The problem with love and patience

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[0:00] This evening turn to Hosea chapter 6. There's 11 verses in total and so we'll read chapter 6 entirely.

So Hosea chapter 6 beginning at verse 1. Just to give you the background, you'll remember that God's people have been put in a position where God wants his people to come home and this here in chapter 6 is where they begin to consider their return.
Now hear God's word. Come, let us return to the Lord, for he has torn us that he may heal us. He has struck us down that he might bind, he will bind us up.
After two days he will revive us and on the third day he will raise us up that we may live before him. Let us know, let us press on to know the Lord.
His going out is as sure as the dawn. He will come to us as the showers, as the spring rains that water the earth. What shall I do with you, O Ephraim?
[1:26] What shall I do with you, O Judah? Your love is like a morning cloud, like a dew that goes early away. Therefore I have hewn them by the prophets, I have slain them by the words of my mouth, and my judgment goes forth as the light.

For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings. But like Adam they transgress the covenant, there they doubt faithlessly with me.
Gilead is a city of evildoers, tracked with blood, as robbers lie in wait for a man, so the priests band together.
They murder on their way to Shechem, they commit villainy. In the house of Israel I have seen a horrible thing. Ephraim's whoredom is there, Israel is defiled.
For you, O Judah, a harvest is appointed when I restore the fortunes of my people. Well again, may God bless his word to us, and we'll come back to that in its message form after this next hymn.
[2:50] Well God, here, wants his people to come home. God's people throughout their history with God have always gone astray.

They've always walked away from a good thing, God being the good thing. They've always taken his blessings for granted, and then wondered why they've not appeared in the foreign land, in the far country.
And yet, the door is always open for them to return, and God's love and God's patience makes it easy for God's people always to return to him.
But they don't always return. And the reason why they don't always return is because perhaps they haven't yet come to the conclusion that God is the good thing, and that there is no good thing beside him.
Now, none of us here, I think, would imagine that God's love and patience could ever cause any kind of problem whatsoever. None of us would imagine, I think, that our love and patience for another fellow human being could actually cause any kind of trouble or difficulty whatsoever.
[4:08] But of course, as you read Hosea chapter 6, you begin to realize that it's actually the very love and patience which causes or allows us to see one of the issues, and it's a big issue.

The main idea here is that God wants his people to come home, but he wants them to come home for good. He wants them to come home and stay.
He doesn't want them to pick up their bags and leave at a later date. And so if that's going to happen, they're going to have to walk back in through the front door, look God in the face, acknowledge their sin, and seek him.
And of course, that's difficult, even though God lays out the door and the path with great love and patience, making it easy for anybody to come back to him. The difficulty is that we have with perhaps our own pride and our own walking back to God.

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Now, God throughout Hosea so far has created conditions to stop his people from straying any further, the hedge of thorn and walls. In other words, he makes it increasingly difficult difficult for a Christian, for his people, to sin without pain.
[5:28] And so he increases the pain, but then you begin to realize that people's pain threshold also increases. It's amazing what someone in sin can put up with because they like the sin and they're quite willing to carry on with it.

I once knew of two people a long time ago who I sat down and had a conversation with. One had a serious gambling problem, and this unfortunately came out in the relationship.
But what also came out in the relationship was that when this person was caught by the first time by her husband, it was the most terrible thing that could have ever happened, and she stopped for a while.
The fact that her husband now knew, the fact that it was a difficult situation, what am I going to do? But after a while, the joy of the gambling was so great that it was worth the rebuke of her husband.
And Christians have a way of balancing things out where sometimes we know that we're going to get told off for it. We know that there's going to be a serious talking with us.
[6:41] But at the same time, the joy of the other side sort of balances it out. We're willing to have that as long as we can have that also. Well, that's no way to live, but it is one of the ways that God's people live.

They do balance those out. That I know I can expect this kind of judgment if I do this, but the trade-off is worth it. I don't think the trade-off is worth it at all.
So God wants his people to come home, but they have to come home for good. He wants them to turn back to him to confess their sins, to acknowledge their sins, not just confess them, but to acknowledge them.
You know, he doesn't want it to be like a conversation a parent has with a child who says, you really need to ask for forgiveness, and then the child goes, what am I saying sorry for?
And then you have to tell them. You realize that if it's got to that stage, you've already lost the battle because now they're confessing what you want them to because they don't themselves feel any kind of internal motivation to say, oh, I know what I ought to be sorry for.
[7:52] Well, God's people are to come back to him, but they need to know what they're sorry for. But they can't just, can you remind me again what I'm supposed to say sorry about? No.

When you come back, acknowledge your sin and seek my face. Now, God does this with complete love and with complete patience for his people. And as I said, none of us would ever think that this would cause any kind of problem at all.
And when they don't come home as quickly as he would like them to come home, he turns up the heat on their end. The conditions that they have to live with become slightly more difficult, encouraging them to turn their way back to God and to seek his face all over again.
And, you know, the further they stray, the more difficult it is and the more painful it is. But again, it never surprises us ever just how much a person who is continuing sin continues in sin because they don't yet want to turn back to God.
They aren't aware of what God is actually doing half the time, but they know that when they sin, they are actually sinning against God. They know that when they do this, they know what they are doing to God and they know how God feels about it.
[9:10] So when they sin, God knows that they're sinning and they know that they're sinning and they know that the relationship between them and God cannot be one where it is blessed at this point.

Everyone knows what's happening and no one wants to address it. Well, God wants to address it, but the people don't. So God's love and patience remains on his people so that they are left with this burden of love in order to return home.
And now something very important comes out of this. In a chapter where God is clearly patient with his people, chapter 5 and into chapter 6, he has clearly not abandoned his people at all, but he's waiting at home.
They must come home. There he is waiting. But now something begins to transpire that suddenly you begin to realize that their coming home may not actually be a good thing after all.
So here's the summary of chapter 6 as it goes. In verse 1, they speak about coming home because life has become difficult for them. They acknowledge that the difficult conditions that they are

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dealing with have come from God.
[10:22] He has torn us that he may heal us. In other words, he's given us these difficulties so that he can bring us back into the place where he can then heal us. He has struck us down so that he can bind us up.

In other words, I am living with the conditions of my own choices, but at the same time, there are consequences that God has sent my way so that I would return home. And we remember that Hosea teaches us that no person can live with consequences.
They can put up with it for a long time, but you cannot live with it forever because they are sent from God and they are designed to bring you home. The consequences that God sends you away when you're walking away from him are designed to bring you home.
So it's impossible to live with them indefinitely because they're part of God's design to turn you around and to bring you back into his present. His love and his patience, as I said, makes it easy for you to return home.
Makes it easy for God's people to return home here. But then we see the problem in verse four. God looks upon his people and he says, what shall I do with you? What shall I do with you, O Ephraim?
[11:38] What shall I do with you, O Judah? Your love is like a morning cloud, like the dew that goes away early. And suddenly we begin to see that the issue here is just how genuine they are.

How genuine is their return to God? And no one can pull the wool over God's eyes and God can judge our genuineness with absolute accuracy. And so he goes on to say, and then in verse seven, that they have transgressed the covenant just like Adam did before them.
And here we begin to notice the seriousness of their sin. It's not just that they've broken God's laws, but they've broken relationship with God. The issue here is more relational than it is the breaking of a law.
The breaking of laws are included. They've gone against God's statutes, God's teaching, God's laws. But what the real pain of the situation, remember, is relational. And this is played out with Hosea and his wife, Gomer.
The whole point of Hosea, the book of Hosea, is not to teach us, ultimately, that sin breaks God's law. Of course it does. But it's to teach us that sin hurts.
[12:52] Sin hurts people. It hurts God. And so verse 7 isn't about the breaking of laws. It's about the breaking of relationship. It's about teaching us that sin hurts.

It always hurts. And so God must take this with absolute seriousness. And so in verse 11, you begin to realize that there are blessings for the people of God.
There are, there's plenty there for God's people to have. But they must return to God in the right way. Now people alone cannot make any effort to change the conditions of their life.
We learned that in Psalm 127. I cannot, I cannot create the changes I need. Only God can create the changes I need by blessing me with them.
I may seek certain advancements in my life, but they won't come unless they come with God's blessing. And God's people have tried this. They've tried to get all the blessings without God and recognizing that you just cannot do that.
[13:57] Now when you know that you need God's blessing, that's good. But knowing it and receiving it is two entirely different situations. Knowing as the people of God that we need his blessing is one thing.

Knowing how to receive it is a completely different thing. I would love for God to pour out his blessing upon this church. I would absolutely love it upon all of his churches.
All of his church. I would love it. But I also know how it will come. And so my hopes aren't that high. My expectations aren't that great. And they're not great not because I'm being pessimistic, but because I understand the conditions and order that God works to before he blesses.
God doesn't hand out things regardless of how his people are before him. Rather his people to come to the place where he wants them and then he blesses them.
That's how it works. So we begin with this issue of expectations. Just how much can you expect to come out of a church? Just how much can you expect from God's people?
[15:06] Well this depends on two things. Number one, that the people know where they are in relation to God. God. And God, and we know where God is in relation to us.

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We ought to know that we shouldn't expect anything from God until we're in the place where God would have us to be. Now this isn't conditional in the sense that this is conditional salvation.
But rather these are the means which God has chosen to bless us. It's just an order of things. Now growing up, I can remember times where I thought it was fun to eat my dessert before I ate my mains.
You know, and perhaps you'd work your way to the starters and every now and then I still think, actually it's not a bad idea. It's just mix it around. But there's an order for the way we do things and there's not a problem with that order.
Well God also has an order when it comes to blessing his people. And so what's actually holding the people of God back from being blessed is not God.
[16:09] The door is open. His love and patience makes it easy to walk down the road. But they're not moving their feet. What's holding them back is not God but themselves.

They're holding themselves back. They have no forward momentum. They do not come together and they do not come to God. And so one person misses out because all the people miss out.
We learn that throughout scripture. Until we have fully understood that God blesses his people, and that it's absolutely possible for one person to mess that up for the rest of us.
We don't really, we haven't really grasped the importance of what it is to be God's people. We still think that God will bless me independently of the rest of God's people around me.
And that's not strictly the case. It can happen but it's not the way God normally does things. He blesses his people as they dwell together in unity.
[17:10] God pours out his blessing on those type of events and congregations that he has. And this is what God's people have to recognize. It's not just about me and God.

It's about all of us and God. Look, if we're going to return, we're all going to have to do it. It won't work if only some of us does it. We all have to return because this is the only response that God would have us do.
Now it is possible at this point that we can acknowledge that sins need addressing but just like people, we say, I'll leave it to a later day. I know that that sin needs addressing but not right now.
And then we think that our relationship with God will be unaffected by that attitude. But it's not unaffected by that attitude. That when Christians know that things ought to be dealt with, and then they say, as God's people do here, okay, but we won't deal with it right now because we've got other things to do.
They then think that their relationship with God can carry on as if that decision was never made.
And it's not the case. God seeks an order to the way that his people live their lives because he wants to pour out blessing upon them.
[18:24] So we need to learn that God moves in an order and we are called to move in the same order that God does. So we can't expect much unless we expect it in the lines and conditions and orders that God decides to give it out.

And the process is this, that when God's people acknowledge their sin and seek his face, then there's blessing. But until then, there isn't.
It's really quite that simple. That God wants his people to come home. He wants them to have everything that he has on the table there waiting for them. But they cannot get it unless they come through the front door.
They cannot get it until they acknowledge their sin and seek his face. But we tend to think that we can have those things and deal with those other things later on.
Or we'll just deal with it a later date. It's more important that you come home and then we will deal with those issues tomorrow. No, God says, we deal with them now as you come home.
[19:30] So that as you come home, you come home for good. You don't come home with the things that could take you away from home. You leave them outside so that when you come in, they're out there and you're in here.

And that is what God is trying to teach his people here. Come home and come home for good. Leave that behind and acknowledge your sin and seek my face.
And so the only hurdle, the only thing that actually gets in their way from coming home is not God, but rather their own will. Can they overcome their own will?
Can they overcome themselves? Can they stop themselves from getting in the way of making their way back to God? So there's the expectations.

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How much can you really expect from a people? How much can God expect from his people when they don't want to live in the way that God has actually called them to live?
[20:34] Your expectations drop immediately. Well, the next problem is the one that we call the frequency of devaluing. Now, that may sound quite grand and ambitious, but you all realize what it means.

Any of you who has loved someone and has been patient with someone begins to realize the devaluation that can happen through your own love and patience. I'll give you an example.
You're loving someone, you're patient with them, and they say to you for the second time, I'm sorry, it won't happen again. I'm sorry, it won't happen again.
But if they said it the first time and never said it again, their words have 100% value. Complete value. But if they say those words for a second time, they have 50% of their value.
By the very fact of the frequency of them being said, their value drops. Until the point the value of those words become totally meaningless, valueless.
[21:41] And this is what God is saying to his people. Well, what shall I do with you, verse 4? O Ephraim, what shall I do with you, O Judah? Your love is like a morning cloud, like a dew that goes away early in the morning.

So here we have God showing love and patience to his people. But then we recognize that no sooner have they said they're sorry, they're doing the same thing all over again.
No sooner have they come back to God saying, we really mean it this time, do you find out that they don't really mean it this time. You're just doing the same thing all over again that you did before.
And so now we begin to realize that their coming home isn't quite as great as we thought it was in the first place. They've come home but there's no genuineness to their return.
It's a bit like saying, I'm sorry, it won't happen again. And you know that because they said it ten times before that they could say it the eleventh time, the twelfth time, the thirteenth time.
[22:40] And every time they say it, you take their words with less value than you did the very first time that they said it. So God's people seem to have this knack of, I don't know where they get it from, I'm not entirely sure, but I can understand it from Hosea 6, of some kind of rededication.

I don't think I actually understand what rededication is. I hear people speaking about it a lot, but it sounds to me like you weren't genuine the first time.
If you're constantly going to have to, I really mean it this time. No, this time I really, really mean it. No, this time, honestly, I really, really mean it this time. And there's this constant, well, if that's the pattern that God's people have got themselves into, something's going wrong.
It's like saying, I'm sorry, it won't happen again, only it does happen again. And therefore, something's not being addressed because there's, no sooner you're back, you're away again.
That God's people have got themselves into a position where they're like the morning cloud and the dew that rests on the grass in the morning. Soon as the sun comes up, it's gone. It wasn't there for long.
[24:00] In other words, they said the words, but it really had no lasting value. There's no lasting value to their coming home, of coming back to God.

When people, when God's people keep saying they'll change, they'll keep saying, I promise that I'll pray more, I'll promise that I'll do this more, I promise that I'll do more. one person once said to me when I first came here, and I've never forgotten it because it's become one of my favorite sayings, don't say sorry, just don't do it again.
I love it because it makes the point that Hosea is saying. Look, okay, sorry for the first time, Grant, but don't say sorry, just don't do it again.
And that's what God is after. It's okay to acknowledge it, but if you keep acknowledging the same thing, then how seriously can I take you?
Can God take his people to actually considering their return to be genuine? And this is what God wants above all, verse seven, verse six, sorry.
[25:13] I desire more than anything God is saying, for I desire steadfast love, not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings. I would rather have you more than anything that you can do for me.

I would rather see your face than the back of your head, as one vicar taught me. That what God wants from you is you, not what you can do for him.

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Leave your sacrifices at home. Just come to him. But it is convenient, isn't it, to come with something to offer God to detract attention away from ourselves.
In other words, sometimes you would think that what we offer brings attention to us, as though, look at what I'm giving to you, God. But it seems to be the case here that God's people are quite smart to figure out that if I do this and that, if I keep busy, then God won't pay attention to me personally. That if God can see me doing this for him and that for him, if I can offer all these sacrifices, if I can turn up at church, if I can give loads of money, if I can do all of that, then God will pay so much attention to those offerings and sacrifices that he will overlook my life before him.
[26:30] Now, when we give a birthday present to someone, we don't think like that at all. We want people to notice what we've given them because it reflects on us.

What do you get from, look at what I gave so-and-so for their birthday. It reflects well on us if we've given a good present to someone. But when it comes to God, we seem to reverse it and we seem to use all the gifts that we have to serve him to detract attention away from our life before him.
It's completely the other way around. And yet God knows it. We're trying to pull the wool over his eyes and what he's saying here is, look, I'd rather have you than any of that. I'd rather have you than any of that.
I'd rather you know me than offer anything. I just want you. And that exposes us because then we begin to realize whether or not we want the same.
That is God. We want God and God wanting us. And that's why the sin here is slightly more serious in that it's not just about breaking God's laws.
[27:43] When an atheist breaks God's law, he breaks God's law. Let's say for a moment an atheist goes out and steals something from a shop or from their neighbor or from a friend.

They've taken something that is not theirs and they've never given it back and they have kept it. They have stolen. Well, they have broken God's law. But when you do it as a believer, not only have you broken law, his law, but you've broken relationship because you're in relationship with him.
And this is the point that God is making. That the reason why the sin is so hurtful here is because the relationship exists. If it was just about breaking my laws, laws that you consider to be arbitrary anyway, and there's no relationship, then okay, I can understand the distinction.
But the reason it's so serious here is because God's people are breaking relationship. God wants relationship. He wants steadfast love. In other words, let me ask a very simple question.
How do you show God steadfast love without doing anything? Without sacrificing anything, without offering anything? How do you love God tomorrow without giving him anything?
[28:57] Because that's what he wants. How do you grow in the knowledge of God without trying to bypass it off with something else? The temptation is to go, well, that's not my skill set.

That's not my strength. Okay, but it is what God wants. It is what God wants. I'm not very good at loving people. Okay, but it is what God wants from you, for you to love him.
I'm not very good at studying and knowing God. Okay, but it is what God wants. So the focus is not so much on us, but rather on what God wants.
So here's the exhortation as we close. What we consider, or at least what we must consider in reading Hosea 6, is that God's people are told to consider what they can really expect to happen next.
There's a huge amount of blessing that can come upon God's people, but it comes upon them in the order that God has designed it to come upon them. He will love them, he will be patient with them, but what he wants from them is steadfast love and for them to grow in the knowledge of him.
[30:07] What he wants more than anything is for them to come home and mean it this time. I want you to come home and mean it. I want you to come home and stay.

But the moment God's people begin to shift in their love for God, they also come to believe other things, but they end up thinking that their relationship with God will be unaffected by this.
Well, it's not unaffected by it, because it is relational. No relationship would be unaffected by it. The very fact that you're in a relationship with God means that any devotion that you have other than God is affected, that your relationship is affected with God.
So God desires to seek his people, to bless his people, to restore his people, but he cannot do it any other way than the way that he has designed it to be done. And the way that he has designed it to be done, to get the job done, is by them acknowledging their sin and seeking his face.

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like all children, it's possible to expect something and think that what I've just done won't affect it. [31:25] I can remember standing before my mum several times and her having to say to me, do you really expect that you can have that now after that? Do you really expect that you can have that now after what you've just done?

And my level of expectancy didn't change for a moment, because I didn't put the two together. And God's people often don't put the two together. And we spoke last time of the importance of joining the dots, so that we understand how one thing affects another thing, because we're in relationship. This isn't about following rules, this isn't about following laws, though that's included. It's about relational blessing with God. So God wants to bless you.
He wants to keep you. He wants to make his face to shine upon you. He wants you to love him. He wants you to be blessed by him. And his love and patience for you is the thing that keeps the door open.
It keeps the door open for all of God's people all of the time. But God knows whether or not our returning to him has any value. he wants to know that we mean it this time.
[32:39] And then he wants us to grow in our steadfast love for him and our knowledge of him. He doesn't want us to come back for the second time and for the third time and for the fourth time.

He'd rather us just come back as it were. But his love and patience allows that to happen. And so as we said at the beginning, none of us would ever really believe that God's love and patience could cause any type of problem in God's people whatsoever.
love and it seems to me that it is because God is loving and patient that we think we can get away with it. That we think we can come and go because God will always have us back.
And it's true, God will always have you back. But what he desires is steadfast love and you growing in your knowledge of him. because he sees you and him in relationship with each other.
It's not about keeping a law. It's about enjoying the relationship. Amen.

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