

JONAH

AND THE GOD OF
SECOND CHANCES

The Last Word

The night we first kicked this series off about a month and a half ago, I got the chance to talk with many students who had never read the book of Jonah. It was really cool hearing their perspective on what they thought was coming; they had no idea! I asked one of them, “How do you think the story will end?” and they said, “Well, I think Jonah will repent, admit that he was wrong, and run back to God.” Wow. What a great guess, and honestly, what a warm and powerful way for Jonah’s story to end....

But as we come to the end of the book today, it’s far from a hopeful, happy ending. In fact, we don’t get a proper ending at all; we’re left on a cliffhanger.

With where we’ve been, you’d expect Jonah’s story to end in triumph, but chapter 4 tells a different story. Jonah’s life reminds us that few believers walk a perfect, upward path of victory. Most of us grow through steps and stumbles, advances and setbacks. After experiencing God’s incredible mercy and grace, you’d think Jonah would never struggle again, but he does.

His story shows that when it comes to growing in God’s grace, none of us ever “arrive.” We all need continual growth and renewal. And that’s where chapter 4 begins, with a surprising and painful statement: “*But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry*” (Jonah 4:1).¹

Icebreaker

What’s your favorite movie, TV show, or game that ended on a big cliffhanger?

¹ Phillips, Richard D.. Jonah & Micah (Reformed Expository Commentary) (p. 114). P&R Publishing. Kindle Edition.

Daily Devotions

Day 1 : Read It

Read Jonah 4:1–11.

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 did God pity Nineveh?**
5. **How did Jonah finally respond to God's grace?**

Day 2 — Today's Theme: Time to Celebrate...Wait, Never Mind

Read Jonah 4:1–4.

On January 28, 1986, Americans tuned in to watch the launch of the Space Shuttle *Challenger*. Among the crew was Christa McAuliffe, a schoolteacher who was set to become the first teacher in space. It was meant to be a moment of national pride and inspiration, a story the whole country could celebrate. But just 73 seconds after liftoff, the shuttle exploded on live television. What began as a moment of joy and unity instantly turned into one of grief and shock.

If the book of Jonah ended at chapter 3, we'd feel something similar, a story worth celebrating. We'd close the book on a high note 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 lay 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. What does God's patience with Jonah in chapter 4 teach us about His character?
7. How does God show that He cares both for Nineveh and for Jonah?
8. Jonah was happy to receive God's mercy but angry when others received it. How can that same attitude show up in us today?
9. What does Jonah's anger reveal about how he viewed himself compared to others?
10. Have you ever struggled to celebrate when someone you didn't like experienced grace or success? What does that say about the condition of your heart?

Day 3 — Today's Theme: Pride Over People

Read Jonah 4:5–8.

Maybe you've experienced this before: your friends are planning a fun weekend, and you're excited to be part of it. You can't wait to hang out and enjoy the experience with them. But suddenly, your parents tell you that you have a family obligation you have to attend. Instantly, you think, "Are you kidding me? This is unfair!"

At that moment your own selfishness and pride take over. God can use moments like that to reveal pride in wanting your own way and to teach you to care for others, even when it's inconvenient.

If anyone in the story of Jonah deserved judgment, it was Jonah. He ran from God, walked away from his calling, obeyed only when he had no other choice, and then got mad when his preaching actually worked. But even though God had every right to be done with Jonah, He wasn't. Instead, God showed him mercy...again!

The remarkable thing is that Jonah didn't even realize it. He hadn't said sorry, yet God was still gracious. He was frustrated, yet God stayed patient.

Instead of striking Jonah down for his bad attitude, God decided to teach him. He caused a plant to grow and give Jonah shade, and Jonah was happy about it. But when God allowed the plant to wither, Jonah became angry and even wished he could die. The plant wasn't just about comfort; it was a lesson. **Jonah's pride showed in how much he cared for the plant, yet he didn't care nearly as much about the people of Nineveh.** God used the plant, the worm, and the scorching wind to reveal Jonah's self-centered heart and to soften it, showing him that people matter more than his personal comfort.

God wanted Jonah to see people the way He sees them, not with pride or judgment, but with compassion.

11. **How do you see pride showing up in Jonah's reaction to Nineveh's repentance, and how is that similar to times when you get frustrated because things don't go your way?**

12. **Can you think of a time in your life when God was patient and gracious with you, even when you were frustrated, selfish, or prideful?**

13. **How can you practice showing compassion and mercy to others, even when it's inconvenient or when you feel they don't deserve it?**

Day 4 — Today's Theme: God's Teaching on Compassion

Read Jonah 4:9–11.

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 from the things He says and does in this story. If you've thought Jonah is the main character of this story, sorry, you're wrong. 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.**

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 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?

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. As you think back over the whole book of Jonah, what attributes of God have you seen on display? Where did you see those attributes most clearly?

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

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

This lesson was written by Ethan Wentzlaff, based on the adult lesson by the VBC pastoral team.