

Day 1

August 31



Pray | *Give God thanks for never losing focus on you, even when you lose focus on him*

Sometime God uses “severe mercy” to remind us of the greatness of his love.

The story of Jonah is a wake-up call to the people of Israel—God’s chosen people—and for those of us who call Jesus Lord. We see, in the life of Jonah, thoughts and behaviors that show up throughout the history of Israel and in our lives as well. The story of Jonah begins with a clear call to action from God, but Jonah decides he can’t or doesn’t want to obey and chooses to run in the opposite direction thinking he can escape from God. Ridiculous, right? WAKE-UP call! How often do we hear the nudge of God on our hearts to reach out to a neighbor, to step up and serve, to give that money away, and we chose to ignore or do the opposite? This story is for us! Fortunately for Jonah, and us, this story is really about the character and love of God. Like a loving parent dealing with a disobedient child, God patiently and wisely steers Jonah and us back to him. At times, God’s loving “steers” may seem severe (swallowed by a fish!), but as the story of Jonah reveals, they are always in our best interest. Praise God that we serve a God who loves us enough to occasionally use “severe mercy” to save us from ourselves.



Read | [1 Samuel 8:4-9](#), [Jonah 1:1-3](#), [Jonah 1:17-2:1-4](#)



Reflect | *Spend some time reflecting on one or more of the following:*

Jonah tried to run away from God, and in the end, God brought him back by showing him exactly what it looks like to be separated from God. We see Jonah’s recognition of this in Jonah 2:4a, “*I said, I have been banished from your sight*”. Take a few moments to reflect on your life. How has God given you a taste of what you “asked for” and shown you how bitter that ask can truly be? Praise God that he did that—that you can recognize it! Be ready to tell your Jonah story to others who may be struggling and need to hear that story from you.

If you have not yet made Jesus your Lord, God may be using the story of Jonah to call you to do that today. Don’t run away! Go to God in prayer now. Share your desires, fears, and concerns, and let his great love and mercy lift the burden of them from your shoulders.



Pray | *Pray for the World*

Pray for our Ministry Partners in Cuba: God is working in the church in Cuba, but there are still needs for training, education, resources, and facilities. So please pray for the Global Fingerprints site development. This Child Sponsorship program of Reach Global is an engine for church planting and for partnership development in addition to showing the love of Christ to the most vulnerable. This program is just getting started in Cuba, but sites in several cities need to be developed.

Day 2

September 1



Pray | *Ask God to reveal areas where sin is separating you from him*

Our only true hope for resisting the temptations of sin is living in God's presence.

Other than the intro and closing sentences of Jonah 2, the entire chapter is a poetic prayer "written" by Jonah in the belly of the great fish. The prayer begins with a powerful description of the distress and hopelessness that comes from being separated from God. Jonah paints a word picture of the downward descent he experienced from a life above, in the light, to a life below, in the darkness. We can see that his descent was physical, emotional, and spiritual, and he had nearly given up hope for living. Lord willing, none of us will ever find ourselves in the belly of a great fish, but there are times in our lives when we experience the hopelessness and descent that Jonah describes. The sin in our lives separates us from God. There are times when we don't even realize it, and there are times when it just seems impossible to stop the descent. Praise God for the hope that we see in Jonah 2:2, "*In my distress I called to the Lord, and he answered me.*"



Read | [Jonah 2:1-7](#), [Isaiah 59:2](#), [Romans 6:20-23](#)



Reflect | *Spend some time reflecting on one or more of the following:*

Recall a time in your life when you experienced the hopelessness and distress described in Jonah 2:3. Reflect on how God sustained you and brought you back into the light. Perhaps it was through your small group, or pastor, or family, or other close friends. Give God the glory for bringing you back, and then commit to being ready to tell your rescue story—it may be just what your neighbor needs to hear.

If you are currently in a state of hopelessness and distress, don't go through it alone. God and his church stand ready to support you and help you back into the light. Call out to God in prayer as Jonah did—if you don't know what to say, just pray the words of Jonah 2:2-9. Also, Five Oaks church would love to come alongside you and help you on this journey. Send a note to office@fiveoakschurch.org or call 651-459-7485.

Romans 6:20-23 describes our human nature without Jesus as "slavery to sin" and our nature with Jesus as "slavery to God". Re-read these verses. What words are used to describe slavery to sin? What words are used to describe slavery to God? Spend a few minutes reflecting on your life. Ask God to reveal where you are still a slave to sin and ask for his strength to turn away from that sin and toward him.

Day 3

September 2



Pray | *Confess the sin in your life and ask for help to turn from that sin*

Real change and hope for eternity begins with confession of sin and repentance

Jonah 2 seems to contain the words of a man with a changed heart and renewed commitment to obey God, but is that right? Jonah has just survived a traumatic experience; he should be dead, but he's not. Is it possible these are simply words of gratitude from a man who is grateful to be alive? Is it possible his heart was not changed by this experience? How can we know? The state of Jonah's heart is revealed in his words and his behavior. In the next two weeks, we'll be looking at his behavior; so, today let's look at his words. What's missing in Jonah's prayer? Confession and repentance. Not once does Jonah admit that he disobeyed God and made a mistake trying to run away. This is a sign that Jonah is still pridefully holding onto the idea that he knows better than God. This is another WAKE-UP call for us. When we call out to God and he responds, it's important to be filled with gratitude, but it's not enough. God wants our hearts more than our gratitude. Confession and turning from sin are the heart changes that God desires most.



Read | [Jonah 2:1-9](#), [Proverbs 28:13](#), [Ezekiel 18:21-23](#)



Reflect | *Spend some time reflecting on one or more of the following:*

Reconsider the words of Proverbs 28:13, "*Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper, but the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy.*" How have you seen this truth show up in your life or the life of the people you know? How important are your definitions of "prosper" and "mercy" as you consider your answer?

Isn't it amazing how easy it is to be grateful to God for his mercy, but how hard it is to actually confess our sin, turn from that sin, and make real change in our lives? Why do you think it's so hard? What is one area in your life where you struggle to make such a change? If God is moving in your heart to make a change, go to him in prayer right now and ask for the strength that can only come from him to make that change.

Like the book of Jonah, Ezekiel 18:21-23 contains a powerful passage that reveals the heart of our God for all people. We live in a society with so many divisions, and it's easy to let those divisions separate us from people, have disdain for people, and even hate people. As followers of Jesus Christ, we are reminded that there is no room for any of that in our lives. Is there a group of people you struggle to love and to have compassion and empathy for? What concrete step can you take today to see that group of people as Jesus sees them?

Day 4
September 3



Pray | *Ask God to reveal the things you value more than him—your idols*

Jesus Christ is the ONLY source of real and lasting hope.

Try to put yourself in the mind of Jonah. Despite his great disobedience (but thanks to God's great mercy), he is alive and in the belly of a great fish. In gratitude for that mercy, he is recalling his descent away from God and God's saving work in the form of a poem and a prayer. Then, in Jonah 2:8 we get a surprise, "*Those who cling to worthless idols turn away from God's love for them.*" The words appear as a thought that just popped into his mind—a recollection of the reality of the world he came from. Of the sailors that tossed him overboard, the people of Israel, and the world, so many have forgotten about the true God of the universe and are chasing after worthless idols. From the belly of the great fish, Jonah sends us another WAKE-UP call—great loss and hopelessness is the result of prioritizing anything above the one and only true God.



Read | [Jonah 2:8, Psalms 115:1-8](#)



Reflect | *Spend some time reflecting on one or more of the following:*

Jonah 2:8 in the ESV reveals the implications of worshiping false gods in a different (perhaps more personal) way. "*Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love.*" Wow—who would ever make a choice to walk away from an unshakable ever-present love? Spend some time reflecting on the priorities of your life in light of that thought.

Psalm 115:8 contains a harsh warning for those who deny that the God of the universe is worthy to be the only focus of our lives and promote other things for our worship. "*Those who make them will be **like** them, and so will all those who trust them.*" Looking back at the words of Psalm 115:4-7, we see idols described by characteristics such as: cannot speak, cannot see, cannot hear, cannot smell, cannot walk, cannot feel. No one wants to be **like** that, right? What idol to you struggle to keep from replacing God in your life? In what ways have you become **like** that idol? Go to God in prayer, confessing your struggle with this idol and asking God to truly help you keep it in proper perspective.

Day 5
September 4



Pray | *Praise God for the assurance that he is in control*

The dark times in life will only last as long as needed for God's will to be done.

Jonah was in the belly of the big fish for three days and nights. Jesus was in the grave for three days and nights. Why three days and nights? We cannot know the answer to that question, but we can take away great hope from these stories and the fact that it was just three days and nights. First, we can be assured that, even when things appear to be at their worst, God is in control and his purposes will be accomplished. Second, we can be assured that, when our hearts are aligned with God's, the low points in our lives will not last forever. There will be a start and there will be an end; at the end, God's purposes will have been accomplished. This is the confidence that can fill our lives when we make Jesus our Lord, but we all struggle to make that real each day. Praise God for giving us his word and his Spirit to help us overcome that struggle and to live in the confidence of being his child.



Read | [Jonah 1:17-2:10, Matthew 12:38-40](#)



Reflect | *Spend some time reflecting on one or more of the following:*

If you are going through difficult times right now, it can be challenging to always be assured that God is in control and know that these times will pass. You are not alone. The book of Psalms is full of pleas for assurance in times of trouble. Today, use Psalm 40 as your prayer of assurance and confidence in God alone.

The story of Jonah reminds us that those who put their trust in God, and have made Jesus their Lord, have a hope and confidence that is greater than anything the world can offer. If you are a follower of Jesus, you are called to reveal that hope to everyone you encounter. Think of all the people you interact with each day. Commit yourself to making one real change this week that will make someone in your life more aware that your hope comes from being a child of God.

If you have not yet put your ultimate trust in the God and Creator of the universe, perhaps the WAKE-UP calls from the story of Jonah have stirred your heart and mind to make a change. Please take action today—share your heart and thoughts with God. He loves you and offers the free gift of salvation to everyone who is willing to make his glory and purposes their top priority.

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