

Dear [—],

February, 1994

I have thought a long time about your question concerning [—] and his current behavior. Last Sunday night at church, I listened as our pastor taught a lesson from the book of Hosea, and I found myself recognizing something of your circumstance in the words. I do not know what is [—]'s response to lessons from scripture. I do, however, know that you take him to church and thus that there is a possibility that he might hear. In that spirit, I am writing a brief summary of what was said, in terms of words you might say to him.

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 section (chapter 11) that may speak to [—], in its call for a return to God's standards of conduct and living, and to you, in its description of how God works with His rebellious children. In the comments that follow are points that you might ponder and, if it seems appropriate, share with [—]. The comments are set in terms of parent-child relationships rather than God-human beings, since this is its potential application for you.

11:1-2 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.”

11:3-4 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.”

11:5-7 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”

11:8-9 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.”

11:10-11 Parents trying to come to terms with all of this have this single hope--that 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.”

11:12-12:1 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.”

12:2-6 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 the right. 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.”

12:7-9;12:15 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.”

14:10 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.”

I know how concerned you are about [—], and I hope and pray that this can be of some small use to you.

We love you.

Bill