

Observations from Hosea 11 on Parent-to-Child Relationships

The book of Hosea was written by a man who recognized in his own grief over a relationship gone bad, a metaphor for God's grief when we turn our backs on Him and ignore His standards and His love for us. The majority of the book speaks of God's love and care for His people in comparison to that of a loving spouse in a bad marriage, but late in the book, for a brief time, the metaphor shifts to parent and child. It is that latter section (chapter 11, and following) that may speak to rebellious children, in its call for a return to God's standards of conduct and living, and to parents, in its description of how God works with His rebellious children. In the comments that follow are points that parents might ponder and, if it seems appropriate, share with their children.

11:1 "When Israel was a child, I loved him as a son, and I called my son out of Egypt. **2** But the more I called to him, the more he rebelled, offering sacrifices to the images of Baal and burning incense to idols.

Parents love their children from the time of their birth. But sometimes in spite of parental love, a child will rebel and go his own way:

"We have loved you from your birth. We loved you even when, as a little child, you rebelled and went your own way."

11:3 It was I who taught Israel how to walk, leading him along by the hand. But he doesn't know or even care that it was I who took care of him. **4** I led Israel along with my ropes of kindness and love. I lifted the yoke from his neck, and I myself stooped to feed him.

Parents teach their children everything from walking to right conduct and right attitudes, but sometimes, in spite of parental teaching, a child will be so insensitive as not to recognize who is teaching and how much they love him:

"We loved you and taught you and fed you and led you when you were a boy, even when you were insensitive."

11:5 "But since my people refuse to return to me, they will go back to Egypt and will be forced to serve Assyria. **6** War will swirl through their cities; their enemies will crash through their gates and destroy them, trapping them in their own evil plans. **7** For my people are determined to desert me. They call me the Most High, but they don't truly honor me.

Parents set rules to guide their children. But sometimes, in spite of appropriate rules, a child will deliberately disobey.

"We continue to love you now, when as a teenager, you deliberately disobey us and refuse to follow the rules we set for your safety and your well-being"

11:8 "Oh, how can I give you up, Israel? How can I let you go? How can I destroy you like [*Sodom*] and [*Gomorrah*]? My heart is torn within me, and my compassion overflows. **9** No, I will not punish you as much as my burning anger tells me to. I will not completely destroy Israel, for I am God and not a mere mortal. I am the Holy One living among you, and I will not come to destroy.

Parents feel overwhelming grief when they see their children making destructive decisions and risking the ruin of their lives. There is anger, too, but love overcomes anger and only a broken heart remains.

"We love you so much we can't give you up, but we are terrified of where your actions and decisions are taking you. We feel anger, but more than anger, we feel overwhelming love and concern. Your behavior is breaking our hearts."

11:10 "For someday the people will follow the LORD. I will roar like a lion, and my people will return trembling from the west. **11** Like a flock of birds, they will come from Egypt. Flying like doves, they will return from Assyria. And I will bring them home again," says the LORD.

Parents trying to come to terms with all of this have one single hope--that some day, their children will finally hear them, and listen, and turn back to the right paths.

"We see the danger you face as if you were a helpless bird running into a snare. We can only hope that you hear us and listen to us and begin to let our counsel guide your life."

11:12 Israel surrounds me with lies and deceit, but Judah still walks with God and is faithful to the Holy One. **12:1** The people of Israel feed on the wind; they chase after the east wind all day long. They multiply lies and violence; they make alliances with Assyria and cut deals with the Egyptians.

Parents who see their children lying and cheating recognize that the children are chasing the wind. And children who chase the wind end up in the grip of the scorching, burning sandstorm from the desert, not the gentle, cooling breeze from the sea.

"We are so afraid for you. Your future is in peril. And you don't even seem to realize what is at risk."

12:2 Now the LORD is bringing a lawsuit against Judah. He is about to punish Jacob for all his deceitful ways. **3** Before Jacob was born, he struggled with his brother; when he became a man, he even fought with God. **4** Yes, he wrestled with the angel and won. He wept and pleaded for a blessing from him. There at Bethel he met God face to face, and God spoke to him-- **5** the LORD God Almighty, the LORD is his name! **6** So now, come back to your God! Act on the principles of love and justice, and always live in confident dependence on your God.

Parents sometimes recognize that their children are, like Jacob, tricksters, but unlike Jacob, their children have not wrestled with the spiritual implications of their tricks and as a result come back to God. Repentance--getting your heart right with God; Attitudes--getting in right relationship to God and to family, friends, and others; Motivation--learning to live your life in the light of God's love.

"We believe your soul is in peril, and we are praying for you to realize the importance of what we talk about at church."

12:7 But no, the people are like crafty merchants selling from dishonest scales-- they love to cheat. **8** Israel boasts, "I am rich, and I've gotten it all by myself! No one can say I got it by cheating! My record is spotless!" **9** [However, God says,] "I am the LORD your God, who rescued you from your slavery in Egypt. And I will make you live in tents again, as you do each year when you celebrate the Festival of Shelters. ... **14** But the people of Israel have bitterly provoked the LORD, so their Lord will now sentence them to death in payment for their sins.

Parents know their children are in serious trouble when they see the children start to think that they are exempt from the consequences of their actions and conduct.

"We believe we can see the eventual results of your continuing to behave in the way you are behaving now. You give every appearance of not seeing those results or of not believing that those consequences apply to you. You are laying a basis for great trouble for yourself, trouble that we cannot shield you from. We want you to be happy and productive and respected and fulfilled. Your present course makes that more and more unlikely. We cannot watch you every minute. We cannot make all of your decisions for you. You must change the way you make your decisions or you must prepare for the consequences of your decisions."

13:1 In the past when the tribe of Ephraim spoke, the people shook with fear because the other Israelite tribes looked up to them. But the people of Ephraim sinned by worshiping Baal and thus sealed their destruction. **2** Now they keep on sinning by making silver idols to worship--images shaped skillfully with human hands. "Sacrifice to these," they cry, "and kiss the calf idols!" **3** Therefore, they will disappear like the morning mist, like dew in the morning sun, like chaff blown by the wind, like smoke from a chimney.

Parents instinctively know a line has been crossed when their children lose their influence among other children.

"We watch with pain as opportunities for leadership come to you, only to go away and come no more. We know that there is much you are capable of doing, but your choices bring more and more hindrances and limits to any chance you have for living a productive and useful life. We pray for you every day, that you would recognize the destructive results of your poor choices and that you would turn your back on those behaviors that seem to be so important to you."

14:9 Let those who are wise understand these things. Let those who are discerning listen carefully. The paths of the LORD are true and right, and righteous people live by walking in them. But sinners stumble and fall along the way.

Parents recognize that in spite of their best efforts, their children may not heed the warnings and be saved.

"We will pray for you to be wise and to understand both the seriousness of the words we say and the deep love we have for you that makes us say them. We want almost more than life itself for you to be whole and in the center of God's plan for your life. We love you so very much."