

Hosea 11 is one of the most moving chapters in the book. Here, God pulls back the curtain on His heart. He is not a cold judge who takes pleasure in punishing His people. He is a loving Father who remembers their earliest days, laments their unfaithfulness, and struggles (in language we can understand) with the tension between justice and mercy.

1. God's Tender Love from the Beginning (Hosea 11:1–4)

*"When Israel was a child, I loved him,
And out of Egypt I called My son.
As they called them,
So they went from them;
They sacrificed to the Baals,
And burned incense to carved images.
I taught Ephraim to walk,
Taking them by their arms;
But they did not know that I healed them.
I drew them with gentle cords,
With bands of love,
And I was to them as those who take the yoke from their neck.
I stooped and fed them."* (Hosea 11:1–4, NKJV)

First, this speaks about Israel's history. God reminds them that when they were a "child" as a nation—slaves in Egypt—He loved them and brought them out. He carried them, healed them, and led them gently. He was like a parent helping a toddler take their first steps, holding them by the arms.

Yet, even as He cared for them, they drifted from Him:

*"They sacrificed to the Baals,
And burned incense to carved images."* (Hosea 11:2, NKJV)

They took God's love for granted and gave their worship to idols.

The New Testament also applies this verse to **Jesus**. When Joseph took Mary and Jesus to Egypt to escape Herod, and later brought them back, Matthew writes:

"...that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, 'Out of Egypt I called My Son.'" (Matthew 2:15, NKJV)

So Hosea 11:1 has a double depth: it describes God calling Israel out of Egypt, and it foreshadows God calling Jesus out of Egypt. Israel was called "God's son" as a people; Jesus is God's Son in the fullest and unique sense. Where Israel failed, Jesus was perfectly faithful.

Practical Application for Believers

Many of us can relate to this picture:

- God has carried us when we were weak.
- He has healed us when we were broken.
- He has drawn us with “bands of love,” not with cold force.

And yet, at times, we wander. We forget His hand in our story. We treat His blessings as ordinary or even use them in ways that dishonor Him.

Reflection:

Take a moment to look back over your life. Where has God carried you, healed you, drawn you with love? Gratitude is often the first step back from drifting.

2. Persistent Backsliding and Coming Discipline (Hosea 11:5–7)

*“He shall not return to the land of Egypt;
But the Assyrian shall be his king,
Because they refused to repent.
And the sword shall slash in his cities,
Devour his districts,
And consume them,
Because of their own counsels.
My people are bent on backsliding from Me.
Though they call to the Most High,
None at all exalt Him.”* (Hosea 11:5–7, NKJV)

God had brought Israel out of bondage, but they flirted with going back to old alliances and old ways. Instead of trusting the Lord, they looked to other nations for security. God warns that instead of Egypt, **Assyria** will rule over them.

The situation is summarized in one heartbreaking line:

“My people are bent on backsliding from Me.” (Hosea 11:7, NKJV)

Their inner direction was away from God. Even when they used religious language and “called to the Most High,” their hearts were not truly exalting Him.

Practical Application for Believers

It is possible to:

- Use spiritual words without a surrendered heart.
- Call on God in crisis but go right back to self-will afterward.
- Be “bent” in the wrong direction internally, even while keeping religious habits.

Challenge:

Ask yourself honestly: Am I leaning toward God or away from Him? Am I seeking His will, or just His help in accomplishing my own?

When God disciplines His people, it is not out of cruelty but out of love, to bring them back from a path that leads to destruction.

3. God's Heart That Will Not Let Go (Hosea 11:8–9)

Now we come to some of the most tender words in Hosea:

*“How can I give you up, Ephraim?
How can I hand you over, Israel?
How can I make you like Admah?
How can I set you like Zeboiim?
My heart churns within Me;
My sympathy is stirred.
I will not execute the fierceness of My anger;
I will not again destroy Ephraim.
For I am God, and not man,
The Holy One in your midst;
And I will not come with terror.”* (Hosea 11:8–9, NKJV)

Admah and Zeboiim were cities destroyed along with Sodom and Gomorrah (see Deuteronomy 29:23). God is saying, “How can I treat you like that? My heart is stirred with compassion.”

This does **not** mean that God ignores sin. Israel still faced judgment and exile. But it reveals that God does not delight in destroying; He is not eager to give them up. His holiness demands justice, but His heart is full of mercy.

“For I am God, and not man...” (Hosea 11:9, NKJV)

Human anger is often impulsive and out of control. God is not like that. He is holy, just, and also compassionate beyond our understanding.

Practical Application for Believers

If you belong to God and you have wandered, do not misread His discipline as hatred. These verses show us:

- God's heart is not quick to “give you up.”
- He takes no pleasure in your ruin.
- He calls you back with love, even while He warns you of the consequences of staying away.

Encouragement:

No matter how far you have drifted, God's heart toward you is not cold. He calls you back not with contempt, but with grace and truth.

4. Hope Beyond Judgment (Hosea 11:10–12)

*“They shall walk after the Lord.
He will roar like a lion.
When He roars,
Then His sons shall come trembling from the west;
They shall come trembling like a bird from Egypt,
Like a dove from the land of Assyria.
And I will let them dwell in their houses,”
Says the Lord. (Hosea 11:10–11, NKJV)*

Here the tone shifts from judgment to restoration. God looks beyond the immediate crisis to a time when His people will once again “walk after the Lord.” The image of God roaring like a lion speaks of His kingly authority and power. When He calls, His scattered people will come trembling back.

Even after discipline and scattering, God promises:

“I will let them dwell in their houses,” says the Lord. (Hosea 11:11, NKJV)

He envisions a return, a homecoming, a restored relationship.

The chapter closes with a contrast:

*“Ephraim has encircled Me with lies,
And the house of Israel with deceit;
But Judah still walks with God,
Even with the Holy One who is faithful.” (Hosea 11:12, NKJV)*

Israel (the northern kingdom) is described as deceptive, while Judah (the southern kingdom) is, for the moment, still walking with God. Yet even Judah would eventually fall when they turned away. In the long run, hope rests not in human faithfulness, but in God’s faithfulness.

Practical Application for Believers

God’s purposes are not ultimately defeated by our failures. He may discipline; He may allow us to experience the consequences of our choices. But His desire is restoration, not destruction.

Reflection:

Do you believe God can restore what sin and wandering have damaged in your life? Hosea 11 invites you to take Him at His word.

A Challenge for Believers

Hosea 11 challenges every follower of Jesus to examine both our view of God and our response to Him.

1. Do you see God’s heart correctly?

He is not indifferent, nor is He delighted to condemn. He is a loving Father whose heart “churns” when His people wander. Let that draw you, not push you away.

2. **Are you living with a bent toward backsliding or toward seeking the Lord?**

God does not ask for perfection in your own strength, but He does call you to sincerity—a real turning toward Him, not just religious talk.

3. **Are there areas where you have forgotten God’s hand in your life?**

Like Israel, we can forget that He carried us, healed us, and fed us. Remembering His faithfulness softens our hearts and renews our love.

Believer, here is your challenge:

Return to the Lord with your whole heart. Let Him break up the hard ground, expose the idols, and restore a simple, sincere, obedient love for Him. He has not given up on you—do not settle for living at a distance from Him.

An Invitation to Non-Believers: Come to the God Who Loves You and Gave His Son for You

If you have never truly given your life to Jesus Christ, Hosea 11 shows you something crucial: God is not indifferent to you. He is not a distant force. He is a personal, loving God who grieves when people walk away, and who calls them back with compassion.

But we have all done what Israel did in our own way:

- We have turned to our own path.
- We have ignored His goodness.
- We have given our hearts to “other gods” – things we put before Him.

Sin does have consequences. It separates us from the God who loves us. But God did not leave us there.

He sent Jesus Christ, His Son, to bring us back:

- Jesus lived a sinless life.
- Jesus shed His blood on the cross to pay for our sins.
- Jesus rose from the dead, and His resurrection declares that He is God, Savior, and Lord.

At the cross, God’s justice and love meet. Our sins are not ignored; they are paid for. And now God offers forgiveness, new life, and a restored relationship to anyone who will turn from sin and trust in His Son.

If you sense God calling you—like that lion’s roar in Hosea 11:10—do not ignore Him.

You might respond with a simple, sincere prayer like this:

“Lord God, I confess that I have sinned and wandered from You.

I believe that Jesus Christ shed His blood on the cross for my sins, and that He rose from the dead.

I confess that He is God, Savior, and Lord.

Please forgive me, cleanse me, and make me Yours.

I turn from my sin and I give my life to Jesus.

Teach me to walk with You from this day forward.

In Jesus’ name, amen.”

The words themselves do not save you—Jesus does. But if you truly trust Him, God will receive you, forgive you, and begin a new work in your life.

May Hosea 11 help all of us—believers and seekers alike—see the heart of God more clearly: a God who loves deeply, disciplines faithfully, and refuses easily to let us go.