

## **Amazing Change**

Art professor Howard Storm fell ill with a perforated small intestine while on a trip to Paris with students in 1985. When surgery was delayed, Howard was preparing for death when he passed out. In his unconscious state, Howard, an atheist, sensed hideous voices calling from another room, beckoning him to come. In his despair he cried out, “Jesus, save me!” When he came to, he was informed that the surgery was successful.

Storm not only converted to Christ, he became a pastor. His story is told in Pastor John Burke’s new book *Imagine Heaven*. Burke discovered that 23% of near-death experiences are negative, often terrifying. Dr. Maurice Rawlings was an atheist cardiologist who came to Christ after a resuscitated patient, Charles McVeig, begged Rawlings to pray for him after McVeig claimed to have been in hell. McVeig, also an atheist, became a Christian as well.

## **Three Amazing Changes That Brought Incredible Blessings to a Wicked City:**

### **1. The Prophet \_\_\_\_\_ (Recanted)**

- a. *“Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time: ‘Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you.’ Jonah obeyed the word of the Lord and went to Nineveh.” Jonah 3:1. God gave Jonah a second chance just as he gave Abraham (Genesis 11:27; 12:1), Moses (Acts 7:25), and Peter (John 21).*
- b. Do you realize that God has placed you exactly where he wants (Acts 17:26). God has determined the family, workplace, and friendship circle you have, and your #1 mission is to share the love of Christ with them (Mark 16:15,16). Invite them to Friend Day next Sunday. The message is entitled “The Great Rescue”, describing the abundant life that Jesus offers each of us.
- c. *“Don’t be afraid of them...don’t be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell...Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. Matthew 10:26-32.*

### **2. The King \_\_\_\_\_ (Repented)**

- a. *“On the first day, Jonah started into the city. He proclaimed: ‘Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned...When the news 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...Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways.’” Jonah 3:4-9.*
- b. Nineveh’s king was a Hitler-like monster. But he was not beyond God’s grace. Never give up on anyone coming to Jesus. Storm the gates of heaven in prayer on their behalf, for when we pray, God and his angelic forces swing into action.

- c. Ask God to open doors so you can share Christ with your friends. *“I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict.” Luke 21:15.*

**3. The Lord \_\_\_\_\_(Relented)**

- a. *“When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened.” Jonah 3:10.*
- b. God relented because 1) the Ninevites heard the Word of God; 2) they believed in God; 3) they expressed sorrow for their sin; and 4) they turned from their sin.
- c. The Hebrew word “nacham” describes the change God made in extending mercy. It refers to an inner suffering that needs to be consoled. 700 years after Jonah, Jesus came as our “nacham”. Jesus suffered by taking our sins upon himself, so that we could be extended mercy.

**Paul Ojeda, pastor of Austin Powerhouse Church, was declared dead of a cocaine overdose at age 30. He realized immediately he was going to hell with no escape so he cried out to God, “If you give me the chance, I’ll go back and tell others this is real.” He did exactly that, today pastoring a Hispanic church in Austin, Texas. We need to spread the same message. God is real and so is His Word! Will you spread the Word this week?**

# Discussion Questions

## Amazing Change

1. Have you ever heard a story like that of Howard Storm? What lessons can we learn from his experience? What precautions should we take when we hear of a near-death experience? Why is it important to understand that the Scriptures always take precedence over an experience? Why do you think that the near-death experiences that are negative (23%) are often not discussed in the media? How did Dr. Maurice Rawlings come to know Jesus? What can we learn from his conversion story?
2. Read Jonah 3. What does verse 1 say about Jonah recanting? Why do you think Jonah obeyed the second time? How was Abraham given another chance (Genesis 11:27; 12:1) and Moses (Acts 7:25) and Peter (John 21)? What does Acts 17:26 teach about where we live? Do you believe God put you in the exact family and workplace and friendship circle that he desires? What is your #1 priority according to Mark 16:15-16? Why are so many Christians reluctant to share their faith? What does Matthew 10:26-33 teach us? What reward is promised in Matthew 10:42?
3. Read verses 4-9. Have you known any “bad dudes” like the King of Nineveh who came to faith in the Lord? How did this happen? Why is it important to understand that no one in our friendship circle is beyond God’s mercy? Why is it so important to pray for our lost friends and family? Why is it important to ask God to open doors so we can share with them? What does Luke 21:15 and Jonah 3:2 teach us about God giving us the words to say?
4. Read verse 10. What does it mean to “relent”? What four reasons were given for God relenting and sparing the city of Nineveh? What did you learn about the Hebrew word “nacham”? In what way is Jesus our “nacham”? What did you learn from the true story of Pastor Paul Ojeda’s conversion? Why do you think God allowed him to experience a taste of hell? How did this experience change Ojeda? How did Ojeda keep his promise to God? Are you ready to spread the Word of God this week? Who is God calling you to invite to Friend Day?