

# Devotional Series

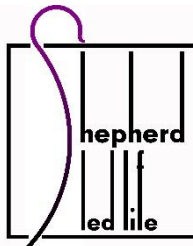
## on

# Jonah



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A



Resource

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Day 1: When God's Word comes to  
YOU...

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*Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me." But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare and went on board, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord. Jonah 1:1-4*

Jonah has issues.

Lots of them, and his issues are directed primarily at God. He is a called prophet of God (who gets another mention in 2 Kings 14:25), and yet in this book he is the one who disobeys God, and will eventually begrudgingly obey. Jonah is simply not impressed with God, and believes he is justified in his anger against God (as we shall see later). Whilst there are some fishy elements to this historical narrative (that's how I understand it, although they tried to teach me otherwise at varsity), we're going to see that while the fish might have gotten away (pretty sure it was glad to get rid of Jonah), this prophet didn't...

We will consider these verses again tomorrow, but perhaps an appropriate question to end off would be:

What do you do with God's word when it comes to you?

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*Day 2: A Personal Word...*

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*Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me." Jonah 1v1&2*

Yesterday the question was posed: what do you do with God's word when it comes to you?

It is such an important question, because think about it: why should God's word come to you?

Are you deserving of receiving God's Word?

Of course not – none of us are. It is the utter mercy of God that He reaches out to us first.

And just like God's Word came to a specific person with a name: Jonah, the son of Amittai, we need to understand that God also sends His Word to us individually, by name.

So the question needs to be repeated: what do you do with God's Word when it comes to you? You can ignore it, try shove it aside, disobey it (like we see Jonah will try and do) or you can receive it and act on it.

What will you do?

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### Day 3: Go! No!

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*Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me." But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare and went on board, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord. Jonah 1:1-4*

So what was Jonah's issue with Nineveh (the capital of Assyria – modern day Iraq)? Why did he clearly not want to go there?

The text gives us the reason: 'for their evil has come up before me.' God saw their evil.

The Assyrians were not famous for human rights, and to get an idea of the dread with which they were held think of ISIS controlling the USA military (an analogy from Michael Ramsden).

Now one would think that it would be great to be told to 'call out against it,' especially since you don't like them and would love to see them dealt with. Jonah understandably didn't like the Assyrians, and nothing would have given him greater delight than to see them destroyed – after all, fair is fair.

But Jonah knows something – he knows from Amos, Hosea and Isaiah that Assyria would be used as an instrument of God to punish Israel – a thought he clearly did not relish, and would obviously rather see them

destroyed to help prevent this calamity. But he also knows God is a gracious God (which we see at the end of this book), and he didn't want to see mercy shown.

Nothing like a bit of self-righteous anger to feed a victim mentality so as to feel the right to take revenge, and to even sound righteous about it.

Will Jonah be able to forgive? It's hard to accept that God offers forgiveness to all – we like it as a concept, until it hits home, and perhaps we too then want to do the Jonah thing, to try and “flee from the presence of the Lord.”

Jonah understandably must have been thinking “Why Nineveh?” I'm inclined to ask “Why Jonah?”

God's ways are not ours!

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Day 4: Tut tut...

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*Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me." But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare and went on board, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord. Jonah 1:1-4*

I don't know you would feel about going to preach a message of repentance to a group of people you simply don't like and whom you hope gets God's judgement in any case.

So Jonah's response is "No, thank you...Think I'll take a summer break at Tarshish...(please permit my imagination some space!)"...

"Oh look! I wanted to go to Tarshish, and here's a ship to Tarshish! This must be God's will!"

Ever encountered that reasoning? Walking in disobedience and finding how things work out? I'm not talking about seeing it in others, I'm referring to seeing it in yourself. Our eyes have a knack for seeing what our heart wants.

Sigh...Jonah is going to find out the hard way that you don't run from God.

It's basically impossible, and I must confess to being grateful for that, otherwise I would really be in a mess.

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*Day 5: But vs But*

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*But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare and went on board, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord. But the Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea...Jonah 1:3-4*

But Jonah...But the Lord

Not exactly a contest of equals, but how our human heart likes to think we can escape God!

I think sometimes God 'plays us' like a fish on a line...letting us get away a bit...drawing us in a bit...letting our rebellion move us away again, but then offers resistance and we tire somewhat, until eventually, when we come to our senses, He can bring us in.

We can be grateful for that phrase "But the Lord..." – not letting us get away with it that easily, determined to intervene in our lives and reveal Himself to us.

What we don't want is the 'therefore' of Romans 1:24ff and the "God gave them up to" of Romans 1:28

When the Lord has placed a call upon you (and He has), don't fight it, but rather embrace the journey.

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## Day 6: Pain management?

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*But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare and went on board, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord. But the Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship threatened to break up. Jonah 1:3-4*

Mercy doesn't always look pretty.

God could have left Jonah to his devices, but God is a God of justice and mercy.

It is not prudent for a child of God to disobey God and expect to get away with it. An undisciplined child is never a pleasure to be around, and chastisement is necessary if authority is to be respected and meaningful contribution to society made. A government that wants to outlaw spanking (there is a HUGE difference between spanking and abuse!) is a government that wants an ungovernable society.

But if every parent intuitively knows the importance of disciplining a child, then how much more so in God's kingdom (see Hebrews 12)! We get so caught up in our lives, and distract ourselves away from the presence of the Lord. And then we wonder what is going on – why do things seem to fall apart? The Lord has sent a wind...



The Lord in His mercy must discipline His children, so that we will call out to Him and find restoration. But, like Jonah, some of us are more stubborn than others...

Sigh...perhaps one day I'll learn that prevention is better than pain...

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## Day 7: Rock the boat

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*But the Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship threatened to break up. Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried out to his god. And they hurled the cargo into the sea to lighten it for them. But Jonah had gone down into the inner part of the ship and had laid down and was fast asleep. Jonah 1:4&5*

I recently learnt from friend of mine that in a severe storm at sea, you first cry out of fear of dying, and then you cry to please die because you can't take more of the storm. I can only imagine how terrifying it must be.

These seasoned sailors were terrified, to the extent that they cried out to their gods. And there is another but... "But Jonah..."

Seriously? Asleep? I kind of wish I could sleep that deeply...maybe his mom violently rocked him as a baby to get him to sleep and this rocking sea was lulling him more deeply.

God has sent a storm, and the prophet is asleep.

At the risk of over-analogising (that's a word I just made up), now is seriously not the time for the church to retreat...

The boat needs rocking.

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## Day 8: Wake Up!

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*Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried out to his god. And they hurled the cargo into the sea to lighten it for them. But Jonah had gone down into the inner part of the ship and had laid down and was fast asleep. So the captain came and said to him, "What do you mean, you sleeper? Arise, call out to your god! Perhaps the god will give a thought to us, that we may not perish."*  
*Jonah 1:5&6*

Oh boy – it's really difficult not to draw analogies, and I do so with a clear conscience! Certainly R T Kendall did so in his sermon series on this book (one of my sources for this devotional series).

Jonah was entrusted with the Word of God, to go and share it with a people who didn't know God. He tried to shirk his duty because of his issues, and now he is asleep in the boat while the sailors outside are on the brink of perishing.

I don't know if any of this sounds familiar.

Funny thing about being asleep – you don't know you were asleep until you get woken up.

And I have a sneaky suspicion (this is not a prophetic word...just an observation): God is seeking to wake up those parts of the church that have been in slumber (because it's not the whole church that has been asleep, far from it – God has been and is still on the move!). World events and threats to religious freedom is making itself felt, and the presumed custodians of the

faith has shifted – for example, have you seen how God is moving amongst the refugees? Who is passing on the faith to them? People are seeking and searching. Even in universities where there are open forums with well-known apologists, there is a full house of questioners and seekers.

Let's make the most of this God given opportunity.

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*Day 9: Stumbling block or stepping stone?*

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*Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried out to his god. And they hurled the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them...and they said to one another, "Come, let us cast lots, that we may know on whose account this evil has come upon us." Jonah 1:5a&7a*

So yesterday I saw a driver who had on his car "Thank you Science" and on his bumper two statements which were blatantly scientific (as in scientism) and obviously wanted to offend Christians, as the one statement (I'm translating from the Afrikaans here) said "please get off the cross, we need the wood." Well, Psalm 14v1 came to mind and I wondered if he was thankful to science when I saw he got pulled over for speeding, after all, it was science which enabled that technology...

But the thought crossed my mind as to whether this person had been burnt by the church. It was so blatantly anti-Christian, and perhaps he had encountered people who were not willing to reason with him.

Which brings me to this Jonah storm incident. You know what disturbs me? These polytheistic sailors were in trouble because of the disobedience of God's servant.

Their options: do what they can (get rid of the cargo) and cry out for help to their gods, which as you and I

know, were and are non-existent (give or take a demon).

Their next option: cast lots. They're being consistent with their worldview. What they didn't realise yet was what they perceived as evil was in fact a severe mercy!

Nonetheless, I don't want people in the world to be in trouble because of my life. I do not want to be a stumbling block to faith, but a stepping stone.

And lets pray for that man...that God would reveal Himself to him!

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## *Day 10: What's Up?*

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And they said to one another, "Come, let us cast lots, that we may know on whose account this evil has come upon us." So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. Then they said to him, "Tell us on whose account this evil has come upon us. What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?" Jonah 1:7&8

So Jonah has tried to run from the Lord. He boards a ship going in the opposite direction, and God sends a scary storm and the sailors are terrified. Meanwhile Jonah is asleep. He gets woken up by the captain and gets instructed to pray...

They cast lots, and Jonah is found out. In the midst of the storm at sea, he gets interrogated...

Did Jonah really think he was going to get away with this?

Truth be told, I think most of us have a Jonah heart at times – I know I do. But if we try to run away, or if we try and ignore the realities of the world, we will lose our impact.

We are called to be a blessing, not a curse. The world is not meant to be asking us questions when we go wrong, but rather to be asking us questions based on the hope we have (1 Peter 3:15) May we have the courage to listen and obey our beautiful God!

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## *Day 11: Are you nuts?*

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And he said to them, "I am a Hebrew, and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land." Then the men were exceedingly afraid and said to him, "What is this that you have done!" For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the Lord, because he had told them. Jonah 1:9&10

Are you nuts?????

Interesting how the ungodly pagan sailors had more insight into Jonah's behaviour than Jonah! But Jonah was put on the spot, and he had to identify himself for who he truly was. This is not the most effective witnessing method...far rather go the approach of 1 Peter 3:15!

Jonah revealed the truth about God: the only God, and greater than the sailors' little gods, and the response of the sailors is to be terrified. Jonah had fallen into the trap of over-familiarity with God – but these sailors soon understood that they had reason to be afraid.

Ever heard God being called 'the big guy' or something similar? Or goodness knows how many times you have heard "OMG?" These are symptoms of over-familiarity (and spiritual ignorance).

In my own life I know how often I have ventured into familiarity, confusing it with 'boldness and confidence.' In fact, I remember a time in my life when I tried to flee from God as well (I was at varsity at the time).



But God brought me back. He brought me back to the realisation that I am His child, and that He, in the words of CS Lewis, 'is not a tame lion...'

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## Day 12: Let's Re-assess

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*"What is this that you have done!"* - terrified sailors to Jonah (1v10)

We've started to look at Jonah, and he is certainly unique among the prophets, simply because his claim to fame is disobedience!

We saw that he tried to run from God, he gets on a boat headed in the opposite direction, and God sends a storm. The anger of God is in fact a display of mercy – how else would we know of our need of repentance?

When Jonah identifies himself to the sailors as the worshipper of the One True God, we see the response of the sailors above.

It sounds absolutely absurd that a person would try to run from God. As I shared yesterday, I also tried this once (I was angry at the time), but was brought back.

But it got me thinking – are there other ways in which I may not be consciously running away from God, but perhaps running the danger of just drifting away from God?

It is said that dead fish go with the flow...

All it takes is a subtle shift in focus, to distract me just a little bit more than I thought, and the good intentions I had to read the Word, pray, or attend Bible study suddenly find themselves in the 'not able to fit in my schedule' category. And because no thunder bolt

comes from the heavens to jolt me back into re-prioritising, I think everything is ok. And before we know it, we are exchanging the bread of heaven for the crumbs of earth.

Perhaps we need to say to ourselves: *What is this that you have done?*

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## Day 13: Faith Inducing Storm

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*Then the men were exceedingly afraid and said to him, "What is this that you have done!" For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the Lord, because he had told them. Jonah 1v10*

The sailor had their gods and Jonah was trying to run, or rather sail, away from his. Jonah was being a disobedient prophet – he admits to that - he doesn't even preach to the sailors, but simply shares his identity and that he is running away from the True God. Take note - no sermon was needed to introduce these guys to God - they were right in the middle of experiencing God and it was terrifying!

This verse just simply highlights for me the truth that God has an agenda for our lives: His plan, His method, His timing, and should we seek to go astray, well, let's just say your actions do not affect you alone.

And yet, even in his disobedience, Jonah actually still gets used (PS: This is NOT an endorsement of disobedience)! Through his correct interpretation of the storm (as we shall see) and what to do, the sailors will end up worshipping God. Personally, I prefer the intimacy of a home group or coffee conversation to potentially introduce people to God...

I just pray it isn't going to take a storm to get me to submit.

That would not be clever.

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## Day 14: Waves of Grace

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*Then the men were exceedingly afraid and said to him, "What is this that you have done!" For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the Lord, because he had told them. Then they said to him, "What shall we do to you, that the sea may quiet down for us?" For the sea grew more and more tempestuous. Jonah 1:10&11*

I'm finding it difficult to move away from this verse! I'm just amazed at how God was revealing Himself to these sailors, and it really is a result of Jonah's disobedience. I'm amazed at how they are more afraid once they discover who Jonah is and His God. I'm pretty sure had he told them who he was when he boarded the ship they wouldn't have cared – but now they are experiencing the powerful anger of God along with the testimony of Jonah and they very quickly joined the dots...and they want help...and they ask this flawed man of God as to what they must do.

You know folks – God is on the move. He is moving in places we wouldn't imagine Him moving – such as amongst the refugees who are turning to the church there and asking for help. But I pray that God will in His mercy also move in a mighty way in the 'western church' – that we would encounter God not because of our obedience or disobedience, or because of the correctness of our theologies, but because of His mercy, and allow Him to align our minds and hearts and hands

with His to the extent that it would cause people in the world to cry out: what must we do?

I know you can't pour new wine into old wineskins, but God can bring new wine out of stone jars.

Let's not give up hope, and let's pray to God with whom all things are possible – even changing your heart.

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*Day 15: It was a dark and stormy  
night*

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Then they said to him, "What shall we do to you, that the sea may quiet down for us?" For the sea grew more and more tempestuous. He said to them, "Pick me up and hurl me into the sea; then the sea will quiet down for you, for I know it is because of me that this great tempest has come upon you." Nevertheless, the men rowed hard to get back to dry land, but they could not, for the sea grew more and more tempestuous against them. Jonah 1:11-13

It was clear that this was no ordinary storm, and Jonah has the insight to realise that he is the cause. The lot had fallen to Jonah, but I don't think Jonah needed the lot to figure out what was going on – he knew he had disobeyed.

So what to do next? Throw him into the sea...but the sailors didn't want to do that (perhaps they thought that was going a bit overboard 😊 )

Was Jonah now on a suicide mission? Was he thinking that by drowning he will definitely escape?

No – he was in essence telling the men: hand me over to my God. He knew that God would not want to make the sailors suffer for something he had done: Jonah knew God.

Which is kind of why he was running away in the first place (see 4:2). Jonah's heart was getting in the way – he didn't want God to show mercy to his enemies.

Sound familiar?



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## Day 16: Grace-filled Anger

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Then they said to him, "What shall we do to you, that the sea may quiet down for us?" For the sea grew more and more tempestuous. He said to them, "Pick me up and hurl me into the sea; then the sea will quiet down for you, for I know it is because of me that this great tempest has come upon you." Nevertheless, the men rowed hard to get back to dry land, but they could not, for the sea grew more and more tempestuous against them. Jonah 1:11-13

Jonah knew what needed to be done. He was not trying to commit suicide, but knew he had to be handed over to God.

I suspect, based on Jonah's answer and how we know the Holy Spirit works, that he had come under conviction for his disobedience.

I also think he was overwhelmed by his glimpse of the glory of God through this storm: God's grace had sought him out, despite his disobedience. We seldom think of God's anger being grace, but it is.

And when you get just a glimpse of God's glory, it is no big deal to give your life away. Jesus Himself taught and exemplified this truth when He said: "For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it (Mark 8:35)."

Let's pray that every child of God would have their eyes opened.

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## *Day 17: Man overboard!*

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Nevertheless, the men rowed hard to get back to dry land, but they could not, for the sea grew more and more tempestuous against them. Therefore they called out to the Lord, "O Lord, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not on us innocent blood, for you, O Lord, have done as it please you." So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows.  
Jonah 1:13-16

Ever tried to row against God in a storm? Not a good idea, because when God sends a storm, it's for a reason. And the reason? Reasons for God acting the way He does is always rooted in His glory.

And look at what happens to these sailors! They are exemplifying Romans 1:20&21. From being polytheistic and superstitious, where their belief system entails gods acting on unpredictable whims, we now see them appealing to a moral God! They do not want to be found guilty of murder by God.

Jonah is thrown overboard and the storm stops. Only God can bring stillness out of chaos (remember Jesus on the boat and stilling the storm?), and the sea, far from being a remnant of original chaos, is also seen as being under the control of God.

And the response of the sailors is that they 'feared the Lord exceedingly...' and they offered a sacrifice

(perhaps they threw idols overboard or perhaps made a sacrifice when they got to the land) and made vows.

Only God can bring about a change like that. So don't stop praying for that hard case you know about!

As William Cowper put it:

God moves in a mysterious way

His wonders to perform

He plants His footsteps in the sea

And rides upon the storm

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*Day 18: How great is your God?*

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And the Lord appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. Jonah 1:17

Ok, so this is where the narrative starts to get seriously fishy...

But of course this part is only suspect if your view of God is too small.

Is it?

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## Day 19: Leviathan doesn't rule

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And the Lord appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. Jonah 1:17

To borrow imagery from the Ancient Near East, Jonah was now in the heart of Leviathan – a sea-monster representing the forces of chaos (check out Psalm 74:13-14 & 104:26).

I honestly think to get caught up in issues of whether there can be such a fish etc etc is to totally miss the point: there is an important phrase here that must not be overlooked: *and the Lord appointed...*

Everything is under the rule of God - even Leviathan. We serve a God who is in full control, and this should be a source of great encouragement to us.

And should you ever feel yourself feeling slightly special because you feel the Lord has called you to something important – well, that is indeed a privilege, but remember that the Lord can also appoint a fish and a donkey (remember Balaam?!). That truth certainly gives me perspective on my life!

It's interesting that God chose to deal with Jonah in this particular way out of a whole multitude of options (such as supplying a piece of wood to float on!). God's ways are truly not our ways.

But let's not go overboard to find out...

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## *Day 20: A Prophetic Fish?*

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Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish – Jonah 2:1

Any place is good to pray, especially in the belly of a fish.

What a journey Jonah had been on! Called to preach, he runs away. He experiences a storm which is God's judgement and realises he needs to be thrown overboard to save the sailors.

He probably never went to swim school. You can imagine that he was half drowning, perhaps not fully conscious and he has this fish swallow him. Perhaps he thought he was in Sheol (it gets mentioned in his prayer). Goodness knows how the fish felt – he'd never eaten a disobedient prophet before!

Whatever Jonah's physical and mental state at this point, he was clearly coming to his senses and knew what he had to do.

Pray.

What a wonderful God that allows us to call out to Him – even when we have messed up!

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## Day 21: Why?

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Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish – Jonah 2:1

A legitimate question to ask would be why didn't the storm calm down with Jonah's confession of who he was and what he had done? Why be thrown overboard and have a fish swallow him?

We can all appreciate that God's ways are not our ways, but I believe Kendall does have some good insight here – and there are just two things that I would like to point out that I find helpful.

Firstly, the fact that our chastening or discipline may continue does not mean that we are not forgiven – of course we are! We must never forget that discipline is a hallmark of the love of God (see Hebrews 12:6) and that God actually doesn't deal with us the way we deserve! As the psalmist put it in Psalm 103:10 "He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities."

Secondly, the storm of discipline will continue because the discipline is not given in proportion to our sin, but in proportion to the lesson we have to learn. Our God is a forward looking God!

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## *Day 22: School of Prayer 101*

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Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish, saying, "I called out to the Lord, out of my distress, and he answered me; out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and you heard my voice." Jonah 2:1-2

Sometimes our prayers are just so...polite, or perhaps a bit overly-familiar, revealing just a not-so-subtle hint of presumption.

It may explain why we don't get the kind of answers we would like to see.

If you want to see prayers answered, be willing to be taken to a place of anguish, and you will discover the Father-heart of God.



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*Day 23: School of Prayer  
Continued*

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*Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish ...For you cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the flood surrounded me; all your waves and your billows passed over me. Jonah 2: 1 & 3*

Then Jonah prayed...

It took a storm of judgement, being thrown overboard and being swallowed by a huge fish to get Jonah praying.

But it brought him to his senses, and he cries out to God, and begins by recognising a crucial and simple truth: God is in charge, and has full right over His creation.

God was not, and is not, averse to disciplining His children – this is a sign of His love. God was not averse to bringing an entire storm, and having Jonah thrown into a rough sea, half drowning, and sending a fish to swallow him.

But it brought Jonah to a place of prayer. I imagine that if God had instead given Jonah the power to walk on water, he may have still tried to run!

In prayer, we must never forget Whom we are addressing, and humble ourselves before Him.

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## Day 24: Looking Up

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*Then I said, "I am driven away from your sight; Yet I shall again look upon your holy temple. The waters closed in over me to take my life; the deep surrounded me; weeds were wrapped about my head at the roots of the mountains. I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever; yet you brought up my life from the pit, O Lord my God." Jonah 2:4-6*

We have seen that God brought Jonah to a place of prayer, but it took pretty drastic means to do so. Jonah continues to recognise this in his prayer, recognising Whom he is speaking to.

But while he states the reality of his condition (which is important in prayer, because that helps you be aware of your need and your humanity) and sees it as the work of God in his life, he also sees that as evidence of the mercy of God, albeit severe.

He is now longing for the presence He tried to earlier escape, and even though he is in the surreal realm of death, he has just discovered something: God is with him – even in the place of apparent hopelessness: yet you brought up my life from the pit, O Lord my God...

That's the key to getting out of a pit: looking up.

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## Day 25: Steadfast Love

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*When my life was fainting away, I remembered the Lord, and my prayer came to you, into your holy temple. Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love. But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay. Salvation belongs to the Lord! Jonah 2:7-9*

What a deep understanding of God is expressed in this prayer – a God who is rich in mercy and steadfast love. I love that powerful statement: “*those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love*” – it shows that steadfast love is what is available to us, but we will never discover it if we orbit our lives around anything other than God. Having seen the ineffectiveness of the gods of the sailors, Jonah knew first hand what he was praying!

Jonah, despite his disobedience, has been brought to a place of repentance. The measures may seem extreme, but God will do what it takes to bring His children to a place of restoration – such is His love towards us.

Salvation truly does belong to the Lord!

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## Day 26: Gut Prayer

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*And the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land. Jonah 2:10*

I cannot presume to speak for Jonah, but I have a sneaky suspicion he was grateful that he was vomited onto dry land – may not have been the most dignified of exits, but certainly better than more natural processes...

It had been quite a journey for Jonah: from receiving a command to go to Nineveh, to trying to run away and eventually end up inside a fish, this was quite an adventure and life-altering experience.

Jonah was brought to a place of repentance, and from inside the fish came an authentic prayer to God. As David Himself prayed: The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise (Psalm 51:17).

This is what God looks for: He is not moved or impressed by our success & potential fulfilment spirituality, but is blessed by the heart that truly knows its need of Him.

That is material God can work with.

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## *Day 27: Running to or from?*

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Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you." So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Jonah 3:1-3a

Ah...now that's much better! The first time Jonah was asked to go, he ran away in the opposite direction. If you recall, that was the wrong decision, because you simply cannot run away from God. I would know, I also tried once...

This narrative of Jonah is an amazing account, and it points to an extraordinary God who, despite the material He has to work with (you and me), can nonetheless ensure His purpose is fulfilled.

He is the God who grants second chances – the God who responds to repentance with abundant compassion and generosity – the One worth not running from, but running to.

Will you run to Him?

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## Day 28: Mighty to Save

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*Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days' journey in breadth. Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's journey. And he called out, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" And the people of Nineveh believed God. Jonah 3:3b-5a*

It's often hard to believe that people who we consider to be hardened or 'lost cases' can be open to receive God's Word.

But God knows the heart, and at this point of Nineveh's history (placing it between 782-745 BC) the people of Assyria were feeling a little vulnerable. Being overthrown was a distinct possibility in their future (note: the size in terms of three days probably refers to administrative district).

One simple proclamation from this foreign Jew and people come under conviction (fortunately they did not kill the messenger).

Never underestimate the power of God's Word, and certainly never underestimate the compassion of God which is exceedingly great to reach people.

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## Day 29: To Whom do you pray?

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*And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them. Jonah 3:5*

If you want to be a blessing to God, do not begin with good works.

Because, as the writer to the Hebrews explains:

And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him (Hebrews 11:6).

It seems obvious to state that you need to believe God exists in order to pray, but the challenge lies in having an expectancy in prayer: truly believing more than God exists, but that He listens, and cares, and knows the heart that is praying to Him. And the heart praying to God needs to know the God it is praying to.

Just one simple message spoken from God through Jonah, and these polytheistic people are asking for mercy. They come before God humbly.

I get very uncomfortable when I hear prayers demanding and commanding various forms of breakthroughs, because I always understood that I was at the Lord's bidding, not the other way round.

May we too come with a humble expectancy before our God.

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## Day 30: The Hope of Anguish

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*The word reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. And he issued a proclamation and published through Nineveh, "By the decree of the king and his nobles: Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything. Let them not feed or drink water, but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and let them call out mightily to God. Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish." Jonah 3:6-9*

Just in case you're wondering why we're told about a king's proclamation after the people had already responded – this is probably a topical order rather than a chronological order (ESV Study Bible footnote) – so that the king probably did issue the decree first, but it is arranged this way to highlight the fact that the people responded immediately to the message of Jonah and it was not based on a command.

But one thing is certain: this ruler was a wise man, and led by example. But have you noticed how the pagans seemed more concerned about loss of life than Jonah? In 1:6 it was a pagan captain calling Jonah to prayer because he feared for the life of those on board, then in 1:14 the sailors did not want Jonah to be thrown overboard or their lives held accountable, and now we see a pagan king being genuinely concerned.



Jonah has yet to show such compassion, and as we shall see, this is a central issue in Jonah's heart...

But nonetheless God has spoken through Jonah, and the people have responded. It must have been quite a sight, and a sound, to behold – but in God's economy, genuine anguish is the path to hope.

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## *Day 31: Relentless Mercy*

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When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it. Jonah 3:10

God relented...

This is a mind-boggling concept.

You are not as good as you think you are. In our legal system, we are supposed to be innocent until proven guilty. But when it comes to matters of our heart, and compare it to the purity of God, the harsh reality is that we all have a Hitler embedded within us and we are already guilty, and we need to be made innocent.

And these violent people respond to the message of the judgement of God, in the hope that He will relent.

And God does! Why should God relent? Why should Almighty God be concerned with puny powerless me?

The only reason you and I can experience the relenting of God upon our lives, is because He didn't relent at Calvary.

I cannot fathom what Jesus went through. Satan didn't relent, and neither did God. I cannot fathom what God the Father went through either – after all, He had to turn His face away.

But for the joy set before Him, as Hebrews 12 tells us, Christ endured the cross.

And as I brushed my teeth this morning, I saw in the mirror the joy that was set before Him. As did you if you have handed your life over to Christ.

I do not deserve the relenting of God upon my life, but I am so, so grateful.

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## Day 32: Angry with God

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*But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry.  
Jonah 4:1*

Ah...now we are beginning to get to the heart of the issue in Jonah's life.

Jonah is going to be honest in his prayer to God, but take note of the strength of his reaction. The people repented, God relented – and this was not the outcome Jonah was wanting. That is quite strong language used: displeased exceedingly!

Anger.

A legitimate emotion in the context of injustice and sinning against God, but most of the time in our human fragility it comes as a result of being personally offended. If it does not get dealt with, it affects our walk with the Lord since, as James puts it: the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God (James 1:20).

Its easy to get offended if we think too much of ourselves.

May God grant us the grace to consider others better than ourselves. We are all in need of God's grace and mercy.

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## Day 33: Love Me...Not Them!

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*And he prayed to the Lord and said, "O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster. Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live." Jonah 4:2-3*

So Jonah is angry with God because God is loving...

We're quite ok with God being loving to us (we even go so far as to think that we quite understand that God would love us), but when that love extends to our enemies...

Jonah knew full well that Assyria would be an instrument of God's judgment against Israel in the future if Israel did not repent. Getting rid of the Ninevites could potentially help avoid this...of course we know God is quite capable of raising up other sources of judgment.

Jonah simply did not want mercy shown to a violent people. And now they have actually responded to the message he was told to give and are repenting! This was not meant to happen!

In other words, its ok for God to love me – just not those who have hurt me or who can hurt me. How quickly we divide the human race into two groups: us and them!

The human heart can be a real conundrum!

And Jonah wants to die.

But you don't tell God what to do...

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### Day 34: Thump 'em Lord!

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*And he prayed to the Lord and said, "O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster. Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live." Jonah 4:2-3*

I just have to share this response I received to yesterday's devotional from a dear brother:

"Lord, thump them... 'cause they're not good like me! You show 'em!"

And that pretty much sums up how we feel at times isn't it? It's hard to witness God blessing those whom we perceive do not deserve it. As my friend said – we all have our own Ninevites! But Jonah was recognising an incredibly profound truth about God: God really is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love – and the Jews could not claim ownership of God, because they didn't own Him but belonged to Him.

And neither do we own God; when we give our lives to God, we belong to Him, and we give Him full rights over our lives – the right to act in ways we do not understand, and to accept that each and everyone of us are not deserving of His mercy and grace. God blesses not because of who we are, but because of who He is.

God is truly worthy of our worship.

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## Day 35: 18 Inch Journey

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*And the Lord said, "Do you do well to be angry?"* Jonah 4:4

Always consider your answers very carefully when God poses a question...

The pagans are now in harmony with God because they repented, and the prophet is in disharmony because from his perspective this whole repentance and disaster avoidance scenario is an evil to him.

As we have seen, Jonah is angry over the compassion of God shown to "them."

But does Jonah have the right to be angry?

Jonah is about to have his head travel to his heart...It's a journey of only about 18 inches, but it has a knack for taking a very long time...(check out The 18 Inch Principle from InContext Ministries)

What question is God posing to you? Is it the same as to Jonah? What is your answer?



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## *Day 36: Wait and see?*

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Jonah went out of the city and sat to the east of the city and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, till he should see what would become of the city. Jonah 4:5

Wow – after everything, Jonah is still hoping that there is a chance of Nineveh being destroyed.

I think many Christians fail to understand a simple truth: the greatest sign and wonder that one could ever experience is the transformation of one's own heart.

I often hear Christians talk about the power that is in them as if it were some kind of power ranger force that they have at their disposal.

Well, I've come to understand that it's not so much power at my disposal as the reality that it takes nothing less than resurrection power to transform this heart of mine.

And Jonah's heart transformation was not yet complete: yes, he did obey and go preach, but he's still hoping they will get destroyed.

It's possible to obey without compassion, but God can even use a resounding gong...

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## *Day 37: Thankless?*

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Now the Lord God appointed a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be a shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort. So Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the plant. Jonah 4:6

Now that's more like it...God assisting the comfort of Jonah, appointing a plant to come up over him to give him shade.

Who doesn't want a God like that?

A God who puts His power at work for our comfort...

And Jonah is really, really happy at this blessing.

I notice he didn't say thank you – just interested in the blessing rather than the Giver.

I'm sure we wouldn't want to identify ourselves as being ungrateful, but have you ever felt that the Lord was somehow obliged to bless you?

Do you take His blessings in your life for granted?

Gratitude makes all the difference in our walk with God.

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## *Day 38: Adult Toddler*

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But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant, so that it withered. When the sun rose, God appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint. And he asked that he might die and said, "It is better for me to die than to live." But God said to Jonah, "Do you do well to be angry for the plant?" And he said, "Yes, I do well to be angry, angry enough to die." Jonah 4:8&9

It seems to me that Jonah has a melancholic disposition in terms of personality with some oppositional traits thrown in – this is not the first time he felt ready to die when things didn't go his way! And his answer back to God sure seems laden with self-pity and not unlike a petulant toddler.

Takes one to know one!

But none of this surprised God. Nonetheless, God is merciful enough to challenge Jonah and teach him a lesson, and even appoints elements of His creation to obey in order to teach Jonah. The sovereignty of God over His creation sure has come through quite strongly in this account of Jonah!

Let us not forget the simple truth that God really is in control over all things, and that we are accountable to Him, and that God is actually allowed to do what He wants regardless of our opinion.

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## Day 39: God of Compassion

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*And the Lord said, "You pity the plant, for which you did not labour, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night. And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle? Jonah 4:10&11*

Since these are the last verses of the book, what gives you the idea that Jonah was speechless after this response by God to his anger we saw yesterday?

It is challenging isn't it? We so often fall into the trap that the blessings we have are somehow owed to us, and unless we develop a thankful heart, we run the fatal risk of becoming self-absorbed, and ignore the reality of those in need.

And God cares. He cares that there are people who do not yet know Him. They're not all 'out there in the mission field,' although there still remain many unreached people groups, and we need to support those serving in the field. But there are also many, believe it or not, who are in your network of relationships, and you have been called to reach them.

Don't run away.

