

Honest Prayers Praying Like Joel

Understanding Joel

Scholars do not really know where to place the Book of Joel in the biblical timeline. There are no clear dates to help us know when he lived or when he prophesied. We do, however, know he lived sometime during the divided kingdom of Israel. During this period in history the Hebrew people were on a roller coaster ride of obedience. Sometimes they were soaring high as they trusted God and followed Him faithfully. Sometimes it would all come crashing down in rebellion, idolatry, and apathy.

Generations before Joel, God gave Moses the law. God's instructions came with a promise found in **Leviticus 26:3-5**. *"If you follow my decrees and are careful to obey my commands, I will send you the seasonal rains. The land will then yield its crops, and the trees of the field will produce their fruit. Your threshing season will overlap with the grape harvest, and your grape harvest will overlap with the season of planting grain. You will eat your fill and live securely in your own land."* (Read more of God's promise in Leviticus 26 and in Deuteronomy 28.) God's basic promise was this: Trust Me and obey Me and I will bless you, protect you, and make your land prosperous.

Given this understanding, we have great insight into what was happening in Israel when Joel was calling out to the people. In chapters 1 and 2 God is sending a swarm of locusts unlike anything ever seen before. Because of Leviticus 26 we know this was more than a natural disaster. It was a spiritual disaster. Their only hope was in the Lord. Joel calls them to look around, take stock of their plight, and respond with lamenting, wailing, weeping, and despair. Joel recognizes they are not in danger because of some bugs on the ground but because they have strayed away from God on His throne. In fact, God tells the people *He* is the commander leading the "army" of locusts toward Israel. Joel calls all the people - even the babies - to the temple to fast, pray, and repent. God speaks to the people and says, "Turn to me now, while there is time. Give me your hearts."

Joel chapters 1 and 2 reveal exactly what God wanted the people of Israel to do. He wanted them to do four things:

1. Observe the reality of their situation and let it **BREAK** their hearts.
2. **BRING** that brokenness to God through prayer and fasting.
3. **BE ATTENTIVE** to God as He corrected the error of their ways and answered their prayers.
4. **BE READY** as God moves on their behalf and does what only He can do.

The end of Joel chapter 2 is full of incredible promises from God. God tells the people if they will realign their hearts with Him, He will *"repay you for the years the locusts have eaten!"* (NIV) He goes on to promise He will pour out His Spirit on the people and He will use His people to do many incredible things for the Kingdom. What an amazing example of God's grace!

The Situation at FBC Forest Park

- God has entrusted the Gospel to First Baptist Church Forest Park and faithfully moved through the ministry of our church for 152 years.
- But our church has been in a season of decline for more than 30 years.
- Recently, God united us together to do everything we can to be more effective in our community and grow the Kingdom in Forest Park.
- We acknowledge and celebrate all God has done in our church family, especially over the last few years. His activity in our church family is undeniable.
- While all of these things are true, the fact remains, we are rapidly nearing the end of our resources.
- If God does not move and nothing changes, we will be out of money in less than 2 years.
- No one wants to close the church, but if we are forced into that decision the legal process of closing will take time and cost money.
- Because of this reality, we can continue to do what we have been doing until January 2027. At that point, if we have not seen significant growth in our congregation, we will have to dramatically cut programs and expenses as we prepare to close the church with integrity.
- The mere thought of First Baptist Church Forest Park closing its doors is truly heart breaking.

The Plan

- We will commit to **read Joel** chapters 1 and 2 every day this week.
- We will commit to **pray** as we read and ask God to speak to us.
- We will commit to **ask** ourselves and God three simple questions:
 1. Do you see any similarities between what is happening in Joel 1 and 2 and what is happening at our church?
 2. Why are we in this situation and how did we get here?
 3. How does God want me to respond?
- We will commit to join our entire church family in a **24-hour fast** beginning at 6:00pm on Sunday, August 17.
- We will commit to **return to the sanctuary** at 6:00pm on Monday, August 18 to discuss what God has revealed to us.

My (Elliott's) prayer for our church family is that:

1. God would **BREAK** our hearts over the possibility we would have to close our church.
2. We would **BRING** that brokenness to God through prayer and fasting.
3. We would **BE ATTENTIVE** to God as He speaks to us.
4. We would **BE READY** to move forward when God does what only He can do.