

# (Hosea) True Wisdom Turns Us Back to God

by David Guzik

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of repentance and returning to God, highlighting the consequences of sin and idolatry, but also offering a promise of restoration and forgiveness.*

**Duration:** 42:27

**Scripture:** Hosea 13:14, Hosea 13:16 - 14:4, Hosea 14:6

**Topics:** "Repentance", "Redemption"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the theme of forgetting God when times are good and turning back to Him in times of crisis. He highlights the tendency of humans to forget God's blessings and go their own way when they are materially abundant. The preacher also mentions how during times of crisis, such as war or recession, people are more likely to turn to God and seek His help. The sermon emphasizes the importance of repentance and returning to the Lord, and concludes with the promise of God's redemption and forgiveness for those who repent.

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## Transcript

The book of the prophet Hosea chapter 13. Tonight we're going to wrap up the book with chapters 13 and 14. We remind ourselves that Hosea is a prophet that ministered mainly to the northern kingdom of Israel.

This was after the civil war that split up the people of God into two competing nations, the kingdom of Israel in the north and the kingdom of Judah in the south. Now, while occasionally Hosea speaks to Judah, more often he's speaking to the northern kingdom of Israel, which had a succession of wicked king after wicked king after wicked king. Although there were times, and especially at the beginning of Hosea's prophetic ministry, when the nation did very well economically and did very well politically and militarily, yet morally and spiritually they were corrupt and they were dead.

So now Hosea speaks again to the nation, chapter 13, beginning at verse 1. When Ephraim spoke, trembling, he exalted himself in Israel, but when he offended through Baal worship, he died. Now they sin more and more, and they've made for themselves molded images, idols of their silver, according to their skill. All of it is the work of craftsmen.

They say of them, let the men who sacrifice kiss the calves. Therefore they shall be like the morning cloud and the early dew that passes away, like chaff blown off from a threshing floor and like smoke from a chimney. You see, there was a time when Ephraim, which is another name for the northern kingdom of

Israel.

Ephraim was one of the twelve tribes, and it was the largest and leading tribe of the northern kingdom. So when the prophet Hosea mentions Ephraim, he's referring to the whole northern kingdom. There was a time when Ephraim spoke trembling in a humble way, and when they spoke that way, they were exalted.

If you see there in verse one, when Ephraim spoke trembling, he exalted himself in Israel. That's always a way to be lifted up by God, is to humble yourself. Remember what the scriptures say? Humble yourself under the mighty hand of God, that in due time he may raise you up.

How about one of my favorite passages of scripture? One of those passages that's repeated for us in the Bible in triplicate, it's so important. The passages said that God resist the proud, but gives grace to the humble. There was a time when the northern kingdom was humble and God exalted them then.

But now they're proud. Look at it there in verse one. But when he offended in Baal, he died.

Baal, of course, was one of the pagan deities that the people of Israel were constantly tempted to worship. And now look at their case. Verse two, now they sin more and more.

God didn't bless them when they worshiped Baal, but that didn't stop them. They kept after their idolatry more and more. Isn't it crazy sometimes how we'll set ourselves on a reckless course of sin and it'll be destroying us.

But we'll still do it more and more. This is if we're just beating our head against the wall and beating it harder and getting it bloodier with each blow. But we just continue on.

We sin more and more. And then it even says, if you notice it here, at the end of verse two, they say of them, let the men who sacrifice kiss the calves. That phrase, the men who sacrifice, may instead have the idea of engaging in human sacrifice.

It could be translated the sacrificers of men. In other words, the idea is of a golden calf and perhaps human sacrifice is taking place before this calf. And to say, well, kiss this idol as a demonstration of your love and affection.

As even today in some superstitious Christian sects, people will go and kiss idols or kiss statues. And they say, well, you kiss the calves and you sacrifice humans there. In ancient Israel, human sacrifice was almost always child sacrifice.

They had the detestable practice of Molech worship, where they would actually sacrifice living children before horrible gods. Friends, this is a total perversion of values. If you look at it there, in verse two, it says here that they've made for themselves molded images, idols of their silver according to skill.

Oh, it's the work of craftsmen. Well, you get an idol and there it is. It's a man made it.

A man created it. It's inferior to the man. It can't think, it can't act, it can't move, it can't do anything.

And there it is, inferior to the man. Yet they will worship it. A craftsman work, it's lifted up to divine status.

Human beings sacrifice their offspring to metal objects. And then that lifeless metal object, that lifeless statue, they beg for help from it. Help me, Baal.

Help me, Ashtoreth. Help me, Molech. And then they embrace with praise and adulation, with worship.

The very same animals that they'll use the next day for plowing. It's crazy. What's the result? Look at verse three.

Therefore, they shall be like the morning cloud in the early dew that passes. How long does the dew stay on the grass in the morning? Well, sometimes it's pretty heavy. And for a couple hours after daylight, there'll be heavy dew on the ground.

But it never lasts more than a couple hours, does it? And so God looked at prosperous Israel at this time. The dew was on the grass. Everything looked great.

Well, look how moist it is. It's great. The dew's on the grass.

They didn't realize that the sun was already up and it was going to evaporate in just a short time. They would pass like the early dew. And look at how God would bring His judgment upon the nation.

Verse eight. He says, Yes, I am the Lord your God ever since the land of Egypt. And you shall know no God but Me, for there is no Savior besides Me.

I knew you in the wilderness, in the land of great drought. When they had pasture, they were filled. And when they fulfilled and their heart was exalted, therefore they forgot Me.

So I will be to them like a lion, like a leopard by the road. I will lurk. I will meet them like a bear deprived of her cubs.

I will tear open their ribcage and there I will devour them like a lion. The wild beast shall tear them. You see, Israel changed, didn't they? At one time they worshipped the Lord.

At one time they served Him. They changed, but the Lord didn't. He says right there in verse four, Yet I am the Lord your God ever since the land of Egypt.

Friends, that's why we need to build our Christian life on what the Lord has done for us. Because that doesn't change. You build it on you, that's not a very shaky foundation.

Worse yet, don't build it on me or on anybody else. Build it on the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Israel changed, but God did not.

He's still the only God. He's still the only Savior. Even when the people sought other things.

If you look at it here, it's a very, very pointed statement there in verse six. He says, When they had pasture, they were filled. They were filled and their heart was exalted.

Therefore, they forgot me. In other words, God blessed them. He blessed them with material abundance.

But when they received the material abundance, they forgot God. Isn't it tragic? God gives man blessing. And then when man is blessed, he says, See you, God.

And he goes his own way. It's a strange and terrible aspect of human nature. That when times are good, we often forget the God who blesses us.

But when times are bad, that's when we're more likely to turn our hearts back to God. You know, you can look at it in your own heart, but why not just look at it on a national scale? Whenever there's a great crisis in America, a war, terrible calamities, terrible recession or hard times. Let me tell you, the churches fill up.

They do. People are hungry. People are searching.

People know, I need something more than what I have. Oh, but when times are great and prosperity is flowing and everybody's pockets are filled. Well, the churches tend to trickle out some, don't they? It's a tragic thing of human nature.

That oftentimes we won't really turn our heart to God until we are brought low. How different it should be. How different we should just lower ourselves because he's blessed us so much.

You know, at the end of the 20th century, Americans were in a season of unprecedented prosperity. The last 10 years or so in the United States of America have been a time of remarkable, remarkable prosperity. Yet statistics show, and I read this just in a recent Los Angeles Times newspaper article.

Statistics show that in the 1990s, churchgoers gave a smallest or the smallest percentage of their income and contributions since the Great Depression. You have to go all the way back to the Great Depression to find a time when the average church grower gave less as far as a percentage of their income. It's just a sad fact that often when we're filled, then we find our hearts exalted, then we soon forget God.

And so look at what God says to Israel here. It's heavy. It makes us pause to consider ourselves.

Verse 7, he says, so I'll be to them like a lion. No, he doesn't mean that in a good way. He doesn't mean, well, I'll be the wonderful lion of the tribe of Judah and I'll cuddle you in my paws.

No, look at it there. I'll be to them like the lion, like the leopard by the road. I will observe them and I will meet them like a bear deprived of her cubs.

That's not the picture you want to see. And then look at the end of verse 8. I will tear open their rib cage and there I will devour them like a lion. The wild beast shall tear them.

See, when we neglect and affront God as he blesses us, then we'll often face the chastening hand of God. Friends, it isn't because God hates us, but because we've demonstrated that we'll only turn to him when times are bad. I think about that.

If that's what you're showing God, take pause to consider it carefully. If you're showing God with your life, Lord, the only time I will seriously turn to you is when times are bad. What are you telling God? Bring on the bad times, God.

Why not just sincerely turn to the Lord right now? I mean, maybe right now things are great in your life. I hope they are. I don't wish for any difficulty or calamity.

I hope for blessing and prosperity and goodness in every part of your life. But take it seriously. Turn your heart in sincerity to the Lord now.

Humble yourself to the Lord now so that you won't have to be brought low to seek him. You see, Israel, when they did this, they rejected God. This is reflected into verse 9 where he says, Oh, Israel, you are destroyed, but your help is from me.

I will be your king. Where is there any other that he may save you and all your cities and your judges to whom you look? You said, Give me a king and princes. I gave you a king in my anger and took him away in my wrath.

You see, God says you're destroyed. You've been mauled over like the person who's a victim from the lion or the bear. And even when Israel felt the sting of God's chastening hand, they could still find help from the Lord if they'll only turn to him.

Oh, that's one of the great messages resounding here at the end of the book of Hosea. How even when we're under the chastening hand of God, if we will turn to him, he will bless. Your help is from me.

You know, I referred, maybe some of you are in a great time of blessing, a great time of prosperity and goodness in your life. Maybe some others, you're under the heavy hand of God. You feel it.

You feel that you're under the chastening hand of God. Well, listen, your help is from God. Look to him.

He says, I will be your king. I gave you a king in my anger and took him away in my wrath. God wanted to be recognized as the king of Israel, no matter who sat on the royal throne.

And when they rejected the Lord as king, he gave them the kind of kings that their hearts wanted, that they deserved. And he even took those kings away as a sign of further judgment. You see, at the end part of Hosea's ministry, kings were being taken away into exile.

And when the nation was finally overwhelmed by the Assyrians, even the puppet king was gone. You look at the sorrowful judgment here, verse 12. The iniquity of Ephraim is bound up.

His sin is stored up. The sorrows of a woman in childbirth shall come upon him. He is an unwise son, for he should not stay long where children are born.

I will ransom them from the power of the grave. I will redeem them from death. Oh, death, I will be your plagues.

Oh, grave, I will be your destruction. Pity is hidden from my eyes. Though he is fruitful among his brethren, an east wind shall come.

The wind of the Lord shall come up from the wilderness. Then his spring shall become dry. His fountain shall be dried up.

He shall plunder the treasury of every desirable prize. Samaria is held guilty, for she has rebelled against her God. They shall fall by the sword, their infants shall be dashed in pieces, and their women with child ripped open.

You see the terrible desolation coming upon a God rejecting Israel. And it's going to come upon them suddenly. It says the sorrows of a woman in childbirth shall come upon him.

Labor pains often come unexpectedly. And they're intense, and they increase with intensity. And they increase in their pain and their duration.

In the same way, judgment's going to come upon Israel. It's going to come suddenly, and then it's going to get worse and more intense. And the waves of judgment are going to get even more intense upon them.

And finally, look at God's promise. He can't give a promise of judgment without also giving a promise of gracious restoration if they will repent. Look at it there in verse 14.

I will ransom them from the power of the grave. I will redeem them from death. You see, the sin and the judgment upon Israel, they were both great.

But not greater than God's ability to redeem. Not greater than God's power to forgive. This is such sweet consolation for us.

You can't out-sin the grace of God. You can't do it. Some of you have tried.

Some of you have pushed it to the limit as far as you can. And maybe not in action, but you have in your heart. Wouldn't it be horrible if other people could see the wickedness that's in our hearts and in our minds sometimes? How dreadful that would be.

The wickedness that we contemplate or wish that we could do. See, my friends, God sees it all. But the bottom line of it is that you can't out-sin the grace of God.

You can reject it. You can push it away. But the problem isn't that your sin was too much for God to forgive.

Or your sin was too mighty for God to overcome. That's never the problem. It's that you would never come to Him in repentant faith.

Because anybody who comes to Him, they'll find His grace more than able to overcome their sin and the judgment upon them. God can even, as it says here in verse 14, He'll redeem from death so that death and the grave are mocked as defeated foes. Look at it there in verse 14.

Oh, death, I will be your plagues. Oh, grave, I will be your destruction. It's like God's trash-talking to the grave and to death.

You can't beat me, He says. I'll beat you. Grave, death, you've desolated human beings.

This isn't the land of the living. This is the land of the dead and the dying. Look at it.

Think about all the billions of people that have been buried in planet Earth. Think of all the graves that have been dug. Think of all the bones that have been parched upon the earth, the planet Earth.

God says, I'm mightier than it all. We say it sometimes that the only two things certain in this world, the only mighty thing is death and taxes. Well, I don't know what the Lord's going to do about the taxes thing, but I know that He's mightier than death.

You see this great, great work that He even mocks them. You may recognize this passage, don't you there, in verse 14, because Paul quoted the ancient Greek, that is the Septuagint translation of Hosea 13-14, and describing the Christians' triumph over death. And when we share in the resurrection of Jesus, and it says, Oh, death, where is your sting? Oh, Hades, where is your victory? Because we can't be overcome.

But you see, my friends, when we reject it, when we reject that forgiveness, when we see what happens, verse 16, then Samaria is held guilty, for she has rebelled against her God. God holds it out to you. The

promise of forgiveness, the promise of restoration, He goes, I can fix this sin problem.

I can fix this judgment problem. It's not a problem. But you have to come.

You have to turn. And if you don't, look at the terrible desolation described at the end of verse 16, where it says, They shall fall by the sword, their infants shall be dashed in pieces, and their women with child ripped open. What a horrible destruction that will come upon an unrepentant people.

In the final analysis, that's what really gets us into trouble before God, isn't it? It's our unrepentance. It's when God confronts us. It's when God convicts us and we don't listen to him.

In a sense, the real crime isn't the sin itself. It's the denial of the sin and the covering it up and the refusal to submit it to God. That's what ends up getting us into far more trouble than the sin itself.

Now we come to chapter 14. If you've been with us through this entire book of Hosea, which I've loved each one of these 14 chapters. It's a marvelous book.

But it's undeniable the tenor of judgment that's in this book, isn't it? I mean, it's a book heavy with judgment. And you might expect that the last chapter might have been even more terrible in judgment. And God's saying, that's it.

Let me describe it. Let me give you a vivid detail of what the agonies of hell are going to be like for you guys. He described the agony that they would undergo on this earth.

You almost think, okay, chapter 14. Now God's telling them the judgment that they're going to receive into all eternity. But you know, God is so rich in grace, so rich in mercy, that Hosea chapter 14 doesn't keep spinning out into judgment.

God puts the brakes on it and he says, let's turn back to the Lord and let's see how to turn back to the Lord and what God will do when we do. Let me read you a little word from Charles Spurgeon about Hosea chapter 14. He says, this is a wonderful chapter to be at the end of such a book.

I had never expected from such a prickly shrub to gather so fair a flower, so sweet a fruit. But so it is. Where sin abounded, grace does much more abound.

No chapter in the Bible can be more rich in mercy than this last of Hosea. And yet no chapter in the Bible might, in the natural order of things, have been more terrible in judgment. Where we look for the blackness of darkness, behold a noontide of light.

So here it is, the prophet's words to Israel, chapter 14 of Hosea, verse 1. O Israel, return to the Lord your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity. Take words with you and return to the Lord. Say to him, take away all iniquity.

Receive us graciously, for we will offer the sacrifices of our lips. Assyria shall not save us. We will not ride on horses, nor will we say any more to the work of our hands.

Because you are our gods, for in you the fatherless finds mercy. Isn't it beautiful? So he's saying, let me show you how to return to the Lord. And it begins, if you notice, in the beginning part of verse 1 with a wake-up call.

Hello, Israel, you've stumbled because of your iniquity. How hard it is for us to come to that place. I stumbled because somebody tripped me.

I stumbled because somebody else was bad to me. I stumbled because of this. I stumbled because of that.

And it's always they. It's always it. It's always they.

But you come back and say, no, I've stumbled because of my iniquity. Friends, the three classic enemies of the Christian faith are the world, the flesh, and the devil. Might I say that the devil, we could say, is the strongest of the three.

Yes, strong is the devil. Hardworking. We can admire nothing about the devil except his work ethic.

He really works hard. He would be the strongest of the three. The biggest of the three would be the world, wouldn't you think? The world system.

It's like a huge octopus with every tentacle reaching into almost every room in every building on planet Earth. There's some attitude, some spirit, some some reflection of the world's way of thinking of the world's value in almost every mind and in every room. So you might say the strongest is the devil.

The biggest is the world. The friends, I'll tell you right now, the most dangerous is the flesh. When you come right down to it, the world can't find much of a base operation in us if it doesn't find it in our flesh.

Friends, Satan can't do much against us if he doesn't find a foothold in our flesh. Our flesh, the person you see in the mirror, that's the person that you have to deal with. That's the person that you have to get serious about.

How easy it is for us to blame our problems, to throw them off on somebody or something else. But God says, no, look at it there. Verse one.

Oh, Israel, return to the Lord your God. That means you recognize you've left him, right? You don't return unless you recognize you've left. So you have to say, hey, I've left the Lord.

I have to return to him. And then what do you say? Look at it there. For you've stumbled because of your iniquity.

OK, that's me right there, you say, Lord. And what do you do next? And maybe I say, how do you do it next? Verse two. Take words with you and return to the Lord.

You see, in returning to the Lord, God's people must come on God's terms, not their own. It's not like we can negotiate with God. Say, well, Lord, I'll come back to you if you do this and this and this and this for me.

But if you don't, God, well, then I don't know if I'm going to turn back to you or not. That's not how we do it. We have to return to God on his terms.

And God says, when you return to me, take words with you. I want you to return to me, God says, not with a silent feeling in your heart, but with proper words of repentance and trust in me. Friends, the silent expression of our heart isn't enough.

When we come before the Lord, it is essential to take words with you. There is a place for sharing the inarticulate feelings of the heart with God. There's a place for that.

Sometimes you do it. Sometimes I do it in meditation and sometimes just just contemplation before the Lord. Our hearts were filled with just a sense of God's presence and communion with him.

That can't even be spoken. But friends, that's not really how to return to the Lord. You see, the essence of fellowship, the essence of prayer with God is intelligent.

And God made us able to communicate ideas and feelings with what? With words. Might I say that God could have made human beings capable of communicating with each other just by thoughts? You know, like they do in science fiction movies. I suppose it's within the realm of possibility, right? You could just beam a thought towards another person.

Of course, husband and wives try it all the time. You've received the stare across the room, didn't you? Of course, they weren't really beaming the thought. They were giving you the look and you knew exactly what it meant.

You see, friends, it isn't enough to come and just have a feeling towards God. It isn't enough to sit before the Lord and to feel love towards him. Instead, take words with you.

Tell God that you love him. It isn't enough to feel repentance before the Lord. Instead, take words with you and tell God you repent before him.

I have a sense that sometimes this is a masterwork of satanic strategy and suggestion to the human heart. When God is operating upon a heart and cultivating a sense and a spirit and a feeling of worship or a feeling of repentance or a feeling of whatever a proper reaction might be towards God in a situation that the individual just kind of stands back and says, well, I'll be content to feel this feeling. It doesn't go far enough.

It doesn't complete it. God says here in verse 2, take words with you. This is the exact same idea that Paul expressed in Romans chapter 10.

Let me read you verses 8, 9 and 10 of Romans chapter 10. He says, but what does it say? The word is near you in your mouth and in your heart. That is the word of faith with which we preach.

That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. Is the heart important? Yes, it is.

But God says you have to follow through from the heart to saying it with your mouth. That's what he says. Look at it there in verse 2. Take words with you and return to the Lord.

Now, what words do you take with you? I suppose you could take up the morning newspaper and read the sports section to God. You're taking words with you, aren't you? But that's not the words God wants you to take. He wants you to take the words that he gives you in his word.

And if ever you feel inarticulate in your worship of God, in your repentance, in your prayer, in your intercession, then friends, pray and speak the words of God back to him. When we communicate to God in the words and in the ideas of scripture, we find an articulate and an effective voice before God. And so

look at what Hosea says you should say before the Lord.

Lord, take away all iniquity. Receive us graciously. When we return to the Lord, taking words with us, we come humbly.

We recognize our sin. We recognize our total dependence on the grace of God. God, receive us graciously.

Don't receive me justly, God. Then I'll be wiped out. Receive me graciously.

And then if you notice, it says here at the end of verse 2, for we will offer the sacrifices of our lips. More literally, from the ancient Hebrew, you could translate that line, for we will offer the calves, as in young cows, the calves of our lips. You see, since bull calves were often brought for sacrifice, the translators felt justified in translating this, for we will offer the sacrifices of our lips.

However, the more literal rendering of this shows how plainly our words of praise and worship and confession and petition are intercession. It's a genuine sacrifice before God. You come and you give God the kind of sacrifice that pleases Him.

Do you remember those precious passages from the Old Testament where it speaks of this great sacrifice going up and being offered in God's way and with the right kind of heart before God? And it says that it was a sweet smelling aroma before God. Isn't that beautiful? You think of God just smelling the sacrifice from heaven. I bet some of those sacrifices smelled pretty good.

You know, God loves a barbecue. That smells good, God says, but obviously means much more than that. It's pleasing to Him.

Friends, you can please God in the exact same way by offering the bull calves of your lips. I didn't say the bull from your lips. I said the sacrifices of your lips.

The animals, so to speak, right there that you can come and lay down before His throne. That's what you do when you take words with you. And all of it reflects a definite attitude of heart.

Look at verse 3 there. The attitude that says Assyria shall not save us. Lord, we're not looking to world powers.

We're not looking to the world's ways. Our confidence is not in them. We will not ride on horses.

We're not trusting in technology or techniques or programs. Nor will we say, verse 3, any more to the work of our hands. You are our gods.

All idolatry. All trust in the world. All trust in technology.

It's all put aside. No, instead it's looking at God and looking at Him in His great character. You see at the end of verse 3 it says, For in you the fatherless finds mercy.

You know, when you return to the Lord and take words with you, you come declaring His greatness. You tell of what a great and merciful grace. God, you're so merciful.

You're so loving. We love you. We praise you, God.

Look at it here. Verse 7. I will heal their backsliding. I will love them freely.

For my anger has turned away from Him. I will be like the dew to Israel. He shall grow like the lily and lengthen His roots like Lebanon.

His branches shall spread. His beauty shall be like an olive tree and His fragrance like Lebanon. Those who dwell under His shadow shall return.

They shall be revived like grain and grow like a vine. Their scent shall be like the wine of Lebanon. Friends, look at the beautiful promise of verse 4. I will heal their backsliding.

Hosea was written to a backslidden people. Horribly backslidden. But God looks at him and says, You come, you repent, you come to me with words and I will heal your backsliding.

God saw that Israel was bent on backsliding against Him, but He promises to heal the backsliding of a repentant Israel. He doesn't do it because Israel deserves it, but look at it there in verse 4. I will heal their backsliding. I will love them freely.

In other words, it's a generous love. It's not love that's earned or deserved. No.

What a compassionate word it is. I will heal their backsliding. God could have been so much more harsh.

Deservedly so. He's holding back. Heal their backsliding.

He describes it more like a disease than a crime. Friends, our backsliding is a crime against God, isn't it? To neglect, to turn away, to lessen our devotion to the very one who created us and redeemed us. Why, we twice belong to Him.

He created us and He redeemed us with the precious blood of His Son. And for us to backslide from that glorious position that He's given us, for us to move back, it's a crime before God. But God doesn't say, I'll heal their crime of backsliding.

I'll forgive their law-breaking. He said, I'll heal it. It's as though He said, Oh, my poor people.

I remember that you're just like dust and you're liable to a thousand temptations because of your fallen nature. And you go astray all the time. But I'm not going to treat you as if you were a criminal.

I'm not going to treat you as if you were a rebel. I'm going to treat you like I'm your doctor and you're my patient. So come, let me heal your backsliding.

Don't you see how gracious the Lord's being to you? But the word is certain, too. It's not just compassionate. It's certain.

I will heal their backsliding. Not I might heal. Not I could heal.

Not I'll give it a try healing. But I will heal their backsliding. So you go to the doctor with the disease and it's a disease that you brought upon yourself.

Let's say your liver is rotting because you've drunken yourself into a stupor. Years of alcoholism and you're just a drunk and you come before the doctor and the doctor doesn't say, Well, you're nothing but a lousy drunk. He should say it, shouldn't he? You deserve it.

But instead he says, I will heal your disease. And then he says, No, I will heal it. You stand back and say, This is amazing.

What doctor can make this promise? Well, the great physician can. God doesn't say, I'll try to heal it or I might heal it. We can come to God for the healing of our backsliding and he will do it.

You know, God is too great of a physician to allow any patient to leave his office without being healed. Isn't it wonderful? I think that it must be very frustrating to an earthly physician, to an earthly nurse or caregiver, whatever, when people are not healed. Oh, it's so cheering, you know, when in the emergency room the life is brought back from the dead or in the dramatic surgery the surgeon does it or at the life-saving treatment or chemotherapy, whatever it is.

It's beautiful. It's wonderful. Everybody rejoices.

But any doctor sees a lot of people die, too. The people come into his office and he just shakes his head and says, I can't help you. I can't help you.

It never happens with God. You come to God with your backsliding. You come to the great physician and he won't look at your chart and shake his head and say, I'm sorry, there's nothing I can do for you.

You're too far gone. He'll never say that. He'll say, I will heal your backsliding.

Friends, the word is also personal. He says, I will heal their backsliding. He speaks to his people and he addresses them very personally.

You have to come to the great physician and you have to say, God, heal my backsliding. I want to be there and I will heal their backsliding. You see, to get the healing you have to count yourself among the backsliders.

Friends, let me lay it right here on the line. This is a question I ask not only you, I ask it to myself. Are you backsliding? The signs may not be so obvious to everybody else.

You know, when it's windy outside and the Santa Ana winds really whip up and you see a tree blown over, broken over, it's easy to think that it was just the wind. You say, well, of course, you know, the wind blew it over. But then you take a closer look and say, well, look, there's a lot of trees just like that one standing.

You say, why did that tree blow over? And then if you often take a closer look, sometimes you'll see that it was insects or some kind of disease that work in the tree a long time, making it weaker and weaker and decline in its strength and decline in its vitality. And it really wasn't the wind that did it. Oh, all the other trees around withstood the wind.

But really, it was the slow decline of strength as the insects and the disease nibbled away month after month. And then when the wind came, well, it fell over. Nobody says it was the wind.

It wasn't the wind. It was the backsliding that nobody could see. Are you backsliding? God looks to you tonight with such tenderness, with such confidence.

He smiles. He said, I will heal your backsliding. And this passage shows us what's restored when we return to the Lord.

Look at it here. It says, verse 5, I will be like dew to Israel. He shall grow like the lily and lengthen his roots like Lebanon.

His branches shall spread. His beauty shall be like an olive tree and his fragrance like Lebanon. Those who dwell under his shadow shall return.

They shall be revived like grain and grow like the vine. Their scent shall be like the wine of Lebanon. You see, when we return to the Lord, there's beautiful restoration.

Well, growth is restored. He shall grow. Don't you want to grow again in the Lord? He said, you'll grow.

Beauty is restored. He says, you'll grow like the lily. That's a beautiful flower.

God says, I'll restore that beauty to your life again. Strength is restored. He promises that he'll lengthen the roots like Lebanon.

That's referring to the great seeders of Lebanon that sent down huge, mighty roots into the ground. Value is restored. It says, his beauty shall be like an olive tree.

Well, olive trees were valuable trees full of oil and production and sustenance. Delight is restored. He says, his fragrance shall be like Lebanon.

Beautiful fragrance. The smell of pine trees all over the place. That beautiful, delightful fragrance.

God says, that'll be in your life again. And finally, he says, abundance will be restored. You'll be revived like grain.

You'll grow like the vine. Your scent shall be like the wine of Lebanon. It'll be abundance everywhere.

And best of all, if you look at it there, it says, his branches. His branches shall spread. And those who dwell under his shadow shall return.

When God restores us, we'll be a blessing to others, not just to ourselves. And so here it is. Verse 8, the new Israel.

Ephraim shall say, this is what the restored people of God say. Ephraim shall say, what have I to do anymore with idols? I have heard and observed them. I'm like a green cypress tree.

Your fruit is found in me. What have I to do anymore with idols? When God's people are healed from backsliding, they focus on the Lord himself, and not any kind of idol. Well, who has time for an idol? The Lord's restored me.

The Lord's healed my backsliding. And then he says, oh, if you see it there, the Lord tells us right there at the end of verse 8, your fruit is found in me. You know, at one time, Israel thought that they might find fruit in themselves, or in their idols, or among the nations.

And God says, nope, nope, and nope. Your fruit is found in me. They're healed of their backsliding now.

They only find their fruit in God. Are you still in that place where you're shaking the tree of the world for fruit? You're shaking the tree of self for fruit. You're shaking the tree of idols everywhere for fruit.

No, forget it. Your fruit is found in the Lord. Now, I think you can say that there's two ideas here equally true.

First, we find the fruit to nourish our soul in God. You want the fruit to nourish your life, your soul, you'll find it in God, and in God alone. But secondly, we find the fruit that we're to bear unto the world, we find it in God and in God alone.

What did Jesus say was the secret for bearing fruit before Him? Abiding. Abide in Him. You're locked into Him, you'll bear fruit because your fruit is found in me, the Lord says.

Finally, verse 9, the last verse of the book of Hosea. Who is wise? Let him understand these things. Who is prudent? Let him know them.

For the ways of the Lord are right, the righteous walk in them, the transgressors stumble in them. Well, who's wise? The wise man will see the message of God throughout the book of Hosea. He'll understand that in His mercy, God offers a wonderful opportunity for repentance and restoration, and it's dangerous and it's foolish to neglect that invitation.

But you see, at the end of it all, the ways of the Lord are right, and the righteous walk in them. Even in the midst of promised judgment, the wise and understanding man sees that the ways of the Lord are right, and that even the announcement of judgment is an invitation to repentance. So, God, thank you.

Thank you for announcing your judgment, God, because now I know to repent. Now I know to receive that invitation and to avoid your chastening hand. Friend, tonight there's such great hope for the backslidden, such great hope to be restored unto God.

I think what we're compelled to do is to take words with us and to receive the love of the Lord and to turn whatever's backslidden in our hearts towards him. He'll heal you. He'll receive you.

So, Father, that's exactly how we pray right now. Heal us of our backsliding. Restore us, O Lord.

We take words before you tonight and we ask that you give us a greater appreciation of your love, of your grace, of your mercy, of your wonderful forgiveness, and turn our hearts towards you, we pray, in Jesus' name. Count us among the wise, Lord. Amen.

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