

An aerial photograph of a tropical coastline, showing turquoise water, white sand beaches, and green land. The image is used as a background for the book cover.

Lessons Learned from a dude named Jonah

By D. Nicole

Lessons Learned Series
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Introduction

God's blessings follow you and await you at every turn: when you don't follow the advice of those who delight in wicked schemes, when you avoid sin's highway, when judgment and sarcasm beckon you, but you refuse. For you, the Eternal's Word is your happiness. It is your focus—from dusk to dawn (Psalm 1:1-2, The Voice).

How does one study the Bible? You may have come to passages of scripture that state we are to “hide God’s Word in our hearts.” What does that mean exactly? How do we accomplish that? I have found that studying the Word of God requires:

- 1) Reading God’s word intentionally & consistently
- 2) Reading God’s word conversationally & expectantly
- 3) Reading God’s word obediently

For the first, we need to remember that anything good in our lives requires intentionality & consistency. For instance, if you are trying to lose weight and get in shape, you can’t just go to the gym a few times a month and expect good results. This is something that requires discipline, dedication, and intentionality. The same is true for the word of God. If we are going to have the necessary tools to disciple, evangelize, and fight off the enemy, we need to read God’s Word consistently. We must be intentional about implementing this daily. Secondly, when we read God’s Word, we should read it conversationally and expectantly. You may have heard the word “meditate” used when it comes to studying the Bible. The word “meditate” means to “talk to oneself.” As we read God’s word, we should chew on it, sit with it, and contemplate what we are reading. As we do this, we become more attentive to what God desires to teach us. When our hearts are open and willing, God will lead us to those quiet places and speak tenderly to us there (Hosea 2:14). Questions that we can ask periodically as we study the Bible are: “What are

you trying to say to me, Lord, through this passage of scripture?” “How can these truths I read be applied to my life today?” We read the Bible with the expectation that God will speak to us. It is meant to be a conversation between you and God. Lastly, we need to read the Word of God obediently. It isn’t only about obtaining knowledge. Through our obedience in reading the Word of God as an intentional part of each day, it becomes alive in our heart and our life. The Word of God illuminates sin in our lives. It exposes what is going on in our hearts such as idolatry, which are things that we put before and above the Lord. It also reminds us that transformation and change cannot happen within our own strength. Studying and meditating on the Word of God tunes our attentions, allegiances, and affections to be centered on the Lord and not this world.

This is a study about Jonah. He was a man who initially thought he could outrun God. As we journey through Jonah’s story, no matter his bad mistakes, we continually see God’s extensive forgiveness, mercy, and love, as well as reminding us what it truly means to forgive those who have wronged us. As you go through this study, try not to look at this like being in school, taking a textbook out, and taking notes etc. It isn’t supposed to be that way. Studying God’s Word is supposed to be transformational. Romans 15:4 states, *“For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope.”* It is with the ongoing study of God’s Word that reminds us of this hope in Jesus Christ. It is this hope we can rely on and cling to in this life. As you read and study His Word may you be reminded of this absolute hope and may your openness to the truth of God’s word be transformative in becoming more like Christ.

Day 1

The book of Jonah is part of what is known as the Minor Prophet section in the Old Testament. The Minor Prophets start with the book Hosea and end with the book Malachi. This particular title isn't given to them because these books are insignificant or lesser than the major prophet books (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, and Daniel). It is due to the size of each of these books as to why they are called minor. However, even though they may be smaller in size, they are filled with incredibly deep and meaningful lessons for each of us no matter our age or season of life.

Who exactly was Jonah? Some have believed this was a book that contained an allegorical tale. But, not only is Jonah mentioned by name in the Old Testament, he is mentioned in the New Testament by Jesus himself (Matthew 12:28-42, 16:2-4, and Luke 11:29-32). We are first introduced to Jonah briefly in 2 Kings 14:25, *"He was the one who restored the boundaries of Israel from Lebo Hamath to the Dead Sea, in accordance with the word of the Lord, the God of Israel, spoken through his servant Jonah son of Amittai, the prophet from Gath Hepher."* Jonah was a prophet from the region of Gath-hepher, which is located in northern Israel. It was during the reign of Jeroboam II (793-753 BC) when it is said that Jonah predicted the restoration of the northern kingdom's boundaries. What Jonah is most known for is God's request for him to preach against the wickedness of the City of Nineveh; calling them to repent. Initially, Jonah runs in the opposite direction and then through a series of events gets swallowed by a large fish and is there for 3 days. After that he does go to Nineveh and the Ninevites do repent, however, there is much more to the story that is important for us to learn.

Think this through and Pray it in

Take a moment and write down all that you remember about who Jonah is and the details you remember about his life. It doesn't matter how small the detail you remember, write everything down. When you think of this story, what things surface for you? What do you remember that is both positive and negative about the story of Jonah? Whatever surfaces for you, take some time to write it down.

Day 2 (Jonah 1:1-3)

Jonah 1:1-3

The word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amittai: ² “Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me.” ³ But Jonah ran away from the Lord and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the Lord.

The opening passage states, “The word of the Lord came to Jonah.” What this tells us is that God himself gave Jonah a command as to what he was supposed to do. As we see in verse 2, Jonah was commanded to go to Nineveh and warn the Ninevites of God’s judgment because of their evil plots, cruelty, idolatry, prostitution, and witchcraft. Jonah was to bring a message of repentance, in spite of all the Ninevites had done, so they could receive God’s mercy and forgiveness. The command is very clear. Go to Nineveh...check! Preach message of repentance...check! God’s in control of this whole situation...check! However, after receiving God’s command, Jonah’s response was to run in the opposite direction.

Think this through and Pray it in

I believe that God can and does speak to us through His Word, through other Christians, and through His church. Is there a message that God is currently speaking to you? Are you listening and responding in obedience? Or are you running away? Take a moment to reflect and process what comes to mind with the Lord.

Day 3 (Jonah 1:1-3)

Jonah running in the opposite direction is a part of the story where I try to get into Jonah's head to figure out why he chose to run away? I'm also completely perplexed as to how he thought he would be able to run away from God? But, if we are truly honest, we find that there are moments in our lives where it is easy to convince ourselves that we know what is best and we head in our own direction. One thing I think about in regards to Jonah running away is the element of pride. I reflect on the number of times I've gotten in the way of what the Lord was trying to accomplish in my life. One of my favorite lyrics from the worship song, "*Lead me to the Cross*," is the line, "*Rid me of myself, I belong to You.*" I love this! Such deep personal conviction in those words. It is a prayer that I have prayed to the Lord many times because I know my tendency is to get in the way, thinking I know best. I spend more time processing through the situation or problem, worrying or fretting, while at the same time trying to come up with my own plans than I do immediately handing it over to the one who is capable and able to do all things. Does that sound familiar?

Think this through and Pray it in

How many times do we rob ourselves of time and energies by giving in to worry, fear, or despair? How many times do we toss and turn, one sleepless night after another instead of spending time resting and trusting? Overall, it's a heart issue with where we place our trust. Do we truly trust the Lord? Do we trust in His promises? Do we trust Him to take care of us? Do we trust that God knows what is best? Take a moment and pray through the lyrics of the worship song *Lead me to the Cross*:

Savior I come
Quiet my soul, remember
Redemption's hill
Where Your blood was spilled

For my ransom

Everything I once held dear
I count it all as lost

Lead me to the cross
Where Your love poured out
Bring me to my knees
Lord I lay me down
Rid me of myself
I belong to You
Lead me, lead me to the cross

You were as I
Tempted and tried, human
The word became flesh
Bore my sin and death
Now you're risen

Everything I once held dear
I count it all as lost

Lead me to the cross
Where Your love poured out
Bring me to my knees
Lord I lay me down
Rid me of myself
I belong to You
Lead me, lead me to the cross

To your heart
To your heart
Lead me to your heart
Lead me to your heart

Lead me to the cross
Where Your love poured out
Bring me to my knees
Lord I lay me down
Rid me of myself
I belong to You
Lead me, lead me to the cross

Day 4 (Jonah 1:3)

Jonah 1:3

³ But Jonah ran away from the Lord and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the Lord.

There is no official reason given in these verses as to why Jonah ran, but it is clear that Jonah didn't want to do what was being asked of him so he chose to go in the opposite direction. In taking some additional time to study what was happening in Nineveh, during Jonah's day, brings some depth of understanding as to the difficulty of the task Jonah was being asked to do. In studying how evil the Ninevites were, is not meant to justify Jonah's choices. However, it does bring a better understanding as to why he chose to run away.

Nineveh was the most important and powerful city in all of Assyria. It was also the most wicked. Jonah would have been raised being told of stories of who the Assyrians were and what they did to his people. In the book of Jonah, it doesn't lay out Nineveh's wickedness, only that "its wickedness has come up before me [God]" (Jonah 1:2). I would say that it was the Assyrians who truly invented the element of terrorism. They were known to annihilate anyone who tried to defy them or go against them. They would come in, conquer a land, take prisoners and relocate them in Assyrian run territories. They went as far as forcing the Jews to marry Assyrians so as to create a whole new race of people. The Assyrians were arrogant, taking pride in all of their conquests and exploits.

In the book of Nahum, the prophet gives a more detailed description of why Nineveh was guilty. Nahum, like Jonah was also a prophet to Nineveh, however, it was over a century later that he prophesized of God's judgment on these people. Unfortunately, evil had returned to this

city and now judgment was being pronounced on this wicked nation. Even though Nahum's prophecy was at a different time, reading through the text brings a deeper understanding as to why God was proclaiming judgment on these people.

Nahum 1:7-15

⁷ *The Lord is good,
a refuge in times of trouble.
He cares for those who trust in him,
⁸ but with an overwhelming flood
he will make an end of Nineveh; he will
pursue his foes into the realm of darkness.
⁹ Whatever they plot against the Lord
he will bring to an end;
trouble will not come a second time.
¹⁰ They will be entangled among thorns
and drunk from their wine;
they will be consumed like dry stubble.
¹¹ From you, Nineveh, has one come forth
who plots evil against the Lord
and devises wicked plans.
¹² This is what the Lord says:
"Although they have allies and are
numerous,
they will be destroyed and pass away.
Although I have afflicted you, Judah,
I will afflict you no more.
¹³ Now I will break their yoke from your
neck
and tear your shackles away."
¹⁴ The Lord has given a command
concerning you, Nineveh:
"You will have no descendants to bear
your name.
I will destroy the images and idols*

*that are in the temple of your gods.
I will prepare your grave,
for you are vile."
¹⁵ Look, there on the mountains,
the feet of one who brings good news,
who proclaims peace!
Celebrate your festivals, Judah,
and fulfill your vows.
No more will the wicked invade you;
they will be completely destroyed*

Nahum 2:7-8, 13

⁷ *It is decreed that Nineveh
be exiled and carried away.
Her female slaves moan like doves
and beat on their breasts.
⁸ Nineveh is like a pool
whose water is draining away.
"Stop! Stop!" they cry,
but no one turns back.
¹³ "I am against you," declares
the Lord Almighty.
"I will burn up your chariots in smoke,
and the sword will devour your young
lions. I will leave you no prey on the earth.
The voices of your messengers will no
longer be heard."*

Nahum 3:5-7, 18-19

⁵ *"I am against you," declares
the Lord Almighty.*

*"I will lift your skirts over your face.
I will show the nations your nakedness
and the kingdoms your shame.*

⁶ *I will pelt you with filth,
I will treat you with contempt
and make you a spectacle.*

⁷ *All who see you will flee from you and say,
'Nineveh is in ruins—who will mourn for*

*her?' Where can I find anyone to
comfort you?"*

¹⁸ *King of Assyria, your shepherds slumber;
your nobles lie down to rest.*

*Your people are scattered on the mountains
with no one to gather them.*

¹⁹ *Nothing can heal you;
your wound is fatal.*

*All who hear the news about you
clap their hands at your fall,
for who has not felt
your endless cruelty.*

The people of Nineveh were cruel, unjust, and evil. I can see how difficult this particular "ask" from God would be for Jonah. I think about how it might be walking into the hub of ISIS fighters, proclaiming God's love for them and calling them to repent for their wickedness. Although this is a message they desperately need to hear, I know that it would be incredibly difficult to do. I also think that beyond proclaiming this difficult message to a truly evil people, it is hard for us to wrap our heads around how God could extend forgiveness for all the atrocities that they had committed? It is in our humanness that we tend to weigh sin, convincing ourselves that some sins are worse than others. But what I have to remember is that we all fall short of the glory of God, because we are all sinners in need of a Savior.

Think this through and Pray it in

Romans 3:23 states, "...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Scripture tells us that to God, it doesn't matter the magnitude of ungodly actions it is all "sin." Although there are multiple passages in the Bible that talk about sin, here are some verses to meditate on and pray through.

Psalm 69:5 (New Living Translation)

*O God, you know how foolish I am;
my sins cannot be hidden from you.*

Mark 7:20-23 (New International Version)

²⁰ He went on: "What comes out of a person is what defiles them. ²¹ For it is from within, out of a person's heart, that evil thoughts come—sexual immorality, theft, murder, ²² adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. ²³ All these evils come from inside and defile a person."

Galatians 5:19-21 (The Message)

¹⁹⁻²¹ It is obvious what kind of life develops out of trying to get your own way all the time: repetitive, loveless, cheap sex; a stinking accumulation of mental and emotional garbage; frenzied and joyless grabs for happiness; trinket gods; magic-show religion; paranoid loneliness; cutthroat competition; all-consuming-yet-never-satisfied wants; a brutal temper; an impotence to love or be loved; divided homes and divided lives; small-minded and lopsided pursuits; the vicious habit of depersonalizing everyone into a rival; uncontrolled and uncontrollable addictions; ugly parodies of community. I could go on. This isn't the first time I have warned you, you know. If you use your freedom this way, you will not inherit God's kingdom.

Colossians 3:5-8 (The Message)

⁵⁻⁸ And that means killing off everything connected with that way of death: sexual promiscuity, impurity, lust, doing whatever you feel like whenever you feel like it, and grabbing whatever attracts your fancy. That's a life shaped by things and feelings instead of by God. It's because of this kind of thing that God is about to explode in anger. It wasn't long ago that you were doing all that stuff and not knowing any better. But you know better now, so make sure it's all gone for good: bad temper, irritability, meanness, profanity, dirty talk.

2 Timothy 3:1-5 (New International Version)

But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. ² People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³ without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, ⁴ treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God—⁵ having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with such people.

James 1:14-15 (New Living Translation)

¹⁴ Temptation comes from our own desires, which entice us and drag us away. ¹⁵ These desires give birth to sinful actions. And when sin is allowed to grow, it gives birth to death.

James 4:17 (New Living Translation)

Remember, it is sin to know what you ought to do and then not do it.

1 John 1:8-9 (New International Version)

⁸ If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

1 John 5:17 (New International Version)

All wrongdoing is sin, and there is sin that does not lead to death.

Day 5 (Jonah 1:3-11)

Jonah 1:3-11

³ But Jonah ran away from the Lord and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the Lord. ⁴ Then the Lord sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up. ⁵ All the sailors were afraid and each cried out to his own god. And they threw the cargo into the sea to lighten the ship. But Jonah had gone below deck, where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep. ⁶ The captain went to him and said, "How can you sleep? Get up and call on your god! Maybe he will take notice of us so that we will not perish." ⁷ Then the sailors said to each other, "Come, let us cast lots to find out who is responsible for this calamity." They cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah. ⁸ So they asked him, "Tell us, who is responsible for making all this trouble for us? What kind of work do you do? Where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?"

⁹ He answered, "I am a Hebrew and I worship the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land."¹⁰ This terrified them and they asked, "What have you done?" (They knew he was running away from the Lord, because he had already told them so.) ¹¹ The sea was getting rougher and rougher. So they asked him, "What should we do to you to make the sea calm down for us?"

Jonah decides to run in the opposite direction of Nineveh. It wasn't that far into the trip when a violent storm hits. Our take away here is to remember that to disobey what God has called you to do never turns out well. In verse 5, the sailors are overwhelmed and afraid because of the storm...BUT (operative word) *Jonah had gone below deck, where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep (Jonah 1:5)*. When I had my first child I was told I should introduce the baby right away to different noises so that they could be trained to sleep and not wake up at the slightest sounds. So, I took their advice. I would put him down for a nap in this swing and then proceed to vacuum the floor all around them. To this day, both of my sons can sleep through just

about anything. However, Jonah's type of sleep was different. What always amazes me about this part of the story is how Jonah could sleep in his disobedience? There is no indication of remorse for running away. Jonah intentionally went to a place where he could fall asleep. He was not concerned at all about what he had just done nor the consequences that he or others would have to face as a result of his disobedience. Unfortunately, in my own life, there were moments when this was true about me. What about you?

Think this through and Pray it in

Is there something you have been hiding? This question isn't meant to stir up guilt and shame. Its intention is to get you to pause and reflect what is going on in your heart. Romans 8:1 states, "*Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*" This is an opportunity for you to be open and honest. Write down and pray through whatever comes up in your time with the Lord.

Day 6 (2 Samuel 11-12)

Jonah 1:7 states that those on the ship find out Jonah is the reason for their calamity. He is found out and reveals why everyone is in this predicament. As I read the text, I see the sailors terrified, but Jonah as being almost emotionless. He knows he has been found out. He knew he couldn't run any more. He came face to face with his sin. As I picture this scene, I am reminded of the story of David in regards to being called out by the prophet Nathan. Let's take a look at this story and David's response to Nathan.

2 Samuel 11:1-16,26 and 2 Samuel 12 New International Version

11 *In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the king's men and the whole Israelite army. They destroyed the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained in Jerusalem.*

² *One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful, ³ and David sent someone to find out about her. The man said, "She is Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite." ⁴ Then David sent messengers to get her. She came to him, and he slept with her. (Now she was purifying herself from her monthly uncleanness.) Then she went back home. ⁵ The woman conceived and sent word to David, saying, "I am pregnant."*

⁶ *So David sent this word to Joab: "Send me Uriah the Hittite." And Joab sent him to David.*

⁷ *When Uriah came to him, David asked him how Joab was, how the soldiers were and how the war was going. ⁸ Then David said to Uriah, "Go down to your house and wash your feet." So Uriah left the palace, and a gift from the king was sent after him. ⁹ But Uriah slept at the entrance to the palace with all his master's servants and did not go down to his house.*

¹⁰ *David was told, "Uriah did not go home." So he asked Uriah, "Haven't you just come from a military campaign? Why didn't you go home?"*

¹¹ Uriah said to David, “The ark and Israel and Judah are staying in tents, and my commander Joab and my lord’s men are camped in the open country. How could I go to my house to eat and drink and make love to my wife? As surely as you live, I will not do such a thing!”

¹² Then David said to him, “Stay here one more day, and tomorrow I will send you back.” So Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day and the next. ¹³ At David’s invitation, he ate and drank with him, and David made him drunk. But in the evening Uriah went out to sleep on his mat among his master’s servants; he did not go home.

¹⁴ In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it with Uriah. ¹⁵ In it he wrote, “Put Uriah out in front where the fighting is fiercest. Then withdraw from him so he will be struck down and die.”

¹⁶ So while Joab had the city under siege, he put Uriah at a place where he knew the strongest defenders were.

²⁶ When Uriah’s wife heard that her husband was dead, she mourned for him. ²⁷ After the time of mourning was over, David had her brought to his house, and she became his wife and bore him a son. But the thing David had done displeased the Lord.

Nathan Rebukes David

12 The Lord sent Nathan to David. When he came to him, he said, “There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor. ² The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle, ³ but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him.

⁴ “Now a traveler came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveler who had come to him. Instead, he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him.”

⁵ David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, “As surely as the Lord lives, the man who did this must die! ⁶ He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity.”

⁷ Then Nathan said to David, “You are the man! This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: ‘I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. ⁸ I gave your master’s house to you, and your master’s wives into your arms. I gave you all Israel and Judah. And if all this had been too little, I would have given you even more. ⁹ Why did you despise the word of

the Lord by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own. You killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. ¹⁰ Now, therefore, the sword will never depart from your house, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own.'

¹¹ "This is what the Lord says: 'Out of your own household I am going to bring calamity on you. Before your very eyes I will take your wives and give them to one who is close to you, and he will sleep with your wives in broad daylight. ¹² You did it in secret, but I will do this thing in broad daylight before all Israel.'" ¹³ *Then David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord." Nathan replied, "The Lord has taken away your sin. You are not going to die.*

This part of David's story is packed full of valuable "spiritual growth" elements, however, I'm just going to highlight portions of this passage. First off, David wasn't where he was supposed to be (2 Samuel 11:1). Secondly, once exposed to temptation, he kept moving towards sin (2 Samuel 11:2-3). Thirdly, he made the intentional choice to sin and as a result, Bathsheba became pregnant (2 Samuel 11:4-5). Lastly, he tried to cover up his sin, but he was unsuccessful so David had Bathsheba's husband killed (2 Samuel 11: 6-17). As much as we can look at this situation and pass judgments, on further investigation within our own hearts, we find that we too can slip into patterns of apathy or indifference of our sin. Our hearts can deceive us and if left unchecked can lead us in making decisions that are dishonorable to the Lord. This is why studying God's Word is important. God's Word is used to illuminate sin in our lives, leading us to repent. It then helps us grow and mature in our faith. God used Nathan to confront David for what he had done. And yet, even though he was caught and exposed, David's response was *"I have sinned against the Lord."* He made no excuses. He didn't point the finger. He didn't try and justify his behavior. David took personal responsibility for what he had done. David laid claim right then and there that he had sinned against the Lord. Nathan replied, *"...The Lord has taken away your sins..." (1 Samuel 12:13).* Here is the good news for us. Because of what Jesus Christ did on the cross for all of humanity, the assurance that when

we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us of our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). No matter what we have said or done...Christ died for all our sins...all of them!

Think this through and Pray it in

When we come before him with a repentant heart, WE ARE FORGIVEN. Let that sink in. YOU ARE FORGIVEN. Christ has taken our sins...they were nailed on the cross with Him. Let's end this chapter with a time of being thankful for scriptural truths such as forgiveness. Spend some time thanking God for Jesus and what He did on the cross for us. Take time meditating and praying through the song, "*You are my King (Amazing Love)*."

YOU ARE MY KING (AMAZING LOVE)

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Verse

I'm forgiven because You were forsaken
I'm accepted; You were condemned
I'm alive and well, Your Spirit is within me
because You died and rose again

Chorus

Amazing love, how can it be
that You, my King, should die for me
Amazing love, I know it's true
it's my joy to honor You
in all I do, I honor You

Bridge

You are my King,
You are my King
Jesus, You are my King,
You are my King

Day 7 (Jonah 1:10b-12)

Jonah 1:10b-17

“What have you done?” (They knew he was running away from the Lord, because he had already told them so.)

¹¹ The sea was getting rougher and rougher. So they asked him, “What should we do to you to make the sea calm down for us?”

¹² “Pick me up and throw me into the sea,” he replied, “and it will become calm. I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you.”

Although Jonah knew what he did was wrong, he didn’t come clean right away. If you go back a few verses before verse 10 you will see that the captain finds Jonah and wakes him up and asks him to pray to whatever god he serves (not knowing he was a Hebrew). Then relying on their own superstitions, the crew decides to cast lots to find out who is the guilty party. Now, I believe that the only reason their “casting lots” system worked was that God intervened to show Jonah that he couldn’t run away. While all of this is going on, Jonah is silent. But as soon as Jonah is found out he comes clean. What do we learn from this part of the story? As one of my grandmother’s would say, “You can’t straddle the fence. You have to pick a side and stick to it.” If we say that we love the Lord, or that we are here to serve the Lord, we can’t at the same time choose to ignore where or what the Lord is leading us to do. 1 John 2:1-11 states,

“My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. ² He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world. ³ We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands. ⁴ Whoever says, “I know him,” but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person. ⁵ But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them. This is how we know we are in him: ⁶ Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did. ⁷ Dear friends, I am not writing you a new command but an old

one, which you have had since the beginning. This old command is the message you have heard. ⁸ Yet I am writing you a new command; its truth is seen in him and in you, because the darkness is passing and the true light is already shining. ⁹ Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates a brother or sister is still in the darkness. ¹⁰ Anyone who loves their brother and sister lives in the light, and there is nothing in them to make them stumble. ¹¹ But anyone who hates a brother or sister is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness. They do not know where they are going, because the darkness has blinded them.”

These verses aren't designed to make you feel guilty or to be condemning or judgmental. If that were the case, this passage wouldn't have started off with the reminder of who Jesus is and why He went to the cross for all of humanity. They are designed to get us to take a look as to what is going on in our hearts. They remind us that if we have screwed up, messed up, done or said something stupid...it doesn't matter. We can stop running, confess and repent what we have done, and accept the free gift of forgiveness and love and recognize that to be on the path God's designed for each of us is the best place we can be. It doesn't mean that there won't be consequences for our sinful behavior, but we can know with absolute certainty that there isn't anything we can say or do that keeps us from experiencing God's forgiveness, mercy, grace, and love.

Jonah 1:12, shows that he chose to do the right thing by taking personal responsibility for his actions. He tells the sailors to throw him overboard. But these sailors, men who do not know God nor worshipped Him, have an amazing amount of compassion on Jonah and instead tried to row even harder to get to shore. They showed more compassion towards Jonah than he initially did with them.

Think this through and Pray it in

When I think about the attitude the sailors displayed, I reflect on when I've become so consumed by the bad situation or the pain someone has caused me or those I love, that I've allowed those emotions and feelings to drive what I displayed outwardly instead of

imaging Christ. What kind of image bearer are you, in your home? In your school? In your work? In your marriage? In your friendships? Out at a restaurant? Or at the beach? Or at the mall? Are you bearing the image of Christ well? Take a moment with the Lord. Be open and honest. Pray through whatever may come up for you in your time with Him.

Day 8 (Jonah 1:13-17)

¹³ Instead, the men did their best to row back to land. But they could not, for the sea grew even wilder than before. ¹⁴ Then they cried out to the Lord, "Please, Lord, do not let us die for taking this man's life. Do not hold us accountable for killing an innocent man, for you, Lord, have done as you pleased." ¹⁵ Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm. ¹⁶ At this the men greatly feared the Lord, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows to him. ¹⁷ Now the Lord provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

The sailors see that their attempts are futile and cry out to God and beg him to forgive them for throwing Jonah overboard. They follow through, throw him overboard then the sea becomes calm. The scripture states that the sailors were in awe of God's power and in that moment pledged to serve him. This is such an amazing and beautiful illustration how God can use our mistakes, short comings, and failures to point individuals towards Him. Even though it may be hard to admit when we are wrong or difficult to come to terms with mistakes we have made, the lesson learned here is that by confessing and repenting of our sin it can be used as a testimony of God's love and forgiveness to those around us.

Jonah has been thrown overboard but God did not forget about him. God's love is displayed in that he sent a "Big Fish" to swallow Jonah. There he remained for three days and three nights. I remember when I was younger, I always saw this "Big Fish" as a punishment or consequence of Jonah's actions. However, Jonah being swallowed showed God's grace and love for him. How is that possible? In doing some research and asking a lot of questions about the region where this story took place, I found out that if Jonah had been in the sea too long he could have died from hypothermia. What may have seemed like punishment was truly a tactical play

in saving Jonah's life. I also know within my research that this is part of the story that many want to define as allegorical, fantasy, a myth, or legend etc. But, when we read through God's Word, I believe that we can't pick and choose which miracles of God to believe in or not. Are we going to question the miracles that God accomplished through Moses? What about the Red Sea? Or the wall of Jericho? Jesus healing a blind man, or making the lame walk? Better yet, what about Jesus rising from the dead three days after being buried? We can't choose to believe some of the miracles, signs, or wonders and choose not to believe others. Jesus mentions Jonah in both Matthew 12:38-41 and Luke 11:29-32 as a foreshadow of his literal death and resurrection.

Matthew 12:38-41 (NIV)

³⁸ Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from you." ³⁹ He answered, "A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. ⁴⁰ For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. ⁴¹ The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now something greater than Jonah is here.

Luke 11:29-32 (NIV)

²⁹ As the crowds increased, Jesus said, "This is a wicked generation. It asks for a sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah. ³⁰ For as Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites, so also will the Son of Man be to this generation. ³¹ The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with the people of this generation and condemn them, for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom; and now something greater than Solomon is here. ³² The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and now something greater than Jonah is here.

Being shared by Christ himself shows that this wouldn't have been a myth or legend as some have claimed. There was a man, Harry Rimmer, who wrote a book called, "*The Harmony of*

Science and Scripture” which did a great job in arguing the validity of Jonah being swallowed by a whale (large fish) and being able to be alive for 3 days just as the scripture states.

Throughout history God has chosen to use methods beyond our comprehension to accomplish His plan, so Jonah getting swallowed by a great fish should not come without surprise to any of us. I know that there may be several reading this text right now who are desperately waiting for some miracle. Maybe a miracle of healing, deliverance, provision etc. Maybe you have been waiting for a long time. I know from personal experience that the waiting is incredibly hard especially when the miracle or deliverance we are looking for doesn’t happen quickly. But, what I’ve found, even in the midst of tears, is that it’s an intentional choice each day to keep my eyes fixed on Jesus (Hebrews 12:1-2) and to keep my mind focused on things above not earthly things (Colossians 3:2). Sometimes hard or painful things enter our lives because it gives us the opportunity to learn full dependency on Christ as well as helping us mature in our relationship with the Lord. No matter how difficult it is we have to make a choice to keep our eyes fixed on Christ, not the past or the pain.

Think this through and Pray it in

I love music and how songs can be a way we can respond in worship to the Lord no matter what the circumstance, to help our hearts pour out praise and thanksgiving for who God is and what He has accomplished through Jesus Christ. Take a moment to worship the Lord as you read through the lyrics of this song and thank Him for being the God of Miracles.

MIRACLES

By Josh Silverberg, Stuart Garrard, Chris Quilala, and Dustin Smith

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VERSE 1

The One who made the blind to see
Is moving here in front of me,

moving here in front of me
The One who made the deaf to hear
Is silencing my every fear,
silencing my every fear

CHORUS

I believe in You, I believe in You
You're the God of miracles
I believe in You, I believe in You
You're the God of miracles

VERSE 2

The One who does impossible is
Reaching out to make me whole
Reaching out to make me whole
The One who put death in its place
His life is flowing through my veins
His life is flowing through my veins

BRIDGE

The God who was and is to come
The power of the Risen One
The God who brings the dead to life
You're the God of miracles
You're the God of miracles

Day 9

(Jonah 1:17 - 2:10)

Jonah 1:17

¹⁷ Now the Lord provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

Jonah 2:1-10

¹ From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the Lord his God. ² He said:

*“In my distress I called to the Lord,
and he answered me.
From deep in the realm of the dead I called
for help,
and you listened to my cry.*

*³ You hurled me into the depths,
into the very heart of the seas,
and the currents swirled about me;
all your waves and breakers
swept over me.*

*⁴ I said, ‘I have been banished
from your sight;
yet I will look again
toward your holy temple.’*

*⁵ The engulfing waters threatened me,
the deep surrounded me;*

seaweed was wrapped around my head.

*⁶ To the roots of the mountains I sank down;
the earth beneath barred me in forever.
But you, Lord my God,
brought my life up from the pit.*

*⁷ “When my life was ebbing away,
I remembered you, Lord,
and my prayer rose to you,
to your holy temple.*

*⁸ “Those who cling to worthless idols
turn away from God’s love for them.*

*⁹ 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.’”*

*¹⁰ And the Lord commanded the fish, and it
vomited Jonah onto dry land.*

Jonah definitely experienced what it means to hit rock bottom. Rock bottom is sometimes the very place where we are taken so that we may wake up and recognize the error of our ways. For the first time in the depth of pain, we find Jonah going to God in prayer. It is there, in distress, we see that Jonah chooses to focus on who God is and, in the midst, begins to

recognize idols within his own heart. Idols that Jonah had intentionally place above God. Psalm 91:14-16 reminds us that God provides and meets us where we are at.

*The Lord says, "I will rescue those who love me.
I will protect those who trust in my name.
¹⁵ When they call on me, I will answer;
I will be with them in trouble.
I will rescue and honor them.
¹⁶ I will reward them with a long life
and give them my salvation."*

Although Jonah had hit rock bottom, the Lord responded and Jonah was saved. What a great reminder that nobody is too far gone to experience redemption. This reminds me of another story about one of Judah's evil kings, King Manasseh and how he found redemption. I've included both the 2 Kings & the 2 Chronicles passages (NIV).

2 Kings 2:1-11, 16

Manasseh was twelve years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem fifty-five years. His mother's name was Hephzibah. ² He did evil in the eyes of the Lord, following the detestable practices of the nations the Lord had driven out before the Israelites. ³ He rebuilt the high places his father Hezekiah had destroyed; he also erected altars to Baal and made an Asherah pole, as Ahab king of Israel had done. He bowed down to all the starry hosts and worshiped them. ⁴ He built altars in the temple of the Lord, of which the Lord had said, "In Jerusalem I will put my Name." ⁵ In the two courts of the temple of the Lord, he built altars to all the starry hosts. ⁶ He sacrificed his own son in the fire, practiced divination, sought omens, and consulted mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the eyes of the Lord, arousing his anger. ⁷ He took the carved Asherah pole he had made and put it in the temple, of which the Lord had said to David and to his son Solomon, "In this temple and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, I will put my Name forever. ⁸ I will not again make the feet of the Israelites wander from the land I gave their ancestors, if only they will be careful to do everything I commanded them and will keep the whole Law that my servant Moses gave them." ⁹ But the people did not listen. Manasseh led them astray, so that they did more evil than the nations the Lord had destroyed before the Israelites. ¹⁰ The Lord said through his servants the prophets: ¹¹ "Manasseh king of Judah has committed these detestable sins. He has done more evil than the Amorites who preceded him and has led Judah into sin with his idols.

¹⁶ Moreover, Manasseh also shed so much innocent blood that he filled Jerusalem from end to end—besides the sin that he had caused Judah to commit, so that they did evil in the eyes of the Lord.

2 Chronicles 33:1-20

Manasseh was twelve years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem fifty-five years. ² He did evil in the eyes of the Lord, following the detestable practices of the nations the Lord had driven out before the Israelites. ³ He rebuilt the high places his father Hezekiah had demolished; he also erected altars to the Baals and made Asherah poles. He bowed down to all the starry hosts and worshiped them. ⁴ He built altars in the temple of the Lord, of which the Lord had said, “My Name will remain in Jerusalem forever.” ⁵ In both courts of the temple of the Lord, he built altars to all the starry hosts. ⁶ He sacrificed his children in the fire in the Valley of Ben Hinnom, practiced divination and witchcraft, sought omens, and consulted mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the eyes of the Lord, arousing his anger.

⁷ He took the image he had made and put it in God’s temple, of which God had said to David and to his son Solomon, “In this temple and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, I will put my Name forever. ⁸ I will not again make the feet of the Israelites leave the land I assigned to your ancestors, if only they will be careful to do everything I commanded them concerning all the laws, decrees and regulations given through Moses.” ⁹ But Manasseh led Judah and the people of Jerusalem astray, so that they did more evil than the nations the Lord had destroyed before the Israelites.

¹⁰ The Lord spoke to Manasseh and his people, but they paid no attention. ¹¹ So the Lord brought against them the army commanders of the king of Assyria, who took Manasseh prisoner, put a hook in his nose, bound him with bronze shackles and took him to Babylon. ¹² In his distress he sought the favor of the Lord his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his ancestors. ¹³ And when he prayed to him, the Lord was moved by his entreaty and listened to his plea; so he brought him back to Jerusalem and to his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord is God.

¹⁴ Afterward he rebuilt the outer wall of the City of David, west of the Gihon spring in the valley, as far as the entrance of the Fish Gate and encircling the hill of Ophel; he also made it much higher. He stationed military commanders in all the fortified cities in Judah.

¹⁵ He got rid of the foreign gods and removed the image from the temple of the Lord, as well as all the altars he had built on the temple hill and in Jerusalem; and he threw them out of the city. ¹⁶ Then he restored the altar of the Lord and sacrificed fellowship offerings and thank

offerings on it, and told Judah to serve the Lord, the God of Israel. ¹⁷ The people, however, continued to sacrifice at the high places, but only to the Lord their God.

¹⁸ The other events of Manasseh's reign, including his prayer to his God and the words the seers spoke to him in the name of the Lord, the God of Israel, are written in the annals of the kings of Israel. ¹⁹ His prayer and how God was moved by his entreaty, as well as all his sins and unfaithfulness, and the sites where he built high places and set up Asherah poles and idols before he humbled himself—all these are written in the records of the seers. ²⁰ Manasseh rested with his ancestors and was buried in his palace.

Even after all the horrible things that Manasseh did, we find him humbly crying out to the Lord. It states in verse 13 that “*The Lord was moved...and listened to his plea...bringing him back to Jerusalem.*” What a perfect story of how the Lord takes that which is broken and makes it whole.

Think this through and Pray it in

No matter how far down you fall, it is never too far from the grace of God. Just as God sent the fish to rescue Jonah, God has also sent humanity a rescuer, his name is Jesus Christ. Take a moment and reflect and pray through John 3:16.

For God so loved the world, that He gave His one and only Son. That whoever believes in Him, shall not perish, but have eternal life.

For God so loved the world (every man, woman and child here on earth) ***that He gave*** (God did this freely, not because we deserved it, but because of His love for us) ***His one and only Son*** (the most precious gift He could give and the most precious gift we could ever receive) ***that whoever believes in Him*** (whoever – doesn't matter your race, your background, your socio-economic status in life etc. – it is whoever choose to believe) ***shall not perish but have eternal life*** (This is God's ultimate desire for every human being on earth).

Spend some time thanking God for the gift of His son Jesus Christ.

Day 10

(Jonah 2:1-10)

Jonah 2:1-10

¹ From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the Lord his God. ² He said:

*“In my distress I called to the Lord,
and he answered me.*

*From deep in the realm of the dead I called
for help,*

and you listened to my cry.

³ You hurled me into the depths,
into the very heart of the seas,
and the currents swirled about me;

*all your waves and breakers
swept over me.*

⁴ I said, ‘I have been banished
from your sight;

yet I will look again

toward your holy temple.’

⁵ The engulfing waters threatened me,
the deep surrounded me;

seaweed was wrapped around my head.

⁶ To the roots of the mountains I sank down;
the earth beneath barred me in forever.

*But you, Lord my God,
brought my life up from the pit.*

⁷ “When my life was ebbing away,
I remembered you, Lord,
and my prayer rose to you,
to your holy temple.

⁸ “Those who cling to worthless idols
turn away from God’s love for them.

⁹ 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.’”*

¹⁰ And the Lord commanded the fish, and it
vomited Jonah onto dry land.

Let’s take a deeper look at Jonah’s prayer. Did you notice that he is praising God for deliverance, before he is delivered from the belly of the fish? Even in the direst of circumstances, Jonah took time to focus on praising God. I believe there is great power in choosing to praise God no matter what we may be going through. Let’s take a look at some other verses. In 2 Chronicles 20:21-22 it states, “...Jehoshaphat appointed men to sing to the Lord and to praise Him (God) for the splendor His holiness as they went out at the head of the army, saying: ‘Give thanks to the Lord, for his love endures forever.’ As they began to sing and praise, the Lord set ambushes against the men of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir who were

invading Judah, and they were defeated.” Worshipers were placed in front of the battle. This illustrates that the focus was first on praise before the action of war. In Acts 16:22-26 it states, *“²² A mob quickly formed against Paul and Silas, and the city officials ordered them stripped and beaten with wooden rods. ²³ They were severely beaten, and then they were thrown into prison. The jailer was ordered to make sure they didn’t escape. ²⁴ So the jailer put them into the inner dungeon and clamped their feet in the stocks. ²⁵ Around midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening. ²⁶ Suddenly, there was a massive earthquake, and the prison was shaken to its foundations. All the doors immediately flew open, and the chains of every prisoner fell off!”* Here we find Paul and Silas, even after being beaten and thrown in prison, they chose to pray and sing hymns to God. Besides these examples, there are many other places in God’s Word where we find very similar actions of people who experience hard or trying circumstances. With that said, it leads to questioning whether we have grossly underestimated the power of praising God?

Think this through and Pray it in

No matter what you may be going through, it is important to take a step back and not only reflect on who God is and what has been accomplished through Jesus Christ, but it is important to spend time thanking Him. This is yet another reason why studying the Bible is so important. It’s in studying the Word of God that we begin to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. This renewal process takes our attentions off our circumstances and helps us focus on God’s character and His promises to us. Take a moment and pray through these verses.

John 3:16-17

¹⁶ For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

2 Peter 3:9

⁹ The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

John 6:40

⁴⁰ For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life...

Romans 10:11-13

¹¹ For the Scripture says, “Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.”¹² For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him.¹³ For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

Romans 5:6-8

⁶ For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—⁸ but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Day 11 (Jonah 3:1-5)

¹Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time: ²“Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you.” ³Jonah obeyed the word of the Lord and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very large city; it took three days to go through it. ⁴Jonah began by going a day’s journey into the city, proclaiming, “Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown.” ⁵The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.

Jonah has been given a second chance and Scripture states he obeyed God and went to Nineveh. Nineveh was a large city. It is said to have been between 30-60 miles across and could hold over 150,000 people. Jonah finally goes into the city to preach but instead of proclaiming what God told him to say, Jonah’s message ends up being only 8 words long (5 words in Hebrew) - “Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown.” What? No mention of God’s love and no mention of how they could repent. No mention of who Jonah was or who sent him. It was almost like, Jonah makes his entrance, says his thing and then mic drop...he’s out! Jonah does the absolute minimum, which is interesting because if you go back to when he is in the belly of the whale, he talks about how “Salvation belongs to the Lord” (Jonah 2:9). What a message that would have been. However, no matter how weak the sermon Jonah preached, scripture states that “the Ninevites believed God.” After the Ninevites chose to believe it states that a “fast was proclaimed and **all of them**, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.”

Before we completely write off Jonah, I can’t express enough that what he was asked to do had to be incredibly difficult. The history of the Assyrians and all the physical and emotional harm they brought to many of Jonah’s people had to be weighing on his heart. To go and preach repentance to these people must have sparked a mixture of fear and anger in Jonah. It makes me wonder that even though he was being given a second chance it seems he was intentionally trying to botch this message. But even in the midst of difficult circumstances, we still have a

choice to be obedient and do what God is asking of us, no matter the cost. In Jonah's case, even though he preached the worse sermon ever, God used these eight words to pierce the very core of the Ninevites and they chose to repent.

Think this through and Pray it in

Has God given you a difficult message to take to someone? Maybe this person has wounded you or those you love deeply. Maybe there is no sign of repentance or change. However, no matter the difficulty, if it is something God has asked you to do are you being obedient or are you still reluctant? Are you afraid? Are you angry God has asked you? Take a moment to really be honest and truthful before the Lord. Think about what is going on in your heart. Try and be attentive to what is going on and be open to what He desires to show you.

Day 12

(Esther 3:1 - 5:2)

Before continuing with Jonah, there is another story in God's Word about an individual who was given a difficult task, but in the end, put her own personal elements aside and chose to accept and move forward with what was being asked of her, no matter the cost. This is the story of Queen Esther.

3 After these events, King Xerxes honored Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, elevating him and giving him a seat of honor higher than that of all the other nobles. 2 All the royal officials at the king's gate knelt down and paid honor to Haman, for the king had commanded this concerning him. But Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor.

3 Then the royal officials at the king's gate asked Mordecai, "Why do you disobey the king's command?" 4 Day after day they spoke to him but he refused to comply. Therefore, they told Haman about it to see whether Mordecai's behavior would be tolerated, for he had told them he was a Jew.

5 When Haman saw that Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor, he was enraged. 6 Yet having learned who Mordecai's people were, he scorned the idea of killing only Mordecai. Instead Haman looked for a way to destroy all Mordecai's people, the Jews, throughout the whole kingdom of Xerxes.

7 In the twelfth year of King Xerxes, in the first month, the month of Nisan, the pur (that is, the lot) was cast in the presence of Haman to select a day and month. And the lot fell on^[a] the twelfth month, the month of Adar.

8 Then Haman said to King Xerxes, "There is a certain people dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom who keep themselves separate. Their customs are different from those of all other people, and they do not obey the king's laws; it is not in the king's best interest to tolerate them. 9 If it pleases the king, let a decree be issued to destroy them, and I will give ten thousand talents^[b] of silver to the king's administrators for the royal treasury."

10 So the king took his signet ring from his finger and gave it to Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews. 11 "Keep the money," the king said to Haman, "and do with the people as you please."

12 Then on the thirteenth day of the first month the royal secretaries were summoned. They wrote out in the script of each province and in the language of each people all Haman's orders to the king's satraps, the governors of the various provinces and the nobles of the various peoples.

These were written in the name of King Xerxes himself and sealed with his own ring. ¹³ Dispatches were sent by couriers to all the king's provinces with the order to destroy, kill and annihilate all the Jews—young and old, women and children—on a single day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar, and to plunder their goods. ¹⁴ A copy of the text of the edict was to be issued as law in every province and made known to the people of every nationality so they would be ready for that day.

¹⁵ The couriers went out, spurred on by the king's command, and the edict was issued in the citadel of Susa. The king and Haman sat down to drink, but the city of Susa was bewildered.

⁴ When Mordecai learned of all that had been done, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the city, wailing loudly and bitterly. ² But he went only as far as the king's gate, because no one clothed in sackcloth was allowed to enter it. ³ In every province to which the edict and order of the king came, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping and wailing. Many lay in sackcloth and ashes.

⁴ When Esther's eunuchs and female attendants came and told her about Mordecai, she was in great distress. She sent clothes for him to put on instead of his sackcloth, but he would not accept them. ⁵ Then Esther summoned Hathak, one of the king's eunuchs assigned to attend her, and ordered him to find out what was troubling Mordecai and why.

⁶ So Hathak went out to Mordecai in the open square of the city in front of the king's gate. ⁷ Mordecai told him everything that had happened to him, including the exact amount of money Haman had promised to pay into the royal treasury for the destruction of the Jews. ⁸ He also gave him a copy of the text of the edict for their annihilation, which had been published in Susa, to show to Esther and explain it to her, and he told him to instruct her to go into the king's presence to beg for mercy and plead with him for her people.

⁹ Hathak went back and reported to Esther what Mordecai had said. ¹⁰ Then she instructed him to say to Mordecai, ¹¹ "All the king's officials and the people of the royal provinces know that for any man or woman who approaches the king in the inner court without being summoned the king has but one law: that they be put to death unless the king extends the gold scepter to them and spares their lives. But thirty days have passed since I was called to go to the king."

¹² When Esther's words were reported to Mordecai, ¹³ he sent back this answer: "Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. ¹⁴ For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?"

¹⁵ Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: ¹⁶ "Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish."

¹⁷ So Mordecai went away and carried out all of Esther's instructions.

5 On the third day Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the palace, in front of the king's hall. The king was sitting on his royal throne in the hall, facing the entrance. ² When he saw Queen Esther standing in the court, he was pleased with her and held out to her the gold scepter that was in his hand. So Esther approached and touched the tip of the scepter.

Even though this was a longer reading for today, it is very relevant, where like Jonah, Esther was given a difficult task. Here we have Esther, who was a Jew, being taken in by the King as a member of his harem, but she found favor with the King and was made Queen. Within every story with a Heroine, there is always going to be some villain. In this story the villain's name is Haman and he hated the Jews. Haman was one of those individuals who was always looking out for himself. There was a time when Haman was commended for some work he had done and was elevated in rank by the King. However, when Mordecai, Esther's relative, wouldn't bow down to Haman, he became infuriated and began to devise a plan to try and annihilate the entire Jewish population in that region. Mordecai learns of this plot and asks Esther to intervene and beg for mercy with the King on behalf of the Jewish people. Now the difficulty in this, is that if you went before the King in the inner court without being summoned and the King did not extend his scepter towards you, you were put to death. It had been around 30 days since Esther had been called by the king. You can see the dilemma. She was being asked to do something incredibly difficult because if he didn't extend his scepter towards her, it would cost Esther her life. I can only imagine the fear that Queen Esther had in making this decision when she didn't know how the outcome would be. But there is an important element to this story that sheds light on how Esther was able to have the courage to move forward. Before any decision was made, she asked Mordecai to get people to rally and pray for the situation. Esther, herself also personally took the time to lift the situation before the Lord. It was through

prayer she was able to accomplish what she needed to do and as a result the Jewish people were saved and Haman was brought to justice.

Think this through and Pray it in

Fear can be debilitating. The byproduct of fear is worry, doubt, running away etc. If we allow fear to keep us from doing what the Lord is calling us to do, we will fail to experience God's blessings. Psalm 27:1 states, *"The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?"* King David penned these words. When you think about the times he was literally being hunted down to be killed, I would think he would have a right to be afraid. But he chose to keep his focus on the one in whom would guide and direct him through even the direst of situations. Through these words, it seems that he knew fear couldn't get the best of him. That God alone was greater than any adversary he may have to face. So the question is, with what you are being asked to do, is fear holding you back? If so, can you, like David pray these words of assurance that GOD IS your light and your salvation and GOD IS the stronghold of your life? Take some time to pray through Psalm 27.

Psalm 27

¹ The Lord is my light and my salvation—
so why should I be afraid?

The Lord is my fortress, protecting me from
danger,

so why should I tremble?

² When evil people come to devour me,
when my enemies and foes attack me,
they will stumble and fall.

³ Though a mighty army surrounds me,
my heart will not be afraid.

Even if I am attacked,
I will remain confident.

⁴ The one thing I ask of the Lord—
the thing I seek most—
is to live in the house of the Lord all the
days of my life,
delighting in the Lord's perfections
and meditating in his Temple.

⁵ For he will conceal me there when troubles
come;

he will hide me in his sanctuary.

He will place me out of reach on a high
rock.

⁶ Then I will hold my head high

above my enemies who surround me.

At his sanctuary I will offer sacrifices with
shouts of joy,

singing and praising the Lord with music.

⁷ Hear me as I pray, O Lord.

Be merciful and answer me!

⁸ My heart has heard you say, "Come and
talk with me."

And my heart responds, "Lord, I am
coming."

⁹ Do not turn your back on me.

Do not reject your servant in anger.

You have always been my helper.

Don't leave me now; don't abandon me,
O God of my salvation!

¹⁰ Even if my father and mother abandon me,
the Lord will hold me close.

¹¹ Teach me how to live, O Lord.

Lead me along the right path,
for my enemies are waiting for me.

¹² Do not let me fall into their hands.

For they accuse me of things I've never
done;

with every breath they threaten me with

violence.

¹³ Yet I am confident I will see the Lord's
goodness
while I am here in the land of the living.

¹⁴ Wait patiently for the Lord.
Be brave and courageous.
Yes, wait patiently for the Lord.

Day 13

(Jonah 3:6-10)

⁶ When Jonah's warning reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust. ⁷ This is the proclamation he issued in Nineveh: "By the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let people or animals, herds or flocks, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. ⁸ But let people and animals be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. ⁹ Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish." ¹⁰ When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.

Right away with verse 6 we see how the King of Nineveh responded once he had been informed of Jonah's warning. He first stood up, took off his royal robes, put on a sackcloth, and sat down in the dust. Let's dig a little deeper with what these actions of the King represent. First, standing up represents acknowledging the truth in the message. Secondly, taking off his royal robes and putting on the sackcloth represents mourning and repentance. Lastly, sitting down in the dust is stripping oneself of earthly comforts in order to be able to process what is going on within their present situation. These behavioral choices of the King show he took this message very seriously. But beyond just his own personal decision to behave this way, he sends out a proclamation to all of Nineveh to follow his example. His proclamation included to urgently call on God, to give up their evil ways and their violence, and that if they did, that God may relent and have compassion on them.

Even though the message Jonah gave was incredibly vague on who God was and of His mercy and forgiveness, I believe that the God supernaturally intervened to illuminate their minds and stir their hearts towards repentance. There was definitely a surrender of the will because the Ninevites could see the error of their ways and embraced their need to repent. They took decisive action with their sin. Let's look at Matthew 5:27-30,

²⁷ “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ ²⁸ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. ²⁹ If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. ³⁰ And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

Jesus is conveying a message that we should not take sin lightly. Through his own words he states that when we are in the wrong, when we have unrepentant sin in our lives, we need to take decisive and comprehensive action towards repentance. This is accomplished by taking personal responsibility for our sin. In Luke 11:27-32, Jesus references Jonah and how Jonah showed up with a message, that the people of Nineveh had a choice to reject or respond to the message. They did respond with fasting and mourning and in return, God had compassion and relented. It was God alone behind Jonah’s weak words that brought the power of conviction to the people of Nineveh. God used Jonah’s worse efforts for His divine purposes. How amazing is that?

Think this through and Pray it in

What is God’s Word speaking to you? Are you paying attention to what He is trying to say to you? Are we asking God to break our hearts for what breaks His? Are you asking Him to show you more of His holiness so that at the same time you see the depth of your sinfulness? Are you remorseful, recognizing that you have sinned against the Lord? Is it that remorse that is leading you to true repentance? Spend some time processing and praying through whatever comes up with the Lord.

Day 14 (Jonah 4:1-4)

¹But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry. ²He prayed to the Lord, "Isn't this what I said, Lord, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. ³Now, Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live." ⁴But the Lord replied, "Is it right for you to be angry?"

Now we get to the part of the story that takes an unfortunate turn. Jonah's response was extreme. It is this part of the story that should lead us to really evaluate, within our own hearts, the element of forgiveness. Forgiveness is something that we are grateful that we receive from the Lord. But, I think forgiveness is something that is incredibly difficult to give when we have been hurt or when others we care about have been hurt. I know for me it has been a hard road.

What has helped me on my path to forgive is to start acknowledging often that I'm a sinner. I'm a part of the "all fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). I know that the element of forgiveness is centered around if my heart is willful or willing. As I am honest, open and willing before the Lord, I begin to see the depth of my own sinfulness. I begin to experience a deeper conviction of sin and a more thorough spirit of repentance. In doing so I experience God's forgiveness. It doesn't matter the sin, 1 John 1:9 states, *"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us."* or 1 John 1:10 states, *"If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and His word is not in us."*

Think this through and Pray it in

Forgiveness is something that we are commanded to do because the Lord has forgiven us. Forgiveness is directly related to my will and whether I'm going to be willing or willful. I have to choose to say, "I **will** forgive..." Forgiveness doesn't minimize the seriousness of the offense. But, when we make this intentional choice to forgive, we can begin to heal and move on.

Read, 2 Corinthians 2:5-11

⁵ If anyone has caused grief, he has not so much grieved me as he has grieved all of you to some extent—not to put it too severely. ⁶ The punishment inflicted on him by the majority is sufficient. ⁷ Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. ⁸ I urge you, therefore, to reaffirm your love for him. ⁹ Another reason I wrote you was to see if you would stand the test and be obedient in everything. ¹⁰ Anyone you forgive, I also forgive. And what I have forgiven—if there was anything to forgive—I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake, ¹¹ in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.

Has forgiveness been something you have struggled with? Forgiveness doesn't change the past but it can change the course of the future. Read through this passage again and spend some time processing it with the Lord.

Day 15 (Jonah 4:5-11)

⁵ Jonah had gone out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city. ⁶ Then the Lord God provided a leafy plant and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the plant. ⁷ But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the plant so that it withered. ⁸ When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah's head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, and said, "It would be better for me to die than to live." ⁹ But God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?" "It is," Jonah said. "And I'm so angry I wish I were dead." ¹⁰ But the Lord said, "You have been concerned about this plant, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. ¹¹ And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left—and also many animals?"

After Jonah's first breakdown he goes away from the city, makes himself a shelter and waits to see what is going to happen. Even though it is a pretty clear assumption that Jonah's waiting for God to bring fire and brimstone on Nineveh, God shows Jonah grace in providing this plant that gives him additional shade to ease his discomfort sitting in the hot sun. And the text states that Jonah was "very happy" about the plant. There aren't very many places in this story where Jonah's emotions are mentioned. The only reason I draw attention to this, is that it dawned on me that this particular emotion is based around a "thing" or "object" that brought satisfaction to Jonah's soul. The "happiness" he was experiencing wasn't exhibited because of who God is or how God is choosing to work in Jonah's life or the lives of others.

The next day, God provided a worm, which destroyed the plant. God also sends a scorching east wind and with the hot sun barreling down on Jonah he has a secondary meltdown and becomes angry about the plant dying. God confronts Jonah asking him if it was really right for him to be angry? Jonah doesn't even pause, just jumps right into the conversation with a "yes it is" and on top of that Jonah exclaims that he just wants to die! And to recap, it is the

second time he had made that statement to God. The first was when God relented, now the second is after God has taken away the plant. I really don't believe that Jonah wanted to die. I think he was so bent out of shape because God had showed mercy to people Jonah hated. He was so wrapped up in his hatred and anger that he completely missed experiencing firsthand the extensiveness of God's mercy towards Nineveh.

Hating your enemy is something that comes very natural to us. It is an aspect of our sinful nature. When we are wronged, think about how easy it is to gravitate towards retaliation. However, what we need to remember is that loving our enemies is something that is truly supernatural. It isn't something we can accomplish in our own strength. To truly love like Christ requires a willing and surrendered heart so that the Holy Spirit can do the transformational work in us that only He can do. It is through this process of surrender that He develops within us the ability to love beyond what we ever thought we were capable of doing.

Think this through and Pray it in

When we choose to love our enemies, it is truly what sets our hearts free from all the bitterness, hate, and judgment we harbor when we or someone we love is wronged. What is holding you back from truly forgiving those that have wronged you? Even if you will never hear the words "I'm sorry" from the individual, may today be the day that you will respond by saying, "I will forgive..." Spend some time journeying with the Lord through the elements of forgiveness and how you can begin experiencing healing and restoration of your heart.

Conclusion

Ephesians 2:4-5

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved

Even though the story of Jonah has a sad ending, it is important to study because it helps deepen our understanding of God's mercy. As we reflect on the story of Jonah we can see for ourselves that God's mercy is not something that we are owed, but it is something that He extends to each of us, even though we don't deserve it. If we take time to reflect on His holiness and then reflect on the depth of our sinfulness isn't it amazing that He doesn't pour out on us His judgment and wrath? That is what we deserve, but instead He extends His mercy freely and willingly to each of us. Even if we don't behave like the Ninevites, or runaway like Jonah, we were all born with this condition called sin. And that sin had to be dealt with. God's wrath and God's mercy intersected on the cross of Christ. Because of Jesus Christ's sacrifice on the cross we are made right with God. 2 Peter 3:9 states that God is patient and that He doesn't want a single individual to perish and spend eternity separated from Him. The world teaches us to "get even" but, this story is important because it reminds us that mercy matters. It is at the very core of mercy that one can experience the depth of forgiveness. Truly embracing the gift of mercy is how we can be mindful of our need to forgive others as we have been forgiven. Behind so many hurtful words or acts in this world, it is embracing mercy that helps one be compassionate. Showing mercy to others is a true reflection of His mercy towards us. In a world riddled with so much hatred, violence, wars, division and the like, find a way to be a beacon of mercy in the midst of the darkness.

Think this through and Pray it in

As we close our time out, spend time meditating on these passages, praising and thanking God for His mercy. Pray for ways you can extend mercy and forgiveness to others. Also, spend time praying for the advancement of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, so that those who accept the free gift of salvation can experience God's mercy, grace, forgiveness and love.

Luke 6:36

Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

1 Peter 1:3

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead...

Titus 3:5

He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit...

Psalms 145:9

The Lord is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made.

Joel 2:12-14

"Even now," declares the Lord, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning." ¹³ Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity. ¹⁴ Who knows? He may turn and relent and leave behind a blessing—grain offerings and drink offerings for the Lord your God.

Psalms 25:6-7

Remember, Lord, your great mercy and love, for they are from of old. ⁷ Do not remember the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways; according to your love remember me, for you, Lord, are good.

Psalms 103:8

The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.

Daniel 9:9

The Lord our God is merciful and forgiving, even though we have rebelled against him...

1 Timothy 1:16

But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life.