

*“Return to Me
with all your heart”*

Joel 2:12

FLORIDA BAPTIST CONVENTION

Prayer and Spiritual Awakening

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God's RESTORATION Invitation

FLORIDA BAPTIST CONVENTION

Prayer and Spiritual Awakening



Joy—Joy marked the atmosphere during Creation, “when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy” (Job 38:7). Joy is the fruit of the Holy Spirit in a believer’s life (Galatians 5:22). It is one of the prominent marks of the Presence of God—“In Your presence is fullness of joy” (Psalm 16:11). When C.S. Lewis penned his testimony of faith in Christ, he titled it *Surprised by Joy*. In David’s prayer of repentance, he cried out, “cleanse me from my sin...make me to hear joy and gladness” and “restore to me the joy of Your salvation” (Psalm 51:3, 8, 12). God is willing and ready to forgive, cleanse, and **Bring Back the Joy**. He has issued **His Restoration Invitation**. Consider His call...!

The Beginning of Joy

In Genesis 2, the Lord brought Adam into the world to **enjoy** a relationship with Himself, to **express** throughout the Creation the realities of that relationship, to **exhibit** the power and purity of a loving servant's heart in reigning over that creation, and through it all to **exalt** the Name, the nature, and the character of the Lord in daily living. There is a sense of peace and joy in the Garden.

God created Adam, placed him in the Garden of Eden to begin this life, and instructed him with three simple guidelines—“cultivate” the Garden, giving oversight to all that would make it grow well, 2) “keep” or “guard” the Garden, protecting all who would live there, and 3) in the Garden choose good, never evil—do not eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

God had a delight in seeing the Garden prosper—with growth, all well-guarded, all good. That meant growth in the plants of the Garden, but that was always secondary to growth in the relationships He designed, first with Himself, and then with one another. He desired to see everything and everyone well taken care of. That meant “keeping” or “guarding,” protecting the plants, the animals, but most of all the people, Adam's family. All of that would be ultimately tied to Adam's choosing good every day. God warned him not to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, for in that day he would die—literally, “*dying you shall die*,” pointing to a process of decline and decay, ending in death.

Genesis 3 describes the process of temptation, sin, and broken relationships—fear, faulty cover-ups, the blame-game. The death process had begun. God came calling... seeking restoration. If God had wanted to bring immediate judgment, He could have, but He came in mercy ready to restore. Of course, that meant dealing honestly with disobedience, with sin in its every dimension. God measured out judgment for their sin—to the serpent, to Eve, and to Adam.



LIVING IN THE FEAR OF THE LORD

God's revelation begins in Genesis 1:1, “*In the beginning God...*” giving a clear foundation for life. **The** issue addressed from Genesis 1 to Revelation 22 is twofold: first, who is **God** and who God **is** and second, how one should **respond**. The right response is worship, love, and obedience. To worship rightly can be summed up by the phrase “**living in the fear of the LORD**” (Acts 9:31). It is living surrendered to Jesus as Lord. The opposite is the life of “self-will” where self is lord, self-fulfillment is the daily goal, and obedience to God's Word is considered irrelevant. What do the Scriptures say about living in the fear of the Lord? Consider these eight summary statements. **Living in the fear of the Lord leads to...**

1. Pleasing Him—“*The LORD takes pleasure in those who fear Him*” (Psalm 147:11; 2 Corinthians 5:9-15; 6:14-18 with 2 Corinthians 7:1; Philippians 2:12-13).
2. More intense knowledge of God. The intimate counsel of the Lord is for those who fear Him (Psalm 25:14; Proverbs 2:2-22 (note verse 5)).
3. Increased wisdom and understanding about God, self, and everyday life (Job 28:28; Psalm 111:10; Proverbs 1:7; 9:10; 15:33).
4. Avoiding sin, evil, and all ungodliness (Genesis 39:9; 42:18; Job 28:28; Exodus 20:20; Proverbs 5:21-23; 8:13; 16:6).
5. Enhanced life, contentment, and peace (Proverbs 10:27; 14:26-27; 19:23; 22:4).
6. Greater personal growth and enhanced relationships (Deuteronomy 5:29; 6:24; 31:9-13; Leviticus 19:14, 32; 25:17, 36; Proverbs 19:23; 22:4; 23:17).
7. More fruitful life and ministry for the local church (Acts 9:31).
8. Greater insight and skill for leaders to help people, to solve problems, and to build healthy relationships, homes, and communities (Exodus 18:21; Deuteronomy 1:17; 17:18-20; 2 Samuel 23:1-4; 2 Chronicles 19:4-11; Nehemiah 5:9, 15).

True worship means walking in the fear the Lord—we fear God only and always. It means hearing His Word, listening, giving full attention and giving all to Him, withholding nothing. It means obeying Him promptly and fully. **Jesus lived this way.** Today, He can express this Life through us as we **surrender** to Him. True worship is simply surrender to Him by faith. That choice can, in turn, lead others to take notice of Him... for the work of His grace in our lives... and for what He could do in their lives. They could give Him glory.

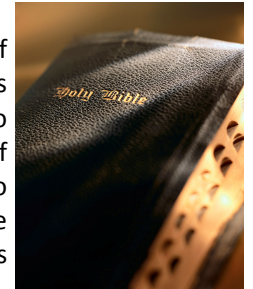
Are we true worshipers? Are **you** a true worshiper? What is **your Story**? What **Statements** would God make about **your** worship? Would He call you to repentance and restoration, to fresh surrender? What **Insights** are in **your** heart? Are you looking to the Lamb for all your sin? Are you trusting the Lord for your situation?

Three questions will help you evaluate if you are a true worshiper of the Living Lord. 1) Who do you **Fear**? Who is the **Lord** in your life? 2) Who do you **Hear**? Whose **Word** matters to you? What causes you to give? 3) Who do you **Cheer**? Whose **Glory** do you seek? Who do you respect and obey? If these three realities are yours or mine, then we will be praying people. Prayer is the voice of dependence on God. The one who fears Him, prays. The one who hears Him, prays. The one who cheers Him, prays. Fear Him. Hear His Word. Cheer Jesus and His will. Surrender, allowing Him to live and love through you, showing Him to others by your deeds, your words of witness, all in worship of Him.

In the **First Spiritual Awakening** recorded in **History** we find **three** characteristics... The text of Genesis 4:26, fresh with the thoughts of the birth and life of Seth and with the clear memory of faith-filled Abel, thoughtfully declares, ***“Then men began to call upon the Name of the LORD.”*** How did they live and walk? They walked in the **Fear of God**, focused on ***“the LORD.”*** They walked ready to give all based on what they heard of His Word. The **Word** was **heard** and responded to in prayer, ***“calling”*** on the Name of the Lord continually, a lifestyle of calling... like Abraham. They walked honoring and obeying God as they gave **Glory in their attention to *“the Name of the LORD”***—His Name, His fame, His honor, obeying Him by faith. They were true worshipers. **Are we? Are you?**

The Lord also gave a promise of such magnitude it would take centuries to unwrap and explain, enveloping the entire history of the world and presenting God’s own panoramic story of Redemption (Genesis 3:15). The Seed of the Woman would come, be born of a woman, and grow up to encounter the seed of the serpent. In the Battle, the Seed of the Woman would be mortally wounded in the heel, but would crush the head of the serpent, dealing the death blow to evil. Ultimately that Seed, whom we know as the Lord Jesus Christ would rise to rule in power and peace and banish all sin and evil.

Genesis presents this beginning of world history and in chapter 12 introduces God’s work with Abram. He called him to Himself and promised him a **land**, a **nation** of descendants to fill the land, and a **seed** who would come to **bless** all nations—that Seed we know as the Messiah, the Anointed One, Jesus Christ the Lord.



Abraham and Sarah gave birth to Isaac, the promised son who then gave birth to Jacob. Jacob whose name was changed to Israel, had twelve sons, the heads of the twelve tribes, the God-ordained network of the nation of Israel. To Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob the Lord repeated those three promises—a land, a nation, a Seed to bless all nations.

We see that being carried out in God’s providential work of bringing Jacob and his family into Egypt where they remained for 430 years. God raised up Moses to lead them out by a great deliverance, an exodus of national proportions. God brought them to Mount Sinai and there led them through eleven months of nation-training, a boot camp on how to be God’s nation to lead the other nations to know and worship Him. God’s goal: ***“that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the Lord is mighty, so that you may fear the LORD your God forever”*** (Joshua 4:24).

Five hundred years later, that same purpose was repeated by Solomon at the dedication of the magnificent Temple in Jerusalem (1 Kings 8:42-43). In 2 Kings 19:19, we hear the same purpose in Hezekiah's prayer and in Acts 15:14, we hear the same concerning God's work through the gospel in His *"taking from among the Gentiles a people for His name,"* a people redeemed from their sin, given new hearts, and assigned to live and speak as His messengers throughout the earth, bearing His Image wherever each would go. God's intention has always been **global** and **eternal**.

What was the heartbeat of God for His people? How were they to reflect their relationship to Him and His Image in them? How would they grow in that relationship and live that out in daily life—in the home, among the family, in the community, at work, in school, throughout the nation, and among the nations of the world?

Deuteronomy 6 gives us the clear pattern God designed. His people were to clearly hear Him, recognizing the LORD God as the only God, as the only "I AM," the one deserving of full allegiance, adoration, and worship. He called His people to a personal love relationship, to *"love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might"* (Deuteronomy 6:5). God is always concerned with the heart. We see that years later in His interaction with young King Solomon. The focus in that early interaction was a wise and discerning heart, literally *"a hearing heart"* (1 Kings 3:9-12). Later, in Proverbs 2:2, 10, and 3:5-6, Solomon penned a clear testimony of the importance of the heart.

Jesus showed us His concern about the heart in Matthew 15:8-20. Paul continually focused on the heart, especially in his appeal for people to believe and call on the Lord for salvation (Romans 10:8-13). God wants a loving, faithful people—hearts **loyal** to Him, not rituals nor life littered with a variety of "religious" components. Not religion, but relationship—All of one's life, heart and soul linked to the Lord in a personal faith relationship.

I AM

the one who would come like a lion to conquer the Gates, the Headquarters of **ALL** His enemies. He would rule over them. This One would also bless all the nations. His name is Jesus. who gave His life.

Jesus said in John 8:56, *"Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad."* He perceived Christ's day and rejoiced that he saw it that day and would see it and experience it one day. The word for rejoice is *agalliao*, which refers to exuberant joy, leaping, exulting, and skipping with excessive and ecstatic joy. Abraham, over one hundred years of age, had a time of rejoicing on Mount Moriah because of the revelation of God to him about the coming Lamb and Lion... and that he would one day participate in that Kingdom. We know this One as our Savior and our Sovereign, who deals with our sin and our situation, and we too will one day participate in that Kingdom in all its fullness.

The New Testament fills in many details about *"My day,"* His first coming (Matthew 13:16-17) plus the *"day of Christ"*—It is the day of His return (1 Corinthians 1:8; Philippians 1:6, 10), of full redemption (1 Corinthians 3:15; 5:5; 2 Timothy 1:12, 18), of rejoicing (1 Thessalonians 2:19-20), of reunion (2 Corinthians 1:14), and of reward (1 Corinthians 3:13; Philippians 2:16; 2 Timothy 4:8; Hebrews 11:13-16, 26). It will be a day of uninterrupted, undistracted worship as we are made like Him and see Him as He is (1 John 2:28; 3:1-3). The fear of Him will be full, giving to Him will be ongoing, obedience to Him will be undying. Glory will go to Him in greater measure.

Throughout the Scriptures, the words and the works of God show us Who He is. When the Scriptures speak of the **"glory of God,"** they refer to that which causes one to have and express a good opinion of another. When we see an athlete run well or accomplish a feat, we speak well of that one. So it is with God. As we hear Him speak, consider His wisdom, observe His might and power, see His acts of grace and mercy, we form a true opinion of Him which leads us to boast of Him; we give Him glory. We cheer Him, His will, and His ways. When others see us doing the good works He has given us to do they glorify the Father (Ephesians 2:10; Matthew 5:16).

Are we living this way today?

The Angel of the LORD gave a third characteristic of Abraham's actions, "... **you have obeyed My voice**" (Genesis 22:18). The **Third** factor—**Obey Promptly and Fully**. God commanded Abraham and he obeyed, trusting God in it all. He walked in the Fear of God. He Withheld Nothing, but gave all, Wholeheartedly and Completely, ... And... He Obeyed Promptly and Full All God said.

Sights and Insights

When Abraham revealed that he feared God, God stopped him from sacrificing Isaac. At that point, we see Abraham with perception and insight. He looked up and saw a ram for the current sacrifice and offered up that ram. He testified about a lamb. He perceived some of what God was up to. So, Abraham **named** that **place**. In Scripture, naming a place meant staking a claim. He staked a spiritual claim on **THAT** place, Mount Moriah. What was significant about that place? It was the location of the future threshing floor of Araunah or Ornan the Jebusite which David purchased. There he built an altar and worshiped (2 Samuel 24:18-25; 1 Chronicles 21:18-28). He also purchased the entire area, acknowledging it as "*the house of the LORD God*" and the place of the altar (1 Chronicles 21:25; 22:1). It would be the location of Solomon's Temple and later Herod's Temple where Jesus would give Himself in death... and rise.

The name of the Place, "*Jehovah Jireh*" or "*Yahweh Jireh*," is translated "*the LORD will provide*." Literally, it means "the Lord will be seen." The writer of Genesis further described this place stating, "*as it is said to this day, 'In the mount of the LORD it will be provided'*" or literally, "**he** will be **seen**." **Who** will be **seen**?—the **Lamb**. That is not all. God promised more. What did God promise him?

In Genesis 22:17, pointing again to Abraham's worship, the Angel of the LORD promised, "*Indeed I will greatly BLESS you, and I will greatly MULTIPLY your seed as the stars of the heavens, and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed [this is a masculine, singular Hebrew word—talking about a Man] shall possess the gate of their [literally, 'His'—again, masculine, singular word] enemies, and in your seed [Him] all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.*"

God gave Abraham perception about the lamb to come and a promise about the lion, the Ruler to come. He spoke to him about

How was that to be realized in each person? God designed multi-layered training opportunities. At the foundation was the whole person loving God with all one's heart—every day, all day, in every situation, in every relationship. To strengthen that foundation, God called each one to have "*these words*" on the heart. That refers to all the words Moses was speaking in Deuteronomy [see 1:1; 6:6] and by extension included all he wrote in the Law (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy). Today, we would include all the Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments (see Timothy's household habits in 2 Timothy 3:14-17).

Upon that foundation of love for the Lord and His Word in the heart, each was to build the family. "*These words... teach them diligently to your sons*" and daughters (Deuteronomy 6:6-7). The Hebrew language in verse 7 paints a picture of **engraving** those words on the hearts, minds, and lives of the children—something to be read for years to come. Plus, "*talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk [or drive] by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up*" (6:7). In other words, make the Word of God **understandable** and **memorable** in everyday life—**all** of everyday life. It should be a part of every education process in the home and community.

God emphasized making that Word seeable, hearable, knowable, even feel-able in everyday life. In Deuteronomy 6:8, when He speaks of binding them on the "*hand*" and the "*forehead*"—literally, "*between the eyes*," the idea is not focused on an outward wearing of Scripture, but an evident living out of that Scripture from the heart. Everything your hand touches, every deed your hand does, every bit of work you perform should have the heart and character of God in it—honesty, diligence, integrity, care, acting in the fear of the Lord. Your countenance should show your heart of love and loyalty to the Lord. Others should see and say—"**these** people are different, unique, caring, doing quality work. They work and act and speak in the light of the presence of the LORD their God. They take their worship into the work week. They want others to personally know their God"—that would be their testimony to others.

With hearts **loyal**, their testimony would be **local**. Deuteronomy 6:9 speaks of writing those words on the doorposts and gates, thus making them evident to those who lived in that home and to the neighbors all around. City or village gates referred to the place where business matters occurred—for example, as Boaz dealing with the legal matters of property and the legal issues of marriage in Ruth 4:1-12 or the mention of matters at the gate in Proverbs 31:23. The Word of God is to be evident in every business matter, every purchase, every legal transaction in a community. Week after week, make your testimony of loving the Lord and obeying His Word **local** where you live.

To help with that, God arranged for the people to meet together as a community every Sabbath, a day of “*complete rest*,” undistracted by the labor of the past six days (and un-preoccupied with the next six) so they could focus attention on worshipping the Lord and hearing His Word. He called them to a “*holy convocation*” or “*holy assembly*,” coming together as a community of believers (Leviticus 23:3). The love of God and the Word of God should mark them **daily—personally** and as a **family**. In the work week, they would reveal their hearts in the **community** and in the **weekly** gatherings express their worship more fully. There’s more.

God designed for them to come together **nationally**—all the nation journeying to meet the Lord at His chosen place [ultimately the Temple in Jerusalem]. That occurred during **three seasonal** celebrations centered around the Seven Feasts (Leviticus 23:4-44; Deuteronomy 16:1-17). **First**, in the Spring (March/April), during an eight-day period (Nisan 14-21) they celebrated three Feasts—Passover, Unleavened Bread, and First Fruits. **Second**, fifty days after First Fruits they came together again around the Feast of Pentecost (late May, early June).

The **third** season occurred after the harvests of the Summer as they came together in the Fall around the Feast of Tabernacles in the seventh month of the religious calendar (Tishri—our September). Three Feasts occurred that month—1) the Feast of Trumpets on the first, announcing the beginning of the seventh month (the Sabbath month in the religious calendar) and the first

When we look at the whole of this series of events, we find that Abraham listened very carefully to the details the Lord gave. He listened with a trusting heart. When God called, he answered. God spoke specifically. Note the detailed description of who, Isaac—“*take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac*” He told him where, “*the land of Moriah*”—what, “*offer him*”—and promised him specific direction as he traveled... Go to “*one of the mountains of which I will tell you.*” You go and I will show you. Trust Me and I will give you what you need to know when you need to know it. Abraham listened carefully, paying attention to the details.

In worship, the **Word is heard** with the intention to obey. Abraham arose early in the morning, obedient, ready to give all. God saw that he withheld nothing (22:12). This is not giving **away**, but giving **to**—not giving away his son, but giving his son to the Lord, fully trusting Him (Hebrews 11:17-19). His relationship with the Lord is the focus. A worshiper is not a withholder, but a giver, a releaser. A worshiper is not a pre-occupied talker, but a loving, trusting, listener. A worshiper is not focused on “my agenda,” but on surrender to the Lord and His will.

Often a contrast helps us see things better, like brilliant clear diamonds on black velvet. There is a contrast of worshipers in the New Testament found in Mark 14 and John 12. Mary took “*very costly perfume of pure nard*,” poured the oil on Jesus’ head, and kneeling at Jesus’ feet, “*anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair*” (John 12:3). That act of worship filled the house with the aroma of the perfume... **and** the aroma of her surrendered, worshipping heart. She was a living example of one practicing the fear of the Lord, withholding nothing, giving all, offering a gift of at least a year’s wage, a deed remembered forever (Mark 14:3-9).

In contrast, Judas complained about this giving, about this worship. He showed no fear of God in his heart, no giving heart. Judas was not a true worshiper, but a whiner. We whine about what God wants, because we think He’s not worth it (like Judas thought about Jesus). True worship says He’s worth giving all, total release. Judas worshiped himself, his pilfering treasures, his agenda. He was a selfish talker, not a loving listener, a taker, not a giver, thinking of greedy self-gain, not giving for God’s gain (Matthew 26:14-16).

What did the Lord **see** in what Abraham **did** that made Him **know**? “*Now I know that you fear God*” (22:12). The **first** mark of true worship—**one fears God only and always**. One walks in the fear of the Lord, in the reverence and respect of God. It is also the fear of missing out on life with God, with God directing it, missing out on life as God can give it. Abraham feared God and feared missing out on all God had for him. He had seen what he could do on his own, apart from God. He had experienced the fruits of some foolish choices and wanted none of that. He walked fearing God.

The Fear of the Lord is...

What would the fear of the Lord look like today? Here is one definition. **The Fear of the Lord** is making decisions knowing that the God of the Bible as revealed in Jesus Christ loves me with pure, holy, unselfish love, and in His holy love is weighing all my motives, intentions, thoughts, choices, and actions AND that I will answer to Him; I will give an account.

The Fear of the Lord is not merely knowledge-based or emotion-based. It is **action** based or action proven. What you **DO** shows if you have the genuine article. Certainly, it is knowing ... It is 1) Knowing Who is **GOD**, His place, His position, His power. That eliminates all the competition, all the stand-ins and stunt actors. 2) It is also knowing Who God **IS**—What He is like, His character, nature, and ways. 3) It is choosing to **Follow** that God with reverence and fear.

What does this look like today, for the Christian? Answer these questions: What or who do you treat as priority? What or who is your first consideration in an action? Who do you call first before a final decision is made? Fearing the Lord means your First Decision is to call on, look to, ask God. He is **LORD**. You **Surrender, Yield** to Him, **Bow** to His Wishes, His Way. You Fear Him.

The **Second** factor of true worship is also found in Genesis 22:12. God said, “*now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me.*” True worship **withholds nothing, but gives all wholeheartedly and fully** based on the Word of God heard. How was this seen in Abraham’s life?

month of the civil calendar (*Rosh Hoshanna*), 2) the Day of Atonement on the tenth, and 3) the Feast of Tabernacles, Tishri 15-22. Three **seasons** of Feasts together as a **nation** in one location—not only a **local** testimony but also a visible **national** testimony.

Each Feast was designed to be a **heart** celebration—to focus attention on the Lord, His Word, and their walk with Him. That included thanksgiving for His provision in the various **harvests**, along with celebrating His work in their **history**, and carrying out His call to them to be a **holy** nation set apart exclusively to **Him** as their God. Everything was designed to build the relationship, to bless the heart, the home, and the nation, and through Israel to bless the nations of the world as they saw what it meant to know and worship the Living God, something other nations did not know. God intended Israel to have a testimony and impact that would be **global** and **eternal**.

One more element God included in His design to build up His people. Within those Feasts God designed **Seven Special Sabbaths** for everyone to come together to meet with Him as a **nation**. Those were the first and last days of Unleavened Bread (first season). Then, the first day of the Feast of Pentecost (second season). In the third season, the Special Sabbaths were the Day of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and the first and final days of the Feast of Tabernacles—Seven Special Sabbaths—national **gatherings** to worship the Lord in thanksgiving, praise, and prayer, with great joy. What goal did God have in mind? Coming together centered around Him, they would be “*altogether joyful*” (Deuteronomy 16:15). God designed for His people to be marked by joy and to bring the nations into a joyful relationship with God!

How did Israel do in following the Lord in this design? They were up and down, off and on, mostly off in their total history and the joy was missing. God revealed His heart in those times as well. He loved Israel. He honored His covenant relationship with them, even though they often did not honor their part. God sent prophets to call them back to Himself, to their covenant relationship. He also sent chastening times which included certain calamities (as in the Wilderness days from Egypt to Canaan), foreign oppressors (as in the times of the Judges), and certain plagues (as in the days of the

prophet Joel). The call of God through Joel gives us a clear picture of **God's Restoration Invitation**, a call to come back to Him and His Word—to **Bring Back the Joy**. It is worthwhile to review His work in those days to understand His heart and to make applications for today, for the local church, for communities, even for nations to turn from their injustices and wrongs to the Living God and His Word.

God's Restoration Invitation...

We can receive many kinds of invitations—Wedding Invitations, Birthday Party Invitations, Dinner Invitations, all kinds of invitations. The most significant invitation is the call to place faith in Jesus Christ for salvation, to receive Him as Lord and Savior. We find that in several places including Matthew 11:28-30; John 1:12; 3:14-17; 7:37-39; 20:30-31; Acts 2:37-41; 4:10-12; 10:34-43; 16:30-34; 26:18; and Romans 10:9-13.

In the Old Testament, we find several **REGULAR INVITATIONS** in which the Lord **invited** His people to meet with Him on a regular basis. As we have seen there were **three levels** of meeting.

Joyful Relationships



First, in the **HOME everyday**—the rise up, walk about, sit down, finish the day meetings in the family... talking about Him and to Him in prayer. Listening to His Word. Walking in a joyful relationship.

Second, in the **COMMUNITY every week**—the Sabbath gatherings together with other families, neighbors together to hear the Word, talk to Him in prayer, and encourage one another in the walk with Him—joyful together.

Third, in the **NATION three times a year—THREE SEASONS** of Spiritual Refreshment for all the families to join in—all for Joy!

and took himself, Isaac, two servants, the wood and the fire. They journeyed three days and came to Mount Moriah (the location of modern day Jerusalem).

There Abraham testified to the two servants, *“we will worship”* and return (22:5). Abraham and Isaac walked up the mountain with the wood, the fire, and Isaac as the sacrifice. As they walked, Isaac asked about the lamb for a sacrifice. Abraham confidently assured him that God would provide Himself a lamb. On Mount Moriah, Abraham prepared the altar, arranged the wood, bound Isaac, but before the knife could strike—the Angel of the LORD stopped Abraham. He had seen his heart of worship. In that moment, the Lord revealed what He saw and described what that worship looked like to Him.

Note it is what Abraham **did**, not only what Abraham said or felt or thought or sang. Worship is action. Singing can be action, but worship is more. In our modern context it is important to understand this truth: Worship is not about the songs we sing. It is about the heart that sings the songs. It is not a matter of the styles or sounds or the loudness or mellowness of the songs one sings. It is the heart God is looking at. God saw Abraham's heart in Abraham's actions.

Since Genesis 22:1 says that *“God tested Abraham,”* it is important to make the faith connection here. James 2:17-24 testifies that Abraham's actions showed true faith. James is not saying that works merit any favor with God. He is saying that genuine *“faith”* works and that kind of *“works”* shows genuine faith is present before the works begin. Works follow real faith, out of a heart of faith.

God's Statements

What did that true worship, that genuine faith look like? God used **three** descriptive **statements** to describe what Abraham **did**. When He stopped Abraham from sacrificing Isaac, He said, *“now I know”* (22:12). Know what? *“Know”* is a translation of the Hebrew word *yada* which is the word for experiential or Interactive knowledge. It was used of a hunter seeking a deer, of a sailor piloting a boat, or of a musician playing an instrument—all examples of hands on, experiential, interactive knowledge.

ARE WE TRUE WORSHIPERS?

A right heart is a worshipping heart. The Father is looking for True Worshipers who worship Him in spirit and truth (John 4:23). What does that look like? Prayer would certainly be a part of that. Prayer is the voice of true worship and worship is the heart of true prayer. The revelation of God is the foundation of worship. Prayer is the response... in yielding and surrender, in praise and thanks, in confession and repentance, in giving and blessing, in interceding for others, in petitioning for our own needs. Prayer is the expression of faith as that faith is tested. When faith is tested, many give in to evil—they faint rather than pray (Luke 18:1-8). Prayer expresses the heart, often not knowing how to pray as we ought (Romans 8:26). It is often simply the heart lifted, brought near to the heart of God, though that need is not fully understood. Prayer entrusts to God the heart's willingness to do His will, whatever that may be.

If prayer is the voice of true worship, what is true worship? What does it look like? Does it refer to singing? Sometimes. Could it be silent? Of course. There are times when there are no words, only wonder, amazement, surrender afresh. Sometimes it is a simple obedient action, without fanfare or flash, with no one looking, except God. It includes giving whatever God has asked. Many times it is unseen, offering praise or a hurt, or some burden.

Abraham's Story

When we turn to the Scriptures, we find an example of worship in Genesis 22. It is the first time the word "*worship*" is mentioned in the Scriptures, the Hebrew word *shachah*, meaning to bow down, to prostrate oneself, showing homage to royalty. The story is quite familiar to many, but some have yet to discover the riches of this God-encounter in the lives of Abraham and Isaac. The incident is the call of God to Abraham to take Isaac, the son he loved and travel to Mount Moriah, to the place "*of which I will tell you*"—travel trusting Me—and offer him there in worship.

This time of worship began with God calling out to Abraham. God had in mind a test of Abraham's faith. This was an opportunity for Abraham to trust God. He arose the next morning

GOD GETS OUR ATTENTION TO FOCUS OUR ATTENTION SO THAT WE PAY ATTENTION

During those Three Seasons there were **Seven Special Gatherings** for worship, prayer, and hearing the Word together—**REGULAR Connection Points** for the people of God in their Covenant Relationship with the Lord, like a marriage relationship.

All married couples have regular connection points such as Birthdays, Anniversaries, Valentine's Day, and perhaps another one or two special days—every year, regular times, for keeping up communication, growing the relationship at special seasons, celebrating with joy. We also have some "**we gotta talk**" times... to deal with certain issues like Budget or Health issues or Family issues or whatever may be a pressing burden—to bring back the joy.

God does the same. He called His people to **regular** meetings, but He also called them to **special meetings** to take care of a major need in the **relationship**... These are invitations He gives that deal with our need for a return to Him, for repentance over foolish, sinful choices. These are not the **Regular Invitations**. These are **RESTORATION INVITATIONS**, invitations in which He gives clear **cautions and** holds out a hand of **mercy**. **How** does He issue those invitations?

When God calls His people to **Restoration**, He **Gets our Attention** so that we **Focus our Attention** on Him and **Pay Attention** to what He is saying. We find an example of this in the book of Joel.

First, God **Got their Attention** by **picturing** the destructiveness and decline caused by sin. The nation had two pictures. First, they experienced an intense drought and raging fires (Joel 1:20). Secondly, along with the drought came a massive locust plague, four kinds of locusts coming in wave after wave over the hills and valleys (1:4, 6-7; 2:3-11). The results—the crops and the economy were devastated. There were at least four levels of devastation.

1) Many of the **luxuries** were taken. For example, the “party” crowd and drunkards had no more wine to drink (1:5-7).

2) **Ministries** were hampered. The **offerings** for the Temple dried up. No grain or oil for the daily offerings. Ministry stopped or was severely hindered—a time of mourning for the priests, Levites, and people (1:9-10, 13).

3) The **necessities** also dried up—oil, wheat, barley, figs, pomegranates, all kinds of food sources gone or extremely scarce for people and livestock (1:10-12, 17-20).

4) Their **testimonies** shriveled. Two kinds of testimonies dried up. **First**, the general atmosphere of the nation testified of the calamity and its effects on the hearts of all. Joel 1:12 states “*rejoicing dries up.*” Think of what Joel said and of the full weight of all that had occurred—“**surely joy has withered away from the sons of men**” (1:12). Everyone was hurting.

Second, the testimonies of the priests and people of God sounded mournful. “*Gladness and joy*” were cut off “*from the house of our God*” (1:16). Joel called the people of God to focused prayer... “*Spare Your people, O Lord...Why should they say among the people [the nations], ‘Where is their God?’*” They could also ask, “Where is their joy?” Israel experienced a measure of remedial judgment, not final judgment. God was not finished with His people.

This was serious. Israel faced the devastation of their testimony—the nations could declare “*Where is their God?*” (2:17). Their lives looked no different than the nations who did not know the true and living God. It looked as if their God was no different than any of the gods of the nations. **Today**, sadly, it could be said of many churches or Christians, “their joy has withered away” and “where is

NOTE: There is no special, specific, or required “order” for a time of prayer in Scripture. This Guideline is simply an example, one way you could lead your congregation. In Scripture, we find many examples of meeting with Him both in individual prayer times and in corporate prayer times. The key point is meeting with the Lord, ready to walk with Him in whatever He wills.

Worship in Song—You may want to sing a final song to conclude the event or simply dismiss quietly.

Bringing Back the Joy

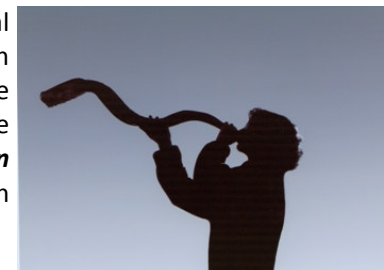


RESOURCES FOR SOLEMN ASSEMBLIES

Several items can be downloaded at www.flbaptist.org/SpiritualAwakening or www.flbaptist.org/Prayer.

An excellent preparation tool is “**Consecrate the People**,” an eight-day preparation guide by Claude King, available through Lifeway. Go to www.lifeway.com and type **Consecrate the People** in the Search box to see or order available resources.

Keeney Dickenson has several resources on Solemn Assemblies that are available at www.prayeridigm.com. The book **Blow the Trumpet in Zion** focuses on Solemn Assemblies.



Worship in Song—Sing songs in line with doing the Will of God, being involved in the Mission of His heart.

R—Restoration. With a restored heart, sensitive to the voice of the Spirit, **Receive** His assignments, His burdens. **Be Ready** to Obey all God says. Often in a time of Solemn Assembly in Scripture, the promise of God was to **Restoration**. He desired to do a new work with a people newly forgiven and cleansed—vessels now ready to do His will. Is there a work of Restoration He has begun in this Time of Solemn Assembly?

Seek God for what He wants you to do as you go from this assembly. Perhaps it is to make something right with another, talk to someone who needs to know the Lord Jesus or who needs to hear the truth for their eternal benefit. Perhaps it is some involvement in another's life, to help or heal in some way. Pray, asking God to show you at least one thing that you need to do in obeying Him. The focus is a **Restored, Receptive, Ready Heart**.

Prayer Time—Call all to pray individually, in small groups, or as an entire congregation, focusing specifically on **doing** what God has put on **each** heart and/or on what God is putting on the heart of the church **collectively**.

Worship in Song—[for example, “Take My Life”]

T—Take Home what God has said to be and to do. Go from here with the readiness to obey knowing that it stays with you 24/7. It starts in the heart, then at home, and goes out from there. The focus is an **Obedient, Joyful Heart**.

Prayer Time—This may simply be a time of closing prayer followed by a time of singing. This depends on the need of **your** church and the leading of the Holy Spirit.

their God? Where is the reality of Jesus in the lives of individual Christians? Where is God at work in this or that congregation? Where is the real kind of joy?”

What about the calamities of today? **What might God be saying today?** Is He getting someone's attention? Anyone's attention? After God got the attention of His people, then He **Focused their Attention** on how He saw things and **presented** the solution. He often did that through various **priests** like Jehoiada in the days of Joash (2 Chronicles 23-24:1-14), through **kings**, like Hezekiah or Josiah (2 Chronicles 29-32; 34-35), through certain **faithful followers** in the land, and through **prophets** like Isaiah, Jeremiah, or **Joel**.

God gave Joel insight. Joel took that insight and pointed at what was going on **externally** and applied it to what was going on **internally**, in the hearts of the people, in the heart of the nation. Joel began by focusing the people on the magnitude of the situation,

“Hear this, O elders, and listen, all inhabitants of the land. Has anything like this happened in your days or in your fathers' days? Tell your sons about it, and let your sons tell their sons, and their sons the next generation” (Joel 1:2-3). This is so significant that everyone—elders, leaders, and all the inhabitants, anyone living in the land—must wake up. This will be told to children, grandchildren, great grandchildren. This is not only going to be told to future generations for decades, it is a series of events meant to speak to the **current** generation. **Wake up! Look up!** Gather all the people—the leaders, the children and infants, the bridegroom and bride, the priests... everyone. Why? To cry out to the Lord, to turn back to the Lord *“with all your heart”* (Joel 2:12).

The issue was the **heart**, their relationship with the Lord. God's call to *“rend your hearts and not your garments”* points to a heart in need of openness to God. It is a picture of one insensitive to God and His will. Lacking tender hearts, so many revealed calloused hearts hardened by stubbornness, self-will, and the determination to get one's own way. Rather than being open and surrendered to God's will, many were proud, self-exalting, and refusing to honor the

name of the Lord. Many focused on seeking self-pleasure rather than obeying God's Word and doing His will. Too many did not really pray. Why would they? They were independent and self-dependent, not God-dependent as long as they could get by that way.

Joel also used the current situation and the needy hearts of the day to point to a future Day of the Lord when the judgment of God would be much more severe. The devastation of the land and the economy, all that was impacted in that day pointed to a yet future day when the Lord would deal in greater judgment (Joel 2:30-32; 3:1-16, 19, 21).

Joel's prophecy is not without **hope**. God gets their attention, to focus their attention, so that they will pay attention. He has a word of healing, a word of promised **restoration**—and **joy**.

After He **got** their attention and **focused** their attention, it was time to **Pay Attention**—He showed them **their Part** and **His Part**. First, **the Call to God's Men**—He started with the **spiritual leaders** calling them to mourn and call for a fast. "*Blow the trumpet,*" the *shofar* or ram's horn that warned of danger or called for an assembly (2:1). Second, we read of **the Call to God's People—Gather the leaders and the people** for a sacred assembly to "*cry out to the LORD*" (1:13-14).

Third, **the Cure for the Heart**—The focus was their relationship with the Lord, specifically, the condition and direction of their hearts. "*Turn to Me with all your heart... rend your heart... return to the LORD your God*" (2:12-13). **Repent—Believe—Obey**

Why? Because of their situation? Of course, but there was an even more significant reason. God was not telling them this to crush them. He wanted to **bless** them. He **gets** our attention and **focuses** our attention so that we will **pay** attention and receive His Word.

He is as merciful as He can be and as forceful as He needs to be so that we can hear clearly and reconnect with His heart's desires for us. After calling them to "*return*" in Joel 1:13, He states, "***for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness; and***

A—Ask. With a cleansed heart, we can more clearly hear the Lord and pray the things He wants. **Ask** the Lord for the things He has burdened you about, for the people He has placed on your heart, for the churches and communities He has brought to mind. He can give us His "burdens" to lift before Him in His strength and with His wisdom. The focus is praying with a **Burdened Heart**.

Prayer Time—With hearts focused on the Lord, His Word, and His Will AND with hearts cleansed before Him, one can now offer the burdens that have come from His Holy Spirit... You may want to have the congregation gather in small groups of 4 or 5 each—turn around in the pews or move chairs as you are able. This allows for more people to pray at the same time. The 'holy hum' of an entire congregation lifting heart burdens before the Lord can be a symphony of the Holy Spirit.

Pray for... (One option is to spend a season of prayer focusing on **each** of these areas, spending as long as needed according to the burden of the Spirit of God in these areas. Some of these areas can be further divided, giving more time to specific burdens within each of these areas of need. Another option is to group some of these together. Follow His leading.)

- ◇ Your families
- ◇ Lost friends, family members, neighbors, work associates, school mates
- ◇ Church leaders, laborers, those in great need in the local church
- ◇ Community, County, State
- ◇ The Nation and the need for Spiritual Awakening
- ◇ The Kingdom of God worldwide, Missions and your part in that
- ◇ Particular burdens your church or community is dealing with

H—Hear God and **His Heart**. Hear His Word. Spend **Time in the Scriptures**. Pray, asking God to speak to your heart. Use Scriptures that focus attention on His call to love and obey Him, on His mission to connect people in a faith relationship to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Be ready to repent of anything that is not His will (see for example, Joel 1-2). The focus is **His Heart**.

Prayer Time—This first season of prayer could be simply inviting the Lord to speak to each heart and to speak to the church corporately. The pastor and a few other leaders could lead this time and prepare the congregation for the next season of prayer. Or, this could be a time for prayer individually or in small groups.

Worship in Song—[Focus on openness to God speaking. “Open our eyes and ears to You, Lord”—You may want to sing a hymn or chorus such as “Take Time to Be Holy” or “Change My Heart, O God”]

E—Empty of Sin and Self-will. Eager to Obey what He says. Have each person in the congregation simply draw an imaginary circle around himself or herself... where each is seated. In that circle are that person and the Lord. Talk to Him. **Pray, asking God to show you any unconfessed, undealt with sin**. Confess to Him. Agree to do what He says. Thank Him for forgiveness and cleansing. The focus is a **Clean Heart**.

Prayer Time—This second season of prayer could be individual, with each person bowed focusing on what God is saying to each heart. Each needs to make sure his or her heart is right with the Lord.

NOTE: You may want to combine these first two segments, hearing God’s heart and then responding by emptying the heart of sin and self-will. There may be need for someone to get things right with another. That time of cleansing can then lead into a wonderful time of prayer, seeking the Lord for His will in many lives and situations.

Worship in Song—[for example, “I Surrender All”].

He relents from doing harm.” He was poised to “leave a blessing behind Him” (1:14).

Fourth, God gives a word of **Comfort for any Heart, any Home, as well as for the Nation**—He promised great blessing if they would respond to His invitation. He spoke of blessing them **nationally—materially** and **physically** through the crops and the economy restored. That included relieving them of the plague, even of restoring “the years that the... locust has eaten” (2:25).

Better than that, He would restore them **personally** and **spiritually**—“you shall eat in plenty and be satisfied [not complaining], and praise the name of the LORD your God, who has dealt wondrously with you,” no longer walking in shame (2:26). In other words, their fellowship with the Lord would be restored. They would have forgiven hearts filled with praise and thanksgiving. Peace and confidence and joy rather than shame and fear and intimidation would mark their days.

God promised the clear evidence of His presence among His people (Joel 2:27). That was a promise for Joel’s day as well as a promise for an even greater manifestation of His presence in the future. **The best of His blessings is Himself**—His manifest presence, where there is “fullness of joy” (Psalm 16:11). A hymn of the late 1800s, “**Himself**,” by A.B. Simpson captures the heart-cry for God Himself.

Once it was the blessing, Now it is the Lord;
Once it was the feeling, Now it is His Word.
Once His gifts I wanted, Now the Giver own;
Once I sought for healing, Now Himself alone.

Once ’twas painful trying, Now ’tis perfect trust;
Once a half salvation, Now the uttermost.
Once ’twas ceaseless holding, Now He holds me fast;
Once ’twas constant drifting, Now my anchor’s cast.

Once 'twas busy planning, Now 'tis trustful prayer;
Once 'twas anxious caring, Now He has the care.
Once 'twas what I wanted, Now what Jesus says;
Once 'twas constant asking, Now 'tis ceaseless praise.

Once it was my working, His it hence shall be;
Once I tried to use Him, Now He uses me.
Once the power I wanted, Now the Mighty One;
Once for self I labored, Now for Him alone.

Once I hoped in Jesus, Now I know He's mine;
Once my lamps were dying, Now they brightly shine.
Once for death I waited, Now His coming hail;
And my hopes are anchored, Safe within the veil.

CHORUS:

All in all forever, Only Christ I'll sing;
Everything is in Christ, And Christ is everything.

Source: <http://www.hymnal.net/hymn.php/h/513#ixzz1X2RkzLDa>

*All in all forever
Only Christ I'll Sing
Everything is in Christ
And Christ is everything.*



Guidelines for a Solemn Assembly

A Solemn Assembly is also known as a Sacred Assembly or a Holy Convocation—a **time set apart** as holy to the Lord to come together having been called together to seek the Lord and His will. In the Scriptures, such an assembly always dealt with the heart relationship between God and His people as well as the heart relationships with others. It was a time to hear from God and to cry out to God seeking His will. It was a time of evaluation of one's relationship with the Lord. It was also a time for confession and repentance of sin, for forgiveness, cleansing, restoration, fresh surrender to His will, and a return of joy

Here is one example of how this meeting time could take place.

Prepare: For a time before—perhaps a week or two weeks, perhaps 21 days or 40 days—prepare by focusing on one's personal walk with the Lord. Call the people to specific times of prayer and seeking the Lord personally. Perhaps give them some Scriptures to read and ponder in preparation for the time together.

HIS H.E.A.R.T.

Prayer by design: This is not a haphazard time. One way to order this meeting time is to focus on five areas using the simple acrostic **H.E.A.R.T.** These five areas help us focus on our relationship with God and our walk with Him. Each part may be preceded by a time of **Worship in Song**, followed by a brief **Word of Scripture**, then a **Time of Prayer** which may be short or long, extended as needed.

Worship in Song [e.g., Sing Hymns or Praise songs/choruses. The important factor is focusing on the Lord, His majesty, His holiness, His love, His will for His church and for each believer. Consider singing more **to** the Lord than only **about** the Lord.]

Jesus Himself had given them (Matthew 28:18-20; Luke 24:45-49; Acts 1:8). Acts 12:1-19 records the fervent prayers of the church meeting in homes throughout Jerusalem after the arrest of Peter. God answered with a miraculous release. In Acts 13:3, we find the church in Antioch gathering together in prayer and fasting as they sent Barnabas and Saul on their first mission journey.

Corporately, concerning restoration, the regular gathering of believers for worship, for teaching, for mutual encouragement, and to hear the Word should serve as an ongoing guard against error, against sinful behavior, and against broken relationships. The periodic gathering for the Lord's Supper is also a time for carefully examining oneself, checking to see if there is a heart problem and making right any error or offense (see 1 Corinthians 11:27-34).

In Revelation 2 and 3, Jesus commended believers in several local churches **and** addressed their sins, calling them to repent and return to His Word and to right actions. To each church, He called them to *"hear what the Spirit says to the churches"* (Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). That message and their actions would have involved coming together to hear, to pray, to repent, and to be restored.

How can a church come together today—in the twenty first century to answer God's **Restoration Invitation**? To put it simply, it means gathering, hearing the Word of God, calling out to the Lord in repentance over sin and error, and seeking Him in order to do His will with His empowering. This is a mark of being ever dependent on Him. It is seeking the leadership of His Holy Spirit for the life and ministry of the local church and of the churches working together. **That** a local church or churches should do this periodically is almost a certainty. **How** and **when** and for **how long a time** a local church gathers for prayer and seeking the Lord depends on the leadership of the Holy Spirit for that local congregation. With that in mind, here is a sample guideline for gathering together. It is one way to respond to **God's Restoration Invitation—for Bringing Back the Joy!**

These days of devastation came to Israel around **800 BC** when they were marked by military might, economic growth, along with moral and spiritual decline. God led Joel to prophesy, to proclaim a **Restoration Invitation**. The Lord dealt severely with His people to **get** their attention, to **focus** their attention, so they would **pay** attention—so they would come back to a right walk with Him, to position themselves to enjoy this relationship—to **bring back the joy** and to bring **others** to know that joy.

That is not all. While this prophecy applied to Israel in 800 BC, God also had more in mind. God worked in their midst, but He did not stop with that generation.

Bringing Back the Joy

Fast Forward to around **30 AD**. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit descended on the waiting 120 disciples, filling them with Himself, with intense joy, and a powerful testimony of salvation in the risen Lord Jesus Christ. Peter declared something unique about those events. He said, *"this is that..."* Is what? What they heard and saw was a further fulfillment of Joel's prophesy of God's **restoring** work.

God promised the people of Joel's day that they would see evidence of His presence (Joel 1:27). That occurred in Joel's day to some extent, but Acts 2 tells us more. In Joel 2:28-32, the Lord promised the outpouring of His Spirit in a greater way. That began on Pentecost Sunday as described in **Acts 2**. Peter used Joel's prophesy to begin explaining the Pentecost outpouring. Understand that Peter is not holding a Joel Scroll in his hands. He is speaking this from knowing this passage, and most likely recalling what Jesus had taught them over the past three years... Only now it made sense as the Holy Spirit filled them with wisdom and insight. 'We see it now. This is what Jesus meant.'

Peter quoted Joel 2:32 to **Get** their attention—*"whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved"*—and then he **Focused** their attention on **Jesus as that Lord on whom all should call** (Acts 2:21). God could and did restore Israel as they turned to Him. **3,000 Paid Attention**. God saved 3,000 that Pentecost day long ago. God can and will restore any today, if they will call on Him. There's more.

The Lord gave many **Restoration Invitations to Israel** over the years. He gave many **“Back to Bethel” Invitations** like that which the Lord issued to Jacob (Genesis 35:1-15). Both Joel and Peter spoke of **The Ultimate Restoration** when Jesus will establish His Millennial Kingdom followed by the New Heavens and New Earth (described with a few clues in Joel 2:32; 3:17-21 and Acts 3:21; 2 Peter 3:11-13) after the final judgments of the *“Day of the LORD”* (Joel 2:31; 3:1-3, 9-16 and 2 Peter 3:10).

After Jesus had risen from the dead, the Spirit gave a **Restoration Invitation at Pentecost** to those Israelites attending that Feast. He gives that **Restoration Invitation to any today** who will heed His call to turn to Him, to repent of sin and call on the Lord Jesus. That restoration is from darkness to light, from spiritual death to eternal life, from guilt and shame to forgiveness, cleansing and new life in Christ (John 3:16; Acts 26:18). For those who are **believers**, but have strayed like Israel of old, there is also a **Restoration Invitation**, like that given to the believers at Ephesus (Revelation 2:1-7).

How does God’s Restoration Invitation come to believers today?

There are two ways in which we see God restoring His people. Individually and Corporately. **Individually**, Galatians 6:1-5 gives guidelines for restoring one *“caught in any trespass,”* one who has sinned in some way that breaks fellowship with the Lord and with other believers. How should one approach an erring believer? One should go *“in a spirit of gentleness”* walking in the fullness of the Holy Spirit as shown a few verses earlier (Galatians 5:22-26). The goal is to *“restore such a one.”* The word *“restore”* was a medical term often used of setting a broken bone or a joint. It was used of outfitting a ship, of mending a net, or even of a leader restoring unity between opposing factions. Each example points to restoring to usefulness, to fruitfulness, to healthy relationships. That is what God wants.

In Matthew 18:15-20, Jesus instructed His disciples about restoring a sinning brother. He spoke of four levels in seeking to

restore someone who sinned. First, if a brother sinned, go to him, reprove him of the wrong and if he listens, the relationship is restored. If he does not listen, all is not lost, for there is a second level. If he does not listen, take along one or two other concerned believers who can go to the erring believer and see and hear his response. If he responds, acknowledging his wrong, then restoration can occur. If he does not respond, then move to the third level, taking the matter to the church, the gathering of believers. Ask them to call him to repentance and restoration, ever praying for that person. If he does not respond to them, then level four is applied. Treat him as an unbeliever. That means to continue to pray for him, speak truth to him, always showing love.

In many places in the Scriptures, we discover the heart of Jesus to restore. We see His heart in the guidelines for restoring a sinning brother in Matthew 18:15-20 or His clear call to forgive others in Matthew 18:21-35. When Jesus was about to go to the Cross, He told Simon Peter that Satan had asked permission to sift all of them (Luke 22:31-34). Jesus then made it clear to Peter that he would fail, but that He Himself had prayed specifically for Peter to turn around and then instructed him that when he was restored to strengthen his brothers. Jesus prayed for restoration. He got Peter involved in restoration of his fellow disciples, all future apostles. That is the heart of Jesus. He is ready to restore so that we become part of His restoring.

The Lord still **gets** our attention, to **focus** our attention, so we **pay** attention. His call is to obey Him and His Word, return to Him in love, trust, and obedience. The Lord delights to **Restore**—Hear Him say it in Joel 2:25, *“I will restore...”* Whether or not we accept any of the many invitations that come our way, we need to be sure to **Accept His Restoration Invitation!**

As among the Old Testament believers, so among the New Testament believers, there were times for gathering together for extraordinary prayer. Sometimes the focus was on the mission of the church as in the prayer gathering in Acts 4:23-31 after having been threatened not to speak about Jesus and His death and resurrection. That was an attack on their mission and the message