



TRANSFORMED

DEVOTIONS CONNECTING TEENS TO CHRIST

“Even now,” declares the Lord, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.” Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity.
Joel 2:12-14

Return and be renewed

One time, there was a wasp nest in the upper corner of the swing set. I found a rock, aimed, and fired. The rock sailed just over the nest and cracked the glass window behind it. Terrified of the punishment, I ran away.

Remember the last time you ran and hid? Was it because of something you looked at online—something you know God doesn’t want you looking at? Was it a substance you know you aren’t old enough to imbibe, but you did anyway? What are you hiding out of the sight of others because you know it’s forbidden by God?

We hide because we are afraid. We are afraid that God could never forgive “someone like me.” We think, “If I was a true Christian, then I shouldn’t keep falling into these sins.” We promise never to do it again. But then we do. Guilt and fear of punishment haunt our hearts and minds. No wonder we run.

Joel was an Old Testament prophet in troubled times to troubled people—tired of trying to crawl back into God’s good graces. They knew from the big-time disasters (like COVID-19) to the daily, little life irritations, they had only themselves to blame.

Joel’s message to them was, “Tear your hearts, not your garments.” Tearing your robe was an ancient sign of mourning and repentance. But what good is an outward show if it lacks real sorrow? Don’t just go the motions of saying sorry, but not be sorry enough to change your actions. Try standing before God on Judgment Day with torn clothes but untorn hearts.

In the moment the devil tempts you to give up and give in, run. RUN ... not away from God, but run *to* God. Why? “He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love.” God put compassion and justice together, demanding punishment for our sins, but graciously sending his Son to serve our sentence as our substitute. The cross is the way back. There is no punishment for your sin. There you will find forgiveness.

If the COVID-19 virus and its destructive power is forcing you to think more of God and pray ... GOOD! Use this time as a call to repentance. But remember how God has chosen to use his divine power: not to destroy you, but to save you. He *loves* you!

In perilous times, stop running away. Run to your gracious God. Run to the cross.

Prayer: Lord, you are overflowing with love for me. Give me the strength to stop sinning. Give me courage in this perilous time and your strength when I am weak. May I daily find forgiveness in you. In Jesus name I pray, Amen.