

**Authentic Living – Major Themes from the Minor Prophets
Slow Fade (Hosea 7-14)**



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Bette Davis once said, *“If you have never been hated by your child you have never been a parent.”* After over 20 years of parenting I believe I understand where she was coming from. I realize as a parent, I have a responsibility...actually quite a few, but one in particular that I feel obligated to fulfill; I feel it is my job to irritate my children! Yes you heard me correctly...in fact if you have never irritated your children at some point in your parental lives; I question whether you took your role as a parent very seriously!

Allow me to give you an example of where I am going with this. I drive my kids absolutely crazy when I take a line of thought, especially if that thought originated with one of them, and move it from their lives at that precise moment that it was expressed, towards the ultimate end of that line of thinking...or as they call it taking it to the “extreme”.

Here’s an example. My son, while watching television with me, hears me react with a little emotion to a scene we have just watched together. I have just responded to what I feel is wrong...a lie, a non-truth, a belief or practice that goes counter to what I believe God intended for this World of ours. My son in hearing my frustration will respond something like this *“Hey Dad it’s their lives, why can’t they do what they want?”*

And suddenly there it is...parental job description, page 42, paragraph 4, line 3, two words ...*“irritate child”*. You see I will take that thought and fast forward through its natural progression. So I may respond, *“Oh, oh, I see...so I guess when it comes to that thief who just stole all my tools from my garage, who am I to call them wrong, or that pedophile whose life choices are different than ours, or for that matter that serial killer, or power hungry ruler of a nation who just decided that one particular ethnic group no longer deserves to be considered human...well who are you or I son, to say otherwise right...after all it is their lives...why can’t they do what they want!”*

Kick in irritated child! *“Why do you always take it to the extreme, I wasn’t talking about those people and their decisions?”* And I simply respond, *“Really?”* Now obviously, my son is not taking in the scope of my anger at that moment, the extent in which I am viewing the overall context of such thinking or it’s far reaching implications, he is simply observing my anger with that one episode or that one individual and their point of view, not the bigger picture...but alas here lies the problem.

Robert Heinlein once said, *“In the absence of clearly-defined goals, we become strangely loyal to performing daily trivia until ultimately we become enslaved by it.”* I look around our culture today and I see enslavement! I see a “way of thinking” that has become so natural, so ordinary and yet so opposite to Biblical standards, and the worst part is...many times were oblivious to just how far off the mark we have strayed or its impact and implications on our culture, on our communities, our families, our own lives and even on the life of the church.

If someone was to tell you that there was a 70% chance your kids would leave church by the time their 18, or 95% by the age of 25, you would call them crazy. Yet these are the numbers being thrown around, whether they are exactly right or not, I'm not sure, but the very fact we are even talking this high is a pretty poor indicator itself! They say in North America only 1% of our church growth is coming from people not born into it! Something is amiss.

One author's response to these numbers was *"Interestingly, the stumbling block for the Church is not its theology but the failure to apply what it believes in compelling ways. The downfall of the Church has not been the content of its message but its failure to practice those truths."* In other words...*"In the absence of clearly defined goals..."* (George Barna)

Karol and I were out with friends Friday night, and my friend was sharing how a co-worker of his who obviously had a pretty difficult and rebellious life, even attempted suicide a few times, was now married and was trying to get his life on track! His first thought was to try church. Not being religious he was trying to determine which one...his final choice...the Catholic Church. Now my friends having grown up Catholic shared some of their concerns with what they now viewed as a very liturgical and regimented format with this couple, especially after their experience of being a part of Lifespring...the church I had pastored.

Listen up to why this man chose the Catholic Church. Basically he responded to my friend, *"That's exactly what I need though, regiment, order, boundaries...the way I struggle with life...I need a place that will be tough on me...all those other churches are too flexible with everything and everyone."* I'm thinking that's not the greatest compliment!

What was God's goal for our lives, Jesus put it best when in John 15:16 he states, *"I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last."* Yet Church doors are shutting at an alarming rate, many simply struggling to survive, or at best maintain, and all this during a time when churches are trying everything they can to create a viable option for Sunday morning versus sleeping in. We have traditional or contemporary; we offer accessibility, daycare, great music and worship, small groups, creativity, theater, visual aids, many going digital...ministry groups for any age and anything really you're walking through in life...and yet the numbers don't lie.

Maybe as one writer put it, *"Were living in a culture that is so infatuated with change that we have forgotten that the church is about transformation, not mere change?"*

So let me give you a definition of a word that I believe is very fitting for this morning and where I will be going. The word is "subtle" and it is defined as, *"So slight as to be difficult to detect or describe; elusive. Not immediately obvious or comprehensible, difficult to detect or analyze..."*

I believe there was a reason Biblical scholars in putting together the American Standard Revised Version of the Scriptures wrote for Genesis 3:1, *"Now the serpent was more*

subtle than any beast of the field.” Subtle was the word they chose for ‘arum’ while the NIV chose ‘crafty’, both indicating this behavior that was difficult to detect, elusive, and very deceptive!

Last week we began a series from the Minor Prophets with Hosea being asked by God to live out some pretty “extreme” measures, in the hopes of painting a very vivid picture of what God was proposing to the folks of that day. What’s that old adage? *“Drastic times call for desperate measures.”* Here’s a thought I want you to mull around with this week, *“How desperate do you believe God is?”* Now I know that the word “desperate” carries connotations of lost hope, or a last resort, but I like the one definition that reads *“extremely intense: like as in felt a desperate urge to tell the truth.”*

This was Hosea as he spoke with desperation in 6:1/3 Hosea writes, *“Come, let us return to the Lord...let us acknowledge the Lord.”* Later in Hosea 9:7 he might as well have been holding a large sign reading *“The End is Near!”* for we read *“The days of punishment are coming, the days of reckoning are at hand.”* You can hear desperation in His words.

The whole episode Pastor Dave described of Hosea being asked to marry a prostitute and later to take her back despite her unfaithfulness was a pretty extreme and intense description of God’s love for us, and the truth He was trying to convey, the extent He would go despite people’s rebellion or unfaithfulness.

But alas the fruit was lacking, because throughout Hosea we are given descriptions that indicate a rather callous and non-committed response...

In other words, it was a tough crowd!

4:1 *“There is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgement of God.”*

4:6 *“...you have ignored the law of your God.”*

5:4 *“Their deeds do not permit them to return to their God.”*

7:2 *“Their sins engulf them...”*

7:11 *“...easily deceived...”*

7:14 *“They do not cry out to me from their hearts.”*

8:1 *“...because the people have broken my covenant and rebelled against my law...”*

8:3 *“...rejected what is good...”*

10:13 *“Because you have depended on your own strength...”*

11:2 *“But the more I called the further they went from me.”*

Any of this sounds familiar? Let me ask you this...do you believe God is any less desperate these days, any less intense? Has the soul of a human being lost any of its value to our Father in heaven? Do you think God still calls out for us today to return to Him? Does He need too? Well recent surveys tell us that fewer than 10% of American Christians actually possess a biblical worldview, in other words a perceptual filter through which they see life and its opportunities.

Thus, without a biblical filter many Christians are making important decisions on the basis of instinct, emotion, assumptions, and cultural influences, past experiences,

external pressures, or chance. The result is a faith that is often in name only, a much diluted Christianity, and a poor representation of Biblical Christianity. A weak spirituality where we want experience more than knowledge, we prefer choices to absolutes, we embrace preferences over truth, comfort over growth, and with regards to faith... well that has to come on our terms or we reject it.

Let's be honest...the barrage of thinking that is counter to God's Word that is found in our media and culture and world these days is so prevalent and influential you would have to be a hermit in the back woods to miss it. The envelope is being pushed at every conceivable corner, and the sad part is "we expect it", we simply deem it as the natural progression of our advanced age! We forget that with every step we take, it's a step away from where we used to be, so my question becomes...where are we headed, and what are we leaving behind?

Friends I wouldn't be so extreme if it wasn't for the fact I see it in my own life and the life of my family, I see it in my friends, I hear it in our conversations, I see it lived out on the jobsite, and I do see it on the hallowed grounds of the church, and I'm thinking so do you!

George Barna writes, "To the average American truth is relative to one's values and circumstances. Only one out every four adults – and even fewer teenagers – believe that there is such a thing as absolute moral truth. The Bible is relegated to nothing more than a book of riveting stories and helpful suggestions. Human reason and emotion become the paramount determinants of all that is desirable and appropriate."

It is subtle people...if we choose to live without an objective standard of right and wrong, than laws and regulations simply become recommendations rather than mandates. Remember Hosea 8:1 "...because the people have broken my covenant and rebelled against my law..." Suddenly people don't see "deception" or "evil" or "Satan" or "wrong", they only see differing vantage points, and woe to those who make a claim to any authority these days.

Without absolute moral truth, there can be no right and wrong, and without right and wrong there is no sin. Without sin there can be no such thing as judgment or condemnation. If there is no condemnation, there is no need for a Savior, as the folks in Hosea's day experienced...Hosea 7:14 *"They do not cry out to me from their hearts."* Why should they, they actually believed they weren't doing anything wrong, how about you?

Has the subtlety of our enemy been any less effective today as it was in Hosea's day? Faith used to revolve around God and His Word, His ordinances and His principles, but so often faith today revolves around us? And if faith interferes with my choices, my enjoyment of life, my goals...well than, than that answers that! Have we lost a sense of awe, fear, or even trembling related to God? I have to ask myself, do I think and behave differently from those who have no claims to God?

The Apostle Paul said, *“Do not deceive yourselves...For the wisdom of the world is foolishness in God’s sight. As it is written; ‘He catches the wise in their craftiness.’”* (1 Corinthians 3:18-19)

How does one deceive themselves? Do we wake up one morning and boldly state, *“Today I shall deceive myself”* or do you think more likely it’s a product of multiple decisions or non decisions made or not made over an extended period of time? I’m a flooring guy; I have to give you at least one flooring analogy. When we install vinyl composite tiles as you see in all the Wall marts, or Superstores, those square foot tiles you walk all over...there is a method to making sure you stay straight.

If I was to install a room 12x12, I could get away with simply beginning at the doorway and simply start lining up the four corners of each of the tiles and have the room finished with minimal inaccuracy. Now in a store of over 40,000 sq ft, dynamics change. If I start at one end and simply begin tiling, without following a pre-drawn centre line, even because I am right handed, that slighter stronger pull on that arm alone is enough to begin a slight subtle shift to the right. In a matter of simply 30 feet I could be out inches already, and by the time I get to the end of the store...yards! I call it “drifting”, and when you hit the outside walls, you soon discover just how far you drifted, with the angled cuts required! Friends I’m afraid many of us are drifting and some of us are unaware, that is until we hit a wall in life!

It’s no different than today’s jets who use sophisticated computer systems to constantly reorient a plane as it travels. On one trip thousands of course corrections are made, and without them even a 1% deviation from an original flight plan could land a airplane in a different country than you were headed. Do you ever feel like your living in a different country than from when you started out in life, maybe it has to do with missing out on the course corrections along the way?

Take the story found in Scriptures about Uzziah, who was just sixteen when he became king of Judah, during Hosea’s lifetime I might add. We are told he was very successful in everything he did, and we learn very quickly the reason for his success: *“He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, just as his father Amaziah had done. He sought God during the days of Zechariah, who instructed him in the fear of God. As long as he sought the LORD, God gave him success”* (2 Chron. 26:4-5).

Uzziah wanted to know God, and he put himself under the instruction of a prophet who taught him God’s Word and God’s ways, and God responded in a positive manner, in fact we read, *“His fame spread far and wide, for he was greatly helped until he became powerful”* (2 Chron. 26:15).

Oh, did you catch that? Read that verse again, *“His fame spread far and wide, for he was greatly helped (pause) until he became powerful.”* Can you imagine your kid suddenly becoming that powerful at such a young age? I guess Justin Bieber might begin to understand what happens when fame and fortune suddenly is your life! People treat you differently, you become an idol to many, and people go out of the way just to see you, to be with you, why shoot they may even cry just because you’re around!

I don't know about you, but I've never had anyone scream or cry just because I was present...or maybe I have, but they were probably crying because they didn't want me there! Do you think Justin's thinking differently these days' verses a few years ago before he was discovered? Do you think he needs a few course corrections along the journey to stay grounded?

God gave this 16 year old godly king the power to win his battles. Blessed him in so many areas, but alas little by little, something happened to Uzziah, so we continue to read in 2 Chronicles, and again we are told... *'After Uzziah became powerful, his pride led to his downfall'* (2 Chron. 26:16)

Ahh...the price of success! You see I'm thinking in life, and part of the problem with North America's culture, is that with success, more so than even with difficulties, we need "course corrections". Because it becomes real easy for us to fall into the trap of believing we accomplished everything on our own, that like King Uzziah, our success is due to our own abilities, talents, and powers, and soon were buying into what everyone is telling us...we are that great, and as King Uzziah discovered...this even impacts our faith journey, and perspective of God.

You see with Uzziah He decided it wasn't enough simply to be king; He would take the religious leadership into his own hands as well. So he enters the Temple and decides to take over the role of the Priest...not a good idea. The Scriptures simply describe this act as *"Uzziah . . . was unfaithful to the LORD his God..."* (2 Chron. 26:16b-18).

And when rebuked does he repent? No he just becomes angry, I can just hear it, the same tone and words we often hear from famous people today who believe they have achieved enough fame and power to be above the normal rules of society... *"Do you not know who I am?"* Shoot why credit only the famous people, as parents have you not ever found yourself in a place where you let your position get in the way of your responsibility?

As Robert Brau puts it, *"The clash between child and adult is never so stubborn as when the child within us confronts the adult in our child."* You see whether you're a King or you simply think you are a King or Queen, anger is often a symptom of pride that we display when our control is threatened and we can't have our own way. The outcome of this pride for Uzziah was...leprosy, and he would never enter the temple again living in quarantine until the day he died.

So are we any better when we forget that all that we possess is not ours? That we are stewards of what God entrusted us with, from our finances to our family to our very own lives? Or has a subtle lie been birthed that say's "I'm in control" and in the process we begin to leave God out of the picture, we change the rules a little?"

Somehow we forget Biblical principles like...God doesn't need us to accomplish any of His ends, yet He has graciously chosen to work through us and our flaws to accomplish His goals if we allow Him. But this requires humility over pride, an attitude of serving others versus being served yourself, and a key component I'm sure Uzziah gave up somewhere along the way, acknowledging God...growing to love Him, learning all you can about Him and inviting Him to be a part of your life.

Pride will overtake humility, independence and self-sufficiency will take away our need for God, and ultimately our activities will become our sole focus, our goals and Day-Timer's become our idols, and soon we will even buy into the lie that simple purchases and efforts given to my image will give me worth?

What are the course corrections we have built into our lives to help guide us towards a successful journey? What resources has God provided to ensure a successful landing at the end of our destination called life?

I love the song and video from "Casting Crowns" recently released, entitled "Slow Fade". In it they sing the words, *"It's a slow fade when you give yourself away. It's a slow fade when black and white have turned to gray. Thoughts invade, choices are made, a price will be paid when you give yourself away. People never crumble in a day. It's a slow fade, it's a slow fade... The journey from your mind to your hands is shorter than you're thinking."*

That's how sin works friends! The Black and White often are pretty obvious and avoidable, but the deceitfulness of sin is so subtle and *"So slight as to be difficult to detect or describe; elusive. Not immediately obvious or comprehensible..."* to the point eventually there are so many other insinuating circumstances we no longer can see the obvious and we are left confused and floundering, and like my tiling analogy eventually we hit a wall in life, a event that we were unprepared for, and we discover our faith doesn't have the legs to stand on.

So am I getting a little carried away, am I being a little too extreme? Do you recall Jesus words with regards to lust and hatred? 1 John 3:15 *"Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him."* or *"You have heard that it was said 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart."* (Matthew 5:27-28) Sound a little extreme possibly? I'm thinking Jesus understood the progression of sin, the potential of its devastation on our lives if we stray from that foundational line! That like lust and hatred, if it already exists up here, than you're not that far from living it out!

Hosea is crying out to the people of his day to open their eyes, to come to a realization of just how subtle sin is, how easy it is to lose sight of what God had in store for us. Hosea 6:1 *"Come let us return to the Lord...let us acknowledge the Lord...let us press on to acknowledge Him..."*

So what is the people's response? *"Israel cries out to me, 'O our God we acknowledge you! But Israel has rejected what is good..."* (Ch 8:3) Did you catch that...the words were there, *"Israel cries out to me, 'O our God we acknowledge you..."* Possibly they even made this very spiritual claim while at church? Service was great, tears were shed, hands were raised, testimonies told, but than Sunday came to a close and Monday started...and things changed! *But Israel has rejected what is good..."* what exactly did they reject? Read the verse before this one...

"...because the people have broken my covenant and rebelled against my law." It starts here friends, the Scriptures are full of course corrections for our lives, and we simply can't pick and choose the parts we agree with and rationalize away the ones that bother us! Yes...living for Jesus is truly living life. There exists joy unspeakable, God is our provider, we can possess a peace that passes all understanding, but there is a cost

involved, and Jesus once said, before you begin this journey take the time to tally that cost!

In fact he warned those in his day, if you wanted to be one of His disciples than friend you better be prepared for a few things like taking up their cross daily, people actually hating them for His sake, and a life of serving versus being served! We forget the majority of Christ's disciples laid their physical lives down for Christ. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:15 *"And He (Christ) died for all that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again."*

Can I be blunt...does this last verse describe the majority of us, never mind the rest of the world? Honestly on most days, that's not me! I'm looking out for myself...I've bought into this subtle lie that numero uno is me! Oh I acknowledge God often...I've been doing it all morning, but cut me off on Charleswood drive as I leave this morning and numero uno kicks in!

I may sing *"God...All that I need to know for tomorrow or for today...Is that you'll be with me each moment...Holding me close to you every step of the way."* But let one bad thing happen to me or my family, allow my finances to fail, or my children stray, or my health deteriorate...and I'm yelling *"All that I really need is answers God, and until I get them...I'm going to be one angry dude!!"*

In Hosea's day, like so often today, the people had fallen prey to deception, and that's why later in Chapter 10:13 Hosea proclaims *"But you have planted wickedness, you have reaped evil, you have eaten the fruit of deception. Because you have depended on your own strength..."* In the Apostle Paul's day he summarized it this way, (Philippians 2:21) *"For everyone looks out for his own interests not those of Jesus Christ."* Isn't this really the bottom line here? Isn't this how subtle sin can infiltrate our lives, like King Uzziah where life becomes about me? What do abortionists cry out...it's my body; I have the right to choose, and the end result, lives sacrificed for our conveniences!

Not all that different from Hosea's day where we read in Ch 13:1-3 As found in The Message...*"Caught and convicted in the lewd sex-worship of Baal—they died! And now they're back in the sin business again, manufacturing god-images they can use, Religion customized to taste. Professionals see to it: Anything you want in a god you can get. Can you believe it? They sacrifice live babies to these dead gods—kill living babies and kiss golden calves! And now there's nothing left to these people: hollow men, desiccated women. Like scraps of paper blown down the street, like smoke in a gusty wind."*

It's not a pretty picture...quite desolate in fact, dark and depressing! So if I was following the pattern of my kids at this point in the message, I would hear them reiterate, that they would never sacrifice kids to some false God...human sacrifices...come on Dad...your getting carried away again...not in today's cultures...little extreme, and I simply respond really? OK...you're right, in this day and age humanity would never stoop to such atrocities, allowing the death of unborn

children, allowing hate to morph into murder or ethnic cleansing...those were simply atrocities of the past?

We would never allow sexual sins to deteriorate to the point rape, child trafficking and prostitution with children of all ages, even toddlers would be tolerated? Hate is completely under control; drive by shootings a thing of the past...killing in the name of God found only in our history books. With today's wealth, and technological advancements world hunger has been solved, homelessness unheard of, people dying of curable diseases resolved because of the global concern for justice and shared wealth. Our priorities today are impeccable...and things are only going to get better are they not? 2 Timothy 3:1-5

"But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God—having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them" (2 Tim. 3:1-5).

Hosea might as well have been standing in front of the CNN's cameras stating *"Return, O Canada and USA, to the Lord your God. Your sins have been your downfall...return to the Lord...forgive all our sins and receive us graciously..."* 14:1-2

And He will friends...God will take us back, we saw that with Hosea and his wife the prostitute. Hosea writes in 14:9 *"Who is wise? He will realize these things. Who is discerning? He will understand them. The ways of the Lord are right; the righteous walk in them, but the rebellious stumble in them."* Tired of stumbling, there is a way out!

I know some of us, including myself, get tired of certain tactics Christians may use to get a point across! Many crossing the line, but the reality is God has held up a pretty massive sign for humanity, and it is John 3:16, *"For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life."*

Do you think God is intent on pursuing us? Do you think desperate times require drastic measures? People we don't need just more information, we need a transformation, and that doesn't come through simply listening to a sermon every week or paying lip service, we need a holistic revelation of mind, heart and spirit...a true spiritual renewal.

We must rekindle our passion for God, recapture a sense of urgency, and respond to the challenges that lay before us. If we don't do business with God friends we will lose our ability to be that light on the hill, and potentially even worse...lose the light all together. What was that kids Sunday School song we used to sing, *"This little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine...(and further in the song) Don't let Satan blow it out...I'm going to let it shine...let it shine, let it shine, let it shine!"*

Can I say it again...friends, God is intense in His pursuit of you. He was willing to pay a huge price...and here's His promise...
Hosea 14:4 *"I will heal their waywardness and love them freely, for my anger has turned away from them."*

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