

WEEK 1 | DON'T WASTE YOUR LOCUSTS
JOEL 1:1 – 2:17



This is the first week in our series on Joel. We're asking questions about the nature of suffering and what God wants to do with us in the midst of it.

- 1.) Read the short article introducing the book of Joel by Eugene Peterson on the next page. What stands out to you from the article as significant, helpful, or confusing?
- 2.) Discuss the quote “Everyone has a plan, ‘till they get punched in the mouth.”
- 3.) Read Joel 1:1-14. What is the occasion for Joel’s writing? What kinds of situations today might be equivalent?
- 4.) What counsel does Joel give so that the people “don’t waste their locusts”? (Hint: look at verses 5, 8, 11, 14) Which of these are most difficult to apply when pain comes into your life? Are there any God is calling you to apply right now?
- 5.) C.S. Lewis wrote, “We could rest contentedly in our sins, and in our stupidities... But pain insists on being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains. It is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world.” What do you think Lewis means?
- 6.) Read Joel 1:15, 2:1-2, 11. Joel switches his attention from the locust plague to the coming “day of the Lord.” What is the day of the Lord? How can the locust plague help them prepare for it?
- 7.) Read Joel 2:12-17. What does God invite them to do? What does it mean to “rend your hearts and not your garments”?
- 8.) Periods of pain and difficulty often become an opportunity for people to consider things they may not think about when life feels more stable. Is there anyone in your life who is struggling, that God may use you to reach out to (first just as a friend, but also with the hope of the Gospel)?

Spiritual Exercise: Each week we're trying to give one option for "working out your faith" in a practical way.

This week take time to read John Piper's essay "Don't Waste Your Cancer"

(<http://dwyrrhh6bluza.cloudfront.net/resources/documents/5137/Don't%20Waste%20Cancer.pdf?1319729290>). Reflect on how God may be using pain and suffering in your life.

INTRODUCTION TO JOEL

by Eugene Peterson (from *The Message Remix*)

When disaster strikes, understanding of God is at risk. Unexpected illness or death, national catastrophe, social disruption, personal loss, plague or epidemic, devastation by flood or drought, turn men and women who haven't given God a thought in years into instant theologians. Rumors fly: "God is absent"... "God is angry"... "God is playing favorites, and I'm not the favorite"... "God is ineffectual"... "God is holding a grudge from a long time ago, and now we're paying for it"...

It is the task of the prophet to stand up at such moments of catastrophe and clarify who God is and how he acts. If the prophet is good – that is, accurate and true – the disaster becomes a lever for prying people's lives loose from their sins and setting them free for God. Joel is one of the good ones: he used a current event in Israel as a text to call his people to an immediate awareness that their wasn't a day that went by that they weren't dealing with God. We are always dealing with God.

The event that Joel used as his text was a terrible locust plague that was devastating the crops of Israel, creating an agricultural disaster of major proportions. He compared it to a military invasion. But any catastrophe would have served him as well. He projected it onto a big screen and used it to focus the reality of God in the lives of his people. Then he expanded the focus to include everything and everyone *everywhere* – the whole world crowded into Decision Valley for God's verdict. This powerful picture has kept God's people alert to the eternal consequences of their decisions for many centuries.

There is a sense in which catastrophe doesn't introduce anything new into our lives. It simply exposes the moral or spiritual reality that already exists but was hidden beneath an overlay of routine, self-preoccupation, and business as usual. Then suddenly, there it is before us: a moral universe in which our accumulated decisions – on what we say and do, on how we treat others, or whether or not we will obey God's commands – are set in the stark light of God's judgment.

In our everyday experience, right and wrong and the decisions we make about them seldom come to us neatly packaged and precisely defined. Joel's prophetic words continue to reverberate down through the generations making the ultimate connection between anything, small or large, that disrupts our daily routine, and God, giving us fresh opportunity to reorient our lives in faithful obedience. Joel gives us opportunity for "deathbed repentance" before we die, while there is still time and space for a lot of good living to the glory of God.