

Mercy Overrules

Hosea 11:1–11

You get into your car in the church parking lot and you're about to start the engine when you feel a jolt and hear a metallic crunch. Somebody has backed into you. You jump out, furious, ready to tell off the other driver. Then you see that it's the teenage daughter of a good friend. She gets out of her car but is too stricken and guilty to say much of anything. You know it must be her first car accident. Though you're still upset and your fender is still crumpled, mercy melts your heart. "It's okay, we'll work it out," you say, then give her a hug.

GROUP DISCUSSION. What is the difference between being merciful and being wishy-washy?

PERSONAL REFLECTION. When has someone showed you mercy? How has it made a difference in your life?

For centuries God had continued faithful to Israel, but they spurned his faithfulness and preferred other gods. *Read Hosea 11:1–11.*

1. What emotions do you sense in this passage?
2. What does this passage tell you about the heart of God?
3. In what ways does this passage characterize your own history with the Lord?
4. Centuries before Hosea, Israel followed God out of Egypt in the exodus (v. 1). How does God describe his care for the Israelites during that time (vv. 1–4)?

5. What had the nation of Israel forgotten (or neglected) both at that time and in the intervening years (vv. 2–3, 7)?

6. As the Lord stated repeatedly through Hosea, what would be the consequences of Israel's rebellion (vv. 5–7)?

7. Even in the midst of righteous anger, what pain and longing did God express (vv. 8–9)?

8. Think of occasions when you want to blow up at somebody, but then you change your mind. What makes you back off?

9. In verse 9 the Lord states that “I am God, and not man.” It seems elementary to state that God is not a man. What are the deeper implications of the statement?

10. What assurance do you draw from the fact that “I am God, and not man”?

11. How would God demonstrate his mercy to Israel (vv. 10–11)?

12. In what way do you need to offer someone your mercy (and through you, the mercy of God)?

Thank the Lord that he is merciful. Thank him specifically for his mercy toward you. Ask him to help you extend mercy to others.

Now or Later

The heart of God longs for you just as he longed for the Israelites in Hosea's time. Choose a symbol of the Lord's mercy: a small cross, a nail, a stone (for the stone rolled over the door of Christ's tomb) or some memento of an event in which you experienced God's mercy. Place the object where you will see it often. In times of discouragement or rebellion, let it remind you that God loves you and gave his Son to forgive your sins. If you are also burdened for a wandering family member or friend, let the object remind you that God's heart also longs after that person.