

June 11, 2023  
“God’s Desire”  
Hosea 6:1-6

**Intro:**

What if we are getting it all wrong? Or out of order at the very least?

A question like this could refer to any number of situations and occurrences in our lives. It could be referring to our approach to yard work or house work. Maybe to parenting. Or perhaps how to serve a meal, or the manner with which we engage in sports and following our favourite teams (Go Riders!).

A question like this could also trigger a little bit of anxiety in our lives, especially if we don’t know the specifics. “What if I am getting it wrong? Oh no! How will I correct it? Did anyone notice?”

On the other side of that question is the person who sees it as a validation of their process or work being the only way to do something. I’m sure we have all encountered such a person, usually it is in a work or school situation – where the boss doesn’t like your work because it isn’t done the way they want it done, even if that way isn’t the most effective. Or the teacher who has decided that there is only one way to approach a particular topic or format for homework handed in.

Mom and I often had disagreements around how something should be done, especially when we were playing games. I, being the more seasoned player of games and clearly the better mind for it, will have determined the most effective way to play, and Mom – being more free-spirited would happily play in whatever manner happened to tickle her fancy at the time. I was on the receiving end of many a stuck out tongue when I tried to “coach” her to a better way to play.

But what am I talking about here? Well, I am talking about worship and specifically about God’s desire when it comes to worship. Let’s take a look again

at what Hosea has to say about this, which is our main passage for this morning, and which we have already read.

[Hosea 6:1-6 \(NLT\)](#) ; [何西阿書 6:1-6 \(CUVS\)](#)

6 “Come, let us return to the Lord.

He has torn us to pieces;

now he will heal us.

He has injured us;

now he will bandage our wounds.

2 In just a short time he will restore us,

so that we may live in his presence.

3 Oh, that we might know the Lord!

Let us press on to know him.

He will respond to us as surely as the arrival of dawn

or the coming of rains in early spring.”

4 “O Israel and Judah,

what should I do with you?” asks the Lord.

“For your love vanishes like the morning mist

and disappears like dew in the sunlight.

5 I sent my prophets to cut you to pieces—

to slaughter you with my words,

with judgments as inescapable as light.

6 I want you to show love,

not offer sacrifices.

I want you to know me

more than I want burnt offerings.

**The Text:**

Hosea, one of the minor prophets in the Bible, was also one of the prophets given the monumental task of pointing out to the Israelites just how far from God they had strayed, and the consequences their continued defiance of God would bring. At the heart of the Israelite rejection of God is the leaders of the nation – specifically the religious leaders and kings, who were leading in worship practices

of other nations, and who turned to the kings of other nations to help get them out of any difficulties they were facing.

If you have spent any time reading through the Old Testament, the message that Hosea brings of the failure of the Israelites and the judgement of God on them will not be an unfamiliar tune. Time and time again, the Israelites break their covenant with God, and time and time again they are faced with the punishing consequences of those actions. And, time and time again, God rescues them from those consequences and restores covenant with them.

This is the pattern that God is referring to in Hosea. The leaders (see chapter 5) have led the nation away from the worship and covenantal following of God, and the people are all now facing the consequences of this. While God does identify the leaders as being the driving force in all of this, He does not excuse the people for blindly going along with it. And so, we have the pattern repeated where the whole nation is facing the difficulty of the consequences.

Just as we know the pattern, and God knows the pattern, the people of Israel also know the pattern, and they know that if they cry out loudly enough and show repentance for their actions, God will relent and He will save them.

One of the reasons people choose to reject God is that their idea of God – a good God who is loving and kind – does not line up with the passages, especially in the Old Testament, of God allowing and in fact causing the people of Israel to be punished. For those people, that is not a God they want to follow. They don't want the consequences. They only want the cuddly and safe teddy bear. They don't want the version of God as presented by C.S. Lewis in the Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe – the question is asked if Aslan, the Lion, is safe. The answer is of course he is not safe! He is not a tame lion. But He is good.

This is the God that the Israelites know as well. They know that God is good. They know He will save them. They count on it. They depend upon it. They take advantage of the goodness of God.

Which is what is happening in the opening lines of Hosea chapter 6. The people are calling themselves to repent, but it really isn't a heartfelt repentance as much as it is their part in the next stage of the cycle. Business as usual.

It is this attitude that God questions beginning in verse 4. What is He to do with these people? They say the right things. They pretend to do the right things. They recognize that wrong has been done, and yet they are also completely missing the point of it all. Their "love", God notes, comes and then vanishes like the dew on the grass. In spite of all the warnings, the message is still not getting through, and they are missing the point. They are getting worship, as it were, wrong.

### **Right Worship:**

This brings us to the original question. What if they, what if we, are getting it all wrong? Or even in the wrong order?

Verse 4 shows us that the people's attitude of worship and love is flimsy and fleeting and doesn't reflect what God is really looking for, what He really desires.

The answer to that is found in verse 6, and it also gives us some confusion about what God is desiring. In verse 6, God tells the people that it is not the worship of sacrifices that He is really looking for, but rather He is looking for the people to show love, and to know God. But they are acting as though their return to the prescribed patterns of worship – the festivals and sacrifices as outlined in the law of Moses, is enough to gain God's favor because that is what they think He is looking for.

They get that wrong. But they are also right... sort of. The problem here is that the sacrifices and burnt offerings that God is saying He doesn't want, is exactly the thing that He gave instruction to the people through Moses to do. It must have been important, right?

Yes, but not of primary importance. We place a lot of importance on worship ourselves. We need to have the right songs, the right worship band. There are books that tell us what the right worship service looks like. We need the right preacher and the right amount of Scripture reading and the right form of prayer. We believe that if we attend one of these proper worship services on a regular basis, then we are doing what God wants us to do and that is enough.

The sacrificial system that God gave to the Israelites wasn't given so that the people would know what to do when they got to church. It was set in place so that they would understand the relationship between people and God. That they would understand and acknowledge the grace and the provision that God gives to them.

It was, ultimately, set into place to create space for the people to get to know their God. Worship wasn't about the rule and form, but about the relationship between the Creator and his people. In Hosea, the Israelites think that if they just get back to the altars and proper sacrifices, everything will be back to normal – no harm, no foul.

In order to stop the cycle, though, practicing the form of worship is not enough. The focus needs to be on knowing God.

**Conclusion:**

Knowing God. The relationship we have with Him. That is the heart of the worship that God wants. Faithful attendance at church, faithful giving, and knowing all the latest worship songs are not the primary thing that God wants. He wants us to love Him. He wants us to know Him. This comes before worship, but it also comes after worship. It is the purpose for which worship exists.

And just in case you think this is an isolated idea, only in Hosea and only for those particular wayward Israelites, this message is repeated in other parts of the Bible as well.

**Psalm 50:14: “Make thankfulness your sacrifice to God, and keep the vows you made to the Most High.”**

**And more familiar perhaps, Micah 6:6-8: “What can we bring to the Lord? Should we bring him burnt offerings? Should we bow before God Most High with offerings of yearling calves? Should we offer him thousands of rams and ten thousand rivers of olive oil? Should we sacrifice our firstborn children to pay for our sins? No, O people, the Lord has told you what is good, and this is what he requires of you: to do what is right, to love mercy, and walk humbly with your God.”**

What God desires most is not our worship, but our relationship. He doesn't want flashy and snazzy songs, he wants us to walk with him. He doesn't desire our tithes as much as he desires that we should know him as fully as we are able to do.

Then, *then* worship can truly happen. Then we will be able to see the world as he sees the world. Then we will be able to engage with others, to love others, to show mercy and do what is right. Not because we have determined the answer to what that looks like, but because we have submitted ourselves to God's leadership in guiding us to those things. If we first seek to know God, then we will know his heart and his concern for this world. Then we will be able to worship – we will be able to worship with the understanding not only of what God has done to forgive and transform us, but also in allowing worship to help us grow in our knowledge of God.

In short, we worship because we first love God and desire to know him. Not because we think that is what is commanded or expected of us.

Let's pray.