

# Series Title

## *Sermon Title*

Fairview Missionary Church | Angola, IN

Scripture: Assorted

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Many of you know I was a youth pastor for nine years here at Fairview Missionary Church before I became the lead pastor. I don't know why you're clapping for that, but sure, okay. Helping teenagers protect their purity and learning to engage in healthy relationships were two of my most passionate topics when I was a youth pastor. It became that way because I had witnessed way too many of my friends growing up and teens while I was in youth ministry experience a lot of pain and hurt in this area of their lives.

And so it became one of my main goals to guide these teenagers from a biblical perspective in dating and eventually marrying their spouse. Many of the struggles that I watched amongst the teenagers had to do with a lack of healthy boundaries, a lack of self-discipline, and even just a lack of forethought. Most teenagers and many adults really for that matter just didn't take the time to truly sit down and answer the important questions about relationships.

We are all guilty of that on one level or another where we just rush into a relationship because we can only see the positives of how it's going to impact us and we put on what I call rose-colored glasses. We overlook the bad things and we only think about the good things. In my time of youth ministry, I never figured out how to help teens with self-discipline. How do you teach somebody self-discipline? All you could really do was ask for it and pray for it, try to have self-discipline in other areas of your lives.

But I was able to help them establish clear boundaries in their relationships and really think through what they wanted in a relationship. Now, as we would look at Scripture, there were obvious boundaries concerning our physical relationship with another before marriage.

I often would tell the teenagers, "Don't see how close you can get to the cliff without falling off, but set your boundaries as far away as possible, so falling off that cliff is not an option." Now, that can be difficult, and sometimes these boundaries that teenagers would make were extreme from a worldly perspective.

I know it isn't right for everyone, and I'm not suggesting that everybody should do this, but I was able to share from personal experience that my boundary when I was dating was to not kiss until my wedding day. So my first kiss was on my wedding day. Now I share that with you, not that you would put me on a pedestal, because it's easy not to kiss when no one wants to kiss you, okay? You all remember my middle school picture, right?

Okay, so it was a little easier for me. The other thing that I suggested for the teenagers was to make a list of all the character traits they wanted in their future spouse. In the midst of this list, I would ask that they would make non-negotiables. These are things that must be true of the person I'm going to marry. It doesn't matter how great they are in any other category. If they don't meet these non-negotiables, then it's out of the question.

Don't settle. There were other traits that I would say, you know, have a secondary list that is like to haves, you know, but you know what? Nobody's going to be perfect, and so if they don't meet all of those, that's okay. But don't settle in those things. Just the other week, I was joking with my wife because she buys and returns so

many things. I didn't share this, I was going to talk about this, sorry, okay? So does anybody else do that? It's like a hobby, like you just buy things and bring them back. So sometimes she does this.

I'm afraid that Amazon's going to pull our membership at some point, but I told her that I was shocked that she hadn't tried to return me yet, okay? And I said, "I must be pretty good if you haven't tried to return me yet." And she just laughed, you know, and whatever else. But I know that she had a list of character traits that she wanted in a spouse before we got married, and I know I didn't check them all, but I must have done good enough that I passed the test.

Did you know that in Scripture, it reveals to us dozens of character traits about God. Did you guys know that? We learn about God in Scripture by what he says and what he does, and you and I can actually make a list of character traits that define our God. One of His character traits is that He is perfect. He is perfect in everything He does and in every way. Now, I wouldn't suggest putting that on your list for your future spouse, all right?

You will wait quite a while for that one. But God is perfect. Today, as we finish our series in the book of Hosea, we are going to see seven character traits of God, just in the last three chapters of Hosea. We're going to see how God is defined from Scripture as He is dealing with the nation of Israel, His people, as they have rebelled against God, how does He respond to their rebellion?

As I continue to read Scripture, the more I learn about God, the more amazed I am, and the more I realize I need Him. The more I learn about God, the more I realize I need Him. And my prayer for us today is that as God continues to reveal Himself to us through His Word, that we would be drawn closer to Him.

So if you have your Bibles, I encourage you to open up to Hosea chapter 12, verse 1, and remember as we are reading this, that God has been faithful to His people even as they have rebelled against Him. And we all fall into that trap. Hosea chapter 12: 1. Again, we're going to jump around. I'm not going to read every verse in chapters 12, 13, and 14. I encourage you to do that at home this week, but we will jump through some of these and get through these three chapters.

So let me pray, and then we'll begin in Hosea chapter 12:1. Heavenly Father, I do thank you for the opportunity we have to gather together. And Lord, this week, as many of us will be celebrating Thanksgiving with family and friends, I pray that this truly would be an opportunity for us to come before you with grateful hearts because of who you are and because of what you have done for us.

Father, as we do visit family and friends, I know that it can be a stressful time, it can be a difficult time, and so my prayer is that as we enter those situations, we truly would be a light for you, that we would love others well, even those that are difficult to love, which sometimes those closest to us, family, friends are the most difficult, and so offer us the grace necessary to love well. Continue to draw us closer to you as we learn more about you.

We pray this in Jesus' name, amen. Hosea chapter 12:1, we read, "Ephraim feeds on the wind. He pursues the east wind all day and multiplies lies and violence. Speaking of the nation of Israel, he makes a treaty with Assyria and he sends olive oil to Egypt." This is describing that the Israelites, instead of turning to God, are turning to these other nations, looking to them for protection, for provision, for friendship, even almost as a Savior, as they are concerned about themselves as a nation.

We jump down to verses seven and eight, and we read, "The merchant, the Israel merchant, uses dishonest scales and he loves to defraud. He loves to lie. Ephraim boasts, I am very rich. I have become wealthy, so with all my wealth, they will not find in me any iniquity or sin." Israel has gotten to the point where they almost believe they're above the law, right? Not just the laws of man, but the laws of God.

I have become so rich, nobody's going to be concerned about what I'm doing behind the curtain. Do we run into this today in our world? Certainly we do, where people get so proud of their position, whether it's their power or their wealth or anything else, that they begin to believe they are above the law and they are accountable to

no one. This is the position that Israel finds themselves in. In verse 14, "But Ephraim has aroused God's bitter anger.

His Lord will leave on him the guilt of his bloodshed and will repay him for his contempt." Here in Hosea chapter 12, we see these two character traits of God working together, and that's the fact that God is faithful, but God is also just. Here even in this part of the story, God is remaining faithful to His people, to the Israelites.

He is continuing to remain faithful to them even though they haven't been faithful to Him. The Israelites have pursued other gods. As I said, they're looking for protection from the Assyrians or the Egyptians instead of from the Lord. And even in the midst of that, we see God staying faithful to His covenant, to His promise with the Israelite people. This is not new.

We are reminded that the people of God continued to walk away from God and do their own thing, but God continued to stay faithful, even from the very beginning of the Israelite people. When God chose Abraham, and then Abraham had Isaac, and Isaac has Jacob and Esau, and God says, "I'm going to bless the line through Jacob," and yet Jacob deceives his brother Esau, stealing his birthright. These people have not been more faithful or better than anybody else.

They are just as guilty, but God remains faithful. As we read in Hosea and certainly in other parts of the Scriptures, we see that God will still judge unrighteousness. He will still judge the unrighteousness of the nations because He is just and fair. One of the amazing truths about God is that He is the perfect representation of these character traits and that God cannot go against Himself.

God cannot be totally just so much so in the fact that He is no longer loving. He can't be so loving that then He's not just. Does that make sense? He can't go against Himself. And this is truly amazing about God, that He cannot defy one part to exalt a different part. He is perfectly balanced. And so, God condemns deceit.

God looks at the Israelites and He says, "Listen, your self-reliance, your pride, has reached a level where we need to deal with it." This idea of self-reliance is sometimes praised in our world as a good thing. It's considered good to be self-reliant. Usually, as our parents were raising us and teaching us, they wanted us to be self-reliant, to do things by ourselves.

And that's not bad, but what God wants us to recognize is as much as we can put forth effort, as much as we can be diligent, as much as we can have self-discipline, it still remains true that we can't accomplish anything without Him. God is the one that provides all of that. I've often heard it say, and so I've tried to live my life this way. Pray like it depends on God, work like it depends on you.

In other words, put in all the effort you can, do everything you can, but then pray understanding that without God, you're not going to get anywhere. We cannot accomplish anything without Him, and so God continues to remain faithful and He continues to remain just. Let's go on to chapter 13, starting in verses 1 and 2. "When Ephraim spoke, people trembled. He was exalted in Israel, but he became guilty of Baal worship and died.

Now they sin more and more. They even make idols for themselves from their silver, cleverly fashioned images, all of them the work of craftsmen. It is said of these people they offer human sacrifices. They even kiss the calf idols.

Jumping down to verse six, God says, "When I fed them, these Israelite people, they were satisfied, and when they were satisfied, they became proud, and then they forgot me." Jumping down to verse nine, "You are destroyed, Israel, because you are against me, against your helper." And then finally, verse 16, "The people of Samaria, the Israelite people, must bear their guilt because they have rebelled against their God, they will fall by the sword, their little ones will be dashed to the ground, and their pregnant women will be ripped open." Here in chapter 13, we see that God is holy and He is sovereign.

Israel became proud. They turned away from God. They felt they didn't need Him anymore. So much so that they turned away from this loving and holy and sovereign God, and they began to worship idols instead. Not only did they worship these idols, they were guilty of offering their own children as sacrifices to these false gods.

This is a nation that has completely walked away from the standards that God had for them, and they began to do the very things that God judged the nations for before them. I'm sure the Israelites got to this point where they were sacrificing children and doing all of these things to other foreign gods, and they thought to themselves, "How did we get here?" I don't know if I would call it a privilege, but one of the responsibilities of my job is meeting with people in my office that are going through struggles in life.

And I wish that I had fewer stories to share with you of those that come into my office and sit on the couch and they begin talking to me and they say, "Pastor, I just want you to know this is going on in my life," whatever it is. We're going to have a trial, I'm probably going to go to jail, all of these bad things are going to happen, consequences. And pastor, I don't have any idea how I ended up here. I never thought that I would end in this position.

And so I asked them, how did you end up in this position where you've gone so far down the road of sin that you find yourself here and without fail, every single person answers, it began with one small bad choice. That's where it always begins. One small bad choice, which led to another small bad choice, and eventually you find yourself doing things that you never thought you would do.

And so here Israel finds themselves in this position, sacrificing to foreign gods. And so because of their disobedience and God's justness and His holiness, there is a price that needs to be paid. God will remind them that ultimately He is in charge, and due to their rebellion, they must face consequences. God is going to remind them of who He is. He will remind them that there is no God like Yahweh.

He is holy, He is good, He is sovereign, and He hates sin. Why does God hate sin so much? He hates sin so much because He sees what it does to His creation and He sees what it does to those He loves. He sees the pain it causes. Some of the language seems extreme. Their children will be dashed on the rocks. Their pregnant women will be ripped open.

This seems like extreme language, but this is God's sovereignty and holiness saying, "Something needs to be done. I am going to make things right again." Here in chapter 13 of Hosea we also see that God is a jealous God. Now I want to take a little time to focus on this character trait because I remember when I was growing up in church and I first heard this phrase that God is a jealous God, I thought, why does God have that character trait?

I always viewed it as a negative thing. If you were jealous, that was bad. It wasn't supposed to be something that you had. So why does God carry that trait? The concept of a jealous God, it actually describes God's passionate desire for exclusive devotion, not a selfish or envious emotion. Let me read that again.

The jealousy of God describes God's passionate desire for exclusive devotion. It is not a selfish or envious emotion. It is actually an expression of God's love and holiness. To define it another way, it is a protective zeal for the well-being of His people.

It's the desire that God has to prevent us from being led astray by other false gods that cannot provide true satisfaction. The best way that I've ever understood this from a human example or a human perspective is the example of a husband and a wife. If a husband sees another man flirting with his wife, he has the right to be jealous because only he has the right to flirt with her.

It is not sinful for the man to be angry if he is being protective. If you could add to the fact, this is not always true. It is with God, but not in this example. If you could add to the fact that the husband knows only he can truly provide for her needs, and all other men would only take advantage of her, then it is easy to see His jealousy as a righteous act. Does that make sense?

If God can look at us and say, "I want devotion from you exclusively in our relationship, that you only worship and serve me, and the reason why I want that is because I know that will bring the most fulfillment and satisfaction to your life." If you worship anything else, that thing is going to take advantage of you. It's going to ruin your life. It's going to bring pain. It's going to bring hurt. It's going to be suffering.

God is saying, by being a jealous God, I want what is best for you, and I know that what is best for you only comes through me. And that is not prideful because it's true. God is saying, I am the only one that can fulfill. Nothing will equal this relationship. Everything else is less than. And so God is a jealous God. Let's jump to Hosea chapter 14:2. "Take these words with you and return to the Lord.

Say to him," He's calling out to his people, "Reply to me, forgive all our sins and receive us graciously that we may offer the fruit of our lips." Jumping down to verse 4, God says, "I will heal their waywardness, and I will love them freely, for my anger has turned away from them. I will be like I will be like dew to Israel. He will blossom like a lily, like a cedar of Lebanon.

He will send down its roots. His young shoots will grow. His splendor will be like an olive tree. His fragrance like a cedar of Lebanon. God is saying, "I will bless them richly beyond what they could ever imagine." Verse nine, wow, we're having some issues here. Who is wise? Let them realize these things. Who is discerning? Let them understand. The ways of the Lord are right and the righteous walk in them, but the rebellious stumble in them.

In chapter 14, we witness God's mercy and His love. We see that God is both loving and merciful. God is calling His people back to repentance. Scripture says that it's God's desire that none would perish, but that all would come to know Him because He wants what is best for us. God promises that He will show mercy, He will offer grace if we would simply return to Him. Why?

Because God's love is steadfast. He is a healing God. He is a God who doesn't hold grudges. He completely forgives. God desires restoration, not destruction. His ultimate goal is reconciliation of his relationships, not punishment. I don't know any parent who enjoys punishing their child when they do something wrong, but yet parents see it as a necessary part of the teaching process of directing their children.

Loving parents want to have a healthy relationship with their children, and so they understand they have been given the responsibility to allow temporary punishment and temporary pain because it will bring long-term benefit. And so sometimes God does the same for us. He allows us to experience temporary pain in His love and in His mercy so that we can have long-term benefit.

If someone were to come to you and ask you to describe God, what would you say? Isn't it great that you can look at Scripture and you can truly give somebody an answer? Just from the book of Hosea, just these last three chapters, we see that God is faithful, God is just, He is holy, He is sovereign, He's jealous, He's a loving God, He is a merciful God.

And not only is He all of these things, He is the perfect version of all of these traits, so much so that He cannot do something that goes against any of His other traits. Just as I asked the teenagers to make a list of traits of what they would like to see in their future spouse, my suggestion to you is that as you read Scripture, you would make a running list of God's traits, somewhere where you're going to remember.

Maybe it's in the front section of your Bible, the back section, maybe you use the Notes app on your phone, but to keep a running list of the character traits of God. And as you and I learn more about God, it will truly help us understand Scripture better and we will grow in our relationship with Him. For those of you who think logically, like me, as you write down these character traits of God and you begin to go through Scripture, you will be amazed at God's ability to operate within His character without overturning another part.

Things will begin to make sense. Why did God have to send Jesus to die on the cross in our place? Why did blood have to be shed? Well, it's because God is both loving and just. He wants to offer salvation. He wants to be fair,

and so he can't make some kind of cosmic scale and say, "Okay, well, if you get on the scales, and if your good deeds outweigh your bad deeds, then you can get in and you can't." That wouldn't have been just, that wouldn't have been fair. And so, what happens if I have one more bad thing than good thing so I don't get in?

Well, God has to be just, He has to be fair. So what did God do? God made this amazing plan that salvation is available to everyone. Nobody can look at him and say, "Well, that's not fair," right? And he also had to send His Son because a price had to be paid because God is just. And because He's just, a price had to be paid for those sins. And so God said, "I can't go against my character, so I will pay the price.

I will offer my life as the ransom." So for those of you that are logic, logical, it's fun to kind of see, wow, only God could come up with that plan. Only God could fulfill that. For those of you who maybe think more emotionally, as you begin to write down these character traits of God, I truly believe you are going to be transformed by how much God shows His love and His grace and His mercy and His forgiveness.

All of these amazing character traits of God, you will see a love that is beyond anything else as you write these down. Never forget that God has your best interest in mind. He desires a relationship with you. He wants you to know Him, not just know about Him. He wants you to know Him personally. It is His desire that none would perish, but all would come to a saving relationship.

Sometimes people will come up to me and say, "Pastor, I want to believe in the God that you believe in, but it's hard for me to believe in a God that would send somebody to hell." And I have to say to them, "Whoa, whoa, whoa, that's the wrong question. God doesn't send anybody to hell." I don't see that anywhere in Scripture, so if you've heard that, I'm not sure where you heard that, but that's not true. God is actually a loving and just God, and so He allows us to make our own decision. God allows people to choose hell because they don't want to follow Him.

And Hell wasn't created for them anyway. It was created for Satan and for his demons and for those that wanted to turn away from God. And so God says, if that's the choice you want to make, I'm going to be loving, I'm going to be gracious, you go ahead and make that choice. God didn't create hell for other people. He doesn't send people to hell. It is God's desire that none would perish. He truly has your best interest in mind. He wants you to know Him because when you know Him, you will live the best life possible.

You will have a peace that surpasses understanding, and you can be assured of your salvation through Jesus Christ. God's ultimate heart and desire is to heal and save His people. You see that in the story of Hosea, you also see it in our story. Because remember, we are all Gomer in the story. We are all the woman who has walked away, committed adultery, began to worship and serve other gods, and God didn't give up on us.

He is like Hosea. He pursued us. Scripture says He didn't come and save us once we had kind of repented and turned back. Scripture says that yet while we were still sinners, He came. While we were still sinners, while we were still spitting in His face, He said, "I want a relationship with You. I love You that deeply." And so may we see the heart of God in the story of Hosea.

May we see that it is His desire to heal and to save and to love. Let me pray. Heavenly Father, if there is anybody here today that's maybe even watching online or listening on the radio and hasn't received Your grace and Your mercy, I pray that they would hear from You today, that they would sense Your love, Your mercy, Your grace, Your forgiveness, and that they would receive that free gift that You offer, that they would come before You with a repentant heart, that they would recognize, just like we all have, that without You, we just make a mess of our lives.

And so, Father, would You heal us? For those individuals, I pray that they would submit to you, that they would experience your best for their lives and the joy that can come with that. Father, even as we celebrate Dominic's baptism today, as he shares in his testimony, I love that he just openly shares as we all can.

You know what? I tried to fill my life with so many other things, and they just left me empty. You are the only one that can truly fill us. That is the testimony of every single one of us. And so would you receive our praise? We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.