

# God's Passionate Pursuit

Bob Larson



The Bible frequently uses wedding images to describe God's relationship with His people. In the Old Testament, God pictured His covenant with Israel as a marriage. Though Israel turned to false gods, God kept pursuing them like a faithful husband.

The prophet Hosea lived this out through his marriage to unfaithful Gomer. This real-life drama displayed God's unconditional love for wayward Israel. In Hosea 2, God appeals to Israel to return to Him. He wants true intimacy, not just outward obedience. Let's explore this passage to see how God ardently woos us.

## God Reveals Himself Through Word Pictures

God uses everyday images to disclose His nature. For example, Jesus taught profound truths through simple parables about farming and fishing. God reveals Himself as a nurturing Father, a protecting Shepherd, and a life-giving Vine. Each metaphor highlights an important facet of how God cares for us.

In the Old Testament, God often portrayed His covenant with Israel as a marriage. He called Israel His exclusive bride and Himself their divine Husband. A faithful husband expects intimate love and loyalty from his wife. In the same way, God wanted Israel's wholehearted devotion.

When Israel worshiped idols, the prophets accused them of spiritual adultery. Just as unfaithfulness destroys a marriage, Israel's idolatry broke faith with her true Husband. This reveals how seriously God views our undivided loyalty and passion for Him.

In the New Testament, Jesus is the bridegroom and the church His pure bride. Their love relationship will culminate in the wedding feast when Jesus returns. The marital metaphor expresses the depth of union and intimacy God desires with us. It is much more than a literary device.

Marriage is the total union of two people in body, soul and spirit. This helps us grasp the profound oneness of knowing and loving God above all else. He wants us to have no other gods before Him, just as spouses pledge marital faithfulness.

So Scripture's marital imagery provides a window into God's heart of passionate, exclusive love for His people. As we see in Hosea, God yearns for the tender intimacy and fidelity found in the best marriages.

## **Hosea's Message and Ministry**

To fully understand Hosea 2, we need to know some background. Hosea served as a prophet in the northern kingdom of Israel around 750-725 BC. During this time, Israel was unfaithful to God by worshiping Canaanite idols.

Seeking prosperity and pleasure, the people fell into immorality at pagan temples. They mixed idol worship with insincere devotion to the Lord. Social injustice and corruption were rampant.

God called Hosea to embody His steadfast love for wayward Israel. Hosea married Gomer, knowing she would be unfaithful. Her adultery mirrored Israel's spiritual betrayal of God. Yet Hosea kept pursuing Gomer's heart, redeeming her from slavery.

Through Hosea's tragic marriage, God showed He would not abandon Israel, though they abandoned Him. After judgment, He would woo them tenderly back like a loving husband. God's covenant love proved greater than Israel's unfaithfulness.

## **God's Promise of Allure and Restoration**

After confronting their sin in chapter 1, God makes an amazing promise in Hosea 2:14: "Therefore I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the wilderness and speak tenderly to her."

Though Israel eagerly chased false gods, God vows to pursue them with tender romance. The Hebrew term for "allure" conveys heartfelt, seductive love. God would entice Israel's heart like a lover whispering words of life.

How would God allure them? He would lead Israel back into the wilderness, where they first loved Him. Just as Hosea sought out Gomer, God promised to romance Israel into renewed intimacy.

God often uses trials to draw us closer to Himself. Hardship strips away shallow pleasures and false dependencies. Through the wilderness we rediscover our soul's true love. God becomes our hearts' only desire.

For Israel, God would exile them from their land of idolatry. After losing everything, perhaps their hearts would return wholly to God. He would use their pain to rekindle their passion for Him.

In verse 15, God declares, "There I will give her back her vineyards and will make the Valley of Achor a door of hope." He would restore Israel's prosperity after they returned to Him. Vineyards represent the blessings of covenant faithfulness.

The Valley of Achor was where Achan was stoned for sin at Jericho. Achor means "trouble." But now this valley of judgment would become a gateway of hope. Their wilderness journey would lead back to the Promised Land.

Likewise, God often turns our trials into pathways of deeper intimacy with Him. Through the valley of shadow, we cling tighter to our faithful Shepherd. Our pain can give birth to greater trust in God's steadfast love.

### **God's Heart Cry for Relationship**

Hosea 2:16-17 expresses God's passionate desire for genuine relationship, not just external performance: "In that day you will call me 'my husband,' and no longer call me 'my master'... I will remove from her lips the names of the Baals."

God does not merely want Israel's obedience as Master. He wants their devoted love as Husband. A master asserts his will upon servants or slaves. But a husband cherishes his bride in tender intimacy.

So God pleads for His beloved to return to Him in faithful love. He wants Israel's heart, not just habitual religious motions. The joy of marriage far exceeds the drudgery of slavery.

To pave the way for renewed intimacy, God promises to cleanse Israel's lips from invoking pagan gods and idols. They could no longer serve two masters. God wants to be their consuming passion, eclipsing all rivals.

How will we answer God's heart cry? Mere outward conformity falls terribly short. God wants to restore the romance of first love, the excitement of newlywed devotion. He seeks the intimacy of a bride who adores her husband above all else.

He jealously longs for our full affection because He alone can satisfy our souls. Everything else proves an unworthy suitor. So God woos us out of complacency into wholehearted desire for Him. We must respond to the Bridegroom's plea with absolute loyalty and passion.

### **The Allure of the Wilderness**

What does it look like to answer God's call today? It begins by going back to our first Love. When we drifted from intimacy with God, what did our spiritual life look like then? Can we identify when or how we lost our original devotion?

In Revelation 2:4-5, Jesus rebukes the church at Ephesus for leaving their first love for Him. He calls them to remember, repent and return to their initial passion. They must retrace their steps back to the spiritual zeal and tender affection of their beginnings with Christ.

Like Israel, we often lose intimacy through gradually accumulating idols that displace God in our hearts. Over time, our devotion cools as the world's distractions and comforts captivate our attention.

Before we realize it, our ardent love has faded into lukewarm religion. We still follow Jesus, but without the fire that once consumed our hearts.

God uses trials and wilderness to reawaken our hearts, just as he promised to allure Israel. Through hardship our idols prove empty, driving us back to God alone as our soul's true desire. Pain becomes discipline to revive our first love.

When we feel distant from God, we should recall the joy of those initial days walking closely with Him. Remember the passion of loving Jesus above all else, before the world had left its imprint.

There in the wilderness, stripped of all distraction and dependency, our hearts were fully His. God was our magnificent obsession. We can rekindle that fire today by asking God to allure us yet again into deeper love.

The wilderness journey removes entanglements and purifies motivation. Alone with God, we can consecrate ourselves fully to Him once more. When Jesus woos us away from the crowds into solitude, He wants to restore the romance of devoted intimacy.

Our trials become blessings when they drive us back into the arms of God. His painful pruning produces greater fruitfulness as we cling to Him. Through the valley of affliction, we discover afresh that He alone is our "exceeding joy" as the Psalmist proclaimed.

God wants to restore our hearts until we truly find Him to be our supreme desire, delight and satisfaction. As Augustine prayed, "You have made us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find rest in You."

### **An Example of Wholehearted Response**

The Song of Songs models wholehearted response to divine romance. In this poetic book, King Solomon uses marital imagery to portray God's love for Israel. It provides a glimpse into the kind of intimate relationship God desires with us.

The Shulamite bride declares her unwavering devotion to her beloved, whom she calls the "fairest of ten thousand" and "altogether lovely." Even when separated for a time, she refuses to compromise her loyalty to him.

In Song of Songs 8:6-7 she proclaims: "Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm; for love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame. Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot sweep it away."

Here is the passionate fire and uncompromising covenant loyalty God wants from us. Half-hearted, lukewarm devotion grieves His Spirit. God wants a bride who is lovesick for Him, consumed with desire for the Bridegroom of her soul.

The Shulamite turns away all competing suitors to reserve her love completely for her beloved. She will accept no substitutes for the one her heart adores. When she declares "I am my beloved's and his desire is for me," she expresses the mutual joy and longing of intimate union.

This gives us a glimpse of the quality of relationship God created us for. His jealous love will not settle for anything less than our full reciprocation. Our lives were meant to climax in marital union with Christ, the true Gladness of our hearts.

### **Application to Our Lives**

Hosea's message confronts us with a challenging question: How shall we respond to our Bridegroom's plea today?

God refuses to be merely one priority among many. He wants to be our supreme desire, our magnificent obsession, the absolute Lord of our lives. Will we return wholehearted devotion to the One who paid such a high price for our hearts?

Many believers have never experienced the passion of first love for Christ. But it's never too late to rekindle spiritual fire. Pray for God to allure you into deeper intimacy. Surrender everything competing for your affection. Ask Him to take you back to your first Love.

For those who once burned with holy passion, consider when and why that fire dimmed. Repent of anything that drew you from fervent devotion to God. Return to your spiritual roots, to the joyful zeal and tender fellowship of your early walk with Jesus.

God wants romance, not just religion. He desires us not only to follow Him, but also to be lovesick for Him. Don't settle for tepid faith that is neither cold nor hot. Embrace the heart cry of the divine Bridegroom by offering your heart completely.

The wilderness awaits all who leave comfortable conformity for radical devotion. But in that solitary place of sacrifice we discover the treasure of Christ's matchless love. Our trial becomes the door to joyful intimacy and renewed passion.

What is keeping you from extravagant love for God today? Lay it down and don't look back. Run into the embrace of the true Lover of your soul. He waits with open arms to welcome you home. No other lover can even compare to the Beloved who sought you first.

Turn from all suitors who have wooed your heart from the Bridegroom. Fix your eyes solely on Jesus, allowing no distraction or diversion. The irreplaceable prize of knowing Christ eclipses every lesser desire.

Jesus paid the ultimate price to present you as His pure and spotless bride. He gave His very life to cleanse your lips and betroth you forever. How can you give anything less than your whole heart to Him?

Cast aside the shabby garments of spiritual complacency. Adorn yourself in worship and praise, making your life a love song to the Altogether Lovely One. Say Yes to the dance of intimacy. Take the hand of the One who is waiting to lead you into joy everlasting.

Your life will never know complete fulfillment until you experience passionate, wholehearted relationship with your Creator. Only in Him will your restless soul find its perfect resting place. Let Jesus satisfy your deepest longings as you walk in sweet communion with the Bridegroom of Heaven.

The divine romance awaits. Lift your eyes to the One who calls your name. Flee into the arms of Love and find your heart's eternal home.

I close with this: lyrics from a Stephen Curtis Chapman song titled, "Magnificent Obsession."

You are everything I want.  
You are everything I need.  
I want this to be my one consuming passion.  
Everything my heart desires.  
Lord, I want it all to be for You.  
Jesus, be my magnificent obsession.

Songwriter: Steven Curtis Chapman

Magnificent Obsession lyrics © BMG Rights Management, Capitol Christian Music Group, Capitol CMG Publishing

## **Reflection Questions**

1. Do I view my relationship with God merely as Master and servant, or intimate Bridegroom and bride? What would deepen my love and devotion to God?
2. When have I felt most spiritually passionate and close to God? What caused my devotion to cool over time?

3. How has God used trials and wilderness seasons to restore my passion for Him? What "lovers" compete for my heart's affection?
  
4. What passions, pursuits or habits have displaced time alone with God in my life? What steps can I take to re-prioritize intimacy with Him?
  
5. How can I tangibly express extravagant, wholehearted love in response to my Bridegroom's pursuit? What is holding me back from complete surrender?