



JONAH



GRACE BEYOND US

WELCOME

For many of us, Jonah is a familiar story. Perhaps you remember hearing about a man swallowed by a giant fish in Sunday School, reading it in a children's Bible, or noticing references to Jonah in popular culture. It's one of the Bible's most recognisable stories.

At its heart, Jonah is a story about God's grace. It is a story about a God who relentlessly pursues people: rebellious prophets, pagan sailors, violent cities, and people who believe they are beyond hope. Again and again, we discover that God's mercy reaches further than we expect.

The book of Jonah also invites us to look honestly at our own hearts. Jonah knew God, yet he struggled to share God's compassion for others. He wanted mercy for himself, but justice for those he considered undeserving. As we journey through this study together, we may find ourselves more like Jonah than we would care to admit.

Jonah was called to go to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria. The Ninevites were feared for their cruelty and violence. They were the very people Jonah believed were beyond God's compassion. Rather than obeying God's call, Jonah fled in the opposite direction.

Yet God's story does not end with human resistance.

Throughout Jonah, we encounter a God who pursues, provides, speaks, rescues, and patiently forms His people. We see His concern not only for those far from Him, but also for those who think they already know Him. We discover that God's mission has always been about drawing people back into relationship with Himself.

As you work through this resource, our prayer is that you would not simply gain a deeper understanding of Jonah, but that you would encounter the heart of God. May His grace challenge us where we have become comfortable, soften us where we have grown hard-hearted, and open our eyes to the people He is calling us to love.

Perhaps we all have a Nineveh: people we avoid, assumptions we hold, or places we would rather not go. The invitation of Jonah is to receive God's grace afresh and allow that grace to shape the way we live and participate in God's mission in the world.





STUDY 1

RUNNING FROM GRACE

Big idea

God is the source of everything we have. As we learn to trust Him, we become wise stewards and generous participants in His work, living with His Kingdom as our highest priority.

DISCOVER

Think of a time when God has prompted you to do something difficult or inconvenient? How did you respond?

Read Jonah 1:1-16

The Problem

Nineveh was the capital of the Assyrian Empire which was predatory and brutal; would become the biggest empire the world had known until that point and would go on to conquer the Northern Kingdom of Israel, Jonah's homeland.

- Why do you think that it might have been difficult for Jonah to hear that God wanted him to preach to the people of Nineveh?
- Prophets were God's agents and spoke God's word to the people. What is surprising (and problematic!) about Jonah's response (v2)?
- When God calls us to do things which are difficult do we always obey? Why/why not?

The problem gets worse!

- Why does God send a storm on the sea?
- Who suffers because of the storm? Do the sailors deserve to suffer in the storm?
- When we cause others' suffering do we care?
- When we suffer because of the sin of others or are caught in the suffering of others how do we respond? Do we show the patience and respect of the sailors?

An Unexpected Solution

- How does Jonah suggest that they deal with the situation? Why do you think he suggested this solution?
- Read Mark 4:35-41. What are the similarities and differences you see with Jonah 1?
- In Matthew 12:39 Jesus describes his death and resurrection as the sign of Jonah. In what ways does Jonah's "death" (his being thrown into the sea) point to Jesus' death for us?
- Jonah is thrown into the sea because of his own disobedience. Jesus entered death because of ours. How does seeing Jesus as the "greater Jonah" deepen your understanding of God's grace?
- In following Jonah (and far more Jesus!) how can we also live in a way which shows sacrificial love for others, even those who are not like us, such as the pagan sailors in the boat?

ACT

- Do you picture God as a God of the nations, or just your own little world?
- God's grace pursued Jonah even while he was running away. When have you experienced God patiently pursuing you? How has that shaped your understanding of His character?

The instruction from the Lord came to Jonah in a pretty clear and concise way. It wasn't that Jonah didn't understand, or as if God left it muddy for him to misunderstand. His problem was that he simply didn't want to do it. This is often our problem as well.

Running from God rarely looks like boarding a ship.

Sometimes it looks like avoiding a difficult conversation, withholding forgiveness, staying comfortable, or assuming someone is beyond God's reach.

This week, ask God to reveal where you may be resisting His invitation.

- What would it take for us to commit ourselves this week to follow and obey where God leads us?



STUDY 2

Jonah 1:17-2:10

GOD SPEAKS IN A FISH

Big idea

Sometimes God speaks the loudest in the places we'd least expect. In our deepest moments, we discover that God's grace reaches further than we ever imagined. He doesn't simply rescue us, He restores us to participate in His mission.

DISCOVER

Jonah 2 reminds us that God doesn't abandon His people when they fail. Sometimes God uses uncomfortable circumstances to get our attention, not to punish us, but to draw us back to Himself. Long before Jonah's heart is fully changed, God extends grace.

1. Can you think of a difficult season that, looking back, God used to shape your faith or redirect your life? What did you learn about God through that experience?

Read Jonah 1:17-2:10

Discuss

- Jonah says, "In my distress I called to the Lord, and He answered me" (v.2). What does this chapter teach us about God's character? What surprises you about the way God responds to Jonah?
- Jonah is rescued before he has fully changed. What does this teach us about grace?
- Jonah ends his prayer by declaring, "Salvation comes from the Lord." Throughout the Bible, salvation is always God's work, never ours. How does this statement prepare us for Jesus? Why do you think Jesus described Himself as the "greater Jonah" (Matthew 12:40-41)?
- Jonah spent three days in the fish before being given a second chance. Jesus spent three days in the grave so that we could receive new life. In what ways is Jesus both like Jonah and greater than Jonah?
- God didn't rescue Jonah simply so he could be comfortable again. He rescued him because He still had a mission for him. How does God's grace move us beyond gratitude into obedience? Is there somewhere God is inviting you to trust Him again?

NURTURE

Grace is never the end of the story it always sends us somewhere. Jonah was rescued so that he could return to God's mission. In the same way, God meets us in our brokenness not simply to make us feel better, but to shape us into people who reflect His heart to the world around us.

Discuss

- Jonah is surrounded by water, descends into the depths, and is brought safely through. Where else in Scripture do we see God bringing people through the waters? What do all these stories teach us about God's rescue?
- Jonah reached the end of himself before he cried out to God. What circumstances has God used to remind you of your dependence on Him? Looking back, can you see His grace at work, even if you couldn't at the time?
- God didn't wait until Jonah had everything sorted before extending His grace. How does that challenge the way you think about yourself? How might it also change the way you see others?
- Why did God rescue Jonah? Was it simply because He loved Jonah? Or because He still wanted Nineveh to experience His grace? How might God be preparing you to participate in His mission today?

ACT

Each day this week, take five minutes to pray Jonah's final words: "Salvation comes from the Lord." (Jonah 2:9)

As you pray, ask:

- Lord, where are You inviting me to trust Your grace today?
- Who are You inviting me to extend that grace to?
- How can I join what You're already doing in the lives of those around me?

God's grace wasn't meant to stop with us it was always meant to flow through us.



STUDY 3

Jonah 3:1-10

GRACE BEYOND US

Big idea

God's grace reaches even the people we least expect. When people turn to Him in repentance, God delights to show mercy rather than judgment.

DISCOVER

1. When have you personally experienced someone giving you a second chance or God giving you a second chance?
2. Have you ever received a second chance to do something that you had previously failed at? How did that feel? Did you do anything differently the second time around?

Read Jonah 3:1-10

Discuss

- What do you notice about God in verse 1? What had happened to Jonah in the two chapters before? Why is this significant?
- What does God ask Jonah to do in verse 2? How does Jonah respond to God in verse 3? What do you learn about God and his purposes through these two verses?

NINEVAH

Amos, Obadiah, Jonah: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture Book by Billy K. Smith and Frank Page

"Archaeology is unanimous in substantiating the cruelty of the Ninevites. One writer said, 'The Assyrian records are nothing but a dry register of military campaigns, spoliations, and cruelties.' The term 'violence,' the arbitrary infringement of human rights, is a term often used by the prophets (cf. Isa 59:6; Ezek 7:23; Hos 12:1; Amos 3:10). It seems to suggest moral misbehaviour and aggressive violence toward other nations. Assyria, and therefore Nineveh, was especially guilty of such violence" (pg. 267)

God has asked Jonah to go to Ninevah twice. This time Jonah goes. Verse 3 also shows how Ninevah was geographically vast. "Depending upon Jonah's starting place, the trip to Nineveh would have been approximately five hundred land miles. According to the usual manner of transport (camel or donkey caravan), it would have taken approximately one month to traverse this distance. Going by foot would have taken even longer" (pg. 256).

Discuss

- What do you notice about Jonah as he obeys God by going to Ninevah?
- What is Jonah's message from God to Ninevah?
- The translation of verse 2 is that Ninevah is a city that is important to God or great to God. What is God's heart through this very short sermon?: "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown." What do you think God thinks about the sin of the Ninevites?
- Why is the response from the Ninevites to Jonah's message so miraculous (verse 5-9)?
- What do the Ninevites now say about God?
- What do the Ninevites now do as a response to this?

The use of Sackcloth in the Old Testament:

"Sackcloth", a coarse cloth most often made of goat's hair, was the customary dress of the poor and those who were in mourning. In the Old Testament Jacob expressed his grief for the loss of Joseph and Job for his sad condition by putting on sackcloth (Gen 37:34; Job 16:15). Prophets often wore sackcloth, perhaps partly to associate themselves with the poor (who were being abused by the greed of the upper classes) but also as a sign of mourning for the sins of the people. (Smith and Page pg. 263)

- How does God respond to the people of Ninevah?

NURTURE

- The Ninevites believed God and called on the name of God. What do you say about your faith in God to others?
- The Ninevites responded to God through repentance, wearing sackcloth, fasting, giving up their evil ways and violence. What do you do as a response to your faith in God through your actions?
- Are there people you know who are behaving like the Ninevites? How are you challenged to keep praying for them and speaking to them about God, his mercy and repentance?
- We can easily think that we are better than the Ninevites or not as sinful. What does Romans 3:21-24 say about our sin?

God's heart for the sinner

"God's compassionate heart is always sensitive to those who cry out for mercy.

This truth is evidenced powerfully here in v. 10. This passage speaks of the incredible mercy of God's heart, of his incredible love. Here one finds irrefutable evidence that God wishes not for the destruction of the sinner but for the redemption and reconciliation of all his creation." (Smith and Page, 270)



STUDY 4

THE HEART OF GOD

Big idea

God is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, and abounding in love. His compassion extends further than human compassion ever could.

DISCOVER

Imagine an entire community or city turning to God, and suddenly filling the church. How would you respond? One would hope that we would rejoice. Yet, in Chapter 4, Jonah provides a snapshot of a propensity in all of us. It would be inconvenient for us. We wouldn't be able to claim our usual seat. We'd have to open our homes to make room for the newcomers. We might not be served and catered to in the way we would prefer. We might have to sit with people who hurt us. In this chapter, we get to see God's desire for our hearts and His patience towards us

1. When you were a little kid (or when you still act like one), how did you (or how do you) usually express your anger?
2. Have you ever celebrated something that was good for someone else, but difficult for you? What made it challenging?

Read Jonah 4

Discuss

- Jonah finally tells us why he ran from God in the first place (v.2). What does this reveal about Jonah's understanding of God? What does it reveal about his heart? Why is it possible to know a lot about God without becoming like Him?
- Think back to week one of this series. How does Jonah's attitude towards the Ninevites compare to the sailor's attitude to him? How does God's compassion compare to Jonah's? Does this challenge the attitudes you have toward people?
- God asks Jonah several questions but never answers Jonah's complaints. Why do you think God responds with questions instead of arguments? Have you experienced God gently exposing something in your own heart rather than simply changing your circumstances?
- In the closing verses of this chapter, we see God continually provide for His obstinate prophet. In your most stubborn times, how has God expressed grace and mercy in your life?
- The book ends without telling us what Jonah does next. Why do you think the story finishes with an unanswered question?

NURTURE

- Jonah cared more about the comfort of a plant than the lives of thousands of people (4:10-11). Are there comforts or preferences that have become more important to you than God's mission?
- Throughout Scripture, God chooses people not simply to bless them, but so that they might become a blessing to others (Genesis 12:1-3). How does Jonah challenge the way we think about our own calling as God's people today?

We are much like Jonah. We want to receive God's forgiveness, but we are not always willing to extend it to others.

- Who is it that we need to extend forgiveness to?
- How is God calling you to grow in compassion for the lost?

ACT

When God gave us grace, we received something we did not deserve.

Think of someone in your life who does not deserve grace and be intentional about showing it to them over the coming week.

This can be a family member, co-worker, neighbor, or even someone in your connect group!

Jonah ends with a question because the story isn't over.

The final chapter invites us to answer God's question with our lives.

"Should I not be concerned about that great city?" (Jonah 4:11)

As followers of Jesus, we are invited to share that same concern.

This week spend five minutes each day praying:

"Lord, help my heart become more like Yours."

Then ask:

- Who have I overlooked this week?
- Who needs compassion rather than judgement?
- Where are You already at work that You're inviting me to join?

FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP

God speaks to Jonah

JONAH 1

Big Idea

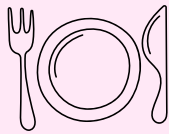
God never gives up on us. Even when we run from Him,
He keeps pursuing us because He loves us.

Wonder Together

- Why do you think Jonah didn't want to go to Nineveh?
- Have you ever been asked to do something that felt really hard?
- Do you think God stopped loving Jonah when he ran away?

Around the Dinner Table

- If you could avoid one job at home forever, what would it be?
- Was there anything you found really hard today?
- When is it difficult to do the right thing?



Create Together

Paper Boat

Make a paper boat.

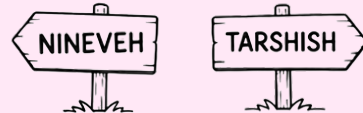
Write inside it:

- Someone you'd like God to help.
- Somewhere you want to be brave.
- A prayer asking God to help you follow Him.



Float it in the bath or a sink while praying together.

Experience Together



Place a "Nineveh" sign on one side of the room and a "Tarshish" sign on the other.

Read different situations aloud. If the choice is moving towards God, run to Nineveh. If it's running away from God, run to Tarshish.

Try these:

- Parent asks you to tidy your toys.
- A friend is sitting alone.
- Someone says sorry.
- You know you should tell the truth.
- Someone at church is new.
- You don't feel like praying.

Which choices are easy?

Which are hard?

Even when Jonah ran away, God never stopped loving him.

Pray Together

God, thank You that You never stop loving us. Help us to trust You even when Your way feels hard. Give us courage to follow You wherever You lead. Amen.

God speaks in a fish

Big Idea

God is with us wherever we are.

Nothing can separate us from His love or stop Him from hearing our prayers

Jonah 2:2 - I cried out to the Lord in my great trouble, and he answered me.

Wonder Together

- What do you think it would have smelled like inside the fish?
- Would it have been loud or quiet?
- How do you think Jonah was feeling?
- What do you think Jonah prayed about?



Around the Dinner Table

- When was the last time you had to be brave?
- When have you felt scared?
- Who helps you feel safe?
- What kinds of things do you pray for?
- Why do you think people pray?



Experience Together

Inside the Fish

Build a "fish" using blankets or a bedsheet. Take a torch or battery candle inside. Turn the light off for a few moments.

Ask:

- How does it feel?
- Would you feel safe? Why?



Jonah couldn't see God, but God was still with him.

**Pray together inside your "fish."
Tell God one thing you are worried
about this week
and ask for His help.**

Create Together

Prayer Fish

Cut out a large fish shape from paper. Write or draw inside the fish:

- Something you're thankful for?
- Something you're worried about?
- People you'd like God to help?

Pray Together

God thank you that you are always with us. Help us to trust You wherever we are, knowing Your love reaches us even on our hardest days. Amen.

God speaks to a city

Big Idea

God's grace is for everyone. No one is too far away for God to love.

Wonder Together

- Why do you think the people of Nineveh listened?
- Were they perfect people?
- Why would God forgive them?
- Does God only love people who make good choices?



Around the Dinner Table

- Who helped you feel welcome recently?
- Is there anyone who might feel left out?
- How do you make friends?
- Who could we invite over this week?

Pray Together

God, thank You that Your love is for everyone. Help us to notice people and share Your kindness wherever we go. Amen.

Experience Together

An Extra Seat

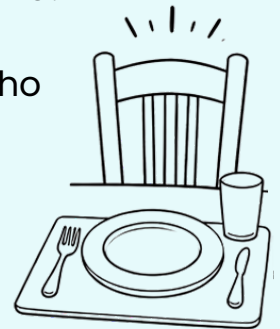
Set the dinner table with one extra place.

Ask:

- "If Jesus came to dinner tonight, who might He invite?"

Talk about people who might feel lonely, left out or forgotten.

Pray for those people together.



Create Together

Kindness Jar

You'll need:

- A jar, bowl or container
- Small strips of paper
- Pens or pencils



Spend a few minutes thinking about people you know who might need to experience God's kindness this week.

Together, write your own kindness ideas onto the strips of paper and place them in the jar.

Each day this week, pull one idea from the jar and do it together as a family.

God loves people

Big Idea

God cares more about people than our comfort.
He wants our hearts to become more like His.

Wonder Together

- Why was Jonah so grumpy?
- What makes you really grumpy?
- What makes you really happy?
- What do you think God wanted Jonah to learn?

Around the Dinner Table

- What made you smile today?
- Did anyone annoy you today?
- What do you think God loves most about people?
- How can our family help someone feel loved this week?

Create Together

Compassion Hearts

1. Cut out lots of paper hearts.
2. Write or draw names of people your family knows.
3. Mix them together.
4. Each person chooses one.
5. Pray for that person every day this week.



Experience Together

Grow a Heart

You'll need:

- A pot
- Seeds (or a small plant)

Plant your seeds together.



God grew a plant to teach Jonah an important lesson. God reminded Jonah that people matter much more than plants.

As your family plants the seeds, remember that just like a plant, our hearts don't grow overnight. They need time, care and God's help.

Every time you water your plant this week, pray together:

"God, help my heart grow to be more like Yours. Help me love the people You love."

Pray Together

God, thank You that You love every person You have made. Help us care about the things You care about.

Grow hearts in us that are full of kindness and love. Amen.

