

June 25 — God Hurts, Too!

READ

Isaiah 12:1-6

Isaiah 17:1-14

2 Chronicles 28:16-225

2 Kings 16:10-18

2 Kings 18:1-8

2 Chronicles 29:1-2

2 Kings 15:30-31

2 Kings 17:1-4

Hosea 1:1-2:13

Hosea 1:2-3, *“When the Lord began to speak through Hosea, the Lord said to him, ‘Go, marry a promiscuous woman and have children with her, for like an adulterous wife this land is guilty of unfaithfulness to the Lord. So he married Gomer daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son...’”*

THINK

There are some pretty crazy things in the Bible, and this story ranks right up there! God called Hosea to be His prophet, and then He told him to do something quite shocking — He told him to marry a prostitute! What?! Why would God do that? It was to send a message in a different way, one in which we could understand His hurt when we turn away from Him and His love that causes Him to pursue us. It was an immediate message to Israel and a timely reminder for us. The bottom line: God hurts, too. It hurts Him when we stray, when we “prostitute” ourselves to greedy self-ambition, moral relativism, and destructive patterns. Through Hosea’s pain, we see God’s pain. Even when Hosea’s wife, Gomer, left him to return to her former adulterous lifestyle, God wanted him to continue to pursue his wayward wife and guide her towards redemption.

But as we’ll continue to understand over the next few days, God, like Hosea, is our pursuing lover. He wants us to turn from our sinfulness and towards His righteousness. He wants to bring us into His loving arms and restore our lives, giving us the security of eternity in heaven. Whatever it is you may be chasing apart from God, realize that His way is best. Turn to Him and accept the unconditional, unfailing love of your Heavenly Father through the sacrificial death, burial, and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ!

PRAY

Heavenly Father, Thank You for being my pursuing lover. How great are Your faithfulness and unconditional love! Forgive me when I stray from You – I know that it hurts You when I do. Guide me in Your path of righteousness. Amen.

June 26 — No More Lip Service!

READ

Hosea 2:14-8:1-14

Hosea 4:1, *“Hear the word of the Lord, O people of Israel! The Lord has brought charges against you, saying: There is no faithfulness, no kindness, no knowledge of God in your land.”*

Hosea 6:6, *“I want you to show love, not offer sacrifices. I want you to know Me more than I want burnt offerings.”*

THINK

Webster’s Dictionary defines lip service as “an avowal of advocacy, adherence, or allegiance expressed in words but not backed by deeds.” As we read about Israel’s actions, we discover how well-fitting this description really is. Time after time, God sent prophets to let them know He saw their “lip service” in their ritualistic sacrifices. He also saw how they mistreated orphans and widows and blatantly worshiped false gods. They didn’t understand that obedience was a greater expression of love than their “worship routine.”

It’s easy to read about these warnings and wonder why they didn’t heed them. Unfortunately, though, we can find ourselves doing the same today. Too many times, we allow life to become a fast-paced routine that just happens to include church as a check on the list of to-do items each week. But God wants more than that for His children. He desires to be in a relationship with us. He wants us to know and love Him just as much as He knows us and loves us. It’s only then that we can experience the overflow of peace and joy from a heart full of love for our Creator.

PRAY

Heavenly Father, I want to know You more. I’m done with giving lip service. I want to experience that peace and joy that only You can give. I love You and worship You alone, Lord. In Jesus ’name, Amen.

June 27 — A Father's Love

READ

Hosea 9:1-14:1-9

Hosea 11:1-5, "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son. But the more they were called, the more they went away from Me. They sacrificed to the Baals and they burned incense to images It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by the arms; but they did not realize it was I who healed them. I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love. To them I was like one who lifts a little child to the cheek, and I bent down to feed them. Will they not return to Egypt and will not Assyria rule over them because they refuse to repent?"

THINK

Your five-year-old repeatedly refuses to put away their toys. What do you do? Your ten-year-old constantly gets caught playing video games when they're supposed to be doing homework. What do you do? Your seventeen-year-old has missed curfew yet again! What do you do? Your Heavenly Father has asked you to obey His commands, but you still keep making the same mistake even though you know it's wrong? What does HE do?

God is the ultimate parent. Just as we must do with the kids and students in our lives that consistently act up by instilling discipline through consequences for repeat offenses, God must do for us. Is it because He is capricious and cruel or because He's a major killjoy who loves handing down punishment from His heavenly throne? Absolutely not! The depth of His love is beyond comprehension. And the Bible makes it clear: God disciplines the ones He loves.

As with us, God was and will always remain madly in love with His chosen people, Israel. They had repeatedly strayed, and in the words of Hosea had, "prostituted" themselves to idolatry and sinfulness. So, as much as it hurt God to watch them give themselves over to evil practices, it hurt Him to allow harsh consequences for their actions.

God never seeks pleasure in watching us hurt or squirm in difficult circumstances. It's the last thing He wants — but we make our own choices. He loves us way too much to let us get away with repeated offenses. There comes the point when we have to learn the hard way, just as the Israelites did. But like any loving parent, God allows us to learn from our mistakes, to gain understanding from the discomfort and hassle of poor decision-making. But here's what's so great about God! He allows us a do-over, the chance to turn back to Him and draw close. He's always patiently awaiting our return, just as He promised His people thousands of years ago.

So, today, give thanks to the Ultimate Parent, your Heavenly Father who loves you more than you could ever ask for or imagine!

PRAY

Dear Heavenly Father, Thank You for Your unfailing love and faithfulness. I don't deserve it, I can't earn it, yet You love me nonetheless. Help me remain obedient to Your commands. Amen.

June 28 — The Lions of Judgment

READ

Isaiah 28:1-29
2 Kings 17:5-41
2 Kings 18:10-12
Isaiah 1:1-20

2 Kings 17:24-25, *“The king of Assyria transported groups of people from Babylon, Cuthah, Avva, Hamath, and Sepharvaim and resettled them in the towns of Samaria, replacing the people of Israel. They took possession of Samaria and lived in its towns. But since these foreign settlers did not worship the Lord when they first arrived, the Lord sent lions among them, which killed some of them.”*

THINK

What happens when we don't heed repeated warnings? We face the consequences. God had sent prophets repeatedly to warn the Israelites of what would happen if they continued on the path of sin and idolatry, and time was up. They were conquered by the Assyrians and sent to live in exile — removed from the very land they'd been promised through God's covenant with Abraham. And as they were taken away, others were sent from Assyria to populate their land.

The Promised Land's new tenants did not know God. They had no fear of His power and ultimate authority — yet God protected His Holy Land by sending lions among the new settlers to do it! God demands honor — He will be glorified. The Assyrians recognized that the lions were from the God of Israel and even commissioned an Israelite priest to teach their people about the Lord! But they did it only out of fear; their people didn't find communion with God.

What can we glean from this? Turning to God out of fear of judgment isn't enough. It's a good start, but God wants to have a relationship with us; He wants us to know and love Him. We must enter into a relationship with Him based on trust in His sacrificial love through Christ, repent of our sin, and learn to walk in His ways.

PRAY

Heavenly Father, I love You and stand in awe of Your Almighty power. I heed the lessons so carefully laid out in Your Word because I want nothing to disrupt my walk with You. Amen.

June 29 — God's Green Thumb

READ

Isaiah 1:21-31-3:1-4:6

Isaiah 5:1-30

Isaiah 5:1-2,7, "I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard: My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. He dug it up and cleared it of stones, and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well. Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit. ... The vineyard of the Lord Almighty is the nation of Israel, and the people of Judah are the vines He delighted in. And He looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress."

THINK

When you purchase plants, they often come with specific care instructions. Succulents are not to be overwatered. Flowering plants such as lantana and hibiscus need lots of water and full sun. With a watchful eye and the proper touch, a great caretaker can use their "green thumb" to produce a beautiful garden. Their faces light up when they describe the care they've poured into their plants!

Our Heavenly Father is like a living tree that brings every person who believes into His vine. As a believer, He delights in YOU. Just as a gardener knows the best time to plant, water, and how much sun is needed, He knows exactly what You need and is always faithful to provide.

Examine the fruit of your life, and allow God to prune lovingly. Trust His skilled hands. Then as good fruits like peace, justice, and righteousness spring up in you, picture Him smiling down on you with joy and pride.

PRAY

Lord, Your love is a mystery to me. That You delight in me is beyond my comprehension, but I am so grateful for Your tender care! Prune me as needed to bring good fruit from my life! Amen.

June 30 — Throne Issues

READ

2 Kings 16:19-20

2 Chronicles 28:26-27

Isaiah 13:1-22, 14:1-32, 15:1-16:4

Isaiah 14:14-15, *"I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High. But you are brought down to the realm of the dead, to the depths of the pit."*

THINK

Friendly competition can be fun when we go all-in for the win. But if our goal is to win at all cost, to step on others as we jockey for top billing, we may want to double-check our motives. Are we seeking fame, notoriety, and recognition? Are we using the end to justify the means? Is it all about us? If the answer is yes to any of these questions, we have a pride issue.

Proverbs 16:18 says, "Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall." This passage of Scripture describes Satan, also known as Lucifer, who was a magnificent angel and lead worship leader in the heavenliness. But he wanted more. He wanted to dethrone the Most High God and receive the glory above all angelic beings for himself. He wanted to be God. Can you imagine trying to beat God in a game of cosmic musical chairs? What was he thinking? Due to his extreme pride, God kicked him out of heaven, and it will one day culminate in his utter demise.

We must all take a hard look at our own prideful tendencies because all sin starts with pride. Then, we must humbly approach God in a state of surrender and confess our arrogance and wrongdoing. When we do, He forgives us, and power washes our souls. With His grace and love, He renews our hearts and minds and guide us on the path He has laid out for us.

PRAY

Lord, forgive me for my prideful ways. Purify my heart and renew my spirit. Teach me Your ways and lead me along the path of righteousness. Amen.

July 1 — Aspire to Inspire

READ

2 Chronicles 29:3-36-31:21

2 Chronicles 31:4-5, *“He ordered the people living in Jerusalem to give the portion due the priests and Levites so they could devote themselves to the Law of the Lord. As soon as the order went out, the Israelites generously gave the firstfruits...”*

THINK

“It’s time someone made some changes around here!” Have you ever had that thought? Perhaps the previous manager was a tyrant, your house is in chaos, or you can’t reach a customer service rep for assistance! Or, maybe you simply looked at the world and are utterly dismayed at how far it’s fallen from God.

King Hezekiah likely had a similar thought. After the Levitical priesthood and true worship of God had gone neglected under the reign of numerous evil kings, Hezekiah said, “It’s time to make some changes! What we’ve been doing is obviously not working!” Therefore, he reorganized the priests and resumed the temple work. He also commanded the Israelites to tithe – to give so the priests could fully and better devote themselves to God’s service. Hezekiah made it a priority and a requirement because he knew of the importance of honoring the Lord and the powerful effect that generosity has on hearts.

And the people responded! They followed his lead because he inspired them by how diligently he committed to carrying out God’s will. Today’s reading says the Israelites gave generously with the first portion of all they produced, without grumbling or hesitation. With that in mind, consider your own response when asked to give. Does it make you feel like clenching your fists or opening your palms? And, like Hezekiah, do your actions inspire others to avail their time and resources in service and honor to God?

PRAY

Dear God, Guide my heart to give with Your spirit of generosity. Use me to lead and inspire others in serving You that Your house may be full and countless lives forever changed. Amen!