

- I. Advanced organizer
- A. **Before I had kids, I had a picture in my mind of the kind of parent I'd be.** Devoted, patient, kind. Fun, energetic, and creative. Sensitive to their needs without coddling them. Firm without being harsh. And then I actually became a parent.
  - B. Parenting exposing my selfishness and entitled-ness more than anything...even marriage. It was amazing and hard and beautiful and hard and draining and mundane and snuggly and wonderful and super hard. (*Show cartoon.*)
  - C. The push and pull of parenting is really true in **many kinds of intimate relationships isn't it?** Marriage, dating, roommate relationships, long-term friendships? These relationships **give us life and they tax us.**
  - D. Like Zendesk's motto currently says, "**Relationships are complicated.**" (*Image*)
  - E. We're finishing our Advent series today called "**Season of Longing**" in which we're focusing on the minor prophets and the longings they voiced and invited God into, that we might sit with them in looking for God to meet us in our longing.
  - F. We've talked about the longing for encouragement, the longing for wholeness, and the longing for justice. Today, we're gonna talk about the **longing for intimacy in relationship.**
  - G. **Hosea was a prophet from Judah (the Southern kingdom)** who prophesied to Judah in the season similar to Micah, when Israel was suffering but Judah's judgement was delayed. Yet rather than learning from their neighbors to the north, **Judah also was obstinate in pursuing idolatry and injustice**, which ultimately would lead to them also experiencing the consequences of their sin. As Hosea revealed in his writing, this was **emotionally complicated not only for people, but also for God.**
  - H. Many of us have grown up thinking of **God as above-the-fray**: omnipotent, omniscient. And we're not wrong to think that. There's truth to that. **We don't want a God that's fickle** and easily swayed by emotion and circumstances. We don't want someone who it's easy to bait or to get under their skin. **We want our God to be the grown-up in the room**, not an overgrown toddler.
  - I. But we also want **a God who is emotionally invested in humanity.** A God that cares. A God that's intimate. A God that's not detached. And in a number of places throughout the Bible portray God, we get the sense that **that is the God we have.** **Jesus particularly communicates this.**
    - 1. **He himself is God** come in the flesh to have intimate relationship with humanity, and he gave insight into the heart of God's self.
    - 2. **Jesus wept over Jerusalem**, saying how, like a Mother Hen he desired to collect Jerusalem under his wings in affection and protection.
    - 3. **Jesus called God "Father", and invited others to do that too.** He told a story of a **wayward son** who cashed in his inheritance and blew it all on wayward living, but when he returned filled with shame and expecting to grovel to his parent, his Father rushed out to meet him, threw his arms around him and threw a huge party because his lost son had returned.
    - 4. Now **these are metaphors** - God as a Mother Hen or a loving Father. **They don't capture the exact nature of our relationship with God** because they're human, and God's bigger than that. But it's meaningful that **these are the kind of metaphors that the Bible keeps throwing at us.** Metaphors that portray God in relationship to us in ways that are similar to some of our most significant, intimate human relationships. And these don't just come from Jesus.
  - J. Hosea also used metaphor to help paint a picture of God through his prophetic poetry. He employed the **metaphor of his own marriage and family famously in one part of his book,**

casting God in the role of a faithful husband, who remains constant even in the face of his partner's infidelity. **And then in Hosea 11**, we see *his* vision of God as a loving parent.

K. This is what we're gonna take a look at today, as we go to Hosea 11, starting with verse 1.

1. What does it look like for God to be the loving parent, even in the face of his child's disobedience? Even as there's warning and judgment approaching? That's what we'll look at here.

II. **Hosea 11:1-7**

*When Israel was a child, I loved him,  
and out of Egypt I called my son.*

*2 The more I called them,  
the more they went from me;  
they kept sacrificing to the Baals,  
and offering incense to idols.*

*3 Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk,  
I took them up in my arms;  
but they did not know that I healed them.*

*4 I led them with cords of human kindness,  
with bands of love.*

*I was to them like those  
who lift infants to their cheeks.  
I bent down to them and fed them.*

*5 They shall return to the land of Egypt,  
and Assyria shall be their king,  
because they have refused to return to me.*

*6 The sword rages in their cities,  
it consumes their oracle-priests,  
and devours because of their schemes.*

*7 My people are bent on turning away from me.  
To the Most High they call,  
but he does not raise them up at all.*

- A. **Walter Brueggeman is a famous scholar of the Old Testament.** He imagines that Hosea, the prophetic poet found this poem coming to him in the night. As he tossed and turned considering the problems of his day, the injustice that no one was acknowledging, the idolatry that most accepted as no-big-deal, the way that people in power worked to consolidate their power. The worship of the Baals was not that different than other schemes in other cultures to make oneself powerful. To shore up security that one could control. The people of Hosea's day were giving themselves to consumption, and the acquisition of wealth, and few of them acknowledged that there was anything in that which would dishonor Yahweh.
- B. But Hosea, as Brueggeman understands him, was haunted but what he saw. He was haunted by dreams, by musings, by glimpses of the divine heart. And in Brueggeman's estimation, in the haunting, a poem came to Hosea from the heart of Yahweh, God's self.
- C. **This poem paints God as a loving parent, painted with male and female imagery; God the paternal and maternal doting on the small child learning to eat, learning to walk, nursing from God's self.** This was the child God led out of Egypt, a toddler fresh and unspoiled, trusting of Yahweh for provision and guidance.
- D. But small children grow into more independent school age children and then more challenging teenagers and young adults. In the same way, **God experienced his people maturing and**

**making their own choices**; choices which often involved turning from all their loving parent had taught and asked for them. **The teenager Israel began to try the parent's patience.**

- E. **So the Parent felt compelled to offer warnings**, to put new boundaries in place or reinforce the old ones; to say “**don't cross this line, or there will be consequences**” and to watch as the child smirks and shrugs and turns away. And like many earthly parents, God, in Hosea's haunted imagery, feels the same frustration that many parents of rebellious teenagers feel. After trying one thing and then another, begging, pleading, warning, challenging, often the parent will just get exasperated, throws her hands up in the air and say, “**Fine! Go your own way. See how well it works for you. But don't come running to me when it all falls apart. You've made your bed, now lie in it.**”
- F. This response is ultimately **the response of the wounded**, isn't it? We get frustrated when the people we love turn away and reject us, because it hurts our hearts. It hurts to be rejected by those we love. **It hurts to see people we care about make choices that we believe will bring them harm.** Maybe we feel hurt by our own failure to keep the relationship on solid footing. And **sometimes when we're hurt, we lash out.** We get defensive. We push away. It's easier than sitting in the grief. The anger comes quickly. And in this poem, this is the picture of Parent God that Hosea has, a parent who is hurt by the rejection of the child and that hurt flares into anger.
- G. Point 1: **Intimacy requires vulnerability. Even God is not immune from being hurt by those He loves.**
1. **That's a crazy thought, isn't it? That God has the capacity of being hurt? That God's heart can be wounded?** And while, again, any human metaphor doesn't capture the reality of the Divine, there does seem to be in what Hosea's metaphor is exploring a sense that the Divine heart is sensitive to his people in away that hurts. There is heartache in Yahweh, for God's heart is soft toward his people. **And softness towards one another is at the heart of vulnerability.**
  2. **This is different than Jesus' story of the Prodigal Son, though the passages have a lot of resonance.** But in the Prodigal Son, we follow the son. We see the story through his eyes, or the eyes of his older brother who resents the father's gracious response. **But this passage in Hosea shows us the wrestling of the Divine Parent.** The wrestling of a heart that is vulnerable to the child.
  3. **Brene Brown** grew to notoriety after her TedTalk went viral on what she calls, “The Power of Vulnerability.” For her, the willingness to be vulnerable is the key to having true, fulfilling intimacy. Here's how she defines vulnerability in her book *Daring Greatly*.
    - a) *I define vulnerability as uncertainty, risk and emotional exposure. With that definition in mind, let's think about love. Waking up every day and loving someone who may or may not love us back, whose safety we can't ensure, who may stay in our lives or may leave without a moment's notice, who may be loyal to the day they die or betray us tomorrow —that's vulnerability.*
  4. **I remember in my first year of marriage or so I had a hard time with vulnerability.** I was too concerned with protecting Jason's impression of me that it was hard at times to be fully honest about my wants and desires. And that even affected silly, trivial things, like him asking me where I wanted to go for dinner. He'd ask me, I'd act as if I didn't really care. But I did have an opinion, I just didn't feel confident enough to voice it. It was only when I stopped worrying so much about what he thought or whether he'd still love me or he'd leave, that I allowed him to see who I really was, the attractive, the unattractive, the just normal and real, that I could experience the power of being really intimately loved and accepted.

5. **But there's a cost to that too.** The reason we shy away from vulnerability is we're afraid we'll be hurt. Like Brene Brown says, vulnerability means risk. It means exposure. And sometimes we do get hurt. Words from a coworker that might bounce off of us, sting when they come from a person who lives with us and knows us really well. It's often the people we're closest to that hurt us the most deeply.
  6. **This is the pain Hosea senses from God's heart.** It doesn't hurt with the Assyrian's don't follow him. They don't know him; they aren't connected with him. But it hurts, **it really hurts, when his people, his kids, turn away.**
- H. Bruggeman imagines Hosea discerning this poem in the night. And in his estimation Hosea heard it like we have. The wistful longing of the parent, building into frustration with the obstinance of the rebellious child. The crescendo to the words, *"My people are bent on turning away from me.*  
*To the Most High they call,*  
*but he does not raise them up at all".*
- I. **And then: a long pause.** It's the pause I have after I lose my temper with my kids or my husband. The pause that comes after my emotion gets the best of me. Usually there's a silence after I let my anger get the best of me. Perhaps for a moment I feel good about ripping a zinger. I feel the pride of getting the last word. **And then, after the words settle for a bit, I begin to feel something else.**
  - J. In the same way, after the pause, Hosea sensed a different beat in the heart of Parent God. Going on:
- III. **Hosea 11:8-11**  
*How can I give you up, Ephraim?*  
*How can I hand you over, O Israel?*  
*How can I make you like Admah? (another name for Sodom)*  
*How can I treat you like Zeboiim? (another name for Gomorrah)*  
*My heart recoils within me;*  
*my compassion grows warm and tender.*  
**9 I will not execute my fierce anger;**  
*I will not again destroy Ephraim;*  
**for I am God and no mortal,**  
*the Holy One in your midst,*  
*and I will not come in wrath.*  
**10 They shall go after the Lord,**  
*who roars like a lion;*  
**when he roars,**  
*his children shall come trembling from the west.*  
**11 They shall come trembling like birds from Egypt,**  
*and like doves from the land of Assyria;*  
**and I will return them to their homes, says the Lord.**
- A. Relationships are complicated. In one moment, Hosea senses **God's hurt and anger**, wanting to wash his hands of his first-born child. In the next moment, **God's heart is struggling**. You can hear the yearning. *"How can I give you up? How can I hand you over?"*
    1. This too is the complication of true intimacy.
    2. Like the worst moment when I'm frustrated with my kids or spouse and then have the opportunity to cool off and I recognize how blessed I am to have them in my life. I become in touch with my affection, even through my disappointment, hurt, and anger.

- B. **God checks himself.** *“I will not execute my fierce anger.”* Whatever he feels tempted to do, he checks it. He controls himself. God recognizes this is an immature response, it’s not his best self. This is fully realized in this climactic statement, **“I am God and no mortal.”**
- C. Hosea sensed through this poem that he was receiving and composing, co-creating with the Spirit of God, that God recognizes that while the *pathos* of God is moved in ways that are similar to human, **God is more than human.** God has maturity and wisdom beyond our own. And so **God’s compassion will rule the day.** It will have more space than God’s wrath.
- D. Point 2: **Compassion and commitment within intimacy are the antidotes to wounding and anger.**
1. God’s emotions, like our own, may flare, but **God’s commitment to his people** and his **compassion for them** is bigger. Intimate relationships, because they are vulnerable, will always have the possibility of wounding, which can lead to anger, even bitterness. **Without commitment and compassion the result is usually broken relationship.** But that isn’t the only way. We, like God, and particularly with his empowerment, **have the capacity to choose commitment to relationship and compassion for one another** as a means of moving forward in the wake of wounding and anger.
  2. **What does this look like?** I don’t think this is only within nuclear families that bonds of commitment and compassion toward one another become important tools in fostering intimacy. I think about our community here.
    - a) **Commitment - This is a reason we have Haven membership.** It’s not that there is some inner circle that some people join and others don’t, and that’s like the special club. Nobody needs to become a member to fully participate and receive what God is doing here. But sometimes commitments are helpful. It’s about **giving us an opportunity to name I have a stake in the relationships here.** I’m committing myself to trying to work things through when I’m hurt. I’m choosing to be a part of something bigger than myself, and I’m doing that intentionally with these people in the room. I want you in my life. I want to become vulnerable before you and to try to love you in ways that honor your vulnerability. Some folks are even choosing to take this to another level of commitment, moving in together, making a choice to get uncomfortable in ways, potentially, but with a context of commitment to one another and to the community they’re building there.
    - b) **Compassion - Our commitment to one another means we seek compassionate responses in the face of other’s failures.** We all make mistakes. In my marriage, in my parenting, with my own parents, with my siblings, or my friendships, I have messed up in all of those. **I’ve made mistakes.** I’ve had to own my part, and I’ve had to seek the mercy, forgiveness, and compassion of those I love to move forward. At other times as a wife, as a mother, as a child, as a sibling, as a friend, **I have been hurt.** I’ve had to find compassion to dispense. I’ve had to look to the Spirit of God to help me let go of my offenses and grant forgiveness to the one who has hurt me. To look at my brother or sister with the same compassion I need them to regard me with, remembering, in the words of Paul, that **love “is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.”**
- E. Point 3: **Intimate relationship longs for the other’s best.**
1. In the last few verses, **God talk’s about God’s desire to gather his people and plant them in a solid home.** He wants to restore them. Wants to see them thrive. This is the beauty of intimacy. We care about others needs and joy beyond our own.
  2. At dinner recently my kids were each talking about the big things they’re hoping they might find **under the tree on Christmas morning.** And then little Gwen turns to me. “What do

you want for Christmas mom?” And I had no answer. When I was her age, I had a long list. But now, I care way more about my kids having a joyful Christmas than myself.

3. **Sometimes what is best for the others costs us personally, and intimacy still moves us to long for their best.** When our dear friend gets the job he and his family have been hoping and praying for, and we all know he deserves, but it’s on the other side of the country, we celebrate. We bless, we come around, even though it hurts. Even though it means loss, we long for one another’s best to come and we celebrate it when it does.

IV. **God kept his promise to do best for his people.** Ultimately, this longing for intimacy that Hosea expressed, an intimacy between people and God that was vulnerable, that was committed, that was compassionate, and that lived for the other’s best was **embodied in the person, whose coming we look to in Advent: the person of Jesus.**

- A. **Zechariah was the priest to whom the coming of Messiah was first announced**, as he was told his wife would also bear a child who would announce the way for Jesus. Zechariah was so shocked and disbelieving, that he was struck unable to speak for months until his son was born and named John, as the angel had told Zechariah to name him. And when his voice was once again restored, he spoke words of praise, that exalted Yahweh for remembering his commitment not to destroy or abandon his child, Israel, but to care for and restore his people. Zechariah said it this way:

- B. ***“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,  
because he has come to help and has redeemed his people.  
69 For he has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David,  
70 as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from long ago,  
71 that we should be saved from our enemies,  
and from the hand of all who hate us.  
72 He has done this to show mercy to our ancestors,  
and to remember his holy covenant—  
73 the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham.  
This oath grants  
74 that we, being rescued from the hand of our enemies,  
may serve him without fear,  
75 in holiness and righteousness before him for as long as we live.”***

- C. Jesus was the way God’s best would be delivered. Jesus was the way he’d restore them. By coming as one of them, dwelling among them, and showing them what it truly meant to love and be loved in intimacy, he fulfilled his promise. And for all the places where we long for intimacy and connection, he stands eager to fulfill it still.

V. Takeaways

- A. **Consider your Relationship Status with the Divine Parent.** How might you characterize it?:
  1. Intimate and Attached
  2. Distant and Detached
  3. It’s Complicated...
- B. **Consider what next step God might be inviting you to take in experiencing deeper intimacy with others and with God.**
  1. Making an active choice to let God and/or another into a vulnerable place in yourself. *Is there something personal that keeps others at arms length? Is there someone safe God has brought into your life to share that with?*
  2. Making or renewing a commitment to relationship with God and/or other(s).
  3. Allowing God to show you “the best” He longs for for you. What might that mean for you?