

DAY 1

SCRIPTURE: JOEL 2:12-14

“Even now,” declares the Lord, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.” 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. Who knows? He may turn and relent and leave behind a blessing—grain offerings and drink offerings for the Lord your God.

OBSERVATION

The book of Joel was written as a massive locust invasion came upon the land. Natural disasters and other massive calamities were often interpreted as God’s judgment. Though judgment of Israel’s behavior was the reason for the locusts, the greater purpose was for the people to examine their lives and behavior and do an assessment of where they stood with God. The good news found in this book is that Israel repented and God relented and restored their relationship. An external indicator of repentance was to rend or tear ones clothing and cover oneself in ashes. While very dramatic, it didn’t prove there was an actual change of heart going on. God is far more interested in the condition of our hearts than the exertion of a religious performance.

APPLICATION

God can and will use anything in our lives to get our attention. When God is working to gain our attention, it can indicate we may have drifted from worshipping Him in some area of our life (It must be noted that when we are going through difficult times it does not indicate we are living in sin or under God’s judgment. See the Book of Job). In all things good and bad, God wants our attention, our worship of Him. Wherever we find ourselves we must strive to always examine our lives and our relationship with God.

Have you ever been in a season where you felt God was trying to get your attention? What was He trying to change in you or teach you? What is your typical response to difficulties in your life? How can you start to use milestone moments to honestly assess your relationship with God?

PRAYER

Father, teach me to not fear or worry that calamity or destruction is coming my way (Psalm 112:7). Teach me to worship You in good times and bad. God, give me faith and understanding when You are trying to get my attention. Help me keep my gaze always on You.

DAY 2

SCRIPTURE: 1 JOHN 1:9

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”

OBSERVATION

John wrote this letter to address false teachings that had infiltrated the church. They denied many of the basic tenants of Christianity and though they had left, those who remained were shaken in their faith. John reminds them of the Gospel and that forgiveness is obtained solely through a relationship with Jesus Christ. One of the false teachings that spread was that as long as you “know” Jesus it doesn't matter how you live your life. John reminds that as Christ-followers we are called to a very high standard for the way we conduct our life, but if we do sin there is forgiveness found in confessing our sins before God.

APPLICATION

It is very easy and extremely dangerous to try and ignore any of the basics truths about Christianity. Often times in our life we will highlight the areas we are strong or while ignoring the teachings that we struggle with. At the end of the day Jesus calls us (through grace) to live like Him in all we do and He also promises forgiveness when we fail to live up to that standard (through grace). A misplaced emphasis on sin will only serve as a distraction to living the life God wants for us.

Do you struggle more with self righteousness (being more concerned with others' sins than your own) or licentiousness (living however you want morally knowing God's going to forgive regardless)? Ultimately our standard for living should be Jesus Christ. How can you become more focused on Jesus rather than others or yourself?

PRAYER

Father, thank You for the promise “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool” (Isaiah 1:18). Thank You that You forgive me when I confess my sin. Help me rid sin from my life so that I can walk in close and deep fellowship with You.

DAY 3

SCRIPTURE: EPHESIANS 4:26-27

“In your anger do not sin”: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.

OBSERVATION

In this passage Paul is laying out practical expectations for how Christ-followers should live. Anger is a common emotional experience and is not intrinsically evil. It becomes sin when we let it fester and go unresolved. Unresolved anger puts a person in a place only God is qualified to be. Getting even is not only common but in many cultures is celebrated as a virtue. Injustice stings deeply and can make anyone blind with a desire for vengeance.

APPLICATION

A common theme throughout Scripture and Ephesians is the call for unity among Christ-followers. Uncontrolled anger and emotions are destructive to healthy relationships. This doesn't mean we can be emotional or passionate but that we, through the love of Christ, must learn to control and direct our emotions in a healthy direction. Paul didn't want Christians to behave like everyone out there. The love and mercy of God are a powerful motivator for people to come to faith but if those who are in Christ do not show love and mercy, how can they ever come to believe?

What makes you extremely angry? Are you able to “be angry but sin not?” Has your anger ever damaged a relationship? How can you learn to recognize triggers that lead you down a path of destructive emotional outbursts?

PRAYER

Father, show me the difference between uncontrollable anger and focused passion. Help me be righteously angry at things that actually matter. Help me to love like You so I can be a powerful witness of your love and mercy.

DAY 4

SCRIPTURE: ROMANS 2:3-4

“So when you, a mere human being, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God’s judgment? Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God’s kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?”

OBSERVATION

Paul is speaking to his own people, the Jews, in chapter two. The purpose of the passage is to address self righteousness which came from an attempt to keep the totality of the Old Testament law. Paul was able to speak from experience since he was “a Hebrew of Hebrews” (Philippians 3). If anyone was close to keeping all of the Law, it was Paul (formerly Saul of Tarsus). His zeal and passion were unmatched, but after coming to faith in Jesus Christ he realized how far off he really was. Our right living is only able to be accomplished because of God’s grace. The moment we realize we can’t do it on our own should give us a life changing humility and grace with others.

APPLICATION

Self righteousness is one of the purest forms of hypocrisy in the world. Jesus saved His harshest rebukes for the religious leaders who used their moral superiority to hold others down. Our priorities are disastrously crooked if we are able to thank God for His love and mercy and yet in the same breath condemn others by withholding love and mercy from them. As followers of Jesus we must fight to maintain the tension of right living and loving the lost.

Has your personal commitment to morality made you think you are more righteous or holy than someone else? How can you maintain moral integrity and still have compassion for those who haven't met Christ yet?

PRAYER

Father, help me to not try and count how much grace I have received. Help me to understand that I don’t require more or less grace than the other person. Show me that I am a redeemed sinner who needs help redeem more sinners. Teach me that your grace is sufficient (more than adequate) to cover my sin and that your grace is available to everyone.

DAY 5

SCRIPTURE: PSALM 139:23-24

“Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”

OBSERVATION

The beginning and the end of this psalm are very similar (*You have searched me and know* v.1), and David is making the point that there isn't anything hidden from God. This reality is both terrifying and comforting at the same time because even though God knows the depravity of my heart and life, He still loves me and wants to use me for His purposes. David, though a man after God's own heart, had spent time with people of less than admirable character and he disdained their lack of integrity and honesty. There is a famous quote “an unexamined life is not worth living” (Socrates) yet for so many they do everything in their power to hide their innermost qualities from others and even themselves. Though God is omniscient (knows everything), we should still willingly submit ourselves to His examination.

APPLICATION

We live in a very strange time. We are able to purchase items, “snoop” on people, and observe content from the supposed privacy of our electronic devices. However we also are becoming more and more aware that what we once thought was private is anything but. “Hackers” and even our own government are spying on us and keeping extensive records of our online activities. Thankfully, though God knows everything, He still loves us and wants the best for us.

What parts of your life do keep secret? What past action or current habit are you ashamed of? What is keeping you from allowing God to examine your life and bring about correction and healing?

PRAYER

Lord, help me to live a transparent and authentic life. Please forgive the shameful, embarrassing parts of my life and help me to live all of my life above the surface. Give me strength to fight for personal purity. God, I surrender my heart to You. Search me and test me so that I can be led in the way everlasting.