

An underwater photograph showing a large whale's head on the right and a person inside a wave on the left. The water is clear and blue.

JONAH

FAMILY DEVOS

Mercy in Difficult Circumstances

Scripture: Jonah 2

Memory Verse: Psalm 46:1

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.”

For My Family:

In Jonah 1, we learned that God is a God of mercy. Remember, mercy is when you don't get the punishment you deserve. Jonah was running away from God's command to go share His message with the city of Nineveh (Israel's enemies), but you can't run away from a God who is everywhere. God sent a storm, and Jonah had the sailors throw him into the sea. Two things happened as soon as they threw Jonah into the sea. Do you remember what they were? 1) God had mercy on the sailors and immediately stopped the storm. 2) God had prepared a very special (and very big) fish to swallow Jonah. Today, we will learn that this was also an act of God's mercy.

It may seem strange to call getting swallowed by a giant fish an act of mercy, but this is where God had to take Jonah in order for Jonah's heart to change. It is interesting that even though Jonah lived for three days and three nights trapped in a swampy, slimy, stinky, seaweedy, giant fish belly, all that we have recorded about his time there is his prayer. So as we read through Jonah's prayer, let's look at three important things Jonah did that we can learn from:

1. Jonah prayed to the Lord (2:1-6) - He didn't complain. He didn't blame God. In his trouble, finally having nowhere else to run, Jonah turned to God in prayer and God heard and answered. If there was anywhere you could go in the world where God wouldn't hear you, that would be the place! But God is everywhere, and He invites us to pray to Him. No matter where we are, what we are going through, or what we have done, we can always turn to God in prayer. God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in time of trouble (Psalm 46:1). So Jonah prayed, acknowledging that it was God who brought him into the fish's belly and God would bring him out.
2. Jonah remembered the Lord (vs. 7) - When things get hard or our circumstances are bleak, it can be all too easy to forget God. We can forget His promises. We can forget that He loves us and knows what is best for us. Jonah had been on the run from the God of mercy! He remembered God. He remembered that he also was in need of God's mercy and accepted God's correction.
3. Jonah praised the Lord (vs. 8-9) - Jonah didn't wait until he was out of the fish's belly. Jonah accepted God's mercy and praised him from inside the fish, trusting in God to be his salvation. Jonah certainly couldn't get himself out of the fish. He was totally dependent upon God. It was God who had brought Jonah into the fish's belly, and it was God who would bring him out.

Jonah *prayed* to God, *remembered* God and His mercy, and *praised* God for the gift of salvation. Jonah was a stubborn man! We can be quite stubborn too. Sometimes we read things in God's Word that we don't want to do. Sometimes we even knowingly disobey! Thankfully, we don't have to spend time in a fish's belly whenever God wants to change our hearts. Instead, He gave us His Word so we could learn from Jonah's mistake and see that God is merciful to us, even in our disobedience.

Sometimes God's correction in our life brings us into troubling and uncomfortable circumstances/situations, but God does this, as your parents do, out of love (Proverbs 3:11-12) to make us more like Him. Jonah finally understood and accepted God's correcting hand in all of this. After three days and nights, God had this fish spit Jonah out onto dry land so that Jonah could get back to doing what God had commanded him to do in the first place. But we'll take a look at that in the next chapter.

Questions for Young Children:

Is there anywhere you can go in the whole universe where God won't hear you when you pray?

How long was Jonah in the fish's belly?

What three things did Jonah do that we should remember to do when we are in trouble? (Pray to God, remember God, praise God)

Questions for Teens and Pre-teens:

How was God sending a fish to swallow Jonah an act of God's mercy?

Jonah was running from God's command. Is there anything that God has said in His Word that you find difficult to obey?

What causes people to forget God and is there anything we can do today that will help us remember Him tomorrow?