

Making Excuses



SABBATH—OCTOBER 28

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Nahum 3:1–4; 2 Kings 17:5, 6; Jonah 2:1–3, 7–10; Jonah 3; Jonah 4; Isaiah 6:1–8.

MEMORY VERSE: “Then I heard the Lord’s voice, saying, ‘Who can I send? Who will go for us?’ So I said, ‘Here I am. Send me!’ ” (Isaiah 6:8, ERV).

Jonah went to Joppa and got on a ship going to Tarshish, located in what is now the south of Spain.

GOD CHOOSES people to serve Him. But not everyone is willing to serve God as Abraham was. Look at Jonah (read Jonah 1–4). God commands Jonah to warn the people of Nineveh. Nineveh was the capital city of the Kingdom of Assyria. Nineveh was located in the area that is now modern-day Iraq. The distance between Nineveh and Jerusalem was one month’s journey. Jonah refused to go. Worse, he ran as far away from Nineveh as he could get. Jonah went to Joppa and got on a ship going to Tarshish, located in what is now the south of Spain. The journey from Joppa to Tarshish was 2,000 miles. This trip would take a month, if the weather was good, and more time if it wasn’t. Jonah uses the month that it takes to get to Nineveh to get away from it. Jonah was a man of God. Why would he do that?

The Ninevites were evil people. They attacked Israel in the past. God asks Jonah to go to Nineveh anyway to warn the people there to stop doing evil (Jonah 1:2). The words in Jonah 1:2 are very much the same as the words God uses when he talks to Abraham about Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18:20, 21). As we will see, Jonah was no Abraham.

What can we learn from Jonah about the excuses we make to get out of doing the work that God gives us to do?

EXCUSE #1: FEAR (Nahum 3:1–4)

Read Nahum 1:1; Nahum 3:1–4; 2 Kings 17:5, 6; and 2 Kings 19:32–37. What do these verses tell us about Nineveh and the connection between Assyria and Israel? Do you think this connection had anything to do with why Jonah decided to go to Tarshish and not to Nineveh?

One reason Jonah may not have wanted to go to Nineveh was fear. The Assyrians were powerful and frightening.

“Nineveh was one of the most powerful cities in Old Testament times. . . . Nineveh was filled with crime and sin. Nahum, a messenger from God, said Nineveh was ‘a city of murderers [killers]! It [Nineveh] is full of liars! It is filled with stolen goods!’ Nahum compared the Ninevites to a mean and nasty lion who was very hungry. Nahum asked the Ninevites, ‘Is there anyone who has not suffered because of how badly you treated [attacked] them?’ Nahum 3:1, 19 [ERV, Nlrv].”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, page 265, adapted.

History writers tell us that the Assyrian King Sennacherib built many things in Nineveh. He built a very large palace in the southwest part of the city. The palace was 1,650 feet long and 794 feet wide (503 meters long and 242 meters wide). The palace had at least 80 rooms. Sennacherib also built 18 canals. The canals brought water to Nineveh from as far away as 40 miles (65 kilometers).

The Assyrians made beautiful things. But they also showed no mercy to their enemies. Sennacherib bragged about the nasty things he did to the Babylonians when he fought them. Sennacherib filled the streets of Babylon with the dead bodies of its citizens. He killed young and old people alike. Scientists who dig in the earth to learn about the past have found pictures carved into stone from that time. These stone pictures show Assyrian soldiers pushing sharp pointed weapons through the bodies of their enemies. Assyrians were not people you wanted to make angry. The Assyrians had no problem with hurting people or causing them pain. They used more strength than they needed against people they didn't like. For sure, Jonah shook with fear when he thought about walking among the people of Nineveh.

We may feel dislike for Jonah when we read his story. We may dislike him for letting his fear get in the way of his doing God's work. But we can do the same thing. We can allow fear, and not God, to control us.



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EXCUSE #2: FALSE BELIEFS (Jonah 2:1–3, 7–10)

When the storm came, Jonah blamed himself (Jonah 1:1–12). Jonah’s thinking shows us what many people believed about God or “gods” back then. These people believed that different gods controlled their countries and their lands. The sea was not controlled by the gods. The people believed the sea was the home of demons. Sailors thought that they needed to make offerings to the sea demons so that the demons would not be angry with them. The Hebrew religion did not teach this false view. But these false views may have caused Jonah to believe he made the sea demons angry. So, this false belief may be why Jonah blamed himself for the storm.

Read Jonah 2:1–3, 7–10. What do these verses show us about how Jonah started to understand God’s leading and watch care?

Jonah learned the hard way that God was in control. The wind and waves belonged to God. The fish, too. “The earth and everything on it belong to the Lord” (Psalm 24:1, ERV). Jonah gave his heart to the God of the earth and sea. So, God saved him.

We can misunderstand God and what He expects from us, too, the same as Jonah. Sometimes we think God wants us to remove ourselves from the evil on the earth around us. Yes, the Bible warns us to keep ourselves “clean from the sinful [evil] things” on this earth (James 1:27 NLV). At the same time, we should not hide ourselves away from people. We should do everything we can to bring God’s blessings and hope to people in need.

Also, we may believe that success depends on us. This belief is another false idea that may stop us from doing God’s work. We must remember that we are the same as Jonah: we can’t save anyone. Jonah couldn’t save Nineveh. Sometimes we behave as if we were a “savior.” But God doesn’t ask us to do His work. He asks us to work with Him. Saving people is work that belongs to God. We praise God for changing us, but only God can lead people to Himself. We plant “seeds” of Bible truth in people’s hearts. Only God can make the seeds grow. We often confuse our work with God’s. When we do, we may use that misunderstanding as an excuse not to share the Good News about Jesus with people. Yes, God used Jonah. But God, not Jonah, saved the city.



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EXCUSE #3: THE WORK IS TOO HARD (Jonah 3)

Jonah's experience in the fish's belly (read Jonah 2) was a powerful show of God's love and mercy. Jonah's prayer shows us that he understood God's message about His love. Sad to say, this miracle didn't mean that some of Jonah's old feelings had changed. Jonah went to Nineveh. But on his journey, he carried bad feelings about the Ninevites in his heart.

What did the Ninevites do when they heard Jonah preach? Read Jonah 3 for the answer. What lessons does this chapter teach us about sharing our faith with other people?

Jonah didn't like the Ninevites much, but he gave them God's message anyway. What happened next was amazing. The Ninevites confessed their sins and stopped sinning. When Jonah finally did what God asked him to do, God was honored among the Ninevite people.

God's work is a success when His workers are willing to give up what they want so that they can work for Him. Maybe they may not want to give up anything, the same as Jonah felt. But they do it anyway. We must give up what we want and put God's work first. Just as Jonah did, we may dislike the people that God asks us to help Him save. Our bad feelings may keep us from serving a person or a group who needs us.

It's not easy to see the hate in your own heart. We must have hearts empty of all pride. God's work takes time and energy. Helping other people and caring for them can make us tired and worn out. Our lives can be filled with stress. The last thing we may want to do is help someone solve their problems when we have so many ourselves.

We also need to change how we feel about our money. Our money is really God's money. He blesses us so we may support His work. Maybe we need to provide care for people. Or buy them Bible books. Maybe we need to pay a babysitter or housekeeper so we can have more time to do God's work. Doing God's work costs money. We may need to stop thinking about ourselves to help God do His work. The good news is that just as God worked with Jonah, He will work with us.

What is God asking you to give up so that people may be saved? Are you ready to trust Him to bless you when you give things up for Him?



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EXCUSE #4: WORKING WITH STUBBORN PEOPLE (Jonah 4)

“He [Jonah] complained to the Lord and said, ‘Lord, I knew this would happen! I was in my own country, and you told me to come here. At that time I knew that you would forgive the people of this evil city, so I decided to run away to Tarshish. I knew that you are a kind [loving] God. I knew that you show mercy and don’t want to punish people. I knew that you are kind, and if these people stopped sinning, you would change your plans to destroy them’ ” (Jonah 4:2, ERV). Jonah prays a beautiful prayer, doesn’t he? Or is his prayer really beautiful? What’s going on?

What is wrong with Jonah? Read Jonah 4 for the answer.

Jonah hated the Ninevites so much. He felt that dying was better than losing people’s respect when they heard that God didn’t destroy Nineveh. Jonah didn’t want people to think he failed as a prophet. A prophet is a special messenger from God. Jonah wanted Nineveh to be the next Sodom and Gomorrah. He wanted God to destroy the people he hated so much. When God didn’t do that, Jonah felt very embarrassed and angry. He was so ashamed he wanted to die.

For the second time in Jonah’s story, God gives Jonah a learning experience. This experience changes how Jonah views life. Our views about life don’t change because we hear something new or different. We make or change our views about life when we have a powerful experience. How we explain these powerful experiences causes us to change how we think about life.

God gives Jonah a new experience to help him understand that his ideas are mixed up and wrong. God causes a plant to grow large enough in one day to give Jonah shade. The shade protects Jonah from the hot sun. Jonah is thankful for the plant. Jonah is not thankful to God for giving the plant to him. Jonah doesn’t think of the plant as a miracle and as a gift from God. Jonah thinks he earned the blessing with his good works and behavior. When the plant dies, Jonah gets mad. He starts to doubt his worth and wants to die.

God talks to Jonah in a loving way. God tries to help Jonah understand that he is being very silly to care more about a plant than the thousands of men, women, and children in Nineveh and all their animals.



God causes a plant to grow large enough in one day to give Jonah shade.

HERE I AM. SEND ME! (Isaiah 6:1–8)

Jonah's story is more than a little surprising. Jonah refused at times to cooperate with God. But God saved the Ninevites anyway. This story helps us understand our part in God's work. We are only His helpers. Only God can change hearts. Jonah's story also helps us remember that God wants only willing workers with no pride in their hearts. God's workers will obey God and do everything He asks.

Read Isaiah 6:1–8. What important idea do we read about in these verses?

God is looking for willing volunteers. We must answer God with obedience. We must respect His leadership and listen to His voice. Then we must choose to obey whatever He tells us.

The story about Jonah also shows us God's love for people who don't know Him or His love. God had pity on Nineveh, and He has pity on the millions of people living in the crowded cities today. In these noisy cities, buildings stand where trees and flowers used to grow. The buildings and busy lifestyle make it hard for people to remember God. God said about Nineveh, " 'There are more than 120,000 people living there. Those people simply [for sure] do not know right from wrong!' " (Jonah 4:11, ICB). God needs messengers today who are willing to take His message of hope to the people living in the cities.

Isaiah heard Someone ask, "Who will go?" That "Someone" was God. (Isaiah 6:8). What will your answer be?

Task #1: Make a list of ten people who are not members of your church. Pray daily for these people for the rest of the quarter. Also, pray for deeper, loving, and more trusting friendships with the people on your list who you don't know very well. Pay attention to their needs, hurts, and pain. Then pray that God will meet their needs.

Task #2: Choose two cities: one near you and one somewhere faraway. Start praying for the people who live and work in each city. Ask God to send strong Adventist Bible workers to those cities to share Bible truth about the soon coming of Jesus.



God had pity on Nineveh, and He has pity on the millions of people living in the crowded cities today.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Jesus invites us to join Him in His work of saving people. Ellen G. White has a strong warning for people who don't do their part in sharing Bible truth.

“Many people make excuses for not doing God’s work. They are responsible for the work, even if they choose not to do it. God keeps a record in heaven. When His people refuse to help the ones that Jesus died to save, then God makes a record of their behavior in heaven. He writes in His books that they are not loyal servants. What if a pastor shuts himself away from the people who need His help? Is this pastor working as Jesus worked? Is he a strength and a blessing to other people? The ones who refuse to care for other people become selfish. What will help them change? They need to spend time with their brothers and sisters so that they can understand their hearts and minds. Then they will know how to take care of God’s people. They will give to God’s people the things that they need most at the time they most need them. The ones who don’t do this work show that they need to change. When they do, they will understand that they have not done their share of God’s work.”—Ellen G. White, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, August 30, 1892.

These words are very strong. At the same time, we must remember that God doesn’t leave us without hope, as Jonah’s story teaches us. “God gave Jonah important work. The workload was heavy for Jonah to carry. The God who asked Jonah to go was powerful enough to take care of Jonah and give him success. If Jonah had obeyed God without question, Jonah would have avoided many painful experiences. God would have blessed Jonah in many ways, too. But the Lord didn’t leave Jonah when he was filled with sadness. God used hard times and strange miracles to give Jonah hope. Then Jonah trusted again in God and in His power to save.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, page 266, adapted.



“God used hard times and strange miracles to give Jonah hope.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① What is your “Nineveh”? What excuses have you made for not doing the work God has given you to do?
- ② As a church, we have been given many precious Bible truths. What is stopping you back from sharing these truths with other people?
- ③ What fears do you have about sharing Bible truth? With God’s help, how can you let go of these fears?

A HOPE STRONGER THAN FEAR

As a girl, Grete suffered from panic sickness. She often woke up at night and felt afraid. Her heart pumped very fast. Grete's fear was so strong that she wondered if her heart would burst. She didn't know where to go to get help. Life scared her. Going to school and walking on the street scared her, too. She didn't think anyone in Germany, where she lived, could help her.

When she couldn't sleep, Grete often thought about her friend Annika. The two girls grew up together and sang in the children's choir. Then Annika got sick with cancer. Annika was brave. She put her trust in God. She told her parents, "Don't be afraid. I know God loves me. Everything will be fine." Annika died without pain or fear.

Annika's faith surprised Grete. Grete was scared every night. Annika's words were the first time that Grete heard about a loving God and everlasting life. Grete wondered if heaven was a real place. "How can I get there?" Grete thought.

Grete stopped suffering panic at night when she was 14. But she continued to feel afraid and lonely. Then she met her future husband, Nico. Nico didn't go to church every week. But he had strong faith in God. Nico's parents were Seventh-day Adventists. They welcomed Grete to their home for the Christmas holiday. They were the most loving family Grete ever spent time with. During that holiday, Grete's heart was filled with so much surprise and happiness that she ran upstairs to cry.

Grete felt God's love in that home. She knew then that God could help her to stop feeling afraid. Grete saw that God is powerful. He can save anyone. Grete felt safe for the first time. She wanted to feel safe forever.

Grete started Bible studies. Later, she and Nico joined the Seventh-day Adventist church on Germany's Rügen Island. Nico and Grete didn't know it at the time, but the church almost shut down because it didn't have enough members. Nico and Grete were an answer to the prayers of the church members. One of those members was Nico's father, Gunthardt, who was the head church leader. Today, Nico and Grete are happy members of the growing church on Rügen Island. Not long ago, the church built a larger building for all its new members.

Grete says, "The most wonderful thing in my life is that I got to know Jesus. I know that knowing Him is the best thing I ever did in my life. My life is so happy."

Thank you for your Sabbath School offerings that help church workers share the Good News about Jesus with people in Germany and in other countries all over the earth where people aren't very religious.

INSIDE
Story
by ANDREW MCCHESENEY



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