



**Date:** June 29-30, 2019  
**Speaker:** Paul McIlwraith, Teaching Pastor  
**Scripture:** Hosea

*Hosea 3:1-5*

*Then the LORD said to me, "Go and love your wife again, even though she commits adultery with another lover. This will illustrate that the LORD still loves Israel, even though the people have turned to other gods and love to worship them."*

*2 So I bought her back for fifteen pieces of silver and five bushels of barley and a measure of wine. 3 Then I said to her, "You must live in my house for many days and stop your prostitution. During this time, you will not have sexual relations with anyone, not even with me."*

*4 This shows that Israel will go a long time without a king or prince, and without sacrifices, sacred pillars, priests, or even idols! 5 But afterward the people will return and devote themselves to the LORD their God and to David's descendant, their king. In the last days, they will tremble in awe of the LORD and of his goodness.*

We are now in full-fledged summer mode and that means sun, sand, surf and weddings. Am I right? How many have been to a wedding already this past month? Anyone have a wedding on the calendar for July or August? Weddings are a huge deal in Canada and as someone who has traveled a bit globally, from what I have seen, weddings are a big deal around the world as well. According to the website, [groomnbride.ca](http://groomnbride.ca) the yearly revenue generated by the wedding industry in Canada is more than \$4 billion with more than 150 000 weddings annually. About 43% of those are held in Ontario. The cost of a Canadian wedding can fluctuate greatly but experts peg the average cost at about \$30 000.

As you may be aware, we have a wedding in our family in May 2020. My daughter and her entourage went out dress shopping this past week and I am excited to tell you that I think she said yes to the dress. I however, almost had to be taken to the Emergency ward of the hospital after she told me the price tag. That was before alterations!

We have made weddings such a big deal in our culture that the planning now takes well over a year. I received a request this week to officiate at a wedding in August 2020. The reception halls are booking up over a year in advance so you have to get on it. There are things to do like, the engagement pictures have to be taken, the dress has to be purchased, the flowers selected, the minister booked and the DJ confirmed. The food has to be ordered. Then there are the bridal showers, the stag and doe, the rehearsal and rehearsal party. It is all leading up to the big day.

That is the part I know best. For any weddings that I officiate, our pre-marriage counselling begins about six months out and then about a month before the wedding, I plan out the order of the service with the bride and groom. That usually includes, the processional of the parents, the groom and groomsmen, the bridesmaids, flower girls and ring bearers, and then the big moment, the Bride appears and walks to her groom. A special song is selected. Someone reads scripture, there is a meditation on God's ideal for marriage and then there are the wedding vows.

The vows. In a Christian marriage, this is by far the most significant part of all the planning. It has led to this point. Before God and the witnesses that have been invited, the bride and groom respond to this charge. The traditional wedding vows included these phrases.

I take you to be my wedded wife/husband

Right at the start these words indicate the intentional choice or decision of each partner. I choose you. It is a beautiful expression of love and that each are taking responsibility for their choices.

To have and to hold - One of the most precious meanings of this phrase, to have and to hold is physical intimacy. There is an anticipation of enjoying each other's company in every way as they share every aspect of their life with one another.

From this day forward - This phrase suggests that there is something completely new starting on this wedding day. The bride and groom are leaving their old way of life behind and beginning a new life together.

For better or for worse- This acknowledges the seriousness of the commitment the bride and groom are making to one another. Life will have its ups and downs. Both partners are expressing their desire to be equally committed to these vows and to facing the joys and sorrows of life together.

For richer or for poorer - This phrase states that the relationship is about much more than money. No matter what the bank balance looks like, they will work together to face and overcome the challenges.

In sickness and in health- This phrase brings reassurance to each partner that even if their body may fail, they are loved for what is on the inside, the soul and spirit which are not bound by bodily conditions.

To love and to cherish- What does it mean to cherish? It is to nurture, admire, appreciate and highly treasure the relationship with your spouse. Sometimes the phrase forsaking all others is included in the Christian vows, implying that your heart is exclusively given to the one you have chosen to marry.

Till death us do part- On their wedding day the loving couple are saying to each other that except for the inevitability of the grave, nothing and no one will come between them.

According to God's holy ordinance- A Christian marriage is holy and sacred and it deserves honor and respect. When you decide to get married you

are doing what God intended for His people. That is, to love one another and live Godly lives which reflect His loving and truthful character.

This is my solemn vow- This final phrase of the Christian marriage vows sums up the whole intention of the wedding ceremony. This is where two individuals are making a solemn vow to each other in the presence of God and witnesses.

Notice it is a covenant that the bride and groom are making with one another. It is not a marriage contract that can be easily voided. No, it is covenant before God which is legally, morally and spiritually binding and cannot be easily revoked.

As an officiant at weddings, once I had shared these vows with each of the bride and groom, I am expecting that they will respond with two words, anyone? I Do

I Do

The bride and groom respond to these vows and the covenant they are making to each other with, I do. That is a holy moment, do you see that? At this point in the service, we should all just pause and understand the magnitude of what has just occurred. With those two little words, I Do, the couple are agreeing to something that will change the course of their life. They are declaring their commitment to one another exclusively and their dependence on God as the very foundation of their marriage.

Isn't that powerful? Do you see why your presence at a Christian wedding is so important? You are not just there to enjoy a great meal, the candy bar, donut station or to dance the night away. You are witnesses to these vows and your role is to pray for, encourage and support this couple in their marriage. When the world seeks to pull them apart, you are there to help push them together.

I have had the incredible privilege of officiating at hundreds of weddings. I have seen the joy that comes out of these marriages. Families grow with the birth of children. The couple is united as they serve the Lord together. Unfortunately, I have also seen the devastation that can occur when the couple forgets the vows they made to each other before God on their wedding day and the relationship is shattered and the pain and heart ache that ensues.

I have seen a broken relationship restored but it takes a lot of work, especially if another person has been involved and it takes coming before each other and God in repentance and humility.

The passage that we come to today as we launch our summer message series, Majoring on the Minors is about a marriage covenant that has been shattered. There has been unfaithfulness. Can I just take a moment to say, that there are parts of the bible that are just difficult? Have you noticed that?

You are moving through parts of it, The Lord is my shepherd, he makes me lie down in green pastures, he restores my soul, I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever, all so beautiful, comforting and serene and then you get to, By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion.....Happy is the one who seizes your infants and dashes them against the rocks. What?!

The writings of the Minor Prophets comprise the last twelve books of the Old Testament of the bible. They're described as "minor" not because they're less important than the books of the Major Prophets such as Isaiah and Jeremiah, but because they're shorter in length. These books contain some tough words mostly directed at God's people, the Israelites, by his chosen spokesmen, the prophets.

Why? Because they had forgotten or disregarded the relationship they had with God, Yahweh and had turned and worshipped other gods. They had been unfaithful to the covenant God made with them and the results are devastating. Just like they are in a marriage when vows have been broken.

But all hope is not lost. The Minor Prophets also serve to remind the people of God's faithful and restorative love towards his people. And that is what we see in the book of Hosea.

If you have your bibles, turn with me there. Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea. It is located just before Joel and Amos. Before I read, let me give you a bit of context.

Hosea lived in the Northern Kingdom of Israel around 750 BC and was a prophet called to speak on God's behalf during the reign of one of Israel's worst Kings, Jeroboam II. The nation was in chaos.

Look at what God instructed Hosea to do in,

*Hosea 1:2*

*When the LORD first began speaking to Israel through Hosea, he said to him, "Go and marry a prostitute, so that some of her children will be conceived in prostitution.*

That is a rather odd request isn't it? For a holy righteous God to tell one of his faithful to go and marry a prostitute? That is a little difficult to fathom but, as we see all throughout scripture, God often required extraordinary obedience from his prophets who were experiencing extraordinary times.

He asked Abraham to leave his family and his home and go to a foreign land. He asked Moses to speak to Pharaoh at risk of his own life. He asked Jeremiah to speak on his behalf to the people even though no one would listen. He would be an utter failure. Maybe God has asked you to do something that you felt was beyond your imagination or your capabilities, but there is always a method to what seems like pure madness.

Hosea go and marry a prostitute and have children with her. Can you imagine what was going through Hosea's mind? He knew ahead of time, that those marriage vows would be a sham. He knew his wife, Gomer was going to be unfaithful to him. This is not exactly starting your married life out on a foundation of trust. And bringing children into that sort of an environment was just asking for heartache, pain and dysfunction.

But Hosea is obedient. Why? He knew that God was going to use his life as an object lesson. Hosea's marriage to an unfaithful woman would illustrate God's relationship to the unfaithful nation of Israel. Look at how *Hosea 1:2* continues,

*Go and marry a prostitute, so that some of her children will be conceived in prostitution. This will illustrate how Israel has acted like a prostitute by turning against the LORD and worshiping other gods."*

It is like God is saying, Hosea, your married life is going to be a living, breathing metaphor for what I want to teach my people about what not to do.

Ahh, thanks God. Have you ever had that experience? Someone comes up to you and says, hey I saw the way you did that. That taught me what not to do, so thanks. In high school, I had a group of

friends and there was one wild guy. There is always one wild person in your friend group isn't there?

If you are not sure who it is in yours, it is probably you. This guy in our group, we used to test whether we should or should not do something but having him go first. If all went well for him, then we would give it a try. If not, we would back away.

My parents had a swimming pool when I was growing up. Can you sense where I am going with this? There was a diving board but on this one particular day when I had my buddies over for a swim which happened to coincide with a day my parents were away, the diving board kind of lost its thrill. I don't know who noticed it first but someone pointed out that the pool shed roof might just make a great launch pad into the pool. The only dilemma was that it seemed to be just a bit too far back from the water's edge. That is when it started, hey Kelly (the wild one), why don't you give it a try. You can do it. Yeah, I think it can be done.

So, not one to back down from a challenge, Kelly scaled the fence beside the shed and hopped on the roof. He kind of surveyed the scene, walking back and forth to gauge how much of a run he would need to make the water. Of course, we were egging him on. Then, we began the countdown, 3, 2, 1 and Kelly sprung from the roof.

I can still hear the sound of his body smacking against the concrete that surrounded the pool edge as he kind of bounced and then crumpled into the deep end. He had underestimated the runway needed to hit the water by about a 1/2 foot. No one went back up on the shed roof that day, thanks to Kelly. His experience was a lesson on what not to do.

Yes, Hosea's married life was going to be a living metaphor for what God wanted to teach His people about what not to do. But more importantly, Hosea's marriage to this prostitute is going to serve as an illustration of who God is and the faithful, restorative love that he has for his people.

Throughout the Old Testament. God is seen like a faithful husband to the people of Israel, did you know that? In fact, in Ezekiel 16:8, God says to Israel,

*Ezekiel 16:8*

*And when I passed by again, I saw that you were old enough for love. So I wrapped my cloak around you to cover your nakedness and declared my marriage vows. I made a covenant with you, says the Sovereign LORD, and you became mine.*

In the book of Exodus, I think most of you know the story, God rescues his people from slavery to the Egyptians, parts the Red Sea and then takes them to Mount Sinai where he makes a covenant with them through Moses.

*Exodus 19:3-6*

*Then Moses climbed the mountain to appear before God. The LORD called to him from the mountain and said, "Give these instructions to the family of Jacob; announce it to the descendants of Israel: 4 'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians. You know how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. 5 Now if you will obey me and keep my covenant, you will be my own special treasure from among all the peoples on earth; for all the earth belongs to me. 6 And you will be my kingdom of priests, my holy nation.' This is the message you must give to the people of Israel."*

This covenant between God and his people petitioned them to be faithful to Him alone just as a marriage covenant between a husband and wife binds them to solitary devotion. Do we understand that?

Shortly after this, God leads his people to the Promised Land where they have everything that they need. They have God's provision with an abundance of food and they have His protection as He gave the enemy over to them but this is also where glimpses of unfaithfulness begin to creep in. Oh, it is subtle at first, just like in a marriage. A side glance, here and there. But it begins to become more and more overt until finally, the Israelites have taken the abundance that God has given them and dedicated to the Canaanite God, Baal. Its idolatry. Its unfaithfulness. They were in bed with another lover.

At that point, God had adequate and legitimate grounds to dissolve the covenant. He could have divorced Israel and sent them packing. He could have cut them loose to fend for themselves and he would have been within his rights.

In our culture today, we are outraged by unfaithfulness in a covenantal relationship aren't we? If someone is caught cheating, it is completely justifiable for the offended party to pursue legal action to end the marriage relationship and I say this with sincere empathy and care, knowing that there are some in this room who have been in this situation.

Some of you know what it is like to be the victim of unfaithfulness and some of you know what it is like to break your covenant vow with your marriage partner. This topic stirs up a lot of feelings but I think we have to go there to understand the depth of what is happening in this text and the way that God responds. It is important to note that God did eventually release the people to the consequences of their sinful ways.

*2 Kings 17:22-23*

*And the people of Israel persisted in all the evil ways of Jeroboam. They did not turn from these sins 23 until the LORD finally swept them away from his presence, just as all his prophets had warned. So Israel was exiled from their land to Assyria, where they remain to this day.*

The people were in exile from God, separated. In fact, Hosea reiterates the repercussions of Israel's unfaithfulness and rebellion towards God. They will suffer defeat at the hands of their enemy and experience exile from their covenant partner, God. It is not a very happy scene. But, Hosea also reveals that God will pursue Israel again and renew his covenant vow with her because God's love is faithful and God's love is restorative.

*Hosea 2:14-20*

*God says this, "But then I will win her back once again. I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her there. 16 When that day comes," says the LORD, "you will call me 'my husband' instead of 'my master.' 17 O Israel, I will wipe the many names of Baal from your lips, and you will*

*never mention them again.... 19 I will make you my wife forever, showing you righteousness and justice, unfailing love and compassion. 20 I will be faithful to you and make you mine, and you will finally know me as the LORD.*

God's love is faithful and restorative but it is difficult to comprehend God's love sometimes isn't it? Especially in the culture in which we live where love seems to be defined as an emotion that goes up and down and all over, depending on the circumstances. Or the mood of the day. Love for us today is so often tied to happiness, have you noticed? If I am not happy in my relationship with someone, then the love must have departed. I've lost that loving feelin' so maybe it is time to move on.

The biblical idea of love is so much deeper than just a feeling. It is more of an attitude. It is a state of mind that is not so easily swayed. True love was to be steadfast in all circumstances that is what that familiar passage in 1 Corinthians 13 is getting at. You know, the passage that we hear at all the weddings?

*1 Corinthians 13*

*Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud 5 or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. 6 It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. 7 Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.*

It is hard to comprehend God's love sometimes and it is hard for us to know exactly what it means to love God. Would you agree? That is why illustrations of divine love are powerful ways of demonstrating the characteristics of God's love. Do you know when God saved and redeemed the nation of Israel from slavery at the hands of Pharaoh and the Egyptians and parts the Red Sea in Exodus and then led them to the Promised Land, it was one of the greatest Old Testament examples of God's love? It is one that we refer back to often.

In the New Testament, well that one is easy. When God sent his son, Jesus to die on the cross for our

sins, it was his greatest act of love towards humanity. In fact, it is spelled out in that well known passage of scripture,

*John 3:16*

*“For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.*

Do you see it? God’s love is faithful and restorative. It brings us back to him. Back to our relationship with him. No matter what we have done. Divine examples of love are one thing, but for most of us, do you know what we understand best? When we see love modeled for us in the actions and attitudes of another human being. That is what makes the life of the prophet Hosea so special. We can relate to him. His sense of joy and then frustration, as he served as a living example of God’s love towards an unfaithful and rebellious bride. Hosea’s tender and devastating experiences with his wife, Gomer help us to image the ups and downs of love more than any definition about love we can read in a book.

Hosea, like God, illogically loved someone who wasn’t really loveable. In his case, a woman of prostitution. He stayed committed to the love relationship in spite of her unfaithfulness and out of deep love, forgave and took back this lover who had betrayed him. Isn’t that amazing? Remember the passage I read before the prayer?

*Hosea 3:1*

*Then the LORD said to me, “Go and love your wife again, even though she commits adultery with another lover.*

This will illustrate that the LORD still loves Israel, even though the people have turned to other gods and love to worship them.”

*2 So I bought her back for fifteen pieces of silver and five bushels of barley and a measure of wine.*

Did you notice that Hosea not only took Gomer, his wife back when she was unfaithful, just as God forgave and loved the Israelites even when they were unfaithful? But it came at a cost?

Hosea had to pay a debt that his wife had accrued. We are not sure what it was but Hosea paid it as

part of restoring her back into relationship with him. Through this experience Hosea knew something of God’s sense of rejection when the people turned from Him. He experienced how unfaithfulness and deceit can undermine a love relationship. He also came to understand something of God’s great grace and forgiveness when he forgave his wife and brought her back home. He was able to speak the words God gave him as a prophet with more passion because he identified with God’s situation. Both had loved and gotten burned by a lover.

Hosea knew that love was not just a warm fuzzy feeling but involves a deep commitment and a willingness to forgive. He also knew that love sometimes comes at a cost. For Hosea, it was some silver, a little barley and wine. He paid Gomer’s debt. For God, what did it cost God to restore his people, us, back into relationship with him? It cost Him His son, Jesus. He held back nothing but paid the debt of our sin and rebellion, with the life of his son. To bring us back into relationship with him. Why?

God’s love is faithful and restorative.

The message of this minor prophet Hosea, should open our eyes not only to the awesome nature of God’s love for us but also to the destruction our sin can cause in our relationships with others. Yes, our husband, wife and other close connections but maybe more importantly, the damage it can do to our relationship with God.

Hosea helps us to understand that unfaithfulness in our commitment to love God is like prostitution. Have you ever thought of it like that? No? Me neither but thanks to Hosea, we see that when we are unfaithful in our relationship with God, deny him, neglect him, worship other gods whatever that looks like in our lives (money, possessions, things, people), it is not just some insignificant slip up. Oops. It has consequences. It drives a wedge between us and God, it distances us and before you know it, you wake up one day and wonder, where is God? He hasn’t moved, you have!

Hosea challenges us to examine the nature of our love relationship with our heavenly Father. Is it a passionate personal relationship with a living being? Is it characterized by faithfulness and devotion to him alone? Is it authentic, or just a performance or

charade of following some accepted religious practise?

Wedding season is such a joyful time, isn't it? Love is in the air. Who doesn't appreciate a good love story? But maybe you sit here today and you have been burned by love. Perhaps you have been on the receiving end of the heartbreak of infidelity.

You know what it is like to give your heart to someone and have it trampled on and discarded and it has caused you to become jaded towards love. Bitterness has set in and you have built a protective shield around your heart that no one can penetrate. Can I just say to you, God knows exactly how you feel?

Or maybe you are here today and you are the one who has been the betrayer, the unfaithful one. You have been lured into the deception that there is someone more enticing outside of your marriage. Perhaps love has grown stale and you sought comfort in the arms of another lover. By the way, unfaithfulness isn't just a physical relationship, it can also be an emotional affair or a virtual affair through pornography. Love can be fickle in our human relationships. It can be fleeting and unstable when we based it on our own needs and personal happiness.

But God's love is so much different. It is steadfast and unwavering and his covenant promises remain the same today as they have been throughout history. No matter what we have done, God's love is faithful and restorative. It brings us back to him.

I don't know where this message meets you today. I don't know what your experiences of love and relationships have been but I want you to know this. God loves you so much. He stopped at nothing for you and for me. He gave his own son, Jesus to cover our sin and bring us back to him.

Will you receive this love of our heavenly Father anew today and with the help of the Holy Spirit commit yourself to faithfully loving him with all of your heart, soul, mind and strength?

Amen? Amen

## Points to Ponder

### **Majoring on the Minors ~ Hosea 3:1-5**

**With a friend, your family or in your small group, discuss the following questions.**

1. What are some memorable wedding services that you have attended? What made them stand out? If you are married, do you remember the vows you shared with your spouse on your wedding day? What made them unique? Do you refer back to them periodically?
2. God told Hosea to go and marry a prostitute. Have you ever felt as though God has asked or told you to do something that may have appeared to have been odd at first but ended up making complete sense later on? Describe that experience.
3. Hosea's marriage to Gomer, served as an illustration of God's faithful and restorative love He has for his people. Describe a situation in your life where you have truly felt the faithful and restorative love of God in your life.
4. Think of your relationship with God. When have there been times when you felt as though you had neglected Him and turned to other "lovers"? If you feel comfortable, share some of those times in your life? What supplanted God as the object of your love and affection and why?
5. Hosea challenges us to examine the nature of our love relationship with our heavenly Father. How would you describe your love relationship with God these days? Do you understand the depth to which He loves you? How are you demonstrating your love to Him in return?
6. How have your experiences with love in relationships with other people affected your love relationship with God?

## **Prayer and Action Item**

Pray for one another out of the key points that were discussed. Pray specifically for those who have expressed some hurt or pain around this area of love in their relationships with others. Pray that you would be open and able to receive God's faithful and restorative love and you would be able to return this faithful love to Him.