

# IS IT RIGHT FOR YOU?

**JONAH: WHEN GOD GOES AFTER THE HEART OF A MAN**

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**BUT I → BUT GOD → SO I WILL**

*God wasn't only trying to get Jonah to Nineveh. He was trying to get Jonah's heart aligned with His own.*

A HAND OF PURPOSE MEN'S STUDY RESOURCE

# Introduction: The Man God Was Pursuing

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Jonah is often remembered for a great fish. But the fish occupies only a small part of the story. The deeper story is about a man of God whose heart needed to be changed.

Jonah knew God. He knew God's voice, God's calling, and even God's character. Yet he repeatedly viewed life through the lens of how circumstances affected him. When God's direction threatened Jonah's preferences, Jonah resisted. When his choices endangered sailors, he slept. When he needed mercy, he prayed for it. When Nineveh received mercy, he became angry. When a plant gave him shade, he rejoiced. When the plant died, he wanted to die.

***A man can know the heart of God without his own heart being aligned with it.***

God loved Nineveh, but God also loved Jonah. The storm, the sailors, the fish, the second call, the repentant city, the plant, the worm, and the scorching wind all became instruments in God's hands. He was not merely trying to change Jonah's location or behavior. He was going after Jonah's motives, compassion, priorities, and heart.

This study is therefore not an invitation to stand outside Jonah's life and criticize him. It is an invitation to let Jonah become a mirror. Where do I say, 'BUT I'? Where has God's mercy answered me with 'BUT GOD'? And what would it look like for a changed heart to finally answer, 'SO I WILL'?

## The Heart Journey

- BUT I - the resistance of self.
- BUT GOD - the pursuing grace of God.
- SO I WILL - the response of a surrendered heart.

***Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.***

Proverbs 4:23

# 1. GOD SPEAKS - BUT I...

JONAH 1:1-3

*Every 'BUT I' reveals a place where my will is competing with God's will.*

Jonah was already a man of God. Second Kings identifies him as a prophet whom God had used. His problem was not that he could not hear God; his problem was what he did after he heard Him.

God's command was simple: arise and go to Nineveh. Jonah's response was also clear: he arose and went the other way. His feet preached the condition of his heart.

Jonah did not merely avoid an uncomfortable assignment. He spent money, time, and energy to move away from it. We can do the same. Sometimes it takes more effort to maintain our resistance than it would take to obey.

An oppositional 'BUT' is the point where what I want collides with what God wants and I begin building a case for my preference. 'I know what God says, BUT...' can become the vocabulary of a heart that wants God to approve what it has already decided.

## NUGGETS TO CARRY

- Knowing God's will is not the same as surrendering to it.
- Direction reveals desire: Jonah's movement exposed his heart.
- Delay, excuses, avoidance, and selective obedience can all be forms of 'BUT I.'
- God's purpose is not served by simply calling ourselves men of God; our hearts must remain responsive to God.

## HEART REFLECTION

**1. What instruction from God or Scripture am I tempted to follow with the word 'but'?**

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**2. Where am I spending energy avoiding something that simple obedience would settle?**

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**3. Do my present actions agree with what I say I believe?**

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**SO I WILL:** When God makes the next right step clear, I will stop arguing with it and take it.

## 2. THE PEOPLE IN MY BOAT

JONAH 1:4-16

*My choices may be personal, but their consequences are rarely private.*

Jonah chose Tarshish, but the sailors entered Jonah's storm. They had not rejected God's call to Nineveh, yet they became afraid for their lives and began throwing valuable cargo overboard.

That is a sobering picture for men. A husband's choices can affect his wife. A father's choices can shape a household. A leader's unresolved heart issues can become burdens carried by people he leads.

While the sailors worked, prayed, and sacrificed cargo, Jonah slept. It is possible to become comfortable with a condition in ourselves that is creating chaos around us. Other people may be compensating for something we refuse to confront.

The sailors also displayed a compassion Jonah lacked. Even after learning Jonah was responsible, they rowed harder to save him. Pagan sailors showed concern for the prophet while the prophet had shown little concern for them or for Nineveh.

Jonah finally owned the issue: he knew the storm was connected to him. That moment matters. Responsibility begins when a man stops asking only, 'Who did this to me?' and also asks, 'Holy Spirit, what is MY responsibility?'

### NUGGETS TO CARRY

- Jonah's disobedience cost innocent people cargo and put lives at risk.
- People around us can end up working harder because we will not address what belongs to us.
- The sailors' empathy becomes a contrast to Jonah's self-focus.
- Owning responsibility is not shame; it is the doorway to change.

### HEART REFLECTION

**1. Who is 'in my boat' - and how are my choices affecting them?**

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**2. Is anyone carrying extra weight because I have avoided a responsibility?**

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**3. When conflict comes, is my instinct to defend myself or examine myself?**

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**SO I WILL:** I will own what belongs to me and stop making others carry what I need to address.

### 3. MERCY IN THE DEEP - BUT GOD

JONAH 1:17; 2:1-10

*Jonah's 'BUT I' was answered by God's greater 'BUT GOD.'*

Thrown into the sea, Jonah had reached the end of his own plan. Yet the Lord prepared a great fish. What appeared to be a terrifying place became a place of preservation. The fish was not simply punishment; it was mercy.

Jonah ran, BUT GOD pursued. Jonah sank, BUT GOD preserved. Jonah failed, BUT GOD was not finished. God's grace did not pretend Jonah's rebellion was harmless, but neither did His grace abandon Jonah to it.

Inside the fish Jonah prayed. His prayer is sincere, but it is striking how often it circles around 'I,' 'me,' and 'my.' His circumstances had changed dramatically; his heart still had distance to travel.

This is an important heart lesson: pressure can change behavior without changing motives. We may pray differently when consequences hurt, yet still need God to uproot the self-centered lens that produced the problem.

Jonah wanted mercy when Jonah was in trouble. Soon God would show whether Jonah could rejoice when mercy reached people he disliked.

#### NUGGETS TO CARRY

- Some of God's rescues arrive in forms we would never choose.
- Grace can preserve us while also confronting us.
- A crisis can reveal the heart, but only surrender transforms it.
- The mercy I receive becomes a test of the mercy I am willing to give.

#### HEART REFLECTION

**1. Where can I now recognize God's mercy in something I once saw only as hardship?**

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**2. Have I changed merely because consequences became painful, or has my heart actually changed?**

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**3. Whom do I find difficult to extend the same patience and mercy I ask God to extend to me?**

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**SO I WILL:** I will remember the mercy that rescued me and let it reshape the way I treat others.

## 4. THE GOD OF THE SECOND TIME

JONAH 3:1-4

*Grace does not always change the assignment; sometimes it gives us another opportunity to obey it.*

The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time. God did not throw Jonah away. He restored responsibility to him.

Notice that the command remained essentially the same: arise, go to Nineveh. Jonah's failure did not force God to invent a new purpose. Grace brought Jonah back to the place where obedience had first been refused.

There is hope here for every man who has failed. Failure can have consequences, but failure does not automatically mean God is finished. The proper response to grace is not entitlement; it is renewed obedience.

This time Jonah went. The same feet that had carried him toward Tarshish now moved toward Nineveh. Behavior was changing. But chapter 4 will reveal that God still wanted more than changed feet; He wanted a changed heart.

### NUGGETS TO CARRY

- God's second call is grace, not permission to repeat the first rebellion.
- Restoration often brings us back to unfinished responsibility.
- Obedience is the proper response to a second chance.
- God can use a man while He is still doing deeper work inside that man.

### HEART REFLECTION

**1. Where has God graciously given me another opportunity?**

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**2. Is there unfinished obedience I need to return to?**

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**3. Do I mistake being useful to God for being fully aligned with God?**

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**SO I WILL:** I will treat God's second chances as invitations to faithful obedience, not as excuses to remain unchanged.

## 5. WHEN A WICKED CITY REPENTS

JONAH 3:5-10

*God's warning was not proof that He wanted Nineveh destroyed; it was proof that His mercy was reaching for them.*

Nineveh responded with remarkable seriousness. The people believed God. The king stepped down from his throne, removed his royal robes, humbled himself, and called the city to turn from violence and evil.

Religious activity alone was not the point. Jonah 3:10 says God saw what they did - that they turned from their evil ways. God looks beyond ritual to the heart and the fruit that flows from it.

The warning itself was mercy. God could have judged without sending Jonah. Instead He sent a messenger because His desire was not merely destruction; He was giving people an opportunity to repent.

Here the contrast becomes startling. A notoriously wicked city responds to one warning, while the prophet who delivered the warning still struggles with the motives of his heart.

It was easier to change the behavior of 120,000 people in a wicked city than to change the motives of the man of God. That should humble every spiritual leader. Public ministry success does not guarantee private heart alignment.

### NUGGETS TO CARRY

- Repentance is a turn, not merely an emotion.
- God notices actions because actions can reveal whether repentance is real.
- Warnings can be instruments of mercy.
- Spiritual influence does not exempt the messenger from needing transformation.

### HEART REFLECTION

**1. When I repent, what actually changes in my behavior?**

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**2. Am I more concerned with appearing spiritual or becoming aligned with God?**

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**3. Could God be using a warning or conviction in my life as an act of mercy?**

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**SO I WILL:** I will allow conviction to produce a real turn, not merely a religious response.

## 6. I RECEIVED MERCY - BUT THEY DID TOO

JONAH 4:1-4

*Jonah loved God's mercy when it rescued Jonah; he struggled with it when it rescued his enemies.*

Nineveh's repentance should have been a prophet's celebration. Instead, Jonah became angry. His message had been heard, lives had been spared, and a city had turned - yet Jonah was displeased.

Then Jonah admits why he fled. He knew God's character. He knew God was gracious, merciful, slow to anger, and filled with unfailing love. Jonah's theology was correct; his heart was resisting the implications of that theology.

He feared that God's mercy would fall on the Assyrians - people he regarded as brutal enemies. Jonah wanted justice for them and mercy for himself.

This is where the book comes painfully close to us. It is easy to sing about grace when grace is aimed at us. The test comes when God asks us to celebrate grace given to someone who hurt us, opposed us, or in our judgment does not deserve it.

Grace received should become grace reproduced. God forgave me, SO I forgive. God showed me mercy, SO I show mercy. God loved me when I did not deserve it, SO I refuse to make deserving it the condition for loving others.

### NUGGETS TO CARRY

- Correct theology can coexist with an uncorrected heart.
- We often want God to treat us according to grace and others according to justice.
- Empathy grows when I remember how much mercy I have needed.
- The evidence that grace has reached my heart is partly seen in how I treat people who need grace from me.

### HEART REFLECTION

1. Who do I secretly hope gets what they deserve?

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2. Do I become frustrated when God blesses or restores someone I have judged?

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3. Where am I asking God for mercy while withholding mercy from another person?

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**SO I WILL:** Because I live by mercy, I will become a man who gives mercy.



# 7. THE PLANT, THE WORM, AND THE SELF-CENTERED LENS

JONAH 4:5-9

*What makes me happiest and angriest can reveal what my heart values most.*

Jonah sat outside Nineveh to see what would happen. God provided a plant that shaded him, and Jonah was delighted. Then God appointed a worm, the plant died, and a scorching east wind beat down on him.

The plant became a heart diagnostic. Jonah cared intensely about it because it benefited Jonah. He was happy when God made him comfortable and angry when God removed that comfort.

Meanwhile, an entire city full of people had just stood on the edge of judgment. Jonah's emotional response to his shade was stronger than his compassion for their souls.

This is the danger of viewing life primarily through the question, 'How does this affect me?' Comfort, schedule, money, reputation, politics, business, preferences, and personal plans can become our version of Jonah's plant. None is automatically wrong. But each can reveal a heart that values personal benefit more than people.

God arranged the plant, the worm, and the wind not because He hated Jonah, but because He loved him enough to expose what was controlling him.

## NUGGETS TO CARRY

- God sometimes touches our comforts to expose our priorities.
- Strong emotional reactions can reveal hidden attachments.
- Self-centeredness shrinks our world until everything is measured by its effect on us.
- God's correction is often an expression of His commitment to change our hearts.

## HEART REFLECTION

**1. What loss or inconvenience produces an outsized reaction in me?**

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**2. What 'plant' am I protecting more fiercely than I am caring for people?**

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**3. How often do I evaluate decisions primarily by how they affect me?**

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**SO I WILL:** I will ask not only, 'How does this affect me?' but also, 'Who does God want me to see and serve?'

## 8. IS IT RIGHT FOR YOU?

JONAH 4:4, 9-11

*God's final question moves the discussion from Jonah's circumstances to Jonah's heart.*

Twice God asks Jonah essentially the same question: 'Is it right for you to be angry?' God could simply have pronounced Jonah wrong. Instead, He asked a question that required Jonah to examine himself.

That question cuts through our favorite defenses. Not: Can I explain it? Did they hurt me? Does my anger feel justified? Do my friends agree? The deeper question is: Is it right?

Jonah could explain his feelings. He could cite Assyria's cruelty. He could point to personal discomfort. But God was measuring Jonah's heart against God's heart.

God then points to Nineveh - more than 120,000 people living in spiritual darkness, and even the animals. Jonah pitied a plant he did not create or cause to grow. Should God not have compassion for people He created?

The book ends with the question unanswered. Scripture does not record Jonah's final response. Perhaps the silence is intentional. The question leaves the page and enters our lives: Is it right for you?

### NUGGETS TO CARRY

- God is concerned not only with what I do, but why I do it.
- Being able to justify an attitude does not make it right.
- God's heart values people beyond the categories we place them in.
- The final work of discipleship is not merely behavioral conformity but heart alignment.

### HEART REFLECTION

**1. Is the attitude I am defending actually right before God?**

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**2. If God examined the motive beneath my current frustration, what would He find?**

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**3. Where do my priorities differ from God's compassion for people?**

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**4. What would change this week if my heart genuinely came into alignment with God's heart?**

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**SO I WILL:** I will invite God to correct not only my behavior but also my motives, reactions, priorities,

and compassion.

# Closing: BUT I → BUT GOD → SO I WILL

Jonah begins with a man hearing God and answering with resistance. The story moves through God's relentless grace and ends with God still speaking to the man's heart.

| BUT I...                               | BUT GOD...                         | SO I WILL...               |
|----------------------------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| My resistance                          | His pursuit                        | My surrender               |
| My excuses, pride, hurt, self-interest | His love, grace, mercy, correction | Forgive, love, serve, obey |
| My way                                 | His second chance                  | His way                    |

## *God speaks - SO I WILL.*

God forgave me, so I forgive. God showed me mercy, so I show mercy. God loved me, so I love. God gave me another opportunity, so I give another opportunity. God called me, so I go. God is faithful, so I trust.

### A Final Personal Inventory

1. Where is my heart most likely to say, 'BUT I'?

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2. Who has been affected by a heart issue I have treated as private?

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3. What 'BUT GOD' moment of grace do I never want to forget?

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4. Who needs to receive from me the grace I have received from God?

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5. What comfort, preference, or personal benefit has become too important to me?

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6. Is there an anger, resentment, judgment, or excuse that I can explain - but cannot honestly call right?

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7. What is my specific 'SO I WILL' response to God today?

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## Prayer of Alignment

***Lord, search my heart. Show me where my preferences, wounds, pride, comfort, or self-interest are resisting Your heart. Thank You for every 'BUT GOD' moment of mercy in my life. Let the grace I have received become grace I reproduce. Align my motives with Your motives, my compassion with Your compassion, and my actions with what is right. When You speak, teach my heart to answer: SO I WILL. Amen.***

## Leader's Discussion Guide

For group use, allow men time to answer before teaching the point. Jonah is especially effective when the text becomes a mirror rather than merely a story to analyze.

- Ask men to identify one 'BUT I' without requiring them to disclose more than they are comfortable sharing.
- Discuss the difference between consequences and condemnation. God's correction of Jonah was purposeful and restorative.
- Use 'Who is in your boat?' to discuss responsibility in marriage, fatherhood, leadership, business, and ministry.
- Ask why Jonah could receive mercy yet resent mercy given to Nineveh.
- Spend time on God's question, 'Is it right for you?' Let men examine motives rather than merely behavior.
- Close by having each man write one concrete 'SO I WILL' action for the coming week.