



## YEAR 3—The God Who Pursues Relationship: A Story of God's People

### *Module 5: The Message of the Prophets*

#### *Lesson 4: God's Love For His People—Hosea 11; Joel 2:18-27; 3:17-21*

### BIBLICAL REFLECTION

*(A theological and biblical reflection on today's Scripture passage.)*

#### GOD'S STORY

Hosea and Joel lived during an era when a wicked king named Jeroboam II took the peoples' focus off of God. The king, following in the footsteps of his father, had everyone bring their offerings to shrines of golden calves instead of making the traditional journey to worship in Jerusalem. Consequently, the people began to loosen up in other areas and pursued pleasure without reservation.

Hosea spoke to the ten tribes under Jeroboam where this would all lead, warning that God would raise up the Assyrians to humble the Jews if they didn't return to their relationship with Him. Unfortunately, God's people continued to care about very little except gratifying themselves. In response, the Lord asked Hosea to marry a prostitute and become a living example of the kind of unending love He has for His people.

Joel was a prophet of Judah and prophesied about to the people while they were under a swarm of locusts that had devoured the area. Everything green was stripped from the land, and a massive drought began to show God's disfavor of their actions. As God's prophet, Joel announced that this would become worse as an army from the north invaded. Nonetheless, the Day of the Lord would come when He would act on behalf of the people and restore all that had been devoured.

Both accounts speak into Israel's tendency to proclaim a love for God, then turn away from Him, and finally run back to the Lord when humbled. He didn't lose His love for them even when this pattern repeated from one generation to the next, and both prophets made clear that the faithlessness of humanity wouldn't have the final say because of the faithfulness of God. As Joel shares on behalf of the Lord, "Even now... return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning" (Joel 2:12).

What is perhaps most outstanding is the tender language God speaks into the hearts of His people amidst all their betrayal. He promises that as they return they will have plenty to eat and experience years of favor. The Lord will woo the people back like a man romances a woman he adores. There will be a day of restoration where things will be set right again relationally between God and His people.

#### OUR STORY

Perhaps not consciously, but often unconsciously we try to convince ourselves that we don't have to do 100% of what God has asked of us. Sometimes we shave off a little bit here or there, taking a shortcut away from pure obedience. We may rationalize that we're due a little breathing room, but really it's more about a sense of entitlement or self-importance to make sure we stay fully comfortable instead of fully committed.

God may have to get our attention like He did through Hosea and Joel. Each spoke both hard and tender words to show the Jews where they had strayed, yet how God would love them through it. When we can't distinguish between the Lord being for us or against us, He makes sure we know He will love us despite our unfaithfulness and help us to walk when we're inclined to fall down.

This is our story, and it has been this way for centuries. The eyes of the Lord roam the earth looking to support those whose hearts are for Him; however, He doesn't take His eyes off the unfaithful but reaches out to them. His love never fails, unlike the unsatisfactory pleasures we search for instead.

### *OTHERS' STORY*

The more a prophet speaks truth to the others around him, the more he may find his audience shrinking in number. Some people may be polite on the surface as you share the Lord with them, while others may overtly push back with intensity and offense. Both Joel and Hosea experienced this in their generation, so we shouldn't be surprised when we find it to still be true with other people.

It may be why God desires to get people's attention. When Hosea had to endure being married to an unfaithful woman, the people who may not have heard his message verbally saw it lived out experientially. Likewise, when Joel spoke tenderly about God teaching Israel how to walk it was a word picture close to the heart of many parents who had done the same for their children. Both men prophesied of a potential change that would relieve everyone from what they had experienced.

Others in your life may need similar consideration. While you may be accurate in the truth you share about God and His love for them, they may need to see it lived out in your life first. By no means should you do something dramatic unless the Lord leads you to, but you can let your relationship with Him be a living example of what it means to find joy and fulfillment in your Creator.

### *THE WORLD'S STORY*

The world seems to find ways to further its broken mentality by extending it out. Things that used to be culturally offensive 20 to 30 years ago are commonplace now. It's a trend that won't stop unless God's people show a much better alternative.

Instead of grabbing picket signs that talk about God, our lives need to be signs of God. Just as the Lord entered the present world of Joel and Hosea to address the peoples' past, Christ entered history to address the issues of peoples' eternity. Humanity as a whole has prostituted itself and taken on a cheapened life, but we can show what it means to return back to our Lord. When the world is intent on becoming its own army of locusts unto itself, we can reveal a much better way of living that is full of mission and the image of God.

On the cross, Christ paid the full price for our freedom because His love for us never fails. The snapshot of His affection for us is a moving picture, for He is always coming toward us even when we turn away. You can never underestimate the impact of showing this to the world through your life.