

Group Study 1

For use after the group has read chapter 1, “Why Fall in Love?”

1. Open in prayer.
2. (Go around the room, let everyone answer briefly) If you had to choose the greatest love song of all time, what song would you select?
3. Read Genesis 2:7-25 together.
4. In verses 18-20, it mentions that God noticed the first man’s “aloneness.” Do you think the man himself was aware that he was alone? Why or why not.
5. Why do you think God chose to create the first woman from the man’s side, rather than creating her from scratch, so to speak?
6. The author of *Falling in Love with God* points out, in chapter 1 of the book, that Genesis 2:23-25 depict three aspects of a loving romantic relationship:
 - Commonality (v. 23)
 - Community (v. 24)
 - Communion (v. 25)

How do you see those characteristics depicted in each of those verses?

7. The author of *Falling in Love with God* says, “Those are the things that make falling in love so fulfilling and rewarding.” Have you ever experienced a relationship that held all three of those elements? If so, can you describe what that was like?
8. How do you think the first humans reflected those three things in relation to God? (HINT: see the following verses and discuss if and how they reflect each characteristic)
 - Commonality (Genesis 1:27)
 - Community (Genesis 2:7)
 - Communion (Genesis 3:8)
9. Do you agree with the author’s statement that, “Every human soul—whether he or she knows it or not—desperately longs to be united with God in a real, loving relationship; one that is like that of husband and wife, but greater; one that is like that of parent and child, but stronger; one that is like that of friend to friend, but sweeter?” Why or why not?
10. Do you think it is possible to experience those things in your relationship with God, today? Why or why not?
11. Do those three words (commonality, community, communion) describe your relationship with God? If so, how? If not, what do you think is lacking?

12. How would you like to see this book and this group study affect your relationship with God? With others in the group?
13. How can this group support or encourage you in pursuing those changes?
14. Any other questions or comments?
15. Close in prayer.

Group Study 2

For use after the group has read chapter 2, “Who Wrote the Book of Love?”

1. Open in prayer.
2. (Go around the room, let everyone answer briefly) Who was your first girlfriend or boyfriend?
3. Read Hosea 1:1 together.
4. The prophet's name, *Hosea*, was a common name in Israel. It is the same name as Joshua (who led God's people into the promised land after the death of Moses), Hoshea (the last king of Israel), and Jesus (or Yeshua). He is distinguished from other *Hoseas* of his day by the added description, “the son of Beerī” (Beerī means, “keeper of the well”), which seems to signify neither fame nor infamy. Other than that, we know virtually nothing about the prophet Hosea. Do you think there could be any significance in Hosea's relative anonymity?
5. Hosea 1:1 says the “word of the Lord” came to him during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah (in Judah) and Jeroboam (in Israel). Take turns reading the following passages to get a feel for the times in which God spoke to Hosea:
 - a. Uzziah (king of Judah; also called Azariah): 2 Kings 15:1-5
 - b. Jotham (king of Judah): 2 Kings 15:32-35
 - c. Ahaz (king of Judah): 2 Kings 16:1-4
 - d. Hezekiah (king of Judah): 2 Kings 18:1-5
 - e. Jeroboam (king of Israel): 2 Kings 14:23-27
6. In what ways do you think Hosea's life and times was different from yours? In what ways does it seem similar?
7. We don't know for sure, but Hosea probably lived in the northern kingdom of Israel and spoke God's Word to his people for at least twenty-five years, and perhaps as long as sixty-five years.
8. Which of the following things do you have in common with Hosea?
 - a. He had a common name
 - b. He came from an ordinary family
 - c. He lived in a time of great political and spiritual upheaval
 - d. God spoke to him
 - e. God chose him
 - f. God used him
9. If God were to speak to you in a new and particular way through this study of Hosea through

the book, *Falling in Love with God*, what would you like him to say, and why?

10. As we conclude this group study, let's bow for a time of silence. In the silence, tell God what you are willing to hear from him, what you want to hear from him, and how you're hoping to change as a result of this study.
11. Any other questions or comments?
12. Close in prayer.

Group Study 3

For use after the group has read chapter 3, “Aligning the Heart”

1. Open in prayer.
2. (Go around the room, let everyone answer briefly) What was your favorite fairy tale growing up—and why?
3. Read Hosea 1:1-11 together.
4. Take a moment to reflect on Hosea 1:2, in which the prophet Hosea records that God told him to marry a prostitute or promiscuous woman. Do you find it odd or surprising that a book of the Bible starts out that way? Why or why not?
5. How do you think you would have responded if you had been in Hosea’s shoes at that time? If you had been Hosea’s mom or dad? His friend?
6. What do you think about the names God told Hosea to give to his children, and what God said about their significance? (see below)

Jezreel (“Reject,” “Throwaway”), because God would soon punish King Jehu and discard Israel
Lo-ruhamah (“Unloved”), because God would no longer love and forgive Israel
Lo-ammi (“Not Mine”), because God said Israel was no longer his people

7. Do you think God’s actions to and through Hosea were too extreme? Necessary to wake up Israel to their sin? An important lesson for future generations? Something else?
8. Has God ever taken extreme measures to get *your* attention? Convict you of sin? Produce repentance in you? If so, what were those measures?
9. Chapter 3 of *Falling in Love with God* draws parallels between God’s message through Hosea and his plan of redemption, saying that, like Hosea’s actions toward Gomer:
 - God condescended to you in spite of your shame
 - God chose you in spite of your past
 - God loves you in spite of your betrayal

Is one of those truths more real to you in some way than the others? If so, which one? If not, why not?

10. Hosea 1 concludes with God’s promise that there would come a day when “Lo-ammi” (Not Mine) would become “Bar El Chai” (Son of the Living God). What does it mean to you that God calls you “Mine?”
11. How can you respond this week to God’s passionate embrace of you as “Mine?”

12. Any other questions or comments?

13. Close in prayer.

Group Study 4

For use after the group has read chapter 4, “Awaking to Love”

1. Open in prayer.
2. (Go around the room, let everyone answer briefly) What works best to wake you up in the morning (radio, buzzer, water pistol, etc.)?
3. Read Hosea 2:1-8 together.
14. Chapter 4 of *Falling in Love with God* points out that those verses we just read begin with an echo of a formal divorce decree (called a “get”), in which God declares his relationship with Israel to be broken and ended. Do you think God sounds (a) angry, (b) sad, (c) mean, (d) loving, (e) vindictive, or (f) redemptive in those verses?
4. Read Hosea 2:9-13 together.
5. Notice that God says he will do at least seven things in those verses. What are they? (In some versions, the words “I will” begin each statement)
6. Read Hosea 2:10-23 together.
7. Hosea 2:14 begins with the word “But” (or in some versions, “Therefore” or “So). It is a turning point, signifying that after a certain point, God will act in a different way, a new way, toward his people. What are the things he says he will do THEN? (Depending on the version from which you are reading, you may be able to list 11 or 12 distinct things God says he will do).
8. Chapter 4 of *Falling in Love with God* summarizes Hosea 2 and suggests that God’s actions toward Israel (and Hosea’s actions toward Gomer) parallel God’s efforts to get us to:
 - admit our fundamental fallenness (Hosea 2:1-8)
 - acknowledge God’s unwavering care (Hosea 2:9-13)
 - awake to the depth of our need (Hosea 2:14-23)

Does any of that reflect how God has drawn you? If so, how?

9. Chapter 4 of *Falling in Love with God* concludes with these words: “Understanding how God has so faithfully stood by us—even when we didn’t thank him, think of him, or even remember him—is a key part of the process of falling in love with God” (*Falling in Love with God*, p. 62). Do you think that’s true? If so, describe how and when God stood by you even when you were unaware or unresponsive toward him.
10. Any other questions or comments?

11. Close in prayer.

Group Study 5

For use after the group has read chapter 5, "Seeing with New Eyes"

1. Open in prayer.
2. (Go around the room, let everyone answer briefly) What is the most recent thing you lost?
3. Read Hosea 3:1-5 together.
4. In Hosea 3:1, God commands his prophet Hosea to once again show love to his wife Gomer, though she had betrayed him in multiple, devastating ways. How do you think you would have reacted if you had been in Hosea's shoes?
5. God told Hosea to "Love her as I love Israel" (v. 1). Hosea had to go looking for Gomer (though we're not told how long and how far he had to search). What does this chapter reveal about how God loves his people? (see Luke 19:10)
6. How does Hosea's search for Gomer resemble God's efforts to seek and find you?
7. Hosea 3:2 refers to Hosea "buying" Gomer for "fifteen shekels of silver and about a homer and a lethek of barley" (NIV). Why do you think Hosea specifically mentioned the price he paid for her?
8. How does Hosea's "purchase" of Gomer resemble God's efforts to ransom you from sin, death, and the devil?
9. Read 1 Peter 1:18-19, and compare it to Hosea 3:2.
10. Hosea 3:3 contain the only recorded words the prophet spoke to his wife, and they are words of restoration. Read them over again. What do you think was the point of Hosea's words...and why were they (apparently) so important that they are quoted directly?
11. How do you think Hosea 3:3 parallels God's treatment of you?
12. In Hosea 3:4-5, Hosea explains the larger significance of his actions in seeking, redeeming, and restoring Gomer as his wife. How were these verses fulfilled in the history of God's people?
13. Does Hosea 3:4-5 have a parallel in your life and experience with God? If so, how?
14. In the closing moments of this study, take some time to meditate. Perhaps close your eyes. Imagine how Gomer might have felt when, after all the pain she had caused Hosea, he sought her...bought her...and restored her to a husband, home, and status

she did not deserve. Picture how she might have reacted...at first...after a while...in time. Does that image draw you closer to God? If so, why and how?

15. Any other questions or comments?

16. Close in prayer.

Group Study 6

For use after the group has read chapter 6, "Tracing the Decline"

1. Open in prayer.
2. (Go around the room, let everyone answer briefly) If you were seven years old again and were taken to a large playground, what playground activity would you run to first (e.g., swing, monkey bars, seesaw, etc.)?
3. Chapter 6 of *Falling in Love with God* traces the decline (as mapped in Hosea's chapters 4 and 5) of a heart that is falling out of love with God:
 - a. a broken relationship (Hosea 4:1-6)
 - b. an empty heart (Hosea 4:7-13)
 - c. clouded vision (Hosea 4:14-19)
 - d. corrupt actions (Hosea 5:1-7)
 - e. tragic consequences (Hosea 5:8-11)
 - f. total devastation (Hosea 5:12-15)

Have you ever experienced any of those things or seen that decline in someone who wandered from God? If so, describe it briefly.

4. Read the following verses: Hosea 4:1, 4:6, 4:10, and 4:14. How do you think these verses relate to each other?
5. According to Hosea 4:14, what is the predictable result of a people without the kind of "understanding" (NIV) or knowledge of God Hosea mentioned in 4:1?
6. In the last verses of Hosea 5, God describes himself as being like "a moth," "dry rot" (ESV) and "a lion" to his people. What do those things have in common? What does that suggest about how God would act toward his people?
7. What does God reveal, in Hosea 5:15, about his purpose in severely punishing his people for their stubborn betrayal and rebellion?
8. Read Romans 11:22.
9. Do you think Hosea 4-5 depicts "the goodness and severity of God" (Romans 11:22, KJV)? If not, why not? If so, how?
10. If God's purpose in allowing his beloved ones to suffer "misery" (Hosea 5:15) is that they would seek his face, what might that suggest about the wisest and most productive way for you to react to "misery" in your life?
11. Is there any "misery" in your life right now? If so, share it with the group. Pray together for

the grace to earnestly seek God when misery hits....and to seek him also when misery goes.

12. Any other questions or comments?

13. Close in prayer.

Group Study 7

For use after the group has read chapter 7, “Grasping the Lover’s Desire”

1. Open in prayer.
2. (Go around the room, let everyone answer briefly) Given a choice, which dessert would you choose: cake, pie, pudding, ice cream, or fruit?
3. Hosea 6 contains some of the most beautiful poetry in the Hebrew Scriptures. Read Hosea 6:1-6 together.
4. Hosea 6:1-3 sounds like God’s people sensitively and passionately responding to God’s warnings and pleadings to return to him. But the following verses (in Hosea 6-7) seem to make it clear that God is unimpressed with their cries of repentance and response.
5. *Falling in Love with God* summarizes Hosea 6:6 like this:

“I want your faithful love,” [God] told Israel through Hosea, “not your religious shows. I want you to want *me*, not just my favor.” Every lover wants that. What good are flowers or candy to a lover who feels ignored or neglected? Who would not be disappointed when a lover gives the impression—repeatedly—that the real attraction is not the lover himself or herself, but the lover’s money or gifts or favors? (p. 102).

6. Have you ever pondered whether you love God for him—or for his gifts and blessings? How would you describe the difference?
7. *Falling in Love with God* identifies four metaphors in Hosea 7 that can help us chart our course if we truly want to fall in love with God. Let’s look at those metaphors:
 - a. ovens that never cool; Read Hosea 7:6-7
 - b. a cake half-baked; Read Hosea 7:8
 - c. a silly bird; Read Hosea 7:11
 - d. a warped bow; Read Hosea 7:16

What do you think each of these metaphors describes? (Feel free to consult pages 105-112 in *Falling in Love with God* if you need help)

8. The author of *Falling in Love with God* suggests a heart-response to each of those metaphors: redirecting my passions, renewing my commitment, refocusing my energies, and returning to my first love. Which of these is the greatest need of your heart and life right now?
9. How can this group pray for you and support you in how God is moving you to respond?

10. Any other questions or comments?

11. Close in prayer.

Group Study 8

For use after the group has read chapter 8, “Relearning What Love Is”

1. Open in prayer.
2. (Go around the room, let everyone answer briefly) Describe something you “knew” or “believed” as a child that turned out not to be true.
3. Chapter 8 of *Falling in Love with God* identifies in Hosea 8-10 ten possible symptoms of our misguided ideas about love that show up in our relationships with God:
 - a. “I am misled by feelings”
 - b. “I take God’s love for granted”
 - c. “I scatter seeds of rebellion”
 - d. “I treat God’s goodness like affliction”
 - e. “I look everywhere else to fill my emptiness”
 - f. “I reject correction”
 - g. “I fail to be grateful”
 - h. “I break promises”
 - i. “I cherish and defend idols”
 - j. “I trust myself” (instead of or more than God)

According to Hosea, Israel was guilty of *each* of those things, which is why God had to discipline them so severely. Chances are, some of those behaviors hit home for you, as well. Pick one that hits close to home, so to speak, and describe how it shows up in your relationship with God.

4. Are there any in the above list you think are never a problem for you? If so, which ones? If not, why not?
5. Read Hosea 10:12.
6. Notice that even after all his pleading and warning of Israel, God continues to urge them to change their hearts and their behaviors. What would “sowing righteousness” and “breaking up your fallow ground” look like in your life right now?
7. Read the following excerpt from pages 132-133 of *Falling in Love with God*:

Hosea’s prophecy helps me to see how my wayward soul must try the patience of God and grieve him to no end. How brokenhearted he must be when I allow myself to be misled by feelings and so miss his love for me, and the love I should have—and want to have—for him. How it must sadden him when I take his love for granted and scatter seeds of rebellion along my life’s path. How it must wound him when I treat his goodness like affliction and look everywhere else for the satisfaction my soul craves—and which only he can give. How it must pain him when I reject his correction, fail to express my gratitude, break multiple promises, and cherish and defend my pitiful idols. And—

especially after all that—how he must suffer to see me stubbornly, repeatedly trusting myself rather than turning to him (*Falling in Love with God*, pp.132-133).

What kind of response do those words prompt in your mind and heart?

8. Any other questions or comments?
9. Have someone in the group turn to page 133 in *Falling in Love with God* and close this session by reading the prayer that concludes chapter 8.

Group Study 9

For use after the group has read chapter 9, “Climbing the Heights of Love”

1. Open in prayer.
2. (Go around the room, let everyone answer briefly) What was your first—or favorite—pet?
3. Read the following excerpt from *Falling in Love with God* to introduce today’s study:

After ten chapters in which God, through his prophet Hosea, described his love for Israel primarily in terms of the love between a long-suffering husband and an unfaithful wife, he takes a notable and significant turn in the eleventh chapter. As deep and wide and high as the love between a husband and wife is, it takes more to express God’s love for his people. A single metaphor can communicate much, but in Hosea’s eleventh chapter, we are confronted with a series of metaphors to help us appreciate the many-splendored nature of God’s love for us. In one of the most tender chapters of the Old Testament—of the entire Bible, in fact—God expresses his feelings for Israel . . . and, in so doing, illuminates his feelings for you and me (*Falling in Love with God*, p. 137).

4. Read Hosea 11:1-11.
5. In Hosea 11:1-3, what metaphor does God use to depict his relationship with his people?
6. In what ways does God treat you as a loving parent acts toward a child? Be as specific as possible.
7. In Hosea 11:4, God changes the metaphor (through verse 7). What is the new metaphor he uses to depict his relationship with his people?
8. In what ways does God treat you as a favorite pet? Be as specific as possible.
9. God employs still another metaphor in Hosea 11:8-9. What is this new metaphor? (Note: this metaphorical shift is less obvious than the others. Feel free to consult pages 141-143 in *Falling in Love with God* if you need help).
10. In what ways has God loved you “like a rock?” Be as specific as possible.
11. In Hosea 11:10-11, God changes the metaphor once more. What is the new image he uses to depict his relationship with his people?
12. In what ways does God love you fiercely, like a lioness roaring for her cubs? Be as specific as possible.
13. Any other questions or comments?

14. Conclude today's study by reading aloud this excerpt from *Falling in Love with God*:

God loves you. Like a son. A firstborn son. An only son.

God loves you. Like a favorite pet. A coddled lamb or a clumsy calf.

God loves you. Like a rock. Immovable. Immense. Unchanging.

God loves you. Like a lion. Roaring. Waiting. Intent on your return (*Falling in Love with God*, p. 145).

15. Close with prayers of praise and thanks to God for the many facets of his love.

Group Study 10

For use after the group has read chapter 10, “Returning to Love”

1. Open in prayer.
2. (Go around the room, let everyone answer briefly) What is the longest trip you’ve ever taken?
3. This week’s study, based on chapter 10 in *Falling in Love with God*, maps how to return to God, no matter how far or long we may have traveled. And, as the book says, “It is a trip any one of us can take. And it is never too late. Nor is it ever too early. And it can be traversed over and over again” (*Falling in Love with God*, p. 148).
4. Read Hosea 11:12-12:2.
5. The first step on the return trip to God is “recognizing what is.” What things do you think God was trying to get his people to recognize about their spiritual state, according to the above verses?
6. How would you describe your current spiritual state? (Circle one or more)

unruly	stale	vibrant	out of control	empty
full	okay	awesome	glorious	pathetic
steady	confusing	fun	boring	other _____
7. Read Hosea 12:3-5.
8. The second step on the return trip to God is “reviewing what has been” (that is, how you got where you are). How do the above verses reflect that step? (Feel free to consult pages 151-152 in *Falling in Love with God* if you need help).
9. What things in your spiritual history have contributed to where you are—good or bad—now?
10. Read Hosea 12:6.
11. The final step on the return trip to God is “reclaiming what can be.” How does the above verse reflect that step?
12. If possible, compare how Hosea 12:6 reads in different Bible versions (feel free to consult page 153 in *Falling in Love with God* for the author’s paraphrase and two other versions).

13. How many distinct actions do you think Hosea 12:6 prescribes?
14. Do you think Hosea 12:6 charts an easy path? Difficult? In-between? Explain your answer.
15. What would enthusiastic obedience to Hosea 12:6 look like for you, in your life right now?
16. Is anything holding you back from enthusiastic obedience to Hosea 12:6? If so, what?
17. How can this group pray for you and support you in how God is moving you to respond?
18. Any other questions or comments?
19. Close in prayer.

Group Study 11

For use after the group has read chapter 11, “Letting Love Change You”

1. Open in prayer.
1. (Go around the room, let everyone answer briefly) Which of the following were rituals for you growing up: “Cross my heart and hope to die,” pinkie-swearing, or something else?
2. Chapter 11 of *Falling in Love with God* identifies three promises God made to his people in the final chapters of Hosea. We are going to look at each of those promises in today’s study.

3. Read aloud the following excerpt from *Falling in Love with God*:

As God had the poor prophet Hosea illustrate with his life, marriage, and experience, time and time again, God’s beloved bride had taken him for granted and betrayed him and broken his heart.

Just like me.

Just like you, if you’re anything like me . . . if you’re anything like the rest of the human race.

But in spite of all that, God makes three amazing promises to his people that, much like a rousing symphony, form a fitting finale to this ancient story of love, betrayal, forgiveness, and restoration. They are promises that apply not only to the ancient nation of Israel—because Hosea is not just some storyteller, but a prophet— but to you and me today. And they are promises that have the potential to utterly transform our lives if we let them (*Falling in Love with God*, p. 162).

The first of those three promises is found in Hosea 13:14.

4. Read Hosea 13:14.
5. Do you think this promise has been fulfilled? If not, why not? If so, how?
6. How does this promise apply to you?
7. Read Hosea 14:4-7.
8. Do you think this promise has been fulfilled? If not, why not? If so, how?
9. How do you think this promise might apply to you?
10. Read Hosea 14:8.
11. What do you think is the significance of God being like a “green pine tree” (NIV) to his people? (Feel free to consult pages 170-172 in *Falling in Love with God* if you need help).
12. Do you think this promise has been fulfilled? If not, why not? If so, how?

13. How do you think this promise applies to you?
14. Is anything preventing you from experiencing the fulfillment of these promises in your life? (NOTE: *Falling in Love with God*, pages 164-167, list four possibilities to consider).
15. How can you let God's deliver you, heal you, and empower you even more in this coming week?
16. Any other questions or comments?
17. One final note: make sure you bring your copy of *Falling in Love with God* to our next—and final—study.
18. Close in prayer.

Group Study 12

For use after the group has read chapter 11, "Telling the Story of Love"

1. Open in prayer.
2. (Go around the room, let everyone answer briefly) What was your favorite story as a child, and why?
3. This is our last group study based on the book, *Falling in Love with God*. The final chapter of the book relates seven stories of people who have fallen in love with God. Did any of the stories hit home to you in some way?
4. Has *Falling in Love with God* and the book of Hosea made a difference in your relationship to God? If not, why not? If so, how?
5. If your story of falling in love with God was included in that final chapter of the book, what would it say?
6. Is there someone in your life who might be helped by hearing your story of falling in love with God? If so, can you think of a way to make that happen?
7. Here are a few ways to use *Falling in Love with God* to reach out to others:
 - Write (or paste) your story of falling in love with God on the blank page 190, and then loan your book to a friend (you can even obtain extra copies of the book and do this multiple times).
 - Write a short review of *Falling in Love with God* on Amazon or Christianbook.com, and weave your testimony of falling in love with God into the review.
 - Start a new study group based on the book among your neighbors, family, and friends.
 - Begin a one-on-one discipleship relationship with someone who wants to draw closer to God, reading a chapter a week together and using these group studies to guide your discussions.
8. Any other ideas for extending the impact of this book and this study?
9. Any other questions or comments?
10. Read Hosea 14:9 as a closing challenge.

11. Close in prayer.