



# Changing People

# Jonah 2:7

TO: NEBRASKA STATE SENATORS

FROM: REV. PERRY M. GAUTHIER

DATE: MARCH 17, 2010

*Have you heard the true story about the little girl riding with her mommy in the car? She was old enough to be out of a car seat, but young enough so as not to understand all the issues of automobile safety. One spring day she got into an argument with mommy.*

*Now little Suzy was like the girl in the Mother Goose rhyme who had a curl in the middle of her forehead: "When she was good, she was very, very good, and when she was bad, she was horrid." You see, this cute little girl, with the curly curly curl, possessed an iron will.*

*Her mother noticed as they prepared to back out of the driveway that she was standing up on her seat. Her mother promptly and politely told her that she needed to sit down and buckle her belt. Suzy immediately answered with a simple, strong "NO!"*

*Her mother asked again with a firmer tone. A second answer came back from the girl with the furrowed brow, "No, I don't WANT to sit down." After all, Suzy was enjoying the view on this beautiful spring day.*

*Suzy's mother now instructed with pursed lips "Now Suzy. Obey mommy and sit down, now, and buckle your seat belt, please!" Suzy refused as she pushed out her lower lip. In this battle of the wills, Suzy reasoned in her little person brain that she should be able to see out the window just like a big person gets to.*

*Already late for their appointment, her mother gently but firmly guided her daughter's body down into her seat, firmly clicking the seatbelt's buckle for her daughter's safety.*

*The story concludes with Suzy's bold pronouncement to her mother as they pulled out into the busy buzz of traffic. She protested, "Mommy! I want you to know that I may be sitting down on the outside but I'm standing up on the inside!"*

*That story reminds me of the maxim Dale Carnegie put forth, "Those convinced against their will are of the same opinion still."*

*That story also reminds me of Jonah, the prodigal prophet, a full-grown man, and a man of God who also had an iron will. Until*

*now, we have seen Jonah being very disobedient in the four-chapter book that bears his name. Finally, Jonah's iron will has been broken as we watch him sink into the sea.*

*Today we will study Jonah's repentance and the hinge point of his change of mind. We will see principles about changing people. How do people change? Why do people change? When do people change? Can we change people? Why is it that we often cannot even change ourselves? We will find relevant answers to these pressing questions in Jonah 2:7.*

**Jonah 2:7** "While I was fainting away, I remembered the LORD, And my prayer came to You, Into Your holy temple."<sup>1</sup>

## I. CHANGING PEOPLE—PRESSURED PEOPLE

Our short passage today is a passage about repentance. Biblically, repentance is a change of mind, not so much a change of the actions. A mere change of actions is what the world's religions have as a goal. However, Biblical Christianity teaches that a change of actions without a change of heart is hypocritical, inauthentic, not pleasing to God and short-lived.

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**"THOSE CONVINCED AGAINST THEIR WILL ARE OF THE SAME OPINION STILL."**

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Changed actions matter to God but not unless they are well motivated from a biblical change of mind, from a true change of heart. The New Testament Greek word for repentance is the compound word *meta-noeo* (μετάνοε'ο)<sup>2</sup> and literally means "to change (*meta*) the thinking (*noe'*o)."

Right actions matter to God, but not more than right thinking. Right deeds are critical in God's eyes but are less critical to him than right motives. More precisely then, Biblical repentance is a change of mind that produces a change of actions.

That said, what we see in Jonah 2:7 is Jonah finally changing his mind. His

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change of mind will affect his actions (his willingness to pray.) We should think about what is motivating Jonah to change his mind. In a word: pressure.

**Jonah 2:7a**      *"While I was fainting away..."*

The first principle we see here is that Jonah changed his mind because he could no longer live with the pressure his sinful choices had placed upon him. God gave Jonah a call to preach to Nineveh. God said, "Go!" Jonah said, "No!" Like the little girl with the curl, Jonah's will was iron and his disobedience was horrid. God, like a holy hurricane, chased Jonah in tough love with stormy seas and lightning bolts. Finally, God threw (literally "hurled") Jonah into the ocean. Jonah did not yet know that a sea savior (in the organic submarine called the "great fish") would swallow him whole. He simply sank into the sea to what seemed to be his certain suffocation.

Jonah's life is ebbing away. He realizes his choices have not been wise. What a tangled web did Jonah weave! Now, as he drops in his drowning, he feels himself fainting. An article on the web page wiseGEEK.com,<sup>3</sup> tells us that a person faints when the brain stem and at least one of the hemispheres of their brain are not receiving an adequate supply of oxygenated blood. Jonah has held onto one last precious pearl of oxygen, one last bubble of life-giving oxygen, like a wide-eyed puffer fish. The panic-attack, pain and pressure that he is facing are finally great enough to cause him to change his mind.

John C. Maxwell is a former Methodist pastor who now does leadership training and motivational speaking around the world. As I heard him speak at The Dallas Convention Center in January 2005, I jotted down this note:

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**"PEOPLE WILL CHANGE WHEN THEY KNOW ENOUGH THAT THEY KNOW HOW TO AND PEOPLE CHANGE WHEN THEY HURT ENOUGH THAT THEY HAVE TO."**

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Pressured people change. Why? Because they hurt enough that they have to. This is Jonah, in an underwater world of hurt; and he has changed. He has been pressured into real regret and remorseful repentance. As we will see next, he has a change of mind.

### II. CHANGING PEOPLE—REAL REMEMBRANCE

**Jonah 2:7b**      *"...I remembered the LORD..."*

Jonah's body is sinking down, down, down but his heart and mind are lifted up to "the LORD" his God. Often the end of our sinful trying is the start of our humble praying. Why is it so often that we do not "remember the Lord?" I believe it is because we do not always walk by faith. Like the young girl with her curl and the old Galilean prophet with his problematic stubbornness, we walk by sight. We want to live life the way WE want to live life. We forget the Lord because we do not want Him, in His lordship, to tell us how to live our lives. We do not want to live by faith in Him. We stick our lip out and say things like, "I will walk by sight!" and "I will stand up in the car" and "I will flee to Joppa." Deep in our mind, we are choosing to walk in sin.

When Jonah "remembered the Lord," he remembered Him in a relational way. This was not just remembering that God existed. Often the Bible uses the word "remember" in this special and close relational way. The thief on the cross asked Jesus to "remember" him in paradise after their deaths on their Good Friday crosses. In communion, Jesus told the church to observe that symbolic supper of communion in "remembrance of Me." He wanted us to remember His sacrifice as our Savior, as He sacrificed His body and blood, when we partake of the communion bread and wine. He wanted us to remember His lordship in our lives, when He instituted the sacrament of communion, when we eat at The Lord's Table.

This special relational recall is what Jonah experienced under pressure as a person in pain. The pressure helped produce his repentance, which is a change of mind.

While Jonah's head is wetly wrapped in salty seaweed, his mind is "remembering." The prophet's synapses are firing in total recall. He remembered the God he had forgotten. He recalled the Lord he had run from. He returns in his mind to a proper relationship with his Lord. Jonah has repented with real remembrance. He has changed his mind.

### III. CHANGING PEOPLE—PROSTRATE IN PROPER PRAYER

Biblically, repentance produces fruit. The proper change of mind will produce the proper change in actions.

Have you heard the true story of how the great Judean prophet, John the Baptist, stuck out his boney prophetic finger one day and thrust it towards the Pharisees and Sadducees? They had decided to gather at the river for baptism. John knew their desire to be baptized was as shallow as the ankle deep water of the Jordan River, in which they stood, while waiting in the line of baptismal candidates. However, John's voice cried out in that wilderness against them. He demanded much in the muddy Jordan waters.



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**Matthew 3:4 & 6-8** *Now John himself had a garment of camel's hair, and a leather belt about his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey... [And those in Jerusalem] were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, as they confessed their sins. But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" Therefore **bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance; (NAS; emphasis mine).**"*

The prophet John was preaching in the water about 26 AD what the prophet Jonah was experiencing in the water about 776 BC. Namely, that real repentance (in the mind) brings a change in the actions (or the fruits) of the life.

So what are the underwater fruits of Jonah's relational repentance? Prayer.

**Jonah 2:7c** "... And my prayer came to You ..."

The word "And" is a linking conjunction. It links the preceding thoughts about Jonah's relational remembrance to his proper praying. The author of Jonah records that Jonah thought "I remembered the Lord AND my prayer came" to Him. His repentance produced prayer.

Jonah's fruit of repentance and proof of his change of mind was his proper praying.

Some prayers are shallow, only ankle deep, and like muddy water. However, true prayer is properly "poor in spirit" and directed toward the Lord. Like the prayer of the thief on the cross, properly repentant prayers say, "Lord, remember me, a sinner, who needs forgiveness."

Like a wild stallion,<sup>4</sup> Jonah, the running prophet, has had his strong will broken. God's patient and unrelentingly strong chastisement has finally pressured and pushed Jonah towards repentance and change.

Now Jonah has become poor in spirit. He has now become strong in faith since he has been weakened in pride. He is walking by faith, not sight. In the underwater silence of the deep, dark ocean, Jonah cannot walk by sight. One preacher quipped, "Jonah spent the night on a foam blubber mattress." In his stay in the Fish-Tail Hotel, Jonah prayed proper prayers, poor in spirit.

Proper prayer is one of the surest signs of changing people. Changing people pray. It is as if they know enough that they want to. There is something about hurting enough that you have to pray that automatically

teaches you to know enough that you want to. People changed by pressure and pain become very teachable in spirit, and return like children, with childlike faith, to the Lord.

Unlike our stubborn little Suzy girl with her curly curl, repentant people learn to sit down on the inside and from that calm and humble center, they pray. Our minor prophet Jonah has learned a major lesson about sitting down on the inside. He is now offering up proper prayers—*finally!*

### IV. CHANGING PEOPLE—GOD'S GOOD GRACE

The final point in our passage is that people are changed when they have confident hope that their prayers are actually heard. Jonah, in repentance, by faith, knows that God will hear his prayers. God is a stand-at-the-door-knocking kind of God. He is relational. He is more than ready to receive those who will open the door, and all those who come to Him. Jonah knew this. His thinking was not muddled with guilt or pride. Once he settled down and sat down on the inside, he knew with clean, simple, pure childlike faith that his loving heavenly Father would hear his prayer. Our text records his prophetically childlike statement of faith:

**Jonah 2:7c** "... And my prayer came to You, into Your holy temple."

Jonah knows his heavenly Father will hear his prayer. Jonah's prayers have nothing to do with Jerusalem, that most sacred biblical city or its multimillion-dollar temple completed by rich King Solomon in 960 BC (roughly 200 years before Jonah prayed this deep-sea supplication). Solomon's temple was in Jerusalem. However, Jonah was not in Jerusalem. Jonah was in jail—whale jail. "*Do not pass GO! Do not collect \$200.*"

Jonah was not in Jerusalem but God was not receiving Jonah's prayer in Jerusalem's Temple either. Jonah was in solitary confinement in the great fish. However, his great God was not confined to Jerusalem's temple. Nor was He kept under the gold lid of the Ark of the Covenant. He was not limited to The Holy of Holies in Solomon's Temple atop Mount Zion in the capital city of Jerusalem. Although that was the most special place on earth in Jonah's day, God was certainly not trapped there. The God who was receiving Jonah's prayer was in His heavenly temple, where He is today.

God is in His sacred heavenly temple where He sits mercifully upon a throne of grace. Thus enthroned as their loving Lord, He sits concerned to hear the prayers of His people. God knows that people change when there is grace enough to allow them to. God loves to hear all prayer—even the prayers of Prodigal prophets. God surely loves even His most prodigal people who get themselves in trouble. God knows that such people will repeatedly find



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themselves in need of mercy and grace. The writer of the book of [Hebrews](#) penned encouraging words for us about our weaknesses as people. That Biblical writer knows that we will all sin like Jonah, the prodigal prophet. He knows that we are all tempted from within to sin, like the little girl with her forehead curl “standing up on the inside” in childish pride. We are all people in need of help, in need of mercy and in need of change:

**Hebrews 4:15-16**      *For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore, let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

### V. CHANGING PEOPLE AND CHANGED LEGISLATORS

The point of our passage has been the need for repentance, the need for change. We are all like Jonah. We all sin. We all walk by sight, run from God’s callings and stand up on the outside and the inside.

First, by way of application, let us learn this lesson from Jonah’s life: that we often force God to help us change by using the pressures and pains of chastisement. Pressured people change.

Secondly, God created us in His image for a real relationship with Him. As one senator told me this year, “*Sometimes we can work ourselves away from the faith.*” I knew what he meant. Legislators are the busiest people I am privileged to know. They put in long hours of hard work and sacrifice significantly. Their public service and financial sacrifice is entirely admirable. However, in working for the people, are you working yourself away from the faith? Perhaps it is time to “remember the Lord,” in a very real relational way.

Thirdly, realize that your prayer life as a Nebraska State Senator is indicative of your relationship with the Lord. One of the truest fruits of repentance is proper and persistent prayer. Christian citizens have a biblical obligation to pray for you as their political leaders. You also have a Biblical obligation to pray for your own life and work, as their leader. Proper prayer requires a real and right relationship with the Savior. Remember Him.

Fourth and finally, be encouraged that no matter how far you may feel from the Lord, He sits in His heavenly temple still. He is instantly in tune with people who are changing, and wants to hear about the pressures of their lives. The King of all kings has not left His throne, and it is a throne of grace to give mercy and help in time of need. Look to the grace of God.

Senators, may I respectfully ask—are there changes that are overdue in your lives? You can change when you *know enough*, with childlike faith, that you know how to. You can change if you *hurt enough* that you feel you have to. You can also change when you *believe enough* that God’s forgiving grace is there for you. His grace will allow you to change as soon as you see that it is time—time to make a change.

I will leave you with the lyrics to a song that I have thought about more than once this year after hearing the song sung in the posthumously released movie “*This Is It.*” The movie is about the final concert preparations of recording artist Michael Jackson. The chorus reminds us of one of the most important ways we can apply these principles about “Changing People.”

“I’M STARTING WITH THE MAN IN THE MIRROR

I’M ASKING HIM TO CHANGE HIS WAYS

AND NO MESSAGE COULD HAVE BEEN ANY CLEARER

IF YOU WANNA MAKE THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE

TAKE A LOOK AT *YOURSELF*, AND MAKE A *CHANGE!*”      --“MAN IN THE MIRROR”

<sup>1</sup> All Scripture quotations are taken from the New American Standard Version 1995 Update unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup> *Metanoe’o* is the word used in [Luke 17:4](#)—“And if [your brother] sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, “**I repent!**” forgive him.”” (*emphasis mine*).

The Hebrew equivalent of “*I repent*” is found in the Old Testament verb *nacham* (Hebrew left to right-- נחם). *Nacham* is used in [Job 42:6](#)—“Therefore I retract, And **I repent** in dust and ashes.”” (*emphasis mine*).

This same word is used in [Jonah 4:2](#) of God’s “repentance”, where He changes His mind about His promissory threat to destroy an unrepentant capital of Nineveh.

<sup>3</sup> The medical term for fainting is *syncope* (pronounced SIN-ko-pee). See the article at wiseGeek.com by clicking here: <http://www.wisegeek.com/why-do-people-faint.htm>

<sup>4</sup> Concerning breaking a horse and breaking the stubborn human will, I received an interesting email from a friend about her father’s correction of a stubborn horse. My friend wrote:

“I remember dad kicking “Little Joe” in the guts to get him to move over in the trailer. Which was an extreme measure to take since most horses will move with a touch of a finger.

*Dad will never let the horse win...he’s persistent and will keep correcting until the horse does what he’s asked to do. Dad is doing this because he cares and wants the best for the horse and obviously wants a good horse to work for him. (Funny how this relates to God getting our attention!)”*

I then thought it would be informative to change the words Dad and horse to God and disobedient Christian:

*God will never let the disobedient Christian win...God is persistent and will keep correcting until the disobedient Christian does what he’s asked to do. God is doing this because He cares and wants the best for the disobedient Christian and obviously wants an obedient Christian to work for Him.*