

An underwater scene featuring a large whale on the right and a smaller whale on the left. A person is visible inside a bubble of air in the water.

# JONAH

FAMILY DEVOS

# The Lord is Merciful

**Scripture:** Jonah 1

**Memory Verse:** Psalm 103:8

“The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy.”

## For My Family:

In this series of devotions, we are going to be looking at the book of Jonah. For many of us, this story is one of the most familiar in the Bible, but do you know what it's all about? As cool as the story of a man swallowed by a big fish is (and we'll get to that next time), Jonah is about something much better than that. It's about God's amazing mercy.

So what is mercy? Mercy is when you don't get the punishment you deserve. When you disobey your parents and they give you a warning instead of putting you in time-out, that's mercy. The God we serve is full of mercy, and that's good news for all of us. He could have left us to suffer the punishment for our sins, eternal separation from Him, but instead He sent Jesus to die on the cross so that we could be forgiven. That's incredible mercy.

Jonah knew that God is merciful, but when God wanted Jonah to warn the people of Nineveh of their sins, he ran away. Why? Because the people of Nineveh hated Jonah and his people, the Israelites. The Ninevites had done all sorts of evil things, and Jonah thought they should be punished. He didn't think the people of Nineveh deserved God's mercy.

So Jonah got on a boat and sailed as far away from Nineveh as possible. He thought that he could run away from God's command, but you can't escape from God. God sent a storm, and it looked like the ship was going to sink. The sailors (who didn't know the one True God) tried to escape the storm and prayed to their idols, but Jonah was asleep. They woke him up, and when they discovered that the storm was his fault, he explained to them that he worshipped the God of Israel, that this storm had come because he disobeyed the Lord, and that the only way to escape was to throw Jonah into the sea.

Even after he said that, the sailors didn't want to throw him in and did their best to row to shore. These unbelievers had more mercy on Jonah than he had on the people of Nineveh! But eventually, they realized they had no choice, so they threw Jonah into the sea, praying that his God would have mercy on them... and He did. Once they threw him over, the storm stopped, and the sailors worshipped the Lord. Before the chapter ends, we see one more example of God's mercy. Rather than allowing Jonah to drown in the sea, the Lord sent a big fish to swallow Jonah, keeping him safe.

Our God is a merciful God. Jonah knew that, but he didn't think that the people of Nineveh deserved God's mercy. The problem is, Jonah didn't deserve His mercy either. None of us do, and that's the point. Mercy is forgiveness that we don't deserve. God's mercy is for everyone, no matter who you are or what you've done. He was merciful to an Israelite like Jonah by sending a fish to save him. He showed mercy to the sailors by calming the storm.

But He also wanted to show His mercy to Jonah's enemies, the people of Nineveh. The same way, today God's mercy is available to you and your friends and family, but also to those who are unkind to you. As we'll see as we continue to study this book, Jonah learned that lesson the hard way. Let's learn from His mistake and remember that God's mercy is for everyone.

### **Questions for Young Children:**

What did Jonah do when God told him to go to Nineveh? Why did he do that?  
What happened when Jonah disobeyed God?

What did God do once the sailors threw Jonah off the boat?

What is mercy? Is it easy to forgive people when they are unkind to you?  
Should we still do it?

### **Questions for Teens and Pre-teens:**

What is mercy? Have you ever experienced mercy? How has God shown you mercy?

Are there people that you think don't deserve mercy? Do you deserve God's mercy?

What are ways you can show mercy to other people?

# 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?

# God's Mercy to Nineveh

**Scripture Passage:** Jonah 3

**Memory Verse:** John 3:16

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.”

## For My Family:

“Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it.” Jonah 3:10

The Ninevites had sinned mightily against the Lord. Their wickedness was so famous that, as we read in chapter 1, Jonah refused to obey God because Jonah wanted to them to be punished. God, however, had other plans. The Lord again said to Jonah to enter the city and preach to the Ninevites. This time, Jonah obeyed the Lord, entered the city, and shouted to everyone who would hear, “Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown!”

Whenever we read a proclamation like this in Scripture, there is always an unwritten *unless*. In this instance, what God is really saying is, “In forty days Nineveh will be destroyed, *unless you repent and turn to the LORD for forgiveness.*” Jonah knew that the Lord is merciful and kind. He knew the truth found in 2 Peter 3:16, hundreds of years before it was written, “The Lord desires that no man should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” This is why Jonah didn’t want to go to Nineveh. He knew that if the Ninevites repented, God, in His mercy, would love them and forgive them.

Verse 5 tells us, “The people of Nineveh believed God...”, and they repented. They put on sackcloth and ashes and didn’t eat any food as they cried out to God. The word “repent” means to turn away from doing the wrong thing and turn to God instead. This is exactly what the Ninevites did, and of course, God did not bring judgment on the city.

In Romans 10:13 we read that, “Anyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” God’s mercy was not just for the Ninevites, or the sailors in chapter 1, or even just for Jonah. God IS merciful, so of course, His mercy is ready to be poured out on anyone.

Just like the Ninevites, you and I have broken God’s Law. We have sinned against God and because of that, judgment is coming. But God has done something even greater for us. He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, into the world to free us from the curse of sin forever. Jesus died on the cross, and God poured out our punishment upon Him, so that anyone who believes in Him shall never perish, but have everlasting life.

If you have never repented of your sins, this is wonderful news. Today you can turn to God and ask Him to forgive you. He will come into your life, walk with you, and help you every day here on earth, and then be with you forever in heaven.

## Questions for Young Children:

How did the Ninevites show God that they were sorry for their sins?

In what way are you and I like the Ninevites?

What did Jesus do to show mercy to us?

## Questions for Teens and Pre-teens

Why didn't Jonah want to go to Nineveh?

Would God have been right to judge the people of Nineveh and destroy the city? Why?

God chose not to destroy Nineveh. What does that teach us about Him?

What does the word "repent" mean? Can you give an example of a time you were repentant?

# God Teaches Jonah about Mercy

## Scripture Passage: Jonah 4

### Memory Verse: Micah 6:8

“He has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?”

### For My Family:

He knew it, he just knew it. Jonah knew that God was so generous, loving, kind, and merciful, that as soon as he set foot in Nineveh and preached the message that God wanted Him to preach, God would spare the lives of the Ninevites. This is exactly why Jonah tried to run away to Tarshish in the first place. Well lo and behold, the Lord *was* merciful to the Ninevites, and now Jonah was upset. Actually, he was more than just upset. He was angry.

The Lord did not reprimand Jonah (again). Instead He asked Jonah a straightforward question: “Is it right for you to be angry?” Obviously, the answer here was no, Jonah should not have been angry, but Jonah wanted to be angry with God, so he stormed off and went and sat on a hill overlooking the city. The Lord grew up a plant to shade Jonah from the heat of the sun, and Jonah was grateful for the plant that the Lord had made him. The Lord, however, was still teaching Jonah a lesson. God also made a worm come and eat away the roots of the plant so that it withered and died. The next day, the sun beat down on Jonah and the wind blew in his face, so Jonah was even more upset and angry about the plant that had died than he was about Nineveh. The Lord asked him the same question, “Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?”

God was teaching a lesson to Jonah about mercy. When the plant was destroyed, Jonah was so upset he wished that he was dead. God was trying to show Jonah that he should have been more concerned about the eternal fate of a hundred and twenty thousand people, than the present fate of a vine.

God made the plant, not Jonah. That means that God could do with the plant whatever He wanted. It didn't actually matter how Jonah felt about the plant; it only mattered how God did. God made the Ninevites, not Jonah. That means that God could do with the Ninevites whatever He wanted. It didn't actually matter how Jonah felt about the Ninevites, it only mattered how God did. God saw that there were 120,000 Ninevites who “didn't know their right hand from their left.” God looked at the Ninevites like children who needed to be corrected and instructed, not the bloodthirsty murderers and evildoers that Jonah saw. God loved the Ninevites, and God loves all people, everywhere. He wanted Jonah to see people the way He saw them, and to love mercy the way that He does.



As we've gone over the book of Jonah, we have been studying God's mercy. We all want to experience God's mercy in our own lives, but the thing about God's mercy is that it's available to everyone... even to people we don't get along with. We want God to forgive us, but sometimes like Jonah, we are not so happy when God forgives those who are not nice to us. But you are no more deserving of God's mercy than they are. As we read in our memory verse, God wants us to be people who love and show mercy. Are you willing to show mercy to people you don't get along with?

### Questions for Young Children:

Why was Jonah angry that God showed the Ninevites mercy?

Why was Jonah angry that his plant died?

Was it right for Jonah to be angry?

What is mercy? How can we show mercy to other people?

### Questions for Teens and Pre-teens

How did God and Jonah view the Ninevites differently? What does that teach us about God?

Are there people in your life that you don't get along with? How do you feel about God showing mercy to those people?

What are some practical ways you can show mercy to others?