

The Book of Jonah

Session 4: Jonah 3:1–10

SESSION GOALS

Every session has a point—what each participant should walk away from the discussion knowing, feeling, and doing.

**Main Idea:** When we respond to God with faith and repentance, he saves us and sends us out to share his message with others.

**Head Change:** To know that God gives limitless second chances to those who continually turn from their sin.

**Heart Change:** To feel remorse for the sins we commit.

**Life Change:** To repent from our sins and receive God’s mercy daily.

OPEN

**What is the farthest destination you’ve ever traveled to visit? How did you get there (by car, plane, train, etc.)? How long did it take you to get there?**

Travel is a normal part of many people’s lives today. We travel for work and for fun. And because of the advances made in the last hundred years or so, we can travel almost anywhere in the world in a relatively small amount of time.

Travel was somewhat normal in Jonah’s day as well, but it looked much different—it took longer to get from one place to the next. So, the journey all the way from Israel to Nineveh was no small endeavor. But God had called Jonah to go, and this time he would listen. In this session, David will show us the lengths God asks us to go to repent of our sin, obey his words, and share his message with others.

Series of horizontal lines for writing notes.

**READ**

Read Jonah 3:1–10.

**WATCH**

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in David Platt's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions.

**What message did God have for Nineveh?**

**How did the Ninevites respond to the message Jonah preached?**

**What did God do in response to Nineveh's repentance?**

Show Session 4: *Jonah 3:1–10* (12 minutes).

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# DISCUSS

As we learned in Session 1, Nineveh was an enemy of God's people and a wicked city that belonged to a brutal empire. It was the last place we might expect to see a move of God. But David opened this session by saying that Jonah 3 records what may be "the greatest revival in the history of the world." **Do you think God can bring about a revival like the one in Jonah 3 today? Why, or why not? What would have to happen in our culture for revival to occur? What could it look like to pray for revival to happen?**

*Note:* For a brief look at another revival from the New Testament, see **Go Deeper Section 1** at the end of this study.

Read Jonah 3:1–3.

*Note:* For a reading exercise covering the book of Jonah, see **Go Deeper Section 2** at the end of this study.

Chapter 3 opens much like Chapter 1 did, with God speaking directly to Jonah again. Reflecting on God speaking to Jonah a second time, David asked: "Aren't you thankful for second chances in your life?" **When has God given you a second chance? What did you do differently the second time around? Where do you think you'd be if God never gave you second chances?**

After running from God and the commands he'd given, Jonah received an almost identical set of instructions. God told him again to go to Nineveh and preach a message to them. Jonah needed another reminder from God. **Do you ever need to hear from God more than once before you'll obey him? Why do you think we're sometimes slow to obey him? How can we overcome our tendency to be slow with our obedience?**

This time, Jonah did obey God. But a trip to Nineveh was no small undertaking—it was at least a month's journey. Jonah's obedience was costly. **When has obedience to God been costly for you? In what ways?**

Read Jonah 3:4–5.

After Jonah arrived in Nineveh, he walked through the city sharing the message God sent him to speak: "In forty days

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Nineveh will be demolished!” And Jonah’s message was not only short, it was forceful. **How would you expect a city with Nineveh’s reputation to respond to a message like Jonah’s?**

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Nevertheless, in response to Jonah’s message, “the people of Nineveh believed God.” Despite the brevity of Jonah’s message, and its brusqueness, these pagan people responded with faith and repentance. **What do you find most surprising about the Ninevites’ response to God’s message? How does their response bear witness to the power of a message from God?**

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When we think of faith and repentance, we often imagine them as abstract experiences that only happen in the mind or as distinct from one another. But the Ninevites show us that faith and repentance are active and go hand-in-hand. **How would you define faith and repentance? What did faith and repentance look like for the Ninevites? What does your faith “look like”? Your repentance?**

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Verse 5 says the revival in Nineveh spread to all levels of society. One way they expressed their faith and repentance was through the act of fasting, or purposely abstaining from food for spiritual purposes. While we aren’t in the same context as the Ninevites, we can still fast to respond to God—it’s an ancient church practice. **Have you ever tried fasting? How would you describe your experience? What did you take away from that experience?**

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*Note: For a brief look at the spiritual practice of fasting, see **Go Deeper Section 3** at the end of this study.*

Read Jonah 3:6–9.

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Jonah’s message eventually made its way to the king. And like the rest of Ninevite society, he responded with faith and exhibited great humility, which is not always people’s normal response, even today. **Why do you think it can be rare for people to exhibit humility? How would you rate the significance of people modeling humility as the king and the Ninevites did? What can we do to call for humility from others and model it ourselves?**

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In verse 7, the king issued a decree requiring citizens to fast, cover themselves with sackcloth, cry out to God, and refrain from wrongdoing, all of which are signs of

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repentance. We can recognize that this event clearly describes a revival brought about by God’s message—and that’s good! **Why is repentance a necessary piece of revival? Can revival take place without repentance? Why, or why not?**

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As the book of Jonah unfolds, we should notice the irony the author is creating, especially in chapter 3. Jonah had to hear God’s call twice. He ran once and ended up in a fish before obeying, even though he was one of God’s people and should have been quick to repent. The Ninevites, on the other hand, received an abrupt and overly simplistic sermon from Jonah and obeyed immediately. **What do you make of the irony we see in Jonah 3? Are you more like Jonah or the Ninevites? Which example do you think the author is trying to convince readers to emulate?**

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With just five Hebrew words, God grabbed hold of the city, inspiring widespread repentance. The people were responding to the news that God would soon “demolish” or “overthrow” the city, which is a frightening thought. But they were responding in hope: “Who knows? God may turn and relent,” the king wrote in his decree. **In what ways is repentance an act of hope? What part does hope play in your own repentance? What do the people of God have to be hopeful about?**

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Read Jonah 3:10.

The book of Jonah is clear about Nineveh’s evildoing—it was a city filled with sin. From a worldly perspective, Nineveh seemed better positioned to receive God’s wrath than his mercy. But as David said in Session 2, God’s capacity to forgive is greater than our capacity to sin. **How do you think most people would want God to respond to Nineveh’s sin?**

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There are still places in the world today that are known as evil places, whether it be cities, whole countries, or even neighborhoods. **When you think of places with sinful reputations, are you more prone to prefer that God show them mercy or exact his judgment upon them? Why?**

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As we read in verse 10, the Ninevites’ hopes were fulfilled. God observed their repentance and, in response, he kept them from the disaster he’d warned them about—he

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showed them mercy. **What does God’s response to the Ninevites reveal about his character? His mercy?**

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After exploring this chapter, David ended this session with a question for us. He asked: “What sin do you need to turn from today?” **If you’re comfortable sharing, how would you answer David’s question? How long have you been struggling with this particular sin? How often have you had to repent from this sin already? How do you think God will respond to your repentance this time?**

A life of faith and repentance isn’t a solitary life, as David showed us. A life of faith and repentance requires help from others, and it beckons us to give help to others. David encouraged us to not only repent ourselves but to call others to repentance as well. Like Jonah, we have been called to go and share God’s message with others (though we don’t have to be as forceful as Jonah). **Are there any people in your life with whom God is telling you to share the message of the gospel? If so, who (you don’t have to share names)? Do you feel prepared to talk to them about God’s good news?**

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**What steps can you take now to prepare yourself to share the gospel with them?**

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**LAST WORD**

Sin is serious. And the Ninevites were a sinful, vile people. God was aware of their evil, and he threatened to destroy the entire city because of it. But God’s capacity to forgive was greater than Nineveh’s capacity to sin. His warning compelled them to repent, and their repentance led him to relent from destroying them.

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Sin remains a serious affront against God. And our sin threatens to destroy us entirely. But God’s forgiveness outpaces all our sins, so long as we repent and turn to him in faith. So, turn to him today, and every day, again and again, for the rest of your life. That’s what faith and repentance look like.

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**GO DEEPER**

The Go Deeper section has two potential functions. It can supplement your small group discussion by providing extra discussion material. We've highlighted a place where each of the following segments could fit in the Discuss section of the study guide.

But you can also use these sections as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting. Consider reading one section a day to deepen your study of the book of Jonah.

*1. Revival: What, Where, Why, and How?*

In this session, David referred to the story in Jonah 3 as one of the greatest revivals "in the history of the world." His claim is hard to refute—what other examples do we have from history of a people so obviously wicked being so thoroughly transformed in so short a time? Few, if any.

David's use of the word "revival" may cause us to ask some questions. What is a revival? Where does revival come from? Why does revival occur? How do we respond to a revival? Let's look at Jonah 3 again to help answer these questions.

Read Jonah 3:1–10.

- What is a revival?

In verse 5, we get a clue that helps answer this question. The passage says, "Then the people of Nineveh believed God." Nineveh's population was thought to be around 120,000 at the time. Whether this verse includes all of Nineveh or not, the author of Jonah is communicating that a large number of people chose to "believe God." They didn't believe God, and then they did. They were revived.

**How would you describe what it means to believe God? In what ways is a strong or renewed belief in God necessary for revival?**

While revivals are normally only recognized when they occur on a large scale, they can also happen personally. In fact, widespread revival can't occur unless it begins at the individual level. **Have you ever personally experienced personal revival? How would you describe**

**your experience? In what ways did your experience mimic what we see happening in Jonah 3?**

- Where does revival come from?

If we're not careful, we can attribute revivals to human abilities—skillful preaching, for instance—and overlook the work of God entirely. But as we see with Jonah, a preacher's skill is more incidental than it is essential. Revival is not dependent on a messenger's eloquence; it comes by the proclamation of God's message. For Nineveh, it meant responding to the message God sent Jonah to share. For us, we most often respond to God's Word in Scripture, whether through someone teaching it or reading it for ourselves. **For what reasons is God's communication—whether through a prophet in Jonah's day or the Bible today—so essential to revival? When has the Word of God revived your faith in him?**

- Why does revival occur?

There are several ways we could answer this question: to save people from their sins, to bless them, and to lead them toward a fuller, richer life. Underneath each of these answers, though, lies an easily forgotten truth: God loves us. God revives us because he loves us. **In what ways is revival an act of God showing us he loves us? Do you find it hard to believe that God loves you? For what reasons? How can you remind yourself that God loves you?**

- How do we respond to revival?

In every biblical account of revival, we see another word close by: repentance. In Acts 2, for example, after Peter finished preaching a sermon to his peers, the crowd asked him in verse 37, "what should we do?" The first word out of his mouth was: "Repent." Responding to God's message preached by Peter, "about three thousand people" chose to follow Jesus (v. 41). It was a revival. When God's message is proclaimed, people are to respond by aligning their lives with his message. Like the Ninevites and Peter's peers, we are called to repent. **In what ways do you find it difficult to repent? How can you train your heart to be quick to repent when you've sinned?**

Spend a few moments praying for revival in yourself, your family and friends, your community, and your country.



2. *Swallow the book of Jonah whole.*

This week, let's continue the habit of setting aside a half-hour to read the book of Jonah in its entirety.

**Before reading, try to summarize the book of Jonah in three to five sentences.**

Reflect on how your familiarity with Jonah has grown over the last several weeks. **What lessons or points of application have stuck with you?**

**If a new believer was preparing to read the book of Jonah, what one or two things would you share with them before reading?**

This week, instead of reading, listen to Jonah 1-4 using whatever translation you prefer. To listen, you can use phone apps like Dwell or the YouVersion Bible app, or you can visit websites like esv.org, biblegateway.com, or biblehub.com.

The Bible was written in an era when oral cultures were the norm. So, hearing the Bible read aloud was often the only way a person could engage with God's Word. **What amount of experience do you have listening to the Bible? How would you describe your experience listening to Jonah? Did you find it difficult or easy to follow Jonah's narrative? Why do you think that was the case?**

**What are the advantages of listening to God's Word as opposed to reading it?**

By this point in the study, you have read the book of Jonah no fewer than five times. **What are you learning about the importance of reading whole books of the Bible in one sitting? What are you learning about the importance of reading repetitively? What have you learned about using different reading methods?**

**If someone asked you why they should read the Bible using the methods we've tried in this study, how would you convince him or her that doing so is worthwhile?**

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One of the features of the Ninevites' repentance was the act of fasting. In Chapter 3, a fast was first assumed by the people and then decreed by the king. It seemed like an instinctual response to God's message. **Are you familiar with the practice of fasting? How would you define what it means to fast?**

The Bible presents fasting as the act of intentionally abstaining from food for some spiritual purpose. In this passage and many others, fasting is associated with mourning and repentance. But it's also an exercise that God's people use to seek God, whether they're mourning or not. **For what reasons do you think fasting is often accompanied by mourning? Why do you think fasting helps us seek God? What is it about abstaining from food that focuses our attention on him?**

There are many accounts of fasting recorded in the Bible. For a few examples, read Nehemiah 1:3–4, Esther 4:3, and Psalm 35:13–14. **What are the general circumstances surrounding each of these accounts of fasting? What are the other practices that accompany fasting in these passages? Why do you think fasting and prayer so often go hand-in-hand?**

There are several reasons we could choose to fast. As we've highlighted already, we can fast as an expression of mourning. We can fast as an act of humbling ourselves before God. We can fast to seek him, both for communion and for guidance. Or we can fast as a way of exercising our faith. **In your experience, which of these reasons has compelled you to fast? Were you able to achieve the purpose of your fast?**

Fasting can be intimidating. It can feel like a foreign concept, especially in our culture. And because it's foreign to many of us, we may not know where to begin. But the Bible is clear: fasting can be spiritually nourishing for us. If you're interested in making the practice of fasting a part of your routine, here are a few ideas you may find helpful.

- You can fast for a day or more, or you can fast from a single meal. If you've never fasted before, it may be wise to begin with a meal.
- You can fast from all food or from certain types of food, like meat or sweets.
- While fasting from food is what we see in the Bible, you can fast from other items as well. Many people

fast from social media, from shopping online, or from buying coffee. Whatever you fast from, try replacing that item or activity with prayer.

The overall goal of any fast is to deepen our communion with God. No matter how you choose to fast, make it your goal to seek God through this spiritual practice. **If you decide to take a fast, what do you plan to fast from? What will be the duration of your fast? When will you start?**

**What do you hope God will accomplish in your heart through your fast?**