

JONAH

An Illustration of God's Surprising Grace

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JONAH

An Illustration of God's Surprising Grace

Introduction to Leader

As minor prophets go, Jonah is well known, largely due to the fishy experience in the center of the book. Although this big fish has served to tickle our intrigue, the account has dwarfed the foundational truth these four chapters portray. From chapter one verse one, the central character is not the book's namesake—the prophet Jonah, but rather the one who sends him—the God Almighty.

Throughout our seven-week study, we will see a wonderful portrait being painted, not of a man, a fish, or a rebellious city, but of a gracious, merciful, and loving God. Each lesson is specifically designed to encourage your group to get into the text and to see God's gracious character. Grace is not only for people in the Bible, but also for your own soul.

Depending on the size and makeup of your group, every lesson will last about thirty minutes. As the leader, you are in control of the timing based on how well prepared you are and how you guide the conversation. We encourage you to spend time each week familiarizing yourself with the material. This will help you decide how to customize the lessons for your group and develop a plan to lead your group through their discussion.

Like LEGO® blocks, each lesson is designed to fit together and to build off the other lessons. The goal at the end of six weeks is for your group to be left with a beautiful portrait of God's unrelenting and surprising grace. Do your best to stick to the material contained in each lesson as this will serve to build anticipation and add intrigue as the heart and character of God is revealed.

This study is not intended to be an in-depth look at the life, times, and culture of Jonah but rather to see God's marvelous grace for all people of all times. Resources consulted when writing this study were:

- *Luther's Small Catechism and Explanation*, Ambassador Publications.
- *People's Bible Commentary Series: Obadiah/Jonah/Micah*, Northwestern Publishing House and Concordia Publishing House.
- *Concordia Commentary Series: Jonah*, Concordia Publishing House

For a fuller picture of background, times, and culture, these resources are recommended as further reading.

Jonah—An Introduction | Leader Guide

Warming up . . .

What do you know about the Book of Jonah?

Encourage group discussion. Possible answers may include: The VeggieTales® retelling of Jonah, a whale/big fish, disobedience, or running from God. Other questions to encourage discussion include: Have you ever heard of Jonah? What do you know about him?

Can you think of a time when you knew the Lord wanted you to obey and you didn't?

Ask the group to share, and be prepared with an example yourself.

How about a time when you did obey?

Ask the group to share, and be prepared with an example yourself.

Into the Word . . .

Many people read the Bible in small chunks. It may not be as common for someone to read an entire chapter, let alone a full book. This lesson is designed to be short enough to allow your group to read through the entire book of Jonah. We encourage you to do this to get an overview of the book, even if it means spending less time on the following discussion questions.

Read though the Book of Jonah.

What do you think is the central or main theme of the Book of Jonah?

Many answers will focus on Jonah's disobedience, yet as we study this book we will discover that the book is not centered around Jonah, his actions, or a fish, but rather about God. This is a story of God's love, compassion, and grace. This book vividly illustrates God's surprising grace.

It's also a missionary book! God calls Jonah to be a missionary—to bring the Gospel to a foreign people in a foreign land who have not yet heard it.

What is "grace"? (see *Luther's Small Catechism and Explanation*, Glossary p.153)

1. *Unmerited or undeserved love. (Unmerited favor)*
2. *The attribute of God whereby He desires to save sinners.*
3. *The favor and mercy of God that comes to us through His Son Jesus Christ, and through His Word.*

See also Romans 5:8.

Can you find the one verse of prophecy in the Book of Jonah?

Jonah 3:4

"Then Jonah began to go through the city one day's walk; and he cried out and said, 'Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown.'"

List some examples of how God's grace is witnessed in this book.

As you make your list, discuss how each idea is an example of God's grace. There are many possible answers. Here are some of them:

1. *God sent a prophet to Nineveh (He could have let them perish).*
2. *God didn't kill Jonah after he ran away (He could have punished Jonah for disobedience).*
3. *God pursued Jonah after he fled (He could have let their relationship remain broken).*
4. *God spared the sailors' life (He could have held them accountable for throwing Jonah overboard).*
5. *God spared the life of Jonah by the fish (He could have allowed Jonah to drown).*
6. *God spared Jonah from the fish (He could have let Jonah be digested).*
7. *God sent Jonah to Nineveh again (He gave Jonah a second chance).*
8. *God forgave Nineveh (He could have punished Nineveh).*
9. *God didn't punish Jonah for his attitude (He could have punished Jonah).*
10. *God provided a plant to shade Jonah (He could have let Jonah be sunburned).*
11. *God was still teaching at the end of the book, still trying to reach Jonah's heart.*

What are some "big ideas" you discovered while reading this book?

Try to get your group to see beyond the big fish and the basic story to some of the characteristics of God and Jonah. Some possible answers include:

Jonah is living proof of God's Law and Grace.

Jonah tried to limit the grace of God.

All people need repentance.

All people can be saved (even Gentiles)

God will go to the extreme to reach a person or people.

Wrapping up: Discussion & Application . . .

Why do you think Jonah ran away from God's call?

The text does not immediately tell us. It is not until the end of the book, Jonah 4:2, where Jonah reveals his true reason. Instead of immediately giving the answer to your group, let them wrestle with the possible reasons Jonah would run away. We will look more at the answer to this question in later lessons.

God has given every individual certain tasks and responsibilities. How do we run away from them and why?

Possible ideas include:

Neglecting schoolwork or other work – not doing them to the best of our ability.

Disobedience to parents and authorities

How does this book stretch my thinking and encourage me today?

Resources for Digging Deeper:

- *Luther's Small Catechism and Explanation*, Ambassador Publications.
- *People's Bible Commentary Series: Obadiah/Jonah/Micah*, Northwestern Publishing House and Concordia Publishing House.
- *Concordia Commentary Series: Jonah*, Concordia Publishing House

Warming up . . .

Have you ever been asked to do something you did not want to do?

Further questions to encourage discussion:

What was your reaction? What happened? How did you feel later?

Have you ever heard the saying, “Don’t shoot the messenger!”? Ever had to deliver bad news?

Ask your group to share what happened if they have been in this situation. Be prepared to share a personal story.

Remember the Pony Express?

The Pony Express was a speedy mail service that operated in 1860–61 by relays of riders on horses across the western United States. They had a goal: deliver mail 1,966 miles between Missouri and California (across the Rocky Mountains) in less than 10 days. Alongside this aggressive goal stood their motto: “The mail must go through.” They understood the important role they had—it was not to write the letters, not to choose who received them, or when they were sent—they were simply entrusted with the duty to deliver the letters safely in a timely manner.

This same sentiment continued at the official General Post Office in New York City located at the intersection 8th Avenue and 33rd Street. This inscription adorns its walls: “Neither snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night stays these couriers from the swift completion of their appointed rounds.” This speaks of the great importance one has as a letter carrier.

This is Jonah. He is a mailman of sorts—He was told by God to deliver a message!

Into the Word . . .

Read Jonah 1 and take a moment for everyone to share a few thoughts about the chapter.

Jonah 1:1 – God’s Messenger

We know very little about Jonah, but this was not His first assignment from God. We read about his beginnings in II Kings 14:23–25.

Jonah was a prophet during the times of Jeroboam II (793–753 BC). This was 80 years after Elisha. Jonah was a contemporary of Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah. The rule of Jeroboam II was economically successful but spiritually bankrupt. Under Jeroboam’s rule, the northern kingdom’s borders were extended, which was promised by the mouth of Jonah. Despite the wickedness of King Jeroboam, God desired to save Israel (V26).

Read Amos 6:4–6 and II Kings 17:16. Here we see Jonah’s prophecy fulfilled.

Jonah was a confirmed, accepted, respected, and well-liked prophet. He brought a positive message, which was easy to deliver to the nation of Israel: God was going to bless Israel. This prophecy came to pass—just as he said that it would. Amos 6:4–6 describes the luxurious living of Israel during that time. Yet despite this outward wealth, II Kings 17:16 tells us the hearts of the Israelites remained inwardly dark and lost in sin.

In this context of prosperity and his own popularity, Jonah received another message from God.

Jonah 1:1–2 – God’s Message

How was this message similar to Jonah’s message in II Kings?

V1 – As we look at verse one and II Kings 14:25, we see that these were God’s words, not Jonah’s. Jonah didn’t come up with this prophecy on his own. The phrase “came to Jonah” in verse 1 indicates that God went to Jonah with a message—Jonah didn’t go asking for it. God had specially chosen him.

V2 – We see in verse 2 that there is an imperative. God directed Jonah to give a message to Nineveh, just as he directed Jonah to give a message to Israel.

How was it different?

V2 – Jonah is directed to deliver a much different message. Before he had delivered a message of hope, restoration, and blessing to Israel. This was good news and an easy message to bring! “Life is bad, but I promise it will get better!” Now God sends a message of judgment—God has seen the sins of Nineveh, and its sin will not go unpunished!

Jonah is also directed to a much different destination. Previously he was called to go to His own people and to bring a message within the boundaries of Israel. Now he is called to go outside of these “walls” and to a foreign people.

Read more about Nineveh in Nahum 3:1.

Nineveh was a capital city of the nation of Assyria, the enemy of Israel. Nineveh and Assyria were known for their great military conquests, the brutality with which they desolated cities, and their licentious worship of false gods.

Nineveh was about 500 miles from Jonah’s home. It was a large city, approximately 21 square miles in size. Nineveh enjoyed great wealth, and it governed itself. The city was full of idolatry and cruelty.

This cruel, idolatrous city is where Jonah was called to GO! God tells Jonah, “Go to Nineveh the great city and cry against it” (V2). This is an imperative. It was an immediate call that demanded immediate action.

Were both messages Jonah was to deliver ones of grace? Why or why not?

Yes, this second message was still a message of grace! It may look a little different, but it is still the same. God could have destroyed the people of Nineveh, but He didn’t. Instead He chose a prophet to bring a message of repentance for 40 days (Jonah 3:4).

Read I Timothy 2:4. What do we learn about God’s heart for people?

God loves the world—all people! He never intended the nation of Israel to keep the message of hope to itself, but to take that message to all peoples and be a light to all nations. In a similar way, He does not intend for the Church to keep the message of hope in Christ to herself, but to bring the message of salvation to all peoples.

Jonah 1:3 – God’s Move

Read and discuss Jonah 1:3. Jonah seemed to forget it was God’s move, not his, so he ran!

Jonah rebelled against God calling the shots. Jonah seemed to forget that it was God’s message and that he, Jonah, was God’s messenger. The delivery of the message required the same obedience as the first, regardless of the content or audience.

Why was it so hard for Jonah to do what God asked?
(Allow class to discuss possible answers.)

Three possible reasons this was hard for Jonah:

1. *The Jews were “God’s chosen people.” They were enemies of the wicked, idol-worshiping Ninevites. They had likely battled them in war, and Israel had finally gained their territory back. Now God was sending Jonah to them with a message of grace and love.*
2. *Because of the positivity and blessing of Jonah’s earlier message, some suggest Jonah experienced national success and was likely loved and respected. Jonah possibly held a position of prominence and was told to leave it to bring a message of salvation to those who were not his own people.*
3. *This may have threatened his position and popularity in Israel. Although we are not told what the response was from the nation of Israel, we can imagine it was similar to what Jonah had a hard time with, namely, a belief that Nineveh didn’t deserve it. After all, they were a heathen nation and not deserving of God’s grace.*

Wrapping up: Discussion & Application . . .

Why do you think God cared so much for the people of Nineveh?
See 1 Timothy 2:4.

What does this teach us about God’s character?

How does Jonah’s call mirror Christ’s ministry?
Jesus Himself went to social outcasts and wicked people who are seemingly not worthy of God’s grace, and He calls us to do the same.

How are each of us like Jonah?
We may think of certain people as being more or less worthy of God’s grace, but all people are born sinful and need God’s grace and forgiveness. Nothing in ourselves and nothing that we do can make us worthy of God’s love and grace. We also, by nature, do not want to obey God.

Do you fear God more than man? Explain.

Warming up . . .

Optional opening idea: Find a video of a car chase to show the class. Ask some of the following questions: What is your reaction when you watch something like this? Have you ever been tempted to do something similar? What happens when we run?

Have you ever tried hiding from your parents when you did something wrong?

What happened?

When we left Jonah, he had just received a message from the Lord to “Arise, go to Nineveh.” We would expect Jonah to obey, but what do we read instead? We find that Jonah ran away!

Into the Word . . .

Jonah 1:3 – He Ran

(During the study, it is important to note that not only did Jonah run physically, but he also ran spiritually.)

After hearing God's call, where did Jonah go?

Instead of traveling the 500 miles northwest to Nineveh, Jonah headed to Joppa 60 miles southeast. This was no rash decision; he had plenty of time to think about and repent for his running as it was a two- or three-day journey. His final destination was Tarshish, a town some 2,000 plus miles away. Tarshish is located on the southwest coast of Spain. It was a Phoenician colony and represented the furthest known city of the ancient world. This to Jonah was the furthest place he could go from the Lord's call.

Whom was Jonah running from?

He was fleeing the presence of the Lord. He was running to the heathen land of Tarshish—a place where he perhaps thought God's presence was not found. He was not only running from the presence of God but also from His call to go to Nineveh. Jonah wanted to escape to a place where he didn't have to think about those words.

What does Psalm 139:7–8 tell us about running from God?

It is impossible to run from God because He is omnipresent (present everywhere). What is even more astounding is that verse 9 suggests that Jonah knew this but chose to try to run away.

Jonah 1:5b – He Hid

Once Jonah boarded the ship, where did he go? Why do you think he went there?

He went below deck. Perhaps he went down to be by himself, out of the presence of his shipmates. He physically withdrew from the world around him, not wanting to be disturbed.

What insight does Psalm 32:3–4 give us as to why Jonah fell asleep?

Running from the Lord is exhausting. It wears us down physically, spiritually, and emotionally. While we are running, we can never find true peace and rest.

According to verses 5 and 6, what was everyone on the ship except Jonah doing?

Praying or calling out to their gods.

Jonah was not only hiding physically. How else was he hiding from the Lord?

He withdrew spiritually. He was not praying. He was not seeking council from the Lord. He was trying to run from and get away from the Lord. He was trying to kill the nagging feeling of wrongdoing and didn't want to acknowledge his rebellious actions, seeking refuge in bed.

Jonah 1:4–7 – God Pursued Jonah

What did God do to make Jonah aware of His presence? (see verse 4)

According to verse 4, the Lord sent a great wind and storm. Although storms were common and something sailors were used to, this was an extraordinary phenomenon. Notice the word “sent.” The sailors wouldn't have seen the storm coming, otherwise they wouldn't have started their trip. The Hebrew for “sent” means “to throw or cast” something. Here God threw the wind (storm) at His target, Jonah. No matter how hard Jonah tried, he couldn't escape God. God kept pursuing him.

How does the storm represent God's judgment and mercy?

The storm wasn't intended as a punishment but rather as a way to get Jonah's attention. It was a tool to get Jonah back into right relationship with God and to listen to His call. It definitely grabbed the attention of the sailors. The ship nearly broke up, and the sailors worked frantically to save the vessel and all on board.

What do these verses tell us about Jonah's spiritual condition?

The sailors saw that this was no ordinary storm. They prayed to their gods and threw the cargo overboard. This throwing off of the cargo could have also been an offering to their sea gods. Jonah, however, didn't seek the Lord. He was asleep. The pagan sailors woke him up and asked him to call on his God. Jonah was spiritually bankrupt.

The prophet was sleeping. What did the captain try to get Jonah to do?

The captain wanted Jonah to call on his “god.” He hoped Jonah's “god” would be concerned about them all and save them from perishing.

As the lot fell to Jonah, how do you think he felt? What might he have been thinking?

Encourage discussion. Although there is no scriptural encouragement or mandate to cast lots, similar to taking a vote today, casting lots was a way God used to direct His will. Casting lots was done through the throwing of dice, pottery shards, or other small objects to point to an outcome.

Wrapping up: Discussion & Application . . . (Answers will vary within the class.)

In what ways do we try to ignore God in our lives or even seek to escape His presence?

Martin Luther noted that we flee from God's presence anytime we run off anywhere faith or knowledge of God and His Word are not present. This can be done as we run to a physical location, or as we seek escape through other means, be it substance abuse, television and movies, or hanging out with people who deny God.

How do we hide from the Lord spiritually? What danger is there in doing that?

Answers may include:

- *When we don't spend time in prayer.*
- *When we don't spend time with His people.*
- *When we avoid church.*
- *When we don't do what we know is right.*

Read Numbers 32:23 and Hebrews 4:13. What happens when we try to cover up our sin and run from the Lord?

Although each of us may be tempted at times to run and hide spiritually and physically from God, from His command, and from His people, this will only bring calamity upon ourselves and those around us. And sooner or later our sin will be uncovered. One can run but never hide from God.

What things might God use to draw us back to Him?

Sometimes God may allow trials or difficulties in our life to help us see our need of Him. He may also use other people to direct us to trust in Him. God also uses His Word to teach us and call us to Him in repentance and faith.

Luke 15:11–32 records the story of the Prodigal Son. What promise is found here for those who run from the Lord?

See especially verses 20–24. The good news is no matter how long you've been gone, how far you've traveled, or what you've run from, God's deepest desire is for you to return in faith and repentance, and He does receive you back again.

Warming up . . .

What is Grace?

See p.153 as well as Question #12 on p.34 of Luther’s *Small Catechism and Explanation*.

1. *Unmerited or undeserved love.*
2. *The attribute of God whereby He desires to save sinners.*
3. *The favor and mercy of God that comes to us through His Son Jesus Christ, and through His Word.*

See also John 3:16 and II Corinthians 5:21.

God’s grace sometimes shows up in ways and times we least expect. Have you ever experienced God’s grace unexpectedly?

Be prepared to share an illustration of how you’ve seen God’s grace and mercy show up in ways you least expected.

Into the Word . . .

Read Jonah 1:6–10 – Sin Exposed

In our last lesson, we left Jonah in a tough spot. He had received messages and a call from the Lord, but he didn’t obey. In fact, he ran in the opposite direction by getting on a boat and trying to sail away from God’s call. God showed His love for Jonah by pursuing him through a violent storm. Soon everyone on board the ship knew Jonah was responsible for this danger to their lives.

Everything the sailors tried failed, from steering the ship to crying out to their own gods. Eventually, the captain woke Jonah in the belly of the ship. The sailors cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. All eyes were on him.

How do you think Jonah felt after the lots fell on him in verse 7? How do you think the sailors felt after they cast lots?

The revelation of Jonah’s guilt unleashed a flood of questions from the crew in verse 8. Emotions and tension must have been high as they were all facing death and now had found out who was responsible for the deadly storm. The crew wanted to know everything about the passenger Jonah, and in verse 9, Jonah provided an answer.

What does Jonah confess about the LORD (YAHWEH) in verse 9? What does he leave out?

Jonah has already admitted to them that he is on the run from God, but now he tells them who this God is. Jonah says that he is a Hebrew, an Israelite. He serves the true, creator God, the all-powerful, all-knowing One. He implies God is in control of all things, even the storm. He leaves out any admission of wrongdoing. He fails to admit to and repent of his sin.

What inconsistencies are there between Jonah’s beliefs and actions?

There is a disconnect between what Jonah believes about God and his actions regarding God’s word. Jonah knew God and worshiped Him. He even had a personal command from

God, but he ran in the opposite direction. Knowing the right things about God did not lead Jonah to do the right things. Discuss why this is a dangerous thing.

Read Jonah 1:11–13 – Solution Proposed

What is surprising about the sailors' response in verses 10–11?

These pagan sailors see what Jonah doesn't admit, that his actions have brought these consequences upon them. Their eyes are opened to who God truly is. They know it was wrong for Jonah to run away from Him. In fact, they cannot fathom someone treating a god like Jonah did (i.e. ignoring His commands/calling and running away). In verse 11 the sailors want to be at peace with God, so they come to the prophet to seek the will of God. They saw Jonah's sin, and they ask him how to repent, how to be reconciled to God. The pagans are seeking God, and the prophet is running from Him.

Compare and contrast how the "prophet" and the "pagans" act.

The pagans were seeking help from God. But Jonah was not seeking God and was even attempting to avoid God.

What do Jonah's actions teach us about the effects of sin?

Our sin and disobedience affect others and sometimes place their lives in danger.

What solution to ending the storm does Jonah offer? Why does he offer this solution?

In verse 12 Jonah offers a solution, "Throw me overboard." Essentially, he says "Get rid of me, and this storm will be over." Note there is admission of guilt, but no repentance.

There are a couple of possible reasons why Jonah suggests he be tossed overboard.

- 1. He wants to die. Perhaps Jonah sees death as the only way out, the only way to escape God. He knows he can't get away, he is unwilling to repent, and he would rather die than obey God.*
- 2. He is offering himself as a sacrifice to save the sailors and appease God. He knows he is guilty and deserves to be punished. He sees no hope but to be hurled overboard to appease God's wrath.*

But Jonah was wrong. God didn't want him to die, but to repent and get back into right relationship with Him. God wanted him to go to Nineveh to relay His message.

What is surprising about the sailors' response in verse 13?

They know Jonah's solution is wrong. They cannot imagine killing a man even to save their own lives. They value human life more than Jonah. They risk their own lives, rowing against the storm, trying to save Jonah's life and their own.

This approach did not work. The storm only got worse until it appeared the only solution was to throw Jonah overboard.

Jonah 1:14–17 – Salvation Bestowed

What is surprising about the sailors' response in verse 14?

It is the pagan sailors who are praying, not Jonah, the prophet of God.

In this prayer, they recognize that murder is wrong, that they've tried everything but nothing is working, that this is in fact Jonah's idea, and so they are asking God to have mercy on their souls as well as on Jonah. This prayer is a great confession of faith, as they are admitting to God's ultimate power and control as well as submitting to His will.

As soon as the sailors tossed Jonah overboard, the storm quieted and the waters calmed. The sailors sought the Lord in faith, and He answered them.

The sailors use the Jewish name for God—YAHWEH—when they pray. God has been working faith and repentance in their hearts. God used Jonah, who didn't want to be used, to convert these pagan sailors.

What other signs of the sailors' conversion do we see in verse 16?

They feared the Lord. They were awestruck or amazed by God. The Amplified Version of the Bible reads, "Then the men [reverently and worshipfully] feared the Lord exceedingly." They saw who God was and now responded in worship by making sacrifices and vows; they had a worship service there on the boat. The vows they made were likely pledges to follow God. See also Psalm 51:17.

How do we see God's grace in verse 17?

God saved Jonah by sending a fish to spare his life. Jonah didn't deserve it, but God did it anyway.

Wrapping up: Discussion & Application . . .

Similar to Jonah, what inconsistencies could there be between our beliefs and actions?

Examples: We say we trust God, but then we worry about things.

We say we love God, but we don't follow His commandments (John 14:15).

How have you seen your sin or the sins of someone else affect others?

Additional questions to prompt discussion: How could telling a lie affect others? How can your disrespect of your parents affect others? What can be a consequence of texting and driving? How does premarital sex affect those who engage in it and those around them?

God used Jonah to bring His grace to the sailors. Who has God used in your life to bring you His grace?

Be prepared with an example.

Grace always starts with sin being exposed, which is never a pleasant process. No matter what we try, humans can never come up with a solution for our sin problem. But God has already taken care of it in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He is long-suffering, and He gives many opportunities to respond to His grace. Remember no matter how far you've strayed or what you have done, as long as it is today there is still time to receive His grace.

For additional resource, see "The Mirror" tract produced by Ambassador Publications.

Warming up . . .

What has been Jonah's biggest struggle?

Jonah was a selfish, self-centered man. He was struggling against what he wanted to do versus what the Lord told him to do. The people of Israel believed they were God's chosen people. God intended for them to be a light to the nations, but many had come to believe that God's plan of salvation was for them alone. Jonah struggled about wanting to take God's message to the heathen Ninevites. But God desires all people to be saved.

How do Exodus 33:19 and Psalm 24:1 speak to this struggle?

Jonah forgot that salvation was not his to bestow, it was the Lord's. Salvation belongs to the Lord.

Into the Word . . .

Read Jonah 2:1–10 – Jonah's State

Describe Jonah's prayer.

Encourage discussion. Possible answers include: Jonah is crying out to God for help. He is in distress and depressed at the beginning of the prayer, but by the end he recognizes God's power and turns to him in thanksgiving.

How do verses 1–6 describe what is happening to Jonah?

There appears to be no hope. Jonah is mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually empty. Over the past few days, possibly weeks, he has been on a rollercoaster ride. He received the call from God and ran. Then he tried to hide from God in the bottom of a boat, but God found him with the storm. He tried to ignore God in the storm, but finally he was tossed overboard to save the lives of the crew. It appeared God's wrath was all around him. He found himself sinking to the bottom of the ocean, and there was nothing he could do. He was helpless and about to die.

How do verses 1:17 and 2:6b illustrate God's grace in this hopeless situation?

Jonah 1:17 begins, "And the LORD appointed." When all hope seemed lost, when all options were exhausted, when Jonah was completely empty of himself and was sure of death, God met him with life. God provided (assigned, prepared, appointed) this fish to save Jonah. This was something only God could do. He appointed the fish to swallow Jonah—God alone secured Jonah's salvation. Jonah acknowledged this in 2:6b, "But You have brought up my life from the pit, O LORD my God."

What are the implications for us today?

God is the only One who is able to bring salvation. See also Hebrews 5:9.

Reread Jonah 2:1–7 – Jonah's Fate

Jonah prayed this prayer not while drowning, but while in the belly of the fish. This is not a prayer for deliverance from drowning nor from the fish, but rather a prayer or hymn of thanksgiving that God had saved him. The fish was not a punishment but rather God's deliverance. In these verses, Jonah considers God's salvation in the form of a fish. He is grateful for God's mercy and gives Him praise and thanksgiving.

What two types of death is Jonah describing in verses 1–7?

1. Physical death

V2 from the depth of the grave (Sheol)

V3 the current engulfed me, breakers and billows passed over me

V5 water encompassed me, the great deep engulfed me, weeds wrapped around my head

V6 descended to the roots of the mountains

V7 was fainting away

2. Spiritual death

V4 expelled or cast away from Your sight. He felt separated from God. But note here Jonah also speaks with faith, "I will look again toward Your holy temple."

It was in this dark hour, in the midst of certain death, Jonah remembered and called out to God, and He answered. God rescued Jonah.

Read Romans 3:20 and Galatians 3:24. What is the function of the law?

The law shows us that we are sinners. The law exposes our sin. We are hopeless and helpless in ourselves. We have no hope outside of God. The law leads us to the cross, where we find our salvation.

The law had done its work in Jonah's heart. In verses 2–7 he is coming to God in faith and repentance. In verse 4 Jonah calls on God to save him with the sure belief that God would do that very thing. Jonah saw the depth of his selfishness and was now relying on God to save him.

Read Jonah 2:8–10 – Jonah Celebrates

As Jonah sat in that dark, dank spot, he reflected on God's mercy, grace, and the fact that he was not dead. Jonah was overcome with thanksgiving and joy and celebrated his salvation by praising and worshiping the Lord.

Jonah confessed that there is no one like God, no one else in the universe that we can trust to bring us grace, mercy, and forgiveness. People who trust in idols forfeit this grace.

What is idolatry?

Anything we place before God (or trust in before God) in our lives is an idol. See also the explanation of the First Commandment in Luther's Small Catechism and Explanation, pp.36–40.

What things do you see people put their trust in other than God?

Possible answers include: They trust in their own works. They trust in science for answers. People may trust in other ways to get to heaven outside of Jesus.

What is Jonah's response to God's grace/salvation? To whom does salvation belong? See V9. *Jonah's response is an attitude of gratitude and a desire to worship God. The phrase "sacrifice to You" is an expression of worship. Jonah wants to be near the presence of God, which is a strong contrast to when he was fleeing the presence of God. Thanksgiving and worship are always proper response to God's grace. This response was seen earlier in the sailors as they responded to God after He spared their lives.*

At the end of Jonah 2, God commands the fish to vomit Jonah onto dry land. Jonah's life has been saved. Now he is able to continue in the task God had for him to do.

Wrapping up: Discussion & Application . . .

God provided a fish to save Jonah from drowning. God desired that Jonah repent. How is Jonah's experience with the fish an illustration of salvation?

Jonah was effectively dead. He was helpless, hopeless, and unable to change his situation. He did not deserve salvation, but God granted it to him anyway. We are in the same state. We are helpless, hopeless, and unable to change our sinful selves. God's grace is still available to us today.

Jesus Himself speaks of the sign of Jonah in Matthew 12:38–41. Christ compares the time Jonah spent in the belly of the fish with the time He would spend in the "heart of the earth." The sign of Jonah points us to the resurrection of the dead. This picture of Christ's death and resurrection provides the basis for our hope of resurrection after death. God taking death and turning it into life is the ultimate sign of God's love and mercy. As Christ rose from the dead, He has provided us life and salvation.

See also Luther quotes at the end of this lesson.

What does this passage teach us about law, Gospel, grace, mercy, and salvation?

Encourage discussion. The law brings us to the end of ourselves, just as Jonah was in the belly of the fish. God's grace, mercy, and salvation are gifts He freely offers to us, just as He offered them to Jonah. Jonah could do nothing — God did everything. The prophet Jonah was

the recipient of God's gracious acts over and over again throughout the book. The Lord sent a storm and a sea creature to lead Jonah to repentance. These are special works of God.

Have you received God's gift of grace?

Be prepared to share verses of God's promise of salvation such as I John 1:9, Romans 3:23.

What are the specific means by which God has promised to extend His grace to us?

Through His Word (Romans 10:17), baptism (Romans 6:1–5, I Peter 3:21), and the Lord's Supper (Matthew 26:26–28).

The following quotes from Luther's Works provide broader background and understanding relating to Matthew 12 and the "sign of Jonah" mentioned earlier in the lesson:

I have therefore chosen to expound the holy prophet Jonah, for he is indeed well suited for this situation and represents an excellent, outstanding, and comforting example of faith and a mighty and wonderful sign of God's goodness to all the world. For who would not trust God with all his heart, proudly defy all the devils, the world, and all the fulminating tyrants, and exult over God's kindness, when he contemplates this story and beholds how easily God's power and grace are able to preserve Jonah in the midst of the deep sea, even in the belly of the whale, thus saving him not only from one death but from various deaths, deserted and forgotten as he is by all men and all creatures? Apparently without effort God sustains Jonah and brings him back merely by uttering a word. It is as if God were saying: "Behold, this is what I can do with one word. In view of this, what do you suppose I could do with My Spirit and power?" The human mind cannot conceive of a greater work than this. For that reason Christ Himself prizes this story so highly, citing this Jonah above all other prophets as an illustration of His own death and resurrection. In Matt. 12:39 He says: "No sign shall be given this generation except the sign of the prophet Jonah, etc."¹

If you note the hopelessly malicious and spiteful knaves with whom the Lord is arguing here, you will not wonder that He deals with them so harshly. For they are familiar with John's message; they send a delegation to Him; they are aware of His popularity with the people; they witness His miracles—and despite this evidence they demand a sign from Him. And if He had flattered their vanity with a sign, they would have reacted with a sneer: "Just see what the devil can do!" And if He refuses, they will remark: "This is not God; it is the devil." Therefore the Lord's reply resembles that recorded in Matt. 12:39–40, where He says that no other sign will be given this evil generation "except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so will the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." The answer is the same here; only the words and the figure of speech are different. He says: "This shall be your sign: 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' " That is: "I shall be the Jonah whom you will cast into the ocean and into the jaws of the whale, whom you will crucify and kill; and on the third day I shall rise again." To the godly this is a joyful sign, but to the ungodly it is a stumbling block and a stone of offense.²

¹ Luther, M. (1999). *Luther's works, vol. 19: Minor Prophets II: Jonah and Habakkuk*. (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald, & H. T. Lehmann, Eds.) (Vol. 19, p. 36). Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House.

² Luther, M. (1999). *Luther's works, vol. 22: Sermons on the Gospel of St. John: Chapters 1-4*. (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald, & H. T. Lehmann, Eds.) (Vol. 22, p. 242). Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House.

Warming up . . .

What are some ways we’ve seen God’s grace so far in the Book of Jonah?

Answers may include: He sent a prophet to Nineveh. He didn’t kill Jonah when Jonah ran away. He pursued Jonah after he fled. He spared the sailors’ lives. He spared Jonah’s life with the fish. He spared Jonah from the fish.

Into the Word . . .

It is easy to end Jonah’s story with him being vomited up by the big fish. But this is not the end. It is not even the climax—we are only halfway through the book. The story of God’s surprising grace continues. Read Jonah 3:1–10.

Same Message Related – Jonah 3:1–4

Compare and contrast Jonah 1:1–3 and Jonah 3:1–3.

Jonah received the same call from God. The mission hadn’t changed. He still intended to have Jonah be His prophet and deliver His message. God hadn’t abandoned Jonah or the people of Nineveh.

God gave Jonah the same message to bring to the Ninevites.

The difference this time was that Jonah obeyed instead of running. Note the distinct contrast between 1:3 and 3:3.

Did you notice what God doesn’t bring up to Jonah?

God never brings up Jonah’s sin. He passes over it with silence. He doesn’t say things like, “I’m giving you a second chance, don’t mess it up!” or “You didn’t go last time” or “Go, or else!” God had forgiven Jonah’s sin and gave him a fresh start.

Look up Psalm 103:12 and discuss how this verse is illustrated in the account of Jonah.

Who brings up our past sins? Why?

We are the ones who bring up our past sins—God doesn’t remind us of them. God says, “It is finished, you are forgiven.” When we have a hard time forgiving ourselves and keep remembering our past sins, it is often because we have a hard time believing that God is enough. Instead of listening to what God declares in His word, we listen to the whispers of Satan. (See 1 John 1:9 and Romans 10:9–10.)

Write down a few observations on Jonah’s delivery of God’s message:

Answers include: The message was simple and short. Jonah didn’t draw attention to himself. No added guilt. No glamorous phrasing. Jonah just shared God’s word. It was up to God to bring conviction. Simple and powerful.

Same Message Received – Reread Jonah 3:5–9

What was Nineveh's response to God's message?

Rather than running Jonah out of town, they had receptive hearts and minds. They let God's message sink in, and they believed it.

Look again at the content of Jonah's message in verse 4 and describe it.

The content is very simple. Jonah doesn't condemn their sin. He just shares the fact that judgment has been passed and they have been found guilty and will be punished.

Is there any Gospel (good news of hope and forgiveness) in Jonah's message?

"The Gospel is the good news of the grace of God in Jesus Christ our Savior." (Luther's Small Catechism and Explanation, p.34)

At first glance, it seems as if this message is one with no hope, grace, compassion, or love. Judgment has been passed, their fate is sealed. It is correct that they lived lives of rebellion, and they sinned against God. They had been tried, found guilty, and awaited punishment.

But a second glance at the message reveals hope and Gospel. The key phrase? "In 40 days." God had given them time! He didn't swoop down all at once to destroy them; He gave them an opportunity to change.

They didn't waste this time—they responded!

What signs of true repentance do we see in the response of the Ninevites?

"Repentance: To recognize, confess, and turn away from sin." (Luther's Small Catechism and Explanation, p.155)

The word "believe" in verse 5 is the same word used in Genesis 15:6 for Abraham believing God. The people took God at His word.

The Ninevites showed signs of spontaneous repentance. They declared a fast and put on sackcloth, which was the cultural way to show regret and sorrow over sin. From the greatest to the least, they all humbled themselves, for they all were guilty. The message of Jonah spread throughout the city. As God's Spirit moved in their hearts, they shared it with others. Jonah's message even reached the king.

They had faith that in turning to God, He might hear them and answer their prayers. The king's edict for everyone, including animals, was a sign of corporate repentance.

Compare the similarities between the sailors' conversion (Jonah 1:13–16) and the Ninevites.

Answers may include: There was a conviction of sin, a turning in faith and repentance to God. Both groups worshiped God through the giving of sacrifices.

The inward brokenness of the people of Nineveh resulted in outward change. They were turning away from their evil to God in faith, seeking His grace and mercy. They had no guarantee this repentance would result in being saved from destruction, but they recognized their only hope was to turn to the Lord. When faced with our own sin, God's grace and mercy are our only hope.

Same Results Seen – Reread Jonah 3:10

What was God's response to the repentance of the Ninevites?

He had compassion and extended mercy, grace, and forgiveness.

Did God change His mind? Read Jeremiah 18:7–8.

God did not change His mind on sin. He still condemns it. He forgave the people of Nineveh and didn't hold their sin against them. This still applies to us today. God hates sin and has passed a judgment on anyone who has sinned but also has promised grace and mercy to anyone who turns to Him in faith and repentance (John 3:17–18).

Wrapping up: Discussion & Application . . .

How is God's message to Nineveh the same message for us today?

This message is still true, God has passed judgment on sin—this results in eternal death. Just as the people of Nineveh were given a period of grace (the 40 days before the judgment), everyone has an opportunity to receive God's grace. See John 3:17–18.

Unlike the Ninevites, what guarantee do we have that God will forgive our sins? See I John 1:9 and Romans 10:9–10.

These verses promise clearly that anyone who turns to Christ in repentance will be forgiven of all their sin, for Christ has made the full and lasting payment and sacrifice for all sin.

What impact do these truths have on how we share our faith?

Evangelism is a work God does through us. All we need to be concerned with is telling others about Him, not with clever delivery. If God worked through a reluctant prophet, He will work through us as well.

Have you ever thought about how God might use you?

Warming up . . .

With all that has happened to Jonah, what do you think Jonah's response and attitude might be?

Before reading Jonah's response, you may think that he would be happy—it is every pastor's dream to have everyone repent after a message is preached. Now here is Jonah who preached a message, and a whole city repents! Not only that, but Jonah has also recently been saved from a deadly storm and rescued (vomited) out of the belly of a fish. He should be over the moon. Instead we find that Jonah is mad.

Into the Word . . .

Read Jonah 4:1–11.

"And they lived happily ever after" is the quintessential ending to nearly every fairy tale. Although we all know that this never really happens, one might expect to find a similar ending here in the Book of Jonah. He has been through quite an ordeal the past few weeks. Running from God, living in the belly of a fish, traveling to Nineveh, preaching the Gospel, and the seeing the Ninevites' response of faith! One would expect Jonah to give a big smile of relief and satisfaction! But no, instead he heads out to the hills, pitches a makeshift shelter, and pouts. He was not filled with joy for the turn of events; instead, he was filled with anger!

Jonah's Anger (verses 1–3)

Why was Jonah angry?

Jonah was consumed with anger. He saw what had happened as a great injustice. He didn't believe it was fair that God had shown grace to these horrible, brutal people. He didn't believe they deserved God's forgiveness. Ultimately, he was upset at God's character.

What reason does Jonah give for not going to Nineveh right away?

See verse 2. He said he knew God would forgive the people of Nineveh.

Read Exodus 34:6–7. What does this passage tell us about God's character?

That He is gracious and forgiving.

Why might Jonah believe the people of Nineveh did not deserve God's grace?

The people of Nineveh were enemies of the Israelites. They were known for being sinful, brutal, ungodly people.

Do you think he was right? Why or why not?

He was right that the Ninevites did not deserve God's grace. But none of us do. We all are sinful people and deserve death and hell. How quickly Jonah forgot that even he did not deserve the grace God had given to him.

God's Answer (verses 4–11)

Reread Jonah 4:4–5. How does God respond to Jonah's anger?

We might expect that after all Jonah's questions and anger God would finally respond in anger and possibly even destroy Jonah, but God continues to show grace and mercy to Jonah. He responds with a simple question, "Do you have good reason to be angry?"

What do you think? Does Jonah have good reason or a right to be angry?

Answers will vary. Encourage discussion.

How does Jonah's response in verse 5 show that not much has changed for him?

Note how similar Jonah's response is here in 4:5 as it was when he ran from the Lord at the beginning of the book. Jonah seems to revert back to his old ways—walking away when something happens that he doesn't like. He demonstrates a similar attitude to that of the Prodigal Son's brother in Luke 15:11–32 (especially verses 28–32) who can't stand the thought of his brother being restored. The brother becomes resentful and angry.

Forgetting where grace comes from is a dangerous place to be.

Reread Jonah 4:6–8. Who is in control?

God.

How does God's grace show up again?

God continues to pursue Jonah. Just as God did not destroy Jonah in chapter one, but rather pursued him with the storm and the fish, so He pursues Jonah now with this real life parable.

As Jonah sits pouting on the hillside, God is still providing for Him. In these verses, we see the same action repeated as with the great fish: "The LORD appointed." First, God provides a vine. This is a miracle vine that grows up in one day. The shelter Jonah prepared for himself isn't enough to block out the relentless sun or the hot winds, so God provides extra shelter for Jonah. Next God provides a worm. This worm is divinely appointed by God to chew through the vine and to kill it. This too is a miracle for a fully grown vine to be destroyed within a matter of hours. Lastly, God provides a wind. Winds of this sort are common to the area of Assyria around Nineveh. However, this was no ordinary wind. It was sent to Jonah in the same way the storm at sea had been hurled in his path.

What is God illustrating to Jonah through the wind, the vine, and the worm?

His grace is extended to all despite their current sinful condition. The vine, worm, and wind were all sent to teach Jonah a lesson. They were sent to bring him back to repentance and to teach him to see people as God sees them. The parable was meant to bring Jonah to repentance from his selfish, prideful bigotry towards the people of Nineveh.

Reread Jonah 4:9–11. Why is Jonah angry this time?

He is angry that the vine died.

Does he have a right to be angry? Why or why not?

No. He did nothing for the vine in the first place. It was God who caused the vine to grow in the exact place Jonah had his shelter. Jonah was mad that his comfort and protection was taken away.

What do these verses show us about God's character?

God has compassion, care, and love for everybody. These verses show God's universal care and love for all of His creation. This same love is why He sent His Son to the cross for our sins (John 3:16).

Who remains the only person unchanged in this story? Why is that?

Jonah remains unchanged, because he has hardened his heart to God's message of grace.

Wrapping up: Discussion & Application . . .

How is Jonah's condition in this chapter similar to that of the Ninevites?

He is just as wicked and sinful as they are. He is hoping for their destruction in the same manner as they destroyed others.

How is our condition similar to that of the Ninevites and Jonah?

We too are sinful and do not deserve God's grace. See Romans 3:23.

In what ways do you care more about your own comfort than about others' souls?

Encourage discussion. Be prepared to share an example where you left your comfort zone to talk about Jesus, or perhaps a time where you didn't talk about God/Jesus/grace and wished you had.

We don't learn what happened to Jonah. Why do you think God chose to leave it a mystery?

Jonah response is left unknown on purpose. Not knowing the end of the story causes us to consider our heart's response and to consider our attitude.

The people of Nineveh didn't deserve God's grace. Jonah didn't deserve God's grace. We don't deserve God's grace. But that is why He gives it.

The events that have taken us seven lessons to study likely unfolded over a few months for Jonah. Regardless of the time, the outcome was the same—encountering God's surprising grace. His grace showed up in every chapter and every place to people who didn't expect it, didn't deserve it, and even at times to people who didn't want it. Time and time again, this grace transformed the hearts and lives of those who received it in faith. God went to great lengths to reach His prophet Jonah, the sea-hardened sailors, and the godless people of Nineveh. For whether it's one stubborn prophet or a city filled with corruption and wickedness, God's desire is for each soul to come to the knowledge of the truth.

We have seen in our study how God moved the sea and animals to move one man's heart and to save a city destined for destruction. All of Scripture points to the mercy of God in sending His only Son, Jesus, out of the glories of heaven on a surprising, relentless mission to bring grace to you. As your substitute, Jesus lived the life you cannot and died the death you deserve. His grace is surprising, relentless, and unending.

Jonah—An Introduction | Participant Guide

Warming up . . .

What do you know about the Book of Jonah?

Can you think of a time when you knew the Lord wanted you to obey and you didn't?

How about a time when you did obey?

Into the Word . . .

Read though the Book of Jonah.

What do you think is the central or main theme of the Book of Jonah?

What is "grace"?

Can you find the one verse of prophecy in the Book of Jonah?

List some examples of how God's grace is witnessed in this book.

What are some "big ideas" you discovered while reading this book?

Wrapping up: Discussion & Application . . .

Why do you think Jonah ran away from God's call?

God has given every individual certain tasks and responsibilities. How do we run away from them and why?

How does this book stretch my thinking and encourage me today?

Warming up . . .

Have you ever been asked to do something you did not want to do?

Have you ever heard the saying, “Don’t shoot the messenger!”? Ever had to deliver bad news?

Remember the Pony Express?

Into the Word . . .

Read Jonah 1 and take a moment for everyone to share a few thoughts about the chapter.

Jonah 1:1 – God’s Messenger

We know very little about Jonah, but this was not His first assignment from God. We read about his beginnings in II Kings 14:23–25.

Read Amos 6:4–6 and II Kings 17:16. Here we see Jonah’s prophecy fulfilled.

Jonah 1:1–2 – God’s Message

How was this message similar to Jonah’s message in II Kings?

How was it different?

Read more about Nineveh in Nahum 3:1.

Were both messages Jonah was to deliver ones of grace? Why or why not?

Read I Timothy 2:4. What do we learn about God's heart for people?

Jonah 1:3 – God's Move

Read and discuss Jonah 1:3. Jonah seemed to forget it was God's move, not his, so he ran!

Why was it so hard for Jonah to do what God asked?

Wrapping up: Discussion & Application . . .

Why do you think God cared so much for the people of Nineveh?

What does this teach us about God's character?

How does Jonah's call mirror Christ's ministry?

How are each of us like Jonah?

Do you fear God more than man? Explain.

Warming up . . .

Have you ever tried hiding from your parents when you did something wrong?

What happened?

When we left Jonah, he had just received a message from the Lord to “Arise, go to Nineveh.” We would expect Jonah to obey, but what do we read instead? We find that Jonah ran away!

Into the Word . . .

Jonah 1:3 – He Ran

After hearing God's call, where did Jonah go?

Whom was Jonah running from?

What does Psalm 139:7–8 tell us about running from God?

Jonah 1:5b – He Hid

Once Jonah boarded the ship, where did he go? Why do you think he went there?

What insight does Psalm 32:3–4 give us as to why Jonah fell asleep?

According to verses 5 and 6, what was everyone on the ship except Jonah doing?

Jonah was not only hiding physically. How else was he hiding from the Lord?

Jonah 1:4–7 – God Pursued Jonah

What did God do to make Jonah aware of His presence? (see verse 4)

How does the storm represent God's judgment and mercy?

What do these verses tell us about Jonah's spiritual condition?

The prophet was sleeping. What did the captain try to get Jonah to do?

As the lot fell to Jonah, how do you think he felt? What might he have been thinking?

Wrapping up: Discussion & Application . . .

In what ways do we try to ignore God in our lives or even seek to escape His presence?

How do we hide from the Lord spiritually? What danger is there in doing that?

Read Numbers 32:23 and Hebrews 4:13. What happens when we try to cover up our sin and run from the Lord?

What things might God use to draw us back to Him?

Luke 15:11–32 records the story of the Prodigal Son. What promise is found here for those who run from the Lord?

Warming up . . .

What is Grace?

God’s grace sometimes shows up in ways and times we least expect. Have you ever experienced God’s grace unexpectedly?

Into the Word . . .

Read Jonah 1:6–10 – Sin Exposed

In our last lesson, we left Jonah in a tough spot. He had received messages and a call from the Lord, but he didn’t obey. In fact, he ran in the opposite direction by getting on a boat and trying to sail away from God’s call. God showed His love for Jonah by pursuing him through a violent storm. Soon everyone on board the ship knew Jonah was responsible for this danger to their lives.

How do you think Jonah felt after the lots fell on him in verse 7? How do you think the sailors felt after they cast lots?

What does Jonah confess about the LORD (YAHWEH) in verse 9? What does he leave out?

What inconsistencies are there between Jonah’s beliefs and actions?

Read Jonah 1:11–13 – Solution Proposed

What is surprising about the sailors’ response in verses 10–11?

Compare and contrast how the “prophet” and the “pagans” act.

What do Jonah's actions teach us about the effects of sin?

What solution to ending the storm does Jonah offer? Why does he offer this solution?

What is surprising about the sailors' response in verse 13?

Read Jonah 1:14–17 – Salvation Bestowed

What is surprising about the sailors' response in verse 14?

The sailors use the Jewish name for God—YAHWEH—when they pray. God has been working faith and repentance in their hearts. God used Jonah, who didn't want to be used, to convert these pagan sailors.

What other signs of the sailors' conversion do we see in verse 16?

How do we see God's grace in verse 17?

Wrapping up: Discussion & Application . . .

Similar to Jonah, what inconsistencies could there be between our beliefs and actions?

How have you seen your sin or the sins of someone else affect others?

God used Jonah to bring His grace to the sailors. Who has God used in your life to bring you His grace?

Grace always starts with sin being exposed, which is never a pleasant process. No matter what we try, humans can never come up with a solution for our sin problem. But God has already taken care of it in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He is long-suffering, and He gives many opportunities to respond to His grace. Remember no matter how far you've strayed or what you have done, as long as it is today there is still time to receive His grace.

Warming up . . .

What has been Jonah's biggest struggle?

How do Exodus 33:19 and Psalm 24:1 speak to this struggle?

Into the Word . . .

Read Jonah 2:1–10 – Jonah's State

Describe Jonah's prayer.

How do verses 1–6 describe what is happening to Jonah?

How do verses 1:17 and 2:6b illustrate God's grace in this hopeless situation?

What are the implications for us today?

Reread Jonah 2:1–7 – Jonah's Fate

What two types of death is Jonah describing in verses 1–7?

Read Romans 3:20 and Galatians 3:24. What is the function of the law?

The law had done its work in Jonah's heart. In verses 2–7 he is coming to God in faith and repentance. In verse 4 Jonah calls on God to save him with the sure belief that God would do that very thing. Jonah saw the depth of his selfishness and was now relying on God to save him.

Read Jonah 2:8–10 – Jonah Celebrates

As Jonah sat in that dark, dank spot, he reflected on God's mercy, grace, and the fact that he was not dead. Jonah was overcome with thanksgiving and joy and celebrated his salvation by praising and worshiping the Lord.

Jonah confessed that there is no one like God, no one else in the universe that we can trust to bring us grace, mercy, and forgiveness. People who trust in idols forfeit this grace.

What is idolatry?

What things do you see people put their trust in other than God?

What is Jonah's response to God's grace/salvation? To whom does salvation belong? See V9.

At the end of Jonah 2, God commands the fish to vomit Jonah onto dry land. Jonah's life has been saved. Now he is able to continue in the task God had for him to do.

Wrapping up: Discussion & Application . . .

God provided a fish to save Jonah from drowning. God desired that Jonah repent. How is Jonah's experience with the fish an illustration of salvation?

What does this passage teach us about law, Gospel, grace, mercy, and salvation?

Have you received God's gift of grace?

What are the specific means by which God has promised to extend His grace to us?

Warming up . . .

What are some ways we’ve seen God’s grace so far in the Book of Jonah?

Into the Word . . .

It is easy to end Jonah’s story with him being vomited up by the big fish. But this is not the end. It is not even the climax—we are only halfway through the book. The story of God’s surprising grace continues. Read Jonah 3:1–10.

Same Message Related – Jonah 3:1–4

Compare and contrast Jonah 1:1–3 and Jonah 3:1–3.

Did you notice what God doesn’t bring up to Jonah?

Who brings up our past sins? Why?

Write down a few observations on Jonah’s delivery of God’s message:

Same Message Received – Reread Jonah 3:5–9

What was Nineveh’s response to God’s message?

Look again at the content of Jonah’s message in verse 4 and describe it.

Is there any Gospel (good news of hope and forgiveness) in Jonah's message?

What signs of true repentance do we see in the response of the Ninevites?

Compare the similarities between the sailors' conversion (Jonah 1:13–16) and the Ninevites.

The inward brokenness of the people of Nineveh resulted in outward change. They were turning away from their evil to God in faith, seeking His grace and mercy. They had no guarantee this repentance would result in being saved from destruction, but they recognized their only hope was to turn to the Lord. When faced with our own sin, God's grace and mercy are our only hope.

Same Results Seen – Reread Jonah 3:10

What was God's response to the repentance of the Ninevites?

Did God change His mind? Read Jeremiah 18:7–8.

Wrapping up: Discussion & Application . . .

How is God's message to Nineveh the same message for us today?

Unlike the Ninevites, what guarantee do we have that God will forgive our sins? See I John 1:9 and Romans 10:9–10.

What impact do these truths have on how we share our faith?

Have you ever thought about how God might use you?

Warming up . . .

With all that has happened to Jonah, what do you think Jonah's response and attitude might be?

Into the Word . . .

Read Jonah 4:1–11.

"And they lived happily ever after" is the quintessential ending to nearly every fairy tale. Although we all know that this never really happens, one might expect to find a similar ending here in the Book of Jonah. He has been through quite an ordeal the past few weeks. Running from God, living in the belly of a fish, traveling to Nineveh, preaching the Gospel, and the seeing the Ninevites' response of faith! One would expect Jonah to give a big smile of relief and satisfaction! But no, instead he heads out to the hills, pitches a makeshift shelter, and pouts. He was not filled with joy for the turn of events; instead, he was filled with anger!

Jonah's Anger (verses 1–3)

Why was Jonah angry?

What reason does Jonah give for not going to Nineveh right away?

Read Exodus 34:6–7. What does this passage tell us about God's character?

Why might Jonah believe the people of Nineveh did not deserve God's grace?

Do you think he was right? Why or why not?

God's Answer (verses 4–11)

Reread Jonah 4:4–5. How does God respond to Jonah's anger?

What do you think? Does Jonah have good reason or a right to be angry?

How does Jonah's response in verse 5 show that not much has changed for him?

Reread Jonah 4:6–8. Who is in control?

How does God's grace show up again?

What is God illustrating to Jonah through the wind, the vine, and the worm?

Reread Jonah 4:9–11. Why is Jonah angry this time?

Does he have a right to be angry? Why or why not?

What do these verses show us about God's character?

Who remains the only person unchanged in this story? Why is that?

Wrapping up: Discussion & Application . . .

How is Jonah's condition in this chapter similar to that of the Ninevites?

How is our condition similar to that of the Ninevites and Jonah?

In what ways do you care more about your own comfort than about others' souls?

We don't learn what happened to Jonah. Why do you think God chose to leave it a mystery?

The people of Nineveh didn't deserve God's grace. Jonah didn't deserve God's grace. We don't deserve God's grace. But that is why He gives it.