



When the Osteens met Piers

Filling the shoes of legendary American talk show host Larry King was no easy feat, but British journalist Piers Morgan made the transition. On one of his first shows he interviewed mega-church pastors **Joel** and **Victoria Osteen**. And they performed brilliantly...

Piers: A few years ago I turned on my television in my hotel room in America and the very first face I saw was yours, Joel, and it was like the Osmonds had been reborn – you were in this huge church, this shiny, perfect guy, saying these extraordinary things all from memory, very charismatic and inspiring, and I was hooked on the Joel Osteen bug straight away. I’ve watched you on and off ever since, but you have an effect; you’re like a rock star aren’t you?

Joel: You know I never think of it that way, Piers. Twelve years ago I’d never spoken in public before, so this is all still relatively new to me; the blessings and favour have amazed me. When my dad died and I took over, I never dreamed people would watch me.

As a matter of fact, my dad had a television programme and the first thing we did was cancel it because I thought, ‘I’m not going to get on, nobody’s going to watch me,’ but my wife talked me into it and the ministry took off.

Piers: What do you call your weekly show – it’s not really a service is it? What do you call it?

Joel: Well, we call it a service. It meets in the former Compact Centre where the Houston Rockets used to play basketball.

Piers: I’m a good old former Irish Catholic boy, and when I was young I went to church – but it was nothing like this. It was very quiet, very serious, there were about 100 people and the priest was normally pretty old, couldn’t hear us and it was very uncharismatic. But these scenes in Lakewood... it’s like a rock concert!

Joel: It’s a different day now, Piers. When we meet it’s more of a celebration. We’re reverent and holy, but we believe in celebrating that God is good and we believe in music, drums and a band and lights and that people are happy. I want people to leave that place inspired saying, ‘I’m going to have a better week because I honour God.’



Piers: So, I feel like that when I go and see ‘The Stones’, so you see I’m right. What do you think, Victoria, when you watch him up there in the pulpit doing his thing? You must think, ‘Wow, look at my husband!’
Victoria: I do, he makes it look so easy, but the truth is he works really hard and dedicates and focuses himself on what he’s going to say.

Piers: How do you come up with what to say for 25 minutes each week?

Joel: I type what I’m going to say and I have a great memory. My mother had a great memory and the more you use it the better it gets. I type like I’m going to talk, and my gift is helping people to live a good victorious life; making the Scriptures

practical for today. I talk about things like having a good attitude, or how to have peace in the midst of a lot of trouble.

Piers: What makes you different? Why have you emerged as the superstar?

Joel: I don’t know, it still amazes me as there are certainly ministers who have more experience, education and talent. I’m reaping the fruit of my parents’ 40 years of ministry.

Piers: What is the state of America spiritually right now?

Joel: Well, I’m an optimist and we travel from city to city and see stadiums filled with people who are hungry for faith and hope. When I grew up, a church of 1,000

was a big deal but today there are churches all over the place that have thousands and thousands, so I think faith in America is at an all-time high.

Piers: I think figures are misleading as it would seem attendances are falling – but the impression is that they are on the up, what do you think is the reality?

Joel: I see it both ways, but I see churches like us that are relevant and practical that are growing. I think the traditional churches that haven’t changed have peaked out.

Piers: You played an extraordinary gig at the Yankee stadium, preaching your message.

Joel: It’s very humbling and rewarding as when I preach I don’t know the people, but they seem to have some kind of connection with me. It makes me think that every word must count as people are listening and I must do it to the best of my ability.

Piers: So, America is currently at war with many countries; we had the shocking incident in Arizona [when alleged gunman Jared Loughner shot and killed six people and wounded 14, including US Representative Gabrielle Giffords]. What do you think is the state of America as a country, not spiritually, right now? Do you feel it needs to change direction?

Joel: We need to have differences but not get angry about them. When we get so passionate that we start falling out with each other because we disagree on some things, that’s not what makes our country great. So I’d like to say that we can be civil and still be friends, we can still be Democrats and Republicans and have different views.

Piers: Most wars have a religious undertone to them – it’s one of the contradictions of religion that something which should bring harmony, hope and peace has the opposite effect.

Joel: It does, and it goes right back to Bible times.

Piers: But is that healthy? When I see audiences getting whipped up and see someone getting over-zealous and over-extreme, it feels a bit edgy. Do you calm people down?

Joel: No, I want to see people excited about life, and encourage them to meet ☺

someone else's need. Go out and be a light, buy somebody's dinner, lift others.

Piers: Yes, but what do you say when you sense someone using religion – Christianity for example, to be violent. What do you do as a preacher who has such influence?

Joel: My encouragement would always be not to use violence, but to be peaceful.

Piers: Do you drink?

Joel: No. I don't like the taste.

Piers: You don't miss it?

Joel: I'm happy. I don't feel like I need it.

Piers: What about you, Victoria, do you drink? Smoke? Ever do drugs?

Victoria: No.

Piers: You two are the squeakiest clean pair I've ever met, I feel like I need to go and repent of my sins!

Joel: That was the goal!

Piers: What was the pressure on you as a child growing up in that kind of environment? My environment is a contrast; my parents ran a country pub in England so I grew up literally immersed in alcohol, just a totally different culture.

Joel: I never felt any pressure. I grew up in a happy family.

Piers: What kind of values did your dad instil in you?

Joel: Several, particularly integrity. My dad always took the high road. He had a love for people: black, white, rich, poor.

Piers: But can you occasionally acknowledge that not all people are good people?

Joel: My goal is just to bring out the best in others and help them overcome. In our church, we see people all the time who are struggling with things, and you can tell they've got issues. But I just speak the truth in love, that they can do better and that we want to help.

Piers: Do you believe that everyone is fundamentally good or do you believe that some people are simply born evil?

Joel: I think everyone is a child of God and we were created in God's image. I think there are many influences and evil forces.

Piers: When you see someone like Adolf Hitler, is there any good in a man like that

– was he born evil?

Joel: I don't understand it all...

Piers: You're good at coping out of answering questions. For someone of your responsibility and influence you need to be more determined about answering questions like this.

Joel: I'm honest enough to say, 'I don't know everything, and I don't always understand God and why sometimes bad things happen. I can't explain Adolf or the guy in Arizona.'

Piers: Can you forgive the young man who shot the people in Arizona?

Joel: I may not right now but I have to get to that place. I think one thing that helps is putting yourself in their shoes. I don't know where he came from, what his environment was, but I doubt he had a good upbringing. Most of the people we see in prison – they don't have the upbringing people like us have. We need to show mercy.

Piers: So right now you find it hard to forgive him?

Joel: No... I just feel so bad for everything when I see him smiling and see no remorse.

Piers: My grandmother renounced her faith because of the holocaust and some of these families in Arizona may be the same – it hits your faith hard.

Joel: It does. There are plenty of things we just don't understand. It's hard, but I believe God is good and gives us strength in these difficult times. Even when I experienced the death of my father – and it's nowhere near a tragedy like Arizona – but I felt a peace like I've never felt before.

Piers: That was an extraordinary time in your life. After years of your father asking you to do the service and you finally agree, and you do one service and then your father dies. That's an extraordinary set of circumstances.

Joel: It was, but I don't believe in coincidences. It was the hand of God orchestrating it all to give me the passion and the confidence to pastor the church. My dad had been persuading me for 36 years! I didn't know this was in me. I liked being behind the scenes running the television production. We thought that was what we would do with our lives.

Piers: What is your view on homosexuality – is it a sin?

Joel: Yes, it's in the Scriptures that it's a sin, but so are lots of other things... Sin means to miss the mark... At the end of our services I talk about the greatest sin of missing the mark in not knowing your Creator.

Piers: You must really miss your father, he must have been a huge influence.

Joel: Yes, I do miss him. We were best friends and we travelled the world together. I remember saying to Victoria, 'What am I going to do when my Father's gone?' But what I thought would be my darkest hour really launched me into what I'm doing now.

Piers: What was the greatest lesson he taught you?

Joel: Be true to who you are; follow your own heart. He never pressured me, he always made sure I was happy so that's made me into who I am today, not trying to copy my father. He was more of a fireball as a Southern Baptist preacher but I'm more laid back.

Piers: Did he ever discipline you?

Joel: Sure! When we were young we got whoppings!

Piers: Did you spank your kids?

Joel: We didn't smack our kids physically, maybe just a couple of times.

Piers: I can't imagine you disciplining



people, Joel. You seem too good.

Joel: Well sometimes...

Victoria: He is a good guy!

Piers: What would trigger a Joel spanking with the kids? He must have a temper?

Victoria: He's not physical; he's very controlled. We've been married 24 years and I've never seen him lose control or lose his temper. He just gives me the look.

Joel: I'm just not an angry person. My mother's never seen me angry a day in my life, I'm just not expressive like that. I never fight, but I do get competitive because I grew up playing sports.

Piers: What is your view on homosexuality – is it a sin?

Joel: Yes, it's in the Scriptures that it's a sin, but so are lots of other things. Is homosexuality the best for someone's life? Sin means to miss the mark. But I'm not going to bash those people, they're good people.

Piers: You don't normally talk about sin.

Joel: I talk about how we live our life and should make good choices. I've grown in my knowledge. At the end of our services I talk about the greatest sin of missing the mark in not knowing your Creator.

Piers: When you see civil partnerships being sanctioned, you see that as wrong?

Joel: Yes, I see it as wrong, as I choose to live my life by what it says in the Scriptures.

Piers: My friend Elton John may be angry with you for that. What would you say to him?

Joel: Again, I go back to what the Scripture says. I can't grab one part that says 'be blessed and live an abundant life' but ignore other things it says. I'm not the judge; God hasn't told me to go around saying that.

Piers: But I think you are a kind of judge, you have seven million viewers every Sunday and you're encouraging them to believe the same as you.

Victoria: We're not judging people's sin. We want to love the people. We can reach people by reaching out to them. We're not judging the person.

Joel: I'm not saying who's bad and who's good. And I don't know if God is judging sin on different levels...

Piers: But I'm curious, what do you say to homosexuals watching this?

Joel: I don't fully understand it; I believe it's a process. We've seen people break addictions...

Piers: Addictions are one thing, but being gay – you're gay! It's much harder than just an average addiction. I don't believe you are born gay.

Joel: I just come back to what I read in the Scriptures – I can't ignore. I don't understand it all, but I come back to this... we're for people. It's not going to do any good to bash people. We have gay people who come to our church and people from other faiths, so it's a hard issue that I don't fully understand.