

# The Gospel Project® for Adults

## Daily Discipleship Guide ESV, Unit 14, Session 1

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### A Rebellious People Receive Mercy

Session in a Sentence: God’s love and mercy extend to all people and are expressed through His sending of messengers to proclaim forgiveness and life through Him.

Background Passage: Jonah

Perhaps you have heard the story about a man being swallowed up by a big fish and living to tell the tale. Immediately this conjures up thoughts of fables and campfire stories. So, what are we to make of this story? Is the Book of Jonah just a fairy tale with a good moral, or is it more? Can we really believe in extraordinary stories like this?

Well, do we believe in miracles? Because the most miraculous part of Jonah’s story isn’t the fact that a large fish swallowed him and he somehow lived. The part that should overwhelm us with awe, wonder, and shock is where a great and holy God, the Creator of the heavens and the earth, has mercy on sinners. Jonah, the sailors, and the Ninevites—these were people God pursued, and God is intent on working in the hearts of rebels just like them and turning them into worshipers.

Why should God’s mercy on sinners qualify as a miracle?

### Group Time

#### Point 1: God pursues a rebellious people and prophet (Jonah 1:1-4,17).

**1** Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, **2** “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.” **3** But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the LORD.

**4** But the LORD hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship threatened to break up.

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**17** And the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

When the word of God came to Jonah to preach a message to Nineveh, he ran. This command of God came to his ears and his heart’s response was rebellion. What this revealed about Jonah was that he, like every Ninevite, was a sinner. His status as an Israelite, his calling as a prophet, his previous acts of obedience—none of these things made it easy for him to obey this command. He would rather leave his home and sail for the ends of the earth than obey God in this.

What are some reasons God’s commands may cause us to run and hide from His presence?

Jonah had faithfully served God as a prophet in Israel (2 Kings 14:25). But suddenly, God’s message came and Jonah’s immediate response was to run from God’s presence, and not for the reason we might think. Jonah feared going to Nineveh, but it wasn’t for his own life or the possibility that no one would repent in response to his preaching. His fear was tied to believing that God could actually spare such evil people (Jonah 4:1-2).

What must be true about God to pursue those who rebel against Him for reconciliation and obedience?

## **Point 2: God extends mercy to a rebellious people and prophet (Jonah 2:10–3:5,10).**

**2:10 And the LORD spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land.**

**3:1 Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, 2 “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you.” 3 So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days’ journey in breadth. 4 Jonah began to go into the city, going a day’s journey. And he called out, “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” 5 And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them.**

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**10 When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it.**

God’s forgiveness and mercy do not diminish His call to obedience. When God once again spoke to Jonah, after responding in mercy to his prayer, His command was the same: Get up, go to Nineveh, and preach. In God’s mercy, He doesn’t lower the standard for our obedience. He doesn’t lower the bar, thinking, “Oh, maybe what I’m asking is too much.” God’s mercy won’t allow His children to miss out on the joy of fully obeying His Word.

Why might obedience to God often feel like an option or a chore rather than a joy?

The sermon delivered by Jonah was short, only five words in Hebrew. Yet at this simple message, this entire city of Nineveh repented. Even the king stepped down from his throne, removed his robe, and repented (3:6-9). While the words were few, two critical components were clear: **1) judgment was coming** and **2) there was time to repent**. God hates sin and seeks to destroy it, and at the same time, He loves sinners and seeks to reconcile them to Himself. He is slow to anger and quick to forgive; He is merciful.

**God Is Merciful:** Mercy refers to God’s \_\_\_\_\_ and is often expressed in God withholding something, such as punishment for sin. Both mercy and grace are \_\_\_\_\_.

## **Point 3: God reveals His patient love for a rebellious people and prophet (Jonah 4:1,8-11).**

**1 But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry.**

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**8 When the sun rose, God appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint. And he asked that he might die and said, “It is better for me to die than to live.” 9 But God said to Jonah, “Do you do well to be angry for the plant?” And he said, “Yes, I do well to be angry, angry enough to die.” 10 And the LORD said, “You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night. 11 And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?”**

When God saw Nineveh’s repentance, He relented from His anger; when Jonah saw this same result, he was greatly displeased and furious. We were created for God’s glory, and our hearts were designed to align with His heart. When our hearts are out of sync with His, when we don’t love what God loves and hate what He hates, we often become angry, bitter, or depressed. But rather than becoming greatly displeased and furious at Jonah’s response, God instead continued His patient work of pursuing Jonah’s heart.

The astonishing thing throughout the Book of Jonah is that *all of creation, except Jonah, was fully submitting to God’s word*. All of creation was available to God as He loved, disciplined, and pursued the heart of Jonah. This is no less true today. God uses all necessary means to bring people to the foot of the cross and align our hearts with His heart. He continues to work

sovereignly and lovingly as He carries out His perfect plan of sanctifying and glorifying a people for Himself.

How should Christians view the opportunities they have to share the gospel with unbelievers and encourage believers in the faith?

### **Voices from the Church**

“God’s too big for us to control. You can’t pick and choose which of God’s attributes you want to see displayed and when and where you want to experience them.”<sup>1</sup>

–Priscilla Shirer

## **My Mission**

Because we were enemies who received God’s grace and mercy, we break down walls and put to death our prejudices as we share the news that forgiveness is available through repentance and faith in Christ.

- **How will you respond to God’s work in your life to align your heart and priorities with God’s?**
- **In what ways can your group reflect God’s mercy for sinners in your community?**
- **To whom will you go in mercy, joy, and obedience to share the good news of Jesus, the better Jonah?**

### **Voices from Church History**

“Let us sow in tears, so that we may reap in joy ... Let us amend our wickedness, lest we be consumed with it.”<sup>2</sup>

–Gregory of Nazianzus (c. 329-390)