

**GOD WANTS TO GIVE YOU ANOTHER CHANCE**  
**JONAH 3:1-10**

One day, a certain man sat eating a bowl of cereal and reading the local newspaper before his commute to work. To his surprise, he read his own name listed in the obituary section of the paper. He did not know if it was an intentional prank or an inadvertent mistake. But it didn't matter. After reading the news that he was dead, his day was ruined. Yours would be too. So he drove to the newspaper office and confronted the editor. "I'm outraged," he said. "You printed my name in the obituary column. As you can see, I am obviously alive and well. This is going to be a cause of great embarrassment for me. I will probably even lose business." "Sir, I'm sorry," said the editor. "It was an error, but there is nothing I can do." That explanation did not appease him. And he continued to rant and even threatened to sue the paper. Finally the editor said, "Cheer up, buddy. Tomorrow, I'll put your name in the birth column and give you a fresh start."

Wouldn't it be wonderful if that was all it took to have a fresh start? Unfortunately, merely changing your column, category, or condition will not give you a fresh start in life. That's the *bad news* for every one of us who has sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. There is absolutely nothing you can do to overcome the consequences of sin.

- **Your good works cannot do it, no matter how determined you may be to change and do right.**
- **Your resources cannot do it, no matter what you have or get.**
- **Your loved-ones cannot do it, no matter who they are or what they can do.**
- **Your environment cannot do it, no matter where you go or how far you go.**

Jeremiah 13:23 says, "*Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Then also you can do good who are accustomed to do evil.*" There is nothing you can do to overcome the consequences of sin. But there is *good news*: God is ready, willing, and able to give you a second chance. Isaiah 1:18 reads, "*Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; through they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.*" No matter what you have done, God wants to give you another chance. God wants to give you a fresh start. God wants to give you a new beginning. GEORGE H. MORRISON was right: "The victorious Christian life is a series of new beginnings." That is the message of Jonah 3. God wants to give you another chance to change your ways. And God wants to give you another chance to change the world.

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**I. GOD WANTS TO GIVE YOU ANOTHER CHANCE TO CHANGE YOUR WAYS.**

In Jonah 1, God ordered Jonah to go to the city of Nineveh to cry out against its great evil. Jonah responded by becoming a fugitive from his divine mission. Instead of going east to Nineveh, Jonah went west to the seaport city of

Joppa and caught a ship to Tarshish to flee from the presence of the Lord. But God overtook the ship with a windstorm that was so severe that it made the pagan sailors pray. Jonah slept. And when the sailors woke him up, identified him as the source of the problem, and challenged him to do something to make the situation right with God, Jonah still did not repent. Instead, he recommended that the sailors throw him overboard, which they finally did with great reluctance. While this course of action spared the sailor's lives, it did not help Jonah escape. God prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah alive. And in the belly of the fish, Jonah prayed the prayer recorded in Jonah 2. God heard his prayer and commanded the fish to spit Jonah out to dry land. Jonah 3:1 begins by telling us what happened next: *"Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time."*

Of course, the specific details of Jonah's experience do not apply to us. But the essential truth of Jonah's experience does: God wants to give you another chance. Jonah's experience is a message from God to us about the opportunity, difficulty, and responsibility of a second chance. Verses 1-4 records God's recommissioning of Jonah. But think about how God could have dealt with Jonah. God told Jonah to prophesy to Nineveh. But Jonah ran in the opposite direction, becoming the only prophet in scripture who ran from the ministry. And God had to use the forces of nature, the integrity of pagans, the watery tomb of the sea, and the obedience of the animal world, to get Jonah to turn around. One might think that after all of this God would have had enough of Jonah. After all, God didn't need Jonah. God could have called one of Jonah's prophetic contemporaries, like Amos, to go to Nineveh - or anybody else, for that matter. Many of us would have said, "I forgive him, but I will never trust him again." But the Lord did not do that. God was more than gracious in delivering Jonah. But he went even further and recommissioned Jonah as his prophet to Nineveh.

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You have missed the story of Jonah if all you can see in the story of Jonah is the story of Jonah. Sure, this book is the story of a specific person (Jonah) that the Lord called to a specific place (Nineveh) for a specific purpose (to proclaim God's message). But while the details make Jonah's story unique; those principles make Jonah's story universal. God was in control of the details of Jonah's life. And God is in control of the details of your life. God determined the place where he wanted Jonah to be. And God has determined the place where he wants you to be. God had a purpose to fulfill through Jonah. And God has a purpose to fulfill through you. Jeremiah 29:11 says, *"For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope."* God has great plans for your life, even though it may not seem that way to you. And because of our sinful minds, worldly attitudes, and limited perspective, we often fail to test and approve that good, acceptable, and perfect will of God. Consequently, there have been times in all of our lives when we have played the Jonah. You have done things that have...

- **Defied the will of God**
- **Brought reproach to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ**
- **Quenched the work of the Holy Spirit**
- **Disobeyed the commandments of holy scripture.**
- **Hindered the message of the Gospel**
- **Embarrassed the witness of the church**
- **Robbed your own soul of the blessings of God**

*You are Jonah!* But inasmuch as you identify with Jonah's sinful rebellion, you qualify for a second chance. God gave Jonah a second chance in spite of Jonah's sinful rebellion. In fact, God gave Jonah a second chance in spite of the fact that Jonah would rebel again in chapter 4. God did not do that because of Jonah. God did it because that is the kind of God he is. I did not say that's the way God *was*. I said that's the way God *is*. God is the God of the second chance. Moreover, God is the God of the tenth, hundredth, and thousandth chance. No matter what you've done, God wants to give you another chance. There is...

**NO RUT SO DEEP YOU CANNOT LEAVE IT**  
**NO DREAM SO LOST YOU CAN'T RETRIEVE IT**  
**NO PAIN SO GREAT YOU CAN'T ENDURE IT**  
**NO SIN SO BAD THAT GOD CAN'T CURE IT**

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Let me place two footnotes here: one is a warning from Jonah's downfall before the second chance; the other is a reminder of Jonah's duty after the second chance. First of all, be careful not to read *Jonah 1:1-4* and then skip to *Jonah 3:1-4*. Make sure you read what happened between Jonah's rebellion and his restoration, for in that part of the story we see that second chances come only after the disciplining hand of God chases, corners, chastens, cleanses, and corrects us. Think about it. God had to almost kill Jonah before he could restore him. Even Isaiah, who did not run from God's call, said, "*Woe is me,*" before he said, "*Here am I, send me.*" God gives second chances after he teaches painful lessons. So obey God now, rather than learning obedience the hard way.

**PHIL YANCEY writes of talking to a Christian friend who was planning to commit adultery. He asked Yancey, "Do you think God can forgive something as awful as I am about to do?" Yancey replied, "Can God forgive you? Of course. Read your Bible. David, Peter, Paul - God builds his church on the backs of people who murder, commit adultery, deny him and persecute his followers. But because of Christ, forgiveness is now our problem, not God's. What we have to go through to commit sin distances us from God - we change in the very act of rebellion - and there is no guarantee we will come back. You ask me about forgiveness now, but will you even want it later, especially if it involves repentance?"**

When we sin, it brings spiritual guilt, divine judgment, and personal consequences. However, when God forgives us through the atoning blood of

Jesus Christ, it removes the guilt and satisfies the judgment. But it may not reverse the consequences. Galatians 6:7 says, *“Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.”* So don't test God's mercy.

- **Obey God now.**
- **Do his will now.**
- **Heed his call now.**
- **Follow his leadership now.**
- **Submit to his commands now.**

But what if this warning catches you too late? What if, like Jonah, you have already crossed the line into spiritual rebellion? What if you have already come under the chastening hand of God? What if you are here today as one of God's special restoration projects? What should you do now? You should do the same thing you should have done before God gave you another chance: OBEY. That's what Jonah did. Verse 3 says, *“So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord.”* That's what Jonah 1:3 ought to say. Instead, it says, *“But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.”* And everything went downhill from there. But God gave Jonah another chance. And when he did, Jonah did the right thing. He obeyed the command of God. That is what you must do. After Jesus healed the man by the Bethesda's pool, who had been crippled for 38 years, he said to him in John 5:14: *“See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you.”* That crippled man's healing both freed him from the past and obligated him in the future. And when God gives you another chance, it is not just to fix your sinful mistakes. He does it to fulfill his sovereign mission. And lest something worse happen to you, you had better get busy doing what God wants to you to do.

**TRUST AND OBEY  
FOR THERE'S NO OTHER WAY  
TO BE HAPPY IN JESUS  
THAN TO TRUST AND OBEY**

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## **II. GOD WANTS TO GIVE YOU ANOTHER CHANCE TO CHANGE THE WORLD.**

Verses 1-4 records the micro-mercy of God extended to the Prophet Jonah. Verses 5-10 records the macro-mercy of God extended to the city of Nineveh. These two stories are connected by the fact that God used a person to whom he had given another chance to reach a whole city to which he wanted to give another chance. The fact that God finally used Jonah to reach Nineveh is encouraging for two reasons. First, the conversion of Nineveh teaches us that there is no limit to what God can do through one person. Maybe you look around at the world around you and feel overwhelmed, useless, and discouraged. You wonder, *“What can I do to make a difference?”* Jonah says that

if you just obey God, there's no limit to what God can do through you. It is said that the match that set D.L. MOODY aflame for the gospel was when he heard someone say, "The world is yet to see what God can do through a person who is totally yielded to him." MOODY replied, "With the help of God, I will be that man."

Adopt that attitude today. Don't worry about your weaknesses, limitations, or inexperience. Memorize 2 Corinthians 3:5 and keep quoting it to your self: "*Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God.*" And there is no limit to what God can do through one person who loves, trusts, and obeys him. Furthermore, the story of Nineveh's conversion teaches us that there is no limit to what God can do through a person, even if that person has made some big mistakes in the past. Is that you? Maybe you are hesitant about ministering to your Nineveh, because of the mistakes you have made in your Joppa. Maybe you are hesitant about witnessing to your family, friends, neighbors, schoolmates, or coworkers, because they know about your Joppa experience. Jonah's story teaches us that God wants to give you another chance to change your ways. And he wants to give you another chance to change your world. But you must remember that God's sovereign grace changes lives, not your puny efforts. God does it all!

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#### A. GOD'S WORD CAN CHANGE THE WORLD.

Verses 3-4 reads: "*So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days' journey in breadth. Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's journey. And he called out, 'Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!'*" Unlike the first time he received God's call, Jonah obeyed went to Nineveh this time. In Jonah 1:2, 3:2, and 4:11, Nineveh is called a "great city." But in Jonah 3:3, we are told that it was "*an exceedingly great city, three days' journey in breadth.*" Nineveh was a metropolis, maybe even the Los Angeles or New York City of its day. Yet Jonah marched into the city alone but on mission from God. And with what did God arm his prophet? Notice what Jonah didn't have. He didn't have personal influence, medial exposure, political clout, military power, financial prosperity, social status, or marketing tools. According to verse 4, he just had a divine message. And it was a short message at that, with only eight words in the ESV and only five words in the Hebrew. And it definitely was not a positive, comforting, or hopeful message. Jonah simply proclaimed: "*Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!*"

Jonah may have said more than that. But the suggestion of the text is that content, extent, and intent of Jonah's message was doom. Yet this very message lead to the most sweeping revival ever recorded in human history. How is that? It is because the impact of the message was not in the message, speaker, the hearers, the length, or the style. The impact of the message was in its divine authority. It was God's message. In verse 2, the Lord told Jonah, "*Arise, go to*

*Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you.”* Jonah did that. And Nineveh got saved. And if God is going to use you to change lives, you must proclaim his word. God’s word can change the world. Only God’s word can do it. If God is going to use you in a great way, you must believe in the divine authority and total sufficiency of God’s word.

What do I mean by the sufficiency of Scripture? I’ll let it speak for itself. Psalm 19:7-11 says, *“The Lord of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.”*

**In his commentary on Jonah, O.S. HAWKINS writes: “In my pulpit I preach from the Bible for two reasons. First, I am not smart enough to preach anything else. If I were to preach on social issues, there are sociologists in my congregation who would know far more about them than I. If I were to preach on political issues, there are politicians who would know more than I do in that field. Second, I am too smart to preach anything else because I know that God blesses his word and it will not return void.”**

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## **B. GOD’S POWER CAN CHANGE THE WORLD.**

Concerning the faithful proclamation of God’s word, it is our job to get the message from our lips to their ears, but it is God’s job to get the message from their ears to their hearts. This is what happened in our text. Jonah got the message to the ears of the Ninevites. God got the message to their hearts. Verses 5-6 describe the SCOPE of Nineveh’s conversion. In verse 5, the *citizens* of Nineveh were converted: *“And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them.”* Picking up on that *“from the greatest of them to the least of reached the king of Nineveh; and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes.”* From the lowliest commoner to the king himself, God’s power changed the hearts of the Ninevites. And God’s power can do the same thing today. God’s power can reach the *least* of people. And God’s power can reach the *greatest* of people. God’s sovereign power can change the world.

Verses 7-9 describe the SERIOUSNESS of Nineveh’s conversion: *“And he issued a proclamation and published through Nineveh, ‘By the decree of the king and his nobles: Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything. Let them not feed or drink water, but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and let them call out mightily to God. Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands.”* Verse 9 shows the SOURCE of Nineveh’s conversion: *“Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish.”* The

Ninevites could fast, mourn, pray, and repent, but ultimately their only hope was based on whether God chose to spare them. And it is the same with every person. We are not saved by what we choose to do; we are saved by what God chooses to do. In John 15:16, Jesus says to his disciples, *"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you."*

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### C. GOD'S MERCY CAN CHANGE THE WORLD.

Verse 10 says, *"When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it."* What does it mean for God to *relent*? The KJV says that God *"repented."* Is that possible? If so, what does that mean? If not, what does that mean? Well, let's get two things off the table. First: God is perfectly holy, infinitely wise, and all-powerful. So God does not ever do anything wrong that he would need to repent of. Numbers 23:19 says, *"God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?"* God is not like us. So God never has to say, "Oops." Second: God does not change. He is immutable. His essential character never changes. Malachi 3:6 says, *"For I the Lord do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed."* And James 1:17 says, *"Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change."* So what does it mean when it says that God *relented*? I think that NIV gets it right, rendering it to say that God *"had compassion."*

God is holy, just, and righteous. At the same time, God is merciful, gracious, and compassionate. And these attributes are never in conflict with one another. Jeremiah 18:7-8 says, *"If at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, and if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I intended to do to it."* So there is always grace in judgment and judgment in grace. Think about that. Even the message of doom is a message of hope. And the Ninevites saw that message within the message. They did not just hear the word *overthrown*; they also hear the words *forty days*. And they understood that to be holy God's gracious offer for them to get right with them in the next thirty-nine days. So they got in a hurry to get right with God. And if you are lost, you ought to run to the cross and receive the compassion of God through faith in Jesus Christ. And God will give you another chance. God will give you a new start. God will give you a new beginning.

**O.S. Hawkins writes of preaching some time ago at Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, I saw this illustrated while walking from my hotel to the school to preach. Those who have visited the Windy City know that it is not called that for nothing. Anyone who has walked the streets of downtown Chicago knows that the wind as it comes off**

Lake Michigan blows like few other places in the world. I started my walk from the hotel against a strong wind. The wind was so strong that it seemed to hold me back as I tried to walk. I literally had to lean into it. I had not gotten very far when I realized I had left my notebook in the hotel room and needed to go back for it. When I turned and went in the opposite direction the same wind helped me along the journey. In fact, it almost blew me over. Now, the wind didn't change, but I changed in relation to it. And if you do that today, God will give you another chance.

ALAS, INDEED, MY SAVIOR BLEED  
AND DID MY SOVEREIGN DIE  
WOULD HE INVOKE THAT SACRED HEAD  
FOR SUCH A WORM AS I?

WAS IT FOR CRIMES THAT I HAD DONE  
HE GROANED UPON THE TREE?  
AMAZING PITY! GRACE UNKNOWN!  
AND LOVE BEYOND DEGREE!