

JONAH

THE PURSUING GRACE OF GOD



A SEVEN DAY DEVOTIONAL FOR SHORT-TERM MINISTRY TEAMS

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**And if we obey God, we must disobey ourselves;
and it is in this disobeying ourselves, wherein
the hardness of obeying God consists.**

Herman Melville, Moby Dick

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- Day 1: The Foundation of Sin and Grace
 The Covenant of Grace**
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Day 1
The Foundation for Sin and Grace
The Covenant of Grace

Read Jonah 1:1-16

God's relationship with His chosen people is the lens through which one may understand the history of Israel correctly...God promises to be the God of Israel, and the Israelites promise to be exclusively His people. Jonah's commission in chapter one must be understood against the backdrop of the Mosaic covenant. However, the Mosaic covenant must in turn be understood against the backdrop of the patriarchs, particularly the covenant with Abraham.-Brian Estelle, Salvation Through Judgment and Mercy

As Israel's history unfolds, it becomes clear that Israel was no more successful than Adam in bringing about in God's garden, rest from sin, injustice, strife, hatred, and oppression. -Edmund Clowney, The Unfolding Mystery; Discovering Christ in the Old Testament

1. In the Covenant of Grace, the Triune God initiates a plan of redemption in which Adam's race will be pursued and rescued from folly, guilt, and ruin. It is in God's commitment to creation that He establishes a line of people who will be the object of his special redeeming love (Gen.3:15). How does the covenant of grace provide comfort and assurance of God's faithfulness and commitment to the believer? To the church? To the world?

2. According to verse 1 Jonah, son of Amittai, was the same prophet who ministered during the reign of Jeroboam II (2 Kings 14:25). During this time Israel continually broke covenant with God. As stated in Exodus 20:1-17, what are the consequences for Israel's faithfulness and unfaithfulness to the covenant?

3. According to Exodus 20:2 what is the promise of the covenant? How does this explain the jealousy of God?

4. Judgment comes to Israel by foreign nations because she repeatedly broke covenant with the Lord. Assyria, with Nineveh as the capital, would be used by God to bring such judgment. How does this explain why Jonah ran from God?

5. Read 2 Samuel 12:9. Explain the similarities between Jonah and David's running from God? How does this explain the way we run from God?

6. Do you see yourself as someone who runs from God or do you believe that you are generally faithful to Him? How?

7. Read Jeremiah 31:31-33 and Matthew 26:26-28. As the covenant of grace unfolds in its successive expressions through Abraham, Moses, and David, explain how the full expression of the covenant is satisfied in Jesus. Is the believer saved by works? If so, whose?

8. Read Galatians 3:1-3. How is trying to keep the law running from the word of the Lord? How is self-righteousness despising or running from God?

9. Read James 4:4-6. How does the jealousy of God guarantee His pursuing grace?

Day 2

The Purpose of Trials

Exposing False Worship

Read Jonah 1:17-2:10

Read & Reflect

Like children, we believe a loving parent would give us ice cream without first making us eat spinach. Goodness is ice cream. It certainly isn't spinach. But our problem is worse than that. Not only do we want what immediately feels good and often dislike what in fact is good for us, but we're also out of touch with what would bring us the most pleasure if it were given to us. There is a heavenly ice cream with the nutritional value of spinach and it's available now, in this life.

-Larry Crabb, *Shattered Dreams*

1. Read Romans 8:26-39. How does this relate to Crabb's statement, "There is a heavenly ice cream with the nutritional value of spinach?" Do you believe that God's grace could be compatible with hurricanes, cancer, divorce, failure from university, rejection, and unemployment? What does God's pursuing grace look like in your life? Does this give new meaning to Romans 8:28? How does the interceding work of the Spirit reveal God's commitment to transform the believer?
2. Read Jonah 2:8 and James 1:2-4. Since the Bible defines steadfastness as fidelity or loyalty to God, what is the intended purpose (vs.3) and desired result (vs.4) of trials? Toward what object is the believer's faith to become fixed or "steadfast" (ESV)? How do trials serve this purpose?

Idolatry is anything we believe we need, apart from Jesus, to make us happy, satisfied, or fulfilled. An idol arises when we desire something more than we desire Jesus; when we fear things rather than God; when we worship ourselves rather than Christ; when we put our trust in anything other than God; when we serve anything other than Jesus. The reason we resort to idolatry is not hard to find. When we fall away from God, we experience great lack, need, deficiency, and alienation. In order to fulfill our lives we resort to idolatry. We serve, love, desire, trust, fear, and worship other things apart from God to give us joy, peace, freedom, status, identity, control, happiness, security, fulfillment, health, pleasure, significance, acceptance, and respect.

-Dr. Neil H. Williams, Gospel Transformation

3. According to verse 8 what was the challenge to Jonah's steadfastness of faith in God? Read Jeremiah 2:11-13 and Romans 1:18-25. Explain in your own words how idolatry is an obstacle to faith to Christ? What are the idols you are trusting other than Jesus and why are they vain or worthless?

4. Read Jonah 1:9, 4:1-3 and 2: 9 . Does Jonah know the mercy of God or merely give a memorized catechism response (1:9)? What is the idol of Jonah's heart as expressed in 4:1-3? How does his running reflect the idolatry of self-righteousness? What effect does the trial have on his view of God in 2:9? Explain how idolatry naturally results in self-righteousness and self-worship?

The wilderness wanderings were not a sign of Moses' poor leadership...These trials did not call God's character into question; rather, they stand as signs of his covenant keeping love. God knows exactly what he is doing. Israel's troubles were in the thoughts and desires of their hearts. They interpreted their trials incorrectly and saw them as reasons to doubt God's goodness, not as proof of it. ...He calls you to turn from questioning him to examining yourself. -Timothy Lane & Paul Tripp, *How we Change*

5. Discuss Lane & Tripp's comment. How does 1 Corinthians 10: 1-14 provide instruction with regard to "desiring evil" and "fleeing from idolatry?" Was Christ present with the Israelites in the trial of the wilderness? Is Christ present in your trials? Read verse 4b. If God's purposes are to expose idols of the heart how does the knowledge of Christ's presence (God's faithfulness) help you interpret trials, escape temptation, and endure (overcome)?

Day 3

The Purpose of Trials

Establishing True Worship

Read Jonah 2: 1-9

When Jonah cried out, "Salvation belongs to the Lord" he was appropriating the grace of God in a profound way. He saw and believed that a right standing with God was not based upon personal performance; religion affiliation or success. Though Jonah had been taught these truths throughout his life he hadn't appropriated God's grace personally. He had to be shown the worthlessness of his idols and the substitution of affections (worship) that had taken place. The further down God took Jonah the greater hope became for his rescue. Jonah had to be shown that self-righteousness was really self-worship. His unwillingness to serve, that is, to go to Nineveh, reflected a lack of thanksgiving for God's mercy. Jonah had come to believe that he was worthy based upon his religious affiliation ("I am a Hebrew" 1:9) and self-righteousness (They don't deserve mercy-4:2).

1. How does ingratitude reflect self-worship and self-righteousness? How can you tell if you are being self-righteous? Here is a quick test. Do you question the goodness of God during trials or challenging circumstances, believing God is not faithful or fair? Do you become anxious and worried? Do you try to figure out what you did in order to do something right to get his favor? How do you respond to other people's moral failure? Discuss.
2. Read verses 4-7. What did Jonah see which caused him to take his eyes off of himself? How would this cause Jonah to turn from "vain idols" to worship the true and living God? Where is our only hope today for turning from self-worship and self-righteousness?

The heart cannot be prevailed upon to part with the world by a simple act of resignation. But may not the heart be prevailed upon to admit into its preference another who shall subordinate the world and bring it down from its wonted ascendancy? ...If the way to disengage the heart from the positive love of one great and ascendant object is to fasten it in positive love to another then it is not by exposing the worthlessness of the former but by addressing to the mental eye the worth and excellence of the latter...-Thomas Chalmers, The Expulsive Power of a New Affection

3. Read John 16:7-14. Explain how the Holy Spirit 'subordinates' the preference for the idolatry of joy, peace, freedom, status, identity, control, happiness, security, fulfillment, health, pleasure, significance, acceptance, and respect?

4. Read Romans 8:1-11. According to verses 1-4 how does the Holy Spirit apply the works of Christ to the believer, enabling him/her to obey?

5. One reason inordinate desires can't be revealed as worthless is because of the self-deceptive nature of idolatry. You typically don't know what is controlling you. Should the worthlessness of an idol become evident why won't strength of will bring positive change and true worship? Explain from verses 1-4.

6. Read Psalm 51:15-17. With the eyes of faith engaged in true worship Jonah responds with an overflow of thanksgiving (vs. 9). What is the sacrifice Jonah vows to give God? What is the only sacrifice he can offer? What is the only sacrifice you and I can offer God?

7. Read Romans 8:5-8 and Galatians 3:1-6. Explain how the believer experiences peace with God, freedom from sin, power to change, and new life? How is this counterintuitive to everything you know about the way to freedom, power, and change?

8. Read Romans 8:9-11 and Galatians 5:16-26. Explain how true worship “disengages the heart” and empowers the will through participation and anticipation of satisfaction and joy?

Day 4 The Transformation of the Heart Repentance and Restoration

In my part of British Columbia, where rainfall is heavy, roads on which the drains fail soon get flooded and become unserviceable. Repentance... is the drainage routine on the highway of holiness on which God calls us all to travel. It is the way we get beyond what has proved to be dirt, rubbish, and stagnant floodwater in our lives. This routine is a vital need, for where real repentance fails, real spiritual advances ceases, and real spiritual growth stops short. -J.I. Packer, *Rediscovering Holiness*

Repentance has two parts, recognizing (cognitive) and turning (behavioral). The recognition aspect to repentance is the act of changing one's mind; seeing the motivations of the heart as well as the actual sins, pride, and self-righteousness. The turning aspect of repentance represents turning first to the Father for restoration, then to others whom offense has been given.

1. Just as idolatry represents false worship so too can repentance be counterfeit and false. Given the criteria from above why is the sailor's initial repentance counterfeit (1:5-13)?

2. Read 2 Corinthians 7:8-12. What does Paul mean when He says that "godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death?" In what way does this describe Paul's explanation of works of the flesh and fruit of the Spirit (Gal.5:19-26)? Can you identify fruit of the Spirit in verse 11?

3. How can grief or suffering run short of repentance? Explain how religion; penance, study, discipline, tear, guilt, even feelings of shame, circumvent the ability of godly grief to produce repentance.

4. How does blame-shifting circumvent the process of repentance? Explain ways you blame-shift? Give concrete examples.

5. What effect does grief and suffering have on the sailors in verse 14-16? Compare their repentance with Jonah's.

6. In dealing with Katrina or any other hardship in our lives which type of repentance do we normally have, the sailor's or Jonah's? Do we really think we need a savior or merely assistance in tough spots? What does this say about our motives?

7. What is God's response when Jonah admits his own failure, and accepts God's grace?

8. Explain the process of repentance as displayed by the Ninevites in 3:4-10. What is God's response in verse 10?

9. Read James 4:6-10. What are the steps of repentance and how does God respond.

10. Read John 7:37-39. Explain how repentance, turning to Jesus through believing the gospel, produces deep change in our attitudes and actions. Is it real or superficial? Is repentance a one time or continual activity?

11. How does the promise of restoration and change give hope to your struggles with lust, sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like that (Works of the flesh in Galatians 5:19-21)?

Day 5 The Transformed Heart Set Free To Love and Serve

Jonah 3:1-9

Read and Reflect

Suppose a single woman starts working in a large company. She has not yet met her new boss. At one end of the office area, she sees a door with a bulletin board next to it. This is her boss's office. He posts directions and rules for his employees on the bulletin board. What does she think of her boss and his bulletin board? Most likely, she has a sense of awe and possibly some fear about her boss. The rules on the board could therefore, be looked upon with similar fear and possible distaste. The rules intended to govern her behavior and maximize her performance might not inspire or motivate her, but she would follow them to avoid being fired. The rules themselves seem impersonal and cold. Now imagine that months later, the boss, a single man, develops a personal relationship with her. Eventually they marry. During that time, she notices that her perspective about the bulletin board changes to the same degree that her heart changes toward her new husband. She now sees the guidelines as wise and loving directions from someone who cares for her well-being. She no longer views them as burdensome. They are specific ways she can honor and please the husband who happens to be her boss. -Timothy Lane and Paul David Tripp, *How People Change*

1. From the above illustration what has changed? Does "fruit" grow from rules or a from a relationship? Explain.

2. As we saw from James 1:2-4, trials bring maturity and change that would not otherwise exist if we were left alone. Ultimately, however, the gospel renews our desires, redirecting the current of our affections. Read Matthew 22:34-40 and Romans 8:29. Explain how the gospel changes us? What does the gospel "look like" and what is the context of the change? How does this affect our fellowship with God and man?

3. Genuine repentance and faith move us away from ourselves and into the lives of other people. Why did Jonah respond differently to God's call this time? Do you think he is obeying because he is afraid that God will punish him or because he realizes that he has been shown grace? How does God's grace transform your obedience?

4. Read Isaiah 6:1-8. Compare Jonah's circumstance with Isaiah's. How does Isaiah respond to the word of the Lord? How does this apply to the church and to the individual believer in Matthew 28:16-20.

5. Read Galatians 5:6.

6. Read James 2:14-26. If we are not saved by our works but the works of another, what does James mean, "Faith without works is dead?"

7. Read Ephesians 2:10 and Philippians 2:12-14. Where does the power to love come from and what is the role of the believer in the process of change?

8. What are several ways in which God is calling you to show the glory and power of Christ to your spouse, parent, sibling, friend, coworker, neighbor, and those of a different race, religion, economic, and social status? Why is it difficult?

9. What does it mean to love our enemies?

Day 6 The Depth of Sin and Grace

Jonah 3:10-4

He really does want to fill the universe with a lot of loathsome little replicas of Himself-creatures whose life, on its miniature scale, will be qualitatively like His own, not because He has absorbed them but because their wills freely conform to His. We want cattle who can finally become food; He wants servants who can finally become sons. We want to suck in, He wants to give out. We are empty and would be filled; He is full and flows over. Our war aim is a world in which Our Father Below has drawn all other beings into himself: the Enemy wants a world full of beings united to Him but still distinct. -C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*

The condemning power of sin is gone, but the active power of sin remains. -Tim Keller

True Christian growth is growth downward -J.I. Packer

1. Do you find Jonah's response to what God does in 3:10 surprising? Why or why not?
2. Do you think that Jonah had really repented the first time? Compare Jonah's sin in chapter 4 with that in chapter 1? When you fall into repeated patterns of sin do you question whether you are really a child of God?
3. Read Romans 6:1-14. How do we reconcile this passage with Jonah's behavior? As a new creature and a prophet of God should he have recurring sin?

8. As we have stated, idolatry and self-righteousness are self-deceptive realities. Piracy of our affections may be unknown and anchored deep in our lives. Discuss how the works of the flesh are great indicators of our poverty and need for Jesus. Consider how anger, anxiety, fear, doubt and the like are in a certain sense the signal flares dispatched from our heart, revealing false worship. From Romans 5:18-21 discuss how sin reveals our need of grace and how it can jettison (throw) us back to the loving arms of our Heavenly Father. Discuss the objections Paul no doubt anticipated from his readers in Romans 6:1-4.

9. Read Hebrews 4:14-16. Explain how Jesus' knowledge of our weakness is a source of hope to the believer. Why do we try so desperately to hide our weakness from Him?

Day 7 The Better Judge with Better Love

Read Jonah 4

Grace teaches us that God loves us because of who God is, not because of who we are. -Phillip Yancy

1. What is Jonah's reason for being angry? Does he have a legitimate reason for anger?

2. What does he say about the nature of God in verse 2? Who has Jonah decided should be the judge of the Ninevites and himself? What the story of Jonah be like if he had gotten his way?

Jonah is angry that there is not justice the way that he would have it. Jonah is angry because God does not love the way he loves. God's love is different, and it is not a respecter of persons or actions. It gives mercy, and hardship so that people will repent. It gives mercy to the wicked, and hardship to the self-righteous. Jonah thinks that he should be judge, and that God should act the way he would act. The irony is, that if Jonah had gotten his way, no one in the story would be right with God. The Ninevites would have been destroyed, and Jonah's hard heart would never have had the hardships needed to break it.

3. What are the three things that chapter 4 says that God provided to Jonah? Are they all expressions of God's love?

4. Is God's love less conditional than Jonah thought? Is living in God's love more costly than Jonah had thought?

God's love is much less conditional upon man than Jonah had imagined. It is not for put-together people or for righteous prophets. It is for those who have spent their lives worshiping other gods, however, the unconditional nature of God's love costs Jonah his prejudice and comfort. If Jonah is loved by a God that looks beyond his self-righteousness and chases him in the midst of his sin, that love must cost him his belief that he is better than others, and it must cost him the belief that his momentary wants are more important than the the messed up lives of people on whom God has compassion.

5. Would we be angry in Jonah's situation? Do we ever put ourselves in the place of a judge instead of God?
6. What are things in our own lives that we cling to like the vine, and are more heart-broken when we lose them, than we are towards people when they suffer? If we had it our way would God's love include sending the worm? Why is the worm absolutely essential?
7. Why does the book end without a happy picture of Jonah's repentance?

