

The Books of Hosea, Joel, and Amos, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 2: Love Like the Lord's: Redeeming the Unfaithful

Hosea 3:1-5:15

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Doctrinally, this lesson sets two truths side by side that the human heart loves to separate: God's redeeming love and God's uncompromising holiness. Chapter 3 shows love that must be commanded because it is unnatural to us, love that pays a price to buy back the unfaithful, mirroring Christ who redeemed His church at the cost of Himself. Chapters 4 and 5 then bring the Lord's lawsuit against a people destroyed for lack of the knowledge of God. Keep both in view. Guard the class from a sentimental gospel that imagines love means God overlooks sin, and from a harsh legalism that forgets God pays to bring sinners home. Note carefully that the promise of seeking 'David their king' (3:5) is fulfilled in the risen Christ who reigns now (Acts 2:29-36), not in a restored earthly throne or political Israel; and that God's withdrawal in 5:15 is the discipline of love, consistent with the truth that people are accountable for their own sin and must genuinely repent.

The formative aim is to move the student from admiring God's redeeming love to receiving it and reflecting it. A heart that truly grasps that it has been bought back, not because it deserved it but because God would not let it go, is set free both to return after failure and to love others with that same undeserved, costly love. At the same time, the student must let God's holiness be holy, taking seriously the warning that lack of the knowledge of God destroys, and committing to know Him truly.

Because Scripture is written for our instruction (Romans 15:4), press the passage home concretely. Help each person identify where God is calling them home, where sin has its grip and must be repented of, and where they are being asked to love someone with a love that does not wait to be deserved. The goal is changed lives, returned to the Lord and remaining faithful to Him.

Question 1

Student Question:

In Hosea 3:1 God commands Hosea to love Gomer again 'according to the love of the Lord toward the children of Israel.' What does this command reveal about the nature of God's love, that it must be commanded and is patterned on His own covenant faithfulness?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The command of Hosea 3:1 is staggering: 'Go yet, love a woman beloved of her friend, yet an adulteress, according to the love of the Lord.' Notice that this love has to be commanded. It is

not the love that wells up naturally toward someone who has wronged us. It is a deliberate, willed, covenant-keeping love, and it is explicitly modeled on the Lord's own love for unfaithful Israel.

This tells us something profound about the love of God. It is not reactive, waiting to be earned. It is covenantal, flowing from God's own faithful character rather than from the worthiness of its object. God loves the children of Israel 'though they look to other gods.' His love is steady precisely where ours would fail, anchored not in what we are but in who He is.

We should handle the marriage imagery with care and reverence, keeping the focus where God puts it: on covenant faithfulness. The point is not the sordid details of Gomer's wandering but the astonishing constancy of a love that keeps loving. For the student, the takeaway is hope. If God's love is patterned on His own faithfulness and not on our performance, then no failure places us beyond its reach.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's love is covenantal, grounded in His character, not our worth.
- Redeeming love often must be willed and commanded, not merely felt.
- God loves the unfaithful even while they wander.
- Our security rests in who God is, not in our performance.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does a love like this have to be commanded?
- How is covenant love different from love that waits to be earned?
- What does it mean that God loves you 'according to' His own faithfulness?

Question 2

Student Question:

Hosea bought Gomer back at a price rather than abandoning her. In what relationship or situation is God calling you to a costly, redeeming love that does not wait to be deserved, and what holds you back?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Hosea does not merely feel love for Gomer; he acts, paying silver and barley to buy her back from the degradation her sin had brought her to. Redeeming love is costly love. It puts something on the line. Hosea purchases the right to keep loving the wife who broke his heart, and in doing so he becomes a living picture of the God who buys back His people.

This points unmistakably forward to Christ, who 'loved the church, and gave himself for it' (Ephesians 5:25), and to the truth that believers are 'bought with a price' (1 Corinthians 6:20).

The love of God is not cheap sentiment; it is purchasing love, willing to pay what redemption costs. At Calvary that price was the blood of the Son.

The challenge to the student is to ask where God is calling them to a love that does not wait to be deserved, in a marriage, a friendship, a wayward child, a difficult fellow Christian. Such love is costly and often unreciprocated. What holds us back is usually self-protection. Hosea's example, and Christ's, calls us to a love that goes first, pays the price, and keeps the door open.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Redeeming love is costly and acts, not merely feels.
- Hosea's purchase prefigures Christ buying back His church.
- Believers are bought with a price and belong to God.
- Self-protection is the great enemy of redeeming love.

Discussion Prompts

- Where is God calling you to a love that does not wait to be deserved?
- What does it cost you to keep the door open to someone who has wandered?
- How does Hosea's purchase help you understand the cross?

Question 3

Student Question:

Hosea 3:4-5 says Israel will abide many days without king, sacrifice, or image, and then 'afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the Lord their God, and David their king.' How is this hope of seeking the Lord and 'David their king' fulfilled in Christ rather than in a future earthly throne?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Hosea 3:4-5 foretells a long season in which Israel will be 'without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice,' followed by a return: 'afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the Lord their God, and David their king.' This is a promise of restoration after discipline, and it reaches its fulfillment far beyond any merely political revival.

The phrase 'David their king' is not a prediction of a literal descendant restoring an earthly throne. It points to the greater Son of David, the Messiah. Peter declares at Pentecost that God raised up Christ to sit on David's throne, and that this reign is happening now from heaven (Acts 2:29-36). The seeking of 'David their king' is fulfilled when people seek Christ and submit to His present reign.

Teach the class to read Old Testament restoration and kingdom language through the New Testament's own interpretation. The hope is not a future earthly political Israel or a coming millennial throne; it is the kingdom that Christ established and over which He reigns now, His

church. To 'seek the Lord and David their king' is, for us, to come to Christ and bow to His rule today.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Restoration follows a season of discipline.
- 'David their king' points to Christ, the greater Son of David.
- Christ's reign on David's throne is present, fulfilled now (Acts 2:29-36).
- Old Testament kingdom hope is realized in the church, not a future earthly Israel.

Discussion Prompts

- How does the New Testament interpret 'David their king'?
- What does it mean that Christ reigns on David's throne now?
- How does this guard us from reading the text as future earthly politics?

Question 4

Student Question:

After a season of discipline, Israel is pictured returning to 'seek the Lord their God.' What does it look like in your own life to genuinely seek the Lord after a time of straying, and how do you know the difference between true returning and mere regret?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The promise that Israel will 'return, and seek the Lord their God' invites the student to examine what genuine seeking looks like. After a season of straying, returning to God is more than feeling bad about consequences. It is a deliberate turning of the whole self back toward Him, a renewed pursuit of His presence, His word, and His people.

Scripture distinguishes godly sorrow that 'worketh repentance' from the worldly sorrow that merely regrets getting caught (2 Corinthians 7:10). Regret looks backward at the pain; true returning looks forward to God and changes course. One produces self-pity; the other produces seeking.

Help the student test their own returning by its fruit. Is there confession, forsaking of the sin, renewed worship and prayer, a hunger to know God again? The text holds out hope: a straying people can genuinely return and seek the Lord. The door home is open, but the threshold is real repentance, not mere remorse.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- True returning is a turning of the whole self toward God.
- Godly sorrow produces repentance; worldly sorrow produces only regret.
- Repentance bears visible fruit, not just feelings.

- The door home is open to the one who genuinely seeks the Lord.

Discussion Prompts

- How do you tell true returning from mere regret?
- What fruit shows that seeking the Lord is real?
- What does it look like for you to seek God after straying?

Question 5

Student Question:

In Hosea 4:1 the Lord brings a 'controversy' against His people because there is 'no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land.' Why does God treat the absence of the knowledge of God as so serious, and what is the link between knowing God and living rightly?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Hosea 4 opens a courtroom. 'The Lord hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land.' The word controversy carries the sense of a lawsuit. God is bringing formal charges, and the foundational charge is the absence of the knowledge of God.

Why does God treat this as so serious? Because the knowledge of God is not mere information; it is a relational, faithful knowing that shapes how a person lives. Where there is no true knowledge of God, the moral foundation collapses, and as the next verse shows, lying, killing, stealing, and adultery break out. Right living grows from rightly knowing God; cut the root and the fruit rots.

The student should see that knowing God truly is the ground of a faithful life. This is not abstract theology; it is the difference between a society and a soul ordered by God and one disintegrating without Him. Teach the class that the pursuit of the knowledge of God is not optional enrichment but the very foundation of righteousness.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's lawsuit centers on the absence of the knowledge of God.
- Knowing God is relational and faithful, not mere information.
- Right living flows from rightly knowing God.
- Where God is not known, the moral foundation collapses.

Discussion Prompts

- Why is the lack of the knowledge of God so serious to Him?
- How does knowing God shape the way a person lives?
- What happens to a soul or society that loses the knowledge of God?

Question 6

Student Question:

Hosea 4:6 warns, 'my people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.' Where do you see a lack of real knowledge of God damaging lives today, including your own, and what will you do to grow in knowing Him?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

'My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge' (4:6) is one of the most sobering lines in the book. The destruction comes not from God's unwillingness to be known but from the people's refusal to know Him. The verse continues, 'because thou hast rejected knowledge.' This is willful, not accidental. They could have known God and chose not to.

We live in an age awash in information yet often starved of the knowledge of God. Lives are wrecked, marriages dissolve, and consciences harden where God is not truly known. The student is invited to look honestly, including at his or her own life, and ask where ignorance of God's character and word is doing quiet damage.

The remedy is deliberate. The knowledge of God comes through His word, taken in regularly, prayerfully, and obediently. Encourage each person to commit to a concrete habit of knowing God more, for this knowledge is not a luxury but the difference between flourishing and being destroyed.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Destruction comes from rejecting the knowledge of God.
- Information is not the same as knowing God.
- Ignorance of God's word does quiet, real damage to lives.
- Knowing God grows through His word, taken in and obeyed.

Discussion Prompts

- Where do you see lives damaged by a lack of the knowledge of God?
- What concrete habit will help you know God more deeply?
- Why is rejecting knowledge worse than never having it?

Question 7

Student Question:

Hosea 4:6 also rebukes the priests: 'thou hast rejected knowledge... seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God.' What does this teach about the responsibility of spiritual leaders and teachers, and the danger of forgetting God's word?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The charge in 4:6 falls heavily on the priests: 'seeing thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee... seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God.' Those entrusted to teach God's people had themselves abandoned God's word, and the people perished as a result. Leadership that forgets God's law leads others to ruin.

Scripture consistently holds teachers and leaders to a stricter account (James 3:1). Those who handle the word of God for others bear a heavy responsibility to know it, keep it, and teach it faithfully. To forget the law of God while claiming to lead His people is a grave failure with wide consequences.

This speaks to every leader and teacher in the Lord's church, and indeed to every parent and influence. The student who teaches or leads in any capacity should feel the weight here, and resolve to be a faithful steward of God's word. Those who guide must first be guided by Scripture, lest in forgetting it they lead others into harm.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Spiritual leaders bear heavy responsibility for God's word.
- Teachers are held to a stricter account (James 3:1).
- Forgetting God's law leads others into ruin.
- Faithful leadership means being governed by Scripture first.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does God hold leaders and teachers to a stricter account?
- How can those who lead guard against forgetting God's word?
- Where do you bear influence that calls for faithfulness to Scripture?

Question 8

Student Question:

Hosea 4:12 and 5:4 speak of a 'spirit of whoredoms' that will not let the people return to God, so that their doings will not 'frame their doings to turn unto their God.' How can sin entangle a heart so that returning becomes hard, and how have you experienced sin's grip on the will?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Hosea speaks of a 'spirit of whoredoms' that causes the people to err, and says plainly in 5:4, 'they will not frame their doings to turn unto their God: for the spirit of whoredoms is in the midst of them.' Sin here is not just an act but a grip, a settled disposition that actually obstructs returning. Persistent sin can harden the will against repentance.

This is a sober reality every honest believer recognizes. Sin indulged becomes sin entrenched, and what began as a choice can grow into a stronghold that makes turning back feel impossible. The longer a path is walked, the deeper its ruts. Sin does not stay where we put it; it spreads and binds.

Yet this is not Calvinistic bondage that removes responsibility. The people 'will not' turn; the resistance is moral, not metaphysical, and they remain accountable. The hope is that God's grace, His word, and genuine repentance can break sin's grip. The warning to the student is urgent: do not let sin settle and harden. Turn early, while turning is still near at hand.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Persistent sin can harden the will against repentance.
- Sin spreads and entrenches when indulged.
- The bondage is moral, not a removal of accountability.
- Turning early, before sin hardens, is far easier than turning late.

Discussion Prompts

- How does sin entangle a heart so that returning grows hard?
- Where have you felt sin's grip on your will?
- Why is it wise to turn early rather than letting sin settle?

Question 9

Student Question:

Hosea 5:15 records God saying, 'I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early.' What does this withdrawal teach us about how God's discipline, His holiness, and His redeeming love work together to bring a wayward people to true repentance?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Hosea 5:15 gives us a window into the heart and method of God: 'I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early.' Here God's discipline, His holiness, and His redeeming love all work together. He withdraws, but the goal of the withdrawal is their return.

This is not abandonment; it is the strategy of love. A holy God will not pretend that sin is harmless, and so for a season He removes the sense of His nearness, letting His people feel the emptiness their idols cannot fill. The withdrawal is purposeful and limited: 'till they acknowledge their offence.' It aims not at destruction but at honest repentance, the acknowledging of sin and the seeking of God's face.

Notice how holiness and love are not at odds here but are partners. God's holiness will not call evil good; His love will not let His people stay lost. So He disciplines, as a faithful Father does, that they might seek Him, and seek Him 'early,' in their affliction. This is consistent with personal accountability: God waits for them to acknowledge their own offense and turn. The discipline is real, but its aim is mercy.

For the student, this reframes the silences and afflictions of life. Sometimes a felt distance from God is His loving discipline, designed to drive us to seek His face in earnest. The right response is not despair or resentment but the very thing God is waiting for: to acknowledge our sin, seek His face, and return early. The cross stands behind all of this, where holiness and redeeming love met fully, so that the way back to God is forever open to all who will seek Him.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's discipline, holiness, and love work together for our return.
- God's withdrawal is purposeful and limited, aimed at repentance.
- Holiness will not call evil good; love will not leave us lost.
- Discipline assumes accountability; God waits for us to acknowledge our sin.
- Affliction can be the loving means that drives us to seek God's face.
- At the cross, holiness and redeeming love fully meet.

Discussion Prompts

- How do God's holiness and redeeming love work together in His discipline?
- Why might God withdraw a sense of His nearness for a season?
- What does it mean to 'seek his face' and acknowledge our offense early?

Question 10

Student Question:

Looking back across Hosea 3–5 as a whole, where has the Lord most challenged you, and name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through this picture of a love that both redeems the unfaithful and refuses to flatter sin?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

As the class looks back over Hosea 3–5, draw the two great strands together: a love that redeems the unfaithful and a holiness that refuses to flatter sin. Hosea buys Gomer back; the Lord brings a lawsuit against a people destroyed for lack of knowledge; and God withdraws for a season so that His people will seek His face. One God, both redeeming and holy, all the way through.

The aim now is to move from admiration to formation. Where has the Lord most challenged the student? Perhaps to receive a love they have not earned, perhaps to extend such love to

someone who has wandered, perhaps to pursue the knowledge of God they have neglected, perhaps to turn back early before sin hardens.

Invite each person to name one specific way Jesus is forming them through these chapters and to take a single concrete step this week. The God who paid to bring His people home, and who loves them enough to tell them the truth, is at work. The fitting response is to come home, to know Him truly, and to remain faithful.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- These chapters hold redeeming love and uncompromising holiness together.
- Truth is meant to form us, not merely impress us.
- Genuine response is specific and acted upon.
- Christ forms us as we return, know God, and remain faithful.

Discussion Prompts

- Where did the Lord most challenge you in Hosea 3–5?
- What one specific way is Jesus forming you through these chapters?
- What single step will you take this week in response?