

Isaac Bennett
Forerunner Church
God's Desire for Wholehearted Love
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Alright, turn to Joel chapter 2. Joel chapter 2. We're going to look at some different things from this passage in light of the solemn assembly that's starting tomorrow. A solemn assembly might be a new term for some of you, and we just use that term to mean a more focused time of corporate fasting and prayer where we come together, seek the Lord in a deeper way, and, um, that's what we're gonna be looking at this morning.

The title of the message is God's desire for wholehearted love. God's desire for wholehearted love. That's the whole reason we do solemn assemblies. It's because the Lord longs for a people that wholeheartedly love Him. To love the Lord in a wholehearted way means that we love God with the same fervor and purity and passion with which He loves us.

And if you're interested in following along, we have the teaching notes posted on our website at Forerunnerchurch.com. Click on the live link. You can download the link there, the teaching notes, if you'd like.

I'm gonna read just two verses from Joel 2, and then I'll pray. Joel 2, verse 12. "Yet, even now declares the Lord, 'Return to Me with all your heart, with fasting, weeping, and mourning. Rend your heart and not your garments. Now return to the Lord your God for He is gracious and compassionate. He's slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness and relents from harm.'"

Father, we love You, and we love Your word. We love who You are. We love the way that You speak and move and lead. Lord, we know the richness of Your glory that comes to us when we gaze upon who You are, Lord, when we look at Your Word and look at Your plans and purposes. Father, I ask that Your presence rest in this room this morning in an increased way. I ask You that a spirit of wisdom and revelation would come, that would come and rest upon this spiritual family, that You would take us into the revelation of Jesus in a deeper way, that our hearts would burn, Lord, that the next generation would burn with fervor for Jesus. We love You, Lord. I ask that You would help me to speak well of You, that You would be glorified, that Your Spirit would give witness to all that is from You this morning within our hearts. In Jesus' name we pray, amen. Amen.

Well, heading into this solemn assembly, I was just struck in an unusual way of the great honor and privilege that it is to be counted among a people just like you. You know, people that moved here from all across the nations. We're this international family of affections. And even domestically, here within United States that have uprooted and left jobs and family and security to come here and be a part of this people, this people that are seeking intimacy with Jesus, prophetic, understanding the Day of the Lord. Just so many of these things that have one point or another that have likely struck your heart and have led you to be here. And just looking around the room, those that have been here for years and years and years, faithfully seeking the Lord through prayer, giving themselves to fasting, giving themselves to wholehearted love, and I am

just so grateful to be named among you. I just want, I want you to know that. I don't want to be anywhere else. I want to be here. I want to raise my family here, and I just, I count that an honor and a privilege. My heart just, is overflowing with gratitude as I look out across the room over the services and just, in our community and see those that the Lord has sent here, that His hand is upon, and it is just my, I just count it personally as a privilege to be here among this people.

Where else can you go in the earth to find a company of people like this that is keeping a day and night flame on the altar, that is reaching for wholehearted love, that is reaching for an increase of the prophetic and the ministry of the Spirit, that's believing for breakthrough and revival and seeking understanding of the Day of the Lord, and all that the Scripture holds in terms of His coming? I mean, we are just so uniquely privileged and gifted by the Lord to be here. My heart is just overflowing with gratitude. And I know there are many other places across the earth that have a similar heart and passion and devotion, but I'm just, my heart is just so touched by our family that lives here right now today. And I'm just so honored to be here with you even this morning.

We're a people of a perpetual assembly. We're going into this solemn assembly, but there's this aspect that we are a perpetual assembly, a perpetual solemn assembly before the Lord, day and night for the last 20 years. There's been this flame of devotion that's burned before the Lord right down here on Red Bridge Road in the Global Prayer Room. Day and night, night and day, just unceasing prayer and worship and adoration of the Lord that's gone forth for the last 20 years. And in some senses, even though we have specific events where we gather together for, you know, these solemn assemblies or the global Bridegroom fast and things like that, we are an assembly before the Lord, and unceasing assembly.

The Lord made it very clear years ago through a man named Paul Cain, and he came to this parking lot. The very first time he drove into this parking lot with Mike Bickle about 35 years ago, he became very serious and sober in the car, and he told Mike, he said, "I'm seeing a vision in the Spirit over this building and over this people, and that it's Joel's army in training." There is a company of people that the Lord has His hand upon in a unique way, and the Lord is raising up this Joel's army, and that's what we're gonna talk about this morning. And when I think of Joel's army, I don't just think of people that are real serious and sober and you know, intense all the time. I mean, I appreciate serious, sober, and intense. When I read Joel 2 and what we're gonna look at this morning, I see a people who are really after wholehearted love. The people that want to pray and fast and uproot their family and move here from California, beautiful California, and move here to Grandview, Missouri. They've gotta be after something else than just a nice worship service and you know, some community. Y'all are weird.

When I think of that, when I think of what that means and the ramifications of that, and the Lord said there would be this Joel's army in training, the Joel's army, the Day of the Lord, the wholehearted love, the rend your heart, not your garment, these things that we're gonna look at, is really about God wanting a people that wholeheartedly love Him. And for some reason, a whole bunch of you, a whole company of people here in our midst, have responded to that. And they've said, "You know what? I'll count the cost. I'll actually do whatever's necessary. I'll clear my schedule and re-locate my job, and put my kids in a different school, and uproot, and I'll

show up and I'll do it faithfully before the Lord, not before men. I really want this. I want to love wholehearted before the Lord." That is so remarkable. And that's something to be celebrated in our midst, not ashamed of. And I celebrate that in our midst.

The first thing that's on the heart of the Lord across the body of Christ and throughout history is to see the purity and love and devotion to Him established in the heart of His people. We call that wholehearted love. The Father in heaven is determined that the bride of His Son, okay, so you have the Father, that's the Father, you have the Son, that's Jesus, and you have the bride, that's us. The Father is determined that the bride would love Jesus, that the bride would love the Bridegroom with the same fervor and the same devotion and the same purity that the Son loves her. That's the definition in my mind of what it means to be wholehearted. To be wholehearted means that everything in me, everything that I am, everything I'm about, and everything that I want has been set on God with the same passion and devotion that He has set His affection upon me.

And the same thing is true for you. Think about how God loves you. I mean, He will spare no expense. He will go to any length. I mean, we can really say this and believe this from the Word of God. God will spare no expense. He will go to any length. He will do anything that is necessary to demonstrate His love and His affection for His people. It's incredible.

God, the Genesis 1 God, the God of majesty and color and light and beauty decides that to demonstrate His love for His people, to get a bride that's worthy of His Son, He's gonna set aside His riches and glory and honor in heaven. He's gonna take on flesh. He's gonna come and be born to a poor Jewish family, Joseph and Mary. And He's gonna eat our food. He's gonna drink our drink. He's gonna walk among us. He's gonna sweat like we sweat. Then He's gonna walk in a perfect, sinless life, and then He's going to take on the guilt of the whole world. He's gonna take on the wrath of God and the penalty for our sins, and He's gonna suffer at the hands of sinners, dying on the cross for us. I mean, beloved, just that narrative right there should emphatically show you how God is willing to go to any length to prove and show and demonstrate His love for us.

And so, when we think of wholehearted love and when we think of loving God back in the same way that He loves us, I mean, it's kind of scary if you think about it. Because Christ had no regard for Himself when He suffered, when he'd lived our life and suffered our death. He had no regard for Himself. He was so fixated on you. He was so fixated on you being with Him in glory forever and ever and ever that He couldn't be talked out of it.

He was this Bridegroom that was so struck with love. He said, "I will do anything. I will give anything, even My own life, even My own blood. I will spill it. I will pour it out to have a bride that can be with Me forever and all of eternity." That's how God loves in a wholehearted love. That's how God, when He looks at His people, He says, "I want that reality, that revelation to break in on the heart of My people with such a profound and powerful way that they would in turn, begin to love Me back with that same devotion. That's what I'm looking for."

In Matthew chapter 22, He defines what is first and foremost on His mind. Now, we call it the first and great commandment. You can see it in the notes. Matthew 22:36-38. He defines it as the

first and great commandment, but what that means is, it means that it's the premiere thing that's on the mind of God when He thinks of relating to His people. His heart of passion and devotion, He's burning... I mean, Scripture describes Him as this burning fire, an all-consuming God. And that fire and that love is the manifestation of His heart of devotion and passion and commitment towards His people.

And He goes, "I am first and foremost, in My heart, when I look at My people," He goes, "This is the thing that I'm after. This is the reason that I sent My Son to the earth." He goes, "This is why I will spare no expense because the first thing in My mind is, I want to release My love upon them so that in turn, their heart is transformed and they begin to love Me back in that way." He goes, "That's the level of relationship that I want with them."

He calls it the first and great commandment. And you know it. You've all heard it likely many times. Verse 37, "The great commandment is that you would love, you shall love the Lord Your God with all Your heart, with all of your soul, and with all of your mind."

Now, when I read that for years, I was like, "That seems so high and lofty and far away," because I know weak, dumb me. I know my love. I know my devotion. I know what I feel on the inside, and I know that I don't always love God with all of my heart. But the Lord goes, "I want you to get a vision to love Me in the same way that I love you." He goes, "This is how I love you. I love you with all of My heart."

Can you imagine if God didn't love you with all of His heart? Can you imagine if God didn't love you with all of His strength, if the love of God wasn't enough? If He went to the cross, got halfway through, and just said, "You know what? I think I've gone pretty far here. I'm gonna actually call those legions out. I'm gonna get down off the cross. I'm gonna kick everybody's butt, and I'm just gonna do My own thing here." Where would we be? Beloved, we'd still be in our sins. Because He loved us with all of His heart, because He loved us with all of His strength, He goes, "I will go the distance. I will finish the race. I am committed to you in the deepest way."

And when we read this command in Scripture, we're not to be discouraged in our hearts. We're not to draw back and think, "Well, I can't love God because I'm so weak and I'm not really that talented and I don't have enough gifts, and I don't know the Bible that well." We want to get a vision for this, that we would love God with the determination and the passion and the power that He loves us.

Because here's why, any command that's given in Scripture, comes with it a guarantee that God will help you walk in that command. If God commands you to do something as the Creator, as the all-sustaining powerful God of glory and majesty, if He commands you to do something that you cannot do, and that no provision is made for you to walk in that thing, that would make Him cruel and unjust.

So, every command that God gives in the Bible, John tells us that the commands of the Lord are not burdensome. I love that verse. The commands of the Lord are not burdensome. He goes, "Whatever I've called you to do, I will release the grace upon you, the empowerment of My

Spirit to enable you to love Me and to walk in My commands like I've called you to here." That's actually the first step in walking in wholehearted love. The first step in walking in wholehearted love is to determine and believe, "I can walk in wholehearted love, and I'm not gonna give up until I do." That's it. That's the part that we play in walking in this first commandment reality.

Now, the Spirit, paragraph B, the Spirit is ever working in the life of the church and the life of the body to create this optimum, I love this, to create this optimum environment where we can grow and mature in wholehearted love. Wherever God has set you presently today, this day, on Sunday, whoever your friends are, whoever your family is, whatever is going on in your life right now is actually, hear me on this, the optimum environment to produce wholehearted love in your heart. The pressures, whether positive or negative, the events, the people, the things that you've gone through that have been done to you, Romans tells us, God works all things for the good of those who love Him. And God is working through all of the circumstances of your life in order that your heart would receive His affection and then be able to give that same affection back to Him.

We sing the song all the time. You know, put me anywhere. Put Your glory in me. And we imagine that that means that God's gonna send us somewhere else to really walk in our calling to really walk in our anointing so that everyone will recognize just how gifted and powerful and unique we are, and we're God's little snowflakes. Right? But the truth is, is that God has placed you where you are. God has placed you in your sphere, in your family, in your city. God has placed you there, and He goes, "I know all of the events in your life, all of the pressures. I know all of the victories. I know all of the encouragement in order to move your heart towards wholehearted love just an inch more. And then an inch more. And then an inch more. And then an inch more." Because the Father, remember, He's preparing a bride for His Son.

That's why your life is so hard. That's why it seems so bizarre. It's like, why is all this stuff happening in my life? Why did I get uprooted from my family and move here, and why are things hard at my job and ministry's hard and family's hard? You know, all of that. You're in the pressure cooker because God is forming and forging something in you that you can't get on your own if you did it your own way. If God came and read your journal and your dreams and your goals coming out of college of what you want your picture perfect life to be like, and then answered all of them, more likely than not, you would not end up in wholehearted love. You actually wouldn't. Because God's ways are far beyond our ways. That would be like me telling my 4-year-old, "Hey honey, whatever you want to do for the rest of your life, I'm just gonna make that happen. I'm not gonna help you in any way. I'm not gonna shift your course in any way. Just, whatever you want to do, let's just do it!" That would be silly. And me, as a father, I have far more wisdom than my daughter does, and I can help her navigate her life in a way that she can't to produce wholehearted love in her heart, and the same is true of God and us.

Paragraph C. There are various barriers within the human heart to wholeheartedness. We know that. We focus mostly. I have it down here, number three. We mostly focus on sin and compromise. The majority of the Christian devotional life likely is talking to God about our sin and compromise, but the Lord wants to change that. And it's not that we don't talk about our sin and compromise and confess it to God, it's that we do it in a way where we actually believe God

is going to forgive us. And then we actually get accountability in our life, we actually get the Holy Spirit in our life, we actually make a determination that I am not going to live this way, and this area of my heart, this area of my life that's compromised in sin, I'm actually going to determine to give this area fully to God in the battle. I don't care if it takes me a week. I don't care if it takes me ten years or fifty years, my heart belongs fully to Jesus, not to this area of sin and compromise. I belong to Him. He purchased me. He didn't purchase this sin. He killed this sin. When He went into the grave, my sin went into the grave. The old man went into the grave and out came a resurrected Lord, and there's resurrected power, by the grace of the Holy Spirit to walk in victory over sin.

If God has called His church to be wholehearted and He says of her in Ephesians 5, He says, "She will be pure and spotless and blameless." Do you think that that's true or not? See, in the day to day, I feel often, and I'm confronted in my flesh, I feel like it's not true. I feel like it's impossible, and I feel like I can't actually walk in wholehearted love, but I want to stir your faith today that in fact, you can.

There's two other areas. Well, there's probably many more, but there's two other areas that are barriers within the human heart to wholeheartedness. Number one. I have it here in the notes, wrong ideas about God. Now, we don't often emphasize that. If someone were to come to you and say, there's barriers in your life, you'd be like, "Oh, no. They know my sin." You wouldn't imagine that a person that came to you and said there's barriers in your life is actually addressing wrong mindsets that you have, but the apostles in the New Testament actually deal pretty shrewdly with this idea. Having the right view of God is a measurably powerful and necessary for the believer.

Let me give you an example. If you believe, if the Christian believes that God is mostly disappointed in them, that He's mostly angry at them, that He's critical of them, and that's the main view of God that you have, it's likely that you will not approach God in your sin and times of desperation. You won't approach Him. You don't believe that He actually enjoys you. You believe that He enjoys you when you're doing good and you've been real, you know, devotional driven, and really pious in your life, and you've like, got all your ducks in a row. You know, I've read a lot of Bible this week. I prayed for somebody and they got healed, so God now likes me. But when things switch around in our life and we don't feel that favor, you know, upon our life, we're going, "I'm not really sure if God is approachable."

Let me tell you something, in relationships, it is impossible to enjoy the relationship if you believe the other person is angry at you. If you believe the other person does not like you or enjoy you, think about a marriage. Think about a friendship. Think about a co-worker relationship. Anyone that you think hates your guts, you will not just show up. Like, "Hey, how's it going? How's your day going? Great. Let's talk." You know? You're gonna shy away from that person. You're gonna back away. There's walls that come up in your heart because you're going, "Oh, I hope I don't make them angry. I hope I don't misstep so that they cut me down or expose me or embarrass me or ridicule me." Do you follow?

We have to get a right perception of who God is, a right perception of the heart of the Father. When I read Joel 2, for many years, I'm like, "Man, this chapter is so intense." If you've read Joel 2, it's like clouds, and gloominess, and fire, and armies, and people dying, and all this stuff. And I'm sitting there, preparing for this message, talking about the solemn assembly, and this verse, here in verse 13, the second half, just begins to leap out at me. The Lord begins to speak to my heart. He goes, "Isaac, his is not mostly about how devoted you are in prayer and fasting. This isn't mostly about you understanding all the details of the Day of the Lord. This is about the revelation of who I am. This is who I am." He says, "I am gracious. I am merciful. I am compassionate. This is who I am. I don't have to choose to be these things one moment and unchoose another moment." He goes, "This is who I am."

Think of your moment of desperation in your own life. Maybe you're there right now or maybe you're not there, but you could envision, imagine your moment of crisis and desperation. Something strikes your life in such a powerful way that you need help. Maybe it's some sin in your life or sickness or whatever it is. Who would you go to? Who's the person that you would go to? Most of us have a person in mind. Who would you go to to restore and to confide your deepest secrets in and your deepest fears in? Maybe you have a person in your life like that.

I want to tell you something. The Father is one thousand times more gracious than that person. The Father is one thousand times more merciful than that person. His heart is, He so overflows with generosity and kindness all the time that it's actually foolish that we would ever run away from Him, that we would ever hold up and esteem a friend or a brother or a leader or a pastor to go to in our deepest time of trouble. God is shouting over the nations, "I am the gracious and merciful God." He goes, "Come to Me. I have the power to heal you, forgive you, wash you clean. I have the power to raise you and give you an inheritance and an incorruptible hope. I am the God of mercy and compassion over your life." And yet, many do not understand this about God. And they run away, and they back away in fear and trepidation of Him, and they go, "I'd rather just talk to so and so. I'd rather just talk to a friend online or call someone on the phone because we imagine that people are more gracious than God is. And it's just not true. He is the gracious God.

God wants to correct our wrong ideas about who He is. He has this against the nations and against many throughout the earth that people are propagating this idea. They're pushing forward this agenda that God is angry, mean, and unjust. And it is absolutely not true, and He's gonna absolutely shatter that lie and bring it down and society and culture and the church and in every human heart, every knee that's gonna bow in that day is gonna go, "You are the Lord. You are as gracious and merciful and beautiful as we heard, as we read, but did not believe."

Secondly, there are wrong ideas about ourselves and how God sees us. We believe that we're disqualified, that we must earn our way into God's approval and into His favor, and yet Scripture over and over and over again resounds that God has made us priests before Him. He wants us to minister to His heart all the days of our life. He's made us His bride. His heart of affection and tenderness goes out toward us. He's made us sons and daughters. He's adopted us and given us a new name and an inheritance and brought us into His family, into the home of heaven, the house of the Lord. We belong to Him. Over and over again Scripture affirms that we are to see

ourselves rightly. Because if we see God rightly, and we see ourselves rightly, our heart is postured to enter in to loving God in the way that He wants to be loved. If we see ourselves rightly, but not Him rightly, which would be impossible, or we see Him rightly, but not ourselves rightly, the heart is malformed. We can't actually enter into the grace of God and the riches of the Gospel to walk in wholehearted life until the Lord begins to align these things. And so, He is.

A brief outline of Joel chapter two, verses one to ten, trouble is coming. There's the great trouble and crisis of the day of the Lord and the nations and the kings of the earth that have set themselves against the Lord. They are going to be in great crisis and trouble. Believe me, Psalm 2 warns them, kiss the Son. If you're a king, if you ever, if you're hearing this and you ever become a king, a president, a leader, a whatever, then read Psalm 2 and at the end, do what the Psalmist says, kiss the Son lest He be angry. Bow down before Him. Humble yourself before Him, and ask God for the grace and the mercy and the compassion that He longs to give. That is a terrifying day. There is trouble coming and crisis coming.

That ultimate trouble is the Day of the Lord, which Joel is outlining here in Joel chapter 2, but there are also crisis', and there's also trouble and trial and tribulation that we enter into right now. And many of you are in the midst of that even now. And Joel 2 is giving us a template for how we walk with God in wholehearted love in the midst of trial and temptation and pressure and all of the above. In verse 11, Joel 2 verse 11, I'm just looking through the passage here. Joel 2 verse 11, he ends this segment with this question. There's trouble that's coming, global trouble, national trouble, regional trouble, your own life trouble. There's trouble that is coming, and he asks this question in verse 11, who can endure the trouble? Who can stand in the midst of the trouble?

Verses 12 to 17, Joel begins to outline those that will endure the trouble, and we'll talk about what that enduring means in just a moment. Verses 18 to 27 is God's ultimate plan of redemption. His promises that will manifest in the earth in the age to come after the coming of Christ. And then verses 28-32 Joel gives us God's promises to help those that are in the midst of trouble and how He's gonna actually do it.

Look at page 2 in the handout if you're following along. Verse 11, the day of the Lord is great and terrible. Who can endure this trouble? Now, when we think of this word 'endure', to endure crisis simply means this. It means that we walk in wholehearted love in the midst of pressure. That's what God is after. The enduring the Day of the Lord doesn't mean that we escape because we hid in some cave somewhere and we live. It's not just about escaping with our lives as the Gospels lay out very clearly. It's about escaping with our souls. It's about actually loving God in the midst of crisis, in the midst of trouble, in the midst of pressure, not just avoiding the trouble and the pressure.

So, enduring the Day of the Lord means that your heart has to be set right so that when the moment of crisis comes, then your heart is exposed and what's truly there is manifest. A couple years ago, I was driving past a Wayside Waves. It's this animal adoption place down here before. Don't take your kids or wives there. You will find an animal that they want. It's guaranteed. That should be their business, you know, slogan, Wayside Waves. It's not an adoption agency or

whatever they call it. Your wife and children will find something here they want. And so, I'm driving past there. I'm not really paying attention, and it's kind of icy out and whatever. And I had had this idea in my mind that if I was ever in this moment of crisis, if I was ever like in a car wreck, I would want to shout the name of Jesus, not a curse word. I just made it this like, own goal. I like thought of this. I had never been in a car wreck before. I had this completely clean driving record. And I'm like, because I had heard about these people who, you know, right before, all of their foul language comes out of their mouth, and I was just like, "God, if that ever happens to me, just let me say something good in the time of crisis, not something horrible that I'll be embarrassed about. So, I'm driving, and this car had driven off the road earlier in the day, and I was, you know, their tire tracks are like down the snow. I was like, "Wow, that was horrible." And I look up, and this lady is stopped, and I'm going fast. You know, whatever, and I slam on the breaks, but it doesn't matter because the ice, you know, the roads are icy and whatever, and I hit the back of the car, boom! And the airbag deploys. Now, in the commercials, an air bag is this giant, fluffy, marshmallowy, silky, it's like a silken bag, and like, you see these manikins, you know, hit this silken bag, and they're just happy about it. And it's almost like they look at the camera and like wave. "I feel so safe in this vehicle! I kind of want to be hit by an airbag because it's like a sweet pillow fight," you know? And in reality, an airbag is made of kevlon. That's the bulletproof material. And there's an explosion that happens to inflate the bag faster than your face can hit the steering wheel, and that explosion sends the airbag out at over 250 miles an hour, kind of like being punched in the face by Mike Tyson. And so, I'm driving down the road, and I see this lady's car, and right before, I just get clobbered in the face by Mohamed Ali, I go, "Jesus" Boom! And I get hit in the face, and I didn't know, nobody told me this. Your car fills with smoke from the explosion. It's like white smoke or powder. Maybe it's just my car. I don't know. It just blew up. I am like stunned. My glasses fall off, my ears are ringing, I open my car door because I'm choking from all the smoke in there, and I'm like, "Ahhh." And I fall out in the road, and I'm just going, "Thank You, God, I said Jesus not the f-bomb!" I was so happy. It was like my little moment of victory.

It was a terrible experience. But like, the truth of it is that it's like the crisis, the moment of crisis shows you what's really there. And a bunch of you have been through little crisis' through your life and you've found that what's there, that's not good. Like, what came out, like wasn't good. And the Lord is giving us this template through the book of Joel, through Joel chapter 2. He's going, I want to show you the path so that wholehearted love is grown in your heart, that when the crisis comes, you're enduring it, and you don't waver. You're actually filled with joy and gladness and gratitude towards God in the moment of crisis, not questioning and everything is thrown off, and under the onslaught of just doubt and unbelief and back-peddling, and "Oh, my gosh. I don't know if I can keep going on." That's what the Lord wants to help us do.

And Joel chapter 2 gives us that template. Look at this, verse 12. He says this. He says, "Turn to Me with all of your heart." Now, this is the ultimate desire of the Lord. What God wants. I'd say all He wants, but all He wants is all of you, so He wants everything, but what God wants, all He wants is He wants His people not just the messed up unbeliever, you know, whatever person who's not saved. He's talking about His people. He goes, "I want My people to give Me all of their heart." He's looking at Forerunner Church. He's looking at IHOPKC. He's looking at

Forerunner Church. He's looking at me. He's looking at you. He's looking at the person next to you. And what God wants, the will of God for your life is that your heart would be fully given to Him in the same way that He's fully given His to us. This is what the cross has made a way for. The cross, the power of the cross did not remove the need for prayer and fasting and solemn assemblies. It actually made a way for it. The cross of Christ, His redemptive power in us, that legal status that we receive by faith in Him, the righteousness of God that we talked about last week, the receiving of the Spirit, Romans 8, that makes us cry out Abba, Father, you're not a stranger anymore. You're a Father to me actually paves a way for us to enter in to prayer, fasting, and the reach for wholehearted love. The continual turning of the heart is so critical because in our heart, our natural propensity is to drift towards compromise and drift towards dullness. That's the natural propensity of the heart. The car that's just in neutral, that's just coasting along. If you've ever driven a car and the engine is not on and tried to steer it, you know what I mean. It's hard to steer. You can't go where you need to go when the car is just in neutral. Many live their lives of devotion before the Lord in neutral mode. We want to do the least amount required so that we get in and we're approved by God, and that is just the wrong formula entirely.

The Lord is after this wholehearted desire being awakened in us. And He does it by releasing the revelation of His heart, His knowledge, His affection. It fills us. We go, "If this is true, if You love me like that, I want to love You in the same way." It awakens wholehearted love.

The work of the cross has legally positioned us to receive salvation through God's grace. Like, we're in. Like, the thief on the cross was really in by his confession of faith that Jesus was the Son of God. However, the work of the cross doesn't do something. Hear this. It doesn't automatically make your heart fully love God. It doesn't do that. And we have to get out of this coasting mode where, "Well, the cross is enough, and the grace of God is enough." It is enough if we access what it actually leads us into. It saves us, that's the foundation. That's the entry point into the Kingdom, but there's more that God is after. He wants all of your affections. He wants everything that you are. He wants you to love Him in the way that He loves you.

Now the tools of the Spirit, paragraph D, God gives us tools that help this environment, this context for our heart to grow in love, and Joel says it. He says, "Turn to the Lord with all your heart, and here's how you do it. With fasting and weeping and mourning." We're like, "Bizarre. Not interested. Not interested." If you've ever tried to fast before, you know how horrible it feels outwardly on the flesh, but once you get a couple days in, your spirit begins to feel alive on the inside. The Lord goes, "I've given you tools that are so against your flesh, that are so counter-intuitive, that are so counter-cultural." It would only be God to give us something like fasting. He's like, "Skip a couple meals and your heart will become susceptible and vulnerable to the Holy Spirit." The Word of God will be like fire, and suddenly the Spirit of revelation will touch your heart, but you've got to peel away the dullness of the flesh that we get through food and media and comfort and just business as usual. The Lord goes, "I have given you fasting as a tool." Fasting is not the end. We're not to stand before the Lord and Him ask us, "Were you good fasters?" "Yes, Lord. We never broke our fasts." Like, that's not what's going on. Fasting is a tool. And the Lord wants us to use that tool in a strategic way. Why? So that our heart is fully turned toward the Lord and He receives what He is worthy of, all that we are.

Fasting weakens the flesh, and it causes us to be susceptible to the Holy Spirit. Many years ago, before I was even married, I was walking to the prayer room, and it's hot. It's like July and like 130 degrees outside. Dust is blowing across the parking lot. It's like day 2 of a fast, and I feel weak. I get cranky when I'm on a fast. The first couple days, I'm just like, put a posted note on my head: Disclaimer: Dad is not pleasant to be around. You know, and I try not to be like that way, and I'm getting better at it, but that's just the reality of it. When we deny ourselves the pleasure of food and the comfort of food, it's like what's really on the inside begins to come out. And I'm walking toward the prayer room, and I'm talking to the Lord, mostly complaining. I'm just like, "Lord, why did you do fasting? This is horrible." I'm like, "It's hot." And the Lord begins talking to me. All of the sudden, the Holy Spirit just begins speaking to my heart, and He says, "Isaac, are you tired?" I'm like, "Yes." He goes, "Are you just cranky a little bit?" I'm like, "Yes." He's like, "Do you just want to give up and go to Chipotle?" I'm like, "Yes." He goes, "Are you really finding you don't have enough strength to continue?" And I'm like, "Yes." And I feel like the little kid who's about to get set up by the Lord, looking back at the story. and the Lord goes, "Good. The fasting's working." And I'm like, "Ahh..." And it really is true that the purpose of fasting isn't so that we feel strong and mighty and pat ourselves on the back. The purpose of fasting is to intentionally weaken all that. It's to weaken your physical strength. It's to weaken your emotional strength. It's to remove the mask of Midwest Christianity that we can just put on. We act like everything's okay. We're so spiritual, but inside we're actually dull, we're actually bored, we actually haven't connected with the Lord in weeks or months or years, and it pulls back that mask, and we go, "Ah. I need You." And He goes, "That's exactly what I want. That's the tool, the working of My Spirit to wear down your self-sufficiency so that I can be your strength."

We're supposed to stand before Him weak. We're supposed to stand before Him needy. We're supposed to stand before Him dependent, leaning on Him, clinging to Him. He goes, "That's what I want. If you fast and pray and you stand on your own two legs," He goes, "Then you don't actually need Me, and you found your sufficiency in fasting and prayer, not in the movement of My heart." He goes, "I want your heart to move because of Me. I want you to connect. I want you to be vulnerable to the Holy Spirit." And the Spirit if God is working around your life. Every day, all day, the Spirit of God is working, and He's trying to get in, but our flesh and our dullness has built these walls around us, and the Spirit's like, "I want to reveal to you the mysteries of the beauty of God. I want to tell you what He's like. I've been searching the things of God." Think about this, for all of eternity, "I have much revelation to give you, but your dullness, your lack of spiritual appetite, your lack of hunger, your self-sufficiency, straight back, head up, shoulders back, posture of Christianity has actually deterred Me from revealing the beauty of God to you." And He goes, "I want to give you a tool. I want to give you a tool, body of Christ. I want to give you something. It's called fasting and weeping and mourning. And all of it is going to break down your flesh. It's gonna open up your spirit, and the Holy Spirit is gonna break in and ambush you in ways that you can't even begin to imagine."

We are to weep and to mourn, which means that we are to connect to our dependence on Holy Spirit. The Lord actually wants you dependent on Him. We need the declaration of dependence day for Holy Spirit. We need it! Because we're so prone to just become independent and

removed from God, and He goes, "That's not the way that I set this up. I set this up so that you're fully dependent, not even halfway dependent, but completely broken down in Me." And you hear the testimony of saints, men and women who have walked with the Lord for decades and decades and decades. They'll tell you, "I feel like I have less wisdom and I'm more dependent on God than I ever was before." You know what that means? That means that their heart has grown in maturity. Mature love isn't stand-alone independence. Mature love is complete dependence and reliance upon Holy Spirit and the things of God.

We've only got two minutes left here. Rend your heart. Just do that the next 3 days. He's gracious and merciful. He is. He's gracious and merciful.

I want to touch on something that I didn't touch on in the first service. It's actually paragraph H, which is Joel 2 verse 15 and 16. The corporate assembly, this solemn assembly is challenging and inconvenient. It's actually supposed to be that way. The Lord set it up. Look at what He says. He says, verse 15, He says, "Blow the trumpet, sound the alarm, call the people to fasting." And no one wants to be called to fasting. He says, "Call the people to fasting, consecrate a fast, call the sacred assembly, get everybody together." Verse 16, then He begins to describe the inconvenience of it. He goes, "I want you to gather all the people and sanctify them." Do you know how hard that is? He goes, "I want you to assemble the elders." Do you know who the elders are? It's the people who are really busy. It's men and women that are really busy. He goes, "I want you to assemble the elders," and they're going, "Lord, do You know how inconvenient this is? We've got tasks. We've got assignments. We've got duties. We've got meetings and deadlines and we've got quarterly reports, and we've got things that we need to do." And He goes, "I know. I actually am making this inconvenient on you on purpose."

He goes, "I want you to gather the children and the nursing babes." Do you know how hard it is for a mom and a dad or any human being to bring a child to a prayer meeting? I've talked about it before. It's incredibly difficult. I used to have this bag of raisins that I'd put in my son's mouth, and eat raisin gave him 15 seconds of silence. We'd try to make it through a whole meeting. He's eating like an entire vineyard of dried grapes by the end of the meeting. They're loud. Kids don't want to be at prayer meetings. They like dancing in circles for like 15 seconds. Then they color everything. Then they're on the floor. It's just like, the Lord knows all of this. He knows how inconvenient it is. He knows the busyness of our lives and our schedules. He goes, "If you don't break out of the mold of the business as usual, you won't enter in. You won't enter into what I have corporately." He goes, "Gather the people together. Get in the room together. Call upon Me. Confess your sins, weep and wail, tell Me how much you need Me because you haven't for a while, and I miss you."

Let the Bridegroom go out from the chamber and the bride from her dressing room. He's going, "Interrupt the wedding. If you're in the midst of your wedding planning and bla bla bla bla bla," He goes, "Interrupt that. That's how inconvenient this is," because the Lord knows you can't get wholehearted love on the go. You can't get it in the normal rigor and the pace of life. You can't even get it in the rigor and the pace of those that are occupational intercessory missionaries. You have to stop. You have to say no to things. You have to get before the Lord. You have to rend

your heart. You have to make yourself open to the Holy Spirit and have those true talks with Him. Praise God.

I'll invite the worship team to come up. Verse 28, there's an afterward outpouring of the Holy Spirit. We don't just stay forever in the solemn assembly. The Lord's going to meet us. He's gonna pour out His Spirit upon all flesh, amen? The verse 28 afterward is in response to the people in verses 12-17. Those that get together that rend their heart, the Lord says, "After you do that, after My people do that," He goes, "I'm gonna release My Spirit upon you. Because actually in all your religious striving and reach for Me in your prayer, your fasting, your weeping, your assembling together and the kids are there, and you're feeding them on a Godly amount of raisins." He goes, "Actually, that's actually not enough to get all of My people into wholehearted love." The Lord goes, "On top of that," He goes, "I'm going to release a spirit of prophecy upon you. You will bear witness to Me." We need a spirit of prophecy to escort us into the things of God to produce wholehearted love on the inside. We can't get it on our own through our Bible study. We can't get it through our religious fervor and our devotion.

He says, "I will release prophecy upon you. I will release dreams upon you. I will release visions upon you." Why? To make your ministry big and successful? No. Because without these things, the people of God cannot enter into wholehearted love. "I'm gonna release signs in the heavens and wonders on the earth. I am going to create the environment across the whole earth for the most amount of people to enter in to this song," this bridal love song of God where the people love Him in the way that He loves them.

It's important that the body of Christ engages in a history of prayer and fasting before the outpouring of the Spirit, before the crisis. Otherwise, we get enamored with the wrong thing. The Lord wants us in this posture of humility. He requires it. He won't let us move forward without being in a posture of humility before Him. We get weird. We emphasize the wrong thing. We emphasize people instead of God. We emphasize the anointing instead of the Holy Spirit. We worship the gifts rather than the Giver. We get off track so quickly. The Lord says, "I want to release such power before the day of My coming that if the people, the heart of the people is not yoked to Me in prayer and fasting, walking in humility, walking in wholehearted love, they will be so enamored by the power of the Holy Spirit that will come. They will love that more than Me."

The Lord is so kind in the way that He leads us. Let's stand.