

Combating Habituation in a World of Injustice

Alex Gailey / 2/11/24

Intro

Today is about stoking the fires of repentance as we look to more fully understand what repentance is.

Psychologists talk about a phenomenon called habituation.

Habituation is a decrease in response to a stimulus after repeated presentation
Habituation involves "growing accustomed to a situation or stimulus," thereby diminishing its effectiveness. -American Psychological Association

Or another way to say this is, Habituation is just getting used to something because of exposure to it over time.

We have a plant that was in our bedroom for a long time and I forgot that it was there. But when it was moved to our boys room, i was reoriented around how big it was. We also just added a piano to our living area at our house. And when we first moved it in, it felt really big and out of place. But it has become a normal part of our house that fits in now.

We habituate to our surroundings. We habituate to our family. We habituate to our homes.

We are Habituated to Injustice

Think about how our lives are set up. I get out of bed in the morning and walk into the kitchen to make coffee, and there is Alexa waiting to be engaged.

The temptation is to ask her to tell me the news for the day, and if I do, she will begin to describe a war happening in the Ukraine. She will tell me about another series of bombs in Gaza. Then she will go on to tell me about the fentanyl drug epidemic plaguing the streets of San Francisco.

Alexa may not be a regular rhythm for you but for others maybe it is social media where you encounter these and other stories of the brokenness of our world.

[This is one reason we should strive for days starting in prayer and Scripture before phone.]

Everyday these reports come through news outlets you follow, and eventually you are habituated to these things. If we are honest with ourselves, the horrors of war in the middle east and Ukraine do not land on us as hard as they should anymore. That is habituation.

We are Habituated to Consumerism

We live in an age of indulgence in every sense of the word. Food is abundant and a given in our lives. Generations before us who would have been so grateful for a meal, for whatever reason that same meal is lost on us and gratefulness to the Lord is nowhere to be found.

Most of us live in a world of consumerism when it comes to different forms of media. As we talked about last week, It is common place for most of us to spend hours in

front of screens each day. And that has become normal. Our bodies do not respond as they maybe once did to screen because its a part of our lives now.

We are Habituated to Sin

Maybe there are certain tendencies with your spouse and your kids in how you communicate that is really toxic but its become so normal it does not land on you as it should. That is habituation.

Or you used to be diligent to protect yourself from certain temptations but you are in a season of life where you cannot get ahead and those safeguards you used to have in place are not there anymore.

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In a world of habituation, Joel serves us as sort of a wake up call to feel again. To train and push our consciences and moral frameworks and our bodies, our whole selves, toward the living God. Be renewed in our awareness of the living God.

He says in [Joel 1:5](#) "Awake, you drunkards, and weep, and wail, all you drinkers of wine, because of the sweet wine, for it is cut off from your mouth."

Wake up to the temptations that used to grip you and cause you to run to the Lord. Wake up to the distractions that occupy your mind instead of the presence of God. Wake up to the injustices of our world and live a life of holiness as we wait for the Lord's return.

Wake up for God's Judgments are Near

I think it is really interesting how the prophets - and specifically Joel - understood how we should view brokenness in the world. It seems as if as the brokenness of the world became more apparent and visible, the more the prophets felt the day of the Lord near.

"Day of the Lord" - When the world would know and experience judgment from the Lord.

The brokenness of the world was the occasion to be reminded of what is certain: that the justice of God will rolled down like a river. And that day is soon.

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What is happening in Joel:

[Joel 1:4-10](#) "What the cutting locust left, the swarming locust has eaten. What the swarming locust left, the hopping locust has eaten, and what the hopping locust left, the destroying locust has eaten. Awake, you drunkards, and weep, and wail, all you drinkers of wine, because of the sweet wine, for it is cut off from your mouth. For a nation has come up against my land, powerful and beyond number; its teeth are lions' teeth, and it has the fangs of a lioness. It has laid waste my vine and splintered my fig tree; it has stripped off their bark and thrown it down; their branches are made white. Lament like a virgin wearing sackcloth for the bridegroom of her youth. The grain offering and the drink offering are cut off from the house of the Lord. The priests mourn, the ministers of the Lord. The fields are destroyed, the ground mourns, because the grain is destroyed, the wine dries up, the oil languishes."

- Famine
- Locusts
- The people cannot worship God. The OT tells us how they are to worship the Lord through sacrifice. And because there was no food available, they could not perform this worship.
- Joel is making the point that this is not the way things should be. And the day of the Lord is drawing near to reveal everyone's complicity in this horrible time for the nation of Israel.
- Joel does not see just a natural disaster happening in the world. He sees the judgment of God in the form of Locust coming against the nation of Israel because of their unfaithfulness.

Wake up for God's Grace is Nearer

[Joel 2:12](#) ""Yet even now," declares the Lord, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;"

So much theology and hope exists in the prepositions of Scripture "YET" - Nearer than His judgment, nearer than the day of the Lord where everything will be laid bare and every mouth stopped at the Holiness of our God, is His grace, mercy, patience, abounding love.

[Joel 2:14](#) and [Jonah 3:9](#) "Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish.""

These 2 passages say the same thing. But Jonah shows us that God comes through on who He says he is. When Jonah preached this message and the people repented, God relented from disaster. Revival came to the city of Nineveh, a city that no one would have expected would have experienced such grace from the Lord.

Therefore, Repent

Repentance: Returning to God

OT: Turn around

NT: Change your mind

Waking up to God resulting in a change in direction. Turning from self-sufficiency to Dependence. Turning from Numbness to Softness of heart. Turning from pride to humble mourning.

Repentance is "of the heart" before anything else.

"Rend your hearts and not your garments."

This hebrew word literally means tear. A way that people would express this negative emotion in the ancient world was through ripping their clothes. You may have seen a guy in the gym who gets so jacked up about working out that he rips his shirt a little right before he maxes out on bench press.

Joel is using that imagery for our hearts.

What he means: Deeply and almost violently moved in the bowels of your heart as you sense the urgency of eternity, the holiness of God, the wonderful scandal of the cross, the need to turn back to Him afresh.

One example from scripture is [John 11](#) when it says that Jesus Wept. That word for weep is literally getting at a grief of soul. A deep letting out of air. You ever been around someone who begins to violently breathe heavy when they are emotionally moved to tears. This is what is aimed at here.

This is not an outward show but an inward reality.

I think that *repentance* really sums up what Joel is saying here in this passage. Rending hearts, fasting, weeping, mourning is a response that demonstrates they are attuned to the things of God and are moving toward Him, not just in the status quo of their lives.

Fasting: abstaining from certain indulgences and practices as a way to awaken yourself to your dependence upon God.

In Joel, fasting right here is a way that they demonstrate their heart for repentance. Joel is saying that the way the world is going right now with all of its brokenness and injustice, fasting is appropriate.

Mccauley: "The purpose of fasting is to remind us that "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God" ([Matthew 4:4](#) NRSV). Fasting wasn't supposed to be something I achieved but a reminder of my need for God's provision."

As we move into Lent, our church is entering in to a fast together where we intentionally take a break from certain things as a way to increase our hunger for the Lord and grow in allowing the Lord to truly captivate our hearts and lives. To understand our dependence upon Him. As we all consider what this will look like for us, here are a few areas you may consider:

- Can I limit how much TV I watch?
- Can I put limits on when/how I use my phone?
- Is there a meal each week that I could fast so that I could spend that hour in prayer or moving toward others in love?
- Is there an indulgence that I struggle to go without? How might I push against this during Lent by asking God to help me?

Esau McAuley: It is not about finding the biggest fast possible. Its about examining the idols of our hearts and discerning how to tear them down. It is also about growing toward God in my life. If i decide to forgo coffee, the desire for coffee inevitably arises in my caffeine-deprived soul, so I use that opportunity to pray for patience or self-control.

Weeping: So in tune with the heart of God that you weep over the things He weeps for.

Draw near to Him and let him teach you his heart.

Jesus was so in tune with the heart of God that He does not look at the city of Jerusalem like other people. How many times did Peter come up over the hill to see Jerusalem in the distant and he be emotionally moved. This probably never happened. But Jesus was. He looked at Jerusalem and was aware and awake of reality. He was moved to tears because of the brokenness of the city and the rebellion of the people.

How do you think Jesus would respond to the brokenness we see in the world. The injustice, suffering, pain, rebellion, wars, that mark our world.

Or even worse, the distractedness of the average American. The Indulgence of the Average Westerner. The apathy that we live with.

I imagine a similar response.

Joel is saying that we should be aware and awake of the things we see everyday in the news and it should not be normal for us. It should break our hearts the state of the world. It should break our hearts the poverty, substance abuse, wars, broken families, orphans and foster children. We should weep over these things just as God's people should weep over the judgment they were experience through these locusts.

Joel is inviting us into feeling the way God feels.

Mourning: It is good that we enter into seasons like this where we become acutely aware to the brokenness of the world so that our hearts can be gripped by the realities of sin and death as God's heart is.

I dont think that Joel is wanting there to be

Joel meets us today as he challenged the people of God of his day, to wake up to what is true reality of our world. Of their rebellion. Of the way things really are. Wake up and turn to the Lord and experience more grace that you could ever imagine.

Conclusion: Gospel Promises

Our call to turn back to the Lord is nuanced a little compared to the hearers of [Joel 2](#) initially.

How does the revelation of Jesus change how we understand this passage?

- Fear not: [Joel 2:21](#): We receive the Fear not before our repentance.
- [Joel 2:21](#) ""Fear not, O land; be glad and rejoice, for the Lord has done great things!"
- We do not look for in anticipation of God's salvation. We look at Christ, rooted in history, alive at the right hand of God now, and hear the words from Joel and from the angel in [Luke 2](#) when he says "Fear not."
- We do not have to fear because the judgment of God toward us was exhausted in the person of Christ. We are welcomed into his presence.
- And this is not license to remain in rebellion and unrepentance. This is the ground for repentance: what God has done in Christ.

Lord's Supper

LITANY OF PENITENCE

Most holy and merciful Father: We confess to You and to one another, that we have sinned by our own fault in thought, word, and deed; by what we have done, and by what we have left undone.

We have not loved You with our whole heart, and mind, and strength. We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We have not forgiven others, as we have been forgiven.

Have mercy on us, Lord.

We have been deaf to Your call to serve, as Christ served us. We have not been true to the mind of Christ. We have grieved Your Holy Spirit.

Have mercy on us, Lord.

We confess to You, Lord, all our past unfaithfulness: the pride, hypocrisy, and impatience of our lives,

Our self-indulgent appetites and ways, and our exploitation of other people,
Our anger at our own frustration, and our envy of those more fortunate than ourselves,

We confess to You, Lord.

Our uncontrollable love of worldly goods and comforts, and our dishonesty in daily life and work,

Our negligence in prayer and worship, and our failure to commend the faith that is in us,

We confess to thee, Lord.

So, Lord we ask you:

Restore us. Favorably hear us, for your mercy is great.

Accomplish in us the work of your salvation,

That we may show forth your glory in the world.

We know that you desire not the death of sinners, but rather that they may turn and live. You pardon all those who truly repent, and with sincere hearts believe the Gospel. Therefore we ask that you grant us true repentance and Your Holy Spirit, that those things may please You which we do on this day, and that the rest of our life may be pure and holy, so that at the last we may come to Your eternal joy; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.