

# After God's Heart

## The call to partner with God's vision for your life and your world

**Acts 13:22** ...‘I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My own heart, who will do all My will.’

### I. Understanding the Times

**1 Chronicles 12:32** ...the sons of Issachar who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do...

#### A. Recognizing the Crisis

1. Crisis in the physical – the economic crisis, Hurricane Katrina, September 11<sup>th</sup> – God's hand of divine protection and blessing is lifting, slowly and gradually according to His mercy, but it is lifting.
2. Crisis in the nation – God has been slow to anger and gracious with a nation living in a culture that not only tolerates but celebrates immorality and abortion.
3. Crisis in the church – the numbers are clear: from 65% church participation in the generation through 1944 to 4% in the generation beginning in 1984. The response of the church to the times is even more clear: we're disconnected from the heart of God. Few have been willing to label the state of our nation a crisis – few of those that do are doing anything to respond to it. There's no crying and sighing over the sin in our midst. We've been carrying on business as usual while God's heart has been in a crisis over this nation.

#### B. Understanding the Times

1. Understanding the Author of the times – the urgency of the hour is a secondary urgency created by the urgency already in God's heart. To understand the hour we need to return to God's heart and search out that original urgency. “God is not the author of confusion.” (**1 Corinthians 14:33**) There is a very clear Biblical response in a time of judgment and the call always is 'return to the Lord', 'seek Me with all your heart.' It's a call to come back to the First and Second commandments and to get serious about reaching for an expression of Christianity that fully embraces them.
2. Understanding the context of the times – Joel defines the hour of crisis by three separate days of judgment: the one that has passed which must be properly identified if we're to respond rightly, the one that is surely coming if we do not respond, and the final day of judgment that is surely coming regardless of response and that God is trying to prepare the nations for.

#### C. The character of an appropriate response

1. Urgency – let the hour cut deeply and respond accordingly. God uses desperate times to give us grace to take desperate measures. As we hear, there is an urgent need to respond – not because time is short to get ready, but because time is short before our hearts again grow dull and are unable to respond. God is calling us to make a shift in our hearts, not just our activities, and it takes a level of urgency for us to truly do that.  
**Joel 2:12** “Now, therefore,” says the LORD, “Turn to Me with all your heart, With fasting, with weeping, and with mourning.” 13 So rend your heart, and not your garments
2. Persistency – time gauges the sincerity of our response. The call is to more than a day of prayer and repentance – it's a call to shift the culture of the church for the coming generations. To make lasting changes to the expression of Christianity.

**Joel 1:3** Tell your children about it, Let your children tell their children, And their children another generation.

3. The Spirit is stirring and the people of God are beginning to awaken. What remains to be seen is will we grasp the urgency of the situation and respond appropriately, or will we have a few days (or even a few years) of prayer and repentance, make some cosmetic changes and settle back into our complacency?

## II. The Biblical Prescription for a Crisis in the Land

**2 Chronicles 7:14** if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

### A. Humble ourselves

1. This is often the greatest problem and hence the first step. We especially wrestle with this one in America where our culture so values independence and trains us to be self-sufficient and self-focused – two thought patterns very contrary to humility.
2. It means acknowledging that we have a problem. We have two major hindrances to this: comfort and blame.
  - a. We live in a land of plenty and that makes it hard to recognize our need. Israel faced the same problem over and over again – God looks fondly on the days of the wilderness where she needed Him, but in the day of plenty she forgot Him.  
**Jeremiah 2:2** ...“ I remember you, The kindness of your youth, The love of your betrothal, When you went after Me in the wilderness, In a land not sown. 3 Israel was holiness to the LORD, The firstfruits of His increase... 7 I brought you into a bountiful country, To eat its fruit and its goodness. But when you entered, you defiled My land And made My heritage an abomination. 8 The priests did not say, ‘Where is the LORD?’ And those who handle the law did not know Me; The rulers also transgressed against Me; The prophets prophesied by Baal, And walked after things that do not profit.
  - b. We also live in a nation where it has become the cultural norm (even within the church) to blame the problem on our government or our neighbors or the church down the street rather than taking personal and corporate responsibility.
3. Beyond that, it means acknowledging that we need God and cannot fix this ourselves. Frequently when God judged the nation of Israel they dug themselves a deeper hole by trying to fix the problems themselves – devising strategies and making alliances without looking to God.
4. Beyond even that, it means acknowledging that there is still a yet bigger problem – that this is not about us and having God's blessing on our life/ministry, it's about God and blessing Him with our life/ministry.

### B. Pray

1. It's a corporate call, not just an individual one.  
**Joel 2:15** Blow the trumpet in Zion, Consecrate a fast, Call a sacred assembly; 16 Gather the people, Sanctify the congregation, Assemble the elders, Gather the children and nursing babes; Let the bridegroom go out from his chamber, And the bride from her dressing room. 17 Let the priests, who minister to the LORD, Weep between the porch and the altar...

2. How well we do on this one is closely connected to how well we humble ourselves. Will we pray for the blessing to return or will we pray for God to be glorified?

**Joel 2:17** ...Let them say, "Spare Your people, O LORD, And do not give Your heritage to reproach, That the nations should rule over them. Why should they say among the peoples, 'Where is their God?'"

3. The call to pray is more than just a call to cry out for mercy. It's a call to get reconnected with the heart and purposes of God. Joel's calling the people to true intercessory prayer that would birth the outpouring of the Spirit that's in the heart of God so that the great harvest would come in before the Day of the Lord.

**Joel 2:28** "And it shall come to pass afterward That I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your old men shall dream dreams, Your young men shall see visions. 29 And also on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days... Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD. 32 And it shall come to pass That whoever calls on the name of the LORD Shall be saved.

4. The call to prayer is a call to establish a lasting culture of prayer. Joel ultimately calls the people to get their eyes fixed on the great move of God and start a solemn assembly that does not end until the Day of the Lord.

#### C. Seek His face

1. This is often opposite to the way that our flesh responds in a time of judgment. Our eyes turn anywhere and everywhere except to look the Lord in the eye.
2. The purpose of the crisis in the natural is to alert us to the crisis in the spiritual. If the crisis in the natural becomes our focus then we have erred in understanding and responding to it rightly.
3. The solution to the crisis in the spiritual is always 'seek Me with all your heart.' If we try instead to fix it ourselves, or if we run from God in shame rather than to Him in love, we have erred in understanding the crisis and responding rightly.
4. The correct answer, always, is to press in to the heart of God. There we will find answers for this and every hour.

**Hosea 6:1** Come, and let us return to the LORD... 3 Let us know, Let us pursue the knowledge of the LORD.

5. The primary purpose of God's temporal judgments are to alert us to to focus on what should always have been our focus – rightly relating with God. God is our biggest problem, but we rarely live like it until in His mercy He makes us acknowledge that He is our biggest problem. "All the problems of heaven and earth, though they were to confront us together and at once, would be nothing compared with the overwhelming problem of God: That He is; what He is like; and what we as moral beings must do about Him."  
- A.W. Tozer

#### D. Turn from our wicked ways

1. Sin within the church is, of course, a serious issue. We need to be reaching under the grace of God for a life with no compromise.
2. Even beyond that, though, God rebukes His people not just for outright sin, but for lives lived less than holy. God set Israel apart as a dwelling place for Himself and His heart burned not only when she sinned, but when she forgot her glory and turned to the empty wells of this world.

**Jeremiah 2:11** Has a nation changed its gods, Which are not gods? But My people have changed their Glory For what does not profit. 12 Be astonished, O heavens, at this, And be horribly afraid; Be very desolate,” says the LORD. 13 “ For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, And hewn themselves cisterns—broken cisterns that can hold no water.

3. One of the most challenging phrases anywhere in Scripture is “a walk worthy.” What does it mean to have a walk worthy of our calling, knowing that we are the redeemed of the sovereign God of the universe, bought with His own blood and now temples of His glory and God Himself dwells within us? That's what we're to be reaching for.

**Ephesians 4:1** I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called,

**Colossians 1:10** that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;

**1 Thessalonians 2:12** that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.

### III. Responding to the Urgency in God's Heart

#### A. Prophetic vision – the urgent need of the hour

1. Without prophetic vision (the knowledge of God's heart), we are utterly incapable of changing our ways in the manner required.

**Proverbs 29:18** Where there is no prophetic vision the people cast off restraint [Or *the people are discouraged*], but blessed is he who keeps the law.

2. The crisis that God identifies is an identity crisis – my people have forgotten Me and so forgotten who they are.

**Hosea 2:16** “And it shall be, in that day,” Says the LORD, “That you will call Me ‘My Husband,’ And no longer call Me ‘My Master,’ ...19 “I will betroth you to Me forever; Yes, I will betroth you to Me In righteousness and justice, In lovingkindness and mercy; 20 I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness, And you shall know the LORD.

3. The only answer is to return to the heart of God. To understand and then respond to and partner with His desire for us as individuals and for all men. He does not want us to use our strength, wisdom or riches to try to fix the situation. He wants us to know Him.

**Jeremiah 9:23** Thus says the LORD: “Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, Let not the mighty man glory in his might, Nor let the rich man glory in his riches; 24 But let him who glories glory in this, That he understands and knows Me, That I am the LORD, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight,” says the LORD.

4. When we understand God's heart, we know exactly how to respond. The issue, of course, is if our knowledge of *Him* is limited or incorrect, then our knowledge of *what He wants* will be as well. The Lord mourns through Hosea over Israel being trapped in this situation – turning, but not to the Lord, because there is no knowledge of God in the land.

**Hosea 4:1** Hear the word of the LORD, You children of Israel, For the LORD brings a charge against the inhabitants of the land: “There is no truth or mercy Or knowledge of God in the land. 2 By swearing and lying, Killing and stealing and committing adultery, They break all restraint, With bloodshed upon bloodshed... 6 My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being priest for Me; Because you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children.

**Hosea 7:13** I would redeem them, but they speak lies against Me. 14And they do not cry to Me from their heart When they wail on their beds... 16 They return, but not to the Most High... 8:2 Israel will cry to Me, ‘My God, we know You!’ 3 Israel has rejected the good...

- B. To really answer the call of God (as summarized in the first and second commandments) we need understanding of God's heart toward us as individuals, towards the church and towards the nations. **Matthew 22:35** Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying, 36 “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?” 37 Jesus said to him, “‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ 38 This is the first and great commandment. 39 And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ 40 On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”
- C. Responding to the desire of God's heart – it is both corporate and personal. We cannot ignore our own hearts, neither can we ignore the state of our nation.
1. As we come to understand that God is looking for something and not finding it, that should birth a burden in us to see Him have it: both in our own lives and community, and in the nation.
  2. We must take up the call to prayer for an outpouring of the Spirit that would turn hearts before more judgment is required. Ultimately, we must get connected with the desire of God's heart for the nation and take up the call to prayer for an outpouring of the Spirit that would see Jesus receive His inheritance.
  3. If our burden is sincere then it must also cut us deeply in our own hearts and cause us to diligently examine our own walk. Ultimately, we must get connected with God's desire for us and who He created us to be and partner with that cry of His heart.
  4. God calls us to partner with Him in His sovereign plans. He will have what He wants, but He will have it in partnership with human beings who voluntarily agree with His will because of love. The question is will that be us or will that be some other individual or generation?
  5. God calls all who call on His name to respond in two ways. Outside of any specific assignment we know we have these two universal callings based on two universal identities: we are His bride and His delight, called to persistent prayer and to press in to the courts of God.
 

**Isaiah 62:1** For Zion's sake I will not hold My peace, And for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, Until her righteousness goes forth as brightness, And her salvation as a lamp that burns.  
 4 You shall no longer be termed Forsaken, Nor shall your land any more be termed Desolate; But you shall be called Hephzibah, and your land Beulah; For the LORD delights in you, And your land shall be married. 5 For as a young man marries a virgin, So shall your sons [Builder] marry you; And as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, So shall your God rejoice over you.  
 6 I have set watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; They shall never hold their peace day or night. You who make mention of the LORD, do not keep silent, 7 And give Him no rest till He establishes And till He makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth.  
 10 Go through, Go through the gates! [into His holy courts - v9] Prepare the way for the people; Build up, Build up the highway! Take out the stones, Lift up a banner for the peoples!
- D. After God's own heart – pursuing what God desires
1. David is called a man after God's own heart, not because he walked perfectly, but because he set his heart on that which God had set His heart on: to be with Him where He was, beholding His glory and responding in love.
 

**Psalms 27:4** One thing I have desired of the LORD, That will I seek: That I may dwell in the house of the LORD All the days of my life, To behold the beauty of the LORD, And to inquire in His temple.

2. Peter makes two statements about David in his sermon in Acts 13: he was after God's heart, and he served God's purpose in his generation. The two are intimately connected – when we set our heart to press in to God's purpose for us as an individual we end up serving His purpose for our generation.  
**Acts 13:22** And when He had removed him, He raised up for them David as king, to whom also He gave testimony and said, ‘I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My own heart, who will do all My will.’  
**36** "For David... served the purpose of God in his own generation
  
3. A generation in need of a move of God is a generation in need of a church with the heart of David. If we are not connecting with God in the way He designed for us to as individuals and as a corporate church, we are useless to our generation.

#### **IV. The promise of grace in our time of need**

**Hebrews 4:16** Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

- A. We respond under grace – though we fall seven times as long as we're getting back up, the Lord is pleased and His mercy covers us.
  
- B. We respond through confidence in love – He bids us draw near with confidence in our hour of need.
  
- C. God is looking at the reach of our hearts, not at our attainment. The urgency is not that we be somewhere but that we determine to go somewhere.
  
- D. God delights in showing mercy. He is not looking for opportunities to judge, but for opportunities to show mercy. We rend our hearts and change our ways, we fast and we pray, not so that we will earn a reprieve but because it gives God the opportunity to show mercy as He longs to do.  
**Micah 7:18** Who is a God like You, Pardoning iniquity And passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not retain His anger forever, Because He delights in mercy.  
**Joel 2:12** “Now, therefore,” says the LORD, “Turn to Me with all your heart, With fasting, with weeping, and with mourning.” 13 So rend your heart, and not your garments; Return to the LORD your God, For He is gracious and merciful, Slow to anger, and of great kindness; And He relents from doing harm.