



THE ORCHARD

We Can Pray

Jonah 2:1-10

Pastor Tom Yoon

May 3, 2026

Recap:

- Last week we learned how we can follow God, even when it's hard to follow.
- And we saw how following God, begins with submitting to his word.
 - Following God isn't about fulfilling our plans.
 - It's not about choosing the most comfortable path.
 - Rather, following God means obeying his word, and trusting his plan even when it's hard.
- Then we saw how we need to remember our mission.
 - Jonah didn't care for the sailors in the boat.
 - They were trying to save his life, while he was trying to run away.
 - God was reminding us, that we need to share his heart, if we want to follow him.
- And then we saw how we need to rely on God's grace for strength.
 - We may feel that God is unfair.
 - But when we look at God's grace, we'll see how he's more than fair.
 - He's rich in love.
 - And as we remember how Jesus Christ pursued us even when we were his enemies, we can find strength to follow him.

Introduction:

- As we continue in our series, we'll see today how we have hope, because God hears us, even when our prayers are weak.
- Do you ever feel that your prayers are inadequate?



THE ORCHARD

- Perhaps incomplete or lacking substance?
- Do you ever feel that God's not answering your prayers because he's mad, or because you're not good enough, or because you've failed?
- Or do you ever feel, you don't know what to pray, and all you can do is ask for help?
 - "God please help me with my future."
 - "Please help me with my kids."
 - "Please help me with relationships."
 - "Please help me with my job."
- You may wonder if God will answer your prayer, despite your failures, despite your weakness.
 - But we'll see in our passage, how we have hope, because God hears us, even when our prayers are weak.

Four Ways:

- To begin, I want us to see from our passage 4 ways our prayers can be sincere, yet still be lacking.
 - Before looking at how God answers us, we'll first look at how our prayers can lack.

Point 1:

- First, our prayers can be sincere but lacking when desperation is the only thing that drives us to pray.
- After being thrown into the sea, Jonah began to drown.
 - I always thought God sent the fish right away.
 - But it's clear he struggled in the water for a good amount of time.
 - He writes how:
 - The floods surrounded him.
 - The waves passed over him.
 - Weeds wrapped around his head.



THE ORCHARD

- He went down to the roots of the mountains, the deep parts of the water.
- He struggled in the water.
- And so, Jonah cried out for help.
 - And Jonah chapter 2 records the prayer he prayed inside the fish.
 - But what's interesting is that his prayer also looks back to what he prayed, while drowning.
 - For example, in verse 5 Jonah says:
 - **“The waters closed in over me to take my life...”**
 - Then in verse 7 he says:
 - **“I remembered the Lord, and my prayer came to you...”**
 - He's basically saying:
 - “I was drowning.”
 - “But I cried out to God.”
 - “And he heard my prayer.”
- And because Jonah cried out to God, the Lord sent a big fish to save his life.
 - Jonah finally prayed to God.
- Now, it's great that Jonah prayed, but I want you to notice how low Jonah had to go.
 - Jonah wouldn't pray for the Ninevites.
 - He refused to pray for the sailors.
 - He refused to pray in the storm.
 - It was only when he was about to die that he cried out to God.
 - God literally had to bring him to his lowest point, to get him to look at him.
 - Yes, Jonah prays to God.
 - But it wasn't a willing prayer, it was a desperate prayer.
- Pastor Warren Wiersbe writes:
 - “His prayer was born out of affliction, not affection. He cried out to God because he was in danger, not because he delighted in the Lord.” (Wiersbe, Minor Prophets, 97)



THE ORCHARD

- And isn't this how many of us pray as well?
 - When things are good, we'll neglect our prayers.
 - Even when things aren't going well, we'll try to figure things out on our own.
 - It's only when we're desperate and have no other option, that we'll finally look to God and ask for help.
- I was listening to a sermon by Pastor Tim Keller.
 - And he mentioned how after 9/11, when terrorists crashed two planes in New York City, in the following weeks, his church was filled many people.
 - They had to have 3 or 4 services on Sunday, to accommodate all the extra people.
 - But after a few weeks, he said the numbers began to decrease, and that most of the people never came back.
- It's good that we cry out in desperation.
 - And it may be that our desperate prayer is what brings us closer to God.
- But if desperation is the only thing that drives us to pray, it may be a sign that we may be further from God than we think.
 - It may be that our hope isn't truly in God.
- Here we see, a desperate prayer.

Point 2:

- Second, our prayers can be sincere, but still be lacking when we don't take full responsibility for our sins.
- In Jonah chapter 2, Jonah states how he felt God's judgment.
 - In verse 4, he says that he was driven from God's sight.
 - In verse 6, he thought he'd be locked up forever in death.
 - But then, he states that he looked to God's holy temple.
 - He ran away from responsibility.



THE ORCHARD

- But he remembered the Lord, and now he recommits to going back to the temple, and serving the Lord.
- Jonah begins to repent, and makes a vow to serve the Lord.
- But I also want you to notice how Jonah's confession is lacking some details.
 - When you read his prayer, he never says:
 - "Lord, forgive me for my hatred against the Assyrians."
 - "Forgive me for disobeying your command to go to Ninevah."
 - He never says:
 - "Forgive me for my sins."
- This doesn't mean that we can't be forgiven, if we don't recognize every single sin.
 - But true confession requires that we acknowledge, that we are sinners.
 - King David writes in Psalm 32:
 - **I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgression to the Lord," and you forgave the iniquity of my sin.** Psalm 32:5
 - David acknowledged his sin.
 - And God forgave.
 - But in Jonah chapter 2, he doesn't explicitly state that he's a sinner.
 - He doesn't take responsibility for everything he's done.
- I think that's why God has to command Jonah again, to go to Nineveh in chapter 3.
 - If he fully repented, God wouldn't need to tell him again.
 - Immediately, after being vomited out, he should've just went.
- Here we see, how it's possible even for a mature believer to confess that salvation belong to God alone, to cry out to God, and still be blind to sin.
- And isn't this true of believers today?



THE ORCHARD

- Think of a person who faithfully serves.
 - But they fail to see self-righteousness growing in their heart.
- Or think of a person who's kind and caring.
 - But deep inside the person doesn't see, they act the way they do because they want to please others.
 - Instead of giving love, they're looking for approval.
- Or think of a person who comes to church and worships God.
 - But then, they see a person who hurt their heart, and they refuse to forgive.
 - They avoid that person.
 - They genuinely worship, but are blind to bitterness in their heart.
- Or think of a person who has a good reputation, and they begin to think of themselves better than others.
 - And they secretly judge others without even knowing it.
- You can cry out to God for help, and still refuse to deal with what's going on, inside your heart.
- We can lack, when we don't take full responsibility.

Point 3:

- Third, our prayers can be sincere, but still be lacking when we lack compassion for others.
- In verse 8, Jonah says:
 - **“Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love. But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay.”**
- Reading this verse, it seems as though he's speaking about the sailors who were praying to their pagan gods.
 -



THE ORCHARD

- Doesn't it sound like Jonah believes the sailors will be judged by God?
- **“Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love. But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you...”**
- He thinks they're separated from God's steadfast love.
- Shouldn't Jonah have prayed:
- “Lord, save the men who were trying to save me. May they turn away from their idols, and see that you are the only God.”
- But he believes the pagan sailors will be judged for calling out to pagan gods.

- What's ironic is that Jonah has no idea the sailors began to worship God after the storm.
 - Listen to chapter 1 verses 15 and 16:
 - **“So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows.”**
 - Jonah declares that he made a sacrifice and renewed his vow.
 - But so did the sailors.
 - Those who pay regard to idols turned to the true living God.
 - Salvation truly does belong to God.
 - God can save rebellious prophets, and even pagan sailors.

- Here we see how it's possible to receive mercy from God, and not want others to receive that same mercy.

- And so, let's ask ourselves:
 - “Have you ever questioned God's mercy for others?”
 - “Are there people you feel don't deserve God's mercy?”
 - Perhaps someone who hurt you, or someone you disagree with?
 - Instead of desiring judgement, let's pray that God would show his mercy.
 - As we ask for God's mercy in our lives, let's also ask for God's mercy in others.



THE ORCHARD

- Our prayers can be sincere, but still be lacking when we lack compassion for others.

Point 4:

- Fourth and finally, our prayers can be sincere, but still be lacking when we focus on our works instead of God's grace.
- It's very subtle, but there seems to be a hint of self-righteousness in Jonah's prayer.
 - Not only because he doesn't fully confess his sin, but because he keeps emphasizing all that he's done.
 - Jonah says:
 - "I called out to the Lord."
 - "I cried and you heard."
 - "Then I said."
 - "I shall look again."
 - "I remembered the Lord."
 - "I...will sacrifice to you."
 - "What I have vowed, I will pay."
 - In 8 verses, Jonah uses the pronoun "I" over and over.
 - A total of 10 times.
- And what's missing is gratitude and acknowledgment of God's grace.
 - When you look at the Psalms, you see many of the writers asking God for mercy.
 - Psalm 25:6 states:
 - **"Remember your mercy, O Lord, and your steadfast love..."**
 - Psalm 51:1 states:
 - **"Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love..."**
 - But Jonah doesn't say, "God remembered me."
 - Or, "God showed me mercy."
 - Or, "Be gracious to me O God."
 - Rather, he says, "I remembered the Lord."
 - It's true he received God's steadfast love.



THE ORCHARD

- But in Jonah's mind it's because he remembered, it's because he looked to the temple, it's because he didn't worship idols.
- And when we think like this, it can be a very dangerous thing.
- Pastor Tim Keller writes:
 - "Despite his breakthrough here, Jonah has not grasped grace as deeply as we might at first think he has. There is still a sense of superiority and self-righteousness...He sees the literal idols that the pagans worship and doesn't see the more subtle idols in his own life that keep him from fully grasping that he too, just like the heathen, lives only...by God's grace." (Keller, Rediscovering Jonah, 81-82)
- The danger of focusing on what we do for God, is that we begin to think, we deserve to be saved.
 - Or that God owes us for what we've done for him.
 - But let's remember, that everything we have in life, our homes, our jobs, our family, our salvation is only because of God's grace.
 - It's not because of anything we've done.
 - At the same time, let's also remember, when God takes things away, or doesn't answer our prayers the way we want, it's not because he doesn't love us.
 - It's because he has a good purpose that we don't fully understand.
 - Just because we don't understand, doesn't mean there isn't a good purpose.
- Some years ago, there was a young mother in our church who was very ill.
 - And so, her husband and father asked one of our pastors to come and pray for his wife, to spare her life.
 - And here's what the father prayed for his daughter.
 - "Lord you know how we love her and we ask you to give her back to us, but we promise that if you should take her, we will not love you less." (Smith, Jonah, 30)



THE ORCHARD

- The father was able to pray this prayer, because he wasn't focusing on what he did for God.
 - This father knew, that everything he had was a gift from God.
 - And he was saying:
 - "Lord, whether give or take away, I will trust in you."
 - "Whether you give or take away, your grace is all I need."
- Can we make that our prayer as well?
 - Let's learn to pray:
 - "Lord, your grace is sufficient for me."
- Our prayers can be lacking:
 - When desperation is the only thing that drives us to pray.
 - When we don't take full responsibility for our sin.
 - When we focus on our works instead of God's grace.
 - When we lack compassion for others.

Conclusion:

- And so, what can we do?

Application 1:

- First, we can cry out to God, because God hears our prayers of desperation.
- It's true that Jonah's prayer wasn't a willing prayer, but a desperate prayer.
- But let's remember that it was God who brought him to that place.
 - Jonah refused to pray.
 - But God didn't just let him go.
 - God didn't just leave him to run.
 - Rather, God kept chasing after him.
 - Jonah had to go down to Joppa, down into the ship, down to sleep, and finally down in the sea.
 - But he finally saw, that he needed to cry out to God.



THE ORCHARD

- Sometimes, the very best thing that can happen to us is the very thing we're most scared to face.
 - Why?
 - Because when we face our fears, when we have no other way out but God.
 - It strips away our self-reliance.
 - It humbles our pride.
 - And it removes from us, every hope, except for the hope we find in God.
 - And even though it's hard to face, this may be the only way God can lead us to pray and depend on him.
- I can't remember who said this, but I'm sure you heard it before.
 - You never realize that Jesus is all you need, until Jesus is all you have.
- That means, when we're brought down, and we cry out to him, God won't say:
 - "Why should I answer you, you're just praying because you've run out of options?"
 - Not at all.
 - Rather, God will hear your prayer, because he's the one who led you there.
- Our prayers aren't perfect, but he hears our prayers.
 - **"I called out to the Lord, out of my distress, and he answered me; out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and you heard my voice."**
Jonah 2:1-2

Application 2:

- Second, we can cry out to God, because he leads us to confession.
- What I find encouraging about this passage is how God answers Jonah's prayer even though Jonah's confession is lacking.
 - God didn't wait for Jonah to fully see his sin.



THE ORCHARD

- In fact, what we see throughout this story is that, it's God who reveals what's in Jonah's heart.
- Apart from the grace of God, Jonah wouldn't be able to see his hatred for the Assyrians.
- But it's God, who continues to show kindness, so that Jonah might see and repent.
- It's the same for us.
 - We don't have to clean ourselves up before coming to God.
 - We don't have to realize all our faults before coming to God.
 - We just need to come, just as we are.
 - And when we come, it's the Lord who opens our eyes, so that we can confess our sin.
- So, let's continue to confess what we know, and ask God to reveal what's hidden in our hearts.
 - Because God is the only one who can open our blinded eyes.
- And when God reveals our failures, instead of running away, let's ask the Lord to help us take responsibility.
- I know it's hard to face sin.
 - But let's also remember that when we confess our sin, God is also faithful to forgive.
- And so, let's consider:
 - Is there any sin that God is trying to reveal in our hearts today?
 - Pride?
 - Selfishness?
 - Anger?
 - Bitterness?
 - Lust?
 - Greed?



THE ORCHARD

- Or it may be that someone has recommended that you seek counseling but you're pushing it off because you're afraid what the counselor would say.
 - Let's stop running.
 - But let's cry out to God, and he'll lead us, not only to confession, but also to forgiveness.

Application 3:

- Third, you can cry out to God, because he cultivates compassion.
- In some way, I can understand Jonah's protest.
 - The Assyrians were a violent nation.
 - They were oppressing God's people.
 - And it was prophesied, they'd eventually judge the Israelites.
- But what we'll see throughout this story is how God continues to help Jonah understand grace.
 - He continues to show Jonah, his compassion for the world.
 - His love for those who have no hope.
- In the same way, I know that it may be hard to show compassion, especially to those who seem wicked and evil.
 - Especially to those who may have hurt you.
- But let's continue to love and pray for those who're hard to love.
 - Because as we cry out for others, God will work in our hearts, to love them, as he loves them.
- I'm not sure if you know who Corrie ten Boom was.
 - But she was a Dutch Christian, who helped hide Jews during World War 2.
 - Eventually her family were discovered and arrested and put in a concentration camp.
 - And sadly, her sister Betsy ended up dying in one of the camps.



THE ORCHARD

- After the war, she spoke about her faith and about the need to forgive others.
 - And in her biography, she speaks about a time when she recognized one of the guards from a concentration camp she was in.
 - He was from Ravensbrück, where her sister had died.
 - And this guard was at the church, where she was speaking.
 - After her talk, she said the guard began to make his way to her.
 - And he said to her:
 - “A fine message, Fraulein!”
 - “How good it is to know that, as you say, all our sins are at the bottom of the sea!”
 - “I have become a Christian.”
 - “I know that God has forgiven me for the cruel things I did...but I would like to hear it from your lips as well.”
 - Corrie ten Boom then writes:
 - And still, I stood there, with the coldness clutching my heart.
 - I prayed silently:
 - “Jesus, help me!”
 - And so woodenly, mechanically, I thrust my hand into the one stretched out to me.
 - And as I did, an incredible thing took place.
 - This healing warmth seemed to flood my whole being, bringing tears to my eyes.
 - I cried:
 - “I forgive you, brother!”
 - “With all my heart.”
 - For a long moment we grasped each other’s hands, the former guard and the former prisoner.
 - I had never known God’s love so intensely as I did then.
 - (Corrie ten Boom, *Tramp for the Lord*, 60)

- I know it can be difficult to pray for others who may have hurt us.
 - But as we pray for them, God will show us his love.

Application 4:



THE ORCHARD

- Fourth and finally, we can cry out to God because his mercy is perfect.
- What's amazing about this chapter is how God heard Jonah's prayer and answered Jonah's cry.
 - Even though Jonah was lacking.
 - God sent a fish to save Jonah's life.
- In the same way:
 - We may find ourselves calling out to God because we have no other option.
 - We may find that our prayer lacks confession, and lacks compassion, and that we don't fully understand God's grace.
 - But even then, when we cry out to God, he hears.
 - Not because our prayers are perfect, but because his mercy is perfect.
- The reason Jonah chapter 2 was written, wasn't to show us a model prayer, but a merciful God.
- And if you're here today, and you feel lost.
 - If you don't know what to say, if you feel like you're lacking.
 - The Lord is speaking to you and saying to you, to call upon him today.
 - Romans 10:13 says:
 - **“For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”**
 - It doesn't say everyone who prays a perfect prayer.
 - Or everyone who has the right words.
 - Or everyone who has everything figured out.
 - It says:
 - Anyone who calls on the name of Jesus Christ, can find salvation today.
- We have hope, because God hears our prayers, even when our prayers are weak.

Prayer



THE ORCHARD

- Silent prayer

- Father in heaven, we know that often times, our prayers are lacking.
 - We don't always see our sin, we struggle with self-righteous pride.
 - But help us to remember, that we can always cry out to you, because you hear the prayers of the weak.
 - When Satan temps us to despair, help us to remember, we can pray, not because we're good, but because you're good.
 - Because you're a merciful God.
 - Save us from our sins we pray today.
 - Amen.