



## Return for Renewal

Jonathan K. Dodson | Hosea 4-7 | June 14, 2020

CSL: God *whispers* in our pleasures, *speaks* in our consciences, but *shouts* in our pain. It is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world. God wants to rouse, not just the world but the church, *our church*. What is he saying through our pain? No doubt, many things, including a more just, less busy society, but he's also saying *more*. When God speaks, he doesn't just inform what we do but forms *who we are*. This summer we're slowing down to listen God's voice through Pain, Prayer, Meditation, Rest. What I'd like to do is lay some of the cultural chaos next to the ordering Scriptures so we can discern God's voice. We've created a guide to help you be formed week by week. Our hope and prayer is that you will experience deep, spiritual renewal through some essential spiritual movements.

### Adopt & Expose

Waves keep crashing in: impeachment trials, COVID-19, racial injustice, rioting, and we haven't even reached the election. With each new wave we find ourselves scrambling to react. With COVID-19, we pivoted to sheltering in place, wearing facemasks, and distancing ourselves from one another. The virus forced us to **adopt** new patterns of living, some have been good. *Relationships*. Many people have reconnected with old friends/family, and parents experienced a special intimacy with their kids; others gotten to know their neighbors for the first time. *Creation*. Some adopted a more outdoor friendly lifestyle. My IG feed lit up with photos from nature: birds, flowers, trails. People hit the Greenbelt like never before. Some became more active: I've seen more joggers on my street than ever before, and after a 15 year hiatus, I became one of them. Why did we adopt these new patterns? **The collapse of a narrative: the Busy Me**. No longer rushing about the city, we've had time to reprioritize. But as the Busy Me collapsed, bad patterns also *emerged*. With more time at home, parents have been short-tempered with their kids. Marital conflict spiked, with record divorce rates in China. As air travel plummeted, so has our sense of achievement: no more flying here and there, being the answer-man at work, building and launching products, a big letdown followed. We were so hooked on achievement that when the Busy Me collapsed so did we: loneliness, exhaustion, depression, overdrinking, porn spike. Some dug in and redirected achievement: Home Depot parking lot packed every day;



garages transformed into crossfit gyms. COVID forced us to adopt new patterns and also **exposed** bad ones. Why? *There's a sickness beneath the sickness.* In the 8<sup>th</sup> century, God raised up Hosea the prophet to confront a spiritual sickness in the northern kingdom of Israel (aka Ephraim). When Hosea pointed out the sickness, they turned to politics for a cure, *When Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah his wound, then Ephraim went to Assyria, and sent to the great king.* Turning their backs on God, they sent to a super power for help. That power eventually came to dominate them, sending them into exile. *What cultural powers are you tempted to turn to for a cure?* Achievement, entertainment, activism, politics? When something doesn't go your way, what do you look to? Hosea sends a stinging reminder: *But he is not able to cure you or heal your wound* (5:13). The cultural powers of more money in the bank, a better spouse, greater notoriety, political gains, a brilliant side hustle, and even a more just society (as much as we need it) *will not heal our sickness!* Cultural cures for spiritual disease never works. In fact, it have the opposite effect; it dulls the understanding. Hosea says, *They forsake the Lord seeking whoredom, wine, and new wine which dull the understanding* (4:11). Understanding the data won't save you, garnering lots of likes won't lift you up, greenbelt hikes and a place in Dripping will not deliver you. Our sickness is spiritual not circumstantial. So while sinful busyness and injustice are awful, they are symptoms of a deeper disease, part of a collapsing narrative, the Big and Busy Me.

### **Recognize & Renounce**

What do we do? Recognize and renounce. To renounce racism, you have to see it; to get sober, you have to recognize your addiction. Videos of urban protests against police brutality and stories of racial profiling have helped many white people see our privilege and renounce systemic racism. It can be painful to see how you have benefited from a system that oppresses others. But pain is God's megaphone. It wakes us from spiritual and moral slumber. God says to Israel: I will be like a lion; I will tear you and go away. You see, God is not tame. While they are responsible for their sickness, God is sovereign over their pain. Sometimes he roars and claws to get our attention. He swipes Israel and says, *"I will return to my place until they acknowledge their guilt and seek my face, and in their distress earnestly seek me"* (5:15). Will you respond to his sovereign swipe? What sinful patterns

do you need to recognize and renounce? A friend of mine developed some serious medical problems. He thought it was cancer. They ran all kinds of tests, and then said, It might sound crazy but there's nothing wrong with you. It's stress. It got him thinking. He happens to be a theater director *and* a football coach. People often ask, How do you bring those two worlds together? He said, *Control*. I don't want to be in the play or on the field, I want to control it. But, I'm learning I can't treat life that way. I have to play my part and trust the the One who *can* control it. What did he renounce? The Big & Busy Me. And now he's praying like he's never prayed before. It's not enough to *recognize* the guilt, *agree* with the guilt, even *confess* the guilt to a friend. *We have to renounce it before the face of God* and say, *forgive me for I have sinned against you*. God says: seek my face. In your distress earnestly seek me. What else might God be calling us to renounce? He declares, *For I desire steadfast love not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings* (6:6). What does he mean? While Israel was busy consorting with cultural powers, they still performed ritual sacrifices to God. They watched sermons, zoomed City Groups, participated in FCs, *while their hearts elsewhere*. God desires steadfast love. The word means loyalty, devotion. You can go to a gospel-centered church, be in a city group, do mercy, justice, and evangelism and be disloyal to God. God doesn't want ritual; he wants *loyal love*. Steadfast love not sacrifice. A couple can cook and clean, work and pay bills, raise kids together, even be intimate in bed, *and still be distant in marriage*. Ritual is not enough. God requires steadfast love. I *desire* steadfast love; desire means to delight. Just as a husband delights in his wife, so God delights in our faithfulness not sacrifice. God is calling us out of cultural and ritual ghettos—to disown the Big Me. *Will we recognize and renounce our and return to him with our whole heart?*

### **Return & Renew**

Recognize and Renounce is just one side of the coin, one half of the turn. The second half, the other side is return and renew. Return is a major theme in the OT, especially in the Prophets. Hosea says, *Return to the Lord* 4x (3:5; 6:1; 12:6; 14:1). What does it mean? To return is to leave one place to go to another. To leave ritual knowledge to enter into intimate knowledge, disloyal love to loyal love. This means physical and spiritual withdraw from the things that reinforce the Big Me. One of my favorite new habits during COVID is



going for walks with my wife. We walk about half an hour down to Radio Coffee and Beer, hang out, and then walk half an hour back. As we walk, we leave one place to go to another. We leave the place of kids, work, phones, and share our struggles, hopes, memories, life. And as we do, we move closer together. When we return, there's a skip in our step, joy in our relationship. Similarly, to experience spiritual renewal we have to leave the place of Big Me and return to the Lord. And if we return, He promises to renew us: *After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up that we may live before him* (6:2).

Although Israel had lingered in their idolatry for years, God says I will make them like new in a matter of days. He will revive, renew, bring back to life. All they need do is return, and he renews; they lay down; he raises up. And the powerful thing about this being raised up on the third day is that he's already done it in Christ. Those who put their faith in Jesus, who was raised on the third day, are raised up seated with him in the heavenly places (Eph 2:6). It's a return to our senses, ourselves in Christ, where we are renewed day after day through his exalted, resurrection presence. Will you return to be renewed? Will you recognize and renounce to return and be renewed? We've all adopted idolatrous patterns of living. God is calling us to recognize and renounce their hold our lives. And to return to the renewing presence of Christ, who lifts us up with his very own life and death. Recognize & Renounce, Return & Renew: movements of spiritual formation.