

May 12, 2020

Dear Hagioi (People-Set-Apart-For-Special-Use),

The Lord is honing us through our “no-plate-zones” and afternoons together in prayer. He’s intensifying and uniting our church family for ministry NOW, and not just when public life reopens. Joel Moments are planned and unplanned, ordered, but with openings and cracks. Hopefully we’re avoiding an airtight (suffocating?) schedule that keeps the Holy Spirit outside the Zoom Room, waiting for the host to admit only “safe” participants. Hearing the Lord’s voice is all that matters, and now more than ever.

Fasting for Readiness to Receive the Holy Spirit’s Direction

In Acts 13, we read about the church at Antioch, which started after Stephen’s martyrdom drove believing “embers” to ignite new Jesus fellowships wherever the wind of the Spirit blew them. The hearts of the Antiochians burned hot. However, at one point they hit a firewall; they didn’t know what to do. How should they themselves spread the word about the crucified and raised World Savior? Acts 13:2 tells us how God stoked their fire and illuminated their path during a confusing time.

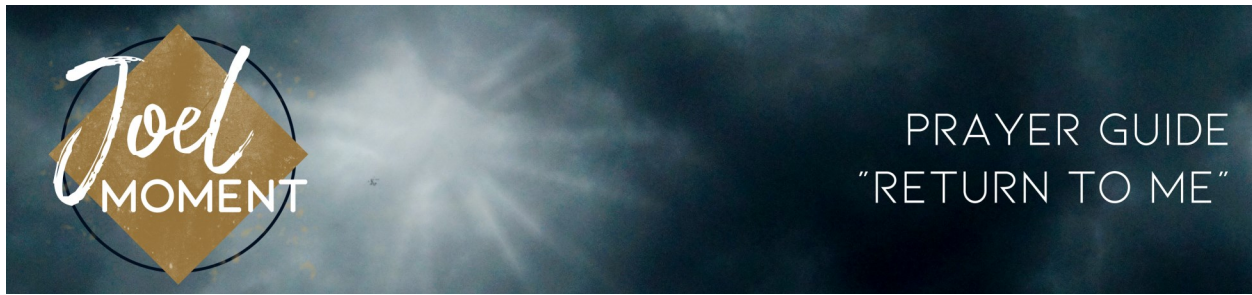
^{ESV} **Acts 13:2** *While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”*

Luke records that the Holy Spirit flashed forth with a vivid message: parcel out Barnabas and Paul for a missionary trip. But for our purposes today, the “how-it-came” is as important as the “what-was-said.” Notice that God’s instruction-giving was contemporaneous with their attention-giving. And prayer and fasting proved their readiness to receive. See, when the believers in Antioch “look[ed] full on his wonderful face,” *then* (and only then) inspired voices reported God’s plan. Today we can be glad that those early believers stopped, dropped and depended. Food is God’s gift, but so is going without it (for short periods) when The Jesus Community needs illumination. Likewise, we’re trusting that the Holy Spirit will throw light on our path as we interrupt our normal habits and train our eyes on the throne.

Eager to Receive the Holy Spirit’s direction,

The Valley Church Leaders

P.S. This is the seventh Joel Moment (if you’re counting). We’ll continue to gather each week, but with a change in tone and materials. The Bible says that there’s a window for every activity, “*a time to weep, and a time to laugh...*” (Ecc. 3:4). Let’s move on from the minor key of lament, and anticipate abundant restoration of what was lost. While continuing to express sorrow about the world’s physical and economic distress, let’s start rejoicing. Why? Because God’s “*I will restore*” oracle starting at Joel 2:18 applies to us as well. We’ll explore these promises next week as we keep crawling through the book. Here’s a preview: because God is “*gracious and merciful*,” locusts aren’t the last word (Joel 2:13). A new chapter awaits the people of God. We’ll also make the Prayer Guide more compact, just one page.



Making the Most of the Day: May 13, 2020

"Why Should I Break My Head?"

Between 6:00 AM—9:00 AM: Lately I've been watching little snippets of the musical "Fiddler on the Roof" at night. It's the story of a Jewish milkman, his wife and five daughters living in the Eastern European village of Anatevka. One scene early in the movie captured my attention. A group of humble Jews are listening to one of their company reading from a newspaper. The article reports that the tsar is evicting peasants from their land. Then Perchik, a visiting university student, appears and berates them ("You stand around...and you chatter, and you don't do anything"). One of the offended onlookers shoots back: "Why should I break my head about the outside world? Let the outside world break its own head."

It's an interesting debate for sure. Why should they risk life and limb for the needs of those outside of view? Don't they have enough trouble of their own? After all, they're just poor children of Abraham, trying to maintain their traditions while avoiding harassment by the authorities. Who is this upstart anyway? Isn't it enough to hide in their village, protect their children, and eke out a living? Or, in language from the script, can't we simply "scratch out a pleasant, simple tune" in life without losing balance and falling? What does the Almighty expect from his people? According to their founding story in Genesis, fiddling on the roof isn't sufficient. The Jews are to be God's "light to the nations" (Is. 49:6).

What's our takeaway? Believers are likewise called into the Great Patriarch's family for more than mere survival. We must venture outside of our little Shtetl on Stelling, even if we — Jews of the heart — are feeling increasingly unpopular with our neighbors (Rom. 2:29). As we seek him today, let's look at Genesis 12:1-3, which describes our family origin and purpose.

ESV **Genesis 12:1-3** *Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ² And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."*

Notice that God's call includes both privileges and responsibilities for the Responder. He or she must leave to receive. First, the "leaving" part. What three securities must be abandoned? List them:

Scholars tell us that the word "go" in verse 1 is actually a compound phrase with a meaning that's hard to bring out into English. It might be translated this way: "Go *for you* from your country...." Is that significant? Yes, indeed. It means that Abraham's adventure will yield tremendous benefits *for Abraham himself*. The journey won't just be for God's glory or for the wellbeing of others, but for him also, by yielding unimagined rewards. This makes sense when we get to the three jaw-dropping benefits mentioned in V. 2. How will the LORD triply reward Abraham? List them on the line, and then talk to God about all the ideas in this passage.



Between 9:00 AM—12:00 PM: Let's read Romans 4:1-12 and consider how Abraham entered a peaceful alliance with God. It wasn't through "*works of the law*," like circumcision and dietary restrictions (Rom. 3:27). Yahweh adopts people into his family from all over the world who look towards his Son Jesus and begin to follow him (Rom. 3:22). They get a clean heart and hiking boots for a challenging pilgrimage. Spend a few minutes singing this classic song "**What Can Wash Away My Sin?**"

What can wash away my sin?
Nothing but the blood of Jesus;
What can make me whole again?
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

Nothing can for sin atone,
Nothing but the blood of Jesus;
Naught of good that I have done,
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

Glory! Glory! This I sing—
Nothing but the blood of Jesus,
All my praise for this I bring—
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

Oh! precious is the flow
That makes me white as snow;
No other fount I know,
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

This is all my hope and peace,
Nothing but the blood of Jesus;
This is all my righteousness,
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

For my pardon, this I see,
Nothing but the blood of Jesus;
For my cleansing this my plea,
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

Now by this I'll overcome—
Nothing but the blood of Jesus;
Now by this I'll reach my home—
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

Between 12:00 PM—3:00 PM: Gen. 12:4 describes Abraham's response to Yahweh's "are-you-kidding-me command" to leave behind life in Haran as he knew it.

ESV **Genesis 12:4** *So Abram went, as the LORD had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.*

Jewish scholars teach that this was the first of many tests that Abraham faced. Just think about them — giving up inheritance from his father, having an unstable food supply, war, family conflicts, and finally the command to sacrifice his son Isaac. Abraham had a shaky performance at times, but he followed through by staying fiercely convinced that God would fulfill his promises. Those who believe in God's Son will likewise follow him into new and strange places — while being continually tested and blessed. That's why Paul wrote that the promises of God are fulfilled for those who "*walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised*" — Rom. 4:12). Ask for a "going" spirit.

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—9:00 PM: Read Rom. 4:12-25. Focus on the God whom our forefather Abraham left everything to follow. V. 17 says that Yahweh performs the impossible in two ways. What are they? V. 18 says that Abraham cast everything on the Lord — taking concrete steps to prove it — even when his dimming eyes told him that fulfillment of God's promises was impossible. Express your confidence now in "*him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord*" (Rom. 4:24). Ask: "how can I prove the faith I profess?"



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. Starting at 4:00 PM, we'll have impromptu, Spirit-inspired sharing.

KURT J. [A Scripture, reflection and prayer on how all of Abraham's children are highly favored by God and made instruments of the Lord's favor to those around them.]

ESV **Genesis 12:1-4** *Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ² And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." ⁴ So Abram went, as the LORD had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.*

PETER G. [A song of trust called "**Be Still and Know that I am God.**" Please mute your audio during this portion so we can hear Peter and our own voices.]

Be still and know that I am God,	I am the Lord that healeth thee,	In thee, O Lord, I put my trust,
be still and know that I am God,	I am the Lord that healeth thee,	In thee, O Lord, I put my trust,
be still and know that I am God.	I am the Lord that healeth thee.	In thee, O Lord, I put my trust.

JAIME B. [A Scripture, reflection and prayer on Abraham-like faith — that is, how a person who believes in the "[God] who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord" will take what appears to be nonsensical action as a result (Rom. 4:24)].

ESV **Hebrews 11:8-12** *By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. ⁹ By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. ¹⁰ For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. ¹¹ By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. ¹² Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.*

ESV **Hebrews 11:17-19** *By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, ¹⁸ of whom it was said, "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." ¹⁹ He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.*



Robyn C. [First, a story about how God called her to be an extension of his love towards someone nearby. Second, a prayer.]

GROUP PRAYER PROMPT #1 (14 min.): In Rom. 4:20, Paul writes about the conviction of Abraham, the patriarch of our spiritual family: *“No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God.”* Ask the Lord to help believers all over the world follow that same response to testing: (1) by showing loyalty to God without wobbling into compromise; (2) by declaring his goodness and grabbing opportunities to show it to others. Pray that way in your group.

GROUP PRAYER PROMPT #2 (14 min.): Gen. 12:2 is the first place in the Bible where people are said to be agents of blessing. Before Abraham, only God does the blessing. Pray now that Valley’s finest “blessing hour” will be now, and that we’ll find creative ways to express all that God is and all that he’s done through his Son Jesus. Plead also for the civic leaders (wisdom), church leaders (direction), the needy (financial help), the lonely (friendship), the sick (healing), and the defiant (repentance and faith).

Record verses and insights from Joel Moment Part 2 — that is, time after 4:00 PM — when we talk, intercede and catch up.
