

THE PROSTITUTE AND THE PROPHET

by Michele Hershberger

KEY VERSE:

Hosea 1:2a "When the Lord first spoke through Hosea, the Lord said to Hosea, "Go take for yourself a wife of whoredom...."

FAITH STORY:

Hosea, chapters 1 and 2

Hosea is called by the Lord to take a prostitute as his wife. This symbolizes God's relationship with the people of Israel. Even though they are unfaithful (like a prostitute to her husband), God still loves them and forgives them. Hosea, by his marriage and love for Gomer, is a living symbol of God's yearning for the people.

FAITH FOCUS:

God loves us unconditionally.

SESSION GOAL:

To help students understand the pain we inflict on God when we sin, and also understand the unconditional love God has for us.

MATERIALS NEEDED AND ADVANCE PREPARATION:

- 1 TV and movie "When a Man Loves a Woman," cued to the clip of Meg Ryan's character rejecting her husband.
- 2 Read the Insights from Scripture and prepare your mini-lecture
- 3 Paper and pens for each student

SESSION OUTLINE

FOCUS: (5 minutes)

Show the movie clip. If you don't use the movie clip, talk about movies the youth have seen where a wife breaks her husband's heart by rebuffing his love. (Or a husband breaks his wife's heart.)

CONNECT: (5–7 minutes)

Talk about the pain of the person who has been rejected. Divide the class into two parts—each half will defend one statement:

He/she should try to win their spouse back. Why?

He/she should not try to win their spouse back. Why not?

Transition statement: Let's take a look at a very interesting Bible story about the relationship between a prostitute and a prophet, and what it had to do with God.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE: (15–20 minutes)

1 Read the scripture, skipping 2:1-15 if you want to.

Do a mini-lecture for the class, explaining the following points:

- Prostitution has two meanings in this story. The Pagan religion the Israelites were tempted to practice was a religion where people performed prostitution to please a god called Baal. The second meaning of prostitution is that it symbolizes a spiritual unfaithfulness that breaks God's heart.
 - The names are very symbolic in this story. The word lo means "not." The word ruhamah means "pitied." The word ammi means "my people." So two of the children of Gomer and Hosea were named Not Pitied and Not My People—symbolic of God's frustration with the Israelites. But notice what happens in chapter 2, verse 1—the names are changed! They are now "My People" and "Pitied." This is symbolic of God's unconditional and unending love.
 - God uses a pun in verse 16. The word "Baal" can mean god, master, lord or husband. Ask class to read the verse and explain what it means when God says "You will call me 'my husband' but no longer will you call me 'My Baal'"
- 2** Divide class into two groups. One group goes through the passage and picks out all of the verses that show God's anger or rejection of the people because of their "prostitution." The other group picks out all of the verses that show God's mercy to the people. Report on their findings.
- 3** Ask students to stand up and move based on the following statement: If you think God hates evil and sin, go to the left side of the room, and if you think God loves sinners, go to the right side of the room. Discuss—was it hard to know where to go? Why? Can you understand God as a rejected husband? What's good about this understanding? What is potentially dangerous about this understanding? (We abuse God's mercy.)

APPLY: (5–10 minutes)

Discuss: Can a person have only one true love? Can a person have more than one "god"? As Christians we say that we only serve God, but many of us put our trust in other things, Name other things that we may use as security or gods.

RESPOND: (5–10 minutes)

Hand out paper and pens to students. Ask them to find a place in the room where they can be somewhat alone as they write a letter to God. The letter could be "marriage vows"—what they are willing to promise to God. Or they may wish to write God a letter to say they are sorry about breaking their vows with God.

INSIGHTS FROM THE SCRIPTURE:

The first three chapters of the book of Hosea are organized around the theme of marriage as a metaphor for God's relationship with the Israelites. Israel is portrayed as God's promiscuous wife, and this is symbolized by God asking the prophet Hosea to marry a prostitute.

Hosea's prophecy is based on a specific understanding of the Lord as God of Israel and of

Israel as the people of the Lord. Israel came to be the people of God through the history that began with the exodus, the wilderness experience, and finally ending up in the land of Canaan. The covenant the Lord made with Israel called them to honor him as the only God in their religious and political life. But in their anxious desire for crops and prosperity, Israel decided to worship the old Baals, and even to worship the Lord as if the Lord was a Baal. In their anxious search for kings and allies who would save them from the dangers threatening their national existence, Israel's leaders were driven into a habit of revolutions, assignations, and foreign alliances, all of which showed that they were no longer trusting God to take care of them. For both of these failures, Hosea used metaphors of whoredom and adultery and portrayed the Lord as the aggrieved husband of a faithless wife. He proclaimed a total punishment that would end the nation's career of promiscuity. But, amazingly, Hosea saw that behind God's wrath there was a love that would not let the people be wiped out, and that the judgment itself would bring about a new beginning, a new covenant, and a new gift of land in a second history of reconciliation and regeneration.