

Pay Attention to the Signs

Some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, “Teacher, we want to see a sign from you” (Matthew 12:38).

Scripture: Matthew 12:38-42

Song: “Increase My Faith”

Maddie pondered the mix of addition and subtraction problems on her paper. She squinted her eyes and scratched her head in frustration. Her tutor reminded her that the signs are important. “What signs?” Maddie asked. Her tutor pointed. Maddie stopped guessing answers and began to use the plus and minus signs to guide her thinking.

We might rush through life and overlook the signs we need to see, or maybe we think we already know enough. The Pharisees and scribes wanted another sign even though they had rejected all those already given. They would still refuse to accept Jesus, the Messiah. Getting everything wrong to that point, they refused to accept the one who stood before them. But another, final sign—a sign not to miss—was coming. It would be like the sign of Jonah: Jesus’ crucifixion, burial, and resurrection three days later. This is an event in history to see and accept because it confirms that Jesus is the risen Savior. He gives eternal life and freedom from the bondage of sin to all who will receive.

Father, thank You for sending Your Son, who died and resurrected so that I can live in Your holy presence forever. In Jesus’ name, amen.

May 24–30. **Melondy Roberson** lives in southeast Texas. She is a special-education teacher who enjoys spending time with her family and mentoring youth at her church.

No Greater Love

“The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and now something greater than Jonah is here” (Luke 11:32).

Scripture: Luke 11:29-32

Song: “No Greater Love”

Linda remembers yelling “You don’t love me. You are the worst mother ever!” as she stormed out of the kitchen. That was also the first time that Linda saw tears stream down from her mother’s eyes. That evening, Linda felt remorse for what she had yelled at her mom. She also realized her mother wouldn’t allow her to go out with her friend because that friend was not a good influence. Linda now knows that her mother’s words and tears were evidence of her love.

God demonstrated His love and grace for the people in Nineveh through the judgment and deliverance Jonah preached. It was a harsh message, but they listened and repented. God showed mercy (Jonah 3). The Father sent His Son as the greatest evidence of His love. Jesus warned the Jews that they were not listening or responding to the Father’s love as well as the Gentiles in Nineveh had done. That is why such Gentiles were in a superior position to these Jews—an idea completely abhorrent to them.

God’s judgment will be real. It is important to recognize God’s love while we have time. It is because of His love that He guides us, protects us, and saves us. Do not miss the gift of God’s love for you in Jesus.

Father, thank You for Your great love for me. Help me see Jesus more clearly. In His name, amen.

Why Are You Running?

Jonah ran away from the LORD and headed for Tarshish (Jonah 1:3).

Scripture: Jonah 1:1-12

Song: “Lay Down My Pride”

Sara sat in her parked car crying and telling herself, *I am done with this marriage. I'm packing up and leaving. That man doesn't deserve me.* But she knew deep within that this was the wrong way to respond to another marital conflict. And working up resolve to leave became more difficult as she thought about her wedding commitment to love. She got out of her car with a decision to go back into the house and try to manage her anger and talk with her husband. That night, 20 years ago, became one of many steps toward a renewed marriage built on devotion and commitment.

Jonah was God's prophet called to speak for God. He had accepted that call, but when it came to speaking to Nineveh, Jonah abandoned his God and his call because of his anger. The people of Nineveh were Gentiles and a dangerous enemy of Israel. Most Jews, and probably Jonah, hated them. Jonah let his anger direct his life.

Anger hinders hearing God's Word and obeying it. It can harden us against God's love and against proper behavior toward others. Naming and managing our anger is not always easy, but doing both can help us admit our need to ask God for help. Asking for help, before we do the wrong thing, can lead us to peace within ourselves and goodness for others around us.

Father, please help me manage my anger so I can love others as You do. In Jesus' name, amen.

Responding to Mercy

[The sailors] took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm. At this the men greatly feared the LORD, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows to him (Jonah 1:15-16).

Scripture: Jonah 1:13-16

Song: “Our God Is Mercy”

Kate was a teenager when she snuck out of the house one night to join a group of friends. She was the only one with a license. While driving, her attention drifted toward her friends, and the car ran off the road and rolled down an embankment. Everyone was able to climb out of the car with only cuts and bruises. Scared but grateful, Kate recognized God’s mercy for her, despite the consequences that would come for her decision.

Because of His mercy for Jonah and the people of Nineveh, God protected Jonah so he could still turn around toward obedience and the task God gave Jonah in the first place.

God has shown all of us His mercy. It is up to each of us to recognize what He offers and to respond with obedience that goes beyond ritualistic attempts to appease Him. God calls us to fear Him and receive His love that leads us to confession of our sin, repentance, and daily devotion to Him and the instruction in His Word. God makes His mercy available as long as we have breath. Each day gives us more opportunity to recognize His mercy and respond in faith.

Father, thank You for Your mercy that invites me to live in Your love and devote myself to follow Your Word. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Sharing God's Love

“I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity” (Jonah 4:2).

Scripture: Jonah 4:1-5

Song: “Mighty to Save”

Ten years ago Michelle received another unsatisfactory performance review at her job and was told that if she did not make significant changes quickly, she would be let go. The failure was due to her addiction to alcohol—the same reason most of her friends were abandoning her. She was not showing up when she said she would, was not following through on her commitments. One of her few remaining friends listened to Michelle complain about her situation on one of her few sober evenings. That friend helped Michelle realize that even though she felt rejected and defeated, God had not rejected her. She could return to God for help.

Jonah eventually went to the people of Nineveh and warned them that God was about to reject them if they did not repent (Jonah 3:3-5). Out of compassion, God gave them time and watched for their response (v. 10).

God is slow to become angry, but He will not tolerate sin forever. He is watching for all who will come to Him for help and mercy. He is ready to show compassion. We can share the love of God with others by sending them a message that can change their lives. No matter how far down or far away from God someone is, they are not fully lost.

Father, thank You for Your great compassion. Help me share Your love with people around me. In Jesus' name, amen.

God Provides

The LORD God provided a leafy plant and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the plant (Jonah 4:6).

Scripture: Jonah 4:6-11

Song: “Provider”

After paying for a new furnace, money was tight. Emmy's mom wondered how she was going to also pay her daughter's college fees. She went up to the attic, where it would be quiet, to pray. As she kneeled down, she noticed a tin box that she had not seen before. It had “Emmy's College” written on the top. Inside the box were several \$100 bills left by her late husband, who had passed away years earlier. Recognizing the money as God's provision, she praised Him for knowing and meeting her need.

Jonah was glad for the shade plant but did not recognize that God had provided it, nor did Jonah thank Him for it. Jonah is not a good model for us. But we can be different by opening our eyes, minds, and hearts to perceive God's goodness for us. He knows what we need for life (Matthew 6:31-32) and also what we need for godliness (2 Peter 1:3). He is able to meet all our needs. Our part is to remain alert and receptive to notice His provision for our lives and to recognize His work to grow our faith. Then we thank Him for His presence and respond to His work in our lives.

Father, thank You for providing for my physical and spiritual welfare. Help me to see Your work in my life. In Jesus' name, amen.

Simply Repentance

“Let people and animals be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish” (Jonah 3:9-10).

Scripture: Jonah 3

Song: “Heart of God”

Jonah was reluctant to go where God sent him (Jonah 1:3). When he eventually did go, his message was very short (3:4). From what Scripture says, Jonah didn't seem to help the people know how to avoid God's judgment. He was reluctant to lead Nineveh to God or help the people grow in relationship with Him. These were parts of a prophet's job that Jonah didn't do.

The king listened to Jonah and feared God. And while the king was uncertain of the outcome, he at least said “Who knows?” (3:9) and led the people into hope. And he was right. God requires a repentant and humble heart (Isaiah 30:15; Ezekiel 18:32). Encouragement to repent is the core of the real prophetic message. Wearing sackcloth and sitting in the dust (Jonah 3:6) were the king's decisions for outward expressions of the sincere confession and repentance that God saw during the 40 days of watching and waiting (v. 4).

Trust in God and repentance that moves us into faith and steady, consistent obedience are what God requires from everyone.

Father, thank You for the opportunity to return to You in faith and repentance today. In Jesus' name, amen.

A Reputation for Truth

The servant replied, “Look, in this town there is a man of God; he is highly respected, and everything he says comes true” (1 Samuel 9:6).

Scripture: 1 Samuel 9:5-10

Song: “Take My Life and Let It Be”

Often in television courtroom dramas, we hear the prosecuting or defense attorney try to discredit a witness of the opposing side. The same thing probably happens in real courtrooms (minus the dramatic background music). A little lie or a forgotten indiscretion is revealed, and the testimony of a witness becomes useless. The seed of doubt about that person’s integrity is planted. Everything he says is suspect.

According to today’s Scripture, Samuel did not have that problem. He was referred to as a man of God, highly respected, and a teller of truth. People trusted what Samuel said. He spoke God’s truth when it made people feel good. He spoke God’s truth when it hurt. He spoke God’s truth when it went against public opinion and made people angry.

Like Samuel, we can be people of God’s truth—accurately conveying the message of His Word. We can also testify about what God has done in our lives. And we must be people of our word—living with integrity that backs up our testimony and gives honor to Him.

Father, help us daily to live lives of integrity that glorify You and Your Son. In His name we pray, amen.

May 31. **Wanda B. Pelfrey**, a retired preschool teacher, lives and writes inspirational mysteries with her retired minister husband, Danny, in Georgia.