

# God Gives Second Chances

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[ 0 : 00 ] Turn to the book of Jonah, chapter 2, verses 1-10.

! 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 spirit, 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 me forever.

Yet you brought up my life from the pit, O Lord my God. When my life was fainting away, I remembered the Lord, and my prayer came to you into your holy temple.

[ 1 : 21 ] 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 dry land. May God add a blessing to the reading of his word.

Would you please be seated? Many of you might remember when I first was brought to Highland Park in view of call, that I shared my story with you, my testimony.

And in that testimony, I shared with you that it was 16. I was 16 years old when I was called to the ministry by God. And I shared the story about how it wasn't too much long after that, that I decided when I was in college that it wasn't fair.

I didn't think it was right for God to tell me what I should do with my life. And so I ran hard and fast from that calling. And the prodigal son is a story that I enjoy reading, because I very much feel like there was a time in my life where I certainly was that prodigal.

[ 2 : 35 ] But I remember when after my time of doing my own thing and getting into a lot of trouble, I eventually realized that this was not God's will for my life.

And thank God that he helped me to see that. He brought me to my senses, and I went back to my church. But I was discouraged when I got back, because I felt like there was a lot of people who had given up on me, that they had heard what I had done.

They had heard me give my testimony when I was 16 years old. They were disappointed, and I understand why and what I was involved with. But when I came back, it seemed like they were very unwilling to give me a second chance, to believe that I truly had repented of my ways.

But thank God we have Scripture. And thank God that we see from Scripture that God does not operate in that way. That God is a God who is willing to give second chances to his children when they stray from him.

And not only will he give you a second chance, he'll give you a third chance, he'll give you a fourth chance, and on and on and on. Because God loves us. And we see that from Scripture, don't we?

[ 3 : 55 ] Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Joshua, David, Peter, were all men who stumbled into sin, and they went their own way.

And thank God that he was willing to give each of them a second chance. But perhaps one of my favorite stories of second chances is the story of Samson. You guys know the story of Samson and Delilah very well.

And that was my favorite story in Sunday school. Whenever we were going to talk about Samson, I mean, my eyes were big. I wanted to listen because Samson was like the Hulk to me.

You know, he was big. He was strong. He was powerful. All the things that I wanted to be as a boy. And if you remember the story of Samson's life, that God had made a pledge, right?

That as long as his hair wasn't cut, that he would have this incredible strength, that he would be Israel's warrior, that he would be victorious in battle against the Philistines, who were a constant problem for God's people.

[ 4 : 59 ] And man, he took them to task, right? We can talk about the things that he did, taking a jaw of a donkey's bone and slaughtering people with it. I mean, that takes some strength. And then we see that Samson, though, was as powerful as he was physically.

He was flawed spiritually. And he had a problem, in particular, with women. And that problem led him to greater problems.

And his hair, his secret was found out. His hair was cut. You guys know the story. You know that the Philistines eventually captured him. They gouged his eyes out. They made him to work in the mills.

They paraded him around town. And they made fun of him. And they mocked God because they had conquered God's great warrior. And what I love is the story where we hear about Samson's second chance.

And he's a beaten man. He's been broken. He's been through it. He's realized that he has left God. It was his sin that resulted in God removing his spirit from him. And there Samson is.

[ 5 : 59 ] He's chained to these pillars of the temple of the god of Dagon. And the Philistines are having this great celebration. There's people on top of the temple that he's chained to. And they are mocking God.

And they are praising Dagon. And Samson there puts his hands on the pillars and he prays, if you remember. And he asks God to return his strength to him because he realizes what he has done. And God returns his spirit to him. And there in one great final act of obedience, he brings that structure down. And he brings a great victory to God's people as a result.

And as I mentioned before, Jesus also talks about the parable of the prodigal son. And again, we see that in that parable, Jesus teaches this great principle to us that God is the one who seeks us. That God is the one who will forgive us. That God will also restore us. And he offers second chances to his children whenever they return back to him.

[ 7 : 02 ] Thank God that he is more gracious and merciful to us than we, as his people, tend to be to each other. Amen? Jonah, as you remember, has been running from God's call.

And as we saw last week, we saw that because God loved Jonah, because God loves his people, he will not allow Jonah to escape from the calling that he's given to him.

And we remember as well that Jonah needs the people of Nineveh as much as the people of Nineveh need to hear Jonah's message. That Jonah is hard in his heart.

That Jonah hates these people. That Jonah does not want these people, so to speak, to go to his church. He hates them. And so God is doing something not just for the Ninevites, but also for his hard-hearted prophet.

And then we see that God, in his mercy, is willing to discipline Jonah by sending a storm upon him. And it serves also to bring those sailors who were on that ship to salvation.

[ 8 : 08 ] And then we saw that God appointed a great fish, and that fish was called to swallow Jonah so that it could redirect his course and his path. And so now Jonah is in the belly of that great fish.

This prophet, who was used to running, now found himself in a place where he could not run to anywhere. There was nowhere else for him to go.

He had been backed in a corner by God, and now God had this man's attention. And here we see, for the very first time in this book, Jonah speaks to God.

Jonah's prayer is recorded in chapter 2, and through his prayer we learn that God gives us second chances. And there are two truths that I want us to see today about our relationship with God.

And the first is this. God will put us in distressful places so that we will acknowledge our running and our need for a second chance.

[ 9 : 13 ] You know, I can imagine that there are probably few places more distressed.

It's more distressed to be in than in a fish's stomach. That's a pretty distressful place. And here is where Jonah is.

In all of chapter 2, he is living inside a fish's stomach. Very distressful place to be in. Well, how did he get there? Well, we know he got there as a result of his running from God.

Because he hated the people of Nineveh. He couldn't bear the thought of seeing them saved. And so he ran from God. Well, who put him there? God put him there.

God was the one, if you remember, he sent the storm. God determined the course of actions that would lead to Jonah being thrown overboard and then swallowed by this fish so that he could take him to where he was supposed to go.

[10:31] So it's important for us to note that nowhere in chapter 1 do we see Jonah pray at all. Nowhere throughout chapter 1 do we see Jonah trying to speak to God, communicate with God in any way.

But now, in this very distressful place, Jonah all of a sudden becomes a praying man. And that's what we see is Jonah calling out to God.

We don't know much about Jonah's relationship with God prior to the events that took place in this book. But it seems very clear that Jonah at some point in time was walking with God.

And it seems very clear also to us that God and Jonah communicated at some point in time. At least it's clear from chapter 1 verse 1 that God spoke to Jonah and Jonah understood that what he was hearing was from God.

Not some voice in his head. Not any other person telling him what he should do. God was speaking to Jonah and Jonah understood that it was God's voice.

[11:41] So there was some kind of communication that at least existed. But that communication and that fellowship was severed the moment when God heard, or Jonah, excuse me, heard God's call.

And instead of choosing to obey it, he chose to run instead. He chose to disobey what God was calling him to do. And so as a result of that, their relationship, though it hadn't been severed, lost its fellowship and communication.

Kind of like, man, if you get in an argument with your wife. You don't do that, right? Because you're a perfect Christ-following man. But say that you did and you got an argument with your wife and she sent you to the couch to spend the night.

Doesn't mean that your relationship has been severed. But it does mean that there's something wrong with your fellowship and your communication. Right? And so that's what's happening here with Jonah and God. We know that Jesus Christ is our Lord and Savior.

If you've made him your Lord and Savior, you can never be severed from that relationship with him. But your sin can cause you to lose fellowship and communication with him.

[13:02] Just like the prodigal son. He never stopped being his father's son. But the father never disowned him. He always was his son.

When we have been given clear instruction from God and choose to run from what he is asking us, we lose fellowship with him. And if you've ever been there before, like I've been there before, you know that for a believer, that's one of the worst.

That's the worst place that you could be in as a believer. To lose fellowship and to lose communication with God. There is no more discouraging.

There is no more depressing. There is no more draining time in the life of a believer than when they have lost fellowship with God because of their disobedience. In Psalm 51, David writes about coming out of this kind of sin that caused this break in his fellowship.

This sin that he had with Bathsheba. He said in verses 3 and 4, For I know my transgression and my sin is ever before me against you. You only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight.

[14:13] And then in verses 10 and 11, he says this, Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence and take not your Holy Spirit from me.

What's David saying? Well, I think he's essentially saying this, God, you can take from me whatever you want. Whatever you want, take it. But the one thing I cannot stand or afford to lose is my fellowship with you through the power of your Holy Spirit.

Do not take that from me. And David had a lot for God to be able to take away from him. So now if you find yourself in that situation, and you don't take the initiative to fix that broken fellowship on your own, then I can tell you, as we've seen, God has a way of getting our attention when we've broken fellowship and communication with him, doesn't he?

As we saw last week, God has a way of getting our attention when we are out of fellowship with him. And he does that by using discipline in order to bring us back into fellowship with him, in order

to bring us back into communication with him.

Well, why does God do that? Well, simply because God loves us too much to allow us to remain in sin and disobedience and to allow us to keep running from him.

[15:42] So he will do whatever is necessary to grab our attention so that he will pull us back to himself. And that is precisely what is happening with Jonah right here in chapter 2.

We've got to understand that God will discipline us by putting us in distressful places so that we will come to our senses and return to him.

That's a difficult thing for us as Christians to try to comprehend and get a hold of, that God will use discipline in order to get us to come back to him by getting us to come back to our senses.

When I was in eighth grade, that was a difficult time for not just me but my parents because I was a pretty bad kid in middle school. And I got in trouble in school for shooting rubber bands at people. And so as a result of that, I was suspended. And our school was kind of rough, so much so that the day that I was to serve my in-house suspension, the suspension room where we kept all the kids was full.

[16:51] So I had to go into a classroom, and they stuck me in a corner, and they took all these TV carts and bookshelves, and they made this kind of makeshift prison for me, and they stuck me in this corner, and I spent my entire day in isolation from everybody else, right, with different kids coming in and looking at me in the corner.

I'm like, what's he doing in there, you know? And that's, you know, that's got to be really embarrassing. And it was. What was the purpose of that? Well, it was to isolate me, to cause me to dwell upon what I had done and to see that the crime was not worth the punishment.

And now I can say to you that I did never, I never spent another day in in-house suspension, but I cannot promise that I never shot another rubber band at somebody.

But God has put Jonah, so to speak, in timeout like that. But God's timeout is a lot more distressful than the one that we sometimes experience.

And God is putting Jonah in a place where he can isolate him, and he's done so by putting him in the belly of a fish. When we are out of fellowship with God, he has a way of grabbing our attention and using discipline to bring us back into fellowship with him.

[18:10] And like I said last week, this isn't a popular message today. Today, people don't like to think of God in that way. They don't like to think that God would discipline them, right?

We don't want to think that God would put us in a corner to get our attention, because what would we rather do? We'd rather be the one who backs God into the corner and say, Listen, God, you're in this corner now.

I'm going to tell you what you should be doing, instead of God being the one putting us in that corner and saying, No, this is what you should be doing, right? We live in a time where there is a lack of discipline, and as a result of that, we see what's happening in our schools and in our world. It's falling apart, and it's crumbling, because there's so much lack of discipline. Everybody wants to be in first place. Everybody gets a trophy at the end of the year, despite their record.

My sisters are teachers, and one of them told me a story about, she's like a fourth-grade teacher, and they had a spelling test. And one of her students didn't do well on the test, and so she wrote on the top of the test in red pen, Did you study?

[19:15] And she got a call from that child's parent the next day, and she ripped into my sister, How could you be so critical of my son or daughter asking that question and writing it in red pen?

That was mean. You know, it's crazy that we are a society that lacks so much discipline. It's no wonder that things are the way that they are. Discipline is difficult to undergo, but it is good, ultimately, for us.

And I said it last week, but it bears repeating. God loves us too much to allow us to run from him, so he will do whatever is necessary to grab our attention and pull us back to him.

He does it because he loves us. Jonah is in the belly of a fish, and what is interesting is that he knows why he's there. He understands why he has been put in that place.

He understands that he is being disciplined. Look at verses 3 and 4. Jonah says, For you cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the flood surrounded me. All your waves and your billows, they passed over me.

[20:20] Then I said, I am driven away from your sight, yet I shall again look upon your holy temple. Jonah understands that God is disciplining him. And we see from his example that God's

discipline is often very painful.

Look at verse 5. Jonah says, The waters closed around me to take my life. The deep surrounded me. Weeds were wrapped around my head at the roots of the mountains.

Doesn't sound very pleasant, does it? Jonah is in a very painful and distressful place. But here's the thing we need to understand.

Pains and trials and discipline are often used by God as his megaphone in order to grab our attention and draw us back to himself.

As a pastor, I get to hear a lot of testimonies about people and what they came through before they were saved and the lives that they lived and the things that they were involved with.

[ 21 : 26 ] And I'll never forget one story from a woman. She was in her 50s. And I never would have thought this woman could have gone through all that she had been through, but she was a drug addict and an alcoholic.

And she was married in a bad marriage. Her husband cheated on her. And eventually they got divorced. And that only plunged her further and further into alcohol and drugs to the point where she lost relationship with her parents.

She lost relationship with her children. The children became like the adult in the relationship. They lost hope that she would ever get better. And then she came to Christ.

And she understood what Jesus had done for her. She understood that she could be changed as a result, that this was not the life that God intended for her to live.

And she received Christ as her Lord and Savior. And she's a completely different person now. You would have no idea if you saw her walking on the street or had a conversation with her that she'd been through all of these things before.

[ 22 : 30 ] She has this amazing story of salvation. And maybe your story is similar to that. You can remember a time when you underwent God's discipline as a result of your disobedience.

And I know that I can share a similar story. And while you may never want to repeat that experience again, you wouldn't change it for the world.

Because as a result of that, you came to know how good and how great Jesus Christ is. I want to be clear that God isn't doing this to hurt Jonah.

That's not his plan. That's not his purpose. God isn't getting back at Jonah for not listening to him. God is wanting to use this man in an incredible way.

And he's not willing to let him go. He's not willing to let him keep running and live in disobedience.

And I also want to say this. Not all our trials and sufferings are a result of God's discipline.

[ 23 : 36 ] We've got to understand that we live in a fallen world. That things are not the way that God created them to be. That sin has wreaked havoc. And so not all suffering and pain is a result of God's discipline.

But we've got to also understand this. Romans 8, 28. That God works all things together for the good. That we have a sovereign God who has a plan.

And he knows infinitely more than we could ever know or ever comprehend or understand. And he is behind the wheel. And he knows what he's doing. And so even though we may not understand when we're going through that difficult time.

And it's not a result of God's discipline. We've got to understand that there is a reason and there's a purpose in it. As difficult as it might be to be going through it. God is in control.

And God has a good plan for you. But again, the belly of a fish is not a great place to live. But it was a great place for Jonah to learn.

[ 24 : 40 ] It was a great place for Jonah to be molded and to be shaped by God. So that he might be better used by him. You see, God's discipline is not an expression of his anger.

But it's an expression of his love. If you're a parent, you understand this. Or if you've been parented by godly parents, you understand this. You should.

That discipline comes from a parent who wants what's best for his child. Again, another story I'll share with you.

Another man who was in his 60s. And he was a Christian. He came to faith later on. But he grew up in a broken home. His parents didn't care about him. He got in trouble at school. He was so bad at school, they would send him home.

And he'd get there. And his parents would basically not care. They wouldn't discipline him. Be like, all right, if you're home, okay. You know, sit down and watch TV or something. But he got so bad

that his parents gave him up for adoption.

[ 25 : 38 ] And you know what else they said to him? We don't love you. We don't love you. And they gave him up for adoption. Now, those are parents who do not discipline their children.

Does that seem or sound like love to you? No, like I shared the experience with my daughter last week. Whenever she grabbed the scissors off the counter and I saw her with those and she was having such a great time, right?

Just let her have fun. She's enjoying herself. No, because I understand that what she has is something that can cause a lot of harm to her. And so I reach out and I snatch those from her. And she cries and she goes hysterical.

And, you know, that's difficult. But you know what? I'd rather her be upset for a moment than be scarred for life. And God does the same thing for us. Look at Hebrews 12, verses 5 through 6. And you have forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons. My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be wary when we are reprov'd by him.

[ 26 : 37 ] For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastises every son whom he receives. John MacArthur says, And so maybe today you are in one of those dark places of discipline.

And I can tell you, God doesn't want to hurt you. That's not the point and the purpose of you going through what you're going through. He wants to use you. But he can't use you when you are walking in disobedience to him.

You know, when I was putting this sermon together, I got to thinking, you know, it would be a whole lot easier if we could learn these lessons from the blessings we received from God.

Right? Man, it would be so much easier. God, why can't it work out that way? When you bless me, I can learn all of these crucial lessons that you teach me when I'm going through discipline. That would just make life so much more better, it would seem.

Well, why doesn't he do that? Jeremiah 17, 9 says that the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick. Who can understand it? Just look at the life of Peter in Matthew chapter 16.

[ 28 : 00 ] Remember? Remember, Jesus is there with his disciples and he's asking them, who do people say that I am? And Peter gets it right. Peter messed up a lot, didn't he?

He was always the one putting his foot in his mouth. But here he gets it right. And Jesus praises him for giving the right answer. You ever been in school or at work and you did something right? And your boss or your teacher gave you praise for doing that? It feels great, doesn't it? You think, if only we could learn from those experiences. But then, not much later, this same Peter, in this same kind of encounter, hears Jesus talking about the fact that he's going to go and he's going to die. And instead of being there for the Lord like he should have been, he's puffed up in pride. I got it right. I'm the one who the Lord praised in front of everybody else.

I got it right. And so what does he do? That praise from the Lord, it puffs him up. It makes him arrogant as a result of that blessing. So much so that he thinks that he can pull Jesus aside and say, No, you're not going to do that.

[ 29 : 07 ] Right? You're not going to do that. I'm not going to let you. And then what does Jesus say? Get behind me, Satan. Peek and valley.

And such it is with us. When we get our blessings, we tend to become puffed up by those things instead of being drawn closer to God.

Now, yes, God can definitely use blessings to teach us. But that's not often the way that he chooses to do things because that's not often the way that we actually learn from him.

The second thing I want us to see is that God will put us in distressful places so that we will change for the better and make the most of our second chance.

It's important that we notice something here. Jonah and God's fellowship had been severed. But notice, who is the one who's taking the initiative to repair what's been broken?

[ 30 : 05 ] It's God, not Jonah. It's God who is reaching out to Jonah to restore that fellowship, to restore the communication that's been lost.

God has put Jonah in a place to where he has nowhere else to go so that he has no one else to turn to. And all he can do is look up and acknowledge his Lord.

Thank God that when we disobey him and when we are the ones who sever that fellowship with him, when we are the ones who go against him, that he is willing to go out of his way and he is the one who is willing to pursue us instead of allowing us to wallow in the mud with the pigs.

God is willing to reach out and restore that relationship with us. As it was in our salvation, so it is in the rest of our Christian life.

It's God who is the one who is always taking the initiative with us, never letting us wander too far away from him. And so there we see in verses 7 and 8 that Jonah's change involved repentance.

[ 31 : 10 ] He understands that he's being disciplined by God. He knows he's in this distressful place as a result of his sin. And he understands that he needs to repent. And so he says, when my life was fainting away, when he's suffocating inside the belly of this disgusting fish, he says, I remembered the Lord and my prayer came to you into your holy temple.

And those who pray, regard vain idols, forsake their hope of steadfast love. And so Jonah goes from running from God to running to God.

And that is a great picture of what true repentance looks like. Running to God. But here's the thing also. Satan tries to tell us that we've gone too far away when we've strayed.

You can't go back. God's not going to let you come back that easy. Right? Or he tries to convince us, you know what you need to do first is you've got to clean yourself up. You've got to get your act together before you can go talk to God again.

But again, we see in the life of Jonah, we see through the parable of the prodigal son and over and over in Scripture that that's not the way that God works. The moment we come to our senses and repent, we turn, and God is always there to hear, to forgive, and to restore what has been severed.

[ 32 : 24 ] The second thing we see is that Jonah's change results with him being given a second chance. He's acknowledged why he's where he's at.

He acknowledges that he must repent. He does so, and then Jonah's change results with him being given a second chance. And then in verses 9 and 10 it says, It is not until Jonah is in the belly of the fish that he realizes that his only hope is not in himself but in God.

That if he's going to be saved, that salvation belongs to the Lord, and so he must ask God for repentance, and he's given a second chance. It's like God has Jonah now downwind of himself, and he can smell his own stench.

He can smell the stench of his own self-righteousness, of his own hatred towards the Ninevites. He's getting a whiff of how stinky his sin is, and so now he is going to be given a second chance and a fresh start.

Those of you who are fishermen, you don't have to be a fisherman to know that fish stink. Fish smell. Could you imagine being inside of one for three days?

[ 33 : 55 ] Jonah must have reeked. And so I can imagine, not only was he inside the fish, but he was, not to be coarse or gross, but he was vomited on the dry land.

So he's covered in stench. And I can only imagine that now he's been given this second chance, and he goes to the people of Nineveh, and you've got to understand that what must have been going through their mind?

What happened to you? You smell terrible. You look awful. What happened to you? And Jonah had a great story to share, didn't he?

He had a great testimony to share with those people so that they could hear the good news of God's salvation. And so I say that to say this to you.

You know what? You're not perfect. Neither am I, neither are any of us, but Jesus Christ. And all of us need Jesus Christ. All of us, I would say, have been in that moment, kind of like Jonah, where we have been involved with things, we have said things, we have done things, we have been covered with the stench of sin.

[ 35 : 10 ] Things that we regretted, things that we wish that we never would have done, but we did them. And here's what I want to say. Yeah, I'm ashamed of the things that I've done, but I understand that those things that I've done are a testimony that I can share.

This is who I was. This is what I was involved with. This is what I did. But let me tell you, the change that happened in my life as a result of Jesus Christ.

Share your testimony. Share what God has done for you. And then my favorite verse, I think, in this entire book is chapter 3, verse 1.

Look at it. It says, Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time. Maybe you're a believer this morning, and right now you know that where you sit, you've been walking in disobedience.

You've run from God. You know that you are perhaps experiencing God's discipline right now in your life.

[ 36 : 24 ] And your life is a mess. Some of you are here this morning, and you don't know Christ at all. You've never placed your faith in Him before.

You, too, have run from God. You, too, have suppressed the truth. You've said, I don't want you, God. And now you've found yourself also in a mess.

And here's what I want to ask you in both cases. How are you going to fix it? How are you going to fix the mess that you're in?

Who are you going to look to for salvation? How are you going to get out of the place where you're at? As a Christian and as a non-Christian, we tend to think that we can get ourselves out of it, right?

I'll just pull myself up by my bootstraps. I'll persevere. I'll carry on. I'll get myself through this. I'll try harder. But I can tell you, as Jonah found out, that salvation is from the Lord and only from the Lord.

[ 37 : 42 ] Your hope is in Jesus Christ. And if you put your hope in anyone else, you will be failed by that person, especially if it's yourself.

And I tell you this also. If you will turn to him wherever you're at, however big of a mess you think that you've made, if you will turn to him, if you will repent, he will change you.

He will give you a second chance. I want to close by reading Psalm 40, verses 1 through 3. And if you're in a place like that, make this your prayer and understand.

I waited patiently on the Lord. He inclined to me and heard my cry. He drew me up from the pit of destruction, out of the miry bog, and he set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure.

And he put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to God. And so many will see and fear and put their trust in the Lord.

[ 38 : 53 ] .