

“The Magnificent Obsession”

Hosea 11:1-11

1 “When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. 2 But the more they were called, the more they went away from me. They sacrificed to the baals and they burned incense to images. 3 It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by the arms; but they did not realize it was I who healed them. 4 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.

5 “Will they not return to Egypt and will not Assyria rule over them because they refuse to repent? 6 A sword will flash in their cities; it will devour their false prophets and put an end to their plans. 7 My people are determined to turn from me. Even though they call me God Most High, I will by no means exalt them.

8 “How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I treat you like Admah? How can I make you like Zeboyim? My heart is changed within me; all my compassion is aroused. 9 I will not carry out my fierce anger, nor will I devastate Ephraim again. For I am God, and not a man—the Holy One among you. I will not come against their cities. 10 They will follow the Lord; He will roar like a lion. When he roars, his children will come trembling from the west. 11 They will come from Egypt trembling like sparrows, from Assyria, fluttering like doves. I will settle them in their homes,” declares the Lord.

How many of you know the acronym OCD? What does it stand for? That’s right Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder. Back in 1997 a movie came out titled “As Good As It Gets” with Jack Nicholson in an Oscar-winning role as a man suffering from an “obsessive-compulsive disorder.” He could never step on a crack in the sidewalk and he had to go through a specific set of acts when locking the door in a particular order. He had to use one bar of Neutrogena soap every time he washed his hands. There are many people that can relate. Everything has to go the same way every time. People get comfort from something that never changes. OCD people are obsessed and no amount of this focused behavior is ever enough.

Someone caught in the grip of obsessive-compulsive disorder gets fixated on one idea, one notion, one motion, and is unable to banish it from his or her mind. CAT scans reveal that, physiologically, one area of the brain seems to get stuck in the “on” position.

Actually Madison Avenue has become quite adept at turning our entire country into a nation of obsessive-compulsives. Through skillful advertising we have been trained compulsively: to shop for more clothes even though our closets are already full because there is a big sale! We have been trained to desire more gadgets even though we haven’t yet figured out how to use the one’s we’ve got, to upgrade our “old” TV’s, computers, and entertainments systems way beyond our capacity to enjoy them or even make use of them, get rid of the car that is paid for that we love before it loses any more of it’s trade-in value, and buy anything that promises to make us look younger, richer, thinner, or more exciting.

Our culture makes it easy and acceptable to be obsessive about money, to be compulsive about material goods. Peter Wehner, director of policy at the conservative think-tank Empower America, wrote in *The Washington Post*: “Assume that you had never read the New Testament and were given a quiz with this question: ‘During His ministry, Christ spoke out most often about a) the evils of homosexual misbehavior, b) the merits of democracy, c) family-friendly tax cuts, or d) the danger of riches.’ If you really hadn’t read the New Testament and you went by what the modern-day Christians were talking about the most, you might say any of the above. But it turns out that Jesus Christ never said anything about homosexual behavior, democracy, or tax cuts. What are we concerned about? Are we concerned about the same things Jesus was and is? Jesus talked a lot about the danger of riches. Have you ever thought about the danger of being too affluent or having too much money? In present day society it is very easy to obsess about money. That is the accepted norm. That same kind of obsessive-compulsive energy, however, is judged as suspect or unhealthy by our society and even unbalanced, when we direct it toward a search to be holy in our lives. If you really strive to set apart your life for Christ and His use for ministry, you will find yourself being counter-cultural. [NOTE 2]

In today’s Bible passage from the prophet Hosea we are given a glimpse of how “unbalanced” God is. Let’s take a close look at Hosea chapter 11. Ever since God took the great risk of forming creation and blessing humanity with God’s own breath of life, God has compulsively stuck with us. Despite the fact that humans almost immediately disobeyed the Divine directives/guidelines He set up, and dismissed the divine presence, God has steadfastly refused to write us off. God, it seems, is obsessed with reaching the hearts and souls of men and women. God is obsessed with finding a way to restore a right relationship between Creator and creature or created. God is obsessed with a ridiculous love for men and women despite our endless troublemaking, disobedient attitudes and disappointing behavior.

Now some of you may be feeling a little uncomfortable with me using words like obsessed and ridiculous as descriptive words concerning God. Please know that I am overstating to make my case. Also the words obsessed and ridiculous are not necessarily negative words even though our culture and society most often use them that way. Obsessed does not necessarily mean an unhealthy focus. Obsessed can simply mean very focused. Olympic athletes could be described as obsessed with their sport for at least four years, most often for their first 30 years of life. Most of society does not consider that unhealthy. So for the purposes of my message today please translate obsessed as clearly focused. Besides “The Magnificent Focus” just doesn’t have the same pizzazz as “the Magnificent Obsession” when we are talking sermon titles does it?? [NOTE 3]

Hosea’s text equates God’s obsessive love for our fractured humanity with that of a parent for a child. Any parent knows well that there are “those days” when our children are anything and everything but lovable. But somehow, some way, we manage to get through the day and heave an enormous sigh of relief and release as the last one is

tucked in bed. Yet looking down at the quiet, sleeping, angelic forms of our children in bed—our hearts are suddenly stirred. Under the power of ridiculously obsessive and obsessively ridiculous parental love, our own hearts “recoil” at the thought of any hardship or pain being visited on our dear little monsters, I mean children. Behaving or not I would die for any of my children or my grand-children in a heartbeat. [NOTE 4]

God’s obsession with humanity has led Him to constantly muddle about in human affairs, involve divinity in history, mix with the rabble of the earth and the rubble of our disobedience. Psychologists would call this “obsessiveness” and “compulsive interference.” The Bible calls this “faithfulness!” Ever since God took that first risky step and created Adam and Eve, God has remained **faithful** to all the descendants of the First Family. God is so “obsessed,” so compulsive about the children of creation that God simply will not leave us to our own destructive devices. We may be creatures, but we are creatures that God loves unconditionally!! Without limit!!!

- God was so obsessed with reminding us of His love that He gave us the rainbow as a promise that He would never flood the whole earth again.
- God was so obsessed with establishing first contact with us that God made a covenant with Abraham
- God was so focused on finding us a home that God led Moses and the Israelites out of Egypt and into the “promised land.”
- God was so obsessed with teaching us the best way to live on His earth that He gave us the Commandments and the Law. Guidelines for us. If you live within those guidelines you are very likely to live a full and meaningful life!
- God was so focused on guiding us that He called judges, prophets, priests and kings to speak the Divine Word. He gave us the Bible. He sent the Holy Spirit!
- God was so obsessed with us that when we ruined all the divine plans for Israel, God made new ones. God made a new covenant!
- God was so obsessed with us that HE spent generations warning us how to avoid the coming judgment, the punishment that was coming (and they still didn’t listen and many of us are still not listening).
- God was so focused on loving us that God devised a plan of restoration, a backdoor way home, when the punishment was at last received by His Son Jesus.
- God’s love for us was so focused that God cheated death and judgment. He raised Jesus from the dead and designated the blood Jesus shed on the cross as payment for sin.
- God was so obsessed with us that God “gave His one and only begotten Son that we should not perish but have everlasting life!”

What kind of creature are we that we return such a magnificent obsession with either complete disregard or, at best, a few mealy-mouthed “thank you’s” mumbled on a Sunday morning? We obsess about our things, we obsess about our bank account, we obsess about sports, fashion, a clean house, but all the while we forget that we already have the most-prized possession we could ever have...a Lord and Savior...Jesus Christ.

Our biggest problem has already been met in fellowship with the Father; a personal relationship with the Creator of the universe.

Why is it that we don't obsess about God! Why do we neglect Him in pursuit of a variety of comparatively trivial diversions? Suzan D. Johnson-Cook, who former President Clinton had appointed to his seven-member race panel, put together a collection of devotions by African-American women. In it, Lynda Seward, a writer in Newark, New Jersey, with a background of ministering to and empowering children from urban dysfunctional families, contributed this entry: "Let's face it. A lifestyle of holiness is not easy. It takes a lot of work to delve deep into the dark abyss of our subconscious mind and awaken all of our crippling past pain, and then allow the Lord to come in and heal and fill us with His constant presence. And to keep on bearing the fruit of the Spirit is a lifelong task. [NOTE 5]

Yet anyone who provides my oxygen, breath, bone, and muscle tissue, brain cells, red and white corpuscles, all the neurons, ions, protons, that make me tick on a daily basis; who monitors my every emotion, thought process, blood pressure, heart and neurological makeup; who from birth has known the running count of hair strands on my head (I can't even keep up with how many fall out in a daily brushing or combing!); and to top it off, who thinks nothing but lovely thoughts about me all day – definitely deserves the trouble of my bending over backward to do whatever it is, this kind of God asks, no matter how long it takes, especially since it is only my best interest God has at heart." Lynda Seward asks the question at the heart of the book of Hosea, the question at the heart of this message: "If obsessive behavior is the prevailing attitude, how is it that the most Magnificent Obsession – the One in whom we "live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28); just slipped through the cracks?"

There is only ONE thing, One person that is worthy of our obsession: that is God. Because God loves us unconditionally and without limit, because God sent His Son into the world that we might have a full and meaningful life, because Jesus paid the debt that we owe, because God sent us the Holy Spirit, we should be obsessing about Him. God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit should be our Magnificent Obsession! The best thing that we can do for Doster Community Church and for ourselves, our marriages, our lives, is to make it our obsession to live God's Way, by the power of the Holy Spirit within us. Pray every chance you get, yes, pray continually. Be willing to tell others about how God answers prayer, and put your love for others, the love God commands us to have, INTO ACTION. Make God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit your Magnificent Obsession! Let's pray ... AMEN!!

Sermon Notes for “The Magnificent Obsession”
Based on Hosea 11: 1-11
given at Doster Community Church June 7, 2026
February 6th, 2022
Given originally in September 2016

- I. Christ never said anything about the evils of sexuality, democracy, or tax cuts. Jesus did talk a lot about the danger of riches.
- II. God is obsessed with a ridiculous love for men and women despite our terrible disobedience and bad attitudes.
- III. Hosea tells us God’s obsessive love for our fractured humanity is similar to that between a parent and child.
- IV. God is always faithful. God’s love for us is so great and focused that He gave us:
 - a. The rainbow to remind us of His love
 - b. A mutually binding promise/covenant
 - c. An exit from slavery in Egypt
 - d. The commandments and the Law.
 - e. Judges, prophets, priests and kings to speak the Divine Word.
 - f. Forgiveness
 - g. Generations of warning so we could avoid judgment
 - h. A plan of restoration.
 - i. A pass from death and judgment
 - j. His one and only Son.
- V. In response to God’s obsessive love and grace and mercy to us we should develop a “magnificent Obsession” with God. Be willing to tell others about how God answer your continual prayers and put God’s love into actions. What are you going to do about it this week?

Sermon in a Sentence: In response to God’s obsessive love, grace, and mercy toward us we should develop a “magnificent obsession” with Him!

Memory Verse: Hosea 11:4 “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.”