

# JONAH

Navigating a Life Interrupted

Sample Chapter

## PRISCILLA SHIRER

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WEEK ONE

I AM  
JONAH



## Day 1

# I AM JONAH

*“The word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai saying.” Jonah 1:1*

I am Jonah.

I want to serve God ...

as long as it is convenient.

I desire to do His will ...

until it is a tad uncomfortable.

I want to hear His Word ...

as long as its message is one I’m supposed to pass on to someone else.

I don’t want to have my plans interrupted.

Oh yes. I am Jonah, and I suspect that in one way or another, you are too.

The story of Jonah has been a tale too extravagant and too outlandish for many people to believe as truth. They can’t wrap their minds around the storm, the big fish, the city’s revival, the sun, the east wind, and the plant that all play a role in this compelling narrative.

Were it not for my own firm belief in the inerrancy and validity of Scripture, I might doubt its veracity as well. Yet with all its unique qualities, I am drawn to the prophet and his true-life saga for one critical reason: Jonah was the only prophet who ever ran from God. I can relate to that. When my life and plans have been interrupted, I’ve wanted to rebel against it.

Have your life plans ever been interrupted?

yes  no  not sure

Have you ever run from God?  yes  no  not sure

Write your thoughts.

If you answered yes to either of these questions, Jonah’s story is your story.

**I hate to be interrupted!**  
**Say it with me now:**  
**“I HATE TO BE INTERRUPTED.”**

Yesterday I had a chance to relax for two hours. It was a delightful surprise to come across some quiet moments alone. I don't know how it happened, but Jerry ended up out of the house with all three of our little boys.

Yes, Lord!

Those two hours became precious to me. I became intent on guarding them. Anything that might invade my treasured plan to relax was overlooked to the best of my abilities. I didn't want to be disturbed.

You know the feeling, don't you? The disgust and overwhelming frustration that washes over you when you are derailed off your chosen course for your day or even the one free hour you surprisingly come across. If you do, then you can also imagine the compounded frustration of having a life that's been interrupted. We planned one thing for our lives, and yet our current situation looks nothing like what we had in mind. Someone tampered with our ambitions, goals, and dreams. The yellow-brick road of our lives veered off in some unexpected direction.

**What are some of your life goals that you've yet to see become a reality?**

**How has life tampered with those goals?**

Some changes we're delighted with. Others disappoint us and leave us buried in questions. Without a firm belief in the goodness and the care of God, we can spend years mad at ourselves, mad at others, or even mad at Him because we didn't get to accomplish what we originally set out to do.

**In the margin list three adjectives that describe how you feel about interruptions you've faced in your life plans.**

Often we equate the term *interruption* with upheaval, derailing, and frustration. Who wouldn't try to avoid those? Yet a closer look reveals an issue of value. When we deem our current task as an essential priority, we'll look

with contempt on anything that threatens our time focused on it. Why? We've given priority and credited value to the current task, person, or goal.

We learn about Jonah's priorities in 2 Kings 14:25, the only other time he is mentioned in the Old Testament.

**According to 2 Kings 14:25, what was Jonah's job?**

**Was he successful at his job, and how did you determine your answer?**

As a prophet to the Northern Kingdom of Israel, Jonah's priorities would have included:

1. hearing from God
2. declaring God's messages to His people
3. being identified as a true prophet of God

I believe God and His will held prominent importance to Jonah. He loved his people and wanted to see them rise in power and influence. It seems Jonah likely enjoyed success because what he prophesied was happening.

**From your personal goals you wrote, would you say you gave highest importance to God and His will?**

During the reign of King Jeroboam II, the nation's territories that had been taken by Syria were restored. While we know little of Jonah's life prior to the events in the chapters we're studying, we do know he had foretold these good things for his people. As a result he most likely was popular, highly respected, and appreciated. In addition, he probably enjoyed financial security.

**Read Jonah 1:3. What might this verse reveal about Jonah's financial security?**

Jonah lived in a time of national economic prosperity. Israel regained lost territories and achieved its most prosperous time since Solomon. Israel's wealth exploded because it controlled important trade routes

*"[King Jeroboam] restored the border of Israel from the entrance of Hamath as far as the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the LORD, the God of Israel, which He spoke through His servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet who was of Gath-hepher."*

**2 Kings 14:25**

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through Palestine that connected the ancient world. In fact, some rabbinic commentators think the Hebrew text implies Jonah chartered the entire ship, cargo and all.<sup>1</sup> If so, he must have had adequate financial means.

According to Jonah 1:1, Jonah's interruption began when "The word of the LORD came" to him. His priorities and life of comfort were disrupted with directives that would put him in an entirely new and different direction than that which he was currently enjoying.

**What do you think might have been some of the comforts Jonah had to leave behind in Israel to follow God's instructions?**

**If your life is being interrupted right now in some way, what "comforts" are you having the most difficult time leaving behind to follow God's directives?**

## CHANGING PERSPECTIVE

I wish Jonah could have seen his life laid out in four simple chapters like we can. He would have seen that what he considered an interruption was really an invitation to participate in one of the more supernatural events in all the Old Testament—one that would not only make a mark in the Old but the New Testament as well (Luke 11:30). He couldn't have known that his story would be studied by millions desiring to draw closer to his God.

Yet Jonah probably felt about God's plans the same way you and I often feel—he was frustrated. The importance and priority we've placed on our plans cause us to frown on new assignments the Lord may send our way.

**What other challenges might you face that will make it difficult for you to see life interruptions in a positive way?**

Our study of Jonah is primarily about helping us to redefine interruption when it comes to our relationship with God. If He is our priority and His will is our primary purpose, then when the "word of the LORD" comes to us or when He allows us to see His hand in our circumstances, we must see

it as an esteemed opportunity to participate in kingdom purposes. What more critical or essential ambition could there be?

So today, my friend, right at the onset of our study, we redefine interruption. God's plan is a "Divine Intervention."

Consider the following equation:

Insignificant Person + Insignificant Task = Interruption

Significant Person + Significant Task = Divine Intervention

Explain the meaning of the equation in your own words.

Interruptions only become positive when we consider the person or the circumstance interrupting to be more significant than that which currently occupies our attention. It is easy to say that God and His plans are our most essential endeavors. It is entirely another thing to live like this is so.

While I love a good in-depth study with deep exploratory questions, I was continually drawn to ask you personal application questions while writing this study. When you turn the last page, you'll no doubt know more about Jonah's story than you may have before, but my primary goal in our time together is to help you dig deeply into its application to your life. Many of the questions I will ask you will focus on how Jonah's story relates to you.

Reworking our view of God and His plans is our goal, particularly this first week. To handle life's interruptions appropriately, the prophet needed a fresh view of God, and over the course of the next few days of his life that is exactly what he was going to get. My prayer is that these seven weeks we spend together will do the same for you and me.

As we place God and His will in a position of significance, I pray that we will be delighted when we hear His voice or see His hand orchestrating our circumstances to align with His purposes.

Conclude today's lesson by listing in the margin your top three aspirations at this point in your life. It could be a goal you have for your children, your career, ministry, finances, or something else. Then take time to meditate on whether you place more importance on them or on God and His purposes for you. Will you yield them to Him if He requests that you do so?

If you find yourself balking at God's instructions in your life, it is an indication of the importance you place on God and His will.

Day 2

# ON THE JOB

*“For we are God’s fellow workers.” 1 Corinthians 3:9*

I recently met a young woman who works as a personal assistant to one of the most powerful people in the country. She was delighted when she was offered this coveted job working alongside this highly respected and busy individual. The moment she signed on to be an assistant, she was told that during her working hours she needed to be on call. This meant that at any moment her boss may call her to assist him and she would need to drop anything she was doing—even if she were working on another assignment at the time. While adjusting to fit this schedule was difficult at first, she quickly became used to it and organized her life appropriately.

Now she is constantly waiting on a call from her boss. She makes sure that all of her communication devices are powered up, activated, and just a hand’s reach away so that she can be ready to receive instruction. While she does make some personal plans during working hours, she holds them loosely. She is fully aware that her primary responsibility is to be ready to manage that which her boss assigns.

I asked her if she felt overwhelmed or disgusted having to change her personal plans. She shook her head and replied, “No way. It’s an honor to have this job. And,” she added, “he’s a nice guy. While everything he asks for is not always convenient, he’s very considerate. I want to do a good job.”

When we signed up to follow Christ, we automatically signed up to be open to “Divine Intervention”—God interruptions. While His “call” might not always be convenient or easy, responding to it should not just be a duty but our joy. We are getting the honor of partnering with the Lord in His purposes for this generation. You can count on the promise in Psalm 145:17. He is kind in all of His ways so you don’t have to worry that He may take advantage of your loyalty. Partnering with Him doesn’t mean having no plans and ambitions of your own. It means holding them loosely, always leaving room for “the word of the LORD” reshaping your purposes and aligning them with His own.

*“The LORD is righteous in all His ways and kind in all His deeds.”*  
**Psalm 145:17**

**Rewrite our equations from yesterday’s lesson.**



Jonah had been a prophet to Israel; now he was being called to Nineveh. (See Jonah 1:2.) Take a moment to find this location on the map in the back of your book and circle it.

**Based on Jonah’s response, did he consider this a divine intervention or an interruption? Explain.**

**In the chart below, write how the biblical character was interrupted. Did he see God’s instruction as a divine intervention or a negative interruption? Explain.**

Name	God’s Directive	Interruption or Divine Intervention
Noah	Genesis 6:13-14,17-22	
Gideon	Judges 6:11-27	
Cornelius	Acts 10:1-8	

In the first half of the 8th century B.C., Nineveh was one of the principal provinces in Assyria. The Assyrians had a reputation for inflicting physical and psychological terror on its enemies, including Israel. The Assyrians may have laid siege to Gath-hepher, Jonah’s hometown. “Perhaps the city was destroyed and many of the inhabitants slain. Some loved one of Jonah may have suffered and been killed at this time. There is a possibility that his own mother and father were slain before his eyes when he was a boy.”<sup>2</sup>

While we can only speculate about details of how Nineveh affected Jonah, Israel definitely had been brutalized by their archenemy. Just the name *Nineveh* would strike bitterness, dread, and fear in the heart of an Israelite. During the 8th century, Assyria was experiencing a time of national weakness and Jonah would have wanted to have seen their decline continue. It would have been his desire to see their complete demise. Yet God was calling Jonah to leave his beloved countrymen and preach to his enemies. Jonah placed no value on Nineveh or on its inhabitants.

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I'll never forget a Rwandan couple coming forward for prayer in our church many years ago. They had been evacuated with other survivors during the vast murders of 1994. However, in the rush to leave the country, their children had been left behind. They didn't know if they were alive or dead and could only hope to see them again. The pain in that mother's eyes and the tears falling down the father's face is seared in my memory forever.

Many genocides have taken place in our lifetime. Hundreds of thousands of people have lost their lives at the hands of renegade governments, soldiers, or dictators. While most of us have not been directly affected by this, consider how you might feel if your family suffered at the hands of others and then you were asked to show mercy and concern for them.

**Did you grow up with a hatred or fear of any group of people? If so, in the margin note who and why.**

God calling Jonah to Nineveh most likely struck the cord of a gut-level, deep-seated hurt with just the mention of the city's name. He had an enormous dislike for this place and its inhabitants.

In our journeys with God, we will likely come across our personal Ninevehs. For some this might actually be a place; for others Nineveh is a task or relationship and just the mention of that mission or person sends us into an emotional tailspin. We'd just rather not go. And, like Jonah, we can point to many reasons that would keep us at home.

**Do you have a Nineveh assignment—something God is requiring of you right now that you do not want to do? What are your reasons for not wanting to do it?**

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## MISSIONARY ASSIGNMENT

During the video lesson I encouraged you to start considering how your group can tangibly and practically minister to others during the course of your study. Begin to consider who the Ninevites may be in your world—the unloved, forgotten, seemingly unreachable ones.

## PRIVILEGED TO BE INTERRUPTED

God graciously gives divine interventions to His children. He presents them an opportunity to partner with Him in purposes they could never conceive. A life interrupted by a holy God is a privilege. Believers must internalize this principle in order to live a life that accomplishes God's will.

God doesn't need us to complete His purposes, yet He still chooses to ask us to partner with Him. It's unfathomable. His calling you means that He has chosen you above anyone else to do what He is asking. You are the one He singled out and pinpointed as His partner for a particular project.

Whether it's parenting a special needs child, starting a Bible study, remaining single for a bit longer, or even, like Jonah, reaching out to those who hurt you, He's purposefully given you the high honor of being the one He deemed suited for a task that has heavenly implications—a task of divine partnership that will yield magnificent results for you and for His kingdom. While these benefits might not be visible at the outset, a supernatural outcome waits on the horizon for anyone who chooses to partner with God.

God's  
calling you  
means He  
has chosen  
you above  
anyone else.

**For each of the biblical characters you just studied, how did each culminate in unimaginable results?**

Noah (Gen. 8:18-22)

Gideon (Judg. 8:22)

Cornelius (Acts 10:30-48)

**From the following verses, list the ways Jonah's life became one of eternal significance:**

Jonah 3:4-5

Luke 11:30

Believing that divine interruptions are a privilege not only will cause us to handle them differently but also to await them eagerly. Knowing that we have an opportunity to participate in God's purposes should cause us to sit on the edge of our seats in anticipation of divine interventions disguised as life's interruptions.

## SIGNIFICANTLY YOU

We know very little about Jonah. In fact, until the four chapters of this book, his life seems fairly insignificant. Jonah is a lone character with one known relative: his father. His dad's name and his birthplace are only mentioned twice in the entirety of Scripture. No other record of his lineage

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*“[King Jeroboam] restored the border of Israel from the entrance of Hamath as far as the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the LORD, the God of Israel, which He spoke through His servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet, who was of Gath-hepher.”*

**2 Kings 14:25**

exists. Everything we know about the prophet before the Book of Jonah shows up in 2 Kings 14:25. Pay special attention to it now.

**Record Jonah’s “résumé” from 2 Kings.**

**His name:**

**His hometown:**

**His religion:**

**His job:**

**His closest relative:**

These five details about Jonah sum up what we know about him. Nothing is particularly noteworthy. Not until he received a divine interruption did he develop a life story that made a stamp on history. The bulk of what Scripture teaches about this prophet and certainly the most eternally significant part of this man’s life comes after God interrupted.

When Jonah heard a word from God—and finally yielded to it—his ordinary existence became extraordinary. Not only did Jonah spark the greatest revival in all human history but as a result of his mission he was mentioned in the New Testament by Jesus. Jonah’s true significance began with a divine intervention.

**Divine Intervention + Yielded Submission =  
ETERNAL SIGNIFICANCE**

**Rewrite this equation in your own words below.**

When God chose Jonah to go to Nineveh, it was a privilege. His story began when he yielded to God’s divine intervention, and it made an eternal imprint on humanity. Whatever God has called you to do should be a privilege for you to undertake. While it might not be easy or convenient, He offers you a chance to write a story of significance for eternity.



## Day 3

## MAKE YOUR MARK

*“Whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ.” Philippians 3:7*

Last fall I got a chance to participate in a wonderful event. It was for young people who were just starting out in positions of leadership in ministry. The theme of the event was “Make Your Mark.” In different workshops and sessions they were being encouraged to stay open to God’s leading in their ministries as they could only leave a lasting imprint to the extent that they chose to yield to and follow God.

Most biblical people who made a lasting mark in Christianity had a point in their lives where they stood at a crossroad. They had to decide to yield to divine intervention at the cost of their own plans or continue on their own path instead. From Noah’s call to build an unfamiliar object called an ark to Paul being told to go to the house of a Gentile named Cornelius, any person God used mightily for His glory both began and continued his or her journey with divine interruptions. As they yielded to God’s purposes, they unknowingly wrote life stories that made a mark on humanity.

**Yesterday you listed the five facts we learned about Jonah from 2 Kings 14:25. Record these same facts about yourself.**

**Name:**

**Hometown:**

**Denomination:**

**Job:**

**Closest relative:**

I want to admit to you that in younger years, my significance was wrapped up in some of these facts. As a daughter of a prominent minister, I have a wonderful legacy of family and faith. Yet the story God is writing in my life and the mark that He wants me to make cannot be based on my family, the legacy of faith they may leave, or the work they have done for His sake. My mark must be mine—orchestrated by God and separate from the great and admirable work He has done in the lives of those I love.

**Look back at your “résumé.” Put a check mark beside any in which you have tried to seek your significance. In the margin, explain and plan to discuss with your group.**

Trouble for believers always comes when they try to stake their claim to significance, even unknowingly, with any of these five things. If who you are, where you are from, what church you go to, what you do for a living, or who you are related to or associated with becomes the thing you hang your hat of significance on, you will eventually find yourself wanting. Our significance, at least the kind that will leave an eternal mark, can only really be found in how fully we yield to God’s purposes for our lives.

Possibly you are on the other side of the spectrum. Maybe the places or people you are associated with do not make you proud. Maybe you’ve not achieved nearly as much as you would have liked or, like me, your past is cluttered with the remnants of a slew of consequences from bad choices you’ve made. Maybe, like Jonah, you don’t have a rich family legacy to speak of or major accomplishments to highlight and you feel that God could not possibly want to use you to achieve something extraordinary. On the contrary, Scripture is replete with stories of men and women who were used mightily of God despite how their résumé reads.

**Choose two of the following characters who most interest you or whom you know the least about. Read the references; then record your answers in the margin.**

## ESTHER

What was her life like (Esth. 2:5-7)?

How did divine intervention change that (Esth. 2:8-9,17-18)?

How did she make her mark (Esth. 4:14-16; 7:1-4; 8:11-14)?

## MARY

What was her life like (Luke 1:26-27)?

How did divine intervention change that (Luke 1:30-35)?

How did she make her mark (Luke 2:7)?

## RAHAB

What was her life like (Josh. 2:1)?

How did divine intervention change that (Josh. 2:2-6)?

How did she make her mark (Heb. 11:31; Matt. 1:5)?

PETER

What was his life like (Matt 4:18)?

How did divine intervention change that (Matt. 4:19)?

How did he make his mark (Matt. 16:18)?

What other biblical characters come to mind who had similar experiences?

## DECLARATION OF DEPENDENCE

What most of us really want is autonomy. We'd like to have independence and freedom to govern our own path. We want to make a mark but only on our terms. We don't mind following Christ as long as His path eventually converges onto the one we already had chosen. We want to select our own course, run after our own ambitions, and decide how to make use of our own time. So when anyone—including God—steps in and makes demands that interrupt our goals, we push back.

Single women rebel against singleness when it's gone on longer than they expected. Mothers get frustrated at the demands of caring for a family when they anticipated conquering corporate America. Ministers want to give up when God's way for them means teaching 20 faithful folks every week instead of stadiums full. Leaders want to throw in the towel when their mission meets with resistance that threatens to give them a harder time than they expected. Interruptions have a way of revealing whether we really mean it when we say, "Lord, not my will but Yours be done." Today is as good a day as any to write a declaration of our dependence on God.

**Pause. Take a moment to let the Lord reveal your heart.  
Be honest with Him about where you are in relation to  
your declaration of dependence.**

We have the benefit of reading the ending of the stories of Bible characters. We skip ahead and find the outcome they did not have the luxury of knowing at the time. They may not have realized the privilege and certainly didn't know the eternal impact they would make. How could they have known that their names would go down in God's Word to encourage us millennia later? At the time they chose to yield to their divine intervention, it was completely by faith in God.

God's call  
and your  
willingness  
to obey  
make you  
significant.

Like these holy heroes, you've got an outcome you can't make out. The fog of life's journey will clog your spiritual sight, and the fear of the unknown is bound to make you consider bowing out. Don't back down. In future generations, your story will be the one that encourages someone else to follow hard after God. Have you ever considered that just as the previous stories encourage us along the way, yours will encourage someone else?

Make sure your life writes a story worth reading. Correctly viewing and appreciating God's awesomeness and His love compel you to realize the distinct privilege of being used by Him.

Your story starts with God. The mark you make and your eternal significance will be found in yielding to the divine intervention God sends your way. When the Lord speaks over your life, separating you unto Himself for His purposes or allowing circumstances to derail you from your original plan, consider it your invitation. You've been given the opportunity to write a story beyond your expectations. Beginning in chapter 1, Jonah's tale unfolds and immediately he becomes more than just a résumé from 2 Kings. He becomes a significant part of God's purposes for entire nations of people.

Your story begins with God's call. It is not your legacy or lack thereof that makes you significant. It is God's call and your willingness to obey it.

**You previously detailed Bible characters who became significant through divine interruption. Now it's your turn. Detail how you've seen life interruptions offer you an invitation to eternal significance.**

**Your name:**

**What was your life like?**

**How has divine intervention already changed that?**

**How are you significant as a result?**

End today by doing two things. First, prepare to share your story of divine intervention. Consider how God might be preparing each person to leave a mark on humanity. Second, use the margin to write your own declaration of dependence. You only need a few strong sentences to state your intention to turn away from autonomous living and to full faith in Him.



## Day 4

## THE REAL STAR

*“We all, with unveiled faces, are reflecting the glory of the Lord and are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory; this is from the Lord who is the Spirit.” 2 Corinthians 3:18*

“Dream Girls” was a breakout hit a few years ago. Theaters were filled with moviegoers riveted by this musical on the big screen. Beyonce Knowles was set up to be the breakout star of the film but the “sleeper” in the movie surprised and awed viewers. Jennifer Hudson garnered an Academy Award for her portrayal of Effie. Her acting chops and moving vocals catapulted her into celebrity status. She became the real star.

On first glance, the principal character in the book we’re studying appears to be Jonah, but a closer look reveals that the title character in this narrative is God Himself. If you keep your attention keen and your eyes peeled in these four short chapters, you’ll be overwhelmed and awed to discover Him all over again. His attributes, His character, and His ability swim through the entire book and therefore Jonah’s life.

The story opens with the word of the Lord (1:1), centers around the acts of the Lord, and concludes with the word of the Lord (4:9-11). From beginning to end, it’s all about Him. Beyond any doubt, the main character is God. It’s a good thing since having a fresh view of Him is paramount if we are to begin believing that life interruptions are really divine interventions.

We’ve  
become so  
enamored  
with the big  
fish, we’ve  
lost sight of  
a big God.

From day 1, fill in the blanks.

Insignificant \_\_\_\_\_ + Insignificant \_\_\_\_\_ = \_\_\_\_\_

Significant \_\_\_\_\_ + Significant \_\_\_\_\_ = \_\_\_\_\_

From day 2

Divine Interruption + Yielded \_\_\_\_\_ = Eternal \_\_\_\_\_

Making an eternal mark on earth should be our most important goal because God is not only the headliner of Jonah’s story but He’s also the title character of yours as well. As long as you view Him as insignificant,

Your life  
involves you  
but is not  
ultimately  
about you.

you'll think His plans for you are too. The result will be continual frustration as you run from or ignore His attempts to guide you toward His best for you. His best includes predetermined purposes that you've been specifically equipped to master.

Giving God a position of significance—the primary role—in your daily living is of paramount importance. This means more than simply receiving Him as Savior. In the tale of your life unfolding right now, He, not you, must be the One in the spotlight. Your life involves you but is not ultimately about you. Knowing this allows you to be more willing to relinquish control over your life and yield to the divine intervention.

## OWNERSHIP VS. MANAGEMENT

Jonah is a quintessential picture of a person who serves God and yet still seeks to hold the title role in his story. He'd been given the gift of prophecy and was willing to use it as long as he could do it in the place and among the people he desired. As soon as God's will led Jonah outside of that comfort zone, he opted out. Jonah had done what we often do—take ownership of that which we've only been asked to manage.

Note that God didn't change what He wanted Jonah to do. Jonah was still called to declare God's message. God just altered where and to whom Jonah was to do it. When God asserted His role as owner of the gift He'd given Jonah, the prophet couldn't take it. The same often happens to us as well. We receive a gift from God—a call to ministry or spiritual gift to edify His body—and subconsciously take ownership of it. We become disgruntled when God tells us to use it in a way we hadn't planned.

**How would you describe the difference between being an owner and a manager?**

**What type of giftings has God given you?**

**Has He ever asked you to utilize them in a way you didn't anticipate? If so, did you handle His request as if you were the owner or manager? Describe.**

How might usurping God's role as owner complicate one's life?

I read a story about a king who sent a message to the ruler of an enemy kingdom. The messenger, hoping the king was declaring war on the enemy, decided to read the letter. He was appalled to discover his king was offering a peace treaty. He decided to take matters into his own hands. He'd simply bury it and craft a lie to tell when he got back home.

His plan was interrupted when scouts from the enemy kingdom discovered him burying the letter, seized him and the note, and delivered them to the king. Peace was established and the messenger released, but he was disappointed and disillusioned at what his king had allowed.

The courier had made a major error. He put himself in the position of owner when he was only supposed to be a manager.

Have you taken ownership of any areas of your life that you should be managing for the King? If so, list one.

How has this affected your life?

How might your life be different if you switch roles from owner to manager?

## THE PRINCIPLE OF PURPOSE

The apostle Paul helped us remember the difference between ownership and management by teaching us the principle of purpose.

Rewrite Ephesians 2:10 in your own words.

The message can never be underscored enough for the believer in Christ. Look at the progression of the principles the verse teaches:

1. You are His.
2. You are His workmanship.
3. You are a masterpiece recreated in Christ Jesus.
4. You are created masterfully for the purpose of being equipped to accomplish good works.
5. You are equipped to accomplish good works that were prepared beforehand by God.
6. You are equipped to accomplish preplanned good works by simply walking in them.

Put the number of the portion of Ephesians 2:10 that is reinforced by each of the following passages and underline the key words from the verse that helped you make the connection.

**Jeremiah 1:5, MSG**—“Before I shaped you in the womb, I knew all about you. Before you saw the light of day, I had holy plans for you: A prophet to the nations—that’s what I had in mind for you.”

**2 Timothy 2:21, NET**—“So if someone cleanses himself of such behavior, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart, useful for the Master, prepared for every good work.”

**Ephesians 4:24, NLT**—“Put on your new nature, created to be like God—truly righteous and holy.”

**1 John 2:6, NASB**—“The one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.”

**Psalms 139:14, NASB**—“I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Wonderful are Your works, and my soul knows it very well.”

**2 Timothy 3:16-17, NASB** —“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”



**John 17:9, NASB**—“I ask on their behalf; I do not ask on behalf of the world, but of those whom You have given Me; for they are Yours.”

Recognizing and internalizing the Principle of Purpose is critical. Walking fully in God’s plans for your life—that are intertwined with His purposes for humanity—hinges on whether you buy into the fact that you are His and have a purpose, a purpose you might not fully comprehend by using only human brain matter.

You were created with specific intention and recreated at the moment of your salvation with specific attention to detail so that you would be equipped to walk in the plans God mapped out for you long ago. You cannot reach complete satisfaction in life apart from your decision to engage in His predetermined plans. For Jonah and for us, this means giving Him the position of prominence in our lives and restructuring our plans so that we can partner with Him.

**Do any specific personal challenges make it difficult for you to embrace that God has a purpose for you?**

*“O that My people  
would listen to Me.  
That Israel would  
walk in My ways!”*  
**Psalm 81:13**

## THIS IS GOD’S STORY

Your life is God’s story being told and His character being displayed. How does your life read? What is your life telling others about the God you serve? As a result of your decisions, do they get to see Him displayed in His best light?

Just as we can see God clearly through Jonah’s story, God can and will be seen in ours. As we surrender to divine interventions (or not), each chapter of our lives puts God on display. We can see many characteristics of God in each chapter of Jonah. Here are a few of the highlights.

**Jonah 1**—God is sovereign.

**Jonah 2**—God is our Deliverer.

**Jonah 3**—God is merciful.

**Jonah 4**—God is righteous.

Today I want you to consider whether God has the title role in the story of your life. What words might you use to describe what this chapter of your life is declaring to others about God? In your current season and station, what do others learn about Him as they watch the way you live? Use the margin to record your thoughts.

## Day 5

# MAKING SENSE OF IT ALL

*“I have still many things to say to you, but you are not able to bear them or to take them upon you or to grasp them now.” John 16:12, The Amplified Bible*

As we close our first week, I’ll say what is probably on both our minds: Very little about the Book of Jonah makes sense. From a huge fish swallowing a man to an entire city turning from wickedness in 24 hours, the only way to account for the happenings in these chapters is to believe that God works miracles and that He has a plan that supersedes our senses.

From the onset, God’s instructions didn’t make sense to Jonah for many reasons. First, Jonah’s ministry had been focused on foretelling the expansion and prosperity of Israel. Assyria was an enemy nation. If Nineveh received God’s mercy, they might stand in the way of Israel’s prosperity.

Second, scholars believed that going to Nineveh wouldn’t have been a simple trip to make. Doing so would have meant Jonah selling all of his earthly possessions to which he might never return. He’d have to leave behind the comforts of economic security and the familiarity of his beloved country to venture into a pagan culture where he would be economically and politically weak. Why would God ask him to do this?

Third, Israel was God’s covenant people. They were His chosen nation. The Ninevites were Gentiles. In Jonah’s estimation, neither they nor any other group of people were supposed to be granted the mercy that had been extended to Israel. They were to be separate from all other people.

To Jonah, God’s directions did not make sense.

**What doesn’t seem to make sense about something  
God is asking of you right now?**

When you consider all the reasons why God’s plans don’t make sense, you might feel justified in running away. That kind of deception is typical of our hearts and minds.

## Why be careful about following our feelings and wisdom according to Jeremiah 17:9 and Proverbs 28:26?

God's plans for us are so overwhelmingly beyond anything that we could ever imagine that our feelings or ability to reason His directives cannot be the determining factor for choosing obedience. Making sense of what God has asked or feeling compelled to cooperate cannot be the prerequisite for choosing obedience. His Word must be enough.

**Study Judges 7:2-8,16. Why might God's instructions not have made sense to Gideon? How did he respond?**

*“Lean on, trust in, and be confident in the Lord with all your heart and mind and do not rely on your own insight or understanding.”*  
Proverbs 3:5, AMP

## HYPOTHETICALLY SPEAKING

Picture a stunning encounter with God. You are alone in your home and have an experience that can only be described as being like Paul's experience while traveling to Damascus. You see a bright light and hear a voice that resonates with authority and power. You don't have any doubt who is speaking to you. You know it is God Himself. He gives you clear instructions to quit your high-paying job, immediately sell the house you just purchased last year and everything in it, pack up your family, and move to Kenya to minister to a primitive tribe that He will direct you to.

**What would your next step be?**

- ignore the encounter with God
- tell myself it couldn't be God since the directions were illogical and nonsensical
- tell my spouse and hope he'd tell me that I was just imagining things
- seek wise counsel before moving forward
- (if I knew for sure it was God,) I'd put my house on the market immediately.

While this is an extreme illustration, we see our natural tendencies most clearly against the backdrop of intense situations. How you responded to

# JONAH

the above hypothetical situation may reveal how you respond when God's divine interruption requires only slight lifestyle modifications.

**What is the last thing you felt compelled by God's Spirit to do? Was your response similar to or completely different than your selection above? In what way?**

## Missionary Assignment

List some reasons why you think God's modern day people have forgotten His heart for others. How can your group combat this?

## THE MYSTERY OF HIS WILL

When the Book of Jonah was written, its original purpose was to be read to the Israelites. God desired that Jonah's mission remind the nation of something that wouldn't have made sense to them. God had a heart for others outside of Israel and wanted to dispense His mercy to them as well. This principle from Jonah's story lays the framework for a message that the apostle Paul continued to convince the Jews of centuries later.

**Read Ephesians 3:2-4,6. What did Paul tell the believers in Ephesus was "the great mystery"?**

As the prosperity and security of Israel increased, the idea of God's family including their enemies would not have seemed logical. And yet, despite their ability to comprehend God's desires, they were being compelled to respond accordingly.

**Fill in the blanks in Jonah 2:9 below.**

**"But I will sacrifice to You with the voice of thanksgiving. That which I have \_\_\_\_\_ I will pay. \_\_\_\_\_ is from \_\_\_\_\_."**

Many commentators believe that the message of the Book of Jonah to Israel hinges on this verse. As Jonah soaked in the gastric fluids and rotting foods in the fish's belly, he most likely drifted in and out of consciousness. In those moments, I believe he realized how much trouble following his good senses had gotten him into. Now he recognized that

“salvation,” which means continued deliverance and sure victory, can only come to those who are yielded to God. Those yielded to Him, even when the directives don’t make sense and even when difficulty is encountered, rest in the knowledge that they are safeguarded by Him.

Engaging in God’s will is not always comfortable or convenient, but it is worth it. The yielded ones are guaranteed the benefits that only come to those who have chosen to camp out in His hedge of protection.

**Rewrite the meaning of this equation.**

**Divine Intervention + Yielded Submission = Salvation  
from the Lord**

**In light of today’s theme, personalize and rewrite the  
truth found in Luke 11:28.**

Close your lesson by noting in the margin the parts of your journey with God right now that don’t make sense to you. Then talk to the Lord honestly. Thank Him for the divine intervention that is your invitation to partner with Him. Meditate on what it will mean to engage fully in His calling even if it is shrouded in the mystery of His eternal will. If you are ready, make a commitment to yield to Him and His purposes even when they don’t make sense.

## **Navigation Tools**

At the end of each week’s study, take a moment to record the principles that most impacted you and can help you to navigate your journey through the interrupted life. Note this week’s navigation tools:

Day 1

Day 2

Day 3

Day 4

Day 5