

A Hypocrites Prayer

Jonah 2:1-10

Week of March 8 – 14

The story of Jonah is certainly more dramatic than most of our own stories, however the attitudes of Jonah are universally human. What can we learn about God, ourselves, and the way God relates to us through Jonah's story? What does Jonah's prayer have to teach us about our own prayers and God's response to them?

Key Point: God welcomes, hears, and may even answer our prayers – no matter how selfish, stubborn, or foolish we are behaving.

Key Verse: When my life was ebbing away, I remember you, Lord, and my prayer rose to you, to your holy temple. – Jonah 2:7

Segment 1 – Knowledge...

Open your time of study with prayer:

Father, I want to be the type of Christian who actually lives my life around what I know about you. Please help me to live with integrity – let my actions reflect what I say I believe. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

1. **Read all of Jonah (it's only 4 chapters) to get the whole story.** As you read, consider: What does Jonah seem to know about the Lord? What statements does he make that tell you this?

2. Look back at the list of statements you made above, and then consider Jonah's actions. Do Jonah's actions make you think he truly *believes* what he "knows" about God? Why or why not?

Pray:

Jonah seems to know a lot about God, yet obviously doesn't want to obey what God has told him to do! Have you ever felt like that? The dramatic and obvious nature of this story makes it easy to ridicule Jonah for "not getting it", but the reality is that most of us have areas of our lives where we act just like Jonah.

Spend some time in prayer now using the story of Jonah as an outline for your own prayer.

- Begin by considering what God may be asking or commanding you to do that you are running away from. Perhaps you don't need to ask, and you already know what you are avoiding. (Spend some time asking what you may be avoiding. However, if nothing comes to mind, don't force it – don't look too hard for a problem that doesn't exist! Skip directly to thanksgiving.)
 - Admit that you are running away, admit your stubbornness. Ask God to show you what "storms" in your life might be a result of your running away.
 - If you are ready, perhaps ask forgiveness for your stubbornness. If not, continue to lift up your struggles to God.
 - Conclude with thanksgiving – thank God for the ways he has saved you and reached out to you in the past. Thank Him for his patience with you when you "don't get it".
3. What did God reveal in this time of prayer? Are there any areas where you are "running away" from God?
4. What did you experience as you tried using Jonah's story as an outline for your own prayer?

Pray

It is easy to view desperate prayers as not sincere. After all, doesn't EVERYONE pray in some form when they get desperate? Yet for all the faults we could find with Jonah's attitude and Jonah's prayer, God answers Jonah and saves him. Why? Had Jonah's heart changed? If it had, it doesn't appear to have changed much based on what we read in the rest of the story. Yet, in the end, judging of the heart is a task that belongs to God alone, and God is capable of seeing and rejoicing in even the smallest movement toward Him.

If you are at a time in your life when you are praying (or could be praying) a desperate "absolutely no way out" prayer to God, spend some time in prayer now. You may wish to use Jonah's prayer as a model by crying out about the desperateness of your situation and acknowledging that you believe God is capable of saving you.

If you are not in that kind of situation now, recall a time in your life when you have prayed a desperate prayer - sincerely, hypocritically, hopefully, or otherwise. Did God meet you in that situation, regardless of your attitude? Did that time of desperation draw you closer to God? Spend some time in prayer now, recalling that time, asking God to show you what his purposes were in that struggle and how it has shaped your relationship with Him. Thank Him for what He reveals about His work in your life.

7. What did you learn during this time of prayer? What did God reveal about who He is? Did you see any of the situations in your life (past or present) in a different way?

Segment 3 – Grudging Obedience

Open your time of study with prayer:

Father God – I am guilty of seeing your commands as drudgery. Please help me to find the joy in doing your work. Help me to see the blessings you wish to pour out on others through my obedience, and to find fulfillment and pleasure through your work in me. Amen.

Read Jonah 3 & 4

8. How is Jonah's response here different from the first time "the word of the Lord came to Jonah"? What do you think caused this change? From what you read in these last two chapters, has anything else about Jonah's attitude changed?

9. What do you learn in this story about the power of God to work through grudging, stubborn, arrogant human beings? What do you think might be possible for God to do through a person who is more willing than Jonah?

Pray:

It is up for debate whether Jonah went to Nineveh the second time because he'd had a change of heart or because, after the storm and fish incident, Jonah felt he didn't have much choice. Again, this is where the story of Jonah, though dramatic, is a very human story. Do you recognize your own attitudes here? Doing something just because you "have to"? Acting grudgingly, then getting angry when the results are not what you wanted? Failing to see the worth of others because of your own biases? Aren't those very human failures?

The story never tells us if Jonah changed after this. Did he ever apologize to God for running away, being stubborn, or getting angry at God's mercy?

As you enter into a time of prayer now, use Jonah's story to help you examine your own life and experiment with prayers of confession to God. Notice where you have negative thoughts or attitudes like Jonah, and confess these to the Lord. This list may help trigger your thoughts:

- ...when I know what God has asked of me, and I do not obey.
- ...when those around me recognize the power of God, but I am too callous to see.
- ...I endanger, or don't bring the best, to those around me because of my own failure to do what I know is right.
- ...I turn to God only when I'm desperate.
- ...I do what God says I have to do, but without enthusiasm or joy.
- ...I am angry when God shows mercy to people I deem unworthy.
- ...I fail to recognize my own faults.
- ...I believe I am entitled to good things and do not recognize them as God's gifts.

Conclude your time of prayer with thanksgiving. God is a God of mercy and compassion. He has promised to forgive our wrongs and failures when we admit them to Him. He has promised his Holy Spirit at work in us to help change us. Thank Him for these gifts.

10. What was your experience with these prayers of confession? Difficult? Easy?

11. How did you feel after this time of confessional prayer? Did you experience God's presence through your confession(s)?