

<sup>ESV</sup> **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.

March 31, 2020

Dear Valley Church Family,

Unless we're 102 and survived the Spanish Flu, none of us have experienced this type of emergency. "Unprecedented" is the word everyone's throwing around. That's why we're calling it a "Joel Moment."

### **The Book of Joel in a Nutshell**

A locust invasion upended all of life for the people of Israel. Normal worship ground to a halt ("The grain offering and the drink offering are cut off" – Joel 1:9). Food supplies disappeared ("the storehouses are desolate" – Joel 1:17). Yet, despite the gloom, hope pierced the dark clouds for the people of God.

The Prophet Joel called for people everywhere to look to God. His sober word is "return."

<sup>ESV</sup> **Joel 2:12-13** "Yet even now," declares the LORD, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; <sup>13</sup> 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.

Starting on Wednesday, April 1, we'll join other Bay Area churches in "returning" through individual fasting and earnest prayer ("To you, O LORD, I call" — Joel 1:19a). Then, from 3:00—4:00 PM, we'll have a churchwide **Joel Moment Prayer Gathering** on Zoom ("gather the people" — Joel 2:16).

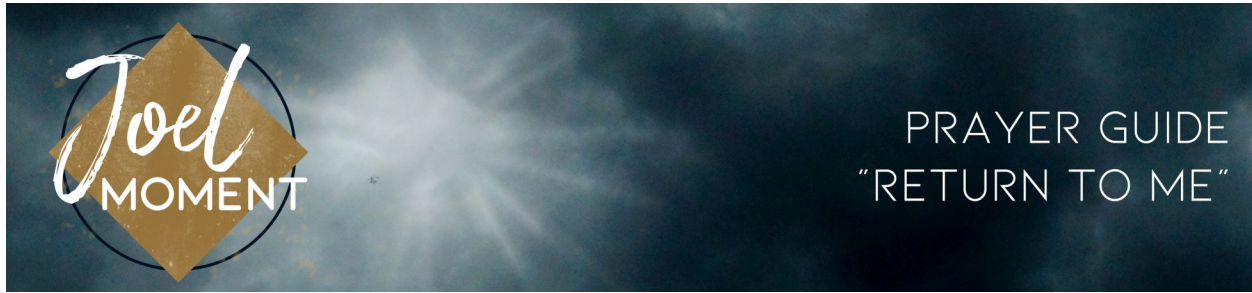
In case you're new to faith, "fasting" means giving up food (or something else desirable) to give extra time and attention to God. As we learned in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus assumed that his followers would do so (Matt. 6:16). Old Testament leaders often called for fasts during calamities. Here's a guide:

### **How to Fast**

- Consider, if you're healthy enough, giving up food. If not, refrain from something else (e.g., media).
- Stay hydrated by drinking water or juice.
- Use normal meal times to read Scripture and pray with your own resources and this guide.
- Expect increased closeness with God as you humbly seek him.
- Hope for a personal and societal spiritual breakthroughs

Sheltering in prayer and repentance with you,

The Valley Church Leaders



While the COVID-19 crisis plays out across the globe over the next number of weeks, we'll practice what it means to "return" to God as individuals, families, a church and residents of the nation. The following schedule is one way of dividing up our day as we cry out to God, while also carrying out our work and family responsibilities. Every person's needs are different, so please only use what's helpful below. The goal is to tune our ears to the One who made this moment in world history.

### **Making the Most of the Day: April 1, 2020**

**Between 6:00 AM—9:00 AM:** Worship the Lord with outstretched hands and read the "Joel Moment" theme passage, Joel 2:12-13. Express your eagerness to close any distance in your relationship with him. Ask the Lord to uncover areas that displease him (*"Search me, O God"* — Ps. 139:23).

**Between 9:00AM—12:00 PM:** Now, let's look away from ourselves and gaze firmly on the King, by reading Matt. 27:11-66 and Matt. 28:1-10. As Hebrews 12:2 says, *"Let us fix our eyes on Jesus."*

**Between 12:00 PM—3:00 PM:** With fresh perspective from seeing the One who suffered, died and rose to cure our sin sickness, let's unburden ourselves before the Lord, expressing sorrow for those mindsets and activities that dishonor him. Hosea 14:2 says: *"Bring your confessions, and return to the LORD."*

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

**Between 4:00 PM—7:00 PM:** End the fast with thankfulness, expecting God to act and extend mercy to all who take refuge in him. After the meal, ask the Lord to give wisdom to national and local leaders as well as to those in the medical profession. 1 Tim. 2:1 says: *"...I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions...be made for all people."* Plead for large-scale "returning" and an end to the virus.

**Between 7:00 PM-10:00 PM:** Go to sleep with deep reassurance by meditating on Psalm 91.