

Why COVID-19 Will Give Way to a 'Happily Ever After' Ending

My wife and I have been COVID-19-positive for five weeks now.

Forty-six years ago, we stood face to face before God and loved ones and promised to love and honor one another in sickness and in health. The day I made that promise to Marsha, I was prepared to suffer through some cold symptoms together and maybe, if it got bad, the stomach flu. I certainly never expected this, just like I never expected getting cancer in my 50s.

Let me tell you, you want to pick a spouse who will stand up to his or her vows the way Marsha has. She has stood by me and suffered with me—literally, in the case of COVID-19—through it all, and I am grateful and humbled by her love.

But that's what love does, right? Even when our lives seem uncertain, love moves us to lock eyes firmly with our beloved and weather the storm together. No wonder the Scriptures use marriage so frequently to describe our relationship with God. Of the many examples in the Old and New Testaments, the book of Hosea is one of my favorites.

On the surface, it is a little jarring. It sounds a bit like all of the "for worse" and none of the "for better." But in spite of its brutality, the book of Hosea is full of beauty. It is an incredible depiction of God's love for Israel—and us—and a poignant lesson in what happens when we keep our eyes and heart fixed on obeying God.

It can be hard to do that in seasons like this. During my recovery, first in isolation at the hospital and then at home, there wasn't much I could do except watch the news. I am a news junkie, so this wasn't all bad—at first. Soon, though, it became clear that the news was less about giving helpful

information about how this serious problem was getting fixed and more about fixing blame on someone. Twenty-four hours a day they broadcast accusations, controversy and even rumors of conspiracy, all cloaked in updates.

This is nothing new to the pandemic. I've watched leaders in churches, businesses and even homes use this fearmongering, smoke-and-mirrors technique for years to escape taking personal responsibility or just the hard task of doing the right thing. When this happens, it's easy to find ourselves breaking our gaze away from the Father's eyes and focusing on their lies. We can be tempted to take steps to protect ourselves or our opinions instead of walking in lockstep with God and His Spirit, instead of trusting His love for us. Before we even realize it, we will have locked eyes with the problem and those claiming to solve it for us—and forgotten God's invitation to play a part in His plan of redemption for humanity.

Hosea never forgot what God called him to or why. God loved Israel, but the nation was pursuing love in all of the wrong places. To help His people understand the depth and breadth of His love, God spoke to Hosea and told him to marry Gomer, a prostitute who, even after her marriage to Hosea, continued to look for love in all the wrong places. In spite of Hosea's devotion, Gomer left him over and over, chasing after men who did not want to take care of her, nor did they have the ability to do so. She ended up being sold as a slave. Each time, Hosea faithfully pursued his bride, restoring her to himself and even rescuing her out of her bondage, just as God promised to do for His wayward people.

Hosea 2:14–23 is a beautiful profession of God's covenantal promise—His vows—to Israel: “‘Behold, I will allure her, will bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfort to her And it shall be, in that day,’ says the Lord, ‘That you will call Me “My Husband,” and no longer call Me “My Master” I will betroth you to Me forever ... in righteousness and justice, in

lovingkindness and mercy ...[and] in faithfulness'" (verses 14, 16, 19–20, NKJV).

Because Hosea remained faithful to God's call on his life, because he trusted God even when his circumstances looked bleak, because he resisted the temptation to place blame on Gomer for complicating his life and God's plan, eventually Gomer returned to him, wholeheartedly and of her own volition. I imagine the process was painful for Hosea, but I'm sure it was worth it in the end.

What will happen when we choose to set our eyes on Christ and see His plan fulfilled in our lives and nation? What if we tuned out the fearmongering and trusted that God is up to something? What if we refused to engage with the politicking and finger pointing and focused, as Hosea did, on the same thing God is focused on: the lost, the Gomers among us?

We are living in an extraordinary moment in history. I have no doubt that God is getting ready to open the doors of the church to the millions of Gomers out there who are realizing that without the love of God, there is no way to make it. I'm believing that when this is all over churches will have to stay open five to seven nights a week to receive all the people coming back to Him.

That sounds to me like a beautiful "happily ever after" to humanity's love story with our Savior. And you and I get to be part of it! Hallelujah!

You're beautiful. I see Jesus in you.

Have a great week! {eo}

Mikel French has challenged spiritual awakening all across America, where many celebrations extended into multiple weeks, and has conducted celebrations in France, Sweden, Russia, Romania, Poland, Ukraine, Moldova, Serbia, Germany, South Africa, Malawi, the Philippines, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Haiti,

Japan, Singapore, India and Thailand. He conducted an outreach celebration in Manila, Philippines, reaching 200,000 teenagers with the book of hope. Through the generous support of partners, he has presented the message of Jesus Christ to millions of people in the nation of Russia through televised citywide soul-winning celebrations. Mikel considers it an honor to assist in conducting the annual pastor's conference, where thousands of pastors from Russia's 11 time zones come for training, teaching and equipping. Mikel and his wife, Marsha, reside in Tulsa, Oklahoma.