BIBLE STUDY HELPS

TITLE: Hollow Promises
TEXT: Hosea 6:1–7:2

TARGET: SESSION IN A SENTENCE

God despises false repentance, delighting instead in undivided loyalty.

LOOK UP: FOCUSING THE GROUP

Display (In Advance): Write the word "LOYAL" vertically down the side of a markerboard.

Notice the word LOYAL on the markerboard. This is the focus of today's session as we continue to examine Hosea's message to the people of God. The Oxford Dictionary defines Loyal as, "giving or showing firm and constant support or allegiance to a person or institution."

Guide: Option One

- How would you describe what being loyal looks like?
- Do you believe people value loyalty today? Why or why not?
- What are some examples where being loyal is vital?
- How do you feel when someone isn't loyal to you?

Ask: Option Two (Write Responses on the markerboard). What synonyms would describe someone who is loyal?

Here are some synonyms that describe the act of being loyal: trustworthy, true, constant, steady, resolute, firm, devoted, steadfast, unwavering. All humans desire some level of loyalty from others. Yet our sin-broken lives constantly pull us away from the God-given desire to be loyal. We act with self-centered motives that sacrifice loyalty for fulfilling personal desires and agendas.

Hosea 4-5 presents God's case against Israel. The charges include cursing, lying, stealing, adultery, and consulting idols. These serious charges paint a picture of empty religion and unrepentant hearts. The Israelites' disloyalty to God and to each other was evident in their actions.

LOOK IN: UPACKING THE BIBLICAL TEXT

God's Loyalty is Constant – Hosea 6:1-3

[1] Come, let's return to the Lord. For he has torn us, and he will heal us; he has wounded us, and he will bind up our wounds. [2] He will revive us after two days, and on the third day he will raise us up so we can live in his presence. [3] Let's strive to know the Lord. His appearance is as sure as the dawn. He will come to us like the rain, like the spring showers that water the land.

Hosea called on the people to turn to God. It's evident by the words in this passage that God never stopped being loyal. He loyally stands ready and willing to renew and restore if His people will just *return to the Lord.*

Identify: In what ways did Hosea say God would demonstrate His loyalty to His covenant people if they would repent?

Contingent on Israel's repentance, the Lord promised to reverse the punishments He had exacted on Israel. The first promise was that God would heal what He had torn, an allusion to God's promise to tear them to pieces like a lion (5:14). Second, God promised to bind up the wounds of those He had wounded.

Notice the words of Hosea 6:2. Consider how God uses this small passage to point us to God's constant loyalty and love. In Matthew 16:21 we are reminded that, "*Jesus began to point out to his disciples that it was necessary for him to go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders, chief priests, and scribes, be killed, and be raised the third day.*"

Then, in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17, God's loyalty is described in this manner toward those who repent and turn to Him: "*[13] We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, concerning those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve like the rest, who have no hope. [14] For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, in the same way, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. [15] For we say this to you by a word from the Lord: We who are still alive at the Lord's coming will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. [16] For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the archangel's voice, and*

with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. [17] Then we who are still alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord."

God's loyalty is demonstrated in Hosea 4:2 as He promises to restore His people to life. While describing this restoration, Hosea provided a partial glimpse of how God would restore Israel and bring about salvation to the ends of the earth through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Direct: Everyone silently read Hosea 6:3 again.
- What does it mean to strive?
- Why does this passage say we should strive to know the Lord?
- If you knew God's appearance was "as sure as the dawn" how would that change the way you lived for God?

Respond: How do the following passages describe what it means to strive if we profess to be Christians? – Philippians 3:12-21; Hebrews 12:1-2.

Even though the people of God constantly demonstrated a lack of loyalty, God remained loyal to them and stood ready to forgive. If the people of Israel would return to the Lord and strive to know Him, then they could depend on Him to return and save them just as sure as the dawn of a new day. It would be a new day for Israel. The Lord's return would be as refreshing and invigorating as rain on barren land.

Ask: Why do so many find it so difficult to "strive" to remain loyal to Christ?

God is loyal to us, but we can't seem to remain loyal to Him. This breaks God's heart as evidenced in the next passage.

Man's Disloyalty Breaks God's Heart – Hosea 6:4-6

[4] What am I going to do with you, Ephraim? What am I going to do with you, Judah? Your love is like the morning mist and like the early dew that vanishes. [5] This is why I have used the prophets to cut them down; I have killed them with the words from my mouth. My judgment strikes like lightning. [6] For I desire faithful love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.

Respond: What does God's question, "What am I going to do with you," reveal about how God felt regarding His people's lack of loyalty? How does God describe the love that His people demonstrated?

Like a frustrated father who must discipline his children but would rather not do so, God expressed His frustration with both Ephraim and Judah. No matter what He did to give them opportunities to turn back to Him, they refused. He had blessed them with fruitfulness, but they continued in their unfaithfulness (4:10). He gave them words of hope and also threatened them, but they turned a deaf ear to both. Because of His love for them, God would rather not have to punish them.

God's love for His people had been unwavering, but their devotion to Him was fickle. The only thing reliable about Ephraim and Judah was their unreliableness. Their heartfelt, loving, loyalty to God was as fleeting as a morning mist or dew that quickly vanished. How could the Lord deal with them as His covenant people when their loyalty to Him so easily disappeared?

Discuss: Notice the type of love and loyalty God cherished in Hosea 6:6. Why is loyalty valued by God more than religious rituals and practices?

Consider your own walk with the Lord. Going to church, singing worship songs, and giving an offering are good things when done as expressions of love and devotion to the Lord. But doing these things is an affront to God when they are done for selfish, deceitful reasons, when it's about what we can get from God rather than our expressions of love for Him.

Next Hosea decried the sins of Israel and Judah and pointed to a coming judgment.

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Man Can't Hide His Disloyalty (Sin) from God – Hosea 6:7–7:2

7 But they, like Adam, have violated the covenant; there they have betrayed me. 8 Gilead is a city of evildoers, tracked with bloody footprints. 9 Like raiders who wait in ambush for someone, a band of priests murders on the road to Shechem. They commit atrocities. 10 I have seen something horrible in the house of Israel: Ephraim's promiscuity is there; Israel is defiled. 11a A harvest is also appointed for you, Judah. 11b When I restore the fortunes of my people, 7:1 when I heal Israel, the iniquity of Ephraim and the crimes of Samaria will be exposed. For they practice fraud; a thief breaks in; a raiding party pillages outside. 2 But they never consider that I remember all their evil. Now their actions are all around them; they are right in front of my face.

Hosea first gives specific examples of Israel's apostasy by giving examples of sins committed by the nation's forefathers going all the way back to the sins of Adam. Then he zooms in on the nation's present condition. Israel was morally impure and ritually unclean. In their folly, the people of Israel failed to consider that God was watching them—their sin was not hidden from God.

Discuss: How does Hosea 7:2 help us understand better why disloyalty breaks God's heart? Imagine always having the disloyalty and sin of one you loved constantly in front of your face? How would you feel? How would you respond?

Hosea 7:2 reveals something that everyone should remember about God regarding our disloyalty and sin, "*they never consider that I remember all their evil. Now their actions are all around them; they are right in front of my face."* Imagine the constant heartbreak God felt toward His people. Imagine the heartbreak He feels when we aren't loyally and faithfully living and loving Him and others. Yet, while Hosea highlighted the sins of the people and the priests, and a coming judgment, he also reminded them of God's constant readiness to forgive and restore because of His loyalty and love.

LOOK OUT: LIVING OUT THE TARGET

We expect our friends to be loyal. We want friends who keep their word. We want them to be dependable, respectful, and gracious. Our friends should expect the same from us. Why would it be different when it comes to God? God remains loyal to His people and expects them to remain loyal to Him in return.

Respond: Think back on someone who was disloyal to you. How did you feel toward that person? How did you respond to them? Can you blame God for feeling as He did toward His chosen people? Can you blame Him for feeling the way He does toward us when we aren't loyal in our relationship to Him? What needs to change in your life so that your expression of loyalty is genuine and consistent?

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