RUNNING FROM GRACE

Studies in Jonah

RUNNING FROM GRACE

We've just spent three weeks looking at the book of Habakkuk, and we saw the prophet go from questioning God's plans to praising his name. Now in the book of Jonah, we meet an even more reluctant prophet. Jonah wants no part of God's mission, or God's calling for his life. He does his best to run for the hills, but in spite of this, God's grace wins. Jonah makes it to Nineveh (against his will), he preaches a reluctant, one-line sermon, and the city repents and turns to God. Just like Habakkuk, the book of Jonah forces us to wrestle with the questions of what God's doing in our lives, when we feel like He's taking us in the wrong direction, or showing grace to the wrong people.

"Get up! Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it because their evil has come up before me."
Jonah 1:2

In the lead up to Christmas, it's especially important that we remember the ways that our God loves to work in unexpected ways, to save the most unexpected people. As we watch Jonah wrestling with God's plans, he was preparing the way for the most unexpected salvation: Of his Son, born in a manger, dying on a cross and rising to new life, to save the least expected people from all over the world.

Christian Standard Bible (CSB) is used in these studies.
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RUNNING FROM GRACE

Jonah 1

STUDY QUESTIONS

Read Jonah 1:1-17.

Nineveh represented everything that stood against God. It was a great and evil city at the head of a godless nation that threatened the people of God. But God tells Jonah to go to Nineveh to preach to them.

What's the equivalent today? A group of people (or person) who you'd be equally shocked if God called you to reach out to?

Read verse 3 again. Take note of the directional words: "down" and "from". What do you think these words are trying to tell us?

Have you ever had a sense that God wanted your life to go one way, but you ran in the opposite direction?

Look up the following verses and see what you can discover from them about Tarshish. Why do you think Jonah may have chosen Tarshish as the place to which he would flee?

- 2 Chronicles 9:21
- Isaiah 66:19

Jonah was so desperate to run from God's calling that he took the first boat out to the dangerous seas with a bunch of sailors he didn't know. But even there, God steps in to cause Jonah to speak of his faith, and causes the sailors to call on God’s name.

What rating would you give Jonah as a prophet here, from this opening chapter?

Have you ever seen God step into your life when you’ve been trying your best to run from Him?

C. S. Lewis wrote this about his conversion:

> "*That which I greatly feared had at last come upon me. In the Trinity Term of 1929 I gave in, and admitted that God was God, and knelt and prayed: perhaps, that night, the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England. I did not then see what is now the most shining and obvious thing; the Divine humility which will accept a convert even on such terms. The Prodigal Son at least walked home on his own feet. But who can duly adore that Love which will open the high gates to a prodigal who is brought in kicking, struggling, resentful, and darting his eyes in every direction for a chance of escape?*"

Can you relate to this experience at all?

What does this show us about God's character?

What do the following verses say about fear?

	What does it say about fear?
Verse 5	
Verse 10	
Verse 16	

Read Mark 4:35-41.

How does this scene remind you of Jonah?

How do we see fear in these verses?

How does Jesus respond differently than Jonah?

Jonah's sacrificial "death" saved the lives of these sailors, and he was "inside the place of the dead" for three days. Jesus would even go so far as to liken this scene with his own death (Matthew 12:40). How does this fulfillment in Jesus' death and resurrection help us to understand Jonah 1?

IN THE BELLY OF THE BEAST

Jonah 2

STUDY QUESTIONS

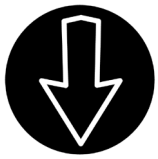
Read Jonah 1:17-2:10.

What's your favourite line of Jonah's Psalm? Why?

At the end of chapter 1, Jonah was thrown into the sea. He couldn't have known that "*the men [of the boat] feared the Lord exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows*" (1:16). But at the same time, the sailors would've felt sure that Jonah had died. Neither the sailors nor Jonah would've known how God would work in the lives of the other/s. But God was at work to save each of them.

Can you think of a time when you'd lost contact with someone, then heard after many years that God had been working powerfully in their life?

What images does Jonah use in his prayer to describe his journey downward? Which images or lines speak about his upward rescue?



Read Jonah's prayer in 2:1–9 again, paying special attention to the images he uses.

How desperate is Jonah's situation? What are some of the images he uses to describe his desperation?

What are the key things that Jonah says about God here?

How does Jonah's attitude towards God change here?

In what ways has Jonah experienced salvation? What has he been saved from?

Do you think Jonah shows repentance here?

Both Jonah and the sailors are brought to places of distress, panic, and desperation before they learn to "fear the Lord." What does this teach us about God and the painful things we face in this life?

Read Matthew 12:38-42.

How does Jesus liken himself to Jonah in this scene?

Read Acts 13:27-35.

In this passage, Paul preaches about Jesus' death and resurrection, referencing multiple Old Testament passages. The last passage he quotes is Psalm 16:10, a Psalm about God's providence and protection of his people, where, in spite of all appearances, God saved Jesus from death.

Read Psalm 16. Try to think of how these words speak to your life, but also of how these words have been fulfilled in Jesus.

How do these words speak into your life?

How can you be praying for one another, remembering God's providence and protection of you (especially in Jesus?)

SURPRISED BY GRACE

Jonah 3

STUDY QUESTIONS

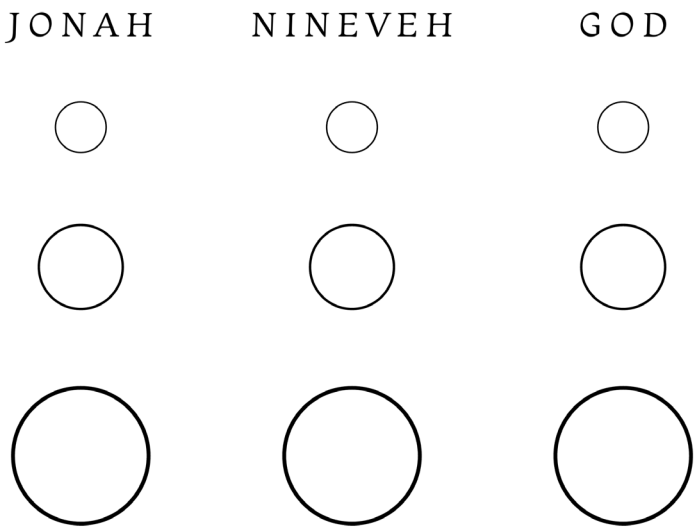
Read Jonah 3.

God has spoken twice in the book so far. How is God's call in 3:1 similar to his call in 1:1? How is it different?

Similarities	Differences

Can you think of a time when you heard a passage of God's word that you'd heard many times before, but it was only on repetition that it struck you, and caused you to act on it?

Read verses 1-3 again. Think about Jonah, Nineveh and God. For each, do they seem small and humble here, or big and proud here? Mark where you think they are on the diagram.

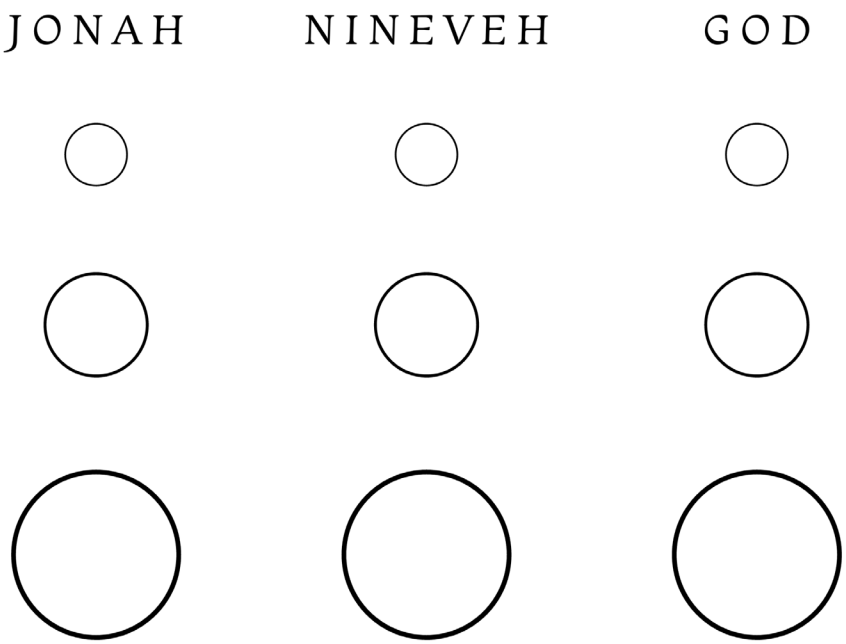


Jonah’s sermon in verse 4 seems quite direct. Does the passage give us any indication as to why the people repent?

Has anyone ever spoken words to you that made you change the direction of your life (a sermon, or from a conversation)? Why did those words speak so powerfully to you?

From verse 10, why did God “relent”?

By the end of the chapter, do Jonah, Nineveh and God seem to be bigger or smaller? (ie. do Jonah and Nineveh seem more proud or humble, is God being glorified or ignored?). Mark how you think they've changed below.



Have you ever faced a challenge for the sake of the Gospel, and felt really, really small in the face of it?

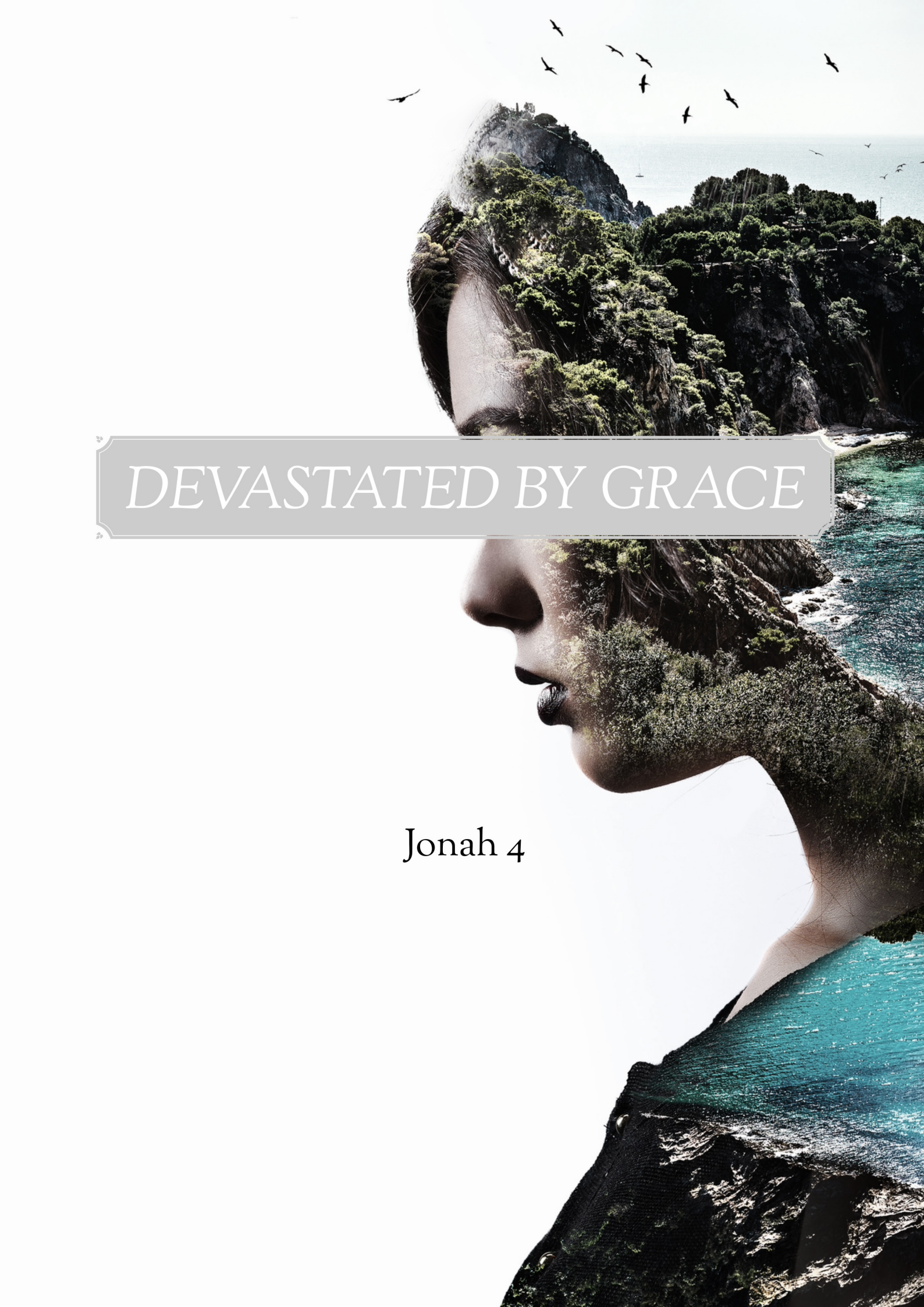
How does this passage encourage us, as we struggle with pride and weakness, in the face of so many great challenges in life?

Read 2 Corinthians 4:7-18.

How does Paul write about our weakness?

How does this weakness help to show the power of God's grace all the more?

Thinking again of those challenges you've faced: According to 2 Corinthians 4, how do Jesus' death and resurrection give hope to those moments?



DEVASTATED BY GRACE

Jonah 4

Read Jonah 4.

Jonah initially fled from God's calling, but then Jonah spoke a somewhat-repentant Psalm and God saved him, then Jonah spoke a short (potentially reluctant) sermon to the people of Nineveh. All throughout the book, it feels like we've been teetering back-and-forth on the question of whether Jonah was truly repentant.

How does chapter 4 help us to see the true state of Jonah's heart?

Jonah was more-or-less dead, in the belly of the fish for three days, but he experienced God's miraculous salvation. But then, in response to the miraculous salvation of the Ninevites, Jonah says: "It's better for me to die than to live." Why do you think that Jonah is so angry about their salvation (verses 1-3)?

Read Matthew 5:43-47.

How do Jesus' words speak into Jonah's struggle?

How does God respond to Jonah’s anger (verse 4-6)?

Throughout the book, we've seen that God has power over storms, the great fish, the great city of Nineveh, and now a plant and a worm. What is God trying to teach Jonah through each of these things?

In verse 6, we hear that Jonah isn't angry, but pleased. Why do you think that Jonah is so pleased with this plant?

But soon enough, Jonah is angry again. Why is Jonah angry in verses 8-9?

In verse 10, God shows that the plant was meant to be an illustration of his grace towards Nineveh. What was God trying to teach Jonah about Nineveh through this plant?

Jonah sums up God's character in verse 2. Looking at these characteristics of God, how many of these does Jonah display in this chapter?

Read Luke 15:1-2, 11-32.

How do verses 1-2 help to give us context, to help us understand Jesus' intention for the parable?

Can you see any similarities between this parable and the book of Jonah?

The book of Jonah and the parable of the two sons both finish on an open ending, with a similar point: Will you accept the invitation to be a part of God's family, even if you have to sit next to forgiven sinners?

Who are the people you struggle to accept could ever become a part of God's family?

How can you be graciously praying for those people?

Read Romans 5:6-8.

How do these realities help us to have grace towards those we struggle to love, or accept as a part of God's family?

THE TRIUMPH OF GRACE

Jonah 5 / Luke 19

STUDY QUESTIONS

Thinking back to what we read last week, the book ends on a dramatic and unresolved note.

Read Jonah 4:9-11.

What do you think would happen next? If you had to fill in the first line of Jonah chapter 5, what would you write?

Jonah Responds to the Lord

5 Jonah responded to the Lord, "_____"

Jonah is one of the prophets of the Bible, and yet, even by the end of his book, he's very angry with the grace of God. Why do you think there's no resolution to the book?

Read Luke 19:28-38.

How is Jesus' attitude different to that of Jonah?

Read Zechariah 8:3 and 9:9. What is Jesus claiming in his selection of transport for the journey up the hill to Jerusalem?

Read Luke 19:39. How do the Pharisees show the same heart as Jonah here?

Read Luke 19:40. How is this an answer to the Pharisees (and also to Jonah)?

Read Luke 19:41-44.

The long journey to Jerusalem is drawing to a close. What brings Jesus to tears as he looks to Jerusalem?

How do Jonah and Jesus respond to looking upon a city full of lost people?

Jonah	**Jesus**

How should this speak to us, and how we feel about the lost?

If Jonah had accepted and delighted in God's grace, and his heart had been changed to look just like Jesus', how do you think chapter 5 might have started?

Jonah Responds to the Lord

5 Jonah responded to the Lord, "_____"

What's something that struck you from your study of the book of Jonah, that you want to remember and keep thinking about in the weeks and months ahead?

As we finish in the book of Jonah, one of the main takeaways is to become a part of God's work in the world, to save and show mercy to all kinds of people, from all kinds of backgrounds. Who are three people (or people groups, or countries) who you can be intentionally praying for now, and in the weeks and months ahead?

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