

## **How to Use Sermon Resources**

- **READ AHEAD TOGETHER** - MCG's should use the Devotional at the end of this resource as a reading plan for the week leading up to your meeting.
- **SIT UNDER THE WORD** - This resource is filled with scripture references. Read them aloud, together before you answer any questions.
- **APPLY TRUTH** - The goal is deep discussion and application, not necessarily to complete this resource. Don't squash a good discussion. If you get into something important along the way that's fine.

## **Small Group Discussion Guide**

**Opening Prayer** [ 2 mins ]

**Use the Overview** [ 5 mins ]

- Cover any key points for people who missed parts or all of the sermon

**Scripture Deep Dive** [ 30-40 mins ]

- Opening Question
- Read the scripture for each question then ask the question. Some have multiple scriptures.

**Close in Prayer**

- In this extended prayer time, ask others to pray as they feel led, pray in a circle, pray over one another, pray to your left, or pray for someone specific. Whatever seems best.

**Split Time (if applicable)**

- Men with men, women with women
- Share in a circle. "What's one thing you want to celebrate? What do you need prayer and accountability for?"
- After everyone shares, pray in a circle for the person to your left/right.

# **SERMON OVERVIEW**

**Return:** Joel

**Sermon Summary:** This sermon explores the book of Joel, presenting a "bad news, worse news, good news" structure that mirrors the prophet's message. Joel addresses the devastating consequences of sin through the imagery of a locust plague, warns of coming judgment (the Day of the Lord), but ultimately offers hope through repentance and God's promise of restoration. The central message emphasizes that sin brings devastating separation from God, but genuine repentance—tearing our hearts, not just our clothes—restores our relationship with Him.

## **Key Points:**

- Sin brings devastation to our relationship with God, illustrated by the locust plague in Joel's time
- The Day of the Lord represents God's coming judgment that will be even worse than temporal consequences
- True repentance requires tearing our hearts, not just our clothes—an inward transformation, not merely outward religious actions
- God is gracious, compassionate, slow to anger, and abounding in faithful love
- Salvation comes through calling on the name of the Lord
- God promises three things through restored relationship: His protection, restoration of what sin has stolen, and His Spirit for mission
- The devastating effects of sin splatter onto others, affecting everyone our lives touch
- We cannot work our way back into right relationship with God through our own efforts

## **Scripture Reference:**

- Joel 1-3

## **Stories:**

- The youth camp illustration where 1,200 students consistently chose to hear bad news first, illustrating human preference for context
- The chicken pot pie versus pizza illustration demonstrating how good news is best when it invades bad places
- The sister's fake crying story showing the difference between outward displays and genuine heart change
- The Hulk Hogan WWF reference explaining the Jewish custom of tearing clothes in mourning
- Natural Geographic documentation of locust swarms, including the 1915 Israel swarm and 2004 Morocco swarm with 69 billion locusts
- Testimonies from Elizabeth's Walk program in South Africa showing God's restoration in lives devastated by addiction and prostitution
- Personal reflection on the 25-40 million Americans in church and the challenge to examine whether outward attendance matches inward heart transformation.

# Scripture Deep Dive

## Opening question

1. Think of a time when “bad news first” actually made the good news much better. What happened, and why did the bad situation make the good outcome feel so significant?

## Sin brings devastation to our relationship with God.

2. **Read Joel 1:2–4; Deuteronomy 28:38, 42** – After reading both passages, identify what specific connection Joel is making between the locust plague and the covenant warnings in Deuteronomy. How does this show that what looked like a “natural disaster” was actually spiritual discipline, and what does that imply about how seriously God takes sin?

3. **Read Joel 1:5, 11, 13–14; Romans 3:23; Isaiah 59:1–2** – Joel lists drunkards, farmers, and priests as all affected by the locusts. Compare that to Paul’s statement that “all have sinned” and Isaiah’s description of sin separating us from God. In what concrete ways can you see that sin’s “splatters” (consequences) rarely stay private but impact every layer of a community or family?

## Repentance restores our relationship with God.

4. **Read Joel 2:12–13; Psalm 51:16–17** – Joel contrasts “tearing your hearts, not your clothes.” David writes that God desires “a broken and contrite heart” more than sacrifices. What are at least two practical differences between outward religious actions (modern “torn clothes”) and true heart repentance, and how could a person test whether their repentance is real according to these verses?

5. **Joel 2:32; Romans 10:9–13** – Joel says “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved,” and Paul quotes this in Romans 10. Using both passages together, what does it actually \*mean\* to “call on the name of the Lord” (beyond just saying certain words), and how do confession, belief, and repentance all fit into that one phrase?

## God promises blessing through a restored relationship with Him.\*\*

6. **Read Joel 2:25–29; Joel 3:16; Acts 2:16–21** – Joel promises that God will “repay the years the locusts have eaten,” be a “refuge,” and “pour out” His Spirit. Peter says in Acts 2 that Joel’s prophecy is being fulfilled at Pentecost. Based on these passages, identify at least two kinds of “restoration” God brings (spiritual, emotional, relational, etc.) and explain how the gift of the Holy Spirit is central to that restoration for believers today.