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JONAH

AND THE GOD OF
SECOND CHANCES

SMALL GROUP LESSONS – PACKET 2

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Who doesn't love a good do-over? Whether it's yelling "Mulligan!" after a bad golf shot, re-recording that awkward voicemail you just left, or realizing you hit "Reply All" when you really, really shouldn't have — we've all needed a second chance. Thankfully, our God is the ultimate giver of divine do-overs.

Jonah's story takes a dramatic and slightly disgusting turn in this passage. After running from God, surviving a storm, and spending three long days inside what must've been the world's smelliest Airbnb, Jonah finally turns his heart back to the Lord. Then, in one of the most unforgettable moments in Scripture, "the Lord commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land." (2:10) not exactly a graceful exit, but definitely a gracious one. And right after that comes one of the most hope-filled verses in the entire Bible:

"Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time." (3:1)

Those words drip with mercy. God didn't scold Jonah, cancel Jonah, or go find "Prophet 2.0." He gave Jonah a do-over. The mission hadn't changed, but Jonah had. The same God who disciplines us in the storm also delivers us to shore and then lovingly says, "Let's try that again."

When Jonah disobeyed, God pursued him. When Jonah prayed, God listened. And when Jonah finally obeyed, God recommissioned him. Jonah's story reminds us that God's grace runs deeper than our stubbornness, our fear, or our worst mistakes. He is the God of second chances and, for most of us, the God of third, fourth, and fifth chances too.

Every believer can relate to Jonah's need for a do-over. We've all had moments when we said, "Lord, can I get another shot at that?" Another conversation, another opportunity, another act of obedience. Yet God doesn't give up on His people. He rescues, restores, and reassigns. His grace doesn't just get us out of the mess, it gets us back on mission.

Before diving into study, take a moment to reflect on this: God's grace not only saves you from your past, it sends you into your purpose. The same God who pulled Jonah out of the deep is ready to pull you up, brush you off, and say, "Let's do this again but this time let's do it together."

ICEBREAKER

We've all needed a 'do-over' at some point in relationships, decisions, or even obedience to God. If you could hit the 'do-over' button on one moment in life, big or small, what would it be, and why?

READ IT

Jonah 2:10-3:3

GET IT

1. According to Jonah 2:10, what did the Lord command the fish to do, and what was the result?
2. In Jonah 3:1, what happened to Jonah after he was released from the fish?
3. What specific instructions did God give Jonah in verse 2?
4. How did Jonah respond to God's command in verse 3, and where did he go?

LIVE IT

JONAH'S SECOND CHANCE

The opening line of chapter 3 is freighted with surprising grace. Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time. (Jonah 3:1) Pause for a moment and let the words sink in: the second time. What grace and forgiveness are bound up in those three wonderful words. We would not reenlist someone like Jonah. We would go back to the drawing board. We would begin reviewing resumes. We would start over — with someone else. Peter had his chance in the courtyard. John Mark had his shot on the mission field with Paul. Thomas missed his chance by skipping out on the upper room. But they all were given second chances!

James Montgomery Boice wrote in his commentary on Jonah: If we were to say, “Go home now, Jonah. I’m glad you repented of your disobedience, but you are no longer useful to me,” we would be just and reasonable in doing so. Does God stoop to use those who have rejected His calling, turned a deaf ear to His word, and pursued a course of determined disobedience? Yes, He is like that. Yes, He does use such messengers. If He did not, none of us could serve Him.

This is not defending disobedience. This is defending the grace of God—not just in Jonah’s life but in your life and mine as well. He is the God of second chances and beyond. Honest reflection compels the believer to speak of Him as the God of the 999th chance; how many times have we been forgiven and had yet another opportunity given to us to do something for Christ? Imagine the thrill of Jonah the prophet as he heard the word of the Lord coming to him again, the second time. George Morrison, the well-known Scottish pastor and writer from several generations ago, once wrote, “The victorious Christian life is really nothing more than a series of new beginnings.”¹

5. **When you read the phrase “the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time,” what emotions or thoughts come to mind? Why do you think we often give up on people or even on ourselves after failure, while God chooses to give second chances?**

6. **If you were God, would you have given Jonah another chance? Why or why not?**

¹ Jonah: Expository Commentary on the Old Testament (Wisdom Commentary Series) Stephen Davey

“God is the God of the second chance and the hundredth, and the thousandth. He always stands ready to forgive us and welcome us home when we truly repent. We don’t just need one second chance; we need repeated ones, the daily beauty of confession and forgiveness that keeps drawing us back to His grace.”²

- 7. How does knowing that God still uses imperfect, disobedient people like Jonah, Peter, and John Mark encourage you in your own faith and service?**

When God brings discipline or distress into our lives, it’s not to pay us back but to bring us back. Still, if we’re honest, most of us don’t handle that very well. We push back, justify our choices, or run the other direction instead of leaning in to what God might be teaching us. Jonah did the same thing, and it took the belly of a fish for him to finally stop running and start listening. But even there, God’s mercy met him. His correction isn’t meant to crush us, it’s meant to change us. It softens our hearts, shapes our will, and pulls us back in step with His purposes. The question isn’t whether God will discipline us, but whether we’ll let His discipline deepen our devotion.

- 8. When God’s discipline surfaces in your life, do you tend to resist it, run from it, or receive it and what does that reveal about your trust in His goodness?**

- 9. How might your current struggles look different if you viewed them not as punishment, but as God’s invitation to return, realign, and grow closer to Him—like Jonah did in the belly of the fish?**

²<https://billygraham.org/answers/does-god-give-us-second-chances>

10. What steps can you take to acknowledge your mistakes, seek God's mercy, and move forward in obedience. What might it look like this week to stop running, start listening, and take the next step God is calling you to?

HE AROSE AND WENT TO ~~TARSHISH~~ NINEVAH!!

In response to God's commission, Jonah arose. He had done this before (cf. Jonah 1:3), though only to flee in defiant disobedience. This time, however, the prophet moved in the right direction he went to Nineveh. Previously, the prophet boarded a westbound ship for Tarshish in his effort to run from God's will. This time, he went where the Lord commanded him to go, traveling east toward Nineveh. The difficult journey of nearly five hundred miles, assuming the fish ejected Jonah somewhere in Israel, would have taken at least a month to complete.

The fact that Jonah went to Nineveh demonstrated the sincerity of his repentance and the reality of God's grace at work in his life. Repentance restores usefulness, as God forgives and enables His servants. That Jonah obeyed God fully is indicated in the phrase according to the word of Yahweh, which describes full conformity to what God demands (cf. 1 Kgs 17:5, 16; 2 Kgs 10:17). In other words, Jonah journeyed to Nineveh not primarily because he was afraid of the consequences of disobedience but out of genuine and heartfelt submission to the Lord. In acting according to the word of Yahweh, the prophet moved beyond honoring God's command to honoring Yahweh Himself. True obedience not only does what God commands, but, more than that, it seeks to glorify the One who issues such commands (cf. Deut 6:4–6; Isa 58:1–19; Zech 7:5; 1 Cor 10:31; Col 3:17; Heb 13:15). While Jonah defied the presence of God at the outset (cf. Jonah 1:3), in response to the second commission, he honored the Lord from the heart, as demonstrated by his actions.³

11. What's the difference between being remorseful over sin and being repentant? Why do you think we often settle for feeling sorry instead of truly changing direction?

³ Jonah & Nahum: Grace in the Midst of Judgment: (A Verse-by-Verse Expository, Evangelical, Exegetical Bible Commentary on the Old Testament Minor Prophets ... Exegetical Bible Commentary on the OT) John F. MacArthur

- 12. Jonah's obedience "according to the word of the Lord" showed that his repentance was more than words it was action. What are some ways real repentance shows up in our choices and behavior?**

Genuine repentance is not a convenient escape hatch after a weekend or a life of folly. It means admitting specific wrong, recognizing your offensiveness to God, changing course, turning to Christ, and wishing with all your heart you had never made the mistake you now despise.⁴

- 13. Jonah's story shows that God's grace doesn't end when we fail, it begins again when we turn back. Where in your life might God be inviting you to begin again, and what would it look like to take that first obedient step?**

- 14. After receiving mercy, Jonah obeyed immediately. How can you make sure God's second chances in your life don't end with gratitude alone, but lead to real action and renewed obedience this week?**

⁴ The Hole in Our Holiness by Kevin DeYoung



Second chances are powerful. We all know what it feels like to fail, to disappoint someone, or to stray from the right path. And we also know the relief of being given another opportunity! Jonah experienced that when God sent him once again to Nineveh.

But even more remarkable was the second chance God gave the people of Nineveh, a city marked by violence and wickedness.

With a simple eight-word sermon, they believed God, humbled themselves, and turned from their evil ways. In response, God showed mercy. This passage reminds us that no one is beyond God's reach, that repentance opens the way to forgiveness, and that God delights to show compassion.

ICEBREAKER

Have you ever experienced a revival? Have you ever seen a group of people repent and turn to the Lord in an incredible way?

READ IT

Read Jonah 3:4-10

GET IT

1. What message did Jonah proclaim to the people of Nineveh?
2. How did the people respond to Jonah's message?
3. What outward signs of repentance did the Ninevites display?
4. What inward signs of repentance did the Ninevites experience?
5. How did God respond when he saw their repentance?

LIVE IT

Jonah preached an eight-word sermon: "Yet 40 days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown." No fog machines. No merch table. Just truth. And what happened? The entire city repented. The king took off his royal robes, people put on sackcloth, even the cows got involved (read it, it's in there). It was the greatest revival in recorded history.⁵

6. **Jonah's message was blunt and to the point, but God used even those simple words to pierce hearts and stir repentance. What does this teach us about the power of God's word even when delivered imperfectly?**

⁵ Greg Laurie, Facebook

7. Describe a time when you saw God use a small or simple word of truth to make a big impact.

8. The people of Nineveh participated in evil behavior. Another prophet, Nahum, spoke against the evil taking place (Nahum 1:1; 3:1). What evil is happening in our world today? Where do you think God is asking you to speak against evil?

Jonah's message was far more than a fish story. It was a threat: "Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown!" ([Jonah 3:4](#)). What happened next was a far more extreme and amazing miracle than the supernatural storm and the prophet-swallowing fish had been. The text declares the miracle in a seriously understated way: "The people of Nineveh believed in God" ([Jonah 3:5](#)). Those few words describe the largest revival recorded in the Old Testament, as the entire population of Nineveh, numbering in the hundreds of thousands, repented and turned to the Lord.

What made the Ninevites so receptive to Jonah's message? Some scholars have suggested that military defeats or civil unrest or natural phenomena (like earthquakes and eclipses) may have preconditioned the people so that they were ready to receive the prophet's warning. In reality, there is no natural explanation for such a massive conversion. There is, however, a supernatural explanation: The Lord went before Jonah and prepared the hearts of the Ninevites. To accomplish His sovereign saving purpose, He used a rebellious prophet to bring rebellious people to faith in Himself.

The full extent of their repentance is explained in [Jonah 3:5–9](#). Everyone in the city, including the king himself, responded with heartfelt sorrow:

Then the people of Nineveh believed in God; and they called a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least of them. When the word reached the king of Nineveh, he arose from his throne, laid aside his robe from him, covered himself with sackcloth and sat on the ashes. He issued a proclamation and it said, "In Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let man, beast, herd, or flock taste a thing. Do not let them eat or drink water. But both man and beast must be covered with sackcloth; and let men call on God earnestly that each may turn from his wicked way and from the violence which is in his hands. Who knows, God may turn and relent and withdraw His burning anger so that we will not perish."

The king, likely identified as either Adad-nirari III (ca. 810–783 BC) or Assurdan III (ca. 772–755 BC), exchanged his royal robes for sackcloth and ashes. In a public display of personal mourning and to symbolize national repentance, the Assyrian monarch pleaded to the true God for mercy and forgiveness. Just as He had done for Jonah, the Lord answered the king's prayer.

When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it. (Jonah 3:10)

Such an astounding impact on an entire nation by a deeply flawed prophet who repented is a classic example of God's grace in making heroes out of unlikely people.⁶

9. The King of Nineveh leads the nation in a time of repentance (read Jonah 3:6-9).

Share a time where you realized the depth of your sin and your repentance affected the people around you. How have you seen your life of faith affect the people God has placed in your life?

10. At the end of v. 8, we see other expressions of repentance, beyond sackcloth and ashes. What are they? What signs of repentance would be appropriate in our time and place? Would they be the same as "let them give up their evil ways and their violence?" Why or why not?

11. A personal commitment to repentance of sin is a regular part of following Jesus. Take the time to read through Psalm 51. Talk about the aspects of repentance and how you can have a clean heart before God.

⁶ <https://www.gty.org/blogs/B150316/jonah-two-stories-of-miraculous-repentance>

JESUS IS THE GREATER JONAH (MATTHEW 12:38-41 NLT)

One day some teachers of religious law and Pharisees came to Jesus and said, “Teacher, we want you to show us a miraculous sign to prove your authority.”

But Jesus replied, “Only an evil, adulterous generation would demand a miraculous sign; but the only sign I will give them is the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was in the belly of the great fish for three days and three nights, so will the Son of Man be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights.

“The people of Nineveh will stand up against this generation on judgment day and condemn it, for they repented of their sins at the preaching of Jonah. Now someone greater than Jonah is here—but you refuse to repent.”

12. How is the message of Jesus similar to the message of Jonah?
13. How is Jesus different from the prophet Jonah? Was His message different? Was His tone different? Was His promise different? Please explain.
14. Jesus' resurrection as the greater "sign of Jonah" (Matthew 12:39-41) shows his power over sin and death, unlike Jonah's temporary mission to Nineveh. What's one specific area in your life such as a habit, fear, or relationship where you can actively trust Jesus' greater power this week, and how will you take a practical step to surrender it to him, and possibly repent of sin that stands in the way?



In the fish's belly, Jonah found grace to repent. His repentance and renewed faith expressed themselves in the classic words, "Salvation belongs to the LORD!" (Jonah 2:9). Repentance and faith also inspired renewed faithfulness, as chapter 3 records Jonah's obedience to God's commission to preach in wicked Nineveh. In an astonishing display of divine power, Jonah's preaching provoked one of the greatest mass expressions of repentance: "They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them" (Jonah 3:5).

Against this background, we might expect Jonah's story to conclude in triumph. But chapter 4 tells us otherwise. Jonah's story reminds us that few believers follow an unbroken ascent from unbelief upward into gloriously victorious faith. Instead, we tend to progress with steps and halts, advances and slips. R. T. Kendall speaks for many when he writes, "Jonah had such a marvelous revelation of God's mercy and grace to him that, humanly speaking, we might expect he would never have a serious problem again. For, after once seeing God in this extraordinary way in his own life, that should set him up for life." Instead, Jonah shows us that when it comes to growing in God's grace, none of us is set up for life; we all have need for continual and perpetual growth in the grace of God. So it is that Jonah's final chapter begins with a most distressing report: "But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry" (Jonah 4:1).⁷

ICEBREAKER

What's your favorite movie or TV show that ended on a big cliffhanger?

READ IT

Read Jonah 4:1-11

⁷ Phillips, Richard D.. *Jonah & Micah (Reformed Expository Commentary)* (p. 114). P&R Publishing. Kindle Edition.

GET IT

1. Why was Jonah angry?
2. What questions did God ask Jonah?
3. What object lesson did God use to teach Jonah?
4. Why does God pity Nineveh?
5. How does Jonah finally respond to God's grace?

LIVE IT

If the book of Jonah ended at chapter 3, we'd celebrate a story of repentance, revival, and redemption. But it doesn't end there. Chapter 4 opens with a "distressing report": Jonah's response to Nineveh's repentance and God's mercy is anything but fitting for a prophet. Yet here, the true heart of Jonah's reluctance is finally exposed. He knew exactly who God was, "gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love", and he wanted no part in seeing that grace extended to those outside Israel, least of all to Nineveh. At the root of Jonah's anger lies the tangled roots of pride: pride that presumed to know better than God, pride that was blind to his own need for grace, and pride that rejoiced in mercy for himself but refused it for others.

6. How does Jonah's response reveal his lack of understanding of God's character and grace?

7. Jonah's response is rooted in spiritual pride. What are some examples of what spiritual pride looks like for believers?

8. What dangers are presented when we stoop to living in spiritual pride?

If anyone in this story deserved judgment, it was Jonah. He had run from God, abdicated his calling, reluctantly obeyed when forced, and ultimately resented the outcome of his own preaching. Yet God, who had every right to destroy him, instead chose to display mercy once again. The remarkable thing is that Jonah didn't even recognize the grace being shown to him. He hadn't repented, yet God was gracious. He was indignant, yet God was patient.

Rather than striking Jonah down for his arrogance, God pursued him with a lesson in mercy. The plant, the worm, and the scorching wind weren't acts of divine cruelty but instruments of grace. They were God's way of exposing what was hidden in Jonah's heart and softening it. God sought to bring Jonah's heart into alignment with His own, to help him see people, not through the lens of pride and prejudice, but through the eyes of compassion.

9. As you look back over the whole of Jonah's story, how have you seen God demonstrate grace and mercy toward Jonah?

10. How would you describe or characterize God's mercy?

11. Describe a season of your life where you are uniquely aware of how God was patient and gracious toward you.

God's word marks the beginning and end of this short book. It's remarkable how much we can learn about who our God is not only from the things He says, the things He does in this story. If you've thought Jonah is the main character of this story – think again. Through every scene of this story we've been watching a portrait of God unfold. The book of Jonah isn't merely about a man who ran from God, but a God who runs after rebellious people, a God of second chances.

12. As you think back over the whole book, what attributes of God have you seen on display? Where did you see His mercy, power, patience, or compassion most clearly?

13. Which of God's attributes have come alive for you in a new way through this study?

The book of Jonah ends in a way that catches us off guard. There's no neat conclusion or final word about Jonah's response. It just ends with a question: "... and also much cattle?"

It feels abrupt, almost incomplete. But maybe that's the point.

What if God's question to Jonah lingers because it's meant to? What if it's an invitation for you as the reader to step into the story and respond for yourself? Maybe we aren't told how Jonah answered because we're supposed to. Will we share God's heart for those who don't know Him? Will we rejoice when His mercy reaches people we wouldn't expect, or maybe don't even want to see forgiven?

Jonah's silence leaves space for us to wrestle with our own hearts. Do we celebrate God's compassion when it's shown to others, or do we quietly wish He'd deal with them differently?

14. What is one practical way you can live out the heart of the God we've encountered in this story?