

DAY ONE

The word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amittai: "Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me." But Jonah ran away from the Lord and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the Lord. - Jonah 1:1-3

GOD'S WILL VS MY WILL

God gave Jonah a simple command: go to Nineveh and preach to the Ninevites. But instead of heading toward Nineveh, Jonah headed in the opposite direction! To Jonah, this wasn't a simple command from God.

The Assyrians were Israel's enemy and Jonah didn't want to give the Ninevites the opportunity to repent and be forgiven. They were a wicked and violent people and Jonah wanted God to judge them and destroy the city.

Unfortunately, Jonah didn't understand what God was doing and tried to impose his own will. He thought he knew better than God. When he made the decision to flee to Tarshish, he was trying to flee from God and His will. (Note to self: Not an effective strategy!)

And lest we get too judgmental of Jonah, how often do we think that we can pick and choose the pieces of God's Word we want to obey? Do you ever try to hide from God by avoiding His Word (the Bible) or His people (the Church)? When God gives a command, our response should be to obey - even when we don't understand or think it's not fair or right. We should know and trust in God's perfect nature and will.

What is God calling you to do today?

DAY TWO

But Jonah had gone below deck, where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep. The captain went to him and said, "How can you sleep? Get up and call on your god! Maybe he will take notice of us so that we will not perish."

-Jonah 1:4-6

GOD IS ALWAYS IN CONTROL

When Jonah ran from God, God used the weather to try to get his attention. Unfortunately, Jonah's sin affected his life and those around him.

When the sailors saw the big storm that threatened to sink their ship, they began to cry out to their gods for help. The problem was that none of their gods could help them. It was God, the Creator of the Universe, the God of the Bible, Who hurled the wind and started the storm - and He was the only one able to stop it.

In the midst of all this chaos: the howling wind, the ship being tossed to and fro, the panicking crew throwing cargo overboard - Jonah slept. He was so far outside the will of God that he nearly missed the very message sent by God to bring him back.

Can you relate to Jonah's predicament? Maybe the sin in your life has affected the lives of others around you. Or perhaps you have been running from God and He has had to use an unexpected messenger (like the pagan captain with Jonah) to point you back to Him. In either case, praise God that He is in control not only of the weather, but also of every tiny detail of our lives.

DAY THREE

“Then the sailors said to each other, “Come, let us cast lots to find out who is responsible for this calamity.” They cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah. So they asked him, “Tell us, who is responsible for making all this trouble for us? What kind of work do you do? Where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?” He answered, “I am a Hebrew and I worship the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.”

This terrified them and they asked, “What have you done?” (They knew he was running away from the Lord, because he had already told them so.) The sea was getting rougher and rougher. So they asked him, “What should we do to you to make the sea calm down for us?” “Pick me up and throw me into the sea,” he replied, “and it will become calm. I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you.” -Jonah 1:7-12

STOP RUNNING FROM GOD

When confronted by the sailors, Jonah finally admitted that his sin was the cause of the storm. And not only that, but he testified to these pagan sailors about the Lord, “the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.”

Jonah knew without a doubt that God had sent the storm because of his disobedience, and he realized that there was no place left to run. It was time to stop running, so he proposed a solution: “Pick me up and throw me into the sea.”

And while this might seem like a noble action, remember that at this point Jonah assumed that he was choosing death rather than obedience. After all, drowning was all but guaranteed if thrown overboard during a raging storm. (And Nineveh still hadn't heard the message from the Lord.)

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Fortunately, the story doesn't end there. What Jonah was about to learn is that disobedience has consequences. God forgives our sins completely, but we still must deal with the consequences of our disobedience.

The reflection opportunity for us today is, in what area(s) of your life are you still running from God? We all have sin in our lives that is offensive to God and contrary to His Word. Ask God to reveal these areas to you.

It's time to stop running.

DAY FOUR

Instead, the men did their best to row back to land. But they could not, for the sea grew even wilder than before. Then they cried out to the Lord, "Please, Lord, do not let us die for taking this man's life. Do not hold us accountable for killing an innocent man, for you, Lord, have done as you pleased." Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm. At this the men greatly feared the Lord, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows to him. Now the Lord provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

- Jonah 1:13-17

GOD WILL REDEEM ALL THAT HE ALLOWS

Let's review where we are in Jonah's story: The ship is being torn apart by the storm. Jonah admitted it was his fault for disobeying God. The sailors tried their best to avoid throwing Jonah overboard to his (almost) certain death. Nothing was working.

It's easy to understand their despair in the midst of this chaotic situation. Throwing Jonah overboard was essentially murder, but they were also dangerously close to losing the ship and their own lives as well. That is not a decision anyone wants to make.

But God had other plans.

When all seems hopeless, God is still sovereign over all. The omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, eternal God Who spoke the world into existence is never not in control. He is never surprised. And He is able to bring good out of even the worst of circumstances.

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Let's go back to our passage.

Amid the hopelessness, God saved the crew. Not only did He save them, He used Jonah's disobedience to cause these pagan sailors to meet and worship the Lord. He also did not forget about Jonah. Instead of letting him die, God saved him as well and provided the means to bring Jonah back to obedience.

Even in our rebellion, God will accomplish His work. The reality is that we don't get to determine what God accomplishes – only where we fit in His plan. The question is, how available are you to the leading of the Holy Spirit today?

DAY FIVE

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

- Jonah 1:13-17

GOD ALWAYS HEARS OUR PRAYERS

Due to his disobedience, Jonah found himself in the belly of a big fish. Can you imagine what was going through his mind? Expecting to drown, he is swallowed by this ginormous fish and finds himself trapped in this cold, wet, dark (& smelly!) environment. With nowhere left to turn, Jonah cried out to the Lord.

It wasn't the storm that drove Jonah to pray - or even when the sailors reluctantly threw him overboard into the raging waters. In our pride, sometimes we wait until things are so bad that we literally run out of options and all we can do is pray.

And that's where God meets us.

God heard Jonah's prayer, just like He hears yours and mine.

This is an incredibly important point and bears repeating. God heard Jonah's cries despite the storm, in the belly of a fish in the middle of the sea - and He will hear your cries wherever you are. As Psalm 34:15 reminds us, *"The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are attentive to their cry."*

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Have you ever felt that God doesn't hear your prayers? Nothing could be further from the truth! He not only hears your cry, but Psalm 139:4 reminds us that He knows the words you are about to say even before they come out of your mouth.

God wants us to turn to Him, regardless of how long we've been running. And He wants us to come to Him with everything, whether big or small. What areas of your life are you holding back from God today?

DAY SIX

“You hurled me into the depths, into the very heart of the seas, and the currents swirled about me; all your waves and breakers swept over me. I said, ‘I have been banished from your sight; yet I will look again toward your holy temple.’”- Jonah 2:3-4

GOD IS ALWAYS NEAR

Despair engulfed Jonah as he found himself helpless in the raging sea, battered by the wind and crashing waves. He was desperate and wondered if God was still there. He needed help and had nobody to turn to but God.

Can you relate to that situation? Like Jonah, sometimes we can feel so isolated – so distraught – that we assume we are cut off from God’s sight. That perhaps God has even forsaken us. We forget that God is always near and hears us when we cry out for His help.

Always.

And that’s exactly what Jonah did. He cried out to the Lord.

Whenever you question whether God is near, look to scripture for encouragement. A few great examples are:

The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth. - Psalm 145:18

God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. - Psalm 46:1

God is always near and ready to help! Will you turn to Him today?

DAY SEVEN

"You hurled me into the depths, into the very heart of the seas, and the currents swirled about me; all your waves and breakers swept over me. I said, 'I have been banished from your sight; yet I will look again toward your holy temple.'"- Jonah 2:3-4

THANK GOD FOR THE PIT

Note how Jonah transitions from the hopelessness of his dire situation to God's glorious deliverance: *"But you, Lord my God, brought my life up from the pit."*

The spiritual parallels abound: God does for each of us what we are unable to do for ourselves. Despite our sin and rebellion, God paid the price to ransom us to Himself so that we could have everlasting life in His Holy presence. Romans 5:8 describes it this way: *"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."*

What a glorious statement!

But do not miss the practical application of Jonah's situation. Have you ever found yourself in a Pit? Perhaps you feel like you're there now. If so, this scripture is for you!

Be encouraged that despite everything you are going through; the Pit is beneficial if it gets you back into the will of God. Being in the belly of that fish changed Jonah's life, just as other experiences have changed and shaped your life too. Rick Warren said, "You never know God is all you need until God is all you have."

When you are in the deepest and darkest Pit, turn to God. He is always there. The answer may not be exactly the way we envisioned it (did somebody say Fish??!), but it will be according to His perfect will. And He, in a way we may not understand, will work out all things for our good and His glory. Thank God for the Pits!

DAY EIGHT

“Those who cling to worthless idols turn away from God’s love for them. But I, with shouts of grateful praise, will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed I will make good. I will say, ‘Salvation comes from the Lord.’” And the Lord commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.
- Jonah 2:8-10

DELIVERANCE THROUGH OBEDIENCE

Deliverance came to Jonah once he understood what it all was about: obedience. (*“what I have vowed I will make good”*) Obedience is such an easy concept to grasp, and yet it can be challenging to live out consistently. The reality is that we don’t need to understand God’s plans. We don’t even have to like them. And we certainly have no right to approve them. We only need to obey whatever God is asking us to do.

We see this theme throughout scripture. 1 Samuel 15:22 reminds us that to God, obedience is better than sacrifice. That might seem odd since a sacrifice usually involves personal cost. But the heart of the matter is exactly that - our hearts. While we can control what is sacrificed, obedience involves the complete surrendering of our will to the Lord, trusting that His will and ways are always best.

That is also what we see in Jonah’s example: God waited for Jonah to get right with Him and then (and only then) did God command the fish to spit him out on dry land.

Sometimes we desire for God to make the first move as if it’s some kind of test to see if He is faithful. But that’s not how God typically works. In most cases, we already know what God expects from us. We just struggle to do (obey) it.

In what area(s) of your life are you struggling today? Pray and ask the Lord to give you the strength to obey – even when you don’t feel like it. There’s deliverance to be found in obedience!

DAY NINE

Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time: "Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you." Jonah obeyed the word of the Lord and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very large city; it took three days to go through it.

- Jonah 3:1-3

THE GOD OF SECOND CHANCES

Déjà vu all over again!

Once again, God tells Jonah "go to Nineveh." It's important to note that Jonah still had to choose whether or not to obey God and go. The fish didn't just drop him off at Nineveh. Jonah was presented with a second opportunity to do the right thing - and this time, he went.

Jonah learned his lesson and didn't want to make the same mistake twice, so he arose and went straight to Nineveh. The ironic thing is that if he had responded this way the first time, he would have avoided all the pain and hardship he just endured!

Sometimes in life there are lessons that we must learn the hard way. It may not be the most ideal or efficient learning process, but it leaves an indelible mark that helps us grow and avoid similar mistakes in the future. (Eleanor Roosevelt discouraged this type of learning when she said, "Learn from the mistakes of others. You can't live long enough to make them all yourself!")

The beautiful part of this story is God's amazing grace. Our God is the God of second chances! His love never ceases. His mercies are new every morning. This means that every single day, you have a new opportunity to make the right choice. Regardless of how badly you messed up yesterday, God's grace is sufficient for you.

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Is there anything in your life you need to change?
Anything you know you are not doing right? Or perhaps,
like Jonah, something you are supposed to be doing but
aren't? Choose today to stop wasting time trying to do
things your way and instead claim the opportunity God
has given you to do what He's asking you to do.

DAY TEN

Jonah began by going a day's journey into the city, proclaiming, "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown." The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth. When Jonah's warning reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust. - Jonah 3:4-6

GOD DOESN'T WANT ANYONE TO PERISH

I imagine Jonah was shocked at how the people of Nineveh responded to God's message. This wicked people were longtime enemies of Israel and notoriously cruel and violent. But instead of reacting against the prophet's warning, the people of Nineveh repented. They fasted and mourned about their sin and their need for God's mercy and forgiveness.

This was contrary to what Jonah expected and what he wanted to happen. Because the Ninevites were so wicked, Jonah didn't think they deserved the opportunity to repent. And before we pass judgment on Jonah, let's pause for a little self-reflection first.

Think about someone whom you know who is far from God. Have you ever found yourself thinking that some people "deserve" salvation more than others? Or perhaps we even decide in advance those we deem more likely to respond to the gospel before we even consider sharing it?

Thankfully, God has a unique perspective.

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2 Peter 3:9 reminds us, *“The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”*

The reality is that every single person is a sinner in need of a Savior. As Christians, we are called to share Jesus with everybody – without prejudice. We need to remember that we are just the message bearers (Matthew 28:19) and that it’s the Holy Spirit’s job to convict the world concerning sin (John 16:8).

Do you struggle with sharing the Gospel with certain people? Pray that God would bring someone into your path this week to share the Gospel with – and then do it!

DAY ELEVEN

This is the proclamation he issued in Nineveh: "By the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let people or animals, herds or flocks, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. But let people and animals be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence."

- Jonah 3:7-8

CONFESSION LEADS TO REPENTANCE

The people of Nineveh took the crucial steps for repentance: they acknowledged their wrongdoings and turned from their evil ways. And they did it individually – everyone from the king and nobles down to the stable boys. That's the meaning of the word repent - to turn in the other direction and towards God.

Since Adam and Eve, human instinct leads us to cover our sins. Our conscience makes us ashamed of our sin and we don't want others to see it. We even think we can hide it from God. Yet, this instinct to hide our sin doesn't benefit us. It prevents us from being real about our condition before God. Proverbs 28:13 says, *"Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper, but the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy."*

Our confession should be appropriately specific. To say, "If I made any mistakes, I'm sorry" is not a confession of sin. Repentance involves being grieved at the sin that is offensive to our holy Lord – and then turning from it. If we are walking with God, we should be aware when our thoughts, actions or words fail to align with His Word.

What does confession look like in your life? Like the people of Nineveh, do you take your sin seriously? Don't hurry this part of your prayers. We need to repent of our sins if we want our relationship with God to grow and flourish.

DAY TWELVE

“Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish.”

When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.

- Jonah 3:9-10

GOD'S COMPASSION NEVER FAILS

Do you know where the word “compassion” comes from? Compassion is a Latin rooted word formed by two words: “con-” a prefix which means “with” and “passion,” from the verb “pateo,” which means “suffer.” Those two words together mean literally “to suffer alongside someone.” Another word that means the same is “sympathy.”

So, based purely on the meaning of the words, the only way to be compassionate or have sympathy for someone is by suffering together with that person – either literally or metaphorically.

Knowing the origin of the word helps us understand better why God's compassion never ends and why He extends it on every occasion and situation. And that's because He not only knows, but He also understands exactly what we are going through.

Hebrews 4:15 says, *“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.”* Doesn't this thought blow your mind? Do you realize that Jesus is not only with you when you suffer but that He completely understands what you are feeling - your doubts, your struggles, your pain?

How can you reflect God's compassion to those you meet this week?

DAY THIRTEEN

But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry. He prayed to the Lord, "Isn't this what I said, Lord, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. Now, Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live."

- Jonah 4:1-3

GOD IS GRACIOUS

Why do good things happen to bad people?

Have you ever thought of something similar to that? With all the pain and suffering in the world that affects us all, why do "bad" people sometimes get a pass?

There are several flaws to that line of thinking – not the least being that spiritually, "none of us are "good" (Romans 3:10-12). While we tend to compare ourselves to someone further away from God than us (why do we never compare ourselves to the Apostle Paul, I wonder?), the reality is that all of us are sinners who deserve eternal separation from the holy Lord. It is only by the grace of God through faith that any of us can be saved. We would do well to keep that in mind.

Back to our text: Normally a preacher is pleased when the people he is preaching to repent. But Jonah was not. Not only was he not pleased with the repentance of the people of Nineveh, but he was also furious about God's mercy toward them!

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In fact, the repentance and salvation of the people of Nineveh was so painful to Jonah that he claimed he would rather die than think about it. He even blamed God's mercy as the reason for his own disobedience in fleeing the first time.

The ironic thing is that Jonah himself called on the mercy of God not too long ago and he benefited from it when it was extended to him. But now he resents it when it is extended to others. What if God treated Jonah the way Jonah wanted God to treat the Ninevites?

How about you? Do you rely on God's mercy for yourself but deny it to others? Do you get angry when good things happen to people who, according to you, "don't deserve it"? Let's reflect God's mercy and love on every occasion and confess our sin of judging others if (when) we struggle with that.

Pray that God would help you see others as He does: sinners in need of a Savior.

DAY FOURTEEN

But the Lord replied, "Is it right for you to be angry?"
- Jonah 4:4

GOD ALONE IS RIGHTEOUS

Yesterday, we saw a very angry Jonah. He was angry to see the people of Nineveh receive God's mercy – something that had been extended not only to the people of Nineveh, but also to Jonah.

Imagine God, in the most loving way, asking Jonah, "Oh, Jonah, really? Do you get angry because I'm doing with the Ninevites the same that I did and still do for you? Do you really think you do well to be angry? It's Me who should be upset!"

"Is it right for you to be angry?" Allow this Scripture to come to mind when you speak in a loud, harsh voice. Or perhaps when you overreact to something that is not done to your expectations.

God is the only one who holds the right to be angry. He is the one who sees all our failures, our sins, our transgressions. And still, He decides to love us.

Romans 3:23 states that all of us have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. All of us. And yet, He still forgives us. Every single day. When was the last time you thanked God for His mercy? Are you aware of the many ways He is gracious to you? Let's start extending grace to others, too.

DAY FIFTEEN

Jonah had gone out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city. Then the Lord God provided a leafy plant and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the plant. But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the plant so that it withered. When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah's head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, and said, "It would be better for me to die than to live." But God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?" "It is," he said. "And I'm so angry I wish I were dead."" - Jonah 4:5-9

GOD IS ALWAYS AT WORK

I love how God demonstrates what longsuffering is like when He deals with Jonah and his anger. Instead of lecturing him (or smiting him!), He prepares yet another object lesson to help the prophet with his perspective.

For the second time in this short book, Jonah abandoned what God asked him to do and tried to sit this one out. He could have taught the Ninevites so much about the amazing love and grace of the one true God, but he had his own agenda. And by doing so he not only missed tremendous blessings, but he also set himself up for additional discipline from the Lord.

We find in Jonah's story a tangible example of the war between the flesh and the Holy Spirit that Paul describes in Romans 7. Warren Wiersbe describes Jonah like this:

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“One minute he’s preaching God’s Word, but the next minute he’s disobeying it and fleeing his post of duty. While inside the great fish, he prayed to be delivered, but now he asks the Lord to kill him. He called the city to repentance, but he wouldn’t repent himself! He was more concerned about creature comforts than he was about winning the lost.”

Do you feel a similar battle rage within your own life? Do you ever get so preoccupied with your own circumstances that you miss how God is working in and through situations? Or maybe, like Jonah, God is trying to use a particular situation to provoke you to spiritual maturity? Pray that God would open your eyes this week so that you can see others and situations as He does: opportunities for divine appointments!

DAY SIXTEEN

But the Lord said, “You have been concerned about this plant, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left—and also many animals?” - Jonah 4:10-11

GOD'S HEART FOR THE WORLD

Today's verses conclude the story of Jonah. In chapter 1, the prophet learned that you can't run away from God. In chapter 2, he learned that God forgives everyone who calls upon Him. In chapter 3, he saw a whole city humble itself before the Lord, repent and receive mercy. Now he learns that God has compassion for lost sinners like the Ninevites.

And like himself.

Jonah had pity on the plant God had provided when it perished, but he didn't have compassion for the people who would perish and live eternally apart from God. The book of Jonah reminds us that God is the God of all humanity and that Jesus died for every people in every nation.

If only there were more verses in the book of Jonah to see how the prophet responded to this final lesson. Did he repent? Did he finally come to terms with the fact that God loves and extends grace and mercy to everyone who turns to Him? From the text we do have, it seems that while Jonah may have been entrusted with God's words, he seemed to miss God's heart.

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Prayerfully ask God to help you live out His heart and priorities to a lost and watching world. Then your life will reflect God's compassion - showing mercy and loving well - even the people who have hurt or mistreated you. And that you would be obedient to whatever the Lord has called you to do.

What has the book of Jonah taught you? Start by doing that.