

10 Takeaways From Jonah's Story That Could Apply to Justin Bieber

I watched part of the 2016 Billboard Music Awards a couple weeks ago and, after seeing Justin Bieber win Male Artist of the Year, I couldn't help but picture him being baptized in NBA star Tyson Chandler's bathtub.

I read an article that detailed the spontaneous water baptism after a sobbing Bieber had reached out to Hillsong Pastor Carl Lentz by uttering, "I want to know Jesus ... baptize me." While I was encouraged by what I read, I was saddened by the critical comment thread that followed.

Unfortunately, most of the criticism and judgmentalism appeared to be from those identifying as "Christian." I'm not making allowance for Bieber's shortcomings, but I'm sure glad my sins aren't national news headlines or accessible via video on TMZ. It seems that too often we forget where we used to be before we found Christ and you would think we would extend the same kind of grace and mercy that has been extended to us.

Enter Jonah.

God commanded Jonah to go to the great city of Nineveh to deliver a message of doom and gloom for 40 days—a message that God was going to destroy the city because of its wickedness. After his defiant disobedience landed him inside the belly of a fish for three days, Jonah's genuine repentance resulted in him receiving grace, mercy and a second chance.

After heeding Jonah's 40-day warning, the king and people of Nineveh—like Jonah—responded with repentance. And just like Jonah, they too received grace, mercy and a second chance. In fact, the Scripture actually says that God changed His mind.

“When God saw their actions, that they turned from their evil ways, He changed His mind about the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it” (Jonah 3:10, MEV).

After the people responded with repentance, Jonah did a happy dance, right? Nope. He was enraged! Instead of rejoicing that an entire city of more than 120,000 people was spared, he was furious that his prediction didn't come true. Apparently, he forgot or overlooked his own disobedience. This reminds me of the parable that Jesus told about a man who's enormous debt (think \$1 million) was forgiven. This hypocritical man whose enormous debt was forgiven chose not to forgive a tiny debt in comparison (think \$1,000) owed to him. God wasn't pleased. And God wasn't happy with Jonah's response either.

The moral of the story is—don't be like Jonah, but learn from his mistakes.

10 Takeaways From the Story of Jonah

- 1. Get up and go in the right direction.** God told Jonah to get up and go to Nineveh. Jonah rebelled by going in the opposite direction. Havoc followed.
- 2. Obey the first time.** Jonah could have saved himself some serious hardship (and nastiness inside a fish) had he simply obeyed God's first command.
- 3. You can't escape God.** Wherever you run to, God is already there. Surrender already.
- 4. You reap what you sow.** There's no such thing as karma, but Scripture is clear about something called sowing and reaping (Gal. 6:7-8). And while Jonah reaped what he sowed, God still extended grace and mercy.
- 5. Repent every time.** Jonah's repentance freed him from the fish and Nineveh's repentance resulted in God changing His

mind. True repentance allows God to deliver a second chance.

6. God is a God of second chances. The story of Jonah illustrates a God who is all about grace, mercy, and multiple chances.

7. Don't be a hypocrite. The fact that Jonah received a second chance but didn't believe 120,000 people deserved one is mind-boggling. Remember, the moment you point your finger at someone else, you have three more pointing back toward you.

8. Extend mercy. Jesus said in Matthew 5:7, *"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."*

9. Don't forget where you used to be. We are all sinners saved by grace, so the moment you think you're better than someone else—because you forgot that used to be you—is the moment you will fall on your face.

Stay humble and grateful.

10. Love people like God loves them, period. First Corinthians 13 is a pretty good guide to help you.

Whether it's a high-profile celebrity like Justin Bieber, an annoying coworker who gets under your skin, or that elderly neighbor down the street who yells at your kids when they turn around in her driveway (yeah, I'm preaching to myself)—when someone repents—be quick to forgive, slow to judge, and always willing to rejoice that God's grace and mercy has been extended in the same way in which it was extended to you.
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Chuck E. Tate is the founder and lead pastor of RockChurch, a growing and thriving congregation in the heart of Illinois. Prior to planting RockChurch in 1998, Chuck worked for a national youth ministry in Tulsa, Oklahoma. In that role, he managed and spoke at conventions across the United States and Canada, and co-produced a national television program that

aired on Trinity Broadcasting Network. His first book is titled 41 Will Come.