



JONAH

A REBELLIOUS PROPHET AND GOD'S UNRELENTING GRACE

— COMMENTARY BY AL JOHNSON —

Jonah: A Rebellious Prophet & God's Unrelenting Grace

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HOW TO USE THIS STUDY GUIDE



My ongoing commitment as a pastor is to help you better know God's word and practically apply what it teaches throughout your life as a Christian. As part of that commitment, I have written companions like this one to coincide with each of our sermon series as I preach verse-by-verse through the books of the Bible [every Sunday at The Well Community Church in San Antonio, Texas].

It's my hope that this book would not just serve to give you information on the text of Scripture, but that as you come to know God more through this study, you would find that walking with Him daily is essential, life-giving, and transformative.

Each chapter accompanies a reading from Jonah with a memory verse, commentary, questions, and space for notes.

SCRIPTURE READING

It is important to understand why we read the Bible. Jesus taught us that “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matt 4:4). In the same way that we need physical food like bread to sustain our bodies, we need the spiritual food of God's Word to sustain our souls, just as the Apostle Paul encourages Timothy to be “constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of . . . sound doctrine” (1 Tim 4:6, NASB). This study guide is designed to equip and train you for a lifetime of studying God's word — to grow within you the discipline to seek after food that will never perish (Jn. 6:27).

MEMORY VERSE

To get the most from this study through Jonah, each chapter of this book includes a corresponding selection from the Scripture reading for you to commit to memory. The reason we memorize Scripture is not to win a contest or to prove to others how smart we are. We memorize Scripture because the Bible is the sword given to us by the Holy Spirit for our fight against sin and temptation (Eph 6:17; Matt 4:1-10; Ps 119:11; Rom 8:13). Memorizing Scripture helps us recall the promises of God and reminds us of the hope we have in Jesus. It also helps us in times of evangelism and counseling (Acts 2:14-40; 1 Pet 3:15).

COMMENTARY

To better help you study and apply God's Word, I have written commentary on each passage. While we may consciously understand that the Bible is vitally important to our spiritual health and relationship with Jesus, it's all too easy to read the Bible and walk away unaffected by it—or to just forget what we've read entirely. Each commentary

is written to ground the reader in God's Word so that they can retain its content and see how it applies to your life.

PERSONAL STUDY QUESTIONS

The truth of the Bible is universal, but every word of it communicates to us directly as individuals as well. The questions in these sections are meant to help you engage with the text and commentary in a deeply personal way, inviting you to meditate and reflect on what God is saying to you specifically. I recommend that you limit yourself to working on only one or two of these questions a day. Don't rush; take the time to think through and write out your answers.

GROUP/FAMILY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

These questions are designed for group discussion. Whether it's in your community group or at the family dinner table, I hope that these questions will help create opportunities for you to open your Bible and grow in love for Jesus alongside your friends and family.

INTRODUCTION TO JONAH



If you ever attended a Sunday-school, you likely have memories of a fun little lesson on the story of Jonah, complete with coloring pages and a crossword puzzle. You can probably recall each scene in your mind as glossy illustrations from a picture book: Jonah hopping aboard a big ship, on the run from God; Jonah disappearing beneath the waves of a stormy sea, and then swallowed whole by a great fish; Jonah spat ashore three days later, repentant and resolved to obey God's voice. But the book of Jonah is no fairytale or bedtime story; beneath the surface of the cutesy, cartoon version of Jonah that we all remember is a poignant reminder how God will expose the depths of rebellion in the human heart, and the unfathomable lengths he goes to display the wondrous magnitude of his mercy toward peoples who do not deserve it.

NINEVEH

For many Christians today, Nineveh is only remembered as it figures into the story of Jonah, but this is not the first nor the only time the city appears in the Bible. Nineveh is first mentioned in Genesis, in a brief description of the rise of Assyria (Gen. 10:11–12). Over time, Nineveh became the center of a brutal empire known for warfare, oppression, and bloodshed. Nahum calls it “the bloody city, all full of

lies and plunder" (Nah. 3:1), while also condemning its sorcery, seduction, and spiritual corruption (Nah. 3:4). The Assyrians were notorious for cruelty, humiliating conquered nations and ruling through fear and intimidation. Nineveh also became associated with the pride of kings who opposed the living God, such as Sennacherib, who returned there after defying the Lord (2 Kgs. 19:36; Isa. 37:37–38). Yet despite its wickedness, God still extended mercy toward the city through the preaching of Jonah.

Jesus later pointed to the repentance of Nineveh as a testimony against unbelief, declaring that, "the men of Nineveh repented at the preaching of Jonah" (Matt. 12:41; Lk. 11:30–32). For a brief moment, one of the darkest cities on earth humbled itself before God, but its repentance did not last forever. Which "is not surprising when we consider the history of the chosen people themselves" (MacKay 2023, 55). Generations later, the prophets announced that divine judgment would fall upon Assyria, and Nineveh would be desolated because of its continual evil and rebellion against God (Zeph. 2:13–15). As we will discover in this study, Nineveh stands as both a testimony and a solemn warning: there is no nation so wicked that it cannot receive mercy from God in repentance; but there is no empire so great that it can escape God's judgment if it remains in its evil.

WHO WROTE JONAH?

While we do not know with certainty as to who wrote the book of Jonah, the deeply personal details woven throughout the story seem to point back to Jonah himself as the primary source behind the account. As we read through the book of Jonah, we will see his fears, his prayers, his anger, his bitterness, and his conversations with God in private moments no one else would have

witnessed firsthand. This suggests that either Jonah himself wrote down his account, or that his personal testimony was dictated later to another, anonymous author writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

GENRE

The book of Jonah, one of the Twelve Minor Prophets of the Old Testament, is primarily written as Hebrew prophetic narrative. Unlike many prophetic books that mainly consist of sermons, visions, or oracles, Jonah tells a story. The focus is not primarily on Jonah's prophetic messages, but on Jonah himself and God's dealings with him.

IS JONAH A TRUE STORY?

The historicity of the book of Jonah has been widely debated among both modern scholars and skeptics over the years. Some have attempted to reduce Jonah to mere allegory, myth, or religious fiction. To them, a man surviving inside a great fish for three days sounds too absurd to be taken seriously. But the far more important question that underlies the skepticism about the more extraordinary elements in Jonah's story is the question of the credibility of Scripture and of God himself. It's important for us to remember that the Bible never presents Jonah as metaphor, and crucially, Jesus himself treated Jonah very literally. He spoke of Jonah as a real prophet, and his life as real history, revealing that God's purpose in it was to point toward Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection. In Matthew 12:40, Jesus declared, "For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." Jesus is communicating clearly here through his choice of the words "just as." The reader should understand that, *just* as Jonah *was* in the belly of the fish, so too would Jesus be laid in a tomb, and *just* as Jonah rose from

the fish alive three days later, so too would Jesus rise from the grave. For us to deny the book of Jonah as true history is to step into dangerous territory, because Jesus himself affirmed it in no uncertain terms. The same sovereign God who appointed the storm, commanded the sea, and prepared the great fish, would later raise Christ the Son from the dead.

WHEN WAS JONAH WRITTEN?

Jonah is identified in Jonah 1:1 as “Jonah the son of Amittai,” and in 2 Kings 14:25 as “Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet, who was from Gath-hepher.” This sets Jonah’s life and ministry during the reign of King Jeroboam II in the northern kingdom of Israel, placing him approximately in the eighth century BC, between 782–753 BC.

Jeroboam II’s ascent to the throne coincided with a rare time of peace between Israel and the Assyrian empire. Jeroboam II’s grandfather and predecessor, Jehoahaz, had pleaded for God to deliver Israel from the ongoing oppression of the Syrians, and God answered by sending them a savior (2 Kings 13:4-5). Historical records seem to indicate that the savior sent to Israel was the Assyrian king Adad-nirari III, who sieged the Syrian capital of Damascus. After Jehoahaz died, his son, Jehoash, inherited the throne. Under his reign, Israel would pay tribute to Adad-nirari III, likely brokering an alliance and peace between their two kingdoms, and allowing Jehoash and his son, Jeroboam II, to lead successful military campaigns against the Syrians. After the death of Adad-nirari III, the Assyrian empire fell into what would be its final decline before its ultimate downfall.

It is during this time that Jonah’s ministry takes place. And while the Assyrians were no longer an immediate threat, rebellion among God’s people remained rampant.

Israel continued walking in the sins of Jeroboam I and refused to turn from their idolatry and compromise with the evils of the pagan cultures of their neighbors.

SINS OF JEROBOAM

Jeroboam I was the first king of the northern kingdom of Israel after it split in two following the reign of Solomon, and his sins against God were the warp and woof for the conduct of every king in his line. Again and again throughout the book of 2 Kings, the kings were judged by whether or not they “walked in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which he made Israel to sin.”

Jeroboam I feared that the people of his new kingdom would eventually turn their hearts back to the house of David, which was then the kingdom of Judah. So Jeroboam I sought to cut them off from their affections by establishing a counterfeit religion, institutionalizing the worship of false gods, political idolatry, and spiritual corruption. He had two golden calves fashioned, and told the people “Behold your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt,” a direct callback to Israel’s rebellion in Exodus 32.

Jeroboam I didn’t stop at golden idols. He violated God’s law on the order of worship, appointing priests “from among all the people,” rather than from the Levites; he established unauthorized religious festivals according to “a month that he had devised from his own heart” (1 Kings 12:33); and he built temples and shrines in high places for the glory of the surrounding nations’ pagan gods (1 Kings 12:31).

The people participated in Jeroboam I’s sin readily enough. They adopted the worship rites of Asherah, a Canaanite fertility goddess, including ritual sex and prostitution, drunken

feasts, orgies, and even child sacrifice. Carved, wooden poles were erected at shrines in her honor, and these shrines were often centers for all manners of exploitation, immorality, and occultic practices. To make matters worse, the people tried to blend these practices with worship of the true God of Israel, utterly blaspheming his name.

The “sins of Jeroboam” became a shorthand for this complete and total corruption of the people, who claimed God’s name while rejecting his authority. The reason all this background matters is because the people of Israel were only experiencing peace and prosperity in Jonah’s time because of the compassion of God for his chosen people, despite their wickedness and rebellion against him. As we will soon see, this reality is exactly what is personified in Jonah himself.

JONAH

Jonah was not some inexperienced prophet who suddenly appears on the scene in the book named for him. Before his call to Nineveh, he had already been faithfully serving as prophet in Israel. 2 Kings 14:25 tells us that Jonah prophesied concerning the restoration of Israel’s borders during the reign of Jeroboam II. His ministry was already established. His words had already come to pass. He had already witnessed the mercy of God extended toward a rebellious people. But now, God calls Jonah beyond the borders of Israel to preach to Nineveh, a major city in Assyria and later its final capital.

Jonah knew the voice of God. Jonah had walked in obedience before. And that’s what makes the opening of Jonah so sobering: a prophet who had once faithfully proclaimed God’s word is now running from the very God he served.

The character of Jonah bids every one of us to examine our own hearts. Jonah was well acquainted with the character of God, he knew the Scriptures very well, and had vast theological understanding. Yet the great tragedy unfolding throughout Jonah is that a man can possess all of those things externally while still harboring deep, internalized resistance to God. His story exposes how possible it is to possess biblical knowledge and personal experience of God's faithfulness, all while still remaining resistant to the transforming work of God in the hidden places of the human heart.

Jonah knew the mercy of God, yet he did not want others to receive it. In fact, Jonah fled precisely because he knew God was "gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love" (Jon. 4:2). Jonah did not run because he doubted God's mercy; he ran because he feared God might actually extend that mercy to Israel's enemies.

In many ways, Jonah mirrors Israel itself. Israel had been called to be a light to the nations, a people through whom the knowledge of the true God would spread throughout the earth (Gen. 12:3; Isa. 49:6). Yet like Jonah, Israel often became rebellious, prideful, and resistant to God's mercy and grace. Jonah embodies the spiritual condition of a covenant people who had received grace from God while forsaking the God of grace. Jonah becomes a living picture of Israel's failure to fully align with the missionary heart of God.

And if we take an honest look at ourselves, we can see that Jonah mirrors us, too. The book exposes how easily our hearts drift from God.

Jonah is not ultimately about a fish. It is about the relentless mercy of God pursuing rebellious people. It is about the scandal of grace. And it is about

the terrifying reality that it is possible to know the truth about God while still resisting his heart.

JONAH IS ALL ABOUT JESUS!

Jonah ultimately points beyond himself to Jesus Christ. Like so much of the Old Testament, the story is preparing us for a greater and better fulfillment that would come through the person and work of Jesus. Jonah is not merely a prophet with a mission, but he is a shadow and a type that helps us to understand and see the glory of Christ more clearly.

Jesus himself makes this connection explicit. In Matthew 12:40, Jesus declares, “For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.” Jonah’s descent into the depths and his deliverance after three days points forward to the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. But the similarities are only part of the story. The contrasts are where the glory of Jesus shines most brightly.

Where Jonah ran from the presence of God in disobedience, Jesus walked in perfect obedience to the will of the Father. Jonah fled from his mission because he did not want mercy extended to his enemies. Jesus willingly stepped into our world precisely to save his enemies. Romans 5:8 tells us, “while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Jonah sat outside Nineveh hoping judgment would fall upon the city. Jesus stood outside Jerusalem and wept over it longing to see her repentance (Lk. 19:41). Jonah was swallowed up because of his own rebellion. Jesus willingly went into death because of ours.

The deeper we move into Jonah, the more clearly we begin seeing the beauty of Jesus. Jonah exposes the failure of the human heart, while Jesus reveals the faithfulness of God. Jonah begrudgingly preached repentance to people he hated. Jesus lovingly proclaims the kingdom and stretches out his hands to rebels, sinners, and prodigals. Jonah wanted fire from heaven to consume Nineveh. Jesus absorbed the wrath of God in the place of sinners so that mercy could be extended to the nations.

This Christological thread unifies the entire study of Jonah. The book is not merely calling us to avoid Jonah's mistakes; it is calling us to behold the greater Jonah who succeeded where every prophet, every leader, and every sinner failed. The story drives us toward Jesus Christ, the true and better Prophet, who perfectly obeyed the Father, perfectly loved his enemies, and through his death and resurrection now extends mercy to the ends of the earth.

CHAPTER 1

FLEEING THE PRESENCE OF GOD

JONAH 1:1-6



SCRIPTURE FOR MEMORIZATION AND MEDITATION:

Jonah 1:3 But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the LORD.

COMMENTARY:

There have been multiple moments in my life where I have heard the call of God with unmistakable clarity. Maybe not an audible voice, but at times it sure felt like it. These moments are marked by their precise timing, the tangible presence of the Holy Spirit, and illumination of the Scriptures in a deeply personal way. The uniqueness of these moments is unforgettable, and each time has produced in me an unshakable conviction to obey the voice of the Lord. One of those moments was when God called me to move to Kenya to serve as a missionary.

At that point, I had already been walking with Jesus for some time. I was a student at The University of Texas San Antonio (UTSA), actively making disciples and burning with zeal to reach those far from Jesus. I wanted my life to count for the cause of Christ. I did not want to waste my years building a small, comfortable life centered around myself while the kingdom of God was advancing across the world. I wanted to be used by God in whatever way he desired.

A few years earlier, I had begun to feel a strange and persistent pull toward Africa. It is difficult to explain honestly, but there was a growing burden in my spirit, a sense that the Lord was calling me there for some reason and purpose, though at the time I had no idea what that purpose was. I did not know when it would happen, how it would happen, or if I was even discerning it correctly. So I submitted it to the Lord in prayer.

I remember one particular moment vividly. I was praying and wrestling through this growing sense of calling, and I said, "Lord, if you are truly calling me to Africa, make it clear." Then I said something that still feels a little strange to me, but that I'll never forget:

| "Lord, call me like a prophet."

Honestly, at the time, I do not think I fully understood what I was even asking. I just knew I wanted clarity from God. I wanted the kind of unmistakable calling I had read about in Scripture.

Fast forward a few years, and the intensity of that burden had become almost unavoidable. The call consumed my thoughts and my prayers. It lingered in the background of everything. I could not shake it.

There's a secluded spot near some trees on campus where I would go nearly every morning to read my Bible and pray, and on one of those mornings I heard with clarity God call me to Africa. God met me there and spoke with vivid clarity through his word and through the weight of his presence and power. As I prayed, seeking discernment on this possible call to Africa, I suddenly became overwhelmed by my own sin, shame, and unworthiness before God. I remember feeling painfully aware of how weak and insufficient I was. Who was I to be sent by God anywhere? Who was I to represent Christ abroad? As the weight of my own sinfulness pressed heavily upon me, a strong gust of wind blew across the place where I was sitting and flipped through the pages of my open Bible.

It opened to Isaiah chapter 6 and as I read, it felt as though I was reading it for the very first time. As I read verses 1-8, chills ran down my spine. In the passage, Isaiah encounters the holiness and presence of God. Immediately he becomes aware of his sinfulness and cries out in confession "Woe is me." Then, after being forgiven, he hears the voice of the Lord asking, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?"

It was almost verbatim what I had just been praying. I sat there overwhelmed by the presence of God. Every part of me felt gripped by the reality that the Lord had spoken. Not audibly, but clearly. Deeply. Personally. I knew deep down in that moment that God was calling me to Africa. And like Isaiah, my response became "Here I am. Send me." The only problem was that I had no idea what to do next.

I finished my time of prayer and walked to the computer lab, which was a regular rhythm back then. We did not have smartphones and constant connectivity like we do now. If you wanted to check your email, you physically went somewhere to do it on a computer that wasn't your own.

When I opened my inbox, there was an email waiting for me from a mission organization connected to a local ministry I was serving with. The email explained that one of their missionaries in Kenya was looking for a ministry partner to join him for a semester because Jesus often sent His disciples out two by two and they would like for him to not go alone. Someone had apparently heard that I had been sensing the Lord calling me to Africa, and they wanted to know if I would be interested in discerning the opportunity.

I remember just sitting there staring at the screen in disbelief. The timing was unbelievable. Only moments earlier, I had been praying, wrestling, confessing sin, reading Isaiah's calling, and surrendering myself to the Lord. And now sitting in front of me was an open door to Kenya, Africa. I walked right out of there and drove to the post office to apply for my passport, and about 6 months later I had a Kenyan address, bank account, and job. This moment often comes to mind when reading the opening words of Jonah.

JONAH ON THE RUN

"The word of the LORD came to Jonah" (v. 1). The author doesn't give us the detail I just gave about my calling to Kenya, but we see immediately that Jonah has undeniably been called by God. For many readers, there is an assumption that this is the first time Jonah has heard the call of God, but Jonah was already an established prophet in Israel. According to 2 Kings 14:23–25, Jonah had previously been used by God during the reign of Jeroboam II and had prophesied concerning the restoration of Israel's borders. "It was through Jonah's preaching that Jeroboam II fixed Israel's border that had been weakened during early conflicts with Assyria. This kept Israel from being blotted out as a people" (Redmond, Curtis, and Fentress

2016, 5). His ministry was already bearing fruit. He already knew the voice of God. He had already experienced the mercy and power of God firsthand. It is vital for the reader to understand this because it changes how we understand what is actually happening here in the text.

Jonah immediately flees upon hearing the call of God to go to Nineveh. It's easy and common for the reader to think that Jonah is primarily fleeing the calling of God to preach to Nineveh or resisting the call to ministry itself. But this is not at all what is happening, nor what is stated in the text. Jonah wasn't suddenly being introduced to the voice of God with a ministry proposition as if this was God's original call for Jonah to ministry. Jonah is not rebelling because he is unfamiliar with God, or doesn't want to be a prophetic preacher. He is running from God himself. "Contrary to our cultural picture of Jonah, the prophet is really more like each one of us than a preacher fleeing pulpit ministry" (Redmond, Curtis, and Fentress 2016, 5).

God commands Jonah to arise and go to Nineveh, that great and wicked Assyrian city, and call out against it because its evil had come up before him. "But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD"(v. 3). We are told twice in the same verse that Jonah was not fleeing a call from God, but was attempting to flee from the presence of God himself. Jonah's heart has become so hardened that, in this moment, he wants distance from God himself.

That is exactly what the sin in man's heart does when left unchecked. It does not only lead us in disobedience, but distorts our affections for God himself. Jonah isn't merely trying to avoid a ministry assignment, but desires to leave his God and his faith completely. Rather than align his heart with the will of God, Jonah would rather run from

the presence of God, although he surely knows that what he is aiming to do is impossible (Ps. 139:7–10).

Regardless, Jonah boards a ship and sets out to flee from the presence of God. The prophet of God, the man who had heard the voice of God, preached on behalf of God, and experienced the power of God, now attempts to run from God, not because he doubted God's existence, but because he despised God's command and thus despised God himself. The reader must continually be reminded that while Jonah certainly seems to hate the Ninevites and the command of God, it is God that Jonah is fleeing, not just the call. He has animosity towards God and wants to have nothing to do with him.

Healthy Christianity does not flee the presence of God—it longs for it. The Scriptures repeatedly show us that it is God himself who truly satisfies the human soul. “O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you,” cries the Psalmist in Psalm 63:1. At our fundamental level, we were created for communion with God. As Saint Augustine of Hippo's great *Confessions* states, “You stir man to take pleasure in praising you, because you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you” (Augustine 1998, 3). And as our Lord Jesus taught, “...‘I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst’” (Jn. 6:35). God's people should desire and long to be near their God, for in him is true pleasure, joy and satisfaction (Ps. 16:11), yet Jonah, a prophet of God, suppresses what he ought to confidently know about God and rejects him. This sets up the theme of the whole book: the sin and rebellion of mankind, versus the relentless, sovereign grace of God.

STORM OF GRACE

Jonah tried to escape the pursuit of God, “But the LORD hurled a great wind upon the sea” (v. 4). Every active pursuit by God towards his creation is an act of mercy and grace. Here we see that grace can sometimes be violent. God did not passively allow the storm; he sent it. He “hurled” it. The same God who spoke galaxies into existence, who commands oceans to stop at the edge of the shore, who stores lightning in his armory and calls stars by name, now aims the forces of creation directly at one rebellious prophet attempting to escape his presence.

Throughout the Bible, God makes it clear that when his people rebel against him, he will often use discipline—even calamity—to get their attention and bring them back to himself. This is the loving correction of a covenant Father calling his people to repentance. Deuteronomy 8:5 says, “as a man disciplines his son, the LORD your God disciplines you.” The prophet Amos recounts God sending famine, drought, plague, and destruction in order to awaken Israel, but no matter the disaster, God’s disappointed refrain after each was “yet you did not return to me” (Amos 4:6–11).” We can see this same pattern in the Book of Judges: God’s people rebel, suffering follows, the people cry out, and God mercifully restores them. Even God’s warnings were filled with mercy, as he says in Zechariah 1:3: “Return to me, and I will return to you.” Time and again, Scripture shows God shaking his people, not to destroy them in judgment, but to wake them up and lead them back into repentance and life in his name. This is what is happening to Jonah, but at this point he doesn’t see it.

What we are witnessing is the sovereign hand of God and the violence of his grace. We often think of grace in a feminine sense, as something soft, sentimental, poised,

and delicate. But in Jonah we encounter a grace fierce enough to shatter ships and terrifying enough to interrupt rebellion. God loved Jonah too much to leave him alone.

There are many who believe that the storms of life, both the proverbial and the literal, are proof of God's apathy or even outright non-existence, and they can often drive even many Christians to doubt and despair. But here, Jonah recognizes the gracious pursuit of God in the midst of the storm, and both Jonah and the unbelieving mariners view it as evidence of God's divine power. It was clear to them that the tempest did not come from the indifferent movement of the weather, but that it was an act of God's presence among them.

The sailors on board with Jonah were seasoned men of the sea who had likely survived many storms before and were well acquainted with navigating violent waters. Yet the text tells us they were terrified. This should give us an indication of the magnitude of this moment. The ship itself threatened to break apart under the fury of the wind and waves. After the mariners' prayers to their so-called gods failed, it remained undeniable that something supernatural was happening and that Jonah's God was responsible. Thus, they insisted that Jonah cry out to his God, the one true God, in hopes that those on the ship would not perish (v.6).

Just as God had hurled the great wind upon the sea, the sailors hurled the cargo overboard in desperation, trying to lighten the ship and preserve their lives. Everyone on the boat is awake, frantic, praying, and fighting for survival— everyone except Jonah.

Jonah is asleep in the inner part of the ship, purposely and actively ignoring the pursuit of God. The way the storm is described, it is hard to believe he is even able to sleep. Yet

he has deafened his ears to the voice of God and hardened his heart to his will. Jonah knows God is pursuing him, which is why he hides, not so different from Adam and Eve in the garden. This is what we often do when we are aware of our sin and aware of the pursuit of God. This is also what sin and rebellion does to us— it leads us away from God and numbs us to his presence and power around us.

One of the most terrifying judgments of God is not immediate destruction, but spiritual apathy. Jonah had become so spiritually cold, so internally disconnected, that he could sleep while under the discipline of God. Don't miss this image: *the pagan sailors are praying while the prophet sleeps*. The unbelievers are awake to the spiritual reality and presence of God, while the man of God is unconscious to it.

WHAT DOES ALL THIS TELL US?

It is possible to know sound theology and still resist God. It is possible to preach truth one day, and run from the presence of God another day. It is possible to have a public ministry while privately hardening your heart. It is possible to become so desensitized by sin that you can sleep through the storm of God's discipline.

Yet in the midst of all this, the mercy and grace of God is active and on display. The storm tells us that God is not distant from his creation. He is sovereign over every molecule, every gust of wind, every crashing wave, every detail of human history, and he is ever pursuing us at every step of our rebellion. There is nowhere a man can run where God cannot reach him. Jonah fled toward the sea, but the sea belongs to God. Jonah fled into the storm, but the storm obeys God. Jonah fled among pagan sailors, but even there God was already revealing himself to these men.

The irony of Jonah is that the prophet is trying to escape the very God who controls the land, the sea, the wind, and the nations. This is still true for us today.

Many people spend their lives running from God, convincing themselves they can outrun conviction, outrun calling, outrun obedience, and outrun surrender. Some bury themselves in work. Others do so through entertainment, lust, success, relationships, comfort, addiction, ambition, or distraction. But God is actively pursuing us and desires to meet with us, even if it is in the middle of a storm. Sometimes grace is gentle and soft like a whisper. Other times it crashes into your life like a hurricane.

PERSONAL STUDY QUESTIONS

Have there been moments in your life where you sensed the call or conviction of God with unusual clarity? How did you respond?

In what ways can unchecked sin distort your affections for God?

Jonah is asleep while the pagan sailors are terrified and praying. What does Jonah's sleep reveal about the numbing effect of sin and spiritual apathy?

Have you ever experienced a season where you were resisting God's will or conviction? What did that resistance look like in your life?

GROUP/FAMILY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Why is it important to understand that Jonah was already a prophet who knew God before Jonah 1 begins? How does that shape the way we read the story?

The text says twice that Jonah fled “from the presence of the LORD.” What does this reveal about the condition of Jonah’s heart?

In verses 4–5, God sends a violent storm. How is the storm actually an expression of God’s grace toward Jonah?

What does Jonah 1:1–6 teach us about the relentless pursuit, sovereignty, and grace of God even in the middle of human rebellion?

[illegible]

CHAPTER 2

YOU WILL BE FOUND OUT

JONAH 1:7-17



SCRIPTURE FOR MEMORIZATION AND MEDITATION

Jonah 1:17 And the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

COMMENTARY

Over the years, I have had the privilege of officiating numerous weddings for couples in our church. At this point, I have spent hundreds of hours in premarital counseling with engaged couples preparing to enter into covenant together, and hundreds more hours walking with married couples through conflict, betrayal, restoration, heartbreak, and healing. One of the things I emphasize to everyone is that secrets have a way of surviving for a season, but never forever. Secret sin eventually comes into the light.

Because of that, one of the things I consistently tell couples during premarital counseling is that they should not enter marriage hiding things from one another. A marriage cannot

be built on concealed sin, half-truths, and hidden histories while expecting covenantal intimacy to flourish. Secrets poison trust long before they are ever discovered. Even when buried, they continue to rot beneath the surface.

There was a couple I had been counseling, though I was not the one who married them, and their hidden sin had finally surfaced. I found myself sitting across from them trying to help piece together the wreckage of their marriage after adultery had shattered the trust between them.

While they were engaged, the young man had entered into a one time sexual relationship with another woman. It happened before the wedding, and instead of confessing it, repenting, and bringing it into the light, he made a private vow to himself that no one would ever know. He convinced himself he could bury it. He told himself it was in the past. He believed he could carry the secret into marriage and eventually into the grave.

Years later, after they had been married for some time, his wife confessed that she had developed a romantic relationship with a man she worked with. What began emotionally eventually became physical and grew into a full adulterous affair. As the marriage erupted into crisis, the husband, in an attempt to console his wife and perhaps lessen the weight of her betrayal, suddenly confessed his own infidelity from years earlier while they were engaged.

To this day, I do not think he even fully understood why he confessed it at that moment. I suspect the secret had been eating away at him for years. Sin hidden in darkness has a way of slowly consuming the soul. What a man refuses to confess outwardly eventually begins tormenting him inwardly.

Instead of comforting his wife, his confession devastated her even further. Yes, she had betrayed her marriage vows, but now she realized he had broken trust before the marriage had even begun, and she had unknowingly built years of covenant life on top of a lie. The foundation itself suddenly felt corrupted and broken. She was enraged, hurt, humiliated, and deeply betrayed.

I remember asking him why he never told her before the wedding, and his answer was that he believed she would have called off the wedding and never married him if she had known the truth. Then, he looked at me and said, “I planned to go to my grave with this secret.” And yet, here he was, having already confessed it.

What we all need to reckon with is that you may hide sin for a season, but it will inevitably be uncovered. “For nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest, nor is anything secret that will not be known and come to light” (Lk. 8:17). You may suppress it, justify it, bury it, rename it, minimize it, or convince yourself that no one will ever know. Eventually, what is hidden comes into the light. Your sin will find you out. Over my years in ministry, I have seen this proven again and again, and it is exactly what Jonah discovers as well.

YOU CANNOT HIDE FROM GOD

Jonah thought he could bury his disobedience beneath the deck of a ship headed for Tarshish, but the sovereign hand of God would not allow his prophet to remain hidden forever. As the storm intensifies, the lots are cast, and the fugitive prophet is finally exposed before the unbelieving sailors and before the God he attempted to flee (v. 7-10).

One of the great lies sin tells us is that our rebellion is isolated and private. We convince ourselves that our disobedience only affects us. That what we do behind closed doors, what we tolerate in secret, what we justify in the hidden places of our hearts, somehow remains contained within our own lives. But that is only a delusion.

Jonah's sin not only put his life in jeopardy, but it endangered everyone around him. One man's refusal to obey God led an entire ship full of sailors to be suddenly trapped in the fury of a divinely appointed storm. Men who had nothing to do with Jonah's rebellion were now terrified for their lives because of the consequences of another man's disobedience. Cargo was being thrown overboard. Livelihoods were being lost. This is one of the terrifying realities of sin. A father's hidden sin eventually crashes down onto his wife and children. A pastor's compromise eventually wounds an entire church. A husband's lust poisons intimacy in marriage. A leader's pride fractures all that he aims to build. A man's addiction creates instability for everyone who depends upon him. Sin always leaks. It spreads like rot beneath the floorboards of a house until the entire structure becomes unstable and crumbles.

Not limited to Jonah, individual sin having massive consequences on others can be seen throughout Scripture. When Achan sinned in secret, Israel suffered defeat (Josh. 7:1–26). One man's hidden rebellion brought consequences upon an entire people. When David sinned by taking an unauthorized census, the nation experienced judgment (2 Sam. 24:1–17). Throughout the books of Kings and Chronicles, whenever leaders abandoned righteousness and drifted into idolatry, the people followed behind them into spiritual corruption and eventual destruction. Sin moves outward like ripples across water. The consequences rarely stop with the person committing it and this is still true today.

There is another view brought to bear in Daniel C. Timmer's commentary on Jonah. He does not dispute the claim that Jonah's sin had consequences for others, but suggests that this is not the only possible reason for Jonah's willingness to go overboard. He raises the possibility that Jonah would rather die than repent. He connects this to Jonah 4, where Jonah is enraged with God when Nineveh repents, suggesting that Jonah's motives for going overboard here may not be as straightforward or as visible as they first appear (Timmer 2011, 71-72).

Whatever his motive, the fact was that the mariners were suffering because of Jonah's sin, and Jonah could no longer remain on the ship. As long as Jonah continued resisting God, everyone around him remained caught in the storm created by his disobedience. So the sailors threw him overboard, and immediately the sea grew calm (v. 15).

JONAH IS ABOUT JESUS

Just as rebellion has corporate consequences, so obedience can bring corporate blessings. One man's rebellion in the garden plunged humanity into sin, death, and separation from God, but one man's obedience opened the way for redemption, righteousness, and eternal life. "For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous" (Rom. 5:19).

Jonah is about Jesus. This is ultimately where the story of Jonah points us. Jonah is a rebellious prophet whose disobedience brought danger upon everyone around him. Jesus is the greater and better prophet whose obedience brings salvation to the world. Jonah fled from the presence of God while Jesus willingly obeyed the will of the Father.

Jonah slept during the storm because of rebellion, while Jesus slept during the storm in perfect peace and sovereign authority over the winds and waves (Mk. 4:35–41). Jonah was thrown into the sea because of his own sin, but Jesus willingly gave himself over to death for the sins of others.

The great turning point of the book of Jonah is found here in verse 17 of chapter one. “And the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.” At first glance, the fish appears to be divine judgment, but in reality the fish is God’s mercy. Left alone in the sea, Jonah would have drowned beneath the waves as the current dragged him down into a watery grave. The fish appointed by God was God’s provision and Jonah’s salvation. God appointed the storm, but he also appointed deliverance. Even in discipline, God’s divine grace is in active pursuit.

Jesus himself tells us Jonah’s descent into the depths was always meant to foreshadow something greater. “For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matt. 12:39–40). Even in Jonah’s failure, God was already painting a picture of the gospel to come. For all the generations after him, Jonah would be a prophetic sign pointing forward to Jesus Christ and his death, burial, and resurrection.

What we begin to see unfold at the close of the first chapter of Jonah is the sovereign grace of God pursuing people even into the depths of darkness, rebellion, and despair.

The same God who appointed the storm also appointed mercy within the storm. The same God who followed Jonah aboard a ship out at sea also followed him sinking into

the abyss. This is the great mystery of the grace of God that we see again and again throughout Scripture. What man intends for evil, God intends for good (Gen. 50:20). Jonah's wicked flight from God is now made a picture of the magnitude of grace and a foretaste of the cross of Christ. This should give us great hope. Sin is real, consequences are real, but even in the middle of our failure, God is still writing a greater story than we can fully comprehend.

JESUS ALREADY KNOWS

If you are hiding sin, confess it. Bring it into the light. 1 John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Over the years of ministry, I have watched countless people destroy themselves trying to conceal what God was inviting them to surrender. I think again of the young man I spoke of earlier who hid his unfaithfulness from his fiancée because he feared she would call off the wedding if she knew the truth. That fear is what drove him into secrecy. He trusted his ability to manage the situation more than he trusted God with the outcome. He was deceived into thinking it was safer to conceal than to surrender. And in all honesty, had he told her the truth, she likely would have called off the wedding—and I believe she would have been right to do so. Only God knows what he might have done in that situation afterward.

What we often fail to realize is that God's ways are always better. Even when obedience costs us something, God is still working out a greater story than we can imagine. He is able to redeem. He is able to cleanse. He is able to restore. He is able to meet us in our brokenness, shame, fear, and deep darkness. We must continually remember

that there is more mercy and grace in Jesus than there could ever be sin in us. That is the hope of the gospel.

You may be hiding in sin and shame today because you fear exposure, rejection, or the unavoidable consequences. The cross of Christ reminds us that Jesus already knows everything that you would want to keep in the dark. Confessing of your sin is not revealing new information to him. He saw every sin, every compromise, every hidden thought, and every secret failure long before the nails pierced his hands. There is a great freedom in knowing that Jesus has already atoned for the sins of the world, including yours, and that freedom should lead us to confession and repentance.

Stop running. Stop hiding. Stop exhausting yourself trying to manage what only God's grace can heal. The same God who pursued Jonah into the storm is still pursuing sinners today, not to destroy them, but to restore them.

PERSONAL STUDY QUESTIONS

What do you think Jonah believed he could hide from God?

What hidden sins, compromises, or patterns are easiest for people to justify and keep buried?

Secret sin eventually comes into the light. How have you seen that truth play out in your own life or in the lives of others?

Why does hidden sin often grow heavier and more exhausting over time?

GROUP/FAMILY

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

How do we see Jonah's disobedience impacting the sailors and everyone on the ship? What are some examples of hidden sin impacting others?

How have you seen God's discipline become an act of grace in your own life?

Read 1 John 1:9. What keeps people from confession and repentance even though forgiveness is offered in Christ?

How does Jonah being thrown into the sea and swallowed by the great fish point forward to the greater story of Jesus Christ? See Matthew 12:39–40.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

CHAPTER 3

GNARLY GRACE

JONAH 2:1-10



SCRIPTURE FOR MEMORIZATION AND MEDITATION

Jonah 2:9 But I with the voice of thanksgiving
will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will
pay. Salvation belongs to the LORD!

COMMENTARY

Sometimes radical rejection of God is met by the radical pursuit of God. That is what we are witnessing unfold in the story of Jonah. Up to this point we've seen how Jonah has actively rebelled against the clear command of God and, moreover, he is running from the very presence of God himself. Jonah has hardened his heart, endangered innocent lives, attempted to escape the sovereign will of God, and would rather die than repent. Yet, every step Jonah took away from God was met by God moving nearer to him. Now the belly of a great fish itself becomes another expression of the relentless grace of God.

| Sometimes, grace looks gnarly.

Jonah's salvation was something out of a nightmare.
Jonah 2:3–6 paints a picture of God's grace not in its

tenderness, but in its power, pain, and terror. Jonah says, “For you cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the flood surrounded me; all your waves and your billows passed over me.” Imagine Jonah’s horror, watching helplessly as the waters close in over him to take his life. The black of the deep encompasses him. Seaweed wraps around his head. The imagery is claustrophobic and death soaked. Jonah is not sitting warm and dry in some softly lit children’s-story-version of a whale. He is buried alive and entombed beneath the sea, shrouded in darkness, awash in decay and the violent churning of the ocean depths.

It was here in the belly of this great fish where Jonah finally begins to surrender to the Lord. “It is only when you reach the very bottom, when everything falls apart, when all your schemes and resources are broken and exhausted, that you are finally open to learning how to completely depend on God” (Keller 2020, 72).

This is often how grace works in our lives as well. God must strip away our illusions, expose our vile pride and dismantle our self-reliance. God’s grace is what brings us to the end of ourselves before we are finally ready to see our need for him clearly. Like Jonah, sometimes God rescues us through things that initially feel like they are killing us.

Up to this point, Jonah had already walked with God and experienced the goodness of God firsthand. He was a prophet. God had spoken through him in 2 Kings 14:25. Jonah had seen God’s covenant mercy extended toward Israel again and again despite their rebellion and compromise. Jonah knew the character of God. He knew God was compassionate, gracious, patient, and abounding in steadfast love. In fact, later in Jonah 4:2, Jonah openly admits this is

precisely why he fled: “for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.”

God had now called Jonah to preach repentance to Nineveh, the capital city of Assyria. Nineveh was infamous for its brutality, violence, cruelty, and wickedness. The Assyrians were feared throughout the ancient world for their military savagery and horrifying treatment of conquered peoples. They were known for torture, mutilation, public executions, and ruthless oppression. They were wicked enemies of God's people. Many commentators point out that Jonah's hatred toward the Ninevites was likely connected to their violent abuse of God's people. Jonah did not want them to receive mercy because, in his mind, they deserved judgment. He wanted justice for them, not grace.

Jonah was fully aware that God might extend to Nineveh the same mercy he had repeatedly extended to Israel, and Jonah could not stomach it. His heart had become so darkened that he failed to see his own need for God's mercy and grace.

It is not that Jonah had never been a recipient of God's grace. His entire life as a prophet was proof that grace had already been at work in him, sustaining him, calling him, and using him to preach God's word to Israel. The issue was not the absence of grace in Jonah's life, but the failure to acknowledge it. It seems that he took mercy for granted, rather than seeing it for something so precious that it demands nothing less than full submission in worship to God. Scripture shows us that this posture of the heart always leads down bitter roads, just as it did with Jonah.

Romans 1 tells us what happens when one refuses to honor God or give him thanks. Paul writes that although people knew God, they did not honor him

as God or give thanks to him, and as a result, their thinking became futile and their hearts were darkened (Rom. 1:21). This is precisely what we see in Jonah.

The evidence of Jonah's darkened heart is his desire to flee from the presence of God. Jonah is a lived expression of a heart that is actively suppressing truth in unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18). Jonah knows who God is, he knows what God has commanded, and he knows what obedience requires, yet he chooses to run, rather than surrender.

Jonah is refusing to live in the light of what he already knows to be true about God's character. A man can be immersed in and shaped by stories of God's faithfulness, and yet utterly fail to grasp the mercy of God. Jonah's heart of stone would have dragged him down to the bottom of the sea; it was only God's heart of grace and mercy that spared him. It's amazing to see how the wind, waves, and even fish obey God, yet the prophet of God remains obstinate.

Now in the belly of the great fish, Jonah finally begins to reckon with his own desperate need for the mercy of God. For the first time in the story, Jonah prays.

"I called out to the LORD, out of my distress, and he answered me" (v. 2). It took distress for Jonah to cry out.

What we need to understand about God's grace is that he can and will use anything to draw us back into his presence. The sovereign grace of God is not limited to comfortable circumstances. Throughout Scripture, God repeatedly uses the very things we would have avoided to awaken us spiritually and bring us to repentance.

That is exactly what is happening in Jonah 2.

JONAH AND THE PSALMS

The entire second chapter of Jonah reads like the Psalms. Jonah's prayer is not composed in words of frantic desperation, but is instead deeply saturated in the language of Scripture. In many ways, Jonah prays the Psalms back to God. It is clear that Jonah has hidden the Word of God deep within his heart. Now, in this moment of trial and suffering, the Scripture rises to the surface. Jonah may have been running from God, but the Word of God was still alive within him, though seemingly dormant.

Throughout this chapter, Jonah directly quotes or references numerous psalms of lament, distress, deliverance, and worship. His prayer sounds like a man who has spent years immersed in the worship language of God's people and now, submerged under the sea, those truths become the vocabulary of his repentance.

In verse 2, Jonah says, "I called out to the LORD, out of my distress, and he answered me." This closely echoes Psalm 120:1, "In my distress I called to the LORD, and he answered me." Jonah is praying like David and the Psalmists before him, crying out to God from a place of anguish and discovering that the Lord still hears the prayers of desperate people.

Then in verse 3, he says, "all your waves and your billows passed over me." This is a parallel of Psalm 42:7, "Deep calls to deep at the roar of your waterfalls; all your breakers and your waves have gone over me." Jonah recognizes that the chaos surrounding him is not random. Even the waves belong to God. The storm itself is under divine authority.

In verse 5, he cries, “The waters closed in over me to take my life,” depicting the imagery of Psalm 69:1; “Save me, O God! For the waters have come up to my neck.” Both passages describe overwhelming despair, helplessness, and the terrifying feeling of being swallowed by death itself.

And again, in verse 6 he says, “yet you brought up my life from the pit, O LORD my God,” just as the Psalmist sang “O LORD, you have brought up my soul from Sheol; you restored me to life from among those who go down to the pit” (Ps. 30:3), recognizing that his survival is not the result of human effort. God alone rescues people from the pit.

Then in verse 8, “Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love.” It seems pretty clear by this point that Jonah is pulling from the themes found throughout the Psalms regarding idols and the rejection of God’s mercy, but especially Psalm 31:6, “I hate those who pay regard to worthless idols, but I trust in the LORD.”

Finally, Jonah closes his prayer with, “Salvation belongs to the LORD!” (v.9). Directly from Psalm 3:8 “Salvation belongs to the LORD; your blessing be on your people!”

Jonah’s theology becomes the most alive in the depths of his despair. The Scriptures he had likely known for years suddenly become deeply personal, and truth that once may have lived only in the intellect are now borne in the flesh through the labor pains of experience. Jonah is no longer speaking about suffering theoretically. He is drowning. He is no longer speaking about rescue abstractly. He has been rescued.

The Psalms themselves were songs given to the people of God, shaping their understanding of his character and

his promises. Long before Jonah found himself drowning in the depths, the Word of God had already been planted within him through the Psalms. And now, in the turbulence of suffering, those truths become anchors for his soul. This is why Christians must fill their minds and hearts with the words and songs of Scripture, because when storms come, shallow theology cannot sustain you. In seasons of darkness, fear, grief, suffering, and even despair, the truths we have hidden in our hearts become the language of our prayers and the foundation beneath our feet. For those who truly know their God, his word becomes an anchor in the chaos of life.

GOD'S HESED

While Jonah's prayer is saturated with the words of Scripture, it is not until the very end of the prayer that Jonah finally seems to grasp the magnitude of God's grace. "Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love" (v. 8). The phrase "steadfast love" is the Hebrew word *hesed*. It is one of the richest covenantal words used throughout the Old Testament to describe the character of God. *Hesed* is the engine of God's grace. It is the fullness of God's covenant faithfulness, his mercy, grace, kindness, loyalty, patience, and unwavering love toward his people. It is the relentless, faithful love of God that refuses to let go of those he has set his affection upon.

What Jonah is beginning to realize here is that he himself has been a lifelong recipient of that steadfast love. God had pursued him, sustained him, spoken to him, disciplined him, rescued him, and preserved him, not because Jonah deserved it, but because God is faithful to his covenant mercy. Even in this moment, drowning at sea and swallowed by a great fish, God is displaying a divine act of *hesed* toward Jonah.

In verse 9, he responds to God's *hesed*, "But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you." Finally, thanksgiving rises from Jonah's heart. This is significant because gratitude is often the evidence that grace has truly been understood. Up until this point, Jonah appears to have received the blessings of God while failing to fully acknowledge and give thanks for the grace of God. Jonah finally recognizes that salvation belongs to the Lord alone, because of his steadfast love.

After giving thanks to the Lord in recognition of his grace, "the LORD spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land" (v. 10). In his commentary on Jonah, Timothy Keller makes the observation that it is at this moment, at the end of his prayer, that Jonah is ken to God's steadfast love for him. "It takes the whole prayer for Jonah to get there—to a declaration about God's grace— but when he does, he is released back into the land of the living" (Keller 2020, 73).

THE NEED FOR GOD'S GRACE

God's grace as portrayed in the Scriptures seems to be increasingly lost in our day. Among many Christians, grace is often reduced to a kind of opaque term for overlooking sin or avoiding hard conversations. "Give me some grace" has almost come to mean, "Ignore the issue," or "Do not confront what is wrong." Grace becomes little more than permissive tolerance. On the other side, much of the non-Christian world is almost offended by the very idea that grace is needed at all. Affirmation has become the supreme virtue of our culture. We are told that humanity is fundamentally good; that our problem is external not internal, and that salvation comes through self-discovery, self-expression, self-love, or greater moral effort.

The Bible tells a completely different story. We all stand guilty before a holy God (Rom. 3:19). It says that “none is righteous, no, not one” (Rom. 3:10). Humanity is not morally neutral or slightly flawed. Apart from Christ, we are hell bent on our own destruction. Ephesians 2:3 says we were “by nature children of wrath.” True justice would mean experiencing the full and righteous wrath of God. Our only hope is grace! We need the *hesed* of God, his steadfast covenant love, mercy, patience, and faithfulness toward undeserving sinners.

Nowhere is that grace more clearly displayed than at the cross of Christ. The cross shows us just how gnarly grace really is. The grace of God is displayed through a brutally beaten Savior, crushed under the weight of our sin, mocked, bloodied, murdered, and “marred beyond human semblance” (Isa. 52:14). The cross is the blazing demonstration of the steadfast love of the Lord overcoming human rebellion and sin. Look at the cross and see the length God was willing to go to rescue sinners. Look at the cross and see the magnitude of his love! Marvel at his grace!

In order to become a recipient of grace, you must first admit you need it. This is exactly what begins happening to Jonah in the belly of the fish. In Jonah 2:2–6, Jonah finally recognizes that God is extending mercy to him and sparing his life. Jonah deserved judgment. Jonah deserved death beneath the waves. Yet God, rich in mercy and steadfast love, pursued him even there.

This is the great offense of grace. In order to receive it, we must first admit we are guilty, helpless, and in need of saving. We must abandon any illusions that we can rescue ourselves through greater effort, morality, discipline, spirituality, or self-improvement. Salvation belongs to the Lord alone (v. 9).

Grace overcomes what we could never fix ourselves. It bridges the separation our sin created between us and God. The power of the doctrine of grace only truly begins to wash over the human soul like a massive wave breaking across the shore when we finally begin to grasp the heft and weight of our sin alongside the far surpassing enormity of God's steadfast love for us. When we begin to see the length Jesus went to save us, something changes—grace begins to transform us.

PERSONAL STUDY

Have you experienced God's grace through any painful, uncomfortable, or disruptive circumstances? If so, how?

Why do you think it sometimes takes suffering or trials for people to finally cry out to God like Jonah did?

Read Romans 1:21. How does refusing to give honor or thanks toward God contribute to spiritual darkness and hardness of heart?

What area of your life right now may actually be a “gnarly grace” moment—something painful that God is using to humble you, awaken you, and draw you back to himself?

GROUP/FAMILY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Jonah's prayer reveals he knew the character of God, yet still resisted obeying him in the previous chapter. What warnings does Jonah's life give to believers today?

Jonah's prayer is saturated with Scripture and the Psalms. What does this teach us about the importance of hiding God's Word in our hearts before storms come?

Additionally, why is Bible-saturated prayer so important during seasons of suffering and confusion?

Discuss the meaning of God's *hesed*—his steadfast covenant love. How is that love displayed throughout Jonah's rebellion and rescue?

[illegible]

CHAPTER 4

REPENT! REPENT! REPENT!

JONAH 3:1-10



SCRIPTURE FOR MEMORIZATION AND MEDITATION

Jonah 3:10 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.

COMMENTARY

Nineveh was one of the great cities of the ancient world, and the final capital of the Assyrian empire, an empire that had expanded its borders through conquest over thousands of years until it dominated most of what we know as the Near-East. Assyrian culture was at the forefront of development in the arts, language, architecture, philosophy and politics of the ancient world. But behind the veneer of its splendor was a brutal, autocratic military dictatorship built atop a culture mired in moral depravity: military captives of Assyria were tortured and impaled on poles; citizens were considered slaves of the king; rampant sexual immorality and perversion, pagan idol worship, and violence were part of everyday life in the Neo-Assyrian period, and at its epicenter stood Nineveh.

It is into this place of darkness and evil that Jonah walks, preaching this message: “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” (v. 4). That was the sermon. Jonah just walked right into one of the most powerful empires the world had ever known announcing God's divine judgment upon them and calling people to repentance.

Think about our day for a moment. Modern culture in the United States bears alarming similarities with the Assyrians. In the pursuit of so-called “tolerance,” we have made a culture that celebrates all things that Scripture calls evil, and seeks to destroy all things that Scripture calls good. Sexual sin, idolatry, violence, the exaltation of man over God and rebellion against his law – all things like these are glorified. Repentance from sin is rejected in favor of affirmation of it. Even within Christianity in America today, sin is treated with kid-gloves, while bold preaching on repentance, God's wrath and judgment is called unloving, harmful, or, as I have heard pastors in my own city suggest, “fear mongering.” Far too many pastors and churches are more concerned with being accepted by the culture than being faithful to Jesus and his word. I've even had pastors approach me in public and question the reason my sermons are filled with calls to repentance. So it isn't difficult to imagine the kind of response Jonah would get if he were to come preaching the message of verse 4 in any one of our cities today.

But what was the result of this so-called hellfire and brimstone kind of preaching from Jonah? Nineveh repented. “And the people of Nineveh believed God” (v. 5). Revival broke out in Nineveh! From the greatest to the least, the city was convicted of sin and chose repentance and faith. “The city of Nineveh donned sackcloth and called on the Lord for mercy, God saw their works of contrition. Though Yahweh was not obligated to pay attention to their cries

for mercy, as their king openly acknowledged (cf. Jonah 3:9), the Lord did not turn a blind eye to these penitent people... [but] took action by graciously recognizing the fruits of their repentance" (MacArthur 2024, 99). One of the greatest revivals recorded in all of Scripture erupted through the preaching of a simple message of repentance and the coming judgment of God.

THE CITY I PASTOR

San Antonio, the city I pastor in, is one of the largest cities in the United States, currently the seventh in the nation. Canary Islanders founded our city in the early 1700s while this land was still under Spanish rule and part of what would later become Mexico. At the founding of San Antonio, two things stood at the center of the city's identity: a mission and a garrison. The mission existed to proclaim the gospel, make disciples, and establish the worship of Jesus in the region. The garrison existed to protect the mission and preserve its work. From the very beginning, San Antonio was built with spiritual purpose woven into its foundation.

Now, more than 300 years later, much of our city has radically rebelled against God. Our city now celebrates the very things Scripture calls sin, and Christians are labeled "bigot" and "narrow-minded" and worse, merely for acknowledging what Scripture says.. Many of our city's churches have drunk the Kool-Aid of apostasy and are spiritually waterboarding their converts with a baptism of pride. City leaders have publicly fought to fund the killing of unborn children outside the state. And when our rainbow sidewalks were ordered removed after state intervention, members of the city council rallied together to repaint them in open defiance and celebration of sexual ideology. Throughout our city, there are places operating under the banner of tolerance

and pride where deep brokenness, exploitation, sexual chaos, and devastating sin flourish openly. Over the years, we have ministered to people coming out of some of these environments who described experiences marked by abuse, violence, exploitation, and demonic activity.

Yet our city often refuses to confront any of it honestly because everything is cloaked in the language of pride, affirmation, and tolerance. Evil is frequently and easily rebranded as virtue so long as it is stamped with the right ideological symbols. What once would have been called rebellion against God is now celebrated as liberation from religious repression. In many ways, this is what makes the book of Jonah feel so painfully relevant. The parallels to our modern western world are impossible to ignore.

PREACHING REPENTANCE

The message of repentance is not outdated. It is the central message of the Scriptures and has always been the message God sends through those who faithfully proclaim his word. Before the public ministry of Jesus ever began, John the Baptist emerged from the wilderness preaching, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt. 3:2). Then Jesus Christ himself stepped onto the scene proclaiming the exact same message. “From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand’” (Matt. 4:17). The apostles carried this same message into the world after the resurrection of Jesus. On the day of Pentecost, when the crowds were cut to the heart by Peter’s preaching, they cried out asking what they should do, and Peter responded, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins” (Acts 2:38). The apostle Paul likewise declared that God “commands all people everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30).

Repentance is a Holy Spirit empowered about-face from rebellion and surrender to God. It is the recognition that we are not our own saviors, not our own gods, and not the final authority over our lives. Repentance humbles us before a holy and righteous God and positions us to receive mercy and grace through Jesus Christ. Contrary to what many assume today, repentance is not bad news, it is an invitation into life with Jesus. It is the doorway to freedom, restoration, forgiveness, reconciliation with God, and transformation through the gospel. The most loving thing a preacher can do is not to affirm people in their sin, but lovingly call them to repentance and faith in Christ.

A faithful pastor must preach repentance because repentance stands at the very center of the gospel message. Martin Luther understood this well when he opened the Ninety-Five Theses with these words: "Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ, in saying, 'Repent you, etc.' intended that the whole life of His believers on earth should be a constant penance." He'd go on to explain that this term penance is not referring to the Roman Catholic doctrine of penance but of what the scripture teaches us of repentance. (Luther 2017, 3-4). A pastor who refuses to call people to repentance does not love people; in fact he truly hates them. He is making them comfortable in the very sin Christ came to save them from. Jonah's message is one of repentance. God's judgment is coming upon you; he will destroy this city in forty days, and the citizens of Nineveh believed God and repented.

OLD SCHOOL PREACHING

For almost twenty years of ministry, this message of repentance has remained central to my preaching and discipleship. I cut my teeth in ministry while attending UTSA as an English major. At the time, the campus culture

was deeply hostile toward Christianity. It was during those years that the atheist movement on campus was rapidly gaining momentum and formalized as “The Atheists Agenda,” famous for its “Smut for Smut” campaign where pornography was distributed in exchange for religious literature. In its heyday, this event would draw thousands. That environment shaped much of my early ministry.

One year, this event gained so much traction that it received national media attention. Along with other Christians, I sought to engage people in civil discourse about Jesus, Christianity, and the truth of the Bible. This would lead to me being selected to participate in a documentary that sought to explore the rising hostility surrounding the event and the growing tension between Christianity and secularism on college campuses. In the documentary, I was chosen to represent and articulate the Christian perspective alongside atheists and agnostics. For me, it became an opportunity to boldly share the gospel.

Following the screening of the documentary, there was a formal debate and panel discussion. During the exchange, the other Christian on the panel with me largely avoided defending Jesus and the authority of Scripture, seeming to buckle under the pressure of the crowd. As a result, much of the responsibility fell on me to articulate the Christian faith and proclaim the gospel in what became a very intense and hostile environment. Many of the questions were not sincere attempts to pursue truth, but efforts to undermine and discredit Jesus and the claims of Christianity. Despite their efforts to stop it, I witnessed that the gospel was still advancing forward. The Holy Spirit blesses the faithful preaching of God's Word. When we deviate from the Scriptures, God removes himself and his power.

Being a Christian in that environment meant I had two options: stay silent, or speak up. I would continually choose to speak up. In the English department, I was often one of the only outspoken Christians in many of my upper level English courses. I vividly remember one professor spending an entire class mocking Christianity, early American colonists, and historic Christian doctrine. He projected theological concepts onto the screen to ridicule them in front of the class and showcase how enlightened and progressive he believed himself to be.

I remember him specifically ridiculing the doctrine of the wrath of God, portraying Jonathan Edwards as cruel, hateful, and psychologically abusive for sermons like "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." Of course, what he conveniently left out was the widespread revival that followed Edwards' preaching, the mass repentance, the renewed holiness, the transformed lives, and the awakening to the glory and grace of God that swept through entire communities.

Honestly, I imagine somewhere generations after Jonah there was probably a Ninevite professor doing the same thing, ranting to students about the hateful speech of Jonah and the vile nature of Jonah's God while conveniently ignoring the repentance and salvation that came through his preaching.

Because it was an English class, discussion and engagement were expected, so after the professor finished his critique of Christianity and distorted presentation of the doctrines of grace, I raised my hand. I explained that he was willfully twisting Christian doctrine in order to justify his own disdain for God. I began explaining the actual message of the Scriptures, the holiness of God, the sinfulness of humanity, the necessity of repentance, the justice of God's wrath, and the relentless grace of God displayed through Jesus Christ.

I walked him and the class through what Christians actually believe about the doctrines of grace, and he was not a fan of my response. But after that, other Christians in the class began to awaken and speak out more boldly, which led to an explosion of discussion about Jesus across campus..

I spent countless hours in conversations with hardened atheists, skeptics, agnostics, some gay, some straight, some even gender-queer (before that term was in use), angry intellectuals, and spiritually confused young adults. The atheist movement at UTSA was aggressive and vocal, yet so was the ministry I was part of. Day after day, I defended sound doctrine, preached repentance, proclaimed the mercy and grace of God, and pointed people toward the gospel of Jesus Christ. By God's grace, people met Jesus, got baptized, repentance spread, and the ministry continued to grow rapidly.

What became clear to me very early on was that repentance is not merely the doorway into the Christian life. Like Luther, I began to see repentance is the whole of Christian life. In 2 Timothy 2:22, we are told to pursue "righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart." True discipleship is teaching people to follow Jesus through ongoing repentance, obedience, surrender, and submission to the authority of God's Word, from a pure heart. A repentant heart. A surrendered heart.

Today, I'm more convinced than ever of the old school, tried and true method of preaching. Week after week, I simply keep opening the Bible. I do not edit it to appease the culture. I proclaim it. I preach the word; in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching (2 Tim. 4:2). That is

still the call. Keep preaching Jesus. Keep preaching repentance. And Jesus continues saving people.

My prayer for San Antonio is that our city would experience the kind of awakening Nineveh experienced in Jonah's day, not with a repentance that eventually fades, but one that would take root and bear fruit for generations. Nineveh would later return to its wickedness. My prayer is that our city would genuinely repent and remain faithful to Christ until he returns. That only happens through faithful preaching of the Bible preaching that is unashamed of the word repentance, and unafraid to proclaim the whole counsel of God.

PERSONAL STUDY

Jonah's message was simple and direct. Why do you think modern Christians are often uncomfortable with preaching about sin, judgment, and repentance?

In what ways do you see society celebrating what God calls sin?

Read Matthew 3:2, Matthew 4:17, and Acts 2:38.
Why is repentance central to the message of
John the Baptist, Jesus, and the apostles?

What fears often keep you silent about Jesus and the gospel?

GROUP/FAMILY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

What surprises you most about Nineveh's
response to Jonah's preaching?

Jonah preached a message that many today would call harsh or offensive, yet revival broke out. What does this teach us about the power of faithfully preaching God's Word?

What similarities do you see between Nineveh's rebellion and society today?

What would it look like for God to bring an awakening or revival to your city or generation like the one we see in Jonah 3?

[illegible]

CHAPTER 5

THE SCANDAL OF GRACE

JONAH 4:1-11



SCRIPTURE FOR MEMORIZATION AND MEDITATION

Jonah 4:2 And he prayed to the LORD and said, “O LORD, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster.

COMMENTARY

Some of the greatest evidence that the Bible is true is its brutal honesty about the people within it. If you or I were writing story about ourselves, we would almost certainly want to end it with triumph and victory where we looked noble and faithful. We would clean up the embarrassing parts. The Bible doesn't do that. If it did, it would have ended with the Nineveh revival and left out this chapter.

Jonah concludes with Jonah's sinful heart exposed. He had just witnessed one of the greatest revivals in the entire Old Testament and yet he responds with anger. To

be clear, it was God's mercy and grace that "displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry" (v. 1).

"We have a somewhat understated rendering of the Hebrew that literally says, 'It was evil, a great evil for Jonah, and he was furious'" (House and Coleman 2026, 304).

Jonah views God's grace as evil. The irony here is quite staggering. In the previous chapter, the Ninevites had turned away from their evil, and because they repented, God relented from the disaster he had threatened against them (Jon. 3:10). They abandoned evil and came into alignment with the mercy of God, while Jonah, the prophet of God, now becomes the one characterized by evil. Everyone in the story is moving toward God except for Jonah.

Jonah is angry precisely because God acted according to his character. "For I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love" (v. 2). Jonah did not flee to Tarshish because he doubted God's mercy. He fled because he knew God's mercy was real. He knew God was capable of forgiving and changing the heart of people who despised God and his ways. Jonah wanted justice wrought in judgment for Nineveh, but he wanted mercy for himself. He loved grace when it rescued him from drowning beneath the sea, but he hated grace when it was extended to his enemies. Jonah was angry that God was being God and doing Godlike, awesome things, like bringing sinners to repentance and faith.

A CAUTIONARY TALE

Honestly, seeing Jonah like this is terrifying because it exposes what the human heart is capable of becoming.

It is possible to be well acquainted with God's grace and his character and yet hate God and others. Jonah knew sound theology. Jonah knew the Scriptures. Jonah knew the character of God, and we've seen him testify to all this himself. Yet, Jonah remains bitter, angry, and resistant to God's compassion. This should serve as a solemn wake-up call to us: if Jonah, a prophet who heard the voice of God, could still be so blind to God's grace, what areas of our own hearts are still resisting the will of God?

Bible knowledge that fails to transform our heart is not any better than the knowledge Satan and the demons possess. Jonah knew true things about God. We already saw that he could articulate the scripture through his prayer in Jonah 2. The knowledge Jonah had remained distant from the affections within him. "You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!" (Jam. 2:19). Demons grasp accurate theology, but they do not love God, submit to God, worship God, or delight in the glory of God. They are really upset and angry when sinners repent too. Jonah has been called to be a prophet of the one true God, but he has aligned his heart with the great serpent, Satan. True biblical knowledge is meant to transform the human heart.

This is why the apostle John tells the early church that there is a direct connection between loving God and loving people. "If anyone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar" (1 Jn. 4:20). To genuinely know the steadfast love of God while simultaneously harboring hatred toward others is a contradiction. When God's love comes to you, it then moves through you to others.

Earlier, Jonah cried out in desperation for God to spare his life. In Jonah 2:6–7, he rejoiced that God had brought his

life up from the pit and revived his fainting soul. But now, in chapter 4 verse 3, after watching an entire city repent and receive mercy, Jonah says, “Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.” The same prophet who once celebrated receiving mercy now wants to die because others received it too. If you are reading this and think, “this is insane,” that is exactly the point. It is insane to respond to the mercy and grace of God in this way.

The insanity continues as Jonah goes out of Nineveh and builds himself a tent, where he “sat under it in the shade, till he should see what would become of the city” (v. 5). Jonah is burning with anger internally while also physically sitting beneath the scorching heat of the desert sun, apparently waiting to see if God might still level the city. Then, once again, the sovereign grace of God appears to Jonah.

“Now the LORD God appointed a plant and made it come up over Jonah” (v. 6).

The plant grows and provides shade for Jonah's head, bringing him relief from his discomfort. The text says Jonah was “exceedingly glad” because of the plant. The wording mirrors Jonah's earlier “exceeding displeasure” in verse 1. Jonah is furious over the salvation and repentance of thousands of image bearers in Nineveh, yet overwhelmingly joyful over a temporary plant bringing him personal comfort. That contrast here is the point. Jonah cares more about his own comfort than the eternal souls of people.

Before we go any further, we should try to recognize how prone we are to the very same disposition lurking within Jonah's heart. God didn't just spare Nineveh while they continued on with murder and perversion. They repented; they turned to the God of the Bible and ceased with their

wicked ways. To put it into modern terms, what we've witnessed in the revival at Nineveh would be something like God suddenly bringing mass repentance and revival to an entire city dominated by violent Islamic extremism, a city filled with people committed to the vehement opposition, persecution, and even murder of Christians. That is the kind of tension underpinning the book of Jonah. The Assyrians were infamous for violent brutality and oppression against surrounding nations, including God's people. This comparison is not as distant as it might initially seem. Nineveh was located in what is now modern-day Iraq, the same region that, in recent history, became associated with groups such as Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), which later became the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). So think about it on that level. Imagine God bringing sweeping repentance and revival to people who were terrorists. If and when God does something like that in our lifetime, we should rejoice and throw a party, because that is exactly what heaven will be doing. "Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents" (Lk 15:7).

My point here is not to turn a blind eye to evil or pretend wickedness is insignificant. The evil of Nineveh was real, just as evil in our world today is real. We should labor for true cultural change within the cities God has placed us. The text here in Jonah bids us to examine our own hearts. As Christians who love Jesus and care about his mission: if God saved your enemies, would you rejoice in his mercy, or resent him for his grace like Jonah? Would you celebrate repentance, or would you secretly condemn God instead?

The thing about the Bible is that we do not merely read it, it reads us. Scripture is living and active (Heb. 4:12). It was breathed out by God through the Holy Spirit (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:20–21), and it continually exposes

the depths of the human heart. The Bible has a way of uncovering what remains unseen at the surface. As our study of Jonah comes to a close, it would be foolish for us not to examine our own hearts and ask where we, too, may be hardening ourselves against the will of God and resisting obedience to his commands.

For some, like Jonah, the issue may be hatred toward others. You do not want repentance for certain people; you want vengeance. You want God to blot them out, and if he were to save them, you would be tempted to throw the same kind of tantrum Jonah did. Some people tend toward the complete opposite side of Jonah's error. They don't believe anyone should receive punishment for sin, and therefore conclude that God is somehow evil for sending those who reject Christ's atonement into hell. This, too, is the same, hard-hearted rebellion that raises its fist against God, repulsed by his revealed truth and unwilling to submit to his authority. Whether someone resents God for showing mercy like Jonah, or resents God for executing righteous judgment, both responses ultimately flow from hearts that are not fully aligned with his word, will or ways.

The reality is that all of us, as sinners, experience moments where our hearts are opposed to the will of God. We are all prone to hardness of heart. We experience moments where God's commands begin to feel restrictive or burdensome because obedience comes at a cost. God calls us to forgive, but we would rather cling to bitterness. God calls his people to a different sex ethic than the world, but we ignore it. God calls us to generosity, truthfulness, courage, and refusing to celebrate the sinful rebellion of the culture, yet many seek the path of least resistance, rather than the way of obedience and the glory of God. Jonah should function as a wake-up call for every one of us.

God calls all people to repentance and obedience, yet somewhere deep within the fallen human heart, we begin believing the ancient lie first whispered in the garden, that God's ways are somehow withholding good from us. Unlike Jonah, most people may never say it out loud, but inwardly they begin treating the commands of God as unreasonable, oppressive, or unfair. At the root of all rebellion is ultimately a distrust of the goodness of God. It is the belief that our way leads to life while his way does not. Yet the testimony found in the Scriptures again and again is that God's commands are not given to crush us, but to lead us into life with him, where there is freedom, fullness of joy, and pleasures forevermore (Deut. 6:24, Deut. 10:13, Ps. 16:11).

GOD'S UNRELENTING GRACE

The scandal of the book of Jonah is that God desires to show us more mercy and grace than we could ever imagine. From beginning to end, the book of Jonah is saturated with the steadfast love of God. God shows mercy to unbelieving sailors caught in the storm. God shows mercy to a rebellious prophet fleeing from his presence. God shows mercy to the violent, God-hating city of Nineveh. Again and again throughout the story, we see a God whose grace is actively chasing after people according to his steadfast love.

There is nowhere Jonah can flee where the *hesed* of God cannot reach him. Not in the storm. Not in the sea. Not in the belly of the fish. Not even in the bitterness and rebellion still lingering in Jonah's heart at the end of the story. God continues pursuing him. God continues speaking to him. God continues confronting him. God continues extending grace to him. Even at the end of the book when God rebukes Jonah, there is a bidding call for Jonah to surrender his hardened heart to God.

God asks Jonah, “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?” (v. 11). The book of Jonah closes with God rebuking Jonah. Even in the rebuke, there is grace. God doesn’t use the same measuring rod on Jonah as Jonah does others. If so, God would have killed Jonah for his bitterness. Even if God had destroyed Jonah, it still would have been righteous, which is different from the vengeance Jonah possesses. The final chapter leaves us with a question suspended in the air calling us to respond. Will we rejoice in the mercy and grace of God? Will we align ourselves with his word, will and ways? Will we love what he loves, in the way he’s called us to love? Will our hearts long for the salvation of others the way God does?

God’s kindness is meant to lead us to repentance (Rom. 2:4). In Jonah, we see this same steadfast love extended both to Nineveh and to Jonah himself. This is the same *hesed* God has for his covenant people. God shows mercy to the wicked city, and they respond rightly—they repent at the preaching of Jonah (Jon. 3:5–10). The shocking twist of the book is that Jonah, the prophet, resists the very grace he proclaims. The point of the narrative is not only that Nineveh needs to repent, but that Jonah must also repent. Grace is not permission to remain unchanged—it is the power to repent, to be reshaped, and to begin loving what God loves.

The story of Jonah ultimately points us to Jesus Christ, the greater and better Prophet. Jonah ran from his enemies, while Jesus came to save his. Jonah sat outside a city hoping for judgment to fall, while Jesus stood outside Jerusalem and wept over it (Lk. 19:41). Jonah was swallowed up because of his own sinful rebellion, but Jesus willingly died for ours. And three days later, he rose again victorious over sin, Satan, and the grave. This is the hope of the

gospel: there is more mercy and grace in Jesus than there is sin in you. Our response should be repentance, obedience, and a life of worship of our great God.

So, today, marvel at God's grace towards you, though you are a sinner. Let it transform you. May it soften hard hearts, humble proud hearts, awaken compassion within us, and drive us into deeper worship, repentance, obedience, and joy. As followers of Jesus, we are called to join him on his mission where we live, work, and play, carrying the grace of God to a world in desperate need of it.

May the steadfast love of God continually overwhelm us. May his mercy keep us near Jesus. May we never forget that the same grace that pursued Jonah is still pursuing sinners like us today.

PERSONAL

STUDY

What part of Jonah's response to God's grace surprises you the most?

Jonah was “exceedingly displeased” over revival, yet “exceedingly glad” over a plant giving him shade. What does this reveal about the human heart?

Why do you think the human heart struggles so deeply with the idea of God showing mercy to undeserving people?

How does the story of Jonah expose your own heart?

GROUP/FAMILY

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

How does the story of Jonah serve as a warning for Christians today?

Read James 2:19 and 1 John 4:20. What is the difference between merely knowing true things about God and actually loving, worshiping, obeying, and delighting in him?

In what ways are modern Christians tempted to prioritize comfort, reputation, or personal preference over the mission of God?

The Bible does not merely inform us, it exposes us. As you've studied Jonah, what has been uncovered within your own heart?

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APPENDIX

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A PROPHET RUNNING FROM HIS DIVINE CALLING.

An escape to sea. A great storm. The belly of a great fish. A beloved Bible story many know from childhood. But beneath the surface of this Sunday-school classic is a terrifying view of the lengths God will go to pursue sinners, expose the human heart, and display his astonishing mercy to people who do not deserve it. The book of Jonah unveils both the magnitude of God's grace and the depths of human rebellion. Jonah's life and ministry parallel and foreshadow the coming of Jesus Christ, but where Jonah disobeyed God, hated the people he was meant to save, and had to be rescued from the grave, the True and Better Prophet obeyed God perfectly, loved his enemies, and conquered death and the grave by his resurrection, extending mercy and grace to the ends of the earth. I pray that this commentary will bless you, your family, and the generations that follow after you.

JONAH

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