

A low-angle, rear-view shot of a person's legs. They are wearing dark, possibly black, cargo-style pants with visible stitching and pockets. They are also wearing brown leather boots with laces. The person is standing on a dark, textured asphalt surface. In the background, there is a blurred view of a road and some trees, suggesting an outdoor setting. A black rectangular box is superimposed over the middle of the image, containing white text.

**HOW THEN
SHALL WE LIVE?**

In Joel 2:12 – 17, God tells His people exactly what we are to do to receive His mercy and deliverance in times of crisis. In Joel's generation, He warned them of a coming Babylonian invasion, **but gave a way out: gather for solemn assemblies.**

This response that God required of Israel is not limited to her in times past, but is for all of God's people today too. God is asking His people for a specific response. He has made it clear in His Word what He desires from us.

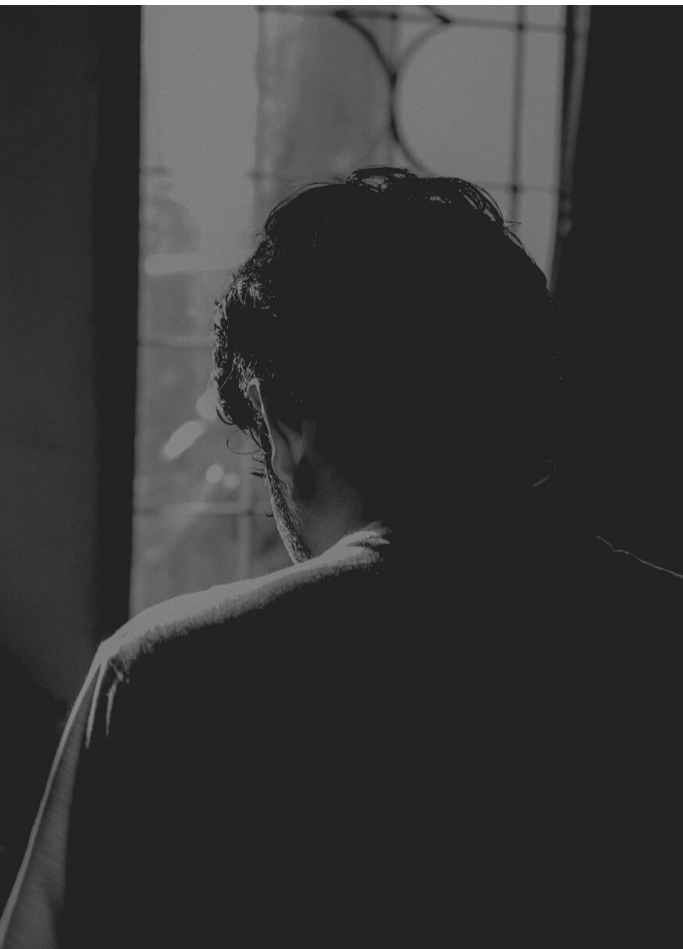
Joel 2:12 – 17 is the clearest passage in the Word of God that comprehensively lays out what God wants us to do in times of crisis – both on local and global scales. He wants us to come together in **sacred assemblies.**

It is a clear requirement for the Body of Christ as the global drama unfolds at the End of the Age. **This is because God wants us to have holy confidence in Him so that we will act with certainty in times of crisis. God wants to remove all false props so that we put our hope only in Him. God will shake all that can be shaken so as to “force” the whole world – including His people – into a corner of desperation where they cannot find any solution apart from Him.**

In Joel 1:13 – 14, Joel called the people to *“come, lie all night in sackcloth”* as they fasted and gathered in solemn assemblies. They were to gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land into the house of the Lord to cry out in prayer.

This was in light of the continuing devastation from the locust plagues and drought.

In Joel 2, He called them to the same response of fasting and prayer in light of a coming military invasion by the Babylonians. This response of fasting and prayer will also pave the way for Israel's future victory and deliverance during the Antichrist's reign of terror that will come at the End of the Age (Joel 3).



The background of the image is a sunset or sunrise scene. The sky is a gradient of dark blue at the top, transitioning through orange and yellow near the horizon. The sun is a bright, glowing orb just above the horizon line. In the foreground, the dark silhouette of a cliff or hillside is visible. Two people are standing on the edge of the cliff, looking out over the landscape. The overall mood is contemplative and serene.

THE RESPONSE THAT GOD DESIRES

TURN TO GOD WITH WHOLEHEARTEDNESS

(JOEL 2:12 - 13)

God requires that we turn to Him with wholeheartedness and love Him with all of our heart (Matt. 22:37). He requires that we respond to His love for us by loving Him, because **God wants our hearts more than anything else**. This is powerful just in and of itself. The fact that He desires our love more than anything reveals His heart. As we give our hearts to Him as an offering of love, we turn from sin and darkness and flee from all that is adversarial against God and He delivers us.

God gives us insight into what “turning to Him with all our heart” looks like. **It involves turning to Him in repentance, fasting, and prayer. This is God’s definition of wholeheartedness.** However, this is resisted by many in the Body of Christ today. Indeed, a fasted lifestyle is an unfamiliar discipline for the Church of Jesus Christ today.



REND OUR HEART

(JOEL 2:13)

Rending our hearts before God is a non-negotiable part of wholeheartedness. To rend means “to tear something violently or forcibly”. When we violently tear our hearts away from areas of sin, we align ourselves with what God requires.

Traditionally, the people of Israel would tear their garments to show their grief and desperation. However, God is after something deeper – He desires the rending of our hearts. **This speaks of spiritual violence and radically dealing with matters of the heart** (Matt. 11:12).

In essence, the prophet Joel was exhorting Israel, “Tear your hearts! If there are any issues that are quenching the Holy Spirit, get rid of them!”

This is exactly what Jesus exhorted in Matt. 5:29, “If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out...and if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off...” He was talking about a radical tearing away from sin and a radical pursuit of righteousness that painfully tears the heart in the process. **In other words, God wants us to radically forsake all compromise!**

Some people pursue wholeheartedness in such a casual way that it allows for compromise. Some want a wholeheartedness that is gentle, easy, and tame. However, there is no such thing.

There will often be pain when we cooperate with the Lord to pull out whole root systems of bondage in our lives. Sometimes it hurts to press through until we get a breakthrough; yet, it is the only way to freedom. Oftentimes we would rather not change our lifestyles and still want God to set us free. We want the Lord to cause our problems to evaporate without any costs or struggles, and without the pain of having to tear our hearts. However, this is not what the Lord wants. **He is looking for an intensely personal rending of hearts, because He has done and is constantly doing the same for us.**

We often fail to realise that God does not love us in a detached and distant way, but instead tears His heart as He pursues us in love. God the Father tore His heart when He sent Jesus for us.

Jesus tore His heart when He went to the cross. His heart is also torn as He sees His people refuse to repent and suffers long as He waits for us to respond.

Indeed, this pain of tearing the heart is often overlooked. We do not mind fasting a few meals or giving a few hours of our time to cry out in the prayer room.

Yet, the tearing of our hearts in love for Him is what the Lord desires and is an inescapable part of turning to Him in wholeheartedness.

Our confidence is that the Lord will empower us in our efforts, because He is a good, kind and gracious God.



CONFIDENCE IN GOD'S KINDNESS AND MERCY

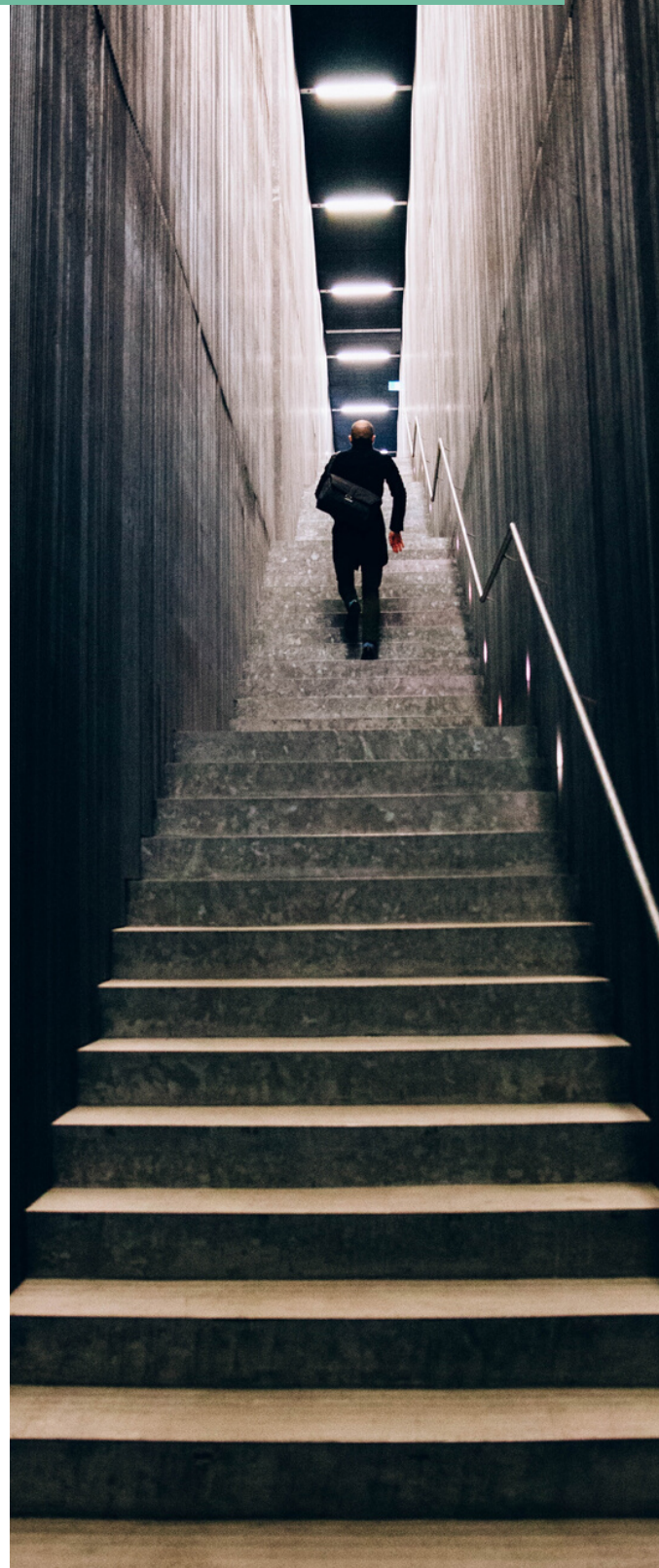
(JOEL 2:13-14)

Joel's call for the people of Israel to return to the Lord was based on who God is. God is gracious, merciful, slow to anger, of great kindness and relents from doing harm. He always desires to make a way of deliverance. The knowledge of God's heart for us makes returning to Him possible and wise, and gives us courage to tear our hearts in repentance. If we take one step toward Him, He will take ten steps toward us.

THE LORD IS GRACIOUS.

He evaluates us differently from anyone else. He remembers our frailty and that we are but dust (Ps. 103:14). He is not like a harsh military leader or an angry coach that rejects any form of weakness. God is "human-friendly" in His way of relating with us.

His requirements are within the reach of the weak because of His all-sufficient grace (*1 Jn. 5:4; Mat. 11:30*).



CONFIDENCE IN GOD'S KINDNESS AND MERCY

(JOEL 2:13-14)

THE LORD DELIGHTS IN MERCY.

One of God's main delights as He governs the universe is to watch the expressions and the heart responses of His people as we encounter His relentless mercy. He enjoys what happens in us when we understand that we get a new start after many failures. (Mic. 7:18)

THE LORD IS SLOW TO ANGER and takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezek. 33:11). He looks for ways to forgive the wicked without violating their free will and His justice. Furthermore, God is not easily provoked by the weakness of His people. Jesus spoke of His patience to the Church in Thyatira as He calls them to repentance (Rev. 2:20 – 22).

THE LORD HAS GREAT KINDNESS.

When we believe that He is kind, then we have confidence to press through whatever hinders our full repentance. We can also ask Him to help us as we seek to repent (Rom. 2:4).



THE LORD RELENTS FROM DOING HARM

(JOEL 2:13)

God also desires to relent from releasing deserved judgment upon nations. When a nation or city awakens and repents before the Lord, He is able to send blessing to them without violating His justice or their free will. This does not mean that God randomly changes His mind, surprising even Himself in the process. Rather, it means that **He responds to the free will of man when man chooses to repent and at the same time, His justice is not violated.**

There are two stages to the execution of God's decrees. First, the decree is established in the heavenly courts. Second, it is issued as God releases angels to execute His judgment. Under certain conditions, the decree can be rescinded even after it has been established (Zeph. 2:1 – 3).

God is willing to relent or cancel the decree instead of executing it.

In response to prayer and through prayer, God can change the decree He initially established in the heavenly courts. Courses of events and end results can be changed.

One great example of God's willingness to relent is found in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Upon learning of God's intentions to judge the city, Abraham asked the Lord if He would relent from judgment if there were only fifty righteous people in it. The Lord said that He would, so Abraham pressed the question, "If there were only ten righteous in the city, would You spare them?" The Lord told Abraham that He would (Gen. 18:22 – 33).

Sadly, not even ten righteous people could be found in the city. However, for the righteous ones (Lot and his family), the Lord in His mercy sent His angels to deliver them before He rained fire and brimstone down from heaven.