

May 5, 2020

Dear Valley Church Family,

We've been sitting in this Joel Moment for six weeks — a time for renewed devotion as God's people. He's answering our humble prayers. When will this time pass? We don't know. Until then, let's keep stretching out towards him ("*...be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer*" — Rom. 12:12).

Back now to our anchor book, Joel. Please don't think this prophet is all rant and retribution. That's a bad caricature. The lament in the first part are opening notes in a symphony of restoration music — promises that expectant people of faith in every age can claim for themselves. We'll explore them at some point. However, for now, let's stay planted in Joel 2:12-17, the returning, fasting, weeping, mourning, heart-scraping, everyone-praying midsection of the book. However, "*Return to me*" will eventually give way to "*I will restore.*"

COVID-19 has made us students of fasting. Maybe we needed the pressure to rediscover this powerful but often uncomfortable practice for disciples of Jesus. Here's another thought to motivate us.

### **We'll Fast Until Jesus is Physically Present with Us Again**

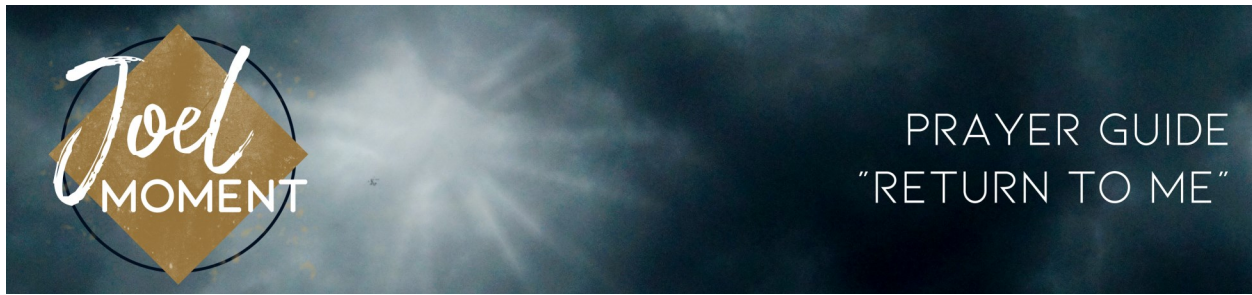
In Matthew 9, the followers of John the Baptist are surprised that Jesus' followers are living large, that is, they're happily eating and drinking with their Master, instead of imitating his more hard-core cousin. And fasting in preparation for the Messiah made perfect sense. But circumstances changed — the promised Messiah appeared! Jesus himself said that celebration was essential ("*Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them?*" — Matt. 9:15).

On the other hand, occasional fasting is equally essential now that Jesus is physically absent (for a time). There are wedding preparations to be made as we split from sin and serve the needy. Jesus said as much ("*The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast*" — Matt. 9:15). What's more, the window for fasting is closing *fast*, because Jesus is coming back to break the gloom and to feast with his people forever. So, let's allow hunger pangs to increase our appetite for his "Parousia," that is, his royal appearing on earth. His banquet will feature an infinite number of courses. So, let's double down — denying ourselves at regular intervals to grow in faith, hope, and love.

One last thought from David Mathis, "If we are to learn the lost art of fasting and enjoy its fruit, it will not come with our ear to the ground of society, but with Bibles open." Set out your Bible tonight. Think of it as an empty plate, about to be piled high with the warm, nourishing and delicious food we need the most ("*How sweet are your words to my taste*" — Ps. 119:103). Tomorrow's first course is Psalm 27.

Hungering and thirsting with you,

The Valley Church Leaders



### **"It Wasn't the Airplanes. It Was..."**

Have you seen the movie "King Kong"? It's about a 25-foot, chest-pounding gorilla. Controlling him is a tall order, literally. Heavy nets can't do it. Neither can steal chains. Chloroform wears off, and then he's really mad. But here's the surprise: A relationship with a beautiful person tames the ape.

At the end of the film, Kong storms through the city after being separated from his lovely friend. He climbs to the top of the Empire State Building, and there reunites with his companion, who again, calms him with tender charm. As Kong beholds her, he's quiet and composed. But shortly after, loud gunfire from military airplanes shatters both the tranquility and the beast, who falls to his death.

When the rampage ends, the photographers gather near the enormous brown body. One of them says, "The airplanes got him." Then a character steps forward and utters a line for the ages: *"It wasn't the airplanes. It was beauty that killed the beast."* It's not just poetic, it's a powerful sanctification principle.

Even though believers are Spirit-indwelt, we still have beastliness stamping around inside (Gal. 5:17). The Bible calls it *"the flesh"* or *"the sinful nature,"* because this power expresses itself through our physical bodies. "King Flesh" drives us to storm about, grab what we want, and do damage. That's why it must be subdued (Rom. 8:13). But how? Threats of punishment? Stern lectures? Chain-like rules? No, external restraints inevitably fail. Just like with Kong, only beauty can kill the beast. That's the theme we'll explore in today's Prayer Guide and at the Gathering this afternoon.

### **Making the Most of the Day: May 6, 2020**

**Between 6:00 AM—9:00 AM:** Let's look at a Psalm of King David.

**ESV Psalm 27:1** *Of David. The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?* <sup>2</sup> *When evildoers assail me to eat up my flesh, my adversaries and foes, it is they who stumble and fall.* <sup>3</sup> *Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war arise against me, yet I will be confident.* <sup>4</sup> *One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple.* <sup>5</sup> *For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble; he will conceal me under the cover of his tent; he will lift me high upon a rock.* <sup>6</sup> *And now my head shall be lifted up above my enemies all around me, and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing and make melody to the LORD.* <sup>7</sup> *Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud; be gracious to me and answer me!* <sup>8</sup> *You have said, "Seek my face." My heart says to you, "Your face, LORD, do I seek."* <sup>9</sup> *Hide not your face from me. Turn not your servant away in anger, O you who have been my help. Cast me not off; forsake me not, O God of my salvation!* <sup>10</sup> *For my father and my mother have forsaken me, but the LORD will take me in.* <sup>11</sup> *Teach me your way, O LORD, and lead me on a level path because of my enemies.* <sup>12</sup> *Give me not up to the will of my adversaries; for false witnesses have risen against me, and they breathe out violence.* <sup>13</sup> *I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living!* <sup>14</sup> *Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD!*



Have you found that negative feelings can suddenly rouse the Flesh Beast? Re-read vv. 1-3. What negative emotion is David combatting in real time as he writes this war-time, worship poem?

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In vv. 2-3, David paints a Skull-Island scenario where T-Rex-like enemies converge on all sides *“to eat up [his] flesh.”* What are the five different threats he mentions in quick succession?

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David keeps a cool head, reasoning with himself in vv. 1-3. Track his thought process. How does it lead to reassurance? Also, read between the lines and try to picture David’s facial expressions. What do they communicate? What’s his mental state? Like Kong, is he rallying — or unraveling in the face of dread?

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Take a look at v. 4. Surprisingly, David doesn’t ask for victory, he asks for a vision. His single request is to get an eyeful of the Almighty (*“to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire [or meditate] in his temple”*). The word for “beauty” in this verse can mean physical loveliness (Song of Songs 1:16), but also “pleasantness” or “delightfulness.” Let’s do likewise, and look away from the microbial and economic dangers on every side, and peer at the magnificence of God himself, God apart from his creation and benefits. Make an offering of ink below. Write why he’s beautiful, pleasant and delightful to you.

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Beholding Divine Beauty convinces David that victory is just around the corner (*“my head shall be lifted up above my enemies...”* — v. 6b) Then he’s inspired to get loud (*“I will offer...sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing and make melody to the LORD”* — v. 6b). Let’s do the same now with an old worship song called **“Shout to the Lord.”** Sing it audibly if you know it, and if you don’t, please find it on YouTube.

My Jesus, my Saviour  
Lord there is none like You  
All of my days I want to praise  
The wonders of Your mighty love

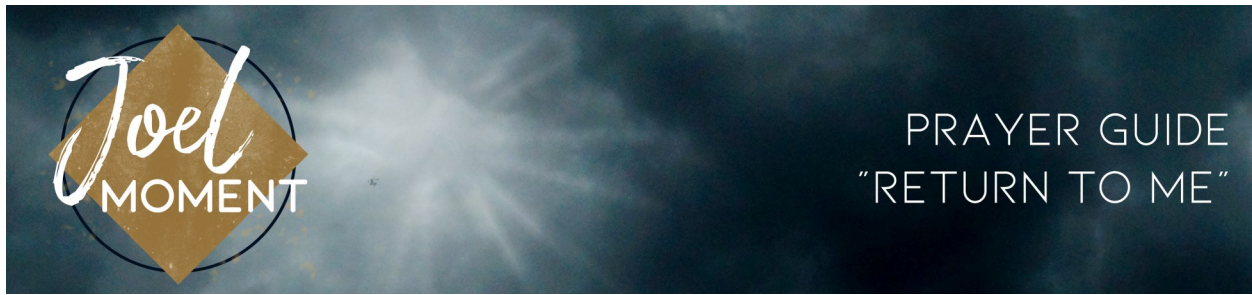
My comfort, my shelter  
Tower of refuge and strength  
Let every breath, all that I am  
Never cease to worship You

Shout to the Lord all the Earth, let us sing  
Power and majesty, praise to the King  
Mountains bow down and the seas will roar  
At the sound of Your name

I sing for joy at the work of Your hands  
Forever I’ll love You, forever I’ll stand  
Nothing compares to the promise I have  
In You

The Bible teaches that this lovely-to-look-at-God, *looks lovingly* at his admirers. In fact, one woman in the Bible gives the LORD a special name for all eternity, “El Roi,” meaning “The-God-Who-Sees.” In a delightful twist in v. 5, David says that the God-Who-Sees is also the God who makes it so that his enemies *can’t see* (*“he will hide me in his shelter...he will conceal me under the cover of his tent”*). God is our camouflaged bunker. Offer more thanks and praise in your own unique words.





**Between 9:00 AM—12:00 PM:** Re-read vs. 7-10. How do you picture David's face now? It appears that the king's high spirits take a dip in these verses. As we know, feelings of confidence and happiness in God roll in and out like the ocean tides. And when they roll out, watch out! That's when King Flesh can get the upper hand, making us vulnerable to pseudo "*light and...salvation*" from substitutes (v. 1). But David is wise. He reminds God, that *God himself* wants his gazers to be gathered in close, especially when other support systems like family and friends fail ("You have said, 'Seek my face.' My heart says to you, 'Your face, LORD, do I seek'" — v. 7-8a). If someone asked you how to seek God's face, what answer would you give? Then practice some of those things yourself.

**Between 12:00 PM—3:00 PM.** Read vv. 11-12. David makes three requests. Let's adapt them for our circumstances, particularly in light of tomorrow's National Day of Prayer.

First: "Teach our nation your ways. Let millions find their hope in the *knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ*' (2 Cor. 4:6). And let there be a revolution of Bible learning and discipleship."

Second: "Lead our nation back into prosperity, but only after national repentance. Humble and guide our leaders in every branch of the United States Government. Let influencers in art, music, film and literature be stricken by a health-restoring fear of you, the Holy One."

Third: "Father, the virus is yours to command, like the locusts in Joel. Discipline us for our unbelief, injustice and immorality, but protect lives so that millions might become your David-like Pursuers."

**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. Here's the schedule. Please join in as you feel led:

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:** Eat dinner. Re-read Psalm 27 with a full stomach and a contented soul. The Bible is fresh and new every time you open it. What do you see in the Psalm now that you didn't see earlier?

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**Between 7:00 PM—9:00 PM:** In v. 13, David says "*I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living!*" He's all but floating when he puts his pen down. And as scholars have pointed out, the meaning is more encouraging than is perceptible in English. A better translation might be, "I [David] am *made to believe* or am *caused to believe* that I will see the goodness of the LORD." Who caused this well-founded confidence to well up inside David? God himself! He acts upon (and within) the one who looks actively at him. As we see, remember and sing to God in the tent of our hearts, God will convince us, like he did for David, that crisis days will pass and that we'll enjoy him and his gifts in this life, or in the eternal "*land of the living*" (v. 13). Ask God to make you stand-in-place, rather than running off to false comforts ("*be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD!*" — v. 14).



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.

**DARREN S.** [A reflection and prayer on the sanctification practice we learn from a popular movie.]

<sup>ESV</sup> **Psalm 27:4** *One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple.*

**KURT J.** [A reflection and prayer on how fitting it is to let vocal praise follow a fresh vision of God.]

<sup>ESV</sup> **Psalm 27:5-6** *For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble; he will conceal me under the cover of his tent; he will lift me high upon a rock. <sup>6</sup> And now my head shall be lifted up above my enemies all around me, and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing and make melody to the LORD.*

**THOMAS S.** [A song and prayer about the beauty of God. Please mute your audio during this portion so we can hear Thomas and our own voices.]

**“Oh, Lord You’re Beautiful”**

Oh Lord, you're beautiful,  
Your face is all I see,  
For when your eyes are on this child  
Your grace abounds to me

I want to take your word and shine it all around  
But first help me to just, live it Lord  
And when I'm doing well, help me to never seek a crown  
For my reward is giving glory to you

Oh Lord, please light the fire  
That once burned bright and clean  
Replace the lamp of my first love  
That burns with holy fear



**CRAIG S.** [A reflection and prayer about pouring out our guts and reminding God of his promises.]

<sup>ESV</sup> **Psalm 27:7-10** *Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud; be gracious to me and answer me! <sup>8</sup> You have said, "Seek my face." My heart says to you, "Your face, LORD, do I seek." <sup>9</sup> Hide not your face from me. Turn not your servant away in anger, O you who have been my help. Cast me not off; forsake me not, O God of my salvation! <sup>10</sup> For my father and my mother have forsaken me, but the LORD will take me in.*

**ANDY D.** [A reflection and prayer for our nation. First, that millions of unbelievers would seek to know the Lord's way and turn from roads of destruction; second, that believers would wait patiently on the Lord for restoration while serving the physical and spiritual needs of the lost and desperate.]

<sup>ESV</sup> **Psalm 27:11-14** *Teach me your way, O LORD, and lead me on a level path because of my enemies. <sup>12</sup> Give me not up to the will of my adversaries; for false witnesses have risen against me, and they breathe out violence. <sup>13</sup> I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living! <sup>14</sup> Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD!*

**GROUP PRAYER PROMPT #1 (14 min.):** 1 Timothy 2:1 says: *First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, <sup>2</sup> for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.* The USA has had a steep spiritual decline since its founding, but reformation is possible. Pray that we'll return to our Christian roots as churches everywhere lift up King Jesus Christ.

**GROUP PRAYER PROMPT #2 (14 min.):** Colossians 4:12 says: *"Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God."* Let's keep exerting ourselves like Epaphras, praying for our friends and family (even by name) to progress towards Christian adulthood as they carry out God's desires for their lives and enjoy his Fatherly gifts and favor.