# Anware ing Too

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF JONAH





#### A HIGHPOINT RESOURCE

Highpoint Church 1805 High Point Drive Naperville, Illinois 60563

www.highpoint.church

All Scripture is from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

Unwavering God: A Study of the Book of Jonah

# Anware ing Too

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF JONAH



### **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

#### INTRODUCTION

#### WEEK ONE: THE UNWAVERING LOVE AND HOLINESS OF GOD

Who is this Jonah guy?

Entering the Kingdom of Heaven

Jesus was sent not to condemn, but to save the world

The Greatest Commandment

Reflection and prayer

Teaching notes

#### WEEK TWO: THE UNWAVERING AUTHORITY OF GOD

But Jonah...

The Great City

Why Tarshish?

Putrid paradise

Reflection and prayer

Teaching notes

#### WEEK THREE: THE UNWAVERING SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

But Jonah? But Yahweh!

Sovereign over all

Cast your lots

My way or the highway

Reflection and prayer

Teaching notes

#### WEEK FOUR: THE UNWAVERING NEARNESS OF GOD

From the belly of a fish

Three days and three nights

Out of the waters

Love and discipline

Reflection and prayer

Teaching notes

#### WEEK FIVE: THE UNWAVERING CHARACTER OF GOD

Oh, the irony

Idolatry 101

Idolatry 201

Take a look in the mirror

Reflection and prayer

Teaching notes

#### WEEK SIX: THE UNWAVERING SATISFACTION OF GOD

Unmerited favor

Same grace as yesterday

Well, that was unexpected...

Saving grace

Reflection and prayer

Teaching notes

#### WEEK SEVEN: THE UNWAVERING MERCY OF GOD

Preach it!

A potent proclamation

God's response

Lord, have mercy

Reflection and prayer

Teaching notes

#### WEEK EIGHT: THE UNWAVERING RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD

Offended by God

GRRRRR!!!!

Tossing tables

Indignation

Reflection and prayer

Teaching notes

#### WEEK NINE: THE UNWAVERING PATIENCE OF GOD

Which way you headed?

Heading East...

Hmph.

Kingdom of God

Reflection and prayer

Teaching notes

#### **WEEK TEN: UNWAVERING MISSION**

Questioning the question

TWO lost sons

Opposing perspectives

An obvious answer

Reflection and prayer

Teaching notes

#### INTRODUCTION

I grew up hearing the story of Jonah. I read the children's books; I watched the Veggie Tales movie; I sat as a Sunday school teacher presented the events of the book flannel-graph style. Perhaps you did, too. Familiarity with this story can lessen its significance, making it feel almost trite and childish. But, Jonah's story of running from God, enduring His discipline, and witnessing His mercy is much more than a children's book.

The book of Jonah is only four chapters long and it's a preposterous story, really. Nothing happens the way the reader expects. The hero is disappointing and stubborn. The worst sermon prompts tremendous revival. A plant appears overnight and then dies. A massive fish and a small worm are used as vessels of God's discipline. The whole thing ends in a question mark. What a bizarre tale! And yet, what shines through this story is the compassion of the *righteous*, *just* God, despite the evil, stubborn hearts of mankind. God the Father is UNWAVERING in His pursuit of both the Ninevites and of Jonah.

As you study Jonah, keep challenging yourself to look for the character of God within the events of the narrative. Notice His patience in all His dealings with Jonah. Notice His mercy in extending forgiveness to an unworthy people. Notice His power in commanding the movements of a worm. But then, consider the hints of your own story in the pages of Jonah's.

There's a bit of Jonah in all of us.



"For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His steadfast love toward those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does He remove our transgressions from us."

PSALM 103:11-12

## DAY ONE WHO IS THIS JONAH GUY?

GETTING TO KNOW YOU, GETTING TO KNOW ALL ABOUT YOU

Today's Reading: 2 Kings 14:23-27

This week our goal is to understand where Jonah's story fits into the Bible as a whole. The story of the Bible is one of returning: returning to Eden, returning to shalom, returning to communion with God. While the Bible is comprised of sixty-six books, each author points to mankind's need to return to God and his inability to make that return on his own. Time and again, the stories of the Bible focus on a person or people group who want something that looks good to them, but is off limits. Ignoring the instruction of Yahweh, the person/people take what they want, then suffer the consequences of their rebellion. An intercessor pleads the guilty party's case before the Lord, and He relents and rescues His people.

The people, settings, and circumstances may change, but God is **unwavering** through every story in every book. He is the same God in Genesis as He is in Revelation and as He is today.

So, what of Jonah? When does he first appear in the Bible? What is his background? What is the role of a prophet? Finding the answers to these questions will require us to embark on a little Bible adventure... my favorite kind of adventure!

Jonah was a prophet. Prophets played a key role in Israel's history. These prophets were Israelites who were commissioned to speak on God's behalf, almost like a representative. The prophet communicated messages from Yahweh to the Israelites and reminded Israel of their role in their covenant (partnership) with God.

The prophets' messages often centered on three main objectives:

- Accusing Israel of violating the covenant
- Calling Israelites to repent and return to God
- Announcing the consequence for breaking the partnership with God

Studying the prophets gives the reader a fuller picture of the history of the Israelite nation, their frequent rebellion against Yahweh, and the unwavering nature of Yahweh's character.

#### THE PROPHETS

**MAJOR** 

Isaiah Jeremiah Ezekiel Daniel

MINOR

Hosea Nahum
Joel Habakkuk
Amos Zephaniah
Obadiah Haggai
Jonah Zechariah
Micah Malachi

Read 2 Kings 14:23-27. To let you know ahead of time, this is a text rich in history and lineage.



At this point in the narrative, the nation of Israel has already split into two kingdoms: the northern Kingdom (Israel) and the southern kingdom (Judah).

O1 Let's get some facts about this text:

Is Jonah from the northern or southern kingdom?

Who is the current king of that kingdom?

Did the king do good or evil in the sight of the Lord?

Historically, when a king did evil in the sight of the Lord, a prophet would come and speak against the king, and Yahweh would bring disaster on the unrighteous king and his kingdom.

But is that what happened to Jeroboam II?

**02** | Read verse 25 again. What happened to Israel, despite Jeroboam's wickedness? How was Jonah involved?

03 | In the situation with Jeroboam II, which of God's attributes stands out to you?

We know little else about Jonah's life other than his involvement with Jeroboam II and what we read in the book of Jonah. He lived in a time of national wealth, as Israel's lost territories were recovered, and the economy was booming because the nation controlled several trade routes. Scholars believe that because Jonah prophesied good things for the people of Israel, Jonah was most likely popular, honored, and financially secure.

O4   Take what you know of the book of Jonah and consider, how does a prophet go from such prosperity and success to running from God?
How easy it can be to forget the Lord brings favor and honor. The Lord exalts and the Lord brings down low.

# DAY TWO ENTERING THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

#### JESUS PAID OUR ENTRY FEE

Today's Reading: Mark 10:17-31

Far too often, I confuse condemnation with the Lord's discipline. If I speak without thinking first, if I get angry and raise my voice at my husband, if I put off a task and miss an important deadline, the critique is always at the ready.

"You are not good enough."

If I'm not careful, I can confuse this inner critic with the voice of the Lord. I hear condemnation and repackage it as discipline. But Hebrews 12 provides clarity on how to recognize the discipline of the Lord. "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives," (vs. 5-6).

Notice the Lord disciplines and chastises. While discipline involves correction or instruction, chastisement involves rebuke and severe reprimand. The Greek word used here is mastigoo and is only used seven times in the New Testament- once, here in Hebrews 12:6, and six times in the gospels, all referring to Jesus' tormenting at the hands of Pontius Pilate's soldiers. There is no sugar-coating it here- chastisement can be excruciating.

That should perplex you a bit, right? How can it be God the Father instructs, corrects, and even rebukes and severely reprimands the ones He loves? Keep reading, sister. "He disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained in it," (Hebrews 12:10b-11).

Condemnation is punishment that yields shame, but discipline, and even chastisement, is correction that yields fruit.

Let's see how this plays into a familiar story in Mark's gospel.

Read Mark 10:17-31.

<sup>&</sup>quot;You are a failure."

<sup>&</sup>quot;You should have known better."

O1   In verse 21, Jesus looked at the rich, young man and loved him. How would the story be different if Mark took out "loved him"?
<b>02</b>   Because he loved him, what did Jesus challenge this ruler to do? What about that challenge could be loving?
O3   If the ruler had followed Jesus' instructions, what type of fruit could the discipline have yielded? According to Mark 10:22, what was yielded instead?
Jesus remarks about the difficulty of a wealthy person entering the kingdom of God. The requirements for entry are the same for the wealthy and successful as they are for the poor and the marginalized. Jesus asks simply for faith in him, for he has already paid the entry fee. Jesus asks of his followers to leave everything and pursue him instead.
MAKE A CONNECTION
<b>04</b>   Remember what we learned about Jonah yesterday in our study. How is Jonah similar to the rich young man?

#### **REFLECTION**

**05** | What attribute of Jesus is most evident, not only in his interactions with the rich young man, but also in his conversation that followed with the disciples?

**06** | How have you experienced the Lord's discipline, or even chastisement, in this season of life? What fruit could following his instruction yield in your life?

## DAY THREE JESUS WAS SENT NOT TO CONDEMN, BUT TO SAVE THE WORLD

#### #REALLIFESUPERHERO

Today's Reading: Matthew 12:38-41, John 3:16-21

This week's goal is to discover where Jonah's story sits within the grander narrative of the Bible. In some of his final instructions to his disciples before he ascended to heaven, Jesus told them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled," (Luke 24:46).

Everything in the Old Testament points to the Messiah, the anointed rescuer, the Christ who would "suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem," (Luke 24:45b-47). We would come to know in the New Testament this Messiah is Jesus Christ. The whole of the Bible is pointing to Jesus.

Even Jonah's story?

#### Read Matthew 12:38-41.

A sign is "an unusual act with special meaning," (Moody Bible Commentary).

**01** Taking what you know of the Pharisees, why are they asking Jesus for a sign? Why do you think Jesus described their motives as "adulterous"?

**O2** | Reread verse 40. What in Jonah's story is similar to that of Jesus'?

<b>03</b>   Why will the men of Nineveh rise up and condemn the Pharisee Ninevites' response to God different than that of the Pharisees in the Jesus?				
According to Jesus, something than is here	(v. 41)!			
<b>04</b>   In what way is Jesus greater than Jonah in his taking the word lost?	of the Lord to the			
While Jonah went to the people of Nineveh <i>reluctantly</i> , Jesus came the lost out of love.	willingly to seek			
Read John 3:16-21.				
MAKE A CONNECTION				
God the Father loved the world so much He gave His Son to save the to condemn it. Let's connect this love to the love Jesus showed the in Mark 10, who we studied yesterday.				
<b>05</b>   How is God the Father's love for the lost similar to that of Jesu young man? How is the method of showing that love similar between Father and Jesus the Son?				

06	What	did	Jonah	lack i	in his	comparison	to J	esus?
----	------	-----	-------	--------	--------	------------	------	-------

God sent Jesus to a lost world, not because he wanted to condemn the world, but because He wanted to save them. Jesus is the **far better** Jonah because he spoke against the people because he loved them.

#### REFLECTION

**O7** | How do you respond to those who are lost? Who is/are the lost person/people in your life? In what way can you show them the love of Jesus this week?

## DAY FOUR THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT

LOVE GOD. LOVE OTHERS.

Today's Reading: I Corinthians 13

In Matthew 22, a lawyer asks Jesus a question to test him. He asks to determine what is the greatest commandment in the Law. The test could force Jesus to favor one command in the Law over others, by default making other laws less important. Jesus responds, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets," (Matthew 22:37-40).

Did you catch that last part? The words of the Prophets- from Isaiah to Malachidepend on these two commandments: love God and love others. Jonah's book rests on these two commandments.

But how does a story of a rebellious, stubborn prophet speak of love at all?

#### Read 1 Corinthians 13.

Let's think about all of those conditional statements in verses 1-3:

- If I speak in the tongues of men and angels
- If I have prophetic powers and understand all mysteries and all knowledge
- If I have all faith, so as to move mountains
- If I give away all I have
- If I deliver up my body to be burned

O1 | If you knew someone who did any or all of these things, what would your estimation of him/her be?

O2   Yet, if any of those gifts or acts are performed without the performer loving God and God's people, what is the result?
03   What does it mean, then, is the connection between love and obedience?
Obedience to God devoid of love for Him and for others is not true holiness. In fact, obedience without love is worthless.  MAKE A CONNECTION
Go back to Jesus' response to the lawyer in Matthew 22. The greatest commandment is to love the Lord your God with all your, with all your, and with all your
O4   How does loving God in this way affect my love of my neighbor?
"When we devote heart, soul, mind, and strength to loving him, we perceive ourselves rightly- no room for pride or self-exaltation- which prepares us to love our neighbor freely. Rightly perceiving ourselves to be unworthy recipients of the agape of God, we become willing to love our neighbor in spite of himself because God first

to act in love whether we feel it or not," (Jen Wilkin, In His Image).

loved us in spite of ourselves. We do not wait to feel love; rather, we will ourselves

Jonah failed to follow both commandments. His book points to the need for a Messiah who is the embodiment of love, a rescuer who came because he loved the ones in need of rescue.

#### REFLECTION

**O5** | Which proves to be the most difficult for you-loving God with all your heart, with all your mind, or with all your strength? What does it look like to love Him in this way?

## DAY FIVE **REFLECTION AND PRAYER**

#### THE UNWAVERING LOVE AND HOLINESS OF GOD

Today's Reading: Psalm 63, 86, and 103

Today's reading: Choose one of the following Psalms that speak of God's steadfast love, chastisement, *and* discipline: Psalm 63, Psalm 86, or Psalm 103.

**01** Reflect on what we've studied this week of how God's love for and discipline of His children are connected. How do you see this in the Psalm you read today?

**O2** | Most often to appeal to nonbelievers, Christians emphasize God's love over His holiness. But God's love often doesn't look like our human notions of what love is. How is God's love different from mankind's love?

**O3** | Who is someone in your life that is difficult to love? At the root of it, what makes loving that person harder than loving others? What would taking a tangible step toward loving that person this week look like?

<b>04</b>   Write out a prayer below thanking the Lord for His love for you, surrendering to His instruction and leading in your life, and asking for help to walk out in obedience as you love Him and others.

## **TEACHING NOTES**


## **TEACHING NOTES**




The earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein, for He has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers.

**PSALM 24:1-2** 

## DAY ONE ... BUT JONAH...

#### ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDS

Today's Reading: Jonah 1:1-3; Psalm 139:7-12

When my daughters were little, hide-and-seek was the game of choice to play in that tricky time between dinner and bedtime. Emery, my youngest, would try to stump me and find the most elusive hiding places possible. What she didn't account for, however, was though her face was covered and she could no longer see me, her feet gave her away. As soon as I yelled "ready or not, here I come" and began my search, little toes sticking out of the bottom of our living room curtains would catch my eye.

I think of times I've tried to hide like that from God out of shame or frustration. I imagine my attempts to escape His gaze are much like Emery's baby toes. There is nowhere I can run outside of His authority and omnipresence. The more I grow in my knowledge of His character, the more confident I am running from Him is futile.

#### Read Jonah 1:1-3 and Psalm 139:7-12.

Beginning this book with the word "now" connects the story of Jonah to the rest of the Old Testament. Think of the books of the Bible as pieces in a mosaic art installation. We are examining one piece of the mosaic, but the piece works together with the other pieces to create one beautiful mosaic picture.

These verses in Jonah introduce the two main characters of the book: Jonah and Yahweh. One interesting feature of this book is Jonah chapters 1 & 3 are parallel to each other and 2 & 4 are parallel to each other. Pay attention to patterns as you read this book.

01 | What does Yahweh ask Jonah to go do and why?

**O2** | Review what we learned last week about the prophet Jonah. What is the role of a prophet? Would this have been the first time he heard a "word of the Lord"?

Draw a box around the words "but Jonah" in verse three. When Yahweh gives Jonah a clear direction, Jonah begins to run away... all the way to Tarshish.

Jonah travels to the port of Joppa, charters a boat, and sets sail for Tarshish, away from the presence of God, and, by default, quitting his position as "prophet." Jonah attempts to flee from the manifest presence or nearness of God.

**O3** | Even without reading the rest of the book, what do Jonah's actions reveal about his devotion to God? His heart for the lost? His estimation for himself?

#### WHERE TO?

Jonah was a prophet from the Northern Kingdom of Israel. When Jonah receives Yahweh's call, he was most likely living in Samaria, the capital city of the Northern Kingdom. Nineveh was roughly 500 miles northeast of Samaria, but Jonah desired to go in the opposite direction, 2,000 miles west to Tarshish.

Consider Tarshish for a minute. Jonah chose to go 2,000 miles in the opposite direction from where Yahweh told him to go. Jonah heard the command of the Lord, didn't want to fulfill it, and ran the other way.

#### MAKE A CONNECTION

**O4** | How does David's view of God's presence, as evidenced in his words in Psalm 139, differ from Jonah's, as evidenced by his actions?

#### **REFLECTION**

**O5** | Have you ever run to "Tarshish"? Has there ever been a time where the Lord's word pricked your spirit, and you knew what He was telling you to do, yet you ran to "Tarshish"? What did you learn about the character of God in your return?

## DAY TWO THE GREAT CITY

#### NINEVEH CAUGHT GOD'S ATTENTION

Today's Reading: Jonah 1:1-3; Genesis 10:10-12

Let's review. Jonah first appears in 2 Kings 14, during the reign of the evil king, Jeroboam II. Jonah received a word from the Lord and prophesied to Jeroboam the borders of Israel would be restored to those from the days of Solomon. In Bethany terms: God's giving back to you the land your ancestors lost, despite the fact you hardly deserve His favor.

Historically, when a king did evil in the sight of God, unless they repented, Yahweh's response was judgment and oppression. Yet, He deviates from this pattern in His treatment of Jeroboam II. Though he was evil, more evil than any king before him, Yahweh blessed Israel with more land and made Jeroboam II victorious over nations. Yahweh showed a corrupt person divine mercy and He delivered that mercy through the prophet, Jonah, son of Amittai.

Interestingly, Jonah's prophecy and Jeroboam's blessings were reversed by the word of the Lord delivered by the prophet Amos (Amos 6:13-14). Ironically, the nation God used to reverse Jeroboam's blessing was Assyria, whose capital city was... Nineveh (2 Kings 16:9).

So, Jonah hears from God a clear command to arise and go to Nineveh, that great city, and his response is to flee from God's presence and quit his prophet gig altogether. Yesterday, we considered what Jonah ran to. Today let's look at what call he ran from: that great city.

#### Read Jonah 1:1-3 and Genesis 10:10-12.

01 | How is Nineveh referred to in both Jonah 1:2 and Genesis 10:12?

Nineveh is the only city in the Bible to be referred to as "great." The Hebrew word for "great" is the word *gadol*. It doesn't mean great as in size, although Nineveh would have been heavily populated. No, *gadol* speaks to *significance*. In Genesis, Nineveh's founding is connected to another significant empire- Babylon. These two kingdoms, Babylon and Assyria would serve as frequent threats to the people of God throughout the Old Testament.

**03** | Look at the following instances in Genesis and Exodus where an evil act comes before Yahweh. As you read, fill in the blanks provided.

And the LORD said, "What have y to me from the ground.		is
Then the LORD said, "Because the and their sin is very grave, I will go according to the outcry, that has (Genesis 18:20-21)	o down towhether they h	ave done altogethe
During those many days the king because of their slavery and		of Israel from slavery

## WHAT MIGHT NINEVEH HAVE LOOKED LIKE?

up to God." (Exodus 2:23)



Nineveh, the gadol city, was one of Israel's most hated enemies. During Jonah's time. Nineveh was home to roughly 120,000 people. The city was enclosed by an inner wall and spanned twelve miles in diameter. It was port city to the Tigress River and, therefore, a mecca for commerce. Because so many traveled to Nineveh to sell or trade, the city would have been filled with various temples to accommodate whatever gods the wealth of travelers would want to worship. The chief goddess of Nineveh was Ishtar, the goddess of sexual love and war. You can imagine the worship of this goddess was sexually immoral. Not only that, but Nineveh was also the capital of the militaristic regime of Assyria, known for their astonishing cruelty to their enemies.

So, The LORD tells His prophet, Jonah, to go to this evil city and speak against it because it's evil has come up to Him.

#### **MAKE A CONNECTION**

Take what you know of Jonah's only other recorded prophecy to Jeroboam II and how Yahweh responded to Jeroboam II, and connect them to what we're learning about the new location Jonah is meant to speak against.

**O4** | What do you think Jonah was afraid would happen? In what way did Jonah question God's character?

#### **REFLECTION**

**05** | What are you facing in your life right now that feels like a Nineveh kind of challenge? What would obedience look like in this circumstance?

## DAY THREE WHY TARSHISH?

#### #HARDPASSONNINEVEH

Today's Reading: Jonah 1:1-3; Isaiah 45:5-10

Tarshish is mentioned many times in the Old Testament. It is regarded as an exotic, distant nation filled with gold and precious gems and metals (1 Kings 10:22, 22:48, Psalms 72:10). In fact, Solomon had a fleet of ships from Tarshish that brought gold, silver, ivory, monkeys, and peacocks to Israel. Tarshish was mysterious and wealthy, but was also portrayed as idolatrous and pagan (Isaiah 2:12-17, Isaiah 23:1). According to many scholars, Tarshish was seen as a distant paradise, where all kinds of luxuries might be found.

God tells Jonah to go to Nineveh, and Jonah makes a break for paradise instead. It sure sounds like Jonah was trying to make an Eden for himself. While the Garden of Eden was the place where God dwelled with man as it was always meant to be, Jonah's pseudo-Eden was intentionally away from the presence of God, in an idolatrous, man-made paradise.

This idea of recreating paradise is not a new one with Jonah. In fact, throughout the Old Testament, humans attempted to form their own faux-Edens in high places or gardens or paradises filled with precious luxuries. But did Jonah go up to a high place to find his paradise?

Read Jonah 1:1-3. What direction is repeated twice in Jonah 1:3?

Jonah goes down to Joppa and down into the ship.

O1 | What is the author implying about Jonah's escape plan?

It seems like the author is pointing out to the reader that Jonah's downward escape plan will lead to death rather than the paradise he is hoping for.

**02** | Though Jonah is the focus of the opening of the book, what do you notice about *God's* character in these verses?

Read Isaiah 45:5-10, a word from the Lord to the people of Israel delivered by the prophet, Isaiah.

**03** | List the attributes of God's character you notice in these verses. For example, I see God's supreme authority in verse 5. What do *you* see?

## **EXAMPLES OF ATTRIBUTES OF GOD**

GOD IS...

Eternal Merciful
Good Omnipotent
Gracious Omniscient
Transcendent Omnipresent
Immanent Righteous
Just Sovereign
Self- Existent Holy

**O4** | In what way is Jonah "striving with him who formed him" (v.9)?

Jonah's refusal to follow God's call puts it in the "woe" category of which verse 9 speaks.

#### REFLECTION

Read verses 9 and 10 again. I've included it here in the NIV translation, which is a bit simpler to understand:

"Woe to those who quarrel with their Maker, those who are nothing but potsherds among the potsherds on the ground. Does the clay say to the potter, 'What are you making?' Does your work say, 'The potter has no hands'? Woe to the one who says to a father, 'What have you begotten?' or to a mother, 'What have you brought to birth?'"

In the analogy, the potter is God the Father and the clay is one of His children, fighting with Him about His intentions for them.

**O5** | What keeps you from fighting with God about His intentions for you? Do you ever feel that His plans do not align with yours? How do you keep your faith strong?

# DAY FOUR PUTRID PARADISE

### WHAT TO DO WHEN GOD CALLS YOU TO UNPLEASANT PLACES

Today's Reading: Jonah 1:4	

The word of the LORD came to Jonah, son of Amittai, saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me." (1:2).

Yesterday we learned that Nineveh was a significant, wealthy, and powerful city. A center of commerce, Nineveh was packed with people living within its walls and seeking protection from the city's many enemies. Even though the city's diameter spanned twelve miles, the population overwhelmed the space. Most citizens would have lived in apartment-style buildings, long before there were building codes or indoor plumbing. Waste would have been thrown out one of the open windows, down to the streets below. These were not sturdy constructions.

Nineveh was packed with various temples to which citizens and travelers could visit and bring sacrifices to their gods. All those animal sacrifices had to be brought through the streets of the city. While each time I walk my dog, Polly, I am careful to bring a bag to pick up any waste she might create on the journey, poop-bags were not priority in the ancient world. The waste of these animals would simply join the waste of the people.

Additionally, the Ninevites, as we learned yesterday, were a cruel, immoral, pagan lot. So, the word of the Lord came to Jonah saying go to Nineveh- that putrid, violent, idolatrous city- and speak against them. Jonah's response? "I think I'll go to paradise, instead."

In the Bible, God's calls to His children are often on that Nineveh scale. Joshua was called to lead an army to march and play a horn around a powerful, vicious city because God would give them over to Israelites. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were called to defy King Nebuchadnezzar's decree to bow down and worship him, despite the fiery punishment awaiting them. Esther is called to prepare a dinner for her king husband who killed his last wife and for the king's aide, who was intent on annihilating Esther's entire people group. God frequently calls His children into dangerous, unwanted situations.

Yet, He is unwavering in His presence with them in those unpleasant places.

Throughout the Bible, the human's response to God brings either positive or negative outcomes. When the human responds in obedience to God's call, he experiences more of the fruit of God's presence and favor; when the human is disobedient and turns away from God's directive, he meets opposition.

See, someone's response of either obedience or disobedience reveals the scope of his faith in and reverence for Yahweh.

The important truth to note is that, regardless of the obedient or disobedient response to His Nineveh-like call, God's ultimate plans are still accomplished. His authority is not affected by man's response.

### Read Jonah 1:1-3.

I hope you're up for a little literary lesson.

**O1** Look back at verse 3 and try to fill in the corresponding blanks below with words from the verse.

But Jonah rose to flee to	from the	of the LORD.
He went to Jo	ppa	
And found a shi	þ	
going to		
So, he paid the	fare	
And went into	it	
To go with them to	. away from the	of the LORD

Do you see a bit of repetition in verse 3? This type of literary device is called *chiasmus*. Chiasmus is a literary device in which words, grammatical structure, or ideas are repeated in reverse order. It comes from the Greek word meaning "crossing" or "X-shaped." The power of *chiasmus* is in the repetition. The author of Jonah does not add any new information by repeating "to Tarshish" or "down" or "presence of the LORD" but rather emphasizes these three ideas by repeating them. Whatever lands at the center of the chiastic structure is the most significant.

**02** | Why do you think the author of Jonah want to emphasize- THREE TIMES EVENthat Jonah is going to Tarshish?

O3   Did you notice how action-heavy these verses are (rose, flee, went, go)? Why do you think the author focuses on Jonah's actions only, ignoring Jonah's feelings?
O4   What do Jonah's actions reveal about his understanding of Yahweh?
Jonah's rebellion and sin have distorted his understanding of Yahweh. Though as a prophet, Jonah would know of the omnipresence of Yahweh, his sin distorts that knowledge and feeds him the lie that fleeing to Tarshish is a viable option.

### REFLECTION

05 | Is that true of only Jonah? How can sin distort our right thinking? How have you experienced this to be true?

# DAY FIVE **REFLECTION AND PRAYER**

THE UNWAVERING AUTHORITY OF GOD

Today's Reading: Psalm 9, 29, and 75

Today's reading: Choose one of the following Psalms that speaks to God's authority: Psalm 9, Psalm 29, or Psalm 75.

**01** Reflect on what we've studied this week of the foolishness of running from or quarreling with God, in light of His ultimate authority. How do you see this in the Psalm you read?

**O2** | What area of your life has been especially difficult to yield your authority over to God lately?

03   Write out a prayer below reminding the Lord of His character and yielding to His authority over that area that is so difficult to relinquish control.

## **TEACHING NOTES**

- <del></del>	
- <del></del>	

## **TEACHING NOTES**




And he said to them, "I am a Hebrew, and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land."

JONAH 1:9 -

# DAY ONE **BUT JONAH? BUT YAHWEH!**

I'M GONNA KNOCK YOU OUT!

Today's Reading: Jonah 1

Have you ever seen one of those Rock 'Em, Sock 'Em boxing games. Players pick their robot guy, and then go head-to-head rocking and socking their opponent. Whichever player's robot head pops up first, loses.

Reading this chapter in Jonah feels a little like a rock 'em, sock 'em match to me, only it's as if one of the players is ten times the size of the other. The Lord calls Jonah to do something he doesn't want to do, but Jonah makes a play. He flees. Rock 'em. Jonah doesn't even get through his nap before the Lord hurls a great wind to rock Jonah's napping spot. Sock 'em. Throughout the chapter, Jonah responds



to Yahweh's awesome power with disinterest or disregard, using his indifference to "rock" back, but nothing can thwart God's plans. Proverbs 19:21 says, "Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the LORD that will stand." The match was over before it began.

This week we will study the sovereignty of God and how His authority cannot be challenged.

### Read Jonah 1.

01 | So what's happening in this chapter? Let's look first at those sailors. What sticks out to you about these pagan guys?

**O2** | Now, what about Jonah? Look at his statement in verse 9. Do you think he's genuine in what he says? Does his "fleeing from the presence of Yahweh" support his statement about his fear of Yahweh?

O3   List below the words you see repeated in this chapter. For example, the word "hurled" is repeated four times in chapter 1.
O4   Now, what of God? What is God doing in this chapter?
<b>05</b>   Even on the first read through the chapter, how do you see Solomon's wisdom in Proverbs 19:21 play out?
REFLECTION
<b>06</b>   In what area of your life are you struggling to release control to the Lord? What would surrender in this area look like?

# DAY TWO SOVEREIGN OVER ALL

THY WILL, NOT MY WILL

Today's Reading: Jonah 1:4-6

We often speak in church about the sovereignty of God. What does it mean, though, that God is sovereign? Is that an admirable quality? Why is His sovereignty both a good and sobering truth for me to remember each day?

Let's see if we can get ourselves to a Biblical definition of sovereignty by reading a few verses that describe God's sovereignty.

- "I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted." (Job 42:2)
- "...He does according to His will among the host of the heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, 'What have you done?'" (Daniel 4:35)
- "...for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose' calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of my counsel from a far country. I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it. (Isaiah 46:9-11)
- **O1** In your own words, what do all of these verses say about God? What is *your* definition of sovereignty?

To me, God's sovereignty is His unyielding command over all things to accomplish His good purpose.

Read Jonah 1:4-6.

O2   What does God show sovereignty over in these verses?
03   What is the mariners' response?
NEW TESTAMENT CONNECTION
Does anything about these verses remind you of another Bible story? Perhaps another scenario with a big storm and a sleeping Prophet?
Read Matthew 8:23-27.
<b>04</b>   What is similar between these two stories? What sticks out to you as drastically different?
Jesus said in John 14:9, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father." Here in Matthew, Jesus displays his sovereignty over the wind and the water, in the same way His Father does in the Jonah 1.
As the storm builds and the hurled cargo isn't helping the situation, the mariners grab Jonah and tell him to "call out to his god!" (Jonah 1:5-6).
05   Does Jonah call out to God at this point?

### **REFLECTION**

**06** | What keeps Jonah from calling out to God, especially if he knows God is the one who sent the storm? What does this reveal about Jonah's heart? Can you relate at all to this?

# DAY THREE CAST YOUR LOTS WHAT'S THE VERDICT?

Today's Reading: Joshua 7:10-15, Jonah 1:7-10

\_\_\_\_

Earlier in the Biblical story, way before Jonah even existed, lived a man named Achan. Part of the Israelite generation that had lived to see the Promised Land, Achan was from tribe of Judah and fought with the Israelite army under the direction of Joshua. His story is told right after God empowers the nation of Israel to miraculously defeat the city of Jericho. God promised Joshua military success over the nations threatening the Israelites, but the Israelites had to devote everything in the cities they conquered to destruction, with the exception of any silver, gold, bronze, or iron materials which were to go to treasury of the LORD.

Enter Achan. Joshua and the Israelites were riding the high of their Jericho victory as they continued their conquest of the Promised Land. The next enemy to defeat was Ai. Believing Yahweh would go with them and defend them in the same way He had before, Joshua and his army attacked Ai and they were wasted. There were many casualties and "the hearts of the people melted and became as water," (Joshua 7:5b).

Joshua was grieved at the loss and upset with Yahweh, questioning why the Israelites lost so badly and why Yahweh had turned His back on them.

Read God's response in Joshua 7:10-15.

### **CASTING OF LOTS**

The practice of casting lots, or cleromancy, is mentioned 47 times in the Bible. The outcome is determined by random means, such as the rolling of dice, but was sometimes believed to reveal the will of God according to the Hebrew Bible. For a few examples of its use in the Bible, see Leviticus 16:8. Numbers 26:55, I Samuel 14:42, and Proverbs 16:33.

**O1** | Why was God angry with the nation of Israel? With what method did God tell Joshua to use to discover who took the devoted things?

The Israelite nation cast lots until the guilty party was revealed. Upon discovery, Achan acknowledges he sinned against the LORD because when he saw the beautiful cloak, loads of silver, and gold bars, he "coveted them and took them," (Joshua 7:21). Achan was put to death, along with all of his "loot."

The casting of lots revealed his guilt.

### MAKE A CONNECTION

O2 | What is similar about the Israelites' defeat at Ai and the mariners in the storm? What is similar between Achan and Jonah?

O3 | What did both Achan and Jonah doubt of Yahweh?

Can | be honest about one thing? Jonah's statement in verse 9 doesn't sit right with me. Does he believe what he's saying? Do his actions reveal a heart that fears the Lord, "who made the sea and dry land,"?

Regardless of Jonah's heart, the mariners were "exceedingly afraid," for they knew Jonah was fleeing from the presence of the God who made the sea and dry land. Already they were sensing God's sovereignty.

God made firm the skies above. He established the fountains of the deep. He assigned to the sea its limits. He marked out the foundation of the world. (Proverbs 8:28-29)

### **REFLECTION**

**O4** | What does it mean to "fear the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land"? What is the difference between the fear the mariners had of the storm and the fear Christians are meant to have of God? What does it look like to live in the fear of the sovereign God?

### DAY FOUR

### MY WAY OR THE HIGHWAY

WE CANNOT THWART A PERFECT, SOVEREIGN GOD

Today's Reading: Jonah 1:11-17

In week one of this study, we looked at how God's attributes of holiness and love are not mutually exclusive from each other. Neither is His sovereignty separate from His love or from His holiness.

God is in complete control; His holy, perfect plan to bring mankind back into fellowship with Him cannot be thwarted by anything or anyone. He is unwavering in His holiness, in His love, in His sovereignty.

Yet, mankind rebels.

Read Jonah 1:11-17.

O1| Twice the author reminds us that the sea grew more and more \_\_\_\_\_. Why repeat this?

**02** | Even though Jonah tells the mariners how to get the storm to stop, they try to row harder and get back to land themselves. Why?

It is difficult to know whether Jonah's command to "hurl" him into the sea was made out of a desire to save the mariners from possible death, or a desire to escape Yahweh's presence for good. Remember though, Jesus told his disciples "something greater than Jonah is here," (Matthew 12:41).

Jesus gave himself up once and for all to save mankind from a deserved death because he loved us, not to carry out his own agenda, separate for God the Father. Greater than Jonah, indeed.

### A WHALE OF A TALE

The Hebrew language uses the same word for both fish, whale, and sea creature. While there is much written about the physical characteristics of sea creatures able to swallow a man, the fact that matters most is the authority of God over that fish. Although, I personally think Jonah must have been swallowed by a sperm whale, the same type of whale chronicled in the novel, Moby Dick by Herman Melville.

### **HOW LONG?**

The Hebrew idiom "three days and three nights" doesn't necessarily mean exactly three full days and three nights, but could also mean a period of time beginning on one day and ending on the day after the one following.

**O3** | Compare Jonah 1:10 with Jonah 1:16. What has changed in the mariners? Why the change?

Jonah is hurled into the sea and the storm ceases. Jonah's "death" brought about the sailors' salvation. The death of a prophet brings about the salvation of the nations. God uses even Jonah's rebellion as an instrument of His purpose in bringing the sailors to repentance and salvation.

And then God shows His sovereignty again by commanding a great fish to swallow up Jonah.

Mercy in the form of one massive, terrifying, large-stomached fish.

### REFLECTION

**O4** | Describe a time in your walk with the Lord where His mercy came in the form of a "great fish." When have you experienced a closed door or a "no" to a prayer that turned out to be the Lord's protection of you? When have you confused His kindness for punishment?

# DAY FIVE **REFLECTION AND PRAYER**

### THE UNWAVERING SOVERIGNTY OF GOD

Today's Reading: Psalm 33
O1   Reflect on what we've studied this week of God's sovereignty. Make a list of the verses that speak to God having supreme authority over all things.
For example, the Lord has authority over the waters, controlling them in whatever way He chooses (v. 7).
<b>02</b>   Psalm 33 not only speaks of the authority of God, but also of His nature. Now, list out God's attributes the Psalmist is praising.
For example, all of the Lord's work is done in faithfulness (v. 4).
<b>03</b>   Write out a prayer below praising God for His character and recalling all that He has authority over in this world.

## **TEACHING NOTES**

	<del></del>	



Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from Your presence? If I ascend to heaven, You are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, You are there!

PSALM 139:7-8-

# DAY ONE FROM THE BELLY OF A FISH

ARE YOU THERE GOD? ITS ME, JONAH.

Today's Reading: Jonah 2:1-2; Psalm 71

"In my distress I called upon the LORD; to my God I cried for help. From his temple he heard my voice, and my cry to him reached his ears." (Psalm 18:6)

"Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress." (Psalm 107:19)

"The snares of death encompassed me; the pangs of Sheol laid hold on me; I suffered distress and anguish. Then I called on the name of the LORD: 'O LORD, I pray deliver my soul.'" (Psalm 116:3-4)

"Out of my distress I called on the Lord; the Lord answered me and set me free." (Psalm 118:5)

"In my distress I called to the LORD, and he answered me." (Psalm 120:1)

"Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD!" (Psalm 130:1)

The Psalms are beloved texts for many believers, as they speak to the highs and lows of the Christian experience and, more importantly, the unwavering nature of God. Maybe you're like me in that when encountering deep distress, Psalms are the Scriptures most readily available in my mind. I find comfort, joy, and a sense of wholeness as I read the Psalms.

Yet nearly sixty-five of the Psalms are laments. A lament is a cry, a groaning out of the depths of distress, an ache set to words. The book of Psalms is full of them, many attributed to King David, the man God said was "a man after His own heart." These laments are not prayers without faith, but rather prayers desperate for faith.

In his book <u>Dark Clouds</u>, <u>Deep Mercy</u>: <u>Discovering the Grace of Lament</u>, Mark Vroegop wrote, "Every lament is a prayer. A statement of faith. Lament is the honest cry of a hurting heart wrestling with the paradox of pain and the promise of God's goodness."

A lament like King David's reveals the foundation of relationship he had with God the Father and often ended in a renewed resolution to trust in His ways and His timing.

Jonah chapter 2 is a lament, one incongruous with Jonah's actions in chapter 1. Is this a rock-bottom prayer for Jonah? Is this a prayer for faith? What does Jonah's prayer reveal about his relationship with Yahweh? This week, we will study this prayer and the theology of biblical lamenting, seeking God's insight in it all.

Before we get to Jonah, though, let's first understand the nature of lament.

### Read Psalm 71.

Most biblical laments follow a pattern, as the one grieving is led by God on a journey from brokenness to hope. While the pattern is not always linear (often the Psalmist will fluctuate between the first three and then end on the last step), each step in the pattern is followed. The pattern has four steps:

In distress, I

- Turn to God
- Complain to God about the problem
- Ask for God's intervention
- Trust in God's character

**O1** Let's break down Psalm 471 in this way. Either list or rewrite in your own words the verses that fall into the four steps.

TURN	
(vs. 1-3)	
COMPLAIN	
(vs.7; 10-11; 20)	
ASK	
(vs. 12-13)	
TRUST	
(vs. 17-24)	

02 | In reviewing the text, why do you think the Psalmist sees God as trustworthy?

### **REFLECTION**

**O3** | Does the theology of lament bring you confusion or freedom? Do you feel uncomfortable complaining before the Lord? Is it possible to be too bold with Him?

"As for me, I am poor and needy, but the Lord takes thought of me." (Psalm 40:17)

Thank you, Father, that you take thought of us.

## DAY TWO THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS

IT'S ALL ABOUT TIMING.

Today's Reading: Jonah 2:1-7

Three days and three nights is a frequent time signature in the Bible. It took three days for Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, through the waters, to Mount Sinai (Exodus 3:18, 5:3, 8:27). It took three days for Abraham to travel to Mount Moriah, upon which he was meant to sacrifice his son, Isaac (Genesis 22:4). The prophet, Hosea, told the unrepentant people of Israel and Judah to return to the Lord, "for He has torn us, that He may heal us; He has struck us down and He will bind us up. After two days He will revive us; on the third day He will raise us up, that we may live before Him," (Hosea 6:1-2). These three days and nights seem to indicate a grueling journey or a time of testing/despair.

In Jonah's case, it seems those three days are significant. Three days in the "belly of Sheol" (Jonah 2:2) indicate the journey and despair Jonah requires to bring Him back to God's assignment.

#### Read Jonah 2:1-7.

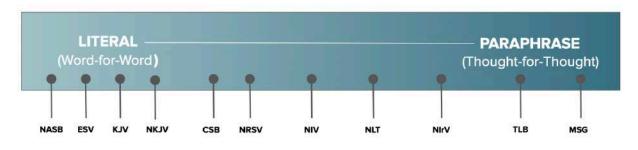
One way to study Scripture in a fresh way is to read the same passage in a few different translations. Below you will find the first two verses of Jonah 2 in three different translations.

From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the LORD his God. He said, "In my distress I called to the LORD, and he answered me. From deep in the realm of the dead I called for help, and you listened to my cry." (New International Version)

Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the stomach of the fish, and he said, "I called out of my distress to the LORD, and he answered me. I called for help from the depth of Sheol; You heard my voice. (New American Standard Bible 20)

Then Jonah prayed unto the LORD his God out of the fish's belly, and said, I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the LORD, and he heard me; out of the belly of hell cried I, and thou heardest my voice. (King James Version)

01 What are the key details in these verses all three translations include?



**NASB** - New American Standard Bible **ESV** - English Standard Version

KJV - King James Version NKJV - New King James Version CSB - Christian Standard Version
NRSV - New Revised Standard Version
NIV - New International Version

NLT - New Living Translations

NIrV - New International Reader's Version

TLB - The Living Bible MSG - The Message

All translations include it's out of his distress Jonah called to the Lord, and He answered. But when did the Lord answer Jonah's cries? His prayer is one of thankfulness after a deliverance. It's easy to assume Jonah is in distress because of his location inside the belly of a fish, but here he says that God's answer was the fish. Jonah is thanking God for saving him by appointing a fish.

A key difference though is from where Jonah's cry hails- deep in the realm of the dead, the depth of Sheol, and the belly of hell. Are all three of these places the same? And what or where is "Sheol"? This word shows up sixty-four times in the Old Testament and can also be translated as hell, grave, or pit. Some scholars believe Sheol is the personification of a craving monster, while others interpret it to be a place of dust, silence, forgetfulness, and darkness. Regardless of the interpretation, Sheol/the deep realm of the dead/the belly of hell all refer to a place of utter despair.

Yet, it's from this place of despair that prompts Jonah to talk to God.

## WHY DIFFERENT TRANSLATIONS?

Reading a verse or passage from different translations of the Bible can help you to understand the passage more deeply. It is not meant to be used as to change the meaning of the text or its doctrine, but rather to help clarify the text so we can better understand what the Bible is saying.

Different approaches were taken to translate the Bible. Some chose a word-for-word or literal approach, some chose to try to convey the original thought in Greek and Hebrew in readable or dynamic translations, while others chose to paraphrase.

Check the chart above to see where your favorite translation falls.

**O2** | Look back on Jonah 2:1-7. According to Jonah, who caused his distress? What do you make of verse 4?

O3   Does Jonah's account of his distress line up with chapter 1?
O4   Yesterday we looked at the four steps of Biblical lament: turn, complain, ask, and trust. What steps do you see in these first seven verses? What is missing?
REFLECTION

| What hinders us from seeing our situation rightly? Why is it tempting to blame God for a situation that was a product of our own choices?

## DAY THREE OUT OF THE WATERS

#### YAHWEH RESCUES HIS CHILDREN

Today's Reading: 2 Samuel 22

In spite of generations of explorers, expensive studies, and vast technological advancements in the field, marine biologists estimate only 5% of the world's oceans have actually been explored. We know more about the moon than we know about the ocean. So then, imagine what was known of the ocean in Jonah's time. Imagine what little was known about sea creatures. The modern study of marine biology didn't begin until the 18<sup>th</sup> century with Captain James Cook mapping out much of the world's unchartered waters. While I could show you a picture of a blue whale or coral or a sea lion or algae, those pictures are only available to me because explorers and scientists have provided them.

The ancient world's understanding of the sea was not built by science, but rather experience, legend, and superstition. The ocean was unknown, dangerous, and full of creatures of undeterminable size and temperament. The ocean was power unhinged and a picture of chaos.

### Yet out of the waters, Yahweh rescues His children.

Though Yahweh floods the earth to rid it of an evil generation, He gives Noah instruction to build an Ark and protects his family from drowning.

Yahweh protects Moses as he floats in a basket down the river Nile until he is picked up by Pharoah's daughter.

Yahweh separates the waters of the Red Sea, and the Israelites pass through on dry land.

Yahweh separates the waters of the Jordan River so the Israelite army, and those carrying the Ark of the Covenant, can walk through on dry land.

Yahweh again separates the waters of the Jordan River so Elijah and Elisha can walk through on dry land.

Out of the waters, Yahweh rescues His children.

Read 2 Samuel 22.

For those of you who do not regularly write in your Bible, this might hurt a little. I want you to find two different colored highlighters or pens. David's prayer recounts the many challenges he had recently encountered and the ways Yahweh acted on his behalf. Any time David mentions a challenge he faced, I want you to underline it in your first highlighter. Then, anytime he talks about how the Lord acted on his behalf, underline it in your second highlighter.

O1 | What do you notice?

**O2** | What does this prayer reveal about David's understanding of God and their relationship?

Now, go back to Jonah's prayer in **Jonah 2:1-9** and do the same underlining process.

03 | What do you notice?

**O4** | What do both prayers reveal about the relationship between the one who is praying and Yahweh?

### **REFLECTION**

05 | What do your prayers reveal about your understanding of God and about your relationship with Him?

# DAY FOUR **LOVE AND DISCIPLINE**

PERHAPS A CHANGE OF HEART?

Today's Reading: Jonah 2:1-10

Have you ever had the experience in prayer where you feel the need to remind God that His ways go? Whenever I pray for something that seems big or impossible to me, I'm quick to remind the Lord, "but if you don't want to do it that way, that's fine with me." Or when my fear threatens to overtake me and doubt is closing in, rather than being forthright with the Lord, I "sugarcoat" my dismay and feel immense guilt as I pray, "I'm not sure what's wrong with me, Lord. I will try to trust you more."

Yet, look at how David, how Job, how Jeremiah all bring their **full** hearts to the Lord, often ranging the spectrum of emotion. God's response is not to smite them. On the contrary! When these early fathers of the faith called out to Yahweh in the midst of their distress, He answered them. "I sought the LORD and He answered me and delivered me from all my fears," David wrote (Psalm 34:4). When Job repeatedly lamented before God, the LORD "answered Job out of the whirlwind..." (Job 38:1). "I called on your name, O LORD, from the depths of the pit: you heard my plea," Jeremiah wrote (Lamentations 3:55-56a). The poor man cried, and the LORD answered.

Despite Jonah's wavering devotion, God's character does not change. When Jonah cries out to Him, He responds.

#### Read Jonah 2:1-10.

**01** In what way is the Jonah of chapter 2 different than the Jonah of chapter 1? What causes this change?

While Jonah's character goes back and forth between impious and pious, angry at God and yielding to God, foolish and aware, God's character does not waver.

02	What specific attributes of Yahweh does Jonah praise in his prayer from the
belly	of the fish? Write those verses in your own words in the space below.

In our first week of this study, we learned how God's love and His discipline are intertwined. He disciplines and chastises the ones He loves.

**03** | How does Jonah's prayer highlight both God's love and His discipline? Where do you see both His power and His protection? His justice and His grace?

In Jonah's prayer, he references fifteen other poems and prayers from all over the book of Psalms, including Psalm 3, 18, 31, 88, 116, and 120. This is not a guy who is unfamiliar with Hebrew Scripture.

**O4** | What do you think Jonah means in verse 9 when he prays, "...what I have vowed I will pay,"?

### **REFLECTION**

**05** | If God is unwavering in His character still, in what way do those same attributes show up in your story?

# DAY FIVE **REFLECTION AND PRAYER**

### THE UNWAVERING NEARNESS OF GOD

Today's Reading: Psalm 62

It is difficult for me to refrain from crying when I hear someone's testimony as they are about to be baptized. Stories of life before Jesus, regardless of the severity of waywardness, break my heart. And then that "but God" moment stirs my affection for the Lord every time. When my brother or sister in Christ comes up out of the water, dripping and smiling, I'm on my feet cheering for all the Lord has done and expectant for all He has yet to do.

Jesus tells his disciples, though, they- and all Christians- will face trouble (John 16:33). He says his way is hard and few will follow (Matthew 7:14). While someone's salvation story stirs our affections for the Lord and compels us to cheer, every believer in the room knows the way will be hard. Worth it, but hard. While Jesus warns his followers of this, he also tells them to come to him, "all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

Our lament is the coming.

Remember the words of Psalmist: "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me," (Psalm 23:4). The valley of the shadow of death sounds a whole lot like the belly of Sheol or the realm of deep darkness to me. Yet, even in the valley, our Father is with us, leading the way.

Our lament is the following.

God is unwavering in His nearness, His comfort, His authority, and His love. When we turn to him, bringing our complaint, asking for Him to intervene, and reminding our souls of why He is faithful, we are choosing to trust in His unwavering nature.

Our lament is not a lack of faith. No, Biblical lament is a *desperate prayer* for more faith and a *song of praise* fueled by hope.

O1   Read Psalm 62, noticing the four steps of a biblical lament. In the space provided, write out your own prayer of lament for whatever is burdening your heart. For more guidance, model your lament after Psalm 62.

## **TEACHING NOTES**




But I with a voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to ou; what I have vowed I will pay. Salvation belongs to the LORD!

**JONAH 2:9**-

# DAY ONE OH, THE IRONY!

### SALVATION BELONGS TO THE LORD

Today's Reading: Jonah 2

"Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love.

But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay.

Salvation belongs to the LORD!"

Jonah 2:8-9

I have sat with these two verses for several weeks, unable to move on. Do you ever have that experience when you study the Bible? Something doesn't sit right with you, and you just can't shake the thought there is more to the text than you are seeing.

To me, these verses feel out of place in Jonah's prayer. The ideas within them don't line up with what we've read in chapter one and in verses 1-7 of chapter two. What is Jonah saying, and who is "paying regard to vain idols"? Is this sacrifice Jonah vows to make happening inside the fish's belly, or is he already trusting the Lord will deliver him from the fish, and is envisioning paying his vows once he's freed? Is Jonah talking about spiritual salvation that belongs to the Lord, or a physical salvation from the fish that belongs to the Lord? I don't like moving on from a text with this many questions unanswered.

This week, we will dig deeper into these two verses and determine where they sit within the grander narrative of Scripture. Let's take the LORD at His Word and expect to find Him when we seek with all our hearts.

Read Jonah 2 to make sure we have these verses in context.

01 What attribute of the LORD does Jonah praise the most in this prayer?

**O2** | This is a tricky question, I know. How would you classify Jonah's depiction of himself in this prayer? What do you notice about how Jonah portrays his own heart and actions?

Now let's start to settle into verses 8 and 9.

**03** Is Jonah including himself in the "those who pay regard to vain idols..." category? If not, to whom could he be referring? (Hint: Maybe consider the other group of people we just read about in chapter one.)

### WHAT IS AN IDOL?

An idol is any substitute for God, material or otherwise. Any idea, person, object, place, or event that is looked to as a source of happiness, security, or identity is an idol. Money can be an idol. Your spouse can be an idol. A promotion can be an idol. Pleasure can be idol. And so on and so on.

Okay, but wait. If Jonah is referring to the pagan Gentile sailors, how do you consider Jonah 1:16? After seeing how Yahweh calmed the sea immediately after they obeyed him and hurled Jonah into it, the sailors "feared the LORD exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows," (Jonah 1:16). God's deliverance from the storm prompted the sailors' reverence to Him. But where was Jonah during all of this? Jonah was in the water. He never saw- nor expected- the sailors' turning back. repentance.

Jonah is declaring his loyalty to Yahweh by pointing out the folly of those substituting a worthless idol for the Almighty God, all the while thinking of those sailors. Not only that, but he contrasts their folly with his wisdom! "But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay," (Jonah 2:9a, emphasis mine).

**O4** What is Jonah promising to God in verse 9?

It is ironic that Jonah can quickly bring to mind the idolatry in another's heart, but fails to see the disloyalty in his own.

### REFLECTION

05 | Why is it easier to see other's sin and not our own?

# DAY TWO IDOLATRY 101

### THOSE GRAVEN IMAGES AREN'T NICE

Today's Reading: Exodus 32: 1-14

Have you ever wondered if God is running late? For me, yielding to the Lord's ways is much easier than yielding to His timing. His timing is perfect; yet, because my understanding of the world is so narrow, His timing can often feel slow to me. When it feels like He is taking too long to fulfill a promise or to respond to my need, I doubt His faithfulness. In my flesh, I grab for control, as if I can push my timing on the God whom I claim to trust. Impatience is the root of my sinful lobbying for control.

Impatience has motivated many an idolater in the narrative of the Bible. At its core though, isn't impatience with God really a doubt in His goodness?

Read Exodus 32:1-14.

01 What happened in these verses? Put the story into your own words.

For a bit of context, Moses is up on Mount Sinai receiving instruction from Yahweh. In Exodus 20, God gives Moses ten commandments for the Israelite nation to follow, the second of which is to refrain from making a "carved image" to worship (Exodus 20:4). God lays out a way of life for Moses to relay to the people and to give merciful guidelines in the way the nation should be governed. Moses spends forty days and nights on Mount Sinai in direct conversation with the God of the universe.

Look back at Exodus 32:1.

02 | When do the people want to build a god?

The Israelites do not know about the commandments, the mercy, the conversations, or the instructions. They only know that Moses is delayed.

They're impatient.

03 | How do the people describe Moses in verse 1?

Though the Israelites have seen manifestations of God's power and protection, they did not yet walk by faith, but rather sight.

Reread verses 5 and 6.

**04** | Who are the people worshiping when they bow down to the golden calf? How do they worship?

## AN IMAGE OF GOD?

"It was not a matter of the people wanting more or newer gods but a case of trying to worship the true God by means of a 'graven image.' Thus, the golden calf was not merely a false god. Rather it was an attempt to depict the true God in a false way,"

(Moody Bible Commentary).

With Moses absent, Aaron steps in as leader. Notice how the description of Aaron is all about his actions. Aaron received the gold; he fashioned it; he made a calf; he built an altar; he made a proclamation. All these actions took time. And yet, not once does the text say Aaron stopped and considered what he was doing. In all that time, not once does is seem to indicate Aaron thought about how he was leading the people into idolatry.

05 | What is the Lord's consequence for the Israelites' idolatry?

Yet, Moses intercedes on behalf of the sinful Israelites and reminds Yahweh of His character and His promises. So, He relents from the disaster He had spoken of bringing on the people, because He cannot deny His character.

## **REFLECTION**

**06** | From what you've read, what is God's response to His children worshipping substitute gods?

07 | Do you think His response aligns with His character? Why or why not?

Remember Jonah 2:8? "Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love." If the LORD had not relented, I can only imagine how would this ring true for the Israelite nation.

## DAY THREE **IDOLATRY 201**

## CAN THE "GOOD LIFE" BE AN IDOL?

Today's Reading: Jonah 2:8-9b

When I have many questions about a text, the first thing I do is read that same passage in many different translations and note both the similarities and the differences. Sometimes my confusion is simply a misreading of the text.

Let's look at today's reading, Jonah 2:8-9b, from four different translations:

"Those who are followers of worthless idols abandon their faithfulness, but I will sacrifice to you with a voice of thanksgiving. That which I have vowed I will pay," (New American Standard Bible)

"Those who cling to worthless idols turn away from God's love for them. But I, with shouts of grateful praise, will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed, I will make good." (New International Version)

"They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy, but I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that I have vowed" (King James Version)

"Those who worship false gods turn their backs on all of God's mercies, but I will offer sacrifices to you with songs of praise and I will fulfill all my vows" (New Living Translation)

01 | What similarities do you see in the four translations of Jonah 2:8-9b? Differences?

Then I go back to my list of initial questions I have about the passage and see if I can answer any simply by reading the different translations.

**O2** | Here are some of the questions I had while reading this passage. Feel free to add some of your own questions in the space provided below.

MY QUESTIONS	ANSWERS FOUND IN SCRIPTURE
What does it mean to pay regard to an idol?	To "pay regard" means to cling, observe, follow, or worship anything other than the one true God.
Is Jonah including himself in "those who pay regard to vain idols?	No, he is contrasting himself with them.
Is the vow Jonah will pay made in the fish's belly?	No, Jonah is referring to vows he made earlier in his life. Perhaps when he first devoted his life to Yahweh?
Is Jonah REALLY repentant?	

Then I look at the question I still haven't answered, the one that nags at me and keeps me from moving on: Is Jonah *really* repentant?

For these questions, I must consider the context of the Scripture, the original language, trusted commentaries, and, most importantly, a whole lot of time sitting with the Lord and waiting for Him to respond.

03 | Let's review. What is considered an idol? I would even consider how the King James Version of Jonah 2:8 describes idols.

**O4** | Does an idol have to be physical? Why or why not?

**05** | If you think about chapter 2 in context of the book of Jonah, rather than focusing simply on verse 8, what "substitute" does Jonah make for God in chapter 1? What does he follow instead of God?

If you're up for a bit of nerdy Bible information, look at Jonah 1:13 and Jonah 3:8. The first describes the actions of the sailors that try to "get back" to shore so they don't have to throw Jonah into the sea. The second describes the king of Nineveh's command to each citizen to "turn from his evil ways."

Both verses use the same Hebrew word: *shuwb*. This word means to return or go back. It's the same Hebrew word used for repentance. The author uses this word to describe the actions of the sailors and the Ninevites.

Can you guess whose actions are never described as shuwb? Jonah.

After three days in the belly of the great fish, Jonah sounds like he's returned and is ready to pay those vows of devotion. As we read the next two chapters, we can determine if he did, in fact, return to the way of Yahweh.

#### REFLECTION

**06** | In what are you often tempted to place your security, worth, or joy as a substitute for God?

## DAY FOUR TAKE A LOOK IN THE MIRROR

YOU CAN'T SEE WHAT YOU CAN'T SEE, AND YET...

Today's Reading: Matthew 7:1-5

Jonah ends his prayer with "Salvation belongs to the LORD," (Jonah 2:9).

Regardless of Jonah's heart, he's right about the true source of rescue. Deliverance, freedom, liberation all belong to God.

Often though, just like Jonah, my actions say otherwise:

Deliverance belongs to my strategy.

Freedom belongs to my avoidance of danger.

Liberation belongs to my willpower.

Rescue belongs to my savviness.

Salvation belongs to my goodness.

Before I even know it, I become my own idol.

#### Read Matthew 7:1-5.

**O1** In this teaching to his disciples, is Jesus pointing out the disciples' external problem or internal problem?

02 | Is there a difference between judgment and discernment?

If you keep reading in Matthew 7, the disciples are told to look out for "dogs" (v. 6), "pigs" (v. 6), and "false prophets" (v. 15).

Pointing out these types of people will require discernment and Holy Spirit leading. So "judge not" must mean something different than discernment.

Judge here means to criticize harshly or to find fault. It's a legal term. We judge when we determine if someone is guilty or not. But throughout Scripture, we learn man cannot discern another's heart; only God can know one's true intentions and motivations.

03 | So, then, what are the "speck" and the "log" Jesus is referring to in verses 3-5?

When I am critical of other's faults without recognizing my own, self-righteousness is rapidly consuming my heart and blurring my understanding of the holiness of God.

Essentially, I am substituting my own "righteousness" as the source of my security and innocence before the righteousness of God. My self-righteousness becomes my idol.

"Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love," (Jonah 2:8).

All substitute gods will inevitably disappoint, leaving the idolater void of hope in the unchanging nature of the one true God.

## **REFLECTION**

In his own study on the book of Jonah, Paul Tripp says, "You cannot confess what you haven't first grieved, and you cannot grieve what you haven't seen and you cannot repent of what you haven't confessed."

Let's make some effort to take inventory of our own lives.

**O4** | What "log" do you need to take out of your life?

<b>05</b>   Find a verse that speaks to the fruit produced in you once that sin is removed and write it in the space below.
For example, the "log" of discontentment can take up residence in my heart so quickly. But, once removed, the Holy Spirit fosters the fruit of peace in my heart.
"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope," (Romans 15:13).

# DAY FIVE **REFLECTION AND PRAYER**

### THE UNWAVERING CHARACTER OF GOD

Today's Reading: Psalm 51

Our second week of this study, we read Psalm 139, which concludes with these final requests: "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my thoughts: And see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting," (Psalm 139:23-24).

David is asking God to reveal the "log in his eye" so that he might turn back to God.

David asks this, knowing God's merciful, loving, and unwavering character.

If you're like me, this week's study has prompted so much reflection about the substitutes I cling to instead of God. The "unrighteous way in me" has been on the forefront of my mind as I've studied Jonah's prayer. How kind of the Lord to invite me to turn back, knowing when I confess my sins, "He is faithful and just to forgive my sin and cleanse me from all unrighteousness," (1 John 1:9).

So, what does "turning back" look like?

## Read Psalm 51.

Not only does David lay out his wrongdoing before the Lord, but he also recalls the character of God throughout the Psalm. Not only does he confess, but he also prays for forgiveness. Not only does he ask God to clean his heart, but he also vows to act in a different way.

## **TEACHING NOTES**




And the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time...

— JONAH 3:1 ————

## DAY ONE UNMERITED FAVOR

THE UNWAVERING GRACE OF GOD

Today's Reading: Jonah 2:10-3:3

I was a sophomore in college and taking my first theology course. The class had been assigned to write a twenty-page exegesis on a passage of our choice. I am not ashamed to

say I lived for these types of assignments. A nerd to the core. I didn't see weeks spent in the library researching and

reading as a waste of time in the slightest.

Because I am old and went to college in the pre-historic Time when personal computers were a rarity, I wrote my entire twenty-page essay in the school's computer lab over the course of many weeks. On the morning of the due date, I went to the computer lab armed with my floppy disk

(for those youths reading, this was a handheld drive upon which I could save all my work) to make my final edits and print out my paper. But when I inserted my floppy disk, my essay was nowhere to be found.

You know these moments. The panic-stricken, can-barely-think-clearly moments. I was experiencing one of those. Later, I would learn the girl who had used the computer next to me the night before had mistaken my floppy disk for hers, and had grabbed mine instead, leaving me hers. At the time, though, I was beside myself. My essay was due, and I had nothing to turn in, despite weeks of work, and no explanation as to why.

When I attempted to explain to my professor why I was essay-less, I was fully aware that a zero on this final assignment would tank my overall grade. He had a no-latework policy, and I had no leg to stand on. Yet, for reasons I still do not understand, he believed my crazy story, and he gave me a one-day extension, free of penalty.

I have no recollection of how I scored on that essay (the floppy-disk taker found me soon after I left the professor's office and I was able to turn in my work before the day was done). I do not even remember what passage I chose to exegete in the first place. But I remember the grace. I remember the utter surprise I felt when given another chance. That moment of grace informed me as a future teacher more than any essay I wrote that year.

To say though the professor's grace was "unmerited favor" isn't entirely accurate. He showed me grace, in part, because of my previous performance in his class. I had a track record of integrity that prompted his grace. I was contrite (and sobbing a bit, if you want the accurate story), so he provided leniency. He showed me barely merited

#### **EXEGESIS**

This type of essay required the student to dissect a passage. analyze it from multiple scholarly perspectives, break down the original language, and apply the truth within the passage to a modern context.

favor out of his estimation I would not abuse his kindness, and I was completely floored by it.

Now imagine the abundant, unmerited, extravagant favor of God. If my professor's "human" grace affected me so significantly, reason stands the extravagant grace of God should change me even more.

Read Jonah 2:10-3:3.

O1 | How does God extend grace to Jonah in these verses?

God gives Jonah a second chance to obey His word. Notice, His instruction is similar to that of Jonah 1:1, only this time, God doesn't give him the "why" ("for their evil has come up before me"). Instead, this time, God assures Jonah, He will give him the message to speak. Even in this second chance assignment, God's presence with Jonah is unwavering.

This week we will study this specific attribute of our Heavenly Father: his unwavering grace. We want to worship Him for who He is, not who we've constructed Him to be.

As we study this week, I challenge you to lay aside any preconceived notions of what grace should look like. Instead, come humbly before the Lord and ask that He gives you insight as you study His character, so you may understand the glorious riches you have in His grace.

First, let's look at "unmerited" aspect of God's grace.

Read Isaiah 55:1-3.

02 | Who is invited to come enjoy the nourishing presence of God?

03	W	'hat	physical	provisions	are	offered	in	this	text?
----	---	------	----------	------------	-----	---------	----	------	-------

God calls His people to come and be filled on what is good, but costs them nothing.

God the Father tells the thirsty one to stop spending his money and labor on that which will not satisfy. In other words, stop trying to create one's own security and favor, for God is providing water, wine, milk, and bread, which are good for eating and delightful to the soul.

**O4** | How does the thirsty one get this provision?

That, dear sister, is the picture of favor that is unmerited. The water, the wine, the milk, the bread are available to everyone "without money and without price."

#### REFLECTION

**05** | What is one evidence of God's unmerited favor on your life? What have you received that you have not paid for?

# DAY TWO THE SAME GRACE AS YESTERDAY

## #LATHER,RINSE,REPEAT

Today's Reading: Genesis 3:6-10, 21

God shows His abundant grace in rescuing Jonah from his running, in appointing a storm to foil Jonah's foolishness, in commanding the fish to save Jonah from drowning, in listening to Jonah's pleas for mercy, in speaking to the fish so it would release Jonah from his belly-prison, and in giving Jonah the chance to try again, but this time, to obey.

Every move of God in the book of Jonah points to His grace, His unmerited favor. Yet, at first glance, many of the actions do not seem favorable. A command to go preach to a cruel, pagan city seems dangerous, rather than favorable. A deadly storm seems harmful rather, than kind. A massive fish rescue seems chaotic, rather than protective.

Yesterday, we looked at the unmerited aspect of God's grace; today we will study the unexpected evidence of His favor.

God the Father is unchanging. His nature is the same today in your life as it was in Jonah's. His grace always has been and always will be.

Ready for a Bible adventure to put that truth to the test?

### Read Genesis 3:6-10, 21,

Eve falls prey to the serpent's lies, eats the off-limits fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and gives her husband a bite, as well. Their actions are prompted by their doubt in the character of their Creator. Now, they have knowledge of what is good and what is bad. While they had been naked and unashamed, because their bodies were good and made in the image of their Creator, now they can only see shame in their nakedness. Their sin rendered them guilty, embarrassed, afraid.

## Read verses 7 and 21 again.

**01** What do both verses have in common? What is the difference between the "covering" Adam and Eve created, and the one God creates?

Hebrews 9:22 says, "Without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness." Sin requires atonement. What grace that instead of requiring the atonement from Adam and Eve directly, the LORD God sacrifices an animal on their behalf. Another's blood provided atonement.

**02** | Even though their circumstances might be different, in what way is Jonah similar to Adam and Eve?

#### **ATONEMENT**

"Having responded to their sin with paternal gentleness and merciful chastisement, God sealed His response with a vivid act of forgiveness, and in so doing He established the pattern by which sin is thereafter properly atoned for," (Moody Bible Commentary).

03 | What caused both of their downfalls?

**04** | How does the grace of God the Father show up in both stories?

God provides Adam and Eve clothing as a loving protection from their shame. God provides Jonah a large fish to save him from himself. Both provisions are His unmerited, undeserved kindness toward those He loved, even when His beloved were unlovable.

## **REFLECTION**

God's character is the same in Genesis 3 as it is in Jonah 3 as it is today. The kindness God showed to Adam, Eve, and Jonah is His character today.

05 | How have you seen His kindness in this season of your life in unexpected ways?

# DAY THREE WELL, THAT WAS UNEXPECTED

### WHEN GRACE FEELS MORE LIKE PUNISHMENT

Today's Reading: II Corinthians 8:1-5; Matthew 5:1-12

When I look back on my years of walking with Jesus, I often consider how his noes were some of his greatest kindnesses to me. Each of those "no" moments- not getting the part in a play, or not being invited to a party, or receiving a rejection letter from a college, or not being chosen for a job- often felt cruel at the time. If I'm honest, those times challenged my faith deeply.

Yet, looking back I can see how all the free time from not making the play afforded me the opportunity to join a Bible study. I can see how the party encouraged activities that would have been contrary and challenging to my still unsteady faith. I can see how the Lord led me to the college closer to home, making it easier to reach my parents when I had my first real crisis of faith. I can see how the Lord had a more fitting job for me I would have missed out on if I had taken the initial job. What felt like a cruel no was actually evidence of the unmerited favor of the Lord.

Perhaps that is because an earthly understanding of favor is different from a heavenly one. To me, favor usually looks like success, preferential treatment, an easier road, or comfort. Yet, God's unmerited favor, His grace, looks very different.

How do we tune our perspective to notice the abounding grace of God, especially when it doesn't feel like favor?

### Read 2 Corinthians 8:1-5.

**01** | Describe the financial and social state of the churches of Macedonia described in 2 Corinthians.

02 | What was evidence of God's grace to the Macedonian brothers?

God's unmerited favor toward the Macedonians was seen in their generosity, despite extreme poverty. His kindness was not giving them money to keep and build up their own storehouses. No, God's grace was giving the Macedonian's generous hearts. What?!

#### REFLECTION

03 | In what way does God's grace look different than our human acts of favor?

#### A LITTLE HEBREW LESSON

The Hebrew word for grace is khen. This word denotes a favorable response or something that draws you in, or something beautiful or charming. Yahweh used this word to describe His character to Moses in Exodus 34:6-7. "The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, 'The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious (khen), slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands. forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and fourth generation."

God's grace is a favorable response toward His own, but also His grace is beautiful, charming, and draws us into Himself. But look at the whole description of His nature that God gives to Moses, both the descriptors before the "but" in verse seven, and those after.

**O4** | List the attributes of God's character you see in Exodus 34:6-7.

We cannot worship the Lord for His gracious love, and completely ignore His righteous judgment. No, these two aspects of His character go together. He is both fully loving *and* fully just.

05	Why is that truth about God both a comfort and a warning?
06	What is the danger of only focusing on God's grace and ignoring His judgment?

# DAY FOUR SAVING GRACE

### SO THAT NO ONE MAY BOAST

Today's Reading: Jonah 3:1-5; Ephesians 2:1-10

Let's recap, as to not forget our dear pal, Jonah. The word of the Lord came to Jonah, son of Amittai saying "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me." But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD (Jonah 1:1-3a). But the LORD hurled a great wind upon the sea, threatening to break up the ship taking Jonah and a slew of sailors to Tarshish. Casting lots, the sailors realize Jonah's the problem, and do as he instructs, by throwing him into the sea. The storm stops and the sailors repent. Three days and three nights Jonah sits and thinks in the belly of the fish. He prays and God tells the fish to vomit him up. And then the word of the LORD comes to Jonah the second time, and tells him to do the exact same thing, and this time Jonah does. Read Jonah 3:1-5. O1 | What details stick out to you in these verses? 02 | Think of the best sermon you've heard in the past few years, the one that stuck with you and impacted you greatly. What was it about that sermon that impacted you so significantly? 03 | How is it possible Jonah's lackluster sermon sparks city wide repentance?

04   Is Jonah responsible for the Ninevites' response?
Read Ephesians 2:1-10.
<b>05</b> Like the Ninevites, you and I were once dead in our trespasses. What does that mean according to Ephesians 2:1?
These verses fire me up and remind me my story is no different than those Ninevites! I
was blindly following the evil one, destined and deserving of eternal death, BUT GOD, in His mercy and His love for me saved me BY GRACE through Jesus Christ.
Let's make sure we catch all of the theology here, because this is so important.
Twice Paul reminds the redeemed they are saved by grace.
"And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of work, <b>so that no</b>

**06** | Why does Paul emphasize this truth twice (v. 4 and v. 8)? In what way is this a key point of Christian doctrine? I challenge you to think beyond a "Sunday school"

answer and really consider why this truth is vital to following Jesus.

one may boast," (Ephesians 2:8b, emphasis mine).

## **REFLECTION**

**07** | Does any Christian have a right to boast? In what way is a boastful heart harmful to one's relationship with Jesus?

## DAY FIVE **REFLECTION AND PRAYER**

## THE UNWAVERING SATISFATION OF GOD

Today's Reading: Psalm 103

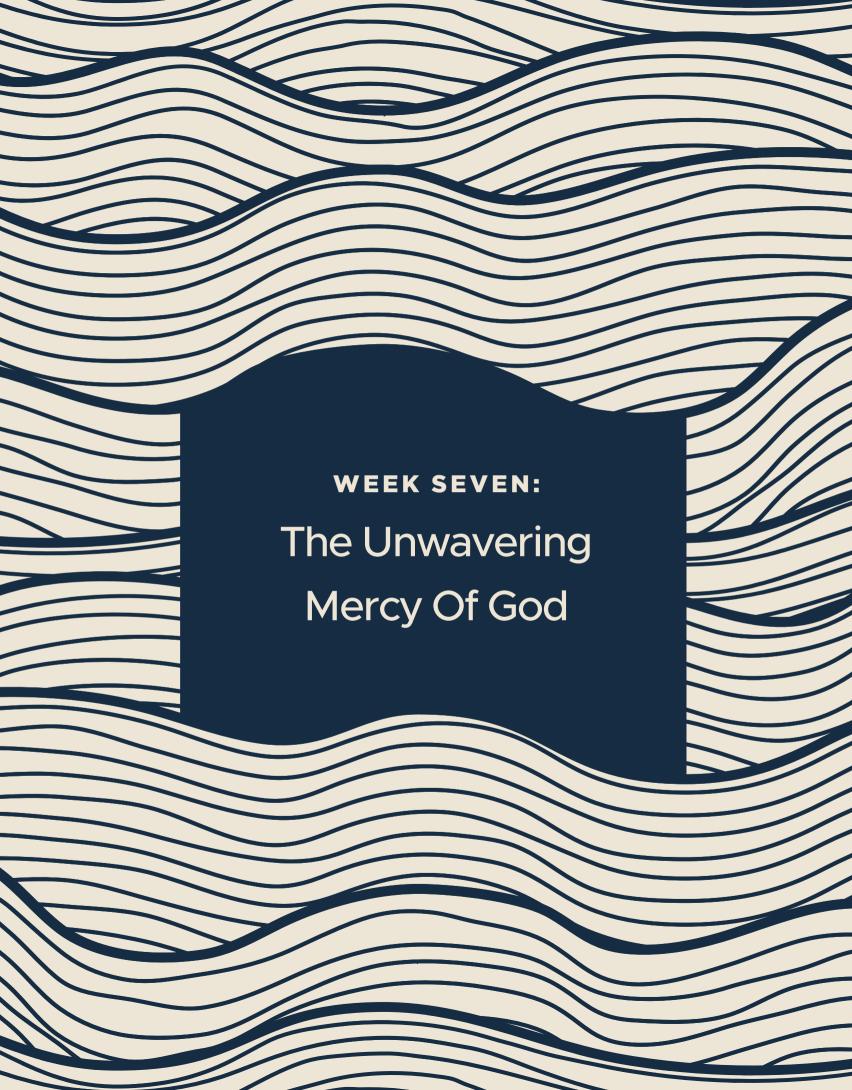
The spiritual discipline of meditating on God's Word requires time, focus, and curiosity. Often, my impatience robs me the joy of mediating on His teaching long enough for it to truly infiltrate my heart and actions. Yet, Psalm 63:5-7 tells of the riches awaiting the one who meditates on God's word: "My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food, and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips, when I remember you upon my bed, and meditate on you in the watches of the night; for you have been my help and in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy."

When I meditate on His character and instruction, my soul is satisfied and joyful.

My challenge for you today is to spend the day meditating on Psalm 103. Read it several times and at different points in your day (maybe before breakfast, lunch, and dinner). Pray through it before the Lord. Write it out in your journal. You choose the method.

<b>O1</b>   Either way, meditate on Psalm 103 today and, as you are compelled, write below some insights that come to mind throughout the day from this prayer of worship.						

## **TEACHING NOTES**



When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that He had said He would do to them, and He did not do it.

JONAH 3:10-

## DAY ONE PREACH IT!

### WHAT'S UP WITH JONAH'S SERMON?

Today's Reading: Jonah 3

I've listened to some impactful sermons in my years of following Jesus. I remember one I heard from Pastor Charlie Dates focused on the power of prayer. "If you pray for rain, you better carry an umbrella," he said before ending his message, and I did my best to scribble those words into my Bible so I wouldn't forget. I remember one I heard from Pastor John Mark Comer about the Beatitudes and the picture they give of the upside-down kingdom of God; I have my notes from that sermon written on the back cover of my Bible so I won't lose them. Sermons on forgiveness, on God's mercy, on faith all are written in small snippets throughout my Bible, often next to the Scripture discussed, so I will remember what I learned.

I can't imagine anyone wanting to scribble down Jonah's sermon.

Jonah's short sermon has no mention of Yahweh, no detail of why Nineveh will be overthrown, no hint of hope. Yet, the Holy Spirit uses this sermon to spark city-wide repentance and revival.

This week we will study Jonah 3, not only to study the words of Jonah and the response of the Ninevites, but also to learn more about the character of God.

### Read Jonah chapter 3.

**01** | Couldn't God have destroyed Nineveh instantly? What does Jonah's detail about "forty days" before destruction say about Yahweh?

**O2** | What was the order of repentance in Nineveh? How did the Ninevites outwardly show the regret in their hearts?

I find the king's actions especially significant. The king removed his robe, covered himself, instead, with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. A king's robe was special and symbolic of his honor and glory. The king removes his own glory and sits in ashes, symbolic of death.

03 | What is the king's edict to the people of Nineveh?

#### WELL, THAT ISN'T COZY

Sackcloth was a coarse cloth, usually made from goats' hair. The material was itchy and irritating to the skin. It was worn as a sign of mourning for the dead, for personal or national disaster, for sin, or for unanswered prayer.

**04** What does Jonah 3:10 tell us about Yahweh?

Where is Jonah in all this? After his sermon, Jonah is nowhere to be found for the rest of chapter 3. Interesting.

#### **REFLECTION**

Consider the attributes of God we've looked at over the past few weeks: His love (week one), His nearness (week two), His authority (week three), His faithfulness (week four), His sufficiency (week five), and His grace (week six).

05 | How do these qualities show up in Jonah chapter 3? Make a list below.

Think about the king's actions in Jonah 3: he removed his robe, put on sackcloth, and sat in ashes. He removed his "glory", and humbled himself before the holy God.

06 | What does it mean to remove our own "glory"? What could that practically look like?

# DAY TWO A POTENT PROCLAMATION

LORD, SEND REVIVAL

Today's Reading: Jonah 3:6-9

In February of 2023, Asbury College in Wilmore, Kentucky held a Wednesday morning chapel service. Students came to chapel... and didn't leave. This chapel service eventually led to a two-week, round the clock prayer service and revival among young adults, both at Asbury and other colleges in the area. Thanks to social media, news of the events at Asbury spread nationwide. By the time Asbury College ended the event, over 50,000 students and visitors from 260 neighboring colleges and universities had come to pray and worship in Asbury's chapel. The events at Asbury sparked similar services at other colleges in the United States. Media dubbed the whole thing the "Asbury Revival," drawing supporters and skeptics alike.

In the church, we pray for revival. We long to see seats filled, hands raised, and altars full. But is that what revival really looks like? Is revival about numbers, or about hearts changed? Often the revivals in history books are the ones that include masses of people, and yet, we serve a God who will leave the 99 to go after the one. So, as we study revival today, don't allow yourself to get caught up in the numbers. The work of God is just as awesome in the heart of one repentant sinner as it is with hundreds.

Read Jonah 3:5-9. I've included three different translations here.

"So, the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them. For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. And he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, 'Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing: let them not feed, nor drink water; But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn everyone from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands. Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?" (King James Version)

"The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth. When Jonah's warning reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in dust. This is the proclamation he issued in Nineveh: 'By the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let people or animals, herds or flocks, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. But let people and animals be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish." (New International Version)

"The people of Nineveh listened, and trusted God. They proclaimed a citywide fast and dressed in burlap to show their repentance. Everyone did it- rich and poor, famous and obscure, leaders and followers. When the message reached the king of Nineveh, he got up off his throne, threw down his royal robes, dressed in burlap, and sat down in the dirt. Then he issued a public proclamation throughout Nineveh, authorized by him and his leaders: 'Not one drop of water, not one bite of food for man, woman, or animal, including your herds and flocks! Dress them all, both people and animals, in burlap, and send up a cry for help to God. Everyone must turn around, turn back from an evil life and the violent ways that stain their hands. Who knows? Maybe God will turn around and change his mind about us, quit being angry with us and let us live!"

(The Message Remix)

01	Make a	list of	all o	f the	actions	you see	taken	in	these	verses.
----	--------	---------	-------	-------	---------	---------	-------	----	-------	---------

**O2** | Why do you think the author focuses more on the Ninevites' outward expressions and not on how they are feeling?

**O3** | What is it about God that causes the Ninevites to act this way? What do they know of His character?

04 | Why include beasts, herds, and flocks in the proclamation to fast and mourn?

Nineveh experiences revival. To apply the author's frequently used adjective: the Ninevites repent exceedingly. They turned from their evil way and from the violence in their hands. Thousands of people repent. This is not a work of Jonah. This is not the work of the king of Nineveh.

This is the unmistakable, awesome work of God opening the hearts of the Ninevites.

REFLECTION
05   Is there one right method to incite revival?
O6   Why is it tempting to assume "revival" is a result of human effort?
Remember the final sentence in Jonah's prayer in chapter 2?
Salvation belongs to Yahweh.

# DAY THREE GOD'S RESPONSE

#### SECOND CHANCES FOR THE WIN

Today's Reading: Exodus 34:6-9; Jonah 3:10

A few weeks ago, we studied Exodus 32, looking deeply at the Israelites' act of idolatry of the golden calf. We looked at how Moses interceded before the Lord on behalf of the Israelites and asks the LORD to turn from His burning anger and relent from the disaster against His own people... a disaster those same people deserved. "And the LORD relented from the disaster that He had spoken of bringing on His people," (Exodus 32:14).

A few chapters later, in Exodus 34, Moses is again on Mount Sinai. "The LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD," (Exodus 34:5). This proclamation of God's name is a clear statement of His character, one referenced throughout the Old Testament in Psalms, Nehemiah, Joel, and Jonah.

Today let's study this proclamation and the unchanging nature of Yahweh.

Read Exodus 34:6-9.

01 How does the LORD describe His character? Make a list below of His attributes.

**O2** | If His nature does not change, we should see Him be true to His character throughout the book of Jonah. Fill in the chart below looking for instances where He is true to His nature in the story of Jonah.

PROCLAMATION ATTRIBUTE	HOW THAT ATTRIBUTE SHOWED UP IN JONAH
Merciful (holding back what is deserved)	God does not instantly smite Jonah for disobeying His initial command; He holds off judgment on the Ninevites for "forty days"
Gracious	
Slow to anger	
Abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness	
Forgives sin and iniquity	
Will not clear the guilty	

REFLECTION
------------

03 | Which of these attributes are you most thankful for in this season on your life?

**O4** | Just like He did with the Israelites in Exodus 32, Yahweh relents of the disaster He had said He would do to the Ninevites. Look at Jonah 3:10. *Why* does it say Yahweh relented?

**05** | When have you seen the Lord hold back what you rightly deserve? How has that instance affected your behavior since witnessing God's mercy firsthand?

#### **DID GOD CHANGE HIS MIND?**

This theological question surrounding Jonah 3:10 has incited many a scholarly debate. Does the fact that God relented on the disaster mean He changed His mind? Can God change His mind? Are His plans not set before the foundation of the world? What would have happened if the Ninevites hadn't repented? For me, though, these questions are missing the point. We know God's nature, and that He is unchanging. Theologically speaking, though, I believe this is an instance of anthropomorphism in the Bible. Anthropomorphism is the attributing of human characteristics, emotions, and situations to God. The Bible is divinely inspired, but written by human men, with human vocabularies, and human minds. Meaning, the author of Jonah put into words their best human description of how God responded to the Ninevites.

# DAY FOUR LORD, HAVE MERCY

#### FULLY MERCIFUL, FULLY GRACIOUS, FULLY JUST

Today's Reading: Isaiah 55:6-11

Often as humans we think of justice, mercy, and grace as mutually exclusive. Justice is getting what is deserved; mercy is holding back what is deserved; grace is giving what isn't deserved. With God, however, justice, mercy, and grace coexist in His Character. Remember His proclamation in Exodus 34 we studied yesterday? "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious... keeping steadfast love for thousands... forgiving iniquity... but who will by no means clear the guilty..." (Exodus 34:6-7). God is simultaneously <u>fully</u> merciful, <u>fully</u> gracious, and <u>fully</u> just. This is why we can approach the throne of God's grace with confidence (Hebrews 4:16). Those who have witnessed His mercy, grace, and justice firsthand are compelled to worship. It is the only fitting response to the Almighty God. Read Isaiah 55:6-13. 01 What attribute of God is most evident in this passage? 02 | What does "seek the LORD while He may be found" mean?

03 | How are the actions of Ninevites in Jonah 3 like the behavior of the repentant

Israelites as outlined in Isaiah 55:6-13?

Reread verse 9.
04   What is the LORD saying about His ways and thoughts?
Verses 12 and 13 focus on the triumph of God's grace in the lives of the redeemed.
<b>05</b>   What does life under the favor of the Almighty God look like? What does it mean to "go out in joy and be led forth in peace"?
NEW TESTAMENT CONNECTION
In his final instructions before he went to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray, Jesus spoke words of encouragement to his disciples.
06   Read John 14:27 and fill in the blanks below.
"I leave with you; myI give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid."
Peace in Hebrew is <i>shalom</i> . <i>Shalom</i> is not the absence of conflict or opposition; <i>shalom</i> denotes wholeness, completion, nothing out of place or missing, the way it was meant to be all along. <i>Shalom</i> marks a right relationship with God (See Psalm 29:11, Haggai 2:9, or Numbers 6:24-26 for cross-reference).

**O7** | Why is it significant that peace is promised, both in the Old Testament and the New Testament, both in God the Father's words and in Jesus', both in prophecy to a large group and in an intimate upper room dinner conversation?

#### REFLECTION

**08** | What is not *shalom* in your life right now? What would it look like to invite the Lord's peace into that situation?

# DAY FIVE **REFLECTION AND PRAYER**

THE UNWAVERING MERCY OF GOD

Today's Reading: THY MERCY, MY GOD

\_\_\_\_\_

Though I grew up singing hymns on Sunday and was familiar with the words of Fanny Crosby and Charles Wesley, I did not come across this particular hymn until well into my twenties. "Thy Mercy" was written by John Stocker in 1776. As we consider all we studied this week of the grace and mercy of God, let's meditate on the truth in this hymn, and how beautifully it captures His character.

### Read the lyrics to "Thy Mercy, My God."

Thy mercy, my God, is the theme of my song, The joy of my heart and the boast of my tongue. Thy free grace alone from the first to the last, Has won my affections and bound my soul fast.

Thy mercy, in Jesus, exempts me from hell. Its glories I'll sing, and its wonders I'll tell. 'Twas Jesus, my friend, when he hung on the tree, Who opened the channel of mercy for me.

Without thy sweet mercy, I could not live here; Sin soon would reduce me to utter despair. But, through thy free goodness, my spirits revive, And He that first made me still keeps me alive.

Thy mercy is more than a match for my heart, Which wonders to feel its own hardness depart. Dissolved by the goodness, I fall to the ground And weep for the praise of the mercy I've found.

They door of Thy mercy stands open all day, To the poor and the needy, who knock by the way. No sinner shall ever be empty sent back Who comes seeking mercy for Jesus' sake.

Great Father of mercy, Thy goodness I own, And the covenant love of the Thy crucified Son; All praise to the Spirit whose whisper divine Seals mercy, and pardon, and righteousness mine.

O1   In the space below, add your own verse to the hymn, praising God for the mercy He's poured out on your life.				

## **TEACHING NOTES**

## **TEACHING NOTES**




Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

JAMES 1:19 -

# DAY ONE **OFFENDED BY GOD**

#### FEELING FLABBERGASTED

Today's Reading: Jonah 4:1-4

Do you ever find yourself mystified by the stories in the Bible? I do all the time. The LORD splits the Red Sea in two so His people can cross it on dry land. WHAT?! Elisha asks God to open the eyes of his servant so the servant can see what is happening in the spiritual realm, invisible to human eyes. When the servant can see, there are hundreds of angels, armed and ready to defend Elisha and the servant. WHAT?! A large fish swallows up a rebellious prophet and then vomits him up on dry land after three days of keeping him in its big belly. WHAT?! What I really need is a record scratch sound effect to play as I read these parts of the Bible.

Jonah 4:1 is the record scratch of record scratches for me. If ever there is a time to write the word "flabbergasted" in a Bible study, it's when we're studying Jonah 4:1.

Last week, we read about the mighty, awesome move of the Spirit, bringing repentance and revival to the Ninevites. These evil people are humbled and brought to their knees in surrender and worship, despite Jonah's measly sermon and reluctant heart. God moved in power!

"But it displeased Jonah exceedingly," (Jonah 4:1). WHAT?! How could another's repentance displease the Christian?

Yet, if I'm being honest, as I've studied this chapter of Jonah, my heart has broken again and again at my own Jonah-ness, and at the times I've been offended by God's generosity to others.

#### Read Jonah 4:1-4.

01 Okay, we have to start with the obvious question. Why is Jonah angry?

Remember what we learned about the Bible's first mention of Jonah in 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 14:25? This is important! Jeroboam II was king of the northern kingdom of Israel, and he did what was evil in the sight of the LORD. Yet, God showed mercy to the nation of Israel, restoring their borders, and protecting the people. He spoke this word of mercy through His prophet, Jonah.

Jonah previously witnessed God's immense, unwarranted, completely underserved mercy to the Israelites, God's chosen people. Jonah tells God *this* is why he fled to Tarshish, because he knew God would show mercy, and he wanted no part of it.

, , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , ,
To Jonah, the Ninevites were not worthy of God's mercy.
<b>O2</b>   Jonah uses that same proclamation we studied last week from Exodus 34 against God. But pay attention. He doesn't quote the proclamation exactly. What aspect of God's character does Jonah leave out? Why is that significant?
03   What does Jonah's anger reveal about His heart?
This question will take a bit more thinking because the text does not directly reveal it.
<b>O4</b>   Ultimately, Jonah's anger toward God reveals His lack of faith in what aspect of God's character? What about God's character is Jonah questioning?

If I'm honest, I can see why Jonah begrudges God's choice to show mercy to the Ninevites. These were an evil people, a violent people. Cruel, pagan, murderous people. Isn't extending them mercy clearing them from the consequences of generations of Ninevites wreaking havoc on any who crossed them? Perhaps in human economy, yes, but not in God's.

#### **REFLECTION**

**05** | Can you relate to Jonah at all? Have you ever been offended by God's generosity toward another, especially when you felt he/she was not deserving of it?

## DAY TWO GRRRRRR!!!

#### IS ANGER ONLY A HUMAN EMOTION?

Today's Reading: Jonah 4:1

Everyone gets angry. Though our anger might be expressed in different ways, we all experience anger in varying degrees. Perhaps yours is red-hot, explosive, and unpredictable. Your mind works quickly and, if you're not careful, you can annihilate someone in merely a few choice words. Perhaps your anger is more of a smoldering, long-suffering resentment. You seem to be at peace with all people, but inwardly your disgust or indignation toward a person, a political party, the church, or a generation is festering and growing. Perhaps your anger is a quiet, inconsistent flame of anticipated offense. You respond in subtle, almost indiscernible jabs and snide remarks. You put on passive aggression, almost like a layer of clothing, to protect yourself from the world.

Anger, in and of itself, is not necessarily sinful. Ephesians 4:26-27 says, "Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger and give no opportunity to the devil." You can be angry and not sin. But you can also be angry and give opportunity to the devil to influence how you express that anger.

Over the next few days, let's look at what the Bible says about divine, righteous, and unrighteous anger. Holy Spirit, give us discernment to understand your word.

**Read Jonah 4:1.** I've put several translations here:

"But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry." (English Standard Version)

"But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry." (New International Version)

"The change of plans greatly upset Jonah, and he became very angry." (New Living Translation)

O1 | What exactly made Jonah angry?

#### **QUE CHARAH CHARAH**

This word *charah* is used ninety times in the Old Testament, many times attributed to God's indignation against mankind's rebellion and sinfulness.

Did you notice all the adverbs- exceedingly, very, greatly. Jonah is not *low-key* angry, as the youths would say. No, Jonah is furious. In fact, the Hebrew word *charah* used here means to be hot, to kindle, or to burn with anger. Seeing the Ninevites' repentance and the LORD's relenting, Jonah was burning with anger.

Is Jonah's anger sinful? Remember what Ephesians says. Let's answer our question by first looking at divine anger.

After Moses' many excuses for why he shouldn't be the man God sends to tell Pharoah to release the Israelites, "the anger of the LORD was kindled (*charah*) against Moses..." (Exodus 4:14). The LORD was angry at Moses' reluctance to trust Him.

The Israelites grumbled and complained about the difficult journey from Egypt to the Promised Land. They claimed it would have been better for them to have died as slaves in Egypt, than to be on this journey. The LORD's anger was "kindled (*charah*), and the fire of the LORD burned among them and consumed some outlying parts of the camp," (Numbers 11:1).

Moses warned the Israelites repeatedly that serving other gods and worshiping them would ignite (*charah*) the anger of the LORD. He warned that God would "shut up the heavens, so that there will be no rain, and the land will yield no fruit, and you will perish quickly off the good land that the LORD is giving you," (Deuteronomy 11:17).

Joshua charges Israel's leaders to stay faithful to their commitment to the LORD. He said, "...if you transgress the covenant of the LORD your God, which he commanded you, and go and serve other gods and bow down to them. Then the anger of the LORD will be kindled (*charah*) against you, and you shall perish quickly from the good land that he has given to you," (Joshua 23:16).

02 | What do all of these instances have in common? What makes God's anger *charah*?

Our God *does* get angry. In his book, <u>Uprooting Anger</u>, Robert D. Jones describes God's anger in this way: "God's anger is his whole-personed active response of negative moral judgment against evil. Simply put, God is angry with sinners and their sin. He maintains righteous wrath against all forms of wickedness. God's anger is his perfect, pure, settled opposition to evil. It is his holy abhorrence to everything that violates his character or misses his will."

When God encounters evil rebellion, especially in His children, He is exceedingly angry. His anger flows from His justice, and is motivated, ultimately, by love. How can that be? How can God's anger be motivated by love and flow from His justice?

Read Psalm 7:11-17. I've put the text below in the English Standard Version:

"God is a righteous judge,

and a God who feels indignation every day.

If a man does not repent. God will whet His sword:

He has bent and readied His bow:

He has prepared for him His deadly weapons.

making His arrows fiery shafts.

Behold, the wicked man conceives evil and is pregnant with mischief and gives birth to lies.

He makes a pit, digging it out, and falls into the hole that he has made;

his mischief returns upon his own head.

And on his own skull his violence descends.

I will give to the LORD the thanks due to His righteousness,

And I will sing praise to the name of the LORD, the Most High."

Our God does get angry. He does respond to evil. But here's an important question to consider when reading those verses in Psalm 7- does the Psalmist indicate anything about when God responds? None of the LORD's actions, as described in Psalm 7, are quick in human terms. He prepares, He readies, He whets, He feels, all while the wicked man conceives evil, gives birth to lies, makes the pit he will eventually fall into. Even in His kindled anger against sin and His indignation against unrighteousness, God is patient and merciful. Oh, how difficult this is to wrap the mind around!

#### **REFLECTION**

**O3** | Have you ever been asked, or even wondered yourself, how a just God could allow evil in the world? Consider what we've been studying over the past several weeks about God's character. How can you answer that question biblically?

# DAY THREE TOSSING TABLES

#### A STUDY IN RIGHTEOUS ANGER

Today's Reading: Mark 3:1-6; 10:13-16

There are a select number of stories all gospel accounts relate. When all four gospel writers deem an event significant, we should pay attention. One event retold by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John is Jesus' overturning tables in the temple, "cleansing" it from the greed threatening its sacredness.

Jesus went up to the temple in Jerusalem and encountered vendors selling oxen, sheep, and pigeons to those needing a sacrifice for their sins. The temple was sacred, holy; it was the place of worship and in its innermost parts, separated by a heavy veil, was the Holy of Holies, the place where God's manifest presence dwelled. These vendors had set up shop in the courts of the temple, bringing their smelly, defecating animals onto holy ground, for the sake of convenience. This makes Jesus exceedingly angry.

"And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the moneychangers and overturned their tables. And he told those who sold pigeons, 'Take these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade.' His disciples remembered that it was written, 'Zeal for your house will consume me,'" (John 2:15-17). Matthew adds more detail to Jesus' words to the robbers. "It is written, 'My house will be called a house of prayer,' but you are making it a den of robbers," (Matthew 21:13). So, was Jesus' zeal just? YES.

The sentence the disciples remembered was from Psalm 69:9, and reveals *why* Jesus was angry- zeal for his Father's house. This type of indignation is righteous. Anger reacting to sin against God and His Kingdom, expressed in godly ways, and leading to expressions of ministry and obedience is righteous anger. Jesus reacted to the money changers and vendor's sin of dishonoring God's temple and taking advantage of the poor. Jesus wasn't vengeful or self-serving. While Jesus was confrontational, he was never out of control. His movements were focused and powerful. He was righteously angry.

What still astounds me is when Jesus was personally attacked, mocked, beaten, or ridiculed, he did not respond in anger. I Peter 2:23 says, "When he (Jesus) was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to Him who judges justly." His anger was never self-serving, but rather, his anger was kindled by sin against God and His Kingdom.

So how can we know if anger is righteous? To answer that question, we must look to our Savior example.

# Read Mark 3:1-6. 01 | According to verse 5, what made Jesus look at the Pharisees with anger? 02 | What wrong had the Pharisees committed? 03 | How did Jesus express his anger? Let's look at another example in Mark's gospel. Read Mark 10:13-16. 04 | What made Jesus "indignant" toward his disciples?

**05** | Was his frustration self-serving?

Compare your answers to the questions concerning both stories and Jesus' examp of righteous anger.	le
<ul> <li>O7   What are the markers of righteous anger? Put them into statements below.</li> <li>Righteous anger</li></ul>	

06 | How did he express his anger?

REFLECTION

**08** | Think about the last time you got angry. In what ways did your anger either reflect or violate the markers of righteous anger?

## DAY FOUR INDIGNATION

#### THE DANGER OF UNRIGHTEOUS ANGER

Today's Reading: Jonah 4:1-4, Genesis 4:1-7

For the past two days, we've been studying God the Father and Jesus the Son's divine, righteous anger in response to sin. "Righteous anger reacts against actual sin (as biblically defined), focuses on God and His concerns rather than selfish concerns, and expresses itself in godly ways." (<u>Uprooting Anger</u> by Robert D. Jones). So, reason would have it, unrighteous anger would fail to meet these markers.

If I'm honest, my anger is rarely righteous, though it often feels quite justified at the time. Yes, sometimes my anger is in response to actual sin, but my concern is personal, or my expression of said anger defies self-control. Sometimes my indignation is out of concern for God's Kingdom, and I'm reasonable in my expression of it, but my perception of sin is off and I'm angry for no reason.

If righteous anger leads to obedience, worship, and ministry, to what does unrighteous anger lead? How can I spot the unrighteousness in my anger sooner before I've given the evil one an opportunity to influence my thinking?

And what about Jonah, the exceedingly angry prophet?

Today we're going to compare Jonah's story to another Old Testament narrative, paying attention to the root of anger, the clues that said anger was unrighteous, and God's response.

#### Read Jonah 4:1-4 and Genesis 4:1-7.

**O1** | Before we begin comparing and contrasting Jonah and Cain's anger, first let's agree on the markers of unrighteous anger. If *righteous* anger is a response to actual sin, is concerned with God and His kingdom, and is expressed in godly ways, what would be the opposite?

•	Unrighteous anger
•	Unrighteous anger
	Unrightonis anger

02 | Now let's look at both stories. Pay attention to even the wording of both stories. What similarities do you notice?

#### **BURN, BABY, BURN**

We learned the Hebrew word *charah* a few days ago, indicating an anger that burns, is hot, is kindled. That word is er.

	used to describe both Jonah and Cain's ange
03   At the heart of the matter, with whom were both Jonah an	nd Cain angry?
<b>04</b>   What attribute of Yahweh did both Jonah and Cain doubt?	?
If you read these verses in the English Standard Version, you wi response to both Cain and Jonah uses the phrase "do well." "If y not be accepted?" God asks of Cain (Genesis 4:7). "Do you do w asks of Jonah (Jonah 4:4).	ou do well, will you
<b>05</b>   What do you make of God's questions to both men? Why question rather than respond to the source of their anger? Why questions instead of rebuking them?	
Cain's anger is expressed with an utter disregard for self-contro brother, Abel. Jonah's anger is expressed with an utter disregard be asks God to kill him, because he thinks death would be prefe	d to reasonableness:

forgiven Ninevites.

Both Cain and Jonah's anger hit all the qualifications for unrighteous anger.

#### REFLECTION

God's warning to Cain arrests me every time I read it: "And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it," (Genesis 4:7b). With God's help, Cain still had the ability to turn from his jealous anger and please God. To do so, though, Cain would have to overcome the power of the sin of anger, by the power of God. But Cain doesn't. He gives in to his passions. Evil ruled over Cain.

This is a warning to us, too. If we do not "do well," if we are not aligned with God in mind and purpose, if we are after our own agendas and not God's, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for us, but we must rule over it, through the power and strength of the Holy Spirit.

**O6** | Does this resonate with you, too? As you read Cain's story, did the Holy Spirit prick your heart over an area in your own life where sin is crouching at the door?

# DAY FIVE **PRAYER AND REFLECTION**

#### THE UNWAVERING RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD

Today's Reading: James 1:19-26

In preparing this Bible study, I've spent weeks in the book of Jonah, asking questions, finding connections, and seeking out God's character within the story. But there is one detail I can't get out of mind, a detail that has shaped much of what I'm learning about God's response to sin and to sinful people. The evil of the Ninevites rose up to God, so God called Jonah to go and speak out against them because He loved the Ninevites.

Honestly, I can't get over this. God speaks out against someone out of love. How many times have I felt ashamed by my failure? How many times have I come before God embarrassed, broken, guilty, very aware of how He's spoken against me, and completely unaware of how His chastisement is out of love for me? Could it be that after over thirty years of being a Christian, I still misunderstand the fundamental truth that God loves me because His love doesn't express itself like my human love? And if I did understand His love, would I ever have cause for unrighteous anger?

I know this week of study could have left you feeling "spoken against." Perhaps in your time with God this week, He's revealed a deep bitterness in your life, an unconfessed jealousy, an unrestrained critique of everyone around you, an indignation toward His generosity to someone else. He disciplines the one He loves, dear sister. He calls out against you because He loves you.

In his book, <u>The Problem with Pain</u>, C.S. Lewis spoke of God's love in this way: "If God is Love, He is, by definition, something more than mere kindness. And it appears, from all the records, that though He has often rebuked us and condemned us, He has never regarded us with contempt. He has paid us the intolerable compliment of loving us, in the deepest, most tragic, most inexorable sense."

So, what now? How should we respond when provoked or when our anger is kindled?

#### Read James 1:19-26.

For today's prayer challenge, pray through the Scripture.

O1   In the space below, write out your James 1 prayer, asking the Lord to help you respond rightly when angry.				
"Dear Lord, help me to be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to become angry"				

## **TEACHING NOTES**


## **TEACHING NOTES**




The Lord is not slow to fulfill His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

**2 PETER 3:9** 

# DAY ONE WHICH WAY YOU HEADED?

#### THE UNWAVERING HEART OF GOD

Today's Reading: Jonah 4

Did God love the Ninevites more than He loved Jonah? Of course not. Does He show the Ninevites more concern than He shows Jonah? No way. Remember, what made Jonah angry was the very essence of God's nature directed at who he deemed to be an undeserving party. Yet, God is "merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquities and transgression and sin" (Exodus 34:6) toward Jonah, as well as the people of Nineveh.

While people make much of the big fish in the book of Jonah, I find chapter 4 truly peculiar. So much of chapter 4 reads like a parable. The details are odd and bizarrely specific. What should we make of this final chapter?

"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work," (2 Timothy 3:16-17). We can't simply ignore the unusual details in the Bible. Every detail is important! Each part of the Bible, including Jonah 4, is profitable.

#### Read Jonah 4.

01 Let's start with what you notice. What details stick out to you in chapter 4?

I notice all the shade. Jonah makes a booth for himself to give him shade from the sun, but then God provides more shade by appointing some kind of plant? Why is Jonah so happy about his double-shade? Didn't he have shade already? And then, once God appoints the worm to eat the shade-giving-plant, what happens to Jonah's self-made shade? Where did his booth go?

I notice all the appointing God is doing. He appoints a plant, a worm, and a scorching east wind. I remember He previous appointed a storm to stop Jonah's retreat to Joppa. He also appointed a fish to both swallow and subsequently vomit Jonah up. That's a lot of appointing.

I notice "east" shows up twice. Why?
I also notice God speaks directly to Jonah. Whenever God speaks to anyone directly in the Biblical narrative, I sit up and pay attention. This week, we will study chapter 4 in detail, but today, ask your own questions about the text.
02   Write your questions in the space below.
REFLECTION
<b>O3</b>   In what way are you growing as a Bible reader? Are you noticing more patterns in the text? Are you quicker to come up with cross-references? Are you growing in consistency in your Bible reading?
04   In what way(s) do you still need to grow?

# DAY TWO **HEADING EAST...**

#### WE'RE BACK TO CAIN

Today's Reading: Genesis 4:8-16

In His conversation with Jonah, God repeatedly asks him "Do you do well to be angry?". In other translations, it reads, "Do you have good reason to be angry?". In the Hebrew, this "good reason" is emphasized both in God's questions and in Jonah's responses. Emphasis indicates importance.

What can be gained from reflecting on a "good reason" for anger? Perhaps God's question is challenging Jonah to consider whether his anger is justified. Was he wronged by God's mercy toward the Ninevites? Was Jonah wronged in the loss of his plant? Jonah responds that not only is his anger justified, but it is justified to the extent that death is the only right result. Oh, Jonah.

What have we to learn of God's character from this conversation?

God is unchanging and consistent. He cannot lie and cannot deny Himself. He is who He is, always. Therefore, the way He interacts with Jonah is not a new revelation of His character, but rather another opportunity to see the same patience and grace He's shown mankind previously.

Last week, we noticed all the similarities in language used in Jonah's narrative and that of Cain's in Genesis 4. The similarities continue as you get deeper into both of their stories.

#### Read Genesis 4:8-16.

01 | What was God's warning to Cain if he did not do well?

02 | How did Cain's sinful act distance him from God?

04 | Now, let's pay attention to the similarities between the two stories.

JONAH'S STORY	CAIN'S STORY
Jonah was exceedingly angry because of	
the favor God showed to the Ninevites	
(Jonah 4:1)	(Genesis 4:5)
God asks Jonah if he does well to be	
angry	
(Jonah 4:4)	(Genesis 4:7)
Jonah builds himself a booth east of the	
city to provide protection from the sun.	
(Jonah 4:5)	(Genesis 4:16-17)
After hearing a word from the Lord,	
Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish away from	
the presence of the Lord.	
(Jonah 1:3)	(Genesis 16)

It's not lost on me Cain would be viewed in human estimation as a stereotypical bad guy. No one would dispute that a murderer deserves justice. But Jonah, in human estimation, is not a bad guy. Jonah is a religious leader, a giant in the Jewish faith. He is well spoken (with the exception of his Nineveh sermon) and respected for his spiritual position. He is the stereotypical good guy.

**05** | So what ties these two stories together? What is significant about all the repeated words and patterns in their stories?

#### JONAH AND CAIN

Jonah is being likened to Cain, who rejected Yahweh's offer of forgiveness and protection and journeyed east of Eden and built his own protection in the form of a city," (Tim Mackie, classroom notes for the book of Jonah).

In the end, both the murderer brother and the prideful prophet, the bad guy and the good guy, are equally depraved and in desperate need of a Savior.

#### REFLECTION

**06** | Why is there a tendency to rank sins as better or worse than each other? Is all sin equal in the sight of God? How does God view your own rebellion against His kingdom?

# DAY THREE **HMPH.**

#### DO YOU DO WELL TO BE ANGRY?

Today's Reading: Jonah 4: 5-11

When my husband and I were first married, we lived in a tiny studio apartment. The whole apartment could fit inside the staff kitchen here at Highpoint Church. Having dated each other long distance for a little over a year before we got married, Joel and I didn't really know each other all that well yet. Needless to say, we had a lot to figure out and very little space to figure it out in. But we were young and romantics at heart. What could go wrong?

We had been home from our honeymoon for about a week when we had our first big argument. Being the picture of maturity at that point in my life (insert heavy sarcasm here), I told him, "I'm going into the bedroom and don't you follow me." At this point, I turned around and sat down on the bed and stewed... but our apartment was a studio. There was no "bedroom." There was only me with my back turned to him, who stood maybe two feet away. As I sighed and huffed in deep indignation, I could soon hear him chuckling at the absurdity of the situation. My desire to make a big statement with my angry retreat from the fight was comical, at best, because there was nowhere to escape away from his gaze.

It's hard not to read Jonah's second "retreat" this way. The first time he disagreed with God's plan, he tried to flee to Tarshish, away from the presence of God. This second time he disagrees with God's plan; he retreats east of the city to build a booth and stew in his anger. Yet Jonah, like me, could not escape the gaze of the Lord.

#### Read Jonah 4:5-11.

O1 | Why does Jonah travel east of the city and construct a booth for himself rather than finding a way back to Israel? What do you think he was waiting for?

It seems Jonah is waiting to see what would happen after the forty days he preached of, almost as if he is hopeful for Nineveh's return to their evil ways, which would result in their judgment. Perhaps God *wouldn't* relent, after all, and Nineveh, enemies to the Israelites, would be decimated.

But he wants to be comfortable while he waits for destruction, so he builds himself a booth. God, too, appoints a plant to grow over Jonah's head to save him from his discomfort. The Hebrew word used here is *ra'ah*. We've seen this word before! Remember in the Garden of Eden, Adam could eat of any tree of the garden except for the Tree of the Knowledge of good and evil, or of *tov* and *ra'ah*. This Hebrew word can be translated as "bad," "discomfort," "moral wickedness" or "evil."

So, did God appoint the plant to save Jonah from his physical discomfort, or his inward wickedness? Perhaps both.

02 | How does Jonah respond when he sees the plant?

#### **BIBLICAL HORTICULTURE**

There is much debate over the type of plant (Hebrew *qiqayon*) God appointed. Some think it was a caster-oil plant with large leaves, while others think a gourd plant. In the end, no one knows but God and Jonah... well, the worm knows too, I suppose.

03 | Why is Jonah's exceeding gladness over the plant so ironic?

Jonah's exceeding gladness is short-lived because God appoints a worm to eat the plant. He then appoints a scorching east wind to blow against Jonah's self-made booth, and then the sun beats down on Jonah's head. Jonah feels faint and asks to die.

**O4** | Was God unloving to Jonah with this plant? What is the point of the plant?

Pay attention to God's conversation with Jonah. This isn't the first time God has asked Jonah if he "does well" to be angry. Essentially, He is asking if Jonah's anger is justified. Jonah feels his anger over the plant is just, so much so that he has good reason to be angry enough to die.

What did we learn though about righteous anger? Does Jonah's anger hit the righteous anger markers?

- Is his anger in response to sin?
- Is his offense personal or is the offense against God and God's kingdom?
- Does he express his anger in a godly way?

God's response wrecks me. "You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night. And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?"

**O5** | What is God revealing to Jonah about both His character and Jonah's disordered priorities?

Tomorrow we will spend more time on God's response to Jonah, but let's not move on before considering the bit of Jonah in all of us.

#### REFLECTION

**06** | What priorities are out of order for you in this season of life? How can you honor God, even in the ordering of your priorities?

# DAY FOUR WHAT A PITY

### THE TRUE KINGDOM ACCORDING TO WHOM?

Today's Reading: Jonah 4: 10-11

I believe these verses are a great example of ones that should be read in multiple translations to discover deeper meaning.

Read God's response to Jonah chapter 4:10-11, in three different translations.

And the LORD said, "You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night. And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?" (English Standard Version)

Then the LORD said, "You had compassion on the plant for which you did not work, and which you did not cause to grow, which came up overnight and perished overnight. And should not I have compassion on Nineveh, the great city, in which there more than 120,000 persons who do not know the difference between their right and left hand, as well as many animals?" (New American Standard Bible)

But the LORD said, "You have been concerned about this gourd, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. And should I not have concern for the great city Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left- and also so many animals?" (New International Version)

01 Why did God appoint the plant in the first place (see Jonah 4:6 for reference)?

God appointed the plant to save Jonah from his discomfort (*ra'ah*). Some translations say to deliver Jonah from his grief. The Hebrew word here means to "snatch away from an enemy." Can we pause here for a bit? God appoints a plant to provide shade and then destroys that plant to remove the shade in order to snatch Jonah away from the enemy of his soul- his own delusion and sin. The LORD uses all these small details to confront Jonah's misunderstanding of His kingdom head on.

02 | In what way is Jonah's pity different than God's pity?

#### **HEBREW CONNECTION**

People who "do not know their right hand from their left" was a Hebrew idiom for being morally and spiritually unaware.

03 | What attribute of God is most prominent to you in His conversation with Jonah?

#### **NEW TESTAMENT CONNECTION**

In Luke 5, Jesus tells Matthew, a tax collector, to follow him and be his disciple. Matthew left everything and "rose and followed him," (Luke 5:28). A large group of tax collectors, disciples, and friends were all invited to Matthew's house for a great feast. The feast was loud enough the Pharisees and their scribes caught wind of it and grumbled to the disciples.

They said, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" Tax collectors were seen as traitors, as unclean, as immoral. On the contrary, rabbis and religious leaders were the morally elite. Why would Jesus, a respectable rabbi, fellowship with the underserving, unworthy, unwanted people?

Jesus answered them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance," (Luke 5:31-32).

Both God's conversation with Jonah and Jesus' conversation with the religious leaders are describing the Kingdom of God. Both Jonah and the Pharisees want that Kingdom to run a different way.

**O4** | The true Kingdom of God is available to whom? List the answers below.

ACCORDING TO GOD	ACCORDING TO JONAH AND THE PHARISEES		

### **REFLECTION**

**05** | If you're honest, have you ever felt God's kingdom is upside down and have wanted it to run differently? What keeps you trusting the Lord's timing and agenda, even when it does not match your own?

# DAY FIVE **REFLECTION AND PRAYER**

#### THE UNWAVERING PATIENCE OF GOD

Today's Reading: 2 Peter 3:3-13

Each time I read Jonah, I notice something new. This week, I've noticed God's immense patience with Jonah. He is slow to anger. The restraint He shows with Jonah stirs my affection for Him. God patiently bears with Jonah's folly, providing Him second chances and compassionately reshaping Jonah's perspective on the lost. His patience with Jonah is reflective of His love for Jonah. In the well-known description of the attributes of love found in 1 Corinthians 13, guess what the first marker of biblical love is- patient. "Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things," (1 Corinthians 13:7).

Why is He so patient? For what is He waiting?

### Read 2 Peter 3:8-13.

**O1** | Today's prayer and reflection focus is gratitude. In the space below, write a prayer of thankfulness to God for His patience toward you.

I encourage you to be specific in the ways you've witnessed His patience toward you in the past, and the evidence you see of His patience with you in this current season. Try to weave Scripture into your prayer to further show God is the same yesterday as He is today and as He will be tomorrow.

ı	INI	\ \ / /\	\\/E	DINIC	3 GC	

## **TEACHING NOTES**


## **TEACHING NOTES**




And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?

JONAH 4:11

# DAY ONE QUESTIONING THE QUESTION

WHO? WHAT? WHEN? WHERE? WHY? HOW?

Today's Reading: Jonah 4:11; Luke 15:11-24

Why end the book of Jonah in a question? There's no sense of closure, no resolution. It's so unsettling... and yet so *exactly* like the Lord. Throughout Scripture, God uses questions to bring repentance, obedience, or insight.

When walking in the Garden of Eden in the cool of the day, the Angel of the Lord calls out to Adam and Eve, "where are you?" to bring them out of their hiding and into His light (Genesis 3:9).

When Hagar is running from Sarai, with no real strategy for survival, God asks her, "Where have you come from and where are you going?" (Genesis 16:8) and listens to her story.

When Job desires an explanation for his current distress, God responds with His own question, "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the world?" (Job 38:4).

There are many more examples in Scripture. Each time God, and then Jesus, asks a question, the listener is compelled to consider the answer. His questions draw the listener to Himself.

Perhaps, this question at the end of Jonah is intended as much for the reader as it is for Jonah.

This week, we will consider the answer to God's question: "Should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?" (Jonah 4:11). We'll consider the answer by using a very similar story.

#### WHAT IS A PARABLE?

A parable is a short story with a deeper meaning. Jesus utilized parables to reveal his own character that of God the Father, and to also describe the Kingdom of God.

#### Read Luke 15:11-32.

In context, Jesus told this parable- and the two before it, which both are about lost things that are found- to a group of Pharisees and scribes as well as to a group of tax collectors and sinners. These are two very different groups of people.

O1   Take what you've been learning about Ancient Israelite history and explain why these two groups are different. Which would have been more respected? Which would be considered "clean"?
In Jesus' parables, the fictional figures in the story represent real people, places, or ideas. The two sons in the parable, in many ways, represent the two groups of people Jesus is speaking to- the tax collectors and sinners (younger son) and the religious leaders (older son).
We will spend today looking at the younger son.
<b>02</b>   What qualities in the younger son are immediately clear in the parable? Look at verses 12 and 13 for reference.
O3   What happens to the man's wealth?
O4   The younger son's folly left him penniless, homeless, and hopeless. Did he deserve his fate?
Verse 17 says the younger son "came to himself." Other translations say he "came to his senses." He realized his mistreatment of both his father and his inheritance had brought him to ruin. He no longer wanted the life he had chosen, and was willing to be the lowest in his father's house just to be home again.

**05** | Remember this parable was told to the religious leaders and the outcasts. How do both groups expect the father to respond to the son's arrival back home? What would be just, in human terms?

Though the son defiantly rebelled against the father, he eventually turned from his folly and went back home, now humbled and contrite. The father comes running out to meet him, forgive him, and host a party for him.

**06** | Why does the father respond in this way? Does his response simply excuse the younger son's poor behavior?

### REFLECTION

**07** | How is the younger son similar to the sailors in Jonah 1, or the Ninevites in Jonah 3? How is the LORD's response to them in Jonah similar to that of the father in the parable?

# DAY TWO TWO LOST SONS

#### FORGIVENESS IN MORE WAYS THAN ONE

Today's Reading: Jonah 4:11; Luke 15:25-32

The Parable of the Prodigal Son is often called the Parable of Two Sons. The story could have ended with the younger son coming to his senses and repenting to his father. It could have ended with the father running to meet him and hosting a party in the son's honor. But the story keeps going, In fact, Luke 15:24 feels like such a fitting final verse, "For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' And they began to celebrate."

But the parable doesn't end there. The younger son isn't the only lost son in need of his father's forgiveness. Today we will study the older son's story.

#### Read Luke 15:25-32.

The older son was in the field, most likely working. He heard the music and dancing and draws near to the house.

01 Why is the older son angry? List some of his grievances in the space below.

**02** | Why does the older son emphasize his long history of service to his father? What point is he trying to make?

### **PRODIGAL DEFINED**

What does "prodigal" mean? According to the Merriam Webster Dictionary, it means "one who spends or gives lavishly and foolishly."

The prodigal son, then, is wastefully extravagant in his lifestyle, and returns after exhausting his resources.

03 | In what way is the older brother a stark contrast to the father?

The older brother would have liked a goat so he could have his own party, just like the younger son, who wanted his inheritance so he could go have his own parties. Both brothers initially seek material goods from their father, rather than their father's company.

**O4** | Which of the father's attributes are displayed most clearly in his conversation with his older son?

### REFLECTION

**05** | How is the older son similar to Jonah?

# DAY THREE OPPOSING PERSPECTIVES

YET PATIENCE PREVAILS

Today's Reading: Jonah 4:1-4, 11; Luke 15:28-32

The past two days, we've read the Parable of Two Sons: one wild, then repentant, one pious, then angry. Both brothers wanted "the good life," but had opposing perspectives of what that life looked like. For the younger brother, the good life seemed to be one clothed in pleasure and passion; but he soon found pleasure lacking and unsatisfying. For the older brother, the good life seemed to be a reputation of following the rules, surpassing expectations, and working hard; but he soon found piety unsatisfying. The parable reveals the brothers are not so different after all. The father is gracious and patient with both sons.

Did you notice, though, there isn't a conclusion with the older son? The younger son's story finishes with repentance, forgiveness, and rejoicing. But the older son's story? The listener/reader is not privy to the older son's response to his father's reproof. Did he see his own error of pride and unrighteous arrogance and repent, or did he dig his heels in, so to speak, and become hard hearted? We don't know.

Boy, this reminds me of the ending of Jonah.

Read Jonah 4:1-4. 11. Luke 15:28-32.

Even without the end of both stories, the reader can see a deeper message emerge. The main point in the book of Jonah is the same point in the Parable of the Two Sons.

01 What do you think is the main message of both stories?

**O2** | Is that message true for us today? What have we to learn about the Father from both Jonah and the older son's story?

Both Jonah and the older son misunderstood their Father's heart and misunderstood their own depravity.

#### The Father's heart is for the lost.

"Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No has ever seen God; if we loved one another, God abides in us, and his love is perfected in us." (1 John 4:7-12)

If we are truly Jesus' disciples, our minds and hearts and souls should align with His. The values of His kingdom should dictate our values. Our mission should match His.

### **REFLECTION**

**O3** | What is the "Nineveh" calling God has put on your life for this season? In what way are you to serve and love those in your sphere of influence? I challenge you to be specific.

# DAY FOUR AN OBVIOUS ANSWER

### WE DESPERATELY NEED GOD'S UNWAVERING COMPASSION

Today's Reading: James 1:16-18

To me, the book of Jonah is much more than a story of a wayward prophet. It's more than a science fiction tale of a man-eating fish or a vine-eating worm. It's more than a parable of an unlikely sermon prompting mass revival.

To me, the book of Jonah is about the unwavering nature of God, despite the utter selfishness and folly of man. God's unwavering holiness, patience, grace, mercy, love, authority, and justice are projected onto the pages. The only response is repentance, and then worship.

I think this is why the book ends in a question, because the answer is obvious.

"But God said to Jonah, 'Do you do well to be angry for the plant?' And he said, 'Yes, I do well to be angry, angry enough to die.' And the LORD said, 'You pity the plant for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night. And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?'

Should the LORD show compassion to the Ninevites? Yes, of course, He should. Because we are the Ninevites... and Jonah... and the sailors, too. We are the younger son *and* the older son. And we are desperate need of God's unwavering compassion.

The book opens and closes with God speaking. He's the main character of the story. He is the hero.

#### Read James 1:16-18.

**O1** | Why does James warn Christians to not be deceived about who gives "good and perfect gifts"?

When I read verse 17, I often have to shout an "Amen!" Perhaps this one would be especially good to memorize.

02 | Let's start by first writing it down in the space below.

**03** | Find another translation for James 1:17 and write it out here (An easy place to find different translations is on blueletterbible.org).

### **FIRST FRUITS**

First fruits offerings are first mentioned in Leviticus 23. The farmer would give the first harvested crops back to the Lord as an offering to show his trust in God. If the Lord provided the early harvest, He would provide again.

He "brought us forth by the word of truth" means that in Jesus, we have new birth and new life. Christians are the "first fruits" harvest that anticipates creation's redemption.

#### REFLECTION

**O4** | All good and perfect gifts come from God who does not change. What is a good gift you're received from Him recently?

# DAY FIVE **REFLECTION AND PRAYER**

UNWAVERING MISSION

Today's Reading: James 1:22-25

Dear sister, we've reached the end of this study of the book of Jonah. I pray all this studying of the Bible has stirred your affections for God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Let's not leave this study without recalling what we've heard and determining how those truths will affect what we do going forward.

#### Read James 1:22-25.

Before we move on from this study, let's take time this week to recall new insights the Lord revealed as you studied the book of Jonah. Go back through your study to review, seeing the ways you saw God teaching you. Really spend time this week reflecting on the book of Jonah. As you reflect on the text, also consider the questions below.

01 | What is your biggest takeaway from the book as a whole?

**02** | Which aspect of the LORD's character on display in Jonah stuck out to you most?

03 | What has been heaviest on your heart in the months of studying this book?

O4   Choose a story, a passage, or a verse from our study that speaks to that area of heaviness and write it in the space below.
O5   James warns us to not be hearers only of the Word but also doers (James 1:22). In what way can you apply a truth you've studied in Jonah to your own life?
I guess there really is a little Jonah in us all.

## **TEACHING NOTES**


# "I called out to the LORD, out of my distress, and He answered me."

Jonah 2:2a

It's easy to consider Jonah a story of running from God. But this story is as much about God's pursuit, as it is of man's waywardness. The prophet will flee, and whine, and fail, even still when he calls out to the LORD, He answers. God's character does not adapt to mankind's antics, nor does it bend to the will of another.

The character of God, His gracious, merciful, just character, is UNWAVERING.

Jonah's story is proof of that.

