

**WEEK 2 | DISASTERS AND GOD'S GRACE**  
**JOEL 2:18-27**



*During our series in Joel, we're asking questions about the nature of suffering and what God wants to do with us in the midst of it.*

1.) If you didn't get a chance last week, 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?

Read Joel 2:18-27

2.) Review Joel 2:17. What do the people pray for? What is God's response in verse 19-20?

3.) What are the reasons God hears their prayer? (see v.18)

4.) In verses 21-23 Joel commands the recipients of grace to "fear not" and "be glad." In what situations are you most likely to be afraid? How does faith in God help us deal with our fears?

5.) On Sunday Josh said "past behavior is the best indicator of future behavior." How can reading the Scriptures encourage us with regard to God's character in difficult times?

6.) God promises to dwell in the midst of his people (v.27). How does this promise point you to Jesus? (Hint: see John 1:1-14; Matthew 1:21-25)

7.) What is the significance of verses 25-26 for people in the midst of pain? What difference would it make in your life if you really believed that at the end you would be able to honestly say he has "dealt wondrously with you."

***Spiritual Exercise:*** Each week we're trying to give one option for "working out your faith" in a practical way. This week take use the book of Joel for a journaling exercise:

- Read Joel 1:4. What have the locusts eaten away in your life? Take time to think, process, and even grieve. But don't stop there.

- Read Joel 2:12-14. C.S. Lewis wrote “Pain is God’s megaphone to a deaf world.” How is God trying to speak to you in your pain? Where do you need to turn back to him?
- Read Joel 2:25-26. Dream – how might God restore the years the locusts have taken? Turn these dreams into prayers. And trust that, though God may have different plans, or different timing, there is reason to hope in him. He will pay back all the years the locusts have eaten.
- Live your life this week, not defined by your wounds in the past or fear of the future, but in hope that God will deal wondrously with you.

## **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.