

## Prayer

Jesus, You heal the wounds of my body, and I thank You.  
Holy Spirit, You heal the brokenness of my spirit, and I thank You.  
Father God, You heal the sinfulness of my soul, and I thank You.  
Take me, and make me whole, to serve You with my life,  
Almighty God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. AMEN

## ***Prayer Suggestions***

### Prayer ideas

*Pour out your soul to God in prayer for those who have lost everything in the tragedy of natural disaster*

### On-going prayers

- **Pray for Your home church** *Pray that God will raise up people of wisdom, spiritual discernment and integrity to lead His people*
- *Give thanks for fair-trade products giving producers fair pay*
- *Pray for Haiti and all those affected by the earthquake there*

## ***Meditation***

Lord God, Almighty Father, Rock of ages,  
Inventor, Designer, Composer and Artist.

Flood all my senses with the ecstasy of life,  
And overpower the torrid pain of death.

Irradiate me with the brilliance of light,  
And absorb the darkest evils of self.

Energise my enthusiastic soul with love,  
And purge the dismal paths of gloom.

Stretch my mind with the intricacies of truth,  
And burst the selfish myth of supremacy.

Lord God, Almighty Father, Rock of Ages,  
Principal, leader, colleague and aide.

Excite me by how much I truly need You,  
And colour me with the hues of godliness.

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## **Bible passage – Hosea 6:1-6**

- <sup>1</sup> 'Come, let us return to the LORD.  
He has torn us but he will heal us;  
he has injured us but will bind us up.
- <sup>2</sup> After two days he will revive us;  
on the third day he will restore us,  
that we may live in his presence.
- <sup>3</sup> Let us know the LORD;  
let us pursue our knowledge of Him.  
He will appear as surely as the sun rises;  
He will come to us like the winter rains,  
like the spring rains that water the earth.
- <sup>4</sup> 'What will I do with you, Ephraim?

What will I do with you, Judah?  
Your love is like the morning mist,  
like the early dew that disappears!

<sup>5</sup> So I have cut them up with my prophets,  
I killed them with the words of my mouth;  
my judgments flashed on you like light.

<sup>6</sup> For I desire mercy, not sacrifice,  
and the knowledge of God  
rather than burnt offerings.

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## Bible Study

### Review

How easily it is to be deceived by our presumptions about Scripture! This text begins with three verses of inspiring prophecy (6:1-3), worthy of inclusion amongst other great New Testament texts about healing. But just as we are rejoicing in these verses, we are reminded that this is Hosea, an unhappy tale of what went wrong between God and His people, using the example of Hosea's anguished marriage with the temple prostitute, Gomer. So what is happening here, and why, after the three glorious verses, do we hear of God's anguish with His people and His desperate call for them to 'desire mercy, not sacrifice' (6:6). These verses are without a doubt, some of the most impressive in the whole of Hosea; but what do they mean?

In a fuller study, we would have time to examine this further, but I must ask you to bear with me as I explain the sequence of Hosea's prophecies here. He has just unleashed prophecies laying bare the errors of Israel's priests, who had denied their godly heritage, developed their own traditions and disregarded the laws of Moses and their Covenant heritage (Hosea 4,5). Israel and her God were bound in Covenant, but Israel had prostituted herself to foreign gods (4:12-19); so why, said Hosea, should Israel think she could turn to the Lord God when she felt like it (5:4)? Surely she has forfeited her covenant rights and was ripe for judgement, not love! In this spirit, Hosea prophesied; '*therefore I am like maggots to Ephraim ... like rotteness to the house of Judah ... I will carry off, with no one to rescue ...until they acknowledge their guilt*' (5:12-15)! Then, immediately after this, Hosea continued '*In their guilt they seek my face, in their distress, they will beg my favour*' (5:15) before going into the first three verses of our reading today.

Now if you read the passage with all this in mind, you will see that although verses 1 to 3 are indeed an appeal to God for help, Hosea is in fact mocking the people of Israel who appeal to God while still sinning! How we would love to lift Hosea 6:1-3 straight out of the Old Testament and ignore Hosea's complaint! However, we must recognise that Hosea was not mocking those who call upon the Lord with a genuine heart. It is likely that the poem 6:1-3 was a well known form of words used by worshippers to ask the Lord for help, and Hosea quoted it rather than wrote it anew himself. With the words being well known, Hosea hoped that people would appreciate his point, that the love of those who called on the Lord unworthily or out of convenience was like '*the morning mist ... early dew that disappears*' (6:4)

As Hosea 1-3 says, the Lord brings both good and bad on His people, and yes, the Lord both tears down the sins of His people and builds up those who repent. Today we can say that in Christ, He restores us '*on the third day*' (if we think of Hosea 6:2 as being a reference to Christ's resurrection). What the Lord requires of His people, however, is not the form of worship but the heart, and He does not like appeals for convenient help from people who only turn to Him only when it suits them! With this in mind, Hosea's famous words '*I desire mercy not sacrifice*' (6:6) are crystal clear. As Moses had said so many years before when setting up the legal basis for God's Covenant with His people (Deuteronomy 6:4f.), the reasons for all the rules about worship were that God wanted His people to love Him; '*you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might ...*'. No legally correct worship can replace the love of the heart; as in marriage, so it is between God and His people.

Our God is merciful and loving, and He will heal and restore His people; but He cannot do this for those who do not love Him, because they have chosen to reject Him. We must not set this wonderful text to one side, rather we must receive it as God's promise for those who are faithful, and a warning that those who seek the Lord unfaithfully set themselves up for God's wrath.

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## Discipleship

### **Questions** (for use in groups)

1. What does this passage of Scripture say about God's help for those who are suffering?
2. Is it right for us to understand that God's help for His people is conditional? Why is it not unconditional?
3. Discuss in your group; what is the 'early morning dew' or the 'mist' that disappears (see verse 4)? How can God's people avoid the trap of false worship?

### **Topics covered by this text**

- *The healing power of God*
- *The frailty of humanity*
- *The proper worship of God*

### **Personal comments by author**

*The first time I lectured on this passage, I noticed that the students who heard me were somewhat shocked that I did not teach the standard line that this passage in Hosea represents the unconditional loving heart of God. I had to explain that God's love is only unconditional in Christ, and that God's people must never forget that the benefits of grace, of healing and the Lord's forgiveness, are only found where Christ is honoured.*

### **Ideas for exploring discipleship**

- *How does your own church practice healing ministry? Think about how this is done, and keep this passage of Scripture in mind. Does Hosea have something to say to us? I am not sure I am in a position to say how the Lord can use this Scripture, but I am convinced that he will use this amongst us today if we are willing to read Hosea's prophecies exactly for what they are.*
- *Read the words of verse 6 again, and take time to share them with someone else. Be careful to explain to them the difference between Hosea talking about 'burnt offerings' and the language we use today about forms of worship.*

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## Final Prayer

Set us free, Lord Jesus, to live in truth of heart and soul. May we speak only what is a true reflection of our thoughts and feelings; may we do for You what You have asked of us because we really want to; and may we listen actively for what is good and worthy within what others say. Set us free, Lord Jesus, to be like You:  
AMEN

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