

Making the Most of Wednesday, June 24

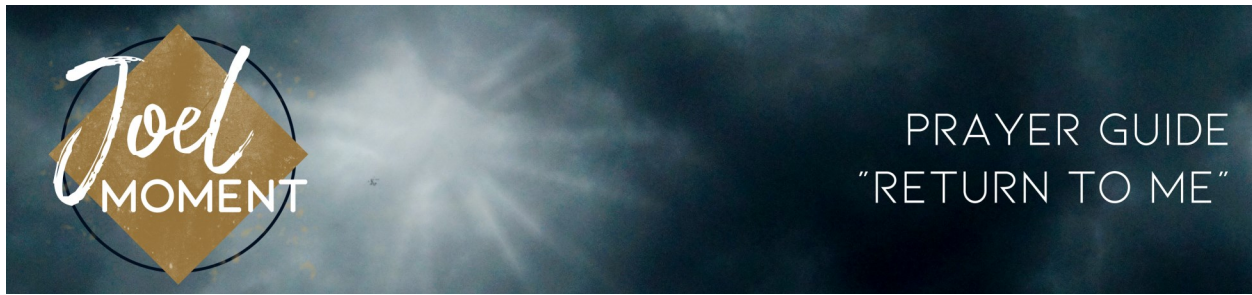
Gregory the Great and Motivation for the Moment



If you ever get to Florence, check out this painting of Gregory the Great by Jacopo Vignali. It's on the ceiling of the library in the Santa Maria Novella Monastery. It was painted in 1630, one thousand years after Gregory's death. As you can see, Gregory is dressed in Renaissance finery, but a more historical painting would show him eating with poor people (which he did daily) and dressed very simply. Gregory was one of the greatest pope and even won the applause of the famous Reformer, John Calvin. He responded to plague, social upheaval and political uncertainty with firm faith in Jesus and courageous action for his Kingdom. Studious monks at the monastery still look up from their books and see his weary face. He worked hard — writing voluminously, serving the destitute and launching a major missionary effort even as his own society crumbled. He was also humble. He wrote in one of his letters, "Every day I transgress." We'll learn from him today.

BETWEEN 6:00 AM—9:00 AM: It's tempting to think that conditions in 2020 couldn't be worse, considering the present pandemic, racial strife, criminality and political chaos. But history says otherwise. In 590 AD, Rome was ravaged, having been overrun by Barbarians. Marble buildings and monuments were toppled and taken over by weeds. Then the Tiber River overflowed its banks, washing away churches, decimating food supplies, and bringing plague. The city, which once boasted one million residents, was reduced to twenty thousand. But God raised up a fine leader by the name of Gregory, perhaps the greatest of all the popes. His first step was to maintain composure and guard his soul. He wrote: "In the midst of the unsteady flow of time [the man of God] knows how to keep steady the steps of his mind." With the help of Psalm 91, let's first steady ourselves in God. Read it slowly and prayerfully.

ESV Psalm 91:1 *He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. ² I will say to the LORD, "My refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust." ³ For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence. ⁴ He will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness is a shield and buckler. ⁵ You will not fear the terror of the night, nor the arrow that flies by day, ⁶ nor the pestilence that stalks in darkness, nor the destruction that wastes at noonday. ⁷ A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you. ⁸ You will only look with your eyes and see the recompense of the wicked. ⁹ Because you have made the LORD your dwelling place-- the Most High, who is my refuge-- ¹⁰ no evil shall be allowed to befall you, no plague come near your tent. ¹¹ For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways. ¹² On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone. ¹³ You will tread on the lion and the adder; the young lion and the serpent you will trample underfoot. ¹⁴ "Because he holds fast to me in love, I will deliver him; I will protect him, because he knows my name. ¹⁵ When he calls to me, I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will rescue him and honor him. ¹⁶ With long life I will satisfy him and show him my salvation."*



BETWEEN 9:00-12:00 PM: Gregory acknowledged his sin and took action for his city. He wrote: "God is full of mercy and compassion, and it is his will that we should win his pardon through our prayers." Then he sent out groups of believers into the streets of Rome to thank God and plead for his help. For three days, the people of God tramped through the streets, offering prayers and chanting the Psalms. If you're able, take a walk through your neighborhood and pray an expanded version of a powerful section of Psalm 89. If you're housebound or unable to get outside, picture your street in your mind.

1. ***"Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; steadfast love and faithfulness go before you" (v.14).***

We praise you, Father, for your every thought and act accords with rightness. You're incorruptible, unchangeable and your feelings for us match those of a mother for her child. Like trusting children, we lean on you with confidence. You're the support which will never give way. We experience your reliability every day despite our frequent failures.

2. ***"Blessed are the people who know the festal shout, who walk, O LORD, in the light of your face," (v.15).***

Father, how we want our neighbors to join our multi-racial worshipping community. So many are marching towards death. Let them turn towards you and thrive by taking on the yoke of our Lord Jesus. He bore our sins and bears our sorrows every day. Shake them awake before it's too late and the door slams shut.

3. ***"who exult in your name all the day and in your righteousness are exalted" (v.16).***

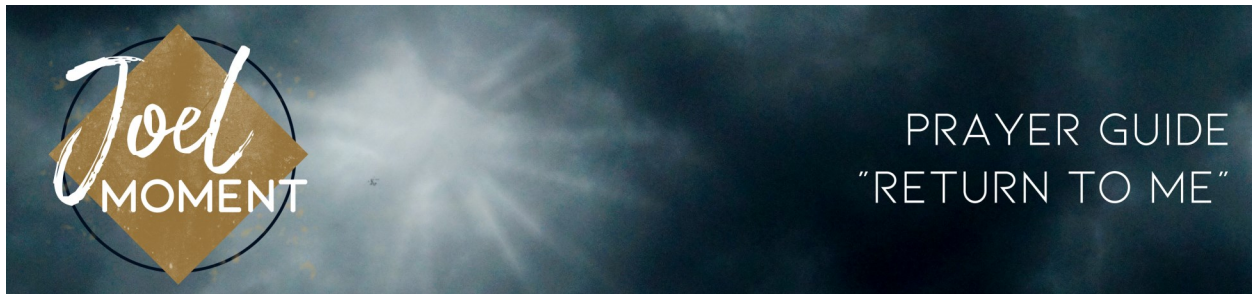
The people around us are excited about possessions, pleasures and achievements that will leave them empty and destitute. We want you to be their treasure, their pearl of great price and their life-long pursuit. Being reconciled to you and having the Spirit is what raises people to lives of impact, dignity and abundance. Please reconcile people to yourself and use us as your ambassadors.

4. ***"or you are the glory of their strength; by your favor our horn is exalted" (v.17).***

Turn the destructive zeal of people of all persuasions to your Kingdom cause, just like you did with a misguided zealot named Saul, who became the greatest promoter of Jesus the world has ever seen.

5. ***"For our shield belongs to the LORD, our king to the Holy One of Israel" (v.18).***

Lord, our protection, security and safety is you, not our bank accounts, retirement funds or other props. We're happy to invest generously in Kingdom-advancing activities because we have everything that's essential in you.



BETWEEN 12:00-3:00 PM: Gregory was highly educated and a skillful administrator. When civil structures broke down, he organized vast help for the poor. And he didn't keep a physical distance. He dined with 12 poor people every day. He also sent out the faithful believers to deliver food to the hungry. Valley Church is currently designing a plan to help our hurting neighbors in more sacrificial ways. We will need our whole church family to join the effort through giving, praying, serving and supporting, while at the same time making sure the needs of our own church family members are being met. Here's a passage to meditate on during this three-hour block. Notice the six benefits promised to those who help the helpless.

^{ESV} **Psalm 41:1** *To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David. Blessed is the one who considers the poor! In the day of trouble the LORD delivers him; ² the LORD protects him and keeps him alive; he is called blessed in the land; you do not give him up to the will of his enemies. ³ The LORD sustains him on his sickbed; in his illness you restore him to full health.*

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: Gregory, like many people today, thought that the end of the world was at hand. He wrote: *"Cities are sacked, strongholds razed to the ground, churches destroyed, fields emptied of farmers. Swords rage incessantly against those few of us who—for now, at any rate—remain, and blows rain down on us from above...Evils long foretold. The destruction of the world."* However, God wasn't done with human history in the sixth century. Another fifteen centuries passed by and generations of believers came, served God in their generations, and then fell *"asleep"* (1 Thes. 4:13).

So, let's watch for the signs of Christ's return, but also be ready — like Gregory was — to take action for the King. Let's talk about Jesus while alleviating pain and deprivation where we can. Gregory, despite the social disorder of his day and instinct to retreat, organized the mission to the Angles and Saxons (modern England). Thank the Lord for how Valley Church has shown a "Gregory-spirit" for 60 years by sending and supporting missionaries. Ask God also to help us know how to be that generous and creative with the "foreign" people who now live just hundreds of feet around our campus. Pray about what new efforts and ventures God would have Valley Church embark on.



DARREN S. [A short talk about Gregory the Great and how we can learn to adopt his courage and bold action in our confusing and turbulent times.]

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GAIL H. [A story about the care that she received from fellow believers who “invested their advantages” for her benefit at a time when she was hurting and broken.]

ANDY D. [A song by Matthew West called “**Do Something**” that might get us moving like Gregory and those who followed him. Andy will share his screen as we watch and think.]

I woke up this morning
Saw a world full of trouble now, thought
How'd we ever get so far down, and
How's it ever gonna turn around
So I turned my eyes to Heaven
I thought, "God, why don't You do
something?"

Well, I just couldn't bear the thought of
People living in poverty
Children sold into slavery
The thought disgusted me
So, I shook my fist at Heaven
Said, "God, why don't You do
something?"

He said, "I did, yeah, I created you"
(now listen)

If not us, then who
If not me and you
Right now, it's time for us to do
something, yeah
If not now, then when
Will we see an end
To all this pain
Oh, it's not enough to do nothing
It's time for us to do something

I'm so tired of talking about
How we are God's hands and feet
But it's easier to say than to be
Live like angels of apathy who tell
ourselves
It's alright, "somebody else will do
something"

Well, I don't know about you
But I'm sick and tired of life with no
desire
I don't want a flame, I want a fire and
I wanna be the one who stands up and
says
"I'm gonna do something"

If not us, then who
If not me and you
Right now, it's time for us to do
something, yes it is, come on
If not now, then when
Will we see an end
To all this pain
Oh oh, it's not enough to do nothing
It's time for us to do something

We are the salt of the earth
We are a city on a hill
We're never gonna change the world
By standing still
No, we won't stand still
No, we won't stand still
No, we won't stand still
No

If not us, then who
If not me and you
Right now
It's time for us to do something
If not now, then when
Will we see an end
To all this pain
It's not enough to do nothing

It's time for us to do something
It's time for us to do something
It's time for us to do something



GROUP PRAYER PROMPT #1 (7 min.): When Gregory was born in 540, prosperity and security could not be taken for granted. Likewise, neither can we assume that life going forward will be “all pony-rides in May-sunshine” as J. R. R. Tolkien put it in *The Hobbit*. As a church family, let’s seize the adventure of “investing our advantages” in the next season of life in these uncertain times. Pray in your own words that we’ll be generous with our money, time, expertise and love.

GROUP PRAYER PROMPT #2 (7 min.): We need discernment right now (“*be shrewd as serpents*” — Matt. 10:16). We must see behind the headlines to the truth of matters. Gregory fought against heresies in his own days. Ask God for accurate understanding of our times that comes from deep reflection on the Bible (Heb. 5:14). Pray that we’ll train each other and our children in the Scriptures at high levels because the schools and social media are catechizing them effectively in progressive religion.

GROUP PRAYER PROMPT #3 (7 min.): We can’t forget our own biological and spiritual families in our haste to “Do Something” like Matthew West sings. Here’s a stiff and unbending verse: “*But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever*” (1 Tim. 5:8). Pray however God leads you for your family members at home and at church.

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