

# *Jonah 2:1-10*

*Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 2/8/2009*

## **HOW DO WE KNOW GOD'S DISCIPLINE IS WORKING? LESSONS FROM THE LIFE (OR DEATH) OF JONAH**

### **Prayer**

Would you bow your heads together with me? Lord, we know You've said in Your Word this life is a vapor and this temporal time passes quickly. And Lord, You've also said in Your Word that we are those who have been born again are aliens, we are sojourners. This place is not our home. And I thank You that You have called us out of the world, that You have called us out of darkness, out of sin, and You are making us like Your Son. Thank You that You have not left how You do this as a mystery. That You use Your Word to conform us to the image of Christ. You use trials to purify us. You discipline us to educate us and correct us and train us, that we would share in Your holiness. Father, as we look at Your discipline today of Jonah, may You do as You please in our lives. May You use this truth to shed light on our circumstances, that we might discern where we stand before You, so that we would respond rightly, and that You would be glorified. Thank You for Your Word. We commit this time to You. We pray that You would be greatly glorified in it now. In Jesus' name, Amen.

### **Sermon**

Well if you've been around here for a while then you have certainly heard the messages we've preached in the book of Hebrews. And I reviewed that a little while ago in chapter 12:4-11, concerning God's discipline. And we see in that chapter, in chapter 12, a quote of Proverbs 3, a very familiar passage to Jonah probably. It was certainly written by the time he was around. And that passage is so clear. It talks about trusting in the Lord and not leaning on our own understanding. In all our ways acknowledging the Lord and giving the first fruits to Him, and recognizing that He disciplines us. And we see kind of a picture, a mini picture of the Christian life, in Proverbs 3. And one element of that mini picture of the Christian life ultimately is that God does discipline those who are His. And we'll look at it later in Hebrews chapter 12:4-11, which clearly proclaims that if we're not disciplined, if we're not being trained, educated, chastised for the purpose of holiness, then we're illegitimate children. But this discipline is a process as we will see today. Just like it was in the lives of those during the time of Haggai. If you were here when we went through the book of Haggai, they were to be about God's business and they weren't. Their priorities were all messed up. They were about their own business. And the Lord confronted them with His Word and revealed to them that He was disciplining them. And their response was one of obedience in the midst of that discipline. But if you continue in the book of Haggai, you see not only did they obey but there were other issues of sin that God then needed to weed out of their lives. And God did do that in the book of Haggai.

The same thing we're going to be seeing in the book of Jonah. That Jonah is being disciplined and today we're going to see that he is disciplined to within an inch of his life, possibly even dying. We're going to look at that issue. And we're going to see that Jonah, after this terrible discipline, does give God the glory. He does give thanks. But obviously if you've read the whole book, he still isn't quite there yet. But this discipline, as we'll see today, brings him to be obedient. Reluctant but obedient. And then we

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see that next step, as God continues to discipline in different ways to bring about the right heart in Jonah as he obeys.

So with this in mind, I want to ask the question of this text today, “How do we know if God’s discipline is working in us?” Because if you are His child, He is going to discipline you. And how do we know if it’s working? Can you turn with me to the book of Jonah, and we’re going to be studying, Lord-willing, 10 verses in chapter 2 today. And I believe we’re going to see lessons from the life, or almost death, of Jonah in this portion. Now this is a long portion, so I’m going to briefly go through the context. We’ve gone through it the last few weeks. If you really want to know the scene and how it’s set, then pull out those CD’s or get a CD. It gives us the history of Israel and the history of the Assyrians and Nineveh. But I’m just going to give you a brief overview, then we’re going to move through a review of chapter 1 quickly, which we saw last week and the week before. Then we’re going to look at chapter 2 today, where we’re going to see as I said, how do we know if God’s discipline is working. Again, turn to the book of Jonah.

Now first of all, the book of Jonah, as I’ve shared before, is a true story. It’s about a real prophet, 2 Kings chapter 14. It’s not a fish story, it’s not an allegory; it is a true story. And it is most important to know that, as Bob read earlier from Matthew 12 and also we see in the book of Luke, that Jesus Himself the Son of God, the Lord of lords and King of kings, that He Himself declared it to be true, as He pointed out the fact that Jonah was in the belly of the sea monster and that the men of Nineveh would stand in the judgment against those Pharisees, because they repented at Jonah; and something greater was there – the Lord Jesus Christ. It’s a true story, and it’s a story that God graciously gives us. But I believe in the time, in its context, was to reveal where Israel’s heart was. That Israel’s heart at this time was just like Jonah’s heart. And maybe some of your hearts are like Jonah’s heart. We need to examine ourselves as we go through this.

Now two things we need to remember. First of all, Israel was disobedient on the way to exile. They were disobedient on the way to discipline. And the Ninevites were not saved and they were on their way to judgment. Now in a condensed view, Jonah was written during a time the divided kingdom, the northern and southern kingdom of Israel – northern kingdom of ten tribes, southern kingdom two tribes. Northern kingdom – Israel. Southern kingdom – Judah. And Jonah was written around 793-758 B.C. when the northern King Jeroboam II was reigning. And all the northern kings as we see in Scripture were ungodly men, turning the hearts of Israel away from the Lord in their wickedness. And it’s important to realize that the northern kingdom was just one generation away from God’s severe discipline through the Assyrians taking them into exile. And later on, you know 140 years later, Judah would go into exile. Now the name Jonah means “dove,” and he was a prophet and God’s servant, ministering to Israel during this time. Now certainly we see not only Jonah in this situation but we see the Ninevites.

Well what about the Ninevites? Jonah was called to go to them as we will see. We know that Nineveh was the capital city of the Assyrian empire. It was the superpower of the day, about 550-600 miles northeast of Jerusalem. I think that’s northeast, that way. But we know that it was a ways away, and in

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the book of Nahum, as I shared before, Nahum 3 – the whole book is a pronouncement of judgment against Nineveh, which God would bring against them. But in chapter 3, we see the nature and character of the Ninevites, in which God was judging. They were a wicked people; you can read that on your own time – Nahum 3. They were a wicked people. They were full of lies, they were a bloody people, a “bloody city” the Lord calls them. Their spiritual harlotry had influenced the nations, including Israel. They were a murderer and liars; they were just like Satan their father as we would see in John 8. They were in the domain of darkness, and they were on their way to judgment. Even in chapter 3 of Jonah, we see the Ninevites themselves when they repented; they called out that everyone would turn from their wicked ways, the violence of their hands. They were a violent, wicked people. They were on the road to judgment because of their wickedness, and this is where Jonah comes in. So today I believe we’re going to see lessons from the life of Jonah. How do we know God’s discipline is working?

So again turn to Jonah chapter 2, but we’re going to briefly review chapter 1. And I’ll just read through it and then I’ll just briefly comment on it. We went through it in depth in the last two weeks. Jonah chapter 1:

*<sup>1</sup> The word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai saying, <sup>2</sup> "Arise, go to Nineveh the great city, and cry against it, for their wickedness has come up before Me." <sup>3</sup> But Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. So he went down to Joppa, found a ship which was going to Tarshish, paid the fare, and went down into it to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. <sup>4</sup> And the LORD hurled a great wind on the sea and there was a great storm on the sea so that the ship was about to break up. <sup>5</sup> Then the sailors became afraid, and every man cried to his god, and they threw the cargo which was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them. But Jonah had gone below into the hold of the ship, lain down, and fallen sound asleep. <sup>6</sup> So the captain approached him and said, "How is it that you are sleeping? Get up, call on your god. Perhaps your god will be concerned about us so that we will not perish." <sup>7</sup> And each man said to his mate, "Come, let us cast lots so we may learn on whose account this calamity has struck us." So they cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah. <sup>8</sup> Then they said to him, "Tell us, now! On whose account has this calamity struck us? What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?" <sup>9</sup> And he said to them, "I am a Hebrew, and I fear the LORD God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land." <sup>10</sup> Then the men became extremely frightened and they said to him, "How could you do this?" For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them. <sup>11</sup> So they said to him, "What should we do to you that the sea may become calm for us?"-- for the sea was becoming increasingly stormy. <sup>12</sup> And he said to them, "Pick me up and throw me into the sea. Then the sea will become calm for you, for I know that on account of me this great storm has come upon you." <sup>13</sup> However, the men rowed desperately to return to land but they could not, for the sea was becoming even stormier against them. <sup>14</sup> Then they called on the LORD and said, "We earnestly*

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***pray, O LORD, do not let us perish on account of this man's life and do not put innocent blood on us; for Thou, O LORD, hast done as Thou hast pleased." <sup>15</sup> So they picked up Jonah, threw him into the sea, and the sea stopped its raging. <sup>16</sup> Then the men feared the LORD greatly, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows. <sup>17</sup> And the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the stomach of the fish three days and three nights. [Jonah 1:1-17]***

So then God calls Jonah to go to Nineveh to proclaim against them because of their wickedness. God is against Nineveh, and He is going to proclaim against them because of their wickedness. And Jonah, because of his attitude as we saw last week towards the Ninevites and a lack of faith concerning God's true character, disobeys God. And he goes the opposite direction to Tarshish – 2,500 miles away. He's on his way. But the Lord doesn't allow him to go far, and He sends a great storm upon the ship. A storm in which they are about to perish. And the pagans call on their gods. The Phoenician sailors – and try to discern how this calamity has come upon them. In God's providence, the lot falls on Jonah. He is questioned, and the cat is out of the bag. He is the reason why this is happening because he is running from the Lord. The sailors desperately try to save the ship and Jonah, but things get worse. And in the midst of this, the most wonderful thing happens as these sailors are saved. They call upon the Lord, and they give the Lord glory and they worship the Lord. They are saved, recognizing His sovereignty and calling unto Him.

But at this point Jonah's discipline continues, and he is thrown into the sea and swallowed by a great fish. So right at this point, while we have the Phoenician sailors, new to the faith, experiencing peace on the seas; and we have Jonah the disobedient prophet now in the belly of the great fish, experiencing the awful consequences of his sin and the tremendous grace of God's discipline as we will see. Now before we get into chapter 2, we need to go over a few things I didn't share last week concerning verse 17.

The term "fish" or "great fish" is used to describe sea creatures. It could describe a fish, it could describe a sea mammal like a whale. It is a generic term in Hebrew to describe sea creatures. Now I've reminded you at times, the Hebrew language does not have a lot of nouns and verbs as Greek does. And many words are used in different ways based on their context. This is a generic term for sea creatures. Now we don't want to get all caught up in what kind of fish this was or whale it was. We don't know! But we do know was it was big enough to swallow Jonah, and it had a stomach big enough that he could hang out in it for three days. And there must have been air in there if he didn't pass away. Obviously he prays later so there must have been air in there for him to stay alive. So whatever you think it is, the Word of God says it is a great fish, it's a big fish. And the Lord God in the passage Bob read earlier, says in that that the writer of the NASB translates it this way: "sea monster." And Jesus uses the Greek word *ketos*, which just simply means "great fish" also. So we don't know exactly what type of fish it is. We just know that Jonah was in the stomach, in the middle of verse 17, of the fish three days and three nights. And the Lord Jesus in Matthew 12 and in Luke also declares this to be true. Just like Jesus was in the ground three days and three nights, Jonah was a type. He typified what Christ would do, being in the grave three days and three nights. And this brings us to our passage today, in which we're going to see that the Lord brings Jonah to the point of death, yet saves him. And more

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specifically, I believe as I've shared before, we're going to see and have the question answered, "How do we know if God's discipline is working in our lives?"

Now if we look at this short chapter, we see a prayer from the belly of the fish. And we will see at the end that God calls the fish to vomit Jonah up on dry land. And within the context of the depths of this chapter, we see first of all, the depths of God's discipline- how far God will go. We see the fruit of God's discipline. And we'll see the ceasing, in this event, of God's discipline.

So then first of all, let's look at the depths of God's discipline as Jonah prays from the belly of the great fish. And he's going to, while he's in the belly, recount an earlier prayer while he was drowning. We need to understand how this chapter works. He is in the belly of the fish and he is praying and in that prayer, he recounts a prayer when he was outside the fish drowning. We need to understand that. That will be helpful to interpret this chapter. Verse 1:

**<sup>1</sup>Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the stomach of the fish. (There, like I said, he's in the fish, right?) <sup>2</sup> and he said, "I called out of my distress to the LORD, And He answered me. I cried for help from the depth of Sheol." (He's talking about when he did this before.) "Thou didst hear my voice. <sup>3</sup> For Thou hadst cast me into the deep, Into the heart of the seas, And the current engulfed me. All Thy breakers and billows passed over me. <sup>4</sup> So I said, 'I have been expelled from Thy sight. Nevertheless I will look again toward Thy holy temple.' <sup>5</sup> Water encompassed me to the point of death. The great deep engulfed me, Weeds were wrapped around my head. <sup>6</sup> I descended to the roots of the mountains. The earth with its bars was around me forever, But Thou hast brought up my life from the pit, O LORD my God." [Jonah 2:1-6]**

We're going to see an account of the drowning of Jonah. We're going to see an account of Jonah almost dying. And it's a horrifying account when you look at it, because God brought him to within an inch of his life. And there are some commentators, that we'll talk about later on, that believe maybe he did die. And that type that the Lord was giving goes even farther than that- that he was dead and then raised up. We'll look at that.

But first of all, notice in verse 1, "Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the stomach of the fish..." We need to know where Jonah's praying, as I pointed out before. He is praying from the stomach of the fish, right? He is in the fish praying. And later on, I believe we're going to see in verse 9 and 10 that this prayer most likely took place on the third day, right before he was vomited out of the whale – that this is probably when this prayer took place. And he is recounting a prayer when he was drowning earlier. Does that make sense? Ok, we'll look at it more.

But notice, he is praying to the Lord *his* God. Now remember Yahweh, the Lord, has always been Jonah's God. This is not something new to the book. We saw in chapter 1, he says, "'I'm a Hebrew, and I fear the Lord God who made the seas and the dry land.'" That's who he feared, right? He says, "This is my God," though he was disobeying Him. In chapter 4, we see that he prayed to the Lord. He is

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recounting back before he had fled to Tarshish, that he had prayed to the Lord his God, while in Israel trying to forestall going to Nineveh – chapter 4, we'll look at that later.

Now I need to make this point. The place where Jonah is praying is a horrible place. This is a horrible situation. Regardless of what type of fish it was. No doubt it was pitch black. No doubt there were stomach acids. No doubt being in the sea, he was being tossed all over the place. This is a horrible place. We need to remember that, that Jonah is praying in the midst of a horrible situation. And we're going to see that he starts to turn in the midst of a horrible situation. He hasn't been delivered all the way yet, and yet he is acknowledging the Lord, and we're going to look at that. So often, people don't acknowledge the Lord. They cry out but they don't acknowledge until after they are delivered. Jonah is still in the fish.

Now he says in verse 2, we're going to see a desperate call. This is an awful situation. And we're going to see him summarize this in a prayer while he's in the fish. He's in the fish and he's going to summarize it. Verse 2: "and he said, (This is in the fish.) 'I called out of my distress to the LORD, And He answered me. I cried for help from the depth of Sheol; Thou didst hear my voice.'" The word translated "distress" here is often translated "trouble." You see it throughout the Psalms translated trouble. He is in great trouble! He is in great distress! And with typical Hebrew parallelism here, we see a parallel statement to help us understand better. He says, in the middle of verse 2, "I cried for help from the depth of Sheol; Thou didst hear my voice." Jonah was in deep trouble. This was a summary. How bad was the trouble? "I cried for help from the depth of Sheol." Sheol was a place of the dead. It was used to speak of the grave. He's saying, "I cried from the grave!" He's about to die, it was over. "I was dying. I was dying." I believe we'll see that.

But notice he says, "And He answered me...Thou didst hear my voice." God answered Jonah's prayer. God answered Jonah's prayer. Now on a side note, many of these statements made here in Jonah's prayer come from pieces of Psalms. And you can look in your notes, as you'll see a portion of it as we saw came from Psalm 31, as Bob shared. Psalm 31:6 and later on in the Psalm. Jonah is paraphrasing and recounting portions of the Psalm as he is praying from the belly of the fish. I'm not going to point those out specifically. We're going to look at this text. But in your own time, look at your side notes and go look at those Psalms, and you'll see that they are similar to what Jonah says. So much so that some have called this the "Psalm of Jonah." I'm not going to go that far. I'm going to call it the "Prayer of Jonah" as we see Jonah praying in the midst of the fish.

And he says, "Thou didst hear my voice." Now it's interesting, Jonah, this portion that we see of Jonah, is like some of the Psalms of deliverance, where they cry out for help and God delivers them. But there's something absent here. In the Psalms we always see them moving from their cry to acknowledgement of their sin to their acknowledgement of God and to praising the Lord for what He has done. We don't see that completely in this Psalm here. Jonah has bits and pieces of it, but he's still not there yet. But he does start to respond as we will see. And we're going to see, how do we know if we're responding to God's discipline?

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So back to our text. We see a desperate call. He is obviously drowning. Verse 3: "For Thou hadst cast me into the deep, Into the heart of the seas, And the current engulfed me. All Thy breakers and billows passed over me." Jonah begins to explain while he is in the fish, how close he was to death when he was out of the fish before he was swallowed. He begins in verse 3 saying, "For." "I cried for help from Sheol for..." "For...here's why I cried for help." "For Thou hadst cast me into the deep, Into the heart of the seas, And the current engulfed me. All Thy breakers and billows passed over me." Here's how Jonah sees this happening. "Thou hadst cast me into the deep..."

Now something interesting here. Jonah is giving God the blame here for being cast into the sea. And if you've been following Jonah, that's not quite what happened right? God is sovereign and God is certainly over all things and He is sovereign over Jonah being cast into the sea. There's no doubt about that. By why is it that Jonah was cast in the sea? Because he didn't want to repent! Right? He didn't repent in chapter 1; he told the sailors, "Throw me overboard and the sea will be calm," right? Jonah is the one that told them to throw him overboard, right? Jonah's responsible ultimately for going into the sea. He's part of this discipline that God is sovereign over. And in a large view, yes, "Thou hadst cast me into the sea. God, You're sovereign over this. I'm here because You are sovereign." But we need to remember this kind of gives us an insight into Jonah's heart. He's not totally there yet. We don't want to go black and white and say Jonah is totally unrepentant or Jonah is repentant. He's in the middle here. He's acknowledging things, but he's not totally there as we will see in chapter 3 and see in chapter 4, right? He's angry in chapter 4. He is reluctant in chapter 3. But yet he is obeying, as I've shared.

But this is horrifying language. Jonah is under water. He's engulfed. Billows and breakers passing over him. He's seeing the tops of the waves underneath. He is aligning himself heavily with the words of the psalmist in Psalm 69. Jonah, yet unlike the psalmist David in 69, doesn't acknowledge sin here yet. But what's the point? He's drowning! He's really moments from dying. And now he's in the belly of the fish recalling this.

Now at this point, there is a horrifying realization – that God is going to let him die. Verses 4-6:

***<sup>4</sup>So I said, 'I have been expelled from Thy sight. Nevertheless I will look again toward Thy holy temple.' <sup>5</sup>Water encompassed me to the point of death. The great deep engulfed me, Weeds were wrapped around my head. <sup>6</sup>I descended to the roots of the mountains. The earth with its bars was around me..." [Jonah 2:4-7]***

Notice Jonah makes a declaration – he has been expelled from God's sight. "I have been expelled from Thy sight." The Hebrew word means "driven out." It's the same word God used in Genesis when He drove Adam and Eve out of the garden. It is the same word used throughout the early chapters of the Bible to speak of the inhabitants of the land being driven out by the Israelites. It speaks of being driven out with the idea of separation. It was also translated "divorce." There is a separation, there is a driving away. There is a separation. Jonah says, "I have been driven out from Your sight." He is drowning, and this is what is coming to mind when he is drowning. "I have been expelled, driven out, divorced from Your sight." It's pretty serious.

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Now the latter portion is very difficult to interpret. I didn't mention this earlier but there are many portions in chapter 2 which are very difficult to interpret. And I'm going to share what I know and hopefully it will be a help to you. He says, "Nevertheless I will look again toward Thy holy temple." There's a distinct possibility with some textual issues in that phrase that it could say, "That I would never see Your holy temple," which says the opposite. There's also the distinct possibility that he is saying, "How shall I again see Your temple?" Now these are in direct opposition. One is an affirmation: "I'm going down but I'm going to see Your temple again." Another one is saying, "How am I going to see Your temple? I am expelled from Your sight."

Well which one is it? I'm not sure actually. The net translation goes with the "That I might never see Your holy temple again." It's possible and they give a lot of evidence for that. What temple was he talking about? He says, "See Your temple again," which implies the physical temple in Jerusalem, which represents the dwelling place of God. They knew it wasn't the dwelling place of God. Solomon shared that when it was built! "You don't dwell in places made by human hands." But it represented the heavenly temple. Quite possibly Jonah is saying, "I'm going down and I'm never going to see the temple again. I'm dying." I think that in context is the best. But certainly there could be an affirmation of faith there, too. "Nevertheless I will look again toward Thy holy temple." Maybe he is affirming the relationship of the heavenly temple. "Ok, I'm expelled, I'm dying, but I'm still Yours and I'm going to see You."

I'm not sure what it is. But the point of this passage, as we will see, is Jonah is going down. That's the point. That's the point. And later on in verse 7 he says, <sup>7</sup> **"While I was fainting away, I remembered the LORD; And my prayer came to Thee, (same phrase) Into Thy holy temple."** He's pointing to the, obviously, the dwelling place of God, the heavenly temple there.

So what do we make of this portion? Verse 4 – I believe Jonah is speaking of the earthly temple which represents the heavenly one and thus making a declaration. He either is going to see it again or he is cast from His sight. I lean towards the one that he says, "How shall I see Your temple?" And he's really saying, "How am I going to see Your holy temple again if I drown?" I think in context that's maybe more close, but I won't die for that interpretation.

The point is, he's cast from God's sight. He is expelled. He is drowning. And notice he is surrounded by water and about to die. Verse 5: "Water encompassed me to the point of death. The great deep engulfed me, Weeds were wrapped around my head." Pretty simple language. He's under water in the depths of the sea. He's got seaweed around his head. He's going down. It's horrifying language and there is a horrifying realization that maybe God's going to let him die. God is letting him get to within an inch of dying. This is pretty serious discipline. Serious discipline.

Verse 6 - <sup>6</sup> "I descended to the roots of the mountains. The earth with its bars was around me forever..." He's talking about descending down, the bottom of the sea. Jonah is going down and he sees the earth as his tomb. He says, "The earth with its bars were around me forever. I am in the earth now," in that sense of dying. And he says, "Forever." Forever – that's a statement of unchangingness. He's saying,

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“It’s done.” And we know from Scripture, it is appointed man once to die and then the judgment. The death rate is one per person.

Folks, do you recognize, do we recognize the extent of God’s discipline on Jonah’s life? That’s really what he’s trying to express here in his prayer, how desperate his circumstance was as he was in the fish. “I was drowning, I was going under, I was dying.” Well have you ever drowned, come close to drowning? It is a horrifying experience, as I read from those who have come close or started to drown. How long does it take to drown? How long was Jonah conscience as he was going under? Certainly he was conscience; he is recounting the prayer. He is recounting himself fainting away. How many minutes does it take? They say it take anywhere from 2-3 minutes to lose consciousness, 5-10 minutes to die. When water begins to enter the airway, the throat spasms, shutting down the passage of the lungs. The mechanism keeping water out of the lungs continues to operate until the person loses consciousness. It is a horrible, horrible way to die. And God is letting it happen.

How far will God go to discipline His children? With Jonah it’s pretty far. It’s pretty far. Now how do we know if we’ve responded to His discipline? How do we know?

Well before that, we need to recognize that he is on the point of his deathbed. That’s the point of this passage. Don’t forget the context: Jonah is disobeying God. He is taking himself out of the sphere in which God has called him to serve. God said, “Jonah, go proclaim against Nineveh, get up and go. This is what I’m calling you to do.” Jonah thwarts that, chapter 4, to forestall that because he’s got an issue with the Ninevites. He doesn’t believe that the salvation of the Ninevites is a good thing, that what God does is good. He knew God would save them if the Word was proclaimed, because God is a compassionate God – chapter 4. But he doesn’t believe that so he is going the other way. He is disobeying God in the sphere in which God has called him to serve. And this is very serious.

And folks, God has called us to serve one another. If you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, you don’t just get saved and go your own way. You are a bondservant of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Lord has declared in His Word what you are to do. And there’s a lot more commands that He has given than He gave Jonah! And some of you might have removed yourself from the sphere in which you could obey God by going to an ungodly church or not going to church at all or not being in fellowship – you’ve removed yourself from that. And I warn you from the perspective of God’s discipline of Jonah, it’s pretty serious. And God does discipline His children. And Jonah is being disciplined to the point of death.

Well would God have let Jonah die? Would God ever discipline anyone to the point of death? Would He discipline a believer to death? He did in the Corinthian church. Turn in your Bibles to 1 Corinthians 11. 1 Corinthians 11, as we have the exhortation in terms of when we come together to remember what Christ has done. Serious, serious thing. The body of Christ to remember the death of Christ, His shed blood, and His body given for us. And the Corinthians were having a party! It was all about the Corinthians rather than about Christ.

And the apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11:27:

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**<sup>27</sup> Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. <sup>28</sup> But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup.** (You need to examine yourself. And I always exhort you every time because the consequences are severe! Examine yourself. Don't proclaim His death and your forgiveness of sin, and hold sin in your heart. It's serious stuff.) **<sup>29</sup> For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. <sup>30</sup> For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep.** (He's using a euphemism, some are dead because of this.) **<sup>31</sup> For if we would judge ourselves rightly, we would not be judged. <sup>32</sup> But when we are judged, we are chastened (or disciplined) by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world. [1 Corinthians 11:27-32]**

That you would not be condemned with the world, God may discipline you to death. I'm not saying you fear that! I say you fear God and obey God, and you don't have anything to worry about. Right? You don't need to look over your shoulder when you're obeying God, do you? When I wasn't obeying God I was looking over my shoulder all the time because I did fear His discipline. And maybe some of you fear that too. Jonah was disciplined, to the point of death.

But God's sovereign compassion was exhibited towards Jonah, as it is through the book. His compassion towards the Phoenician sailors in chapter 1; His compassion towards Jonah in chapter 2; His compassion towards the Ninevites in chapter 3; His compassion explained in chapter 4. God is compassionate!

Verse 6: <sup>6</sup> "I descended to the roots of the mountains. The earth with its bars was around me forever, (It's over. It's over.) But Thou hast brought up my life from the pit, O LORD my God." He's in the whale. He can't see a thing. He's alive and he's recalling that God saved his life. "You did it, Lord. You answered my prayer." Folks, the first step of getting out of discipline is praying. You need to pray. And God heard his prayer. He's alive.

But the discipline is not over yet, right? He's still in the fish, right? He's still in the fish. Question is, did he die? It's possible. Not sure. The language sure points to the fact he was about to die, that we know for sure. Some interpreters believe that he did die and that God resurrected him on the third day in the fish and then he prayed. That's possible, too. God can do anything. The point is he was about to die and God saved him, whatever it was. Now he's inside the fish. An awful circumstance still. He's not standing on dry land saying, "Ah it's all over!" He's in a difficult situation, awful situation, but he's praying. And he's saying, "But Thou hast brought up my life from the pit, O LORD my God." God saved Jonah.

Now Jonah summarizes this now, I believe, while he's in there. Verse 7: "While I was fainting away, I remembered the LORD..." He was going down. Two to three minutes. Five you're out and you're gone. "While I was fainting away..." That word translated "I" in the NASB is really "My soul," *nepshesh*. "My life. My life was slipping away! And I remembered, called to mind, turned attention to, recalled the LORD."

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It's amazing how we see believer and nonbeliever at the point of death turning their attention to the Lord at times. Here Jonah turned his attention to the Lord. He prayed and God heard him. Because Jonah was saved! He did fear the Lord I believe. And God heard his prayer. Now some of you here today may find yourself at some time at the point of death, conscious, crying out to Jesus. Some of you who are not saved, crying out to Jesus not to save you from sin but from death. And God's Word is clear. He doesn't hear. You don't want to get to that point. Jonah was saved and he cried out and God saved him. If you're not saved and it gets that far, what does the Word of God say?

Psalm 66:18 - ***<sup>18</sup>If I regard iniquity in my heart, The Lord will not hear.***

Isaiah 59:1-2 - ***<sup>1</sup>Behold, the LORD's hand is not so short That it cannot save; Neither is His ear so dull That it cannot hear. <sup>2</sup>But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, And your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He does not hear.***

Jonah was heard. If you get in this circumstance and it's not for the salvation of sins, you're not going to be heard. I remember an example. I used to be a corporate pilot so I used to study plane crashes and I still do. It's something I don't like – the death and destruction, it's an awful thing. But I study those events and accidents so that I would learn how to be a better pilot so I would not get in that circumstance. And I remember a cockpit voice recording of a Western Airlines DC10 in Mexico City in '79, where the captain is blaspheming God, just swearing and using God's name in vain. And it turns out that he went and landed on the wrong runway, noticed at the last minute, hit a truck. And at that moment there's the horrifying recognition on the tape, no longer blaspheming God, he cries out, "Oh Jesus!" If he wasn't saved do you think he got saved then? Psalm 66:18 - "If I regard iniquity in my heart, The Lord will not hear."

Jonah was a believer and God heard him. He didn't have to. If he would have died he would have gone in the Lord's presence. He would have been in paradise like the thief on the cross. But God did save him. And Jonah's in the belly of the fish, but he was within an inch of death. It's serious, serious stuff.

The Ninevites were within an inch of death because God was bringing this judgment on them. And Jonah was too. But it was his discipline. Don't let it get to this point, believer, where it's this bad and you're crying out to God. Don't let it get to that point. Obey the Lord. Obey what He said in His Word. In the midst of God's discipline, Jonah prays and God intervenes. And we're going to see also later on, at the end of this prayer in this fish, God intervenes again.

Are you being disciplined by the Lord? Are you in a dark, slimy, difficult situation? Cry out to the Lord!

So then, we have the depths of God's discipline – brought to within an inch of his life. Jonah was at death's door. Now we see, I believe, the fruit of God's discipline, where we notice Jonah's deliverance from death brings him to declare three things.

Verse 8 - ***"Those who regard vain idols Forsake their faithfulness, <sup>9</sup> But I will sacrifice to Thee With the voice of thanksgiving. That which I have vowed I will pay. Salvation is from the LORD." [Jonah 2:8-9]***

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This is a change for Jonah. Albeit, he is not fully there, as we see in chapter 3 and 4. But we're going to see in chapter 3 that Jonah does obey the Lord. Disobedient, now obedient. And then God is going to work on his attitude, just like those in Haggai. Now this is a difficult verse. Verse 8 is extremely difficult to translate. There are seven words; there are only about five in Hebrew. We can understand the first part pretty easily. It says, "Those who regard." It's a participial phrase. Those who keep, those who observe, those who regard.

Now the word "idol" is not here; it's actually "vain emptiness" or "vain lying emptiness." Vain emptiness. The point is there is nothing behind it. What's behind an idol? Nothing! Whatever the idol might be, there's no power. Those who keep regard, recall, observe vain idols. And he may be quoting what Bob quoted here earlier, Psalm 31:6. ***I hate those who regard (same phrase) vain idols, but I trust in the Lord.***

Now he says here in the second half, and this is the hard part to translate – then our text says, "Forsake their faithfulness." And I don't understand what that means in that context. It's very difficult to interpret, so we have to look at what this word "faithfulness" is here, and it is the Hebrew word *chesed*. It is a well-used Hebrew word. And it is used almost always to describe God's loyal, faithful, covenant-keeping love. *Chesed*. Certainly it has an element of faithfulness, but it's more than that. It is loyal love. Unchanging love. It's translated "loving-kindness" often. It's translated "unchanging love." There's certainly faithfulness within that, but I think the NASB translators have missed it here in translating it just "faithfulness." Indeed later on in chapter 4, look a little farther in verse 2. He says, ***And I prayed to the Lord and I said, "Please, Lord, was this not what I said while I was still in my own country? Therefore, in order to forestall this I fled to Tarshish (He's speaking about the salvation of the Ninevites) for I knew that Thou art a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in (chesed) loving-kindness." [Jonah 4:2]*** Loving-kindness.

As I looked throughout the Old Testament, I looked at almost every occurrence; I didn't look at every one so you can do that on your own time because it is used a lot. But just about every single one is used, is *never* used to speak of an attribute of the unsaved. Usually of God or those who are saved. *chesed*. It's God's loyal, keeping love.

Ok with that in mind, what does it mean here? I don't think it's speaking of unsaved, idolaters forsaking their own *chesed* because they don't have any to start with. The book of Jonah is about the Lord's *chesed*, the Lord's loving-kindness. The Lord's saving love. God saves the Phoenicians. God saves Jonah. God saves the Ninevites. God is a loving, kind God. And the immediate context of this passage is salvation. He says in verse 9 the salvation is from the Lord. So what does he mean here? And this is the hard part, and hopefully you're still with me.

It could mean "Your loving-kindness." Or "the loving-kindness of You." I think it's the loving-kindness of them. In context, God's saving loving-kindness. Those who regard vain, empty things forsake, in context, God's loving-kindness of them. It's difficult, but I think that's what it means. When you go after vain idols, you forsake His loving-kindness. And I believe that's what Jonah is talking about here because

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in contrast he says, “But I will sacrifice to Thee with the voice of thanksgiving.” I’m not going to die on that interpretation. But I think it really does point to that. Again, it is a difficult book to interpret.

But notice, Jonah first of all – here’s the fruit of discipline. He’s thankful. He’s in that awful situation and he’s giving thanks. There’s fruit of someone who is being changed by God’s discipline. Discipline is not even over yet, and he’s starting to thank the Lord, right?

<sup>8</sup> “Those who regard vain idols forsake their faithfulness.” Or “His faithfulness” or “His love of you” I think. <sup>9</sup> “But I will sacrifice to Thee with the voice of thanksgiving.” What will he sacrifice there in the whale? Can he put together a sacrifice? He’s going to give thanks. That’s how he’s going to sacrifice, right? With thanks. It’s the first evidence, I believe, that Jonah responded to the severe discipline of the Lord. He’s thankful. He’s thankful. Don’t forget, Jonah is still inside a pitch black, slimy, acid-fill stomach of a great fish tossing and turning all over the place. Yet here we see he is thankful. God’s discipline, I believe, has started to begin to change Jonah. Not all the way, but he’s changing. He’s responding, I believe.

Oh brother and sister, are you thankful for your salvation? Are you thankful to the Lord for what He has done? A lack of thankfulness reveals you’re not walking with the Lord. I’ll tell you right now, if you don’t wake up and start thanking the Lord and spend the day thanking and praising Him, you’re walking by yourself. Scripture is full of thankfulness to the Lord. We don’t have time to go through the Scriptures today, but thankfulness is an evidence of a changed heart. Certainly in the context of salvation, but also in the context of sanctification – the process of God making us like Christ, which He is doing with Jonah through discipline.

In the Psalms, which are man’s inspired response to God concerning the revelation of God in the Word, we see thankfulness throughout.

**Psalm 7:17 I will give thanks to the LORD according to His righteousness, And will sing praise to the name of the LORD Most High.** Thankfulness – singing praise. They go like this. That’s why it breaks my heart so often when people come to church and don’t sing. Examine yourself! Not that you’re singing for other people. Is your heart changed? Do you want to sing to the Lord about what He’s done?

**Psalm 9:1 For the choir director; on Muth-labben. A Psalm of David. I Will give thanks to the LORD with all my heart; I will tell of all Thy wonders.**

**Psalm 33:2 Give thanks to the LORD with the lyre; Sing praises to Him with a harp of ten strings.**

**Psalm 105:1 Oh give thanks to the LORD, call upon His name; Make known His deeds among the peoples.**

And this is spoken multiple times through the Scriptures, especially in the Psalms.

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**Psalm 106:1 Praise the LORD! Oh give thanks to the LORD, for He is good; For His (chesed) lovingkindness is everlasting.**

Jonah sees God's chesed. **Those who regard vain idols**, forsake it. Jonah is thankful for His lovingkindness.

**Psalm 118:1 give thanks to the LORD, for He is good; For His lovingkindness is everlasting.**

**Psalm 136:3 give thanks to the Lord, of lords, For His lovingkindness is everlasting.**

Now thankfulness in the New Testament – a lack of it is an evidence that you are not saved. If you continually, habitually do not give thanks to God, maybe you're not saved.

**Romans 1:18-22** <sup>18</sup> **For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,** (They see creation, God's handiwork, and they suppress the truth in unrighteousness.) <sup>19</sup> **because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.** (Everyone sees it.) <sup>20</sup> **For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.** (There's enough right there to condemn you.) <sup>21</sup> **For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God,** (and listen to this) **or give thanks...** (God is changing you in sanctification.)

**Ephesians 5:18-20** <sup>18</sup> **And do not get drunk with wine,** (Don't be controlled by wine.) **for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit,** <sup>19</sup> **speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord** <sup>20</sup> **always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God.** Giving thanks.

A parallel passage helps us understand it.

**Colossians 3:15-16** <sup>15</sup> **And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful.** <sup>16</sup> **Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.**

I believe Jonah is being changed because he's thankful. How do you know if God's discipline is working? Are you thankful? Even if you're still in the midst of that slimy, awful situation that God has allowed – are you thankful? That's the first thing. Jonah's thankful.

Well what else do we know and how can we know that God's discipline is bearing fruit? I believe he has a desire to obey. Verse 8 again, back in Jonah 2. <sup>8</sup> "Those who regard vain idols Forsake their faithfulness (Or "His faithfulness of you" I believe.), <sup>9</sup> But I will sacrifice to Thee With the voice of thanksgiving. (Jonah is thankful in contrast.) That which I have vowed I will pay." What is he talking about here?

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He's in the whale praying, recalling salvation from death as he was drowning, giving God the glory and I believe he's acknowledging he's going to obey. Most likely in context, he's going to go to Nineveh. "That which I vowed..." He's a prophet. He's going to do it. "I'm going to do it now." I believe that's true because we see in chapter 3 he goes. I think in context, that is most likely what he has vowed, to obey the Lord. "I'm going to do it."

It starts out with a decision – "I'm going to obey You Lord" – and God empowers us to do that obedience. Wow, a disobedient prophet now desiring to be an obedient prophet. And he does obey, chapter 3, albeit with a bad attitude. But God is still working on him, just like those in Haggai. God showed them through discipline their lives were futile, their priorities were out of wack, they weren't about God's business, they made the decision to obey but yet they still had issues. And God worked on those after they started obeying. I'm not saying obedience is everything. I'm saying we have to have good attitudes, we should have good attitudes. The discipline is going to stop in that area if you do have a good attitude. Jonah didn't and we'll see that.

But he does obey. How do you know that God is causing a change through your life? Are you thankfully obeying Him? That's what you know. Am I doing what He said? There's so much Scripture concerning what we are to do concerning the body of Christ – serving. And there's so much! We don't do it out of guilt; we do it because we're privileged, we're thankful.

Lastly, notice more fruit in Jonah's life as he gives all the credit to God. <sup>9</sup>"...Salvation is from the Lord."

<sup>8</sup> "Those who regard vain idols Forsake their faithfulness, (Or most likely His loving-kindness of them.) <sup>9</sup> But I will sacrifice to Thee With the voice of thanksgiving. That which I have vowed I will pay. Salvation is from the LORD." [Jonah 1:8-9]

Jonah had nothing to do with the salvation of himself. It's evident. You can't save yourself from drowning. There needs to be intervention, and God intervened with the whale or a fish, whatever it was. God intervened. He appointed a great fish. You can't save yourself concerning salvation. There's nothing you can do to be saved. You must recognize your utter complete despair. You were on the precipice of judgment, you cannot save yourself. Salvation is from the Lord!

Now what salvation is Jonah speaking of here? Certainly in context, his physical salvation from drowning. But also he points out about those who forsake His *chesed*, His loving-kindness. I believe it's speaking of their salvation also, which they forsake. Where does salvation come from? It is from the Lord alone. It has nothing to do with me.

But where does our salvation from sin come from? Do you remember what the angel told Joseph in Matthew concerning Christ, the Son of God? "And she shall bear a Son and you shall call His name Jesus. It is He Who will save His people from their sins." The word "Jesus" means "The Lord is salvation." Salvation is from the Lord and it is in the person of Jesus Christ, the God the Son who took on human flesh, lived the perfect life, bore our sins in His body on the cross, spent three days and three nights in the tomb, rose from the dead. Salvation is from the Lord. **And there is salvation in no one**

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**else, for there is no other name given under heaven, given among men, by which we must be saved.**

**[Acts 4:12]** The Lord Jesus brings salvation. It is from God. Add anything to it and it's not from God. Add anything you do and it is not from God. Someone says, "Do this and trust Jesus. Do that and trust Jesus," it's not from God. Salvation is from the Lord.

Jonah cried out to the Lord. God saved him. He was on the verge of physical death and God saved him. And some of you are on the verge of eternal death, the second death. You are in your sins; you are on the precipice of eternal judgment. But the Lord is salvation. You will never be saved from your sin if you believe it is anything you can do. Salvation is from the Lord. It is faith in Christ alone. **For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works lest any man should boast.** [Ephesians 2:8-9]

Our problem, our sin problem is boasting. God eliminates boasting through faith in the work of Jesus Christ. Jonah declared salvation was from the Lord. And this is fruit of God's heavy hand. God gets all the glory. Thankful, willing to obey - God gets the glory. How do you know if God's discipline is working? There you go. Are you thankful? Willing to obey? Does God get the glory? Can you say in your heart of hearts like the prophet Micah in Micah 7:18? **<sup>18</sup>Who is a God like Thee, who pardons iniquity And passes over the rebellious act of the remnant of His possession? He does not retain His anger forever, Because He delights in (chesed) unchanging love.**

Jonah is finally yielded. God had to take him to the point of death. How far does God have to take you before you are willing to obey Him? What passages of Scripture are you disobeying right now concerning what He's called you to do? Good things, wonderful things. How far will He have to go before you're willing to say, "Thank You. I'll do what You say. It's all from You"?

So then we see God's disciplinary hand bringing Jonah near to death. We see the fruit in Jonah's life beginning to appear - thankful, desires to obey, gives God all the credit. And notice at this point what happens. The end of the ceasing of this element of discipline.

**<sup>8</sup> "Those who regard vain idols Forsake their ("Their own mercy." Or I believe it's really speaking of His faithfulness.) *faithfulness,*<sup>9</sup> But I will sacrifice to Thee With the voice of thanksgiving. That which I have vowed I will pay. Salvation is from the LORD."** (Then a Hebrew continual action here.) **<sup>10</sup>Then the LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah up onto the dry land. [Jonah 2:8-10]**

Jonah acknowledged it; discipline over for Jonah at this stage. He vomits up Jonah onto the shore. God speaks and the text is implying that once Jonah made this declaration the fish was commanded and vomited him up. That's when God stopped it. The severe discipline is over. Thankful, ready to obey, giving God the glory – vomits it up.

Now some of you are in the midst of severe discipline. You're not obeying the Lord. He's called you to serve Him in His body. 1 Peter 4 – the commands are clear. We're to be together to stimulate one another to good deeds. Hebrews 10 – not forsaking our assembling. We need think of others as more

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important than ourselves – Philippians 2 and all other sorts of verses. But maybe you’ve been AWOL (absent without leave). Yet if you’re willing to obey God will restore you. Now it may not be pretty. This is not a pretty sight being vomited onto the shore. He’s being restored in the context of vomit. But he’s being restored. The discipline is over, at least this stage.

Today we’ve seen God’s discipline of a disobedient prophet, bringing him to the brink of death. But God was gracious and spared him when Jonah cried out and prayed. When he was feigning away he cried and God heard him. And we see that this discipline bore fruit as he is in the whale and he gives thanks, desires to obey, and gives God all the glory. And in the midst of this prayer the discipline ends as he is vomited up on dry land. God is a compassionate God. He’s a good God. Don’t let it get this far.

The Corinthians let it get too far, some of them. Are you a believer? Do you name the name of Christ? Are you obediently doing what He’s called you to do? I don’t need to go through it. Just read through 1 Peter, read through Ephesians, read through Colossians, read through those books and ask yourself, “Am I doing what You want me to? Am I willing to do it?” Are you serving in the sphere that God has called you? The church – not a building but the body of Christ. If not, you need to pray. If you’ve removed yourself like Jonah, you’ve fled away to some other way to avoid that because it displeases you maybe, maybe God has placed you in the same circumstance. You need to pray, confess, be thankful, make a choice to obey and recognize God is sovereign over it all. And I believe that at this time God will have you vomited out of this harsh discipline, like Jonah.

This story illustrates how far God would go with those who are His. “It is appointed man once to die and then the judgment.” If you reject Christ there is the terrifying expectation of judgment. And Scripture declares you will be thrown into the lake of fire, the second death. But I declare to you today salvation is from the Lord. If you cry out to Him. Whoever cries, calls upon the name of the Lord, that’s the Lord Jesus Christ, will be saved. That Christ, the same Christ who bore your sins on the cross, who died for your sins, was entombed for three days and three nights, who rose from the dead – cry out to Him to save you and He will.

If God would go to this extent on His children, how far will He go for you? 1 Peter 4, I want to read this for you as we close. In the context of suffering.

***<sup>17</sup> For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? (God commands you to believe in Christ. Are you obeying that? God commands you to repent. Are you obeying the gospel?) <sup>18</sup> And if it is with difficulty that the righteous is saved, what will become of the godless man and the sinner? <sup>19</sup> Therefore, let those also who suffer according to the will of God entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right. [1Peter 4:17-19]***

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Be thankful. Obey the Lord. Give Him all the glory.

He's a good God. He's a loving, kind God. He's a compassionate God who saves. Salvation is from the Lord.

## **Prayer**

Dear Lord, You are so good. And You give us these truths to make us like Your Son. And I pray for anyone here, You know their hearts, and they know too; Jonah knew he was being disciplined. I pray they wouldn't let it go that far. That they would just thank You for Your salvation. They would thank You for how You are saving them right now from sin unto Yourself, that they would make a choice to obey You and that You would receive all the glory. Salvation, past, present, future is from You. Thank You for Your Word. Lord may we not walk around in the midst of a guilt trip. May we just confess and be thankful and live in the context of restored joy, which is in You. Thank You for Your Word. We desire that You would have Your way in our lives. And it's in Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

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