

Thank God for Second Chances

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Preacher: Fred Stone

- [0 : 00] A young man from Anderson, South Carolina, came home from World War II and realized his dream of playing professional baseball.
- After a few years in the minor leagues' lower levels, he realized, I'm never going to make it to the major leagues.
- And so he gave up baseball, settled down in Anderson with his wife and young son, went to work, and became a committed Christian.
- But not long after he left the baseball world, he found out that his wife was cheating on him. When he confronted her about it, she said she was going to leave him because, in her words, I married a baseball player.
- He was devastated, as anyone would be, but it hurt even more to be told that working a regular job and living a faithful Christian life was not what this woman wanted in a husband.
- [1 : 20] Well, a few years later, he met a single lady who was looking for someone just like him. Committed Christian, committed to home and family.
- They were married for 52 years until her death just a few years ago. Now, this man is 96 years old, and he tells everyone who will listen that the Lord blessed him with 52 years of marriage to a perfect wife.
- He emphasizes 52 years of marriage. He emphasizes 52 years married to a perfect wife. Now, it's obvious to anyone who knows this man's story that God gave him, that God graciously gave him a second chance at marriage.
- And he made the most of it. Have you ever thought about how God is in the business of giving people second chances?
- Well, that's going to be the focus of our study in Jonah chapter 3 this morning. If you would turn to the book of Jonah as we continue our study. We're now in chapter 3.
- [2 : 46] And what we're going to see is how God gave Jonah a second chance to do his will. Read with me.
- Jonah 3, verse 1. Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you.
- So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the Lord. Now, Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days' journey in breadth.
- Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's journey, and he called out, Yet 40 days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown. And the people of Nineveh believed God.
- They called for a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest of them to the least of them. We're going to stop there this morning.
- [3 : 51] The point that we are going to look at, what I want to really major on this morning, is that we serve a God who has a habit of graciously giving us second chances.

And the last word is plural. Because God gives us more than just one second chance, doesn't he? So what I want us to do is to look at this with the idea of, God has graciously given me chance after chance after chance after I've blown it.

I need to be thankful, and I need to learn to make the most of the second chances he gives me. Number one, I want us to say that God often gives us second chances.

Note in this little chart that will be on the screen, God's call to Jonah is nearly identical from chapter one to chapter three. Note in chapter one, Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah, the son of Amittai, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.

Then in chapter three, Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you.

[5 : 20] Jonah heard that call at the beginning, but he rebelled. He tried to get away from God. He didn't want to do it.

And then in chapter two, or the end of chapter one and chapter two, God pursued Jonah, broke him, humbled him. And Jonah responded by confessing his sin and coming back to God in a renewed commitment.

Well, now in chapter three, he is given for all practical reasons, the same call.

That's a sign of God's grace to Jonah. God is giving his rebellious prophet a second chance to be faithful. A commentator by the name of O. Palmer Robertson says, This helps us see some of the qualities of God's grace.

I want you to look at some of the qualities of our Heavenly Father's grace that we need to be so thankful for. Look at it. God forgets and never holds the things against you.

[6 : 32] Think of how wonderful are the implications of that one fact for your life. God simply does not hold grudges against people who humble themselves and ask his forgiveness through Jesus Christ.

Some of you may need to let that really sink in. God forgets when he forgives. God doesn't hold grudges against us.

He doesn't keep throwing it up to us. There may be someone in your life who refuses to forget your sin or your failures.

And they make it their point to not let you forget. Such people, I want you to understand, they are not God's messengers.

They're the devils. When God forgives, He cleanses us. He puts it in the past.

[7 : 41] He will not remember it anymore. And I want you to understand, if there's someone in your life that just won't forgive you, always bringing it back up, always implying something about your past failures, don't listen to them.

They're not worthy of your time or your attention. And they are certainly not God's spokesperson. That's just the devil talking through them. They may not be to the core evil, but they're acting in an evil kind of way.

And I want to encourage you, don't listen to them. There's some people who like to be that way. Don't listen to them. God gives us second and third and tenth and twentieth and hundreds of chances when we truly humble ourselves, repent of our sin, and come back to Him in obedience.

Jonah is a great example that God forgives. And God gives us fresh starts in serving Him.

You know, this is really not an unusual thing what we see in Jonah. Jonah, I mean, God has a track record of giving His people second chances, some of the most important people in the Bible.

[9 : 10] Abraham. Abraham. He was chosen by God to be the father of what would become the nation of Israel. Paul tells us in the New Testament that Abraham is also the father of all people of faith.

He's our father as Christians as well. When God first called Abraham, he didn't obey God fully.

I want you to look with me. It's going to be from Acts chapter 7. Stephen is sort of giving us an oral history of the people of Israel.

He tells us this about Abraham. When he was first called, he was living in a place called Ur, and God said, go out from your land and from your kindred and go into the land that I will show you.

That was the promised land, what would be called that later on. But Abraham stopped short of it. Abraham settled hundreds of miles from where God was going to take him in a place called Haran.

[10 : 20] Look at this from Genesis 11. Talking about Abraham and his family. They went forth together from Ur of the Chaldeans to go into the land of Canaan, but when they came to Haran, they settled there.

They shouldn't have. That was not where God was leading him. That's not where God was going to do what he was going to do through Abraham. Now, later on, God called, his name is Abram at this point in time.

He called Abram a second time. And look what happens. Genesis 12. Now the Lord said to Abram, go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land I will show you and I will make of you a great nation.

So Abram went as the Lord had told him. Abraham. He disobeyed at first.

He didn't do all that God told him to do, but God gave him a second chance. The Apostle Peter is well known for the way that he failed the Lord Jesus.

[11 : 35] He denied, not once, not twice, but three times that he even knew Jesus. Well, shortly after that, Peter was broken in his own spirit.

He repented of what he had done. And after Jesus arose from the grave, Jesus made it a point to restore Peter. We did a series on that from John chapter 21 a few years ago.

Peter had denied Jesus three times, so three times Jesus asked Peter, do you love me? And three times Peter said yes. Jesus not only restored him to fellowship with him, but Jesus also commissioned him or recommissioned him to feed his people, feed his sheep.

Peter received a second chance to be faithful. And that's what we see in chapter three. Jonah receives a second chance to be faithful, and this time he is.

Look again. He obeyed God's call in verse three. So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the Lord. We need to, we need to look carefully at how God gives his people, you and me, second chances.

[12 : 56] God often gives us second chances when it comes to obeying him, but, and this is an important but, he does it always.

One of the most shocking examples of God's ultimate discipline is found in the book of Acts chapter five.

I encourage you to read it today when you go home, the first part of Acts chapter five. A husband and wife named Ananias and Sapphira, they were church members. Well, they sold a piece of property, but held back some of the prophets and told the apostles they'd gave it all.

They'd given it all. It was their property and they didn't have to sell it. When they did sell it, what they got was their money. They didn't have to give any of it. But they, for whatever reason, maybe to look like someone special in the eyes of other church members, they lied to the apostles about what they had given and as soon as they were confronted about their lie, they fell down dead.

God killed them. God did not give them a chance to repent. God did not give them a second chance.

[14 : 22] I say this to say we need to be careful that we do not presume upon God's grace. Daniel Aiken points this out.

He says, we should never dismiss God's call or delay or delay in responding to Him. God does not guarantee a second chance. Sin and disobedience have consequences and it is possible to miss God's best when we refuse His plan or attempt to run from His presence like Jonah.

We cannot make too much of God's grace and God's mercy because the Bible from cover to cover, the Bible emphasizes our God is a God of grace and mercy.

I am not in any way trying to de-emphasize that but at the same time God does not choose in every instance to show grace but sometimes to give justice just like He did with Ananias and Sapphira and others that you probably can think about as you think about what you know about the Bible.

But while God does not guarantee us second chances He does often choose to show us patience and grace just like He did with Jonah.

[15 : 51] I am so thankful right now that God has been patient with me all my life. I am so thankful that He has shown to show me grace and not justice.

I am so thankful for the opportunities He has given me to confess my sin. For the guilt He has inflicted on me to cause me to want to turn from it.

I am so thankful that God has allowed me to come back to Him to make new commitments to serve Him afresh. I hope you are because if you're here that means you have experienced God's multiple chances multiple new starts.

More often than not God does offer us second chances. You may have never thought about it this way but John is describing God's second chances in one of the most important promises in all the Bible.

Look at this in 1 John 1.9 I've put it on the screen probably a hundred times over the years. If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

[17 : 14] that's God's promise of a second chance a fresh start if we confess our sin. He is faithful. He is just to forgive us and not just forgive us but to cleanse us and give us that fresh start.

God forgave Jonah. God restored him to fellowship with himself and God recommissioned Jonah to useful service.

That's what I want us to look at next. God sometimes blesses our second chances with great success. Jonah obeyed God's call to preach to the people of Nineveh and look how God blessed his efforts.

Verse 5 again and the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sack cloth. They publicly demonstrated their repentance and this happened from the greatest of them to the least of them.

We're going to go into more detail next week about how they responded how God worked and they responded what I want us to see here is God blessed Jonah's second chance in a tremendous way and that's not unusual.

[18 : 41] The Bible reveals that God greatly blessed some of his greatest leaders when he gave them the second chance. Abraham the father of the nation of Israel.

Well Abraham had the promised child Isaac after he got the second chance and went to that place. God did this real work of establishing Abraham in this what would become the promised land after Abraham responded to God's call the second time.

Peter his greatest success came after the Lord gave him the second chance and recommissioned him. You can read about it in Acts chapter 10 God used Peter to preach the gospel in the home of a Gentile named Cornelius which was God's way of just sort of announcing the gospel is for all people not just Jews and he used Peter to do that.

Later on God used Peter to write two letters to churches that are now part of our New Testament. Later on God made Mark the traveling companion of Peter and as Mark listened and wrote down what Peter was preaching Mark put that in what we call New Testament today in the form of his gospel of Mark that all happened after Peter's second chance.

Here's what I want you to understand God may greatly bless your second chance effort but you won't ever know until you try and you won't ever try unless you trust God.

[20 : 35] Richard Phillips points this out in terms of our willingness to be the Lord's faithful witness. Look at what he says. Many of us do not expect to see mighty works of God looking at things as we often do from a strictly human perspective.

So we do not expect to see our witness blessed with the salvation of a neighbor or a friend. I want you to think about this. Are there people in your life that you really love and care about who are not Christians?

And maybe you pray for them. Maybe you pray that God would send someone to share the gospel with them and they would be saved. Maybe you even pray that God would allow you to share the gospel with them and they would be saved.

Have you ever attempted to share the gospel with the expectation that God would work through you? That that person would listen and believe and you'd see them change?

They'd see their life change? Why is it that we if we're Christians our faith is something supernatural?

[21 : 53] We're believing in a supernatural God, a supernatural Lord. Why can't we believe that God could use us, would use us in supernatural ways like he did Jonah?

Jonah was just being obedient. Jonah was just sharing the good news that God gave him. actually, Jonah preached a message of bad news as we'll look at next week, but God even used that.

We are right to think that on our own we are unable to bring meaningful life change to other people. We can't do that on our own. But we're wrong to think that God cannot use us, that God cannot work through us to make life changes in other people.

You as a parent, you need to understand that God can use you to powerfully impact your children, your grandchildren, the children that you teach at school.

You need to think that God can use you to powerfully influence your friends. I like the way Warren Wiersbe makes this point.

[23 : 15] He says, the will of God will never lead you where the grace of God can't keep you and the power of God can't use you. God uses people just like us.

And He uses people just like us who have failed Him at first, who have failed other people at first. God is the God of the second chance.

We see in verse five that Jonah was not responsible for the way people responded to the message he preached. They didn't just believe Him. They heard this as a message from God and they believed God.

It says that. And the people of Nineveh believed God. I want to ask you right now, are you willing to be used by God to make the most of your second chance?

Will you trust God to use you to make a difference in your home as a husband, as a father, as a wife, as a mother?

[24 : 31] Will you trust God to use you to make a difference in your home as a child who honors your parents, who obeys your parents?

Will you trust God to use you to make a difference among your friends at school, or at work, or wherever else God wants to use you? You know, what we see here, Jonah chapter three, verses one through five, the way God used Jonah is supposed to encourage each one of us, no matter how strongly we have rebelled against God, no matter how far we have run from him and what he wants us to do, no matter how sinful we have acted or have become, if we're still breathing, it's not too late for us to humble ourselves before the Lord, come back to him, confessing our sin, turning from it, and renewing our trust in Jesus and commitment to him.

And I want you to understand, when God forgives you, he forgets. He's not going to throw it back up in your face. He's not going to use it against you.

And I want you to understand, when God forgives you, he restores you to full fellowship with him as your heavenly father. You don't have to be away from him and stay there.

And you need to understand who you are if you are a Christian. If you're truly trusting Jesus Christ, and if you have a real relationship with him, you need to understand your sins are forgiven.

[26 : 27] He paid the penalty for them when he died on the cross. His blood cleanses us, we can think of. And his righteousness, the perfect life he lived, that is credited to us.

It's like we're clothed with his perfect life. Don't you let anyone ever tell you that you are disqualified from serving God.

God, because of your past sin or failure. God graciously gives us second chances, just like he did Jonah, just like he did Abraham, just like he did Peter, just like he did David, just like he has me and everyone sitting on the road with you.

But like Jonah, we've got to obey God. God, we've got to make the most of his gracious second chance. And that's the question I want you to answer before you leave today.

Will you make the most of the grace God is showing you right now? God, we do it in a tangible way where you live, where you work, the people you're already involved in.

[27 : 49] God is the gracious God of the second chance. And a part of the grace he gives us is the grace to make the most of it.

Will you embrace it? Will you act on it? Let's pray together. Dear God, help us to see right now what it means for us to make the most of the second chance you've given us.

And help us to make that commitment. Lord, if there are people in this room who are not Christians, help them to understand that it is by your grace, through faith in Jesus, that they can be saved, forgiven, made your child.

Help them to do that now. Well, Lord, help us all to identify how we need to make the most of your grace, of your forgiveness, of your second chances.

And help us, Lord, to do it. In an attitude of prayer, you just do what God's telling you to do. I'd be happy to pray for you during this time. I'll be here at the front.

[29 : 14] You just listen to the Lord and obey Him.