

JONAH

How We Are God's Mission
While On God's Mission
An Everyday Discipleship Study

By Brad Watson



JONAH : How We Are God's Mission While On God's Mission

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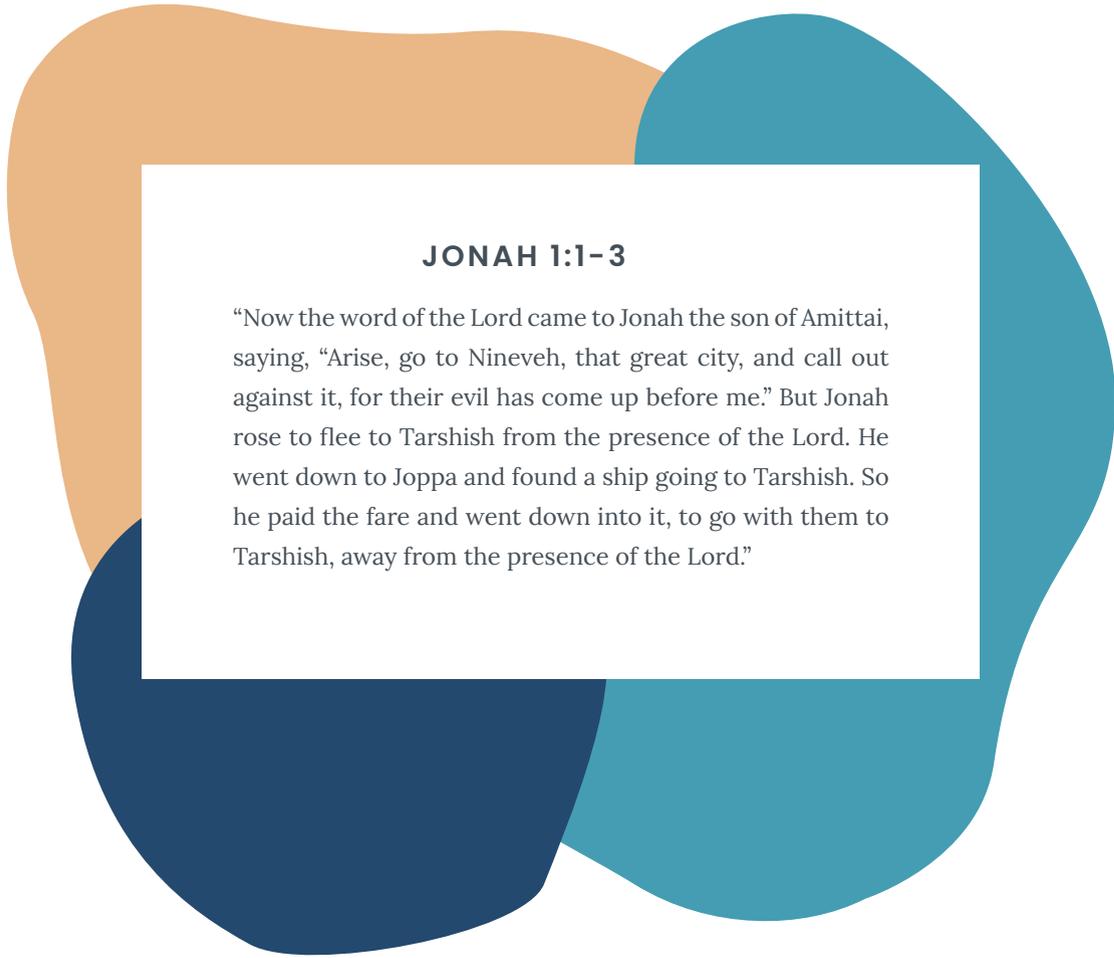
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JONAH 1:1-3

“Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.” 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.”

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|----|
| Introduction to Series | 10 |
| How to Use This Guide | 12 |
| Introduction to Jonah | 14 |
| The Story of Jonah | 18 |
| Week 1: God's Mission and Our Hearts | 22 |
| Week 2: God's Grace Interrupts Our Rebellion | 30 |
| Week 3: God Uses Incomplete People to Complete His Mission | 38 |
| Week 4: Participating in God's Mission to the City | 46 |
| Week 5: A Repentant City: "And the People Believed God" | 54 |
| Week 6: Our Anger and God's Pursuit of Us | 62 |
| Week 7: God's Mercy for the "Great City" | 70 |
| Week 8: Where Do We Go from Here? | 78 |
| Glossary of Terms | 86 |

INTRODUCTION TO SERIES

Each fall as a church in Los Angeles, we take eight to twelve weeks to teach through our core convictions, beliefs, and practices as a church. We often do this through sermons that outline the purpose and power of the gospel, our gospel identity, and the rhythms of life that overflow from the gospel.¹ It's more than a sermon series for us. These are the gospel basics, the primer, and the foundation on which everything we do as a missional church is laid.

You can read through these convictions on our website (saturatetheworld.com), or in Jeff Vanderstelt's book, *Saturate*, or you could even attend a Saturate training event or Soma School to have a deep dive instruction on them. We don't just train on these things as topics, they saturate every aspect of life in our church. They come out in each sermon, we sing them in our gatherings,

and we find them through the whole of the Bible in both its grand narrative and in each particular scene or book of Scripture. It could honestly and humbly be said that this is our church's culture and the vision for the intentional and steady study of the Scriptures in our missional communities. This series of guided Bible studies is built around and from church cultures like ours from the ever-multiplying family of churches called Soma.

Our aim of this series is to help communities small and large engage the Scriptures from the context of the Story of God and grow deeper in the richness of understanding, speaking, and living the gospel of Jesus. Five core principles hold each of these studies together:

¹If you're unfamiliar with these concepts, further explanation is given in the glossary of this study.

Discipleship Environment

Disciples are made in community on mission, and a disciple is someone who is increasingly submitting every aspect of life to God the Father, Son, and Spirit.

Holistic

Good theology isn't just understanding the truths of God in our heads, it is believing and applying the truths to our hearts, and it's obeying the truths in our everyday lives. A fully formed disciple is growing in their head, heart, and hands.

Bible

The Bible is the authoritative grand narrative of God's mission to restore all things. This is the true story of the entire world.

The Gospel

The good news of Jesus is He has defeated sin, death, and evil through His life, death, and resurrection and is making all things new, even us.

Empowered

Prayer is the oxygen of every gospel-focused community of disciples.

We believe that through each study, a community will be reintroduced to the foundations of discipleship while also growing in a deeper understanding of how the gospel applies to every aspect of life.

USING THIS GUIDE

This guide has been designed for disciples who are committed to the process of learning to find Jesus in such a way they see their lives and neighborhoods made new. Disciple-making environments create space for followers of Jesus to thrive by repeated reintroduction of the gospel to the hearts of each disciple. This guide is designed to facilitate that type of space.

This guide can work well in multiple settings. It can be used on your own as a personal and enriching study. Large community groups, like a weekly meal within a missional community, can adapt it for their purposes. Or smaller groups, like what many Soma churches call DNA Groups when two or three disciples meet together, can use it to facilitate study and connection. You are an expert in the communities and disciples you're leading. Use it in whatever context you believe is most beneficial.

Personal Reading and Reflection: The Four Questions

In preparation for each week, we encourage each participant to take time to read the passage and reflect on how it introduces us to the gospel. Use these four questions that help disciples focus their Scripture reading on the gospel of God.

1. **Who is God?**—What does this passage tell us about God's character, motives, and identity? The Bible is about Him.
2. **What Has He Done?**—What do we see God doing in this passage? What work do we observe?
3. **Who Are We?**—What does this passage tell us about our identity?
4. **How Do We Live?**—Lastly, how is God calling us to live based on who we are, what He has done, and who He is?

This is important because personal reading and reflection are a crucial part of a disciple's journey and they allow each person the opportunity to come into the group discussions ready to engage.

Holistic Discussions: Head, Heart, and Hands

Each week has a short opening article to set the table for your time, followed by a reading of the passage and discussion about what the passage means. Then, you move to applying the truths of the Bible to your own heart before thinking through what obedience to that passage will look like. This is a holistic study of an entire person. We call these different pieces Head, Heart, and Hands.

Head

Our minds are renewed by the knowledge of God, allowing Him to change what and how we think.

Heart

Our souls are restored by the application of truth to our wounds, stories, suffering, and sin.

Hands

Our everyday lives are transformed through the power of the Spirit to call us into obedience to the truth.

Extras

We've included "Extras" in each section that will provide insights into the text. This is intended to be supplemental and give extra linguistic, cultural, or modern context to the Scriptures.

Prayer

Each week we will guide you to pray. We're not going to throw a ton of instructions your way about that. But we urge you to pause and pray. Respond to God, talk to God, and listen to God in community.

Make It Your Own

Lastly, there's freedom! If you're leading a group, we suggest reading through this guide on your own in its entirety and then mapping out how your group will engage this tool. For example, you may decide your group would benefit from each person doing each week on their own before getting together to walk through each person's "highlights" or key questions you want to discuss as a group. Or you may decide your group would most benefit from walking through the entire thing together. Or you may decide on a mixture of those two approaches. Either way, know you have complete freedom.

INTRODUCTION TO JONAH

Jonah is a short book in a collection called the minor prophets, not because these prophets were below average in their speaking, but because they were brief.

Some of these prophets used powerful poetry (like Habakkuk and Zephaniah). Others used the culturally relevant events of the times to make their point in a few chapters (Joel, for example). Others used visceral visions (Zechariah, for example). But a few, like Jonah, used story. In fact, they used their own stories to get to the depth of the imaginations of people to unlock their minds to the grace, justice, and love of God. Stories cut through the noise and leave us with truth we can process over time.

These prophets used their own stories to reveal who God is, what He's doing, who we are, and what we're called to do. Jonah is written as a "play within a play" like Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*, where the actors play characters who are actors performing a play.

Jonah is like a play, or a short story, written within the "grand story" of God, His people, and His mission. To understand Jonah, we have to understand the whole story. Here's the SparkNotes version of that big Story that Jonah is within:

Creation

In the beginning, God created everything and it was good. He created humans to reflect His glory and goodness. To be united to Him and with one another. The world was thriving and bustling with joy, purpose, and even understanding.

Promise

But God promised to defeat sin, evil, and death and make the world new. He chose Abraham to be the father of a family that would bless all the peoples of the world. Through their uniqueness, obedience, and worship, the world would once again see what God is like. But most pressing, God promised that through His family, a King would come who would redeem the world from sin, death, and evil.

Restoration

One day, Jesus will return, rule, and restore all creation. All sin, death, and suffering from evil will be wiped away. God will dwell with His people and we will worship Him forever, just as we were created to: delighting in God's loving resolve to restore us and His world.

Rebellion

Later, humanity rebelled against the living God who created them, knew them, and provided abundant life for them. Sinning against God, they seemingly broke the world forever. Shame, guilt, destruction, murder, pride, greed, and many more sins rushed into the world. All human life orbited around sin, death, and evil.

Redemption

Jesus is that King. The good news about Jesus is that through His life, death, and resurrection He has defeated sin, death, and evil and is making all things new, including humanity!

Church

Jesus sends His Spirit into all who believe, and they're called not just into salvation but into the people of God—the Church. The Church is a remarkable resurrected family that exists in this world as a signpost of the gospel and agents of reconciliation in a world still gripped with death.

*These symbols were created by Kevin Platt and Chris Gonzalez and used with permission.

This is the unfolding True Story. The book of Jonah was written within the act of “Promise.” It came when the people of God had neglected their purpose to be a blessing through whom all the people of the world would be blessed (Genesis 12:1-3). It also came as God’s people were consumed with pride, thinking they had the inside track to God. And, they refused to be a blessing people who operated as a holy nation of priests to the world. Jonah is a story about how God responds to that.

What this story is telling us is deeper than one man’s fishy journey of disobedience. It’s telling us the story of God’s mission to God’s people and *through* God’s people.

This small story will challenge our motivations for loving neighbors and will alter our visions of how we participate in what God is doing.

WHAT IS THE JONAH STORY ABOUT?

Jonah is a story about a sour prophet on the run. It's also a story about a large fish with an appetite for prophets. And, it's the story of a rebellious city sprung into a revival of repentance. But, it's first and foremost about God and His mission. He gets the first words, and He gets the last. He is the cause and the conclusion of this story. To journey through the book of Jonah is to go on a long walk into the heart of God and His passion to make Himself known to all people.

"Mission arises from the heart of God himself, and is communicated from his heart to ours. Mission is the global outreach of the global people of a global God."

- Christopher Wright, *The Mission of God*

A very accurate title of this book could have been: God's Pursuit of Jonah. Each chapter is about God's mission to those closest to Him, who hear His voice, participate in His mission, and walk in His ways. God, in this powerful story, pursues the heart and soul of the one He sent. God pursues Jonah from the first words when He calls him and sends him on a mission to Nineveh. Then, through the storm, through

the fish, through the proclaiming of God's message in the city, and ultimately through his complaints, God pursues Jonah. Jonah, it becomes clear, needs pursuing. Yes, he's done a lot of things for God, but he doesn't understand Him. He doesn't understand the motivation of God and His mission. He doesn't understand grace.

Perhaps, that's you. You've grown up or been part of the "church" for so long you can't remember being on the "outside." You walk in obedience, you do the right things, you even care about people, and you're making sacrifices for God's mission. Maybe you "live intentionally" and love some of your neighbors. You might daily hear from God. You might even believe the story of Jonah is about the consequences of disobedience: "Don't be like Jonah; if you disobey God, He'll hunt you down and make you do it anyway but only after He's made life miserable!"

But I wonder, do you live in His grace? Do you live under His pursuit of your soul? Has God captured your heart in such a way that everything He calls you to isn't a burden to accomplish but a joy?

Here's the truth for you in Jonah: God is not done with you. He's pursuing your soul. You're not on God's mission, you are God's mission.

The book of Jonah is also the story of God's pursuit of the outsider and those far from Him. It could also very accurately be titled: God's Pursuit of the Wayward City. In this story, God pursues the sailors who worship other gods, an evil king, and a warmongering city that has tormented its neighbors. As the story unfolds, it becomes clear that God not only wants to do something in Jonah's life, but He wants to make Himself known to the most despicable. God loves, has compassion for, and even purposes His entire self in pursuit of the most distant.

God's Pursuit for Humanity: The Masses and the Personal

This book gives us an imagination for revival among the hardest of souls. It tells the story of multiple unlikely conversions. In the end, we discover why God cares about mission: because they're people He's made. God tells Jonah, "This is a great city with countless people. How can I not have mercy?"

WEEK 1

God's Mission and Our Hearts

WEEK 1

JONAH 1:1-4

PERSONAL REFLECTION: FOUR QUESTIONS

Spend time reading this passage and reflecting on these questions in order. Think through all the explicit and implied statements about who God is, then what He has done, who we are, and how we should live. As you answer these questions, you can even connect them to each other. For example: If that's what God has done, who does that make me? And how do I live in light of that truth?

- **Who is God?**
- **What has He done?**
- **Who are we?**
- **How do we live?**

INTRODUCTION

One of my favorite places in the world is Griffith Observatory, which overlooks the city of Los Angeles, but more importantly, houses astronomers and telescopes. At night, they point telescopes toward the heavens and allow mere mortals to gaze at supernovas, planets, and brilliant stars light-years away. While the observatory is always packed with people, the lines for the telescopes are short.

Most people craft Instagram stories of the lights below, bypassing the spectacular above. You can often overhear people walking away from the telescopes, unimpressed, "Is that all?" We're unmoved by the spectacular, miraculous, and otherworldly. Not just with the cosmos, but with the Scriptures, too. Our eyes skip words, our hearts respond, "Is that all?"

In the Bible, there are sentences more awe-inspiring than a star forming four billion miles away. One such sentence is this: "The Word of the Lord came."

God speaks words to humans. He breathes His thoughts, motives, actions, and words. The Lord, the God of the Story of the Bible, is a revealing God and a speaking God. In Jonah,

He speaks about rising up and going. He talks about going to a place. He declares this place, "a great city." A big and worthwhile place. God uses His words to send, and He uses His words to be involved in human history. He isn't aloof, and He is aware of evil. He knows of it, He sees it, and He is going to do something about it. What a marvelous God who cares about distant people, even in their rebellion, and sends a messenger to them.

Jonah is a person like you and me. He has acquired the skills of hearing God's voice and speaking His words. God comes to him and speaks, calling him into a journey of making God's will known to this city. God calls him into His passion for seeing it restored. This is the stuff of mystery. Maybe we take it for granted; God cares so deeply about this world that He's willing to intervene. His purposes are so intentional; He calls us to participate in it. What a spectacle!

This is the setting of the story of Jonah. It is also the setting of our lives. God has spoken to us through His Son: "Go make disciples!" He has also intervened. He is deeply concerned with even the most rebellious city. God, our God, has

a word for us. A word of God has come to us. The Word. The story of Jonah hinges on this son of Amita's response. This launches our story. God has a message, and God has a messenger, and God has a destination. But the messenger rebels.

Jonah would rather abandon his God, his home, and his profession than be on mission to those people. These first verses of Jonah are a treasure chest of grace, calling, heartbreak, pride, and idols.

READ JONAH 1:1-3 OUT LOUD.

HEAD:

Discuss this passage together.

- ***What does this passage reveal to us about God and His character?***
- ***What does God do? How is this like what He has done in our lives?***
- ***Who is Jonah? What do you think Jonah's decision says about who he believes God to be?***
- ***What does Jonah do? Putting yourself in his shoes, why?***

TWO CITIES: TARSHISH AND NINEVEH

The first lines of Jonah pit two cities against each other. Nineveh was a beastly city of a war-prone nation. A place of wickedness, evil, violence, and disregard for human life. It was a landlocked desert city. Nineveh wasn't a generic place for Jonah; it was an enemy state opposed to his homeland, religion, and God. It was noteworthy in the news, but a far cry from any sort of tourist destination. Tarshish, on the other hand, was a Mediterranean outpost on the edge of the known world filled with a coastal breeze, culture, and peace. Tarshish was glamorous—the type of place you daydream about. Nineveh was grueling, and the message for them would be harsh: You're wicked, and you need to change. The process for "mission" in Nineveh was likely long, seeing a hard place become soft to God over many years.

The destinations are different in every way. Perhaps Jonah wasn't just disregarding Nineveh but was

grasping for Tarshish. Or, it wasn't only that Nineveh was scary, but that Tarshish sounded nice. It wasn't only that Nineveh was inconvenient but that Tarshish was pleasing. Or, perhaps, it wasn't only that Nineveh seemed beneath him but that Tarshish also seemed worthy of his talent. Have you ever faced a Tarshish vs. Nineveh decision?

In the end, Jonah chose Tarshish. Verse three says: "He went to Tarshish...to flee from the Lord." He didn't merely choose Tarshish over Nineveh; he chose it over God and His presence. His choice reveals his desires for his life and his belief about God. He believed God wasn't concerned with him, he doubted His voice, and he doubted God cared about his good. He believed God was withholding, punishing, even acting cruelly. It appears that Jonah was done being God's prophet because he didn't trust God with his life. He also decided God's mission wasn't worthy. Nineveh didn't deserve him, and God wasn't to be trusted. He didn't want to be in the presence of God. So he took matters into his own hands.

HEART:

Put yourself in Jonah's shoes. Imagine a decision or response to God's mission that is facing you.

- *How do you process obedience to God's voice?*
- *What do your decisions say about who you believe God to be?*
- *What do you choose over God's voice and God's presence?*
- *What are you tempted to choose over God's mission? Why?*

HANDS:

In Jonah's case, to get on the boat to Tarshish, he had to travel to the port city, purchase fare, wait for the ship to be ready, and finally board it. Along the way, he had many moments to stop and change his mind about who God is, His voice, and His mission.

- *What would it have been like if Jonah shifted his decision? What if he trusted God and obeyed?*
- *In what areas of your life are you tempted to choose "Tarshish over Nineveh"?*
- *What would it look like for you to change your mind and choose trust and obedience?*

PRAY

Spend time praying for each other as you reflect on this passage and your own lives. Pray to be empowered by the Spirit as you walk in obedience.