

The Empty Promises of Addiction

Hosea 2

Relentless (Book of Hosea)

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“...it would seem that our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.”

—C. S. Lewis

Introduction:

Open your Bible to Hosea 2. We are continuing in our series through Hosea, about “God’s Relentless Love”. Tonight’s message is entitled, “The Empty Promises of Addictions”.

Don't get me wrong. I don't speak of addiction as a disease from biology but as a worship disorder. An addiction is really what the Bible describes as an idol. We are trusting in another entity for peace and rest other than our Creator.

When I speak of an addiction, I am speaking of anything that you turn to that takes the place of God. It is not really an addiction problem but a *worship* problem. *Addiction/idolatry is something you are willing to turn to when you are in trouble or when you are empty. It is normally something that dominates your life.*

Richard Wurmbrand

Romanian pastor Richard Wurmbrand spent 14 years in prison for preaching the gospel. Although his captors smashed four of his vertebrae and either cut or burned 18 holes in his body, they could not defeat him.

He testified, “Alone in my cell, cold, hungry, and in rags, I danced for joy every night.” During this time he turned to a fellow prisoner, a man he had led to the Lord before they were arrested, and asked, “Have you any resentment against me that I brought you to Christ?” His response: “I have no words to express my thankfulness that you brought me to the wonderful Savior. I would never have it another way.” These two men exemplify the supernatural joy that can be experienced by believers who live on the edge of horrific suffering with complete fullness of joy.

Not a Sin to Seek Godly Pleasure

I want to be clear tonight. It is not a sin to seek godly pleasure. God invented pleasure. He invented laughter, joy, freedom, sex, art, music, and all good things. “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change” (James 1:17). It is a sin to seek pleasure outside of God and His plan for our lives. Our problem is that when we

seek unhealthy and ungodly addictions, we are breaking the first commandment. We seek addiction to please ourselves without regard to pleasing God. What do these idols/addictions look like?

- It could be an **emotional** addiction/idol. You could be addicted to control and having your way, and you are good at manipulation.
- It could be a **behavioral** addiction/idol, like pornography or gambling or lying.
- It could be a **substance** addiction/idol, like alcohol or drugs or food.
- It could be a **media** addiction/idol, like compulsive web surfing or use of social media on your pc or phone.
- It could be an addiction/idol to **materialism** and the accumulation of more stuff, to the praise of men, to a thousand other things that take the place of God.

John Calvin Quote

John Calvin said, “The heart is an idol making factory”. Our sinful heart has the ability to create thousands of idols.

Pleasure Without God

The root of all idols is the desire to please your self above God. Pleasure is not a sin. James tells us (ESV) — “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change” (James 1:17).

We are called to "delight in the Lord" and to have "joy unspeakable and full of glory."

It is not wrong to seek pleasure. It is wrong to seek it outside of God and His plan for our lives. All people seek pleasure. The question is, how do we seek it?

Blaise Pascal Quote All Men Seek Happiness

Blaise Pascal said it this way.

All men seek happiness. This is without exception. Whatever different means they employ, they all tend to this end. The cause of some going to war, and of others avoiding it, is the same desire in both, attended with different views. The will never takes the least step but to this object. This is the motive of every action of every man, even of those who hang themselves”.¹

The one thing that all of these things have in common is they promise to take away the immediate pains and pressures of life.

Addicts / idolators are described in **2 Timothy 3:4** (ESV) — “lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God”. Addiction is not bad. The truth is, we need to **worship** the right things.

¹ Blaise Pascal, Pascal's Pensees, trans. W. F. Trotter (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1958), 113, thought #42.

Psalm 37:4 (ESV) — “Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.”

We Have a Worship Disorder

What we have is a *worship disorder*. We were created to have pleasure in God.

As we consider a woman who is an adulterer, let’s consider tonight how God can deliver all of us out of our idols and the things that take the place of God in our lives.

There was a woman in the Bible that understood this. The Lord makes teaches a lesson through her life. Her name is Gomer. She is an adulterous. Her addiction is the pleasures of this world. Interestingly, we learn in Hosea 2, that her addiction is not to sex itself, but to the rich lifestyle that she can obtain by selling herself. She is not so much addicted to sex, but to material things.

The sad thing, is that her addiction to materialism costs her everything. Remember as well that this is not just about Gomer, but about the entire nation of Israel who had become materialistic. And this could be a letter just as well written to you personally about any number of idols in your heart and life.

Consider first...

I. The Price of Addiction (vs. 2-4).

Verse 2, “Plead with your mother, plead—”. There is a play on words here. Hosea is telling his children to “plead with their mother”, but it is truly a message for adulterous Israel.

A. Addictions could make you lose your **family** (vs. 2).

Verse 2, “Plead with your mother, plead— for she is not my wife, and I am not her husband— that she put away her whoring from her face, and her adultery from between her breasts;

B. Addictions could make you lose your **livelihood** (vs. 3).

Verse 3, “lest I strip her naked and make her as in the day she was born, and make her like a wilderness, and make her like a parched land, and kill her with thirst.”

Addictions make empty promises but cannot satisfy. If the addict does not turn to God, they will be left by God “naked”, “thirsty”, and dead with no mercy.

Israel was whoring after the world for satisfaction. Any idol is a whoredom for the child of God. James describes it this way. **James 4:4** (ESV) — “You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.”

But the greatest loss is found in verse 4.

C. Addictions could even make you lose your **own children** (vs. 4).

Verse 4, “Upon her children also I will have no mercy, because they are children of whoredom”.

D. Addictions could even make you lose your **dignity** (vs. 5a).

Verse 5a, “For their mother has played the whore; she who conceived them has acted shamefully.”

Getting Desire of Your Heart Might be the Worst Thing!

Tim Keller in his book "Counterfeit gods" said this:

“Most people spend their lives trying to make their heart’s fondest dreams come true. Isn’t that what life is all about, “the pursuit of happiness”? We search endlessly for ways to acquire the things we desire, and we are willing to sacrifice much to achieve them. We never imagine that getting our heart’s deepest desires might be the worst thing that can ever happen to us”.²

The truth is, getting the desire of your heart, if it that desire is not put there by God, is **always**, disastrous. Why is that?

Listen to God’s judgment upon those who forsake Him in **Romans 1:24** (ESV) — “Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts...”

Why is this the worst judgment God can give? It is because our hearts fashion the good gifts of God into idols. As Paul goes on to say in Romans 1:25 (ESV) — “they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator...” Our hearts are made to be filled with the infinite God. Without Him, we fashion all things we have into idols! The need for God is so insatiable, that without Him, our hearts become “idol making factories”.

Every human being must live for something. Something must capture our imagination and our heart and our allegiance! The Bible tells, us without the intervention of the Holy Spirit, the object of worship in our hearts will never be God.

Now let us look at the allure of addiction. Why is it so powerful?

II. The Power of Addiction (vs. 5; Heb. 11:25).

Look at the power of addiction. What would make Gomer, Israel, and us be willing to lose all or some of our family, livelihood, our children, or our dignity? What is worth losing everything? Listen to Hosea’s account of Gomer’s words.

Verse 5, “For their mother has played the whore; she who conceived them has acted shamefully. For she said, ‘I will go after my lovers, who give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, my oil and my drink.’”

What is it that drives addictions, idols, and adultery against God? It is the instant gratification. Gomer’s lovers instantly gave her the wool and flax for clothing she wanted and the oil and drink to satisfy her desire to eat and drink lavishly.

² Timothy Keller. *Counterfeit gods* (Dutton: London, 2009), 1.

“[T]he pleasures of sin” are only “for a season” (**Heb. 11:25**).

III. The **Pattern** of Addiction (vs. 5; James 4:1-3).

Verse 5, “For their mother has played the whore; she who conceived them has acted shamefully. For she said, ‘I will go after my lovers, who give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, my oil and my drink.’”

Essentially, Gomer gives up everything to get what she wants. James 4 gets to the heart of it..

The passions of our heart drive the patterns of our behavior.

A. The *passions* of our heart. “you desire”

James 4:1–3 (ESV) — “What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? 2 You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.”

James asks “What causes quarrels... and fights”. We could just as well ask, “Why did I do what I did? It is because of my heart. It is because of the passions within me.

What is your passion?

- “I feel bad, guilty, empty”.
- “I want to get out of the pressure”...
- “I want to feel good”

B. The *patterns* of our behavior, “you fight and quarrel”.

Why do you lie? It is because we feel we must have something that is more important to us in our hearts than God! We would not lie unless we first had made something more important than God in our hearts. It may be...

- Human approval
- Reputation
- Power
- The money to live comfortably
- Pleasure

IV. The **Promises** of Addiction (vs. 6-8).

“6 Therefore I will hedge up her way with thorns, and I will build a wall against her, so that she cannot find her paths. 7 She shall pursue her lovers but not overtake them, and she shall seek them but shall not find them. Then she shall say, ‘I will go and return to my first husband, for it was better for me then than now.’ 8 And she did not know that

it was I who gave her the grain, the wine, and the oil, and who lavished on her silver and gold, which they used for Baal.”

Gomer pursued her lovers, but couldn't "overtake them". In other words, they delivered for a while, but then they stopped taking her phone calls.

The promises of addiction and idolatry is that something other than God can bring you ultimate happiness. These are lies! Idols give you temporary pleasures. “[T]he pleasures of sin” are only “for a season” (**Heb. 11:25**).

What are some of the Empty Promises of Idols?

In order to be truly happy...

- I must have a spouse who is godly, romantic, responsible, and a good communicator.
- I must have obedient children who please me.
- I must have a good job where I am respected and well paid.
- I must be loved and appreciated by others.
- I must feel safe from all harm.
- I must have enough money to live in comfort.

You see all of these are idols. Where is our ultimate fulfillment for companionship, respect, love, safety and comfort? It is God! If I'm willing to break God's law to get what I want, then I am an idolater.

Martin Luther on Idolatry

You see **idolatry** is *when you want something so bad you are willing to sin against God to get it*. No one understood this better than Martin Luther. In his Treatise on Good Works, he wrote that the Ten Commandments begin with a commandment against idolatry. Why is this the first commandment? He said it was because “the fundamental motivation behind lawbreaking is idolatry”. It is that we want something so bad, we are willing to break God's law to get it.

Why do we fail to love God and live unselfishly? It is because we are broken and sinful yes. But it is ultimately because ***we believe there is something more important than God that can make us happy!*** That's the essence of idolatry. Why do we lie? Why would a couple end their marriage? Why would there be a complaining covetous spirit? God forbids all of these things. Why do people do it. Because they believe there is something more important than God that can make them happy.

What we are going to find out is that pleasing God will bring you the highest level of satisfaction in life.

V. The Pain of Addiction (vs. 9-13).

You always reap what you sow. Sow to the flesh you reap destruction. Sow to the Spirit, you reap life.

Verses 9-13, “Therefore I will take back my grain in its time, and my wine in its season, and I will take away my wool and my flax, which were to cover her nakedness. 10 Now I will uncover her lewdness in the sight of her lovers, and **no one shall rescue her** out of my hand. 11 And I will **put an end** to all her mirth, her feasts, her new moons, her Sabbaths, and all her appointed feasts. 12 And **I will lay waste her vines and her fig**

trees, of which she said, 'These are my wages, which my lovers have given me.' I will make them a forest, and the beasts of the field shall devour them. 13 And I will punish her for the feast days of the Baals when she burned offerings to them and adorned herself with her ring and jewelry, and went after her lovers and forgot me, declares the LORD."

The pain of addiction is that satisfaction in anything earthly is always TEMPORARY at best. They can come to "an end" (vs. 11), they can be "laid waste" (vs. 12), and "beasts of the field" can "devour them".

Galatians 6:7-9, "Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. ⁸For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. ⁹And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up."

There comes a time when all earthly things waste away and they can no longer deliver. An occupation, a relationship, a substance, etc. all waste away. It's painful. But God never fails. He never wastes away. He is always infinite and fully satisfying! That brings us to our last point.

VI. The Pathway out of Addiction (vs. 14-23).

The pathway out of addiction is to find a greater, more overwhelming addiction. There is as this passage teaches, a door of hope in the Valley of Achor. Achor is the Valley where Achan was judged for his sin near Jericho. And the only pathway out of all addiction and idolatry is to worship the one true God.

An addiction to God is when we are so filled with Him that we display His glory and love, and power and delight. We are so satisfied with Him, we want to please Him.

- **Psalm 37:4** (ESV) — "Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart."
- **1 Corinthians 10:31** (ESV) — "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."
- **2 Corinthians 5:9** (ESV) — "So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him."

You and I were made in the image of God to reflect His image and His glory. We are to do that whether we feel good or not.

- The Wilderness: A Door of Hope

In Hosea 2, the prophet speaks of this wilderness as a door of hope.

Hosea 2:14-15 (ESV), "Therefore, behold, I will **allure** her, and bring her into the **wilderness**, and **speak tenderly to her**. 15 And there I will give her her vineyards and make the Valley of Achor [NEAR JERICHO WHERE ACHAN DIED] a door of hope. And there she shall answer as in the days of her youth, as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt."

God says "A day is coming when I'll open a door of hope in the wilderness". I'll not leave you in Egypt or in the Valley of Achor where Achan died outside of Jericho. I'm

bringing you to the wilderness to make a covenant, like a marriage contract, with you. I want you to be my people!

Syncretism "My Baal"

Hosea 2:16 “And in that day, declares the LORD, you will call me ‘My Husband,’ and no longer will you call me ‘My Baal.’ 17 For I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth, and they shall be remembered by name no more. 18 And I will make for them a covenant on that day with the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the creeping things of the ground. And I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land, and I will make you lie down in safety.”

I Will Have Mercy on No Mercy

Hosea 2:19 And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. 20 I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know the LORD. 21 “And in that day I will answer, declares the LORD, I will answer the heavens, and they shall answer the earth, 22 and the earth shall answer the grain, the wine, and the oil, and they shall answer Jezreel, 23 and I will sow her for myself in the land. And I will have mercy on No Mercy, and I will say to Not My People, ‘You are my people’; and he shall say, ‘You are my God.’ ”

Come to God, and He will be all you need to satisfy your deepest hunger! It is only by *pleasing God that we will experience the highest level of satisfaction in life.*

C. S. Lewis said this:

“If there lurks in most modern minds the notion that to desire our own good and earnestly to hope for the enjoyment of it is a bad thing, I submit that this notion is no part of the Christian faith. ... it would seem that our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.”³

It is only by experiencing the mercy, grace, love, and sovereign hand of God in your life that your soul will have “peace that passes understanding” and “joy unspeakable and full of glory”. It is only when we realize that that we can say with the Psalmist...

Psalm 42:1–2 (ESV) — “As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. 2 My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?”

It is not that we desire too much. We truly don’t desire enough, and we are too easily satisfied.

Conclusion: Let me close with the words again of Blaise Pascal:

³ C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1965), 1–2.

“There once was in man a true happiness of which now remain to him only the mark and empty trace, which he in vain tries to fill from all his surroundings, seeking from things absent the help he does not obtain in things present. But these are all inadequate, because the infinite abyss can only be filled by an infinite and immutable object, that is to say, only by God Himself.”⁴

⁴ Pascal, *Pensees*, 113.