

God's Story – Our Story
Bringing the Heat – The Heart of The Divine Parent
September 8, 2024

Overarching Theme: 2024 – A Year in God's Story

Instructions:

When using this resource as teacher, feel free to discern the points you want to emphasize in the lesson. See "The Grand Sweep" material for additional information.

Core Point: 2024 can be a year of living into God's Story as we journey from Genesis to Revelation together.

Reflect on this Scripture: *Hosea 11:1 (NRSV) When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. ²The more I called them, the more they went from me; they kept sacrificing to the Baals, and offering incense to idols. ³Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk, I took them up in my arms; but they did not know that I healed them. ⁴I 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. ⁵They shall return to the land of Egypt, and Assyria shall be their king, because they have refused to return to me. ⁶The sword rages in their cities, it consumes their oracle-priests, and devours because of their schemes. ⁷My people are bent on turning away from me. To the Most High they call, but he does not raise them up at all.*

⁸How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, O Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I treat you like Zeboiim? My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender. ⁹I 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. ¹⁰They shall go after the LORD, who roars like a lion; when he roars, his children shall come trembling from the west. ¹¹They 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.

Commentary: Consistent with the book as a whole, Hosea 11 uses familial imagery, with God as the parent and Israel as the beloved child whom God rescued from slavery in Egypt (verse 1). The poem describes God's care for Israel in verses 3–4 with tender language ("loved him," "took them up in my arms," "bent down to them," "lifted to the cheeks"). Yet Israel's response to this devotion is rebellion. Rather than acknowledging their divine parent,

they worship other deities like the foreign storm god Baal (Hosea 11:2). God's threatened response of abandonment and violent reprisal seems harsh (verses 5-7), but within the world of the metaphor, it is born of the deep pain of a rejected parent, who can only watch helplessly as the child makes choices that will ultimately lead to their ruin.

Hosea 11 also paints a complex picture of God by giving voice to a remarkable divine confession in verses 8-9. Despite the pain of rejection, God admits feeling internal turmoil at the thought of disowning God's children: "My heart recoils within me / my compassion grows warm and tender" (verse 8). This is no aloof, detached deity. Hosea's familial imagery is a powerful tool for expressing this shocking divine vulnerability.

These verses depict a tension between divine anger and divine compassion, a tension consistent with the God revealed in the Old Testament in particular. While acknowledging the same tension, Hosea refuses to leave it unresolved. Compassion wins out in verse 9. It is the triumph of mercy over justice (see James 2:13) that is fundamental to God's identity, not the tension between these attributes. God can choose "not [to] exercise my fierce anger" precisely because God "is God and no mortal, the Holy One in your midst" (Hosea 11:9; compare Isaiah 54:7-8). Although the threat of judgment returns in subsequent chapters in Hosea, God's compassion has the final word in the book (Hosea 14:1-8). Too often, contemporary Christians accept the false and unhelpful dichotomy between the "Old Testament" God of wrath and the "New Testament" God of love. Hosea 11 offers a more nuanced and compelling portrait of a divine tension that gradually but decisively resolves itself on the side of mercy. - Adapted from online commentary by J. Blake Couey

Questions to Ponder for Accountability in the Group:

1. At the beginning of Prophet Hosea's ministry, conditions remained fairly prosperous in Israel. But Hosea knew that this bubble, built on injustice and idolatry, would soon burst (defeat/exile was on the horizon). Most people likely rationalized - "things are good now, why listen to negative Hosea?" How difficult is it to be attentive to a message to repent when on the surface conditions are currently favorable?
2. Hosea used the metaphors of broken family relationships to describe the brokenness of Israel's relationship with God. What would be particularly compelling about this analogy?
3. In chapter 11, Hosea reviews God's gentle, gracious parenting of toddler Israel. But instead of returning God's familial love, Israel rebelled. What impact did this have on God? Israel?

4. In verses 8-11, Hosea reveals the parental struggle of God – the pain/frustration of his child’s rejection, the pain of knowing the consequences the child will face as a result, and yet longing for reconciliation and healing. How does God resolve this inner conflict (see v. 9)?
5. Given verse 9, consider God’s heart toward you when you have been distant from God or wayward. What is your response to such a gracious God?

Activity for the Life of a Disciple:

1. Remember to find encouragement for the day by reading the daily devotional from FUMCC.
2. Ponder and pray on this scripture this week: Hosea 11: 8b-9
My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender. ⁹I 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.