



# JONAH

THE TALE OF TWO STORIES.

A 25-DAY DEVOTIONAL STUDY OF THE BOOK OF JONAH

# PREFACE:

This devotion was written by Common Ground Church in Cape Town, South Africa in 2022.

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All Bible references are from the English Standard Version translation, accessed through [www.classic.biblegateway.com](http://www.classic.biblegateway.com)

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Commentaries leaned on for developing this resource include:

- Africa Bible Commentary: A One-Volume Commentary Written by 70 African Scholars (Zondervan, 2010).
- Michael Eaton, Jonah Preaching Series (2011).
- Timothy Keller, Rediscovering Jonah: The Secret of God's Mercy (Penguin Group, 2018).

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# INTRODUCTION TO JONAH:

Tim Keller, a theologian from New York, describes the book of Jonah as being divided into two symmetrical halves – the record of Jonah’s flight from God and then his mission to Nineveh. We see two stories being told through this account – Jonah’s story and God’s story. To miss seeing our own behaviour and character in Jonah would be to miss the important message of the book. God’s sovereign hand is over the world, and his message will reach where he sends it, yet he is also working on us as individuals. His mercy and grace is for all and we get to be partakers both in receiving it, and in taking the message of the gospel to others.

Beninese theologian, Augustin Cossi Ahoga, writes that Jonah’s main theme is the universal divine mercy of God for the world, both Jew and Gentile. Jonah encounters people who are racially and culturally very different to him. His behaviour is dismissive and unhelpful, while the unbelievers outperform him in acting more admirably than the prophet of God. One of the important messages of the book of Jonah is that God cares how we as believers relate to and treat people who are different to us.

# HOW TO USE THIS DEVOTIONAL:

In his book, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, John Mark Comer writes of how goals and lifestyles have to be entwined.

He notes that you may desire the physique of professional athletes, but unless you live the type of lifestyle and make the necessary sacrifices that they do, you will never realise that goal. Likewise, if we want to fully experience the life in Jesus that he promises us, we need to live the lifestyle of Jesus – we need to follow the Way of Jesus. We need to spend time with him, get to know him and choose to do things like he would do them.

In striving to practice the Way of Jesus, this devotional is divided into four components each day to help us learn to be like Jesus and live life the way he demonstrated:



## **BEING WITH JESUS/WORD**

through reading the daily scripture, and prayerfully reflecting on God's word



## **CONSIDER**

what the scripture teaches us about how God would have us live



## **REFLECT**

how this speaks to and applies to our life



## **WORSHIP/PRAYER**

responding to the day's devotion in prayer and worship





# WEEK ONE

JONAH 1:1-9





# JONAH 1:1-2



## BE WITH JESUS:

Before you read today's verses, still your heart and mind by speaking prayers of worship and thankfulness to God. Ask him to quieten your mind from distraction so you can hear what he would say to you today.

<sup>1</sup> Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, <sup>2</sup> "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me."



## CONSIDER:

Up to this point, God had primarily been working in the Israelites – his chosen people. Jonah had already been used by God to speak to the king of Samaria (2 Kings 14:23-29) to declare the purposes of God's favour for Israel. Now God tells Jonah to go to a Gentile city, renown for violence, to send his message of displeasure for their sins. This instruction was unprecedented. But God is the God of the nations, and this shouldn't have surprised a prophet of God, who would know, by heart, the promise God gave Abraham – that through the children of Abraham, God would use them to be a blessing to the entire world.

Yet this minor prophet, a nationalist, was deeply unhappy to be sent to people who were different from him. He was reluctant to leave his people and risk his reputation to follow God to Assyria; one of the most violent empires of ancient times, to prophesy doom.



## REFLECT:

*For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. (John 6:38)*

Jesus would one day come to display God's heart fully and completely. He left the comfort of heaven to suffer cruelty at the hands of the Roman Empire on our behalf.

- What do these scriptures suggest about God's heart for others?
- How do you think God has positioned you uniquely in your spheres to share his heart for others?



# JONAH 1:3



## BE WITH JESUS:

Before you read today's verses, still your heart and mind by speaking prayers of worship and thankfulness to God.

Ask him to quieten your mind from distraction so you can hear what he would say to you today.

*<sup>3</sup> 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.*



## CONSIDER:

Jonah didn't like the job God had given him. He despised the people of Nineveh and he was afraid of them. Later in the book, he admits that he expected God to show them mercy, hence his reticence to take God's message to them.

Jonah's bigger problem was with God. He doubted God's wisdom and justice, he doubted his goodness. If God was going to pardon the people who had done terrible things to his people, then could God really be good? Not only this, but Jonah's reputation would be ruined as his nation would probably respond in the same way Jonah had. His country would probably see him as betraying them.

So, Jonah did the opposite of what God commanded. He went west instead of east, travelled on sea rather than overland. He ran in the opposite direction of God's purposes and will.



## REFLECT:

- When have you found yourself avoiding or running from God, or deliberately disobeying him?
- Have you ever felt like God was asking too much from you?



**PRAY:**

Spend some time praying prayers of confession or repentance for those times when you have deliberately disobeyed, avoided or run from God.

*The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. (1 Timothy 1:15)*

Pray prayers of gratitude that Jesus in obedience to God, did the opposite of Jonah, and came to love his enemies, to save his enemies, to turn them into friends and brothers and sisters under his name. Think about your own personal journey of rescue and offer prayers of thanksgiving for God’s work in your life.

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# JONAH 1:4



## BE WITH JESUS:

Before you read today's verses, still your heart and mind by speaking prayers of worship and thankfulness to God.

Ask him to quieten your mind from distraction so you can hear what he would say to you today.

***4 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.***



## CONSIDER:

Tim Keller says that the dismaying news is that every act of disobedience to God has a storm attached to it. That is not to say that every difficulty that happens to us is punishment for some particular sin, but that every sin will bring difficulty.

We are designed to live for God more than for anything else, so if we build our lives on anything other than God, we act against the grain of the universe and our own design and being.

Genesis describes how God didn't create the world for suffering and death, but how that was the consequence when humanity chose to turn away from God.

God sending the storm was his discipline of Jonah. It was to bring him back to himself and not allow him to go his own way.

***5 And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says, "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, 6 because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son." (Hebrews 12:5-6)***

'If we Christians do sin, we shall be forgiven but we shall lose a lot: our peace, our joy, our good conscience, our usefulness to God, eventually our reputation, our ministry. We shall lose our reward in heaven. We are in danger of experiencing God's discipline. Our life could be lost. We will be saved through fire, which is the worst kind of mixture of blessing-and-tragedy. God is altogether against our sinning and we cannot go against God and it turn out good.' (Michael Eaton)



### REFLECT:

- Have you ever experienced difficulty or storms as a result of disobedience?
- How have you experienced God's mercy through difficulty?
- What areas of your life/attitudes/behaviours do you feel God may be highlighting or prompting you about? Are there things he wants you to let him have lordship and leadership over?



### PRAY:

Spend some time thanking God for his ever-loving, ever-pursuing presence. Use this Psalm to guide you in your prayer:

*<sup>7</sup> Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? <sup>8</sup> If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! <sup>9</sup> If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, <sup>10</sup> even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me. (Psalm 139:7-10)*

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# JONAH 1:5-6



## BE WITH JESUS:

Before you read today's verses, still your heart and mind by speaking prayers of worship and thankfulness to God.

Ask him to quieten your mind from distraction so you can hear what he would say to you today.

*<sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> 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."*



## CONSIDER:

Seasoned mariners being afraid suggest that the storm must have been fierce. Look at these comparisons:

- The sailors are aware of their situation and danger, while Jonah is oblivious.
- The sailors cry out to their deities, while the prophet of God is running from his.
- The sailors are even more open to praying to Jonah's foreign God than he is!

The prophet who judges the pagan as unworthy of God's grace and mercy is spiritually outperformed by the pagan sailors trying to save his life, who are open to his God. Not only this, but they end up pointing the runaway prophet to God, rather than the other way around.



## REFLECT:

- What in today's Scripture and considerations struck you about how God outworks his purposes?
- Have you ever had God work through unbelievers to reach you? What does this suggest about how we should view God's sovereignty?



**PRAY:**

What circumstances do you feel are weighing you down and making it hard to fix your eyes on Jesus?

Bring these things before him now, one at a time. Ask him to help you weather the storms you need to weather and leave the anxieties which are not yours to carry, at his feet.

Use these scriptures to guide you in your prayer:

*Cast your burden on the LORD, and he will sustain you; he will never permit the righteous to be moved. (Psalm 55:22)*

*Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup> For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (Matthew 11:28-30)*

*When I am afraid, I put my trust in you. (Psalm 56:3)*

*In my distress I called upon the Lord; to my God I cried for help.*

*From his temple he heard my voice, and my cry to him reached his ears. (Psalm 18:6)*

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# JONAH 1:7-9



## BE WITH JESUS:

Before you read today's verses, still your heart and mind by speaking prayers of worship and thankfulness to God.

Ask him to quieten your mind from distraction so you can hear what he would say to you today.

*<sup>7</sup> And they said to one another, "Come, let us cast lots, that we may know on whose account this evil has come upon us." So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. <sup>8</sup> Then they said to him, "Tell us on whose account this evil has come upon us. What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?" <sup>9</sup> And he said to them, "I am a Hebrew, and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land."*



## CONSIDER:

Casting lots was a way of determining divine will. After Pentecost, God's will was discerned by listening to God's Spirit and through his Word. But before Pentecost, even Israelites would cast lots to determine the will of God.

Rightly, the lot fell to Jonah. He was discovered to be responsible for what was happening to the sailors. The fact that the sailors had to ask him where he was from shows how far he had run from his identity as one of God's people. Israelites would have been fairly easy to identify in those days.

When Jonah responds, he puts his race before his faith. If Jonah's identity was found more in his race than his faith, it indicates why he was so resistant to calling Nineveh to repentance.

Jonah's private faith is being of no public good. Unlike the commission that God had given his people through Abraham, Jonah was not being a blessing to the nations. The sailors call him out on this. This shows us that as believers we should listen to what God says to us through those who do not believe. God will use who he will to see his purposes done. The whole book of Jonah demonstrates this well. The messenger of God is the one receiving grace from God, through the pagans he detests. Jonah is rebuked by an unbeliever for not caring enough and for not utilising his resources and prayers for the good of all. Jonah had not represented God and his people well.

Tim Keller says, 'Shallow Christian identities explain why professing Christians can be racists and greedy materialists, addicted to beauty and pleasure, or filled with anxiety and prone to overwork. All this comes because it is not Christ's love, but the world's power, approval, comfort, and control that are the real roots of our self-identity.'



**REFLECT:**

*Jesus told his followers: "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)*

- In what ways do you think you can behave like Jonah at times to the watching world around you? Think about your different spheres – work, varsity, school, traffic, speaking to people in the service industry, online engagement – does your behaviour change across spheres?
- In what other things do you think you may find your identity, over and above the love of Christ?
- Where might God be prompting you to be his salt and light more?



**PRAY:**

Ask God to reveal where your faith has been too 'private'.

Pray prayers of repentance for any areas that you feel God has been challenging.

Pray for opportunities to be God's salt and light to a watching world.

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# WEEK TWO

JONAH 1:10 - 2:1



# JONAH 1:10-11



## BE WITH JESUS:

Before you read today's verses, still your heart and mind by speaking prayers of worship and thankfulness to God.

Ask him to quieten your mind from distraction so you can hear what he would say to you today.

*<sup>10</sup> Then the men were exceedingly afraid and said to him, "What is this that you have done!" For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them. <sup>11</sup> 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.*



## CONSIDER:

Sometimes our sin can seem harmless and private because we don't think it impacts on others, but scripture warns God's people that their sin will catch up to them.

***But if you will not do so, behold, you have sinned against the LORD, and be sure your sin will find you out. (Numbers 32:23)***

God's love doesn't allow our sin to continue in secret. When we run from God as believers, his light will come for us. If we keep running and sinning, God's chastisement, his discipline, will be evoked. This is what Jonah found when he was challenged by the pagan sailors. He confesses that he has failed to live according to his God's purpose, confessing that his sin had caused the storm threatening their lives.

The sailors were affected by a storm brought on by someone else's disobedience. Notice they didn't rage against Jonah's God for bringing calamity on them, but held the one who had offended God responsible.

We are all impacted by the consequences of other people's sin. Much of the suffering in the world comes about because of other peoples' sin. Likewise, others are impacted by our sin.



**REFLECT:**

*Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy. (Proverbs 28:13)*

- Have you ever had your sin “discovered” and this helped turn you back towards God and community?
- How has God’s disciplining love drawn you back to him?
- What comfort is it knowing God will not allow those who call him Father to continue down paths that lead to destruction?



**PRAY:**

In which areas of your life do you need God’s forgiveness right now?

Who is God prompting you to forgive?

Spend some time asking God for courage and the power of the Holy Spirit right now to do this.

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# JONAH 1:12-13



## BE WITH JESUS:

Before you read today's verses, still your heart and mind by speaking prayers of worship and thankfulness to God.

Ask him to quieten your mind from distraction so you can hear what he would say to you today.

*<sup>12</sup> 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."*

*<sup>13</sup> 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.*



## CONSIDER:

Jonah now offers himself as substitution to save the lives of the sailors. He acknowledges that the reason for their peril is him and that the key to their safety is in his removal from the boat. Jonah is confessing his responsibility.

When he first received God's instruction, Jonah ran away because he didn't want to take God's message to pagans. Yet now, he is offering his life for theirs. Being around people different to him, seeing their responses and terror, Jonah is already changing. As Tim Keller notes: 'Jonah may have been moved by nothing higher than pity, but that was far better than contempt. Often the first step in coming to one's senses spiritually is when we finally start thinking of somebody-anybody-other than ourselves.'

As we see in the unfolding of this account, Jonah had acted with nationalist pride when he refused God's instruction. But now we see that God had brought these good men who tried hard to save Jonah, even though he was responsible for their peril. One way to combat 'othering' which results in the sin of racism, sexism and other 'isms' is to develop a diverse community. It is far harder to have apathy or hatred towards people when you see faces that you know, respect and even love.



**REFLECT:**

- In what ways has God used relationships to soften your heart towards others?
- Do you have friends that develop you in different ways because of their backgrounds, economic realities, temperaments or intellect?
- Where might God be challenging you to deepen or expand some of your relationships in this regard?



**PRAY:**

*After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands,<sup>10</sup> and crying out with a loud voice, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!' (Revelations 7:9-10)*

Pray prayers of gratitude for the people God has used to shape you more into his likeness.

Thank him that we get to enjoy a sample of this 'one day' reality in South Africa.

Pray that he would help us to worship him as a diverse and unified family and grow even more into his vision for his family.

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# JONAH 1:14-16



## BE WITH JESUS:

Before you read today's verses, still your heart and mind by speaking prayers of worship and thankfulness to God.

Ask him to quieten your mind from distraction so you can hear what he would say to you today.

*<sup>14</sup> 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." <sup>15</sup> So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. <sup>16</sup> Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows.*



## CONSIDER:

The sailors had already tried twice to save Jonah and themselves. It was only when it became clear to them that Jonah was the reason for their predicament and only by doing what he had told them could they hope to be saved, that they did what Jonah instructed. But before that, they prayed to Jonah's God.

After Jonah had been thrown into the sea, the storm calmed. The men turned to God and worshiped him. Unknowingly, Jonah had converted pagans. He had substituted his life for the sailors' and they had been saved as a result. This foreshadowed what Jesus would do for all mankind.

*"and behold, something greater than Jonah is here."*

In Matthew 12:41, Jesus referred to himself as greater than Jonah. He was the ultimate substitution.

*He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. [1 Peter 2:24]*

Jesus, unlike Jonah, was not responsible for the debt of sin that needed to be paid. When he offered his life for ours, it was complete and full payment.



**REFLECT:**

- Have you placed your faith in the substitutionary work of Jesus for your sins?
- The work of Jesus means your ultimate eternal reality is ensured. How does this affect your worship and prayers?
- Who do you know who needs to experience the saving grace of Jesus?



**PRAY:**

Spend some time praying for the people who came to mind during your reflections. Consider all that Jesus won for you on the cross and give him thanks.

If you have never placed your faith and life in Jesus and his authority, why not pray the following prayer now:

*Lord Jesus, you created me and are rightfully Lord over all. I have sinned against you and have chosen to live my life apart from you. I believe you are the Son of God. I believe you died for my sins and rose again. Please forgive my sins and save me. Give me your gift of eternal life and make me yours. I choose to turn away from everything that I know displeases you. Give me deeper faith in you and help me walk on your path. Come into my life as Saviour and Lord. In your name, Jesus, I pray these things. Amen*

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# JONAH 1:17



## BE WITH JESUS:

Before you read today's verses, still your heart and mind by speaking prayers of worship and thankfulness to God.

Ask him to quieten your mind from distraction so you can hear what he would say to you today.

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



## CONSIDER:

Jonah has been doubting God's goodness. Yet as he is thrown overboard, God provides a miraculous salvation. It is the very mercy that Jonah had been so worried God would show his enemies, that now saves Jonah from certain death.

The likelihood is that Jonah felt like this was the end. What are the chances that he would survive this situation? And so for three days and nights, Jonah would be in this underwater prison. Was he right to despair? Since we know how the account unfolds, we know that he was not right to despair. But how often are we in the same situation and respond in a similar way?

J.R.R. Tolkien, author of the Lord of the Rings and The Hobbit, pointed out that there is no antonym in the English language for catastrophe. No opposite word that pointed to a sudden turn to the good that couldn't have been foreseen or anticipated. Patrick Curry, an author on Tolkien's work said:

*'Despair is for people who know, beyond any doubt, what the future is going to bring. Nobody is in that position. So, despair is not only a kind of sin, theologically, but also a simple mistake, because nobody actually knows. In that sense there is always hope.'*

*And the truest form of understanding this, as Tolkien explained, was through the resurrection.*

*When everything seemed its darkest, when despair seemed the most apt response, it couldn't have been furthest from appropriate. What seemed hopeless and catastrophic was in fact brilliantly glorious, when understood with the lens of the resurrection.*

The resurrection changed everything! Everything they thought they knew about Jesus, about the crucifixion, about suffering, about defeat and death. The resurrection turned it all on its head.

- What opposition or circumstances are you facing that seem insurmountable?
- How does Jonah's situation and the hope of the crucifixion speak to our situations today?



**PRAY:**

Spend some time praying for the situation or circumstances in which you are feeling overwhelmed. Ask God to give you his perspective and his strength to persevere.

Pray that God would use your current situation to bring you closer to himself and make you more like Jesus.

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# JONAH 2:1



## BE WITH JESUS:

Before you read today's verses, still your heart and mind by speaking prayers of worship and thankfulness to God.

Ask him to quieten your mind from distraction so you can hear what he would say to you today.

*<sup>1</sup> Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the belly of the fish,*



## CONSIDER:

Jonah had reached the end of himself. He was still alive, but there was no more running to be done.

Many times we are able to live oblivious to some of the deep flaws in our character. Like so many other people in scriptures (Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David to name a few), sometimes it is only after facing our deep shortcomings that we are prepared to stand before God and realise how utterly dependent we are on him.

This is the first time in the book of Jonah that we see Jonah actually praying to God. This prophet of God, the messenger of God, didn't even pray for the safety of the ship in peril. He tried to run from the presence of God and now he is trapped. Graciously, God is there with Jonah. Likewise, even when we run from God, it is his grace and mercy that means he is always with us, ever pursuing, ever calling us back to him, to what is of ultimate worth.

- Have you ever found yourself in a place where the only person you could turn to is God? What happened?
- When you find it hard to worship God, what do you find the obstacles to be?
- What seems to regularly come up from people around you in terms of things you could work on? How do you tend to receive feedback from others?



## PRAY:

*Take delight in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart. (Psalm 37:4)*

Spend some time praying prayers of gratitude “delighting in the Lord” for his faithfulness and dependability.

Bring any personal shortcomings or weaknesses that have come to mind to him now.

Are there attributes of your identity and self-worth that are more important to you than Jesus himself? Repent of these and ask Jesus to make himself ultimate in your heart.

Pray for people you know who are far or running from God. Pray that he would make himself known to them. Ask him who he would have you reach out to.

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**WEEK THREE**

JONAH 2:2-9





# JONAH 2:2



## BE WITH JESUS:

Before you read today's verses, still your heart and mind by speaking prayers of worship and thankfulness to God.

Ask him to quieten your mind from distraction so you can hear what he would say to you today.

*<sup>2</sup>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.*



## CONSIDER:

It is not only the process of Jonah being brought low that begins his transformation and restoration, but also his prayer. Prayer matters. It is the method of communing with God, our Creator and Father. Tim Keller says that 'prayer is continuing a conversation that God has started through his word and his grace, which eventually becomes a full encounter with him'.

In his prayer, Jonah brings to mind scripture. His prayer is scattered with Psalms that he would have memorised. Such as:

*Psalm 18:4-6 – The cords of death encompassed me; the torrents of destruction assailed me; the cords of Sheol entangled me; the snares of death confronted me. In my distress I called upon the Lord; to my God I cried for help. From his temple he heard my voice, and my cry to him reached his ears.*

Think about Jonah's state of mind. The trauma of a prophet running from God, his people and vocation; being caught in a terrible, life-threatening storm; confessing his failures to pagan sailors; being thrown overboard and then swallowed by a great fish. Jonah was likely trapped now with some degree of trauma and internal chaos. Even though he had brought this on himself, he could be forgiven for a state of desperation within that fish. He realises that the fish is God's rescue of his life from the sea, but he doesn't know how long he will be in the fish's belly, nor if he will live to see the sun again.

So when he turns his mind towards God, an eloquent prayer comes forth because Jonah understood and had memorised scripture. Even after running from God, he never doubted who God was, and he is able to turn to the very presence he thought he could run from. God's presence that was in the ship with him, in the storm sent across his path, and in the fish of rescue.



**REFLECT:**

*Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. [Psalm 119:105]*

Knowing scripture by heart helps us to pray. We can begin by using the bible to shape our prayer but the more we can draw on scriptures by heart, the easier it becomes to draw on them in moments of need, just as Jonah did.

*The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth. [Psalm 145:18]*

- When have you found yourself brought back to God through circumstances beyond your control? What happened?
- How do you think knowing that God is close to all who call on him should impact your worship and prayer-life?
- How can you improve your spiritual discipline of scripture memorisation?



**PRAY:**

Spend some time now praying prayers of thanksgiving for God's word to us. Thank him that he is near to all who call on him. Thank him that he desires communication with us.

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# JONAH 2:3-4



## BE WITH JESUS:

Before you read today's verses, still your heart and mind by speaking prayers of worship and thankfulness to God.

Ask him to quieten your mind from distraction so you can hear what he would say to you today.

*<sup>3</sup> For you cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the flood surrounded me; all your waves and your billows passed over me. <sup>4</sup> Then I said, 'I am driven away from your sight; yet I shall again look upon your holy temple.'*



## CONSIDER:

It is difficult for us to truly recognise our sin and character failures at the best of times – especially at the best of times – when things are going well, we have a tendency to lose our dependency on God. It is therefore often when we are faced with evidence we can't refute about who we truly are, in situations that are our undoing, that we are brought face-to-face with our own sinfulness, our utter incapacity to make ourselves good and our complete dependency on God's mercy and grace.

Jonah's prayer is where we should all find ourselves – broken at our own sin and rebellion – yet, like Jonah, filled with worship at the only hope being God himself. It is here that truest freedom can be found. Only by recognising that God is who he says he is, can we truly look at ourselves with complete honesty and receive the abundance of his mercy, salvation and acceptance.



## REFLECT:

*Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy. (Jude 24)*

Jesus is the one who changes us. He justifies and sanctifies us. He is the one who is able to keep us from stumbling and present us before God without fault, because we appear in his righteousness.



# JONAH 2:5-6



## BE WITH JESUS:

Before you read today's verses, still your heart and mind by speaking prayers of worship and thankfulness to God.

Ask him to quieten your mind from distraction so you can hear what he would say to you today.

*<sup>5</sup> The waters closed in over me to take my life; the deep surrounded me; weeds were wrapped about my head <sup>6</sup> 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.*



## CONSIDER:

Psalms 40 says this: *I waited patiently for the LORD; he inclined to me and heard my cry. <sup>2</sup> He drew me up from the pit of destruction, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure.*

Once again, Jonah reflects on his situation, on who was responsible for his situation, and who was the only one who could save him. God had saved Jonah already, through the fish.

The judgement had fallen – the presence of the supernatural storm, the lot falling on Jonah, his confession of rebellion to the sailors, and being tossed from the ship. He should have drowned. The wages of his sin was death (Romans 6:23a). *But God.* The free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 6:23b). We who believe in Jesus' death and resurrection are freed from the grip and penalty of sin.

Yet, like Jonah the believer, we too can rebel and run from God. But God will pursue us – in love and in discipline – to bring us back to himself. It is the most loving and beautiful truth.



## REFLECT:

*For the Lord will not cast off forever, <sup>32</sup> but, though he cause grief, he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love. (Lamentations 3:31-32)*

- Where are you closing yourself off from God’s loving light and discipline?
- What areas of your life do you resist God’s kingship? (Consider finances, relationships, church/community commitment, work situations, habits).
- Who could help you keep accountability in these areas?



**PRAY:**

*<sup>22</sup> The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; <sup>23</sup> they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. <sup>24</sup> “The Lord is my portion,” says my soul, therefore I will hope in him.” <sup>25</sup> The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him. (Lamentations 3:22-25)*

Use this passage to pray prayers of gratitude and worship to God.

Ask him to help you release all areas of your life to his lordship.

Pray prayers of confession and repentance for areas where you have been running away from God.

Ask his Spirit to empower you to give your whole self over to him.

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# JONAH 2:7



## BE WITH JESUS:

Before you read today's verses, still your heart and mind by speaking prayers of worship and thankfulness to God.

Ask him to quieten your mind from distraction so you can hear what he would say to you today.

*<sup>7</sup> When my life was fainting away, I remembered the LORD, and my prayer came to you, into your holy temple.*



## CONSIDER:

What do we do when we are in trouble? When we are suffering? When we are at our end? Jonah echoes scripture when he replies "I remember the Lord."

*But God.* Arguably two of the most beautiful words to hear in light of the path of destruction we seem to be predisposed to walk. God intervenes. He loves us and he shows this through the work of Jesus.

*<sup>3</sup> He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. <sup>4</sup> Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. <sup>5</sup> But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. <sup>6</sup> All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. (Isaiah 53:3-6)*

- How can our suffering and trials, when viewed through the lens of the suffering of Jesus, make us more like Jesus?



## REFLECT:

*Remember the wondrous works that he has done, his miracles and the judgments he uttered, (1 Chronicles 16:12)*

- Are there areas of discomfort or even suffering, that God may be using to shape you more into his likeness?
- What does Jonah's prayer in today's verses teach us about what to do when we are under trials?
- How can you remind yourself about God's mercies towards you when you are facing trials and difficulties? What disciplines will help you to remember?



**PRAY:**

Spend some time bringing to mind all the ways God has shown you goodness and mercy. Thank him for all he has done for you.

Pray also for the peace of God that defies understanding.

Pray that he would give you wisdom and joy in whatever your circumstances are currently.

Pray that you would be quick to remember his goodness.

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# JONAH 2:8-9



## BE WITH JESUS:

Before you read today's verses, still your heart and mind by speaking prayers of worship and thankfulness to God.

Ask him to quieten your mind from distraction so you can hear what he would say to you today.

*<sup>8</sup> Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love. <sup>9</sup> But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay. Salvation belongs to the LORD!"*



## CONSIDER:

Nothing and no person was ever designed to be the complete source of our joy and contentment. Neither was anything or any person ever designed to be the source of our identity. Paul Tripp and Timothy Lane <sup>1</sup> write that worship is first an identity before it becomes an activity. We are worshippers and that's why we worship. Our hearts are always under the control of something, and whatever controls our heart will control our behaviour, which will determine what we truly worship.

We see in Genesis that the pinnacle of God's creation was mankind. He made only one creature in his own image – mankind. We were created to live for something, to worship, to pour ourselves out. There will always be some treasure that our heart craves. Therefore, when we drop our sights from God, who is of ultimate worth, we often drop our sights to worshipping that which is of lesser worth – ultimately ourselves. We worship our bodies. We worship our image. We worship our meaning and significance through the pursuit of our careers and building our empires. We worship our competitiveness through idolising sport. We worship these lesser gods. Sometimes we distort that which we are called to love and serve by making that ultimate to us – spouse, children, friends, colleagues, church, even ministry. We ascribe absolute worth to these good things – distorting their worth and making them into idols. We offer our bodies as living sacrifices to these other gods, rather than God for whom we were designed to live.

Only God loves us with an all-consuming love, with the love we were designed for. When we pour ourselves out for God, we are filled with hope and love and peace.

When we pour ourselves out for lesser gods, for idols in our lives, we forsake the hope of steadfast love and we live in a perpetual emptiness and dissatisfaction.

We will worship God when our hearts value God above all else.

- What occupies your free time/thoughts/energy? When you have time, how do you naturally want to spend it?



**REFLECT:**

*“When I have learnt to love God better than my earthly dearest, I shall love my earthly dearest better than I do now. Insofar as I learn to love my earthly dearest at the expense of God and instead of God, I shall be moving towards the state in which I shall not love my earthly dearest at all. When first things are put first, second things are not suppressed but increased.” - C. S. Lewis, Letters of C.S. Lewis [8 November 1952]*

- What does Jonah mean when he says paying attention to idols “forsakes their hope of steadfast love”? When has this been true of you?
- When do you find it hard to worship God? What are obstacles to worship for you?
- What does Jonah’s conclusion suggest we should do to ensure that we place God in the appropriate place in our lives?



**PRAY:**

*<sup>1</sup> Ascribe to the Lord, you heavenly beings, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.*

*<sup>2</sup> Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; worship the Lord in the splendour of his holiness. (Psalm 29:1-2)*

Spend some time praying through these scriptures and your reflections. Worship God in prayer now.

Ask that God would help you keep him as ultimate in your life.

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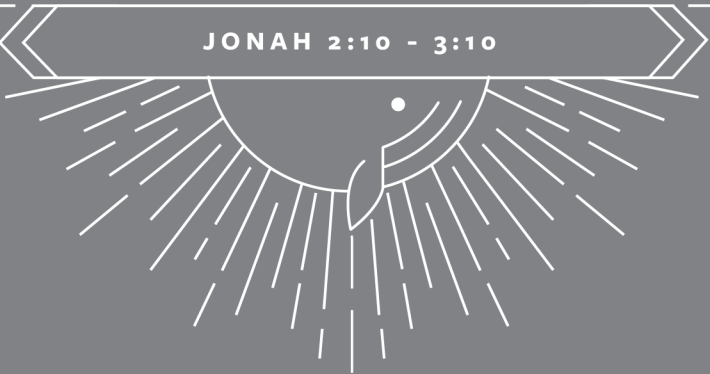
<sup>1</sup> Relationships: A mess worth making by Paul David Tripp and Timothy Lane





# WEEK FOUR

JONAH 2:10 - 3:10



# JONAH 2:10



## BE WITH JESUS:

Before you read today's verses, still your heart and mind by speaking prayers of worship and thankfulness to God.

Ask him to quieten your mind from distraction so you can hear what he would say to you today.

*<sup>10</sup> And the LORD spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land.*



## CONSIDER:

*"Men have been looking so hard at the great fish that they have failed to see the great God." (G. Campbell Morgan)*

In Matthew 12, sceptics ask Jesus to perform a miraculous sign to prove he is who he says he is. But Jesus isn't just another teacher; he's the Saviour.

*<sup>39</sup> But he answered them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. <sup>40</sup> For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. <sup>41</sup> The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here. (Matthew 12:39-41)*

Tim Keller comments that it is interesting that people find the miracle of the great fish difficult to believe when the death and resurrection of Jesus is the greatest miracle to ever happen.

The miraculous sign of Jonah isn't so much a display of power as an astonishing display of weakness. Jesus laid aside his glory and the advantages of heaven, humbling himself even to death on the sinner's cross. Just as Jonah was cast into the water to save the sailors from God's judgement, so Jesus would be cast into death to bear God's judgement to save us. And just as Jonah rose from the water when the fish spat him out, so Jesus was raised in resurrection for our justification. This was the sign of Jonah to which Jesus referred. Jesus was the better and greater Jonah.



# JONAH 3:1-2



## BE WITH JESUS:

Before you read today's verses, still your heart and mind by speaking prayers of worship and thankfulness to God.

Ask him to quieten your mind from distraction so you can hear what he would say to you today.

*<sup>1</sup> Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, <sup>2</sup> "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you.*



## CONSIDER:

Scripture is full of examples of God's patience and his grace, while never deviating from his sovereign plans. When Adam and Eve disobeyed God, he provided the sacrifice to cover their shame and guilt and gave them the promise of the Messiah who would one day bring their sin to an end. This continued to be shown through Abraham and Sarah who took some 40 years of deviating from God's path for them before they obeyed God. David, the man after God's heart, broke so many of the Ten Commandments, yet was forgiven and restored, still fulfilling the promise of his lineage leading to Jesus. Not to mention the disciples in the New Testament. Think of Peter – who denied Jesus three times in his worst moments – but was then used to launch the global church community. God is good always. He is good in his plans. He is good to us. He is good when he calls us. And he is good to see his plans fulfilled. This means he is also good when he disciplines us and brings us into obedience to his will. Because his will is ultimate and of ultimate good – everything he does is good for us – even when it hurts.

Now, God brings the instruction to Jonah again – to go and take his message to the Ninevites.



## REFLECT:

*The Lord is not slow to fulfil his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. (2 Peter 3:9)*





# JONAH 3:3-5



## BE WITH JESUS:

Before you read today's verses, still your heart and mind by speaking prayers of worship and thankfulness to God.

Ask him to quieten your mind from distraction so you can hear what he would say to you today.

<sup>3</sup> *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.* <sup>4</sup> *Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's journey. And he called out, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"* <sup>5</sup> *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.*



## CONSIDER:

The turning of the people of Nineveh to belief and repentance came as a result of preaching. Whether one believes this message was a gleeful or reluctant uttering from a messenger of God, or Jonah accurately proclaiming what he believed God had commanded him to say, one thing is clear from this text: the power is in the message, not the messenger.

We see the power of God on display throughout this account of Jonah, and especially in this message; proclaiming judgement for sin.

The city was turned around because of the proclamation of the wrath of God towards sin. It was a sobering call to turn from injustice and that God's wrath means he will punish sin.

Jonah wanted to see the city fall into judgement for what they had done. He didn't want them to turn to God. Yet, he was still used by God as a messenger, even if his motives were not Christ-like. God uses anyone and all to see his sovereign will unfold.



**REFLECT:**

*<sup>15</sup> It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. <sup>16</sup> The latter do so out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defence of the gospel. <sup>17</sup> The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. <sup>18</sup> But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice. (Philippians 1:15-18)*

Our joy in Christ is robbed when we compare ourselves to others or allow competitiveness to ruin our joy. How much more so when we allow slights and offenses against us to wish that person never experience the loving mercy that we ourselves have received? When we allow pride to rule us, we can even take something as precious as the preaching of the gospel and twist it so the very preaching of salvation becomes an occasion of envy and rivalry. This robs us of joy and robs God of our worship.

*Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the LORD weighs the heart. (Proverbs 21:2)*

- When do you most easily give in to pride?
- When do you find yourself feeling overlooked or offended?
- Is there any part of your identity and life that God may be prompting you to submit to him and rather to boast in the saving work of Jesus?
- What steps can you take to grow in Christ-like humility?



**PRAY:**

Spend some time praying to God about his great love and work of your salvation. Thank him for loving you despite your flaws and even despite the legalism that can creep in. Ask him to help you trust in him over anything the world offers.

Pray for those you consider 'your enemies'. Pray that God would help you see them the way he sees them.

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# JONAH 3:6-9



## BE WITH JESUS:

Before you read today's verses, still your heart and mind by speaking prayers of worship and thankfulness to God.

Ask him to quieten your mind from distraction so you can hear what he would say to you today.

*<sup>6</sup> The word reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. <sup>7</sup> 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, <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish."*



## CONSIDER:

True repentance requires knowing that God is who he says he is – holy, sovereign, the only one who judges sin and the only one who can save us from death – and knowing who we are, sinners unable to save ourselves.

*Jared Wilson writes a good summation of what true repentance looks like: <sup>2</sup>*

*"A genuine repentant heart is willing to name and not underplay sin; to experience godly sorrow, not because of being caught, but because we have caused God and others grief through our sin. It is a willingness to confess our sins, before we are caught in them. When we are called out by others, true repentance confesses quickly and doesn't try excuse or explain the sin. True repentance also desires and actively seeks to make amends, while showing understanding and patience if those we have hurt are unwilling to forgive. True repentance is willing to confess even if the consequences are severe (including undergoing church discipline, facing jailtime, or having a spouse leave us). True repentance doesn't resent the consequences, but grieves them, seeing them in light of our own behaviour and celebrating the ultimate reality of God's forgiveness, even if we bear the weight of consequences in this world. True repentance takes steps to turn from patterns of behaviour that are sinful. True repentance is humble and teachable.*



# JONAH 3:10



## BE WITH JESUS:

Before you read today's verses, still your heart and mind by speaking prayers of worship and thankfulness to God.

Ask him to quieten your mind from distraction so you can hear what he would say to you today.

*<sup>10</sup> 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.*



## CONSIDER:

God is a God of mercy and grace. Mercy is not getting what we deserve. God's greatest mercy is the forgiveness of our sins. Grace is getting what we don't deserve. Grace is how, after we are saved, we get Christ's righteousness assigned to us. When God looks at us, he sees us as holy. We are adopted as children of God. This is God's grace. We get to partner with God to advance his kingdom, we get an inheritance along with God's Son.

God is just! He will punish sin, but he is slow to anger. God always leaves room for repentance.

And these promises are for everyone who would take hold of them. The irony is that this was something Jonah seemed to miss. The very mercy and grace, and slowness to anger that God showed towards Jonah was something that Jonah didn't want shown to the Ninevites.

God had promised mercy and grace to the nations through Abraham. And the true and ultimate mercy and grace for the world would come through Jesus. Yet Jonah kept his gaze small and insular (as we will see in the upcoming days). But God's plan for repentance wasn't to be thwarted. A gleeful, underwhelming message from Jonah to a wayward pagan nation, turned everyone, including their wicked king away from sin and towards God and his truth.

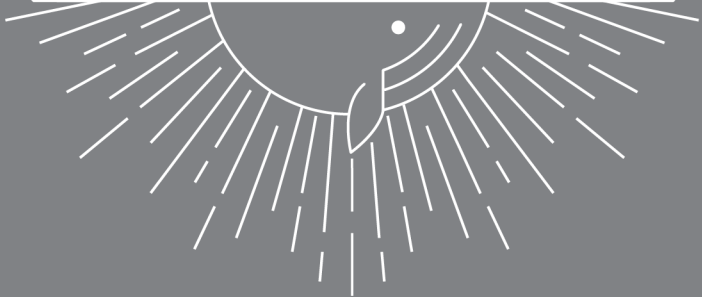






**WEEK FIVE**

JONAH 4:1 - 4:11





# JONAH 4:1-3



## BE WITH JESUS:

Before you read today's verses, still your heart and mind by speaking prayers of worship and thankfulness to God.

Ask him to quieten your mind from distraction so you can hear what he would say to you today.

*<sup>1</sup> But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live."*



## CONSIDER:

This is the section of Jonah's account that seems to be left out of our Sunday School lessons. We tend to remember God giving Jonah a second chance to take his message to Nineveh and saving him using a fish.

Yet, there is a surprising epilogue to Jonah's mission trip to Nineveh.

After preaching to the greatest yet cruellest world-power of the time, Jonah watches in despair when his message works! The people turn from their ways and repent as a whole region. Even the evil king humbles himself before Jonah's God. Most of us read this and struggle to understand Jonah's reaction. We would consider a career in evangelism crusades if we uttered a one sentence message and saw over a hundred thousand people turn from their sin towards God!

We also see now what was the main, original objection that Jonah had and why he had run from God. His problem wasn't one of misunderstanding who God was: 'I knew you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster.' Clearly, it wasn't a doubting problem – as Jonah anticipated that God would move if he obeyed him, and God did just that. God's mercy and faith, through his gospel message, is even to the most ardent disbelievers and cruellest sinners.

So what was happening?

Jonah failed to recognise his own sin and God's mercy towards him. Jonah's heart wasn't truly changed. A truly changed heart would love even our worst enemy - willing to die for their salvation - because we know how wretched we ourselves were! God's act of grace that saved us, means that we can't consider anyone else as worse than ourselves. Consider this in what Jesus taught (even knowing what he was going to go through):

*<sup>43</sup> "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.'  
<sup>44</sup> But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, <sup>45</sup> so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. <sup>46</sup> For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? <sup>47</sup> And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? <sup>48</sup> You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Matthew 5:43-48)*

- Are there any people who you really struggle to love or extend compassion and understanding towards?
- Are there people who you tend to avoid? Or people from your past who you haven't forgiven for what they have done to you?
- Are there people who you can't celebrate when good things happen to them, because you feel they don't deserve it?



## **REFLECT:**

*"Now there is a final reason I think that Jesus says, "Love your enemies." It is this: that love has within it a redemptive power. And there is a power there that eventually transforms individuals. Just keep being friendly to that person. Just keep loving them, and they can't stand it too long. Oh, they react in many ways in the beginning. They react with guilt feelings, and sometimes they'll hate you a little more at that transition period, but just keep loving them. And by the power of your love they will break down under the load. That's love, you see. It is redemptive, and this is why Jesus says love. There's something about love that builds up and is creative. There is something about hate that tears down and is destructive. So love your enemies. [from "Loving Your Enemies by Martin Luther King Jr]*

- How have you changed over your time of knowing Jesus?
- Where do you feel you resist God changing or challenging you with regards to other people?
- How do you think God is speaking to you about your 'enemies'?
- What do you need to do to become more like Christ in these areas?

# JONAH 4:1-3 *continued*

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**PRAY:**

*And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. <sup>34</sup> And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." And they cast lots to divide his garments.*

*<sup>35</sup> And the people stood by, watching, but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!" <sup>36</sup> The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine <sup>37</sup> and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" <sup>38</sup> There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews." (Luke 23:33-38)*

Spend some time thanking Jesus for his ultimate example of loving his enemies by dying for us, his enemies, even as humanity's contempt and evil was poured on him.

Pray that these truths would take root in our hearts and shape us to live like he did – loving those who hurt us and desiring their good.

Spend some time asking the Holy Spirit to coach you now.

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# JONAH 4:4



## BE WITH JESUS:

Before you read today's verses, still your heart and mind by speaking prayers of worship and thankfulness to God.

Ask him to quieten your mind from distraction so you can hear what he would say to you today.

*4 And the LORD said, "Do you do well to be angry?"*



## CONSIDER:

Genesis 1:26-27 teaches us that we were created in God's image. This means that we share attributes with God – such as being eternal beings, being able to know truth, being able to know the difference between good and evil, being able to love, being able to be and grow in wisdom, etc.

It means we have characteristics in his likeness. God has emotions and made us to have emotions. All emotions, when experienced and expressed in a godly manner, are good and right. Therefore, for example, the issue isn't being angry, necessarily, but often the reason for the anger and the outworking of that anger.

Jonah has just described God's attributes as compassionate, merciful and slow to anger. Yet in his tantrum, he concludes that God should kill him as he doesn't want to be alive in a world where his enemies are forgiven. God's response is perfect. 'Do you do well to be angry?'

Jonah's anger was because of his internal heart status. He was angry because he wasn't like Jesus – it wasn't a righteous anger, but a proud anger, a self-righteous anger. He was angry because God's actions didn't serve Jonah's desires.

Our anger is often related to a lack of trust in God and/or a lack of love for others. This is what we see from Jonah. He didn't think the Ninevites were deserving of God's grace and so when God relented of imposing his wrath on them Jonah was angered. Was it in Jonah's interest to be angry? Was his anger warranted? Did it edify Jonah or bring him closer to God?



**REFLECT:**

*<sup>4</sup> Be angry, and do not sin; ponder in your own hearts on your beds, and be silent.*

*<sup>5</sup> Offer right sacrifices, and put your trust in the Lord. (Psalm 4:4-5)*

*<sup>19</sup> Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; 20 for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. (James 1:19-20)*

- When do you find yourself getting angry or offended easily?
- How can you tell when it is good to be angry compared to ungodly anger?
- What does the story of Jonah in God’s bigger story to the nations suggest about evaluating the merit of our anger?
- How can you work on being slower to anger and quicker to listen?



**PRAY:**

Ask Jesus to help you become more patient with others.

Think of those people or relationships where greater patience is needed from you and pray into those specifically.

If you have a tendency to anger, ask God to help you identify someone who could walk a journey of accountability in this area.

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# JONAH 4:5



## BE WITH JESUS:

Before you read today's verses, still your heart and mind by speaking prayers of worship and thankfulness to God.

Ask him to quieten your mind from distraction so you can hear what he would say to you today.

*<sup>5</sup> 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.*



## CONSIDER:

Jonah held his national pride higher than his love for God. Jonah had replaced God as his main reason and joy. He knew God, but valued something more than him. He couldn't bring himself to worship God or appreciate his work in Nineveh because God had touched a nerve by forgiving Jonah's enemies.

When we bargain with God, we disclose our true ultimate love. As soon as we cannot be challenged by God himself or by his word about something we hold as important (be it our culture, our history, our nation, or even truths we hold to in our faith) we can be sure that something has replaced God's place in our affection.

Whatever can make us angry with God is a good indicator of what this could be.

We also see that Jonah does not turn to God with his emotions and frustrations. Instead of continuing to be God's representative to a nation turning from sin and aligning with God's will, teaching them to do what God would want, Jonah leaves the city to sulk on the hill, hoping that they would turn from God and end up being destroyed after all [Jonah 4:5].



## REFLECT:

Anger in itself isn't wrong. When something you love is threatened or harmed, anger is an ingrained response. But when the anger is overwhelming and self-righteous, it is wrong. Tim Keller says 'Jonah's rightful love for his country and people had

become inordinate, too great, rivalling God ... As long as there is something more important than God to your heart, you will be, like Jonah, both fragile and self-righteous. Whatever it is, it will create pride and an inclination to look down upon those who do not have it. It will also create fear and insecurity. It is the basis for your happiness, and if anything threatens it, you will be overwhelmed with anger, anxiety, and despair.'

- Are there any areas of your life that you sometimes bargain with God about? 'If you give me x ... I will do y.'
- Is there anything in your life, if you are completely honest, that you don't think you could forgive God if he took it away from you?
- Is there any title/position/relationship status that is so important to you that you don't think you would want to live if it got taken away? Or doesn't happen as planned?



**PRAY:**

***For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Matthew 6:21)***

Thank God for his faithfulness, his mercy, his grace. Thank him that he is slow to anger and so patient with us.

Ask him to help you become more like him in every way and to show you where you are not putting him first. Ask him for the courage to let him have lordship over any area that you have not given to him. Pray that he would be your ultimate love and treasure.

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# JONAH 4:6-8



## BE WITH JESUS:

Before you read today's verses, still your heart and mind by speaking prayers of worship and thankfulness to God.

Ask him to quieten your mind from distraction so you can hear what he would say to you today.

*<sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant, so that it withered. <sup>8</sup> 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."*



## CONSIDER:

Once again, we are confronted with the reality that a person who knows God, who has experienced God's grace and mercy, who has been used by God to build his kingdom – can still be unsanctified. This is important. Scripture shows us that we have no part in our salvation – it is the work of Jesus alone. But working with the Holy Spirit, in the power of the gospel, we can work to become more like Jesus – more sanctified. Jonah had received God's mercy and rejoiced in it. However, he seems to have a spiritual amnesia when he turns to others who need God's mercy.

Jesus speaks of this when he taught the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant (Matthew 18). He compared the kingdom of heaven with a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. One servant owed a great debt to the king. He would have to sell everything he had, including his wife and children to try and make a payment (the point being that the debt was too great for the servant to pay). He asked the king for mercy and out of pity, the king released him and forgave the debt. Straight away that same servant on leaving the king's presence, went to a fellow servant who owed him a much smaller debt – he seized him by the throat demanding the debt be paid. Even when the fellow servant begged for leniency, the forgiven servant refused and condemned his colleague to prison. Read how Jesus concluded the Parable:

*31 When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. 32 Then his master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. 33 And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' 34 And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. 35 So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."*



### **REFLECT:**

It is difficult to forgive. And it should be. Tim Keller writes: 'When you forgive, that means you absorb the loss and the debt. You bear it yourself. All forgiveness, then, is costly.'

It is not only difficult, it can sometimes feel impossible. Terrible things happen to people – to ask them to absorb the loss and debt is outrageous. It can even feel cruel. Yet, it seems that Jesus expects this of his followers. How can this be? Because Jesus demonstrated it best, and because he empowers us to do the impossible. It is by representing him that we win people over to him. It cost Jesus his life to forgive us our sins. The weight of our debt before God is incomparable to anything anyone has done to us. That doesn't minimise what has been done against us, but it should awaken us to how great is God's forgiveness for us.

Jesus was betrayed by one of his close followers, whom he had loved and taught for three years. As he grappled with his upcoming death, his closest friends were more interested in sleeping than paying attention to his emotional distress. His close friends would eventually leave him to face his accusers alone. Peter would deny that he even knew him.

And for these friends, and the world, and the soldiers mocking and flogging him, and for us, he chose to bear the guilt and sin of the world. And while they were denying him, humiliating him, beating him and killing him he still prayed that they would be forgiven (Luke 23:43).

- Are there any fresh realisations about God's forgiveness from today's considerations?
- What has struck you about how you can become more like Jesus?
- What might God be saying to you now about representing his love and mercy to those who have wronged you?





# JONAH 4:9-11



## BE WITH JESUS:

Before you read today's verses, still your heart and mind by speaking prayers of worship and thankfulness to God.

Ask him to quieten your mind from distraction so you can hear what he would say to you today.

*<sup>9</sup> 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." <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> 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?"*



## CONSIDER:

Once again, God is showing his slowness to anger, his vast patience, and his desire that we would all grow in his likeness. He didn't leave Jonah once during this whole account. No matter how much Jonah messed up and misrepresented God and became self-righteous, yet God still pursued Jonah, still taught him and still provided for him. He is patiently pointing out that Jonah's concern for one tree is absurd, given his disregard for a whole city of people and animals. He is also reminding Jonah that unbelievers cannot be expected to act like believers until they become believers. As Paul says in Romans 10: 13-15:

*<sup>13</sup> For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." <sup>14</sup> How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? <sup>15</sup> And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!"*

We too continue to fall into our old ways and attitudes after we come to know God. We all battle with self-righteousness. We all are tempted to disorder our loves and make things that aren't God ultimate. We are all like Jonah. This is why we continue to need to grow in Christ-likeness with humility and openness to God. We continue to need to hear the gospel, the good news. The same power that saves us is the power

to change us. We never stop needing the gospel to shape us. We are to be a gospel-shaped people.



**REFLECT:**

God’s grace towards Nineveh and his kindness in how he speaks of them to Jonah in this last passage exposes even more starkly Jonah’s hardened heart and lack of generosity to his fellow man.

God was grieved by the sin of the city. He was brought to sorrow. His anger is part of his grief and his sorrow and his love. This is a great difference in our human anger, as represented by Jonah. Jonah wanted the city to pay for what they had done. He wanted revenge. God wanted to restore, to save, to redeem. Just as he did for us. We have seen over this book how Jesus was exactly what he described himself in Matthew 12:41 – ***“behold, something greater than Jonah is here.”***

- Take some time to consider all the ways we have seen how Jesus is the better Jonah.
- Take some time to consider how and where you have identified with Jonah over this journey.



**PRAY:**

God is waiting to hear our prayers and wants to bring his wisdom and perspective to our lives so we can live for his glory.

Spend some time thanking him for his great mercy, grace and patience.

Thank him for his desire to continue to bring you into the fullness of Christ. Ask him to continue to shape you for his purposes.

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