

THE PASTOR'S STUDY

EXERCISING THE MIND || IGNITING THE HEART || PREPARING THE HANDS

A free quarterly paper for rural pastors

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Photo: Pineapple Plantation at Ol Donyo Sabuk (Aaron Dunlop)

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WELCOME TO THE PASTOR'S STUDY

We are getting encouraging reports of how the magazine is helping pastors. Praise God! Our aim is to provide a careful study of one part of the Bible, and to address other themes that are essential to a healthy ministry. We thank Dr. Joseph Pipa (President Emeritus of Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary) for his excellent editorial on preaching as part of public worship (page 3). Preachers should study this article carefully.

This issue deals with the book of Jonah. Robert Johnston, a Presbyterian pastor in Northern Ireland, shows us how to preach Christ from Jonah (page 5). As usual, we have a more detailed commentary on the book (pages 6-8), and an example of notes on the text (pages 10-11). Look out for our new step-by-step guide for preparing sermons (page 9). Dr. Nelson Were shows that Jonah teaches us theology—who God is, and what he is like (page 12). Pastor Isaac Ong, from Singapore, presses Jonah on our hearts with the question: “What is your Nineveh?” (page 20).

Drawing on John Calvin, Dr. Joel Beeke reminds us that the Church is important for Christian piety (page 13). Pastor Dan Huffstutler, from Uganda, exhorts us to meditate on the Bible (pages 14-15). Dr. Michael Haykin offers a thought-provoking historical reflection on the colour purple (pages 18-19).

We trust these articles will be an encouragement and a help to you in your ministry, and in your own Christian life.

Sincerely, Aaron Dunlop

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EDITORIAL: PREACHING AS PART OF PUBLIC WORSHIP

Dr. Joseph A Pipa, Jr.

In the *Westminster Assembly's Directory for Public Worship*, the authors include a section entitled *Of the Preaching of the Word*.

Why do they include a section on preaching? The authors answer the question in chapter 21 of the *Westminster Confession of Faith*. After dealing with prayer they list the other elements of worship:

The reading of the Scriptures with godly fear, the sound preaching and conscionable hearing of the word, in obedience unto God, with understanding, faith, and reverence; singing of psalms with grace in the heart; as also the due administration and worthy receiving of the sacraments instituted by Christ, are all parts of the ordinary religious worship of God: beside religious oaths and vows, solemn fastings and thanksgivings upon special occasions, which are, in their several times and season, to be used in a holy and religious manner.

Notice that the public reading of scripture, the sound preaching of the word, and the careful hearing of the word preached, are at the head of the list of the elements of worship.

Public worship is a covenantal dialogue. God speaks to us, and we respond to Him. We speak to God in prayer and praise, and God speaks to us through preaching.

The authors of the *Westminster Confession* considered preaching an element of worship, and they also believed it was the highest part of worship. They state:

The Spirit of God maketh the reading, but especially the preaching of the word, an effectual means of enlightening, convincing, and humbling sinners; of driving them out of themselves, and drawing them unto Christ; of conforming them to his image, and subduing them to his will; strengthening them against temptations and corruptions; of building them up in grace, and establishing their hearts in holiness and comfort through faith unto salvation.

Preaching is the primary means of grace because when the lawfully ordained man preaches the word of God, God speaks with a living voice. God takes the inspired, infallible written word and makes it a living word.

Calvin writes that God “deigns to consecrate to himself the mouths and tongues of men in order that his voice may resound in them.” In another place Calvin says, “Christ acts by his ministers in such a manner that he wishes their mouth to be reckoned as his mouth, and their lips as his lips.”

Paul teaches this truth clearly:

“How shall they believe in whom they have not heard?” (Romans 10:14)

Note that the correct translation of this verse is not: “How shall they believe in him *of whom* they have not heard” (as though preaching is a man speaking *about* Christ). The correct translation is: “How shall they believe in him *of whom* they have not heard.”

This shows that preaching is *Christ himself* speaking to sinners. This leads to Paul’s question: How shall they hear Christ without a preacher?

Thus, the preached word becomes the living word. Preaching, therefore, is the chief means of grace and primary element of public worship.

Joseph A. Pipa, Jr. is the President emeritus and Professor of Systematic and Applied Theology at Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, and the pastor of Antioch Presbyterian Church in South Carolina, USA.

POINTS FOR PREACHERS

The Message of Jonah

This book is all about God’s mercy (Jonah 4:2). This includes:

1. God’s mercy to gentile idolaters
2. God’s mercy to a Jewish prophet

God’s Providence in Jonah’s Life

1. The ship to test him
2. The storm to restrain him
3. The sailors to rebuke him
4. The sea to correct him
5. The fish to rescue him
6. The Ninevites to reveal his heart
7. The shade to comfort him
8. The wind and sun to expose him

Jonah’s Inconsistency

1. He heard God’s Word, but disobeyed
2. He worshipped God as the creator of the whole world, but still tried to run away.
3. He and the sailors were in great danger, but he was fast asleep.
4. He preached to sinners, but he was angry when they repented.
5. He cared about the plant, but not about the people of Nineveh.

A Struggling Preacher

Jonah did not like God’s calling to preach, and he did not like God’s mercy to sinners. He struggled:

1. Against God’s call
2. Against God’s corrections
3. Against Nineveh’s conversion

PREACHING FROM THE STORY OF JONAH

Rev. Robert Johnston

The storyline of the book of Jonah is packed with surprises. In the very first verse, God's prophet rejects the Word of God himself! Then, when Jonah made his confession to the sailors, *they* were the ones who prayed to the LORD, not Jonah!

In chapter 3, the ungodly Ninevites responded well to the Word of God preached, even though the heart of the preacher wasn't really in it. A whole generation of Ninevites was saved, and Jonah was surprised, even angry (Jonah 4:1).

Woven into the changing story of Jonah is the unchanging character of God. Jonah knew this from the beginning: "I know," he said, "that You are a gracious and merciful God" (4:2). The book shows that God is gracious and merciful.

God's grace to Jonah

Jonah was a rebel, but God loved him and saved him through the fish. God was patient with him and gave him a second chance. God was patient again when Jonah got angry at the grace of God towards the Ninevites (4:10-11).

God's grace to the sailors

The sailors were pagans, but

when they heard Jonah's testimony, they feared the LORD and were saved from the storm, because God is loving, patient, and God forgives.

God's grace to Nineveh

For forty days, Jonah preached to Nineveh about judgement. Those forty days of preaching were also forty days of grace. God was giving Nineveh time to repent.

Jonah was angry (4:1). How could God save such wicked people? The answer is in his own rescue from the whale's belly. His "death" in the sea, and his "resurrection" onto dry land, was a sign pointing to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Matthew 12:39-42). Only through his death and resurrection can sinners be reconciled to God.

The Ninevites repented at Jonah's preaching, and now Jesus himself has come preaching to us! Like the Father, he is gracious and merciful. Unlike Jonah, he has obeyed God, and he cares about the lost. He calls us to repent and be saved.

Robert Johnston is the pastor of Knock Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Belfast, Northern Ireland. He is married to Julie and they have three children.

THE STORY OF JONAH: THE RELUCTANT PROPHET

Pastor Aaron Dunlop

Jonah was the only prophet sent to preach to non-Israelites. He was also the only prophet who refused to take the message that God gave him.

Jonah's disobedience is a stark contrasted with God's mercy. God showed mercy to the sailors, to Jonah and even to the people of Nineveh. Jonah enjoyed the mercy that came his way, but he had a hard time understanding God's mercy to others.

The book of Jonah has a missionary message. God will show mercy to all the nations, and God's people will be expected to take that message to them (see Acts 10:1-11:18). This book is also an accusation against the unrepentant Israelites. Unlike the pagan Ninevites, Israel did not repent when God sent prophets to warn them about their sin.

This book is also a study in the life and ministry of one prophet. Only a few words of Jonah's preaching are recorded: "yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown" (3:4). However, the text is not focused on Jonah's prophecy so much as it is focused on his life. The focus is especially

on how God called Jonah to ministry as a prophet, and how he responded to that call.

Jonah struggled with the call of God on his life. This is not unusual. The prophet Jeremiah also struggled with God's calling (Jeremiah 11:18-12:6; 15:10-21; 17:14-18; 18:18-23; 20:7-12, 14-18). So did Elijah also struggled with the call of God (1 Kings 19), and Moses (Numbers 11:11-15).

The book divides into two main sections, each two chapters long. Chapters 1 and 2 tell us about Jonah's first commission, which he openly disobeyed. Chapters 3 and 4 tell us about Jonah's second commission, which he outwardly obeyed, but inwardly resisted.

Jonah runs away (chapter 1)

The LORD is the God of the whole earth (Genesis 6:13, 18:25). He sees and judges sin in every nation, not just among his own people. The sins of Nineveh had come up before him and Jonah's assignment as a prophet was to go to Nineveh and preach against it. We have to wait until later to discover why Jonah ran (see 4:2). At this point, all we know is that he no longer wanted to be the LORD's prophet.

Jonah took a downward path. First he went down to Joppa. Then he went down into the ship (verse 3). Then he went down into the deepest part of the boat (verse 5). Finally, cast into the sea (verse 15), and swallowed by a fish (verse 17), he went down to the roots of the mountains (2:6).

When Jonah had freedom, he ran from God. Inside a whale, he cried out to God.

Jonah was undisturbed by the storm. Perhaps he saw it as a way out of obeying God (verse 6). He would rather drown than obey God! But God would not allow him to off-load his responsibilities. Through two divine actions, God brought Jonah back into line: he “hurled” a great wind at the sea (verse 4), and “appointed” a great fish to swallow Jonah (verse 17).

The sailors made every effort to save lives, at great expense. They lightened the ship (verse 5), called everyone to prayer (verse 6), identified the cause (verse 7). Jonah told them that the solution was to throw him overboard, but they tried rowing even harder (verse 13). In the end they realized that the almighty God had caused the storm. After praying, they reluctantly “hurled” Jonah overboard (same word as in 1:4). With a calm sea

around them, they worshiped God (verses 14-16).

Jonah prays (chapter 2)

God uses his creation to work for his people. Here he appointed a “great fish” to help Jonah.

Jonah’s life was fading away (2:7). Perhaps he became unconscious. Eventually, he woke up and discovered that he was alive, in a fish’s belly, which was as dark as a tomb.

When Jonah had freedom, he ran from God. Now he found himself trapped in the cage of a whale’s ribs and in the depths of the sea. Here, he cried out to God.

Jonah preaches (chapter 3)

The opening of chapter three “rewinds” the story to the beginning (compare 1:1-3 and 3:1-3). If only Jonah had obeyed the first time!

This time, Jonah did obey, but still he was reluctant about it. He had learned something about God’s kindness to him (2:9), but he had not yet caught God’s vision for Nineveh. But Jonah was not sent to preach his own message (compare 1 Peter 4:11). He was sent to preach God’s message.

Nineveh is called that “great city” three times (1:2; 3:2; 4:11). This may indicate that the area spoken of was Nineveh and the surrounding towns, as we speak of the Greater

Nairobi Metropolitan Area, or Greater London.

This “great city” had a “great king.” But even though he was high and mighty, the king humbled himself when he realized his own sin. The king’s repentance was immediate and profound, and the reality of it was reflected by both man and beast (verses 7-8).

Jonah complains (chapter 4)

Jonah was not a false prophet, but he was a disobedient one. His theology was clear (4:2), for he knew that God would spare Nineveh.

When Nineveh repented, God stopped being angry with them. But when God turned from his anger towards Nineveh, Jonah got angry at God! He did not want God to show mercy to Nineveh. These people were very wicked, and they had been very cruel to Israel. This was the reason Jonah ran at the beginning (4:2). Even in the great storm, he would rather drown than obey. Now, in the hot desert outside Nineveh, he would rather die than show mercy.

God had another lesson to teach Jonah. He is the God who rules the sea and the dry land (1:9). In the sea, he had “prepared” a fish to rescue Jonah, and now on the dry land he “prepared” a plant to shelter him (the same word is used in 1:17 and 4:6).

This time, there was an extra twist. While Jonah was enjoying the plant’s shade, God “prepared” (the same word again in 4:7) a worm to destroy the plant, so that the sun and wind beat on Jonah.

God showed Jonah that he cared more about the plant than the people of Nineveh. It was a sin to be angry with God about destroying the plant. But it was a bigger sin to be angry with God about saving the Ninevites.

Conclusion

The book begins and ends with an unhappy prophet. He was unhappy when God sent him to Nineveh. Then he was unhappy that God saved the Ninevites.

The book ends with a haunting question, leaving us, like Jonah, to consider Nineveh’s great need for God’s grace.

And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left—and much livestock?

The message of Jonah is that we all need God’s grace as much as Nineveh.

Aaron Dunlop is the Director of the Krapf Project and the pastor of Dunamanagh Baptist Church in Northern Ireland.

PREACHING JONAH STEP BY STEP

A guide for preachers exploring a Bible narrative.

Preparing sermons is a lifelong habit. It is a good idea to follow the same steps over and over again, always making progress (1 Timothy 4:15) in your ability to understand and preach God's word.

Step 1: Set the boundaries

In this study we are dealing with the entire book of Jonah. In the next issue we will deal with "Jonah in the belly of the whale," so we will limit our study to chapter 2.

Step 2: Take time to read

It is not a waste of time to read the story over multiple times. It will help you identify themes, repeated words or ideas, and get familiar with the reading for the pulpit. It is also a good idea to read the story in different translations—English, Swahili or another language.

Step 3: Look for the details

Pay attention to the verbs and the nouns. Notice contrasts, repeated words, and connections with other Scriptures. At this point you will also look for theological reflections, pathways to Jesus, and other points of application to jot down.

Step 4: Summarize the meaning

"God shows grace to undeserving sinners." That is one way to

summarize the message of Jonah. It is not easy to summarize a whole book in one sentence. Also, there are many ways it could be done. There are multiple layers to any story, so it is sometimes helpful to wait until you have all the exegesis completed before you make a judgment on the final meaning of the text.

Step 5: Develop an outline

Break the text up into manageable sections. These sections will be different sizes. For instance, the whole book of Jonah divides in two sections: "Going to Tarshish" and "Going to Nineveh."

These sections divide into smaller parts. Think about how these go together. Your outline could show how part 1 moves from disobedience, to judgement, and then to salvation. In part 2, the movement is different: first there is judgement, then salvation, and finally disobedience.

Step 6: Prepare the sermon

Now you can pick up on different themes, teaching or devotional ideas that you have found in the text. You could develop a series of sermons on the book.

PREACHER'S WORKSHOP

EXEGETICAL NOTES

(Notes on the text, words, and grammar)

Jonah went down “to Joppa” (1:3), “Into the boat” (1:3), “Into the deepest part of the boat” (1:5), “Into the land of death” (2:6).

Emotions were high: “Exceeding”.
Sailors exceedingly afraid (1:10)
Jonah exceedingly angry (4:1)
Jonah exceedingly glad (4:6)
Also Nineveh was exceedingly great (3:3)

Repeated words:
“wickedness” / “evil” 1:2; 1:7; 1:8; 3:8;
3:10; 4:1; 4:2
“fear” 1:5; 1:9; 1:10; 1:16
“arise” 1:1; 1:6; 3:2; 3:6
“great” 1:2; 1:4; 1:12; 1:17; 3:1; 3:5;
4:11

1:17 “The great fish” — what would have been certain death, is actually a means of preserving Jonah’s life.

4:3 “take my life away.” A theme of the weary prophet in the Bible. See Numbers 11:11-15; 1 Kings 19:4; Jeremiah 15:10; 20:14-18.

3:10 “Evil way” and “destruction.” this is a play on words in the Hebrew, which is highlighting the grace of God. Evil ways lead to destruction. Jonah knew this and expected this to happen (4:1), but God is gracious.

PREACHING NOTES

(Points for explanation and application)

Jonah went west after God told him to go east. Disobedience only takes you down (1:3, 5; 2:6)

God will use Israel to bring the gospel to the Gentiles (Matthew 28:18-19; Acts 1:8, Acts 10:1-11:18).

Verse 2. God is interested in all nations and sin in any nation is a problem and comes up before the face of God.

Notice the questions in the book. Everybody has questions. The man of God who deviates from the Word of God only creates confusion and raises questions.

From bewildered Sailors: “What do you mean, you sleeper?” “What is your occupation?” “Where do you come from?” “What is your country?” “Of what people are you?” “What shall we do with you?” (1:6-11)

From a repentant King: “Who knows if God will show mercy?” (3:9)

From a complaining prophet: “Is this not what I said?” (4:2)

From a gracious God: “Do you do well to be angry?” (4:4, 4:9) “Should I not pity Nineveh?” (4:11)

QUESTIONS

Here are some questions you should ask as you prepare your sermon. They will help you focus on the most important matters. You might choose to mention these questions in your sermon, or you might not. Some suggested answers are provided.

1. What does the story teach about God?

God is “merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth” (Jonah 4:2 quoting from Exodus 34:6).

2. What does the story teach us about ourselves?

We have the blessing of God’s word given to us in the Bible, but our sinful hearts are still disobedient. We have the blessing of forgiveness for our sins, but we are not merciful toward other sinners.

3. What does the story teach about Christ?

Christ is a better prophet than Jonah, because he really did die and rise again, he always obeyed God, and he is wonderfully merciful.

4. What does this story tell us to do?

We must repent of hypocrisy and harshness. Offer sincere obedience to God, and true mercy to men.

What would you add to these questions and answers?

APPLICATIONS

Application is an important part of every sermon. Show your hearers how the Bible’s teaching affects them personally. Show them what God wants them to do and how God wants them to change. It is best to apply your sermon specifically to different kinds of people. Here is an example:

The Lost

The Bible is full of warnings about God’s judgement. These are not meant to scare you away from God, but to bring you to repentance. Even if you are as bad as the Ninevites, if you truly repent you may be forgiven.

The Lazy

In the long run, full obedience is simpler and easier than disobedience. Running to Tarshish looked easier at the time, but it was not.

The Weak

If your heart is harsh toward other sinners, remember God’s mercy to you. He has forgiven your sin and gently corrected your faults. In the present, he is providing you with blessings you do not deserve, which he can remove at any time.

The Wandering

You may know the Bible well, and have a reputation for righteousness, and not be truly obedient to God. You can hide from other people, but not from God.

THEOLOGY IN THE STORY OF JONAH

Pastor Nelson Were

The book of **Jonah** is not just the story of a rebellious preacher. There are rich theological lessons on the nature of God and how he deals with his servants. We can also learn important lessons about the nature of man.

God is the sovereign Lord. This is clear from the story of Jonah. The “who,” “where” and “what” of the story was according to God’s sovereign choice—Jonah, to Nineveh, to preach (verses 1-3). But God is also the all-knowing and all-wise Lord. God knew where to find Jonah, and the word of the LORD “came to Jonah.” God also knew the wickedness of the city of Nineveh (vs 2).

But perhaps the most remarkable lesson of this book is what we learn about the human condition. The account of Jonah reveals the stunning depravity that still pervades the human heart, even the heart of God’s servant. Like his father Adam, Jonah deliberately chose to defy God and ran “from the presence of the LORD” (verses 3, 10, see also Genesis 3:6,8; 1 Timothy 2:14). While confessing to the mariners that his God was the “God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land” (vs. 9), Jonah was

running from him. How inconsistent can we be who profess to know and serve the living God?

Also, both Jonah, the prophet who knew God, and the heathen mariners, who did not know God were reluctant to do what they knew to be God’s will. Their first response was to try and do it their way. But they learned that God’s will cannot be subverted, and that man’s joy and peace is found only in obedience and submission to God’s revealed will.

Jonah lost time and money in his attempt to flee from God, and after it all he ended up where God had sent him. Jonah learned a lot of lessons, not only about the sovereignty of God, but also, as Paul reminds us, to keep a close watch on ourselves and to the teaching that has been given to us as stewards of the Word (1 Timothy 4:16).

***Nelson Were** is the pastor of Holy Trinity Church in Kisumu. He has a Doctor of Theology degree from the Far Eastern Bible College in Singapore. Nelson currently lectures at the Bomet Bible Institute and is the deputy principal at Faith College of the Bible in Eldoret.*

THE CHURCH'S PLACE IN CHRISTIAN PIETY

Dr. Joel Beeke

Calvin's idea of piety doesn't stand apart from Scripture or from the Church. Rather, it is rooted in the Word and nurtured in the church. While breaking with the clericalism and absolutism of Rome, Calvin nonetheless maintained a high view of the church: "If we do not prefer the church to all other objects of our interest, we are unworthy of being counted among her members."

Augustine once said: "He cannot have God for his Father who refuses to have the church for his mother." To this Calvin added:

For there is no other way to enter into life unless this mother conceive us in her womb, give us birth, nourish us at her breast, and lastly, unless she keep us under her care and guidance until, putting off mortal flesh, we become like the angels.

Calvin wrote, also, that apart from the church, there is little hope for forgiveness of sins or salvation. It is always disastrous to leave the church. For Calvin, believers are engrafted into Christ and His Church, for spiritual growth happens within the church. The church is the mother, educator, and

nourisher of every believer, for the Holy Spirit acts in her.

Believers cultivate piety by the Spirit through the Church's teaching ministry, progressing from spiritual infancy to adolescence to full manhood in Christ. They do not graduate from the church until they die. This lifelong education is offered within an atmosphere of genuine piety in which believers love and care for one another under the headship of Christ.

Growth in piety is impossible apart from the Church, for piety is fostered by the communion of saints. Within the Church, believers "cleave to each other in the mutual distribution of gifts." Each member has his own place and gifts to use within the body. Ideally, the entire body uses these gifts in symmetry and proportion, ever reforming and growing toward perfection.

Joel Beeke is a minister of the Heritage Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan (USA), and President of the Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, where he is also the professor of Systematic Theology and Homiletics. He is the author of many books and articles.

MEDITATION ON THE BIBLE

Pastor Dan Huffsutler

Our spiritual fathers, the Reformers and especially the Puritans, extolled the discipline of focused meditation on God and His Word. Unfortunately, many Christians today are unaware of what our spiritual ancestors meant by biblical meditation.

Biblical meditation is thinking on the truths of God's Word seriously, personally, and earnestly while seeking to practically live out those truths in daily life. Biblical meditation has been called "the doctrine of Christian thinking."

*The Scriptures are a
harvest of fruit
waiting to be harvested
to benefit the soul.*

When we meditate, he is filling his mind with God's truth, so that his life is ruled by the attitude of his Saviour. Christians who do not meditate on God's Word will only experience the Bible intellectually.

We need to meditate on the Scriptures in order to incorporate

them into our daily habits of thought and life.

Biblical meditation offers abundant spiritual benefit, and is necessary for every healthy Christian. Thomas Watson (1620-1686), an English Puritan, wrote:

A Christian enters into meditation as a man enters into the hospital, that he may be healed. Meditation heals the soul of its deadness and earthliness.

According to one author the steps for effective biblical meditation are:

1. Praying for Spirit-led fervency,
2. Choosing a Scriptural thought from God's Word,
3. Questioning, considering, and examining oneself, and
4. Concluding with personal application, resolution and thoughtful prayer.

The Scriptures are a vast and expansive treasure of divine knowledge, like a bountiful harvest of fruit waiting to be harvested to benefit the soul of God's child.

We can meditate on a wide range of spiritual subjects: the Holy Spirit,

the benefits of trials, the person of Christ, the suffering work of Christ, the means of grace, the errors of the age, the beauty of holiness, the gospel, the devil, and the privileges of believers.

Stephen Yuille has explained the Puritans' confidence in the benefits of meditation:

Simply put, meditation is the principal means by which the Holy Spirit quickens the affections for the zealous performance of the other spiritual duties.

Meditation is not only modeled for us by Christians of ages past. It is also commanded in Scripture. The prophet Haggai exhorted the people of God to "Consider your ways" (Haggai 1:5).

The psalms are a beautiful model of biblical meditation. In Psalm 39, the Psalmist wrote that when he mused on God and his life, his heart became hot, a fire burned within him, and he understood how he was to live.

Perhaps the greatest example of biblical meditation is Psalm 119, with its many-sided delight in the wonders of God's word. "Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day" (Psalm 119:97).

Biblical meditation will inflame the heart with affection for God. It will provide soul-calming comfort and assurance. It will produce in us

God-honouring joy, thankfulness, and holy contentment. Finally, one of the most important benefits of meditating on God's words is that you will be better able to keep God's word in the heart for times of trial and trouble in life.

Meditation is an essential discipline for sanctification.

Meditation is an essential discipline for sanctification. If Christians are going to grow in their faith, love, and joy in God while progressively becoming more holy, they must engage in biblical meditation.

One author wrote:

Little meditating makes lean Christians, of little life, little strength, little growth, and of little usefulness to others.

Let us be Christians and leaders who find our greatest delight in life in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ through his inspired and infallible Word.

Dan Huffsutler has been a missionary in East Africa for over a decade, engaged in church planting and theological education. He is currently living in central Uganda, working with the Shepherds Training College in Kubamitwe.

WHY DO WE PRAY IN THE NAME OF JESUS?

Pastor Aaron Dunlop

The most frequent and fundamental lesson that Jesus taught His disciples about prayer was to ask in his “name.” “Ask in my name,” he said, and the Father will hear you (John 14:13–14; 15:7, 16; 16:23–24, 26). In the Christian Church, praying in Jesus’ name is so common and obvious that we often overlook its meaning. But what does it mean to pray in Jesus’ name?

Praying Because of Jesus’ Atonement

First, to pray in the name of Jesus means to rest on the value of his atonement (his sacrifice for sin). Before Jesus died on the cross, believers did not ask in Jesus’ name (John 16:23–24), but when Jesus finished His work on earth, ascended into heaven and sent his Holy Spirit, the conditions for prayer were fully met. The work of Christ was finished. Outside of Christ’s sacrifice for sin, we have no ground for prayer.

We pray in Jesus’ name, therefore, on the basis of our relationship with Jesus. As sons and daughters, adopted into God’s family, we can come with our requests, appeals and problems, to our Father in heaven (Matthew 7:9).

The words of Jesus in John 14:15 not only point to our union with God in Christ, but our communion with him also—our abiding in Him (John 14:14–16; 15:7).

*Outside of Christ’s
Sacrifice for sin, we
have no ground for
prayer.*

Praying Because of Jesus’ Authority

Secondly, to pray in the name of Jesus is to pray with the authority of Jesus. When Jesus told His disciples to pray in His “name” He meant them to pray on the “authority of His person.” In the Hebrew mind the name stood for all that the person was; in this sense then the “name” and the “person” mean the same thing.

When we read the book of Acts, and the work of the disciples, they appealed to the name of “Jesus;” sometime the “Lord Jesus” or “Jesus Christ,” but mostly just “Jesus” (Acts 2:38, 3:6, 4:10, and many others). Why did they emphasize the name “Jesus” among the other

titles that our Saviour has? Paul told the Philippians that our Saviour has been “highly exalted” and given a “name that is above every name” (Philippians 2:9–12).

***We can pray with
purpose and
confidence, pleading
the promises.***

The name “Jesus” means “Jehovah is salvation” (Luke 2:21). Jesus is God. He lovingly came to save us, by being conceived in Mary’s womb, and born in Bethlehem with a real human body, like ours. After living, dying, and rising again, he ascended to heaven. Now his human body and mind share fully in the glory he has always had as God.

Now that he has accomplished redemption on earth, he is applying redemption in heaven. He has been given “all authority in heaven and on earth” for the establishment of his Kingdom (Matthew 28:11).

**Praying Because of Jesus’
Promise**

Thirdly, to pray in the name of Jesus is to pray with the guarantee of Jesus. He is the “Amen” of our prayers (Revelation 3:14, 2 Corinthians 1:20).

We use the word “amen” after a

prayer to express agreement—“so be it” (used like this in Jeremiah 28:6). The word “Amen” is used however, with the definite article as a descriptive title which the Lord takes to himself.

The word “amen” is a Hebrew word meaning truth, or firmness. Jesus is “the faithful and true witness” (Revelation 3:14; 19:11; 21:5; 22:6 cf. Isaiah 65:16 the “God of Amen”).

In 2 Corinthians 1:20, Paul said that all of the promises of God are guaranteed in Christ – they find their “yes” in Him. That is why through Him we can say “amen.”

We can pray with purpose, then, and confidence, pleading the promises of his Word, with assurance that he hears us, he is praying for us and with us.

This is the last point in the Westminster Shorter Catechism:

*And in testimony of our desire,
and assurance to be heard, we
say, Amen.*

The Heidelberg Catechism makes a similar point in a beautiful way:

What does the word Amen mean?

Amen means: it is true and certain. For God has much more certainly heard my prayer than I feel in my heart that I desire this of him.

THE COLOR PURPLE: MALARIA, SNAILS AND THE KINGDOM

Dr. Michael Haykin

In 1856, English Chemistry student William Henry Perkin was looking for a cure for malaria. Instead, he stumbled on a way to make an artificial purple dye from coal tar.

In so doing, he literally changed history, for his discovery led to advances in medicine, photography, perfumery, food production, and revolutionized the fashion industry.

Making ancient Tyrian purple

Purple has for many years been valued as a colour, because to create it was very difficult. According to the Roman scientist Pliny the Elder, the best purple dye was manufactured at the Phoenician city of Tyre (see 2 Chronicles 2:7).

The raw material out of which this dye was manufactured was obtained from the glandular secretion of a carnivorous sea snail. It took around 12,000 of these snails to produce a mere 0.05 of an ounce of dye.

Tyrian purple, as it was known, was literally worth more than its weight in gold and purple-dyed fabrics commanded exorbitant prices. As Pliny noted of ancient fashion, “it adds radiance to every

garment,” and this led to what he called a “frantic passion for purple” among the upper and middle classes of his world.

The Old Testament world had also been shaped by this passion for purple, where it was associated with royalty, prestige and power (see Proverbs 31:22; Song of Solomon 3:9–10, 7:5; Daniel 5:7; Esther 8:15).

Purple was associated with royalty, prestige, and power.

The Christian seller of purple

When the apostle Paul came to the city of Philippi, he met a woman named Lydia, who was originally from the city of Thyatira (in modern-day Turkey).

Ethnically she was Greek, but she had come to believe that the Jewish Old Testament contained the truth about God and the world, and thus she regularly met with a number of sincere Jewish women to pray and worship (Acts 16:14–15).

We are also told by Luke that she was “a seller of purple” (verse 14), which meant that she either sold the dye, or, more likely, sold purple-dyed clothing.

Lydia opened her home as a base of mission in the city of Philippi.

She would have been a woman of great wealth. Her regeneration by the Holy Spirit—“the Lord opened her heart” (verse 14)—led to her baptism, and she opened her home as a base of mission in the city of Philippi.

When Paul went with the Gospel to a new city, a key part of his mission strategy was to find a place where the churches could meet for distinctively Christian worship and fellowship.

So it was that in Philippi, the Lord used the wealth that Lydia had obtained by the selling of purple clothing, to serve Paul’s preaching about the Lord Christ.

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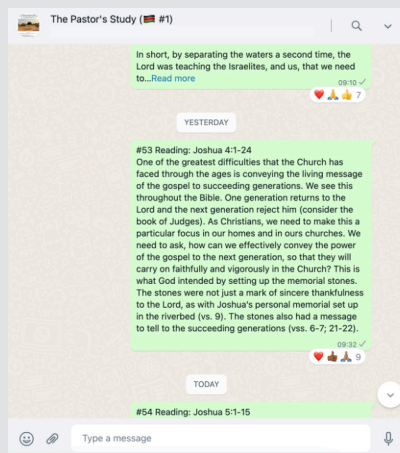
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WHAT IS YOUR NINEVEH?

Rev. Isaac Ong

Wouldn't it be nice that whenever we take a course of action, things just fall into place neatly? That seems to be the case with Jonah. "The word of the Lord came unto Jonah...Arise, go to Nineveh" (Jonah 1:1-2a). He knew what he had to do. It was a pointed and personal communication of the will of God to the prophet.

But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. (Jonah 1:3)

Nineveh was to the east of Joppa. Tarshish was some 2,500 miles to the west of Nineveh. Jonah was running as far as he could in the opposite direction, but things seemed to fall into place for him. When he went down to Joppa (present-day Jaffa), there was a ship sailing to Tarshish, and there was an open berth for Jonah.

Jonah not only defied a direct divine command and departed from God's presence, but he also deluded himself into thinking that the coming of circumstances neatly in his life proved that he must be doing the right thing.

As a matter of fact, Jonah was so at peace with himself that he fell fast

asleep even when the ship that he was in was caught in a raging storm.

*What are the excuses
that you imagine to
justify your running
from God?*

What is the situation in your life now? What is your Nineveh? What is the matter God has laid upon your heart from which you are trying to run away? What are the excuses that you imagine to justify your running from God?

You may say, "If only God would speak to me in the same way that He spoke to Jonah, then I won't be running away from Him." Well, God does speak directly to us. He speaks to us through His inspired Word and the Holy Spirit (John 14:26). The Holy Spirit through the Word brings direction and purpose to our lives so that we will run with God and not away from Him.

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