



09

SESSION NINE

The Warning of Joel

SESSION SUMMARY

The prophet Joel warned God's people about the Day of the Lord—a day in which God would judge His enemies, vindicate His people, and restore the world. In light of the coming judgment, Joel called the people of Judah to repentance. As believers who are restored by God's Spirit, we are commissioned to call others to repentance, to spread the good news that anyone who calls on the name of the Lord can be saved.

SCRIPTURE

Joel 1:1-14; 2:12-14,18,25-32

THE POINT

Repentance requires grieving over our sin and turning away from our sin and toward God for forgiveness.

INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

Option 1

Locusts are a species of grasshoppers. Most of the time, locusts are at best a curiosity and at worst, a nuisance. From the curiosity standpoint, you can find the shells they leave behind stuck to tree trunks. From the standpoint of nuisance, they can often sing loudly, especially when there are a lot of them.

But sometimes locusts move beyond curiosity and beyond nuisance. When the conditions are right, locusts breed abundantly. They move in swarms and rapidly destroy crops. They fly great distances and consume all the green vegetation wherever they settle.

From ancient times, farmers have lived with a fear of locusts. Imagine sitting idly by while a swarm of insects thick enough to darken the sun descends upon the source of your livelihood, only to leave it and your life devastated because of their appetite. This kind of nightmare has led to scientific monitoring of locusts. Societies take extreme measures to avoid the destruction a plague like this can cause.

There were no such monitoring stations or preventative measures during the days of Joel. And the land was being consumed before the eyes of Judah. But the prophet Joel helps us see that the locusts were more than an unfortunate circumstance; the swarming insects were the instruments of judgment in the hand of God. As the people sat by and watched their land be consumed, the prophet Joel pointed the people not only to their own sin, but also to the fact that their current situation was only a shadow of the relentless judgment of God.

But even then, in the dark days of plague and famine, there was hope of restoration. God reminded His people, both then and now, that the Day of the Lord is a day of judgment, as well as a day of vindication and redemption for those who have repented and trusted in Him.

- **Share of a time in your life when your hope in God helped you through a difficult season.**

Option 2

Place students into groups of three to four, and ask them to discuss the following questions.

- **What are the signs that someone has a broken heart?**
- **What do people turn to in order to heal a broken heart?**

Joel told the Israelites not to simply mourn outwardly by symbolically tearing their clothing, but to mourn inwardly by tearing their hearts. In other words, he wanted them to allow their hearts to be broken over their sin. In the same way, we must see our sin, let our hearts be broken over the way we have offended God, and then we must turn toward Him.

HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

THE POINT

Repentance requires grieving over our sin and turning away from our sin and toward God for forgiveness.

CHARACTERS

- **The Triune God** - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- **Joel** - prophet whose preaching ministry produced the book of Joel.

PLOT

Our journey continues as we look at the ministry of the prophet Joel, who warned God's people about the Day of the Lord—a day in which God would judge His enemies, vindicate His people, and restore the world. In light of the coming judgment, Joel called the people of Judah to repentance.

TIMELINE

JOEL

A prophet who warns God's people about the Day of the Lord.

JEREMIAH

God's calling and presence overcomes obstacles in the mission.

THE NEW COVENANT

God promises to indwell His people.

GOD CALLS HIS PEOPLE TO GRIEVE OVER THEIR SIN

We don't know much about the prophet Joel, but we do know that his message from the Lord was a sober reminder about the deplorable nature of sin. In the days of Joel, an unprecedented disaster had overtaken the land of Judah, and Joel wanted to make sure no one attributed this disaster to bad luck or happenstance. This was judgment from God.

The word of the LORD that came to Joel, the son of Pethuel: Hear this, you elders; give ear, all inhabitants of the land! Has such a thing happened in your days, or in the days of your fathers? Tell your children of it, and let your children tell their children, and their children to another generation. What the cutting locust left, the swarming locust has eaten. What the swarming locust left, the hopping locust has eaten, and what the hopping locust left, the destroying locust has eaten. (Joel 1:1-4)

The scary side of God's involvement in life is that terrible things do sometimes happen as a result of His judgment. The people in the days of Joel couldn't credit their situation to coincidence. The same God who feeds the birds is, in this case, the God who oversaw the swarm of locusts. In light of God's involvement, Joel called the people to recognize the truth of what they were experiencing. The proper response to that recognition was to grieve over their sin, which brought the judgment of God.

Awake, you drunkards, and weep, and wail, all you drinkers of wine, because of the sweet wine, for it is cut off from your mouth. For a nation has come up against my land, powerful and beyond number; its teeth are lions' teeth, and it has the fangs of a lioness. It has laid waste my vine and splintered my fig tree; it has stripped off their bark and thrown it down; their branches are made white. Lament like a virgin wearing sackcloth for the bridegroom of her youth. The grain offering and the drink offering are cut off from the house of the LORD. The priests mourn, the ministers of the LORD. The fields are destroyed, the ground mourns, because the grain is destroyed, the wine dries up, the oil languishes. Be ashamed, O tillers of the soil; wail, O vinedressers, for the wheat and the barley, because the harvest of the field has perished. The vine dries up; the fig tree languishes. Pomegranate, palm, and apple, all the trees of the field are dried up, and gladness dries up from the children of man. Put on sackcloth and lament, O priests; wail, O ministers of the altar. Go in, pass the night in sackcloth, O ministers of my God! Because grain

offering and drink offering are withheld from the house of your God. Consecrate a fast; call a solemn assembly. Gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land to the house of the LORD your God, and cry out to the LORD. (Joel 1:5-14)

Joel gave his people a strong dose of reality. The locust swarm was meant as a wake-up call for people to recognize their sin and return to the Lord. The beginning of a return to God involves proper grief over sin.

- **Does it surprise you that God sent the locusts as a warning to His own people? Where else in the Bible did He use locusts to send a message?**
(p. 60, PSG)

GOD CALLS HIS PEOPLE TO RETURN TO HIM IN REPENTANCE

We often think *repent* means *stop*. Whatever sin you're doing, grit your teeth and quit doing it—whether it's coarse joking, cheating your way through school, or behaving inappropriately in your physical relationships with others. But this interpretation of repentance misses the love that comes with the biblical picture. To *repent* is to *turn*, not to stop.

Turning is different than stopping, bigger than stopping. You can stop and still be facing the same direction, sitting motionless. And though stopping sinful behavior is important, it's really only the midway point in the fullness of true repentance. Repenting isn't just about stopping, because it's not enough to stop. Repentance is about turning and choosing a better action than the one you were caught up in. In other words, repentance isn't just walking away from something; it's walking toward something.

In the days of Joel, God called His people to not only stop in their sin, but to turn to the only true Source of joy and satisfaction.

“Yet even now,” declares the LORD, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments.” Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster. Who knows whether he will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him, a grain offering and a drink offering for the LORD your God? (Joel 2:12-14)

In this passage in Joel, we see two key aspects of what it means to truly turn away from sin and turn toward God:

First, repentance begins in the heart and is expressed in action. You can see the clear emphasis on the heart in these verses. Joel reminded the people to turn to God their whole heart, and to make sure that their hearts were torn and not just their clothes. The physical signs of repentance can be manufactured. We can

make a simple choice of the will to *appear* grieved with our sin. At the same time, true repentance with the whole heart always results in action. From the opposite perspective, the Bible emphasizes (notably in the Book of James) that true faith always results in action.

Second, repentance is received by a gracious and compassionate God. There is always an element of risk when we go to someone we have wronged in a humble manner, admitting our fault. Why? Because we don't know how they'll respond. They might receive us warmly, but they also might snicker at our actions. They might want reconciliation or they might hold a grudge. The amazing news in this passage is that there is no such risk when we return to God.

When we come to God in repentance, we don't have to wonder about His response. He will not hold back His forgiveness and His love. He is not interested in putting us on "spiritual probation" until we prove ourselves worthy of His mercy. Rather, it's His character to readily and freely extend that mercy and grace to all who come to Him.

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Repentance

Repentance is a response to God's gracious call to salvation, and includes a genuine sorrow for one's sin (Luke 5:1-11), a turning away from one's sin toward Christ (Acts 26:15-20), and a life that reflects lasting change and transformation (Ps. 119:57-60). It is the human counterpart to God's work of regeneration, helping us to see what takes place from the human side of conversion.

GOD PROMISES TO RESTORE HIS PEOPLE BY HIS SPIRIT

Following God's call to repentance in Joel, the prophet's message turns a corner. Starting in Joel 2:18, the text begins to look forward to the promised restoration of God's people:

Then the LORD became jealous for his land and had pity on his people. (Joel 2:18)

Though the text doesn't tell us exactly what happened, the change in the mood of the rest of the Book of Joel is so dramatic that some scholars believe the people got the message. The people repented, and they began to see the compassion of the Lord played out in their land. As chapter 2 continues, we see that not only was there an immediate fulfillment to God's promise of restoration, but the text also points forward to an even greater and more lasting restoration by the Spirit of God.

TIMELINE

THE FALL OF JERUSALEM

The hardness of heart and the fall of God's people.

EZEKIEL'S VISION

God is capable of raising the dead.

Beginning Winter 2016-17

FAITHFUL IN EXILE

When God's people pursue holiness, others take notice.

I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the hopper, the destroyer, and the cutter, my great army, which I sent among you. "You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied, and praise the name of the LORD your God, who has dealt wondrously with you. And my people shall never again be put to shame. You shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am the LORD your God and there is none else. And my people shall never again be put to shame. "And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit. "And I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the LORD has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the LORD calls." (Joel 2:25-32)

CHRIST CONNECTION

As we look forward to the Day of the Lord in our time, we must remind ourselves that God's patience with the sin of man will not last forever. The day is coming when we will be held accountable for what we have done with the gospel message of Jesus Christ. So will those around us.

Though it might not be popular to talk about God's judgment in our day and time, it is an inescapable reality. We cannot be the kind of Christians who love to talk about God's love and harbor some embarrassment when it comes to discussing the reality of His coming judgment of sin. Let us not be the people who drink deeply of the gift of the Holy Spirit in our day and yet greedily withhold the message of escape from those around us. The way of escape during the Day of the Lord is available, and that is why we are active in sharing the gospel message with those around us.

YOUR STORY

10-15 MINUTES

GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **What does it mean to grieve over sin?** *In part, it means to be broken by the reality of sin to the point that a change in behavior follows. If one is truly broken over the sin of lying to one's parents or cheating in school, that person will not only feel the weight of the sin within his or her heart, but their actions will also demonstrate repentance.*
- **What is the difference between grieving over the effects of sin and grieving over sin itself?** *Grieving over the effects simply means one is upset about the consequences that sin has brought, as opposed to grieving over the presence of sin and disobedience to God in the first place.*
- **What are some of the actions that were to accompany the emotional aspect of grief from the people? What actions represent our grief over our sin today?** *They tore their clothes, they assembled at the temple and cried out to God, and so forth.*
- **When it comes to repentance, why is it important that both attitude and action go together?** *For us, the act of repentance might not mean tearing our clothes or going without food, but it will mean something. It will mean turning from old habits and attitudes; it will mean actively seeking the forgiveness of those we have wronged; and it will mean a changed lifestyle that falls in line with what has happened deeply in our hearts.*

HIS STORY

God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES



HEAD

Joel's words in Joel 1:1-14 indicate that God is not passive in His rule over creation. Rather, He is actively involved in the most intimate details of life. Jesus would later express the positive side of this truth when He commanded His followers not to worry in Matthew 6:25-26. The reason believers can be free from anxiety is not about our attitude or personality; it's about the fact that we know God is intimately involved in all the details of life.

- **What are some details of life where you have seen God at work?** *Answers will vary.*
- **How should the truth of God's involvement in the details of life help us when we may not "feel" His presence?** *All Christians go through seasons where they may not sense God's presence or nearness. In times like these Christians need to recall the fact that our emotions are not always right and can lead us into wrong patterns of thinking, especially in light of the biblical truth that God is always near whether we "feel" Him or not.*



HEART

Like the people of Joel's day, our sin has practical and tragic consequences. However, there is a difference between grieving over the effects of our sin and over our sin itself. The former is meant to move us to the latter, where our greatest grief over our sin is not because of what's it's done to our lives, but because of what it's done to the heart and glory of God.

- **How do you think God feels about the sin in our lives?** *Answers will vary.*
- **In what ways does the sin in our lives communicate to others what we truly love and cherish?** *Because our hearts are always tied to what we treasure, we only need to look to the things or people in our lives we treasure in order to know where our deepest devotion lies.*



HANDS

God pursues people from every tribe, tongue, and nation, and is ready to receive them as they come to see His gracious character fully expressed in the message of the gospel. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is a once and for all declaration of the grace and mercy of God. Demonstrated in His sacrifice of His own Son, God invites all who are willing to repent to turn to Him and find Him waiting with open arms.

- **What are some practical and appropriate ways you can present the reality of God's judgment to those around you?** *Whatever suggestions students come up with, it is important to remind them that the tone in which we speak to others and the motivation behind our words, is just as important as the truth we have to say.*
- **Why do you think many Christians find it challenging to talk about the judgment of God?** *Answers will vary.*

▶ ADDITIONAL INFO

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to lifeway.com/TGPFAL16Chron)**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at

GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources

And for ***free online training*** on how to lead a group visit

MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject