

## “The Joy of Being Caught”

Good morning, Grace!

**CHEROKEE:** My sister had a dog years ago that was absolutely crazy. His name was Cherokee, a chocolate lab. Man was he hyper. You would accosted upon entrance to their home by this dog. He would jump on you, kiss you, scratch you, and pretty much maim you. Every time a guest would come to their house he would pea on the floor. Cherokee just let himself go! But Cherokee had a problem with his ears.

His ears would get infected with stuff growing in there. So the vet would prescribe some medicine ear drops. If they would let the medicine work it would clear up his ear. The problem is that he would continue to itch the ears and itch the ears. He would be in pain because he was hurting his ears even more by scratching. So finally the vet had to do it. He prescribed...

The cone of shame (If you've seen *Up* you know what I'm talking about)! That's right the cone put over his head because he couldn't control himself. So they put on this device and he could no longer access his ears. He had to wear it for weeks on end. He'd try to go out the door and bam he'd hit the wall with the cone. They actually had to feed this dog by hand because he couldn't eat with the cone of shame. It was an embarrassment to him as a dog and definitely to my sister and her family.

**TENSION:** A lot of us relate to God out of our own version of the cone of shame. We've messed up and feel the guilt and shame.

Maybe you believe God's role in our lives is to not only make us feel guilty but to make us where the cone of shame.

Perhaps you've felt guilty for your anger. You've exploded on someone losing your temper and you feel guilty.

Maybe you've said some words you wish you could get back. Perhaps you have a problem swearing or you've made statements about people that you just wish you wouldn't have said. You feel guilty.

Some of you might have made a mistake by getting involved in a relationship beyond what you should have. You've lost the trust of the ones you love and you feel guilty.

Perhaps you made a decision that you regret. It's one you're not proud of and it's causing pain in your life. You feel guilty and full of shame.

Maybe you grew up in a situation where your home environment lacked love and it was never communicated or you never received a parental blessing. So you are confused about where God has been in the pain of your life. So you feel ashamed about who you are.

Guilt and shame are *POWERFUL* emotions. Guilt and shame speak to us often. Guilt says,

**What I did was wrong.** We are convicted that what we did was wrong. It offended God and is sin. Guilt is one thing but shame that's not just thinking what you did was wrong. Shame says,

**Who I am is wrong.** Now these two can serve positive purposes in our lives if they drive us to God for His forgiveness, grace, and healing.

Listen, we all have a past. We've all done things our way and its lead us to guilt or shame or both. So we end up pursuing something to numb the pain of guilt and shame. And we believed that whatever it was we put in its place would satisfy but substitutes never satisfy. So we're stuck in a desperate situation not sure how to get back to God.

**Q:** *How do you break free from guilt and shame?*

**STORY:** Today we will discover the answer to that question found in the book of Hosea. Quick review. Hosea is a prophet and God asks him to marry a prostitute named Gomer. The marriage is a picture of God's relationship with His people. He loves them even though they're unfaithful. They return to other gods just as Gomer returns to prostitution. But Hosea doesn't give up and he pursues her to buy her back. And He pays the price to do that.

Now the story of Hosea and Gomer is really told in the first 3 chapters of the book. Then it kind of fades into the background while God talks about His relationship with His people. There is blistering judgment from God toward His people because of their sin and idolatry. There are occasional reprieves from it, but Hosea goes on and on about their sin and God's anger and love.

**TRANS:** And that leads us to the end of the book where Hosea tells us how to break free from guilt and shame. Look at 14:1

**"Return O' Israel to the Lord your God. Your sins have been your downfall." – Hosea 14:1**

You break free when you go back. You break free from guilt and shame when you return to the One who has loved you all along. Hosea tells Israel to return to God because He has a purpose in His pursuit. Sin didn't work out

We often think God's primary role in our lives is not only to make us feel guilty but to make us wear the cone of shame. Not so.

## **God pursues me to restore me**

God pursues us to help us become the people He created us to be. It's not like He is pursuing us to change us so that then He'll love or accept us. He already loves us. You and I have ran from God and embraced substitutes. Hosea says, "Go Back!" The word he uses is repent.

**ABOUT FACE:** It's like in the military or the marching band (yeah I was band geek). You're going this direction pursuing other things and now you need to do an about face - a 180 – and return to God! Go back to God because He can renew and restore you. That's why He pursues you.

And so Hosea gives us a pathway back to God. And the first stop on that path is to...

### **Ask for His Forgiveness**

Look at verse 2,

***“Take words with you and return to the Lord. Say to Him forgive all our sins and receive us graciously so that we may offer the fruit of our lips.” – Hosea 14:2***

No matter what you've done, where you have been or what you have experienced this week or last night or even this morning already the first step whether you have been a follower of Jesus for fifty years or you are just beginning is to receive forgiveness.

The answer to breaking the through guilt and shame isn't to just stop feeling that way. It isn't to build your self-esteem and start doing some positive talk to yourself. The answer isn't in trying real hard to leave your past in the past. The answer is found in how our forgiveness was secured.

**GOSPEL:** Hosea knew what it was like to pay the price to redeem the one he loved. Remember he pursued her when she returned to her idolatry and paid the price for her to be released from the sexual slavery she became part of. He forgave her.

Gomer knew what it was like to be forgiven. Her husband entered her dark world, negotiated with her pimps, and bought her back. What humiliation. What guilt. What shame. She knew what it was like to receive forgiveness.

God knows what it's like to pay the price. His love and grace are offered freely but they cost Him everything. He paid the price to set us free from our slavery to sin and restore us. He did so through Jesus His son and His death on the cross and resurrection from the dead. God paid an outrageous price to cover our guilt and carry our shame.

Do you know what it's like to be forgiven? We often think God can forgive this person or that person, but not me. Listen; when you say God can't forgive you, what you're basically saying is *“God, you're going to have to pay a higher price for me. What Jesus did wasn't enough.”*

Have you confessed to God your sin? Admit to Him you have run away and pursued other things. Return to God and seek His forgiveness and love.

**God's love is based on the one giving it, not the one receiving it!**

I dare you to let God's love through Jesus be applied to your debt of sin. When you do that the cone of shame is removed.

**TRANS:** Returning to God start by asking for His forgiveness. The next stop on the path back to God is to...

### **Break from your past**

The past is the past, friends. We can't change it but we can begin today to step away from it. Look at verse 3,

***"We will never again say, 'Our gods' to what our own hands have made..." – Hosea 14:3b***

God freed us so we could walk differently. We take off the cone and walk with confidence found in Him and His love. We are pursued to become all God created us to be. To get there we have to break from the prison of the past.

What I mean by your past is that past can be a rich wonderful heritage but there can be behavioral patterns in our past that are destructive for us and for our families and those around us.

*God's love is what powers us to get past our past.*

**PASSENGER SEAT:** You cannot fulfil God's purposes when you're focused on your own plans. You need to move over to

the passenger seat on this journey. Stop trying to be the driver who is in charge of navigation. Let God be the leader and director and one who is driving. You break from your past when you switch seats!

Doesn't transfer the pain of your past onto others; instead let God transform the pain of your past into the foundation of your future. God is much more powerful than your history.

God is pursuing you to restore you to a relationship with Him that's entirely based on His love. It's not a relationship about not doing certain things, but a relationship that lives out of a new reality of who you are in Christ.

*Your situation may not be reversible but it is redeemable.*

The past may have been filled with selfishness, betrayal, damaging words, broken promises, harmful actions, but that's why it's called the past. The moment we make Jesus the leader of our lives the past is dead. The trick is to break free from the familiar and embrace the potential. Don't cling to the past so tightly you can't size what God has for you today!

*Grace is all we needed when we first came to Jesus and grace is still all we need to grow in Jesus.*

**TRANS:** The path to returning to God stops at Asking for His forgiveness, breaking from your past, and Hosea gives us one more stop which is to...

### **Count on His mercy**

Look at the powerful imagery in verse 4:

***“I will heal their waywardness and love them freely, for my anger has turned away from them...they will dwell again in His shade.” – Hosea 14:4, 7a***

Let's look at a few things in these verses.

First, when we return to God, He will make us healthy even though we turned our backs on Him. He heals our waywardness. What you're pursuing is only found in the One pursuing you!

Next he says when we return to God, He loves us freely. This means He voluntarily loves you. He loves you even though you've turned your back on Him!

**ISAAC:** The other day one of our boys was mad at me for telling him to stop jumping off the couch. He knows exactly how to strike at my heart. He literally says, “I hate you. I hope Michigan wins!” I'm like, “You said what?!?” Was I as concerned about his hate for me or his rooting for Michigan. See, I always thought it could be a sin to root for Michigan (ok, I'll stop). But anyway,

we chatted and he of course apologized pretty regretful of what he had just said and did. It was cool in that moment on His bed to tell my child, “*I love you no matter what you say or do.*” I do not love my son because of what he does or doesn't do. I love my son because he's my son. I love him voluntarily.

Finally, Hosea gives this really cool image saying they will dwell in His shade in verse 7. **SUNSHINE:** Now I am a weird and odd one because I do not like the sun. I love cool cloudy days...no like really. Being in the sun light can give me a headache. When it's hot and it's sunny I am on the lookout for SHADE! God's people at the time of this book lived in a dry, hot, arid climate. What a perfect picture of God's love.

When we return to God, ask for His forgiveness, break from their past, and count on my mercy, I'll be their shade. I'll be their covering. I'll be their protection. I'll shield them from the harsh elements of the sun. I'll give them refreshment. He does that through His love in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ!

## **CONCLUSION**

You might say, “You know what Nick, that's all great in theory, but you don't know my story.” And I'd say you're right. I don't know your story. I'd also say that your story is legit. The hurt and pain you feel is real. But the reality is that your greatest sin and your greatest mistakes can't stump God or keep God from loving you or make Him stop pursuing you. He does that voluntarily.

Today I want you to hear this from someone who knows what it means to experience the pursuing love of God. Here is the story of a gentlemen connected to Grace Church. He was on the run pursuing other stuff, weighed down by his guilt and shame, and 3 years ago things came to a head. In pursuit, God caught up to Him. This story is a little longer than usual, but you'll see why. Watch his story and see how God feels about you:

Wow, what a story of how God's love pursues to return to Him! That story of Louis Powers will be available online at [woostergrace.org](http://woostergrace.org) this week.

What a series this has been. A ridiculous and unconventional love story teaching us how unbelievable and available God's love is for each of us.

Has there ever been a greater picture of God's love in history than Hosea & Gomer? Could there be a more powerful display of love than Hosea staying with Gomer and caring for their children even though they had different fathers? Has there ever been a more profound image of God's divine obsession with people than Hosea going to the shady party of town to buy His wife back? Would could be more illogical than this? What could illustrate more commitment?

I can only think of one thing – the cross of Jesus Christ! God sending His own Son to buy us back. All our pain, rebellion, and running crashing into God's passionate pursuit on beams of wood. God taking our punishment we deserved bearing our guilt and shame.

### **RESPONSE: Turn or Return!**

**HADLEIGH:** I love to chase our daughter Hadleigh around the house. She's almost 2 and runs from me and giggles and squeals. You know why? She can't wait to be caught! Listen, there is joy in being caught by God's pursuit!

God is pursuing you. Do you think he's doing that to pull you over, beat you up, and toss the cone of shame on? Or have you discovered that He is pursuing you to give you freedom? These stories all reveal to us how much God loves us. You are God's obsession. He loves you. He is pursuing YOU!

### **MY NEXT STEP:**

- Today I begin a relationship with God through Jesus Christ by turning from my sin and trusting His death for my forgiveness.
- Today I am returning to God to be restored.