

The Way Forward: Through Wholehearted — Joel 1–2 — Sept 6

Purpose

To help us recognize how God gets our attention, leads us into honest sorrow, calls us to wholehearted return, and restores His people by mercy. As CBC moves toward Sacred Assembly, this guide invites us to reflect honestly, repent deeply, and return to the Lord with our whole heart.

Icebreaker

Can you usually tell when something is “off” in your soul? What are some signs that you need to stop, listen, and pay attention to God?

Scripture - Primary Text: Joel 1:1–4; 2:12–18 **Additional Texts:** Psalm 51:16–17; 2 Corinthians 7:10; James 4:6–10; 1 John 1:8–9

Observations

- Joel speaks to Judah during a devastating locust plague that stripped the land, ruined the crops, interrupted worship, and caused joy to wither.
- The crisis was not merely agricultural or economic; it was spiritually disruptive.
- Joel calls elders, priests, farmers, and all the people to wake up, lament, gather, fast, and seek the Lord.
- Joel 2:12–13 is the heart of the passage: “Return to me with all your heart... rend your hearts and not your garments.”
- Repentance is not religious performance or outward appearance. It is wholehearted return to God.
- God’s invitation to repent rests on His character: He is gracious, merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.
- Joel 2:18 turns toward hope: the Lord becomes jealous for His people and has pity on them.

Core Teaching

Joel gives us a clear pattern for the way forward.

First, **God gets our attention**. The locust plague disrupted Judah’s ordinary life and forced God’s people to ask, “What is the Lord saying to us?” We may not face a locust plague, but God often uses disruption, conflict, spiritual dryness, strained relationships, or diminished joy to get our attention.

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Second, **God leads us into honest sorrow**. Joel does not minimize the loss. He names it: “Surely joy withers away from the children of man.” Godly sorrow is not despair. It is truthful grief over what has been lost, neglected, tolerated, or diminished in our life with God and one another.

Third, **God calls us to wholehearted return**. Sorrow alone is not repentance. Repentance means turning around, returning to God, and surrendering the heart. Joel says, “Rend your hearts and not your garments.” God is not looking for spiritual theater. *He desires the whole heart — our loves, loyalties, will, relationships, and obedience.*

Fourth, **God restores His people by mercy**. We dare to repent because God is gracious and merciful. He does not expose sin to shame us, but to heal us. He names what is false to restore what is true. He confronts self-rule so Christ may again become our shared center.

Discussion Questions

1. What does Joel’s locust crisis reveal about the connection between disruption and spiritual reflection?
2. Where have you seen joy, worship, love, or mission “wither” in your own life or in church life?
3. Why is sorrow alone not the same as repentance?
4. What does “rend your hearts and not your garments” expose about shallow or performative repentance?
5. Which of the four movements do you most need right now: attention, sorrow, return, or restoration?
6. How can CBC prepare for Sacred Assembly with seriousness but not despair, confession but not condemnation?

Digging Deeper

Read Joel 2:12–13 slowly. What words or phrases reveal God’s heart toward His people?

Read 2 Corinthians 7:10. How is godly sorrow different from shame, regret, or self-condemnation?

Prayer

Gracious Father, get our attention where we have become distracted, hardened, or spiritually numb. Lead us into honest sorrow without despair. Teach us to rend our hearts and return to You with wholehearted devotion. As we move toward Sacred Assembly, restore Christ as our shared center and renew us by Your mercy. Amen.