



Surprised By Grace: God's Relentless Pursuit Of Rebels

Tullian Tchividjian

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God's compassion and pardon are utterly shocking in their lavish abundance--that's a lesson God himself pounded into the epic life-story of one man who kept resisting in whatever way he could. Surprised by Grace retells that man's true story--in a gripping presentation that will open readers' eyes wider than ever to God's relentless, purposeful, and inexhaustible grace.

The man's name isn't new to anyone. It's Jonah, the famous Old Testament prophet. This fresh unfolding of his story seeks to recapture the staggering effect it had on those who first encountered it so many centuries ago--the same shock effect that's desperately needed today among those who think they know God's heart far better than they really do.

In a powerful journey through unforgettable events and imagery, Surprised by Grace reveals how relentlessly God pursues rebels (a category that ultimately includes everyone), though he has every right and plenty of reasons to give up on us all.

Surprised By Grace: God's Relentless Pursuit Of Rebels Details

Date : Published 2010 by Crossway

ISBN : 9781433507755

Author : Tullian Tchividjian

Format : Hardcover 192 pages

Genre : Christian, Christian Living, Religion, Theology, Nonfiction, Christianity



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From Reader Review Surprised By Grace: God's Relentless Pursuit Of Rebels for online ebook

Bryon says

"The gospel doesn't just ignite the Christian life; it's the fuel that keeps the Christian going every day."

Tullian Tchividjian brings fresh perspective to the Old Testament story of Jonah in his new book, Surprised by Grace: God's Relentless Pursuit of Rebels. The central character in Tchividjian's book is Jonah the prophet. The story does not begin with Jonah as a hero nor does it end that way. In fact, Jonah's story ends rather abruptly as Tchividjian points out a little more than halfway through his book. Jonah is a runner and a complainer. Jonah has the right religion and proper politics; he serves the true God and hates the worst sinners. But, as Tchividjian so skillfully explains, Jonah needs the Gospel. "He sounds like a lot of people in the church ... despite his pedigree and profile, Jonah's still running from God. His morality and correct religion have brought him no closer to God..."

Tchividjian says that there are two ways to run from God. And both of them are "self-salvation projects": "Immoral people try to save themselves through licentious living—liberally and lawlessly. Moral people try to save themselves through legalistic living. The immoral try to save themselves by breaking the law; the moral try to save themselves by keeping it."

Tchividjian argues compellingly. He shows that the rule keepers need the Gospel just as badly as the rule breakers. The reader learns that Jonah is good at being religious and knows it and expects God to move on his behalf because of it. Like the older brother in the Parable of the Prodigal Son (another "rule keeper"), Jonah is baffled that God would show such compassion to such horrible sinners. Tchividjian skillfully links the Old Testament narrative of Jonah to New Testament principles of grace and new beginnings.

Why is God so persistent about Jonah seeing this assignment through to its conclusion? Why doesn't God employ someone more willing and more passionate about the souls of sinners? Tchividjian explains that God pursues religious "rule keepers" with grace. He pursues them even if it hurts.

"The fish's belly was not Jonah's prison or death chamber," explains Tchividjian, "but only a temporary hospital for his soul and a protection for his body from the ocean depths. It's good for Jonah to be here. God ensures that His unworthy servant is made fully aware of this undeserved deliverance." God is much more interested in the person than the project. We think we're replaceable, but God makes it obvious that Jonah is the project.

Tchividjian includes plates from world renowned artists, samples from Raphael, Dennis McGeary, Phillip Ratner and Salvador Dali, to name a few. The works of art displayed in the book's pages are incredible visual aids for the reader. Jonah thrown overboard and then swallowed to stew in the digestive system of a large fish are horrors that defy description. With great talent, the artists illustrate their disgust as Tchividjian vividly contrasts it against the backdrop of God's grace. "As a storied presentation of the gospel, it especially reveals the expansiveness of three things—our sin, God's grace and God's mission. There's nothing small about any of them."

Surprised by Grace is written for any of us who tend to minimize these three. I can't decide which is worse to minimize: my sin, God's grace or God's mission. Your eyes will be opened to corners of the Jonah story that will look familiarly like dark corners of your own heart. You'll lie awake at night comparing your heart to

Jonah's.

It's interesting that God doesn't hold grudges against Jonah, but Jonah begrudges everything and everyone including God. A worldly boss would simply replace Jonah. Why doesn't God?

"Once God rescues sinners, his plan isn't to steer them beyond the gospel but to move them more deeply into it."

<http://www.relevantmagazine.com/cultu...>

Aaron says

My full review can be read at Blogging Theologically:

he book of Jonah is one of the most captivating in the Old Testament. The rebellious prophet has inspired more art than nearly any other Old Testament figure, and his story has been told and retold repeatedly in the centuries since the events first occurred.

But Jonah is not only a tale of a prophet on the run—it's one of the clearest depictions of the gospel in the Old Testament. And in *Surprised by Grace: God's Relentless Pursuit of Rebels*, Tullian Tchividjian takes readers on a journey through the biblical account to help us discover the gospel according to Jonah...

Kory says

This book has misnomer written all over it.

The whole book is written about the story of Jonah, which is one of the more powerful stories of grace in the Bible. But ultimately, the book isn't really about grace, it's just about Jonah. Grace is simply here mentioned on various occasions.

Not really impressed with the depth of this book. All I would say is that I think the theology behind it is reliable, and it's a short read. Someone will like it and benefit from reading it, but there are a lot of better books out there. Namely, I would recommend "Grip of Grace" by Lucado, "What's so amazing about grace" by Yancey, and "Ragamuffin Gospel" by Manning, in that order, just among books that focus on God's grace.

Nat says

Knowing a little of the background of the author, I honestly thought that this book would be a little auto-biographical. However, this book is about Jonah.

But in turn, Tullian ultimately uses the book to cause the story of Jonah to be about God. A strong selling point is that God could have used any other prophet or person to go to Nineveh, but why did he keep going after Jonah--especially when it doesn't seem that Jonah gets it? He's doing all these actions on the outside,

but his heart is not in it.

The author does a great job showing how God demonstrates grace and mercy with all the characters in the book of Jonah: the sailors, Jonah, the Assyrian king, and the city itself.

I only have two minor gripes with the book. The first is that the author uses some classic and contemporary pieces of art to describe man's take on Jonah. It works well in some parts of the book, but not in others.

The second minor quibble happens in the last chapter of the book. The author uses two poetical writings, one by John Piper and one by Robert Frost. I guess they were used to speculate what happened to Jonah after Nineveh. (We don't really know. The story in the Bible just ends without a change in Jonah's life up to that point). Passages of Piper's poem were quoted, while Frost's was described (maybe the author couldn't get copyright?). Perhaps the author wanted to convey Frost's take on Jonah's life, but it just doesn't seem to fit with the rest of the book. It's also odd that the description of the play goes on for a few pages as if a friend was describing it to you in person without quoting it.

Then the kicker comes. A quote from the book after going through the speculation:

"The bottom-line focus on God is why any speculation about Jonah's post-Nineveh experiences, as well as search for the more psychological details behind his actions and words in this story, are relatively unimportant."

I'm glad we took ten pages to examine that.

However, my comments above may seem harsh. Please don't take them to be an overwhelming negative about the book. I found it to be a rather enjoyable read, and I believe that the author did a great job of going through the book of Jonah passage by passage.

I also learned a few things about the sailing, Hebrew, and Assyrian cultures along the way that helps the book of Jonah make a lot more sense in regards to their actions.

Jon Stephens says

In preparation for an upcoming sermon series on the Book of Jonah I read Tullian Tchividjian's book "Surprised by Grace: God's Relentless Pursuit of Rebels".

Surprised by Grace has a great flow to it and goes through the Book of Jonah chapter by chapter and verse by verse, but it doesn't read like a traditional commentary. Although there is plenty of explanation of cultural context and words, there is also plenty of application and it reads smooth like a book and not just a reference resource.

Tchividjian emphasizes right from the beginning of the book that the story of Jonah is the story of the gospel, and its message is for both the believer and the unbeliever. I also really appreciate his encouragement that readers of Jonah need to see themselves in this story because we've all been there, unchecked heart issues and running from God and His plans and purposes for our lives.

One thing I really loved about the book was a section of full color photo's of art spanning hundreds of years

inspired by the story of Jonah. You could spend a great deal of time simply admiring the art and interpreting the parts of the story that inspired the artists. There are some outstanding visuals that definitely make you think about Jonah in a new way. The stand out piece for me was Phillip Ratner's sculpture Jonah.

Here are a few of my favorite quotes from the book:

“Running from God keeps you from ‘breathing’ and living the life he intends you to live. You thereby rob other people of the blessing God intends to give them through you, because you’re less than you’re meant to be...” (p. 44).

“Jonah desperately needs an intervention. This storm was God-sent to liberate Jonah from Jonah” (p. 53).

Overall I would say this is a pretty solid book on Jonah. It would be great for personal reading, a small group study, and sermon/Bible study preparation.

This is my first time reading a book written by Tullian Tchividjian and I look forward to reading more from him.

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Julie Biles says

While Jonah is a familiar story, Tchividjian's retelling is refreshingly unique and amazingly insightful. The themes of the the book of Jonah, I have always heard have been primarily about this prophet and his disobedience: how he ended up in the belly of a big fish or whale for three days and then was miraculously spewed out. Then he went on to the evil city Nineveh, though he did not want the people to really repent nor did he want God's anger to relent, he only wanted justice! He was all about God's justice toward the guilty. So, we normally hear, "Don't be like Jonah!" That is the lesson learned, right? Not so much in Surprised by Grace.

Tullian retells and interprets the story with the focus on God's mercy and grace. We are all like Jonah, we all run from God. Whether in our outward rebellion, like the stubborn child who says, "NO! I will not!" or in the self-righteous, "Yes, I will go because it will make me look good or feel good or whatever." Both responses are equally wrong and are rooted in a self-centered, self-focused heart. We are all in desperate need of rescue and deliverance whether we know it our not, it is reality!

This book focused on how we all are quick to run from God, but the difference is that God is quick to run after us. He pursues us relentlessly.

Tchividjian states,

"God's capacity to forgive is greater than our capacity to sin; while our sin reaches far, God's grace reaches farther. It's a message revealing the radical contrast between the sinful heart of mankind and the gracious heart of mankind's Creator...The good news is that God's ability to clean things up is infinitely greater than our ability to mess things up."

I could continue to list quotes from this book that caused me to sit and ponder, then take notes, only to find, as I closed my journal, that the next sentence or paragraph was equally thought-provoking and noteworthy. I close with the recommendation of this book to the one who has willfully disobeyed, and feels justified or not, and to the one who has obeyed and is very pleased with him or herself as well. I also recommend this book to the one who does not believe he fits into either of the two categories I have mentioned.

Brandi says

"The story of Jonah shows us that this gospel of the cross--the good news that God relentlessly pursues sinners in order to rescue them--is just as much for Christians as it is for non-Christians. Jonah's life proves this, because Jonah, who knows God, obviously needs divine deliverance as much as anyone else in the story. In fact, his need for rescue gets far more emphasis than anyone else's. It's his destitution, not that of the Ninevites, that gets the most play. That alone should be enough to convince us that God's rescue is a continuing requirement for Christians and non-Christians alike."

"But laying down your life for others is impossible. It's too scary--unless you know you've been eternally loved by Christ. Then you're free to give your life to others, because you've received so much yourself."

A.C. Bauch says

I enjoyed the leisurely journey through the book of Jonah, as well as the included artistic depictions of the story. Phillip Ratner's sculpture *Jonah* particularly captivated me.

However, this book was compiled from a sermon series, and it often reads as such. I felt the text suffered from an overreliance on quotations from other sources, which made the book seem more like a graduate thesis and which I found distracting. If I had interest in knowing what so many other authors thought about Jonah, I would read their works. But I read this book because I sought the author's unique perspective on Jonah. (And it's always a given that I'll disagree with some of the theology. This book is no exception, with some borderline works righteousness being espoused.)

If you're familiar with Jonah and have done even cursory reading about it (e.g., from notes in a study Bible), you're unlikely to find much new information here. But I would recommend this book for someone who's uninitiated and would like to learn more about such a brief, yet rich (and perhaps the most famous) prophetic book.

Stuart says

I'm a fan of Tullian. His voice is an important one, and he gets and preaches grace more than most. That said, I did not like this book. It reads like a middle of the road evangelical devotional with simplistic understandings and emotional appeals that have all the subtlety of a study bible.

Plus, I reject the outstanding premise that comes up over and over: love God, or he'll fucking kill you and send you to hell. But, shouldn't we live as if there is a God and be wrong, then live as if there isn't a God and be wrong? So, just follow the Law then. If you start with that premise, you end up with a bunch of legalists who think they can force their way into heaven, and they'll go out of their way to harm those who threaten their efforts.

This book was published back in 2010, and lots has happened in the world since then. Perhaps this book best

serves as a snapshot of that time and his thinking, because nowadays, he's a lot more grace centered.

Wouldn't recommend.

Nathan says

In many ways, this is the OT equivalent of Tim Keller's NT masterpiece, *Prodigal God*. Tullian walks us through the book of Jonah and shows morally self-righteous rebels our desperate need for grace. He builds on the work of men such as Jack Miller, Tim Keller and Jerry Bridges by bringing the gospel into all of life. Christians of all generations should read this book. It not only confronts self-righteous rebellion, but it also offers gospel-centered hope. The gospel is the power of God for salvation (justification) and Christian living (sanctification). When Christians apply the gospel to every day living, it transforms us and affects the way we interact with sinners both inside and outside the church and it unleashes the grace of God.

Travis says

*** While I will keep this review here as an honest account of my first impressions, I no longer would personally recommend this book to others. The content of the book has not changed. But since this book's publication, I believe the author has harmed the usefulness of this book and his teaching on grace through a public fall and scandal which threatens to push his handling of a biblical understanding of grace and our call to repentance beyond biblical bounds. Thus, I believe readers should find better works on the grace of God that do not carry with them the baggage of the author's choices since publication. The confusion is simply not worth it. ***

Tullian Tchividjian is a name that not everybody knows and almost nobody can spell, but his impact on the work of the kingdom is growing rapidly. In *Surprised by Grace*, this author/pastor walks his readers through the book of Jonah with an eye to the gospel impact of a well-known but not well-understood Old Testament book. Throughout the work, Tchividjian points his readers to the amazing, pursuing, overcoming grace of God.

Positive

Tchividjian has a great handle on the grace of God, and that grace comes forth in every chapter of the book. We see the grace of God in the fish that swallowed Jonah, in the repentance of the people of Nineveh, and in the hard lesson of the worm and the vine. At the same time, readers of this work see how similar we are to the disobedient prophet who was hounded by a gracious and holy God.

Tchividjian handles the text of Scripture very well in the book, drawing out solid points from every part of the Jonah narrative—a fact which is no surprise. What is unique in this writing, however, is Tchividjian's interaction with the arts and in historical representations of Jonah. I was regularly struck by the different portrayals of Jonah in poetry, art, and literature that Tchividjian used to help his readers to understand the different interpretations of the book that men have put forth. I can't say that this is a big deal in general, but it was refreshing to read data of a different sort in a still useful Christian book.

Negative

This work is not overly-long, and thus it cannot explore every nuance of the book of Jonah. The chapters feel more like sermons than scholarly work. Don't get me wrong, the work is not shallow and the application is excellent, but this is certainly a more popular-level handling of the biblical account. I write this as a weakness merely because some who look at this book as a treatment of Jonah might want more. However, on the whole, this is not much of a negative at all.

Recommendation

I very much enjoyed reading *Surprised by Grace*. I found that the pages flew by with ease. The focus on the grace of God for a sinner like me is very refreshing, and it is certainly needed in the church today. I would recommend this book with no reservations, because we all need a better grasp of the grace of God.

Audio

For this review, I listened to the excellent audio version of the book from ChristianAudio.com. this recording meets the high standards that I have come to expect from this fine company.

Kara says

Pastor Tullian Tchividian's newest book, *Surprised by Grace: God's Relentless Pursuit of Rebels*, published by Crossway, is a unique, gospel-centered study of the book of Jonah. After encouraging us to set aside "the notion that Jonah is primarily a story about a man gulped down by a fish", he takes us verse by verse through the book, showing us that the story of Jonah reveals both God's heart and our own, explicitly contrasting them in a way no other story in the Bible does. Through the use of literature and art, he illustrates different aspects of the story of Jonah in a very memorable way. All the works of art he refers to are included in color plates in the center of the book, and he uses each one to show graphically an aspect of the story that we can apply.

Pastor Tullian (who, incidentally, is the grandson of none other than Billy Graham) contends that there's just as much confusion inside the church as there is outside regarding the true meaning of the gospel, and that perhaps what we most need to get a better grip on it is to be startled, surprised, even shocked by it!

"I once assumed the gospel was simply what non-Christians must believe in order to be saved, but after they believe it, they advance to deeper theological waters. Jonah helped me realize that the gospel isn't the first step in a stairway of truths but more like the hub in a wheel of truth. As Tim Keller explains it, the gospel isn't simply the ABCs of Christianity, but the A-through-Z. The gospel doesn't just ignite the Christian life; it's the fuel that keeps Christians going every day. Once God rescues sinners, his plan isn't to steer them beyond the gospel but to move them more deeply into it."

He goes on to skillfully show how Jonah illustrates the concept that Martin Luther called "simil justus et peccator"...that we are "simultaneously justified and sinful". Although we've already been saved from sin's penalty, the gospel is vitally necessary each and every day to save us from sin's power also. We clearly see this in Jonah's actions.

Jonah tries to run from God...and quickly discovers that's not possible. We tend to assume that the storm is God's punishment for Jonah's disobedience, but Pastor Tullian counters that it is, in fact, God's intervention, brought about by his affection, not his anger. God could have easily left Jonah to his own devices and found

someone else to do the job. Instead, in an act of mercy, he sends the storm to liberate Jonah—from himself. Running showed that Jonah was still relying on himself and his own strength and not submitting to God. We do the same thing. Some run by intentionally living by the world's standards and rejecting God. Others run by being rule-keepers. Both ultimately show self-reliance and are insufficient.

"Only the gospel can truly save you. The gospel doesn't make bad people good; it makes dead people alive. That's the difference between the gospel of Jesus Christ and every other world religion. All the others exhort their followers to save themselves by being good, conforming their lives to whatever their worshiped deity is. But the gospel is God's acceptance of us based on what Christ has done, not on what we can do."

God gives Jonah a second chance to get it right. It's interesting that Jonah is grateful to be rescued, but there's still no indication of repentance. But here we see three aspects of God's amazing grace, according to Pastor Tullian:

God doesn't hold grudges. Our acceptance is not based on anything we do or don't do. It's based on what Christ has already done.

No deals. God doesn't lighten the load for Jonah. There are no negotiations. In the same way, God's grace toward us is not a lessening of his demands...he still demands perfect obedience. Grace is experienced when we realize that these demands have already been met in Jesus.

God doesn't give up. If getting the task accomplished was all God was worried about, he could have easily just let Jonah go his way and found someone else. Since he knew Jonah would run, why did God ask him in the first place? Not because he needed Jonah, but because Jonah needed God! In the same way, God doesn't need any of us. The reason he seeks, saves, and sends sinners like us is because God loves sinners.

Later in the story, Pastor Tullian uses the rather abrupt ending to point out that redemption involves much more than simply "going to heaven"...it's about Christ making everything sad come untrue, about restoring all that Adam's disobedience ruined and correcting every injustice.

He also uses Jonah's negative response to God's mercy to Ninevah to contrast the tribal versus missional mindset. A community with a tribal mindset values self-preservation above all. It exists solely for itself, always looking for ways to protect itself from those who are different. A missional-minded community, on the other hand, values self-sacrifice above all. It exists to serve others. Two guesses which mindset Jonah exhibits. By nature, we all tend to be tribal. But the gospel demands a missional, not tribal, mindset.

Pastor Tullian closes with "The Gospel According to Jonah". He points out that this is the only prophetic book in the Bible that focuses on the prophet himself rather than his message. This is because Jonah's life IS the message! We're all like Jonah. The story shows us the expansiveness of our sin, God's grace, and God's mission. We can never fully embrace God's grace if we don't realize how desperate our condition is. Yet God's grace is even more expansive than our sin. And, God doesn't simply rescue us from our sin, he rescues us to DO something. He expects us to develop the world around us to his glory. At the cross, we see the convergence of these three things.

I've barely scratched the surface of the depths of the gospel that Pastor Tullian mines in this book. I have so many quotes highlighted there's no way I can share them all! I loved this fresh perspective on a familiar story. He brought out details I'd never noticed (like the fact that Jonah was apparently a prominent national figure, based on the reference to him in 2 Kings 14:25) and presented the gospel in a wonderfully unique way. I loved his emphasis on the fact that the gospel is not just a set of truths non-Christians need to believe to be saved, but something that we need to embrace daily, and that we're not simply saved from sin, but saved to bring him glory here and now!

Pastor Tullian writes in an easy to read, conversational style and still manages to impart deep theological truths in a fairly short book. This highly readable, devotionally rich look at Jonah and the gospel gets my highest recommendation!

(My thanks to Crossway for providing a review copy of the book to me. I was not required to give a positive review, all the opinions I've expressed are my own.)

Matthew says

It's one of the most familiar stories in the Old Testament. All Christians know it. Most non-Christians have at least heard of it (if they've watched the movie Master and Commander, for example). Some may mock it, but there's a fascination with the story of Jonah. God tells this guy to go preach doom to some people. He doesn't want to go and leaves on a ship so God works it out so a whale swallows him alive. After praying inside the whale, the guy is spit out on the beach. Then, he goes to preach to the people. Moral: Do what God says or he'll get you.

That's most people's basic understanding of the story. But there's so much more to it than that. God reveals so much more of His character in the story of Jonah than most people realize. In his new book, *Surprised by Grace*, pastor Tullian Tchividjian takes readers on a grace-filled ride through Jonah's familiar yet surprising story of God's pursuit of those who run from Him. It's a fantastic journey, and one that will have me thinking about Jonah's story (and God's grace) differently from now on.

After setting the scene with a brief introduction to the story and some pre-emptive strikes against the objections people might have to the historical accuracy of the story, Tchividjian begins to slowly unpack the numerous layers of meaning and insight in Jonah's short story. It's always encouraging to hear the gospel of God's grace preached from the Old Testament, and that's exactly what this book does. Tchividjian uses various sources (with large doses of John Calvin) to demonstrate from Jonah that God is sovereign over all events and works all things together for the good of his children by His grace. What appears to be a story about a guy being swallowed by a fish for disobeying God is shown to actually be God's gracious provision for a man struggling with fear and pride, a state to which all of us can relate.

If, like me, you grew up hearing the story of Jonah but never really listening to it, let me encourage you to read this book. God is the same yesterday, today, and forever, and the book of Jonah demonstrates that his grace was just as prominent in the Old Testament as during the time of Christ and today. He's a gracious, loving Father who pursues His children however far from Ninevah they run. I repeatedly saw myself in Tchividjian's descriptions of Jonah's responses to God, and this book encouraged me that God's relentless grace pursues me in exactly the same way it did Jonah so long ago.

JenNSteve Dalton says

I bought this book while I was in the middle of several others, and it kept moving a little lower in my "stack" of books I wanted to read, so this was my completion of a book of been meaning to read for my 2016 challenge. I enjoy Tchividjian's point of view and explanations of the book of Jonah. I think we often think of the prophets as wise and infallible, but they were just as in need of God's grace as anybody else. Jonah is a

great example of that. Reading Jonah, we think it is the Ninevites that God wanted to save, but in reality the story is about God working to change Jonah's heart.

Meredith says

For those who have been a rebel or have a child who has rebelled, this book is full of hope. At the core, we are all rebels who have been pursued by God's grace and redeemed. This book takes the reader through the OT book of Jonah, pointing out that all Christians are Jonahs. We cannot escape God's grace and His pursuit of us. This book gives a clear presentation that the Gospel is so much more than what most of us think. The Gospel empowers Christians to live daily in the shadow of the cross. A great book!
