SESSION SUMMARY

In this session, we see how the life and, in particular, the marriage of God’s prophet Hosea shows us the great lengths God goes to in order to pursue the people He loves. Despite our unfaithfulness, God loves us still and is willing to take on the personal cost and sacrifice of bringing us to and keeping us in right relationship with Him. Because of His love, God continually goes after unfaithful people like us, and in this pursuit, He provides a model for how we are to pursue others with the good news of His love.

SCRIPTURE

Hosea 1:2-9; 2:14-23; 3:1-5
THE POINT

God faithfully pursues His people even when they are unfaithful.

INTRO/STARTER  5-10 MINUTES

Option 1

The way a message is communicated says a great deal about the message itself and the message deliverer. Have your parents ever told you to watch your tone of voice? Have they ever commanded you not to “talk back” to them? Although the content of the message is important, the method of delivery can cause people to listen intently or turn their backs and walk away—away from the deliverer and the words he or she spoke. Even our actions, body language, and facial expressions communicate with those around us. Communicating a clear message is important, but we must also use the appropriate tone, facial expressions, and actions to accompany our words.¹

• How do you typically deliver important messages? Do you think your tone of voice often causes people to listen or to shut down?

• Have you ever experienced someone delivering a message to you in such a way that you didn’t want to hear them out or you didn’t understand what they were saying? What happened?

In the Bible, a prophet delivered God’s message to God’s people. God called Hosea to be a prophet, but his method of delivery would not consist of only words—Hosea would actively demonstrate God’s faithfulness to His unfaithful people. God instructed Hosea to marry a prostitute, have children with her, and continue to love and pursue her, no matter what she did or how many times she ran away from him. God actively confronted Israel’s sin through Hosea’s life.

• How did the way God chose to communicate show love to His people? Do you think any other method would have gotten the point across?

Option 2

People say that dogs are extremely loyal. Articles exist to identify the most loyal dogs, including those who found lost children, stayed with wounded owners until help arrived, or lay beneath the casket of a fallen war hero.² Despite some stories of dogs that turned on their owners or acted aggressively, for the most part, people believe dogs love unconditionally. No matter how “their humans” might act, dogs seem to love us just the same.³ Though dogs cannot tell humans what they think, they often show it. Lead the students to discuss their own ideas about loyalty, and what it means to be truly devoted to something or someone. Talk about how, although we may know some of these characteristics, nothing and no one’s loyalty outshines the Lord’s.

• In what way have you seen the Lord’s faithfulness in the face of your own unfaithfulness?

• What are some signs that someone is loyal and devoted in a relationship? How do these signs show up in our relationship with God?
THE POINT

God faithfully pursues His people even when they are unfaithful.

CHARACTERS

- **The Triune God** - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- **Hosea** - prophet of God who's marriage with Gomer illustrates God's faithfulness to His unfaithful people

PLOT

In a time when the marriage relationship is often made light of and seen as a contract that can be easily broken, we catch a glimpse into the persistent faithfulness existing between God and His people. By looking at Hosea’s story, we not only see ourselves and the spiritual unfaithfulness we have towards God, but we also see God’s unwavering faithfulness to us in the unending pursuit of His love toward sinners.
HOSEA PURSUES AN UNFAITHFUL BRIDE

What does the Bible mean when we find reference to a prophet? God’s prophets, in the Old Testament, are His mouthpieces. They are those who stand before the people and say with heavenly authority, “Thus says the Lord.” Typically, the messages of prophets involved needed repentance on the part of people.

In the case of Hosea, the prophetic role involved more than speaking. God’s plan for this prophet involved a walking, talking, breathing kind of message. It was this call that God placed on Hosea’s life.

When the Lord first spoke through Hosea, the Lord said to Hosea, “Go, take to yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the Lord.” So he went and took Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son. And the Lord said to him, “Call his name Jezreel, for in just a little while I will punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel. And on that day I will break the bow of Israel in the Valley of Jezreel.” She conceived again and bore a daughter. And the Lord said to him, “Call her name No Mercy, for I will no more have mercy on the house of Israel, to forgive them at all. But I will have mercy on the house of Judah, and I will save them by the Lord their God. I will not save them by bow or by sword or by war or by horses or by horsemen.” When she had weaned No Mercy, she conceived and bore a son. And the Lord said, “Call his name Not My People, for you are not my people, and I am not your God.” (Hos. 1:2-9)

GOING FURTHER WITH THE STORY

Hosea was under no pretense about the kind of relationship he was entering into. He knew from the beginning that this marriage was to be filled with infidelity. God’s command was shocking, of course, because doing so contradicts any number of commands given by God regarding faithfulness in marriage. But this prophet was not to prophesy against unfaithfulness like the prophet Micah. Instead, he was to take in and embrace a wife with the full knowledge of her history and even her future.

In fact, if we look through this passage, we see a distinct difference in the way the children that would come from this marriage were described. Notice in verse 3, the language used to describe their first son: “she conceived and bore him a son.” But then look down to verse 6 and verse 8. In both cases, the language changes: “she conceived and bore.”

The shift in language suggests that while the first child was truly the child of Hosea, the second and third children were a result of Gomer’s ongoing unfaithfulness. Here, then, we start to see the fullness of God’s command to His prophet. He was to marry an unfaithful wife and he would be reminded for years—even decades—of that unfaithfulness while caring and providing for illegitimate children.
When God designed marriage, He instituted a relationship of such intimacy, such sacrifice, and such mutual love, that it would serve as a walking, talking, living, breathing, illustration of the relationship between Christ and the church (Eph. 5:32).

In commanding Hosea to take an unfaithful wife like Gomer, God was demonstrating the intensely personal relationship He desires with His people. Further, He illustrated just how painful and sacrificial that relationship has always been for Him as the faithful partner.

**HOSEA’S MARRIAGE REPRESENTS GOD’S UNENDING LOVE**

If Hosea, a man, showed this kind of love and faithfulness to his wife while knowing her pattern of unfaithful behavior, then how much more must God love His people? How much more passionately does His affection burn even for those who time and time again walk away from Him?

God, in His love, not only pursued us in the midst of our unfaithfulness as Hosea did with Gomer; God promises His love to us forever. Threaded inseparably into the narrative of Hosea’s marriage is God’s promise of love for His own people. Just as Hosea was called to continue to pursue and love his wife, so God had committed Himself to His people.

“Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her. And there I will give her her vineyards and make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. And there she shall answer as in the days of her youth, as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt. “And in that day, declares the LORD, you will call me ‘My Husband,’ and no longer will you call me ‘My Baal.’ For I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth, and they shall be remembered by name no more. And I will make for them a covenant on that day with the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the creeping things of the ground. And I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land, and I will make you lie down in safety. And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know the LORD. “And in that day I will answer, declares the LORD, I will answer the heavens, and they shall answer the earth, and the earth shall answer the grain, the wine, and the oil, and they shall answer Jezreel, and I will sow her for myself in the land. And I will have mercy on No Mercy, and I will say to Not My People, ‘You are my people’; and he shall say, ‘You are my God.’” (Hos. 2:14-23)

It is not that love is devoid of emotion when it comes to God; far from it. In fact, these verses along with a host of others in both the Old and New Testaments show us the deep affection God has for His people. But God’s love is much deeper than that. His love, and all true love, involves willing pursuit and necessary sacrifice for the sake of the one being loved.
It’s important to see in these verses that God is the One doing the pursuing. He is leading. He is taking. He is giving. His people are the ones responding to the love God initiated. So it is with us.

It’s also important to notice in these verses that there is no time limit to the love God promised. The imagery of eternity is intertwined in this poetic treatment of the love of God: We will be His people forever. We will rest in Him securely forever. He has promised and given us love, and this promise and gift will never be revoked.

- Take a minute to list the promises God made in this passage. What promises stand out to you? Why is it important to know that God will not withdraw His love from His people? (p. 49, PSG)

GOMER IS PURCHASED OUT OF SLAVERY

At some point between Hosea 1 and Hosea 3, Gomer left. We don’t know exactly why or when she did, or if this was the first time she left. Maybe this was her usual pattern. She would, like so many of us do in our own relationship with God, commit herself to her husband only to find the lure of the old life so strong that she left.

Or perhaps she could never fully believe that the love of her husband was as true, faithful, and sacrificial as it seemed. Maybe she was always waiting for the other shoe to drop, every day wondering if this would be the day when he finally wised up and changed his mind. If so, maybe the wondering became too much for her and it was easier to run than to live with the wonder of faithful love.

Whatever the rest of the story, Gomer had found her way out of the house of Hosea and into slavery.

And the Lord said to me, “Go again, love a woman who is loved by another man and is an adulteress, even as the Lord loves the children of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love cakes of raisins.” So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and a homer and a lethech of barley. And I said to her, “You must dwell as mine for many days. You shall not play the whore, or belong to another man; so will I also be to you.” For the children of Israel shall dwell many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or pillar, without ephod or household gods. Afterward the children of Israel shall return and
seek the Lord their God, and David their king, and they shall come in fear to the Lord and to his goodness in the latter days. (Hos. 3:1-5)

The imagery is vivid and powerful. Hosea—the abandoned but faithful husband who has every right to turn his back. Gomer—powerless to affect her situation. And then the husband, in love, paying the price to purchase the freedom of the one he loves. This passage gives us a mental picture of several relatable points to the message of the gospel.

**Slavery.** It wasn’t just that Gomer was gone; she was enslaved. Because of her lifestyle, Gomer has found herself trapped and powerless to change her own circumstances. Instead, she was at the mercy of others.

**Rescuer.** Hosea had every right to leave his wife to what she deserved, but he did not. The Lord commanded him to “go” to her because there was no way she could come to him, even if she wanted to.

**Price.** Hosea did not buy back Gomer on emotion, sentiment, or good intentions. He didn’t stand at a distance and shout about His love for her; instead, Hosea recognized freedom doesn’t come cheaply, so He went with His pockets full in order to pay the price so that the one he loved could go free.

**CHRIST CONNECTION**

Just as Hosea went to Gomer when she was powerless to return to him, so Jesus came to us as the Rescuer we so desperately needed. Through His death and resurrection, He broke the chains of sin and death and brought freedom to the people of God. This freedom came not as a result of our efforts, struggling against the chains that kept us in bondage, but from One who loved us enough to come to us. Though we have been unfaithful, He faithfully gave up His life in our stead.

Not only that, but in an even greater way, there was a high price to be paid for our freedom. As rebellious sinners, God’s justice demands death as payment for our rebellion, and that justice must be satisfied. Jesus Himself was the price paid. And because He gave up His own life, we can go free.

This entire process can be summed up in a single word: **Redemption. To redeem something means to buy it back.** This is what Hosea did for Gomer, and it’s what Jesus Christ did for us at the cross.
GROUP QUESTIONS

God’s Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

• In what ways have you found sin to be a snare that enslaves, rather than something that frees? Answers will vary.

• Like Gomer, what are some sins that you keep running back to in your own life? Answers will vary.

• What does the story of Hosea and Gomer teach us about God’s character, especially as it relates to our own unfaithfulness to Him? Among other things, it teaches us that God is the One who pursues us even when we run away from Him. He loves us, and He demonstrates that love in the active pursuit of rescuing us from sin and ourselves.

• What are some ways we can cultivate uncompromising devotion to God in our own lives? One way is to continuously remind ourselves of the price God paid for our deliverance, as well as the joy of our salvation.
HEAD

Like Gomer, you and I are enslaved to the pattern and ways of this world. We are chained by our own sin, and both because of our nature and our choices, are incapable of escaping from those chains. Like Gomer, we are on the slave block, and unless someone intervenes, our eternal destiny is set. We will be chained for all eternity as a result of our sin.

- List some ways the prophet Hosea (whose name means Savior) resembles Jesus and His work. Answers will vary.
- How does understanding the love of Hosea for Gomer help us grow in gratitude for God has treated us? Answers will vary.

HEART

This picture of the love of God stands in stark contrast to what passes for love in our culture. We love sports, movies, pets, food, actors, games, and a host of other things. We throw around the word without thinking about it; it’s part of our regular vocabulary. It seems that to us, at least based on the way we use the word, love is a feeling or emotion. According to that mind-set, love is not commitment based, but sits on the shaky foundation of personal preference and taste. With God, we find the true definition of the word love. It’s a definition forged not with word, but with action, exemplified by the work of Jesus on the cross.

- How do we, based on our usage of the word in our culture, define love? Answers will vary.
- How is that different than the picture of God’s love we see in Scripture? In the first place, while the word love is sometimes used as a noun, it is more often used as a verb throughout Scripture.

HANDS

Having been pursued and loved by God, and in light of the great personal cost to Himself, we are called to extend that same pursuit and love to others. We love because we have been loved (1 John 4:11). As in the case of Hosea, this love for others is not emotional attachment, and it’s not without cost. To pursue others with the message of the gospel will be a costly endeavor—it will cost us time and the realignment of priorities. But when the cost might seem to be too great, it’s helpful for us to call to mind the great cost that God Himself paid for us.

- Why do you think God asked Hosea to marry this woman? Why was it not sufficient for Hosea to deliver God’s message with words alone? Answers will vary.
- How can you use the story of Hosea when sharing the gospel with someone? Answers will vary.
LEADER PACK
For this session, refer students to pack item #7, which contains a list of common things students pursue in place of God.

SOURCES

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES
Check out the following additional resources:
- Leader Training Videos
- One Conversations
- Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to lifeway.com/TGPFAL16Chron)
- Circular Timeline Poster
- App (for both leader and student)

Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at
GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources

And for free online training on how to lead a group visit
MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject