

How to Give God Joy
Pastor Larry Kroon
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One simple goal today, one project to accomplish, one target to hit, one educational purpose—that is by the end of our session together you will know how to give God joy. Got it? Careful here...I'm not going to be teaching how to enjoy God today. I'm not going to be talking about how you can deepen your joy in relationship with God, to have a more exciting Christian life, more...more fun in it, or anything else like that. What I'm gonna focus on is one very, very specific thing...which is how *you* can give God joy; that by the end of the day God would sit back and say, 'I enjoyed being with you today.' That would be my goal, is you would know how to give God that sort of day.

I'm gonna be speaking more specifically, and most specifically, to those of you who are committed to our Lord Jesus Christ, and who have a reason to want to give God joy. You understand what He's done for you in Jesus, and you would want to give God joy. That's my...who I'm primarily talking to. All of you will learn more about our relationship to God and His relationship to us as we go through this. But I'm primarily talking to those of you who would say, 'Yeah, I'd like to give God joy, 'cause man, He's touched my life.' By the time we're done today my goal is you'll know exactly how to do that.

We're gonna use a specific text of scripture. I mean, that makes sense if you are going to...to give God joy, then you ought to look and see exactly what God says He enjoys. And so we're gonna be going back into the ancient pages of the Old Testament, and we're gonna find a very specific text where God talks about what He enjoys. I'm lookin' forward to that. Let's pray and then we'll get started.

Our Father in heaven,

Our desire is to answer to Your desires. It's such a great thing to give You joy. And so, as we spend time in Your word today, I pray You'll help us to understand how to do that. Father, as we look at some general principals today, I pray for each one of us Your Spirit would be prompting us in specific areas of how to respond, and that, Father, the final outcome of what we spend time with today will be, in our lives, joy given to You, Your heart enjoying us.

We pray this in the name of Jesus, amen.

Gonna take you back to almost seven hundred years before Christ, and we're gonna go to the situation that we're gonna be looking at is first of all marked by what I would call a stumbling nation. The once-great nation of Israel had divided around nine hundred years before Christ into two separated nations—north and south. It was a civil war. It's almost two hundred years after the civil war, the nation is divided in two, and the northern kingdom—called Israel, and sometimes called Ephraim after one of its dominant tribes—the northern kingdom is beginning to stumble. The southern kingdom—often called Judah, after its dominant tribe—was still going through ups and downs, but much more stable. This country, Israel, Ephraim, the twelve tribes of the north...or excuse me, the ten tribes of the north...were stumbling. They had been going very well in terms of peace and prosperity and military might. They had grown...they had come out of a time when they had been right at the very bottom of things; and under a powerful king they had gained in power and affluence. And they had been goin' through some really good times. But now things were starting to fall apart.

It was like the wheels were starting to come off in the nation. They had explanations for that. People had different reasons that they were beginning to postulate about it. Things hadn't totally collapsed, but there was a sense—'things aren't right.' And some of 'em felt that it was political, that they had some leaders that were not as sharp as the guys of old. In fact, there's a time here that they go through almost twenty-five years where they go through six different kings. And four of those kings are assassinated by the individuals who replace them. It was a pretty strong time of 'You either produce or we get rid of ya.'

It wasn't just necessarily a concern over politics. There was economic factors that were pressin' in on them; markets were changing, and there had been droughts; there were struggles in terms of produce and failed harvests. And so there were economic issues that had to be dealt with, trade routes that were in conflict with other countries that were raiding them. And so there was economic issues that they were trying to address.

And then there were the religious ones. And this one we find a little different. Maybe...people were saying, 'You know what? We got a problem with our religion in this nation.' But it wouldn't necessarily be the problem we would think of with Israel. Israel's people were lookin' at it and sayin', 'You know, our problem is we keep staying with this old guy named Moses. And he's centuries gone by. He doesn't understand the realities we're dealing with. When he wrote it was a different time, and a different place. And there are other gods to deal with. There are other relationships with other countries and religions that we should establish and cultivate. And there's other ideas to explore. And Moses really is frankly out of tune with where we're at. We're too narrow.'

The nation was stumbling. People were sayin' it's political, people were sayin' it's economics, people were sayin' it's religious. God answers that stumbling nation with a loyal prophet. He sends in a spokesman—that's what a prophet is. And He sends in a prophet by the name of Hosea. He says, 'Hosea, you go talk to 'em.' And Hosea did—for thirty-eight years this man spoke to the nation of Israel.

It's a harsh message at times; it's a strong message. In fact when you read it, it isn't uplifting, exciting reading. He's very firm and very grim about what the nation is facing, at the most immediate, if they don't change direction. There are some great glimpses of hope off into the final day of all things, when God's eternal kingdom will come. And that's exciting stuff. But when he zeros on the present it's pretty grim reading.

But Hosea stayed with it for thirty-eight years. He ministered to that people. His ministry began in a really, really strange way. You go to chapter 1 verse 2, it introduces Hosea. And I'm gonna encourage you to find this prophet in your Old Testament. It's gonna take you a while to find it—he's tucked away in those pages that we seldom go into, called the minor prophets, and Hosea is one of those. He's the first one in that listing.

When the Lord first spoke to Hosea, when the Lord first called him to be a prophet, first gave him his mission, God tells him—and this had to be one of the strangest instructions God ever gave to one of His prophets—He said to prophet Hosea, He said,

"Go take for yourself a wife of harlotry."

In other words, He said, 'Go marry a prostitute, and have children of prostitution. Go marry an unfaithful woman and raise a family with her; a family in which you won't even know if these kids are yours or not as she continues her relationships with other lovers.'

That's what Hosea does—marries a woman named Gomer. The first three chapters of Hosea describe their marriage, does it against the backdrop of Israel; and it's a sad, sad affair. It ends in chapter three with a glimmer of hope that eventually this family is marked by faithfulness. But you look at it and you wonder why would God do this? And you wonder about...you wonder about Hosea's ministry, how people would come up to him and say, 'Hosea, you're a prophet, man. You're a preacher. What are you doing married to this unfaithful woman?' I mean, I can just imagine people coming up to Hosea and sayin', 'We saw your wife, Gomer, out on the street corner last week!' Imagine the birth of a child, and somebody looks at him—'Hosea, are you sure that's yours?'

God said 'Do this

"...for the land commits flagrant harlotry; it's forsaken the Lord."

In other words, God says, 'Do this, Hosea, because your marriage is gonna provide a picture of Israel's relation to Me. And when people ask you about your marriage, and they raise questions about your marriage, and they wonder about how you can remain with this woman, and they wonder about your children, and they look at it and they say, "This isn't the way it should be, Hosea," you look at them and you say, "This is the way it is between you and God." You look at this people of Israel and you tell them "You are behaving just like my wife in your relationship to God! And understand, I love her just as God loves you. But you're living just like her in your relationship to God.'"

The message that Hosea was to deliver was recorded beginning at chapter 4. The first three chapters kinda give us a picture of this strange marriage which was to be an object lesson before all of Israel. Chapter 4—the message of Hosea begins. We have the marriage, and then we have the message. It starts off with a statement. It says

Listen to the word of the Lord, O sons of Israel.

It's a call for the nation to hear this prophet, the one prophet God had given them at that time. And he says

For the Lord has a case against the inhabitants of the land,

...the Lord has a cause to raise with you. There's a problem to be addressed, Hosea says. And he addresses the problem in this way. He says

Because there is no faithfulness...

...there's no loyalty here in this land toward God...

...and there's no kindness...

'You don't treat each other with compassion and with mercy.' And even more, he says,

...and there is no knowledge of God in the land.

People don't understand Him; they don't know about Him; they don't recognize who He is, what He's like, what He's done. They're ignorant when it comes to God! He says there's a lot of other things in this land. He goes on in the verses that follow. He says there is swearing, there's adultery, there's murder, there's violence. He lists a number of things there. He says these things are missing.

The rest of the book is like a collection of notes from Hosea's sermons. They're not put together in a long, sequential listing. It's not put together in one, big essay. It's more of a collection of statements, and sayings, and illustrations. It's like when Hosea was done, he collected some of his key quotations and put 'em in this set of chapters. When you go through 'em and you look at all the various pictures, it's not exciting stuff. And you'll find him pointing out where there's faithlessness, where they're not being loyal to God as they chase after the gods of other nations. He'll point out their lack of kindness to one another, and their mercy and patience with each other. And he'll point out over, and over, and over again their ignorance when it comes to God.

And he finally hits one place, one verse probably, that stands out. And this is the centerpiece of the whole book. It answers to the problem that he addresses here. It comes in Hosea 6:6. It's one of the more well-known verses of the Old Testament. We've had it up here before in the past; it's been a number of years. But I'm gonna go back to it again. This is the...this is one of those verses that's kind of a directional verse for our lives; and it's so key, it's so central. This is the verse that...this core statement that Hosea gave to the people of Israel at that time. They were talking about repenting; they were saying, 'We ought to get our act together,' at the start of chapter 6. But they don't go anywhere with it. And God challenges 'em. He says, 'Your sacrifices aren't enough. I don't need your offerings.' And then He comes to this statement. He says...in verse 6 He says "*I delight...*"

And I wanna stop for a second right there. God is saying, 'I *delight* in something. I *enjoy* something.' That one statement tells us a whole lot about our God. He feels. He has emotion. God can feel joy. His heart knows what it's like to swell up with pleasure over something good. He's not this detached being out there that is always blessed and never goes through the ups and downs of emotion. Our God has heart! And He can and does feel joy. And specifically He says, "*I delight...*" and He's gonna say two things here.

"I delight in loyalty rather than sacrifice."

Special word, that word 'loyalty' here. It appears in the Hebrew; it has a number of English translations. And every time it appears in the Hebrew the translators wrestle to give us the exact sense of it, because it's a multi-faceted word. It's like a prism that, when you shine a light on it, it shines a number of different colors out of it. It's a fantastic word in the Hebrew. And the key idea that is always there is the idea of loyalty, that it'll stay with it, it won't quit, it won't give up. But it always with it the fact that it cares; there's heart to it. It's an allegiance that is not cold; it is an allegiance that cares.

When it's allegiance directed at God, when it's a loyalty to God, it is a heart engagement that says, 'I'm gonna follow You because I care about You, God. You matter to me.' When it's directed to people it's a persistent compassion that won't give up. When it has to, it'll say the hard things that need to be said. When it needs to, it'll draw the boundaries that need to be done. But it will always, always care as it moves forward with someone—a persistent compassion.

And as the term is used here, God is sayin', 'I enjoy loyalty; I enjoy loyalty that comes towards Me. I enjoy loyalty that goes to others. I enjoy it when people persist in their passion through all the ups and downs, twists and turns of relationships. I enjoy that! And I enjoy it when they stay with Me, through all the ups and downs, twists and turns of life. That's what I desire. It's what I enjoy.'

And then there's a second thing He says.

"And I enjoy the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings."

God's saying, 'I know when people really...' He's saying, 'I love it when people really know Me. They understand intellectually...' and this is important. 'They understand intellectually what I am like, My attributes, My character. They know what I like, and they know what I don't like.' He says, 'I love it, I enjoy it, when people know what I've done, and what I haven't done. I enjoy it when people can speak with intelligence about who I am and what I'm like. I enjoy it when people know what I've said.'

It includes that, but it goes beyond. The term has a personal sense to it. He says, 'I...I enjoy it. Not only when they know the things about Me, but they know Me. They know those realities, My realities, in their life; they're aware, they're alive, they acknowledge My presence in their life. They know Me...not just in the pages of this book, but they know Me in the days of their lives.' God says, 'I enjoy that. That's what I desire.'

It's interesting. He's very emphatic here. He says, 'I really...I'm not that focused on what you want to do for Me, sacrificially. It's not about big offerings here. It's not about doing great things that cost you dramatic costs.' God says, 'What I really enjoy is relational, the fact that you have loyalty to Me, to My Son, to My people, to the people in your life; and that you do know Me. I'm not just a distant concept to you.'

That's the text. For some of you, you should hear it as an unsettling text. Some of you should be unsettled by this verse. It should...use the word 'convict' you a bit, should challenge you. In fact, some of you, when you read this verse, your first response may need to be repentance. It may be to say, 'Man, I don't know God that well. I haven't bothered to learn. And there's a lot of other people and things that matter a lot more to me than Him.'

Now, you may not see that. The Israelites didn't; when Hosea came to them their response was, 'We know God. We already know Him. We're Israelites!' Hosea's response was, 'You don't know Him; because if you knew Him you wouldn't be worshipping the goddesses and the gods of other nations. You would know that He detests that.'

I was wondering...how do we do a quick, and I can put it this way, a quick self-test—is this an area where we may need repentance? How would we gauge that? I could try to do what Hosea did, and go down and list all the various things I see going wrong, and try to list those and say, 'Ok, if you're doing these things, then you need repentance.'

I really don't think that's the best way to do it. I don't think we need to do a spiritual MRI here, or a CT scan. I can give you a really quick way to test. Here it is. If, in the first thirty seconds of this sermon today, you got excited about the topic, then you may...you may not need repentance. But if, in the first thirty seconds of this sermon today, you did not get excited about the topic, if you did not get focused, if you did not say to yourself, 'I need to know this,' then you probably do need to repent. See, in our culture, preaching is about telling people how to enjoy God. And we'll get excited about that. We'll get out the notebooks for that. We'll go to seminars for that. If somebody says, 'I will show you how to give joy to God,' we sit back and say, 'Get this over with.'

If you didn't get excited in the first thirty seconds of this sermon when I told you what we'd be studying, then you need to be rethinking your attitude. But actually, I don't wanna talk about that. What I'm more excited about, what I *do* want to talk about, is the people who *are* living this verse. People ask me; they say, "Larry, when you put together a sermon, were you thinking about me?" Especially if I address a problem in their life and they come up and say, "Did somebody tell you?" Or maybe I've met with somebody about something in the past, and I'm talking about that subject, and they say, "Did you...were you talking about me when you said that?" And I have to come back and say no. Rarely does that happen. In fact, I deliberately try to avoid it.

But I tell you what...I thought of a lot of people, a lot of people, specific people this week with this sermon. And I thought about the ones that are living this verse in our midst. I thought about the people among us who are people who are loyal, and people who know God. I thought about those spouses that I've seen, doin' everything it takes to hold their marriages together for years. I thought about the young man that came into my office this week, and his very manner, his very history among us, and his very way he had dressed and talked to me—I saw a young man who honors his parents. That's loyalty. It's just...and it was all over his manner. I thought of him specifically.

I thought of those friends that have been through those times when one gives offense, and the other takes offense. And then they work through it and there's forgiveness, and there's reconciliation, and now their friendship is intact and they're going on, knowing there's going to be more twists and turns in their relationship; but they'll still stand together. And I've seen 'em shake hands. I've seen loyalty.

I think of the person who has been through medical trauma in the past two years that goes beyond anything I could imagine. And their life has been through so many other twists and financial ups and downs, and family give-and-take, and everything else; and yet they remain...they remain loyal to the absolute to God. And in their presence I feel humbled. I don't feel like I'm even worthy, with my faith, to be around theirs.

Then I think of those Bible studies I get in. My men's study on Wednesday night, where we just sit around the table together and we read through the scripture together, and the guys interact, and they talk about what they're seeing, and they talk about what's happening in their lives. And when we're done I walk out and I say, "Man, I learned today. Those men know our God!" And it isn't just in the pages of the book. These men know Him in their lives.

I think of four conversations I had over Memorial Day weekend with four different individuals, four different times, four different places. And every one of those conversations, I walked away recognizing someone knew God in their life, by the way they talked about Him.

Boy, that's what comes to my mind when I read this. And I recognize, you know what? That's what I enjoy about congregational life. That's what I enjoy—the loyalty to God, to His Son, to His people, to one another, to our families; a knowledge, an awareness, an aliveness to God and all that He is. That's what I enjoy about congregational life.

And God has said it's what He enjoys. It's what He desires. You can bring it to Him, or you can not.

Let's stand.

Our Father in heaven,

As we leave here today, I pray that You'll take this verse as a seed planted in our lives, and that, Father, it would bear its fruit. We've tasted it...we've tasted what it's like to have people of loyalty, people who know You in our midst. We know that joy, Father. Our desire is that You would have that joy from our lives. And so, Father, we bring to You our loyalty, and we bring to You our commitment to know You.

In Jesus' name, amen.