

Making the Most of Wednesday, June 10

A Scary Story and Personal Coaching from History's Bravest Pastor

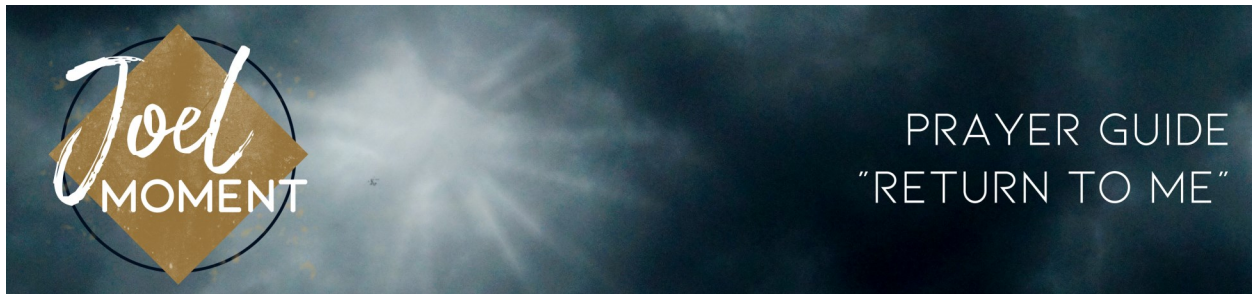
BETWEEN 6:00 AM—9:00 AM: Last week, my prayers trickled more than gushed (“...when I was pricked in heart, I was brutish and ignorant; I was like a beast toward you” — Ps. 73:21-22). I felt more like a mute animal. Can you relate? I was already disturbed by the death of George Floyd and the widespread brutality that followed, *before* the events of Saturday, June 6, in Ben Lomond, where we used to live. My story — to kick off today’s Prayer Guide — begins on Friday night, June 5, when I asked my friend Mark to pray that I’d have power to focus completely on my daughter Anna as we celebrated her 17th birthday on the following day, Saturday, June 6.

But here was my challenge. Like you, I’ve been preoccupied with the coronavirus, the killing, the chaos that followed, and how to interpret these events from God’s perspective, rather than with the worldly wisdom which is “*earthy, unspiritual and demonic*” (James 3:15). And I dreaded that my distraction might spoil a special day with my first-born daughter by being so much “in my own head,” so to speak. I knew that I’d never get Anna’s birthday back if I missed it, so I planned to enjoy it to the full.

Here’s what else I need to tell you. Anna’s birthday wish was to visit our beloved Ben Lomond in the Santa Cruz Mountains and see her old stomping grounds in the redwoods, including our home at 156 Jacobson Lane. This is “the house that built Anna,” to paraphrase Miranda Lambert’s great song. Anna bloomed there between the ages of 6 and 13. It will always be a special place, where among other things, she “learned to play guitar.”

We got to Ben Lomond at about 11:30 AM, and after hitting some of our favorite places, swung by our old house. We peeped over the back fence and marveled at some of the changes. Then we drove around to the front side of the house, on Jacobson Lane, for more gazing and reminiscing. Feeling both happy and nostalgic, we then headed to Santa Cruz for pizza and a stroll on East Cliff Ave. Life almost felt normal again, with the exception of all the face wear, which still felt surreal after two-plus months.

However, that’s when the fly of reality dropped into the ointment of Anna’s birthday. While cruising home on Hwy. 17, we saw 13 police cars with lights flashing and sirens blaring, flying towards Santa Cruz. At home, I checked the news and read that someone had ambushed police officers *in Ben Lomond*, using guns and explosive devices. Our former town was on lockdown, our old neighbors threatened, while deputies hunted for the suspect. Not long afterwards, our friend texted us that *our* former street, the one we had just been strolling on, was on TV. She sent us a link to an online video showing the suspect, Steven Carrillo, being arrested by a bevy of officers *on Jacobson Lane*, maybe thirty yards from our old house, after menacing a resident. I was chilled to think that Anna and I had just been there.



We were spared harm, but others weren't. We learned that Sergeant Damon Gutzwiller was killed in the attack and two other officers had been injured. Damon left behind a pregnant wife and a six-year-old son, the same age as George Floyd's daughter, Gianna. As Tennyson wrote, "Never morning wore/To evening, but some heart did break." More families and friends were devastated. We continued the birthday party on Saturday night, but with a shadow hanging over the festivities. The following day, Sunday, we mourned Damon's loss at a vigil attended by hundreds of Santa Cruz County residents.

Honestly, on Monday morning, I felt flat — like I myself needed a pastor. By God's grace, I got one. Pastor Paul ministered to me through his second letter to his young friend and fellow minister, Timothy. His ancient words — inspired by God — were as fresh as when first penned, and they provided the perspective and firmness that I lacked. Paul said: "Don't be surprised by the pain and pandemonium."

ESV **2 Timothy 3:1** *"...understand...that in the last days there will come times [kairos] of difficulty [xalepos].*

Yes, in the final phase of this present age (before the royal appearing of the King), conditions will be increasingly "poor, nasty and brutish." The word for "times" is in the plural, meaning that human history will be convulsed by various horrors. We appear to be in such a *kairos*. Notice also that Paul says that these episodes will be "difficult [xalepos]." This word could also be translated as "troublesome, hard to deal with, violent or dangerous." Ancient writers used the word *xalepos* to refer to wild animals. Matthew describes the two demon-possessed men with this term ("so fierce [xalepos] that no one could walk near them" — Matt. 8:28). But Paul implies that fierce times shouldn't shake us.

Then Pastor Paul characterizes the unredeemed of all races in unvarnished terms. The descriptors below are enough to cool the blood and paralyze faith-driven action. Read Paul's words, remembering that the Bible doesn't sugarcoat the truth about the sad state of humans who are outside of Christ and devoid of his transforming Spirit. Also, let's see our own pre-Christian selves in the catalog below.

ESV **2 Timothy 3:2-9** *For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³ heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, ⁴ treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, ⁵ having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people. ⁶ For among them are those who creep into households and capture weak women, burdened with sins and led astray by various passions, ⁷ always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth. ⁸ Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth, men corrupted in mind and disqualified regarding the faith. ⁹ But they will not get very far, for their folly will be plain to all, as was that of those two men.*



Reflect on the Scriptural facts: First, unredeemed people — from every race — will come to a sorrowful end. Second human unrighteousness is most visible in personal relationships. We can think of many examples from the news (and even from our own lives at our worst moments) of the inhuman qualities that Paul says will only metastasize in the days leading up to the return of Jesus the King.

In addition to identifying the unfeeling, self-superiority that expresses itself in sins like racism, Paul calls out lascivious men for their mistreatment of vulnerable women, especially the wolves who cloak their lust with religion. The Prophet Joel plainly teaches that God will pay back all who abuse his multiracial family. *“I will gather all the nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. And I will enter into judgment with them there, on behalf of my people and my heritage Israel, because they have scattered them among the nations and have divided up my land”*— Joel 3:2.

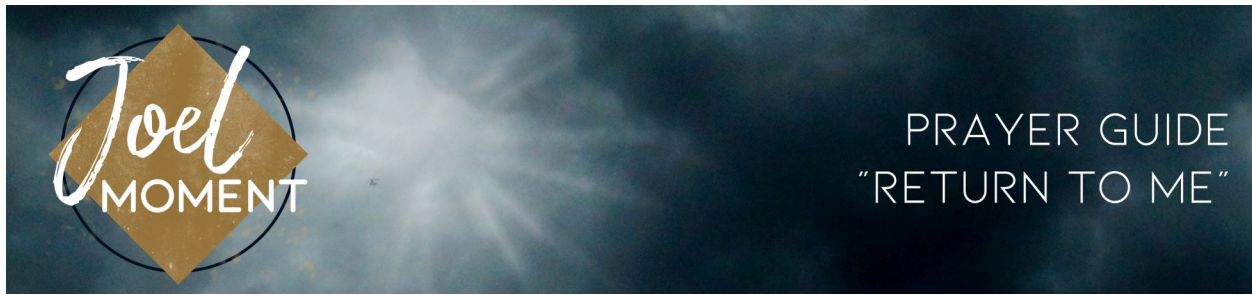
Take time now to honor our vengeance-dealing, but somehow merciful, God. After all, God sent Jesus to save those who welcome him from his own fierce wrath and just punishment. Praise the Lord for his perfectly appropriate — but happily averted — retribution that his faithful followers will never taste. Find a way to say, “Father, your mercy for me cloaked your judgment, which fell on innocent Jesus.”

BETWEEN 9:00 AM—12:00 PM: In contrast to the vicious character qualities of the unredeemed, Pastor Paul pointed to himself as an example of how we ourselves should think and act when the tides of self-promotion and bloodshed rise on every side.

ESV **2 Timothy 3:10-12** *You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, ¹¹ my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra--which persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me. ¹² Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,*

Paul didn’t unravel, cocoon himself, or claim victim status when the heat came. Self-pity was alien to him, because he knew that God had pitied him in Christ. These eight aspects of Paul’s personhood are particularly worth imitating. Pray for Paul-likeness for you and others, for he was like Christ.

1. **“my teaching”** — Father, help me, like Paul, to keep the facts of King Jesus always in mind. That is, how Jesus, the pre-existent Word, became the worldwide King through his obedient life, sin-cancelling death and resurrection. Paul saw all of life through this story. Help me to see life this way.
2. **“my conduct”** — Father, help me, like Paul, to bubble over with enthusiasm about God’s reign, and to be verbal about it, skillfully (or awkwardly) injecting Jesus and his accomplishment into my conversations with outsiders.
3. **“my aim [or way] in life”** — Father, help me to adopt the Apostle’s personal, “pouring-out-lifestyle,” that is, refreshing other people in tangible ways when I meet them along the path (Phil. 2:17).



4. **"my faith"** — Father, help me, like Paul, to be loyal to you in unwavering worship, service, purity, humility, gratitude and hope. Awaken me from any spiritual stupor. Alert me to my special calling.
5. **"my patience"** — Father, help me, like Paul, to be tranquil, content and compassionate while awaiting the outcome of these present troubles. Let me contribute to peace and equality where I can.
6. **"my love"** — Father, help me, like Paul, to reject mere tolerance for others and be gripped with true affection for people who think differently than I do, or who see me as stupid or evil. And the more broken are the people around me, the more ready may you make me to see Jesus Christ in them.
7. **"my steadfastness"** — Father, help me, like Paul, to always fight the temptations to shrink back, give in, or coast along. Mobilize me to fresh action with the corpse-raising power that lives in me.
8. **"my persecutions and sufferings"** — Father, help me, like Paul, to endure the disrespect, taunts and scorn of others who are asleep to you, your gospel, and your demands for a holy life. Remind me that it's a privilege to hurt for you, and suffering can sweeten the intimacy we enjoy (Phil. 3:10).

BETWEEN 12:00 PM-3:00 PM: ^{ESV} **2 Timothy 3:13** *while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.*

Talk to God about the clouds of confusion over the globe, as people don visible masks over their mouths and invisible ones over their eyes. Erring people are pushing errant agendas. We must discover who they are and what they're advocating. We must also understand how prone we are to believe that we alone have the corner on truth. Often our convictions are the result of our preferred "go-to" sources. Let's pray for humble minds while striving to understand our circumstances by intense reflection on Scripture (illuminated by the Holy Spirit) and thoughtful interactions with diverse believers who ground their views on the eternal words that God exhaled. Then, let's politely sift all views for truth.

BETWEEN 3:00 PM—4:00 PM: *Join the **Joel Moment Prayer Gathering**. Go to [Zoom.com](https://zoom.us) and enter Meeting ID and Password.*

BETWEEN 5:00 PM—9:00 PM: ^{ESV} **2 Timothy 3:14-17** *But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it ¹⁵ and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.*

In summary, "Keep Calm and Carry On," because the people of God have urgent tasks in this moment. But like Paul, we need Scripture feasts (and news/social media famines) to taste the grace that is always with us. I suggest focusing on Pastor Paul's 13 letters. But tonight, make Psalm 4 your evening solace.



FEMI O. [A teaching and group prayer on the story of the Good Samaritan.]

ESV **Luke 10:25-37** *And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" ²⁶ He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" ²⁷ And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." ²⁸ And he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live." ²⁹ But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" ³⁰ Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. ³¹ Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. ³² So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. ³⁴ He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. ³⁵ And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.' ³⁶ Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" ³⁷ He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise."*

MARY N. [A new friend of Valley Church will share her testimony, baptism story and a group prayer.]

THOMAS S. [We'll sing "Holy, Holy, Holy." Please mute your Zoom so we can just hear Thomas' voice.]

Holy, holy, holy!
Lord God Almighty
Early in the morning
Our song shall rise to Thee
Holy, holy, holy!
Merciful and mighty
God in three persons
Blessed Trinity!

Holy, holy, holy!
Though the darkness hide thee
Though the eye of sinful man
Thy glory may not see
Only Thou art holy
There is none beside Thee
Perfect in power
In love and purity

Holy, holy, holy!
Lord God Almighty
Oh thy works shall praise Thy name
In earth and sky and sea
Holy, holy, holy!
Merciful and mighty
God in three persons
Blessed Trinity

Oh God in three persons
Blessed Trinity!



GROUP PRAYER PROMPT #1 (7 min.): Maybe it's time to think again about what we ourselves actually *think* when we see people with different skin colors or racial backgrounds. Maybe we do harbor negative or suspicious thoughts towards others who don't look like we do. Maybe we think poorly of people with different intellectual or political "pigmentations." This would be no surprise, because harsh, judgmental attitudes and speech are intrinsic to human character (Rom. 1:29). However, anyone with the Holy Spirit can be changed. But, as with all shortcomings, the shift starts with contrition and calling out: "I'm sorry, Lord." I know we're in prayer groups of people we might not know very well, but still we can confess in general terms any perspectives that devalue others. Let's do that now.

GROUP PRAYER PROMPT #2 (7 min.): Christians can't be unfeeling when others are gripped by pain. Romans 12:15 says: "*Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.*" We can argue about the causes and reasons of our present crisis, but the simple fact is this: many black people in this country feel searing pain and longstanding dishonor, right now. So, let's pray for our fellow countrymen and human brothers and sisters, who — in many cases — are members of God's family. Pray how God leads you. And pray also for the brokenhearted wife and son of Sgt. Damon Gutzwiller.

GROUP PRAYER PROMPT #3 (7 min.): The famous American poet Langston Hughes wrote this about his people: "We know we are beautiful. And ugly too. We are all *imperfectly* human, and these imperfections are also markers of human equality." Everyone images God *equally*, and everyone is mangled by Murderous Sin (Rom. 7:11). Ask God to bring people to Jesus en mass, whatever their racial background, because God seeks true worshippers from every nation, tribe, language and people (Rev. 14:6). May multitudes in America be drowned in the waters of Christian baptism, and by believing, rise up to "*learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless [and] plead the widow's cause*" (Is. 1:17). Pray also for coronavirus-related concerns.

Record what God shows you in Joel Moment Part 2 — that is, time after 4:00 PM — when we share Scripture, intercede and support each other as the Holy Spirit leads us.
