

JONAH: LIFE. LESSONS.

STEPS TO GETTING RIGHT WITH GOD - JONAH 3:4-10



SERMON NOTES:

1. We must _____ God.
2. We must turn away from _____.
3. We must cry out for God's _____.

NEXT STEPS:

1. This week, I will continue reading one Psalm a day for the next seven days (Psalm 15 on June 15, Psalm 16 on June 16, etc.) believing and obeying all of God's Word.
2. This week, I will take some time to evaluate my life and actions to make sure that I am, as far as I know, right with God.
3. This week, after evaluating my life and actions, I will repent and cry out for God's mercy in those areas in which I am not right with God.
4. Today, I'm committing to taking advantage of the opportunities I have over the next seven days to "Love God, Love People, and Serve Both."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Open your group in prayer, and remember that this is only a guide. Feel free to discuss each of the provided questions and Next Steps above, or simply dive deeper into just one. Before you close with prayer, take a few minutes to look over the three essential questions at the end before the Digging Deeper Section. **NEW:** Check out the section called Toolbox that gives you practical tools to take this further!

ICE BREAKER:

Someone from your group/family share the circumstances around how they came to believe in Jesus as their Savior and Lord. (or go around and let everyone share briefly)

OBSERVE | *What Do I See?*

1. Highlight each action verb within this passage.

INTERPRET | *What Does It Mean?*

2. What does it mean that the Ninevites believed God?
3. Did the Ninevites repent before or after word had reached the king? What does this reveal about their repentance?
4. What role do you think the king played in the spiritual health of the city? What role do you think leadership plays in the spiritual health of a nation? Why?
5. The people of Nineveh were incredibly violent and hateful, but God showed them mercy rather than holding their sins against them. How does this point us to Jesus? (cf. Mark 2:13-17)

APPLY | *How Does It Work?*

6. Pastor David suggests the passage models three aspects of repentance. What are they? Which of these do you find most difficult? Why is it important to include all three of these elements (i.e. what would be missing if one of them was left out?)

7. Think of other accounts in Scripture of people believing and obeying. Why is immediate obedience so important, and what are the pitfalls of delayed obedience?
8. The Ninevites believed God. Is this true in your own life? Because, if you think you believe something that you don't actually experience, then you either don't really know what it means or you are being actively resistant to it. Evaluate your level of conviction by your consistency of choice. As it's been said many times, "People say what they think, but they believe what they do."

Create a personal application statement that expresses how you will apply this truth in your life:

9. Who can you share this with this week?

THREE ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:

If you have more time, the following questions are intended to be open-ended and encourage members to consider how they felt and what they, or the group, can do as a result of hearing the message!

1. **What do you think?** How did this message challenge, change, or affirm your thinking? What point in this message was most impactful for you?
2. **What will you do?** How will you or your group put into practice what you've learned today?
3. **How can you help others in your group?** How can you encourage, affirm, pray for, and keep accountable the commitments they put into practice?

TOOLBOX:

Simple Gospel | We believe that outside of God's grace, all people face an eternity separated from God. This motivates us to share the good news of Jesus with anyone who that does not have a personal relationship with Him. Who can you share the gospel with this week? How does it make you feel thinking about this conversation? See Appendix for how to start a spiritual conversation. Sharing the Gospel:

- God loves you and created you to know Him personally (1 John 4:9; John 17:13).
- We are separated from God by our sin, so we cannot know Him or experience His love (Romans 3:23, 6:23).
- Jesus is our only solution for our sin. Only through Him can we know God and receive His love and forgiveness (Colossians 1:15, John 3:16).
- We must each respond to Jesus by placing our trust in Him as our Savior and Lord. Only then can we know God personally (John 1:12, Ephesians 2:8-9).
- Practice sharing these simple truths with a partner.
- Look for opportunities to share this week!

Every Neighbor Prayer | As a group, spend time praying for those on your group's board, adding names as led. See Appendix.

DIGGING DEEPER:

The Ninevites believed God (3:5-6)

Of all the unexpected twists in the Jonah story, this has to be the one we are least prepared for. "Believed" translates a verb from the Hebrew root 'aman. The basic meaning is to be firm, trustworthy, or safe. Thus it means to regard the one believed in as trustworthy, to have trust in that person or thing. It is often used for trust in God as the one able to do Godlike achievements (Gen. 15:6; Ps. 78:22). Nivevah was known as a religious city with temples to many gods, but in this instance the people of Niveveh turned their backs on all their national gods and personal gods and turned to the God of Israel who created the heavens and the earth.

The citizens of Nineveh demonstrated their faith in concrete ways. They called a fast, eating no food. They dressed in sackcloth, the traditional clothing for mourning. These actions were taken by the entire population—from the biggest and most important to the smallest and least important. The king of Nineveh would also be the king of the entire Assyrian Empire—one of the most powerful men on earth. Was not this the greatest spiritual awakening in history?

Some scholars go to great lengths to show that possible loss of territories, a complete solar eclipse, a major earthquake and famine may have occurred during the reign of King Ashshur-dan III who ruled from 773 to 756 B.C., making the monarch ready to hear the prophetic word. But then scholars are forced to conclude that there is, of course, absolutely no way to identify with confidence the king mentioned in Jonah 3:6.

The Bible, however, gives the king no reason to listen to Jonah except the power of God's message on the people and on him. (*Trent C. Butler, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Holman New Testament Commentary [Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2005]*)

How deep was the spiritual experience of the people of Nineveh? If repentance and faith are the basic conditions of salvation (Acts 20:21), then we have reason to believe that they were accepted by God; for the people of Nineveh repented and had faith in God (Jonah 3:5). The fact that Jesus used the Ninevites to shame the unbelieving Jews of His day is further evidence that their response to Jonah's ministry was sincere (Matt. 12:38-41). (Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Amazed, OT Commentary Minor Prophets* [Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook Publishers, 1996])

APPENDIX:

INTEREST-CREATING STORY - HOW TO START A SPIRITUAL CONVERSATION

The parables that Jesus told created an interest in His Kingdom- the characteristics, the hopes, and the realities of the Gospel. Sometimes, Jesus wouldn't even mention that He was Messiah; sometimes He did pointedly. Jesus made the Gospel accessible to those who would hear and didn't apologize for who He was.

Sadly, we have become conditioned to put on a filter and not speak of Jesus- because we imagine that it is awkward, pushy, or politically incorrect. We need to take off this filter and grow in boldness and love as we share stories about who He is and what He is about. There was no doubt that He was marking himself as special, as a spiritual being, and often, much more than that!

Likewise, "marking ourselves as spiritual" can help us gauge whether others are interested in God and His message. Some people will "lean in" as you speak about such topics, asking additional questions, sharing their own beliefs, telling about their own journey. Some will not; they will "lean back" and change the topic, become silent, or shut down altogether. Allow the Holy Spirit to prompt you as you initiate and let Him do the work of speaking to a person's soul.

Practice talking with your spouse, children, or friend about two or three of the following "interest-creating" topics:

Recently, God/Jesus has been teaching me that...

I am realizing more and more that God has blessed me by...

I used to struggle with (insert fear, stronghold, idolatry) but now I see God wants me to believe...

I decided to follow Jesus because...

Think of common topics that come up as you meet people - for example: career, living situation, family history, educational background. Pick one of these and tell how God changed your path in the past, or how He is guiding you in the present.

As you practice talking about these things, try to end with a learning question such as, "Have you ever considered God in this way before?" OR "Do you think God is teaching/blessing/asking you to believe anything right now?" Your questions are to gauge a response and to allow space for them to interact with your story. Now, be prayerful and alert as to who God wants you to share with this week!

Prayer Stories

Another way to create interest is prayer stories. Most people in today's world still value prayer. Think of someone in your Live, Work, and Play network who has expressed a need, struggle, or unmet desire. Can you do one of the following this week?

Share how God has answered a prayer in your life, something specific and real and transforming.

EVERY NEIGHBOR PRAYER At the heart of Every Neighbor, there is a desire to be observant, expectant, and involved in who God is putting into our paths where we Live, Work, and Play. He wants us to pray - that many will know Him as Father and as Savior as He draws them to Himself and His Kingdom (John 6:44). As well, Jesus modeled prayer for those who were like "sheep without a shepherd" (Mark 6:32-34)." Jesus's own ministry of compassion (Matthew 14:14, 15:32) to those who were on the fringes of society, those who had no status or reputation, was a beautiful example of for whom we are to be praying for and seeking to include in our daily lives - those who are outside our comfort zones, but fully loved and wanted by our God.

Each week, we gather to pray for these people. Who did God impress upon you when you drew out your Live, Work, and Play network? Who are the people who might be seeking His Kingdom, who are asking hard questions, who are far from Christ and need a better hope? Using your Live, Work, and Play network, who do you need to purposely add to the Every Neighbor Prayer board? On this board, collect the names of those you are hoping to bless with the Gospel through service, acts of love, conversation, and/or Bible study. Pray boldly for God to reveal Himself to them and open their eyes to His power and freedom.

You may meet someone new this week or renew an old relationship from the past. Is this someone God is asking you to put on the Every Neighbor Prayer board, to actively pray big for their salvation? Add them to the board. Each week, take time to update your group, and let's see what God will do! Another tool that's useful is www.blesseveryhome.com.

LIVE, WORK, PLAY MAP The word “oikos” is a Greek word that means family. In Jesus’s time, a family would include workers, extended family, and people residing in their home. Basically, this was their greatest circle of influence. For us, this can also include not only our family, but our friends, coworkers, and acquaintances. It can include the guy at the gas station that you see at each fill up, or the barista that serves you that mocha latte each morning. It is anyone that we commonly encounter on a regular basis, giving you the ability to have influence in their lives.

So what does this have to do with us, and how does it help us spread the Gospel? “Oikos” is used around 120 times in the New Testament. Often when Jesus or His disciples found people that were open to the gospel, He would eventually share the message with the entire network, their oikos and their communities. Jesus met the woman at the well (John 4), and after revealing His message and who He was as Messiah, she was amazed and told her oikos, her whole town, AND many believed! We want to see the same thing happen. Every Day and Every Neighbor means that we are participants in a Greater Story of God’s plan of salvation, and we can be ambassadors for Christ (2 Cor. 5) wherever and with whomever we find ourselves.



Draw your own network: Think about the people in your spheres of influence. With whom do you Live, Work, and Play? Be as exhaustive as possible and brainstorm away! Also, think about people who are just beyond your normal spheres. People who are that next step out - perhaps an acquaintance whom you don’t know well, a neighbor who is different from you ethnically or social-economically, a community member whom the Holy Spirit has put in your path but is more a stranger than friend? Be creative and think outside the box on this one!

KIDS' DISCUSSION:

Show your kids some VHS, DVD, and Blu-ray movies (or a picture of these).

Say, "I have some movies here. What's different about them? Well, they're all in different formats. This one is a VHS, and you need a VHS player for it. This one is a DVD, and you need a DVD player for this one. This one is a Blue-ray, and you need a Blue-ray player to watch it. All this has been invented in the past 40 years. When a new version is made, the old one stops being made. People do not want a VHS anymore. People who want to watch movies or TV shows will have to keep up with the change.

Everything changes. There is always something new coming. Trends change in clothes, music, and even in the words we say. Wouldn't it be funny and a little weird if we said "groovy" all the time, like they did in the 1960's? However, if we say "cool" that would be totally normal. The world is constantly changing. What's cool doesn't stay cool forever.

People change too. Do you know who always stays the same? God. You can see in the Bible that God stays consistent. You can always count on Him to stand by His Word, and you can always count on Him to love you. If you feel alone this week, remember that God is always there for you. He is unchanging. Be thankful today that God isn't like the world. There is not a new version of Him every few years. God doesn't change at all, and the steps to getting right with God never change:

- We must believe God and His Word.
- We must turn away from our sin.
- We must ask God for mercy.

Read Jonah 3:5-10

God wants everyone to repent (turn away from their sin) and follow Him. The Good News is if we confess our sins, admit what we have done wrong and that we disobey God, say we are sorry, and turn to God, He will forgive us. When God saw what the people of Nineveh did and how they turned from their evil ways, He was merciful. God had compassion and did not punish them as He had threatened.

KIDS' ACTIVITY:

Start out by asking the kids if they've ever heard someone in a movie or on TV begging and crying and saying something like, "Please have mercy on me." Ask them what they think the word mercy means and what the person in that situation might be asking for. Pastor David told us in his sermon that mercy is when we do not get something that we do deserve.

Preparation:

Write each of these situations on two separate sticky notes:

Lying to your parents about homework.

Hitting someone at school.

Give each child the two sticky notes you wrote on, two blank sticky notes, and a pen or marker.

Ask your child to come up with the expected punishment for the two situations. Tell them to write the punishment on a sticky note and place it over the "situation" sticky note. Once completed, discuss the definition of mercy (withholding a deserved punishment) in view of God's mercy on us. Ask the children to take each punishment sticky note off and write "MERCY" over the situation sticky note. Tell the children it is God's mercy that protects us from the ultimate penalty of our sin (being forever separated from Him and spending eternity in hell). Remind kids that God's mercy gives us more time to repent, ask for forgiveness, and enter into a relationship with Him through His Son, Jesus Christ.