

Day 1

November 6



Pray | Ask God to shake you out of ignorance to your separation from him

God demonstrates his great love through trials that wake us from ignorance.

This week we will be exploring the word of God revealed to us in the book of Joel. While we do not often refer to this book, it is a book that reveals the true nature of God in a powerful way. A key reason for its power is its clear application to our culture and society today.

The prophet Joel was called by God to partner with him in an effort to shake the people of Judah out of a stupor of ignorance. They had drifted so far from God that they no longer even recognized their need for him. God used an army of locust to destroy the things that the people of Judah loved, to shake them out of their complacency and ignorance. Ultimately, it took the words of Joel to help the people of Judah realize what was going on. The love of God that prompted this intervention with the people of Judah is the same love that intervenes in our lives and society today. God is constantly at work putting people and situations in our lives that remind us that our only true hope comes from him. Praise God that he never gives up on us!



Read | Joel 1:1-12; 2:25



Reflect | Spend some time reflecting on the following questions.

In the passage we read today, we see that in order for God to get the attention of the people of Judah, he needed to send an army of locusts that destroyed many of the things that gave the people of Judah comfort and security: vineyards, fig trees, olive trees, etc. What things might God have to destroy in your life to get your attention and dependence back on him?

The depth and breadth of God's love is revealed in his willingness to intervene with this level of "tough love" in the lives of the people of Judah. How does the reality of God's magnificent love impact your life and your behavior each day?

Like Joel, as God's hands and feet in this world, we are called to reflect and demonstrate the love of God to those around us. Are there people in your life for which God is calling you to be the "awakening voice"? Take a few minutes to reflect on this, and ask God to clearly reveal where he is calling you to action.

Day 2
November 7

Read | Joel 1:1-14



Pray | Ask God to reveal the sources of your separation from him

God calls us to grieve for our sins and the effects of our sins.

The words of Joel to the people of Judah make it clear that simple awareness of their sin and separation from God was not enough. Joel calls the people to respond to this awareness with words like: **wail, lament, mourn, be ashamed, put on sackcloth, cry out to the Lord**. It would have been natural for the people of Judah to do most of this because their sources of comfort and security were consumed by a swarm of grasshoppers. God, through Joel, is calling them to something deeper. They are being called to see beyond the obvious effects of the sin, to see the implications of sinning. At its core, sin reveals a lack of trust in God. That lack of trust stabs at the heart of our great and loving God. It also dilutes the influence of the sinner on those around them, ultimately drawing praise, honor and glory away from God. The primary duty of followers of Jesus Christ is to bring honor and glory to God. Limiting our ability to do that is the true reason to grieve for our sins.





Reflect | Spend some time reflecting on the following questions.

What does it mean to you to “grieve” for your sins?

In Joel 1:14, the people of Judah were called to gather in a solemn assembly at the house of the Lord as part of the grieving process and recognition of their sin. What is your typical response when you recognize your sin?

The cycle of dependence: 1) dependence on God, 2) blessing from God, 3) dependence on the blessings rather than God, 4) awakening event to call us back to dependence on God; is common throughout the history of mankind. Why do you think God continues to bless us? Wouldn't it be better for him to give us just enough to stay dependent on him?

Day 3

November 8



Pray | Confess your sins to God and turn your heart to him

Repentance for sin is not just stopping sin; it is turning your heart to God.

We tend to think about sin as specific actions or behaviors that are in conflict with godly priorities or instructions. With that definition, it is easy to think of repentance as being sorry for that behavior, and trying to stop that behavior. In reality, at its core, sin is a state of separation from God. When you think about sin that way, repentance takes on a whole different meaning. It is not enough just to stop doing something bad, it must start with turning your heart toward God and starting to close that gap of separation. The instruction from God to the people of Judah could not be clearer: “Yet...return to me with all your heart...rend (tear) your hearts and not your garments” (Joel 2:12). We can be assured, as were the people of Judah, that when our repentance begins with turning or returning our hearts toward God, that he, as our loving Father, will joyfully forgive and receive us back: “God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love” (Joel 2:13, author’s



paraphrase).

Read | Joel 1:13-14; 2:12-14



Reflect | Spend some time reflecting on the following questions.

How has reading these words from God changed your understanding of repentance and how you respond to sin in your life?

We most often think of repentance as an individual thing – something between a person and God. In our passage today it seems that God, through Joel, is asking an entire group of people to repent. Do you see a need for that in our society (your community) today? How can you play a role in making that happen in your sphere of influence?

If you are feeling like there’s a big gap between you and God that you’d like to close, take some time reflecting on your life and your priorities. Then go to God in prayer – sharing your heart and calling on his grace and mercy and unbounded love to help you close that gap and live in close relationship with him. Remember too that there are people around you that would love to support you in this as well. Share your thoughts and decision with your Small Group leader, your Pastor, or a Christian friend.

Day 4
November 9



Pray | Praise God for restoring you in times of need

God's loving blessings should increase your dependence on him not decrease.

While it is not directly stated in the book of Joel, clearly the people of Israel did respond in repentance because in our passage for today we see our loving and gracious God jump into restoration mode. Words like jealous and pity are used to describe the transition. When you combine that with the immediacy and the magnitude of the response from God, you really get a true sense for how desperately God loves his people. We see it time and time again throughout the story of God. Despite countless failures and rejection of God, God does not give up on his people. Each time they repent and turn to him, he accepts them and blesses them. For the people of Israel that cycle of rejection of God never really ended. Despite having a full view of this cycle of behavior by Israel, we all fall into the same trap: depending on and loving the blessings rather than the source of the blessings. Followers of Jesus Christ are called to a higher standard – complete dependence on God.



Read | Joel 2:18-27



Reflect | Spend some time reflecting on the following questions.

The blessings of God take many shapes: health, family, time, possessions, status, power, the list goes on and on. Reflect on these blessing in your life. Is there something on that list that, if removed, it would cause you to question God's love and authority in your life? Take those thoughts to God in prayer and ask him to give you clarity on how to increase your dependence on him.

Joel 2:18 uses the word "pity" (ESV) to describe God's emotions toward his people. Generally pity is not viewed as a positive thing – especially when you're the object of the pity. Take a few minutes to reflect on the implications of the word pity. Are you ok with God having pity on you?

In Joel 2:27 God promises that never again will his people be shamed, because they again recognize that God is their God. How can this same recognition help you when you're in a situation where you are ashamed to admit you are a Christian? What key thoughts can you draw on to assure yourself that you can embrace your faith confidently?

Day 5

November 10

Read | Joel 2:28-32



Pray | Thank God for the gift of the Holy Spirit, available to everyone

The Holy Spirit sustains and directs us until our final, eternal restoration.

Yesterday we saw how our loving God passionately provides physical and emotional restoration for those who turn their hearts to him. In reality, this is only the very tip of the iceberg when it comes to the plan God has to restore his people and the earth to its original state of perfection. That restoration truly began when Jesus came to earth and died and rose from the dead, conquering sin and death. It continued in the delivery of the Holy Spirit to counsel and strengthen all who have made Jesus their Lord. It culminates in the final return of Jesus to this earth to judge all people, and establish his new eternal and perfect kingdom here on earth. Amazingly, God began to reveal his plan for this final restoration of all mankind through the prophet Joel, to give the people of Judah hope. We have seen the reality of many of these promises. Jesus' death and resurrection, the presence of the Holy Spirit, and Jesus' promise to return – these are the basis for our hope!



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Reflect | Spend some time reflecting on the following questions.

What does the fact that God sent the Holy Spirit to be our personal guide and counselor for life on this earth tell you about his character? How does the reality of the Holy Spirit's presence impact your life?

People today have many different reactions to the idea of Jesus' final return and judgment of all people. For some it's a source of great joy, for others it's an event that stirs up fear, and still for others it's a big joke. Where do you land on that spectrum? How does the promise of Jesus' final return impact your behavior today?

We were recently reminded that God accomplishes great things through ordinary people, like the prophet Joel. Take a few minutes to meditate on the message of the book of Joel – separation, turning to God in repentance, and restoration. Where (to whom) is God calling you, in the strength of the Holy Spirit, to share this message of hope?