

JONAH

THE CALL OF COMPASSION



A Devotional Bible Study
on the Book of Jonah

by Sue LeBoutillier

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~ The Call of Compassion ~ Jonah

Dear Friends,

Who doesn't know the story of Jonah? Even those who haven't read the Bible have some familiarity with the *great whale*, who gobbled up poor Jonah and spat him out on the shore. Many people would put this story in the same category as **Paul Bunyan** or **Johnny Appleseed**. But is it a tall tale? Why is it in our Old Testament lineup of prophetic books? After all, it might seem more like a bedtime story than a legitimate book of the Bible.

Well, we're in for a treat, and we'll actually learn a lot about God through this book of the Bible. The main point isn't the *fish, Jonah*, or even the city of *Nineveh*, the main point is *God's mercy* available to all people on earth. THAT is why it's one of the 66 books of the Bible.

We will let the words of another prophet give a proper summary of this book for us:

*Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth;
For I am God, and there is no other —Isaiah 45:22*

I hope you will enjoy this study and grow in the mercy of God!

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Jonah Chapter 1

Welcome to our first week of independent study. I've called this a *Devotional Bible Study* because we not only want to learn what the book of Jonah is all about in the context of the whole Bible, but we also want to learn what it means for us in the context of our life.

I want to encourage you to grab a journal or notebook, so that you can write out the whole book by hand. That sounds intense, until I remind you that we'll only write a few verses each day *and* there are only 48 verses in total. Still, you have permission to feel *accomplished* when you are finished. (I'll suggest markings for select words in your journal, so you may want to double-space your text.)

There are four days of study prepared for each chapter. Each day, pause and pray before you read the Scripture. Ask God to teach you, through His Word and His Holy Spirit. Then, as you write the passage, listen to what the Lord might be saying to you through the Scripture. I find that writing with my hand opens a special place in my mind for listening.


Like we said, the book of Jonah is about God and His mission of mercy to the world. Along the way we'll also learn a lot about our own responses to God's call, as we journey with Jonah.

Be blessed, friend!

Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth;
For I am God and there is no other
— Isaiah 45:22

Day 3:

 READ & WRITE **Jonah 4:9-11**. In your journal...

- Draw a box around the word *angry*
- Mark the word *pity* with a tear drop 

Socratic Questioning is a method of asking questions to get students to reason for themselves and return with thoughtful answers. God does a lot of this as we wrap up this book.

- What question did God ask Jonah twice (**v.4, v.9**)?
- The first time, Jonah was *angry* and wanted to *die* because...
- The second time, Jonah was *angry* and wanted to *die* because...

Perhaps God's questioning was already helping Jonah to see his weak character. Still, God didn't leave anything to chance. He made it crystal clear, by pointing out Jonah's *pity* for the plant that perished, and lack of *pity* for the people who did not perish. God gently showed him the reality of his heart...and, then, that was the end! God had the last word.

I think there was a time when that really bothered me...not knowing the *end of the story*. Did Jonah return to Israel? What did he tell people? Were they just as angry that the Assyrians were spared?

But now, an unresolved story brings me comfort. I like the idea of God having the final word. I like that we don't know how Jonah turned out. I guess I just like more mystery in life than I used to, because there are many more unresolved corners in my own life.

I would invite you to join me often by echoing the words of Abraham: *"Will not the judge of all the earth do right?"*

Day 2:

🔗 READ & WRITE **Jonah 4:5-8**. In your journal...

- Draw a box around the words *exceedingly, glad, might die*
- Put (parenthesis) around the words *appointed*

We are fairly complex creatures — our emotions can be all over the map. In this chapter, we put a box around the words that showed us how Jonah responded emotionally to what was going on in his life.

- Choose a phrase from **v.2** that shows how God's character is quite the opposite from Jonah's:
- Which direction from Nineveh did Jonah sit?
- So, which direction was he facing in the hottest part of the day?
- What do you think he was waiting to see?
- In what way did God show mercy to Jonah, while he was watching over the city?

We see in this narrative how God used **His** own creation in **His** plan for Jonah. First He *appointed* the fish, then He *appointed* a plant.

- Name two more things that God *appointed* to alter Jonah's circumstances:
- How did Jonah's emotions rise and fall with his circumstances?
- How do your emotions rise and fall with your circumstances?

Day 1:

🔗 READ & WRITE **Jonah 1:1-3**. In your journal...

- Mark all the words *arise, rose* with an upward arrow ↑
- Mark all the words *down* with a downward arrow ↓
- Underline *presence of the Lord* and *up before me*

These first verses don't tell us what God's word-for-word message to Nineveh was. Let's peek ahead to **Jonah 3:4-5**:

- What was the message?
- What was the response of the people of Nineveh?

We're getting ahead of ourselves. It's clear that God's intention was to show mercy to pagan Gentiles, if they would *respond*. It's also clear that God offered Jonah a role to play in *His Call*, if he would *respond*.

- Write one sentence that summarizes Jonah's response in **v.1-3**:
- What do you think may have been some of the underlying reasons for Jonah's actions?

What about YOU? As God is extending His mercy in the world today, and as He invites you to participate, what people/situations might tempt you to pretend you didn't hear God's call, or to actually turn the other way?

Day 2:

✎ READ & WRITE **Jonah 1:4-8**. In your journal...

- Mark all the words *arise* with an upward arrow ↑
- Mark all the words *down* with a downward arrow ↓

From these verses, write a summary of:

- The difficulty that came upon the journey and why?
- The actions of the mariners during the storm and why?
- Jonah's activities during the ship's journey and why?
- The command of the captain and why?
- The sailor's method of determining the cause of the storm and why?

Everyone in this event had motives behind their actions — even God! READ **Psalm 107:23-32**. This Psalm is a study of God reaching out to people in all sorts of difficult situations.

- What did God allow to happen in this section of the Psalm?
- How did the people react to the difficulty?
- How did God respond to them?
- What was the outcome?

Consider sharing with your group a time when a difficulty arose in your life — how you cried out to the Lord, how He responded, and how it may have changed the course of your life.

Day 1:

✎ READ & WRITE **Jonah 4:1-4**. In your journal...

- Draw a box around the words *displeased, exceedingly, angry*

Why would someone become so negatively charged about God holding back His wrath? Let's consider some possible reasons:

- First, describe the reason that Jonah gave to God (**v.2**):
- Then, consider other reasons you think of (including reputation):
- As Jonah is praying to the Lord, what passage of Scripture does he seem to be referencing?
- Write out the three phrases in **v.2** that give color and definition to God's **mercy**:
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READ the account of God's judgment on Sodom in **Genesis 18:22-19:29**. In **18:25**, Abraham said to God, "***Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?***" Sodom's fate was completely opposite of Nineveh:

- Why do you think that was?
- Abraham was certain God was *just*, but was He still *merciful*?

Jonah Chapter 4

I think some of us would be much happier if there were only three chapters in Jonah, rather than four. I mean, the story ends so nice and tidy, right at the end of chapter three. It's a win-win for everyone!

Unfortunately, there is one final chapter and the camera focuses in tight on Jonah again. This chapter is all about man's response to God's mercy — and that is often a messy picture.

Why is it that even modern Christians, who understand God's grace, still stumble over the truth that God lavishes His mercy over people? —Even on people whom we don't think deserve mercy!

In **Exodus 33:19**, God told Moses:

*"I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious,
and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy."*

The Apostle Paul, missionary to the Gentiles, also quoted that in his letter to the Romans (**Romans 9:15**). WOW! That understanding sort of puts us in our place, and leaves us out of the decision-making process, doesn't it? We know the Bible says, "*God's ways are not our ways*" and, "*Who can know the mind of the Lord?*", but we sure do want to try sometimes!

Here is the truth: God is intent on His work of salvation, despite the stubbornness of His people!

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven
and do not return there but water the earth,
making it bring forth and sprout,
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,
so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;
it shall not return to me empty,
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,
and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.
— Isaiah 55:10-11 (ESV)

Day 3:

✞ READ & WRITE **Jonah 1:9-13**. In your journal...

- Underline the phrase *presence of the Lord*.

Can you imagine how frightened the sailors must have been? They lived in a superstitious world that believed every bad thing was caused by the displeasure of some god. The burden to figure out which god was having a bad day, and what to do about it, rested on their shoulders!

- What did Jonah tell the crew about himself in **v.9**?
- Why was it sadly ironic that he **said (v.9)** that he *feared the LORD, the God of heaven*; yet the men **knew (v.10)** that he was *fleeing from the presence of the Lord*?

When God's kids ignore God's calling and *fall asleep on the job*, other people are often affected.

- List who was affected by Jonah's disobedience in this chapter.
- How have you been affected by another's disobedience?
- Here's a harder question. How has *your* disobedience affected those around you?

READ **Galatians 6:1** and **James 5:16**. Explain how we should relate to people who are, or have been, *fleeing the presence of the Lord*:

- Why do you think the sailors might have been reluctant to follow Jonah's order (**v.12**)?

Jonah Chapter 2

Today's chapter is different than the other three. It's a song, a prayer, a poem. From the time that Jonah was swallowed by the great fish, until God spoke to the fish at the end of this chapter, the narration pauses, and the text turns to Jonah's inner turmoil and response.

When Scripture looks deep within a soul, we should take the opportunity for introspection as well. And we will...but first...the fish!

Chapter one ended with Jehovah *appointing* a GREAT FISH to swallow up Jonah. Could this be a thing? Isn't this the reason people want to file the whole book on the *fable* shelf?

Well, let's talk fish!

- 1) Remember, it's not our responsibility to *prove* Scripture by our reasoning skills. After all, is not salvation itself a miracle of grace?
- 2) Sea creatures *do* exist that seem to have the capacity to swallow an animal as large as a man whole, and there *are* stories throughout history that seem to prove that experience.
- 3) The life and mission of Jonah read the same, whether he was sustained alive for three days, or actually resurrected after three days in the fish's belly.

The point is, a person needs to make peace with the existence of miracles, in order to receive anything from the Biblical text!

- Did the Red Sea part, allowing Israel to walk on dry ground?
- Did God provide manna for His people for 40 years?
- Did Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead?
- Did God create the Heavens and the earth by His word?

This event with the fish is no greater or smaller than any of those. It was **miraculous mercy**, either way.

So, we see that learning from the Bible is closely tied to believing that God exists, that He is in control of all of His creation, and that He is constantly using creation to reach out to mankind.

Day 3:

📖 READ & WRITE **Jonah 3:6-9**. In your journal...

- Mark the word *arose* with an upward arrow ↑
 - Put a "C" over the phrase *call out*
 - Mark the words *turn* and *relent* with a U-turn sign ↩
- Once word had reached the king, how did he respond personally (v.6)?

What four things did he require of all the people through his proclamation (v.7-8)?

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- How might the withholding of food for the animals have created an ongoing reminder to the people to pray to God?
- What did the king hope might be the result of his people's unified actions (v.9)?
-
- What characteristic of God was he counting on for that outcome?

Day 2:

🔗 READ & WRITE **Jonah 3:4-5**. In your journal...

- Put a “C” over each word *call, called* in **v.1-5**,

The title of our Bible Study is **The Call of Compassion**. What do you think of when I say, *Compassion Ministry*? Maybe feeding starving children in a developing country? Pop-up dental clinics in areas with poor nutrition? Handing out toiletry packs for the homeless? We probably equate *compassion* with help — meeting physical needs.

- Look up the word *compassion* in a dictionary, and write a few of the definitions you find.
- What was the *Compassion Message* that God asked Jonah to speak in Nineveh? (Write the exact words)
- On the surface, that message seems more like judgment than compassion. Why do you think it’s legitimate that we call this a message of *compassion*?
- What effect did Jonah’s call have on the people (**v.5**)?
- What physical actions accompanied the Ninevites’ response (**v.5**)?
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Day 1:

🔗 READ & WRITE **Jonah 2:1-6**.

This week, we’re going to take a long look into Jonah’s spiritual condition while in *the belly of the fish*, and see what we can learn about emotional and spiritual prisons that we create within ourselves.

- Describe Jonah’s emotional condition in the opening of **Jonah 2**:
- Who did Jonah consider responsible for his current situation (**v.3**)?

It sounded like Jonah was placing blame, but then, God actually *did* play a role in Jonah’s downward spiral. Jonah set the pace when he consistently *went down* — away from the presence of the Lord — but God helped to propel him *further down* than he wanted to go — for a purpose.

In your journal, put [brackets] around phrases that describe God’s work of trouble or uncomfortableness in Jonah’s situation. Also mark the *down* with a down arrow ↓ and *brought up* with an up arrow ↑.

- Does this exercise shake up your theology a bit? Are you okay believing God would contribute to our distress for His purpose?
- Can you cite other Biblical examples, where God did something similar in someone’s life?

What about your life? Have you ever initiated the downward spiral from God’s presence and then realized God allowed you to stay on that path, until you recognized the emptiness and distress of going your own way? Explain.

Jonah Chapter 3

In chapter two, we hit the *pause button* on the **Call of Compassion** toward Nineveh, while God took care of business with one of His kids. Isn't that how our lives go sometimes? God holds all the spinning plates of the world, yet He somehow efficiently deals directly with ME! He is doing this for all of us at the same time! It's amazing!

Now, as we hit the *resume button* in chapter three, it sounds shockingly similar to where we started at the beginning of this book. It's as if Jonah's slate is wiped clean and he gets a complete *do-over*!

Whenever I see that in Scripture, I claim it for myself. I tell the Lord, "*If you did it for Jonah, you can do that for me.*" And He has — God has graciously allowed me many second chances in my life. I wonder if God has done that for you, too.

By nature, a second chance means that we have personally run headlong into God's mercy. In many ways, I believe we become even better equipped after a *run-in* with God's mercy.

As we begin this chapter, let's remember an important point about this book — it's not about Jonah — it's about God and His *Call for Compassion* to reach people with His mercy before the day of judgment.

**“Come, let us return to the LORD;
for he has torn us, that he may heal us;
he has struck us down, and he will bind us up.
After two days he will revive us;
on the third day he will raise us up,
that we may live before him.
Let us press on to know the LORD;
his going out is sure as the dawn;
he will come to us as the showers,
as the spring rains that water the earth.”**
— Hosea 6:1-3 (ESV)

Day 3:

Well, that was *Jonah's season* of being *cast down*. Do Christians go through similar seasons? If the plethora of Psalms written specifically from a *downcast* heart is any indication, I'd say — *Yes!* Christians can also enter into spiritual and emotional despair.

Today, we're going to use a couple of Psalms to inform our mind and heart about how to handle distress and the depression that follows.

READ **Psalm 43:5** —

- What things in *your* life contribute to you becoming emotionally *downcast*?
- Explain how the Psalmist speaks to himself. How does he instruct his soul? How is this similar to Jonah's prayer?

Read **Psalm 66:16-20**:

- What does that the Psalmist want to explain to everyone who hears him?
- His desire was that God would hear his call and answer him, but what does he say might have lead to that not happening?

Has this Bible Study, by chance, caught you turning from the *presence of the Lord* in some way? Have you created a downward progression in your life, leading to depression and distress? Based on Jonah's prayer and these Psalms, what will be your plan of action?

