**You are Established**

Matthew 9:9-13

Matthew was a Jewish man who had become a tax collector. Mark and Luke give us his childhood name, Levi - about as Jewish a name as you could have. Literally named for the most holy tribe, the one entrusted with the care of the temple area.

***Tax collectors were notoriously hated people*** in the first century - whether they were Jewish or gentile. The system itself was bound to be abused. The way tax collectors got paid was by taking a portion of the taxes they collected. Exactly how much you took became an iffy kind of game. Rome allowed the tax collectors to set their own commission - essentially letting them see how much they could get away with charging people over and above the tax that actually went to Rome.

The result was that tax collectors became very wealthy - but at the price of their reputation. And Matthew had the added problem of being Jewish yet representing Rome in a Jewish town. He was very much viewed as **a traitor and a sell out**. Notice in our passage how tax collectors are described:

“And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples.” Matthew 9:10

Did you catch that? ***“Tax collector” was synonymous with “sinner.”*** The two words were interchangeable. Remember the parable Jesus told about the two men who went into the temple to pray? A Pharisee and a… TAX COLLECTOR. They were the worst of the worst. The most despised. The most notorious sinners - right down there with the prostitutes as the lowest layer of scum in the pond of first century villainy.

What had led Matthew to such a position? We don’t know. Maybe it was financial problems. Maybe it was greed or ambition. Maybe he was disillusioned with his Jewish faith and thought he would try things over on the Roman side.

But here is what we do know:

“As Jesus passed on from there he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth and he said to him, ‘Follow me.’ And he rose and followed him.” Matthew 9:9

***When Jesus called, Matthew came.*** Whatever his background, whatever his reasons, however long he had been away from his childhood faith - at this moment Matthew heard the call of the Rabbi and left his livelihood and his life to follow Jesus. Not only did Matthew follow Jesus, he threw a party at his house and all of his tax collector buddies came so they could also meet Jesus.

But that event caused the Pharisees great consternation. ***Why would this powerful rabbi hang out with such rabble?*** To this question, Jesus gave this profound answer.

“Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.’ For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.” Matthew 9:12-13 (Hosea 6:6)

On the one hand, Jesus’ point is obvious: sick people are the ones who need a doctor. Everyone in those days would have looked at the tax collectors and sinners and said, “Yep, those guys need some help.” At first it’s just a simple deflection to explain why he was hanging out with the riffraff. But when you look at it more closely you see what an insightful confrontation it is for the religious minded Pharisees.

***If you consider yourself “righteous,” then Jesus says he can’t help you.*** To qualify for the Jesus program, you have to recognize that you are a sinner. So Jesus is basically saying, in a clever, sidelong way - you “righteous” Pharisees are actually more lost than these tax collectors. And you’re lost precisely because you THINK you’re righteous.

But in the middle of this confusing confrontation **Jesus gives them a clue**. He drops them a bread crumb that would lead Bible scholars to more bread crumbs and a path to the truth. Jesus quoted Hosea 6:6 - “I desire mercy and not sacrifice.”

Huh?

Ok, rewind. ***What is the book of Hosea about?*** None of the prophets had super comfortable, happy assignments. You really didn’t want Ezekiel or Jeremiah’s job descriptions. But you really didn’t want Hosea’s either.

Hosea was a prophet. A holy man. A man of God. A preacher of God’s Word. And God commanded this holy preacher to go and marry a prostitute. What? Yes. Go marry her.

“When the Lord began to speak through Hosea, the Lord said to him, ‘Go, marry a promiscuous woman and have children with her, for like an adulterous wife this land is guilty of unfaithfulness to the Lord.’ So he married Gomer daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son.” Hosea 1:2-3, NIV

I chose the NIV here because the ESV was a little too explicit and literal. The NIV gives us the point without talking about “whoredom,” quite so much. Why was Hosea given this assignment? Because God wanted the prophet to see what it felt like to be God. ***Israel was to God like an unfaithful wife to her husband.*** The people of God were repeatedly unfaithful to Him - continually seeking after other gods to worship and serve them.

Ouch. Rough assignment. After marrying this prostitute and Hosea had a couple of kids with her - kids with ominous names like “Not loved” and “Not my people.” Come here, “unloved.” Do the dishes. Come on “disowned.” Take out the trash. “Hey disowned - here’s a nickname, reject.” “Unloved, how about I call you disgrace. No, disgusting.”

After a while Hosea’s wife went back to her former career and was gone for a time. Then in chapter three God told the prophet to go and take her back, ***paying the price for her redemption.***

So ***Hosea was a living parable***. His experience was a deliberate picture of God’s faithfulness to His unfaithful people. In the midst of this miserable, heart-breaking experience God promised those Jewish children - unloved and disowned - that they would one day be called “beloved” and “cherished.” So while Hosea was a confrontation of Israel’s sin, it was also a promise of their redemption.

What was Jesus saying to the Pharisees? What did this quote imply? Do you see how beautifully it fits with his experience with the tax collectors?

“Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.’ For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.” Matthew 9:12-13 (Hosea 6:6)

He was like, “Come on, teachers of the Law of Moses - remember your teachings! Remember your Old Testament! ***Remember HOSEA***. Israel is the unfaithful wife. YOU Pharisees - that’s you - you are the unfaithful wife. You are promiscuous and sinful like these very sinful tax collectors and prostitutes you are so quick to judge. Look at your own hearts and you’ll see you are just as sick as the tax collectors - maybe worse.

C.S. Lewis has a helpful thought exercise to **prevent judging others**. One of the reasons we are not in a position to judge someone else is that we don’t know their story, their weaknesses and their limitations. Lewis says, “***think of your town drunk*** - the one who is stumbling around the streets at night. It’s easy to judge that guy. But it’s totally possible that his choice to have only 3 drinks tonight instead of 10 is a more impressive accomplishment than your choice to have 1 drink, or your choice to gossip over a dinner that was a little too lavish.” That town drunk - do you know his story? Do you know everything he has been through? Do you fully understand the depth of his addiction? Lewis was writing with WW2 in the recent past. Maybe this poor guy was a war veteran who still heard bombs exploding and saw his closest friends getting blown to pieces.

***Before you judge someone just remember how very little you know about them.*** There is every chance the person you are judging is actually more righteous than you if only because of your judgmental spirit. Do you see what Jesus was doing there with the Pharisees? He says, “Oh, you are so quick to judge these tax collectors. But do you know the first thing about them? Do you know their hearts and their hurts?”

Let’s walk through Hosea 6 and we will see four layers of commitment to God.



***To have a life that is secure - that is firmly established, according to Jesus, we need to build these four layers of commitment.*** This is how Jesus concluded the sermon on the mount - with the parable of the wise and foolish builders. The fool was the one who heard the words of Jesus and did not do them. The wise builder is the one who heard the words of Jesus and DID THEM - He obeyed the Word of God.

Turn with me over to Hosea toward the end of the Old Testament. Let’s walk through these four layers of commitment so we can all be more securely established!

**Layer 1 of Commitment to God**

* **Know** God

“Come, let us return to the LORD; for he has torn us, that he may heal us; he has struck us down, and he will bind us up.” Hosea 6:1

Here is ***the prophet’s overt call to the people of God to come back*** - come home! Return to the Lord you have abandoned. Come back to the God you have betrayed. Quit being a wayward wife and come back home. God had disciplined his people - he tore them down, he struck them down to get their attention; to show them their need. How far will you run? Haven’t you found rock bottom yet?

But look at the hopeful promise in verse 2!

**Layer 1 of Commitment to God**

* **Know** God

“After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him.” Hosea 6:2

Now, from our vantage point after the death and resurrection of Jesus we understand the promise of “the third day,” and how it relates to God raising US UP as He did Jesus. But this must have been an ***enigmatic prophecy*** for the Jews - simply understanding their promised restoration at some future time. In other words - “wait for it.” Trust in the Lord and His timing - knowing that He will restore us as a nation one day. Not today - not the second day - but the third day. He will bind us up. He will heal us. We will trust Him to the extent that we KNOW OUR GOD.

**Layer 1 of Commitment to God**

* **Know** God

“Let us know; let us press on to know the LORD; his going out is sure as the dawn; he will come to us as the… spring rains that water the earth.” Hosea 6:3

This is amazing. Hosea was a prophet before the northern kingdom of Israel was taken into exile by the Assyrians. It was a grim, dangerous time for the nation. So the prophet calls the people of God to return to the Lord - to repent of their idolatry and fix their trust in the Lord alone. **He calls the people to KNOW GOD** - to press on to seek the knowledge of God.

And what does Hosea point to in the knowledge of God? ***The assurance that HE WILL COME.*** As surely as the sun will rise in the morning; as certain as the late afternoon rainfall in a Florida summer. Ok, as sure as the spring rains. Ask any kid who ever played baseball in the spring - it’s going to rain. Count on it. Two natural examples of reliable cycles - the sunrise and the spring rain.

Here is the promise, 800 years before Jesus - for those who would trust in the Word of God - on the third day he will raise us up; he will bring healing and restoration - because GOD HIMSELF WILL COME.

Mic drop.

***Do you know God in this way?*** Do you know Him so much that you trust Him to show up for you? Do you know His presence in your life like you know the sunshine on your face or the wind in your hair?

Remember, ***these were not pleasant, easy times for Hosea.*** He had to marry a prostitute; that’s how unfaithful Israel was to the Lord - and judgment was coming soon as a consequence. But even before the exile, God promised restoration and called His people to repent and come back to Him - like a wayward wife who has gone back to her prostitution - God promises to pay the price to redeem His people, “on the third day he will raise us up.”

***You will not be established in your life or in your faith if you do not KNOW GOD.*** It’s so important to read your Bible and see how God has worked in history - both in Israel and in the church. Read biographies of faithful Christians and tell stories in your own family - to be reminded of God’s goodness and power and faithfulness.

* Remember Abraham and his 25 years waiting for his wife to conceive.
* Remember Moses and his 40 years as a shepherd in the wilderness, being prepared to lead God’s people for another 40 years in the wilderness.
* Remember Joshua and the fall of Jericho as the people simply marched around the walls.
* Remember David and his 40 years as king - fighting for his life and experiencing miracle after miracle of God’s deliverance.
* Remember Peter, James and John - remember the apostle Paul - remember Augustine and Athanasius; remember Luther and Calvin; remember Hudson Taylor and George Mueller.

Remember the faithfulness of God. Mark milestones in your life and celebrate your spiritual birthday. Share your testimony often to encourage others with how God has changed your life. The first layer of a firm foundation for your life is to KNOW GOD. “Let us press on to know the LORD.” Second:

**Layers of Commitment to God**

* **Know** God > **Love** God

“What shall I do with you, O Efraim? …Your love is like a morning cloud, like the dew that goes early away.” Hosea 6:4

***If we know God we will love Him.*** To remember His faithfulness and know His goodness is to LOVE the Lord. But because Israel did not really know God - they didn’t know His heart or remember His great salvation or treasure His presence with them - so they didn’t love Him. Their affection and devotion was like a light, fluffy cloud that burns away in the sun; or like dew that evaporates quickly.

***What is your love like for the Lord?*** Is it steadfast and passionate or is it fickle and easily displaced? Are you like a faithful wife who loves and respects her husband or like an unfaithful wife who continually looks for other suitors?

Israel as a nation was continually unfaithful. They constantly turned to other gods and looked around for other options.

Brothers, sisters - naturally, on our own, this is what we are all like. ***Our human hearts are drawn to this world***, we are easily distracted by other gods, other promises of the world, the flesh and the devil.

Think of your ***progression from knowing something to loving it.*** The big three idols of our day are sex, money and power. It is said that in our 20s we chase after sex. In our 30s we turn to money. And in our 40s and 50s we shift to power. It’s the height of football season, so **let’s take football as an example** to illustrate the connection between knowing and loving something.

If you cheer for the Bucs or the Gators or the Seminoles, your affection for the team, your excitement for any given game will grow to the extent that you KNOW the details. Obviously if you watch the games you’ll care more. If you don’t watch the games you won’t track with the drama of the season - you won’t be moved by a big injury or excited by a big play.

I’ve lost some of the ladies, so feel free to ***shift the analogy to shoes or handbags*** or hair products. Whatever you KNOW - whatever you focus on and think about and spend time on - that is what your heart will come to LOVE.

If our knowledge of God is fickle and short-lived then our love for Him will be equally shallow and wavering. If you don’t regularly read your Bible and pray and come to worship service and participate in a small group - if you don’t have regular inputs to your knowledge of God - it won’t be long before your love begins to grow cold.

Think of it as a **LONG DISTANCE RELATIONSHIP**. It is possible to maintain your love for someone even if you live far apart. But everyone knows it’s difficult. If you don’t come to church very often, you’re not in a small group and you don’t read your Bible - it’s like you’ve moved to California but your husband is in Florida. You still consider yourself married and, at some level, you love him. But absence does not make the heart grow fonder - it makes the heart grow forgetful. And cold. And empty.

Have you had a long distance relationship with God for a while? Maybe you’re here as a commitment to renew that relationship. ***Let me encourage you to really plug in.*** Commit to be here most every Sunday for worship. Engage with the Bible focus each week - that’s why we send it out every Friday. Join a small group - whether a couples group or a group just for men or just for women - find one that works for your schedule and attend regularly. Get into a Bible reading plan - and really read. Don’t just skim and check the box. Read and pray through the passages each day. You can share the reading plan with friends - and share your thoughts and prayers as you go.

Get to KNOW GOD again and it will ***kindle the flames of your LOVE FOR GOD***. Think of each point of contact as a piece of wood you throw on the fire of your love for God: coming to worship, attending a group, reading the Bible, praying regularly - what does your fire look like? Is it just a few twigs thrown together? Easily put out? A few drops of rain and it’s smoldering? Or do you have lots of wood there - lots of kindling and some big logs?

As Israel drifted from the Lord, ***He kept calling them back***. Verse 5:

**Layers of Commitment to God**

* **Know** God > **Love** God

“Therefore I have hewn them by the prophets, I have slain them by the words of my mouth, and my judgment goes forth as the light.” Hosea 6:5

Hosea 6 uses strong, ***graphic language*** to describe God’s relationship with His people. In verse one it says “he has torn us,” and “struck us down.” Here in verse 5 God says “I have hewn them and slain them.” Ouch. This is painful terminology. How much more does God have to do to get our attention?

This is how seriously God takes His relationship with us! He sent prophets - one after another - like Hosea and Jeremiah and Ezekiel and Isaiah - to hack at His people with confrontations and rebukes, with warnings and promises.

***How has the Lord been hewing and hacking at you lately through His Word?*** And how have you been interpreting those assaults? Do you see God’s loving pursuit of you through His Word? Do you see the jealousy of God as a reflection of His desire for your greatest good and your fullest joy? God knows that you will only be really, deeply satisfied if you know and love Him. Anything else you seek to know and love and trust and serve will let you down.

And God doesn’t want that. So ***He will do battle with your idolatry.*** God actively attacks any competitors for your love for Him - just as your wife will go on the rampage against pornography or any interest you might have in another woman; or your husband would feel about a wife who was flirting with other men. Our hearts were designed to be protective of our most precious relationships. We know deep down that you can only really love and serve one person. Adding a mistress to the marriage equation is always bad for everyone. Or adding a “mister” - why isn’t that a word? What’s the male equivalent for a mistress?

Look at the goal of God’s loving confrontation: to bring LIGHT into the darkness of our sin. To lovingly expose the waywardness of our hearts so He can call us back to Himself. This brings us to verse 6 - the one Jesus quotes to the Pharisees:

**Layers of Commitment to God**

* **Know** God > **Love** God

“For I desire steadfast love [mercy] and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.” Hosea 6:6

***Here God puts together love and knowledge***, making them synonymous in the parallelism of this verse. God desires two things over two other things - but really it’s one thing God wants over one other thing. He doesn’t care as much about sacrifices and burnt offerings, what He cares about much more is love and the knowledge of God. The word there for love is HESED - which needs two words in English to do it justice. It’s not the fickle, romantic, flickering crush love of modern American, it’s the deep, abiding, unconditional, serving love and mercy of the God of heaven for His wayward, sinful people.

God is saying that He doesn’t care about the religious activities of the Jewish people if their hearts are not in it. The third layer of commitment is:

**Layers of Commitment to God**

* **Know** God > **Love** God > **Obey** God

“For I desire steadfast love [mercy] and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.” Hosea 6:6

If our obedience and service to God does not come from love for Him, which grows out of our true knowledge of Him - then it is empty ritual to God and He doesn’t want it. God is not interested in RELIGION. ***He doesn’t want your dutiful obligation. He wants your joy; your love; your heart.***

***What were the sacrifices for?*** Why did the people have to bring an animal to sacrifice to the Lord every month on the new moon? Why did the priests offer sacrifices every day in the temple area and in large numbers on the holy feast days? God was teaching His people the COST OF SIN and the price you must pay to cover it. Their word was ATONEMENT - which means COVERING.

Basically, the Jews were commanded to offer lambs and bulls and pigeons - burning them up as sacrifices - instead of themselves being consumed by God’s wrath.

Every time you brought a sheep and watched the priest slit its throat it should have been a deeply personal spiritual experience. You watch the light of life go out of the animal’s eyes - you watch their blood spill all over the steps of the altar. You see the lifeless body on the stones, being burned up. It should have created such a culture of gratitude and devotion to the Lord.

But - like every religious ritual - it devolved into emotionless acts. The people brought the animals and recited the Scriptures and sang the Psalms - but there was no joy - no heart engagement. So, God called them back to the heart of the sacrifice system. One more layer that’s needed to be firmly established with the Lord.

**Layers of Commitment to God**

* **Know** God > **Love** God > **Obey** God > **Love** People

“For I desire steadfast love [mercy] and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.” Hosea 6:6

What God desires is not just love for HIM - but love for Him that overflows in love for His people, and for all people. This wonderful verse has an intentional double meaning. “I desire steadfast love.” For whom? Mainly for the Lord - since it correlates directly to the knowledge of God in the parallel phrase. But there is an implication there - that if we love God we will love people, since God loves people. And look at the next four verses - which are all about a LACK of love.

**Layers of Commitment to God**

* **Know** God > **Love** God > **Obey** God > **Love** People

“But like Adam they transgressed the covenant… As robbers lie in wait for a man… they murder on the way…” Hosea 6:7-9

What God continually pointed to in His confrontation of Israel’s sin was the BLOOD on their hands. He focused on how they treated each other - and especially the most vulnerable among them. Did Israel consistently care for their poor, their orphans and widows and the refugees among them? ***If they had KNOWN GOD, they would have known that God has a special heart for the weak and powerless.*** He chose Abraham precisely when he was most weak and powerless himself! He saved Israel when they were slaves in a foreign land. He constantly reminded them - “you were once refugees yourselves - so take care of the foreigners in your midst!”

If they had loved God, they would have loved the things that He loved - especially PEOPLE.

***So, when we fail to love people*** - either actively abusing or taking advantage of people or simply neglecting to love and serve them well - what we are revealing is that we don’t know and love GOD.

This brings us back to Matthew and the Pharisees. ***Why was Matthew working as a tax collector?*** How was he able, in his conscience, to take advantage of the Jewish people and charge them significant interest over and above their taxes to Rome? Matthew’s lack of love for people - especially his own Jewish people - revealed the condition of his heart, and how far from God he had grown. He had lost sight of the knowledge of God and as a result his love for God had grown cold. Without knowledge of God and love for God, he couldn’t possibly obey the Lord.

But Hosea 6 ends on a note of hope, as does Jesus’ encounter with Matthew.

**Layers of Commitment to God**

* **Know** God > **Love** God > **Obey** God > **Love** People

“For you also, O Judah, a harvest is appointed. When I restore the fortunes of my people.” Hosea 6:11

**The word “harvest”** is sometimes negative in prophecy - referring to the end times harvesting of the nations in the fire of God’s final judgment. But here it is connected with the restoring of fortunes - so it’s the more obvious connotation of harvest with bringing in crops - which means life and provision and feasting.

***So be encouraged today!*** Even though Israel was totally unfaithful - even though God had to strike them down with judgment and exile and suffering and confrontation - He had a plan to restore them in the Messiah.

***Matthew represents the Jewish people. Compromised. Corrupted.*** Wayward. Like Hosea’s wife, the prostitute, who had gone after the gods of Rome. But just like Hosea going back to retrieve his wife, so Jesus came to retrieve his wayward son - Matthew. And Jesus would pay the price for Matthew’s redemption - as well as for yours and mine.

If you want to be more established in your relationship with the Lord - follow the example of Matthew and the call of Hosea.

* Get to know God - get back into your Bible!
* Fall in love with God again as you get to know Him.
* Let your obedience grow from your relationship with God.
* And part of that obedience will involve loving and serving others - especially right here in the family of God.

Jesus calls you today, very simply, as he did to Matthew saying, “Come, follow me.” Will you come today?

Let’s pray.