

GREATER THAN  
JONAH





# GREATER THAN JONAH



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*Greater Than Jonah*

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Published by The River Church  
8393 E. Holly Rd.  
Holly, MI 48442

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First Edition, March 2026

Printed in the United States of America

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# Preface

What happens when God calls, and we run? The story of Jonah is more than a tale of a prophet and a fish. It's a deeply human journey of rebellion, repentance, and redemption. In the book *"Greater Than Jonah,"* you will read about Jonah's honest struggle with obedience and how that relates to our own struggle to obey God's instructions. Even in the midst of his disobedience, Jonah is thrown into a sea of God's mercy.

We will examine Jonah's call from God, his blatant disobedience, and consider how God's unwavering grace meets us in our weakest moments. As we follow God's response to Jonah—in the storm, the fish, and the vine—we discover a powerful truth: our disobedience doesn't disqualify us from God's purpose. In the book *"Greater Than Jonah,"* you will see that the God of second chances speaks not only to the Ninevites but also to Jonah, and to us.

*"Greater Than Jonah"* consists of five study guides for personal or group discussion and thirty devotions to help you see how God's message can transform the most unlikely hearts. Whether you're running, repenting, or resting, this devotional will help you hear the heart of a God who never gives up on you.



LESSON ONE

JONAH 1:1-6

# THE CALL TO JONAH AND HIS RESPONSE

PASTOR CHUCK LINDSEY

***“Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, ‘Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it, for their evil has come up before Me.’ But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the LORD. But the LORD hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship threatened to break up. Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried out to his god. And they hurled the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them. But Jonah had gone down into the inner part of the ship and had lain down and was fast asleep. So the captain came and said to him, ‘What do you mean, you sleeper? Arise, call out to your god! Perhaps the god will give a thought to us, that we may not perish.’”*** Jonah 1:1–6

1. Are you running from the Lord and what He wants?

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To open the book of Jonah is to ask this one single question, “Am I running from God and what He wants?” Every person should ask this question. It easily happens in many ways and areas of life! It might be that God has told you to do something and you are not doing it, or it might be that God has told you to stop doing something, but you continue to do it. In these ways, we are like Jonah. We know what God wants, but we run from it. In reality, we are not just running from what God told us to do; we are running from Him.

2. What is something that God has told you to do that you are not doing.

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## GREATER THAN JONAH

Jonah was a prophet. His job (as was the job of all prophets) was to take what God told him and tell it to whomever God wanted to hear it. It was his calling, his purpose, his function in this world. But when God tells him to go to the city of Nineveh to preach repentance, he runs in the exact opposite direction. Nineveh is five hundred miles northeast of Jerusalem (Jonah's home was in Galilee near Jerusalem). Instead of going east, Jonah turns and heads two thousand miles to the west! It's safe to say that he went as far as possible from where God told him to go. He not only went far, he went down. God intended for Jonah to travel by land, but he ended up in the depths of the sea, in the belly of a fish. The most well-known part of Jonah's story is a tragic and enduring picture of where running from God takes us, away and down! This is always where rebellion to God leads: away from all that God wants and so far down into the depths of sin and rebellion.

3. What do you think was going on in Jonah's heart and mind towards God, that led to this decision?

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The book of Jonah alludes to why he ran. The people of Nineveh were Assyrians. The Assyrians were renowned for their evil and cruelty towards the nations around them. They were known not only for strength in war, but also for terrible and frightening practices. Think something like what ISIS did in the Middle East. The Assyrians were known for flaying the skin off of their victims while they were alive, mass beheadings, and long, chain-gang style marches where the chain was connected to a hook that went through the mouth and out the eye of those in the line. Fear gripped the surrounding communities as hundreds of people were paraded in this way as an example of Assyria's might. Jonah knew of their cruelty and wanted God to destroy them, not forgive and redeem them.

4. Have you ever been reluctant to help someone that you knew did not deserve it?

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I am always amazed at the length that we will go to, as people, to rebel against God. I have seen husbands and wives sacrifice their entire families for a moment with someone else. I have seen addicts give up every good thing in their lives for “just one more time” with the thing they love. I have seen teens run from the safety of their homes into the chaos of this world to follow an infatuation. On and on we could go. It seems that rebellion to God has no limits! Jonah’s story is an ancient example of just how far going our own way takes us. It’s always away and down!

5. Would you be willing to share what it was like in your life at a time you were in rebellion to God?

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One detail that is often missed in this story is that Jonah goes into the bottom parts of the boat (down) and falls asleep. This tells us three things:

- A. Running from God is exhausting.** It really is. To run our own way is to run against the strongest headwind. **“Good sense wins favor, but the way of the treacherous is their ruin”** (Proverbs 13:15). Rebellion to God will wear you out. It’s exhausting and Jonah unknowingly shows us this.
- B. Running from God makes us inactive.** Again, Jonah’s story teaches this. Here he is, in a boat, going nowhere, doing nothing. He’s not sharing with the people on the boat. He’s not doing what God has called him to do. He is alone in the

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bottom of a boat, doing nothing useful, completely inactive, entirely ineffective; this is one of the most tragic aspects of rebellion to God—so much lost and wasted time. Years go by like minutes on a clock in rebellion to God, so much idle time, so many wasted days.

**C. It actually cost him to get on that boat.** Verse 3 says that *“he paid the fare,”* and this tells us that there is always a cost to going our own way. It’s not cheap. I’ve heard it said that sin often costs us “more than we ever wanted to spend, keeps us longer than we ever wanted to stay, and takes us further away than we ever wanted to go.” As a pastor I often see the cost of people’s rebellion to God. One of the hardest parts of pastoring is seeing others realize the cost of going their own way. Sometimes that cost is the end of a marriage, sometimes it’s the rebellion of kids, sometimes the cost is physical, and sometimes it’s the loss of all the real things in life. The cost of rebellion always scares me. I have stood before too many people that have wept saying, “I didn’t know it would cost this much.” This cost should scare us.

6. How do we get out of this, if we are in this place?

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7. Has the Lord told you, moved you, brought people to you telling you what He wants you to do, but you have tried to avoid it? Are you running?

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Learn from the sad life of Jonah—it never goes well! If you are, I would ask: How far away will you get? How far down have you gone? What has it already cost? Aren’t you tired? Repentance is

## THE CALL TO JONAH AND HIS RESPONSE

always the answer to rebellion to God. Surrender is always the next step. Come to God in repentance and then give in to Him and His will.





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# WE ALL RUN AWAY

## DEVOTION 1 - PASTOR RYAN STORY

Have you ever had that sinking feeling when you know exactly what you're supposed to do, but it's the absolute last thing on earth you want to do? I feel the weightiness of Paul's words when he says, "**For I do not understand my own actions**" (Romans 7:15). If you are like me, maybe this thing you have to do is a difficult conversation you need to have, returning to obedience to how you are living for Jesus, an apology you need to make, or a task that feels overwhelming. You know the right path, but every aspect of your being wants to find that side road, that detour, that other way to go. If you've been there, you're in good company. Just ask Jonah.

God gave Jonah a clear command, "**Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me**" (Jonah 1:2). Nineveh was the capital of Assyria, the brutal and pagan enemy of the Israelites. For Jonah, this wasn't just an inconvenient request; it was unthinkable. He was being asked to offer a message of warning, and potential mercy, to people he despised and feared.

I love the Bible because it shows that even those who are in its pages struggle with their obedience to God. So, in this moment when Jonah was told, "**Arise, go,**" what did this prophet of God do? He said, "Nope!" and booked a ticket on a ship headed for Tarshish, the complete opposite direction. It's almost comical. Jonah, a man who spoke for God, thought he could somehow outrun God's presence and plan. We have *never* been there, right? Only me?

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It's a powerful and humbling reminder that even the most dedicated people of faith can mess up big time. We can let our own prejudice, fear, or comfort get in the way of God's call. We can convince ourselves that our plan is better, or just plain easier. Jonah's story gives us permission to admit that sometimes we want to run away from our Nineveh.

The most beautiful part of the story of Jonah is that God's plan didn't depend on Jonah's perfection. God pursued Jonah, not to punish him, but God wanted to show His mercy and grace, not only to the Assyrians, but to Jonah himself. Through a storm and a great fish, God mercifully rerouted this reluctant prophet. That truth should bring us all to praise. His ultimate goal was redemption, and God was willing to use a flawed, disobedient messenger to get it done.

Our mistakes, our detours, our moments of running scared should never have the final say. God's grace is bigger than our biggest failures. We worship a God of second chances. We all stumble, we are all disobedient at times, but praise God, His powerful plans work in our lives as He is working on those around us.

# THE DIVINE COMEDY OF DISOBEDIENCE

## DEVOTION 2 - LORENA NORRIS

We usually think of Jonah as a light, kid-friendly Bible story, but when read closely and thoughtfully, it's anything but simple. It's a divine mix of SNL satire and comic-book exaggeration: storms rage, sailors panic, and the prophet Jonah naps through it all. Jonah's stubbornness is ridiculous, yet painfully familiar. Beneath the laughs, the book of Jonah is God holding up a mirror to us all. It's not just about a storm, a big fish, or a distant city. It's about me and you: our disobedience, our excuses, and the ways we cling to our little version of "true life" while resisting the life God is actually offering.

In verse two, Jonah receives a clear and direct call, "***Arise, go to Nineveh.***" No confusion. No mystery. Jonah is a prophet, and his entire job is to speak for God. Instead of obeying, he runs in the exact opposite direction, booking a ticket to Tarshish and paying his fare to flee God's presence. Why? Because Jonah thought he knew best. He thought he understood justice, mercy, and who deserved God's love. He wanted control over the story. He thought God's plan was a threat to his idea of "the good life." In reality, he was running from life itself, from the adventure God was inviting him into.

This story points straight to Jesus. Like Jonah, we try to run from God's call, but Jesus goes where we cannot—into brokenness, sin, and death itself—so that we can be born again. God calls us to step into lives that need mercy, just like Jonah was called to Nineveh. Jonah's story reminds us that God's grace is bigger than our fear, bigger than our judgment, bigger than our stubborn hearts. The gospel is that Jesus pursued us when we were running, carrying us into true, abundant, eternal life.

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So, here's the question you are faced with: where are you headed, Nineveh or Tarshish? Is there a part of your life where you're running because it's uncomfortable or because God's invitation messes with your plans? Jonah's story is funny and over-the-top, and his story of disobedience forces us to examine our disobedience. Stop running. Laugh at your stubbornness for a second, then trust God's invitation. His call isn't ruining your life. He desires to lead you into the adventure of grace, bigger than anything you could ever imagine.

# FEAR OR FAITH

## DEVOTION 3 - ZACH HONNEN

How do you sleep? This seems like a simple question, but for many of us, we might have different answers. Some are wrong (socks on, with the thermostat set to eighty) and some are right (A/C set to a good sixty-six, socks off, and on our side wrapped up like a burrito).

Now, the reason I bring this up is because we're going to look at two different men. Each of them fell asleep in the midst of a storm, but each had different circumstances. Let's jump to our text.

***“Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, ‘Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.’ But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord. But the Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship threatened to break up. Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried out to his god. And they hurled the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them. But Jonah had gone down into the inner part of the ship and had lain down and was fast asleep. So the captain came and said to him, ‘What do you mean, you sleeper? Arise, call out to your god! Perhaps the god will give a thought to us, that we may not perish.’”*** Jonah 1:1–6

In the beginning of the book of Jonah, we see that God gives Jonah a task, and he runs away from it. Jonah tries to ignore the

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command of the Lord. So, what did he do? He ran, hid, and to ease his conscience, he slept.

He tried to ignore the sin he was committing by numbing his mind with sleep. I wonder how many of us sleep like this? We know that we are living in sin. We know that we are disobedient to God; yet, we try to run, hide, and sleep.

Now let's look at a very different sleeper: ***“And when he got into the boat, his disciples followed him. And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but he was asleep. And they went and woke him, saying, ‘Save us, Lord; we are perishing.’ And he said to them, ‘Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?’ Then he rose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm”*** (Matthew 8:23–26).

Now we see a similar scenario. Jesus is on a boat, a storm arises, and He is sleeping. But Jesus is not sleeping to numb His conscience or hide from sin. He is sleeping because He is at peace with God, knowing that all things are in His control. There is no fear. There is no guilt. There is no sin. There is only faith.

So, my question for us today is: Do we sleep in faith, or do we sleep in fear? To sleep in faith is to know that there is nothing we can do to ruin God's plan. We know that there is a King, a God, a Warrior who is watching over us and controls all things, and His will is perfect. To sleep in faith is to understand what Jesus has done for us, and because of that, we rest in the peace of God.

However, if you find yourself sleeping in fear, fear of sin, fear of your history, fear of God's wrath, I want to invite you to rest in the Gospel. Whether you are hearing it for the first time, or for the thousandth time, the Gospel is the answer for peace with God.

***“Even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved...For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”*** Ephesians 2:5, 8–9

To find peace in the storm, to sleep with faith, requires a relationship with the Peacemaker and the Giver of faith. Rest in Christ, and you'll find peace in the storm. Choose faith instead of fear.

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# RUNNING FROM GOD'S CALL

## DEVOTION 4 - RICH SAWICKI

Have you ever felt like God was asking you to do something, and your first thought was to do the exact opposite? That is what happened to Jonah. His story is a powerful reminder that God's plan is always best, even when it is not what we think we want.

Let's look at Jonah 1:1-6: ***"Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, 'Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.' But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord. But the Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship threatened to break up. Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried out to his god. And they hurled the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them. But Jonah had gone down into the inner part of the ship and had lain down and was fast asleep. So the captain came and said to him, 'What do you mean, you sleeper? Arise, call out to your god! Perhaps the god will give a thought to us, that we may not perish.'"***

God's command to Jonah was simple and clear, ***"Go to Nineveh."*** Nineveh was a huge city known for its wickedness. God's heart was to offer them a chance to turn back to Him, and He wanted Jonah to be His messenger. God's calls on our lives are without a reason. They are always tied to His purpose—to love people and bring them closer to Him.

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Jonah did not want to go. He hated the people of Nineveh. Instead of heading east toward them, he went west, to a far-off place called Tarshish. He was not just trying to get away from Nineveh; the Bible says he was trying to run ***“from the presence of the Lord.”*** We cannot truly escape God, but we can try. And when we do, we usually head in the complete opposite direction of where He is leading us.

Jonah's choice had consequences. He paid a fare to get on a boat, but a storm came and threatened to sink it. The storm was not an accident; God sent it to get Jonah's attention. While everyone else on the ship was panicking and praying, Jonah was asleep, trying to ignore everything. Running from God might feel like a good idea at first, but it always ends up costing us more than we think. It can put us and others in danger, and it can leave us feeling spiritually numb, like Jonah asleep in the storm.

When God speaks, our best option is always to obey. Is there a "Nineveh" in your life right now? A person or a place God is calling you to? Let us not run the other way. Instead, let us turn toward Him and trust that His plan is the safest and most life-giving path.

# SLEEPING THROUGH THE STORM

## DEVOTION 5 - KATRINA YOUNG

Have you ever slept through a raging thunderstorm? I have been told that I have! I am actually a fairly light sleeper, but in those storms, for some reason, I was able to block out my surroundings and not hear a thing. In the story of Jonah, we find a man who was able to sleep through a storm. In Jonah's case, we know he is actively defying God's request and fleeing from His presence (Jonah 1:10), and yet, he is able to sleep through a life-threatening storm that had everyone else in a panic. What does this tell us? Maybe Jonah's sleep was not that peaceful, maybe it was an attempt to escape the consequences of his disobedience. He was literally and figuratively "out to sea" when it came to what God had asked him to do.

In Jonah 1:2, God says, ***"Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me."*** Jonah went the other way, the complete opposite direction, heading to Tarshish some three thousand miles away. However, instead of escaping God's presence, he saw God's power on display. Our God is all-seeing and all-knowing, and there is nothing we can do to escape it. Psalm 139:7-8 reminds us, ***"Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!"***

Sometimes, we can be spiritually asleep during life's storms. We might be ignoring God's call or running from a difficult situation that God wants us to walk through. We might be so consumed by our own desires or fears that we miss the very real spiritual battles raging around us. Like Jonah, we might be oblivious to the danger

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until someone else (like the captain of the ship) wakes us up to the reality of our situation. The good news is that God's mercy is greater than our disobedience. Even in Jonah's deep sleep and rebellion, God was working.

***“He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.”*** Psalm 103:10-12

What storms are you facing today? Are you sleeping through them, trying to avoid or even ignoring God's voice? Or are you awake and actively seeking guidance from Him? Remember that God is always at work, even when we are not. His desire is for us to turn to Him, to wake up to His presence, and to trust in His plan, even in the midst of life's most turbulent waters. He will not abandon us, but He will lovingly pursue us, even if it means sending a storm to get our attention.

# RING RING

## DEVOTION 6 - GRANT GRIMES

***“Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.” But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the LORD.”*** Jonah 1:1–3

Called...there are many things in life we are called to do: going to work each day, providing for our families, and taking care of the basic needs of life like eating and sleeping. Jonah was called by the Lord to go to Nineveh and preach against the city's wickedness, but instead of obeying, Jonah ran. Even as the conviction of the Lord pursued him, he continued to flee from His calling.

How we respond to a calling shapes who we are. Ignoring God's call is never a neutral choice, it sets a chain of events into motion. Jonah went in the opposite direction from where God called him, and it led to storms not only for himself but for those around him. The same is true for us; our obedience or disobedience impacts more than just our own lives. When God calls, we must decide if will we answer, or if will we silence His voice.

The call given to Jonah is the same call Jesus gives in the Great Commission, to go, to preach, and to declare what the Lord has done (Matthew 28:19-20). For Jonah, it took a great storm, a large fish, and a lot of hardship before he obeyed. What will it take for you?

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If you have answered God's call to repent of sin, you have also received a new calling, not to wander in sin or be caught in storms, but to live as a disciple and as a conduit of the Lord's truth. Everyone has a "Nineveh" in their life, a person, place, or task that God is specifically calling you to. So, when God calls you to share the Gospel with a friend, neighbor, or co-worker—will you respond, or will you let it ring?

## THE CALL TO JONAH AND HIS RESPONSE



LESSON TWO

JONAH 1:7-17

**MAKING DEALS  
WITH IDOLS**

PASTOR JOSH YATES

***“Then they said to him, ‘What shall we do to you, that the sea may quiet down for us?’ For the sea grew more and more tempestuous. He said to them, ‘Pick me up and hurl me into the sea; then the sea will quiet down for you, for I know it is because of me that this great tempest has come upon you.’ Nevertheless, the men rowed hard to get back to dry land, but they could not, for the sea grew more and more tempestuous against them. Therefore they called out to the Lord, ‘O Lord, let us not perish for this man’s life, and lay not on us innocent blood, for You, O Lord, have done as it pleased You.’ So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows.”*** Jonah 1:11–16

1. What is your favorite TV game show of all time? What was it about that show that made it so fun for you to watch?

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I may just be dating myself by asking about this, but remember the show, *“Let’s Make a Deal”*? It was originally hosted by Monty Hall back in the 1960s and ‘70s and was redone with new game shows in the 2010s, when it was hosted by Wayne Brady. The premise of the show was to make deals to hopefully win big prizes. Everyone dressed up in crazy costumes in the hopes of being picked from the audience to be a contestant. Then, once on stage, you were given something of value and had the opportunity to trade it in on a box, or what’s behind curtain one, two, or three. Sometimes it turned out good, other times it didn’t. It was all about whether or not you wanted to risk what you had for the “deal” that you didn’t see yet.

2. Go back to the first verses of Jonah 1. What had God called Jonah to do?

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GREATER THAN JONAH

3. What did Jonah decide to do in response to God's call?

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Read through Jonah 1:7–16. Jonah was running from God because he really didn't want to do what God was calling him to do. He really didn't want Nineveh to have the opportunity to repent from their sin and turn to the Lord. Read that statement again.

4. Have you ever run from what God was calling you to do? What were the circumstances?

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Jonah is now on a boat going the other direction away from Nineveh. Not only did he not go, he's actively going in the opposite direction. This brings judgment on not just himself, but on the people who are the innocent bystanders on the boat with him as the storm threatens to destroy the boat.

5. When have you seen the sin of a loved one or friend affect the people around them?

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Here's where the account gets pretty interesting. The men on the boat did not know Jonah's God. They had their own gods and followed them, but it seems as though they had heard of the One, True God. Jonah tells them why the storm is going on and they were terrified of the storm and of Jonah's God. Jonah informed them what they had to do: throw him into the sea. However, the men in the boat decided to try to make deals with idols before finally obeying God.

6. What deals have you tried to make with God in your life?  
What deals have you made with idols?

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You may not think what these sailors did was making deals with idols, but they did. They made a deal with personal effort, trying to work their way out of the situation by rowing harder. They made a deal with the idol of chance, hoping the lot would tell them the answer. They were hoping to make a deal with control, wanting to control the situation by appealing to the right god, the right country, the right occupation. Jonah points them to the Lord.

7. When you've tried to control a situation or turned to "idols" in a circumstance in life, how has that turned out?

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8. How have you turned back to God after trying all kinds of idols (including the ones above)?

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The sailors now realize that they have a real problem. They don't want to be responsible for killing Jonah, but they have a directive from his God to throw him overboard!

9. Have you ever come across a person whose life was falling down all around them but still refused to call on the One, True God? Have you ever been in that situation?

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## GREATER THAN JONAH

The sailors want a solution without turning to God. However, the situation got to a point where there was no other solution. In a very real way, Jonah represents Jesus in this account. These sailors needed someone to take the blow so that they could be saved from the storm and, quite possibly, they turned to God to follow Him after this encounter.

10. Have you turned to God in your life? What areas of your life need an encounter with our gracious God?

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Remember, even in the fish, God was gracious to Jonah. Even in the trial, God was gracious to Jonah. Even when Jonah ran from God, God was gracious to him. Get to know the real God, not the image of Him that you've potentially made up or try to appease the idols we contrive.

If someone calls on the Lord in salvation, they cannot reach back, subsequently, and grab their self-help idols when they are in trouble or life becomes rough. They cannot then attempt to appease God by more faithful church attendance, increased obedience to parents, more frequent reading of the Bible, or increasing sacrifices of their time and money. The moment you think that doing such things makes God move in your favor, you are grasping an idol, polishing it, holding it up to the Lord, and saying, "See God, look at me. I am doing everything right. You are going to act now to stop my storm, right?" However, if you think God is moved by such efforts, you are not talking to the God through whom **"we have all received, grace upon grace"** (John 1:16). You are talking to your idol-manufactured concept of a god. Real conversion starts with grace and knows that grace will lead us home. This grace comes from Jesus Christ. (*"Exalting Jesus in Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk,"* Curtis Redmond.)







## GREATER THAN JONAH

# GOD'S RESPONSE TO JONAH

## DEVOTION 1 - PASTOR MITCHELL HOLMES

When I was a child, I hated one rule that my parents had more than any other: the sweets rule. You see, my parents only allowed us to have sweets a few times a week, so it was common for us to be told that we couldn't have dessert because we just had it last night. Being the sweet tooth that I was, I wouldn't always abide by this rule. It was not uncommon for me to wait for my parents to go to bed, then sneak out and take some candy or pop back to my room to enjoy. I deliberately ignored my parents' instruction and hid what I was doing from them. Of course, my parents only had my best interest in mind, but that didn't stop me from trying to do things my own way.

Jonah attempted to do the same thing, except he tried to do things his own way by running and hiding from Almighty God. Just like our parents here on earth know the things that we try to hide from them, there is no outrunning or hiding from God. In Jonah 1:7-17, we see Jonah on a boat, trying to run in the opposite direction from Nineveh, where God has called him to go. When the storm comes and the crew begins to discuss their coming demise, it is revealed by Jonah that he is running from God. ***“So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows. And the Lord appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.”*** Jonah 1:15-17

Here we see God's response to Jonah fleeing from what God has appointed him to. First, we see that God does not give up on Jonah. Instead, He has Jonah spend time in isolation for three days so that

## GREATER THAN JONAH

he can properly align his heart to match what God has tasked him with. Secondly, we see the sailors worship the Lord as a result of the events beginning with Jonah's disobedience. It brings me great comfort to know that even when I am far from God's will or I've missed the call to be a part of His mission, He still uses it for good and for His glory.

We all have moments in our lives where we choose disobedience to God. Perhaps He has tasked us with sharing the gospel with someone that we know will make things uncomfortable, so we avoid the conversation. Or maybe, we are ignoring His nudge to make a change in our life to better focus our minds on Heavenly things. Whatever it may be, God's response to Jonah shows us how God does not give up on His children, and instead gently (or not so gently) redirects us back to what He has for us. Take time today to prayerfully ask God how you need to surrender to His will. Where are you running from Him? What have you convinced yourself that you've successfully hidden from Him? Turn back to His way, the way that leads to life.

# GOD'S KINDNESS

## DEVOTION 2 - CATHY STORY

Recently, I came across a concept in a book that was interesting. The idea is that our kids are constantly asking us (even subconsciously) two questions: the first, "Am I loved?" and the second, "Can I get my own way?" As parents, the first question is pretty easy to answer. Do we love our kids? Absolutely, wholeheartedly, and without a doubt! This book went on to say that it is actually the second question we struggle with a bit more. When our child is asking with their words or actions, "Can I get my own way?" we sometimes swing to extremes in our response. At times, we answer, "Yes, you can *always* get your own way!" While at other times, parents can swing to the other extreme, "No, you can *never* have your way, you can only do my way." As a parent, we may recognize that, truthfully, the answer needs to lie more in the middle; sometimes our kids can get their way, but sometimes they just cannot.

Here in Jonah chapter 1, I imagine God's response to Jonah falling into this scenario. God loves Jonah, we know that, but in this moment, Jonah is seeking his own way, and in all of His loving kindness, God steps in and says, "No." ***"For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the Lord, because he had told them"*** (Jonah 1:10). Jonah was not hiding the fact that he was trying to go his own way. As the storm continues we see the men on the ship asking what to do to get this storm to end. Jonah, knowing that this storm was due to him trying to get his own way, says to throw him into the sea. Finally, in verse 15 it says, ***"So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging"*** (Jonah 1:15).

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These verses are such an interesting depiction of how God used this storm to show both His love for and kindness to Jonah. Just as parents cannot allow their children to get their own way all the time, God loved Jonah too much to allow him to go his own way and used a storm to get his attention. I can say that I do not always want to view the storms in my life as God trying to get my attention or redirect me back to what He desires me to do. Take time today to reflect on ways God might be trying to get your attention and direct your heart back to Him.

# WHEN THE STORM TURNS TO WORSHIP

## DEVOTION 3 - PASTOR JOHN CARTER

Sometimes, it's not the calm that brings us closer to God; it's the storm or the chaos of the storm. The sailors aboard Jonah's ship were caught in a terrifying storm. These men, who were likely experienced seafarers, had seen storms before, but this one was different because it had a divine origin and a divine purpose. Ever consider the storm you're going through as having a divine origin or a divine purpose? When their prayers to false gods failed and their human efforts proved useless, they cast lots, desperate for answers. God, in His sovereignty, allowed the lot to fall on Jonah, the runaway prophet.

What follows is unexpected. Jonah admits that he serves ***"the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land"*** (Jonah 1:9). The sailors are terrified. Yet, through Jonah's confession and the calming of the sea after he's thrown overboard, something remarkable happens: the pagan sailors who previously were calling out to their false gods become worshipers of the one true God.

***"Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows."*** Jonah 1:16 is easy to skip over as we're caught up in the drama of the sea and the great fish, but pause here. These pagan sailors had an incredible encounter, not by seeing miracles alone, but by encountering the fearsome mercy and power of Yahweh. Their response was not just relief, it was reverence. They ***"feared the Lord exceedingly,"*** offered sacrifices, and made vows. In other words, their fear turned into faith. This verse reminds us that God is always working, even through our disobedience, to draw people to Himself. Jonah was running. He

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was not trying to be a missionary to Nineveh, let alone to a boat full of pagans. But God still used Jonah's story, even Jonah's failure, to reveal His greatness and His mercy. God could have taken the whole ship down and still taken Jonah with a fish, but He offered these pagans a chance to see the power and mercy of a loving God.

For us today, there's encouragement here on multiple levels. First, we can trust that God does work in the midst of storms. Whether it's our own mistakes or the brokenness of the world around us, God is not limited by our failures. Second, we're reminded that God is reaching people in the most unexpected places in the most unexpected ways, on ships, in storms, and through a reluctant and disobedient prophet.

These verses challenge us to evaluate our response to God's power and His mercy. The sailors feared, then worshiped. They saw God's hand, power, and His mercy, they surrendered. Are we moved by God's power, His mercy? Have we grown dull to His voice? Sometimes it's the storms that strip away all our false hopes and bring us face-to-face with the real and living God. May our response be one similar to these seafaring men who started their journey as pagan men and ended as men of faith, fearfully worshiping the Almighty God. He alone has the power to accomplish anything. He can even change a wretched soul like mine.

# HOW DO WE GET OUT OF THIS FISH?

## DEVOTION 4 - DEBBIE GABBARA

***"And the Lord appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights."***

Jonah 1:17

There was an extremely difficult time in my family years ago that marked a season of growth and total dependence on God. However, in the midst of it all, as one event after another occurred, we were deeply shaken. During that time, my husband and I often asked each other, "What does God want us to learn or do so that we can get out of the belly of this fish?"

The book of Jonah tells us of a time when God had to completely shake up Jonah's life. God gave Jonah an assignment that he was frightened by and unhappy about, so he tried to run away by boarding a ship going the opposite direction of where God told him to go. Because of his disobedience, God caused a storm that affected not just Jonah's life but also the lives of those on the ship with him. They soon feared for their lives, tried to save themselves, and finally, they threw Jonah overboard...and God appointed a fish.

Scripture tells us that the Lord appointed a fish to swallow Jonah. God's purposes will always be accomplished, and He will be glorified. God gave Jonah an assignment and then, when he was thrown into the depth of his storm, God used divine intervention to keep him from drowning and give him time to repent.

There were days during our season of trial that we felt like we were sinking and sometimes wondered how we would make it. Yet, as

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the months went by, we began to see how God's will was being accomplished in our lives. He kept us from drowning, all the while drawing us closer to Him and shaping us through His sovereign plan.

When storms and trials come, and we know they will, we have a choice. We can resist like Jonah, and God will humble us, or we can trust Him, submit to His will, and let Him lead us through.

Will God have to send a storm to shake us awake, or will we trust Him before it comes? I pray we do not have to spend too many days in the belly of the fish.

# GOD'S RESCUE PLAN

## DEVOTION 5 - PASTOR KEATON WASHBURN

From the time I was a young kid, I have always been afraid of storms. When I was little, when the thunder and lightning began, I bolted into my parents' room and up into their bed with them. I spent many nights snuggled between my parents as the storm raged outside. Even to this day, I'm not a fan of thunderstorms. I struggle to sleep and my mind races. As we are studying Jonah, I can't even imagine what it would have been like to be on the ship with Jonah and the sailors in the midst of their great storm.

As a way of reminder, let's get up to speed on Jonah's situation. After running from God after He told him to go to Nineveh, the ship that Jonah was on faced a great storm. The sailors cast lots to determine whose fault it was and the lots fell on Jonah. Jonah didn't run from the truth any longer and admitted that he was fleeing the Lord. After some vexation, the sailors agreed to throw Jonah overboard. At this point, let's pick it up in Jonah 1:17 which says, ***“And the Lord appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.”***

I once heard a pastor say that the storm was God's provision, not His punishment. And the great fish that swallowed up Jonah—God's provision, not His punishment. Oftentimes, suffering in our lives is also God's provision, not His punishment. Put yourself in Jonah's shoes for a moment, what does the storm feel like? A punishment or a provision? If we're honest, it feels like a punishment from God. Jonah disobeyed and now he's paying the price for it by having to be thrown overboard to drown in the middle of a huge storm. But God didn't let that happen, He rescued Jonah with the great fish. He was trying to get Jonah's attention!

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I don't know what you're going through today, but if you are wondering what God is doing and why He's allowing things into your life that you wouldn't choose, have you looked to Him in this situation? There's a good chance God is providing for you in a way you aren't even aware that you need Him to. ***“Those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.”*** Isaiah 40:31

# GOD OF GRACE

## DEVOTION 6 - STEPHEN BILLINGS

One of my favorite parts of life is playing games with my children. My wife and I are blessed to have an eight-month-old baby girl, along with two sons who are two and three years old. When it comes to playtime, my kids are obsessed with “*Paw Patrol*.” They love it! My kids have “*Paw Patrol*” trucks and figurines which they spend many hours playing with. However, when one of them makes a wrong choice and tries to take a “*Paw Patrol*” toy from one of their siblings, playtime becomes an opportunity for them to learn to forgive and show grace to one another.

In the book of Jonah, God gives Jonah clear direction to go to the city of Nineveh and preach. However, Jonah makes a poor decision and chooses to disobey God. Jonah chooses to flee “***from the presence of the Lord***” (Jonah 1:10). Even though Jonah feared God, he did not want to go to Nineveh, so he tried to run from God.

Despite Jonah’s actions, God chooses to respond to Jonah with grace. “***And the Lord appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights***” (Jonah 1:17). God sent a big fish to swallow Jonah not as a form of punishment, but as a form of grace.

Just as playtime for my kids can turn into an opportunity for grace and forgiveness to be given, the same is true in our everyday lives. God gives us all sorts of opportunities to obey or disobey Him. We, like Jonah, can try to run away from the presence of God or step forward in obedience to Him.

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I pray that each and every day we ask for God's strength to be obedient to Him and His commands. However, when we do fail in our pursuit of following God, we know that God is a God of grace and forgiveness. God showed grace to Jonah and will do the same for us. Hebrews 13:8 shares, "***Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.***"





LESSON THREE

JONAH 2-3:1

JONAH'S  
GOOD EXAMPLE

PASTOR JUSTIN DEAN

Many people can identify with the phrase “rock bottom.” Throughout your life there has most likely been a time when you felt like you were at your lowest, broken, discouraged, defeated, or on the brink of giving up. For me, this was at the end of my first year in college. I will spare you the details, but needless to say, I had hit rock bottom and was in need of something new.

1. When was a time in your life when you hit rock bottom?

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2. What were some of the thoughts going through your head?

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3. Did things change? What led to that change?

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Jonah chapter 2 starts off by saying, “***Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish.***” This was Jonah’s rock bottom moment. He ran from God’s command, found himself on a boat in the middle of a storm, was cast overboard into the ocean, and is now in the belly of a fish. I will be honest, my rock bottom moment simply does not compare to his. That is a tough place to be in physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Jonah wrestles with his disobedience, reflects on his failure, recognizes the physical danger he is in, all while knowing He chose to run from God Almighty. In this moment, he does the only thing he really can do: reflect and pray.

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4. What would be going through your head if you were in this situation?

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5. Take a moment to imagine what it might look like for Jonah to be in the belly of a fish. Do you think it was comfortable and spacious? Could he see? What could he do to keep himself busy for three days and three nights?

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Jonah 2:2-5 says, ***“I called out to the Lord, out of my distress, and he answered me; out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and you heard my voice. For you cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the flood surrounded me; all your breakers and your waves passed over me. Then I said, ‘I am driven away from your sight; yet I shall again look upon your holy temple.’ The waters closed in over me to take my life; the deep surrounded me; weeds were wrapped about my head.”***

In this passage, we begin to see the distress that Jonah was in. In his prayer he begins to cry out to the Lord the depth of his emotional and spiritual state. On the brink of death, he lays bare his plight before the Lord. All too often, we go through life dealing with difficult things, struggling and in distress, carrying emotional and spiritual burdens, and we do not take time to lay them before the Lord in prayer. In many instances, Jonah is not a character who sets an example that we want to follow, but in this case he is. When we find ourselves in times of deep distress and brokenness, those are the times when we need to take that brokenness to the Lord in prayer.

6. When was the last time you took a moment to self-reflect?

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7. How often do you turn to prayer in times of defeat or discouragement? Is it difficult for you to do? Why or why not?

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8. How do you feel after you spend time in prayer? Why do you think you feel that way?

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In Jonah 2:6, he moves from self-reflection to focusing on the redemption that the Lord offers. ***“To the roots of the mountains I went down, to the land whose bars closed upon me forever; yet you brought up my life from the pit, O Lord my God.”***

Many times we acknowledge with our words that the Lord is the only true source of redemption, but when times of hardship come our way, we run to other sources to find fixes to our problems. Money, self-help books or podcasts, distractions, or addictions seem to be what we run to in when things seem to get out of our control. The truth is, things are not in our control to begin with. For Jonah, it took being in the belly of a fish for this to really sink in. He recognized Who was in control and Who really brought salvation, redemption, and restoration.

GREATER THAN JONAH

9. When you have a problem, what is the first place you look for a solution?

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10. Why is it easier to run to the solution the world offers than to God?

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11. Control is often a difficult topic of discussion. How do we begin to hand over control to God rather than struggle to keep it ourselves?

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We have highs and lows, successes and failures, valleys and mountain tops. These different stages of life are unavoidable, so we, as God's people, have to understand how to turn to Him in all seasons. The Lord is our salvation and restoration; He alone is Who we need at rock bottom. In this instance, follow Jonah's example and cry out to the Lord in prayer.

## JONAH'S GOOD EXAMPLE





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# GOD'S GRACE RUNS FARTHER

## DEVOTION 1 - MARK PITTENGER

Jonah chapter 2 is a beautiful reminder that we serve a God of second chances. That is a truth that resonates deeply with anyone who has ever failed, wandered, or found themselves in the depths of regret.

Jonah had fled from God's calling, boarding a ship to Tarshish instead of going to Nineveh as commanded, but God's love is persistent. He pursued Jonah, not to destroy him, but to restore him. After being thrown overboard and swallowed by a great fish, Jonah found himself in a dark, lonely, and terrifying place. And it was there, in the belly of brokenness, that he prayed. ***"Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish"*** (Jonah 2:1).

Many of us have had ***"belly of the fish"*** moments—a failed relationship, a moral compromise, a calling we ran from. The consequences may not look as dramatic as Jonah's, but the feeling is familiar, swallowed by shame, isolated by guilt, and drifting far from God's plan. Yet, like Jonah, we find that God meets us in the depths.

Jonah's prayer in chapter two is raw and repentant. In verse seven he prays, ***"When my life was fainting away, I remembered the Lord, and my prayer came to you, into your holy temple."*** He acknowledged his disobedience and turned back to God. God, rich in mercy, commanded the fish to vomit Jonah onto dry land, giving him a second chance—a second chance that was not deserved but graciously given.

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Scripture is filled with stories that echo this truth. Peter, who denied Jesus three times, was later restored and became a pillar of the early church (John 21:15–19). The prodigal son, who squandered everything, was embraced by his father with compassion and joy (Luke 15:11–32). Even King David, after his grave sin with Bathsheba, found forgiveness and purpose when he turned back to God (Psalm 51).

God's grace does not ignore sin; it transforms it. He disciplines us not to condemn us, but to correct, redeem, and restore us. As Hebrews 12:6 says, ***“For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.”*** Jonah was disciplined, but not forsaken. And neither are we.

Perhaps you find yourself in a place of regret or rebellion today. Maybe you've felt too far gone or too flawed for God to use. Let Jonah's story assure you, God is not done with you. His purposes for your life are not revoked by your failures. Scripture tells us, ***“For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable”*** (Romans 11:29).

No matter how far we run, God's grace runs farther. His mercy meets us in the depths, lifts us from despair, and offers us a new path forward. Our God is the God of second chances.

# JONAH'S PRAYER

## DEVOTION 2 - JEANNIE YATES

In Jonah chapter two, we find the prophet knee-deep in the guts of a big fish, who knows where in the ocean, crying out to God. Of course, he cries out to God—wouldn't you?! Even people who don't actually believe or follow God call on Him when they find themselves in great trouble or distress, especially when they're thrown overboard and swallowed by a gigantic fish!

Take a moment to read Jonah's prayer: ***“Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish, saying, ‘I called out to the Lord, out of my distress, and he answered me; out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and you heard my voice. For you cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the flood surrounded me; all your breakers and your waves passed over me. Then I said, ‘I am driven away from your sight; yet I shall again look upon your holy temple.’ The waters closed in over me to take my life; the deep surrounded me; weeds were wrapped about my head at the roots of the mountains. I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever; yet you brought up my life from the pit, O Lord my God. When my life was fainting away, I remembered the Lord, and my prayer came to you, into your holy temple. Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love. But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay. Salvation belongs to the Lord!”*** Jonah 2:1-9

This isn't just a random prayer to an unknown divine creature in the sky. In this prayer, we see by Jonah's declarations that he is calling out to the one true God, whom he knows and trusts. Pastor Steven

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Lee points out three themes in this passage. Even in the depths of the sea, Jonah knows that God still listens, God still reigns, and God still delivers. (*"Mercy at the Bottom"* [www.desiringgod.org](http://www.desiringgod.org).)

1. God Still Listens. ***"I called out...you heard my voice."*** Jonah 2:2

Throughout Scripture, we see God reminding us that He hears us and draws near when we call on Him. In Jeremiah 33:3, God says, ***"Call to me and I will answer you."*** And Psalm 145:18 reminds us that, ***"The Lord is near to all who call on him."*** Jonah knew that even though he disobeyed, God would still hear him. We see another example of this in the parable of the Prodigal Son. The rebellious son eventually finds himself in a pig pen, digging for scraps, when he humbles himself and seeks mercy from the Father that he knows will listen (Luke 15:11-32).

2. God Still Reigns. ***"For YOU cast me into the deep...all YOUR breakers and YOUR waves passed over me."*** Jonah 2:3

Jonah knew the storm wasn't an accident. His trip overboard was not the fault of the sailors; he knew that God was in control of it all. Even in the middle of the darkness and fear, he had faith in the One who holds it all. Jonah was engulfed in darkness and disgust, and called on the God who ***"is before all things, and in him all things hold together"*** (Colossians 1:17).

3. God Still Delivers. ***"You brought up my life from the pit... Salvation belongs to the Lord!"*** Jonah 2:6, 9

Psalm 34:17 reminds us, ***"When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears and delivers them out of all their troubles."*** No matter what you're facing or how stinky of a mess you have put yourself in, remember that God hears you. God is still in control. Your troubles don't surprise Him. God will deliver. Pastor Lee challenges us, "Wherever you are and whatever obedience you're currently resisting, run to God in prayer. Be persistent in prayer, knowing your God is even more persistent in mercy."

# REMEMBER THE LORD

## DEVOTION 3 - JUSTIN FOROOZAN

I've been very self-reliant for the majority of my life. Whatever I did, or wherever I would go, I could always take care of myself. Even when I got into trouble, I would think, "If I got myself into this, then I would get myself out!" This thought ruled my life and all of my actions until the fateful day came when I screwed up and couldn't fix it. I remember trying to sweet-talk my way out of trouble and feeling of dread when I realized it wasn't going to work! I realized that I had no power and I needed help.

***"Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish, saying, 'I called out to the Lord, out of my distress, and he answered me; out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and you heard my voice.'"*** Jonah 2:1-2

I can imagine the feeling that Jonah had before being thrown off the boat into the water. He had thought he would be in big trouble if he went to Nineveh, so he decided to take things into his own hands. Then, once on the boat in the storm, he realized he had no power, and his actions were causing all of the chaos. He sacrificed himself into the sea and was swallowed by a fish, and in his distress, Jonah calls out to the Lord and he is heard. He decides to stop relying on himself and starts to rely on God. When we cry out to the Lord, He hears us. We might not know how He intends to help us, but neither did Jonah when he went into the water, and He still turned to the Lord.

***"When my life was fainting away, I remembered the Lord, and my prayer came to you, into your holy temple. Those who pay***

## GREATER THAN JONAH

***regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love. But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay. Salvation belongs to the Lord!***” Jonah 2:7-9

In Jonah's lowest of lows, with his life fainting away, he ***“remembered the Lord.”*** For those who are self-reliant like me, we act like the only time we should remember the Lord is when we are desperate, but God wants us to come to Him with everything. We become vain idol-worshippers when we look to ourselves. We forsake our hope when we don't turn to the Lord. We must remember the Lord, even when we think our troubles seem small and not important enough for Him. We must remember the Lord, even when we think we are able to take control. With the voice of thanksgiving, we should be grateful that the Lord has it all figured out for us, because ***“salvation belongs to the Lord!”***

# GOD DOESN'T CHANGE

## DEVOTION 4 - JOANNA MONTGOMERY

Jonah was asked to do something he didn't want to do. In fact, he ran the opposite direction. When he found himself in a place where he couldn't go any further, he prayed to God and thanked Him for salvation. God gave Jonah a second chance to do the will of God. He didn't change what Jonah needed to do, he still had to go preach salvation to Nineveh, but Jonah obeyed when God gave him a second chance. God didn't change, Jonah did. God gave Jonah a second chance to do God's will, even though Jonah didn't want to. What a wonderful message for us, God will give us a second chance as well.

One of the most wonderful things about the God of Heaven is that He never changes. It is hard for us to truly understand this because we experience change all the time. When we are born, we are incapable of self-care. We know we need something, and we cry out for someone to solve a problem we don't even understand. As we grow and develop, we change and begin to understand how things work. When our stomach growls, eating food will stop that. When we touch something that hurts us, we learn to avoid touching it. We experience change every day. When I look out a window, I might see trees flowering in the spring, snow sparkling on the yard, or my neighbor mowing their green grass. We experience change constantly. Being able to understand a God who never changes can be nearly impossible.

It seems in our world today, everything is constantly changing. Not just the weather and the seasons, but people. As a whole, people don't care about other people the way they used to. They care about

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themselves more than others. I see this when I drive. People will speed up to prevent another car from merging in front of them, honk if someone slows down to turn, or will speed through an intersection where people are waiting to cross with their children. We are impatient and only seem to care about self. Constant change is the song of the world. It is the platform to power and the desire of the lost. We have definitely changed in our society, and it's evident in so many ways.

The Bible teaches that God never changes; He is always the same.

***“For I the Lord do not change.”*** Malachi 3:6

***“God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?”*** Numbers 23:19

***“I am the Lord. I have spoken; it shall come to pass; I will do it. I will not go back; I will not spare; I will not relent; according to your ways and your deeds you will be judged, declares the Lord God.”*** Ezekiel 24:14

There are many other passages that reveal God never changes. So, what does that mean for us? It means when God promises us something, we can trust that promise. When the Bible says, ***“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life”*** (John 3:16), it means that the believer in Christ, the Son of God, will have eternal life with God in Heaven. It isn't conditional except that we must believe in Jesus Christ. God doesn't change. He loves us, and even when we won't change, He will wait for us while we do.

# DO YOU LOVE ME MORE THAN THIS?

## DEVOTION 5 - DAVID HUDGENS

Whenever I read Jonah's prayer from the belly of the fish, I can't help but see my own journey with the Lord in it. Jonah had run from God's calling because he didn't want to walk the path the Lord had set before him. Similarly, although I didn't run to Tarshish, like Jonah, in my mid-twenties, I was running all the same.

At that time, my personal faith and obedience to Christ were growing. I loved Jesus, and I wanted to serve Him. I sensed a calling on my life, and I assumed it had to be through music. And what I knew for sure was that I didn't want it to look like my dad's calling (he was a preacher). Now, I didn't resent preaching; I just didn't want to "be my dad." So, I closed my ears to anything that might even hint at that direction and ran toward my own vision.

The tricky part is that my path looked godly on the surface. You see, I was pursuing worship ministry. I played, sang, and led anywhere I could: church gatherings, retreats, youth events, but I wasn't seeking the Lord for His will for my life. I was assuming His will, and over time, it left me deeply unsatisfied.

As time went on, I saw others who I thought had less talent and/or spiritual maturity being given opportunities I believed I deserved. I grew bitter, asking God, "Why don't I get to serve You like they do? Why does no one recognize my gifts?" Slowly, my frustration was poisoning my relationships, my marriage, my friendships, even my service at church all suffered.

Then came the breaking point. My band at the time, my closest friends, one by one told me they were done. They weren't interested

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in the music we were making anymore. I was devastated and unfortunately my despair led to one particularly harsh argument with my wife. After this, I finally broke down before the Lord and let Him “have it.” I poured out all my anger, my disappointment, my confusion. When I had finally said my piece, I sensed the Holy Spirit ask me one piercing question, “Do you love Me more than music?”

In that moment, like Jonah in the belly of the fish, I wept. Jonah prayed, **“When my life was fainting away, I remembered the LORD, and my prayer came to You, into Your holy temple”** (Jonah 2:7). That was me. God revealed to me that I had made music my idol, my object of worship. I was pursuing the gift more than the gift-Giver. And just like Jonah, when I surrendered, the Lord delivered me.

Jonah ends his prayer with the words: **“Salvation belongs to the LORD!”** (Jonah 2:9). The fish spit him out, and then we read: **“Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time”** (Jonah 3:1). God, in mercy, gave Jonah another chance.

That’s what God did for me. After breaking my idol, He gave me a second chance, and not first as a worship leader, but as a student pastor, helping me learn to teach the Word to shepherd people. For six years, music took a back seat and then, in His perfect timing, God called me into full-time worship ministry, but this time not to serve music, but to serve Him.

Friends, Jonah’s story and mine share the same truth: when we run, whether away from God or ahead of Him, He is merciful. He breaks us, restores us, and calls us again to His will and purpose.

So let me ask you, is there something, perhaps even a good thing, that has become your idol? Is there a place you’re running on your own instead of being sent by the Lord? Consider Jonah’s words again, **“Salvation belongs to the LORD.”** Our God is the God of second chances.

# GOD OF SECOND CHANCES

## DEVOTION 6 - PASTOR GARY WRIGHT

***“Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, ‘Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you.’”***

Jonah 3:1-2

After graduating high school, I went to a trade school where I learned to be a diesel mechanic. One of my first jobs as a diesel mechanic was at a trucking company in Detroit. The company hired me to get their trucks caught up on oil changes. One night, after I drained the engine oil from one of the trucks, I tightened the drain plug on the oil pan finger-tight, but forgot to go back and tighten it down completely with a wrench. I proceeded to fill the engine with oil, thinking all was good. The next day, the truck went on the road and the drain plug fell out and all the oil drained out of the truck. The engine was destroyed! When my employer shared with me what had happened, I thought for sure I would be fired. To my surprise, the company kept me on and gave me a second chance, even though I had made such a huge, and very costly, mistake.

Jonah had also made a huge mistake. God had called Jonah to go and preach in Nineveh, but instead Jonah ran from God and ended up in the belly of a great fish. Jonah's situation seemed hopeless. When we fail the Lord, our situation can seem hopeless too. It sometimes might even feel as if we cannot go on. Nothing could be further from the truth. God is the God of second chances.

When it comes to second chances, there are a few things we can learn from Jonah.

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First: Pray! The first thing Jonah did when he failed God and it seemed hopeless was to ask the Lord for help. ***“I called out to the Lord, out of my distress”*** (Jonah 2:2). Jonah knew his only hope was to cry out to God. Jonah still trusted God, even though he had totally failed Him.

Second: Remember you are not alone! God never left Jonah. Jonah 2:2 continues, ***“You heard my voice.”*** As rebellious as Jonah was, God was still there and listening.

Third: Repent! The last thing I want you to see is that Jonah repented. ***“What I have vowed I will pay”*** (Jonah 2:9). Jonah understood that he had sinned and he was willing to turn back to God and do what God had called him to do. After Jonah repented, God spoke to the fish and the fish vomited Jonah onto dry land. God then repeated His call to Jonah a second time. God gave Jonah a second chance.

I was surprised when my employer gave me a second chance after I had made such a huge mistake. I believe Jonah was probably surprised when God gave him a second chance as well. God is the God of second chances. When we belong to Him, He will never leave us. We can cry out to God when we fail Him. When we let Him know we have messed up, ask for forgiveness, and turn from our sin back to Him, God will forgive and give us another chance.

***“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*** 1 John 1:9

## JONAH'S GOOD EXAMPLE



LESSON FOUR

JONAH 3

**THE POWER OF  
GOD'S MESSAGE**

**PASTOR ROY TOWNSEND**

In my life, I have always been so appreciative of a second chance. Whether it be a second chance to accomplish something or to get better at something, I really appreciate a second chance to try something. I am probably more appreciative if I actually get better at something.

1. Can you share about a time when you appreciated a second chance?

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2. Are there times when you didn't appreciate a second chance? Please explain.

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From the biblical account of Jonah, we can see that God is the God of second chances. We will pick up in Jonah 3:1-2: ***"Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying, 'Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you.'"***

3. What can be learned about Jonah getting a second chance to obey God and tell the people of Nineveh of their wicked ways?

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Jonah 3:3-4 reads, ***"So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days' journey in breadth. Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's journey. And he called out, 'Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!'"*** We can

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see here that Jonah had a powerful message with a large threat of judgment. Jonah was recommissioned by God to speak God's Word to the people of Nineveh. We can see that Jonah finally obeys his instructions from God to deliver the message. We have to realize that there is immense supernatural power in God's Word to us. We have learned that God spared Jonah despite his disobedience to the powerful message of God, but what will happen to the people of Nineveh?

4. Do you believe that you would hesitate with a divine message from God because you disliked some groups of people or you knew that they disliked you?

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Now in Jonah 3:5 we can see a different reaction to God's message, ***"And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them."*** What a different reaction than what was expected! Jonah was obedient in delivering the message, but we wouldn't think that the people would react in this way. They didn't worship the God of the Bible, but they believed God's message and immediately took action by calling for a fast and putting on sackcloth, which is putting on coarse, rough clothing to symbolize remorse, distress, and repentance.

5. Why do you think they believed the message so quickly?

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Sometimes we need to be reminded of the powerful message in God's Word, and we are to be faithful to deliver that message. It isn't our responsibility to make them believe, but simply to deliver. Sometimes, I miss this aspect of the message that we have been

given to share with others, and I quickly talk myself out of it. I need to remember that God is in charge and can call anyone to Himself.

Jonah 3:6-9 reads, ***"The word reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. And he issued a proclamation and published through Nineveh, 'By the decree of the king and his nobles: Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything. Let them not feed or drink water, but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and let them call out mightily to God. Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish.'"*** The message was believed by the people, and the king responded in belief also. He issues an order to participate in these acts and symbols of repentance.

6. Do you believe that the king's response underscores the true repentance of Nineveh?

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7. How would our society respond to a serious message from God?

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Repentance for the combined actions of the Ninevites is a beautiful response to the message. This is highly contrasted by Jonah's initial response, which was to run away from God's message and call. God's grace and compassion on the wicked and disobedient are powerful messages from this section of Scripture.

In Jonah 3:10, we read, ***"When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he***

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*had said he would do to them, and he did not do it.*" Wow! God spares the people because of their repentance. What an incredible outcome that is recorded in Scripture. However, we have to be careful here not to miss the message.

- 8. Is there a powerful message from God about how to avoid disaster? Why or why not?

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- 9. Does God's judgment mean He won't forgive? Does God's forgiveness mean He won't judge?

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Here, the powerful message of God is about the importance of repentance, no matter what the outcome. That repentance is a turning from our evil ways to what God has called us towards, and in this case, **"God relented of the disaster."**

- 10. How should we respond when our repentance doesn't negate the consequences of our actions?

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# HAPPY ACCIDENTS

## DEVOTION 1 - KARSEN THEEDE

Everyone who has ever set foot on this earth has made a mistake, broken a rule, or done the wrong thing (Jesus being the one exception). It's a common human experience, no matter where you are from, we have all messed up. Because of this, many famous quotes have come from it: "Anyone who has never made a mistake has never tried anything new" (Albert Einstein). "To make mistakes is human; to stumble is commonplace; to be able to laugh at yourself is maturity" (William Arthur Ward). And my personal favorite, "We don't make mistakes, just happy little accidents" (Bob Ross). Our own mistakes can have varying levels of impact or importance in our lives and our plans, but do our mistakes have the same effect on God's plans?

Right now, we are going through the book of Jonah, and this week we are focusing specifically on Chapter 3. ***"Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, 'Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you.' So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days' journey in breadth. Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's journey. And he called out, 'Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!' And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them."*** Jonah 3:1–5

In this passage, Jonah has been freshly spat out of the big fish after three days and three nights, and God comes back to him with the same mission he was tasked with before the fish came along.

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Jonah was to go to Nineveh to warn them of the destruction coming because of their sin. This time, Jonah does what He was told to do. He travels to Nineveh and shares the words God gave him. When Jonah does this, the city turns from their wicked ways and believes in God. The city is saved from the destruction they faced because they turned from the great sin they were living in. Even though Jonah ran from God and His plan for him, he was still used for God's glory. God didn't choose another man to fill in the role or give up on the city of Nineveh because Jonah didn't listen from the beginning. While our mistakes may change the path we take, they do not stop God's ability to work through us or accomplish His greater plan. God can and will use any situation for His glory, no matter how dire, because I know for a fact that being in the belly of the fish felt like a dire situation.

We are often in the same shoes as Nineveh as well. I have had times in my life that were filled with sin, and very few of my actions were good. Just like with the city of Nineveh, God sends people and situations into the lives of sinners, never giving up on them because of their sins. He pursues us even in our rebellion against Him.

# DON'T BE A JONAH!

## DEVOTION 2 - SIERRA COMBS

A few years ago while sitting down to dinner with my family, we went around the table and discussed which person from the Bible we most identified with. As soon as the question was asked, I knew my answer. In fact, it was something that had smacked me in the face as a middle schooler at winter camp, when my youth pastor spoke about him. As a lifelong church kid who went to dozens of camps and heard hundreds of middle and high school sermons, I really only remember this one, because he was me. Jonah.

It is slightly embarrassing to admit, because while Jonah is relatable, it is not really ever for positive reasons. This is the guy who ran from God, who argued and complained, and who sulked when things didn't go his way. As much as I hate to admit it, I saw myself in him then, and I can still sometimes see it now. I know what it is like to hear God's call and hesitate or flat-out disobey, or to want to avoid the hard assignments. Worst of all, I know what it is like to think, "They don't deserve it," and then grumble when God's mercy doesn't fit into my idea of fairness. I walked away from that middle school winter camp with a heavy dose of conviction and the internal pep-talk telling myself, "Don't be a Jonah." It has stayed with me ever since. The best part of Jonah's story, and mine too, is that God's power isn't limited by our weaknesses and failures. Even when Jonah's heart wasn't right, God's message still broke through, and an entire city was transformed.

If you have your Bible with you, I encourage you to read Jonah chapter 3. After his detour in the belly of the fish, Jonah finally obeys. He goes to the violent and godless city of Nineveh and delivers the

bare minimum of a sermon. ***“Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's journey. And he called out, 'Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!’”*** (Jonah 3:4). That was it! That was the sermon, and yet, the impossible happens. The entire city repented, from the common people all the way up to the king himself.

Jonah 3:6-9 tells us that ***“The word reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. And he issued a proclamation and published through Nineveh, 'By the decree of the king and his nobles: Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything. Let them not feed or drink water, but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and let them call out mightily to God. Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish.’”*** Look back to verse four and those eight words, and I think you will agree that it was not Jonah's passion, eloquence, or love for the Ninevites that led them to repentance. He was just the mouthpiece. Ultimately, it was God's Word that pierced through hardened hearts and reached the ones whom Jonah had deemed unreachable and undeserving. The power was in God's message.

What an encouraging thing it is to know that God's Word doesn't depend on our perfection, and the power to change hearts is His alone! Jonah's heart was half in it at best, but God's Word carried full power and even through a reluctant and grumpy prophet, God brought revival. Like Jonah, we don't have to be flawless messengers. God isn't waiting for us to have the perfect words, the perfect attitude, or the perfect faith before He can use us. He simply asks us to be faithful and obey. When we share His truth to our friends, family, or even someone who seems totally uninterested, we can trust that His Word will carry its own weight. When God speaks, walls fall! He delights to use even the most reluctant of messengers, people like Jonah, and people like me.

# TRUST THE POWER

## DEVOTION 3 - PASTOR PHILIP PIASECKI

Kids naturally don't do what you tell them to do. If only they could come out of the womb completely obedient, that would be the dream! Our youngest daughter, Eden, can just tell when we're asking her to do something, and naturally, she knows how to quickly do the opposite. My older two kids caught onto this quickly and started using it to their advantage. If they want a hug from her they'll say, "Eden, don't give me a hug, don't you do it," and boom, they get their hug from her. It was pretty clever, but we had to quickly stop the kids from doing this; we didn't want to create even more parenting problems for ourselves down the line.

The story of Jonah revolves around the questions, "Will Jonah listen?" and "Will the Ninevites listen?" Just like a child, we see Jonah doing the opposite of what God commands him. After Jonah tries to run from what God was telling him to do, he finally relents and preaches what I consider to be the worst sermon ever. God tells Jonah to preach repentance to the Ninevites, and the message he delivers is, **"Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown"** (Jonah 3:4). He doesn't offer them any solutions or action steps, he simply tells them that in forty days they will be overthrown. Yet, the response from the Ninevites is nothing short of a miracle.

***"And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them...But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and let them call out mightily to God. Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish."*** Jonah 3:5, 8-9

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They believe God, repent from their evil ways, and God miraculously (through the worst sermon ever) spares their lives. Naturally, we can believe that people are not going to listen to us when we share the Gospel with them. We can treat them like our kids, expecting them to do the opposite, or we can trust in the power of the Word of God and share the message of hope with those around us. Jonah begrudgingly shared God's message and God used it in a mighty way. This story always encourages me that God can use even me and my incoherent attempts at sharing the Gospel to save people. Like Jonah, God has commanded us to share our faith. Trust that through the power of the Holy Spirit working inside of you, God will use your words to impact the lives of those around you. There is power in the Word of God, trust it!

***“For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”*** Hebrews 4:12

# VESSELS OF GOD'S POWER

## DEVOTION 4 - KATIE PETTIBONE

***“Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's journey. And he called out, ‘Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!’ And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them. When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that He had said He would do to them, and He did not do it.”*** Jonah 3:4-5, 10

As we move further into the book of Jonah, we see the power that is within God's message by witnessing how quickly Nineveh repented of their ways and turned to God. God has the power to transform a whole city's heart into one that glorifies His will. We see this when Jonah, finally, makes his way into the city God has called him to be. Now that Jonah is listening to God's will, God is able to use him to save the people of Nineveh.

While reading Jonah, it is easy to look at him and say, “Man, what are you doing? God is calling you to save a whole city! Why are you running?” But I think that we forget that even though Jonah was a prophet, he was also a human—just like you and me. You see, Jonah faced this reality that God was calling him into a scary situation and he let his fear overcome him. I cannot tell you how many times I have done the same thing, where I was afraid to do the will of the Lord, fully knowing how powerful it is, and ultimately it pushed me away from doing the good work He has called all His followers to do.

I think we can all be reminded by this story that God's plans are

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accomplished by His power and His control alone. We are the vessels He uses for His glory to get things done, but ultimately, transformation happens through God's power alone. We are the blessed creations that get to experience His amazing power firsthand. In times that bring us fear to do His will, such as sharing the Gospel or even praying in public, we need to look to the One who can bring us through it, instead of running away from it.

Let's take a second and think of a butterfly. We all should know that a butterfly doesn't start out with beautiful wings and being able to fly. A butterfly is born as a caterpillar, which lives almost in a totally different way than the butterfly. Instead of flying, it crawls everywhere through dirt, mud, and other obstacles, climbing over everything it sees, which is a lot of work. This happens until one day, a change comes. The cocooning process begins and the caterpillar is most likely surprised by this. Have you ever wondered if the caterpillar becomes frightened of this? Does it get warned throughout its whole life that the change happens, or does it just happen? It's not like it can force it to stop, because the change is inevitable. But without this changing process, the butterfly would never exist. It would never be able to fly or show the world its beautiful wings. It is no longer constantly covered in dirt from everything it crawls through; now it can fly over any obstacle it faces.

We are a lot like the caterpillar. We have this opportunity to become like the butterfly, but instead of wings, we gain the Holy Spirit. Instead of showing everyone our new colors, we are showing them Christ's love and resurrection. We are made new in Christ when we are born again, and we have to live differently in this world and that desire first comes from the heart. What are we letting others see within us, so that they may be able to see His good plans? It is not from our power alone, it is only through God's that this is able to be done. ***"In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."*** Matthew 5:16

Jonah's story is a reminder of just how powerful God is and how He can use us for His greater glory, such as helping bring entire cities to turn to Him and repent of their old ways. The same power that's within this story also lives within you if you have accepted Him as your Lord and Savior. Let your wings fly!

I encourage you to take this time to pray and ask the Lord for boldness in spreading His news. Think of people in your life who may be on the same path as Nineveh was before Jonah warned them. Have you shared Christ with them? Pray and ask the Lord to help you rely on His Holy Spirit to move within you that you may ultimately be used to bring others to Him!

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# A WICKED KING THAT CHOSE REPENTANCE

## DEVOTION 5 - JOSHUA PETERSON

***"The word reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. And he issued a proclamation and published through Nineveh, 'By the decree of the king and his nobles: Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything. Let them not feed or drink water, but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and let them call out mightily to God. Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands.'" Jonah 3:6-8***

The more I run to the Lord, the more my sin is revealed in my life. As I become a brighter light for His kingdom, the more darkness in my life sticks out like a sore thumb. Even though I work at the church and am the student director at our Holly location, I am so broken. Three years ago, I moved from Grand Rapids to Colorado to work at a Christian camp called Sky Ranch and to do a program called the Legacy Fellowship. This program is aimed for college graduates and is designed for spiritual growth. Each year, there are around fifteen college graduates in this program. Everyone in this program is far from home for a year. The people you live with are the same people you work with, and are the same people you hang out with. You don't have any other options for friends because you are all stuck together on a mountain away from home. The nearest Walmart was roughly an hour and forty minutes away. This remote and close-knit environment revealed my sin all the more.

The Ninevites, just like myself, are sinners. They were part of the Assyrian empire and were known to be very violent, carrying out

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fleshly desires. They would even cut off the noses and ears of the prisoners and do other terrible acts to strike fear into surrounding nations and enemies.

However, after Jonah shared God's message, even while the Ninevites lived in wickedness, they immediately repented from their sin and turned to God. The king of Nineveh himself immediately removed his robe, put on sackcloth, and sat in ashes. Then he called the rest of Nineveh to do the same. All of Nineveh recognized their sin and turned to God. Then, in Jonah 3:10, God chooses not to destroy Nineveh because of their repentance.

God used Jonah to reveal Nineveh's sin, just like He used people in my life while I lived in Colorado to reveal my sin. As followers of Christ, are you calling out brothers and sisters in their sin? How are you responding to brothers and sisters in Christ when they call out your sin? Are you repenting like the Ninevites, or are you continuing to live in accordance with your flesh?

# GOD'S MESSAGE

## DEVOTION 6 - ELIJAH EDWARDS

What is news that you've heard, or a message someone gave you that made you react quickly? For some of us, it might be good news where we rejoice, bad news where we go into panic and dismay, or maybe something as simple as running to the table because we were told dinner is ready. Whatever it may be, our reaction depends on the news or message that is given. As we go through the book of Jonah, we reach the third chapter where Nineveh was about to receive a message themselves.

Read Jonah 3:1-3. First and foremost, Jonah had just been vomited out of a giant fish and the first thing that God tells him is to again go and complete his task and give the message to the Ninevites.

After reading all of Jonah and getting to this chapter, how important is this message that God has for the people of Nineveh? This message was very important to God because not only did He rescue Jonah for it to be delivered, but God also caused the fish to swallow Jonah to turn him around for the message to be delivered. I want us to mull that over for a bit as we continue.

Read Jonah 3:4-5. What was Nineveh's the immediate reaction? Nineveh believed! The entire city believed. We read that ***"the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them"*** (Jonah 3:5).

Now, read Jonah 3:6-10. For me, this is the most powerful moment of this chapter. The King of Nineveh, instead of pushing his own

## GREATER THAN JONAH

power, bowed to the awesome power of God and turned away from evil. This was an important message for Jonah to deliver. God was going to wipe out and destroy Nineveh for their evil, but instead, He sent them a message through Jonah of how to turn away from that destruction. When Nineveh heard it, they repented and turned to God. The power of God's message is life-changing and life-bringing.

Romans 6:23 tell us that ***“the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*** How does this verse relate to the message God sent through Jonah? Each and every one of us have been given this same message. Our sinful and evil heart makes us deserve death and eternal separation from God. God has every right to wipe us out. Yet, through the good news and message of Jesus, the life-changing and life-bringing power of God saves us from destruction.

I leave us with one last question. What is your reaction to the message God brings through Romans 6:23? When we hear the power of God's message, how do we react? Like Nineveh, repenting and believing? Look at the power that God's message had over Nineveh and let us examine our own life and how we react to that same message.





LESSON FIVE

JONAH 4

PLANTS  
VS. PEOPLE

PASTOR NOBLE BAIRD

Anger is a truly complex and overwhelming emotion to experience. This is an emotion that no one needs to be taught or shown to understand. As humans, because of the fall and brokenness of our world due to sin, anger is an emotion that is simply ingrained in us from birth. Whether it is a toddler who was not allowed to watch their favorite show for the fifth time in a day, an employee who was overlooked for a promotion for their peer who they believe is “unqualified,” or you getting cut off during the crazy Michigan construction; we all experience anger.

1. What was a time in your life that you allowed anger to overcome you?

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2. Was the outcome good or bad?

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In Jonah chapter 4, we come to the end of this truly incredible and special story. From an attempted runaway, to being thrown overboard a ship, being swallowed by a big fish, taking a trip underwater inside the fish, to then having the opportunity to preach repentance to an entire city; Jonah is truly an epic story! However, in chapter 4, we see a glimpse into the brokenness of even one of the Lord’s prophets. I don’t say this as a pass or excuse to anger or sin. I say this first, as a reminder to never put our fellow brothers or sisters in Christ on a pedestal. None of us are perfect, we all mess up, fall short, and continue to sin. That’s the beauty of the Cross and the continual need for the active work of the Spirit to sanctify us and make us more like Christ! Secondly, as we will see as we unpack chapter 4 together, we must remind ourselves to view our world through the eyes of the Lord, not ourselves.

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As we read from the end of Jonah 3:10–4:1, ***“When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it. But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry.”*** The people of Nineveh were truly on a one-way path to ultimate destruction. Yet, Jonah was called to take repentance to these people—something that he truly had no desire to do. The people heard the message, they truly repented of their sins and the Lord relented His righteous judgment upon them. This, however, was not what Jonah wanted and therefore stirred up this emotion of anger within him.

3. Have you ever been angry with God?

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4. What were the circumstances and how did you react?

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Continuing in Jonah 4:2-4 we read, ***“And he prayed to the LORD and said, ‘O LORD, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster. Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.’ And the LORD said, ‘Do you do well to be angry?’”*** Did you catch what Jonah did in light of the anger he was experiencing? He prayed to the Lord. Jonah’s response to his call from the Lord, and his response to Nineveh’s repentance all stemmed from selfish disobedience; however, this he did right. His response to his anger and frustration was to simply talk to the Lord. I love this! If you get nothing else from this passage and this study guide, take this challenge. During your moments and

maybe even seasons of anger, frustration, selfishness, take those thoughts and feelings before the Lord and talk it out with Him.

The Lord responds to Jonah's anger and desire to, honestly, die, by asking him a simple question to try and refocus his heart and mind, ***“Do you do well to be angry?”*** (Jonah 4:4). From here, I believe that Jonah may have found himself at a place where he was convicted by the Lord's question and realized He needed to take a step back to evaluate his response. Some argue that he was simply sitting to wait and see if the people of Nineveh would fall back into sin and the Lord would then unleash His judgment. However, I view his time sitting outside the city as a time of contemplation. Jonah 4:5-8 reads, ***“Jonah went out of the city and sat to the east of the city and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, till he should see what would become of the city. Now the LORD God appointed a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be a shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort. So Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the plant. But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant, so that it withered. When the sun rose, God appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint. And he asked that he might die and said, ‘It is better for me to die than to live.’”***

5. How often have you taken your emotions and feelings of anger, frustration, and disappointment, and prayerfully had an honest conversation with the Lord?

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6. What was the outcome of those prayers and times with the Lord?

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GREATER THAN JONAH

- 7. When was the last time you took some time to honestly take a step back and refocus your heart and mind on Christ?

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These verses in Jonah 4:5-8 are filled with yet another miracle. The Lord literally made a plant spring up to maturity in a matter of moments, maybe a few hours. Regardless of the time, it grew up to maturity in time for Jonah to have relief for the time he was sitting outside in the heat with the sun beaming down on him. Yet, the next day it was eaten and destroyed by a worm. Now, if you have not seen the VeggieTales version of Jonah, I want you to stop what you are doing and go enjoy *"The Pirates Who Don't Do Anything"* In that video, the worm is a silly, fun character. However, in the Scriptures, this worm is used to further the Lord's point to Jonah that He is the Author and Creator of ALL things. It is solely the Lord who can create and solely Him who can bring ultimate and righteous judgment. Sadly, Jonah again finds himself at a point of selfishness and pity for his needs as he has lost shade and relief from the heat, crying out to simply die again. It is important to note that this truly is not a statement of hyperbole from Jonah. His anger and emotional self-pity have driven him to a point of desire for death to seek relief from his disappointment and anger at the Lord's response to the grace given to the people of Nineveh.

- 8. When was a time in your life that you experienced the grace of the Lord?

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- 9. Do you desire God's righteous judgment over your life for your sin and disobedience?

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This book ends with the following verse in Jonah 4:9-11, ***“But God said to Jonah, ‘Do you do well to be angry for the plant?’ And he said, ‘Yes, I do well to be angry, angry enough to die.’ And the LORD said, ‘You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night. And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?’”***

The Lord again questions Jonah asking him, ***“Do you do well to be angry for the plant?”*** Again, the Lord is trying to convict Jonah's heart and anger to understand the bigger picture at hand. The Lord then puts Jonah's whole mission in front of him with a final question. He uses the creation and death of the plant that He created in contrast to the thousands of Ninivies He also created. The people were living in sin and disobedience, yes, but they were still His creation. God asks Jonah a simple question of which deserves to have pity and mercy, the plant or the people?

We serve a just and righteous God, who created all living things in our world and created us male and female in His image. Jonah was given an incredible mission and calling. The call to share the ultimate grace of the Lord and call a city to repentance is simply an amazing calling. Yes, they were enemies of the people of Israel, but this was a calling and directive from the Lord to Jonah. When the Lord calls, He will lead us in our obedience! So, I want to challenge you the next time we become angry or frustrated with a situation or person, to remember the Lord's question, ***“Do you do well to be angry?”*** May we truly take a step back from the situation, refocus our hearts and minds on the Lord, then prayerfully bring that anger and those emotions before Him. Ask for His will, His purpose, and be obedient to His leading.





GREATER THAN JONAH

# STEADFAST MERCY

## DEVOTION 1 - PASTOR PATRICK BICKNELL

I think we can all imagine a time in our lives when we have been hurt by someone. Whether that person was a close friend, colleague, or even a random stranger, when we get hurt it is very natural to have a disdain for that person. We might not go as far as saying we want terrible things to happen to that person, but at best, we do not want to see something good happen to them. We probably want to distance ourselves and cut off communication with them so that we do not get hurt again. I know that is true for me.

I remember one time a very close friend of mine did something behind my back that hurt very much. I did not talk to them for years until the Lord put it on my heart to reach out to that person, tell them I had forgiven them, and it helped to put the situation behind me. I share that because I think within this context, understanding how sometimes it is hard to love those we do not get along with will help us to understand the story that is happening in Jonah chapter four.

I want to focus on Jonah's response to the Ninevites' repentance at the beginning of the chapter. He says, ***“O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster”*** (Jonah 4:2).

It is very easy to criticize Jonah here and think, “How could this man feel that way? After all, are not those people the ones who need to hear about God's mercy too?” That is absolutely true, but instead of criticizing Jonah, I think we need to try and look at ourselves. Does

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our life reflect this attitude? Specifically, think about people you do not get along with. Odds are, the people that will come to your mind will be the ones who have hurt you before. Do you desire for those people to experience the mercies of God?

I think we need to learn this from Jonah's story. We should have a desire for all people to experience the grace and mercy of God, especially those with whom we do not get along. God views all people the same; they are sinners who need a Savior. He has provided that salvation and He has charged us with going into the world and sharing this news. Regardless of what our relationship to those people might be, we need to pray for them and desire that God would change their life with His abundant steadfast love and mercy.

# ALIGN WITH GOD'S HEART

## DEVOTION 2 - JILL OSMON

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

As we finish up the book of Jonah, it is interesting that Jonah's story doesn't end with the repentance of Nineveh; it ends with Jonah's anger. Instead of rejoicing over lives saved, Jonah sulked under a plant, upset that God didn't do what he thought should happen.

Far more often than I'd like to admit, I catch myself wrestling with the ways God shows mercy to people I don't think deserve it. It feels uncomfortable to admit, but if we're honest, most of us struggle with this in one way or another. We've all heard the question, "Why do bad things happen to good people?" Yet, if we dig deeper, we're probably more troubled by the opposite: "Why do good things happen to people we consider bad or undeserving?" Both questions clash with what we know Scripture teaches about God's justice and mercy, but they reveal how easily our flesh resists God's grace when it doesn't fit our expectations.

In Jonah 4, we see a mirror reflecting our own hearts. How often do we want mercy for ourselves but justice for others? How often do we become frustrated when God's plan doesn't match our expectations? Jonah knew God's character—gracious, compassionate, slow to anger, rich in love—but he didn't want those qualities extended to his enemies.

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God uses a plant, a worm, and the scorching sun to teach Jonah that His concern is not just for “good” people, but even for the wicked Ninevites. Jonah’s heart needed to align with God’s heart. Ours does too. Remember King David’s prayer, **“Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me”** (Psalm 51:10).

# LOST SIGHT

## DEVOTION 3 - MARC-E DELCAMP

Growing up, I was an extremely competitive person. Honestly, I still hate losing, but when I was younger, my competitiveness went beyond just trying my best. I cared more about winning than about the people I was competing with. I wanted victory at any cost, and if I lost, I would get bitter and angry. In those moments, I lost sight of the whole reason I was playing in the first place.

Jonah does something similar in our passage. In Jonah 4:1-4, we read, ***“But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. And he prayed to the Lord and said, ‘O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster. Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.’ And the Lord said, ‘Do you do well to be angry?’”***

Jonah is upset, not because something bad has happened, but because something good has happened. Nineveh repented, and God spared them. Instead of rejoicing, Jonah complains. He even admits in verse two that this is why he tried to flee in the first place. He knew God would show mercy.

How often do we lose sight of our purpose, even while doing the work of the Lord? Jonah preached repentance to Nineveh. He was doing God's work, but his heart was far from God's heart. Jonah had lost sight of what it was all about.

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In verses five through eleven, God drives this lesson home. ***“Jonah went out of the city and sat to the east of the city and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, till he should see what would become of the city. Now the Lord God appointed a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be a shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort. So Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the plant. But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant, so that it withered. When the sun rose, God appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint. And he asked that he might die and said, ‘It is better for me to die than to live.’ But God said to Jonah, ‘Do you do well to be angry for the plant?’ And he said, ‘Yes, I do well to be angry, angry enough to die.’ And the Lord said, ‘You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night. And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?’”***

God is showing Jonah that the real point of life is not victory, shade, or comfort, it's God Himself. Scripture confirms this truth:

- ***“So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”*** 1 Corinthians 10:31
- ***“You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.”*** Psalm 16:11
- ***“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.”*** Philippians 4:4

Jonah rejoiced in a plant, but only for a moment. When it was gone, his joy was gone too. He missed the bigger reality. It was never about Nineveh's downfall, or even about the comfort of a little shade. It was always about God.

As you go through this week, take time to reflect on the goodness of God. Enjoy His presence, whether that's through prayer, reading Scripture, or simply pausing to thank Him. Be intentional. It's easy to lose sight of Him in the busyness of life, but setting aside these moments will help keep your heart focused on what truly matters.

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# DO YOU DO WELL TO BE ANGRY?

## DEVOTION 4 - CHRIS MONTVILLE

Have you ever had a passionate opinion about something, only to find out that you were actually wrong the whole time? If you are a sports fan, you might be thinking of a friend who says some ludicrous things about your favorite teams. I encourage you, rather, to think about your friendships, relationships, or marriage. I'm sure we have all had moments where we feel strongly about something and then, later on, have to accept the fact that we were wrong.

In chapter four of the book of Jonah, we see this playing out in real time. From the beginning of the book, Jonah is hesitant to go to Nineveh because he does not want to see the city repent. Nineveh was a political enemy of the nation of Israel, so naturally, Jonah had some pretty passionate opinions about the city and its people. God uses Jonah to lead people to repent from their evil ways anyway. Jonah is not happy about this, and storms off to wait and see how things will play out. He even prays, ***“O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster”*** (Jonah 4:2).

I absolutely love God's response to this prayer, ***“And the Lord said, ‘Do you do well to be angry?’”*** (Jonah 4:4). The NIV translates this, ***“Is it right for you to be angry?”*** That is a convicting question! It's very direct and to the point, and it's a question we must all ask ourselves any time we feel angry or passionate. Your emotions are not a bad thing; in fact, they're a key part of what it means to be made in the image of God. However, the Bible tells us that, ***“the***

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***heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?"*** (Jeremiah 17:9). Therefore, we must always ask the question, "Are we right to be angry?"

Righteous anger is a real thing; there are times it is valid and correct to be angry. However, there are plenty of times when our anger is not justified, and we are in the wrong. The great news about this is that God never gives up on us. God is interested in teaching us lessons to help us grow, and that's what He starts doing with Jonah near the end of chapter four.

In verses six through eight, God shows Jonah that He is really the One who is in full control of all things, and every blessing is ultimately through God's grace. God then asks Jonah some more convicting questions to help Jonah understand why He cares about the people in Nineveh in verses ten through twelve. The book, interestingly, ends without seeing Jonah's response to this learning experience. I believe the reason for that is because it is now your turn to look at yourself and ask: Am I right to be angry? And how will I respond if I am wrong?

# MORE THAN COMFORT: TRUSTING GOD'S PLAN

## DEVOTION 5 - ALYSSA FAIRSE

***“But God said to Jonah, ‘Do you do well to be angry for the plant?’ And he said, ‘Yes, I do well to be angry, angry enough to die.’ And the Lord said, ‘You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night. And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?’”*** Jonah 4:9-11

In the fall of my senior year of high school in 2012, I went to an Acquire the Fire worship conference at Michigan State University. From the stage, they talked about an internship in Texas called the Honor Academy. They described it as a one-year opportunity to focus fully on the Lord, grow as a leader, and be part of building His Kingdom. I remember walking out of that conference completely sure I'd never step foot in Texas. My exact thoughts were, “Texas is way too hot, too far from my family and friends, and I don't know a single person there. Ain't no way I'm going.” Months passed without even thinking about it again. Until suddenly, I found myself at the airport boarding a flight to Texas. That year turned out to be everything they said it would be and more. Through climbing mountains in Colorado, going on two-mile runs together every morning, working in a call center, sitting under the teaching of incredible speakers, and forming Christ-centered friendships, God used every piece of it to grow and shape me. Looking back, I couldn't be more thankful that He led me there.

Jonah's story reminds me of mine in some ways, but the ending is so different. God used Jonah in such a powerful way, an entire

## GREATER THAN JONAH

city turned back to Him! But instead of celebrating, Jonah grew bitter. He focused more on his personal comfort than on the fact that thousands of souls were saved. I love how God confronted him with the image of the plant, ***“You pity the plant for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night.”*** That verse always sticks with me because it shows how easy it is to value the temporary and forget about what matters most, people meeting the Lord and finding life in Him.

I also love this passage because it reminds me that God is ultimately in control. Jonah didn't provide that plant, God did! Just like He told Job, ***“Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?”*** (Job 38:4). God shows Jonah, and us, that He is the Creator, the Sustainer, and the Provider. Job 1:21 reminds us that, ***“The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.”*** He alone gives and takes away, and He knows what is best for His children. ***“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose”*** (Romans 8:28). My role is not to cling to plants, comforts, or temporary things, but to rejoice in His mercy and join Him in His mission ***“to seek and to save the lost”*** Luke 19:10).

I could have left Texas bitter and angry at the fact that I didn't want to go there in the first place, bitter that God sent me there, much like Jonah grew angry over Nineveh and the plant. But instead, I'm so thankful the Lord gave me eyes to see His mercy and goodness. I was able to rejoice in how fruitful that season was and recognize all the ways He moved through me and in me. Jonah's story reminds me that it's easy to focus on temporary discomforts instead of God's eternal purposes, but when we trust Him, we can see His hand at work even in challenging seasons. God's plans are always for our growth and for His glory, and when we align our hearts with His, we can celebrate His faithfulness rather than grumble at our circumstances.

Take a moment to consider the “plants” in your life, the temporary comforts, routines, or preferences that you may be clinging to. Are they keeping you from rejoicing in what God is doing through you or in the lives of others? How can you shift your focus from your own comfort to God’s eternal purposes? Ask God to give you eyes to see His mercy, even in challenging seasons, and a heart willing to trust His timing and plan.

## GREATER THAN JONAH

# WHAT DOES GOD VALUE?

## DEVOTION 6 - JOSH THAYER

If you've ever read Jonah's story, you know most of the spotlight falls on the big fish. But honestly, the real heart of the story isn't the fish, it's chapter four. This is where we see Jonah's heart, and it's not a pretty picture.

Jonah had preached to Nineveh, and to his surprise, they actually repented. God showed mercy. You'd think Jonah would be thrilled, right? Nope. He was angry, so angry that he even said he wanted to die (Jonah 4:3). Why? Because Jonah cared more about seeing Nineveh get what he thought they deserved than about seeing people experience God's mercy.

That's when God gives Jonah an object lesson. He appoints a plant to grow up and give Jonah shade. Jonah is very happy about the plant (Jonah 4:6). But the next day, God appoints a worm to destroy it, and Jonah is back to being angry—angry enough to want to die again.

Then God cuts to the point, ***“You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow...And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons?”*** (Jonah 4:10–11). Jonah's problem is the same problem we often wrestle with. He cared more about his own comfort (a temporary plant) than he did about people made in God's image.

It's a sobering question for us: Do we value what God values?

- Do we care more about our comfort, our plans, our stuff, our “plants,” than about people who are far from God?

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- Do we get more upset when something inconveniences us than when people around us don't know Jesus?

The truth is, we're all a little like Jonah. We get wrapped up in the temporary and forget about eternity, but God's heart is clear. He loves people, even the ones we might write off, even the ones we think don't "deserve" mercy.

The book of Jonah ends with a question, almost like God is leaving it open for us to answer. Will we align our hearts with His? Will we care more about people than plants?

Take inventory of what really grabs your heart. What gets you upset or excited? Ask God to shape your heart to care about what He cares about—people who need His mercy and grace. We are what God values. At the end of the day, plants fade, comfort fades, but people matter forever.





## OUR VISION

Matthew 28:19-20: ***“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”***

## REACH

At The River Church, you will often hear the phrase, “We don’t go to church, we are the Church.” We believe that as God’s people, our primary purpose and goal is to go out and make disciples of Jesus Christ. We encourage you to reach the world in your local communities.

## GATHER

The goal of weekend gatherings at The River Church is to glorify Christ in all we do! Whether it be through singing, giving, serving, or any of the variety of ways He has gifted us and called us together, Jesus is at the center of it all. We celebrate that when followers of Christ gather together in unity, it’s not only a refresher, it brings life-change!

## GROW

Our Growth Communities are designed to mirror the early church in Acts as having ***“all things in common.”*** They are smaller collections of believers who spend time together studying the Word, knowing and caring for one another relationally, and learning to increase their commitment to Christ by holding one another accountable.

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