

SMALL GROUP GUIDE



WARNINGS FROM GOD **THE BOOK OF JOEL**

ACCEPT

JOEL: WARNINGS FROM GOD

"Warning: Dangerous Conditions Ahead," an orange sign flashed while my wife and I were traveling north on Interstate 81. "That's weird," we remarked. "We can handle it, though. Let's keep going." We had driven this highway thousands of times, so we weren't about to let a little snow cancel our holiday plans. We kept pressing north despite the steady snowfall gaining force. The blizzard made it look like our car was flying through space at warp speed. It was fun, but then it became frightening. We passed another sign with a shorter message. "Warning, warning," it flashed. "Wow, they're getting right to the point," I remarked.

We realized that we should have listened to the signs. The road eventually became invisible and nearly impassable. The black pavement became so white with snow that it looked like cake icing. Our car slipped and slid like a runaway bobsled. Foolishly we pressed on until we came across a flashing orange message: "road closed."

We slid down an offramp before pulling into the nearest motel. This place was far from the Ritz. It was more like the Fritz. It was our only option, though. While we miserably tossed and turned on a bed that felt like it was made of rocks, we did what anyone else would do. We complained. Why weren't the plows out? Why didn't they say the road was closed sooner? Why? Why? Why?

Don't Ignore the Signs.

Here's the harsh truth. Why were we in that mess? Because we ignored the signs. We had plenty of warnings before our drive became dangerous. There were clear messages strategically placed closer to bigger cities with better hotels. We just ignored the warning signs until it was too late. Our past stubbornness triggered our present situation.

Have you ever ignored a warning sign until it was too late? Maybe you kept driving past hazard warnings. Maybe you ignored red flags in a relationship. Maybe you kept assuming your check engine light would turn off. In all of these circumstances, if you ignore the warning, you are on your way to trouble.

The Book of Joel

The Old Testament book of Joel reads like a flashing warning sign on the side of the road. Every chapter contains a cautionary message from God. In this study, we are going to analyze Joel's letter to Israel in order to learn about life's warning signs.

Joel is one of the minor prophets in the Old Testament of the Bible. Why is he a "minor" prophet, though? Does that mean he's less important than other prophets? Not at all! We simply call him a minor prophet because his book is short. As a matter of fact, there are 12 minor prophets at the end of the Old Testament and you could read all twelve books in less than two hours. As you read any of the minor prophets, you quickly see that these short prophecies carry significant meanings.

At this point in history, Israel was suffering from ignoring God's will. They received hundreds of crystal clear warning signs. God sent prophets, leaders, kings, judges, and preachers to get their attention. God's people seemed to speed right past the signs with little regard for their messages. The prophet Joel writes to Israel to give them one final warning before things go from bad to worse.

READ: Joel 1:3-4

"Tell it to your children, and let your children tell it to their children, and their children to the next generation. What the locust swarm has left the great locusts have eaten."

The book of Joel had three important implications for the people of Israel that still ring true for us today.

When God wants your attention, He sends a warning.

The people of Judah desperately needed a warning sign. They were on the road to destruction, so God appointed Joel to wave them down. Israel had turned to false gods and forsaken the true God of their ancestors. Joel writes to wake them up and shake them out of their spiritual slumber.

A plague of locusts had swarmed over the land of Judah. It looked like black snow had fallen from the sky. Millions of buzzing bugs were slowly destroying lives. In those days, a severe locust plague was so much more than a bunch of bugs bothering you. When

lots of locusts came, they destroyed the crops, which made the animals malnourished, which meant that people had no food. A long-term locust infestation could lead to a severe famine. Joel wrote to warn Israel that it would get worse if they didn't turn back to God.

We are all familiar with warnings—flashing lights, storm sirens, emergency alerts, red flags at the beach, etc. They don't just exist for natural disasters, either. Warnings are also evident in personal disasters. Sirens blare when a sin becomes part of your daily life. Flares fire off when selfishness makes your friendships suffer. Red flags fly when your actions hurt people. Personal warnings reveal themselves in numerous ways. Friends may reach out. A sermon may sting. Guilt, regret, and burdens may overcome you. Whenever you feel a warning, take it seriously. It's God trying to get your attention.

When God sends you an alert, pay attention! It's there to help you.

God's warnings may seem harsh, but they're always helpful.

An infestation of locusts seems pretty brutal, right? However, that's far better than what could have happened. Israel's misguided ways could have led them straight into a national catastrophe, war, or uprising. God sent them a warning that may seem harsh, but it's helpful.

God-given warnings will occasionally light up on the dashboard of your life. Listen to them because they're designed to protect you. At the moment, God's correction may feel challenging, but he's warning you in order to win you back.

Learn to look for warnings and see how they help you. A disagreement may be what your relationship needs in order to last. Feeling sick when you wake up may be what you need in order to quit dangerous habits. A correction from your boss may protect you from losing your job. A broken relationship may be what you need in order to learn about a life of integrity. With God, every consequence is an opportunity to correct your course.

God warns us because he wants what's best for us, which brings us to our last lesson from the book of Joel.

READ: Joel 2:13a

"Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love."

God warns us because he loves us.

Have you ever seen a child do something dangerous? Whether they are sticking their hand in fire, playing with a wild animal, or running into traffic, what is their parents' first reaction? They snap into action. They raise their voice, snatch up their child, and give them an intense speech. These interactions are usually marked with fanfare. There are tears, screams, apologies, and remorse. Is the parent mean for doing this? Absolutely not. Their child needed stern intervention because they were in serious danger.

Like a parent snatching their child away from traffic, God was doing the same to Israel. This is really important to understand. God's corrections are rooted in God's compassion. He's a good parent, so he may punish you to prevent you from getting hurt. When warning his Hebrew friends, Joel reminded them that their God is compassionate, slow to anger, and abounding in love. These traits are the motivators behind God's message. He's not punishing His people; He's actively pursuing them.

Whenever your circumstances feel like a correction, remember these traits of God. He's slow to anger, so he's not going to harm you. He's gracious, so he will quickly forgive you. He abounds in love, so He goes to great lengths to pursue you. Despite your rebellion, your rejection, or your neglect, God wants the best for your life. When things feel tough, remind yourself that God's character drives His behavior. Thus, God's got your good in mind. He's not punishing you; He's protecting you. He's not attacking you; he's teaching you. He's not hurting you; He's helping you.

Joel wrote his little book of prophecies to alert a wayward nation. Next time you notice a divine alert, ask yourself this: "What is the meaning behind this warning?" When you realize the reason, take action. You experience safety and security when you listen to God's warnings.

TALK IT OUT

Go through these questions with your circle. Be honest. Be open. Talk through the tough stuff.

Ice Breaker: Go around your circle and share this week's highs and lows. What was the best part of your week and what was the lowest part of your week?

Q1: What's one thing that stood out to you from today's message?

Q2: How does God give us warning signs when we are headed in a dangerous direction?

Q3: What should we do when we recognize one of these warning signs?

Q4: If listening to God's warning signs would protect us, why do we so often ignore them?

Application: What's one thing you think God has been warning you about in your life? How can you acknowledge the warning sign and make a God-honoring decision?

READING PLAN

READ THESE PASSAGES IN ORDER EVERY DAY

Joel 1:1-12

Joel 1:13-20

Joel 2:1-11

Joel 2:12-17

Joel 2:18-32

Joel 3:1-16

Joel 3:17-21

Do the following with each passage:

ASK– God to connect with you here. In prayer, start by slowing down and inviting God to be present. Begin with focus and openness to see what God has for you today.

READ– the selected section of Scripture slowly. Take note of the words and phrases that intrigue you, reading them a second time if necessary.

REFLECT– on what grabs you. How does this passage personally relate to your own life and experiences?

RESPOND– to the Scripture. Speak directly to God about what's on your mind and heart. Look for ways to live out what you've uncovered.