

JONAH

AND THE GOD OF
SECOND CHANCES

Call to God

We all know what it means to face an **emergency**, that moment when you need help right *now*. Years ago, I hit that moment when the worst pain of my life—a searing pain in my lower right side—left me unable to move, lying on the bathroom floor. I couldn't get to the car, so my wife, Beth, made the call to **9-1-1**. The diagnosis? A **kidney stone**.

In a far more dire emergency, the prophet **Jonah** made his own distress call from an impossible location: the belly of a giant fish. When his life was truly ebbing away, Jonah prayed to God. God heard Jonah's prayer and answered it, rescuing him and giving him a **second chance** to go preach against the wicked city of **Nineveh** and call them to repent.

Icebreaker

What is the nicest, most impactful gift or act of kindness you've ever received that you are still genuinely thankful for? Tell us the story behind it.

Daily Devotions

Day 1 : Read It

Read Jonah 2:1–9.

Get It

1. From what specific location did Jonah pray to the Lord?
2. Who does Jonah state cast him into the deep?
3. What did Jonah say he was driven away from?
4. What did Jonah remember when his life was fainting away, and what action did he take as a result?
5. What belongs to the Lord, according to Jonah?

Day 2 — Today's Theme: Can You Hear Me Now?

Read Jonah 2:1-2, 7.

When do you think the first ever cell phone was invented? On **April 3, 1973**, an engineer named **Martin Cooper** made the world's first public call from a handheld cellular phone on a New York City street. The first person he called? His main competitor, Joel Engel of AT&T.

But this first phone, nicknamed "**The Brick**," was ridiculously hard to use:

- **Charging Time:** It took about **10 hours** to fully charge.
- **Talk Time:** That only gave you **30 minutes** of actual talk time.
- **Cost:** It sold for around **\$4,000**, which is over **\$11,000** today when adjusted for inflation.
- **Availability:** It took another **10 years** before a version was even available for the public to buy.¹



So, here's the million-dollar question: **Why did they put so much effort into creating this giant, expensive, barely-working brick?**

The purpose was simple and revolutionary: **To be able to talk to anyone, anywhere, at any time.** They wanted to free communication from being tied to a house, a car, or an office.

God has given us something even better than the world's most advanced cell network: the gift of **prayer**.

Just like that first cell phone was created to let you talk to anyone, anywhere, at any time, **prayer is your direct, personal, and constant line to God.**

The amazing thing is that with God, there's no such thing as "no signal." Think about the Bible story of **Jonah**. He found himself in the absolute worst "dead zone" imaginable: **the belly of a great fish, deep in the sea.** And what did he do? **He prayed to the Lord his God.**

No matter where you are—in your room, at school, traveling, or in a tough situation—**God is there, and your call goes through.** He hears your prayers, no matter how quiet or small they are. **God is always in range.**

Since we have this perfect, free, 24/7/365 connection to God, why don't we use it more?

Think about your phone usage. How often do you check it?

Imagine this challenge: What if before every time you looked at your phone, you took some time to talk with God?

How would your prayer life, your stress level, and your relationship with God be different?

6. **Martin Cooper called his rival, Joel Engel, on the first cell phone call. If you could make a historic call to any single person right now (someone famous, a family member, etc.), who would it be and what's the one most important thing you'd want to tell them?**

¹<https://www.mintmobile.com/blog/history-of-cell-phones/#:~:text=The%20E2%80%9Cbrick%20phone%E2%80%9D%20makes%20its,today%20when%20adjusted%20for%20inflation.>

7. If you started connecting with God the way you connect with your phone—frequently, personally, and without hesitation—how would your life be different?
8. The original cell phone was invented so you could talk to anyone, anywhere, at any time. What is the most important reason you want to talk to God—is it for guidance, comfort, wisdom, or something else?

Day 3 — Today's Theme: God's Discipline

Read Jonah 2:3–6.

At Kaneland Harter Middle School, every student has an assignment notebook. In the front of this notebook is a special page that you hope never gets used. It's a page where teachers can sign their name if you do something wrong. If you receive enough signatures, then you receive a lunch detention. If you continue to have unacceptable behavior, you will have meetings with the dean and you may even be suspended from school. The purpose of this page is to correct bad behavior.

The same thing happens at home. When you do something wrong, your parents step in. They might take away your **phone, ground you from activities, or assign extra chores. Why? Not because they hate you, but because they love you** and want to help you follow Jesus.

The Bible shows us that God uses consequences, too. Think about **Jonah**. God gave him a clear job: go preach to the city of Nineveh. Jonah completely disobeyed and ran the other way on a ship.

Because God loved Jonah and wanted him back on the right path, God sent a huge storm. The sailors threw Jonah overboard to save themselves, and then **BAM!** Jonah got swallowed by a giant fish.

Being stuck in the belly of a fish is definitely a way to get someone's attention!

The book of **Hebrews** tells us why God does this: "**The Lord disciplines those he loves.**"²

God cares about you. If you are struggling with sin or ignoring what you know is right, God will lovingly step in to get your attention and bring you back.

When you hit a tough spot in life, and you feel the heavy weight of regret or conviction, **PAUSE**. Ask yourself, "Is this God's loving discipline, trying to get me to stop and turn back to him?"

² Hebrews 12:6

When you realize you've messed up: **Repent**. That means confess your sin and turn back to following the Lord. That's how you find real **peace** again.

It's important to remember that consequences never feel good in the moment. Detention is painful, being grounded is painful, and God's conviction is painful.

Hebrews 12:11 puts it perfectly: **"No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it."**

The pain of the discipline isn't the final goal; the goal is the **"harvest of righteousness and peace."** This means that we start living a righteous life like Jesus where we choose to obey God instead of giving in to sinful temptations, and we have the peace of God's forgiveness where we don't have to carry around with us guilt and shame. When you allow God to use those hard moments to train you, you grow into a stronger, wiser person.

Remember this simple truth: **You can either discipline yourself to do what's right, or God will discipline you out of His deep love.**

Which kind of training would you choose?

9. Can you share a time (without giving too many details) when a consequence that felt hard at the time ended up teaching you a valuable, long-term lesson?

10. What does a "harvest of righteousness and peace" actually look like in a teenager's life?

11. What is one area of your life right now where you know you need to start disciplining *yourself* (like your screen habits, your words, or your honesty) to avoid a bigger "storm" later?

Day 4 — Today's Theme: Worthless Idols

Read Jonah 2:8.

When you read the **Bible**, asking questions is one of the best ways to figure out what God is really saying.

Jonah's prayer focuses on thanksgiving after God saved him from drowning! In **Jonah 2:8**, he talks about people who "cling to worthless idols." It caused me to stop and ask: **Why would Jonah even care about idols right then?** He's literally in a fish, giving a thank-you prayer to God for not dying!

As Jonah is overwhelmed by God's amazing love and rescue, it makes him see how selfish he's been. He realizes that *he* was the one clinging to a **worthless idol**.

What Was Jonah's Idol?

When God told Jonah to go to Nineveh and preach to the Assyrians, Jonah hated them and wanted them to be destroyed. So, what did he do? He ran away to **Tarshish**.

- Jonah put his **own will**, his **prejudice**, and his **personal desires** above following God's clear mission.
- That choice—putting his own comfort and opinion first—was a form of **idolatry**.

An idol isn't just a statue people bow down to. An **idol is anything** we prioritize or trust more than the one true God.

- It could be a **relationship**, a **sport**, your **phone**, a **personal ambition**, or even a **desire to be right**. If something pulls your focus away from God's immense, steadfast love for you, it becomes a worthless idol.

Jonah realized that the very thing that plunged him into the deep sea—and the love that then rescued him—was meant to pull him back from his "idol" and show him that **God's love is the only thing worth holding onto**.

12. What is one thing that takes up the most time, energy, or thought in your life right now? Could that thing (even if it's generally good) potentially become an "idol" if it consistently pulls your focus away from God?

13. What are some non-physical "idols" that are common for teenagers? Which one do you personally struggle with most?

14. Do you find it easier to realize you've been wrong (or clinging to an idol) when things are going great, or when you've hit rock bottom? Why?

Day 5 — Today's Theme: Gratitude: The Motivation for Obedience

Read Jonah 2:6b, 9–10.

Imagine having a disease that forced you to live completely separate from your friends, family, and social life. That's what **leprosy** was like in Jesus' time. It caused terrible disfigurement and nerve damage, and people believed it was a sign of a curse. If you had leprosy, you were an outsider, totally cut off.

In **Luke 17:11–19**, ten lepers begged Jesus to heal them. Jesus told them to go show themselves to the priests (the religious authority who could confirm a cure). As they walked, they were miraculously **cleansed**—totally healed!

But here's the unbelievable part:

- **9 of the 10** kept walking, got their clean bill of health, and went back to their old lives. They were healed, but they never came back to say thanks to Jesus.
- **Only 1**—a Samaritan, who was already an outcast—came back, praised God, and knelt at Jesus' feet with gratitude.

Nine people took the miracle for granted. One person realized the life-changing gift he'd received.

Fortunately, **Jonah** was more like that one thankful leper. After being saved from drowning and spit up on dry land, his entire prayer in the fish's belly (Jonah 2) is a prayer of **thanksgiving** for God's incredible rescue.

In **Jonah 2:9**, he shouts his gratitude:

"But I, with shouts of grateful praise, will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed I will make good. I will say, 'Salvation comes from the Lord.'"

Notice Jonah's response to God's salvation:

- **He gives "shouts of grateful praise."** (He doesn't keep quiet about it.)
- **He vows to make good on his promises.** (He commits to obedience.)

Jonah's motivation to finally obey God and go to Nineveh didn't come from fear; **it came from overwhelming thankfulness for being saved and being given a second chance.**

This is the key for us: Our motivation to obey God shouldn't feel like a chore or a rulebook we have to follow. It should be an **overflow of gratitude** for the ultimate salvation we've been given.

Think about it: Jesus didn't just heal a skin disease; he saved us from the consequence of sin—a spiritual "leprosy" that separates us from God forever. Jesus did this through his death on the cross and resurrection.

Are you grateful for the Lord saving you?

The best, most genuine way to show your gratitude isn't just saying the words. It's following Jonah's example: **The best way to say "Thank You" is to obey what the Lord has asked you to do.**

15. Does your desire to obey God feel like a chore or a heavy rule you *have to follow*, or more of an overflow of gratitude for what Jesus has already done for you? Explain.

16. What is one thing you know God has clearly asked you to do or stop doing this week? How would doing that one thing be a practical way of shouting grateful praise to God?

This lesson was written by Pastor Mario Arindaeng, based on the adult lesson by the VBC pastoral team.