

Second Chances

We often talk about our desire to pursue God, but what's easy to forget is that God is also constantly pursuing us! And nowhere in the Bible is this more evident than in the book of Jonah, whose story reminds us that we cannot outrun or outpace the relentless pursuit of God.



INTRODUCTION

We have been studying the pursuit of God in our lives. Our God is a God of judgment, and yet He is merciful. He gives us many chances to make the right choices. God did this for Jonah; He gave him a second opportunity to go to Nineveh because of His love for Jonah and because of His love for the people who lived in Nineveh. Let's dig into understanding God's relentless pursuit in each of our lives due to the immense grace and compassion He has for us.

STARTER QUESTION

God relentlessly pursues all of us – even our enemies – because He wants to give us a second chance. What new beginnings has God created in your life through His love and His grace?

INTO THE WORD

1. Going to Nineveh was incredibly brave. While this situation resulted in the Ninevites repenting, it could have had a much different ending considering the violence of the culture. Even when we are following God's instructions, it can be very frightening. What promises from God can we trust in when obeying him means going into a situation that scares us? Consider Deuteronomy 20:4, 2 Samuel 22:3-4, Psalm 34:19, Psalm 138:7, and 2 Corinthians 4:8-9.
2. The stories of second chances abound in Scripture. What things do these stories taken collectively tell us about God? What do these stories have in common? What do these stories have in common with your story? What is there about God that draws you to Him? Consider some of the examples that Pastor Paul mentioned today including Moses, Peter, Matthew, Mark, and Saul.
3. Understanding that Jonah did not even like the people of Nineveh, why do you think it is that they responded so well to his proclamation of their city being overturned in just 40 days unless they changed their ways? Why would they even listen to him and how did Jonah even draw a crowd to preach in such an important city that one would assume from the text wanted little to do with a message about God?

APPLICATION

4. One of the objectives we learned is that we can receive God's grace in vain. Can you think of other examples in God's Word where His grace was received "in vain"? What can we learn from them?
5. Thinking of other "second chances" and the people God has used to shape His ultimate plan, who do you most identify with in your second chance? Is it the prodigal son who finally came home to the father? Or is it Jacob before he was changed, being wrestled into submission so that the nation of Israel could be born? Or what about David, even with all his failures, being remembered as "a man after God's own heart"? Or maybe during this Easter season, it's Simon Peter hearing the rooster crow three times, then getting his second

chance of whom God built His church? How will you respond to God as he mercifully offers you or someone you know a second chance?

6. We learned that God wants His grace to reside deep inside our hearts. We were encouraged to honestly tell God: *Lord, I'm not enough. But you are. Lord, I can't save myself, but you can. Lord, I have nothing to offer you, yet you have provided everything.* Depending on God's grace takes a lot of trust! What aspects of your life can you lay in God's hands, trusting Him to do the work it takes to help you? How can telling God these truths change your perspective? What are some ways God has changed you by His grace?

PRAYER

Dear Father, thank you for being a God of grace, mercy, and so many chances. Help us see clearly when we, like Jonah, are running in the wrong direction. Let us correct our course alongside your love and grace, so that our ways may be pleasing in your sight - and your will be done. Amen.

SUGGESTED ANSWER GUIDE / MORE FOOD FOR THOUGHT FOR SELECTED QUESTIONS:

Question 1:

Deuteronomy 20:4 – God promises to go with us, fight for us, and save us.

2 Samuel 22:3-4 – God is our refuge; we shall be saved from our enemies.

Psalms 34:19 – God does not promise that we will not have difficulties, but that He will deliver us.

Psalms 138:7 – God will revive us (i.e. give us the strength we need to endure).

2 Corinthians 4:8-9 – No matter how dark and difficult our trials become, God will see us through.

Are there others that you go to in times of uncertainty?

Question 2:

Some examples of these stories are Moses the murderer (Exodus 2:11-12), Elijah the self-destructive (1 Kings 19:4), Peter the denier (Matthew 26:69-75), Matthew the tax collector (Matthew 9:9-13, Mark 2:13-17, Luke 5:27-32), the thief on the cross (Luke 23:40-43), Saul the persecutor of the church (Acts 8:1-3), the prodigal son in Jesus' parable (Luke 15:11-32), and the tax collector praying in the Temple (Luke 18:9-14).

Question 3:

Read and discuss Jonah 3:5-9. Is this the reaction you expected from the sinful Ninevites? Go back and reread Jonah 1:17 (inside "a great fish" for "three days and nights") and Jonah 2:4 ('a man from the dead') to truly ponder what the experience Jonah had did to prepare him physically and spiritually for God's mission. Consider how God used this strategy of a large fish to differentiate Jonah from anyone else in the world upon his arrival to Nineveh.

In *Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee (Proverbs through Malachi; page 759-760)* Dr. McGee writes:

"At this point someone is going to ask me, 'how did Jonah get a crowd?' Drawing a crowd is always a problem for a preacher. It's natural and normal for us to want as many people as possible to hear the word of God. How did Jonah do it? He didn't use any of our modern methods or our modern tactics. He didn't rent a great auditorium and put on a great campaign – there's nothing wrong with that; in fact, that's very right to do today – but Jonah didn't do it. He didn't use any gimmicks. He didn't bring in celebrities or some great singer. He didn't entertain the crowd. That was not his method.

Jonah used a method that is a little different from any that we could use today. His method was that **he was a man from the dead**, and I think he was **rather spectacular to see**. A man who has spent three days and three nights in a fish simply cannot come out looking like he did when he went in!

If you will recall the illustrations which I gave earlier of the man who had been swallowed by a fish and lived to tell the story, you will remember that the late Dr. Harry Rimmer told about seeing one man who had spent two days inside a fish. The man was put on display in London as "the Jonah of the 20th century." When Rimmer interviewed him two years after it had happened, this man didn't have a hair on his body, and his skin was a yellowish-brown color. You see, the gastric juices of the fish had reacted upon the individual as the fish had tried to digest him.

Those chemicals were bound to have an effect upon him, and this is apparently what happened to Jonah also. You can imagine the color of Jonah's skin, and you can imagine how he must have looked. When he stopped at a corner and the crowd gathered, they would say, "brother, where have you been?" Jonah told them, "I am a man from the dead. A fish swallowed me because God had sent me to Nineveh but I tried to run away to Tarshish." People didn't ridicule Jonah's story. They listened to him."

Question 4:

Numbers 14:11-12 & 20-24 – Throughout the Old Testament, the Israelites continually turn from God, despite being forgiven numerous times. More than once, God was on the verge of destroying them, before showing them grace. However, it wasn't long before the people turned from him again. They suffered many consequences for their disobedience. In this particular circumstance, they were not allowed to enter the promised land until the current generation had completely died off. Later in the Old Testament, we see the temple destroyed and the people sent into exile: more consequence for their disobedience. *What can we learn from them?* While God will continue to forgive our sins and offer Grace, the consequences will not be taken away and may even get worse the more we disobey.

Genesis 19:15-26 – The story of the destruction of Sodom includes grace toward Lot and his family. God's messengers physically removed Lot and his family from the city, even after they were reluctant to leave. Yet even after they had been saved from the city's destruction, Lot's wife chose to look back at what she was leaving, and it cost her life. *What can we learn from them?* It may be hard to see at the time, but the life that we are offered under God's grace is immeasurable better than the life of sin we leave behind.

These are only 2 examples. Who else received God's grace in vain?