

God's Stubborn Love
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Hosea 11
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I can only imagine what it must have felt like to Bernie Palmer.

He was awakened in the middle of the night by a phone call and the caller, a policeman, informed him that his son was in jail.

Far greater than the embarrassment he felt was the fear he felt for his son. Fear over the direction his teenager son's life was taking.

Bernie's wife died giving birth to their first child - this son named Barry.

The young father hired a middle-aged woman to live in the home and care for Barry.

Though Martha was a no-nonsense person, she very adequately cared for Barry and grew to love him.

But Bernie didn't turn over the rearing of his son to Martha.

He spent a great deal of time with Barry wanting to make certain that the boy knew he was loved.

They played ball together, they rode horses together by the time he was four, and Barry responded to all the love.

It was about three or four years later that Bernie remarried.

He met, dated and fell in love with Marge, who loved little Barry as much as Bernie did.

The nanny, Aunt Martha, as she had come to be called, was no longer needed and moved to a house a block away.

Marge and young Barry "hit it off" very well and Barry responded to her attention and love.

Both Marge and Bernie lavished their attention on the little boy.

It was about two years later that Marge announced that she was pregnant.

Unfortunately, 5 year old Barry learned of the coming new baby from Aunt Martha who told him that his parents would no longer want him once a baby came but that Barry could come and live with her.

Barry's reaction to a new baby was understandably hostile, but over time he grudgingly accepted his new sister.

When two years later, Marge and Bernie told Barry that he was going to have another brother or sister, his response was even stronger than before.

"What's the matter? Aren't Becky and me enough?"

"Why do we have to have a new baby anyway?"

"We don't need anyone else!"

"You don't care about me anymore, at least mother doesn't!"

"Everyone knows that she's my stepmother!"

Marge had never before been stung so sharply by words.

Barry had spit that word "stepmother" out as if it contained all the hatred his little mind could conceive.

Twin brothers were born months later but Barry would have nothing to do with them - not then and not for years.

During the next five years Barry grew ever more sullen in spite of the love that Bernie and Marge showed him.

Marge was the one who into his middle elementary years would read to him every night.

She was the one who gently nursed him to health when he got sick.

Bernie spent nearly every evening with the boy and almost every Saturday was just for the two of them.

It was during these late elementary years that Barry stopped calling Marge "Mother" and from that time forward would not speak to her and would refer to Marge as "her" whenever he was forced to speak of her.

By Barry's tenth grade he was in serious trouble:

He was nearly expelled for forging his mother's name.
And he was arrested for vandalism.

Barry and friends of his, for reasons unknown, totally destroyed the inside of a house on the other side of Holdridge, Nebraska, the small town in which they all lived.

It was this incident that prompted the middle-of-the-night phone call that Bernie and Marge received.

After Barry was released to his parents, his reaction was the opposite from what Bernie and Marge hoped for.

On the verge of angry tears, Barry yelled at them in the car on the way home:

"Go ahead. Tell me what a worthless, rotten, no-good son I am!

"Tell me that I've disgraced you and that you wish I'd go away so you'd never have to see me again." (pg 95)

The tears were not of remorse but of hostility.

Marge could barely talk, "Barry", she whispered, "don't talk that way.

"You know how much we love you."

"I'll bet you do." Barry spat out.

At that Marge began to cry.

How could I love him any more than I do, she thought.

Can you imagine Marge's hurt as she had endured over 5 years of Barry's hostility, his insolence, his refusal to call her anything but "her".

Yet through it all she and Bernie continued to fiercely love that boy.

In the first four verses of Hosea 11 God says of the people of Israel: READ 1-4 again.

Look at God's love for the people:

Hosea pictures it in his mind as a father's love for his child

v 1 When Israel was a child I loved him.

When Israel was in slavery in Egypt I set them free.

Because of my love, I'm the one who gave you life.

Probably no one understands this love more than a couple who has been unable for years to have children and then finally the wife conceives.

The child is born and the parents know they could not love someone more than they do their child.

What love!

All of the prayers, all of the expense in doctors during the early years of their marriage, all of the anguish, - it was all worth it - they have their child.

Likewise, God says, I gave you life - I love you!

In v 3 God says, "It was I who taught Israel to walk, taking them by the arms."

Can you picture a father tenderly, patiently and expectantly teaching his son to walk?

God had so patiently walked through the wilderness with his people.

Every time they stumbled, every time they sinned he picked them up and helped them on.

In v 3 God says, they didn't realize it was I who healed them.

What sorrow filled the heart of God when his people gave credit to other gods (who were no gods at all but only wood and stone) - when they gave credit to others for their prosperity, their health, the good things they enjoyed in life.

God is saying, "Listen people, I love you. I gave you life. I am the one who has given you all that you have.

And then changing the image from a father to a kind farmer -

God says in verse 4:

"I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love; I lifted the yoke from their neck and bent down to feed them."

I was kind to you. I did not drive you or hurt you.

I was there to meet your every need.

But look back at verse 2:

"But the more I called Israel, the further they went from me. They sacrificed to the Baals and they burned incense to images."

They gave their hearts to others.

The more Marge and Bernie Palmer gave of themselves to Barry the more hostile he became.

In spite of the standards Bernie and Marge had set and modeled in their home, Barry flaunted them.

By his Junior year he was drinking heavily.

He went to church but refused to participate.

His friends, if they did come to the house, were obnoxious and abusive to Barry's brothers and sister.

Bernie would try to talk to him evenly and objectively but Barry would explode in anger.

Somehow, the more they gave Barry the worse he became.

Looking back at Hosea 11:2 we see again God's charge against some of his people:

The more God sought them to help them the further they pulled away.

The more God gave them, the more they credited their success to themselves or others but never to God.

And they took what God blessed them with and used it for things contrary to the will of God.

Of course you understand by now?

The story of Bernie's and Marge's relationship to Barry and God's relationship to Israel is a picture of God's relationship to us in this room.

In verses 5 and 6 God, through Hosea, makes it clear what will have to happen to Israel.

She will suffer the consequences of her sin.

In Israel's case, other nations were already on the horizon just waiting for God's timing to move in and punish that country.

After Barry graduated from High school his drunkenness continued, he stole a car with some friends and was again arrested.

I don't have the time to recount for you all the cruel ways he treated his parents during those years even though they housed him, fed him and tried to love him back.

He married a young woman to whom he was unfaithful and from a motel room, drunk with another woman, he would call his father late in the night to vent his anger.

He had a wife and daughter whom he did not want and did not support:
Bernie and Marge provided their food but Barry convinced himself that the provisions came from others.

His drinking turned to alcoholism.

He lost his job and his family.

And in Hosea's lifetime he saw Israel invaded, defeated, slaughtered, and led away into captivity.

If some of you know what the "killing fields" of Cambodia were about in the 1970s then you know something of the complete destruction of a nation and a people.

But even as Israel was being judged for their sin God was there trying to woo them back to himself.

Giving them yet another and another opportunity to repent and come back to God.

Preacher after preacher, prophet after prophet came to them telling them of God's love and their need to return to God.

But God says in verse 7: "My people are determined to turn from me. (and the rest of the verse is translated best in the NASB) "Though the prophets call them to the One on high, none at all exalts me."

It makes no sense.

Why doesn't God just let them go.

If they treat God that way why isn't he just done with them?

For twenty five years Barry had proven there was no redeeming value in him.

Why didn't Marge and Bernie just write Barry off?
Because he was their son and they loved him!

I have told some of you of my youngest sister who after growing up as a model Christian child and finishing a Christian college began working in Minneapolis.

It was not long before she had become the live-in girl friend of a man
20
years her senior and an atheist.

I will never forget the pain my parents experienced over the next few years. I also remember my reaction was to just disown her - be done with her - let her go her own way.
I was angry at her for the pain she was causing my parents but they loved her and wouldn't not let her go.

If you were God and Israel had responded to your overtures of love as Israel has responded to God's what would you do?
You would have every right to utterly destroy them.

But look at God's attitude toward Israel and toward you in verses 8 and 9: READ

Verse 8 is one of the most remarkable verses in the Bible!
Most people still think of God only as a judge who rewards good and punishes evil.

What would you expect that kind of God to do? Be done with them!

But what do we find? We find God's heart in turmoil! His love is in agony!!

On the one hand justice cries out for punishment.
Admah and Zeboiim of verse 8 were two other cities that were burned when Sodom and Gomorrah were wiped out. Israel was more wicked than Sodom and Gomorrah, than Admah and Zeboiim.
Justice cries out - "Destroy them."

On the other hand God's love cannot let them go.

God says, "How can I give you up, how can I treat you like Zeboiim?"

Then the next phrases are so touching:

God says that his heart is changed within Him or "turned over".

That means that God's heart was in turmoil because of his
justice
and his love.

The Bible goes on to describe God's compassion for you as "aroused".
God's love is deeply moved.

Do you realize those are the kinds of feelings God has for you?

His love is not theoretical it is felt, it is from the heart of God, it arouses
God to compassion.

Can you feel the pain in the tender hearts of Bernie and Marge for their son
Barry?

Can you feel the far greater pain in the tender heart of God for you?

John Watson wrote, "God is the chief Sufferer in the universe".

G. Campbell Morgan wrote, "it is love in agony". (p 131 Morgan)

Please see the situation as it is - People are not seeking the love of God.

This love of God is unsought and unearned.

Not only did Israel walk away from God but when God went after him he
refused to repent.

This is not a picture of accidental or ignorant sin but of willful,
deliberate
rejection of God.

When God still loves that is pure grace.

Then in verse 9 with words that reverberate down into the New Testament,
God says that he will not destroy Israel altogether.

God has every right to fully destroy Israel.

But because of something in God he chooses not to.

Clearly understand, it was not something God saw in Israel that caused him to refrain from putting them away forever - it was something in God.

Romans 5:8 says it so well: "For God demonstrated his own love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us."

OR as the Apostle Paul said it to the Ephesians, "It is in accordance with the riches of God grace" that he chose to love, forgive, and restore us to himself.

Like Israel, everyone of us deserves eternal separation from God and eternal punishment - BUT GOD - God loves us and offers to us a way back. He has, in His own Son, paid the penalty for our sin thus satisfying his justice.

That's why Jesus died.

He died to meet the demands of the holy and just heart of God.

That's why Jesus died.

He died to open the way for us to be reconciled to our loving father.

In verses 10 and 11 Hosea predicts that because of God's love and grace a remnant of the people will come back to God.

When God roars (calls) they will come trembling in awe of God's love.

And from all the places they had gone to, looking for purpose, and pleasure in life, they would come home.

READ the 10-11

I am delighted to tell you that my sister, several years later, by God's grace, came to full repentance and was restored to her God and to my parents and my family.

My parent's stubborn love and more importantly God's stubborn love

never let loose of her.

Bernie Palmer in his book, My Son, My Son, writes of Barry.

Barry's life crashed.

His wife and daughter were gone, he was out of a job, he was seriously in debt and physically ill in the hospital.

In that position Barry finally saw God's love.

From a hospital bed Barry sincerely asked the forgiveness of his father and mother.

He asked forgiveness of a man who had hated him for years.

He asked the doctor's forgiveness for all the problems he had caused him through his years of drinking.

He talked to his old friends about coming to know Christ.

He asked the forgiveness of his sister and brothers whom he had not acknowledged for over 15 years.

He didn't pressure his ex-wife but he asked her forgiveness. Over the next several weeks while he lay in a hospital bed and prayed with her and studied the Bible with her she became convinced that he was truly changed.

Barry had every reason to believe that he was going to get well and his repentance was real and his desire to serve God was strong.

Known only to God are the reasons why Barry didn't recover from his pneumonia.

But the entire family was able to say without bitterness, God answered everyone of our prayers.

Bernie said, "Because of God's stubborn love, our son is with the Lord."

Are you one who like Israel and Barry has refused God's love?

Are you one who is living away from God?

Is your work done without reference to God?

Are your hobbies and recreation entered into without thought of God?

Are your relationships lived without regard for God?

Has God given you life and has he prospered you **and yet** you treat him as if he does not exist?

Is your income perceived as your own?

Is your time yours to do with as you please?

Are your talents and energy for you to invest as you choose?

Does God love you and yet you spurn his love?

I want you to know that he loves you still!

I want you to know that his stubborn love longs for you to return to him.

I want you to know that He is calling you today.

If it is your desire to come to God or to come back to him, will you tell him now?