

Holy Week, April 7, 2020

Dear Valley Church Family,

True shepherds of the LORD's flock have always urged their brothers and sisters to raise their "God-sensitivity levels" at critical moments. The Prophet Joel was such a leader. At a time of enormous pressure and confusion, he didn't say, "*Peace, Peace*," like the indifferent leaders in Jeremiah's day. Rather, his anointed message was to shut the fridge, rally together and talk with God.

ESV Joel 1:14 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.

In the spirit of Joel (and other leaders we'll learn about in the weeks ahead), we're asking you to abstain from food on Wednesdays before dinner, so we can increase our appetites for God and gain his clear direction. Also, please join our **Joel Moment Prayer Gathering** on Wednesday, April 8, from 3:00-4:00 PM through Zoom or on your phone. If you're unable to go without food for health or other reasons, please choose another activity to put aside briefly (e.g. consuming the news, social media). Last Wednesday's gathering was very meaningful as we examined ourselves, confessed our sins, and interceded for our leaders in unity with dozens of other Bay Area churches. Also, each week during the this COVID-19 crisis, we'll share a thought or two on fasting, because this breakthrough practice is new and intimidating to many of us.

Fasting Creates Emptiness for God to Fill

Emptiness has been a theme of late. City centers, schools, and playing fields are ghost towns because of the shelter-in-place orders. It's weird to see so many blank spaces. But fasting for devotional purposes creates a healthy emptiness that God can fill with fresh insight, correction, and guidance. By not eating physical food (temporarily), and feeding on God's Word, we gain nourishment of a different kind, and the benefits extend to individuals, families, churches, and even nations.

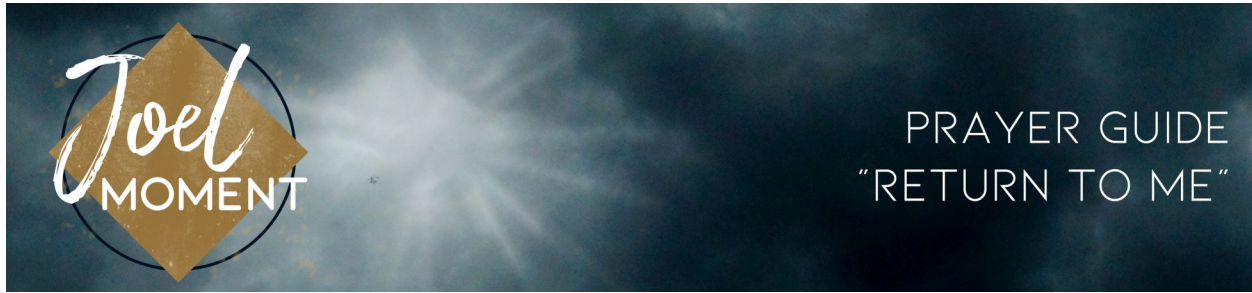
Here's another thought: although no one ever emerged from a sincere fast with disappointment, fasting can be as empty as our bellies if we make a show of it to others. Here's what Jesus taught us:

ESV Matthew 6:17-18 But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

In other words, even with rumbling stomachs, let's appear as normal as we can on Wednesdays without trying to impress others with our spiritual seriousness. The food denial that pleases God is when we fast with our eyes set squarely on him, and not on others (Zech. 7:5). We'll keep learning together.

Being empty and expectant with you,

The Valley Church Leaders



A Trip to the Street Curb

As I was thinking about this prayer guide early last Friday morning, the garbage and green waste trucks rumbled into my neighborhood, shattering the quiet and shaking my thin windows. Diesel engines groaned and back-up beepers sounded, measuring between 97-112 decibels. The loud uproar didn't just jar my nerves, it got me moving. I sprinted down the stairs and out my door, dragging the trash to the street curb before it was too late.

Likewise, the Prophet Joel rolled into Jerusalem, rousing the people to return to God by removing the refuse from their lives, that is, every toxic attitude and unworthy deed that dishonors him and grieves his Spirit (*"Blow a trumpet in Zion, sound an alarm on my holy mountain"* — Joel 2:1). Taking out the garbage will be our theme for Wednesday's churchwide fast.

Making the Most of the Day: April 8, 2020

Between 6:00 AM—9:00 AM: One leader at Valley Church wrote this: *"I believe the Lord is looking to purify His people, His bride..."* Read Psalm 19:12-13 and make it your heart's plea. Then sit quietly and write down those wrongs that the Lord brings into your mind that have created a space between you.

Between 9:00 AM—12:00 PM: Now, let's look away from ourselves and see how Jesus pursued a morally broken person and began changing him to be a capable helper in his Kingdom mission. Open Luke 5:1-11. What happens after Peter acknowledges the truth about himself to Jesus? Talk to God.

Between 12:00 PM—3:00 PM: With fresh courage from seeing the One who claimed, pardoned and commissioned Peter, let's take responsibility for the sins we've toyed with and reject them. Say, *"Lord, I need forgiveness and cleansing for..."* Then, cross them out above, and write a sentence of gratitude to God below (*"Be glad in the LORD and rejoice...and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!"* — Ps. 32:11).

Between 3:00 PM-4:00 PM: Join the **Joel Moment Prayer Gathering** through Zoom or on your phone.

Between 4:00 PM—7:00 PM: It's time to enjoy a friendship meal with Jesus like Levi did after the Lord called him (Luke 5:29). After dinner, ask the Lord to make you useful to him like Peter and Levi were in advancing his Kingdom. Ask God for one person you can speak to about how Jesus is your shelter.

Between 7:00 PM-10:00 PM: As a community of believers at Valley Church and in the Bay Area, God inspired us to step humbly in his direction today (*"Return to me"* — Joel 2:12). Finally, ask the Lord to give physical healing and spiritual life to every sick person. Also, all leaders need help now to perform their duties. Plead to God for them. Psalm 116 is the ideal passage to end this big day, especially Verse 7.



Here are the Scripture passages and songs that the leaders will share during the **Joel Moment Prayer Gathering** from 3:00—4:00 PM. We provide them so that you can follow along if that helps you to concentrate.

Craig Stephens: ^{ESV} **Luke 5:27-32** *After this he went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax booth. And he said to him, "Follow me." ²⁸ And leaving everything, he rose and followed him. ²⁹ And Levi made him a great feast in his house, and there was a large company of tax collectors and others reclining at table with them. ³⁰ And the Pharisees and their scribes grumbled at his disciples, saying, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" ³¹ And Jesus answered them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. ³² I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance."*

Thomas Sorrentino:

From "Cleanse Me"

My sins have taken such a hold on me,
I am not able to look up to Thee;
Lord, I repent; accept my tears and grief:

But Thou hast taken all my sins away,
And I in Thee dare now look up and pray:
Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief.

Of nights unhallowed, and of sinful days,
Of careless thoughts and words and works and ways,

Lord, I repent; accept my tears and grief:
And in the life which doth within me live,
And the forgiveness which can all forgive,
Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief.

From "Reign in Me"

Spirit of the Living God fall afresh again,
Come search our hearts and purify our lives.
We need Your perfect love, we need your discipline.
We're lost unless You guide us with Your light.

Daniel Kim: ^{ESV} **Psalms 32:1-5** *A Maskil of David. Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. ² Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit. ³ For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. ⁴ For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. Selah ⁵ I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah*

Jaime Burnett: ^{ESV} **Psalms 32:6-9** *Therefore let everyone who is godly offer prayer to you at a time when you may be found; surely in the rush of great waters, they shall not reach him. ⁷ You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with shouts of deliverance. Selah ⁸ I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you. ⁹ Be not like a horse or a mule, without understanding, which must be curbed with bit and bridle, or it will not stay near you.*



Andy Drake: ^{ESV} **Isaiah 58:6-8** *"Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? ⁷ Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? ⁸ Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily; your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard.*

Here's how to "share your bread" with the hungry with Valley Church's Shepherd's Table Ministry:

1. Contact ministry leader Tim Gildersleeve at (650) 383-8097 or info@valleychurch.org and tell him how you'd like to provide food.
2. Shop for the items on the list below and make arrangements for Tim and his team to pick them up. (Social distancing will be honored.)
3. Consider other ways to serve (e.g., driving bags of food to the homes of people in need, befriending those who receive the food who are interested in personal contact).

Vegetables:

Cans of peas
Cans of green beans
Cans of corn
Pinto beans
Cans of kidney beans
Cans of garbanzo beans
Instant mashed potatoes
Baked beans

Fruits:

Cans of fruit
Dried fruit
Fruit cups

Beverages:

Fruit drinks
Sports drinks
Snapple
Coffee and tea
Cocoa mix

Meats:

Spam and ham
Cans of tuna
Cans of chicken
Cans of turkey
Cans of chile
Cans of stew

Pasta:

Spaghetti
Pasta
Pasta sauce
Cans of tomato
Macaroni and cheese
Cans of tomato sauce

Misc. Items:

Rice
Grocery gift cards
Popcorn
Peanut butter
Mayo
Salt and flour

Oil and vinegar
Jelly/jam and Jell-O
Cake mixes
Syrup

GROUP PRAYER PROMPT #1 (8 min.): Psalm 99:5 says: *Exalt the LORD our God; worship at his footstool! Holy is he!"* Let's praise the Lord for his many attributes and the ways that he has demonstrated his goodness to us even in the midst of great difficulty.

GROUP PRAYER PROMPT #2 (8 min.): Let's thank him for the forgiveness he purchased for us on the cross. This is the week in particular where we remember his suffering on our behalf. So, let's do that, thanking and blessing the Lord for his life, death and resurrection.

GROUP PRAYER PROMPT #3 (8 min.): Let's widen our prayer focus now and pray for wisdom and competence for leaders, physical and spiritual healing for sick people, freedom from fear for believers as they carry out good works, the filling up of our Shepherd's Table Food Pantry, etc.