

MARCH
2022

Donald J. Wills
Senior Pastor

FOLLOW



ADULT CONNECT
CLASS CURRICULUM

The purpose of First Baptist Church of Fort Worth is to ***introduce*** people into a loving relationship with Jesus, ***instruct*** them in spiritual growth through God's Word, ***inspire*** them to serve for God's kingdom, and ***incorporate*** them in authentic worship to glorify God.

A Note From Our Pastor

Dear FBC family and friends,

One of the most familiar stories of the Old Testament is the story of Jonah. The word of the Lord came to Jonah, but he rejected the call to follow and went his own way apart from God. Often, this happens in the lives of believers. There are several reasons that may cause one not to follow God such as fear, selfishness, no-relationship with God, unbelief, assumptions about results, and other things. As a child of God, we should follow His word in faith knowing that He will do what He says He will do. One blessing we can learn from Jonah's journey is that God does not give up on us (we often give up on God) and we read in Jonah 3:1 that "the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time."

As a reminder, the layout of this Curriculum begins with a 7-day approach for both the teacher and the members to get the most from each study. We also acknowledge that teachers may have their own methods for preparing the lessons and we encourage them to prepare in the way that makes them most effective in presenting God's Word and the weekly lesson. We also encourage each teacher and member to use the suggested 7-day approach for their own personal study and encouragement.

Remember our God is a God of second chances. Therefore, seek His will through His Word and follow Him!

-Blessings
Pastor Don



Suggested Plan for Using this Bible Study Guide Effectively

Introduce

Day 1: Read and meditate on the Scripture, asking God to guide you throughout the week as you study His Word and allowing Him to speak to you through the Spirit. Read the **INTRODUCE** portion of the lesson commentary.

Instruct

Day 2: Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and read the **INSTRUCT** portion of the lesson commentary. Concentrate on memorizing the focal verse for that particular week.

Day 3: Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and answer the focal questions in the **INSTRUCT** portion of the lesson commentary.

Inspire

Day 4: Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and begin thinking about tangible ways you can incorporate the principles you learned in your daily life. Read the **INSPIRE** portion of the lesson commentary.

Incorporate

Day 5: Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and apply the theological principle that you learned from this week in a tangible way. Use the **INCORPORATE** portion of the lesson commentary to guide you.

Day 6: Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and in the journal section describe how God allowed you to apply this passage in a real and tangible way this week.

Day 7: Review the Scripture and share with others in your Connect Class on Sunday morning at 9:30am. Be ready to share your experience about how God allowed you to apply the lesson for that week.

Contents
March Lesson Plan

3



March 6, 2022

When Reluctance Prevents
us from Following

[Jonah 1:1-16](#)

17



March 13, 2022

When Repentance is
Needed to Follow

[Jonah 1:17-2:10](#)

29



March 20, 2022

When Results Occur
as We Follow

[Jonah 3:1-10](#)

41



March 27, 2022

When Resentment Obscures
Our Path to Follow

[Jonah 4:1-11](#)

SUNDAYS AT FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF FORT WORTH

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW



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Parents of Teens • Parents of students in grades 7-12

Ladies • Women of all ages

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Legacy Equippers • Retired singles & couples (75+)



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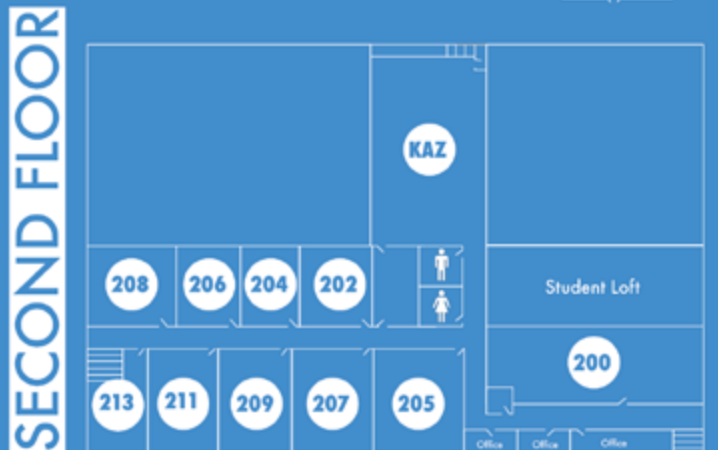
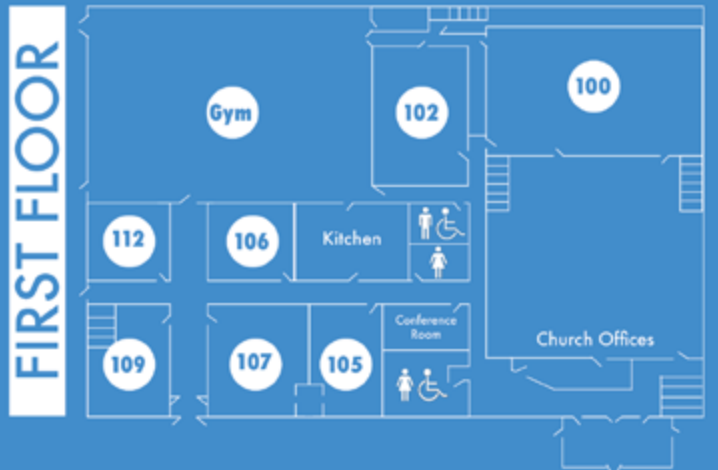
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KIDS		9:30am	11:00am
	Nursery-Ones	107	107
	Twos-Threes	105	105
	Fours-K	213	KAZ
	1 st & 2 nd Grades	209	KAZ
	3 rd & 4 th Grades	207	KAZ
	5 th & 6 th Grades	202	KAZ

TEENS & ADULTS		9:30am	11:00am
	7 th - 12 th Grades	100	
	Young Adults	205	
	Young Families	208	
	Parents of Teens	200	
	Ladies	112	
	Legacy Builders	102	
Legacy Living	106		
Legacy Equippers	Gym		

WORSHIP SERVICE



March 6, 2022



When Reluctance Prevents us from Following

Jonah 1:1-16

Focal Verse:

“Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me.”

Jonah 1:2

back to
Table of
Contents

Introduce

We live in a state best known for our fierce independent streak. After all, we have the Alamo where vastly outnumbered Texans stood defiantly and fought to the bitter end against the better equipped and larger Mexican army under the leadership of General Santa Ann. We respond with tenacity, and sometimes ferocity, when provoked, not letting anyone push us around or take advantage of us in any way. When riled, we proudly champion our state's slogan, which started as an anti-littering campaign in the 80s and has become our unofficial creed, "Don't mess with Texas!" As Texans, we view the traits of independence and stubbornness as good qualities to have



in most situations—until it comes to our own families which pit parents against strong-willed children.

Over the years, I have talked to many of our families who have described the on-going battle they encounter in their households with strong-willed, stubborn individuals who attempt to persist in getting their way. I have also observed this struggle surface within our nuclear families while attending church and among the members of the body of Christ as well! We generally have a problem in our world of following rules designed for our benefit. We want to do our own thing! As you are reading this, one of two thoughts probably crossed your mind. You either immediately thought of someone in your family or circle of friends who fits this category or you realized it's you. In reality, every one of us deserves to be called stubborn and is reluctant to follow in some way! So, let's not just point fingers, but use this opportunity to examine our own lives as we study the life of Jonah who certainly fits this category himself.

Strong-willed people tend to respond to directives in one of three ways. First, they may protest in outright defiance. For instance, defiant adults may not literally say this, but their actions betray it: "I'm not and you can't make me!" We've seen this all-too-often recently in a variety of settings in our world. The battle lines are drawn and the fight is on. Second, people may try to avoid the situation altogether. They ignore the request, acting as if they didn't hear it or the situation didn't really happen. Children,

Introduce

for instance, who don't want to do something or to go somewhere will run and hide. Some pets even do this when they realize that they must travel in a car or go to the veterinarian.

Finally, some will feign compliance, but then never practice what is required. Jesus even relates a parable featuring this type of response in the New Testament ([Matt 21:28-32](#)). When it comes to the Lord, however, we cannot be stubborn, defiant, and reluctant to follow! To respond to our heavenly Father in any of these three ways is sinful and will only lead to trouble as Jonah discovered. When summoned by God to go and preach to the Ninevites, Jonah fled in the opposite direction. His reluctance to follow was disobedience! We should learn from Jonah's mistake and not follow his pattern of reluctance. Instead, may we follow Christ without any hesitation or reluctance wherever He leads us.

Key
Question

When have you been reluctant or hesitant to follow Christ, choosing to do things your own way?

Jonah 1:1-2

THE CALL TO GO:

Beginning like many of the prophetic oracles in the Old Testament ([Hosea 1:1](#); [Joel 1:1](#)), Jonah receives a direct call from the Lord who reveals His plan to His servant through His **word** (v. 1). The revelation, not short on specifics, expresses God's divine intention to impart a message of salvation through repentance to a particular people—in this case the citizens of **Nineveh**, the capital and most prominent city of the Assyrian Empire. Consequently, God issues a command for Jonah to **arise** and **go**, which would have loudly resonated in his ears, for no other prophet from Israel had ever been asked to go to a foreign land to deliver a message of judgment prepared by God (v. 2). Other prophets, such as Isaiah, had



Remains of Nineveh near Mosul, Iraq

certainly received such messages to proclaim against other nations, but none of them actually went to the foreign land against which they spoke.

This call would have also struck a nerve with Jonah because the Assyrians were widely known for their cruelty and violence. Not only did they have the penchant for mercilessly slaughtering people in war, but they also brutally tortured survivors! Carvings depict dissenters being impaled with stakes, historical documents record people being skinned alive, and tablets refer to people being buried in the sand and left for dead. Throughout ancient literature, including the Bible, the Assyrians were well-known for their **wickedness**. In fact, the prophet Nahum chastises the Ninevites for their cruelty when he proclaims, "Woe to the bloody city! It is all full of lies and robbery. Its victim never departs" ([Nah 3:1](#)). The prophet ends by noting the scope of their **wickedness** when he asks, "For upon whom has not your wickedness passed continually?" ([Nah 3:19](#)). Everyone had experienced it! As a result, Jonah would have naturally feared the response of the people of **Nineveh** when he preached because he

Instruct

carried a message of judgment from the Lord and was an unwelcome foreigner.

What do you fear most about sharing the gospel? In what ways does that fear prevent you from sharing more often?

Question
1

In-Depth Information



For more information about the documented brutality of the Assyrians, see [Erika Belibtreu, "Grisly Assyrian Record of Torture," *Biblical Archaeology Society* 17, no. 1 \(Jan/Feb 1991\).](#)

As one of the largest cities in the world at the time given the three-day journey required to traverse it ([Jonah 3:3](#)), Nineveh exerted much power and influence among Ancient Near Eastern cultures. Described here in the text as a **great city**, it was a bastion of evil and **wickedness**. Based on the context, the Hebrew word translated "**great**" refers to the city's importance rather than its size, however. Although it had a large population, as the capital of the Assyrian Empire, Nineveh wielded significant political, cultural, and economic influence over the entire region—much like the cities of Los Angeles (media), New York (financial), and Washington, D. C. (political) do throughout the U.S. and world today. Therefore, it profoundly impacted every nation and culture within its shadow.

Even today near the site of this ancient civilization we encounter radical ideology which



perpetuates this same kind of barbaric violence and torture. The ruins of Nineveh lie in modern-day Iraq near the city of Mosul which ISIS forces re-captured and destroyed when U.S. backed troops withdrew and Iraqi-trained forces collapsed in 2014. From such a band of misguided miscreants, like ISIS, we see the grotesque disregard for life displayed in

the killing of thousands of civilians and first responders on September 11, 2001, and

subsequent acts of terror worldwide, including frequent beheadings. It was into this kind of radical and harsh environment God called Jonah!

Imagine God had called us to go to such a hostile place to proclaim the gospel along with a message of judgment for those who refuse to repent. If we had been in Jonah's position, how would we have responded? Instead of Jonah's name, let's hypothetically insert our own into this call: **The word of the Lord came to Mike saying, "Arise and go to Mosul and cry out against it, for their wickedness has come up before Me."** We would already have three strikes against us before we even uttered a word in that city. First, we come from a Western culture which they despise, particularly the United States. Second, their religious convictions differ drastically from our own which dictate conversion by force rather than a choice to repent which stems from God's grace through Jesus Christ. Finally, we are delivering a message of judgment upon them if they do not repent. It's one thing to remain in the U.S. and condemn the **wickedness** of a godless foreign land, but it's an entirely different scenario to **arise** and **go** to the actual place where God will judge the people lest they repent.

Whom do you fear most in sharing the gospel?
Why?

Question
2

Although we have much less to fear in the way of physical harm here in the relative safety of the U.S., many believers too often remain silent and flee from opportunities to share the gospel. God has called us all to **go**, but many don't. Many refuse to **arise** and **go** into our own cities, across the street to our own neighbors, and even to our own families. We may experience rejection, ridicule, and exclusion, but we usually don't fear for our lives. Still, many won't **go** as God command whether because of fear or even a misapplied sense of justice, like Jonah who hoped these people would get what he felt they deserved!

To whom has God called you to arise and go
share the gospel? How have you acted upon
that call?

Question
3

Jonah 1:3

THE CIRCUMVENTION OF THE CALL:

Because of his fear and animosity toward the Assyrians, instead of obeying God's call, Jonah tried to escape it. Residing in the Northern Kingdom of Israel probably

near Samaria, he fled to the port city of **Joppa** where he paid the fare to board a ship going to **Tarshish** (v. 3). Scholars have attempted to link various areas throughout the Mediterranean, such as Spain, Sardinia, and Carthage, with **Tarshish**. Technically, however, the word refers to the “open sea” which indicates that Jonah traveled westward over the Mediterranean Sea—the exact opposite of Nineveh—in order **to flee from the presence of the Lord**.

Consequently, **Tarshish** may not refer to a proper place name, but it could be the text’s way of indicating that Jonah did exactly the opposite of what God had instructed him! He wanted to avoid God’s call on his life at all costs. Twice within verse 3 alone, the text recounts his desire to “**flee . . . from the presence of the Lord**.” What an utter picture of disobedience and sin this presents! It perfectly depicts what sin is: a willful choice to do

the opposite of what God has decreed. Sin doesn’t just spring upon us unaware; it doesn’t just happen to us. On the contrary, we make a cognizant choice to do it. And any one of us can errantly make that choice no matter how wise, how important, and how capable we may see ourselves! Jonah,

a prophet who under the reign of Jeroboam was identified as the “servant” of the Lord ([2 Kings 14:25](#)), now wants to escape His **presence** altogether—refusing to bring the divine message to a people who desperately need to hear it.

Unfortunately, we all can relate to Jonah’s attitude in a very personal way, for we ourselves have rebelled against authority and many of us have had children who at some point have challenged ours. Because of our sin nature, children frequently rebel against their earthly parents just as Jonah did against his heavenly Father. They will attempt to free themselves from their parents’ supervision and oversight by theoretically going somewhere they can’t see them! This may mean that they circumvent online safety protocols, wipe their Internet and text history, or download Apps of which their parents are unaware in an effort to conceal their actions and indulge in forbidden content. Outside of the virtual world and the home, children may

attempt to escape the notice of their parents by being deceptive about where and with whom they hang out. They know their parents' expectations and boundaries, but they run in the completely opposite direction than which they have been instructed. As followers of Christ, people sometimes take this same odious path as a strong-willed child! In a vain attempt, they try desperately to escape God's notice by concealing their actions, attitudes, and motives. As a result, they seek to justify their sin and rationalize their defiance by regarding God's request to follow Him as unreasonable. They throw a temper tantrum and defiantly run in the opposite direction than the one in which they know God has called them through His Word. Through such a testimony like Jonah's, Scripture reminds us that we all have gone the opposite direction at some point in our lives when we have refused to follow God's directives. For some, it may mean defiantly practicing the things which God has forbidden in His Word. For others, it may mean inactivity and apathy. They refuse to budge. They won't go in the direction God has called them. They won't serve; they won't share the gospel; they won't sacrificially give of themselves to the Lord.

How do you identify with or relate to Jonah in his pursuit to flee in the opposite direction? What did you learn from those times?

Question
4

Jonah 1:4-15

THE CONSEQUENCE OF DISOBEDIENCE:

Instead of preaching the message of judgment to the Ninevites as God specified, Jonah has now incurred judgment on his own life for his own sinfulness. Suddenly, a fierce storm came upon the vessel causing it nearly to capsize and break apart in the waves (v. 4). As the audience, we are acutely aware that the Lord caused the wind to whip the waves because of Jonah's disobedience. Yet, the crew aboard frantically sought a reason. In desperation, they **cried** to their gods for help (v. 5). Living in a polytheistic society, each crew



Instruct

member prayed to **his** own **god** in hopes that this storm would subside once he had appeased the one responsible. In antiquity, three types of gods were believed to exist: personal gods worshiped by an individual, family gods worshiped by a household, and national gods worshiped by an entire country.

Having tried everything to no avail, crew members began jettisoning their **cargo** to prevent the **ship** from sinking, but this too failed as the storm persisted. Eventually, they found Jonah in the **cargo** hold of the **ship** sound asleep, so the **captain** approached to roust him, sternly calling, “**Arise, call on your God**” (v. 6). This must have startled Jonah for these were two of the same words that the Lord had used when He instructed him to **go** to Nineveh. In verse 2, God bid him to **arise** and **cry** (i.e., call) **against** the city, but now the tables have turned and Jonah realizes that this tumultuous storm was indeed meant for him. No matter how hard he had tried, he could not escape **the presence of the Lord**. Instead of the Ninevites facing the prospect of judgment, Jonah himself has now become the object of God’s displeasure and divine wrath.

What has God used to get your attention when you have strayed in order to lead you to repentance?

Question
5

To assess the situation more clearly, the crew **cast lots** to determine who was responsible for bringing this calamity upon them (v. 7). **Lots** were similar to dice. Rather than having numbers, however, the sides were either light or dark. Two light sides indicated yes and two dark sides signified no in response to a question being posed. Although based upon their own incomplete understanding and flawed logic in seeking answers from gods who could never respond, the crew acted compassionately without any judgment. They didn’t immediately condemn anyone without first giving him a chance to make amends!

This approach starkly contrasts with Jonah’s attitude because he had already passed human judgment upon the Ninevites and determined in his mind that they should perish for their wickedness. The crew, however, never jumped to such a conclusion about their mysterious passenger even though they already knew that he was attempting to **flee the presence of the Lord** since he **had told them** (v. 10)! Instead, they sought to give him every possibility to explain himself! Thus, these pagan crew

members acted toward Jonah in the way God wanted Jonah to act toward the Ninevites—with grace and mercy, giving them a chance to repent.

After **the lot fell** to Jonah, the crew asked him a series of questions to find out who he was, **where** he was **from**, **what** his **occupation** was, and why he had brought this



catastrophe upon them, so that they might resolve their predicament by appealing his God (v. 8). The more they knew about Jonah and his God, the crew reasoned, the better chance they might have in placating Him! Jonah, realizing why they were in peril, acknowledged that he fears or worships **the God of heaven**—the One who created the **sea** and the **land** (v. 9). In a way, God is still speaking through an obstinate prophet to proclaim the truth of His Word! Even though His prophet was running in the opposite direction so he did not have to proclaim His Word, the Lord uses Jonah’s testimony to introduce the sailors to Himself—the one and only true and living God who created and sovereignly controls the universe.

Based on the phrasing from Isaiah 55:11, how have you personally seen God’s Word not return to Him void despite our or others’ stubbornness?

Question
6

In response, the crew then asked him **what** they must **do with** him so that the storm would abate (v. 10). Jonah knew, however, that the penalty for sin and disobedience is death, so he told the crew to throw him overboard—for Jonah would even rather be dead and suffer the penalty of his disobedience than fulfill God’s desire that he preach to the people of Nineveh (v. 12)! The crew hesitated, fearing that they might still be making a mistake by



Instruct

shedding innocent blood, so they furiously try to row back to shore without any luck (v. 13). After praying to the Lord and maintaining their innocence before Him, they threw Jonah overboard and immediately the storm ceased (vv. 14-15).

Through these events, we can learn a valuable lesson about sin. Although we alone bear the responsibility for our choices and receive the due penalty unless we repent, our sin affects others—even those not directly involved in participating in it. Here, we see an entire crew affected by Jonah's sin! Certainly, they had sin in their own lives, for they failed to worship the Lord, but it was Jonah's sin in this instance that brought about the storm. When we sin, it not only affects us directly, but it also affects others—whether in the church, in our families, among our friends, or sometimes even strangers we meet during our daily duties. In addition to the crew, Jonah's disobedience also affected the Ninevites in that it delayed the proclamation of God's Word to them. Our choices have consequences both for us as well as others! Therefore, it is dangerous to have a *laissez-faire* approach to sin, thinking we're not hurting anyone but ourselves! Quite the opposite, we must stop and think how our actions affect others. We must also lovingly warn others when we see them sin, responding to them graciously and seeking to restore them according to God's Word rather than enacting vengeful judgment.

How does sin either directly or indirectly affect others even though they may not be explicitly involved?

Question
7

Jonah 1:16

THE CULMINATION OF GOD'S WORK:

Despite Jonah's reluctance to proclaim God's Word to the Ninevites and even through his brief presentation of the gospel unwittingly to the sailors, God reveals Himself through the circumstances in a mighty way to the polytheistic crew. The word **feared** in this context is best translated as revered in the sense that the sailors honored God and paid homage to Him through a **sacrifice** once they returned to land (v. 16). In actuality, the phrase **feared exceedingly** seems to indicate that the men recognized the power and sovereignty of the Lord and believed in Him.

Although the text doesn't specify that they forsook all their other gods in favor of the Lord, it does clearly portray that they had come to the realization of who the one living

God truly is because they **took vows**. The text doesn't tell us the nature of these **vows**, but we can surmise that it was to worship the Lord based on His revelation to them during the tumultuous storm. In some circumstances, when we fail to share the gospel, God does not let His Word go unuttered. He still disseminates it according to His divine plan and prerogative. Through circumstances and even unwilling individuals like Jonah, God makes Himself known in such a way that remarkable transformation occurs among people. Even though God's Word is proclaimed as He intends regardless of the choices that we might make, this does not excuse us from obeying God's command to evangelize. Rather than run from our call to participate in the Great Commission, let us joyfully fulfill it, allowing God to use us as willing vessels to proclaim the Word to a world which desperately needs to hear it.

How has God used you to proclaim His Word?
What results have you seen from it?

Question
8

Regardless of any nation or person's wickedness, God still affords them a chance to repent, just like He does with us, so He sends people like Jonah to deliver the message personally. Like Jonah, we also have been called to share the gospel to those who are perishing in their wickedness; for just as the word of the Lord came to Jonah, Jesus has also called us to "go therefore into all the world" ([Matt 28:19](#)). Some of us may receive a call to travel to foreign lands on mission, but the majority of us are like Israel's other prophets who deliver God's message to the people here at home. We need to arise and go to the people whom God has placed on our hearts, whether locally or internationally, and proclaim the message God has given us boldly. Let us follow the Lord wherever He leads us, not allowing hesitation or reluctance to dissuade us in any way!

Incorporate

In what areas in life has God given you clear direction, but you've resisted in following?
What made you so stubborn in resisting?

How do our choices affect other believers and the body of Christ as a whole? Why should we be adamant, yet gracious and merciful, to remove sin from our midst and seek to restore the individual through repentance?

How do you fulfill the Great Commission daily? How is God using you to proclaim the gospel of Christ?

March 13, 2022



When Repentance is Needed to Follow

Jonah 1:17-2:10

Focal Verse:

“When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the LORD; and my prayer went up to You, into Your holy temple.”

Jonah 2:7

back to
Table of
Contents

Introduce

Charles had greatly anticipated the day he would get to go on his week-long solo backpacking and camping trip to the backcountry of Yellowstone National Park. He had meticulously gathered everything he would need from his bear-proof food canisters to his tent. After securing his backcountry permit at the Northeast Ranger Station, he finally arrived in the beautiful Lamar Valley. Excitedly, he grabbed his gear from the car and began his journey by following a well-worn trail next to a gentle brook called



Slough Creek with the towering peaks of the western edge of the Rocky Mountains in front of him. As he walked through meadows filled with Spring wildflowers and saw a herd of bison grazing at a distance, he would pass the occasional thicket of lodgepole pine trees which would grow ever denser as he entered more mountainous terrain. Having walked a few miles as the sun began to lower on the horizon, Charles found his campsite and began preparing for dinner and making it ready to spend the night. At some point in the night, another group of individuals set up camp in the next site. Although Charles couldn't see them, he could hear them well because sound traveled further in the still, mountain air aided by the dense forest in which the campsites were located. What he would hear over the next few hours would greatly disturb him. From their campsite, Charles heard the most-foul language pouring from their mouths as they frequently asked their buddy next to the cooler to hand them another beer. As the night progressed, the conversations became ever more unsettling. They recounted all types of sexual deviancy in which they had proudly participated and of which they fantasized about doing one day. Hate spewed forth from their lips as they talked about the vile things they wanted to do to torture and kill people whom they disliked. They also callously laughed about all the people whom they had already robbed and assaulted.

To Charles, this seemed like it went on interminably. But suddenly, he heard the voice of his father clearly instructing him to go to that campsite and share the good news

Introduce

of Jesus Christ. Instantly, he vociferously protested, "Don't you know what they'll do to me? I can't go over there." The voice of his father, who unbeknownst to Charles had pitched his tent in a nearby campsite to watch over his son, continued to insist. Instead of going, Charles packed his gear and set off toward the southeast in the pitch-black, moonless night. He walked briskly in the opposite direction of the campsite not knowing, or even being able to see, what was ahead.

Suddenly, the growl of a grizzly bear sent him running wildly toward a deep ravine. Charles' father who had followed him with a flashlight saw his peril and threw a rope around his son like a calf roped at a rodeo. It saved Charles' life, but didn't keep him from plunging over the edge of the ravine and dangling precariously. As morning broke, he could plainly see the danger in which he had put himself. He began lamenting his decision to flee, so he expressed remorse for disobeying his father's voice. At once, the rope began to tug and somehow pulled him slowly up the cliff. He still hadn't seen his father physically, but his father was right there rescuing him! Finally, Charles returned to the campsite he had fled. He began telling those just awakening about Christ and the salvation he offers as well as about the destruction that awaits those who refuse Him. To his surprise, every one of them repented and accepted Christ! An immediate, visible transformation took place in their demeanor as they repented! It was evident they had truly repented! Charles learned a valuable lesson that day: the importance of listening to his father's voice. He also came to realize how his father had saved him from his own peril, graciously giving him a second chance. In our lesson this week, we will see how Jonah learned this lesson too. When he disobeyed the Lord and fled, God in His infinite mercy corrected him, even saving him from a worse peril which he brought about through his disobedience. The Lord graciously gave Jonah a second chance. Let's learn from Jonah's experience. Rather than flee, may we listen to our Father's voice! When we do err, may we recognize that our Father is there to correct us, rescue us, and get us back on course.

Key
Question

What situations or circumstances has God used to help you return to Him when you have strayed off course?

Jonah 1:17

GOD'S CORRECTION OF JONAH:

Just as we saw God's hand in stirring up the storm at sea, we also see His hand here in preparing a **great fish** not just to teach Jonah a valuable lesson about obedience, but also to mercifully spare his life (1:17). The word translated **prepared** or appointed shows how carefully God crafted His plan. Jonah's flight to Tarshish didn't catch the Lord off guard. He didn't merely react to the situation, concocting a haphazard, last-minute plan in response to His servant's obstinate actions. On the contrary, God orchestrated His plan from the beginning to the end! He had everything **prepared** that would provide His servant with the opportunity to repent and be restored into right relationship, graciously giving Him a second chance! God had thoughtfully developed and implemented this plan to rescue Jonah from a certain watery grave, but now it was up to His servant to respond.

Often, we regard the **fish** only as an instrument of punishment, but in reality it was a place of mercy and grace where God revealed Himself to Jonah in an intimate way. The text goes to great lengths to note how Jonah was in the fish's **belly** for **three days and**

three nights in order to stress the miraculous nature of the prophet's deliverance by God. Although some attempt to spiritualize and interpret the number **three** symbolically, in this context it merely serves the purpose of showing how Jonah was as good as dead had God not intervened. Thus, this **great fish** becomes not Jonah's grave but a place of refuge and rescue!



God wasn't finished with him yet! Despite His prophet's rebellion, God still had a plan to restore him to the original purpose for which he had been called!

Looking back on your life, when has God rescued you despite the poor decisions you made? What did God teach you through this?

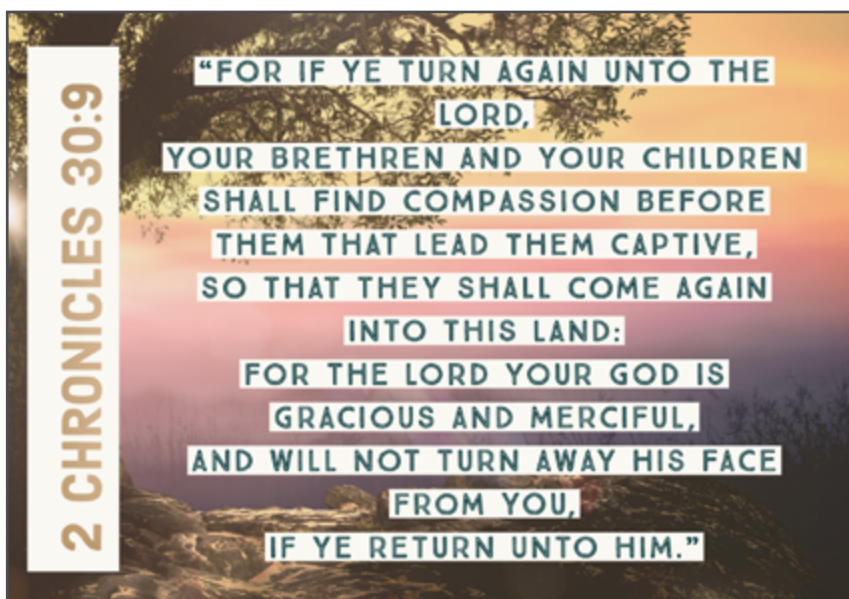
Question
1

Instruct

Based on our choice to reject God's Word and refuse to apply it as He intends, we bring correction upon ourselves. We are not innocent victims who are helplessly and hopelessly caught up in our circumstances as the world seeks to portray itself. The choices we make have consequences! When we make the wrong choice, we have no one to blame except ourselves. Because we are God's children through Jesus, He will correct us just as a loving earthly father would ([Heb 12:5-8](#)). This means that sometimes God must allow us to experience self-induced affliction so that we realize how far off course we have gotten and how much we have dishonored Him with our disobedience. As parents, we can set boundaries for our children and do everything within our power to convince them to follow them. But ultimately, we cannot make the choice for them! They are responsible for their actions. For example, we can warn our children about the dangers of touching a hot stove and do everything humanly possible to keep them safe. Often, however, they only learn through experience because they have a streak of defiance in wanting to do that which is forbidden. When they touch something hot and experience it for themselves, they quickly learn to heed our advice. At that point, we can gently remind them we instituted these boundaries for their protection and benefit. We should then help them to understand the wisdom in following them, not merely exclaiming, "See, I told you so!"

How have others helped you to understand the consequences of your choices? How do or have you helped your children to do the same?

Question
2



When he rejected the assignment and attempted to flee, Jonah learned by experience what it meant to transgress the boundaries which God had set. In the process, using a **great fish**, God taught him a valuable lesson about the consequences of his choices as well as about grace and forgiveness. He didn't vindictively say to Jonah, "Now, I've got you!"

I'll teach you!" On the contrary, the Lord lovingly brought His servant to the point of recognizing his own faults and seeing the need for repentance—a course correction in his life. Like Jonah, every one of us has a testimony about how God has rescued and restored us during those times we defiantly disobeyed. Therefore, when we share the gospel, we can speak from experience and point others to the same grace and forgiveness that God has offered us.

To be fully surrendered to God and become effective servants capable of being used by Him, we must die to our fleshly desires so that we become in tune with His will (Gal 2:20; Luke 9:23). Because the Christian life is a journey and no matter how many times we may figuratively ask, "Are we there yet," we never fully arrive in perfection until Jesus calls us home or returns to collect the church at the end of history (1 John 3:2). Consequently, we need to examine our lives daily to mature in our walk with Him so that we might be found worthy of the gospel (Phil 1:27). Therefore, we must ask ourselves in what ways have we seen God's hand of correction in our lives and how did God use that experience to restore us into a right relationship with Him? When we can identify God's grace and forgiveness in our own lives, we can then share that testimony with others in a real and tangible way.

To what personal experiences can you point when sharing the gospel which demonstrate God's grace and forgiveness in your life?

Question
3

Jonah 2:1-3

JONAH'S CONSCIOUSNESS OF HIS SITUATION:

With **three days** inside the **fish**, Jonah has time to contemplate the course of his life (2:1). In his **affliction**, he **cries** to God who answers him—which ironically serves to highlight his dependence upon the very One from whom he had tried to flee to Tarshish (v. 2). The only relief Jonah has in his miserable condition comes in the form of prayer. In contrast to many people who consider themselves self-sufficient and offer only inauthentic prayers when circumstances look most dire, Jonah doesn't use insincere words, but he offers praise unto God for his rescue despite his disobedience. Jonah has come to realize that without God the **belly** of this **fish** would become his grave; yet even in **Sheol**, that is a metaphorical grave, God answers him graciously.

In-Depth Information



The Hebrew term **Sheol** has a variety of meanings, but most frequently refers to the place of the dead—whether righteous or unrighteous. In modern terms we would identify this as “the grave.” For example, in [Job 14:13](#), the beleaguered saint cries, “Oh, that You would hide me in the grave, that You would conceal me until Your wrath is past, that You would appoint me a set time, and remember me!” In *Jonah*, some translations use *Hell* or *Hades* for this term, but this is misleading based upon the context. *Jonah* doesn’t believe that he has descended into *Hell* separated from God, but rather that he was as good as dead in the grave without God’s intervention.

Jonah recognizes the predicament that he encountered was God’s response to his disobedience for three times in the passage he notes God’s sovereign actions through



the pronoun **You**. Just as he did when he instructed the sailors to throw him overboard, he acknowledges that ultimately God is the one who **cast him into the deep** (v. 3). As he splashed into the midst of the sea, Jonah describes how the **flood surrounded** him and the **billows** and **waves**

crashed over him. What a terrifying scene this must have been to know that despite anything that he could have done he would not have seen the shore again unless God intervened.

At what times in your life have you cried out to God in the midst of trouble? How has God answered you?

Question
4

Jonah 2:4-7

JONAH’S CRY OF REPENTANCE:

Jonah has come to understand God’s grace in a tangible way because he now

recognizes that he should have perished in the sea for his disobedience. Sin, as the prophet knows, separates us from God and for this reason he laments that **he has been cast out of God's sight** (v. 4). Perhaps something similar to Isaiah's proclamation echoed in Jonah's ears: "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear" ([Isa 59:1-2](#)). Although God is still watching over His servant and there is nowhere Jonah can escape His divine presence, including the stomach of a **fish**, sin has disrupted their relationship, driving a wedge between them. Unconfessed sin in our lives always prevents us from being used by God and it always creates dysfunction in our relationship with Him.

What in your life hinders God from using you in the way that He most desires?

Question
5

Not only does sin separate us from God, but it also leads to death as its ultimate penalty unless we cry out to God in repentance ([Gen 2:17](#); [Rom 6:23](#)). Once again, Jonah recalls the depth of his despair by recounting the harrowing experience he faced in the ocean. Like a casket being lowered into a pit and then covered with dirt, the **waters surround** Jonah who plummeted so deep that he saw the bottom of underwater **mountain** ranges and seaweed became entangled around his **head** (vv. 5-6). As he sank into the depths, he realized he has been sentenced to death when the earth figuratively **closed** its **bars** around him like those of a prison when a criminal has been convicted of a crime. What hope does he now have but to resign himself to the reality of his death? Even in his darkest hour of despair, hope exists because grace triumphs over sin and God has provided a way for us to have a restored relationship with Him. As adamantly as he tried to flee God's presence, Jonah now resolves to **look again toward** His **holy temple** (v. 7). Not only did the temple represent God's presence among the people, but



it also provided a picture of reconciliation with God through its sacrifices when people have a contrite heart and penitent spirit ([Psalm 51:17](#)). Hopeless as he was, Jonah **remembers** the solution, so he prays to **the Lord** who alone can rescue him. God hears His prophet's prayers for repentance and responds through grace and mercy to deliver him from his condition. In a sense, God resurrects Jonah and restores life unto him so that he exclaims, "**You have brought up my life from the pit.**"

In-Depth Information



Today, we have forgiveness not through the annual reminder of sacrifices offered in the temple, but through the once-and-for-all sacrifice Jesus offered on the cross. The words and imagery Jonah uses here in his prayer figuratively depict his "death" and "resurrection" through God's intervention. Having died to sin and his rebellious pursuit to flee the Lord, he will now surrender to follow the Lord in complete obedience. In a way, these events relate the New Testament understanding of how we too must recognize that we are sinners in the need of a Savior and die to our old way of life. Paul captures this very idea when he writes, "Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection" ([Rom 6:4-5](#)).

When Christ saves us from our sin, He does so once-and-for-all. Therefore, even though we will still sin at times, we do not lose our salvation and need to be "saved" again—repeatedly. Yet, because we are not perfect and are still subject to our fleshly desires, we must constantly evaluate ourselves against God's perfect standard in His Word. As believers, sin in our lives still disrupts our relationship with the Lord, but it does not sever it. When we do sin, we must repent and be restored into right fellowship with Him so that He can once again use us effectively ([1 John 1:9-2:2](#)).

Consequently, we must continually examine any belief we hold, attitude we exhibit, action in which we participate, and thought which we contemplate. If anything conflicts with God's prescription for holiness and His directives for our lives, we must repent. Once we repent, however, we cannot become mired in guilt. God has already forgiven us, if we have asked and repented, so we must move forward according to His plan! We must learn from our mistakes, but we cannot allow ourselves to become

incapacitated in our service by wallowing in guilt.

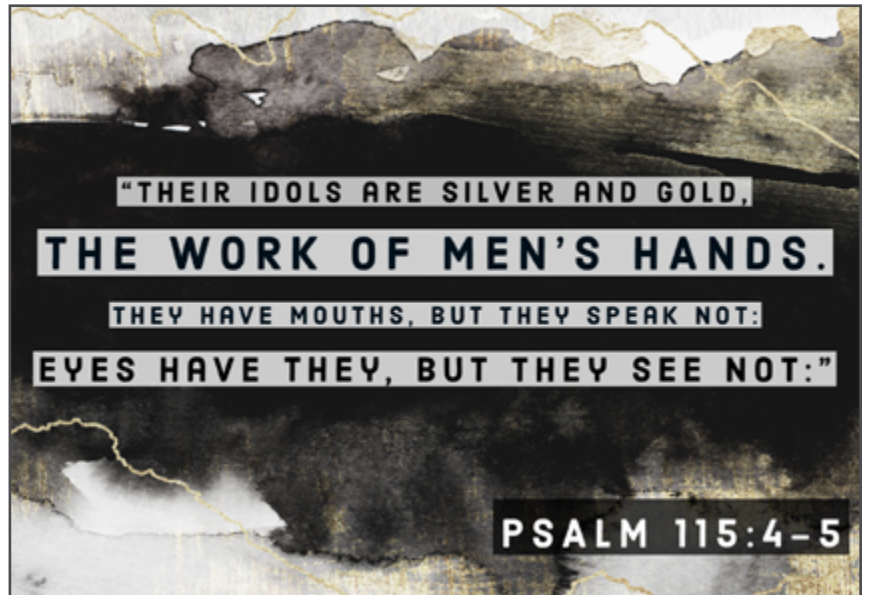
How does the enemy use guilt over our past actions to distract us in our service?

Question
6

Jonah 2:8-9

JONAH'S CONFESSION ABOUT GOD:

Perhaps recalling the vain attempts of the sailors to appease their gods and quell the angry waves, Jonah mocks their **worthless idols** (v. 8). Since no other gods exist, they cannot hear prayer or respond to human needs ([Psalm 115:4-5](#))—it's as if the people who worship them have abandoned any attempt to receive **mercy** because these gods are unable to provide it. This leads Jonah to assert his allegiance to the only true and living God who created the world and who alone deserves our praise.



In his jubilant offering of **thanksgiving**, Jonah commits to do the will of the Lord as a testament of worship and service to Him—even if it means that he must go to Nineveh; therefore, he will **pay** the Lord **what** he has **vowed** because salvation belongs to Him alone (v. 9). No other god in the universe could have saved the ship and its crew, no other god could have saved Jonah from the depths of the sea, and no other god could have saved Nineveh from its own destruction and wickedness—what a merciful and loving God we serve who loved us so much that even though we were disobedient He provided a way for us to be saved and have a relationship with Him ([Acts 4:12](#)).

To what sources does the world turn today for help? How has God shown you the worthlessness of turning to these things and the value of trusting in Him?

Question
7

Instruct

Jonah 2:10

GOD'S CESSATION OF DISCIPLINE:

The **fish** that God uses to bring Jonah to repentance expels its unusual cargo back on **dry land** (v. 10). Likely back in close proximity to where he had begun his quest to flee God, Jonah now must make good on his promise to worship the Lord—this time he must heed the call to go to Nineveh no matter how vehemently he may still hate the idea. He must now extend that same grace and forgiveness which God had shown him to the citizens of Nineveh, for salvation belongs only to the Lord who chooses to offer it to all who will accept it.

Through Jonah's actions, we can learn a key principle about repentance. Repentance without action is worthless just as is a fruit tree that bears no fruit. If Jonah had prayed unto God and promised to worship Him by obediently fulfilling His will, but never did, we would call him insincere and hypocritical. We would also say that he never repented because he continued to do the very same things which had gotten him in trouble in the first place! Like this wayward prophet, we too need to use God's correction in our lives to be transformed and grow in Him.

Let's not go through the motions and feign repentance simply because we have "gotten caught" and found ourselves in difficult circumstances. Rather, let's show our repentance through our transformed actions so that all may see. God will send people into our lives who have share similar experiences in life so we can encourage and witness to them. Before we can ever witness and share the gospel with them, repentance needs to be evident in our lives through our actions.

Inspire

God has given us a plan to follow that leads to life. Sometimes, whether like Jonah or Charles in the introduction, we stray from it and find ourselves in peril of our own making, needing to repent. Fortunately, God always responds with grace and mercy when we sincerely call upon Him. He has a well-thought-out plan through His Son that He devised before He spoke the world into existence. Through the cross, we can be saved from certain death and find life in Christ. But sometimes we stubbornly stray from God's path as His followers. Although we will suffer the consequences for our choices, God will lovingly and patiently correct us. When He corrects us, we need to repent and we need to exhibit our repentance through our transformed actions.

Incorporate

How does God's correction in our lives testify to His grace and care for us? How can you use the experience of God's correction in your life to share the gospel?

Using your past experiences during times of God's correction in your life, what would you confess about Him (see Jonah 2:8-9)? In other words, what did you learn about His character?

At times in your life where you needed to cry for repentance, what brought you to the point of repenting? How was repentance then displayed in your life?

March 20, 2022



When Results Occur as We Follow

Jonah 3:1-10

Focal Verse:

“So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them.”

back to
Table of
Contents

Jonah 3:5

Introduce

Eli Reynolds' family owned and operated a large-scale, prestigious furniture manufacturing company in the Midwest that produced quality pieces made from real timber rather than the cheap composite boards so often used today. His father wanted to teach him the basic foundations for running the company from the ground up, so he assigned Eli the task of building every piece of furniture by hand. Eli resented this task—not understanding why it was necessary. After all, their business used the most sophisticated computers and software to make the most precise cuts and assemble each piece with the most advanced fasteners.

Before sending him to the factory, his father gave him explicit instructions for designing and building a dining room table and set of chairs. Although he didn't voice his complaints to his father, he grumbled under his breath and even refused to begin the project.

Carefully drawn on a piece of paper, the blueprint for the project specified the measurements of the table which would be hewn from cherry, sanded, and covered with a special lacquer that would bring out the vibrant color of the wood. Instead of using nails or screws, he



would secure the legs on the table using mortise and tenon joints. The chairs would also be constructed with these same kind of joints, but he would glue the pieces together to give them added strength. Finally, he would wrap a cushion in a beautiful piece of fabric to match the finish, sew it, and attach it to the chair using fabric glue and staples.

Despite having specific directions, Eli decided he knew better. He had a better way of doing things than building something by hand! So, he plugged the measurements into the computer and set it to work. Unbeknownst to him, however, he hadn't entered the data properly which caused the table to tilt almost imperceptibly to one side. As his father came to inspect the progress at the factory, he put a marble on every table produced from the assembly line. On one particular table, the marble began to roll, picking up speed as it slid from one side to the other. "Eli Richard Reynolds," he shouted

Introduce

as he quickly glanced under the table. There were his son's initials ERR etched into the finish like one of those inspector tags found on clothing.

His father began lecturing him. He showed him the table he had built and all the imperfections in it. Eli's father explained to him that he needed to know how to do something by hand before he could use advanced equipment. It wasn't as easy as simply imputing data into a program. To know the basics, therefore, would enable him to produce accurate work and to be able to test it for quality. At that moment, Eli realized what his father had wanted to teach him and he apologized for his disobedience. In his mind, however, Eli began thinking, "I've made so many mistakes. He'll never trust me again. He won't ever ask me to do anything for him." Almost as if on cue, his father compassionately said, "Son, I'm going to give you a second chance. Here are the blueprints. Build the dining room set like I showed you. But do it my way, not yours."

Fortunately, we have a Father who gives us a second chance; actually, He gives us many chances! He extends great patience to us and lovingly corrects us when we stray. We should never abuse His grace, mercy, and patience, however ([Rom 6:1-2](#)). But we also cannot think like Eli, "I've made too many mistakes. God will never trust me. He can't use me." If we learn from our mistakes and truly repent, God can and will use us no matter what we have done! He will continue to work through us if we obediently surrender to Him. To use us, we must do it His way and not ours! Jonah learned this principle after being vomited from the fish's belly when the Word of the Lord came to him a second time (Jonah 3:1)! When we obediently follow God, we will see the results intended in His divine plan.

Key
Question

How has God given you a second chance? What did you learn from those times in which He did?

Jonah 3:1-2

GOD RE-CALLS:

The first two verses of chapter 3 almost replicate Jonah's call verbatim from [1:1-2](#) where **the word of the Lord** came to the prophet and instructed him to **arise** and **go** to the **great city** of Nineveh to **preach** ("cry") against it (v. 2). In the call repeated here in chapter 3, however, the text adds two important phrases to highlight both God's mercy toward Jonah and the seriousness of the call: **a second time** and **that I will tell you** (v. 3). The first phrase, **a second time**, signifies that God has given Jonah a mulligan—a **second** chance. Thus, the text emphasizes that **the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time** so that he could fulfill the promise which He had uttered to God from the stomach of "the great fish" where he proclaimed, "I will pay what I have vowed" (Jonah 2:9).

In-Depth Information



*In 1:2, God instructs Jonah to **cry out against** the **wickedness** of the city of Nineveh whereas in 3:2 He directs him to **preach** to it. In actuality, they are the same word in Hebrew, but are translated differently because they have two different focuses. In 1:2, the **word of the Lord** focuses on the **wickedness** of the people and the revelation of judgment that Jonah would offer about their sinful choices. Conversely, in 3:2, the focus shifts to the people receiving the message of judgment and not merely the revelation of the city's **wickedness** in preparation for their change of heart and repentance.*

In a game of informal golf, amateur players, and professionals who care to admit it, who have a severe slice may wish to replay the stroke without accruing any penalty against them. Many years ago, as a teenager, I played Microsoft Golf 2.0 when it first came out on Windows 95. Although more simplistic and less complicated than today's games, it was nonetheless challenging to position the trajectory of



Instruct

the ball and click the mouse at precisely the right time with the right power to get it close to the hole. Soon, however, I discovered the joy of mulligans. I no longer had to try! I had unlimited chances. I could strike the ball and not worry about where it landed. I'd just do it over without penalty or loss in stroke. I exploited the game and beat the system, inflating what would otherwise be a terrible score!

To God, this isn't what a **second** chance or mulligan entails. God doesn't give us **second** chances so we can exploit His grace and abuse His mercy. He gives us **second** chances so we can learn from our mistakes and not continue repeating them. He gives them so that we might mature in our walk and become more like Him. The pages of Scripture are filled with people whom God has given repeated chances: Adam, Noah, David, Peter, and Paul to name a few. Yet, God displayed patience to all people in every nation, offering everyone a chance to repent and start over. He would wipe the slate clean if only people would accept His conditions through repentance. But many refused and incurred the wrath of His judgment upon their sin. Three principles will serve us well to remember and apply when God gives us a **second** chance.

First, we ought to recognize that our strength comes from the Lord to do His will and abide by His Word. For this reason, the text emphasizes that God will **tell** Jonah exactly what to **preach** when He arrives in Nineveh. God has not only sent him to that **great city**, but He has also equipped him to speak to it. On our own, we're doomed to repeat our failures. Because our strength comes from the Lord, however, we should not continually beat ourselves up for our mistakes. We must learn from them and turn to Him, realizing that He alone makes us worthy to serve Him if we would listen and follow Him! However, God doesn't leave us in a broken, worthless state; He restores us! Jonah was rebellious, deliberately defiant, and disobedient. Humanly speaking, he didn't deserve a **second** chance, but God graciously gave it! When we do make a



mistake, we should heed the Lord's correction; we should allow the Potter to mold us into a vessel He can use for His purposes. Consequently, we should not continue talking about how worthless and broken we are or how undeserving we are; God

doesn't. Rather, we should focus on what He has made us in Him for His glory; we should focus on the task to which He has called and equipped us. At the same time, however, we must have balance in our assessment. We cannot take our sin lightly; God doesn't. We should treat all sin with seriousness. Therefore, we must submit to Him and allow Him to do His work of transformation and restoration in us, so that He might make us worthy and be able to employ us in His service.

What mistakes have you had a hard time moving beyond in your life? When you surrendered to the Lord, how did He take that brokenness and turn it worthiness to serve Him?

Question
1

Second, we ought to use **second** chances to examine other areas of our lives to ensure they reflect righteousness which both mimics and honors the Lord. Despite having graciously been given a **second** chance by God, Jonah still resented the Ninevites and wanted to see them destroyed—which we'll study next week in [chapter 4](#). If Jonah would have used this **second** chance to proclaim the **word of the Lord** as a time for self-examination, perhaps he would have noticed his bitter, ungodly attitude. We can sometimes become so focused on one area of our lives that we lose sight and become blinded to others, causing us to veer off course. When God gives us a second chance, may we evaluate every area of our lives to see if they are pleasing to Him so that we might serve Him with pure motives and right attitudes.

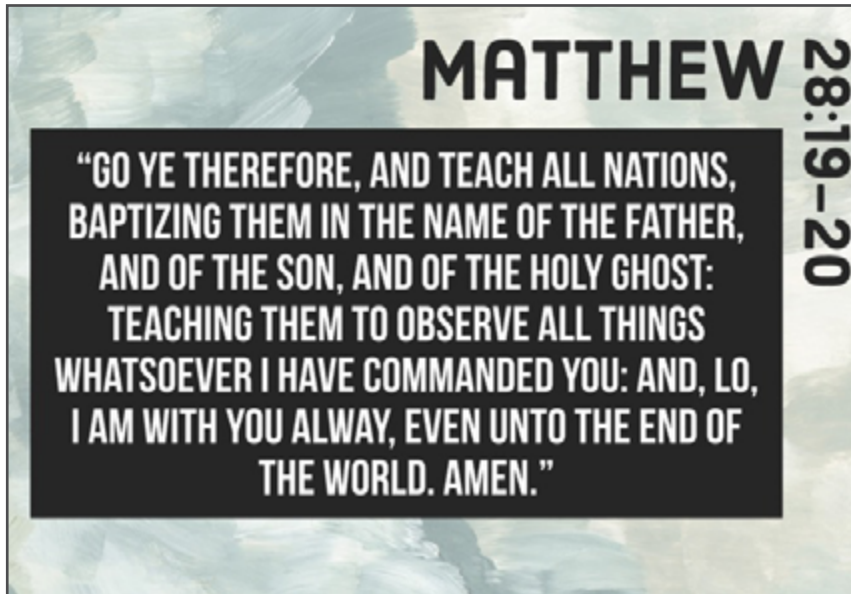
Third, when we receive a **second** chance, it should remind us of God's grace which we ought to extend to others. If God is willing to forgive and be reconciled with us, we should also be willing to forgive and be reconciled with others. In fact, Jesus even teaches, "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matt 6:14-15). Thus, just as God has shown grace to us, we ought to show grace to others no matter what they have done. Yet, sometimes as we age in our walk with Christ, we forget. We complain, insult, and secretly hope others get what they deserve. We forget that God showed us that same grace and mercy while we were yet sinners!

Who do you need to give a second chance?
Upon whom has God called you to show grace just as He has shown you?

Question
2

Instruct

We can observe one other principle from this passage which will greatly help us in our service. Regardless of how we see ourselves or what we may think of our abilities, God



equips us to do His work when He calls us! Here, He gave Jonah the exact **message** to speak. Perhaps, the number one excuse I hear why people don't share the gospel is: "I don't know what to say." God has called every one of us as His ambassadors to proclaim the good news. It's a command just as the one Jonah received ([Matt 28:19-20](#)). If He has commanded us, He

will also equip us. He will **tell** us **the message** to relay! Whether sharing the gospel or any act of service to which God has called and gifted us, He will equip us. Let's not make excuses about sharing and serving, but let us trust the Lord to empower us as He leads. May we go wherever He leads, do whatever He calls us to do, and be who He has called us to be.

Jonah 3:3-4

JONAH RESPONDS:

Jonah's response differs dramatically from the first time God approached him when he attempted to flee His presence. This time, the prophet obeyed; he **arose** and **went to Nineveh according to the word of the Lord** (v. 3). The text describes **Nineveh** as a **great city** and an **exceedingly great city** to emphasize its importance in two primary ways: 1) in terms of God's perspective and 2) in terms of its size. First, the text identifies **Nineveh** as an important **city** to God who demonstrated His love and His mercy for the people by sending Jonah to warn them to repent despite their **wickedness**. **Nineveh**, like any city or nation, is important to God because He desires a relationship with all men and has established a plan to restore them if they will accept it. In the New Testament, God reveals His love for all nations when He expresses His desire that all men be saved ([1 Tim 2:4](#)) and that He wants none of them to perish, but that they should all come to repentance ([2 Peter 3:9](#)).

In-Depth Information



The Hebrew text of Jonah 3:3b literally reads: “And Nineveh was a great city to God.” Most of the translations, however, regard the phrase “to God” as a superlative which means something akin to “God-sized.” Consequently, they translate the phrase as an **exceedingly great city** or a very large city. Thus, they view it like an idiom, such as what we say metaphorically about our state, “Everything’s bigger in Texas.” In the first lesson, we observed that the word **great** in relation to Nineveh is best translated as important. For this reason, 3:3b should be translated as *Nineveh was an important city to God.* This translation best captures the theme of the book. Even though Jonah despised and hated the Ninevites, God loved them and desired a relationship with them. God saw the wicked Ninevites as important to Him, so He sent a messenger to warn them to repent or face impending judgment!

How do you view other peoples and nations in terms of their importance to God? How does this influence how you act toward them?

Question
3

Second, the narrator describes the size of Nineveh as a **three-day journey**. When we think of a **three-day journey**, we view it as how long it would take us to travel from Point A to Point B in linear motion—such as from Fort Worth to Seattle; however, in this context, this phrase signifies the days that it would take Jonah to **preach** to the population of the city—hence a **three-day** visit to the city. With a population of 120,000 ([Jonah 4:11](#)), for most of its citizens to hear the message it would require Jonah to walk throughout the city and preach for **three** days just to cover it sufficiently.

The text adds this detail about the size of the city in order to highlight how quickly God’s **message** spread and how quickly the people repented. In verse 4, Jonah began **to enter the city on the first day’s walk**, preaching the message of judgment that God gave him. Instead of taking **three days** for Jonah to **preach** to the



Artist's Rendition of What Nineveh may have Looked Like

Instruct

city, the **message** penetrated the hearts of the citizens all the way to **the king** in only one day. The city's response is immediate. When someone has experienced radical transformation because of God's forgiveness, they don't wait for a preacher to come with another **message** to their friends and family, but rather they go themselves and tell others what has happened to them. As a consequence, the **message** spread like wildfire not because of Jonah's preaching, but because the change in the Ninevites' heart compelled them to share what God had done for them.

When on mission, how have you seen how quickly the gospel can spread among family members who have accepted Christ?

Question
4

Jonah preached a simple **message**—the one which God had expressly given him: **Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown** (v. 4). Let's not overcomplicate the gospel, but let us communicate it with the simplicity with which God intended. Whether we have the full text of the **message** or only the most-basic summary, we know it comes from God. We can observe it through the radical transformation that takes place in the lives of the citizens. If we are faithful to convey God's Word as He has communicated it to us, He will accomplish what He has sent it to do. It matters not how eloquent of speech we may be, how much education we may have, or how much influence and popularity we may garner. It only matters that we go when He calls us and we say what He directs us according to His Word!

How do we sometimes make the communication of the gospel harder than it really is?

Question
5

Jonah 3:5-9

NINEVEH REPENTS:

Nineveh responded favorably to Jonah's warning from God by repenting. They repented not merely through words of contrition, but rather by deep-seated actions of remorse. The people heeded the prophet's warning and **believed** God. Through Jonah's short sermon, God convicted the Ninevites and moved them to repentance. The first step in repentance is the admission or acknowledgment of God's truth—that we are sinners and need restoration. The Ninevites expressed their belief in God and

acknowledged their sin visibly by proclaiming **a fast** and wearing **sackcloth**. The king himself even sat in **ashes** as an expression of grief and remorse over his sin. The whole city, **from the greatest to the least of them**, participated in this act of repentance to demonstrate how thoroughly the **message** has penetrated their hearts.

Not only must we acknowledge our repentance verbally by expressing sorrow for our sins, but we must also demonstrate it through our changed lives. Going through outward religious motions like fasting, donning **sackcloth**, and sitting in **ashes** falls woefully short of true repentance unless accompanied by a change in lifestyle. They are meaningless actions unless we stop engaging in the sin and turn to the Lord! In addition to these city-wide expressions of repentance, the king declares in his proclamation that **everyone** should **turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands**. If we are genuinely sorrowful for our actions and not just the fact that we have been caught in our sins, seeking to avoid punishment through phony contrition and apologies, then we will no longer habitually live according to our sinful, fleshly ways. Although we may stumble at times in our lives, when we repent, we have turned to walk with God so that we might be worthy of the calling with which He has called us and we might represent Him by the righteousness that we exercise in our lives as assisted by His Spirit. Our repentance will be demonstrated in our changed lives.

When God has convicted you of sin, how have you shown your repentance?

Question
6

Jonah 3:10

GOD RELENTS:

As a God of mercy and grace, the Lord responds to the genuine repentance of the Ninevites by relenting from the judgment that He would have brought upon them. God, who sees the heart, identifies their sincerity here both through their **works**, which are verbal and visible expressions of sorrow like fasting and wearing **sackcloth**, and by the fact that they **turned from their evil way** (v. 10). God does not desire meaningless religious rituals or hypocritical prayers just so that we can avoid punishment, but rather He desires a genuine, heart-felt response that leads to lasting change. In his advice to King Saul, Samuel asks a rhetorical question and provides the answer: “Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams” ([1 Sam 15:22](#)). Praise be to God who gave both Jonah and the Ninevites a second chance—and who

Instruct

still extends those second chances today for people who believe in Him and follow His prescription for repentance by turning from their wicked lifestyles.

Inspire

If we have a relationship with Christ Jesus, God has given us a second chance and wants to use us in service to glorify Him. If you don't have that relationship with Him, Jesus has extended that gracious second chance to you as well. All you must do is receive Him in repentance of your sin and allow Him to transform you. As we think about the second chances we've been given, let us learn from our failures, but let us focus on our future in Christ. When we forget our failures, we are often doomed to repeat them. We are also more likely to treat others with the same grace which we have been shown. When we focus on our future, however, we will concentrate on what Christ has made us; we will examine our lives in conformity to His standard so that we become more like Him. Therefore, we will focus on fulfilling the purpose for which He has called us.

Incorporate

When God has given you second chances in life, how did you respond? How did it prepare you for the ministry and service to which He called you?

How can or does focusing on past failures hinder your current growth and service in Christ?

What has God taught you through the second chances which He has given you that you could use to help or encourage others?

March 27, 2022



When Resentment Obscures Our Path to Follow

Jonah 4:1-11

Focal Verse:

“So he prayed to the Lord, and said, ‘Ah, Lord, was not this what I said when I was still in my country? Therefore, I fled previously to Tarshish; for I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm.’”

Jonah 4:2

back to
Table of
Contents

Introduce

Recently, I saw a commercial for a company that sought to entice consumers to switch their service to get the “best deal” and the most benefit from their money spent. It opens with a family of four standing in a showroom listening to a marketing pitch from a sales representative. As the representative concludes, she confidently reassures the family that they are getting the best deal the company has to offer. But the mother sarcastically interjects, “Don’t all companies say that they’re giving the best deal?” To which the representative responds, “Yes, all companies say it, but not all companies do it.”

To illustrate her point about the company’s care for their customers and the desire for transparency, the representative pulls out a lollipop. As she hands the lollipop to the family’s ecstatic daughter who has a big smile on her face, the representative implies that this symbolizes the best deal of the company’s competitors. She then produces another, much larger lollipop, insinuating that this is the best deal from their company and hands it to the girl’s brother whose eyes gleamed with joy. Suddenly, the adorable daughter’s radiant smile turned into a scowl of displeasure and disgust. Voicing her resentment, she angrily declared, “That’s not fair!” At which point, the representative pulls out the same lollipop she had just given her brother and exchanges it with her. Once again, a smile returns to the girl’s face and her perceived idea of justice is restored.

The representative continues to explain that the company believes everyone deserves the best deal without any gimmicks. Then, the father, who had been silent the whole time, clamors to receive his lollipop—reminding his wife that the sales representative did indeed say “everyone.” The commercial eloquently illustrates the world’s concept of fairness and justice. But it doesn’t necessarily reflect the Lord’s concept of these two principles. Jonah buys into the world’s perspective which causes him to resent God’s treatment and extension of grace to the Ninevites when they repented. Like the girl in the commercial, Jonah’s countenance changed and he became enraged. He even



Introduce

essentially has the same response, “That’s not fair!”

In some ways, life isn’t fair as some are afforded different opportunities and have different misfortunes than others. What matters most, however, is how we respond to the opportunities in life which God gives us or the challenges through which He allows us to go. Although God is indeed just and will punish sin, He extends grace to all who will accept it. In the eyes of the world, this may seem unfair because God will save the most-vile sinner who has done the most reprehensible deeds just as much as He will save a person who has led a relatively good life. In life, we are all on a level playing field in that we have all sinned, we all deserve death, and we all need a Savior.

When we start focusing on our works and our character rather than Christ, resentment will begin to consume us because we won’t see how we really are. We will look at others through the eyes of suspicion and judgment rather than grace. This leads us to compare our lives with theirs. It ushers in a spirit of competition in which we see ourselves as better than they. Hence, we will then focus on what we perceive we should have received or what we deserve rather than that which Christ has graciously given us and that from which He has mercifully saved us. May resentment never obscure our path from following Christ, but may we truly understand His grace and mercy so that we might rejoice when others accept it—whether we consider them friend or foe.

Key
Question

What times have you experienced resentment or jealousy because of a good thing that happened in the life of another person? What did God teach you?

Jonah 4:1-4

JONAH CRITICIZES GOD'S PLAN:

In contrast to God's love and mercy which He shows to the Ninevites at the end of [chapter 3](#) by hearing their prayers of repentance and relenting in His judgment against them, Jonah becomes **exceedingly displeased** and vents his frustration to God (v. 1). Not only does he display contempt and animosity toward both God and the Ninevites, he also demonstrates his own selfish attitude. A prayer, which should proclaim praise for God's miraculous work after the Ninevites' repentance, features a laundry list of complaints which is why we learn that Jonah tried to flee to **Tarshish** in the first place (v. 2). This same prophet, who extols the mercy and salvation of the Lord in [2:1-9](#) for his own deliverance, now vehemently complains that God is too liberal and free with His grace and mercy toward other people (4:2)—what utter hypocrisy this prayer shows!

At what times have you cried for justice and become resentful of those who received grace instead of the justice you envisioned?

Question
1

Jonah knows well the attributes of God as expressed in His favor and faithfulness to Israel. He can accept the repentance and forgiveness of a wayward Israel, but when it comes to a foreign nation, particularly the Assyrians, the prophet expects retribution without a chance to repent. Perhaps, Jonah recalls a similar incident in [Joel 2:13](#)

where Israel is reminded of God's benevolence toward her: "So rend your heart, and not your garments; return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness; and He relents from doing harm." Israel, not Nineveh, in Jonah's mind should be the sole beneficiary of God's grace and mercy and Israel alone should be given the chance to repent by God who is **slow to anger** and faithful to keep His promises.



In-Depth Information



The word translated **lovingkindness** in verse 2 is notoriously difficult to interpret because of its wide range of meaning. It can mean favor, faithfulness, goodness, kindness, and mercy. In English, faithfulness reflects the closest understanding of this Hebrew word—in particular, God’s faithfulness to fulfill His promises. The emphasis in Jonah 4 focuses on God’s faithfulness to His Word. True to His Word, God has forgiven the Ninevites, just as He has forgiven Israel numerous times, and relented in His judgment against them ([Ezek 14:6-8](#)). God certainly displays His kindness to Nineveh, but it’s much more than mere kindness. It’s faithfulness to His Word and His covenant because He loves mankind whom He desires to rescue and restore.

Jonah has so much hatred for the Ninevites that he favors death over life. Recalling his peril in the Mediterranean Sea when the sailors tossed him overboard, Jonah asks God to finish the job and **take his life from** him (v. 3). Just as in the beginning of the book, he would rather **die** than to see the Ninevites repent and be reconciled to God. In [Matthew 20:1-16](#) in a parable about a landowner and his hired hands, Jesus discusses a similar attitude with a great multitude which included the Pharisees. In this parable, the landlord represents God who has called people to work in His vineyard, agreeing to pay each of them one denarius—that is a day’s wage—regardless of at what time they were hired.

The first group, which was hired at 6:00 AM, resented the last group, which was hired at 5:00 PM, because they both received the exact same wages. Even though the last group only worked an hour rather than twelve, they still received the same payment as the first! Therefore, Jesus poses a question to the crowd, “Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things? Or is your eye evil because I am good” (Matt 20:15)? God deals with Jonah in the same way when He chastises him for his attitude. In the same way God reminds His bitter prophet that He has every right to be concerned with His creation and reconcile it to Him. Therefore, He rhetorically asks Jonah if **it is right for him to be angry** (to expose this fundamental flaw in his thinking) (v. 4).

How does the cry for justice in our world often lead to injustice? How can we ensure that we always respond with grace?

Question
2

GOD CHASTISES JONAH:

God chastises Jonah for his selfish stance by teaching him an important lesson about the value of human life. After entering the city from the west and journeying throughout its streets preaching the word God had given him, the prophet exits **on the east side** where he travels to a safe distance so he can wait the forty days to see if God would indeed overthrow and destroy Nineveh (v. 5). Using the scant desert resources that he could find, such as rocks, clay, and small sticks, he constructs a



temporary **shelter** so that he could comfortably watch what would **become of the city**, hoping it would be a Sodom and Gomorrah-type destruction. Even with the construction of this **shelter**, Jonah could find little relief from the sweltering sun and scorching wind—like Texas in the hottest part of the summer.

Just as God had **prepared** or appointed a great fish to rescue Jonah from certain death in the sea, He once again acts with mercy and compassion toward the prophet by preparing **a plant** to offer him relief through the **shade** of its leaves (v. 6). **Grateful** for the respite **from his misery** that the **plant** provided, Jonah expresses his thankfulness to the Lord for his deliverance. Even though God shows Jonah mercy a second time through the provision of relief from the weather, he still doesn't learn his lesson because he remains obstinate in his bitterness and unwillingness to forgive.

In-Depth Information



The word translated as **misery** in 4:6 is the same word used in [1:2](#) to describe the **wickedness** of the citizens of Nineveh. This serves to remind the audience of the connection between Jonah and Nineveh—highlighting the sinfulness of his attitude as well as showing how both are recipients of God's mercy and grace. Just as God provides the plant to rescue Jonah from the hostile desert environment, so He also provides forgiveness and reconciliation to rescue the Ninevites from their sins and impending disaster.

Instruct

Whereas the people of Nineveh recognize their wrongs and repent, Jonah refuses to admit his, so God **prepared a worm** to kill the plant as well as an **east wind** off the desert to blow in hotter air (vv. 7-8). The sun **beat down on Jonah's head**, causing him to lament the loss of the **shade** and the relief that it provided. Yet, Jonah's complaint, echoing [verse 3](#), once again expresses his selfishness. He wishes that he could **die** and be put out of his **misery**—not only his physical **misery** exacerbated by the scorching sun and searing heat, but also the mental anguish caused by God's benevolence toward his enemy, the Assyrians.

We live in a culture rife with the same type of double standard we observe here in the book of Jonah. Euphemistically dubbed the “cancel culture,” people crusade for what they believe to be justice. They wage war on anything and anyone whom they deem



insensitive, offensive, or culturally unacceptable according to their own limited view. They demonize people outside of their group who have made mistakes and erred in judgment. Rather than forgive, they clamor for no mercy. They seek to ruin the individual's reputation and life, including their livelihood. They petition to see

them fired from their job, call for boycotts of their businesses, attempt to have them blacklisted both socially and financially, and try to inflict their own brand of vigilante justice upon them. Even if they sincerely apologize and truly amend their ways, reconciliation and forgiveness are rejected no matter the circumstances.

On the other hand, those who vilify others always petition for grace and mercy for themselves! Although they refuse to forgive others, they themselves want to be the beneficiary of receiving forgiveness—to the point that they become angry and upset when they must suffer the consequences for their actions. When past offensive comments resurface or they make a major *faux pas* in public, they rally those within their group to come to their defense, seeking mercy and grace from them. Typically, the person will issue an “apology,” primarily because they got caught, attempting to explain that they misspoke. Many will even try to restate and redefine what they

“really” meant.

We have seen such double standards in our society regarding race, particularly the Holocaust, as well as social issues regarding the pandemic. To make a claim, for example, that one does not deserve medical treatment or life-saving transplants based upon vaccination status violates normal human dignity and lacks any compassion. Although we are called to stand firmly upon the tenets of Scripture without compromise and to speak the truth in love, we are also called to extend forgiveness to all, acting compassionately with grace and mercy toward mankind created in the image of our God. This does not depend upon one’s race or ethnicity, one’s social background and popularity, one’s political beliefs, or one’s personal convictions. All have sinned. All need a Savior. And Christ came in demonstration of God’s grace and mercy to all, offering forgiveness and reconciliation through His blood! Let’s follow His example rather than the double standard of the culture around us.

With whom has it been difficult for you to forgive, showing grace and mercy? If you have forgiven them, how has that affected your life and what did you learn from the experience?

Question
3

Jonah 4:9-11

GOD COUNSELS JONAH:

Using the object lesson of the **plant**, God counsels Jonah about the proper way to extend compassion and love to all nations, not just his own. He begins by repeating the question He posed in [verse 4](#). This time, however, the Lord draws attention to the anger Jonah expresses over the withering of the **plant**. Thus, He pointedly asks, “**Is it right for you to be angry about the plant**” (v. 9)? Astonishingly, and somewhat defiantly, Jonah contends that he has every **right to be angry, even to the point of death**.

The illustration of the **plant** and the ensuing conversation between Jonah and God demonstrate three principles. First, Jonah cares for the **plant** only because it benefited him; therefore, it serves as a testament to his selfishness. Second, it shows God’s sovereignty as the Creator and how He uses nature to accomplish His will and purpose. Once again, the text emphasizes God’s prerogative in executing His plan by using the verb **prepared**, which can also be translated as appointed or directed, in relation to the **plant**, the **worm**, and the **east wind**. Through this, it establishes how God supernaturally accomplished His purpose through His divine control over nature. Finally, as Creator, God has the right to be compassionate toward His creation as He so

chooses!

When have you ever become angry because either you didn't get what you thought you deserved or other people got something you felt they didn't deserve?

Question
4

After his outburst where he asserted that he had every **right to be angry** about the demise of **the plant**, the prophet ceases speaking and God begins to lecture him about selfless **pity**. First, God reminds him about the concept of grace. Whereas Jonah **labored** to construct a **shelter** that provided little relief, the **plant** was a gracious gift from God (v. 10). Jonah neither **labored** nor **made it grow**, yet he was the recipient of its beneficial shade—an act of compassion and grace. Second, God reveals the nature of His relationship to His creation since He is intimately involved in it. Jonah has nothing invested in **the plant**. If it were not from God, it would have been impossible for it to **grow** so rapidly in a desert environment. Jonah, unlike God who created it, doesn't till or fertilize the soil, doesn't plant it, and doesn't water it. **The plant** has no intrinsic value to the prophet except in the shade that it provides! Therefore, it is significant to him only for selfish reasons.

As the pinnacle of God's creation, mankind has a special place in His heart and plan. Unlike any other act of creation, God made man in His own image and likeness ([Gen 1:27](#)). Rather than speaking man into existence, God took time to fashion him and breathe life into his nostrils ([Gen 2:7](#)). As part of His creation, God can choose to whom He offers grace and compassion and He tries to help Jonah see that He extends them to everyone—even those considered wicked and unlovable if only they would accept His gracious gift. In a final rhetorical question, God asks Jonah why He shouldn't have **pity** or compassion upon Nineveh, for they too are His special creation for which He deeply cares. If Jonah cares for the plant and God cares even for the **livestock** or cattle, how much more should God care for His wayward creation which doesn't know right from wrong (v. 11)?

In-Depth Information



Much debate exists about why the text included the phrase, much livestock, at the end of the question. It certainly does remind us in chapter 3 that the repentance was so thorough that the animals were also included in the actions to illustrate that the entire

In-Depth Information—continued

city came under conviction and was reconciled to God. Here in 4:11, however, it's best to regard this as an argument moving from lesser to greater. If God cares for animals, how much more would He care for human beings and extend grace unto them? Thus, God not only cares for the livestock, but He is more deeply concerned about the 120,000 people who are perishing apart from His plan.

We live in a culture that calls for justice, refuses to forgive, and cancels grace at every opportunity. With his attitude here in [chapter 4](#), Jonah would fit in well. Unfortunately, many Christians mimic the culture in this same way rather than follow the pattern which Christ Himself established. Although we have received forgiveness, many harbor resentment, seek revenge in the name of justice, and are unwilling to forgive. What could Jonah have



done to free himself from such an ungodly attitude? What can we do to make sure we follow the example of Christ rather than indulge in the passions of the flesh?

Looking at Jonah's life as a whole, we will discover four principles which he could have implemented to maintain the right perspective and attitude when God had called him to go to Nineveh. First, we must recognize our own faults or sins. Jonah knew he was disobedient when he fled to Tarshish, for he understood that God had sent that storm to bring him to his senses. Second, we must recall the grace God has extended to us during those times of disobedience. Only days after being vomited from the fish's mouth, Jonah had forgotten how God had saved him and given him a second chance. Instead, he focused on the sin of others rather than his own sin and salvation.

Third, we must rejoice when we see evidence of God's work rather than complain. None of us deserves salvation; it is a gracious gift from the Lord. Because salvation does not depend upon our works, but the work of Christ on the cross, we have nothing in which we can boast before others. As a result, we ought to rejoice when others accept the grace that God has offered them and it has transformed them from death to life.

Instruct

Finally, we must realize that we're not God. We have no right to stand in condemnation of anyone else. Although we can distinguish between right and wrong and are called to do so, we cannot condemn because apart from Christ we have a flawed sense of justice. We can err in our judgment because we can only see the outside rather than the heart and we are not privy to all the information. Only God is; therefore, only He can rightly judge.

When have you ever misjudged a situation or another person?

Question
5

Consequently, resentment can blind us to the work God is doing or wants to do whether in our own lives or in the lives of others around us. God has called us to follow the pattern He has exhibited to us. We are to love as He first loved us; we are to extend grace just as He has extended grace to us; we are to forgive just as we have been forgiven; we are to serve Him obediently just as He served in obedience which led Him to a horrific death on the cross. Let's not run from the calling God has given us. Instead, may we follow the path He has set before us, so that we might see others come to a relationship with His Son through the ministry to which He has assigned us. May we rejoice when sinners repent, no matter who they are or what they have done to the world or us personally.

Inspire

Life isn't fair. And aren't you glad that it's not always fair? If it were, you and I would have gotten what we deserved: death. Justice apart from grace would have sentenced us to eternal separation and incarceration in a pit of suffering and despair. No matter how much we pleaded, protested, or promised to change, we wouldn't be good enough to deserve forgiveness and salvation. Glory be to God that He doesn't operate the way Jonah did. He exercises grace and compassion upon us as His creation because He loves us. Although we must accept forgiveness and be reconciled according to His terms—that is through His Son—he offers salvation freely to all who repent! We, too, need to see the world through His eyes. We need to extend grace and forgive just as He has done unto us. Therefore, let us not resent the work He is doing in the world to accomplish His plan through the gospel; may we rejoice when people repent and are restored unto Him.

Incorporate

How can resentment blind us to the work God is doing or wants to do in our lives or the lives of others?

Despite all the negatives of our culture, where do you see God working? For what can you rejoice?

In what instances has God shown you grace or given you a second chance? How does recalling those instances help you to extend grace and forgiveness to others?

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