

## ***Session 7 How to Respond to Global Crisis***

### **INTRODUCTION**

We're in our seventh class and we're looking at session notes number nine, page seventy-nine in the syllabus. First I want to take a few minutes and give a brief overview of the importance of prayer to remind you how significant is prayer. Because prayer is at the core of how we are to respond in a time of national or international crisis. God has revealed to us clearly what He wants us to do. Yet many of His people don't think of this passage when a crisis comes or a crisis is looming. Joel 2:12-17 isn't the only thing God tells us to do, but it's the foundational thing He tells us to do as the people of God.

### **GOD HAS GIVEN THE HUMAN RACE THE DIGNITY OF FREE WILL**

Paragraph A. The response God wants is based on this principle: God has given the human race great dignity. In other words, He has given us a free will. We can make real choices that really make a difference. That really makes a difference. That is the dignity of our free will. If we want to sin with our free will, God will honor us; He will let us sin. He will try to persuade us not to do so, but He will actually let us exercise our free will all the way to the lake of fire. That is how much dignity He has given the human spirit.

There is real perplexity among the philosophers and theologians as to why there is evil in the earth. They say, "If God is good and God is powerful, why did He not stop it?" The thing they don't reckon on, the thing they don't take into consideration, is the dignity God has given the human spirit, and allowing us to make choices that are real, that He honors; even choices He disagrees with. He allows us to make them without stopping us. He will try to persuade us differently, but He won't make us choose obedience towards Him. Our choices for sin and righteousness really do bring blessing or evil to us and to the people near us. I'm talking about innocent people who have nothing to do with our choices except that they're related to us physically or socially or in ministry. Our choices for good or bad affect them because we're connected as human beings in the earth. Our choices provide the legal entry point for angels and demons to be involved in the natural realm in a greater way. If we choose righteousness, angels have greater access to activity in the natural realm. If we choose sin, we open legal entry points for demons to have more involvement in the natural realm. It's real; our choices are real.

### **GOD GOVERNS THE UNIVERSE IN PARTNERSHIP WITH HIS PEOPLE IN INTERCESSION**

Paragraph B. God governs the universe in partnership with His people in intercession. This is a dramatic point; we all know that. Here at IHOP-KC that's a foundational point. God governs the entire created order in partnership with people through intercession. If they ask Him, He does more; if they don't ask Him, He does less. He not only honors our free will in terms of righteousness and sin, He actually listens to our prayer or lack of prayer and acts accordingly. Not only does He act in regard to our choices and our prayer, but He does consider it dynamically in what He does and doesn't do.

### **THE MYSTERY AND MAJESTY OF INTERCESSION**

Paragraph B. I call it the mystery and the majesty of intercession. The mystery of intercession is how simple it is. We simply tell God what He tells us to tell Him. It's mysterious how simple it can be. It's so simple everyone can do it, but so simple that most people don't. The mystery of intercession is that we tell God what He tells us to tell Him. He does more. The majesty of intercession is the fact that Jesus does it. We're talking about the second person of the Trinity, the eternal uncreated God. It says here in Hebrews 7 that Jesus "ever lives to make intercession for us" (Heb. 7:25), or always lives to intercede. Jesus will be making intercession as

the mode of releasing power, even a million years from now. Even then He will tell God the Father what the Father tells Him to tell Him. That is majestic: that God would act in intercession to release power; that God the Son would intercede to release the plans of God the Father. We need revelation as to how majestic is this simple thing called intercession. If we do it, we can shift history or geographic regions of the earth. If we don't do it, then less happens; if we do it, more happens.

### **“ASK OF ME, AND I WILL GIVE YOU THE NATIONS FOR YOUR INHERITANCE”**

Look at Psalm 2:8. The Father says to Jesus, “Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations” (Ps. 2:8). You would think that after Jesus died on the earth, the nations are just His. The Father says, “No, You've paid for them. Now through Your intercession, I will release them to You.” Of course the intercession that Jesus engages in, we join with Him in doing. We are His partners in intercession. I find it amazing that Jesus still is in a position of interceding that the nations would be His. We would think by now that we would be on automatic pilot. It's not like that; He's still making intercession.

### **THE WHOLEHEARTEDNESS OF CONNECTING WITH GOD IN INTERCESSION**

Beloved, the majesty of intercession; that's what Joel 2 is about. It's really about wholeheartedness, connecting with God, interceding from the place of wholeheartedness and then changing history. That is really the message of Joel 2:12-17. Wholeheartedness is what God is really after. Out of that wholeheartedness comes partnership in intercession to determine what happens in geographic regions of the earth. I mean large regions are in the balance of the people of God living wholeheartedly and interceding according to God's will. If they do it, greater blessing happens in that geographic part of the earth.

### **GOD HAS ALREADY DETERMINED MANY OF THE PRIMARY EVENTS**

Paragraph D. We'll just make another point or two. This isn't a message on intercession, but I can't avoid it because it's such an important part of Joel 2. Paragraph D. God has already determined many of the primary events in His eternal plan. He has already determined them. Regardless of what people do, there will be some events that cannot be stopped, no matter what demons or people do. Jesus is returning; the Devil will be thrown into the lake of fire; Jesus will rule every nation of the earth as King. The new heavens and the new earth are coming. There are major things that are bigger than our participation.

Having said that, paragraph E, He gives us a dynamic role in determining the quality of life that we experience in the natural and in the Spirit. By our choices and our partnership with Him, we have a role in determining the quality of life we have in the Spirit. It's not only us, God's sovereignty is involved, but we have a dynamic role, a dynamic involvement. He says, “I will let you determine part of the quality. If you want more, and in your hunger and your obedience you cry out according to My will, you will have more. If you're happy without more, you can live without more. Even though I'll continually persuade you otherwise, I will allow you to live in less.”

### **GOD OPENS AND CLOSSES DOORS ACCORDING TO OUR PRAYERS**

Paragraph F. God opens and closes doors according to prayer. He opens doors of blessing; He closes doors of oppression if we ask. Think of that simple passage in James, “You do not have because you do not ask” (Js. 4:2). There are doors of blessing, and the Lord is saying, “I really will give them to you if you ask Me persistently, not just once on the run. If it's something important to you that you can't live without and you ask Me in a persistent way, I will open doors of blessing if they're in My will.” There are doors of blessing in God's

will that He won't open until we ask Him and they're in His will to open. There are doors of oppression that will be closed if we ask them to be closed. We ask the Lord; we rebuke the enemy.

**“HE WILL SURELY BE GRACIOUS AT THE SOUND OF YOUR CRY”**

Paragraph G. This is one of my favorite verses on prayer. It's Isaiah 30:18-19. This is absolutely remarkable; it's been one of my favorite prayer verses for many years. This is for another day, but in context Isaiah 30 is pointing to the generation of the Lord's return and the second coming of Christ. It's a passage that's very relevant to the generation in which the Lord returns, but the principle is relevant no matter what.

“The Lord longs to be gracious” (Is. 30:18, paraphrased). He says, “I long to be gracious; it's in My heart. I want to give you grace.” “Therefore God waits to have compassion on you” (ibid). God is waiting on us.

“I thought we were waiting on Him?”

In one regard we're waiting on Him. He has timing for some things. Part of that timing is related to us asking. The Scripture says, “He longs to be gracious” to give more. He's waiting.

“He will surely be gracious at the sound of your cry; when He hears it, then He will answer” (Is. 30:19, paraphrased). He will surely answer you. This is individually, but in the context of Joel 2 and even Isaiah 30, it's corporate. It's the blessing of God even in geographic regions being released, a spirit of revival, a withholding of a spirit of judgment, the stopping of the work of the enemy. The Lord says, “I long to be gracious. I wait for you. You think you're waiting for Me; in part you are, but part of what I'm waiting for is for you to ask. Your asking figures into the overall timing of what I'm going to do to you in terms of releasing blessing.”

“For He will surely be gracious at the sound of your cry; when He hears it, then He will answer.”

**“NOW THEREFORE... TURN TO ME WITH ALL YOUR HEART”**

Page eight-two. Roman numeral III. The response that God requires. Let's look at Joel now. He requires solemn assemblies. We already looked at that in session six last week. We aren't going to go through the solemn assembly in detail again, but let's make a few points that aren't made in Joel 1:13-14.

“‘Now therefore,’ says the Lord, ‘Turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning.’ So rend your heart, and not your garments” (Joel 2:12-13). That means, “Tear your heart; don't tear your garments, but tear your heart, and return to the Lord.”

Here he gives five reasons why we should have confidence and courage to tear our hearts. Because He's gracious, number one. He is merciful; He's slow to anger; He has great kindness. Not kindness, but *great* kindness. Even if He prophesies judgment and destruction, it's in His heart to relent, to change. He will change it. God changes even from the judgment that He's set to release. He wants to change; it's in His heart to change. Give Him a reason to change. He's so kind. He wants a response.

**“WHO KNOWS IF HE WILL TURN AND RELENT AND LEAVE A BLESSING?”**

“Who knows if He will turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind Him?” (Joel 2:14). Joel leaves a bit of the mystery of sovereignty here. He says, “You don't know to what degree the blessing will come or be reversed!”

Press in and trust Him and ask Him and move into His heart. Who knows? Maybe He will relent”—which means change His mind—“and leave a blessing.” Instead of a disaster zone, we would be a revival center. The place that was scheduled for judgment becomes a place of revival and blessing.

### **THE ANSWER IS IN YOUR COLLECTIVE, NOT JUST INDIVIDUAL RESPONSE**

“Blow the trumpet in Zion, consecrate a fast, call a sacred assembly” (Joel 2:15). Paragraph A. In Joel 2:12-17, God tells us what we’re to do. We looked at this in session notes six. Joel 1:13-14. We looked at the five different responses. You can put these sets of notes together and get the whole picture. He wants us to turn in wholeheartedness and then from wholeheartedness to cry out in intercession. That’s what He wants, to partner with Him in prayer. In crisis He not only wants, but requires, that His people gather in solemn assemblies. It’s not just a one-off intercessor, though God values the lone intercessor. He wants the people in unity together, laboring together, because God is a Father with a family. He isn’t just the Captain of the army who only wants soldiers; He wants a family that operates together. He says, “I want you to gather.”

“Well, I don’t really like their way and style.”

He says, “That’s OK. Just put that aside and gather.”

The answer is in your collective response, not just in your individual response. It’s individual responses, but there’s a bigger dimension, a collective response in a geographic area that God is after. We can’t do it alone; we need each other. That is beautiful. God loves His family and He runs His kingdom from a family perspective.

### **THE POWER AND SIMPLICITY OF THE SOLEMN ASSEMBLY**

Page eighty-three. God doesn’t leave us guessing what He wants; He wants solemn assemblies. Roman numeral IV. As simple as it is, and it’s crystal clear in the book of Joel, it’s often neglected and often never thought about, even in the midst of fervent people. I’ve talked with many people through the years, and when they heard this group or that group was gathering for a day of prayer and fasting, a few hundred or a few thousand or whatever, it was so intriguing. They had never heard of such a thing. I’m talking about people who have known the Lord for years; they’ve never heard of anyone who has done that. The exciting thing is that in this hour of history, solemn assemblies are springing up all over the earth. There is no passage that’s more clear and instructive on solemn assemblies than Joel 2:12-17. “Turn to God with wholeheartedness.”

### **“REND YOUR HEART, AND NOT YOUR GARMENTS”**

“‘Now therefore,’ says the Lord, ‘turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning.’ So rend your heart, and not your garments; return to the Lord your God” (Joel 2:12-13). The reason he said, “Not your garments,” is because in ancient Israel, they would show grief by rending or tearing their garments. There was so much grief, they would tear their shirt, and that would indicate how much grief they were in. It was symbolic of their pain: a physical demonstration of how much pain they were in. What the Lord was saying is, “That isn’t really what I want. I want you to do that to your heart. I want you to radically confront the issues in your heart that aren’t in agreement with My heart. I don’t want a symbolic demonstration; I don’t want just a public show of grief. I actually want you to tear you heart.” The most challenging, and the most costly, but the most powerful part of what God wants is the tearing of the heart. It’s the rarest part, but it’s the most powerful.

## **THE URGENCY OF TEARING OUR HEARTS TODAY, AND NOT TOMORROW**

It says here in verse 12, “Now therefore,’ says the Lord...” (Joel 2:12). “Now.” There is urgency.

People often plan to tear their hearts tomorrow. They really mean it. “After I have this one more weekend or one more month or one more this or that, I’m really going to get around to it. Because I know it’s right, but I need one more short season, a few days, a few weeks, or a few months, or I have a few things that I want to do that aren’t in agreement with God.”

God says, “Now. Now, turn to Me. Right now.”

### **“TODAY, IF YOU WILL HEAR HIS VOICE, HARDEN NOT YOUR HEARTS”**

Because there’s a dynamic that many people don’t really define, that when the grace of God woos us to respond, and we feel a little inspiration to respond and we don’t, we aren’t the same. We’re actually a little harder or a little softer every time we hear the invitation. We never stay neutral; we never stay the same. Right now, in this building and with those that are joining us through the e-school and the Internet, the very fact that you’re hearing this—there are issues in most people’s lives. That one issue, those two issues that are a challenge, if we feel a little inspiration, but don’t respond, our heart is subtly actually a little harder. It’s not the same. Or if we do respond, it’s a little softer; maybe not dramatically, but a little. We’re always moving forward or backward. We never stay the same. Joel says, “Now. Respond now. It’s important. Don’t put it off; there’s an urgency.”

### **IT’S ALWAYS HARDER TO REPENT TOMORROW THAN IT IS TODAY**

In their context, the Babylonian invasion was right around the corner. It may have been five, ten, twenty years away; no one knows exactly when Joel was prophesying. It was near the time of the Babylonian invasion. What the Lord is saying is, “Israel, Jerusalem, you need to respond now. Don’t wait for another prophet to show up. Now.” Things are getting progressively worse and it’s always harder to repent tomorrow than it is today. Especially after you’ve heard the message a few times, because the message doesn’t move you as much the more you hear it. He says, “Turn to Me with all your heart.”

### **THE LORD GOD IS AFTER NOTHING MORE OR LESS THAN ALL OUR HEARTS**

It’s important to me that the first commandment, the turning with all your heart, is consistently what God wants from Genesis to Revelation. If you ask the Lord at any time in history, “What do You want most?” He will always say, “All their heart is what I’m after.”

Jesus came and made it crystal clear. In Matthew 22 He says, “This is the first commandment: Loving God with all your heart, *that*, that is what God wants most. Always. That’s what He wants most” (Mt. 22:37-40, paraphrased). It’s what He wants first. So with consistency to His heart, He says, “Turn with all your heart. I want your heart.”

### **GOD WANTS US TO RESPOND TO HIS LOVE BY RESPONDING IN LOVE**

Paragraph A. He wants our love. God loves us and wants love. He wants us to respond to His love by responding in love. He wants us to love Him with all our heart because He loves us with all His heart. He says, “I don’t ask anything of you that I haven’t done first in the relationship.” His all is bigger than our all, a lot bigger, but it’s still our all. As small as our all is, it’s our all and that’s all He asks for.

## **COMING BACK TO THE HEART OF WORSHIP AND REPENTANCE**

Turning to God with all our heart, or wholeheartedness, involves repenting. Some people think of loving God with all their heart as enjoying worship songs that have love themes in them. If they're really tender worship songs, and they really like them, that must be love. It's cool to like anointed, tender worship songs, but at the end of the day, enjoying worship isn't the same thing as loving God. Loving God, when it's all said and done, must be coming into agreement with Him at the core. Enjoying the worship songs is certainly a good thing and a plus, but some people confuse the feeling they get in worship with actually loving God. They enjoy God in a worship service or a big conference. Then they go out and do what they want. They have this dichotomy in their life. They're in confusion about what's really happening in their life. They love good music, which isn't the same thing as loving God. They even cry when the music plays. Turning to God with all our heart involves repenting and coming into unity. Repentance sounds negative. There is a negative dimension to it. Repentance basically means breaking our agreement with darkness and coming into agreement with His heart. Repentance means agreeing with His heart. It involves fasting; it involves prayer. We don't fast to prove we're dedicated; actually, we fast because it positions us to be tenderized to receive grace in a faster way. Fasting doesn't earn us anything.

## **IT'S THE TENDER HEART THAT MOVES GOD'S HEART**

Some people fast to prove to God that they're sincere. Then they get confused. You fast because fasting is a means in the grace of God that positions your heart to accelerate the process of becoming tenderized in your spirit. It's the tender heart that moves God's heart. It's not the fasting that moves God; it's your heart of agreement, your heart of tenderness. The fasting is what helps that happen. As I have fasted regularly over the years, I find it easier to agree with God. I have far less resistance in my emotions and a far greater desire to do what's in His heart. Fasting really increases that in His heart; it really does.

Jesus in Matthew 6 came and talked about repenting, prayer, and fasting. He validated this verse in Joel 2:12. He didn't comment on the verse itself, but in Matthew 6:1-18, He talks about prayer, fasting, and repentance. He lays it out. It's really the Joel message that Jesus is validating.

## **THE PLACE OF PROTECTION IS IN THE COMPANY OF THE DEVOTED LOVERS**

Paragraph C. The place of safety in the time of judgment is in the midst of a company of people that has long-term corporate wholeheartedness. I'm not saying if someone is with people like that, no trouble will come their way. That's not what I'm saying. When I look across the earth, wherever you land this year, next year, in five years, in ten years, make sure you get with people who are pressing into God. It doesn't matter if they're not cool. What matters is, do angels come and demons leave when they pray? That's what you care about. It doesn't matter how cool they are or how cool their Power Points are and all their technology. What matters is, do angels come and demons leave when they talk to God?

“Yes they do...”

Well, get in that group and be a part of it. I determined this years ago, when I was just in my early twenties and newly married. I said, “I'm going to be with a people who cry out, a whole bunch of people.” I don't care if it's a few hundred. It doesn't have to be thousands, so long as they do it long-term, a lot of them, and not just for a summer, not for just one year, but with a long-term history of seeking God together, hard. As you plan your future, don't just plan where the weather is good, the ocean is cool, the mountains are nice, and the hunting and the fishing are great. Plan where there are people who are fervent for God. If God sends you somewhere and

there aren't any, guess what? Start it. Really do it. Start with three, grow to four, grow to five. Meet the other group down the road. Hang out with them some. Start it.

### **THE POWER OF DEALING RADICALLY WITH ISSUES OF THE HEART**

Roman numeral V. Rend your heart. I've already mentioned this. The tearing of the heart, paragraph A. People in Joel's day tore their garments. The tearing of the heart means dealing radically with issues of the heart, the matters of the heart. This is the most challenging, the most costly, the most powerful part of what God requires. It has power. The result of connecting with God, there's power in it. It really moves God. It changes history and it moves God. It really does move God. When your heart is moved, it moves His heart; it really does. This tearing of the heart is the most neglected part of the book of Joel. This one verse, verse 13, there's so much love in that one verse because it's the declaration of our love for Him.

### **THE VIOLENT REJECTION OF EVERYTHING THAT QUENCHES THE SPIRIT**

Paragraph B. To *rend* means to tear, but it means to tear violently, to tear forcefully. We tear our heart away from everything that quenches the Spirit. If something is quenching the Spirit in our life, there's always some man somewhere that will come up with a Bible verse to prove why you can do it. If you're looking for a Bible verse to back up your compromise, there are thousands of believers who will give you Bible verses to help you back up your compromise under the banner of the grace of God. You're not looking for Bible verses to feel good about your sin; you're looking for Bible verses to help you get free from your sin. It's really true. There are so many today who are champions of the grace of God. All that really means is that they find Bible verses to make people comfortable sinning and in compromise, but they live powerless in their spirit.

In Matthew 5:29, Jesus talked about the tearing of the heart. He said, "If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you" (Mt. 5:29). Now He's speaking symbolically; because some people actually read the next verse, which talks about cutting your right hand off, and do very extreme things. He isn't talking about altering your body; He's talking about radically, consistently dealing with issues of the heart. That's what He's talking about. Because you can cut an arm off and your heart is still enraged in sin. I'm not talking about altering your body. I'm talking about a consistent, steady, long-term resolve to deal with the issues of the heart because you love Him. You say, "Lord, You love me with all Your heart. I love You. My love is weak, but I want it to grow. I'm in this thing for love. I'm in this thing for You."

He says, "Well, this is what I want you to do then: Deal radically with the issues of the heart."

### **THE COST OF A BROKEN HEART**

Paragraph C. The tearing of the heart is personal. It's painful. Some people want to get free from their sin patterns or they want to get free from sinful relationships without requiring any personal choice that tears their heart. I'm going to say that again. Some people, what they want is, they want to get free from sin patterns, sinful patterns in their life or sinful relationships, without having to make any choices that tear their hearts. They want to wake up one day with no desire whatsoever for what they're doing wrong. When they wake up and the desire is gone, then they say, "I'm in."

The Lord says, "No, no. I want you to choose, and I'll help you. You can even ask Me to help you choose."

When you say that, say, "Lord, be gentle when You help me to choose." He's gentle. You can ask Him: "Lord, I'm not happy with what's in my heart. I'm not there yet. I want to get rid of it. Help me; help me." That's

totally legitimate, but sooner or later, and sooner rather than later is best, you must make choices. Those choices tear the heart. “Ouch! Ouch! I don’t like what I just chose. Yuck!” It’s real, though; that’s what love is about. It’s the theater in which you show your love for Him. Those choices are the theater of love or the platform on which you show and demonstrate your love for Him.

### **WHOLEHEARTEDNESS IS MORE THAN A BANNER, MORE THAN A SONG**

Paragraph D. We can’t pursue wholeheartedness in a casual way. There is no such thing as tame, easy wholeheartedness. Wholeheartedness is more than a banner, more than a song, more than a dance at a conference. Wholeheartedness is radical. It’s not tame; it’s real. Of course you know that.

### **WE TEAR OUR HEARTS BECAUSE HE TORE HIS FOR US**

Top of page eighty-four. Paragraph E. Jesus tells us to tear our heart. Why? He tore His heart. When He came to the cross, He tore His heart. It tore the Father’s heart when Jesus went to the cross. God knows about a torn heart. When He calls us to this kind of love, it’s not like He doesn’t understand or didn’t do it Himself. He gets it. The extreme love that Jesus showed in becoming human and going to the cross is the God of the torn heart, the God of the rent heart, the God who rends His heart for His people. He wants us to rend our heart for the relationship.

### **A TEARING IS COMING TO OUR NATION AND THE NATIONS OF THE EARTH**

I want to say one more thing: We will either tear our hearts in breaking our unity with sin, our agreement with sin to come into unity with God, or judgment and sin will tear the land. There is a tearing coming one way or the other. A tearing is coming to our nation and the nations of the earth. It’s already here. The tearing is happening right now in the earth. It’s not future; it’s present. It will get far more dramatic in the future. There will be a tearing of the nation or there will be a tearing of the heart of God’s people. This is a global type of situation, not just one for America. The answer is for us to voluntarily tear our heart in love as the covenant people to come into that wholeheartedness, and then into the place of intercession to release blessing. The covenant people, the born again believers in the earth, are the ones in the position to release blessing. Yes, I believe that secular society needs to stop doing some things, but my focus is on the covenant community responding to God in wholeheartedness.

### **THE FIVEFOLD REVELATION OF GOD’S HEART**

Roman numeral six. This is the part that I like the most. It’s the fivefold revelation of God’s heart. It’s tearing our heart with confidence because of these five things. Every one of them could warrant several hours of teachings. Many of you could teach on these five things; you could go on and on with each one of them. I’m going to mention them and then leave it to you to spend your life going deeply in these five things. My whole life I’ll spend drinking from the well of these five revelations of God’s heart.

### **YOU HAVE A GREAT FUTURE BEFORE IF YOU TURN FROM YOUR SIN**

Here’s why you have confidence in returning to the Lord. You’ve been in immorality, you’ve been in compromise, you’ve just been in drunkenness or passivity. It’s time to turn. Why do you have confidence that you should do it, or that it will even matter? Here is why you have confidence: because He is so gracious. Because He’s very merciful, turn now. Why? Because He’s slow to anger. He will actually push delete and make it like it never happened. He’s so slow to anger, turn now (Joel 2:13).

Wow. Beloved, there's a chance for a new beginning starting now, is what Joel is saying. The new beginning is yours. He's slow to anger; He's of great kindness.

### **THERE IS A REASON TO CHANGE, BECAUSE HE DELIGHTS IN LOVING HIS PEOPLE**

Number five: He relents. He changes His plan to release the judgment or the discipline. The harm is a holy harm because it's coming from Him. He's talking about judgment or discipline. Those ideas overlap. He changes His plans to discipline or judge a person or a nation. He really will change. That's why we have courage to change, because the change matters. That's the point: It matters to God. If He was harsh, unforgiving, quick to anger, there would be no point in changing. We're dead anyway. But that's not the truth. There is a reason to change. Why? Because we have a great future, starting now. If we will change, I mean, wow. I love this verse.

### **IF YOU TAKE ONE STEP TOWARDS GOD, HE WILL TAKE TEN TOWARDS YOU**

Paragraph A. Joel summons the people to return, giving them five reasons why it's doable and why it's wise. The knowledge of God's heart; it gives us courage to change because it's worth it, because it moves God. It matters to God. It changes our life. It matters; that's why it's worth doing. If we take one step towards God, He will take ten towards us. You take one step, He will take ten.

### **WHEN EVERYONE ELSE LEAVES YOU LYING BROKEN ON THE ROAD, HE WILL COME**

Paragraph B. This is just ever so brief; I only put a sentence on each one. You could put paragraphs on each of these five revelations of God's heart. He is gracious; He evaluates us differently than anyone else does. When even a kind person would write you off, God gives you yet another chance. He's so kind in the way He evaluates. When a good person says you're a failure, God looks at you and sees the cry of your spirit and says, "I like what's in your heart towards Me. I see good seed; I see fruit in your life. I see the seeds, the yes in your spirit and it matters to Me."

### **HE HAS NOT DEALT WITH US AS OUR SINS DESERVE**

Psalm 103. He has not dealt with us and He has not punished us as our sins deserve (Ps. 103:10. That's what that verse means. He has not given to us according to our iniquities. *Iniquity* and *sin* is the same idea. What David is saying here in Psalm 103 is that God doesn't deal with us as our sin deserves. Man, that's great news. He doesn't deal with you like your sin deserves. "That gives me a chance to start over, as a first class citizen, with God's favor and delight. No matter what I've done! Yes, I have courage to repent."

That's what Joel is saying. Look at what David says four verses later: "God knows our frame. He knows the human frame, how weak it is. He remembers that our humanity is but dust" (Ps. 103:14, paraphrased).

We say, "We're so weak."

God says, "Yea, I know your frame. I know how prone you are to weakness." We're dealing with the God who understands our constitution; the God who has a tender, gracious, evaluation of us.

### **HE IS NOT A GOD WHO DELIGHTS IN JUDGMENT, BUT IN MERCY**

Paragraph C. He delights in mercy. He's merciful. "Who is a God like You, pardoning iniquity?" (Mic. 7:18). Why does God pardon sin? He so enjoys mercy. He loves it. God would rather give mercy than judgment anytime. He delights in mercy. He doesn't like judgment; He delights in mercy. He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Eze. 33:11). He has no pleasure in judging the wicked; He delights in mercy.

This is how I read that. God looks down at your life and my life, and He gives us mercy. It connects with us. We say, “God forgave me. He’s tender. Oh, wow.”

He’s watching and He says, “I love it when that impacts you so much. This is my favorite thing, is when it hits you.” When it dawns on you how He feels about you, He delights in that. One of His favorite things to do is to show you mercy and for it to connect with you and for you to say, “Oh, I love You. Oh, I’m yours. Oh, yes. Thank You.”

He says, “Oh, it moves Me when that moves you.” It’s true. He delights in it.

### **IF THE LORD GAVE JEZEBEL THE CHANCE TO REPENT, WHAT NEED WE FEAR?**

Paragraph D. He’s slow to anger. Look at the verse in paragraph E. Jezebel in the church at Thyatira. Jezebel was an actual person in the early Church. She was a teacher, a prophetess. She was turning the grace of God into licentiousness, as Jude puts it (Jude 4). She was teaching people that in the grace of God immorality was fine. Many of the saints in Thyatira were buying into it. The Lord appears to John here in Revelation 2 on the island of Patmos.

Now, you have to give her a little mercy: Her parents named her Jezebel. That’s a tough beginning. This isn’t the Jezebel who married and reigned with Ahab; this is a new Jezebel, but she had the same name. Don’t ever name your daughter “Jezebel.” Anyway, she was teaching. She had quite a following. She obviously had some sort of dimension of influence and power in her life, because she had a large following. She was telling them, “Well, if you understand grace right, immorality isn’t exactly what people say it is. They’re being a little legalistic.”

Jesus says, “Tell her and those people whom I love in that church to stop it. Stop it.”

“I gave her time to repent” (Rev. 2:21). Jesus gave Jezebel time to repent. I mean, my goodness. Talk about slow to anger, when Jezebel gets a chance to repent, you know everyone does. It’s real. If the Lord gives her a chance, He says, “Tell the saints in Thyatira the same. I’ll give them chance to repent. I’ll give them chance to process it, to repent of it, but they had better be in earnest about it. I don’t want to destroy them. That’s not what I want to do.”

### **THE MERCY OF THE LORD IN CUTTING SHORT ONE’S LIFE TO SAVE HIS HEART**

Look what He says He will do; this is the Lord speaking: “Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. I will kill her children with death” (Rev. 2:22-23). He says, “I will take them home so that they don’t end up going so far that they deny their faith in the end. I will take them home early in severe mercy to keep them from denying their faith.” Because when people get on that track where immorality and grace is all the same, they get into a dark realm of deception where it just gets worse and worse as the years go by. I’ve seen many people in my years of ministry for whom immorality and grace seem to be OK together. They don’t repent of their immorality. They end up with a dark way of understanding after a few years. The Lord says, “I will make her sick and I will actually kill her and her children, her disciples, in order that they wouldn’t deny the faith over time.” This is severe mercy.

## **OUR REPENTANCE WILL NEVER BE MET WITH REJECTION**

Top of page eighty-five. Number four. Kindness. God has great kindness. Our repentance will never be met with rejection. God is kind. There is so much to say about that.

Paragraph H. The fifth one. He relents from harm; in other words He changes His plan. The Lord sees how we respond. Now, God knows everything. God sets plans into motion according to what we're doing.

“Well, if He knows everything, how does He really change His plan?”

It's difficult for little guys like us to figure out the omniscient God, so let's not go there when we try to comprehend the God of Genesis 1. The Bible is clear: God makes plans according to our choices, though He possesses all knowledge. When we change our choices, He changes His plans. That works inside His economy of the kingdom. He understands what's really happening. With great kindness He will change His plans and relent, for the sake of an individual, as well as for a nation.

## **“I SOUGHT FOR A MAN WHO WOULD STAND IN THE GAP”**

Roman numeral VII. The Lord relents; He relents from doing harm. This is a vast subject. We only have a moment to speak of it. In Ezekiel 22, the Lord seeks an intercessor: “So I sought for a man among them who would make a wall, and stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land” (Ez. 22:30). He's speaking of a spiritual wall, a wall of intercession; not about building a physical wall, but a wall of intercession. God says, “I sought for an intercessor who would stand in the gap on behalf of the land.” Why? “That I should not destroy it; but I found no one” (ibid). God says, “My eyes are looking to and fro, for a man or woman who will stand before Me wholeheartedly.” Because this isn't describing someone who would just go to a prayer meeting. The idea is someone living in unity with God who would intercede out of wholeheartedness. The Lord told Ezekiel, “I found no one. I was seeking for it; I searched for it. I want to save the land, but I will not violate My own justice when I do it. I look for someone to stand before Me: a man or a woman or a group that has unity with My heart, that would agree with My heart, so that I would hear their prayer and move on their behalf and spare the land. I couldn't find one.”

## **HE DESIRES TO CANCEL THE DECREE OF JUDGMENT**

Paragraph A. God desires to relent. He wants to cancel the decree of judgment. He really does. He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Eze. 33:11).

Paragraph B. Zephaniah 2. I see two stages in God's decrees. Not that there aren't many stages; There could be many more. I'm not trying to simplify it; I'm trying to distinguish between two things. I'm sure in God's economy there are many stages. First, a decree of judgment is decided on in the heavenly court. It's established. God decides on a decree of judgment in His heavenly court. Then later He issues it. When He issues it, He sends the angels to execute it. There is a decree of judgment decided on over many lands, but the issuing of the decree is yet another matter.

This is a very poor analogy, but think about if you've ever written an email and you didn't quite send it. Your finger was on the send button, hovering right above it, and you said to yourself, “Hmmm. You know what? I think I'll sleep on this.” You've decided it, but you're going to sleep on it, maybe a day, a week, or a month. Maybe you don't send it, maybe you do. God decides decrees of judgment, but He doesn't issue them at the

same time. When they're issued, then it's over; the judgment is over. Angels that execute the judgment are released. In Ezekiel 9, the executing angels went forth because the decree was released.

### **DISASTER CAN ALWAYS BE AVERTED IF WE GATHER AND REPENT**

Look at Zephaniah 2: "Gather yourselves together, yes, gather together" (Zeph. 2:1). That, of course, is the solemn assembly. "Before the decree is issued" (ibid)—in other words, "Gather together before the anger comes. Don't wait and gather afterwards." Although, you should do that as well, because you need to do it before, during, and after. The same response is before the judgment, during the judgment, and then after it; so the judgment doesn't compound in its impact in a negative way. Most judgments have a compound impact that multiplies over weeks and months and years. We gather together. Zephaniah is saying, "Have your solemn assembly beforehand. If you miss the window, have it during. If you miss that window, do it after." The key is to do it before judgment is released.

### **"IT MAY BE YOU WILL BE HIDDEN IN THE DAY OF GOD'S WRATH"**

Paragraph C. A coming disaster can be changed. It really can be. Top of page eighty-six. Roman numeral VIII. The "perhaps" of God. That's just a term I use. One translation says, "Perhaps God will restrain judgment." I don't know what translation that was; I heard it years ago and it stuck with me. Joel 2 says, "Rend your heart, for He relents from doing harm. Who knows?" (Joel 2:12-14, paraphrased). That's where you would put, "Perhaps He will turn; perhaps He will make the disaster zone a revival center. Perhaps."

Then we're going back to the same verse in Zephaniah 2. "Seek the Lord" (Zeph. 2:3). It's the same passage in which we talked about the issue being decreed, only a few lines down. "Seek the Lord, all you meek of the earth... seek righteousness, seek humility. It may be that you will be hidden in the day of the Lord's anger" (ibid).

This is a dynamic principle. "You will be hidden," meaning protected in the day of wrath. God says, "You seek the Lord." He's talking to a group of people. "When the judgment comes, perhaps God will put His hand over you in a geographic area. He will hide you from the judgment in that area." I call it a pocket of mercy. When God releases judgments, there are pockets of mercy. It may be a family, it may be a neighborhood, it may be a city, it may be a five hundred-mile region. Who knows? There are pockets of mercy. That's not a biblical term, but a biblical idea. Where God releases judgment, there are those who are spared judgment in the midst of the judgment.

### **HOW WILL YOUR REGION RESPOND WHEN JUDGMENT COMES?**

There has been a debate going on in the nation. To me it's a debate that's not that helpful. The question is, "Is judgment coming?" The reason I say to America that it's not that helpful is because it's already here. I don't even grasp the relevance of it because judgment has been on our land for years. It's just compounding; it's building to a crescendo. It won't be in a crescendo in a year. I don't know what's going to happen in Kansas City, America, or the nations. I know one thing: I'm going to get a group of people, as big as I can get, who press in as hard, as consistently, as believably, in first commandment love, and New Testament faith, and I'm taking my chances with the "perhaps" of God. We can have the greatest revival. Maybe it will be great or not so great; I don't know. I'm going full blast and I'm not looking back. I'm burning the bridges, burning the boat and not looking back. Because we can see great change, maybe in our region, maybe our nation, I don't know the boundary lines. I don't know. All I know is that God says that if you come according to Joel 2 consistently and more people do it, more good will be poured out that will be a blessing to you.

### **WICKED MEN WHO RESPONDED TO GOD WITH PRAYER AND REPENTANCE**

Let's just end with this. On the last page, I give you a few examples of some men who repented. Look at that. Individuals. Josiah, top of page eighty-nine. Josiah, paragraph A, Roman numeral XII. Josiah was a good man, obviously. I looked at the notes and I couldn't believe it. I forgot to put the solemn assembly on the notes. Right there in paragraph A, put "2 Chronicles 34:29-32." He called a solemn assembly. Here I am in my Joel class, my Joel notes, and I left out the solemn assembly. Here I am in paragraph A, 2 Chronicles 34:23-28, but it's in the next four verses, 29-32, that the solemn assembly is described.

The two men I want to point out, paragraph B, are Ahab and Manasseh. They were wicked men. I mean really bad men. Ahab and Manasseh were two of the most wicked men in Israel's history. They humbled themselves and God said, "Even you, the most wicked in Israel's history, I will forgive and give you a new beginning." You don't think you would ever get blessed by Ahab and Manasseh, but part of their story will bless you. If God will forgive Ahab and Manasseh, if God calls them the most wicked and terms like that are describing them and both of them came to a point of repentance at the very end and God gave them grace, I mean, wow. Amen.