

The Big Picture: Finding Jesus in the Old Testament:

Week 11 — Jonah: More Than a Whale Story

Jonah 1–4, Matthew 12:38–41

Opening Prayer: Merciful God, open our hearts as we study Your Word. Help us see ourselves honestly in Jonah's story and understand more deeply the grace You have shown us through Jesus. Teach us not only to receive Your mercy but also to extend it to others. Amen.

Theme: God's mercy is bigger than our boundaries.

Jonah is more than a story about a prophet and a great fish. It is a story about a God who pursues those who run, rescues those in the depths, offers second chances, and extends mercy even to people we may struggle to love. Ultimately, Jonah points us toward Jesus, whose death and resurrection reveal just how far God is willing to go to save.

Secular Quote: *"Resentment is like drinking poison and then hoping it will kill your enemies."*
— Often attributed to Nelson Mandela

Starter Question: Think of a time when someone gave you a second chance you did not necessarily deserve. What did that experience mean to you, and did it change the way you treated others afterward?

Digging Deeper Questions:

Read Jonah 1:1–3. God tells Jonah to go to Nineveh, and Jonah immediately heads in the opposite direction. Why do you think we sometimes run from what God asks us to do even when we know what God wants? What are some modern-day "Tarshishes"—ways we distract ourselves, avoid difficult conversations, or resist God's direction?

Read Jonah 1:4–16. One of the great ironies of this chapter is that the pagan sailors show compassion while God's prophet is running away from his calling. What do the sailors do that surprises you? What might this teach us about assuming who is spiritually "inside" or "outside"?

Read Jonah 1:17–2:10. We often think of the great fish as Jonah's punishment, but Scripture says God **"provided"** the fish. How does viewing the fish as rescue rather than simply punishment change your understanding of the story? Have you ever experienced something difficult that you later realized God used to redirect, protect, or transform you?

Read Jonah 2:1–6. Jonah describes himself sinking into the depths and then says, **"But you, Lord my God, brought my life up from the pit."** What are some of the

"deep places" people experience today? What does Jonah's prayer teach us about calling upon God when circumstances seem hopeless?

Read Jonah 3:1–5, 10. After Jonah fails, "the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time." What does this reveal about God's character? How is Jonah himself experiencing the same mercy that he will soon resent God giving to Nineveh?

Read Jonah 4:1–4. Jonah admits that he ran because he knew God was "gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love." Why would God's mercy make Jonah angry? Why can it sometimes be easier to believe God should forgive us than to believe God should forgive someone who has hurt us?

Read Jonah 4:5–11. Jonah becomes deeply concerned about the loss of a plant while showing little concern for the people of Nineveh. What does the plant reveal about Jonah's priorities? Are there things we sometimes care more about—our comfort, preferences, possessions, traditions, politics, schedules—than people who need God's love?

Read Matthew 12:38–41. Jesus describes Jonah as a sign pointing toward His own death and resurrection. What similarities do you see between Jonah's three days in the deep and Jesus' three days in the grave? More importantly, what differences show us that Jesus is greater than Jonah?

Jonah runs from his enemies; Jesus moves toward His. Jonah resents mercy; Jesus embodies mercy. Jonah sits outside Nineveh waiting for destruction; Jesus weeps over Jerusalem. What does comparing Jonah with Jesus teach us about the heart of God?

The book of Jonah ends with God asking, **"Should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh?"** We are never given Jonah's answer. Why do you think the book ends with a question? What answer do you think God is asking from us?

Actionable of the Week:

This week, identify your **Nineveh**. It does not necessarily have to be one particular person. It may be a group of people you struggle to understand, someone who has disappointed you, or someone toward whom you carry resentment.

Do three things this week: **Pray, Examine, and Act.**

Pray: Pray for that person or group each day. Do not begin by asking God to change them. Ask God to shape **your heart** toward them.

Examine: Ask yourself, “Do I want this person to experience the same mercy from God that I want for myself?” Pay attention to where your answer becomes uncomfortable.

Act: Take one concrete step that reflects Christ's mercy. It might mean offering encouragement, beginning a difficult conversation, forgiving an old offense, serving someone different from you, or simply refusing to participate in bitterness or dehumanizing speech.

Remember: extending mercy does not mean ignoring wrongdoing or eliminating healthy boundaries. It means refusing to allow resentment to have the final word.

Closing Prayer:

God of mercy, thank You for pursuing us, forgiving us, and giving us another chance. Help us release resentment, love beyond our boundaries, and extend to others the grace You have given us through Jesus Christ. Amen.

Suggested Daily Scripture Readings

Monday Psalm 139:7–12

You cannot outrun God. Even in the deepest and darkest places, God is present.

Tuesday Lamentations 3:22–26

Mercy is new every morning. God's compassion is not exhausted by our failures.

Wednesday Micah 7:18–19

God delights in mercy. God does not reluctantly forgive; mercy is part of His character.

Thursday Luke 6:27–36

Love your enemies. Jesus challenges the Jonah within us by calling us to extend mercy beyond those we think deserve it.

Friday Romans 5:6–11

Remember when you were Nineveh. Christ died for us while we were still sinners and enemies of God.

Saturday 1 Corinthians 15:1–8, 20–22

The deep is not the end. Jonah's three days pointed forward to Jesus, but Christ is the greater sign: He is risen.

— THE BIG PICTURE —

JONAH:

MORE THAN A
WHALE STORY

GOD'S *MERCY* IS BIGGER THAN WE THINK.

WEEKLY THREAD

	MONDAY	<i>Stop Running.</i>	
	TUESDAY	<i>Receive Mercy.</i>	
	WEDNESDAY	<i>Choose Mercy.</i>	
	THURSDAY	<i>Love Your Enemies.</i>	
	FRIDAY	<i>Look to the Cross.</i>	
	SATURDAY	<i>Live in Resurrection Hope.</i>	

GOD'S HEART IS FOR ALL PEOPLE.
LET HIS *MERCY* SHAPE YOUR LIFE ALL WEEK LONG.