



THE STORY OF

JONAH

First  Lutheran
CHURCH

The Story of Jonah

Sermon Series

By David Platt

July 7 - August 16, 2024

One of the most compelling stories in the Bible is the story of Jonah. Jonah is not the ideal prophet. Much like we often do, Jonah fights God, resists God's call on his life, clings to bitterness, and runs from God. Yet God does not give up on Jonah, God offers Jonah grace and new beginnings and calls Jonah to share the same message with his enemies. Jonah's story will open our eyes to God's love and mercy, as well as the challenging call to love those who are difficult to love.

Prior to the first week: Read Jonah chapters 1-4

Each week prior to small group meetings, review the sections "Discuss-Last Word" for each lesson.

July 7, 2024 Session 1: Jonah 1:1-3, Pages 1-8

July 14, 2024 Session 2: Jonah 1:4-16, Pages 9-15

July 21, 2024 Session 3: Jonah 1:17-2:10, Pages 16-23

July 28, 2024 Session 4: Jonah 3:1-10, Pages 24-32

August 4, 2024 Session 5: Jonah 4:1-9, Pages 33-40

August 11, 2024 Session 6: Jonah 4:10-11, Pages 41-49

Session 1: Jonah 1:1–3

OPEN

How do you respond when someone tells you what to do? Are you more prone to obey or disobey? Why?

For many of us, the last thing we want to hear is someone telling us what to do, whether a parent, friend, or boss. In fact, their instruction can inspire us to do the exact opposite, even when what they've asked of us is good and necessary.

In the book of Jonah's first few verses, we see Jonah responding to God's instructions in the exact opposite way he should. Though God was sending him to Nineveh, Jonah refused and headed as far in the opposite direction as he could. Pastor and author David Platt will show us in this first session of *The Book of Jonah* that we're not too different from Jonah—we disobey God's Word just like Jonah did. But God wants us to obey him and help others do the same.

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.

Why did God send Jonah to Nineveh?

How did Jonah respond to God's command that he go to Nineveh?

Why does the author of Jonah wait until chapter four to share why Jonah ran?

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

DISCUSS

When we imagine the book of Jonah, most of us think immediately of his run-in with the large fish. But since Jonah's time in the fish's belly takes up so little of the story, David warned that if we fixate too much on it, we could miss a lot from the book that's important.

How would you rate your familiarity with the book of Jonah? Have you ever read the entire book? If so, what aspects of the story stuck with you?

David insisted that Jonah is a book that is startlingly relevant to our lives and the world around us. Jonah is a man just like us in a world similar to ours.

What are you hoping to take away from your study of the book of Jonah? What could you do to prepare your heart to receive what God will teach you through this study?

Read Jonah 1:1–3

1 The word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai: **2** “Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me.”

3 But Jonah ran away from the LORD and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the LORD.

The first words of the book of Jonah are startling. The passage gives no indication that Jonah was looking or listening for God. Nevertheless, “The word of the Lord came” to him. God, of his own volition, spoke directly to Jonah. And though we aren’t prophets in the same way as Jonah, God continues to speak to his people, most often through his written Word—the Bible.

What does it say about God that he chose to speak to Jonah? Do you ever wonder if God cares to speak to you? In what ways does it encourage you to know that God initiates conversation with his people?

Verse 1 names Jonah as “Jonah the son of Amittai.” God wasn’t speaking blindly to whoever was in the vicinity to hear his voice. He had a specific message at a specific time for a specific person. While it might seem foreign to us today, God still speaks specific messages to us today. But how?

Can we hear God just like Jonah did? Are there other ways to hear a message from God? If so, how?

In verse 2, we read that God was sending Jonah to Nineveh to “cry against it” (NASB) because the city’s wickedness had “come up before” him. Normally, God sent prophets to his own people. In this case, in a stunning act of grace, he was sending a prophet to another people.

In what ways does Jonah’s call to Nineveh reveal God’s grace toward the Ninevites? In what ways are God’s words of correction an act of grace toward us?

God was sending Jonah to a nation known for its brutality, and he had a hard message for them. So, it’s understandable that Jonah wouldn’t want to go. If we’re honest, we can closely relate to Jonah—we often don’t want to obey God.

Have you ever wanted to disobey God? What instruction did you not want to obey? For what reasons?

Verse 3 describes Jonah’s response to God’s instruction: He fled from the presence of the Lord. David said we will learn later in the book why Jonah fled. But until then, we can see him going to great lengths to disobey God’s command to visit Nineveh.

Have you ever run from God? What prompted you to run? How long did your attempt to run last? How did it end?

David noted that “if God didn’t love [Nineveh], he wouldn’t send his Word to them.” Even though the Assyrians in Nineveh exercised great wickedness, God loved them still. God abounds in steadfast love and faithfulness, even toward sinful people like the Ninevites. And like us.

If God loves sinful people, how ought we to relate to sinful people? How does God’s love for sinful people apply to us?

Instead of going northeast to Nineveh, Jonah went as far in the opposite direction as he could—to Tarshish. He boarded a ship in Joppa, paid out of pocket for a ride, and sailed west—taking cover in the bowels of the ship. He took great lengths to evade the will of God.

Why do you think we often go to such lengths to evade God’s will and go our own way? Are there specific commands that you’re most prone to disobey? What are they, and why is it difficult for you to follow them?

As David pointed out, Tarshish wasn’t just far from Nineveh, it was a place where the people hadn’t heard about or seen the glory of God. In today’s language, we would call the people of Tarshish an unreached people group, or a community with no access to God’s Word. Jonah was running from God to a godless place.

When have you been tempted to run from God to a godless place?

In this session, David helped us see how similar we can be to Jonah. We disobey God’s commands, step outside of his will, and even try to hide ourselves from him altogether. Acknowledging how like Jonah we are, David posed a handful of questions he encouraged us to ask ourselves.

Why do we disobey God? Do we not trust God? Do we think we know better than him? Do we simply prefer our own way to his? Are we afraid?

David explored our reluctance to share God’s Word with others. Those of us who have received the gospel have been given the mandate to share it with others, especially those who’ve never heard it. But we often find talking about God difficult.

Have you ever stayed silent when you had the opportunity to share the gospel with someone else? For what reasons did you hold back? What steps could you take now to help you share God’s Word next time?

Jonah ran from the presence of the Lord, which, as we’ll learn in another session, proved more difficult than he probably imagined. Whether in the bowels of a ship in the

middle of the sea or in a land as far as Tarshish, God's presence was still there. And that's good news for Jonah, and for us.

In what ways does it encourage you to know that God is with you wherever you go?

How aware are you of God's presence in everyday life? What can you do to be attuned to his presence during your day?

David closed this session by discussing the staggering number of people in the world who are considered unreached by the gospel—more than three billion! These people have never heard the good news, and they have no hope of hearing it unless Christians go to them and share God's message. And God has commanded us to go.

How familiar are you with the concept of unreached people groups? What emotions does it stir in you to know that there are thousands of people groups around the world that are yet to be reached with the gospel? What could you do to participate in bringing God's Word to unreached people?

God gives specific commands to his people. And whether it involves crossing the street or crossing oceans, we are expected to obey his commands. One of God's most emphatic commands is that we are to share his Word with other people, especially those who haven't heard it before.

What role can you play in spreading God's message? How can you prepare yourself to say yes to God?

LAST WORD

God spoke to Jonah. But Jonah ran from God's voice and God's presence. God was sending him to a people who needed the news he was meant to deliver. And instead of obeying the word of the Lord, Jonah disobeyed, fled, and hid.

We can be a lot like Jonah, can't we? The temptation to disobey God always knocks at the door, and we can often give in to that temptation. Even though we're instructed by God to share his news with others, we, like Jonah, sometimes run from the task and run from God. But we have a message of hope to share, and there are billions of people who need to hear it. So, what's stopping us?

GO DEEPER (OPTIONAL)

1. *Swallow the book of Jonah whole.*

One of the most tried-and-true ways to grow more into the likeness of Christ is to familiarize ourselves with his Word. We should read it, meditate on it, memorize it, and do so in large chunks. However, it's easy to get stuck in the habit of reading a verse here or a chapter there, sporadically jumping from one passage to the next.

What do your Bible reading habits currently look like? Do you tend to read large or small chunks of Scripture?

Reading books of the Bible in their entirety is beneficial in many ways. It helps us follow the author's argument more closely, notice important patterns in the story, and even retain what we're reading more completely. Reading whole books of the Bible is also similar to how the original readers would have interacted with the text.

What are some other benefits of reading whole books of the Bible? Have you ever read an entire book of the Bible in one sitting? If so, which one(s)? What was your experience like?

Read Jonah 1–4 two times this week and use the instructions and questions below to guide you.

In your first reading, read at your normal pace. Once you've completed your first pass, work to recall the story.

What stood out to you the most about the story? How would you summarize the book of Jonah? What are the two or three main points you would emphasize in your retelling of the story?

As you read the story a second time, proceed at a slower pace. Move slowly from word to word, picking up the author's cadence. Pay attention to punctuation, word tenses, and literary devices like metaphors, imagery, and motifs that stand out (Ex. Jonah went *down* to Joppa; he went *down* into the ship).

How did this second, slower reading add to your understanding of the story? What stood out in the second pass that you may have overlooked in the first? Would you summarize the book in a different way after your second reading? If so, what changes would you make?

The Bible is a book rich with meaning, and we should savor it. One way to do that is to read it often and in big chunks. The habit of reading whole books at a time will help us not only savor the Word but be transformed by it.

How can you make the practice of reading whole books of the Bible a part of your regular reading routine?

2. Nineveh and the Assyrian Empire

In the book of Jonah, we learn that God is sending Jonah to a city called Nineveh. As modern readers, we may not be familiar with many ancient cities and empires we find throughout the Bible. But it can be an important addition to our Bible reading to learn about cities and civilizations like these when we encounter them in the text. Here is some basic information about the Assyrian Empire and Nineveh, its capital city.

Assyrian Empire: Facts and Figures

Era: Assyria's history dates back at least to the fourteenth century BC, if not before. The events recorded in the book of Jonah, however, are believed to have taken place during the eighth century BC, when the Assyrian Empire was experiencing a period of strength and expansion.

Location: Assyria was located in northern Mesopotamia in the area that is now northern Iraq and southeastern Turkey. The city of Nineveh (modern-day Mosul, Iraq) sat on the eastern bank of the Tigris River—more than five hundred miles northeast of Israel.

Size: God called Nineveh, Assyria's capital, a "great city." Its footprint was estimated to be at least 1,850 acres and the perimeter of its walls is thought to have spanned about 7.5 miles. Experts estimate that Nineveh's population during Jonah's time would have been around 120,000.

Culture: Nineveh was known as a royal and luxurious city, containing such things as public squares, parks, botanical gardens, a zoo, and even a library.

Reputation: As an empire, Assyria was known as a vile and vicious people. As it expanded and conquered other nations, Assyria would use great brutality, killing and enslaving people without mercy. They were infamously cruel and fearsome.

In what ways does this information about Nineveh and the Assyrian Empire enhance your reading of the book of Jonah? Does it help you understand Jonah's reluctance to travel to Nineveh? If so, how?

What modern-day cities or countries remind you of Nineveh and Assyria? What do you think God could do in those places if we go to them instead of fleeing from them?

3. *Where can I flee from your presence?*

The word of the Lord came to Jonah, and he responded by running. Jonah took great pains to shield himself from God's view (down to Joppa, down into the ship) and flee from his presence (to Tarshish by way of the sea). At least, he tried.

Despite Jonah's effort—and ours, if we're honest—the Bible speaks plainly about our ability to hide from God. We can't do it.

Read Psalm 139:7–12:

⁷ Where can I go from your Spirit?

Where can I flee from your presence?

⁸ If I go up to the heavens, you are there;

if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.
⁹ If I rise on the wings of the dawn,
if I settle on the far side of the sea,
¹⁰ even there your hand will guide me,
your right hand will hold me fast.
¹¹ If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me
and the light become night around me,"
¹² even the darkness will not be dark to you;
the night will shine like the day,
for darkness is as light to you.

After opening Psalm 139 with a brief survey of God's knowledge about him, King David, the author of this psalm, turns in verse 7 and asks two questions: "Where can I go to escape your Spirit?" and "Where can I flee from your presence?"

Have you ever asked these questions (or some version of them)? If so, what were the circumstances that led you to want to flee from God?

David responds to his own questions, and he does it in a way that answers them definitively. First, he says in verse 8 that he cannot ascend high enough ("If I go up to heaven") or descend low enough ("if I make my bed in Sheol") to escape the presence of God ("you are there"). It's not hard to believe that God is in heaven. But even in Sheol—a word that can mean the grave, hell, or the place of exile—God is there.

Does it encourage you to know that God is present even in circumstances that feel hellish? Have you ever experienced a situation that felt Sheol-like? To what degree did you sense God's presence?

David goes on. Not only can neither height nor depth separate us from God, but we can't run far enough to the east or, like Jonah tried, far enough west to escape God. David's language grows more intimate in verse 10: "Even there your hand will lead me; your right hand will hold on to me." So, whether we're running like Jonah or just feel distant from God, he is not only with us but he is leading us and holding us firmly in his grasp. **Are there moments in your life that you can look back to and see that God was leading you and protecting you, even though it didn't feel like it at the time? How can remembering those moments encourage you to keep going when he seems distant?**

Finally, no amount of darkness can hide us from the presence of God. Whether we intentionally try to hide ourselves from God or it just seems like darkness is shrouding his view of us (and our view of him), God sees us—and he loves us.

What are the ways we attempt to block God's view of us? Why do you think we're so prone to hide from him?

Sometimes we intentionally run from God like Jonah. We try to flee from his presence. Other times, we wonder if his presence can even be found. In either case, we can take heart and know that—whether height or depth, east or west, dark or light—nothing can separate us from his loving presence. Spend some time reflecting on the good news that God is with you and will never leave you. Consider what difference it makes in your life when you believe by faith that God is always close by.

Session 2: Jonah 1:4–16

OPEN

Have you ever experienced a significant or dangerous weather event? How would you describe your experience? How did you respond?

Weather can turn severe surprisingly quickly. A nice, sunny day can turn into a thunderstorm before we know it. And what's most unsettling about severe weather is that it is entirely outside of our control. We can prepare for it, and we can shelter ourselves, but we are virtually helpless against it.

As we continue in the book of Jonah, we come to a notable severe weather event. But this was no typical weather pattern, and everyone aboard the ship knew it. In this session of *The Book of Jonah*, David Platt will show us why this tempest came upon Jonah and the crew, and what we can learn from it.

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.

While the ship's crew members were crying out to their gods, where was Jonah?

How did the sailors respond when they learned that Jonah's God "made the sea and the dry land"?

Instead of repenting of his sin, how did Jonah suggest that they resolve their predicament?

Show Session 2: *Jonah 1:4–16* (11 minutes).

DISCUSS

David opened this session by pointing out that, at this point in the story, we see Jonah giving up on God. But God hadn't given up on Jonah. God could have sent plenty of other prophets to Nineveh; he could have let Jonah go. But he didn't. **In what ways do you find it encouraging that God refused to give up on Jonah? Do you believe God will never give up on you? Why, or why not?**

Read Jonah 1:4–9

⁴ Then the LORD sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up. ⁵ All the sailors were afraid and each cried out to his own god. And they threw the cargo into the sea to lighten the ship.

But Jonah had gone below deck, where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep. ⁶ The captain went to him and said, “How can you sleep? Get up and call on your god! Maybe he will take notice of us so that we will not perish.”

⁷ Then the sailors said to each other, “Come, let us cast lots to find out who is responsible for this calamity.” They cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah. ⁸ So they asked him, “Tell us, who is responsible for making all this trouble for us? What kind of work do you do? Where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?”

⁹ He answered, “I am a Hebrew and I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.”

Beginning in verse 4, the story takes a foreboding turn. Jonah was running away, but God didn’t let Jonah get far before he intervened in a dramatic way.

Has God ever intervened in your own life in a dramatic way? What was your life like when God intervened? In what ways did God’s intervention change your life?

God “threw a great wind onto the sea,” halting Jonah’s progress and frightening all those aboard the ship. It was such a violent storm that it threatened to rend the ship in two. The sailors were so frightened that they began crying out to their gods.

What does this passage show us about God’s power? Did these sailors respond to God’s exercise of power in the right way? To what degree are you conditioned to respond to the power of God like these men?

In contrast with the ship’s crew, Jonah had descended into the bowels of the ship and fallen into an apathetic slumber. He was hiding from God and, in effect, plugging his ears to the voice of God.

In your life, to what lengths have you gone to hide from God and shut out his voice? Who or what did God use to break through to you? What does it say about God’s love for you that he engaged you even as you were avoiding him?

As David pointed out, the irony of verse 6 is that Jonah, the prophet from Israel, was running from God while the pagan ship captain and his crew did anything they could to seek God. What’s more, they implored Jonah to snap out of his slumber and seek God too.

What is Jonah doing wrong? What did the captain and his crew get right? What stands out to you about the difference in Jonah’s and the sailors’ reactions?

Eventually, the mariners convened and cast lots to determine who was responsible for their plight. Jonah was found out, and when they confronted him, he answered them in verse 9: “I’m a Hebrew. I worship the Lord, the God of the heavens, who made the sea and the dry land.” Jonah could have saved everyone a lot of trouble by taking responsibility much sooner.

Why do you think Jonah was so slow to take responsibility for the ship's current situation? How do you tend to respond when you're confronted for wrongdoing? Do you confess honestly, or do you try and circumvent the charges?

Read Jonah 1:10–16

¹⁰ This terrified them and they asked, "What have you done?" (They knew he was running away from the LORD, because he had already told them so.)

¹¹ The sea was getting rougher and rougher. So they asked him, "What should we do to you to make the sea calm down for us?"

¹² "Pick me up and throw me into the sea," he replied, "and it will become calm. I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you."

¹³ Instead, the men did their best to row back to land. But they could not, for the sea grew even wilder than before. ¹⁴ Then they cried out to the LORD, "Please, LORD, do not let us die for taking this man's life. Do not hold us accountable for killing an innocent man, for you, LORD, have done as you pleased." ¹⁵ Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm. ¹⁶ At this the men greatly feared the LORD, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows to him.

Learning that Jonah had sinned against the God who made the sea, the men on the ship "were seized by a great fear" (v. 10). They began urgently seeking for a way to appease Jonah's God. They were learning the hard way that sin and a lack of repentance have dire consequences.

To what degree do you feel an urgency to repent when you've sinned? How could you condition your heart to view sin as seriously as these men did?

In this exchange, we see God using Jonah to spread his Word to the nations. Even in Jonah's reluctance, these sailors witnessed the power of his God. At the same time, God was working on Jonah's heart as well. And that's one of the beauties emerging from this story already: God is concerned both about the redemption of whole people groups and the hearts of his people individually.

How can we recognize God's plan of redemption and the individual care he gives his people—both in this story and in our lives? What happens if we emphasize one over the other?

As the sailors were questioning Jonah, searching for an escape from danger, Jonah proposed a solution in verse 12: "Pick me up and throw me into the sea." David suggested a number of other solutions Jonah could have proposed, repentance being one of them. Instead, as David said, "Jonah would rather die than obey God" at this point in the story.

How do you think Jonah could prefer death over obedience? Does obeying God's will ever feel more frightening to you than the consequences of your disobedience? Why?

In verse 14, the sailors were at the height of their desperation. On one hand, they faced certain death because of the storm. On the other hand, Jonah was arguing that the storm would calm if they just threw him overboard, presumably to his death. So, in their desperation, they cried out to God—they prayed.

What is it about desperate circumstances that compel us to cry out to God? Have you ever found yourself in a desperate situation? Did you respond more like Jonah or like these sailors? How did God attend to you in your desperation?

In their prayer, these men cried out for mercy—something Jonah had yet to do. Then they cast Jonah overboard. David said that while Jonah thought he was running to a distant, exotic land, he was running to his death. And this is where sin leads. It disorients us, deceives us, and leads us to places we don't want to go. Jonah is showing us, David said, that "rebellion against God never ends in our good."

When have you experienced the bitter effects of sin? What did it take for you to recognize that your sin was leading you down a road you didn't want to go?

David said one of Jonah's problems was that his faith in God didn't carry with it the fear or reverence of God. There are a lot of ways to describe what it means to fear God—reverence, awe, respect, or even dread.

In your own words, how would you define the fear of God? How can we cultivate a healthy fear of God? How can a healthy fear of God lead us to submit to him and his Word?

When the ship's crew threw Jonah overboard, and he landed in the sea, the storm stopped. The men were once again "seized by great fear" (v. 16). They offered sacrifices and made vows to the Lord. In these acts of worship, the sailors identified as followers of God. So, even as Jonah disobeyed God's command to go to a foreign nation, God used him to lead sailors from foreign nations to himself. **What does this story communicate about God's willingness and ability to save people, even despite our own feeble attempts or refusal to share his Word? How can this story remove some of the pressure we might feel to perform perfectly when we talk about God?**

David closed this session by reiterating two thoughts. First, God is intent on accomplishing his purpose of spreading his salvation to all nations. But, second, he's also intent on transforming and caring for the hearts of his people—we see it in Jonah's narrative, and we can see it in our own lives as well.

In what ways is God currently at work in your heart? What means is he using to shape your heart? To what degree are you submitted to God and the work he's doing in you?

In what ways is God’s work in your heart preparing you for deeper involvement in spreading his Word to others? What opportunities do you have right now to share the gospel?

LAST WORD

Jonah was resolved in his efforts to flee from the presence of God and shirk the command God had given him. But God was committed to Jonah and the work he planned to do through him and in him. That was good news for Jonah, and it’s good news for us.

God will spread his Word to the nations, and he will use us to do it. And as he’s using us, he will shape us and our hearts into his likeness. The question for us is will we resist like Jonah, or will we submit to the good work God intends to do through us and in us? Which will you choose?

GO DEEPER (OPTIONAL)

1. *Swallow the book of Jonah whole.*

Before reading, reflect on what you read last week.

Which pieces of the story stuck with you over the last seven days? What were your major takeaways and how did you apply them to your life?

Read Jonah 1–4, this time using a different translation. There are plenty of options, such as the CSB, NIV, NASB, ESV, NET, NLT, KJV, NKJV, and The Message. If you don’t have a physical copy of another translation, you can use websites like stepbible.org, biblegateway.com, or biblehub.com, where you can access all major Bible translations. You can also access several translations in the RightNow Media app.

Bible translations can vary in the way they present the text. A translator’s goal is to take what the original autographs communicate and translate it as accurately as possible in a form that is readable. And each reputable translation has something to offer its reader.

Compared to your previous readings, what differences did you notice between translations (word choices, paragraph breaks, section headings, etc.)? How did these differences—specifically the word choices—add to your understanding and retention of the book of Jonah? Which translation did you prefer, and why?

After reading, spend some time recalling and reflecting on the book of Jonah.

To what degree is your fluency of the story improving? How can you tell? How do you think growing more familiar with the book of Jonah will help you become more like Jesus and follow him more faithfully?

2. *Jonah and Jesus: Sleeping through a Storm*

Certain aspects of Jonah's narrative are what theologians refer to as a "type," or a pattern or motif that occurs in the Old Testament which points to something in the New Testament. And if you're familiar with the Bible, you may have noticed—whether you knew what to call it or not—a "type" in Jonah 1:4–6 that resurfaces in a well-known story from the New Testament. In these first few verses of Jonah, we get our first glimpse of the book's typological significance. Let's explore it briefly.

We examined this scene already in this session, but it's worth another look as we consider its connection to the life and ministry of Jesus.

What are the main points of tension in this portion of Jonah's story? In what ways does Jonah fall short as a prophet of God?

Flipping ahead to the New Testament, we find in Matthew's gospel (Mark's and Luke's as well) a story that is strikingly similar to Jonah's run-in with the storm. In some ways, it's a story meant to accomplish what Jonah left undone.

Read Matthew 8:23–27:

²³ Then he got into the boat and his disciples followed him. ²⁴ Suddenly a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping. ²⁵ The disciples went and woke him, saying, "Lord, save us! We're going to drown!" ²⁶ He replied, "You of little faith, why are you so afraid?" Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm. ²⁷ The men were amazed and asked, "What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!"

Jesus and his disciples, some of whom were adept sailors or fishermen, were out in a boat when a storm rushed upon the sea. As the waves were swamping the boat, Jesus was below deck fast asleep while his disciples were in a panic.

What similarities do you notice between this scene and the scene in Jonah? What differences do you see?

Afraid for their lives, the disciples woke Jesus and yelled for him to save them. In their panic, you can almost hear echoes of the crew in Jonah: "What should we do?" Instead of instructing them to cast him into the sea like Jonah, Jesus gives instructions to the storm. He said, "Quiet! Be still!" (Mark 4:39, NIV). In both stories, the storm was calmed. But how each storm was calmed couldn't have been more different.

How did the disciples respond to Jesus calming the storm?

These stories reveal why Jesus is often referred to as "the greater Jonah." Jonah rebelled against God and was plunged into the stormy sea, presumably to his death, to

save others from God's wrath. Jesus's storm was a bit different—it wasn't brought on by his sin. But he, too, would eventually plunge himself into death on behalf of rebels like Jonah. And his sacrifice wouldn't save only a few sailors, but *all* who believe in him. **To what degree does the good news of Jesus amaze you and cause you to worship? How can you grow in your amazement (or fear) and worship of the Lord?**

3. *Pause and Reflect: Lectio Divina*

We can sometimes breeze through familiar or difficult passages of Scripture, speeding over the words instead of letting the truth of Scripture sink into our minds and hearts. Lectio Divina, or prayerful reading, is a historical Christian practice that has helped generations of Christians to pause and reflect on God's Word.

Below are the four steps of Lectio Divina, which will help you pray and think deeply about Revelation 7:9–10, which David referenced in this session. As we consider God's command to spread his Word to the nations, what does that mean about the make-up of his kingdom, and how does this passage illuminate it for us? Carve out some time this week to go through this exercise. Take your time with each step. This isn't something to rush through, so make sure you have plenty of time before you start.

Revelation 7:9-10

⁹ After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. ¹⁰ And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."

Lectio (read): Remove all distractions and quiet your mind before God. Read Revelation 7:9–10 three times slowly. If you can, read it out loud to yourself. Let the message hit you. After reading it three times, find something that stands out to you. Re-read it a couple more times and place emphasis on different words as you read.

Meditatio (meditate): Think about the words or phrases that stood out to you the most. What do they mean? What do they say about God? What do they say about God's kingdom? How do they illuminate the main idea of Revelation 7:9–10?

Oratio (pray): Pray through your words or phrases. Ask God to show you what he's saying through this verse. Take the verse and turn it into a prayer. For example, you could pray, "Thank you, God, that you save people from among every nation around the world," or, "Help me, oh God, to join your work of saving people from among the nations."

Contemplatio (contemplate): Now that you've read, thought, and prayed through Revelation 7:9–10, finish your time in silence. Ask God to speak to you. Pray he'd show you one practical thing you could apply to your life from this passage. Then listen. Write down what he says and then do it.

Session 3: Jonah 1:17–2:10

OPEN

Have you ever been fishing? If so, describe your experience. Did you enjoy it? What's the largest fish you have ever caught? If fishing isn't your thing, what about it doesn't appeal to you?

Not all of us enjoy fishing—it's not for everyone. Whether we like to fish or not, or even know much about it, most of us are aware that fishermen are widely known for one thing in particular: exaggerating the size of the fish they've caught. Humorously, as the story of a catch is retold, the fish seems to grow. And grow. And grow.

As Jonah's narrative continues, we come to an event in the story that, if we're honest, can seem like an exaggeration. Did Jonah *really* sit in the belly of a fish for three days? Is this just an old fisherman's tale? However, what's most amazing is not that a large fish came fishing for Jonah (though that's true), but what God did *for* and *in* Jonah during those three days. In this session, David will help us see the mercy of God toward Jonah and toward us.

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.

At what point did Jonah pray for the first time?

In Jonah's prayer, does he ever confess his sin to God or express a desire to repent?

Who takes the initiative in our relationship with God: God or us?

Show Session 3: *Jonah 1:17–2:10* (12 minutes).

DISCUSS

As we continue in the book of Jonah, we come to the most well-known portion of the story: Jonah is about to be swallowed by a great fish. Before we proceed, though, it's important to review the story up to this point.

In one sentence, how would you summarize what has happened in the book of Jonah thus far? What are the two or three major points that should be emphasized from chapter one? How has God used what you've learned from chapter one in your life over the last two weeks?

Read Jonah 1:17

¹⁷ Now the LORD provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

In verse 17, we learn that God told a fish to swallow Jonah. And the fish obeyed, keeping Jonah in its belly for three days and three nights.

What does this scene reveal about God's power and rule? Do you have any personal experiences you can point to when it seemed God "appointed" something to happen? If so, will you describe one of those experiences to the group? What did you learn about God from that experience?

Jonah's trip into the fish's belly is abnormal, to say the least. It's something none of us have experienced ourselves. Nevertheless, we probably have experienced some version of the despair Jonah encountered during those three days and nights.

Have you had moments or seasons of despair? What was it like for you to experience despair? In what ways did you respond?

David mentioned that the book's author uses words and images in this verse that are freighted with meaning, words like "swallow" and the imagery of "three days and three nights." These words indicate that Jonah is undergoing a kind of judgment that leads to salvation—plunging to his death and returning to life. It's an Old Testament passage that New Testament authors reference in the Gospels.

What event in the New Testament is described with similar language and imagery? How does connecting the language in Jonah to the New Testament enrich your reading of Jonah?

Read Jonah 2:1–9

¹ [a] From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the LORD his God. ² He said: "In my distress I called to the LORD, and he answered me. From deep in the realm of the dead I called for help, and you listened to my cry.

³ You hurled me into the depths, into the very heart of the seas, and the currents swirled about me; all your waves and breakers swept over me.

⁴ I said, 'I have been banished from your sight; yet I will look again toward your holy temple.'

⁵ The engulfing waters threatened me, [b] the deep surrounded me; seaweed was wrapped around my head.

⁶ To the roots of the mountains I sank down; the earth beneath barred me in forever. But you, LORD my God, brought my life up from the pit.

⁷ "When my life was ebbing away, I remembered you, LORD, and my prayer rose to you, to your holy temple.

⁸ "Those who cling to worthless idols turn away from God's love for them.

⁹ But I, with shouts of grateful praise, will sacrifice to you.

What I have vowed I will make good. I will say, 'Salvation comes from the LORD.'"

Jonah responded to his despair by praying—his first time praying in this story.
**What does it communicate about Jonah that this is his first recorded prayer?
What does it say about his relationship with God?**

**In what ways can you identify with Jonah’s reluctance to pray? Why do you think
it often takes a run-in with despair before we cry out to God?**

In the opening lines of Jonah’s prayer in verse 2, he describes his interaction with God. What stood out to Jonah was that God “heard [his] voice” and “answered [him].” Despite Jonah’s running and rebellion, God still hears him and answers his cries.

**Does God’s response to Jonah surprise you? What does God’s response tell us
about his character? In what ways does it encourage you to know that God sees
you, listens to you, and responds to you even when you’ve run as far away from
him as you can?**

In verses 3–6, Jonah poetically recounts his descent beneath the water. He sank down, he says, “into the depths” where “the earth’s gates shut behind [him] forever”—he presumed himself as good as dead. But then God raised his life from the pit.

**What words would you use to describe the kindness God shows Jonah in raising
him from the pit? Are these the words you normally use to describe God and his
posture toward you? Why, or why not?**

Many of us have found ourselves in a pit—or low point—of our own. Maybe we’re there now.

**When has God helped bring you out of a low point in your life? If you’re there
now, do you believe he can deliver you again? Why, or why not? If any group
members are currently in a pit, what words of encouragement can you share?**

As we mentioned, Jonah prayed to God in his distress. But as David observed, there wasn’t much remorse in Jonah’s prayer. He cried out to God, which is a good response, but he didn’t confess his sin or repent. You could even argue that his prayer was selfish (he refers to himself much more frequently than to God).

**When you think back on your experiences with distress, what kinds of prayers
did you pray? Would you change the way you prayed in those moments? If so,
why?**

Near the end of his prayer, Jonah turns to the topic of idols. While we may not think of idols and idolatry as being relevant to us today, they certainly are. They’ve just emerged in different forms. Whereas an idol in Jonah’s day may have been a small wooden

implement, today they often look more like an iPhone, a flashy car, or even something abstract like professional success. An idol is anything we prize more highly than God. **How can we know what our idols are? Is there anything in your life that you idolize? If so, what?**

Whatever form they take, as David said, “Idols in this world are empty.” They promise much and deliver little
How have your idols let you down? What did it take for you to realize that you were idolizing something? How have you sought to rid yourself of idols?

In his prayer, Jonah suggests that we can turn from our idols by turning toward God in gratitude. We can take time to remember who God is, what he says about us, and what he’s done, and give thanks.
When you think about who God is, what are you thankful for? What has God done for you that sparks gratitude in your heart? At what intervals of your day could you insert a habit of expressing gratitude to God?

Jonah’s prayer closes in verse 9 with five words that David said are the theme of the entire book: “Salvation belongs to the Lord.” In these words, and in Jonah’s story, we learn that “God’s mercy is relentless for rebellious sinners,” as David noted.
In what ways has God been relentlessly merciful toward you?

As he did with Jonah, God pursues us. Regardless of what we’ve done (or are currently doing), “God’s capacity to forgive is greater than our capacity to sin against him,” David said. And it’s not as if God pursues us only to the point when we place belief in him—he is still pursuing us, inviting us into a deeper relationship with him. Part of that invitation involves a continual turning from sin, knowing that God will continually forgive us.
In what ways does turning from our sin develop a deeper relationship with God? To what degree does it encourage you to know that God’s capacity to forgive exceeds your capacity to sin?

Read Jonah 2:10

¹⁰ And the LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.

Chapter 2 ends with the fish spitting Jonah onto dry land at the Lord’s command. God had done his work in Jonah’s heart during those three days and nights, and now he was sending him back on mission.
Have you had any moments of waiting like Jonah when God was preparing you for what was next? Did you find that waiting period difficult? In what ways? What was God preparing you for?

As the session closes, spend some time as a group sharing your stories with one another, as David suggested.

When did God save you? How God has pursued you in your life? How is he pursuing you now? In what ways are you still prone to run from God?

In many ways, Jonah is an example for us of what not to do. Running from God is a sin, and it's a sin that we all have the capacity for. David encouraged us to help each other fight against this sin. Now that you've confessed the ways you're prone to run from God, spend some time praying for one another.

What could you do to remind yourself to pray for your group members throughout the week? How can you become quicker to confess and repent every time you choose to run from God and help others do the same?

LAST WORD

Jonah's story up to this point shows us a clear picture of what it looks like to disobey God. It also shows us the consequences of doing so—ultimately, our sin leads to judgment and death.

But Jonah's story also shows us that God is overwhelmingly merciful to us. For followers of God, our sin and rebellion—no matter how egregious—are met with God's grace. He never stops pursuing us and never stops inviting us to return to him. While we have a great capacity to sin, God's capacity to forgive is even greater. Make it your ambition every day to run toward God and his purposes, and not away from him.

GO DEEPER

1. *Swallow the book of Jonah whole. (optional)*

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 recall the book of Jonah in as much detail as possible.

Who are the main characters? Which characters are worth emulating, and which are not? How has reading Jonah multiple times helped your retention of the book?

Read Jonah 1–4 out loud using your preferred translation. Read slowly and work to find the author's cadence.

Reading out loud adds another element to our experience with any given text. Since the Bible was written primarily in an era of oral cultures, we can benefit by interacting with the text like the original audience would have.

In what ways was the experience of reading the Bible out loud different for you? Did you find it more engaging or less? Why?

In addition to reading the text, reading out loud offers the added benefit of hearing the text.

Do you think hearing the text read out loud will help your retention? In what ways did hearing the text help you pick up on the author's cadence, use of literary devices (metaphor, imagery, etc.), and repeated words, phrases, and themes?

Now that you've read Jonah again, spend some time reflecting on the book once more. **How would you define the book's theme? If you had to write a thesis statement for Jonah, what would it say? What is God teaching you through the book of Jonah?**

2. Two Tombs: Type and Antitype

In last week's Go Deeper Section 2, we explored the theological concept of typology. In his book, *The Baker Compact Dictionary of Theological Terms*, Dr. Gregg Allison says that typology is a concept that notes "the correspondence between what went on previously in the Old Testament (type) and something later in the New Testament (antitype)." In other words, a type is something that points readers to an antitype. And Jonah is bursting with typology.

Read Jonah 1:14–17

If you are familiar with the Bible, you may know there are words and images in this passage that are repeated by New Testament authors. While the author of Jonah wasn't aware of it at the time, there are co

nnctions between the story of Jonah and what we encounter in the ministry of Jesus.

What does the repeated use of words and imagery between the Old and New Testaments communicate about the coherence of Scripture?

Jesus alluded to Jonah's story in his teaching to religious leaders.

Read Matthew 12:38–41

³⁸ Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from you." ³⁹ He answered, "A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. ⁴⁰ For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. ⁴¹ The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now something greater than Jonah is here.

In this passage, Jesus makes a couple of startling comparisons. He compares himself and his future experience in the tomb to Jonah's time in the fish, and he compares those who respond to his teaching with repentance to the "men of Nineveh" in verse 41.

If there were any questions about the typological connection between these two scenes, Jesus clears it up in this passage.

Why does Jesus allude to Jonah? What is he saying about himself? What is he saying about his audience?

How does Jesus expect his followers to respond to his Word? What can we do to respond like the repentant sailors and the Ninevites and not like Jonah and the Pharisees?

3. *Praying the Psalms*

Do you ever find yourself struggling or even unable to pray? Jonah struggled to pray, so much that he refused to pray until he was at the end of his rope. We might not be in Jonah's shoes, but whether we're too exhausted by life or we just don't know what to say, prayer can be a real challenge sometimes. For these moments, we can turn to pre-written prayers.

The book of Psalms is a great source of written prayers. At its core, Psalms is a collection of prayers organized into a single book for God's people—it's our prayer book.

Have you ever used any psalms in your prayer life? Which psalm do you turn to most often? Why?

When we're sad, exhausted, grieving, angry, or maybe deep in sin, and we aren't sure what to pray, the Psalms can be a great help. Here's a psalm we can pray when we're in need of God's mercy.

Read Psalm 6:1–4

For the director of music. With stringed instruments. According to *sheminith*.^[b] A psalm of David.

¹ LORD, do not rebuke me in your anger or discipline me in your wrath.

² Have mercy on me, LORD, for I am faint; heal me, LORD, for my bones are in agony.

³ My soul is in deep anguish. How long, LORD, how long?

⁴ Turn, LORD, and deliver me; save me because of your unfailing love.

King David wrote this psalm. His prayer sounds a lot like a prayer of desperation. Though we don't know why, David is in obvious distress.

When have you prayed a prayer of desperation like David's? How did God answer your prayer?

It's often most difficult for us to pray when we've sinned. We're aware we've messed up, and we may not know how to approach God or what to say. In this passage, King David pleads with God on account of his sin.

What stands out to you most about David's prayer? How might this passage be a help during a moment when you need his mercy?

While David doesn't divulge the circumstances that compelled him to pray, he believes God should discipline him for something he's done. But he appeals to God's character, saying in verse 4, "Save me because of your faithful love."

In appealing to God, do you think David is trying to remind God of his faithful love or remind himself of God's faithful love? For what reasons is that an important distinction?

In what ways has God shown you his faithful love in your life?

There are a couple of ways to pray a psalm like this one. We can pause after each line of the prayer and relate the words to our current situation. Or we can simply go line by line, reciting the words verbatim. In either case, God will hear our prayers, and he will respond because his ear is always turned toward our cries.

In what ways can you implement the Psalms into your prayer life this week?

Session 4: Jonah 3:1–10

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.

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).

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?

Read Jonah 3:1–3

¹ Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time: ² “Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you.”

³ Jonah obeyed the word of the LORD and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very large city; it took three days to go through it.

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

⁴Jonah began by going a day’s journey into the city, proclaiming, “Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown.” ⁵The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.

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

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?

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?

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?

Read Jonah 3:6–9

⁶When Jonah's warning reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust. ⁷This is the proclamation he issued in Nineveh: "By the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let people or animals, herds or flocks, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. ⁸But let people and animals be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. ⁹Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish."

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?

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 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?

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?

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?

Read Jonah 3:10

¹⁰ When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.

The book of Jonah is clear about Nineveh’s evil doing—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?

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?

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

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?

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

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.

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.

GO DEEPER (OPTIONAL)

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?

Read Acts 2:37-41

³⁷ When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"

³⁸ Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call."

⁴⁰ With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." ⁴¹ Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

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?

3. *On Fasting*

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**

³ They said to me, "Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire."

⁴ When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven.

Esther 4:3

³ In every province to which the edict and order of the king came, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping and wailing. Many lay in sackcloth and ashes.

Psalms 35:13–14

¹³ Yet when they were ill, I put on sackcloth and humbled myself with fasting.

When my prayers returned to me unanswered, ¹⁴ I went about mourning as though for my friend or brother. I bowed my head in grief as though weeping for my mother.

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?

Session 5: Jonah 4:1–9

OPEN

Describe a time when you did something wrong as a kid and experienced consequences for it. Did you receive the punishment you deserved? What did that feel like? How do you think it would have felt if you hadn't been punished accordingly?

When we've erred in some way, whether intentionally or not, mercy is often the last thing we expect to receive. But when mercy is extended, it can leave a lasting imprint. However, sometimes we're more prone to receive mercy than we are to give it. And that's what we see in Jonah 4.

In this session, as we learn more about Jonah's motives, David will help us see how much like Jonah we really are. Like Jonah, we welcome God's mercy in our lives. But we often find the task of sharing God's mercy a bit too uncomfortable and inconvenient. David will encourage us to extend the same mercy to others that we've received from God.

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.

Why did Jonah not want to go to Nineveh?

What question does God ask Jonah twice in this passage?

To expose Jonah's heart, what comfort did God take away from Jonah?

Show Session 5: *Jonah 4:1–9* (11 minutes).

DISCUSS

So far in the book of Jonah, we've seen God addressing Jonah and Jonah praying to God from the belly of a fish. But in chapter 4, we see dialogue between God and Jonah for the first time. And their conversation helps us to see what's going on in Jonah's heart.

Read Jonah 4:1–4

¹ But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry. ² He prayed to the LORD, "Isn't this what I said, LORD, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. ³ Now, LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live." ⁴ But the LORD replied, "Is it right for you to be angry?"

After God relented from the disaster he had threatened Nineveh with (Jonah 3:10), Jonah was furious. He was displeased with God and the grace he'd shown the Ninevites.

Has there ever been a time when you were displeased with God? Or, even mad at him? Why were you upset? How did you behave toward God during that time? How did God respond to you?

David said that Jonah's outburst is even more shocking in the original language. It's not just that he was displeased and furious, he viewed God's dealing with Nineveh as evil.

Why do you think Jonah would call God's actions evil? How would you expect God to respond to Jonah's contempt?

In verses 2–3, Jonah prays. He tells God why he fled to Tarshish—because he knew that God is “gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in faithful love, and one who relents from sending disaster.” Clearly, these are all good character traits. But Jonah isn't keen on the idea that God would act in Nineveh's favor.

What does Jonah's prayer communicate about his contempt for Nineveh? Have you ever felt contempt for someone? How did your contempt manifest itself?

Looking at Jonah's prayer, it's important to note that his theology (his thoughts and words about God) was spot-on. He articulated God's character accurately: God is gracious and compassionate, he is slow to anger and abounding in faithful love, and he does relent from sending disaster. The problem was not Jonah's theology, it was his application of his theology.

What can go wrong when we misapply good theology? Have you ever applied your theology in an inappropriate or misguided way? How so? What things can we do to rightly apply the truths we believe about God?

We find out in verse 2 that Jonah ran away because he was intentionally trying to keep Nineveh from receiving God's love. Jonah praised God for his steadfast love when it was directed at him but scorned God when he extended love to Nineveh. While we might not lash out at God for showing love to others, we can sometimes try to hoard his love and mercy for ourselves.

In what ways do we sometimes keep the love or mercy of God for ourselves? For what reasons do we behave this way? What can we do to resist the temptation to be hoarders of God's love?

Based on this passage, it could be easy for us to be hard on Jonah. But Jonah's disdain for Nineveh and the Assyrian Empire came from experiences of real injustice. Israel had received the Assyrians' cruelty and barbarism and would again.

To what degree is Jonah's frustration understandable? What do you think about Jonah's candor with God? Is it commendable that he voiced his frustrations with God, or should he have suppressed them? Explain your reasoning.

Jonah moved from not being able to stand the Assyrians to not being able to stand God himself, which he illustrated by saying in verse 3: "take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live." David argued that with this statement, Jonah was saying he'd rather die than serve God.

Have you ever been in such despair that you wanted nothing to do with God? If you're comfortable sharing, what led you to that point? How did you climb out of it?

We finally hear God's response to Jonah in verse 4. He didn't scold or berate Jonah. He simply asked him a question: "Is it right for you to be angry?"

What's the answer to this question? Do you think God already knows the answer? If so, what's the purpose of his asking?

At this point, the interaction between God and Jonah trails off, and the scene shifts.

Read Jonah 4:5–9.

⁵ Jonah had gone out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city. ⁶ Then the LORD God provided a leafy plant^[a] and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the plant. ⁷ But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the plant so that it withered. ⁸ When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah's head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, and said, "It would be better for me to die than to live." ⁹ But God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?" "It is," he said. "And I'm so angry I wish I were dead."

Jonah didn't answer God's question. Instead, he left Nineveh, headed east, and built himself a shelter overlooking the city so he could have a front-row seat to watch Nineveh's destruction. He was eager for the city's downfall. In this instance, Jonah was guilty of the sin of gloating by hoping for the Ninevites' misfortune with pleasure.

What does Jonah's gloating reveal about the state of his heart? Is gloating something that you have ever struggled with? If so, how so?

In verse 6, "God appointed a plant" to grow up and provide shade for him "to rescue him from his trouble." God gave Jonah comfort, and Jonah was happy. Comforts aren't bad things, of course, but we can become inordinately reliant on them, as Jonah did.

Which of your comforts are you most addicted to? Do they ever keep you from obeying God? How do you think you'd respond if those comforts were removed?

In the very next verse, God took Jonah's newfound comfort away. He also sent a "scorching east wind" and a beating sun that withered Jonah's strength. And once again Jonah cried out, "It's better for me to die than to live" (v. 8). For good reason or not, Jonah is in the pit of despair.

What's your reaction to Jonah's behavior here? Do you see any of yourself in him? If so, how so?

As David pointed out, God didn't give up on Jonah. He invited Jonah to see the foolishness of his heart by repeating in verse 9 the question he asked in verse 4: "Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?" And Jonah answered, "Yes!" Jonah believed it was more important for him to be comfortable than for Nineveh to be saved. Jonah's self-centeredness is on full display.

In what ways is being attached to our comforts self-centered? What can we do to overcome any self-centeredness in ourselves?

While the book of Jonah doesn't end there, David halted his teaching at this point in the story so we could stop and consider how we sometimes look a lot like Jonah. We are often more than happy to receive God's mercy ourselves yet resistant to share it with others.

What similarities do you see between yourself and Jonah? In what ways have you viewed people the way Jonah did in this passage?

David encouraged us to consider what it might look like to let go of our comforts to spread God's Word and the good news about the mercy he offers. Since God has been so merciful to us, we can sacrifice comfort to share his mercy with others.

In what specific ways is God calling you to sacrifice your comforts and embrace his command to spread his Word?

LAST WORD

God's mercy is amazing—given as a gift to those who don't deserve it. But often, once we've received God's mercy ourselves, we dispense it only to those we consider worthy of it. Or we withhold it altogether. We choose the comfort of hoarding God's mercy over the command to share it with others.

But there's plenty of God's mercy to go around. We need only to get outside of our comfort zones and spread it—we can spread the gospel in far-off places and or extend forgiveness to family members. Both are acts of mercy. Consider who you can show God's mercy to this week.

GO DEEPER

1. Swallow the book of Jonah whole. (optional)

We'll need a bit more time this week to go through Jonah, so grab a pen and notebook and set aside thirty to forty-five minutes to read (and write) the book of Jonah in its entirety.

Before reading, look back at the thesis you wrote in Session 3. Having read the book a couple more times, would you make any changes to the thesis you wrote? If so, what changes?

This week, as you read Jonah 1–4, write out the entire book of Jonah word for word in your notebook.

Just as hearing the Word of God read aloud adds something unique to our interaction with the Bible, so does writing it out. Writing adds a physical element that helps to inscribe God's Word into our hearts and minds.

How much longer did it take you to write out the book of Jonah compared to just reading it? Other than the time and physical act of writing, what was different about your interaction with Jonah this week?

What's one observation or take away from the book of Jonah that you gathered from writing the text that you hadn't noticed before?

To what degree do you think physically writing out the text will help you retain what you read?

While writing out every book of the Bible may not be terribly practical, and we might not do it frequently, it can be helpful for a short book like Jonah.

What are some additional benefits you think writing out books of the Bible offers? Is this a habit you can see yourself doing from time to time? Why, or why not?

2. Good theology requires love.

Everyone is a theologian. From the most insolent atheist to the most faithful Christian, and everyone in between, we all have reasoned thoughts and words about God—that's theology! However, the fact that we're all theologians doesn't mean we're all good theologians.

Have you ever thought of yourself as a theologian? In your mind, what do you think makes a good theologian? What are the criteria?

Like us, Jonah was a theologian. And in some ways, he was a good one—he said true things about God. But his theology lacked a critical component, which led him woefully astray in applying his theology. Read Jonah 3:10–4:2.

What did Jonah say about God that was true? Where does Jonah’s theology start to go wrong? What would you say is lacking in Jonah’s theology?

On paper, Jonah’s theology was sound. Yet, his theology lacked one thing—and that one thing spoiled all of it. If we skip forward to the New Testament book of 1 Corinthians, the apostle Paul shows us what can undermine our theology: a lack of love.

Read 1 Corinthians 13:1–3

¹If I speak in the tongues^[a] of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. ²If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. ³If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast,^[b] but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Without love, our words from and about God—our theology—and our good works for God—the application of our theology—are useless and worthless. And maybe even counterproductive.

How does a lack of love bear false witness about God? To what degree can a loveless theology lead others away from God and not to him?

Good Christian theology is anchored in the love of God and love of neighbor (Matthew 22:34–40), and it is consistent with Paul’s description of love in the book of 1 Corinthians.

Read Matthew 22:34–40

³⁴Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. ³⁵One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: ³⁶“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”

³⁷Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’^[a] ³⁸This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’^[b] ⁴⁰All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

Read 1 Corinthians 13:4–8

⁴Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

⁸Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away.

Theology that is inconsistent with what we read in this passage is sub-Christian, lacking, and incomplete. And while none of us embodies this list perfectly, we should all strive to exercise and apply our theology according to its criteria.

What might a theology that is patient, kind, humble, etc. practically look like?

How do you think this kind of theology would be received by others?

What could you do to ensure your theology, and the application of your theology, are thoroughly anchored in love?

3. Gloating: A Proverb and a Prayer

After Jonah expressed his frustration with God, he abandoned his mission and set up camp on a piece of land in view of Nineveh. Seething, he sat waiting and watching for the city's destruction. He was contemplating their misfortune "with malignant pleasure"—he was gloating.

Jonah's gloating didn't come in response to Nineveh's fall but in hopes of it. He was hoping the city would stumble in its repentance so he could rejoice over its fall.

For what reasons is Jonah's heart toward Nineveh problematic?

Gloating might not be a word we hear too often, but it's an issue that's as prevalent now as it's ever been. And the Bible has something to say about it.

Read Proverbs 24:17–18

¹⁷ Do not gloat when your enemy falls; when they stumble, do not let your heart rejoice,

¹⁸ or the LORD will see and disapprove and turn his wrath away from them.

A heart that gloats is a heart that enjoys seeing an enemy's downfall. But this passage shows that God often uses a person's gloating to keep destruction from happening. Rather than watching their enemies fall, gloaters see God may turn his wrath away from their enemies.

For what reasons does gloating displease God? How does God show his disapproval of our gloating?

Gloating is a sin. That is clear. And while we can recognize it as a sin, and try with all our might to avoid it, we may still struggle to overcome it.

In what ways are you prone to gloat? How can we work to overcome the sin of gloating?

If you struggle with the sin of gloating, consider praying this prayer inspired by Proverbs 24:17–18.

Father,
Forgive me for the gloating that resides in my heart, And the times when I fail to resist it.
Give me strength, that I might not gloat when my enemies fall, Nor rejoice when they stumble.

For I was once your enemy, yet you turned your wrath away from me. Turn your wrath away from them, too,

Because of the mercy offered to them in Christ. Empower me by your Spirit to seek their good, And to rejoice when you take pleasure in showing them mercy.

Give me grace when I stumble, oh God.

Amen.

Session 6: Jonah 4:10–11

OPEN

What are a few of the goals you've set out to achieve in the past few years? Have you achieved them?

Setting goals is generally viewed as a good and helpful practice. It helps us clarify our purpose and, for many of us, provides the fuel we need to accomplish whatever we're seeking to accomplish.

Believe it or not, God has a goal for his creation. All over Scripture, we see that it's God's ambition to spread his good news to every nation on Earth. And while Jonah was commanded to help achieve God's goal, he had ambitions of his own. And his ambitions led him astray. In this final session, David will help motivate us to join God's work of spreading the gospel to the ends of the earth.

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 does it mean that the 120,000 citizens of Nineveh didn't know their right hand from their left?

Why does the book of Jonah end with a question?

What is the point of the book of Jonah?

Show Session 6: *Jonah 4:10–11* (11 minutes).

DISCUSS

Before we begin, let's take a few moments to summarize the book of Jonah as a group.

If you were going to share this story with children, how would you tell it? What would be some of the main application points you'd share with them? What one truth would you want them to walk away knowing?

What we'll read in Jonah 4:10 comes on the heels of Jonah's response to a question God asked him in verse 9: "Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?" Because God had taken away his source of comfort, Jonah was convinced that his anger was warranted.

Was Jonah right to be angry about the withered plant? Why, or why not? What does Jonah's response reveal about his heart?

God's response to Jonah is recorded in the next verse.

Read Jonah 4:10–11

In verse 10, God pointed out that Jonah had grown attached to a plant that had sprung up overnight. It was a source of comfort for Jonah. And when it was taken away, he threw a tantrum.

Why do you think we, like Jonah, can get attached to the things that provide us comfort? For what reasons do we react sourly if they're taken away?

Do you have any sources of comfort that you have an inordinate attachment to? What could it look like to reign in your attachment to those things?

God doesn't rebuke Jonah outright for his attachment to the plant, but he does draw a sharp contrast between Jonah's care for the plant and God's care for the city of Nineveh. While Jonah cared for an insentient plant, he begrudged God's concern for people he made.

In what ways is Jonah's behavior illogical? Is God being gracious by pointing out Jonah's folly? How so?

David highlighted a phrase God used when describing the people of Nineveh. Verse 11 says they didn't know their right hand from their left. In other words, they didn't have God's law, so they weren't able to make decisions based on it.

Do you know anyone who doesn't "know their right hand from their left"? What "truth" do they depend on? To what extent have you tried to engage them with God's Word?

David said the Ninevites were a picture of "unreached people" in the Old Testament. They were under God's judgment and couldn't be saved unless someone brought his Word to them.

What does it communicate about God that he sent Jonah to share his Word with the Ninevites? Do you think God shares the same concern for people and nations that are unreached today?

Who are the people around you with whom God is calling you to share his Word?

The book of Jonah ends with a question mark, which feels like the book is left unresolved. But David said the question is intentionally left unanswered because God is leading us to ask the same questions. Spend some time answering the questions David posed:

Do you know and believe that God loves all the nations of the world to the same degree he loves you? To what extent do you comprehend that to be saved,

people in these nations must hear and respond to the gospel? How committed are you to going to the people around you, and even the nations around the world, to tell them about God's love for them?

David returned to the idea of comfort and the way it often impedes our drive to spread God's glory in all nations. If we're honest, it's easier to stay in our comfort zones than to do the often-difficult work of spreading the gospel.

Would you say you're more prone to step out of your comfort zone to spread God's Word? Why, or why not?

In a previous session, we briefly looked at the connection between Jonah and Jesus, and we introduced the phrase, "Jesus is the greater or better Jonah." In this session, David expounded on that idea. He said, "Jonah reluctantly preached to sinners in need of God's mercy. Jesus relentlessly pursues sinners in need of God's mercy."

What other observations can you make about the contrasts between Jonah and Jesus?

Taking the observations about Jonah and Jesus into consideration, David said that "God is calling us to leave behind the spirit of Jonah and live according to the spirit of Jesus."

How would you describe what it means to live according to the spirit of Jonah? In what ways is it different to live according to Jesus's spirit? How can we follow Jesus's example instead of Jonah's in our day-to-day lives?

In the book of Jonah and in Jesus's ministry, we see God giving his people a mission. For Jonah, it meant going to Nineveh and preaching God's Word. For us, we've been commanded in Matthew 28:19–20 to go to all nations and make disciples of Jesus. And within God's grand mission, we each have a role to play.

Matthew 28:19–20

¹⁹Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Some of us are called to cross oceans, while some may only be called to cross the street. Some are called to give financially, while others are called primarily to give of their time. All of us are called to pray.

What are the primary roles that you play in making disciples? In what specific ways do you carry out those roles?

If we're unsure what to do to spread the gospel to the nations, we can always pray. In fact, prayer is one of the primary means—if not *the* primary means—through which God accomplishes his purposes.

How has God used your prayers in the past to help accomplish his will? What does your prayer life look like right now?

Do you believe that God can accomplish great things through the prayers of his people? What do you think could happen around the world if God's people committed themselves even more to prayer?

In addition to prayer, David challenged us to use our financial resources to share the gospel with other nations. It can be difficult to talk about money, but the way we spend money is a clear indicator of what we treasure.

What could you do to adjust your budget so you can give more toward the spread of the gospel? What are some ways you can give financially—through your church, to parachurch ministries/organizations, or by supporting missionaries?

In Jonah's day, travel was primarily accomplished by walking. And communication technologies were severely limited—writing letters was just about their only option. But today, we can travel by plane and communicate in real time.

What opportunities do we have to spread the gospel thanks to technological advancements? Take a few minutes to brainstorm together all the ways you could use the tools we have to spread God's Word to people who've never heard, both locally and internationally.

What are some ways could you start leveraging these tools today?

As he closed this session, David challenged us to pray a very specific prayer. He said, "God, I will do whatever you call me to do, no matter the cost, to give the gospel to people who've never heard it." For many of us, his prayer can be intimidating or even frightening.

In what ways does David's prayer frighten you? To what degree do you sense reluctance in your heart to pray this prayer? For what reasons might his prayer be a difficult one to pray?

All of history is headed toward the vision we see in Revelation 7:9–10, where people from every nation are gathered before God's throne singing what Jonah said from the belly of the fish: "Salvation belongs to our God."

What one thing can you do today to work toward accomplishing the vision articulated in Revelation 7:9–10?

Revelation 7:9–10

⁹ After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people, and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. ¹⁰ And they cried out in a loud voice: “Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.”

As David showed in this series, the book of Jonah is relevant to us today. Oftentimes, we’re more like Jonah than we’d care to admit. There’s a lot we can apply to our lives from the book of Jonah and David’s teaching.

As you reflect on what you’ve learned in this series, what are your two or three most important takeaways? How has God used this study to help you love him more? In what ways are you more committed to sharing the gospel with your neighbors and the nations?

LAST WORD

There are billions of people around the world who have never encountered the Word of God. At this moment, those billions of people find themselves under the judgment of God just like the Ninevites did. But he is committed to getting his good news to them, and, like he did with Jonah, he has invited us to join him in that work.

The question for us is: Will we do it? Will we sacrifice the comforts that often stand in our way? Will we leverage the resources and tools God has given us? Will we obey God’s command to make disciples of all nations? These are weighty questions, and saying “yes” will require much of us. But others are depending on us. How will you respond to God’s call in your life?

GO DEEPER

1. *Swallow the book of Jonah whole. (optional)*

This week, using whichever translation you prefer, read Jonah 1–4 aloud to someone else. Take time to discuss the story afterward, using these questions:

Before reading, ask them what they already know about the book of Jonah.

Have they read the book before? How familiar are they with the story of Jonah? Take some time to give them a general idea of the book.

Once you’ve read the book, spend a few minutes discussing the book with your reading partner. Discuss the book together. **What stood out to you most about Jonah? What questions emerged as you were listening to the story? What surprised you? What things didn’t make sense or need further clarification?**

Now, spend some time reflecting on your interaction.

How did your conversation with your reading partner help you to further understand the book of Jonah? What observations did they make that surprised and helped you? How did answering their questions improve your grasp of the story?

Reading in community is one of the most helpful ways that we can approach the Scriptures. Doing so gives us a conversation partner, elicits more insight into the text, and helps us to further comprehend and retain God's Word.

What did you learn from your experience reading the Scriptures with a partner? What did you gain from this experience that you hadn't gained by reading the text by yourself? How can you make reading in community a regular habit if it isn't one already?

2. Reaching Unreached People Groups

The concept of an unreached people group may be new to many of us. While we've established that an unreached people group is a group "that lacks enough followers of Christ and resources to evangelize their own people," we might wonder in what parts of the world these people live and, moreover, how we can pray for and reach them. There are several ideas and organizations that can help us.

- Joshua Project "is a research initiative seeking to highlight the ethnic people groups of the world with the fewest followers of Christ." On its website, Joshua Project includes a near-exhaustive amount of information to apprise Christians of everything from the number of unreached groups in the world, what and where they are, and important information about each group.

The website also includes a prayer calendar, prayer cards, prayer guides, prayer videos, and prayer ideas. It is a remarkable resource aiding Christians to grow more deeply involved in reaching unreached people groups all around the world.

Website: joshuaproject.net

- In this session, David mentioned that some unreached people groups may be in nations where Christians are considered enemies. While Joshua Project can help us understand these groups, another important resource that can help us Open Doors International (ODI). ODI is an organization that specifically identifies countries where Christians face extreme persecution.

One of ODI's most crucial resources is its World Watch List. Each year, they produce a list of the fifty countries where Christians face the most extreme persecution, rank them, and create profiles for each country providing in-depth information about their situation, believers' stories, and specific prayer requests.

The World Watch List is a resource that gives Christians a tangible, focused prayer guide for Christians who live in these countries.

Website: opendoors.org

- Another way to stay informed about peoples around the world that are yet to be reached is to stay in contact with the missionaries that your local church supports. You can sign up for their email list, query them about their specific prayer needs, help support them financially, and invite them to your home when they return on furlough.

Have you ever actively prayed for unreached people groups? If so, what tools did you use to familiarize yourself with those people groups?

How could you use the resources above (or others) to involve yourself in the work of reaching those who are yet unreached with the gospel?

Do you know people who have served or are serving among an unreached people group? In what ways have you supported them? To what degree could you increase your involvement in their ministry, and in what ways?

3. How to Use Technology to Spread the Gospel

One of the points that David emphasized in this session was the amazing technological capabilities we have at our disposal today. Jonah used the technology available to them in their day—walking, traveling by ship, etc.—to spread God’s Word, and so should we. But our capabilities are far more advanced than theirs.

What are some of the differences between Jonah’s day and ours, especially as it relates to technology?

Technology today is amazing. With the device in most of our pockets, we can speak in real-time with people on the other side of the world; with a single keystroke, we can send an electronic letter that will arrive at its destination in seconds; we can jump on an airplane and travel across oceans in a fraction of the time it took Jonah to get from Joppa to Nineveh. It’s amazing.

But because technology is such a normal part of life, it seems that we can overlook the value these tools have in spreading God’s Word. Here are a few ideas for how we can use technology to get his message to the nations.

Social Media

Love it or hate it, social media is a tool that can be leveraged for the spread of the gospel. While it's often used unfruitfully, we can choose to redeem the time we spend on our social accounts by posting God's good news.

In what ways do you currently use your social media platforms? What is one change you could make that would spread the light of God's love to a dark world?

Email

As we grow older, life has a way of leading us away from relationships we've had in the past. We change jobs or move to a new city or neighborhood and fall out of touch with old friends and co-workers. It's a natural part of life. One way we can work to keep in touch—especially with those whom we've tried sharing the gospel with—is through email.

Is there anyone in the past with whom you've shared the gospel that you've fallen out of touch with? What would it be like to reconnect with them over email?

Travel

One of the real advantages of our era is the opportunity we have to travel. No longer must we walk for hundreds of miles like Jonah did. Now, we can hop in a car, on a train, aboard a ship, or on an airplane and arrive at our destination quicker than people in Jonah's day could have imagined.

What could it look like for you to travel on a mission trip? Where would you go? Is that something you could begin planning now?

Money

We may not often think of money when we think of technology, but the way we exchange money nowadays is incredible. In mere seconds, we can transfer money from our account to a missionary's account, for instance, with the use of tools like PayPal, Venmo, and Zelle.

Do you use any money transfer tools? How could you leverage them to help support missionaries spreading the gospel around the world?

Translate

One of the major barriers impeding the spread of the gospel for millennia is the language barrier. By most estimates, there are more than seven thousand languages spoken around the world. How can we possibly communicate with people who speak such different languages? With tools like Google Translate and translation software on our phones and computers, the language barrier is becoming much less challenging to overcome.

Have you ever used translation tools? What are some of the ways you could envision them being used to spread the gospel?

We sometimes have mixed feelings about whether many technologies are good. Some present serious ethical challenges in the ways they're used. But many technologies can be leveraged in powerful ways for the advance of the gospel. As Christians, we can be eager to use technology to spread God's Word around the world to those who've yet to be reached with the gospel.