



## The Forgotten Prayer

Text: Jonah 2:1-10

Business Administrator Michael Sullivan

1. Michael opened his message by pointing out that while many of us may be familiar with the beginning and end of Jonah's story, far fewer of us are familiar with the middle of his story. This is often true for us as we look at our own lives. We think back to the "good old days" or spend our time dreaming about what might lie ahead. Those are not bad things, but we far less frequently taking a moment to step back and thoughtfully look at our lives in the here and now. It is in the middle, the heart of Jonah's story, from the belly of the fish, that God does a work on Jonah that prepares him for the next step of his journey.
  - a. What are you in the middle of right now in your life?
  - b. What growth have you already experienced through that situation?
  - c. How might God want to continue to use this situation to shape you and mold you into who he wants you to be and what he wants to do in and through your life in the future?
2. Read Jonah 2:3-5. Think of a time when you felt far away from God. How would you describe your life in that moment? What was it that drove you away from God? What was it that brought you back?
3. Read Jonah 2:1-2, 6-9. Michael says that it was Jonah crying out to God that brought him back into God's presence. Have you ever had a moment where you cried out to God? What happened? What is it about crying out to God that draws us back to him?
4. Read Jonah 2:9 again. In what ways was Jonah changed while in the belly of the whale? What does Jonah have to be thankful for while trapped in a whale?
5. When Jonah says, "What I have vowed I will make good," this is a moment of surrender. Like Jonah, we are called to stop running and surrender to God. Practically, what does it look like to surrender? What makes surrender so difficult? When we finally do surrender, how will our lives look different?

Challenge: What part of Jonah's story do you identify most with in this current season? On the run? In the middle of something? In the belly of the fish. What is God teaching you through Jonah's story? What is your response?

Prayer: Jesus Christ, my Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come. I give You all the glory and honor that is due to Your name. I praise You and surrender my life to Your will. Father, You are so awesome!

Today I bow humbly before Your throne of grace, where I receive Your mercy and cry out with a heart that is broken. Help me to understand the calling You have placed on my life and my purpose on earth. Father God, help me to realize that You are in control and that You have me in the palm of Your hands. Allow me to experience Your nature such that whatever I ask for in prayer is received, as I believe in Your holy power.

And when I find it difficult to forgive the people who have wronged me, Father, allow me to hear the still, small voice from within, ministering to me at every junction in my life. Teach me to hold my tongue in bad situations. Guide my steps, gracious God and let Your will be done, as it is in heaven. May my cup overflow with the unmerited favor of Your goodness.

I declare, Abba Father, that you will raise me from my brokenness, in Jesus' most magnificent name, SO BE IT... Amen and Amen!

## STUDY DEEPER

### **Crying out to God**

A scary diagnosis. Losing a job. Not enough money. Sick kids. An accident...and the list goes on. We may not be stuck in desert wastelands or deep darkness, but it can sure feel like it at times. For the children of Israel, that hardship included captivity. Exile. Separation from their families. Living in a strange, godless land. This psalm tells the story of how God's people wrestled with adversity and cried out to God in faith.

### **In the Word**

Read Psalm 107

Some wandered in desert wastelands...some sat in darkness, in utter darkness...some became fools through their rebellious ways...Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble, and he brought them out of their distress. Psalm 107:4, 10, 17, 28

I love the Scriptures because they never sugarcoat problems in life. They tell it like it really is. Yes, we can have strong hope that God will somehow orchestrate even the most painful events in our lives and create something good from them, but the Bible never recommends minimizing our problems, excusing those who caused them, or denying they even exists.

On every page, we're encouraged to look life squarely in the face and trust God's wisdom, goodness, and greatness. Occasionally, he rescues us out of our difficulties, but more often, he gives us the strength to walk through them. The process of being faithful in the midst of the struggle is where we learn life's most treasured lessons.

In Psalm 107, we find four groups of people who were in big trouble. Sometimes, their dilemma was self-inflicted by foolish and sinful choices, sometimes it seemed like an accident, and in one case, God himself caused the difficulty they faced. No matter the cause of the problem, each group of people had the same response: They cried out to the Lord in their trouble, and each time, God answered their prayer. Which one of these groups can you relate to?

Faith enabled the Israelites to believe that God was available and attentive to their cry.

- Even when they couldn't feel God's presence.
- Even when they sinned.
- Even when they were confused.
- Even when they were angry.
- Even when they failed.

Again, they cried out to the Lord in their trouble. They were desperate. They knew they needed God. And what did God do? (Hint: verses 6, 13, 19, 28)

### **Make it Real**

When we encounter hard times in our lives, or much worse, when we are devastated by death, disease, or some other unexpected trauma, we naturally turn to God and ask, "Why?" What have you been asking God why about lately? Think about it.

- "God, why \_\_\_\_\_?"
- "God, why \_\_\_\_\_?"

"Why" is not a bad question, and it's not wrong for us to ask it. The problem is that we sometimes (maybe often) can't figure out the cause. The second question we need to ask is, "What now?" No matter what the cause might be, we need to respond by clinging to God's hand and trusting him for direction. Sometimes, like in the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego,<sup>1</sup> the Lord rescues us out of our difficulties, but more often, he gives us the strength to walk through them. And when we are too weak to keep going, God himself carries us. Strangely, it's often during life's most difficult struggles that we grow closest to Jesus.

How do you usually respond to pain, heartache and disappointment? Do you ignore it? Fake it 'til you make it? How do you cope?

What did the people in Psalm 107 do?

Desperation can drive us to do some pretty crazy things that only hurt us more. If you don't cry out to God, you will cry out to something else. Being a woman of faith doesn't mean detaching

from or devaluing your heart. Rather than trying to push through and rely on your own strength, or just “cope,” why not invite the One who is “a man of suffering, and familiar with pain” into your struggle? Desperation should always drive us to him!

Take a moment to read each one of these verses and think about how they apply to your life. Wherever you can do it, insert your name in the verses. Pray these passages over your heart.

- “Out of the depths I cry to you, LORD; Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy.” Psalm 130:1-2
- “Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.” Jeremiah 33:3
- “I sought the LORD, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears. Those who look to him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame.” Psalm 34:4-5

### **Heart to Heart**

I’ll never forget that rainy, dreary night. Driving behind the ambulance, my dad inside. The doctor had told us that day that he wouldn’t live another two weeks. He was coming home from the hospital. To die. Ever felt betrayed by God? I did. It was one of the worst days of my life. With a sinking heart, I realized the irony. The next car I’ll be driving behind is a hearse.

As the tears rolled down my cheeks, I asked God a million questions. Why? How could you? We asked you to heal him... My heart felt just about as dark as the storm outside. I felt alone. Abandoned. Even angry.

But I am learning that our pain is often God’s classroom. Philip Yancey writes: Gregory of Nicea once called St. Basil’s faith ‘ambidextrous’ because he welcomed pleasures with the right hand and afflictions with the left, convinced both would serve God’s design for him.<sup>3</sup>

Do we really believe that God can fulfill his purposes through our pain? If we truly want his purposes and not just our own comfort, we’ll turn to him in our darkest moments. Faith means becoming convinced, like Paul “that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”<sup>4</sup>

God, I’m crying out to you because I don’t know what else to do. I’m tired of trying to be strong and figure out life on my own. Just like you did in the Bible, I beg you to deliver me. Help me. Grow my faith...

<https://www.drjamesdobson.org/blogs/julie-clinton/julie-clinton/2017/09/20/crying-out-to-god>