

# Worship Notes

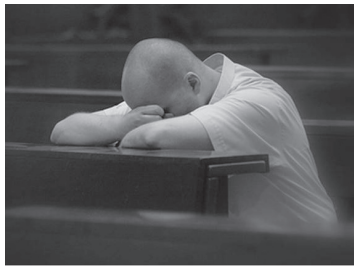
by Christine Gofron

Because of your unfailing love, I can  
enter your house; with deepest awe  
I will worship at Your Temple.

Psalm 5:7

## What's Happening in the Places of Worship?

I've been reading the book of Joel, and at this time I believe that the message that God has for all of us as worshippers is very clear. Since I choose to write from where God is teaching me, I will approach this subject which may be a bit touchy for some. If you read this and find that you are offended – realize that nothing I'm saying here is new. I'm simply reiterating what we should already know and what God has been communicating clearly.



In the book of Joel, the Israelites were experiencing extremely hard times when a plague of locusts had invaded their land. Joel begins by describing the crops and fields that had been laid to waste by a "nation" of locusts that was "powerful and without number". There was no turning away from them – there were no fruit trees, no oil, no grain – what they needed to sustain life had been stripped from them. The animals were moaning from the pain of starvation, and Joel even calls out those who would turn to drinking to escape. He tells the drunkards that they can weep because there isn't even any wine to drink. They are forced to remain sober. Joel 1:12 states what the Israelites were probably thinking at the time, "Surely the joy of mankind is withered away."

But Joel's purpose here wasn't to whine along with them. He wasn't going to sit on the dusty ground and moan and wail over agricultural despair. As devastating as that was, he was using their current situation to bring a wake up message from God. The Israelites had become preoccupied with their daily routines. Nothing of consequence was happening in the places of worship, and when disaster struck in the form of an army of locusts, Joel's first response was to call them back to the places of worship to repent, to intercede and to fast. But while they were praying for deliverance, Joel was warning them of an even greater attack to come – from a pagan army that Almighty God would actually allow to be raised up against them. He was warning them of the final day of judgment, when all of mankind would be exposed under the light of God's justice and we would have to account for our decisions and how we spent our time. Those who had not made Him Lord of their life, placing Him at the center, would be exposed to His wrath.

Locust attacks come in all forms now: Countless families have

lost loved ones due to violence, while others are faced with joblessness and poverty that leads to despair and depression. Substance abuse isn't just outside the four walls of the church – its inside too. Friendships that seem rock solid and time tested are snuffed out, in an instant, because of our faith in Christ. Everywhere you turn we are faced with trials that can wipe us out physically and emotionally. But what Joel is communicating from God is this: praying for deliverance from our trials isn't going to transform us. We need to take a huge leap back and look at the big picture again. This is serious business.

We need to acknowledge to God that we have placed Him in the margins of our lives instead of the sovereign center, and ask for His forgiveness. Gossip, slander, self-preoccupation, and staying busy about the business of the earth are how we let the locusts in. Another way we let the locusts in is to become so involved in our ministry – our "job" for the Lord – that we forget our responsibility as a child of God. So Joel is telling them it's time to regroup and get their house, the church, and their land in order by starting with repentance.

The second thing Joel tells them is to fast and intercede. He says to "summon all who live in the land to the House of the Lord your God, and cry out to the Lord." I like the way The Message puts it: "Round up everyone in the country and get them into God's Sanctuary for serious prayer to God." (Joel 1:14) This very action is where we need to put most of our energy into. If you don't have an intercessory prayer team – round up one. These people will be asked to make it their ministry to intercede for the church on an ongoing basis. There should be intercessors going before God during the worship services too. There needs to be a call

**“Summon all who  
live in the land...and  
cry out to the Lord”**

*Joel 1:14*

to prayer like nothing else. Forget the trustee meetings for a while. Take a break from the education meetings. Walk away from the exercise classes, coffee socials and quilting classes that your churches may be offering now. Stop with all the announcements and distractions during the times of worship and teaching. When the worship is cut short or the pastor is rushed to finish the sermon because there was so much "inside marketing" going on, something's wrong. When the service starts and there are more people in the lobby drinking coffee, snacking and socializing than there are in the sanctuary, do a double take.

It's downright scary to watch and see how, in the lives of so many churches, God has been refashioned to fit our own schedule

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# What's Happening in the Places of Worship? *continued*

and needs. What's even more frightening is the consequences. You know the truth. You know who God is. He's not far away – He's here and now, and He is a God of His Word. Whether we like it or not, His promises will be fulfilled.

Let's stand together in repentance and prayer. The day of judgment is coming. When we stand before the Glory of the Lord we will not be asked about the productivity of our business meetings. We will not be asked how many soccer or baseball games

our kids won. We will not be congratulated on the amount of hours we spent in front of the computer, television or in the office. When it comes to the sovereignty of God, it's not just the thought about it – it's your response to it that counts.

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**“When it comes to the sovereignty of God, it's not just the thought that counts, but the response.”**

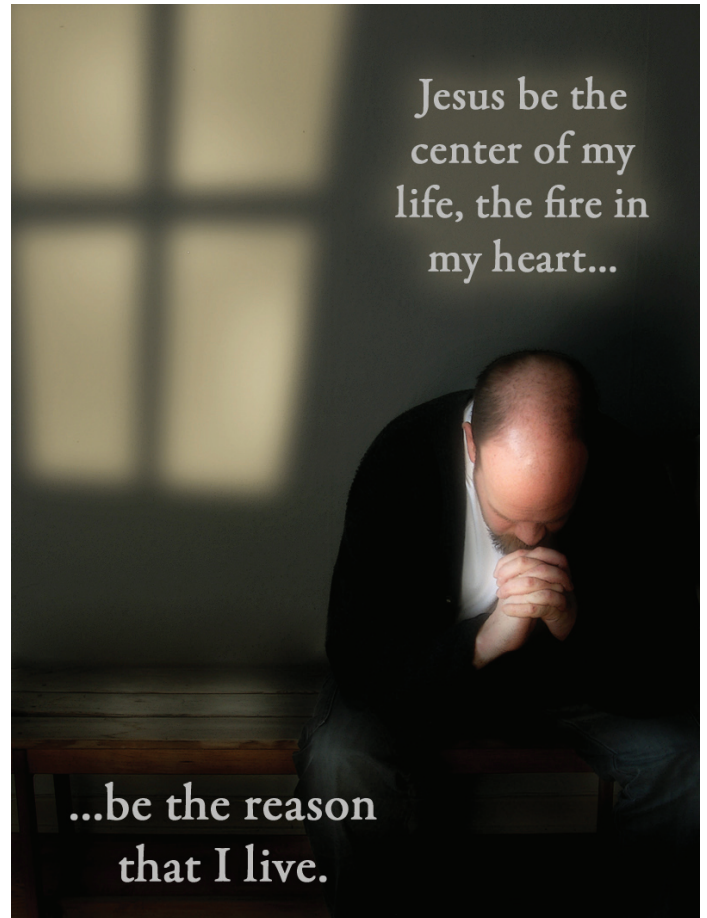
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Even churches who have experienced renewal have to step back from time to time. It happens to the most well intentioned of us. We cannot sustain ourselves on something that happened in the past, there is no growth in that. The churches who find themselves in continual growth (spiritually, not just numerically) are the ones who are at all times seeking God and finding their sustenance in what God is teaching them today – not forgetting, but building on the renewals of the past.

Here's the bottom line. Repentance and intercession gives birth to renewal in the person, and as a result in the church as well. A renewed church coming out of a time of intercession begins to regularly reach out to the needy and poor – the pastor doesn't need to ask them, they show up expecting it. They are servants in their community. They are growing in numbers – not because they have really cool media presentations or a rockin' worship band – but because the Spirit of the Lord is an active, drawing presence that cannot be ignored. People will approach you to hear about the testimony of Jesus Christ. Your services will become an inner court of worship, and the delivery of God's Word will be anointed and will be absorbed to maximum capacity and overflowing. Revival will be on its way.

I'll end with Joel 2:18-27, which is God's response, and I encourage you to read this. God takes His land back for the Israelites because of their obedience to His commands through Joel. He restores them. Verse 25 says “I will repay you for the years the locusts have stolen” – God not only delivers them from attack, but He goes beyond that to restore all that was taken from them. The book of Joel ends with a description of the end times where God's Spirit is poured out, there are wonders in the heavens and the prophecies are fulfilled. And then, of course, the Almighty's triumphant return to Zion – the glorious day when we meet our Lord face to face.

If you want God's Spirit to be poured out on your churches and your communities – don't get preoccupied with building bigger and better worship lists to get it. It doesn't come that way. God's Spirit will not be poured out because we have tons of programs and a prettier church. The people who walk on the carpets of your church are more important than the color and beauty of them. Yes, keep the house of God in order. Keep it



clean – and if you have the budget for new carpets and need them, by all means get them. But there should be imprints of the Saints of God on their knees on those carpets.

I cannot think of a better way to be a better worshipper than to be on my knees. I want transformation. I want renewal and I want revival. We all do. But we need to take that step back and realize what it's going to take to get it – getting before God and acknowledging His sovereignty and centeredness in our lives.

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