It's put there so that he would shape us into the people that he wants us to be.

Amen.