



- I. **Ice breaker.** *Getting to know each other questions.* (10 minutes)
  - What is your favorite spring flower?
- II. **Read today’s scriptures** out loud, slowly, either in unison or using a designated reader and move into scripture quiet reflection. (3 minutes)

<sup>5</sup> The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth. <sup>6</sup> When Jonah’s warning reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust. <sup>7</sup> This is the proclamation he issued in Nineveh: “By the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let people or animals, herds or flocks, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. <sup>8</sup> But let people and animals be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. <sup>9</sup> Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish.” <sup>10</sup> When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened. Jonah 3:5-10

**Scripture quiet reflection:** (5-10 minutes)

This is a time to personally reflect on this week’s scripture. Have a paper and pen available.

**1. Read.** Read through the passage silently.

**2. Reflect.** Notice any words or phrases that particularly draw your attention and stand out to you. How do these words/phrases speak directly to you and your present situation? Write your insights.

**3. Respond.** As God has spoken to you in the Scripture, respond back to God in prayer. What do you want to say to God? What else does God want to say to you?

### III. Sermon and Scripture Application Discussion. (20-30 minutes)

- A. As you reflectively engaged the Scriptures, what stood out to you from these passages?
- B. Last week, we saw the gloomy message Jonah delivered to the Assyrians by the command of the Lord: “Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown.” The Assyrians were one of the cruelest and most violent empires in ancient times, and God was bringing judgment upon them for their wickedness (1:2).

**The Assyrians were known to torture, dismember, and decapitate their enemies, cutting off their legs and one arm leaving the other arm so they could mockingly shake hands with the victim as he was dying. God saw the need for appropriate justice because of their wickedness. Justice is coming back in vogue where we see people crying out for justice for those who horrifically abuse their power to hurt others. (KF)**



- In our culture today, we continue to see the inappropriate and horrific abuse of power that calls for justice. Kevin shared the story of Rachael Denhollander told in her book, *What is a Girl Worth?* As a teen, Rachel was sexually abused by U.S. Olympic gymnastic physician, Larry Nassar, who sexually abused hundreds of young girls who came to him for treatment.
- How did the Assyrians abuse their power and influence? How do we see those in our culture today abuse their power, someone like Larry Nassar?
- Think about your influence and power over others – as a parent, supervisor, spiritual mentor or counselor, spouse, or friend. How might your influence or power in these roles be abusive in these relationships?

**Power is influence. We all have power to some extent, and we use that power to either negatively or positively influence others. It's part of our human nature to want glory and esteem. But we need to be aware how we use our power to not abuse it. Abuse of power is sinful behavior that does not bring God glory.**

C. The message is preached to the Ninevites, and they respond by believing God, proclaiming a fast, and putting on sackcloth. The text implies God's Word was preached with power, and their response was immediate.

- What influence, if any, do you think the King's response had with the people of Nineveh? How would you describe his leadership?
- Kevin shared three stages of the response of the Ninevites: inward, articulate, then outward.
  - Believed God – they accepted the message as true. Believing doesn't necessarily result in a saving faith.
  - The depth of their repentance allowed God to relent regarding his judgment He preached against them.
  - According to the text in verse 5, what was the response of the Ninevites? Have you ever witnessed this kind of humility in the life of the church? If so, share with your group.
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**Sackcloth was worn to publicly express mourning, sorrow or regret. Someone wanting to show repentance would normally wear sackcloth, sit in ashes, and put ashes on their head. Sackcloth was a coarse material usually made of goat's hair, making it uncomfortable to wear (GotQuestions.com).**

- The Ninevites had a trio of external actions: fasting, ashes, and sackcloth. These are meant to be signs of genuine inward repentance.
  - Fasting is not to be used as a manipulation tool, but as a means of humility softening our hearts towards God.
  - Read Is 58:3-9. What kind of fasting does God require?



“Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers. <sup>4</sup>Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high. <sup>5</sup>Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for people to humble themselves? Is it only for bowing one’s head like a reed and for lying in sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD? <sup>6</sup>“Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? <sup>7</sup>Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter— when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? <sup>8</sup>Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness<sup>[a]</sup> will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard. <sup>9</sup>Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I.

- D. When God saw their response to His warning, He relented and did not bring destruction to Nineveh at that time. Relenting is God staying true to His character – He is merciful!
- Discuss God’s unchanging character - that He is the same yesterday, today and forever, and doesn’t change His mind – and the shift from judgment to mercy.
    - Numbers 23: 19 - God is not human, that he should lie, not a human being, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?
    - 1Samuel 15:29 - He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind; for he is not a human being, that he should change his mind.”
    - James 1:17 - Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.
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    - Jeremiah 18:7-8 - If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, <sup>8</sup>and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned.
  - How do you view the doctrine of sin as someone who stands condemned with no way out to save yourself? Do you view this as bad or good news?
  - Sin requires everyone to call urgently upon God and give up their evil ways and their violence (Jonah 3:8). How we choose to live our lives really matters to God.
  - Evaluate your own heart and choices. What areas in your life is the Lord asking you to repent from? Sit quietly to reflect and listen to the Spirit.
  - If you’re comfortable, share what God has spoken to you. Pray for one another.