



Throughout scripture, God is showing grace and compassion to undeserving people. Imagine this scenario.

A boy starts dating a girl. He's infatuated. So infatuated, in fact, that on the first date, he doesn't arrive home until 4 am, way past curfew. As the boy opens the door to his house, he runs into his dad who is leaving to look for his son.

Later the two of them sit down to discuss the house rules, expectations of obedience and earning trust. The son professes renewed vigor to meet his curfew.

The next night he goes on date number 2. The night progresses, the couple has a wonderful time together and he doesn't arrive home until 2 am. An improvement but he misses curfew again. Repeat conversation with dad about rules, expectations of obedience and earning trust; repeat profession from the son to meet curfew from that point forward.

The next night he goes on date number 3. He tells his new girlfriend about his curfew and asks her to help him be on time tonight. She agrees. The night progresses, they are having a blast and the boy arrives home at 3 am, way past curfew.

The son is filled with shame as he and his father again discuss the house rules, expectations of obedience and earning trust. The father ends the conversation with these words: "Your mother and I know you would like to go snow skiing during Spring Break with your friends. And we know that you don't have the money to pay for the trip. We'd like to give you the money so you can go on your ski trip. We've been saving up for a summer anniversary cruise to the Bahamas and we'd like to give you that money we've saved. We won't go on our cruise."

Can you imagine being that child? Imagine being on the receiving end of this kind of sacrificial gift. This is a gift of grace. Grace defined is: being given something wonderful that you do not deserve.

The book of Jonah revolves around this theme: the stunning lengths God will go to show His grace and compassion. The natural questions that arise as we look at this book today are:

- » Have you received God's grace and compassion?
- » Are you giving God's grace and compassion to others?

Turn in your Bibles to Jonah.

**The word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai: "Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me." But Jonah ran away from the LORD and headed for Tarshish (Jonah 1:1–3).**

This is a wonderful and amazing occurrence. The Word of the Lord comes to Jonah and will come to us today as well. God loves to speak. God is a speaking God. We see this through history—Word, prophets, circumstances, wise counsel. We can be obedient to this or, like Jonah, be disobedient.

By looking ahead in the book we can see Jonah's reasons for running away from God's will.

**"That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity" (Jonah 4:2).**

Jonah didn't want to go to Nineveh because he didn't want them to have a chance of repentance. Jonah was stingy with God's grace and compassion. Some think that Jonah was afraid of the Ninevites. And for good reasons. The Ninevites were scary people. Nineveh was the capital city of the Assyrian Empire, a brutal Empire. When they conquered a city they would kill children, rape, skin the men alive and bury them in the sand. Then to make sure the terror of their reputation spread, after the conquered were dead, they would stack up the skulls in a pile at the city gate. The message: This will happen to any city that defies us.

So, yes, the Ninevites were scary people. They were brutal, wicked, sinful people. But I don't think Jonah was afraid for his personal safety. Jonah decided that people like that didn't deserve a chance to hear about the grace and compassion of the Lord. He felt they were so wicked they deserved to be wiped out.

I wonder if you and I have ever felt that way about someone? Not being wiped out, that's too extreme. Just a little bit of suffering, God, to teach them a lesson. Just a little bit of hardship, to knock some sense into them. Maybe someone who has betrayed us, insulted us, intentionally sought to harm us and we would be slightly uncomfortable if they got off free. Jonah does not want the Ninevites to get off free.

So instead of following the Lord's instructions and going to preach to them, he ran in the opposite direction toward Tarshish.

That didn't last long. Didn't Jonah know you can't run from God?

We see here that Jonah's private rebellion will hurt others. It's simply a matter of time. Look at the trouble that is caused by his rebellion.

**Then the LORD sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up (Jonah 1:4).**

The sailors are scrambling to save their lives. They throw all of the cargo overboard to lighten the ship. The sailors cast lots to determine who is causing this calamity—Jonah is the cause of the trouble. Jonah admits it and tells them he's running from the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land. This terrified them. The sailors try to row back to shore. No good. So as a last resort they follow Jonah's instructions to throw him overboard.

**Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm. At this the men greatly feared the LORD, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows to him (Jonah 1:15–16).**

What do we learn from this? God has determined that Jonah is the man to preach to Nineveh. There is no escaping God's plan when the Word of the Lord has come to us. And if we are trying to escape something that the Lord is telling us to do, we can't. Note the grace and compassion God shows to the pagan sailors. They threw His prophet overboard in a raging storm and God calmed the seas.

What happens next is a well-known fact: Jonah is swallowed by a whale, right? Kind of. It was a fish actually.

**Now the LORD provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights (Jonah 1:17).**

What might get lost in the stories that float around is that the Lord provided this fish in order to save Jonah's life. Jonah's worst nightmare was exactly what he needed. Imagine being thrown from a ship into a raging sea. You're falling toward the water. When you hit the water, you're slapped a couple of times by these huge waves, you're struggling to stay afloat and then the waves calm down. Hey, that seems great. Maybe the sailors can pull you back on the ship. Everything is OK now.

But no. That's when you see the fin of a large fish coming your way, a very large fish. So large it can swallow you whole. And it's coming directly toward you. It's coming and coming and you're swimming and panicking and then it swallows you.

Jonah's worst nightmare was exactly what he needed. Sometimes that happens with us too. Sometimes we confuse God's rescue as some type of punishment.

In this fish rescue, the Lord shows us another example of His grace and compassion by sparing His disobedient prophet's life. The belly of a fish might not be the best way to travel through

the sea but it's better than drowning. And inside that fish, Jonah had a momentary change of heart. Chapter 2 is Jonah's prayer to God. He acknowledges God's power and his own change of heart.

**But I, with shouts of grateful praise, will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed I will make good. I will say, 'Salvation comes from the LORD'" (Jonah 2:9).**

In dire circumstances, Jonah turns to the Lord with a repentant heart and vows his obedience to the Lord. God was pleased with his change of heart and has the fish spit Jonah up onto the beach.

**Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time: "Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you." Jonah obeyed the word of the LORD and went to Nineveh (Jonah 3:1–3).**

The Word of the Lord comes to Jonah a second time. Another example of God showing grace and compassion. Jonah was not the kind of person you'd want on your project team. He's stubborn, stingy and doesn't take direction well. Yet God came to him a second time. Isn't this the way He comes to us as well? He comes to us the first time. If we don't listen and obey He comes a second time, a third time, a fourth time, until we respond in obedience.

I'm simultaneously bothered by God's grace toward Jonah and encouraged that He comes to me multiple times as well. I wonder, has the Lord been coming to you with a special word that you've been trying to ignore? If He has, let me encourage you today to say "yes" to Him. You know He's just going to keep at you. You might as well give in now.

At this point, Jonah does go to Nineveh and preach, as God told him. His sermon is short and unfriendly.

**"Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown" (Jonah 3:4).**

Jonah's entire sermon was five Hebrew words. It was short, direct and offensive. Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown. God's mercy is a limited time offer. Yes, God is showing His stunning lengths of grace and compassion **but** His offer is for a limited time. The Ninevites were told how long their offer would last—40 days. This brings a sense of urgency to obey.

**The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth. When Jonah's warning reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust. This is the proclamation he issued in Nineveh: "By the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let people or animals, herds or flocks, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. But let people and animals be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. Who**

**knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish" (Jonah 3:5–9).**

The Ninevites believed God. This was shocking. It would be like Howard Stern apologizing for his crude behavior and changing his show to Christian talk radio. It would be like everyone in Las Vegas publicly repenting of his or her ways and then re-purposing the buildings, which had formerly been used for sinful acts, being turned into places of worship.

The Ninevites believed Jonah's preaching and repented. This was a radical, cultural and spiritual change. Just for the king to leave his thrown at midday was a sign of repentance. Then the king issues a proclamation—this is politically incorrect! But when the Lord gets our attention, we are no longer concerned with appearances or the fallout. We step boldly in obedience.

God may relent. God may give us a second chance. God may show us grace and compassion. The Ninevites, who were the furthest from God, respond better than Jonah.

**When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened (Jonah 3:10).**

**But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry. He prayed to the LORD, "Isn't this what I said, LORD, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. Now, LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live" (Jonah 4:1–3).**

Jonah prays two times in the book. Once when he's in trouble and once when he's angry. In his prayer now he shows that he knows that God is gracious and compassionate. He's happy to be on the receiving end of it, but he doesn't want the Ninevites to get it. He's happy to be given a second chance, but he doesn't want the Ninevites to get one. He's happy to get and then horde God's grace and compassion, while the Ninevites shouldn't get any of God's grace and compassion. In Jonah we see the ugliness of how we might act when we withhold God's grace and compassion.

In response to Jonah's anger, God, continuing to show grace and compassion, provides the plant as an object lesson to Jonah. A large vine grows to provide Jonah shade and he loves the plant. The next day, the Lord sends a worm to eat the plant and Jonah was so mad he wanted to die again.

**But the LORD said, "You have been concerned about this plant, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more**

**than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left—and also many animals? (Jonah 4:10–11).**

In these final verses, we continue to see Jonah's selfishness and stinginess. He's like a pre-schooler on the playground who doesn't want to share the toys, which he did nothing to earn. Jonah wants to horde God's grace and compassion. In contrast to that, God does not selfishly horde. Instead, He is generous with grace and compassion.

These poor Ninevites are a mess. Yes, they are brutal and rebellious people. But they're more complex than that. Their brutality and rebellion is birthed from spiritual ignorance. God describes them like pre-schoolers: they don't know their right hand from their left. They are so ignorant to spiritual realities that they know almost nothing. They need a helpful teacher. They need instruction. God sees past their wicked behavior and sees a heart in need of redemption. God, because He has a loving heart, wants the Ninevites to know that spiritual life, redemption, holiness and change is possible.

This is where the theme of Jonah is clearly seen: God will go to great lengths to show His grace and compassion to people. God inspired this book to be written because God wants us to receive His love and take His message of grace and compassion to everyone who will listen.

This charge applies to us as a group and as individuals. As a group, we are so fortunate that our elders are passionate about this. It was part of their vision to replicate healthy, Bible teaching churches throughout the peninsula so that we would be taking the message of God's grace and compassion to people that might not hear if we didn't go. This is why our North campus was started two years ago. This is why we're starting our South campus next Spring. We will not be stingy with the love that God has given us!

But let's be honest, while it's exciting, it's not convenient to start a new campus. You might even feel some resistance to go to the North or South campus because, well, those campuses aren't as nice as Foster City. It takes a lot of work to get a campus going, set everything up and take everything down. Maybe your best friends are planning to go to the South campus and you're planning to stay at the Foster City campus. That's inconvenient. Yes. Let's just admit it—extending grace and compassion to as many people as possible is not convenient. It rarely is. So I want to ask you, if you live in San Carlos and south, are you willing to bear the inconvenience? Are you willing to join the South campus and reach people with the saving message of Jesus Christ?

On an individual level, each of us should ponder deeply—how far will we go in order to take God's grace and compassion to others? Each one of us should generously share God's grace and compassion by talking to a co-worker, a neighbor or a family

member. Sometimes we hang back because we're afraid or distracted by the worries of life or consumed with materialism or so disconnected from Jesus that we've lost our passion.

Today is a good day to answer these questions:

- » Have you received the grace and compassion of God?
- » How are you going to give God's grace and compassion to others?

This heart of compassion, grace and love of God is most fully seen by looking to the New Testament. In the Gospels we read about Jesus' perfect, loving life, His sacrificial death on the cross and His resurrection from the dead, all because God wanted to save rebellious people from spiritual death.

Rebellious people are Jonah, the sailors on the ship, the Ninevites, us; rebellious people, stuck in spiritual death, unless

we have Jesus. We see degrees of wickedness and evil between all of these groups, but we all stand in the same place, in great need of God's grace through Jesus, of God's love through Jesus, of God's forgiveness through Jesus. New life through Jesus.

And once we have experienced this, God drafts you and me onto the promotion team to carry the Name of Jesus to everyone who will listen. This is why God inspired this book to be written. To instruct us, to remind us and to charge us. How will you carry the Name of Jesus to people who don't know their right hand from their left?

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*