

HUMBLE YOURSELF, REPAIR WHAT YOU CAN +++

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Well, hi, my name is Zach and I'm a sinner. Welcome back to week four of our Sinners Anonymous support group. I'm so glad that you are here. And if you're new here or maybe somebody invited you, you're like, what did you just invite me to? When I think of an anonymous group, I think of alcoholics and narcotics and gamblers and sex addicts. What is this?

We have been working through two things the last several weeks and the next few weeks. Number one, we're going through the entire book of Jonah in the Old Testament, learning from God's prophet. And number two, we're learning from the 12 steps made popular by Alcoholics Anonymous. And we're seeing that these 12 steps are actually really practical biblical principles, principles, maybe even a way of life for practicing things like confession and humility and today repentance.

And so we're diving into this because we recognize that, yeah, maybe not every one of us is an addict, but biblically we are all sinners. And frankly, I think that recovery communities sometimes talk about this, this idea and the steps that we're taking with a level of honesty that those of us who attend church on a Sunday can learn from. There are people sitting in folding chairs in church basements on Monday nights and Thursday nights that are able to talk with a depth and a level of honesty that sometimes Christians that show up on Sunday mornings to worship God in padded chairs, pretend like everything is fine and it's not.

And so again, welcome to Sinners Anonymous. And you might've thought we've been deep so far, but we're going to go even deeper because I found in the Fremont toy section, this amazing book about Jonah. So can I read Jonah for you? Let's bring out Johnny. Let's get into some story time here. I need a little, little music behind me. Can we welcome Johnny to the stage? Johnny our Miller Worship Director, I just want to kind of catch you up in where we've been in this really deep book called Jonah. Yeah, yeah, that was good. Do that again. Yeah. Oh yeah, now I feel ready. All right, let's story time. Come on in. Lean in folks. Here we go.

God picked Jonah for a special cause to go to the city and enforce his laws. God told Jonah he must obey. Jonah was scared and ran away. He boarded his ship and went to sea, but from the Lord, he could not flee. God caused a mighty wind to blow nice and toss the small boat to and fro. The frightened sailors began to yell and into the water. Jonah fell. A giant fish came into sight and swallowed Jonah in one big bite. In the belly of the fish, Jonah stayed for forgiveness. He prayed and prayed for three long days and three long nights. Jonah suffered his terrible plight. God would punish Jonah no more and made the fish spit him out on shore. Jonah was changed that very day and he promised God he would always obey. The end.

Can we give it up for this amazing book, for Johnny, for the depth of theology that our campus director, Tyler, is leading the Fremont people into. What a great story. By the way, if you want the other titles in

this series, you can read Joseph, Baby Jesus, and Noah at some point too, except one thing. They left out the last two chapters. And you may have thought we've been deep already, but we're going deeper. If you're ready to go deep, say, I'm ready to go deep.

I'm going to show you the part of the story that they don't teach in Sunday school. And if you left it at this point, the lesson might be kids obey God, or you may get swallowed by a fish. And we're not done. There's a lot more, a lot more to this book. In the 12 steps, we have these cards at each one. If you haven't grabbed it, you can grab it on your way out in any campus. We've been working through these 12 steps.

And so far where we've been is in week one, we, with our sin, recognize that, that it's my fault. Like I'm powerless. Like as much as I want to get myself out of this sin and work my way through it, like at some point we have to say two words. I can't. In steps two and three, though, we came to believe in a higher power. We know that higher power's name is Jesus. And so we said, Jesus can. And in response to that, so I surrender, I made a decision that I'm going to surrender.

We started looking at what surrender looks like. How does that play out in steps four and five last week? And we said, well, it starts by examining yourself. We said, we got to look inside and then work towards confession. Tell the truth. Tell the truth. And in Jonah, we left off exactly where this book left off, that Jonah went to Nineveh and he obeyed. What it doesn't tell you and what I told you last week is he preached possibly, well, for sure the shortest sermon in the Bible and possibly the least inspiring sermon in all the Bible, eight English words.

And what irritated me, I spoke about this last week, is not only the lack of effort he put into his message, but how amazing the outcome was because, well, I just work a lot harder and don't see the outcome that he got. And we landed in these four words, the Ninevites believed God. So today we see what happens next. And if we're real, steps one through five, they've done a lot of work. We have gone deep. We've made progress, not perfection, progress. And so far we've gotten to the place where we're recognizing I can't, Jesus can. So I surrender, I'm examining myself and I'm confessing and I'm telling the truth. I'm honest with where I'm at.

Today we're going to cover a lot of ground, steps six through nine, because it's really great to know and to confess and to see what has been around you. But at some point, what happens next? Steps six through nine are really about repentance and it asks the question, are you ready to repent? And what we're going to see in repentance is that repentance is not saying, I'm sorry. It's not just feeling something, it's doing something. And I would put before you today that steps six through nine is a way to do repentance that has worked for millions upon millions upon millions of people and may just work for you too. So we've got a lot of ground to cover today.

So let's get back into it. And amazingly, we're going to see steps six through nine play out, not in God's prophet Jonah, but rather these nasty Ninevites. Verse five, the Ninevites believed God, and now we keep moving. A fast was proclaimed and all of them from the greatest to the least put on sackcloth. So they believed God and then something changed about them. And that takes us directly to step six. Let's say these words together of step six, we're entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.

And this is a challenging step. Again, I think there's a difference between admitting something is wrong where we've been and being ready for God to remove what we need him to remove. Because sometimes don't you want God to forgive you and remove the guilt? But you don't say it this way, but you, you think it don't take away my sin. So we'll say things and we'll bargain with God. And so we might be like, God, I know my marriage is struggling. I know I'm not perfect. Will you help us? And then God would say, okay, but first, can I, can I show you what needs to change in you? And we're like, well, actually, God, I have a list of my spouse. Can we start with her first?

We want God to remove the consequences and clean up everything around us while the enemy would very much love for that character defect to stay right inside of us. So God fix, fix my financial mess, but don't talk to me about my spending habits. God, oh, I'm so anxious. Will you take away my anxiety, but I'm not willing to let go of anything that might deal with the pace of life in my life. God restore trust with my family, but don't make me tell the whole truth. The truth is that each of us likes the immediate gratification that sin can provide. Otherwise, you wouldn't be tempted because you know, it's not right. And you know, it leads you astray and what the steps and what I'm calling you and what Jonah and God, what we're all calling you to do is to live and pursue a holy life.

And the reality is, is that a holy life is a lot of boring, small, consistent steps in the right direction that don't immediately produce gratification, but in the end lead to the life you actually want. The challenges along the way is to get out of those boring, small, consistent steps in the right direction and choose sin for gratification. We like what comes of our sin. And so step six asks us, honestly, are you ready? Like really ready? Not are you strong enough? Not I can fix myself. We know we can't. I can't. And we know who can. So I surrender. This is what I've done. I'm sorry. And I'm ready. That's hard.

If you look at Nineveh, a few verses ago, they didn't even know Jonah's northern Israelite enemy prophet was coming into their town. And the reality is that the collective immediate gratification that they experienced from their world domination and from destroying other people was extensive. I mean, think about the power and the wealth and the fame that they had built up. They were collectively experiencing that immediate gratification. And somehow, somehow, through this lackluster preacher and a lackluster sermon, they believed his message and they recognized that even though all of this gratification is around us and we're seeing good things, that ultimately we will be destroyed and we don't want that. And so they're ready, which moves us into step seven.

Let's read step seven together. Humbly asked him to remove our shortcomings. Humbly asked him to remove our shortcomings. And ironically, the picture of humility that is greatest in the book of Jonah is going to come from none other than the king of Nineveh. Verse six says it this way. When Jonah's warning reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from the throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust. The most powerful man, maybe the most evil man in the city, takes off his comfortable robes and puts on sackcloth, which is really itchy, scratchy clothing. And even more gets in the discomfort of sitting down in the dust. This is humility.

And I love that phrase, just the king gets off the throne. And maybe that's the picture of humility that you need to see today. Because a lot of times we love so much about Jesus. We love that he is our savior and we know we've made mistakes. We've written those mistakes down. We're sorry for them. And we love that by his grace, we've got a place secured for us forever in heaven. Salvation is ours. We love that part. We love Jesus as savior. We love Jesus as counselor, that he pours his Holy Spirit into us and we've got wisdom and advice to help her along the way. We love Jesus as friend, that when

someone in this world or our friend or a loved one lets us down, we've got a friend that is closer than a brother.

We love all those things about Jesus. The part about Jesus that maybe is the hardest is Jesus is Lord or King. Because if he's the Lord and King, that means that he gets to reign and he gets to kind of tell me how to live. He gets to tell me who I am and what I do. And I submit to that. And that's challenging because we like to stay on the throne. Verse seven, this is the proclamation the King 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, but let people and animals be covered with sackcloth.

And by the way, you know, repentance has gotten serious when even the cows are fasting, right? Can you imagine being one of those cows? Like, I don't know what this Northern Israelite prophet preached, but somehow I lost lunch. It's a weird scene. Everybody involved from the greatest to the least, the Kings, nobles and cows, which tells us something about repentance is that repentance is personal, but it's not always private.

In recovery communities with addiction, at least they say it this way, that the opposite of addiction is not sobriety. The opposite of addiction is connection. You want to get through addiction? You stay connected. You do it with somebody. And really recovery communities have just modeled what the church has known, but sometimes struggle to practice is this statement of we heal better in relationships. We heal best, I would say in relationships, because what's true about addiction is true about sin is that sin loves secrecy and isolation.

The enemy loves keeping you in those places because then the enemy can lie to you and he can tell you things like your sin doesn't matter. It's just yours. It's private. It's not going to hurt anybody. It's just a little thing. And then if actually you feel convicted or like it's a big thing, then the enemy will say, actually, well, nobody in the 8 billion people in the world is going through what you're going through. You're different. And so you should keep that to yourself. Lies.

And I've watched this happen over and over with the people in recovery. Had the awesome opportunity to be president of a recovery ministry that came out of our church in Florida for more than five years. And it was a year long program at that time, just men. And I would hear their stories and be so excited that they're in the program and what great steps that they would take. But there were times when someone would come to me and every time they would say this, it would, it would hurt me because I knew what was going to happen.

They would say something to the effect of here's what my life was and praise God, like I am healed. Like God just miraculously took the desire out of me. And so I'm grateful for that and I get why everyone else needs the steps and why they need to show up for meetings and why this program is good for them. But I'm going to leave early. I don't need the meetings because the desire is not there anymore. Others need a sponsor and I don't. And I would watch what would happen. They would leave the program. They would relax on their recovery and you know what would happen for about a month or so they would go off adrenaline and things would look really great. And then it would be crash and burn and they would often fall the hardest.

We heal best in relationships. I 100% believe in a God that can immediately make a person change and take the desire away. He can change your life in a moment. He can do that in the waters of baptism.

But something that took you years or maybe decades to form inside of you takes both ongoing practices and community as God continues to form it out of you. You weren't designed to do this life alone. You need somebody. Every one of you needs somebody.

So I probably seven or eight years ago now at this point, I was in ministry and I saw this pattern happen in others around me. And I started recognizing that I don't, I didn't have the appropriate accountability in my life that I thought was important. And so I approached someone who is a pastor in ministry like me here, wired very similarly to one another. And I asked him and I said, Hey man, I want to be the best that I can, a great dad, a great husband. I'd love to be a faithful pastor. And more than any of that, like just to be an awesome disciple of Jesus. And I don't have accountability in my life. And I'm wondering, can you be my accountability partner? I'd love for somebody to talk with, to process life with. I'd love to tell you the times that I fail and confess to you. Is that something that you can do for me? And if you need that for you, I'd be happy to do that for you. And he said yes to both of them.

And so we talk on Fridays and we hear about what's going on in each other's life. We confess our wrongdoings and we pray for one another and we hear God's words of forgiveness over our life. And it's one of the most important things I do every single week. We all need someone. A few weeks ago when Pastor Greg asked us to pull our phones out right away and text somebody in the message that you're grateful for, that you want to encourage, my accountability partner was who I texted. Again, I'm not saying that God can't work supernaturally in and through you. He does actually. And he can remove those character defects. What I'm saying is that staying pure, staying holy, remaining righteous, and doing the work of repentance is not a one-time statement, a one-time belief, a one-time act. It is daily, repeatedly, and it happens best in community, progress, not perfection.

And the Ninevites show us this. It starts with the king. He doesn't issue a decree telling everybody else while he stays on the throne. He goes first, puts on sackcloth, sits in the dust. And then he says, verse eight, let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. So we're going to do this. We're going to humble ourselves. We're going to ask God to remove these character defects, but then we're going to do something. We're going to change. And this is where we get to steps eight and nine.

Step eight, let's say these words together, made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all. This is where we get deeper. Sin is never as private as you want to think it is. And so, yeah, we mentioned earlier some of those lies of like, this is my thing, my choice, my life, my problem, not impacting anybody. But you know, if you have walked alongside of anybody that has a sin, a pattern in their life, you know that that's not true. If you need an example of this, chapter one, Jonah is running away from God and literally waves are splashing onto the boat that the sailors did not deserve to be in. And so we said, addiction has splashed damage. Sin has splashed damage. Your sin impacts those around you.

Not saying that to condemn you, but to convict you. If you're a dad that drinks regularly and too much, your kids feel that. If you're a mom that lies or a wife that lies, the other spouse lives with the consequences. If you gamble away money, somebody else loses their security. If you constantly explode in anger, everybody in your house has got to walk on eggshells. You become obsessed with your career and the people that you love the most get your leftovers. You gossip and somebody else's reputation pays the bill. Sin is relational, which means repentance is relational too.

You can't always fix what you broke. You can't undo words that came out of your mouth. There are consequences to our earthly sin. There are years you can't get back, and there are people that may never trust you the way that you want them to trust you, maybe the way that you once had it. There are relationships that will never be the same. But repentance asks, what can I do now? Who did my sin affect? Who's paid a price for my choices and decisions? What damage did I leave behind?

If you did the homework or the challenge from last week, we had you actually start listing out the ways in which you failed. You answered the question, where have I not been, rather, the person God has called me to be? And now this step is actually placing names of those that have been hurt by your choices and decisions. Inventory starts to get names on it, and it gets deeper and harder.

Step nine, which we'll read in just a moment, remember those in recovery communities often say that step four and step nine are the hardest. Step four was actually examining ourselves and taking the time to do that. And step nine then, this one's really hard, let's read it together. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others. And so what this step is asking you to do is to not just say, amend is not the same as apologizing. I'm sorry, and now what can I do?

You would know this if you're a parent and you've got two kiddos or more, that eventually those kids are going to fight, someone's going to throw a punch, and you're going to try to rationalize with them and they'll say things like, well, he started it, she started it, she did this, he did that. And eventually at some point, you're going to force them to say two words, I'm sorry. If you're a really great parent, you should also force them to say, what can I do now? Because that's how they say, I'm sorry. Now, I didn't do that as a parent. If I could go back, I would have. So I'm kind of a hypocrite in telling you to do that, but you should do that. What can I do? What can I do to repair what I've done?

If you stole something, repentance likely means returning it and maybe more. If you lied, it would be correcting that lie and maybe more. If you damage somebody's reputation, it might mean going back to the people that you talk to and telling the truth and maybe more. If you owe money, it might be making a plan to repay it and maybe more. And I want to be careful here because step nine is careful. It does say wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others. And so in other words, wherever it's wise, wherever it's appropriate to make things right, make things right. But making amends doesn't mean because you're on this journey and praise God, you're on this journey that you barge back into somebody else's life that you've hurt so that you feel better. It also doesn't mean if you've been hurt by somebody and they're going through a similar process that you have to let them back in your life. And it certainly does not mean that a victim needs to reenter an unsafe relationship. You get what I'm saying? Sometimes the most loving amend that you can make is to respect somebody's boundary and to change your behavior and leave that somebody alone.

What I'm saying is the splash damage of our sin is really complex. And that's why it's so important that you aren't doing it by yourself, but you've got somebody in your life, in your world, a sponsor, an accountability partner, a pastor, a counselor, a trusted friend, that in the challenging times, you can say, hey, what should I do? What is appropriate in this case?

So as we enter back into the story of Nineveh, the king is not just saying everybody believe Jonah and get down in the dirt and feel sorry. He's saying, no, we've got to stop the violence. We've got to turn from our evil. We've got to call on God and we've got to change our direction. We got some work to

do. And then verse nine says, who knows? I like even that humble. Who knows? I mean, we know because we knew who God is, right? But who knows? He doesn't know. He's new to the faith. He says, God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish. Who knows?

The king isn't bargaining with God. He's not saying, okay, God, we fasted. We put on the sackcloth. Our cows haven't eaten today. So we did it time for you to reward us. He is humbly saying, who knows? And he's throwing himself and his city at the mercy of God. And verse 10 shows what happens 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. What a great verse that God relented and he did not destroy them. He changed. He relented when they turned, he changed.

Now the Hebrew word for relent is a word that like is a breathing strongly or a sigh. Some translations, English goes far to say God changed his mind. God changed his mind. My seminary professor read Lessing actually wrote a 496 page commentary on this four chapter book. So again, it's a little deeper than this would go. And if you want that book, let me know. I'll find it for you. But in the book, he had an excursus, an article that had the question, does God ever change his mind? It's a really fascinating read. And what it says is that this word relent, the word that they're using there is as close to it as it happens. And when this word shows up, that it's hard to know, like did God change his mind or was God there first and already was going to be doing it like the order of it sometimes is kind of confusing.

But what we're read Lessing goes to my professor is he says, what's amazing is that when this word is ever used, here's the reality that it is always and only for our benefit. That when we cry out on to God, that, that, that we know who knows, we know that God, when we throw ourselves at the mercy of God, we know that God will give us mercy. Now, did God change his mind? I don't know, because gosh, as I look at the story of Jonah, the appropriate thing wouldn't be to say that the Ninevites did this. And so God rewarded them because actually didn't God show up first, didn't God send a prophet twice, by the way, an enemy prophet to go into their land, to give them these words, to give them this warning, to give them the opportunity to even throw themselves at the throne. Maybe God was there all along, especially when you think of verses like Psalm eight verses three and four, which I love these verses. It says, when I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you've set in place, what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them. And so does God change his mind or was God's mind on them before they turned?

The truth is that before it's ever on your mind to change, God is mindful of you. And before you even drove here to church today, God was mindful of you. Before you heard words that you thought might've been perfectly for you and responded to them. And for a second thought that you did this or I did this. No, God was mindful of you first. That's what we see in the story of Jonah. It's not a, it's not a, I know I'm a sinner. I made mistakes. And so I figured it out and I'm all cleaned up. And so God, now will you accept me as a perfectly finished, clean product? No, the word of God says that Jesus came for us while we were still centers. Oh, we were still centers.

And as we look at this king of Nineveh who did so many things wrong, but this one thing, right? He is a picture of the person that centuries later would do what this king did perfectly. Our King, this King, the one we sing to that is seated on the throne. What did he do? He got off the throne. What did he do? He didn't just put on sackcloth. He was stripped and put on a crown of thorns. He wasn't just a little

uncomfortable seated in dirt for a little while. He was whipped and beaten so much so that they crucified Jesus. And didn't just place him in dirt, but buried him. He went into the dirt.

Sin has splash damage. Your sin has splashed damage. You are not to look at Jesus on the cross and look at the scene that day and say, how in the world could they do what they did to Jesus? You are to look at the crucified Jesus, hands spread apart and say, my sin is what held Jesus there. Your sin has splash damage. And the gospel is not, you were so clean that Jesus received you. The gospel is not, look at how well I'm making amends. I'm the best amend maker in the world. Will you receive me now, God? The gospel is before, during, and after this process, as good or as bad as you work these steps, his grace is for you. It meets you at the cross. His grace comes to you and then his grace moves through you. The king is a picture of what Jesus would do perfectly. Anybody grateful for this God?

So if I could summarize these steps, cause we like to summarize it and make it memorable. Step six and seven, humble yourselves. Steps eight and nine, repent. Steps eight and nine, repair what you can. This is what repentance looks like. Your challenge this week is maybe some of you did that list from last week is to ask the questions of after I've acknowledged my brokenness, my sin, the ways I've missed the mark, who has been hurt by that? And what would love require me to do now? That's deep. That's hard. Repentance is turning and we don't do it to get God. We do it because God got us. Amen.

I'd like to invite you to stand at all campuses. I'd like you to start with our opening posture of the series, which is hands to the side and a little behind you, powerless position. There is power in powerless. And on the count of three, I'd love for you all to say, hi, my name is, put your name in and I am a sinner. One, two, three. Hi, my name is Zach and I am a sinner. Welcome. You can't say I can't. Jesus can. So I surrender. One more time. I can't. Jesus can. So I surrender.

We looked inside last week. We confessed our sin this week. We humble ourselves. And so I'd like for you in a willing posture to take one half step forward and place hands with palms open right here and lean in, lean in and pray with me. God, this is, this is our posture today. We humble ourselves. We know we can't. We know you can. We surrender. We're sorry. Lord, help us to be the people you've called us to be. To practice repentance and grace for one another. It would help us to get off of our own thrones where we have fallen. And we thank you that no matter how well we do at these steps, that you're with us, that you're for us, and that we already have your grace. It's in your name we pray and together all campuses say, amen.