

JONAH'S GREAT STRUGGLE

LOVE YOUR ENEMIES SERIES - Part 1

Ben Rudolph

Good morning Life Fellowship. It is so good to see you here this morning. Turn in your Bibles to Jonah. Jonah is one of the small little books of the Bible in the Old Testament. Psalms is usually the half way point in your Bibles then there are the major prophets of Isaiah and Jeremiah and then Daniel, and then there is Hosea, Amos, Joel, Obadiah and Jonah. So mark that in your Bibles because we are going to be there for the next four weeks.

How many of you have ever heard the term 'lullaby effect?' Any of you ever heard of the lullaby effect? The idea of a lullaby effect means it is something that you have heard of many, many times so that there is a lot of familiarity to it. But just because you are familiar with it does not necessarily mean that you understand what it means. And so when it comes to studying the story of Jonah and the book of Jonah you may think that it is a very familiar story that you have heard many times.

My dad was a pastor so I grew up going to church multiple times a week. I had one of those children's Bibles, and as a parent I raised my kids on Bible stories. And so the story of Jonah is a very well-known story. It is a well-known story even for people who do not go to church, or who don't call themselves Christians, because it is just one of those fantastic stories in Scripture. And I even think a lot of people have seen the Veggie Tale version of Jonah. So I get it. I understand what this book is about.

But I want to ask you this question this morning. Would it be possible to just let everything you know about this story, about this prophet named Jonah and about this book of Jonah to just kind of set it aside and to have fresh eyes and ears to see and hear the Word of God? I know that most of us know this story. I am going to actually read the entire book this morning and I timed myself and it only takes about five minutes. It is a very short story. But I want us to just open this morning with prayer that God would give us fresh eyes, ears and spirit to receive what God may have for us today. Okay? So let's just go before the Lord now.

Dear Jesus, we know that you yourself referenced Jonah and this fantastic story when you walked here on this planet. And Lord, we are asking you right now to help us to see and to hear and to know the message of this book. God, if there is a familiarity that we have with it, if there is kind of callousness in us about knowing it, God, remove it from our hearts and our souls right now. And I pray that we would hear you speaking to us through your Word, through your Spirit. And God, the message you have for us, let it change our hearts today. We pray this in your name. Amen.

So I am going to read the book of Jonah. It is four chapters and I did it in about four minutes and forty-seven seconds, so if any of you are detail people you can time me. If you have your Bibles you can read it along with me because the verses will not be on the screen. And if you don't have your Bible please just sit there, close your eyes and imagine what is happening. We will start in Jonah Chapter 1.

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“Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.” But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord.

But the Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship threatened to break up. Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried out to his god. And they hurled the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them. But Jonah had gone down into the inner part of the ship and had lain down and was fast asleep. So the captain came and said to him, “What do you mean, you sleeper? Arise; call out to your god! Perhaps the god will give a thought to us that we may not perish.

And they said to one another, “Come, let us cast lots that we may know on whose account this evil has come upon us.” So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. Then they said to him, “Tell us on whose account this evil has come upon us. What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?” And he said to them, “I am a Hebrew, and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.” Then the men were exceedingly afraid and said to him, “What is this that you have done!” For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the Lord, because he had told them.

Then they said to him, “What shall we do to you, that the sea may quiet down for us?” For the sea grew more and more tempestuous. He said to them, “Pick me up and hurl me into the sea; then the sea will quiet down for you, for I know it is because of me that this great tempest has come upon you.” Nevertheless, the men rowed hard to get back to dry land, but they could not, for the sea grew more and more tempestuous against them. Therefore they called out to the Lord, “O Lord, let us not perish for this man’s life, and lay not on us innocent blood for you, O Lord, have done as it pleased you.” So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows. And the Lord appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish, saying, “I called out to the Lord, out of my distress, and He answered me: out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and you heard my voice. For you cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the flood surrounded me; all your waves and your billows passed over me. Then I said, ‘I am driven away from your sight; yet I shall again look upon your holy temple.’ The waters closed in over me to take my life; the deep surrounded me; weeds were wrapped about my head at the roots of the mountains. I went down to the land whose bars closed upon my forever; yet you brought up my life from the pit, O Lord my God.

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When my life was fainting away, I remembered the Lord, and my prayer came to you, into your holy temple. Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love. But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay. Salvation belongs to the Lord!" And the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land.

Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you." 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 days' journey. And he called out, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown." 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.

The word reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes. And he issued a proclamation and published throughout 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. Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish." 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.

But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. And he prayed to the Lord and said, "O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster. Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live." And the Lord said, "Do you do well to be angry?"

Jonah went out of the city and sat to the east of the city and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, till he should see what would become of the city. Now the Lord God appointed a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be a shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort. So Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the plant. But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant, so that it withered. When the sun rose, God appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint. And he asked that he might die and said, "It is better for me to die than to live."

But God said to Jonah, "Do you do well to be angry for the plant?" And he said, "Yes, I do well to be angry, angry enough to die." And the Lord said, "You pity

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the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night. And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?"

That is the story. You know I don't like stories that end with a question. I don't. We are going to do a giant overview of the book of Jonah today, and then the next two weeks we are going to kind of break down Jonah's response to God, and then the last week we are going to look at God's response to Jonah. That is what we are going to be doing over the next four weeks.

But I want us to kind of take a wide view lens of this book today. And here is the main point of the book of Jonah – love your enemies. That's it – love your enemies. Now we can close up our Bibles and we can go home. It is that easy – right? Love your enemies, that is the message of Jonah, and not only is that the message of Jonah but that is a core message of who Jesus is. When Jesus was teaching the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew Chapter 5, He said, ***"I tell you to love your enemy and bless those who curse you."***

So we have Jesus when He was on this planet saying they have already heard that they were to love their neighbor, but now He is telling them to also love their enemies. Not only did Jesus teach this, but He demonstrated this. This is who Jesus was and is. And today when I think about how we are living in our nation, in our culture, with what is going on within the church and outside of the church, there is no greater message I think God wants us hear and to obey than this message to love thy enemies. If we want to stand out in the world today, we need to love our enemies. If we want people to question our faith, love your enemies. If you want to understand the heart of God, love your enemies.

Now I can say love your enemies all day long and it doesn't make it any easier to do. I mean the reason why we are going to spend four weeks on Jonah is very simple; it is so difficult to love our enemies. Since the book of Jonah ended with a question I have some questions for us this morning. The first question is this – why is it so difficult to love our enemies? Why is that so difficult? What is it about that that it doesn't feel right? It is because it is antithetical to human nature, isn't it?

When someone wrongs us what do we want to do? We want to wrong them back. Your spouse ticks you off, what do you do? You are going to tick them off back. Someone cuts you off in traffic, what do you do? You are going to speed around and cut them off. This is what we do. When we are wronged as human beings, we have a sense of justice that says, *'If you do this to me, then I want you to taste what you did to me.'* And that seems to be completely natural for us. So that is the first reason.

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The second reason is this – it contradicts cultural righteousness. What do I mean by that? Today in our culture if someone says something or does something that you don't like, what is the mode of operation? It is to cancel them. They must be silenced. We must shut them down. *'I don't agree with them; therefore they hate me.'* And so we have heard this term, 'cancel culture,' a culture by which we believe if you disagree with me, or you don't like me, then you must be cancelled. And that is the opposite of the kingdom of God.

And listen, sometimes I know being in a room like this probably we hear about 'cancel culture' more on the left, but cancel culture exists everywhere. I don't care if you are on the right or the left. I know pastors who have lost their ministries because they spoke out against something that Donald Trump said that was not Christian like. Maybe you are thinking, *'Are you serious? Donald Trump said that?'* Yes, he did. And pastors that spoke the truth against someone who many Christians believed were their hero and savior of our political system lost their ministries over it.

Cancel culture exists everywhere. And if we are not careful we can buy into this idea that if you are treated wrongly, or you disagree with me, or there is something about you that doesn't align up with my values or beliefs, then I need to get you out of my life. And I will treat you as if you were dead. That is what is present in our world today. And what we have to do is stand apart, to be holy, to look different in the world. To love our enemies is something that God is calling us to.

So here is the second question I have – who is Jonah and who were the Ninevites? I mean we read this story and again we are all familiar with this story, but I think we really need to understand who Jonah was and who the Ninevites were to really get the richness of the story. The first thing it says about Jonah is he was the son of Amittai. Now you may be thinking that is interesting that his father's name is Amittai. But every little detail in the biblical text is there for a reason. And Amittai means 'God is truth,' so this says something about Jonah's nature.

What we get from the sense of Jonah's nature is that Jonah is someone who loves truth and justice. He loves it when people do something wrong that they get justice in the end. That is Jonah. Jonah was a prophet during the time of the great resurgence of the northern kingdom of Israel. Israel and Judah had broken up after King Solomon in the middle of the tenth century. The northern kingdom of Israel, the ten northern tribes, lasted for a little more than two hundred years, and they never had a good king. They never had a godly king and they never had a revival of any sort. So there were a lot of prophets in the northern kingdom like Elijah and Elisha.

And Jonah was one of these guys who followed in this line of prophets. And during this time, in II Kings Chapter 14 verse 25, Jonah is mentioned as a prophet who predicted that the borders of Israel would be restored to its fullest glory. And they were. Listen, if Jonah walked around with a hat it would be a MIGA hat – 'Make Israel Great

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Again.' That was Jonah. Jonah predicted that the borders would increase, and that the elevation of the nation would prosper economically and militarily. It was to kind of have a rejuvenation of everything but the spiritual nature of the people. And Jonah loved Israel. He loved his people. And the fact that God used him to declare that the borders would be increased was something Jonah cared about a great deal.

So here Jonah is with a strong sense of truth. And there are three times that Jonah wishes to die in this book. The first one is in Chapter 1. I know when we are reading this and we are familiar with the story we are like, *'Oh Jonah is asking to be thrown overboard because he knows there is going to be a big fish there.'* No, he doesn't know that. Jonah is like, *'Would you please throw me overboard because I would rather die than do what God wants me to do.'* So Jonah first wants to be thrown overboard and sink to the bottom because he was the type of person that would rather die than to violate his principles. That is how strong Jonah was. And some of you are like that. Some of you think, *'I have my principles, I have my convictions, and you will have to kill me to break them.'* You are that strong. Some of you are like that, and that was Jonah. Jonah had very strong convictions about truth. So we need to understand that there was something going on with Jonah that we need to learn how to relate to.

Now who were the Ninevites? Well, the Ninevites were quite possibly the most brutal nation and group of people that have ever existed on the face of this planet in the history of the world. The only people that could come close to the brutality of the Ninevites were what the historians call the Assyrians, or maybe the Nazis of the Third Reich. They were very atrocious to people. They had pictographs that they have found, scenes that were etched in stones to commemorate the greatness of their culture. And in these pictographs that were carved in stone were scenes of them pulling on people's lips to keep them silent, gouging out their eyes, and ripping out their tongues. That is what they loved to do. If they captured a city they would see how many tongues they could rip out, or how many eyes they could gouge out.

If that didn't suit their fancy then they would line people up and impale as many people as possible en masse for their sport. If they had to take a bunch of captives back from a conquered city to their own city, they would make mile markers with decapitated heads of their prisoners. The pile of heads would mark the journey from the conquered city to their city. They were atrocious people. Even reading about these people was awful. And this is a quote that I have to read to you. *"Indeed, to continue describing these peoples' utterly perverse natures would be to weary the senses and exhaust all language in searching for suitable words with which to portray the unspeakable depths to which they had sunk."*

I know we think the world is bad today, and there are atrocities happening all over the world, but I think the Ninevites, and the Assyrians were at a level that we cannot even imagine. And so this is who the Ninevites were. Now let me just stop right here. Some people wonder if the story of Jonah was just a parable because there were so many crazy

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things that happened in it. Like Jonah, a Hebrew prophet going to a foreign people like that, they should have killed him on the spot, so why wasn't he killed? And we are going to get to that in the fourth sermon of this series. And some people think it would just be crazy that Jonah could be alive in a great fish and how he could possibly survive that.

But here is what we know. Jesus makes reference both to Jonah and the people of Nineveh in one of His sermons to the Pharisees. Jesus said that He would have a greater sign than the sign of Jonah being in the belly of a big fish for three days and three nights. And He also said that the people of Nineveh would stand in judgment for these people who were hearing Jesus speak. So we know that Jesus believed that the story that we read in Jonah was real. It was history. And if Jesus believed it was real history that is good enough for me.

And we will get into some of the historical things later on. We know that there are stories of people existing in the belly of whales for a period of time. We know that is possible. And it is also possible because we serve a supernatural God. There are people that want to take the story of Jonah and throw it out the door and that is because they have an anti-supernatural bias. And if they have an anti-supernatural bias about anything that they read that could have been of a supernatural occurrence, they just believe it could never happen. But we believe that there is a God and that He can interject Himself within the natural realm at any time to adjust the rules according to what He wants because God can do that. He made the rules so He can adjust them as well. So I don't read this story and have a problem with a man being in the belly of a great sea creature. I just don't because with God it is possible.

So the third question I have is why did Jonah run from God? Chapter 1 said: ***“Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.” But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.”*** Jonah went in the opposite direction of Nineveh. So why did Jonah run from God?

I don't know about you but if God came to me and said, *‘Hey, I want you to go to the Ninevites,’* my first reaction would have been, *‘They are going to kill me. Have you heard about what these people do? I can't go there. I can't do that.’* But Jonah wasn't afraid of the Ninevites. That is not what drove him to run from God. Remember Jonah is wearing his MIGA hat; he wants to make Israel great again. Maybe he was thinking, *‘I care more about the Israelites than I do about the Ninevites, so I don't have time for that, and I am just going to go do my own thing.’*

Was that the reason Jonah went in the opposite direction? No, that is not why he ran from God. Jonah explains why he ran from God, but the first thing we have to understand is the key word in the book of Jonah. The reason why Jonah ran from God is because of this word ‘evil.’ The word ‘evil,’ and if you have a pen I want you to kind of mark every verse that talks about evil in the book of Jonah, because this is the great

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struggle that Jonah had. It was the great struggle that Jonah had and it is the great struggle I think that we have today. Let's look at every time the word evil is mentioned.

In Jonah Chapter 1 it says: *“Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.”* Now go down to Chapter 1 and verses 7 and 8: *And they said to one another, “Come, let us cast lots, that we may know on whose account this evil has come upon us.”* And then another: *“Tell us on whose account this evil has come upon us.”*

Now go down to Chapter 3 and verses 7 through 10 where the king says this: *“And he issued a proclamation and published throughout 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.”* Look in verse 10: *“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.”* And that word ‘disaster’ is the Hebrew word *Ra* meaning ‘evil.’ So God relented of the evil that He had said He would do to them, and He did not do it.

Now Chapter 4 and verse 1 is the first time you don't see the word evil: *“But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry.”* We don't have the word evil there but in the Hebrew the word evil is there. Here is the exact literal translation of this verse: *“It was a great evil to Jonah what God had done.”* That is why Jonah ran from God. This is the struggle Jonah had because he believed that what God had done was actually evil. God came to Jonah and said, *‘Jonah, I want you to go to the Ninevites. I want you to preach to them.’*

And Jonah thinks, *‘Are you kidding me? You want me to preach to them. I know who you are and I know what kind of God you are. And I know what these people have done, how they have ravaged, pillaged, and raped people and cities across the region. We sit here every day fearing what these people are going to do to us, and you want me to go over there and preach forgiveness and repentances to them? God, bring fire upon them. They don't deserve your mercy. I cannot believe that you would have me go to them. They don't deserve your grace; they don't deserve your compassion, look at who they are.’* That was Jonah. And Jonah was angry with God because of what he believed. Jonah believed that what God had done by relenting of the evil, the disaster, was a wicked thing He had done and he was angry.

See this is Jonah's great struggle with God and it was rooted in Jonah's application of compassion and mercy over truth and justice. And this is our struggle as well. Jonah's struggle is quite possibly our struggle this morning. I don't know who your enemy is. I don't know who that person is in your life that you look at and you have

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contempt for. I don't know who that person is, or who that group of people may be, that you are just angry with, but whoever they are, maybe it is not even anyone with a name, but it is a face, and there is something inside of you that just makes you angry inside and they are your enemy. And when you have these feelings of anger that justice must be done to them, we expect God to do something about it, and that is where the struggle is.

I hate sharing this story publicly because it is one of my worst moments as a human being and as a dad. But I had an episode of road rage that was pretty bad one time. I was driving my kids down 150 going home from Denver where I live on the west side of the lake. I moved there in 2006 when there was nothing there. And if you live on the west side of the lake you are used to driving over to either Mooresville or Huntersville to do shopping or go to restaurants or just to experience civilization.

And I can't tell you how many times living in Denver I would come out to this side of the lake. And when I would tell people I lived in Denver they would be like, '*Really? Where is that?*' It is quite possible that you can live in Lake Norman for ten years and never go to Denver. It is quite possible that you have never been there; except maybe driving through it on your way to somewhere else. But I promise you that everyone that lives in Denver spends times in Mooresville or Huntersville. So my kids and I had gone on a shopping excursion and we were driving back to Denver. There was construction on 150 right where the road narrows down from two lanes to one lane, where you are leaving civilization, and you have to take turns narrowing down to the one lane.

And I hate traffic, I just hate waiting there and it just always puts me in a bad mood. No amen to that? '*Not me Pastor Ben. I have the patience of Job.*' But I hate traffic and I have waited my turn, right? I have just patiently waited for the turn sign, and some person is coming and they go off road and then whip right in front of me. There was barely room in front of me but they managed to squeeze in. And I put my hand on my horn and I kept my hand on my horn for a long time. My kids are begging me to please stop honking the horn but I am determined to make this person feel very uncomfortable, so I just kept my hand on my horn for a long time.

Now listen, I share that story because that is a small story of anger. Again, I am not proud of doing that and my kids always love bringing up that story. '*Dad, remember when you lost it.*' They love those stories and I always have to apologize again, and ask them to never be like me in those moments. And that is just a small case of the anger that comes inside of us when there is someone that wrongs us, someone that commits an injustice against us, where we believe God should do something to that person that aligns with His truth and His justice.

You see this is what I want us to be honest about in our great struggle to love our enemies. Our struggle in loving our enemies really becomes a struggle to understand God. Our struggle might not be primarily with the person who has wronged us, our

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struggle might be with God who could do something about the evil done to us and who has done nothing. And if we are not honest about our struggle with God, I don't think we will really have a relationship with Him the way He wants us to.

Jonah is the son of truth and look at what he says to God. I want you to see each of these passages of Scripture because the first time God names Himself in Exodus Chapter 34 on Mount Sinai He declares who He is. In Exodus Chapter 34 and verses 6 and 7 this is what it says: ***“The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, (now circle that word faithfulness), keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children’s children, to the third and fourth generation.”***

This is God declaring who He is, in the fullness of His grace and His mercy and His truth and His justice. Now there is another passage in Psalm 86 that says God is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. And there are two other places in Psalms where it mentions God is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

And then in the Prophet Joel who was a little bit before Jonah, he describes God again. Joel says: ***“And rend your hearts and your garments calling to people of Judah to repent. Return to the Lord your God for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.”*** Everything lines up in how God describes Himself and yet He relents over *Ra*, disaster.

Now when Jonah talks to God and remember he is ticked off, he tells God why he didn't go to Nineveh? This is what he says in verse 2 of Jonah Chapter 4: ***“That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster.”*** What is different about that description of God than how God previously described Himself? Jonah doesn't use the word 'faithfulness.' God said in several passages of Scripture that He was: ***“merciful and gracious, abounding in steadfast love, slow to anger and faithfulness.”*** That word faithfulness is the word 'truth.'

Who is Jonah? He was the son of truth. This is what Jonah was saying: *‘I would rather die than live in a world where you are not true, and what you are doing is not true. These people deserved punishment, God. They are wicked. They are evil. They have done evil to so many innocent people on this planet, and yet God you are going to give them a ‘get out of jail’ free card? I can't take it, God. How can they get a second chance after all that they have done. I just can't take it. I cannot take it.’* Listen, before we beat up on Jonah let's be honest and admit we have all felt the same way. We have all been there. We have all been where Jonah was.

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And this leads me to my final question – was Jonah's great struggle our struggle? There are some things that have happened to us, there are some things that may have happened to our children, some things that may have happened to our spouse, or to our family, and whether it was big or small, the offense, the wrong has left a scar, it has left a gaping wound, and we are struggling with this question – *'God where are you? You are supposed to be a God of truth and justice, and all I see is this mercy and compassion, and I don't like it. I don't like it for them because of what they have done.'*

Three quick points and we are done. Number one – we have to learn how to be honest about our struggles with God. Jonah's conversation with God is very parallel to the conversation that Elijah had with God. Remember when Jezebel told Elijah that she was going to kill him and he ran away. Elijah said the same thing to God as Jonah, *'I want to die. Can you please kill me right now, God.'* Elijah has this conversation with God that was very similar to Jonah. And here is the thing that I think is really important. If we have never gotten angry with God, I don't know if we have really been honest with Him. We see in Scripture some of the greatest prophets that have ever walked the face of this planet and we see how they struggled and how they were angry with God. And it is fascinating that the Bible records prophets getting angry with God.

This is how we can tell that a man didn't write this book. God is freely describing our interaction with who He is. Have you ever met a couple, a married couple, and they say, *'We never fight.'* And we think, *'Oh that is great.'* But either a) they are lying or b) one person in that relationship is not being honest and they are just kind of lying down. Because what I know is when there are two people in a relationship there is going to be some level of disagreement. And I can't think of any relationship that is more important than our relationship with God, and He is going to do things that we don't necessarily agree with. God does this all the time. *'God, why did you allow this? God, why didn't you stop this? God, why didn't you fix this?'* The beginning point of healing, the beginning point of the restoration is learning how to be honest. We need to tell God when we are struggling. We need to tell Him we may be angry with Him, because of what He allowed or what He didn't do. We need to be honest with Him.

Number two – we need to be honest with who our enemies are. It is okay to name people who have wronged us and not to live in this comatose state. It is okay to say, *'Hey, I am struggling with this person, God. I am struggling with this group of people. I don't like this group. God, I wish you would send lightning down on this person.'* Remember Korah in the Bible who didn't like Moses and who caused rebellion? Moses told Korah to go stand over there and he would stand over here and then he asked God who was right. And the ground opened up and Korah's people fell into the center of the earth and were swallowed up. Man that would have been awesome to see.

Some of you are wishing God would do that again. *'I work with some people. I have some neighbors. Could you just open up the earth thing, I would love that. That political party, man, open up the ground and swallow them. I love that story, God.'*

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Listen, let's be honest about the people who have hurt us, whether it is family members, co-workers or neighbors – we have to name our enemies. Do you know why we have to name our enemies? It is because we have to name the people that we know that we need to love.

Lastly, we have to remember the cross. I want us to be honest with the struggle today, but I would not be doing my job, I would not be doing God's service by not reminding us that we have something to look toward. There is a great force in our lives, there is something that we can fix our eyes upon, and that is Jesus. He experienced the greatest injustice on the face of the earth. And we can learn how to identify with Him.

There is something about the words of God in Isaiah Chapter 53 where it says, *“By His wounds we are healed,”* that I believe means we need to learn how to take our wounds to the crucified Jesus. And to say, *‘Jesus, I know you are probably the only one who could sit with me and understand my wounds. You can understand what it is like to be treated unjustly. You can understand this because of what you experienced.’* And we need to be people who know how to come to Jesus and to bring our wounds to Him because He understands.

We can come to Him and say, *‘You said on the cross while you were being tortured, ‘Father, forgive them.’ I don’t know how to do that, but I need you to teach me.’* And I think what we have to do with the cross is to bring our struggle there. And one simple thing I want to challenge you to do is to pray the blood of Jesus Christ over your wounds, over your struggles, over your feelings, and over your enemies. It is not just flipping a switch because we don’t want to minimize what has happened to us. We don’t want to minimize the wrong that was done to us, and just forget it. It is hard but one thing I know that can change us is the blood of Jesus Christ. And if your struggle is the same as Jonah’s this morning, there is hope, there is a way, and His name is Jesus. Let’s bow our heads and close our eyes and go before the Lord.

Jesus, we come to you, and we have a picture of what it means to love our enemies. And it is hard. We want to acknowledge the struggle is real for many of us, but help us to remember that you loved us when we were enemies. So God, I just pray right now as we close this service that there would be a level of honesty and openness that we have with you that maybe we have not had in a while, that we would name our struggles, and name our enemies. And we would learn how to look to Jesus in ways we never have before. God, I pray the blood of Jesus Christ over every hurt and every wound that is in this room.

God, I don’t know them by name but you do, and you felt their pain, and you felt their wounds on the cross. So God, I just pray for healing over us. And I pray, God, that we would be a people that learn how to set ourselves apart from the world. God, show us how to love our enemies because it is hard, it is difficult and we don’t want to do it. So Lord, we are crying out to you because if this is what you have called us to, and this is

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who you are, we want to be obedient to you this morning. So go before us, hem us in behind and before, hold us by your right hand, teach us, guide us, counsel us with your Spirit, and take us on a journey these next four weeks that we may come to a deepening understanding of your love for us and for your world. We pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

The preceding transcript was completed using raw audio recordings. As much as possible, it includes the actual words of the message with minor grammatical changes and editorial clarifications to provide context. Hebrew and Greek words are spelled using Google Translator and the actual spelling may be different in some cases.