

Years ago, I met a follower of the living God. A complex man struggling with God. Recently I met him again. The privilege of reacquaintance stirring me. To understand more deeply as a fellow believer his wrestling with God. His name: Jonah. Born at the wrong time and in the wrong end of the world to meet him face to face. I met him in the pages of the Bible. Some of my questions about his relationship with God not yet answered. The complexities of that relationship still puzzle me. Unexpectedly my reacquaintance with Jonah shines a spotlight on my relationship with God. At times leaving me uncomfortable. Reflective. Determined to get to know God better. To recommit myself to living out his purposes of preparing the world for eternity. Brothers and sisters, you also met Jonah in the pages of the Bible. The latest chapter in our relationship with Jonah comes through the lens of the last chapter of his story. Preserved by God for our growth in Christ. A strange but true story of anger and compassion, plant growing and plant destruction, revelation and life lessons. A tale of two characters. The living God. The very flawed human Jonah. Understanding the flaws in Jonah, in me and you. Begins under the spotlight of God's perfect character. Beautifully and surprisingly summarised by none other than Jonah. *'I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.'* **v2** God is the God of grace. Undeserved favour. Poured out firstly on Israel his chosen people. A big grace not limited to Israel. For God's heart is big enough for all the peoples of the world. Evident throughout the Jonah story. Undeserved favour for a runaway prophet. Also, for pagan sailors and wicked Ninevites. My favourite T-shirt (show it) The coming of Jesus. Grace to the world. Not just to Israel. Seen in Jesus ministry as he seeks out the lost sheep of Israel and those beyond God's covenant people. In the words of Isaiah, *'the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.'* The God of grace sometimes pours out his grace on the believer in the shape of severe mercy. Witnessed in his disciplining of Jonah. Remember the story. Jonah began a vigil outside Nineveh. With building skills similar to mine. He builds a shelter to provide shade. Clearly inadequate. For Jonah's gracious God miraculously grows a large leafy plant providing much needed shade. The story continues, *But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the plant so that it withered. When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah's head*

so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, and said, "It would be better for me to die than to live." The original language points to God seeking to save Jonah not so much from heatstroke but from the impact of what is going on in his heart. The writer to the Hebrews reminds us. God disciplines his children for their good so they may share in his holiness. In his grace God teaching Jonah a tough but vital lesson for his growth in godliness. Sisters and brothers, you are also the recipients of God's amazing grace. Rejoice. From time to time you will experience God's discipline. Sometime in the form of severe mercy. Not a cause for resentment but thanksgiving. He loves you as his child. He desires you to grow more like Jesus. When God seems to be against you, ask him to show you what is going on in your heart. Pray *'teach me Lord what you want me to learn through these difficult circumstances.'* In the light of God's amazing grace, let's explore what's revealed about Jonah in this passage. Open to what God may be teaching us. The story of Jonah points us to a firm conclusion. Starkly evident in **chapter 4**. Jonah does not understand the breadth and impact of God's grace. That God has a heart for those who stand under his judgement. That in Christ he comes to seek and save the lost. God's object lesson for Jonah. *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?"* **v10-11** Jonah you are only concerned about little things that pass away. As the Creator God I am concerned for the eternal future of my creation. I so love my world I will do everything necessary to save it. We know that meant giving his one and only Son. Two things about Jonah's lack of understanding of God's grace. **First**, Jonah sees God's grace as no more than a personal gift. A gift God ought to selectively give. Evident in his contrasting responses to the outpouring of God's grace. He praises God for his own rescue. Takes pleasure in God's gracious provision of a leafy plant to shelter him from the heat of the day. He angry and bitter at God's gracious forgiveness of the Ninevites. *'But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry.'* **v1** Literally the verse indicates Jonah saw it as an evil for God to rescue such an undeserving, wicked bunch. **Second**, for Jonah, God's grace a creed to declare not a lifestyle to live. Rightly describing the character of the God of grace in **v2**. Failing to live out grace. Resenting the salvation of the Ninevites. No rejoicing with the angels in heaven that thousands of sinners repent. Instead, after the 40 days elapse and God

saves not destroys Nineveh. *'Jonah had gone out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city.'* **v5** Waiting to see if God changes his mind again. Possibly hoping God will take notice of his 'I told you so' prayer. Jonah works for God but not with God. A signed-up prophet on God's team. Out of step with the game plan. A prophet of God without the heart of God. Brothers and sisters, before we jump to judgement of Jonah. Look in the mirror. How much of Jonah do you see? What's going on in your heart? Resentment at God's outpouring of grace on undeserving people you actually don't like very much. Anger that God not pouring enough grace into your life. According to your definition and life plan. How in step are you with God's gracious purposes for the world? Writing your own personal game plan or fully committing to God's. Where is rejoicing for the salvation of others? What are the priorities of your prayers? Like Jonah, praying only when in trouble or angry with God. How often are you praying with passion and compassion for the lost? What does the sharing of God's grace with others look like in daily relationships; in your sharing of the gospel? We have no right to be angry, bitter or resentful at the ways God pours out his grace. Sisters and brothers, we need the supernatural work of God in our hearts to live out the radical implications of grace. We need each other: to model, walk with, correct, rebuke, encourage. Pray for God's Spirit to work in us. Pray we will be a radical grace church. To this point in Jonah's life he was unable to live a grace filled life. Leaving him angry and miserable. We don't yet know the outcome in Jonah's life. What will be the outcome in ours? Will we reflect God's heart? Will we respond to God's call? A challenge we will explore further next week in our final message from Jonah.