

April 21, 2020

Dear Valley Church Family,

A chorus of voices at last Wednesday's Prayer Gathering urged us to seek hard after God. In particular, Pastor Kurt and Laura Drews called attention to King Jehoshaphat, who, we're told in Scripture, "set his face towards the One who could repel the foreign invasion" —2 Chr. 20:3. And God answered. We're hoping the Lord will likewise repel this virus invasion. It was a somber time for our church family, but still lots of smiling faces peered out of those small rectangles. Tomorrow, once again, we'll detach our faces from our plates and other activities and look into God's countenance ("*I will return...to my place, until they acknowledge their guilt and seek my face, and in their distress earnestly seek me*" —Hos. 5:15).

While we're on the theme of faces, let's talk about God's face. Of course, he doesn't have a physical one because he's Spirit, but the Bible accommodates our limited understanding by describing him in human terms. For example, the Bible refers to God's "eyes" (2 Chr. 16:9), "ears" (James 5:4) and "mouth" (Deut. 8:3). But did you know that God has a long nose? He tells us so in numerous places in the Bible.

Backing up a bit, we've been drawing near to God by focusing on Joel 2:12, which invites old and young to "*return*" to him. However, we haven't spent much time on the *reason* the Prophet Joel gives for running to the Lord. Can we be confident that we'll get a favorable welcome? Consider God's character:

^{ESV} **Joel 2:13** *...for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love...*

Many Old Testament scholars have observed that the phrase "slow to anger" is an accurate thought-for-thought translation. However, a literal translation of this colorful idiom is "long of nose." Conversely, someone who is "short of nose" is quick-tempered and impatient, as in Prov. 14:17. As Dr. Miles Van Pelt at Reformed Theological Seminary wrote: "The theological significance of God's long nose is not to be underestimated. Because God is patient, his people do not perish. Because God's nose is long, he has not treated us as we deserve." Praise God for this unforgettable description of his compassion towards us.

As we continue to learn about fasting, here's another Scriptural reason why Christians give up food.

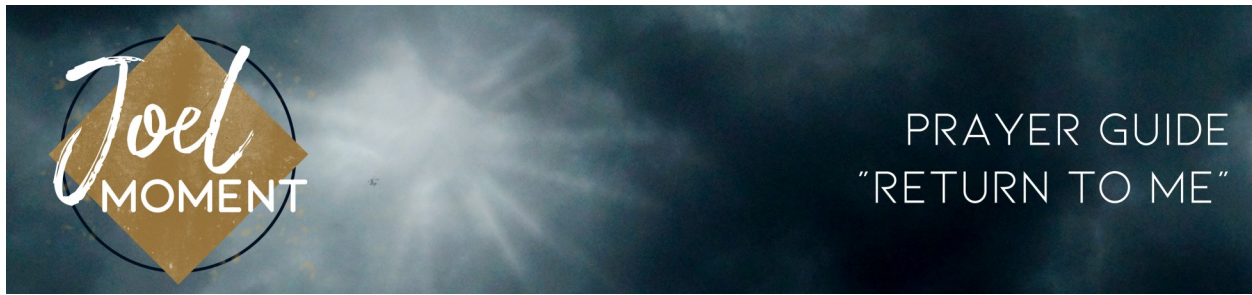
Believers Fast to Break Compulsive-Sin Patterns in Ourselves and Others

^{ESV} **Isaiah 58:6** *"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?"*

As you'll see on the next page, tomorrow we'll fast to break specific chains that lay heavy on millions.

Laying aside the sin that clings and clouds our vision (Heb. 12:1),

The Valley Church Leaders



"Worthless" on Every Device and in Every Direction

If you're still reading this Prayer Guide after three weeks, it means you're probably quite serious about your faith. So, let's deal with a secret issue: sexually explicit material and the people of God. Erotic images are everywhere. Listen to what these Christian leaders are saying about the danger:

"I would probably say from all my knowledge that pornography's probably the greatest threat to the cause of Christ in the history of the world. It's that serious." Josh McDowell.

"Pornography is the greatest cancer in the church today." Chuck Swindoll.

"I think that pornography represents the greatest moral crisis in the history of the church...Porn is something evangelicals can do in a dark room behind a shut door after they have railed against homosexual marriage and talked about conservative theology...I think the greatest threat to the church today is the Christian pastor, the Christian school teacher, the Christian college and seminary student who exalts sound theology, who points to the Bible, and then retreats to the basement computer to indulge in an hour or three of Internet pornography." Heath Lambert.

Even if we're not struggling with pornography (although statistics say that many believers are gripped by it), "pornishness" reigns — from Amazon Prime to Netflix to a certain cable news station, with its enticing "features & faces." We must fight for our freedom and purity, and for the freedom and purity of our families — especially our kids. Giving ourselves over to it is lethal (Prov. 5:5; Eph. 5:5). So, on Wednesday, with empty stomachs and outstretched hands, let's contend in the Spirit against this plague in our homes, churches and land (*"this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting"* — Matt. 17:21).

Making the Most of the Day: April 22, 2020

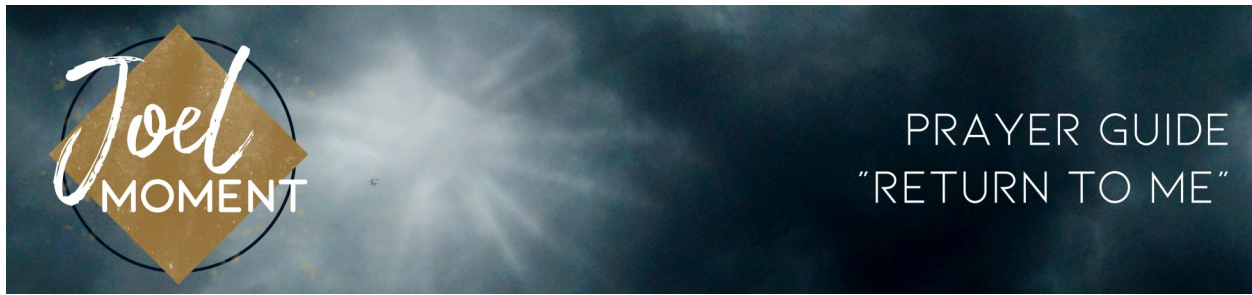
Between 6:00 AM—9:00 AM: Psalm 101 is an apt Psalm to consider as we think about clean hearts.

^{ESV} **Psalm 101:1** *A Psalm of David. I will sing of steadfast love and justice; to you, O LORD, I will make music. ² I will ponder the way that is blameless. Oh when will you come to me? I will walk with integrity of heart within my house; ³ I will not set before my eyes anything that is worthless. I hate the work of those who fall away; it shall not cling to me. ⁴ A perverse heart shall be far from me; I will know nothing of evil.*

King David centered his worship on the theme of God's "chesed," that is, his compassion-in-action for his frequently stumbling people. And how he knew God's "chesed" firsthand. Here's a song about it. Take time now to sing it to God. If you don't know the melody, you can find many versions on YouTube.

"The Steadfast Love of the Lord"

*The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases.
His mercies never come to an end;
They are new every morning,
New every morning:
Great is Thy faithfulness, O Lord,
Great is Thy faithfulness!*



Between 9:00 AM—12:00 PM: *"I will ponder the way that is blameless. Oh when will you come to me" (Ps. 101:2a).*

Maintaining pure eyes in an eroticized world takes planning. Notice that David gives the matter thought, because it's a road he must find and stay on. Note also that "blameless" doesn't mean perfect. We'll never be perfect. Rather, it's a positive quality, even though it gets translated in English as the absence of something bad (blame). But it means wholeness or completeness. In fact, God tells Abraham in Gen. 17:1 to be "blameless" (whole and complete) as he journeys through life, with God always watching. What's more, to grow into this kind of person is to invite God's blessing and to make him glad (Ps. 119:1; Prov. 11:2). Pray about stepping onto this narrow path or remaining right in the middle of it.

Between 12:00 PM—3:00 PM: *"I will walk with integrity of heart within my house" (Ps. 101:2b).*

I'm reminded of Rev. Robert Boyd Munger's classic short story, "My Heart Christ's Home," about a man who invites Jesus into his life. On the day Christ crosses the happy man's threshold, he says: *"Lord, I want this heart of mine to be Yours. I want to have You settle down here and be perfectly at home. Everything I have belongs to You. Let me show You around and introduce you to the various features of the home that you may be more comfortable and that we may have fuller fellowship together."* Then Jesus, with perfect kindness and sympathy, begins to make changes to create fullest and most intimate friendship. Think about where you live in cyberspace. Tell the Lord that you want him to be totally at home with you in that place. Ask him to take control of your devices, computer and television.

Between 3:00 PM—4:00 PM: Join the **Joel Moment Prayer Gathering**. Go to Zoom.com and enter Meeting ID and Password. (Email info@valleychurch.org if you need this info.) Here's the schedule: 3:00 PM—3:30 PM: Scripture, silent prayer and songs. 3:30 PM—4:00 PM: Breakout Prayer Groups.

Between 5:00 PM—7:00 PM: *"I will not set before my eyes anything that is worthless. I hate the work of those who fall away; it shall not cling to me" (Ps. 101:3).*

In this verse, David puts his foot down. He won't intentionally expose himself to items that lack true beauty and goodness. That's a high standard. Instead, he expresses his complete hostility for anything that's vulgar and vile. He loathes the words and works of those who have swerved away from God's righteous road. He refuses to let garbage touch him. Ask God to help you replace the worthless with the worthwhile. Talk to him about your entertainment habits and those of the people you know. Here's a verse to pray through: *"Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things" (Phil. 4:8).* Read, watch or listen to something today that builds you up in Christ, like the movie "Amazing Grace" about William Wilberforce.

Between 7:00 PM—10:00 PM: *"I will look with favor on the faithful in the land, that they may dwell with me; he who walks in the way that is blameless shall minister to me" (Ps. 101:6),*

Speaking of "eyes," David says that he will highly regard people who share his commitment to living before God with honor. Do you need to part ways with any "friends" who are drawing your attention away from Jesus and towards worthless things? Pray that our teenagers will turn their backs on peers who give lip service about knowing God but who are dragging them into dark places.



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.

JAIME B. [A reflection and prayer for the plague of “worthless” (i.e., pornography) that has inundated our culture.]

ESV **Psalm 101:1-3** *A Psalm of David. I will sing of steadfast love and justice; to you, O LORD, I will make music. ² I will ponder the way that is blameless. Oh when will you come to me? I will walk with integrity of heart within my house; ³ I will not set before my eyes anything that is worthless. I hate the work of those who fall away; it shall not cling to me.*

THOMAS S. [A song about God’s never-failing love for his often-failing people.]

“The Steadfast Love of the Lord”

*The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases.
His mercies never come to an end;
They are new every morning,
New every morning:
Great is Thy faithfulness, O Lord,
Great is Thy faithfulness!*

ANNE B. [A reflection and prayer on the demonic aspect of much accepted entertainment.]

ESV **Ephesians 6:10-18** *Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. ¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. ¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. ¹³ Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. ¹⁴ Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵ and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; ¹⁷ and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, ¹⁸ praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints,*



KURT J. [A reflection and prayer about looking in two directions — at ourselves and at our Savior.]

ESV Lamentations 3:40 *Let us test and examine our ways, and return to the LORD!*

NAS Hebrews 12:2 *fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

ESV John 8:1-11 *but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. ² Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him, and he sat down and taught them. ³ The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and placing her in the midst ⁴ they said to him, "Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. ⁵ Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?" ⁶ This they said to test him, that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. ⁷ And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her." ⁸ And once more he bent down and wrote on the ground. ⁹ But when they heard it, they went away one by one, beginning with the older ones, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. ¹⁰ Jesus stood up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" ¹¹ She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more."*

ANDY D. [A reflection and prayer about one practical method for leaving sin behind.]

ESV Acts 19:18-20 *Also many of those who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices. ¹⁹ And a number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted the value of them and found it came to fifty thousand pieces of silver. ²⁰ So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily.*

GROUP PRAYER PROMPT #1 (9 min.): Matthew 7:4 says: "Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye?" As those who like the Prophet Daniel take responsibility for our own and others' sins, let's acknowledge the church's entanglement with "worthless" content and other worldly activities that hurt our faith and families. Let's repent.

GROUP PRAYER PROMPT #2 (9 min.): Let's pray for every need we can think of (e.g., leaders in government and education, churches, the sick, the isolated and those enslaved to sin and unbelief).

GROUP PRAYER PROMPT #3 (9 min.): Let's end with expressions of gratitude ("Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving...and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me" — Ps. 50:14-15). Let's not wait. Let's exalt him now for who he is and how he'll help us.