

*Hosea 2:13–15 (NIV)*

<sup>13</sup> I will punish her for the days  
she burned incense to the Baals;  
she decked herself with rings and jewelry,  
and went after her lovers,  
but me she forgot,”  
declares the Lord.

<sup>14</sup> “Therefore I am now going to allure her;  
I will lead her into the wilderness  
and speak tenderly to her.

<sup>15</sup> There I will give her back her vineyards,  
and will make the Valley of Achor a door of hope.  
There she will respond as in the days of her youth,  
as in the day she came up out of Egypt.

*Philippians 3:7–110 (NIV)*

<sup>7</sup> But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.  
<sup>8</sup> What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ <sup>9</sup> and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of **faith**. <sup>10</sup> I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, <sup>11</sup> and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

*Romans 1:16-17; 3:21-24 (Common English Bible)*

<sup>16</sup> I’m not ashamed of the gospel: it is God’s own power for salvation to all who have faith in God, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. <sup>17</sup> God’s righteousness is being revealed in the gospel, from faithfulness for faith, as it is written, The righteous person will live by faith.

<sup>21</sup> But now God’s righteousness has been revealed apart from the Law, which is confirmed by the Law and the Prophets. <sup>22</sup> God’s righteousness comes through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ for all who have faith in him. There’s no distinction. <sup>23</sup> All have sinned and fall short of God’s glory, <sup>24</sup> but all are treated as righteous freely by his grace because of a ransom that was paid by Christ Jesus.

*Travel to the heart of the Christian faith and you will find faithfulness:  
Jesus’ and our own.*

Choices. We could say that we are defined by the choices we make. Some are large and obviously important. But most are small and seemingly insignificant. But it is in the thousands of small choices we make that our character, our identity, is found. Do we strive to make choices that are Christlike or do we go our own way, doing whatever we think is right, day after day, year after year?

God created us in his image and gave us the responsibility to care for God's creation, to make good God-filled choices. But a life filled with poor choices, those that pay God no mind, is a life that dissipates and disperses our soul. The ground we stand on becomes ever weaker and more fragile, moving underneath us as we chase one desire after another with little heed for how we were created to live. As Arthur has said many times, we trade heaven for hell. We find we've surrendered the kingdom of God for gold-plated baubles that tarnish and crumble and are surprised that our souls have shriveled up.

This week, we turn to the seventh of the fruit of the Holy Spirit: faithfulness. Talking about faithfulness in the Bible is best grasped in the context of covenant.

### *The marriage covenant*

The union of one man and one woman, which we call marriage, is part of God's created order. It is more than a convenience or a means of managing finances. Marriage is God's gift to us. Marriage is God's grace at work. It is important to see that marriage is not part of God's Law brought to the Israelites by Moses. Marriage is a gift bound up with the very creation of humanity (see Genesis 2). It is a gift even to those who do not know God. So, we shouldn't be surprised that a commandment to be faithful to one's spouse should make the "top ten list" and is then taken up by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount.

There is no better way to grasp the importance that God places on faithfulness within the marriage covenant than to reflect on the story of the prophet Hosea. I've always found it to be one of the most shocking and moving stories in the Bible. How much does God value covenantal faithfulness? You're about to see for yourself.

### *Hosea's story*

The opening verses of Hosea certainly don't read like a love story. God tells Hosea this: "Go, marry a prostitute and have children of prostitution, for the people of the land commit great prostitution by deserting the LORD" (1:2). Can you imagine? Hosea is to go find an adulterous woman, marry her, and be a father to her children. Nothing about affection or courtship -- just go and do it.

Hosea is to enter into a marriage covenant with a woman who is not faithful to the covenant, committing adultery with other men. Similarly, God has entered into a covenant with the Israelites and they have been unfaithful to that covenant by committing adultery with foreign gods. The way the adultery makes Hosea feel is the way it makes God feel, but Hosea is to be faithful to Gomer as God is faithful to Israel. No wonder that God takes our faithfulness in our marriages so seriously.

### *Covenant betrayal and a surprising response*

If you've spent any time with the Old Testament, you know that the people's idolatry, the worshiping of foreign gods and idols, was a BIG problem during the long decline of Israel and Judah. In the biblical view, this idolatry, along with the people's abandonment of social justice, explains the decline of the Israelite kingdoms and their eventual destruction.

The story of God's response to this covenant betrayal is also told through the marriage of Hosea and Gomer. God's expected anger, judgment, and punishment await the adulterous Israel (2:1-13). Yet, that is not the end of the

story. We are also told that God will win Israel back by showering her with tender affection (2:14-23): “Therefore I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her . . . On that day, says the Lord, you will call me ‘My husband,’ and no longer will you call me ‘My Baal’<sup>1</sup>.”

The over-arching Old Testament story is that of covenant betrayal, judgment, and restoration. Nearly every OT prophet comes bearing a word from God about the coming destruction of unfaithful Israel, but also brings a word of hope and restoration. The people will have to bear the consequences of their betrayal, but God will one day restore them as his people, putting things right for them and for all of creation. It is this restoration (a.k.a. the coming of the kingdom of God) that the Jews are so anxiously awaiting in Jesus’ day. It is the proclamation of God’s kingdom, this restoration that occupied much of Jesus’ ministry and was accomplished in his death.

We can see that this is somewhat like a marriage between a man and woman that has been rocked by unfaithfulness. It is hard and hurtful, marked by anger and despair. Yet, the couple makes it through, emerging on the other side with a marriage stronger than before. Is this really possible? With God, all things are possible.

### *True love*

In *The Message*, Eugene Peterson writes, “Hosea is the prophet of love, but not love as we imagine or fantasize it. He was a parable of God’s love for his people lived out as God revealed and enacted it — a lived parable. It is an astonishing story: a prophet commanded to marry a common whore and have children with her. It is an even more astonishing message: God loves us in just this way—goes after us at our worst, keeps after us until he gets us, and makes lovers of men and women who know nothing of real love. Once we absorb this story and the words that flow from it, we will know God far more accurately. And we will be well on our way to being cured of all the sentimentalized and neurotic distortions of love that incapacitate us from dealing with the God who loves us and loving the neighbors who don’t love us.”

### *Adultery and betrayal*

Yep . . . a choice we make. Will we remain truly faithful to our spouses or not? We who are married said we would in the vows we took, but those vows are embodied in the countless choices we make every day. Adultery and betrayal lie at the end of a journey, not at the beginning.

Love is a choice. Faithfulness is a choice. It is about what we do. True love is self-giving rather than self-seeking. Faithfulness is about trusting and remaining worthy of that trust, forsaking betrayal and deception.

### *Relationships*

Relationships. We’ve all got ‘em. They come in many shapes and sizes. We all have parents, many of us have brothers and sisters. Most of us marry, and most of us have children. We all have friends and hopefully at least a few very close ones. We have extended families and large, vast networks of acquaintances.

We use the catch-all word “relationships” to describe them all. A few of our relationships are deep, rich, and life-long; indeed, sociologists tell us that we are

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<sup>1</sup>Baal was the chief god in the Canaanite pantheon and a main subject of the Israelites’ idol worship.

incapable of sustaining more than a handful of truly deep relationships. Others are thin and barely recognizable as relationships at all; I have 1000+ “friends” on Facebook, whatever that means.

The question for us is this: What do all the relationships in our lives have in common? We could talk about marriage or friendship or parenting, but think about all the relationships in your life. What could we say about all of them?

We ought not to be surprised that our lives are a complex web of relationships. After all, we are made in the image of God, all of us, believer and non-believer alike. And this God, the creator of the cosmos, is inherently relational, three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, comprising a loving community for all eternity.

It is our claim that God is Triune (three persons/one God) that makes concrete John’s claim that “God is love” (1 John 4:8). Love requires an object – you love someone, someone loves you. Jesus reveals to us that God is love in God’s very being, God’s essence. God simply *is* a loving community of three; God simply *is* love.

So, we are to love. Love God and love neighbor, Jesus said, are the two most important of all God’s teachings. But how is this love manifested – across all our relationships?

#### *Jesus’ own faithfulness*

I believe that “faithfulness” pretty well sums it up. The Bible is one long story of God’s love manifested in his faithfulness. God makes promises and keep those promises – that is the essence of faithfulness.

As I’ve written about often, the word “faith” in Greek is *pistis*, and the best synonym for it is “trust.” Thus, faithfulness is grounded in the trust of the other person. It is to trust that the other person will keep their promises, will live up to their end of the bargain, will be true to a covenant made.

God is all these things. God is “faithful and just” (1 John 1:9). God made promises to Abraham and to his descendants, and kept those promises in God’s son, Jesus.

And so we cannot be surprised that we restored to a right relationship with God (i.e. saved), not by virtue of our own faith but by Jesus’ faithfulness all the way to death . . . even death on a cross (see Philippians 2).

#### *The Faithfulness of Jesus Christ*

Christians often speak of their “faith in Jesus,” sometimes leaving the impression that their own trust in Jesus saved them.

But that can’t be right. We have been made right with God by his grace – so that no one can boast (Eph. 2:9). As Paul writes, Jesus became a curse, hung on a tree, so that we might be redeemed. It is Jesus who has saved us – by his faithfulness all the way to the horror of death, even death on a cross. He knew what lay ahead, anyone would have known. Others had claimed the mantle of Messiah and died for it.

Wasn’t there another way? Jesus had prayed in Gethsemane for just such a way, but there was none. If Jesus was going to be true to the vocation given him by God, if he was going to genuinely love God and neighbor without fail, then he

would collide with the powers of this world, with those invested in and committed to their way, rather than God's way. It was true then; it is true now.

The apostle Paul was tasked with trying to understand what Jesus' death on a cross really meant. What did it say about God and his work in this world? Why was Jesus born? For what purpose? Why did God humble himself in this way, taking on a full-blooded humanity and dying on a cross?

If your answer to these questions is "to save us," you are right so far as it goes. But God's rescue involves far more than just us. It is the keeping of promises that God made long before, such as those to Jeremiah.

Grasping that Jesus' birth, death, and resurrection demonstrate God's faithfulness to his promises is the key theme of Paul's letter to the Romans. Like Jeremiah, Jesus and Paul lived in a time of great turmoil, as many Jews resisted Roman rule. They awaited the day when God would finally keep his promises, when, as written the scroll of Jeremiah, "I [God] will raise up a righteous branch from David's line, who will do what is right and just in the land" (Jeremiah 33:15, CEB).

But the Jews had waited many centuries and it was natural for some to wonder if God's promises would forever go unfulfilled. The Jews knew that they weren't really keeping their end of the covenant God had made with them – they didn't really love God and neighbor every day and in every way. But still, where was God?

For Paul, the fact of Jesus' faithfulness, even to death on a cross, revealed that God had kept his promises. In a sense, Jesus was the "righteousness of God" in the flesh (see Romans 1:16-17).

Jesus was the way out of the covenant dilemma. Despite the unwillingness or inability of the Jews to live up to the covenant and to be the light to the world, God had provided the means of covenant-keeping. This means was Jesus Christ, the one Jew who did truly love God and love neighbor without fail. Jesus' own faithfulness to the covenant and to God all the way to the cross revealed that God is not only the covenant maker, but the covenant keeper. In Christ, God's covenant people had been restored to a right relationship with God. Hence, they had been saved. And who are these covenant people? Namely those who have faith in Jesus Christ, Paul writes.

To reiterate, God's righteousness (his covenant faithfulness) was revealed to the world through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ, for the rescuing of all who believe. This is the Good News. This is the message for the whole world that we are to bring them. Alleluia!

## **Scott Engle's Bible Classes**

### **Monday Afternoon Class**

Current study: *Ruth*

Meeting on-line at 3pm Monday on Scott's Facebook page. Search for "Scott Engle - St. Andrew UMC."

### **Tuesday Lunchtime Class**

Current study: *Acts*

Meeting at 12:00 noon Tuesday in person in Piro Hall and on-line on Scott's Facebook ministry page. Search for "Scott Engle - St. Andrew UMC".

*About the weekday classes:*

Join us whenever you can. Each week's lesson stands on its own. This is very "drop-in." Both classes are recorded and are available each week in my podcast at [scottengle.podbean.com](http://scottengle.podbean.com). They are also available on Apple podcasts and elsewhere. Search by "Scott Engle Bible Studies".

### **Scott's Sunday Class**

This week: Week 2 -- *The Atheist Delusion: Science, the Bible, and the Truth in Which We Live.*

Meeting on Sunday at 11:00 in Smith Worship Center and on Scott's Facebook page. Search for "Scott Engle - St. Andrew UMC."

**Videos of all three classes are posted on Scott's YouTube channel.** Search for "Scott Engle." These videos are posted as soon as possible after class.