

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF

# JONAH

DRAWN INTO THE DEPTHS OF GOD'S GRACE



# WELCOME

At Transformation Church, we are one family walking together as we follow Christ. It's our hope and prayer that this guide will be a helpful resource to you as you listen to our sermons and meet in small groups. We want to help you get comfortable reading the Bible on your own and in community.

To watch the sermons that go along with each week's lesson, go to our website: [TransformationChurch.tc/series](https://TransformationChurch.tc/series) and look for the JONAH series.

This guide will serve as a companion resource to this sermon series. It does not necessarily follow the sermons exactly, but there will be many cross-over references. In viewing the sermons and using this resource in tandem, you will gain a greater understanding of the book of Jonah and how to study the Bible for yourself. It will also empower you to discuss what God is showing you with your small group. Allow the Holy Spirit to use your sermon notes and this guide to further your biblical understanding and enhance your biblical conversations.

# READ & PRAY

At the beginning of each week you will find Bible verses to read. Set aside time before meeting with your small group to read through these verses and consider journaling your thoughts as you pray and commune with God.

# PREPARE

Before meeting with your small group, read that week's recap. Spend time slowly taking in the information. This is also a great time to go over any sermon notes that stood out to you or even re-watch the sermon online.

# DISCUSS

Get together with your small group to go over the Discussion Questions. These are categorized into Upward, Inward, and Outward questions. Upward questions point us to God and remind us of who He is. Inward questions help us understand how to apply what we're learning to our lives so that we can experience true transformation. Outward questions help us to see how we can take what we've discussed and live on mission in our community.

If you still need a small group to join, be sure to check out our website or contact our Groups Coordinator. We would love to help you connect to biblical community. You can reach us at [Groups@TransformationChurch.tc](mailto:Groups@TransformationChurch.tc).

**UPWARD. INWARD. OUTWARD.**  
**TRANSFORMERS, ROLL OUT!**

# WEEK 1

The word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amittai: "Get up! Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it because their evil has come up before me."

– Jonah 1:1-2



# BIBLE VERSES TO READ:

Jonah 1:1-3; 2 Kings 14:25; Luke 15:11-32

## WEEKLY RECAP:

If you grew up going to church or Sunday school, you have likely heard the story of Jonah. You might have been fascinated with the part about Jonah being swallowed by a big fish and living to talk about it. You might even think that the story is allegory, simply a myth to teach us a lesson about not running away from God.

When we take the time to slow down and consider the cultural context of the day, we find that this short book is packed with wisdom.

We meet Jonah in the book of 2 Kings. He is a prophet, the son of Amittai. Not much else is said about him there. When we get to the book of Jonah, however, we learn more. Right from the start we are told that Jonah receives a word from God to go to Nineveh and tell them to repent, for destruction will come upon them. In the very next verse, Jonah goes in the complete opposite direction, defying the Lord's command. This is puzzling behavior from a prophet. What would compel him to disobey God?

Looking at history, we know that the Ninevites were a brutal force in the ancient world. And up until that time Israelite prophets had only called on their own people to repent, but now Jonah was being sent to a Gentile nation, and not just any Gentile nation, but one that was infamous for its cruelty. There's more. Tim Keller says, "2 Kings 14:25 tells us Jonah ministered during the reign of Israel's King Jeroboam II (786-746 BC). In that text we learn, unlike the prophets Amos and Hosea, who criticized the royal administration for its injustice and unfaithfulness, Jonah had supported Jeroboam's aggressive military policy to extend the nation's power and influence." In short, Jonah was intensely patriotic and a partisan nationalist. He feared and hated the Ninevites. This was the man God chose to preach in Nineveh.

Knowing the background story, it should come as no surprise to the reader that Jonah chose to run from God. Jonah was not about to put himself in harm's way, especially not for Nineveh. Jonah could see no good reason to go to Nineveh, so he didn't. He trusted his own perception over God's vision.

In Luke 15 we see another story about running from God. Jesus tells a parable about a man with two sons. The younger one asks for his inheritance and leaves. The older one stays and works, but when the father forgives the younger son, the older one is angry. Both of these sons rejected their father in some way. Neither one trusted his father's heart. As we continue to read in the book of Jonah, we will see how Jonah's behavior and attitude is reflected in both the younger son and the older son. At first, he rejects his Father and runs away, but even when he eventually comes back, there is still a level of rejection.

How do you see yourself in these passages? Do you relate to Jonah? Are you running from God? At the root of Jonah's disobedience was his mistrust in the goodness of God. Do you trust in God's goodness? Do you believe He has your best in mind? As Christ followers, we have the cross and the empty tomb to solidify our belief in the goodness of God. We know He is good because He sent Jesus so that we could be eternally united to Him. Whenever you begin to doubt and feel like you might take off running, remember that He is good and that you can trust in Him.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

### UPWARD:

- Why do you think God called Jonah specifically to go to Nineveh?
- What do you think is God's heart towards Nineveh?
- How do you see God's heart reflected in the parable found in Luke 15:11-32?

### INWARD:

- Do you relate to Jonah in any way? Reflect on this and share with your group.
- Is there any area of your life in which you are running from God?
- Which son do you relate to in the parable? Why?

### OUTWARD:

- Marinate on the goodness of God. How have you seen His goodness in your life and in the lives of others?
- What steps of trust and obedience can you take this week?



# PARALLEL PATTERNS IN THE BOOK OF JONAH

SCENE 1: Jonah, the pagans, and the sea	SCENE 2: Jonah, the pagans, and the city
1:1 God's Word comes to Jonah	3:1 God's Word comes to Jonah
1:2 The message to be conveyed	3:2 The message to be conveyed
1:3 The response of Jonah	3:3 The response of Jonah
1:4 The word of warning	3:4 The word of warning
1:5 The response of the pagans	3:5 The response of the pagans
1:6 The response of the pagan leader	3:6 The response of the pagan leader
1:7ff How the pagans' response was ultimately better than Jonah's	3:7ff How the pagans' response was ultimately better than Jonah's
2:1-10 How God taught grace to Jonah through the fish	4:1-10 How God taught grace to Jonah through the plant

\*adapted from Tim Keller's *The Prodigal Prophet*

# WEEK 2

The Lord appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

– Jonah 1:17





# BIBLE VERSES TO READ:

Jonah 1:4-17; Romans 8:28; Luke 10:25-37, John 13:35

## WEEKLY RECAP:

In verse 4 of the first chapter of Jonah we are immediately hurled into action. Jonah has decided to disobey God and run away from Him. (As if there was anywhere he could go apart from God's presence!) God, in His great love and mercy, however, intervened by sending a storm.

Usually when we go through a storm in life, we don't think of it as evidence of God's mercy. We usually ask God why, and we wonder what the purpose of the storm could possibly be. Storms are inconvenient, messy, and furious. But what if the storm we are experiencing is actually protecting us?

Jonah is on a boat headed towards Tarshish in the middle of a storm. The sailors on the boat are terrified, but Jonah is fast asleep. Jonah's disobedience was the cause of this storm, but it was the sailors who were dealing with its effects. Before going further, it's important to say this: Not every storm, or difficulty, we endure is the result of sin, but every sin will bring about a storm. And often the people around us get caught up in that storm as well. Tim Keller says, "Most often the storms of life come upon us not as the consequence of a particular sin but as the unavoidable consequence of living in a fallen world." The sailors experienced the storm even though it was not their particular sin that brought it on. As a result, they came to faith in God. This was a great mercy to them from God.

It was also a great mercy to Jonah, because this will be the start of him asking the question that we must all ask ourselves: "Who is my neighbor?" In Luke 10:25, we see an expert of the law ask Jesus how one can inherit eternal life. Jesus did what He does best; He responded to the man's question with another question: "What is written in the law? How do you read it?" The expert is forced to stop and think about all he has learned from God's word. "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." This is the right answer! Everyone should be happy! Except it's clear that the expert in the law is not satisfied. He wants to justify his prejudice against certain people groups, just as Jonah wanted to be justified in his disdain for the Ninevites. He asks

Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” He’s waiting for Jesus to say, “Well, your fellow Jews of course!” But Jesus has something different in mind.

Jesus goes on to recount the parable of the Good Samaritan. This is significant because the Jews and the Samaritans did not get along, in fact, they hated each other. The Jews looked down on the Samaritans because they were a mixture of Jewish and Gentile ancestry. Jesus undermines the normal ethnic divisions of the day by telling a parable in which a Samaritan is the hero.

God cares about how His followers relate to and treat people who are unlike them. He wants us to treat everyone, regardless of their faith, ethnicity, or status with respect and dignity. John 13:35 says, “By this everyone will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another.”

Jonah saw himself primarily as a member of the Israelite community but forgot that he was also part of a larger human community, which included the Ninevites. This is a humbling realization for Jonah, as we will see in the coming weeks, it’s a humbling experience for us all.

Through this storm, Jonah is able to see God’s grace in action, even in the most unexpected way. The same can be true for us. The storms of life may be painful, but God’s grace can and will break through even the most painful of circumstances. We simply need to look around and see how God’s grace is evident in the storm.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

### UPWARD:

- Why did God send the storm onto Jonah and the boat?
- How was this storm evidence of God’s grace?
- How do we know God cares for all people?

### INWARD:

- What’s a recent storm you have endured in your life?
- Read Romans 8:28. Have you been able to see God’s grace in the storm you recently endured? If not, ask someone to help you see it.

## OUTWARD:

- Is there someone around you who is currently going through a storm? How can you reach out to them in love?

# JONAH AND JESUS

Commentators have pointed out the parallels between Jonah's experience in the storm and Jesus' experience in the storm on Lake Galilee in Mark 4:35-41.

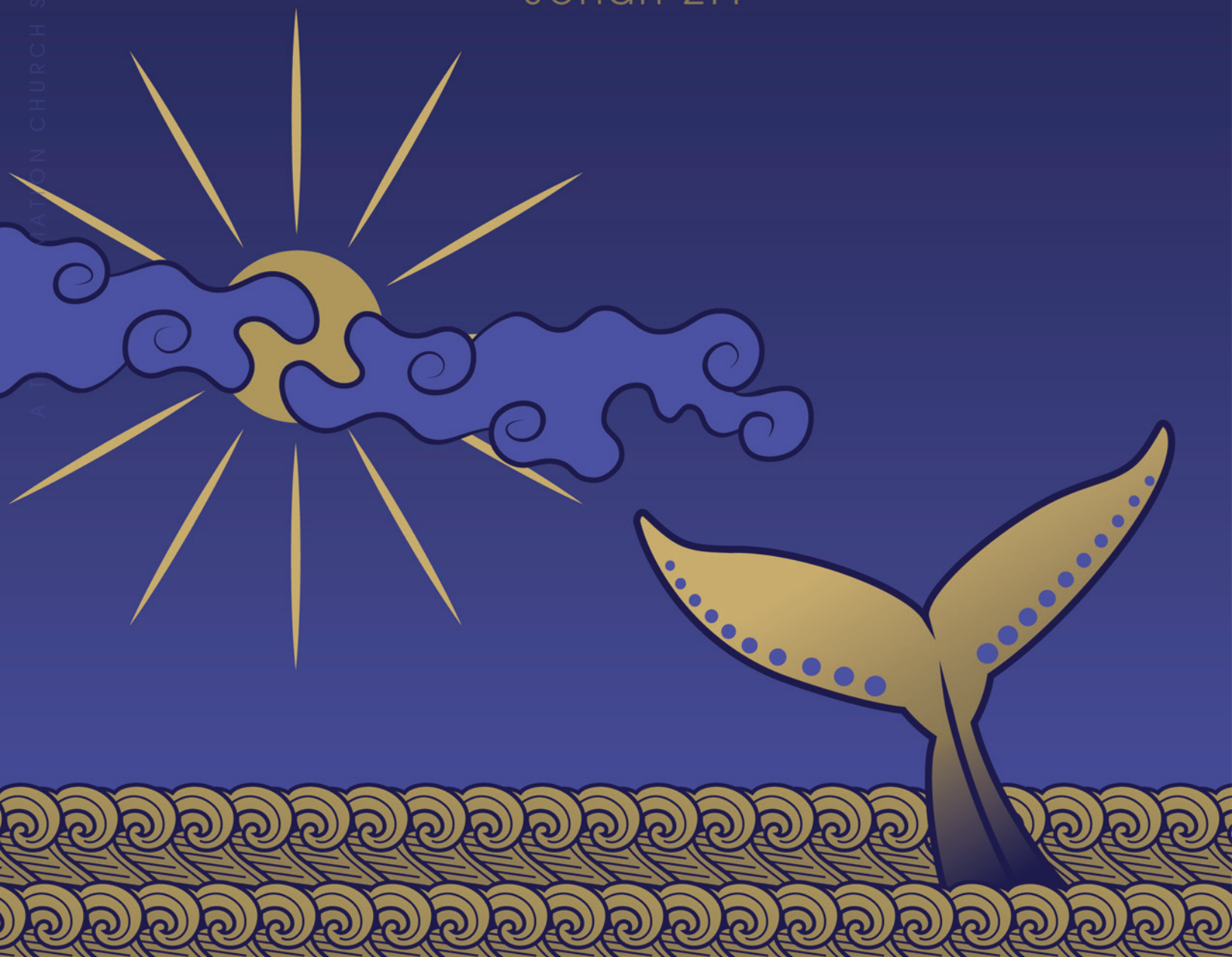
Jonah out on the water in a boat	Jesus out on the water in a boat
Jonah's boat overtaken by a violent storm	Jesus' boat overtaken by a violent storm
Jonah is asleep	Jesus is asleep
Sailors wake up Jonah	Disciples wake up Jesus
There is an intervention by God and the sea is calmed	There is an intervention by God and the sea is calmed
After the deliverance the sailors are more terrified	After the deliverance the disciples are more terrified

“By this parallelism, Mark is telling us that Jonah's willingness to die for the sailors points us to an infinitely greater sacrificial love that brings an infinitely greater salvation.” – Tim Keller, *The Prodigal Prophet*.

# WEEK 3

Jonah prayed to the Lord his God  
from the belly of the fish.

– Jonah 2:1



# BIBLE VERSES TO READ:

Jonah 2:1, Psalm 130:1-2, Matthew 12:40, Romans 6:23

## WEEKLY RECAP:

After descending to the bottom of a ship, on his way down to Tarshish, Jonah now descends further—to the belly of a great fish. This illustrates not only Jonah's physical journey, but his spiritual journey as well—a journey marked with resistance to Yahweh's call on his life, a journey of allegiance to the interests of Israel as opposed to the interests of the God of Israel, a journey that serves as a mirror for us as modern-day readers. Yes, Jonah's time in the belly of the great fish serves as a lesson to us as well.

For many, this may seem like an unleashing of God's wrath on the life of the prophet. But Tim Keller calls this act by God an example of "severe mercy." Yes, this repulsive, dark, and watery prison serves as proof of God's mercy in the life of Jonah. Rather than allowing Jonah to run and evade the beauty and freedom of living out his calling, God slows him down so that he must pause and reflect. From the belly of the great fish Jonah prays, and the Lord slowly begins to turn his heart back to Him in repentance and renew his calling as a missionary to the Ninevites.

Jesus, the better Jonah, understands what it's like to descend to a pit of His own. While Jonah figuratively descended to Sheol (the place of the dead), Jesus literally descended into what He refers to as "the heart of the earth." Yet, this act of severe mercy was not for Jesus' personal benefit in the same way that it was for Jonah's. It was done to benefit you and me. Jesus experienced the severity of the grave so that we might experience the very mercy of God, become sons and daughters in His family, and join Him as He bears witness to the world through us. Whether it's through the belly of a great fish or through an empty tomb, God delights in extending mercy.

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

## UPWARD:

- Read Jonah 2:1. What does Jonah's temporary sentence in the belly of the fish teach us about the character of God? What does this say about God's heart for wayward people?
- Read Matthew 12:40. What does this passage say about Jesus' mission? Why is it important?

## INWARD:

- Jonah's experience in the belly of the fish is an example of "severe mercy." Can you think of an example of "severe mercy" in your own life? If you feel comfortable, please share what the Lord taught you through that experience with the group.
- Do you have trouble accepting that God's mercy may look severe at times? Why or why not?

## OUTWARD:

- Read Psalm 130:1-2. This prayer reflects a cry to the Lord for help. Who in your sphere of influence is in the middle of what you might see to be a "pit"?
- What does it look like to walk alongside others as they wait on the Lord?



# JONAH AND JESUS

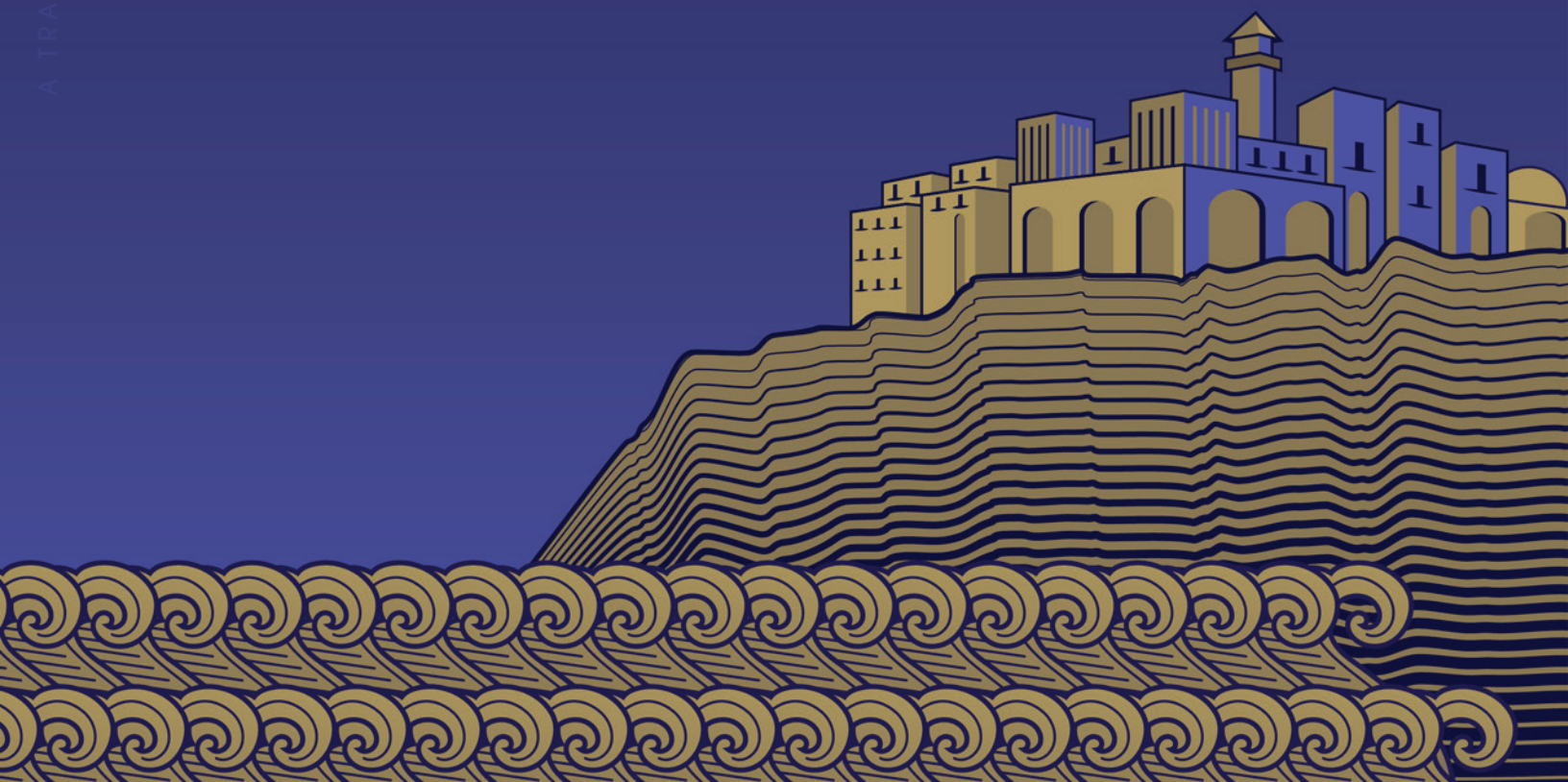
Parallelism between Jonah's experience in the belly of the fish and Jesus' experience in the heart of the earth:

Jonah figuratively speaks of how he is in the place of the dead.	Jesus literally speaks of how He will descend to the place of the dead.
Three days and three nights in the belly of the fish.	Three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.
Was temporarily appointed to the belly of the fish to receive God's mercy.	Was temporarily appointed to the grave as an extension of God's mercy to us.
Was released from the fish to bring a message of hope to his enemies.	Was released from the grave to be a message of hope to those who are far from God.

# WEEK 4

But as for me, I will sacrifice to you  
with a voice of thanksgiving. I will  
fulfill what I have vowed. Salvation  
belongs to the Lord.

– Jonah 2:9



# BIBLE VERSES TO READ:

Jonah 2:2-10, Romans 5:8, Ephesians 2:4-5, James 2:1

## WEEKLY RECAP:

Jonah's prayer in verses 2-10 serve as somewhat of a turning point in this short prophetic book. Being so consumed by the national interests of Israel and his ethnocentrism, Jonah refused to be a conduit of God's mercy to the Ninevites. He had already concluded in his heart that they were undeserving of mercy and worthy of the full weight of God's wrath. They were, after all, a heinous people who committed brutal acts of violence. God, however, is rich in mercy and had plans for Jonah, as His prophet, to be an extension of that mercy. But before Jonah could be a conduit of God's mercy, he first had to be a recipient of that mercy. Before he could call the Ninevites to repentance, he had to repent. As Tim Keller asserts, the real deliverance is not so much that Jonah is eventually released from the fish, but that he is slowly being released from his own pride and disobedience. That is the true miracle at work in this part of the story!

Jonah acknowledges his wrongdoing in that he has been banished from the sight of God and has sunk to the very foundations of the mountains. The distance between Jonah's heart and the will of God is palpable as Jonah descends further and further into the sea. Yet, in the midst of his descent, he "remembered the LORD." It is the faithful love of God that slowly moves Jonah's heart to call out to Him. Jonah's commitment to the mission of God is renewed, and he vows to go to the Gentiles whom he deemed undeserving recipients of God's mercy.

Jonah ends his prayer by saying, "Salvation belongs to the LORD." As we continue reading in the coming weeks, we will see that Jonah's difficulty in extending mercy to the Ninevites persists throughout the rest of the story. Nevertheless, the same God who is committed to saving Jonah is committed to saving this Gentile nation as well. And He is the same God who persists in saving us—all of us. The salvation of God shows no partiality, has no favorites, and is to be received by any who are willing.

The pinnacle of this beautiful reality can be seen in the person and work of Jesus, who shows no favoritism in who He invites into the family of God. When we trust in Him, we are transformed into a people who can extend mercy without showing partiality. As you reflect on this truth, thank God for the ways He has extended mercy to you. Let Him know you see His hand in your life and are grateful for it. If you're still having trouble seeing it, you can still go to Him. You can be honest before God and ask Him to give you eyes to see and ears to hear. This is also a great opportunity to ask your community to come around you in prayer. He is good, and His mercy endures forever.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

### UPWARD:

- Read Jonah 2:9. Pay special attention to the phrase “Salvation belongs to the LORD.” What thoughts come to mind as you reflect on this phrase? How is this phrase evident in the person and work of Jesus?
- Despite Jonah’s slowness to repent, God is committed to working in and through him. What does this say about the character of God?
- Why do you think God is so committed to developing Jonah and extending him mercy?

### INWARD:

- Read Jonah 2:7. Can you recall a time when you “remembered the Lord”? You may think of the moment you began following Jesus for the first time, or of a time you repented after a long period of disobedience while following Jesus. Take time to share with the group.
- Did your family of origin or surrounding environment while you were growing up teach you to exercise favoritism towards one group of people over another? What was that experience like for you? How can you break free from these biases?

### OUTWARD:

- Read James 2:1. As God’s people, why do we still find it difficult not to show favoritism?
- Ask the Holy Spirit to search your heart for ways that you may be exercising favoritism. Like Jonah, we must receive God’s mercy and repent so that we can embrace the mission that He invites us to play a part in. Take time to pray for this specifically as a small group.

**“MERCY”**  
**MAVERICK CITY MUSIC &  
ELEVATION WORSHIP:**





# WEEK 5

Everyone must call out earnestly to God. Each must turn from his evil ways and from his wrongdoing.

– Jonah 3:8





# BIBLE VERSES TO READ:

Jonah 3:1-10; 2 Timothy 2:25; James 1:17; Romans 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9

## WEEKLY RECAP:

In Jonah 3, we meet Jonah after he is released from the belly of the fish. Jonah had just experienced a major breakthrough, repenting from his disobedience, nationalistic pride, and hard heart. God gave him another chance to fulfill His mission and walk in obedience. God repeated His original instruction, commanding Jonah to travel to Nineveh. This time, Jonah didn't put up a fight or run in the opposite direction. He made the three-day journey to Nineveh, willingly entering the capital of the Assyrian empire, despite the uncertainty and potential danger that awaited him.

Jonah proclaimed to the people of Nineveh, "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown." What a warning! Jonah probably expected the Ninevites to laugh in his face, ignore the warning, and execute him. After all, the Ninevites were notoriously evil and wicked. Why would they take Jonah seriously?

The people of Nineveh, however, respond in a shocking way. They believed God. Even the king of Nineveh told his people to turn from their evil ways. Collectively, the Ninevites were receptive to the word Jonah brought to them and repented. In the original Hebrew, the word translated "repent" means "to change one's mind" or "to turn away completely." Repenting isn't feeling guilty or halfheartedly apologizing. Repenting is to completely turn away from your sin.

But here's the thing: Repentance is a work of God, not a work of our own flesh. 2 Timothy 2:25 says that God grants us repentance, rather than us crafting it for ourselves. James 1:17 tells us that every good thing is from above. Romans 2:4 reminds us that God's kindness is what leads us to repentance. Just like the people of Nineveh, we don't know how to do good apart from God. The people of Nineveh went from heinously slaying humans to putting on sackcloth (a sign of submission, mourning, and repentance in biblical times).

God saw their repentant hearts and had compassion on them. Instead of destroying the Ninevites who themselves had caused so much destruction, He offered them grace and gave them a second chance. Jonah's obedience brought the repentance of Nineveh and spared them from destruction.

The Lord is still changing hearts and granting repentance to those who seem so far from Him. This can be true in our own lives and stories. We all need to repent at times because we're all broken. God's kindness leads us to repentance, away from disobedience and into abundance. In addition to granting repentance to us individually, God invites us to live on mission with Him by encouraging those around us to repent and walk in relationship with the Lord. He kindly welcomes us in to participate in the beautiful redemption of the lives of others! God is using His people to lead others to repentance. We are called to be obedient and invite others into a life of abundance.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

### UPWARD:

- In Jonah 3, we see that God commanded Jonah to preach the message of "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown." Why do you think God instructed Jonah to proclaim this message?
- What does it say about God that He gives compassion to people who do heinous things?

### INWARD:

- Sometimes, like Jonah, our pride gets in the way, leading to our disobedience. What factors keep you from being obedient to God? How can you take a step of obedience?
- How have you seen God grant you repentance? What does repentance look like?

### OUTWARD:

- How can you be a picture of repentance to those around you?
- God gives grace to the wicked Ninevites. To whom can you extend grace? If no one comes to mind, ask God if there is anyone from whom you have withheld grace, and ask Him to help you give grace when it is difficult.

# “WHAT IS REPENTANCE?”

Watch this short video of J.I. Packer talking about repentance. Take a moment to reflect on his words. What stands out to you?



# WEEK 6

The LORD asked, "Is it right for you to be angry?"

– Jonah 4:4



# BIBLE VERSES TO READ:

Jonah 4:1-11; Exodus 34:6-8; 2 Peter 3:9; Luke 23:32-34

## WEEKLY RECAP:

This week, we read about Jonah's reaction to God's extravagant grace and compassion on the people of Nineveh. When God had mercy on the Ninevites, Jonah exploded on God. Jonah accused Him of forgiving too easily and not being a God of justice. He hated that God forgave His enemies so easily and willingly. Not only was Jonah not overjoyed at the repentance of the heinous Ninevites, he was so angry that he said he'd rather die, and he begged God to take his life. God's response? Simply to challenge Jonah's anger with a question. Is it right for you to be angry? God's response to this disobedient prophet to whom He had given many chances was flooded with grace and patience.

Notice that God didn't condemn Jonah's anger immediately but challenged him to think of the cause of his anger. Anger in itself isn't sinful, but when our anger is self-righteous or illegitimate, we are dishonoring God.

Jonah found shelter outside of Nineveh, where he continued to stew over God's decision to relent and not destroy the city. In His kindness, God grew a plant to provide shade for Jonah so that he could rest. Even though Jonah was criticizing Him and was furious with Him, God still showed Him grace. However, the next day, God "appointed a worm that attacked the plant," causing the plant that was providing shade for Jonah to suddenly die.

Sitting in the heat once again, Jonah repeats that he would rather die than continue to live. In response, God compares Jonah's investment in the plant and grief over its withering to God's investment in the people of Nineveh. He reminds Jonah that God wants repentance for all people and that He is a God of forgiveness and mercy. When Jonah had been continually forgiven of so much, how could he turn his back on the people of Nineveh and grieve at their repentance?



Often, we may be tempted to live from a similar posture. We may expect God to like the people we like and dislike the people we can't stand. While we would never turn down His grace and forgiveness to us, we resent the grace He lavishes on those whom we believe do not deserve it. We forget that God doesn't have favorites, that He loves each of us extravagantly and wants none of us to perish.

In Jonah 4, we see drastic differences between Jonah and Jesus, the perfect Prophet. Jonah didn't grieve over Nineveh's sins or rejoice in their repentance. Jesus wept over the state of humanity and praises God when we turn away from sin. Jonah was overcome with fury at God's forgiveness towards the people Jonah deemed unforgivable. On the cross, before He died, Jesus begged God to forgive the very people who were crucifying Him. He didn't hate them nor condemn them but saw them in need of forgiveness and not beyond redemption. The person of Jonah elevates the Person of Jesus, who is the ultimate hope and redemption of all people.

The story of Jonah reminds us that none of us deserves His grace. That's why it's a gift we can only receive and not earn. Only when we fully grasp the compassion we have been shown by God can we want it for others as well. When it's difficult to love others as God loved the Ninevites, pray for the Lord to make your heart more like His.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

### UPWARD:

- Read Exodus 34:6-8 and Jonah 4:2. What is the difference between Moses' reaction to God's grace and Jonah's reaction to God's grace? Why do you think Jonah reacted in this way?
- What do we learn about God in the illustration of the plant and worm?
- How does Jesus on the cross reverse Jonah's reaction in Jonah 4?

### INWARD:

- Read Jonah 4:4. How can you discern between righteous and unrighteous anger?
- Do you relate to Jonah? Why or why not?

### OUTWARD:

- To whom do you find it hard to show love and grace? How can you show them love today?



# MEET JONAH—THE PRODIGAL PROPHET

In this article, Tim Keller describes how Jonah is a prodigal prophet.



# ABOUT:

Transformation Church is a multiethnic, multigenerational, mission-shaped community that loves God completely (Upward), loves ourselves correctly (Inward), and loves our neighbors compassionately (Outward).

For more information on our church, service times, and additional resources, check out our website at [TransformationChurch.tc](http://TransformationChurch.tc).

You can connect with us on social media:

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