



For January 24th, 2010

Midlothian Bible Church

Life In Focus

Examining Life Through the Lens of Scripture

Minor Prophets

Jonah



We've all been there, so none of us should swell up with pride too much, but we still do. We like to think that we are just a little bit better off than the next person, that we would not do the same thing if given the same situation. We observe crumbling mar-

riages and bow up at the strength of our own. We shame the person who cheats in life wondering where all the integrity has gone while praying no one looks too deep past the tidy facade of our closet. We shake our head in disgust at a stubborn teen's imploding decisions forgetting our own selfish stupidity in knowing everything and nothing at the same time. Whether in finances, career, politics, relationships, or struggle, we exhaust ourselves in the effort for, as troubling and arrogant as it is, we can't seem to kick the insidious addiction of perception. We would rather have someone view what they perceive in us favorably than to risk the vulnerability of letting them know the reality of how things actually are. To top it off, we play this game with God forgetting that we cannot hide from the One who formed us; no amount of charades can mask our nakedness before Him. It's not easy being real, is it? Our heart deceives its true desire with the pious cloak of perception and all the while God screams for us to give Him all that we are, to lay our necks bear before Him as a pauper in total humility before its king. For when we dare to be real with God in every acclaim and distaste of our lives it is then we find rest and purpose. All God wants is all of us and when He has all of us, He crafts an amazing picture of grace and beauty. This we know for we've seen His handiwork, still we struggle with letting Him have total control. Whether we like it or not we are all like the OT prophet Jonah. We think we know better than God how things should be and so we run to the place we feel most comfortable even if it is at the expense of others. In this misguided pursuit, we search for something only God can fulfill and find ourselves covered in vomit from the belly of a whale. But if we let it, even vomit can reveal God's mercy.

MBC Mission Statement:

Building God's family by developing intimate followers of Jesus Christ.

Grow Mature Reproducing Disciples

Raise Christ-centered Families

Adore the Triune God

Communicate Him to our Culture

Express our Faith Globally

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Day One

The Setting of the Heart

Digging
Deeper



- **Presence:** David’s fear of Psalm 50:11 was real. The Spirit came upon kings for leadership and blessing. David saw in Saul, the first king of Israel, what it would be like to not have it.
- **Psalm 32:** This Psalm is his words of restoration after being forgiven of his sin with Bathsheba.

Scripture Memory

Jonah 4:2

“...for I know that you are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in loving-kindness, One who relents from doing harm.”

New King James Version

It is important to hide God’s Word in our heart. Each week we will provide a section of verses you can use to enjoy this benefit.

Tips:

1. Use a familiar, reader-friendly version.
2. Write the vs. on a 3x5 card. Carry it with you.
3. Repetition is key.
4. Focus on content.

◆ **Introduction:**

↪ In the covenant God made with Moses, all of his chosen people, the nation of Israel, promised to walk in obedience to all that God commanded. But not too unlike you and I, they struggled with obedience and floundered in an unhealthy cycle of sin, enslavement, and salvation. They would cry out to God to be delivered from the consequences of their own actions only to fall back into the same thing that led them astray in the first place—idolatry. It wasn’t long in their history that the unity experienced with Joshua in conquering Canaan splintered into the Northern and Southern Kingdoms.

↪ This illustration of disobedience is made clearer in the fact that none of the Northern kings had a heart for God and only eight from the South honored him. Throughout this divided kingdom God spoke to his people through prophets so they would return to him, stay his hand of judgment and experience the blessing of obedience. What makes the book of Jonah so compelling, beside the similarities we see in our own lives, is the fact that the word of compassion God wanted Jonah to share was to an arch enemy—the Assyrian Empire. As the ruling world power, they struck fear in the hearts of people at just the mention of their names. And so thinking they he knew better than God, Jonah did what we would have done...he ran.

↪ Before we jump into the story, let’s spend the rest of today looking at our own lives. In light of the opening article on page one, start today’s journey of faith with the commitment to be open and honest with God.

◆ **Study:** Read *Psalm 51*.

↪ Knowing this was written after King David was confronted by the prophet Nathan for his sin with Bathsheba, how would you summarize what this Psalm is talking about?

◆ **Reflect:**

↪ In v. 10, David asks God to “create in him a clean heart and renew a steadfast spirit.” What does this mean? Where do you need God to cleanse you? How willing are you to let him work?

Day Two

Running from God

Digging
Deeper



o **Date and Setting:**

It is difficult to know the exact date of the writing of Jonah, but he “is mentioned in **2 Kings 14:25** as having predicted the victories of Jeroboam II by which the borders of the kingdom of Israel were greatly enlarged. If Jonah prophesied at the beginning of Jeroboam’s reign, he would precede Amos by about twenty years only. At that time Assyria was already a great power, and had begun to reach...westward: in fact, Jeroboam’s victories were partly due to Assyrian raids upon Damascus and neighboring states, which weakened these kingdoms. It would seem that Jonah was afraid of Assyria, whose cruelties were well known and whose power was dreaded.” (Search the Scriptures, p.312).

◆ **Introduction:**

↪ Have you ever bargained with God? One thing to remember about reading the prophets is that we can be sure that when God issued judgment it was the last thing he wanted to do. He would rather have people, especially those who claim to be his, be humble and honest before him turning from disobedience and running to God for forgiveness. This is what God wanted for Israel, but they continued to disobey. So, God used a people Jonah didn’t think deserved compassion to teach his people an important lesson about it. To Jonah however, this was unconscionable. So he took matters in his own hand trying to make his own deal with God. But God had other plans.

◆ **Study: Read *Jonah 1*.**

↪ What did God want Jonah to do? Why?

↪ Nineveh was the capital of the Assyrian Empire and is now in modern day Iraq. Where did Jonah go instead of Nineveh? Turn to a map in the back of your Bible and track his journey.

↪ What happened when Jonah stepped aboard the ship? How did the sailors arrive at the decision to throw Jonah into the water? Describe their process in fearing God. What did God use to spare Jonah’s life?

◆ **Reflect:**

↪ Where do you see yourself in this chapter? Think about a time that you tried to bargain with God. How did it turn out? What do we learn about following God from this chapter?

Day Three

Prayer and Deliverance

Digging
Deeper



- **Understanding the message of the prophets:** As we go through the various minor prophets it is often difficult to understand what is being said and why. In their book *How to Read The Bible Book By Book*, Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart offer three points they consider crucial to making sense of the message of the prophets: *One*, it is necessary to understand the social-religious-political situation into which they were speaking. This includes significant political, military, economic, and social concerns. It also includes a high level of unfaithfulness and disregard for the Mosaic Covenant. Finally, enormous shifts in the balance of power on the international scene. *Two*, be aware of the tensions the prophets have for the near and future prophecies. *Three*, it is important to know the words are most often in the form of poetry.

◆ **Introduction:**

↳ I don't know how the three days went for Jonah in the belly of the whale, but it couldn't have been pretty. From the smell to the darkness, from the feel of sliminess to the appalling taste and gurgling sounds, Jonah couldn't have been any lower. With rotting food as a companion, he cried out to God for mercy and God, true to his nature, listened to his cries for help rescuing him through a pit of vomit.

◆ **Study: Read *Jonah 2*.**

↳ Read the first and last verse of this chapter. What happened?

↳ What stands out to you about the content of his prayer? Read his prayer and underline the points of what he learned about God and about himself.

↳ Use Jonah's prayer as a model for a prayer of repentance. What are at least four components a prayer of this nature should include?

◆ **Reflect:**

↳ When David confessed his sin against God, he admitted everything holding nothing back. Close today by praying for God to forgive you where you need it. Don't miss out on the way in which Jonah's prayer was given: *Humility & Honesty*.

Day Four

Preaching the Word

Digging Deeper



- **Our Indictment:**
From the prophets we learn a number of things about ourselves. “God had not changed, and human nature has not changed,” so we too are responsible for what we learn in their message. There are at least five categories:
 - ▶ *Unfaithfulness to God.* Where are you tempted to be unfaithful to God?
 - ▶ *Oppression of Defenseless.* Are you a help or hindrance to those people on your street or around the world concerning injustice?
 - ▶ *Devaluing, Deprecating, Degrading, Demeaning Deity.* How would God view your commitment to him?
 - ▶ *Misplaced Reliance.* Who do you depend upon?
 - ▶ *Confused Priorities.* What is first place in your life?

◆ **Introduction:**

✦ After he woke up on the beach in a pool of slim and vomit, Jonah decided to follow God. He had been willing to give up his profession to not do what God wanted him to do, but now he wanted nothing else than to at least be the mouthpiece for God and deliver a message of compassion. The city of Nineveh was huge, a three day journey through it. In fact, some have stated that it could have been at least thirty miles in width. About a day’s journey into the city, Jonah stops and opens his mouth and what he feared would happen did indeed happen. God relented from his judgment. He had been faithful to say the words God wanted him to say, but he still struggled with believing “why?” Quickly faithfulness to preach the word of God turned to anger and Jonah ran away again.

◆ **Study: Read *Jonah 3.***

- ✦ Put yourself in Jonah’s sandals. How would you feel about waking into the city of people you hated and knew could rip you apart at any moment? Would that affect your message?
- ✦ How did the people of Nineveh respond? To what level did the repentance go? What did the nobility declare?
- ✦ Why did God turn from punishing the people of Nineveh? Why did he acknowledge about their repentance?

◆ **Reflect:**

✦ What can we learn from Jonah’s faithfulness to preach the word of God? What can we learn from the people of Nineveh in regard to repentance? What do we learn about God?

Day Five

God's Plant

Digging
Deeper



- **Indictment:** Yesterday, we mentioned five categories taken from Walton and Hill's *Old Testament Today's Commentary*. Which one of ones of those categories do you struggle with the most?
- **Family Exercise:** Gather your family in devotions before bed some night. Allow for about 30 minutes for this exercise. Act out this book in your devotions. Have one of your kids construct a whale and a plant out of some construction paper. Be sure you confront your children where they are most like Jonah. Let the story be real in their lives.

Life *In Focus* © is a weekly sermon-based ministry serving Midlothian Bible Church and is written by Layne A. Mershimer (mersh@att.net), *Pastor of Adult Ministries*. Learning takes place in the context of community, so we encourage you to interact with the lesson and send your questions. Our prayer is that L.I.F. will help you grow in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

◆ **Introduction:**

- ↳ Sitting on a hill outside of the city, Jonah sat down to sulk. God had done exactly as he had thought. He forgave a violent people of their sin and did not judge them. To Jonah this was the worst of the worst, but as we have learned in this book, as much as this story focuses on Jonah's belief and disbelief, it is not about him. It is about a faithful God being true to his word. To Jonah's anger God caused a plant to grow. But it wasn't until the next day when its lesson was made clear.

◆ **Study:** Read *Jonah 4*.

- ↳ How angry do you think Jonah got? Have you ever been angry with God's compassion with other people? In what way?

- ↳ What did Jonah pray to God? How was this prayer different than his prayer in Chapter 2?

- ↳ How did God respond to Jonah? How would you describe what happened in v.5?

- ↳ What was the point of the plant? How does this chapter end? What question are we left with?

◆ **Reflect:**

- ↳ Where do you need to be honest with God? How do you think your life would be different if you walked with him in obedience? Jonah's story ended unresolved, how will be it answered in your life? Close in prayer.