

Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

Orcutt Christian Church

A Grace Driven Church for Grace Needing People!

"Come As You Are ... Leave Changed!"

Burning Questions 12

What is the Most Difficult Act of Love?

Ephesians 4:31-32

Mar 26, 2017

Communion: Marilyn Currier

Care Calling: Archie Miller

Host: The Webb's

Saturday 3/25 Clean Up: The Webb's

- 1 🎵 **How Majestic [DH 2238]**
- 2 🎵 There is power in the blood [vs 1,2,3] 329
- 3 🎵 Turn your eyes upon Jesus [sing twice] 340
- 4 🎵 **Doxology [DH 1981]**
- 5 🎵 At the cross [vs 1,2 ,5] 323
- 6 🎵 Victory in Jesus [vs 1] 353
- 7 🎵 **Family of God [DH 2357]**

Ephesians 4:31-32 (NCV)

Do not be bitter or angry or mad. Never shout angrily or say things to hurt others. Never do anything evil. 32 Be kind and loving to each other, and forgive each other just as God forgave you in Christ.

What is the most difficult act of love?

We all need to hear this sermon.

And, full disclosure, I probably need to hear this sermon more than you.

Look at your sermon notes.

Answer the True or False questions.

Then we will look at what the Bible says.

T F 1. A person should not be forgiven until they ask for it.

T F 2. Forgiveness includes minimizing the offense and the pain that was caused.

T F 3. Forgiveness includes restoring trust and reuniting a relationship.

T F 4. You haven't really forgiven until you've forgotten the offense.

T F 5. When I see someone else hurt then it is my duty to forgive the offender.

If you study the Bible, you'll discover that all five of those statements are false.

The Bible says in

1 Corinthians 13:4-8 (Moffett)

Love is very patient, very kind.

Love knows no jealousy;

Love makes no parade,

gives itself no airs,

is never rude,

never selfish,

never irritated,

never resentful;

Love is never glad when others go wrong,

Love is gladdened by goodness,

always slow to expose,

always eager to believe the best,

always hopeful,

always patient.

Love never disappears.

In other words, love doesn't store up hurt.

Love doesn't keep a grudge.

Love doesn't keep score.

One woman said, "When my husband and I get in an argument, he gets historical."

**The other woman said, “Don't you mean hysterical?”
“No, historical. He tells me everything I've ever done wrong.”**

Love doesn't keep a record of wrongs.
Do you do that?

I am regretful to say that sometimes I struggle with this.
Sometimes we keep a record of wrongs so we have ammunition so
when others hurt us, we can hurt them back.
But the Bible says love doesn't do that.

Forgiveness may be the single most difficult act of love above all
the other things we've talked.
Forgiveness may be the most difficult act of love.

**Do you remember Dayna Curry and Heather Mercer?
"Today we've got incredibly good news," President George W.
Bush said in an impromptu news conference Nov. 15, 2001,
interrupting a dinner with Russian President Vladimir Putin at
Bush's ranch in Crawford, Texas.**

**"Our United States military rescued eight humanitarian
workers who have been in prison in Afghanistan."**

**Mercer and Curry -- along with four German and two
Australian aid workers were employed by the German based
Shelter Now International, were arrested in Kabul, Afghanistan
on August 3, 2001 by the Taliban, and charged with preaching
Christianity.**

**It's interesting that in the press conference with Dayna Curry
and Heather Mercer when those two women were released
from the captivity of the Taliban and they were asked,
“What was the most difficult thing in your Afghan
experience?”**

**They said, “It was living with six women in a very small room.
We had to learn to forgive each other a lot.”**

There's a lot of shoddy thinking about forgiveness.
Most people totally misunderstand what true forgiveness is.
They don't understand at all.
It gets abused.
It gets cheapened.
So today we're going to look at what it's all about.

I. What Forgiveness is NOT

Five things forgiveness is not.

A. Forgiveness is not conditional.

In other words, it's not based on somebody else's response.
Real forgiveness is unconditional.
It's not earned.
It's not deserved.
It's not bargained for.
It's not paid for.
It's not based on some promise that you'll never do it again.

Hear the story of the lost son from the modern setting as told by Philip Yancey in his book What's so Amazing about Grace.

Yancey tells the story of a 17 year old girl who was disgusted with her old fashioned parents who overreact to her nose ring, the music she listens to, the length of her skirts, so she runs away. She ends up in Detroit where she is befriended by a older man who then forces her to be a prostitute.

One night while sleeping on the metal grates of the city's sidewalks, she began to feel less like a woman of the world and more like a little girl.

She begins to whimper. "God, why did I leave. My dog back home eats better than I do now." She knows that more than anything in the world, she wants to go home. Three straight calls home get three straight connections with the answering machine. Finally she leaves a message. "Mom, dad, its me. I

was wondering about maybe coming home. I'm catching a bus up your way, and it'll get there about midnight tomorrow. If you're not there, I'll understand."

During the seven hour bus ride, she's preparing a speech for her parents. And when the bus comes to a stop in the Traverse City station, the driver announces the fifteen-minute stop. Fifteen minutes to decide her life.

She walks into the terminal not knowing what to expect. But not one of the thousand scenes that have played out in her mind prepares her for what she sees. There in the bus terminal in Traverse City, Michigan, stands a group of forty brothers and sisters and great-aunts and uncles and cousins and a grandmother and a great-grandmother to boot. They're all wearing goofy party hats and blowing noise-makers, and taped across the entire wall of the terminal is a computer-generated banner that reads – Welcome Home!

Real forgiveness is unconditional.

It's not earned.

It's not deserved.

If you say to someone "I'll forgive you **if...**" that's not forgiveness. That's called bargaining.

Genuine forgiveness is unconditional.

What if Jesus had said when He prayed, "**Father forgive them if they ask for it.**"

Luke 23:34 (GW)

34 Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them. They don't know what they're doing."

The truth is nobody had asked for it when Jesus prayed on the cross

Genuine forgiveness is unconditional.

It is offered whether it's ever asked for or not.

B. Forgiveness is not minimizing the seriousness of the offense.

It's not saying, "It's not a big deal."

It's not saying "It's OK."

If somebody tries to ask forgiveness, you say, "Don't worry about it. It's no big deal."

That is not forgiveness.

If someone accidentally wounds you, that does not require forgiveness.

You're hurt unintentionally all the time.

You just need patience and acceptance at that.

But when you're deliberately wronged, when other people with malice aforethought wrong you, that requires forgiveness.

Big difference.

When you minimize a wrong, either your own or somebody else's, you are cheapening forgiveness.

So forgiveness is unconditional.

And it is not minimizing the seriousness of an offense saying it's no big deal.

C. Forgiveness is not resuming a relationship without changes.

This is one of the most misunderstood concepts about forgiveness.

Forgiveness is not the same as restoring a relationship.

Some of you are afraid to forgive because you're afraid you're going to have to be their best friend again or whatever.

Restoring relationship and forgiveness are two different things.

Forgiveness is instant, **But** trust must be built over a long period of

time.

The Bible says that those are two different things.

Forgiveness takes care of the damage done.

It just lets the person off the hook.

You let them go – Scott free.

But it doesn't guarantee that the relationship will be restored.

Forgiveness is your part in reconciliation, when you forgive the offender who's hurt you.

For a Relationship to be Restored, the offender has to do three things that are totally unrelated to forgiveness.

1. The Offender has to demonstrate genuine repentance.

Matthew 3:8 (GW)

Do those things that prove you have turned to God and have changed the way you think and act.

They have to show that they're genuinely changing before the relationship can be rebuilt.

Genuine repentance, and genuine repentance means changing the way I think and I act.

2. The Offender has to make restitution whenever possible for the damage done.

Numbers 5:6-8 (GW)

⁶ “Tell the Israelites: If you do something wrong to another person, you have been unfaithful to the LORD. When you realize your guilt, ⁷ you must confess your sin, pay in full for what you did wrong, add one-fifth to it, and give it to the person who was wronged. ⁸ But there may be no heir to whom the payment can be made. In that case, the payment for what you did wrong must be given to the LORD

3. The Offender has to rebuild your trust by proving they have changed over time.

If somebody repeatedly wrongs you over and over, you're obligated by God to forgive that person over and over and over.

But you are not obligated to trust that person or instantly restore the relationship.

They have to prove trustworthy.

2 Tim. 2:26 (GW)

Then they might come back to their senses and God will free them from the devil's snare so that they can do his will.

Understand the difference between trust and forgiveness.

It takes more that forgiveness to build a relationship.

It takes trust.

And trust is built over time.

Forgiveness starts by making a choice.

And, the offender has to make the choice to rebuild trust in the relationship.

Forgiveness is not conditional.

It is not minimizing the offense and saying it's no big deal.

And it's not resuming a relationship automatically.

D. Forgiveness is not forgetting what happened.

And, this is a biggy for people.

Forgiveness is not forgetting what happened.

You've all heard the cliché "Forgive and forget".

Forgive and forget.

It sounds so nice!

The only problem is it's impossible to do.

It's impossible.

It's foolish and illogical.

In the first place, it's impossible to try to forget something.

You can't try to forget anything.

When you're trying to forget something, what are you focusing on?

The very thing you want to forget.

And whatever you focus on, you tend to move toward.

The fact is, your brain stores every single memory you've ever had.

Doctors, brain surgeons, scientists know that if they were to open up your brain and take a probe and stimulate a certain part, they can bring back every single memory you've ever had in vivid color.

Your brain does not forget anything.

It can be pushed down from trauma.

It can be repressed.

But your brain doesn't really ever forget anything.

There's something better than forgetting.

In fact, the only way to forget something is to reframe it and replace it.

You can't try to forget anything.

You have to choose to put something in its place.

This will take you to a new level of spiritual maturity.

There's something better than forgetting.

You can choose to reframe it.

It's remembering but realizing how God can bring good even out of bad.

Romans 8:28 (TLB)

28 And we know that all that happens to us is working for our good if we love God and are fitting into his plans.

Thank God that even though this terrible thing happened to me and it hurt a lot, I believe You could turn around and use it for good.

And You could actually use me in the same situation.

And all the many ways that we've talked about how God could

bring good out of bad.

Romans 8:28 talks about how all things are not good – in fact, there's a lot of bad in the world.

But all things work together for the betterment of our character.

The Bible talks about letting go of the pain, letting go of the hurt, letting go of the resentment, letting go of the bitterness, not holding on to it.

But that's not forgetting.

Because you never will forget.

In fact, the more painful something has happened in your life, the more likely it is that you're going to remember it.

Some people think, "When am I going to get to the point spiritually where I forget all those hurts?"

Well, frankly you're not going to get there.

The key is learning to see it through the lens of grace and through and through the lens of how God can turn even bad things into good in your life if you'll trust Him and you learn to respond in the right way.

Forgiveness is not forgetting what's happened.

E Forgiveness is not my right when I wasn't the one that was hurt.

This may disturb some of you, but hear me out on this.

Only the victim has the right to forgive.

You can't forgive people who haven't hurt you.

The big fad is to offer blanket forgiveness to anybody, anywhere who's hurt anyone just in case somebody, somewhere might feel guilty.

So we're out there running around forgiving all kinds of people that we have no business or no legitimate right to forgive.

Some of you will remember the incident in 1997 when a 14-

year-old Michael Carneal, boy shot and killed three high-school girls in Paducah, Ky., as they participated in a prayer circle at Heath High School.

Before those girls had even been buried, some well-meaning kids at the high school the next morning put up a sign that said, “We forgive you, Mike.”

Those kids meant well, and they probably thought they were doing the Christian thing, but they didn't have the right to forgive because they weren't the victims.

The family was still in shock.

How do you think that grandiose display of forgiveness made the parents feel, the brothers and sisters of those girls?

They hadn't even worked through their grief yet.

Yes, the family eventually could come to a place of forgiveness themselves, but somebody was short-circuiting the system illegitimately.

Those high-school kids couldn't forgive.

They hadn't been the ones who were hurt.

Only the victim has the right to forgive.

You can only forgive those who've hurt you.

And others can only forgive those who've hurt them.

If somebody's house gets robbed, and I go to the robber and say, “I forgive you. It didn't bother me!”

It's meaningless.

There is always a cost to sin.

And there's always a cost to forgiveness.

And that's why you have to let it go and you have to reach out to that offender.

A few weeks ago I shared about Mary Johnson, whose 30 year old son was murdered by then 16 year old Oshea Israel. She said: "My son was gone. I was angry and hated this boy, hated his mother. The murder was like a tsunami. Shock. Disbelief. Hatred. Anger. Hatred. Blame. Hatred. I wanted him to be caged up like the animal he was."

She decided to found a support group and counselled mothers whose children had been killed and encouraged them to reach out to the families of their murderers, who were victims of another kind.

Then she went to the prison and over a period of time a trust was built, and when Oshea was released, Mary Johnson convinced her landlord to allow him to move into the empty apartment next door to hers.

She said: "Unforgiveness is like cancer. It will eat you from the inside out. It's not about that other person, me forgiving him does not diminish what he's done. Yes, he murdered my son - but the forgiveness is for me."

So, forgiveness is not conditional.

Forgiveness is minimizing the offense.

Forgiveness is not resuming a relationship without changes.

That's the negative side of forgiveness.

II. What Forgiveness Is

Forgiveness, from a Scriptural point of view, involves three things.

A. Real forgiveness is relinquishing my right to get even.

This is the heart of real forgiveness.

You don't seek revenge.

The Bible says it like this in

Romans 12:19 (Living)

Dear friends, never avenge yourselves. Leave that to God, for he has said that he will repay those who deserve it.

You say, “If I give up my right to get even with somebody who’s hurt me, that’s unfair.”

You’re right.

It’s unfair.

Whoever said forgiveness is fair?

Was it fair for Jesus Christ to forgive everything you’ve ever done wrong and let you go Scott free?

Was that fair?

No.

How is it that Jesus can forgive me when I injure you in some way?

It was you that I wounded, not Jesus.

And I just said that only the one who is offended can offer the forgiveness.

God said to Moses:

Numbers 5:6 (GW)

6 “Tell the Israelites: If you do something wrong to another person, you have been unfaithful to the LORD.

And, in his prayer of repentance, David said:

Psalms 51:4 (GW)

I have sinned against you, especially you. I have done what you consider evil.

So, when I do injustice to you, I also do injustice to God.

We always want justice for everybody else, and we all want forgiveness for ourselves.

When it comes to somebody else, it’s not fair.

But we don’t want God to be *fair* to us, though.

We want God to be *gracious* to us.

The truth is that life is not fair.

And forgiveness is not fair.
It's called grace, and God has shown it to you.

The Bible does say this.
One day, God is going to have the last word.
One day, God is going to settle the score.
One day, God is going to right the wrong.
One day, God is going to balance the ledger.

The Bible says I relinquish my right to get even.
So you let God settle the score.

You forgive so there can be peace in your heart and you can get on with your life, and you leave the justice part to God.

Who can do a better job of justice?
Who can do a better job of getting even?
You or God?
Who has more ways at His disposal of righting wrongs, you or God?

The starting point is to relinquish my right to get even.

Ernest Gordon, in his book "Through the Valley of the Kwai", says:

We found ourselves on the same track with several carloads of Japanese wounded after we were freed from the Kwai prison camp. These unfortunates were on their own without medical care. No longer fit for action in Burma, they had been packed into railway cars which were being returned to Bangkok. They were in a shocking state. I have never seen men filthier. Uniforms were encrusted with mud, blood, and excrement. Their wounds, sorely inflamed and full of pus, crawled with maggots. The maggots, however, in eating the putrefying flesh, probably prevented gangrene. It was apparent why the Japanese were so

cruel to their prisoners. If they didn't care for their own, why should they care for us? The wounded looked at us forlornly as they sat with their heads resting against the carriages, waiting for death. They had been discarded as expendable, the refuse of war. These were the enemy. They were more cowed and defeated than we had ever been. Without a word most of the officers in my section unbuckled their packs, took out part of their ration and a rag or two, and, with water canteens in their hands, went over to the Japanese train. Our guards tried to prevent us, bawling, "No goodka! No goodka!" But we ignored them and knelt down by the enemy to give water and food, to clean and bind up their wounds. Grateful cries of "Aragatto!" ("Thank you") followed us when we left--. I regarded my comrades with wonder. Eighteen months ago they would have joined readily in the destruction of our captors had they fallen into their hands. Now these same officers were dressing the enemy's wounds.

We had experienced a moment of grace, there in those bloodstained railway cars. God had broken through the barriers of our prejudice and had given us the will to obey His command, "Thou shalt love."

So you relinquish your right to get even.

The Bible says this in

Heb. 12:15 (Phillips)

Be careful that none of you fails to respond to the grace which God gives, for if he does there can very easily spring up in him a bitter spirit which is not only bad in itself but can also poison the lives of many others."

And resentment can be passed on from generation to generation to generation.

B. Real forgiveness is Responding to evil with good.

Luke 6:27-28 (NIV)

"But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, [28] bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.

Circle those three verbs - do good, bless, pray

That's part of forgiveness.

You return good for evil.

One of the most powerful prayers in the midst of suffering I have read was uncovered from the horrors of Ravensbruck concentration camp.

Ravensbruck was a concentration camp built in 1939 for women.

Over 90,000 women and children perished in Ravensbruck, murdered by the Nazis.

Corrie Ten Boom, who wrote The Hiding Place, was imprisoned there.

The written prayer of one of the murdered women said:

O Lord, remember not only the men and woman of good will, but also those of ill will. But do not remember all of the suffering they have inflicted upon us: Instead remember the fruits we have borne because of this suffering, our fellowship, our loyalty to one another, our humility, our courage, our generosity, the greatness of heart that has grown from this trouble. When our persecutors come to be judged by you, let all of these fruits that we have borne be their forgiveness....

You also understand their hurt.

You start seeing their hurt.

When you learn to forgive, you can not only see your own hurt, but you see their hurt, too.

Then you start to understand why they acted in such evil or selfish

or hurtful or abusive ways.

You can pray for them and pray for God to bless them.

You're never going to get on with your life unless you let it go.

Unless you forgive and let it go.

Not forget.

But relinquish my right to get even and respond to evil with good.

The third is the hardest of all.

C. Real forgiveness is repeating this process as long as necessary.

Forgiveness is rarely a one-time shot.

It's rarely a one-time event.

Forgiveness goes on and on and on.

How often do I have to do this?

How often do I have to keep releasing my right to get even?

How often do I have to keep blessing them when they do evil?

Until the pain stops.

Until you stop feeling the hurt.

And then you'll know you've forgiven them.

Matthew 18:21-22 (Msg)

At that point Peter got up the nerve to ask, "Master, how many times do I forgive a brother or sister who hurts me? Seven?" [22] Jesus replied, "Seven! Hardly. Try seventy times seven.

Peter thought he was being pretty magnanimous.

In Jewish law, you had to forgive a person three times.

And after you'd forgiven them three times, that was it.

You didn't have to forgive them any more.

There is a cartoon on your sermon notes about this.

So Peter asked, "How often do I have to forgive somebody who hurts me? How often do I have to forgive my brother?"

It may have been his real brother.

How often?

He's thinking, "The law says three times. How about if I double it, and add in one for good measure. Seven times?" (God's going to really be impressed with this!)

And Jesus says, "**Wrong! You're not even close! How about seventy times seven.**"

He's saying "To infinity and beyond! You just keep on doing it. You just keep on forgiving."

Some of you hold resentment against people who are no longer even alive.

It's not always advisable or even possible to go back to that person.

Lewis B. Smedes wrote in his book, *Forgive and Forget*, "When you release the wrongdoer from the wrong, you cut a malignant tumor out of your inner life. You set a prisoner free, but you discover that the real prisoner was yourself."

What is the secret of genuine forgiveness?

The secret of forgiveness is to remember.

I need to Remember how much I've been forgiven.

That's the secret.

Remember how much I've been forgiven by God.

I remember what it cost Jesus Christ to forgive me.

All the things I've done.

I'm not spotless.

I've hurt a lot of people in my life.

And so have you.

Col. 3:13 (NLT)

You must make allowance for each other's faults and forgive the person who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.

God has forgiven you, so He expects you to forgive those who

have hurt you.

Ephesians 4:30-32 (TLB)

30 Don't cause the Holy Spirit sorrow by the way you live. Remember, he is the one who marks you to be present on that day when salvation from sin will be complete. 31 Stop being mean, bad-tempered, and angry. Quarreling, harsh words, and dislike of others should have no place in your lives. 32 Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God has forgiven you because you belong to Christ.

You were forgiven, not because you deserve it.

Not because you earned it.

Not because you balance it out with good works.

Not because you promised never to sin again.

You were forgiven by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We are going to close with our invitational song.

God wants to have a deeper, more personal relationship with you.

He is calling for you to make your life more meaningful than you could ever imagine.

I beg of you to comply with God's terms of pardon.

As the righteous judge, He has made clear what we must do to have our sins forgiven.

Col. 2:13-14 (NLT)

You were dead because of your sins and because your sinful nature was not yet cut away. Then God made you alive with Christ. He forgave all our sins. [14] He canceled the record that contained the charges against us. He took it and destroyed it by nailing it to Christ's cross.

God needs you here at the Orcutt Christian Church.

Will you come as we sing?

Prayer and Invitation

March 26 Lesson 4 **Restoring Love**

Devotional Reading: [2 Peter 3:1-10](#)

Background Scripture: [Joel 2](#)

[JOEL 2:12, 13, 18, 19, 28-32](#)

12 “Even now,” declares the LORD, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.” **13** Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity.

18 Then the LORD was jealous for his land and took pity on his people. **19** The LORD replied to them: “I am sending you grain, new wine and olive oil, enough to satisfy you fully; never again will I make you an object of scorn to the nations.”

28 “And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. **29** Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days. **30** I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke. **31** The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. **32** And everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance, as the LORD has said, even among the survivors whom the LORD calls.”

KEY VERSE

Rend your heart, and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity.—[Joel 2:13](#)

Introduction

A. Culture of Defiant Unrepentance

Deal with it. This seems to be the cry of many public figures whose lives fall far short of biblical standards. Caught committing adultery? Misusing public funds? Plagiarizing material? Just hire a public relations “spin doctor” to justify or explain away the behavior!

Moral and ethical failures happen so often that we are no longer shocked or even surprised. If anything does surprise us, it’s a forthright admission of guilt that is accompanied by genuine repentance. Instead, we have come to expect excuses, finger pointing, etc. We live in a culture that is increasingly indifferent to accountability for misdeeds; it is a culture of defiant unrepentance. We are dismissed as “being judgmental” when we voice expectations for accountability and consequences. Culture wants us just to *deal with it*.

We see such an outlook in ancient times as well. But when people thought they could live above accountability, the Old Testament prophets responded

to brazen sin in a most judgmental way: *repent or die!* The judgment of wrongdoing and consequences was not that of the human prophet, however; it was the judgment of Almighty God.

But how does God distinguish true repentance from false? The prophet Joel had God's answer to that question.

B. Lesson Background

The last 12 of the Old Testament's 39 books are known collectively as the Minor Prophets. The book of Joel is one of these. The word *minor* refers to the lengths of these books, not to their contents. The importance of the latter is seen in the 30 quotations from them that appear in the New Testament.

The book of Joel is one of the eight Minor Prophets so quoted.

The name Joel means "the Lord is God." We don't know much about this man or when the book was written. Traditionally, the book is dated as early as 837 BC, making Joel a contemporary of King Joash ([2 Chronicles 24](#)). Joel's references to enemies are identified more readily with an earlier historical context (see [Joel 3:4](#)). Another viewpoint proposes a date several centuries later, partially because of reference to "Greeks" in [Joel 3:6](#). The theory is that Joel would not have mentioned the Greek people until they had become internationally prominent.

The backdrop for the book is a cataclysmic locust infestation that had descended on Jerusalem and the surrounding area (see [Joel 1:2-4](#)). Locusts are voracious, grasshopper-like insects that multiply rapidly and swarm. The descent of a swarm on a small area may result in utter destruction of crops, trees, and other vegetation ([1:7](#), [10](#)). Such devastation could lead to famine, with starvation taking a great toll on both humans and animals. God used locusts as instruments of divine judgment on occasion (examples: [Exodus 10:3-15](#); [Psalms 78:46](#); [105:34](#); compare [Revelation 9:3, 4](#)).

For his part, the prophet Joel connected his horrific description of the locust plague by declaring the nearness of "the day of the Lord" ([Joel 1:15](#); [2:1](#)) and this challenge: "The day of the Lord is great; it is dreadful. Who can endure it?" ([2:11](#)). The question was a warning with an obvious answer: no one can withstand that day. It is futile to resist the judgmental wrath of God. But there was another option.

I. Repentance

([Joel 2:12, 13](#))

A. Turning to the Lord ([v. 12](#))

12. "Even now," declares the LORD, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning."

The alternative to experiencing the judgment of "the day of the Lord" ([Joel 2:11](#)) is repentance. Repentance involves turning away from sin while turning back to *the Lord*.

But words and actions of repentance must match (compare [Jeremiah 12:2](#)), so the prophet goes on to list three characteristics of genuine repentance.

Fasting is self-denial that indicates spiritual submission. *Weeping* indicates distress; it is a natural companion of *mourning*, a sign of profound grief (compare [Esther 4:3](#)). These are the basics of repentance for people reorienting their lives from sin to God.

What Do You Think?

What should be the when, where, why, and how of fasting for Christians?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Considering positive biblical examples ([Matthew 6:17, 18](#); [Acts 13:2, 3](#); [14:23](#); etc.)

Considering negative biblical examples ([Zechariah 7:5, 6](#); [Matthew 6:16](#); [Luke 18:12](#); etc.)

B. Tearing the Heart (v. 13)

13a. Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the LORD your God,

Repentance is not a simple apology or an “I’m sorry” statement. It is a change of *heart*, a spiritual decision to reverse course. This change is based on recognizing that one’s earlier decisions were wrong, self-destructive, and offensive to our holy God.

Joel describes this change as rending (meaning “tearing”) the *heart*. This contrasts with the common way of expressing personal anguish: tearing one’s *garments* (examples: [Genesis 37:34](#); [2 Samuel 3:31](#); [Job 1:20](#)). True repentance will rip one’s heart wide open, break down any resistance to God’s will, and lay bare our souls.

What Do You Think?

What are some ways to rend one’s heart in true repentance?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

In contrast with a halfhearted rending

In terms of changed priorities

In terms of how sin is viewed

Other

13b for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity.

Joel gives the reason for genuine repentance: the compassionate nature of the Lord. Even when our punishment is deserved, he desires to forgive as we repent. Joel piles up the descriptions of this aspect of God’s nature in a powerful and beautiful way. The Lord is *gracious and compassionate*, not brutal and rigid. The Lord is *slow to anger*, not given to knee-jerk bursts of

rage. Unlike the fictitious gods of the pagans, the Lord's nature is *abounding in love*; this has the sense of "loyalty," love that does not give up easily.

Joel concludes his description of God's mercy with a statement that may strike us as curious: the Lord *relents from sending calamity*. The idea is that human repentance results in avoidance of deserved punishment from God (compare [Jeremiah 18:8](#); [Jonah 4:2](#)). This is the forgiveness of God. When we repent sincerely, he is willing to forgive (compare [Acts 5:31](#)).

II. Rebuilding

([Joel 2:18, 19](#))

A. Jealousy and Pity (v. 18)

18. Then the LORD was jealous for his land and took pity on his people.

Joel does not leave us with a picture of irreversible devastation of God's *land* and *people*. He wants to restore the country stripped bare by voracious locusts. He cares deeply about the distress of those facing starvation. God indeed hears the cries of his people in distress ([Exodus 3:7](#)).

We should take care to understand what it means for the Lord to be *jealous*. God's jealousy is not like that of a boy who has a fit if he sees his girlfriend flirting with someone else. The biblical concept of jealousy when applied to God indicates a profound sense of caring and commitment. This is even more apparent where a word in the original language is translated "jealousy" in one passage but "zeal" in another.

For example, the Hebrew noun translated "jealousy" in [Ezekiel 8:3](#), [5](#) and [Zechariah 8:2](#) is rendered "zeal" in [Isaiah 9:7](#); [37:32](#); [59:17](#); [63:15](#). In the New Testament, the Greek noun translated "jealousy" in [2 Corinthians 11:2](#) is the same one translated "zeal" in [Philippians 3:6](#). Overlap in meaning is affirmed in English by a dictionary entry that offers one meaning of *jealousy* as "zealous vigilance." The common idea is one of fervency.

JEALOUS GOD, ZEALOUS GOD

As a university professor for over 40 years, I have seen student papers that have all but butchered the English language. One of my most startling experiences was when a graduate student turned in a three-page book review with 58 grammatical/spelling errors! I have seen sentences such as "He wanted to be untied with his friends." A spell checker won't catch this error, and the difference between *untied* and *united* is important!

I have always been interested in etymology, which is the study of word origins and how meanings change over time. For example, our word *hotel* comes from the French *hostel*, which in turn comes from the Latin *hospital*. Today these three words in English carry very different meanings. At the other end of the scale, some words undergo relatively fewer changes in

meaning over time. The word *jealous* is an example, as we trace it back to thirteenth-century French, then further back through Latin and Greek. We usually think of jealousy as a negative thing, but it can be positive when the fervency (zeal) is properly motivated and informed. We see the positive side in [John 2:17](#) (quoting [Psalm 69:9](#)); we see the opposite in [Philippians 3:6](#). For what are you jealous/zealous today?—J. B. N.

B. Provision and Honor (v. 19)

19. The LORD replied to them: “I am sending you grain, new wine and olive oil, enough to satisfy you fully; never again will I make you an object of scorn to the nations.”

The promise of Joel is that the locust-caused famine will soon be replaced by life-sustaining agriculture. There will be plenty, and the people will be satisfied. There will be no more want, as the famine conditions are replaced by the Lord’s lavish provisions.

A further result is that God’s covenant people will no longer be *an object of scorn to the nations*. This is an era when each nation is understood to have a patron god ([1 Kings 11:33](#)). Such nations will no longer be able to consider the people of the true God as abandoned by him (compare [Joel 2:17](#)). The Lord is always faithful ([2:23](#)). The locust plague was horrible, but the restoration will cause Joel’s audience to truly know that the Lord is their God, the one who wants to bless them ([2:27](#)).

What Do You Think?

In what ways can churches be more attuned to God’s will so that his blessings will serve to mute the reproach of secular culture?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Concerning charges of inconsistency

Concerning charges of irrelevance

Other

III. Revelation

([Joel 2:28-32](#))

A. Receiving the Spirit (vv. 28, 29)

28a. “And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people.

Joel now describes a future beyond the restoration of Jerusalem and its people, a period he refers to as *afterward*. This passage is prophetic of the time when the old covenant gives way to the new. Centuries later, the apostle Peter will understand this as being fulfilled as the church is birthed on the Day of Pentecost ([Acts 2:17-21](#)).

We should understand this as Peter did: as a time that features the distribution of God’s Spirit such as was never experienced by ancient Israel. Joel’s description as pouring is figurative language, of course, since the Holy

Spirit is not liquid! But the figurative language is very powerful in painting an image of something coming from above *on all people* below. Such pouring indicates, among other things, that God's Spirit is not something inherent within ourselves; to receive the Spirit of God does not mean unlocking some hidden potential in our hearts. It is, rather, the introduction of a new presence in our lives: the comforting spiritual presence of the Lord himself.

The Spirit is said to come upon certain individuals at various times in the Old Testament era (example: [Judges 6:34](#)). But the availability of the Holy Spirit for everyone is not a reality until the New Testament era. Joel looks forward to that new reality, which we understand to be the established church. This is where all believers are given the Holy Spirit as a gift ([Acts 2:38](#)).

28b “Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions.

Joel describes the giving of God's Spirit as yielding spiritual results: the divinely given abilities to *prophesy*, to receive revelatory *dreams*, and to experience *visions* (compare [Numbers 12:6](#)). This is not the restoration of a previous state, but empowerment for something new. Joel is foreseeing the Holy Spirit's role in (at least) the founding of the church. Christians do not receive the Holy Spirit as a tool for their own pleasure, but as the presence of God to enable them for extraordinary activities as he chooses.

29. “Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days.

The phrasing here refers to both male and female slaves, and Joel prophesies that the Spirit will be poured on them as well. There will be no class or gender distinctions with regard to the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Addressing the topic of access to salvation in the New Testament era, the apostle Paul affirms, “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” ([Galatians 3:28](#)). Stated a little differently, in Christ we “are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit” ([Ephesians 2:22](#)).

IT'S FOR EVERYONE

A student who was blind sued a music college to challenge its requirement for sight-reading music. A Christian university received negative media attention because the admission requirements included a weight limit. Overweight applicants claimed discrimination; school leadership believed that overweight applicants (we are talking *very* overweight here) were

neglecting the Christian stewardship responsibilities for their bodies. Claims of discrimination regarding unequal access, overt or otherwise, are heard in many other contexts as well.

We live in an age when equal access is still a much-debated topic. Virtually everyone agrees that people should be treated fairly. But there is often disagreement on the boundary between reasonable and unreasonable accommodation. The fact that some organizations still attempt to achieve proportional representation by use of quotas indicates that society has not yet reached the point where it can take equal opportunity as a given. But Joel points out that the pouring of the Spirit is to be “on all people.” No discrimination here! Does the “targeted demographic” approach to church growth fit this category?—J. B. N.

B. Seeing Wonders ([vv. 30, 31](#))

30, 31. “I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.

Joel’s prophecy includes imagery that is commonly called apocalyptic. Just as God created *the heavens* and *the earth*, he can uncreate them as well. He can cause the “greater light” of *the sun* to go dark and/or the “lesser light” of *the moon* to appear any way he chooses ([Genesis 1:16](#)). These are signs of the great *day of the Lord* (compare [Matthew 24:29-31](#); [Mark 13:24-27](#); [Luke 21:25-27](#); [2 Peter 3:10-12](#); [Revelation 6:12-14](#)). *Billows of smoke* seem similar to the “pillar of cloud” and “pillar of fire” that signified God’s presence in [Exodus 13:21](#), [22](#).

What Do You Think?

What preparations can and should we make as we anticipate the day of which Joel speaks? What need we not bother with? Why?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Regarding personal preparations

Regarding preparations by our church as a whole

Other

Fire often refers to judgment ([Jeremiah 21:12](#); etc.). But that does not seem to be the way Joel is using it here, since he has already used the locust plague as such an image. Instead, fire seems connected with the powerful spiritual movements of the Lord. This imagery is seen in [Acts 2](#), where the Spirit descends upon the disciples with “tongues of fire” ([Acts 2:3](#)).

C. Claiming Salvation ([v. 32](#))

32. “And everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved; for

on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance, as the LORD has said, even among the survivors whom the LORD calls.”

What an exciting passage this has been! Spiritual indwelling that leads to powerful prophesying, divine dreaming, and revealing visioning! Visible displays of God’s incredible power!

But let us not miss the climax of all of this, which is Joel’s remarkable promise that *everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved*. This is more than a promise of earthly deliverance of ancient Israel. God is promising a salvation that Peter sees being fulfilled on Pentecost ([Acts 2:21](#)).

The apostle Paul clarifies in [Romans 10](#) what it means to *call on the name of the Lord*. As a whole, [Romans 10](#) is particularly concerned with the issue of righteousness that is based on faith vs. righteousness that is based on law as these apply to fellow Israelites. His quote of [Joel 2:32](#) in [Romans 10:13](#) is [Romans 10:9](#) stated more succinctly. Within [Romans 10:8-15](#) Paul confirms his argument by citing Old Testament passages that include [Deuteronomy 30:14](#) and [Isaiah 28:16; 52:7](#).

When we put all this together, we can only conclude with Paul that calling *on the name of the Lord* is the same as declaring “with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord’” ([Romans 10:9](#)) because “it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved” ([10:10](#)). To believe that Jesus is Lord is to submit to his lordship in following the plan of salvation as he established it ([Acts 2:38; Ephesians 2:8, 9](#); etc.).

In quoting [Joel 2:32](#), Paul is also clarifying what that prophecy means by the phrase *will be saved*. Joel’s picture is that of God’s covenant people having been found guilty of sin, with the result of judgment in the form of a locust plague. The solution is for the guilty to turn, to rend hearts in true repentance and faith. Then God will bless their land again and restore them to a position of honor. But this second chapter of Joel also looks beyond this to the “afterward” time.

That time is about much more than abundant crops and national prestige. It is about our eternal relationship with our true Father, about accepting his restoring love with faith and loving him in return for his graciousness. The issues of what is required to be saved and what being saved entails are vital for us, so we take care to read Joel in the light of Paul’s explanations.

What Do You Think?

What steps can we take to help others call on the name of the Lord for deliverance?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Concerning deliverance from unholy influence of certain people

Concerning deliverance from unholy influence of certain places

Concerning deliverance from unholy influence of certain things

Conclusion

A. Locusts of Life

I am writing this on a cold day. Winters are cold in Nebraska, but this is what one website described as “ridiculous cold.” The high for the day will not be above 0°, and the windchill factor will hit -30°. All the schools are closed—in Nebraska! Although my wife and I moved here from California, we can put up with cold weather. But sometimes it just seems too much! The old saw “When it rains it pours” seems to be true for all of us on a regular basis. Winter doesn’t result in just one lingering episode of illness, but two; some months inflict not just one unexpected expense, but four; some summers witness not just one dear friend moving away, but three. These are the minor locust swarms of life, when one bad thing is piled upon another before we can recover from the previous.

What do we do? Although these may not be times when we have sinned to a greater extent than at others, we may take Joel as suggesting that such times are opportunities for spiritual examination. It would be presumptuous to think that all our misfortunes are God’s judgments on us, but there is no wiser thing to do in times of distress than to turn to the Lord. There is no better thing to do than repent of being so busy that we have neglected prayer. There is no more comforting thing to do than to call on the Lord’s name for his mercy.

When the locusts of life seem to swarm, remember that God’s love is both restoring and sustaining. When those locusts devour your joy and peace, turn to God. He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and has a heart of great kindness.

B. Prayer

Heavenly Father, restore us where we are broken, love us when we are unlovable, rescue us when we have lost our way. We pray all this in the name of the Lord Jesus. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

The Lord wants to restore us.

How to Say It

apocalyptic *uh-paw-kuh-lip-tik*.

etymology *eh-tuh-mall-luh-jee*.

Ezekiel *Ee-zeek-ee-ul* or *Ee-zeek-yul*.

Isaiah *Eye-zay-uh*.

Pentecost *Pent-ih-kost*.

Zechariah *Zek-uh-rye-uh*.