

A Heart for the Nations: The God-Fugitive

Jonah 1-2

The Week of October 1, 2017

THIS WEEK'S CORE PRACTICE

God Space: Disciples that have received the good news of Jesus Christ should actively pursue opportunities to share it with others. C. S. Lewis (1898-1963) was a Fellow at Magdalen College, Oxford and was also the greatest Christian thinker of the 20th century. The following is an excerpt from his classic apologetic work, *Mere Christianity*:

It is easy to think that the Church has a lot of different objects – education, building, missions, holding services. Just as it is easy to think the State has a lot of different objects – military, political, economic, and what not.

But in a way things are much simpler than that. The State exists simply to promote and to protect ordinary happiness of human beings in this life. A husband and wife chatting over a fire, a couple of friends having a game of darts in a pub, a man reading a book in his own room or digging in his own garden – that is what the state is there for. And unless they are helping to increase and prolong and protect such moments, all the laws, parliaments, armies, courts, police, economics, etc., are simply a waste of time.

In the same way the Church exists for nothing else but to draw men into Christ, to make them little Christs. If they are not doing that, all cathedrals, clergy, missions, sermons, even the Bible itself, are simply a waste of time. God became man for no other purpose. It is even doubtful, you know, whether the whole universe was created for any other purpose. It says in the Bible that the whole universe was made for Christ and that everything is to be gathered to Christ.

It is our hope for each Growth Group at Loudonville Community Church this year is a place where God Space is created, where men and women are drawn to Jesus Christ, and where they become “little Christs!”

This Week's Complementary Passage

Ephesians 2:12-14 (ESV)

¹² Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility.

This Week's Text for Study – Jonah 1-2 (ESV)

STEP ONE ...

READING what the passage says
(*Read it at least three times*)

Jonah 1-2 (ESV)

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. ⁵ Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried out to his god. And they hurled the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them. But Jonah had gone down into the inner part of the ship and had lain down and was fast asleep. ⁶ So the captain came and said to him, “What do you mean, you sleeper? Arise, call out to your god! Perhaps the god will give a thought to us, that we may not perish.”

⁷ And they said to one another, “Come, let us cast lots, that we may know on whose account this evil has come upon

us.” So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. ⁸ Then they said to him, “Tell us on whose account this evil has come upon us. What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?” ⁹ And he said to them, “I am a Hebrew, and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.” ¹⁰ Then the men were exceedingly afraid and said to him, “What is this that you have done!” For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the Lord, because he had told them.

¹¹ Then they said to him, “What shall we do to you, that the sea may quiet down for us?” For the sea grew more and more tempestuous. ¹² He said to them, “Pick me up and hurl me into the sea; then the sea will quiet down for you, for I know it is because of me that this great tempest has come upon you.” ¹³ Nevertheless, the men rowed hard to get back to dry land, but they could not, for the sea grew more and more tempestuous against them. ¹⁴ Therefore they called out to the Lord, “O Lord, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not on us innocent blood, for you, O Lord, have done as it pleased you.” ¹⁵ So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. ¹⁶ Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows.

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.

¹ Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish, ² saying,

“I called out to the Lord, out of my distress,
and he answered me;

out of the belly of Sheol I cried,
and you heard my voice.

³ For you cast me into the deep,
into the heart of the seas,
and the flood surrounded me;
all your waves and your billows
passed over me.

⁴ Then I said, ‘I am driven away
from your sight;
yet I shall again look
upon your holy temple.’

⁵ The waters closed in over me to take my life;
the deep surrounded me;
weeds were wrapped about my head

⁶ at the roots of the mountains.

I went down to the land
whose bars closed upon me forever;
yet you brought up my life from the pit,
O Lord my God.

⁷ When my life was fainting away,
I remembered the Lord,
and my prayer came to you,
into your holy temple.

⁸ Those who pay regard to vain idols
forsake their hope of steadfast love.

⁹ But I with the voice of thanksgiving
will sacrifice to you;
what I have vowed I will pay.

Salvation belongs to the Lord!”

¹⁰ And the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land.

STEP TWO - OBSERVING how the passage moves

Return to the passage and **Mark key words, phrases and movements:**

- Circle all of the words in these passages that speak of the Triune God (Father, Son, Holy Spirit, etc.).
- Underline the significant verbs/action words in these passages.
- In Jonah 1:1, underline the phrase: “the word of the Lord.”
- In Jonah 1:2, underline the phrase: “Arise, go to Nineveh.”
- In Jonah 1:3, underline the phrase: “But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish.”
- In Jonah 1:3 (2X) and 1:10, underline the phrase: “the presence of the Lord.”
- Highlight Jonah 1:9.

- Highlight Jonah 1:14-16.
- Highlight Jonah 2:2.
- Highlight Jonah 2:6b-9.

STEP THREE - Ask the five “W” questions and the one “H” question:

1. **Who** is speaking? Who is this about? Who are the main characters? And, to **whom** is it speaking?
2. **What** is the subject of the passage? What does the passage say about the subject?
3. **When** do or will the events occur? When did something happen to a particular person, people, or nation?
4. **Where** did or will this happen?
5. **Why** is something said or mentioned? Why would or will this happen? Why at this time? Why this person?
6. **How** will it happen? How is it to be done? How is it illustrated?

STEP FOUR ...

UNDERSTANDING what the passage means

This commentary is intended to enhance your own study of the text.

Jonah 1-2 (ESV)

1:1 - 2:10 - The book of the prophet Jonah falls into two main divisions, each introduced by the sentence, “Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah.” The first division comprises two sections: the call, flight, and judgment of Jonah (Ch. 1), and the thanksgiving psalm (Ch. 2).

Jonah 1 - This passage depicts Jonah’s disobedient response to the commission as a prophet to go to Nineveh, but does not tell us Jonah’s reason for fleeing from God (which is not revealed until 4:2). Here we witness Jonah’s interaction with the Gentile sailors, which involves a theme prominent in the book’s second division—the Lord’s mercy to Gentiles. Despite Jonah’s disobedience and hypocrisy, the sailors do not despise Jonah’s God, but see the clear hand of the God of Israel and respond in worship. In contrast with Jonah, the Gentile sailors are careful to avoid personal sin before God (v. 14). The prophet of God is judged, but the Gentiles are spared, an event that foreshadows the response and sparing of the Ninevites in the book’s second division.

1:1 - “**Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah.**” With some variations, wording like this is used some 112 times in the Old Testament to describe the giving of a divine message to a prophet.

“**Jonah the son of Amittai.**” The recipient of the Lord’s revelation is Jonah (“dove”), the son of Amittai (“loyal” or “faithful”). This designation identifies the prophet as the historical character of 2 Kin. 14:25, who proclaimed that Jeroboam II (793-753 B.C.) would recover territory from the Syrians to the north. Contrast Jonah’s message to Jeroboam’s kingdom with the words of Amos and Hosea, who prophesied during the period of Israel’s spiritual decline in the latter part of the same century.

1:2 - “**Go to Nineveh.**” The Lord’s sovereignty over all the nations is implicit in the command to Jonah. He is the Judge of all the earth (Gen. 18:25). The last capital of the Assyrian Empire, Nineveh was located on the east side of the Tigris River directly opposite the modern city of Mosul in northern Iraq. The site has been extensively excavated and boasts a long and rich history.

“Call out against it.” Jonah understood that his pronouncement of the Lord’s judgment on the feared and hated Assyrian Empire was reversible. He knew that his message offered the opportunity for repentance.

“Their evil has come up before me.” In the later prophecy of Nahum (seventh century B.C.), the Assyrian capital of Nineveh is the focus of divine wrath and is depicted as the embodiment of evil and cruelty (Nah. 3:1-7). The Assyrian war machine was guilty of horrendous atrocities; in 612 B.C. that empire would itself fall victim to a cruel destroyer.

1:3 - “Tarshish.” Precise identification of this Tarshish is difficult, though it is often identified with the mining port of Tartessus in southern Spain. Sometimes, however, the term designates distant Mediterranean coastlands in general. **“From the presence of the Lord.”** Because God is present even “in the uttermost parts of the sea” (Ps. 139:9), escape was impossible.

1:4 - “The Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea.” Jonah’s God is the Creator and Lord of the sea (Gen. 1:10, 21; Ex. 14:21; Mark 4:41).

1:7 - “Let us cast lots.” The casting of lots was a common form of divination in the ancient world, a device used to discover the will of the gods. This method of discerning the will of the true God was not forbidden in ancient Israel, for the Lord ruled even over lots (Num. 26:55; Josh. 18:6-10; Neh. 10:34; Prov. 16:33; Acts 1:24-26).

1:9 - “I am a Hebrew.” Jonah identifies himself in ethnic terms. The term “Hebrew” was used by Israelites to identify themselves to foreigners (Gen. 40:15; Ex. 1:19; 3:18; 10:3).

“I fear the Lord.” Jonah also identifies himself in religious terms. The Lord his God is not just a personal, family, or national deity. He is the supreme and sovereign God, the Creator of land and sea.

“The God of heaven.” An old title (Gen. 24:3, 7) also commonly used in the Persian period after the Exile (2 Chr. 36:23; Ezra 1:2; Neh. 1:4, 5; 2:4).

1:17 - “The Lord appointed.” The same Hebrew word also occurs in 4:6-8; each instance indicates a startling example of God’s sovereignty over the natural world.

“A great fish.” The species of whale or fish that swallowed Jonah cannot be identified with certainty. Suggestions have included the sperm whale or a large shark. The fish was God’s instrument to rescue Jonah from the depths of the sea (“the belly of Sheol,” 2:2).

“Three days and three nights.” Jesus referred to the Book of Jonah in order to communicate truths regarding His own message and mission (Matt. 12:38-41; 16:4; Luke 11:29-32). He speaks of the “sign of the prophet Jonah” not only with reference to the three days and three nights that Jonah was in the fish (Matt. 12:39, 40), but also with regard to the efficacy of Jonah’s preaching. Without benefit of a miraculous sign, the Ninevites recognized Jonah’s message as one with divine authority, and they responded in repentance.

Jonah 2 - Jonah’s response to God’s judgment is framed in the form of a thanksgiving psalm (v. 9). The cry of the prophet focuses on the desperate character of his situation by using terms typical in poetic descriptions of death or nearness to death. In his plight he looks to the Lord’s holy temple, the physical token of the Lord’s saving presence with His people. The psalm is a moving testimony to the heart of Israel’s faith and to the heart of the prophet, but he still had much to learn. His vision of God’s mercy was still narrow.

2:1 - “Jonah prayed.” Consistent with Old Testament narrative style, the Jonah story is interrupted with a poem (vv. 2-9), a psalm of thanksgiving and celebration for the Lord’s deliverance and mercy. The literary structure is typical of a thanksgiving psalm: (a) petition for deliverance (2:2); (b) review of crisis (2:3-6); (c) review of deliverance (2:6, 7); and (d) praise for deliverance (2:8, 9).

2:2 - “I called out. . . and he answered me.” Using the poetic device of parallelism, Jonah’s psalm is introduced in two couplets that tell of the prophet’s prayer and the Lord’s answer. Jonah acknowledges that he was rescued “out of the belly of Sheol” (a watery grave in the depths of the sea).

2:3-6 - These verses contain a vivid recollection of the near-death crisis, its causes, and results. Jonah’s plight was the Lord’s judgment on his disobedience. The brush with a watery grave is presented with graphic imagery: entanglement in seaweed, the silence of deep water, and waves swelling high above the victim.

2:4 - “I am driven away from your sight.” For the prophet, the ultimate horror of death was separation from the presence of the Lord (Ps. 88:4, 5, 10-12).

“Yet I shall again look upon your holy temple.” The Jerusalem temple was the earthly location of the divine presence. Jonah longed for the communion with God that the temple afforded. The prophet now laments losing the same divine presence that he earlier had sought to escape (1:3, 10).

2:6 - “I went down.” Jonah was at death’s door. His slow, silent descent through the depths, like a journey to the underworld, had brought him to “the gates of death” (Ps. 9:13).

“You brought up my life from the pit.” Here “pit” is used to describe the realm of death (Job 33:22, 24; Ps. 49:9; Is. 51:14). Despite the hopelessness of the circumstances, the repentant prophet is rescued from the realm of the dead and restored to communion with God.

2:7 - “I remembered the Lord.” The context indicates that this prayer was answered; the importance and effectiveness of prayer are again emphasized, as in v. 2 (cf. Heb. 4:16).

2:8 - “Those who pay regard to vain idols.” Recalling the ineffectiveness of the sailors’ prayers and of their gods (1:5), Jonah condemns those who put their faith in idols.

2:9 - “Salvation belongs to the Lord.” Like Joshua before him (Josh. 24:14, 15), Jonah declares his loyalty to the Lord and extols Him as the only source of salvation and deliverance. In imparting salvation to Jonah, the Lord moved the prophet from disobedience to repentance; in imparting salvation to the Ninevites, He will move them from idolatry to faith (3:5–10); in imparting salvation to the Gentiles now He sovereignly moves them to faith and repentance (Acts 11:17, 18).

2:10 - “The Lord spoke. . . it vomited Jonah.” Again creation responds obediently to the sovereign commands of the Creator (1:4, 15, 17). The fish, which might have been God’s weapon of death, by grace became God’s tool of deliverance.

Resource for Commentary: *The Reformation Study Bible* found at www.biblegateway.com.

STEP FIVE ...

SUMMARIZING the message

A Heart for the Nations
The God-Fugitive
Jonah 1-2

The prophet Jonah represented the Lord in the northern kingdom of Israel during the reign of Jeroboam II, 793-753 B.C. The early years of Jonah’s ministry were met with considerable success. In fact, Jeroboam II expanded the borders of Israel, just as Jonah had prophesied (cf. 2 Kings 14). God expanded Jonah’s audience when He gave him an international assignment to go and preach against Nineveh, the great capital city of the Assyrian Empire. Nineveh was located about six hundred miles northeast of Israel, near the present-day city of Mosul, Iraq. Nineveh was a large urban center, requiring a three-day journey just to circumnavigate it. Other prophets were called to preach a word of judgment against the enemy nations of Israel while remaining in Israel, but Jonah’s call was unique. He was sent to a nation with a notorious reputation that neither bordered Israel nor posed an immediate, existential threat.

Jonah responded to the call of God, not by simply running in the opposite direction, he truly thought he could flee from the presence of the Lord (1:3, 10). He went down to the port city of Joppa, paid his fare, and boarded a ship for Tarshish, as far away as he thought he could get from the Lord’s presence. Once on board, he made peace with his disobedience and fell asleep. God, however, was not pleased. He hurled a raging storm that threatened to break the ship apart. While each mariner was calling out to his own god for deliverance, the captain of the ship frantically confronted Jonah, “What do you mean, you sleeper?” His ability to sleep in the middle of a mighty tempest revealed Jonah’s distorted perspective. He mistakenly thought that he was in control of his life. When the seamen cast lots to determine which passenger was culpable, Jonah had to embarrassingly confess that he was the sole liability (1:9). He was a fugitive from God. As a result, he lost all credibility as a witness for the Lord, let alone as a prophet. As the mariners struggled to reach land, even after Jonah admitted his guilt, they revealed a level of compassion that Jonah did not possess. In his unstable state, he assumed that the only remaining option was for the crew to toss him into the sea. Jonah became a self-appointed castaway. Instantly, the sea became calm and just as quickly, the men on board turned toward the Lord.

God then directed a giant fish to swallow Jonah. He was miraculously kept alive inside some kind of sea creature for several days. Inside the belly of the fish, perhaps a great-toothed-whale, Jonah repented. He realized that inside the fish, God was not only judging him, but also mercifully preserving him. Conscious that he should have been a dead man, he repented of his deliberate disobedience, self-righteousness, and gospel-negating nationalism. He admitted that his national pride had become a form of idolatry by which he justified his defiance of the Almighty (2:8). He praised God for His steadfast love and thanked the Lord for rescuing him. The Lord then promptly vomited him out on dry ground.

STEP SIX ...

EXPLORING the passage through discussion

1. Since this is the first gathering of your Growth Group this fall, take some time to get to know one another. Just in case you need some, here are a few prompts. Or, better yet, come up with a couple of your own!

- **What is the most memorable activity you did with your family as a child?**
- **Take a few minutes and find the following items in your wallet or purse:**

Something that . . .

- You've had a long time.
- You're proud of.
- Reveals a lot about you.
- Reminds you of a fun time.
- Concerns or worries you.

. . . and share about it.

- **When, if ever, did God become more than a word to you, and how did it happen?**
2. Do you remember the first time you heard the story of Jonah? What do you remember about hearing this story as a child?
3. Frederick Buechner suggests that we tend to tell the stories of the Bible to children while refusing to “hear” them as adults. What about Jonah’s story is difficult for people to hear? What about it is difficult for you?
4. The first purpose the book of Jonah accomplished was to make clear God’s love the nations. Take a moment and remove the love of God from the abstract and set it into today’s world.
- What does it mean for God to love the nations?
 - What does that say about God’s love towards your non-Christian neighbors, co-workers, and our post-Christian community?
 - What does God’s love for the Ninevites say about God’s love toward the enemies of the United States?
5. The second purpose of the book of Jonah is to challenge us. When did you ever respond to the Great Commission (cf. Matthew 28:19-20) by fleeing to “Tarshish?”
6. What are the “Tarshish’s” in your own life; the places you flee to avoid obeying God’s command?
7. What is it in your life right now that God has called you to do—and trust Him with it—that you’re running away from?

STEP SEVEN ...

APPLYING the passage to my life

Our desire is not to be merely hearers of the Word but doers. James 1:22

When you apply God's Word, you are thinking about what God might be saying to you through the Scriptures. Application involves action. Application makes your reading become a reality in your own life. Make your applications specific (State who, what, & when). You are encouraged to use the **S.P.E.C.K.** method to apply God's Word to your life. Remember that each passage of Scripture may not lend itself to answering all five of these questions.

S – Sins to confess and avoid (Are there sinful actions, attitudes, or thoughts that you need to confess to God based upon your study of these Scriptures?)

P – Promises to claim (List God's promises for you from these Scriptures.)

E – Examples to follow (What examples, for right thinking or right actions, can you take for you own life from these Scriptures?)

C – Commands to obey (List God's commands for you from these Scriptures and seek to be obedient to them.)

K – Knowledge of God to apply (God's character is visible throughout the Scriptures as an example to us. What attributes and/or attitudes does God display that you can apply to your own life?)

This Week's Memory Verse:

"For I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster."

Jonah 4:2b

THE MISSION OF LOUDONVILLE COMMUNITY CHURCH

We are committed to reaching and teaching people to become devoted followers of Jesus Christ, connecting them to one another and sending them to serve their families, communities and world.

10 CORE BELIEFS OF A DISCIPLE

Authority of the Bible *2 Timothy 3:16-17*
We believe the Bible to be the inspired, the only infallible, authoritative Word of God.

The Godhead *2 Corinthians 13:14*
We believe that there is one God,
eternally existent in three persons:
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The Deity and Sinlessness of Christ *Colossians 2:9*
We believe in the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ,
in His virgin birth, in His sinless life.

The Sufficient Atonement of Christ *2 Corinthians 5:19-21*
We believe in His vicarious and atoning death through His shed blood.

The Resurrection and Return of Christ *Acts 1:3, 9-11*
We believe in His bodily resurrection, in His ascension to the right hand of the Father, and in His personal return in power and glory.

Salvation By Grace *Ephesians 2:8-9*
We believe that for the salvation of lost and sinful man, regeneration by the Holy Spirit is absolutely essential and that a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

The Ministry of the Holy Spirit *John 14:16*
We believe in the present ministry of the Holy Spirit by whose indwelling the Christian is enabled to live a godly life.

Unity in Christ *Ephesians 2:14-17*
We believe in the spiritual unity of all believers in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Eternity *Revelation 21:22-27*
We believe in the resurrection of both the saved and the lost; they that are saved unto the resurrection of life and they that are lost unto the resurrection of damnation.

Stewardship *1 Timothy 6:17-19*
We believe that everything we have or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES OF A DISCIPLE

Undiluted Worship *Matthew 22:37-40*
Loving the Lord God with all of our physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual vigor and, my neighbor as myself.

Constant Abiding *John 15:1-11*
Abiding in Christ in order to be faithful and bear fruit.

Bible Study *Hebrews 4:12*
Reading the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for daily life.

Desperate Prayer *Psalms 66:16-20*
Praying to God to know Him, laying requests before Him and, finding direction for daily life.

Biblical Community *Acts 2:44-47*
Fellowshipping with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, other people's lives and, in the world.

Spiritual Gifts *Romans 12:4-6*
Using my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Total Forgiveness *Ephesians 4:30*
Practicing forgiving others as God has forgiven me in Christ.

Tangible Compassion *Matthew 25:31-46*
Showing compassion to those in need and so minister to Jesus Himself.

Generous Giving *2 Corinthians 8:7*
Giving away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

God Space *Ephesians 6:19-20*
Increasing the quantity and quality of our gospel conversations.

10 CORE VIRTUES OF A DISCIPLE

Love - a sincere affection for others *1 John 4:10-12*
Love is acting in someone else's interest no matter who they may be, no matter how you feel, and no matter what it costs.

Joy - a delight unaffected by circumstances *John 15:11*
An inner delight in God that is sustained in spite of the changing seasons of life.

Peace - an abiding sense of harmony *Philippians 4:6-7*
Relationships are free from friction. Positively, it describes harmonious relations with others in the church.

Patience - a willingness to stick with things *Proverbs 3:3-4*
Being willing to live with a difficult situation for a long time—even if things are slow to change or never change.

Kindness - a sense of compassion in the heart – *Job 6:14*
An inner disposition that puts others at ease and out of which kind actions flow.

Goodness - a goodness that flows outwardly *1 Thess. 5:15*
Choosing to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Faithfulness - an unwavering loyalty – *Psalms 26:3*
Being the kind of people who keep our word to one another.

Gentleness - an attitude of humility without any entitlement *Philippians 4:5*
Gentleness is power and strength under God's control.

Self-Control - an ability to direct your energy wisely *Titus 2:11-13*
The strength to restrain our desires, emotions, and actions has to come from within rather than from some outside source.

Humility – a lack of self-awareness *Philippians 2:3-4*
Considering others above myself, if I consider myself at all.

Hope – a certainty of what is to come *Hebrews 6:19-20*
Coping with the hardships of life and with death because of hope in Christ.