

A *Discover Together*
BIBLE STUDY

by Sue Edwards

Hosea

Discovering God's Fierce Love



LEADER'S GUIDE

Hosea: Discovering God's Fierce Love
Leader's Guide © 2019 by Sue Edwards

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NE, Grand Rapids, MI 49505.

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Before You Begin . . .

Hosea is a love story—but not the kind of love story you find in romance novels. It’s a love story about eternal love between God and you. I hope studying this little book will increase your love for God many times over, as it did for me. Real love is founded on a deep understanding of one another. God knows and understands you better than anyone. He created you. But do you deeply know and understand him? As I wrote this study, my insight into God’s character and motivation dramatically increased, especially related to his tough love and discipline. I’ve always struggled with understanding why hard things happen to people, especially people I care about. Hosea helped me grasp the truth that God always has our best interest at heart—even when we struggle or suffer. If you want to truly know God, dig into Hosea. You won’t emerge the same.

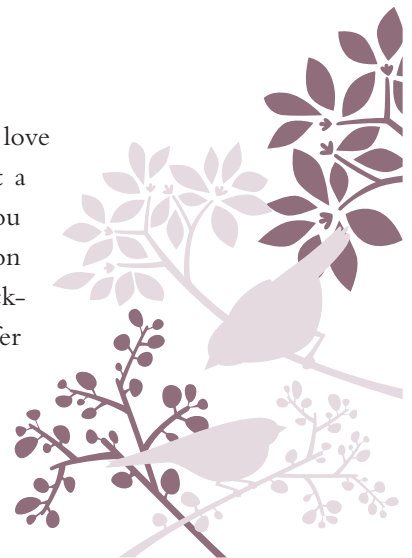
Every believer should study this book, and I’m delighted that you have chosen to unearth its riches. Although you may use this study guide for personal devotions, consider inviting other women to join you to add depth to your quest.

If you invite other women to join you, familiarize yourself with this overview and digest the “Why Study Hosea?” section carefully. Then, as you work your way through the study, read the week-by-week leader’s guide. I have included discussion topics particular to that lesson, troubleshooting tips, activity ideas, and other pertinent information and counsel to aid in a productive group experience.

If you are new at leading a small group, be sure to study the “Training Guide for Small-Group Leaders” before your first gathering. You’ll find this resource on my website, www.discovertogetherseries.com, along with other helpful tools. Even if you have led groups before, consider reviewing the instructions and tips in the training guide. Skilled leaders enhance the likelihood that a group will bond and thrive, but a poor leader usually stifles healthy interaction. If you encounter particular challenges in your group, refer back to the training guide for help, or you can contact me by liking my Facebook page, “The Discover Together Series,” and leaving a message or emailing me at doctorsue7@gmail.com.

GOAL OF THE STUDY

The goal of this study is to awaken you to God’s fierce, passionate love for you. As you come to truly understand this ferocious love at a heart-deep level, instead of just intellectually, my hope is that you will be motivated to reciprocate that love and your primary affection will naturally focus on God while other affections fade into the background. Your relationships with loved ones and friends won’t suffer



as a result. Instead, others will benefit when you live out your love for God and make decisions to please him. Those decisions will manifest in an outpouring of the love of God through you to others, illustrating what only God's love can do in a person and arousing a jealousy in them to love God that way too.

You will simply want to reciprocate his love rather than attempting to follow God through some compulsion or guilt-inducing fear. You'll live differently as a natural by-product of your newfound connection to your Creator, your whole life will change, and, as a result, you will glorify God through the Holy Spirit's work within you. That's how the spiritual life is supposed to work. So relax and delve into Hosea, on a quest to experience God's love as never before. You won't be disappointed.

HOW TO LEAD IF TIME IS LIMITED

A thorough study of any biblical text is vital for biblical literacy that results in sound application, but if you aren't able to go through the questions without rushing or giving everyone time to participate, consider these tips:

- As the leader, quickly summarize any introductory material and move into the questions. Don't read notes or other lesson sections unless needed for clarification.
- Answer observations from the text yourself as the leader or limit the response to one person.
- Skip questions that you discern are not central to the meaning of the biblical text.
- Focus on just one section of the lesson that you sense is most applicable to your particular group. This is better than skipping around and choosing a question here and there. Understanding the flow of the text is important and builds toward a valid application. Otherwise you risk twisting Scripture.

A SAFE PLACE

Making the group an open, protected place will be especially important as you discuss these serious issues. We need a place where we can be brutally honest about our shortcomings, doubts, and fears. We need a place where no questions are off-limits. Your role as a leader is to create a safe place to process and share. Safe places destroy roadblocks to faith and bring down strongholds, resulting in spiritual, emotional, and mental health. As you guide the group with skill and a caring heart, women may actually change the way they think, feel, and act. What a privilege!

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

Each lesson walks you, verse by verse, through the book of Hosea. Observation, interpretation, application, correlation, opinion, and discussion questions flow, guiding you through the text to help you grasp God's intended meaning and apply it to life today. This methodical approach is based on sound interpretive principles designed to reduce error and speculation. Occasionally women will be asked to place themselves into the setting or the shoes of the original author or listeners; this exercise, although somewhat speculative, helps the passage come alive in the mind's eye of contemporary readers. Opinion and discussion questions aid in application to current and personal issues.

The goal is more than head knowledge—it's life change. Authentic growth includes new convictions and attitudes. The lessons are designed to move the participant's learning from head to heart to hand. Although each lesson is grounded in Hosea, occasionally you will study other related passages for additional insight.

I will provide short commentaries on unclear or perplexing passages. My goal in this leader's guide is not to overwhelm you with massive amounts of information but instead to give you concise answers that will help you guide your group through any rough spots. It also provides additional quality resources for further study on your own.

You'll want to acquaint yourself and your group with the supplemental content available to enhance your study experience:

- *Memory Verse.* Each lesson begins with an optional memory verse related to the main topic that week. Use this tool on a volunteer basis only.
- *Digging Deeper.* Some women will want to engage with the optional Digging Deeper questions located in the margins of the study guide. Determine with your group how you want to use these study prompts. You may want to include them in your discussion, use them at the end if time allows, or simply suggest that women who want to spend more time in deeper study work on these on their own. If a particular woman shows an aptitude for Scripture study, you may want to ask her to tackle a specific Digging Deeper question and report her findings in the next session. Then ask if any other women also worked on that particular Digging Deeper question, widening the discussion if possible.
- *Quotes, Background Info, and Extras.* Soak up the inspiring sidebars that relate to particular parts of each lesson. If any especially resonates with you, use it as a springboard for discussion or personal application.

WILL YOU END WITH A WRAP-UP MESSAGE?

Leading small groups and teaching are different skills. When you wear your small-group leader's hat, you do not lecture! But you may want to end your time by putting on a teacher's hat. Participants often enjoy hearing a message to crystallize biblical truth.

Your wrap-up might be a ten-minute informal presentation, allowing for interaction and questions, or a thirty-minute formal lecture, more like a pastor's Sunday message. If your study consists of several small groups, you may prefer a formal lecture. If you're meeting in a home, your group may prefer a more interactive format. Use what works for you and your group.

If you believe that God may want you to teach the Bible, step out and try. Women love to hear their own leaders teach them rather than hear virtual teachers on DVD. Resources to sharpen your teaching skills are listed below. At first, your skills may not be as honed as more experienced teachers, but in time and with practice you should improve. And you have advantages over a virtual teacher. Women need models they can watch, hug, and talk to. And when one of their own steps out and is used by God, it inspires everyone to step forward and use their gifts too. So, if something in you says, "Teach!"—then go for it!

INTRODUCTORY IDEAS

If you plan to include lecturing in your format, you may want to begin with a message on understanding the difference between healthy and unhealthy jealousy and romance. What do the women in your study need to know as they embark on a study of Hosea? Do they need insight into the historical setting? If you take on a teaching role, do they need to get to know you as their teacher? Do they need an opportunity to learn more about each other? Do they need time to interact, building trust and comfort in the group? Ask the Holy Spirit to direct you as you consider how to prepare your group for the study.

ENLIST WOMEN TO TEACH WITH YOU

Other women have something to say that would benefit the group. Listen attentively when they tell how God works in their lives. Identify women who inspire others. Who holds a high view of the Bible and has spent time studying? Who walks close to Jesus? Who lives wisely? Who is articulate? Passionate? Growing? Mature? Organized in her thinking?

If you add a teaching element to your Bible study format, consider asking one of these women to share a short testimony or deliver the message for the entire group that week. She must have a cooperative attitude. When you give a woman the plat-

form, you give her influence. I've worked with a few women who took advantage of this opportunity. They spoke twice as long as the time allotted. Or they refused to prepare, wandering aimlessly. Or they became so emotional that they broke down, upsetting women in the study.

To alleviate these problems, set a time limit and ask women to write out what they will say. Insist that they review their message with you. Stress that if they're a "time hog," group time will be shorter, irritating other members. Use wisdom as you select presenters, but consider how much women will benefit by hearing a variety of voices.

RESOURCES TO HELP YOU TEACH WITH ACCURACY AND SKILL

- Bruce, Barbara. *7 Ways of Teaching the Bible to Adults: Using Our Multiple Intelligences to Build Faith*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2000.
- Mathews, Alice P. *Preaching That Speaks to Women*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003.
- Palmer, Parker J. *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998.
- Robinson, Haddon. *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001.
- Stanley, Andy, and Lane Jones. *Communicating for a Change*. Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2006.
- Stott, John. *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982.
- Swindoll, Charles R. *Saying It Well: Touching Others with Your Words*. New York: Faith Words, 2012.
- Willhite, Keith, and Scott Gibson, eds. *The Big Idea of Biblical Preaching: Connecting the Bible to People*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998.

RESOURCES TO HELP YOU STUDY HOSEA

An excellent free online resource are the Bible notes of Dr. Thomas L. Constable, a former professor at Dallas Theological Seminary. His commentaries are thorough, clear, and practical, but not overly detailed or tedious. His resources provide quality help for both academic and lay teachers and leaders. Find them on www.planoblechapel.org/soniclight.

- Jensen, Irving. *Minor Prophets of Israel: A Self-Study Guide*. Chicago: Moody, 1975.
- Smith, Gary V. *The NIV Application Commentary: Hosea, Amos, Micah*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001.
- Walvoord, John F., and Roy B. Zuck, eds. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*. Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1985.

LESSON 1

Discovering God's Fierce Love

Open with prayer. Should you pray or invite one of the participants to do so? Be sensitive to the women in your group. If they're comfortable praying out loud, give them the opportunity. If not, you, as the leader, pray.

Then spend some time getting to know one another. You might, for example, ask each woman to introduce herself by telling something about her family, hobbies, what she likes to do on a Saturday night, a pet peeve, or what she hopes to gain from the study. If time allows, spend your first meeting connecting with questions or ice-breaker games to help your group bond or focus on the study theme. You can google icebreakers or community-builder games and locate an activity that suits your purpose for the first gathering. You might also find and tell a great story or illustration about follow-through or the importance of living out what you learn. Relate the story or exercise to the upcoming study when the group will work through how to actually apply what they are learning. Remind them that they will need one another, as well as God, to succeed. You may want to pray for one another as you close.

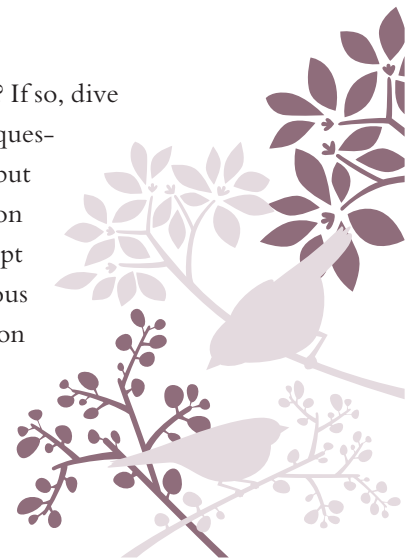
GET FOCUSED

Look over the study guide with your group and express your excitement about the topic. Create and discuss ground rules. If women join later, remember to orient them. Stress the importance of confidentiality.

Some women come to Bible study for the sole purpose of studying Scripture. Others come for community, to find friends. Regardless of your own bent, honor both desires. We all need a relationship with God through serious Bible study *and* we all need relationships through connecting in authentic community. Be sure the schedule reflects time for both.

DISCUSS LESSON 1

Did you ask the women to come prepared to discuss the first lesson? If so, dive in. Paraphrase parts of the introductory section and ask the first question. Spend more time on the discussion and opinion questions, but don't skip observation (what does the text say?) and interpretation questions (what does the text mean?). If you do, you will interrupt the flow of the discussion, as many questions are based on previous questions. If you don't want to spend time discussing the observation



questions, you may summarize the answers yourself and then move into other kinds of questions.

If you are running out of time, cut questions that do not hinder the logical flow of the lesson. If you don't have enough time to cover all the questions well, you may simply want to discuss one part of the lesson thoroughly and not address every section. Make the questions work for you and your group.

Point out that the lesson is peppered with notes to help with difficult passages and to give helpful background. Tell them to read the quotes in the sidebars as time allows. If they desire more, encourage them to tackle the Digging Deeper questions. These added elements should bring the truths of the lesson alive, and you may even want to discuss them.

LESSON CONTENT

Lesson 1 contains three parts:

- The introductory section preparing women for the study
 - » God teaches us about himself through creation
 - » God pursues you with a fierce passion
 - » Our personal longing for love
 - » The universal longing for love
- The historical setting showing how Hosea fits into the flow of biblical history
- Discussion questions on Hosea 1:1–2:1

If you sense these three elements will overwhelm your participants, you might divide this lesson into two parts or cover some elements during the first gathering as well as icebreakers or an orientation to the study. Then discuss the questions another time. Be creative and use the material however it works best for you.

TROUBLESHOOTING

I have provided notes and sidebars throughout the lesson to aid in understanding difficult passages. I've described events that would have been familiar to the original audience but are unknown to current-day students of God's Word. Acquaint yourself with these notes and sidebars so you can direct group members to these resources.

CREATIVE ARTS IDEAS

- Hosea challenges us to distinguish the world's romantic love from God's perfect love. Encourage the women in your group to look for stories or poems

about the world's romantic love, and use them during group time to find fallacies in this kind of love. Can you locate stories or poems that illustrate God's love for us? If so, compare them with the worldly examples of love. If you don't have time to read these stories or poems in the group, make copies or email them for participants to read outside group time. Consider choosing the best and reading them during a final wrap-up week as a review of what you learned.

- Ask each woman to write down a particular struggle that she would like to commit to God and learn to overcome during the Hosea study. One way to provide confidentiality is to furnish black ink and black paper. Then pray over the struggles and place them where they can be seen each week. Or you may want to bury them or plant them under some flowers.
- Find some way to creatively express God's love to group members. Make sacred valentines or frame love poems or passages to help the women remember God's fierce love for them.
- Create a drama to illustrate God's request of Hosea and his response. Help participants understand the reality of this decision upon Hosea's life.

LESSON 2

Journeying into the Heart of God

Lesson 2 takes us deeper into the heart of God and helps us understand his righteous jealousy if we desert, neglect, or marginalize him. The lesson is challenging, especially for women that struggle to understand God's discipline of them or loved ones. But this aspect of his character is vital to knowing God well and gives us some insight into what he's doing in the world, in our lives and the lives of other believers. Help the participants understand that God's discipline is only for believers and is always for their good.

The questions move through the text step-by-step, wringing out each concept thoroughly. The verses contain some difficult ideas completely foreign to current cultural thinking. Take time to dissect each part. Understanding these truths is required if we are to stand strong and live well in life's crucibles. Hosea paints word pictures to express God's truths and help us understand deep, rich spiritual truths that can prepare and strengthen us for life, for the consequences we may reap when others sin, and even for the painful results of our own sin.

TROUBLESHOOTING

Question 3 asks about the meaning of the second half of verse 2. When answering, remember that Hosea represents God and Gomer is a figure for Israel. God is imploring Israel to change her attitude toward false gods, leave behind her worship of Baal, and instead return to faith in the One who truly loves her.

The Old Testament sometimes uses the word *judgment* (5:1) when referring to God's displeasure with his beloved people. If women find this word offensive, feel free to use the New Testament word *discipline* instead.



LESSON 3

Gangrene and God's Grace

In Lesson 3, Hosea shows us the putrid nature of sin and the cleansing beauty of God's grace. The comparison should overwhelm us with gratitude. Typically Western culture avoids asking us to take an honest look at our shortcomings, flaws, and sins by teaching that ultimate truth—right and wrong—does not exist. The highest value is tolerance. As long as we are aren't "hurting" anyone else, anything goes.

As a result, the women in your group may push back when asked to judge themselves against biblical standards. Encourage the women that we are all in process and unconditionally loved regardless of our faults. Learning to live out our faith is a gradual process and results in good for ourselves and the world around us. God doesn't ask us to live wisely to deprive or punish us but because he has our best interest at heart. Help the participants understand that we are all at different places in our walk with God, and discourage anyone from playing the "Holy Spirit" for the group.

At the same time, help the group see the seriousness of sin and how it breaks God's heart.

TROUBLESHOOTING

Question 10 cites Hosea 3:5, where God refers to King David. This passage is talking about the coming of Jesus the Messiah, a descendent of the house of David.

CREATIVE ARTS IDEA

- Choose a verse and make a bookmark or a plaque for each member, reminding her of God's grace.



LESSON 4

Understanding and Valuing God’s Tough Love

Lesson 4 focuses on an important doctrine for women to understand—the true nature of God’s love. Read the introductory two pages carefully and paraphrase whatever you think the women in your group need to hear. You may sense some pushback. Rejoice that these women feel comfortable and safe enough to verbalize their honest struggles with this concept. Encourage them that this week’s Scripture passages and lesson should provide insight that may answer some of their questions.

TROUBLESHOOTING

Question 5 explores Hosea 6:2 and asks participants to determine what Hosea means when he uses specific numbers. Help the women see that this literary device is common in the Bible. Hosea is simply pointing out that God doesn’t act according to our timetable. The relative values of the numbers give us clues as to the meaning of the verse. Help the group realize that biblical authors sometimes use figurative language to reveal truth. Our task is to discern how the original author meant for the original audience to understand the text.

Question 10 reveals what God wants from his beloved people—mercy and not sacrifice. Hosea isn’t saying that living a sacrificial life isn’t important. He’s pointing out that without a life of love and care for others, the legalistic rituals like the Israelites’ sacrifices in the temple did not please him, just as a Christian life of rote obedience without a loving heart toward God and others doesn’t please him today.

CREATIVE ARTS IDEA

Take time to read and discuss Francis Thompson’s story of God’s tough love that brought him back to God. Stories are often powerful tools to help an abstract concept stick in the minds of learners. Follow up the discussion by reading the parts of the poem at the end of the lesson. Although the language is dated, careful reading can communicate God’s ferocious love in ways that prose sometimes cannot.



LESSON 5

Experiencing the Abundant Life

This lesson shows the dangers of mixing our fidelity to God with loyalty to the world and its temptations that constantly woo us. Hosea points out the folly of this kind of life, using the Israelites as our object lesson. God won't be mocked, and neither will he turn a blind eye when his beloved people attempt to live this way. Like a heartbroken, faithful spouse, he will pursue us with hopes of bringing us back to our senses. As you discuss this lesson with your group, continue to remind them that God is not vindictive or cruel in his pursuit of his own. He always has their best interest at heart. Help the women keep an eternal perspective. What God does, he does with eternity in mind.



LESSON 6

The Role of Discipline in Forgiveness

This lesson shows us the compassionate heart of God who, like a grieved parent, deeply hurts when forced to resort to tough love as the wisest course of action. In the first part of the lesson, we look at God’s grief over the deceit of his beloved. In the second part, we study three incidents in Jacob’s life to illustrate these truths in the life of one of the patriarchs.

TROUBLESHOOTING

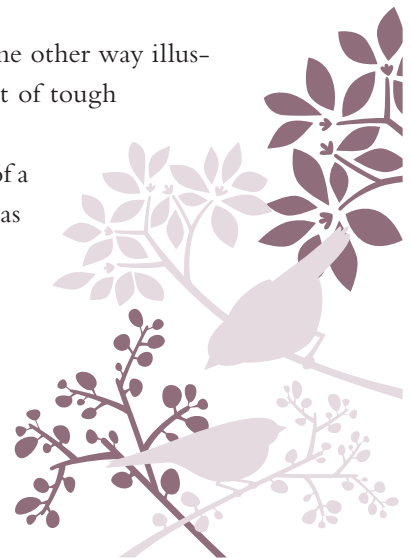
Question 5 asks, “What do you think Hosea means when he says Israel ‘feeds on the wind?’” In Ecclesiastes, Solomon uses the words “chasing after the wind” to describe our tendencies to pursue meaningless, worthless things of no substance that make promises they do not fulfill. To feed on the wind means that we pursue and value lies that Satan’s worldly system feeds us. We look for satisfaction in all the wrong places at the expense of our relationship with the true God.

If women in your group struggle with the concept of God’s “judgment,” spend some time on the note on page 79, where they can learn the differences concerning God’s judgment of his people and of those who do not follow him.

Question 16 refers to a significant dream in Jacob’s life where he observed a stairway or ladder with angels both ascending and descending. The point God wanted Jacob to grasp was that God would be with him wherever he went and that God’s emissaries always remained active on God’s behalf in Jacob’s life. The angels took people’s needs up to God and brought down God’s provision and protection. Jacob didn’t need to manipulate and attempt to control his own circumstances as was his habit.

CREATIVE ARTS IDEAS

- Ask for volunteers to create and act out a drama or in some other way illustrate Jacob’s interaction with God and the ultimate effect of tough love on Jacob’s life.
- Ask a woman who has experienced the emotional impact of a prodigal child in her life to share her story and what she has learned about God.



LESSON 7

“Happy Endings”

The end of Hosea ultimately reveals a happy ending for God’s people, but not without the Jews experiencing seventy years of captivity in Babylon and Assyria. Sin is like a tall glass filled with something that tastes sweet initially, but as we drink, it becomes more and more bitter until we can hardly get it down in the end. Sadly, we must drink the whole glass so we can learn the reality of sin’s damage. This experience is the best teacher to help us avoid sin in the future. But these are hard truths. Again, help your group keep an eternal perspective as you work through the lesson. In light of eternity, seventy years is actually not a long time, although it feels incredibly long from a human perspective. But God’s tough love should hinder us from living a miserable life and breaking God’s heart over and over.

WILL YOU SAY GOODBYE OR GO ON TOGETHER?

Is this a short-term group, or do you, as the leader, want to continue meeting? The first decision is yours. Count the cost. Is the group thriving? Bonding? Committed? Worth the effort you are investing? Answer these questions honestly. Every group has a beginning and an end. Is this the time for your group to disband? If so, tell the group your reasons, kindly but emphatically. Don’t be pressured into continuing against your better judgment.

If you determine that you’re excited about leading the group through another study, you may want to poll the group to learn their desires. If so, plan a date to meet for a brainstorming session on what to study and what changes might be in order, if any. (See www.discovertogetherseries.com for additional study options.)

Either way, use this last gathering of *Hosea: Discovering God’s Fierce Love* to reflect, review, and celebrate what has been accomplished. Plan a time that fosters a sense of closure, possibly festive food, a potluck brunch or luncheon, or some other special activity. For example, you might talk about how God has helped you grasp God’s love for you or understand his tough love in a new way. You could list benefits you enjoyed as a result of the study. You might talk about changes you observed in the members as a result of sharing this study. In some way, celebrate this final chapter in your group experience. Praise and thank God for what he has done in your lives individually and as a worshipping community. If any of the participants are leaving the group, be sure to say goodbye and pray for them.

