

"Seek the Lord, and Ye Shall Live"

Show Notes & Transcripts

Podcast General Description:

followHIM: A *Come, Follow Me* Podcast with Hank Smith & John Bytheway

Do you ever feel that preparing for your weekly *Come, Follow Me* lesson falls short? Join hosts Hank Smith and John Bytheway as they interview experts to make your study for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' *Come, Follow Me* course not only enjoyable but original and educational. If you are looking for resources to make your study fresh, faithful, and fun--no matter your age--then join us every Wednesday.

Podcast Episode Description

Why would God send a runaway prophet to the very people he hates? Dr. Robbie Taggart joins Hank and John to explore Amos's fiery call to repentance, the humor and mercy of Jonah, and why a God who prepares a great fish is the God of second chances.

Timecodes:

- 00:00 Welcome and meet Robbie Taggart
- 03:02 The prophetic arc and God's plan for the whole world
- 04:49 Two very different prophets
- 06:42 Robbie's background and the *Come, Follow Me* lesson
- 09:29 Amos, the shepherd called to carry a burden
- 13:09 Amos draws the circle closer and closer
- 14:55 The poor, the vulnerable, and Elder Holland
- 17:09 Amos pleads, "O Lord God, forgive"
- 19:06 The prophet's voice and the heart of God
- 22:55 "Them, them, them... us"
- 24:42 Greed, opulence, and the powerless

- 28:26 "Seek me, and ye shall live"
- 30:34 Let justice run down like waters
- 32:40 Consequences, not punishment
- 37:02 A police officer or a firefighter? Robbie's story
- 40:52 A famine of hearing the words of the Lord
- 42:43 Lions, snares, and the prophet who has to speak
- 46:14 Restoration and extravagant abundance
- 51:03 Poetry as a way to see differently
- 54:09 Robbie's poem on God's delicious love
- 01:00:46 Obadiah and saviors on Mount Zion
- 01:02:56 Chosen to bless every nation
- 01:05:09 Meet Jonah
- 01:07:08 Reading Jonah like a short story
- 01:10:57 Down, down, down to Tarshish
- 01:12:55 The sailors and "I fear the Lord"
- 01:16:34 Into the fish
- 01:19:33 Jonah's prayer from the fish
- 01:23:05 Relentless pursuit, even if it takes a fish
- 01:26:47 Jonah's eight-word sermon
- 01:28:55 Nineveh repents
- 01:31:26 Jonah is angry at God's mercy
- 01:35:51 Building the forgiveness muscle
- 01:39:50 Mercy beyond every border
- 01:44:42 Possible gods and goddesses
- 01:46:36 Jonah's last lesson
- 01:53:20 Looking at strangers the way God does
- 01:56:53 Closing thoughts

Sources:

Baron, Ross D. “Isaiah 58–66, Part 2.” Interview by Hank Smith and John Bytheway. *Follow Him* podcast, September 28, 2022. https://podscripts.co/podcasts/followhim/isaiah-58-66-part-2-dr-ross-d-baron-oct-3-9.

Bible Project. “Amos.” Overview video. https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/amos/.

Bytheway, John. *Isaiah for Airheads*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2006. https://www.deseretbook.com/product/5091146.html.

Fluhman, J. Spencer. “Doctrine & Covenants 76, Part 1.” Interview by Hank Smith and John Bytheway. *Follow Him* podcast, July 2, 2025. https://podscripts.co/podcasts/followhim/doctrine-covenants-76-part-1-dr-j-spencer-fluhman-july-7-july-13-come-follow-me.

Heschel, Abraham J. *The Prophets*. New York: Harper & Row, 1962. Reprint, New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2001. https://www.biblio.com/0060936991.

Holland, Jeffrey R. “Are We Not All Beggars?” General conference, October 2014. https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2014/10/are-we-not-all-beggars?lang=eng.

Holland, Jeffrey R. “The Laborers in the Vineyard.” General conference, April 2012. https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2012/04/the-laborers-in-the-vineyard?lang=eng.

Holland, Jeffrey R. “A Prayer for the Children.” General conference, April 2003. https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2003/04/a-prayer-for-the-children?lang=eng.

“Hope for Parents of Wayward Children.” *Ensign*, September 2002. https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2002/09/hope-for-parents-of-wayward-children?lang=eng.

Hopkins, Gerard Manley. “As Kingfishers Catch Fire.” Poetry Foundation. https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44389/as-kingfishers-catch-fire.

Kearon, Patrick. “God’s Intent Is to Bring You Home.” General conference, April 2024. https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2024/04/45kearon.

Lewis, C. S. “The Weight of Glory.” In *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*. New York: HarperOne, 2001. https://www.christianbook.com/the-weight-glory-and-other-addresses/c-s-lewis/9780060653200/pd/653205.

Matheson, Kimberly. “Wonder of Scripture Lecture.” Neal A. Maxwell Institute, Brigham Young University. https://mi.byu.edu/kimberly-matheson-wonder-of-scripture-lecture.

Renlund, Dale G. “Choose You This Day.” General conference, October 2018. https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2018/10/choose-you-this-day?lang=eng.

Smith, Hank, and John Bytheway. *Finding Jesus Christ in the Old Testament*. Free download. https://followhim.co.

Walker, Steven C. *Illuminating Humor of the Bible*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013. https://wipfandstock.com/illuminating-humor-of-the-bible.html.

Biographical Information:



Robbie Taggart is an associate teaching professor in Ancient Scripture at BYU. He is a scholar of theology and religious literature with a PhD in Theological Leadership, an MA in Comparative Studies, and a BA in English Literature. Before coming to BYU, he taught in Seminaries and Institutes of Religion for 17 years. His academic interests focus on the intersections of literature and belief and on narrative theology in sacred texts. Robbie emphasizes a theology centered on divine love, human holiness, and God's expansive plan of mercy. His passions include teaching, writing poetry, exploring national parks, and rejoicing in his five wild and holy children with his remarkable wife, Julie.

Fair Use Notice:

The *Follow Him Podcast with Hank Smith and John Bytheway* may make use of copyrighted material, the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright holder. This constitutes a "fair use" and any such copyrighted material as provided for in section 107 of the US Copyright Law. In accordance with Title 17 U.S.C. Section 107, the material on this podcast is offered publicly and without profit, to the public uses or the internet for comment and nonprofit educational and informational purposes. Copyright Disclaimer under Section 107 of the Copyright Act of 1976, allowance is made for fair use" for purposes such as criticism, comment, news reporting, teaching, scholarship, and research. In such cases, fair use is permitted.
No copyright(s) is/are claimed. The content is broadcast for study, research, and educational purposes. This falls under "Fair Use" guidelines: www.copyright.gov/fls/fl102.html.

Note:

The *Follow Him Podcast with Hank Smith and John Bytheway* is not affiliated with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints nor Brigham Young University. The opinions expressed on episodes represent the views of the guest and podcasters alone. While the ideas presented may vary from traditional understandings or teachings, they in no way reflect criticism of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day leaders, policies, or practices.



Hank Smith:	00:00:00	Coming up in this episode on followHIM.
Dr. Robbie Taggart:	00:00:03	Steve Walker would often say, "What did he smell like? As he stepped onto that shore, covered in whale bile and bleached by his experiences inside the whale." I just loved the way he made it come alive for me. What did he smell like? And was that the reason they were so quick to repent? Any God who would do that to somebody is a God I don't want to be on the wrong side of.
Hank Smith:	00:00:30	Hello, my friends. Welcome to another episode of followHIM. My name is Hank Smith. I'm your host. I am here with my great fish co-host, John Bytheway. Now, John, this doesn't sound like a compliment, but I promise it is. The great fish is from Jonah once. Look what it says in Jonah. "The Lord had prepared this great fish." When I read that, I thought, John Bytheway has been prepared for all the good he does. Now, I don't think you go swallow prophets. I get that part, but I do feel like as you look back over your life, John, you've been prepared for what God has you do.
John Bytheway:	00:01:13	Oh, a great fish. That sounds like it could have been prepared as the meal or as the person to eat, I guess. So in this case, yeah, he ate Jonah.
Hank Smith:	00:01:24	I would like the great fish, please, with the side of Neph-ries, right?
John Bytheway:	00:01:28	Yeah.
Hank Smith:	00:01:30	Speaking of, well, not great fish, but great teachers, John, we have Dr. Robbie Taggart with us. He's a friend of mine. Robbie, you are now a friend of the followHIM podcast. Welcome. Glad you're here.
Dr. Robbie Taggart:	00:01:41	Thank you. So good to be here.

Hank Smith:	00:01:43	I was telling you earlier, Robbie's someone that I've been keeping in the back of my mind, in my back pocket, knowing how great he is, but he's had a new job teaching in the religion department at BYU for the last little while. So I thought, let's let him simmer over there. Now we're going to bring him out for the great fish. John, when you think of these minor prophets, Amos, Obadiah, and Jonah, Jonah's probably the most famous of these three. What comes to mind? What were you looking forward to when you sat down?
John Bytheway:	00:02:12	Yeah. Jonah, we know about and we love to talk about, and I can relate to because sometimes I just want to run the other way because I'm an unprepared great fish. It's hard to run when you're a fish. I'm not suited for that. When I read Amos, I thought this sounds like such a pattern in the Old Testament. Okay, you're supposed to be House of Israel. You're not living up to your covenants. You're going to have problems, but in the end, everything will be okay. And it's just that theme throughout. But Jonah is the one I love because I feel like I can relate to that idea of, I don't want this heavy responsibility. I don't want this heavy calling. I love talking about that because I think we can all go, "Yeah, I get that." Especially if it's the Assyrians.
Hank Smith:	00:02:54	I love the reality of Jonah. I think Robbie's going to show us that. Robbie, as you've been prepping for this, what are we going to do today? What are you looking forward to?
Dr. Robbie Taggart:	00:03:02	Well, I think we've got some really big ideas that we're going to get to explore. Like John's talking about that arc, I call it the prophetic arc. There's this sense that Israel is not living up to the sweetness of its relationship with God. That will inevitably bring suffering, destruction, and the prophets see that so clearly. Amos is clear-eyed and relentless in his critique of what is going wrong in Israel. They see and they say what they see, but there's always a swoop up toward hope, toward restoration, toward redemption. The end of the story is always more beautiful than the beginning of the story even. It's often the creation of some tiny little remnant of Israel. This tiny little remnant is going to finally be prepared to be faithful to God, to live inside of their covenantal responsibilities, and then participate in the blessing of the whole world.
Dr. Robbie Taggart:	00:03:57	We're going to see the relationship between Israel and the other nations, this balance between they are especially chosen people with this exclusive capacity to be in

		relationship with God, but always with the intention of blessing the whole wide world. We're going to see at times some fraught relationships with other nations around them. Ultimately, we're going to get a sense of the bigness of God's plan, the expansiveness of the work that God's engaged in. Through that, we're going to be introduced to the mercy of God. Ultimately, these are deeply theological. We're going to see that we have a God who is relentless. We're going to see that we have a God who is merciful. We're going to see that we have a God who is generous and who is interested and involved in the lives of more people than we could ever imagine in more ways than we could ever imagine.
Dr. Robbie Taggart:	00:04:49	That's kind of the big arc. As we talk about prophets, we've got these two, Amos and Jonah. We'll put Obadiah in there for a little bit, but you almost couldn't find two more different prophets than Amos and Jonah. Amos is called to go preach to wicked Israel. He willingly, courageously goes and speaks this word. Despite being rejected, he fulfills the command. Jonah, on the other hand, is going to be called to speak a message of hope to their historic enemies. He doesn't want to go. They do repent. The messages couldn't be different. Even though the way that the stories are told, they're totally different genres, but I think we're going to see that it's the same God working through them to bring about this big redemption. I'm really excited to watch the way that God works through these different individuals to bring about something that's destined to bless the entire world through this expansive mercy.
Hank Smith:	00:05:46	Wow. I love it. John, whenever our guests preview what they're going to do, do you find yourself going, "Oh wow, I'm excited."
John Bytheway:	00:05:54	Yeah.
Hank Smith:	00:05:54	As you were talking, I thought, what an interesting perspective we have. Here we are sitting in the gathering. We're literally right in the middle of the gathering and we're looking back at the scattering. I think I have a tendency to forget that my perspective is so blessed that, oh, why can't you guys figure this out? It's great up here. Well, forget about that. Let the gathering be thousands of years in the future. Come back here and let's just experience life with them. I like how you said that. It made me go, okay, let me go put myself there. What would it be like to be Amos? What would it be like to be Jonah? John, now I know Robbie

		pretty well, but our audience, I'm guessing maybe doesn't know Robbie. Hopefully his mom and dad are listening and John, you know his dad.
Dr. Robbie Taggart:	00:06:37	Hi, mom and dad.
Hank Smith:	00:06:38	What do you know about Robbie? What have we discovered?
John Bytheway:	00:06:42	Yeah. Hank, thank you for that because I worked at continuing education when I was a student at BYU and then afterwards worked there full-time for a long time. Steve Taggart was there in continuing ed, and Steve Taggart is Dr. Robbie Taggart's father. So we had this reunion, hey, say hi to your dad. He was always so nice to me and so wonderful. Dr. Robbie Taggart delights in the radiant existence God has given him. He believes that all people are inherently holy as children of divine heavenly parents. He rejoices in the expansiveness of God's plan of mercy. Before coming to BYU, he taught in seminaries and institutes for 17 years, which is shocking because he doesn't look that old. He received his bachelor's in English literature from BYU, a master's in comparative studies with an emphasis on comparative religious literature. He received a PhD in theological leadership from the University of the Cumberlands.
John Bytheway:	00:07:40	Robbie is interested in the intersections of literature and belief in sacred literature from the world's religions. He and his wife Julie are the parents of five wild and holy children. That sounds biblical. In his free time, he reads, writes poetry inspired by scripture, spends time in nature with his family, and we're just glad today he's spending time with us. Thank you for being with us.
Dr. Robbie Taggart:	00:08:04	Yeah, thank you. Good to be here.
Hank Smith:	00:08:06	John, this is going to be a good day. I've gotten to know Robbie as he's become full-time in the religion department and I'm more impressed each time we interact. It's significant. Well, let's get into the Come, Follow Me manual. Robbie, John and I want to be your students for the day. I'm excited.
John Bytheway:	00:08:24	Absolutely.

Hank Smith:	00:08:25	The lesson, seek the Lord and ye shall live. Amos, Obadiah, and Jonah. Jonah was on a ship headed for Tarshish. There's nothing wrong with sailing to Tarshish except that it's far away from Nineveh where Jonah was supposed to go to deliver God's message. When the ship encountered a great storm, Jonah knew it was because of his disobedience. At Jonah's insistence, his fellow mariners cast him into the depths of the sea to stop the storm. It looked like the end of Jonah and his ministry, but the Lord hadn't given up on Jonah just as he hadn't given up on the people of Nineveh, on the house of Israel or any of us. So he keeps sending prophets like Jonah, Amos, Obadiah, and our prophets today with the message that if we repent, we will not be cast off forever. Of all the secrets God reveals, this is among the most precious, that because of Jesus Christ, it is never too late to change.
Hank Smith:	00:09:18	He still wants to help us live up to the covenants we have made with him and he's willing to offer us another chance. Wow, that's a great introduction. All right, Robbie, what do you want to do?
Dr. Robbie Taggart:	00:09:29	If we can start with that idea that you addressed, God's love in reaching out through prophets, because Amos is the first of what we call the literary prophets in the eighth century BC. To understand him as a prophet, we get a sense of what these prophetic figures are doing, then we'll see Jonah doing something else. Amos's name means burden, and sometimes being called to be a prophet is being called into a space you would rather not go. He's a sheep herder in Tokoa, which is a city in the southern kingdom of Judah. He's a keeper of sycamore trees. He's a farmer. He has no interest in being a prophet, but the message of God comes to him and asks him to go up to the northern kingdom. This is during the reign of Jeroboam II, who is a super successful king as far as expanding Israel's territory goes, but he's not a righteous man.
Dr. Robbie Taggart:	00:10:24	Amos's burden is that he has to call this people to repentance. We have one of the most famous for Latter-day Saints verses in Amos 3:7, "Surely the Lord God will do nothing but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets." In Amos, leading up to there, we see the way that this prophet is going to deliver his message, and it's actually kind of dramatic. So he goes from the southern kingdom to the northern kingdom, and he begins by denouncing and declaiming the wickedness of other surrounding nations. This is what we call in biblical

literature a doom oracle against the nations, and it accounts for 13% of the writings of the written prophets, the literary prophets. The only literary prophet who doesn't have any doom oracles is Hosea, and Hosea's got all kinds of other things going on.

Hank Smith: 00:11:17 He's dealing with other things.

Dr. Robbie Taggart: 00:11:19 But the way Amos uses it, it's honestly brilliant. He's in this kingdom and he starts talking about the nations around him and the ways that they're brutal, the ways that they are disregarding the laws of God and the destruction that is going to come upon them. And he does something very prophetic. Many of the prophets use poetry to convey their message, to make it memorable. So he's going to use these two repeated refrains. He's going to name the nation that has been breaking God's commands, and then he's going to say, "For three transgressions and for four." Then he says, "The Lord will send a fire." You're going to catch this almost incantation. He's supposed to roar from Zion. So thus saith the Lord verse three, "For three transgressions of Damascus and for four, I will not turn away the punishment because they threshed Gilead with threshing instruments of iron.

Dr. Robbie Taggart: 00:12:14 They were violent to God's covenant people. So for three transgressions and for four just means they have heaped sin upon sin, upon sin, upon sin. So he's not going to name these three transgressions. He's just going to say they have lived in wickedness repeatedly, and he says verse four, "But I will send a fire into the house of Hazael." What we have here is Damascus is the capital city of Syria to the northeast of the northern kingdom of Israel. And you imagine the people kind of nodding along like, "Yes, they have been wicked. They deserve to be destroyed. This prophet is doing what we expect this prophet to do." Then in verse six, "For three transgressions of Gaza and for four, I won't send away the punishment because they took captive the whole captivity. They delivered the Israelites into Edom. I will send a fire on the wall of Gaza." Gaza is Philistia, which is to the southwest.

Dr. Robbie Taggart: 00:13:09 You've got this nation up to the northeast, this nation down to the southwest, and you're going to start seeing what he's going to do is he's going to draw this sort of circle that's getting closer and closer and closer, and the people are nodding along as he's declaiming and denouncing against these other nations until Israel is in the sights and Israel gets the longest, most extensive, most devastating prophecy of

destruction, and that's when they get shocked. And it's been all this cruelty, all this brutality. And then it finally comes to Judah, the southern kingdom where he's from, and he says they haven't kept the laws of the Lord. But then he gets in chapter two, verse six, "Thus saith the Lord for three transgressions of Israel and for four, I won't turn away the punishment." These other people have been engaging in this incredible violence.

Dr. Robbie Taggart: 00:13:55 They've been engaging in this oppression. Here's what he starts naming as the sins of Israel. Anytime that a prophet is speaking against the sins of the covenant people, we as covenant people need to listen up because in our chosen state, are there ways that we forget the Lord our God or forget people? Those are going to be the two great commandments. He's going to say, "Your religious rituals are empty, and the way you treat people is lacking in compassion." The first thing he says in chapter two, verse six, "They sold the righteous for silver and the poor for a pair of shoes that pant after the dust of the earth on the head of the poor and they turn aside the way of the meek." You have not cared. You've cared more about getting ahead, getting material, getting stuff, than you've cared about the vulnerable, than you've cared about those who are suffering, than you've cared about those who are hungry.

Dr. Robbie Taggart: 00:14:55 And I don't know if you remember a talk years ago that Elder Holland gave, but he said, "The Lord has issued no more persistent call for us to join him in alleviating the burden of poverty from his people." If you want to make an Old Testament prophet really upset, then ignore the plight of the vulnerable, ignore the plight of the poor, ignore the plight of those that don't have enough. He says, "This is as bad as the warfare, as the oppression, as the greed of these other nations that's been destroyed." And then he's going to go on for pretty much the next eight chapters talking about all the things that Israel has done wrong. There's a book that I absolutely love by a Jewish rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel called The Prophets, and he talks about what comes across as this intensity in these Old Testament prophets, what comes across as this relentless critique of a society that's gone broken. I want to read you just a couple of lines from it because this is what you see in Amos. In fact, the first prophet that he uses as his model is the prophet Amos.

Dr. Robbie Taggart:	00:16:06	He says, "The prophet's words are an outburst of violent emotions. The prophet is a man who feels fiercely," and that's an end of that quote for just a second, but what he feels fiercely is the plight of those who suffer. The prophet is a man who sees the holiness, the value, the sacredness, the beauty of every person on this planet. God has thrust a burden upon his soul, and he has bowed and stunned at man's fierce greed. Prophecy is the voice that God has lent to the silent agony, a voice to the plundered poor, to the profane riches of the world. Then he says, "Yet there are interludes where one perceives an eternity of love hovering over moments of anguish." In Amos chapter seven, Amos sees the first three of these four visions that he's going to be given. They are visions of destruction. He's going to see locusts devouring fields.
Dr. Robbie Taggart:	00:17:09	You sense the love that Amos has for even the very people that he's trying to criticize or critique. He says he sees these grasshoppers going forth. And in verse two of chapter seven, it says, "It came to pass when they had made an end of eating the grass of the land I said, O Lord God, forgive. I beseech thee. By whom shall Jacob or Israel arise? He is small." Don't let Israel be completely destroyed, even though they deserve it, even though they've behaved in ways that are uncomely for the covenant people. And it says the Lord repented, or turned, shew from this and he says, "It shall not be. I won't utterly destroy Jacob." And then he sees a fire. Again, he says in verse five, "O Lord God, cease, I beseech thee." Then he'll see God measuring Israel with a plumb line, seeing if they are straight, like a straight wall.
Dr. Robbie Taggart:	00:18:02	The sense is the prophet does not desire the destruction of the people, but he sees that it is inevitable. He says that God will raise up a nation. Well, Jeroboam II is in the eighth century BC where Assyria is becoming the big bad superpower. Amos is probably prophesying in 750 BC just a few decades before Assyria is going to come and fulfill all of his prophecies, destroy Israel. He says that God is going to raise up this nation to destroy you because you have lived in a way that is like an empire. You have lived in a violent, selfish, greedy way and God will allow the empire that you've become to sort of come and destroy you, but it's not what Amos wants. And then Heschel goes on to say, "The prophet's style is charged with agitation, anguish, and a spirit of non-acceptance. We cannot let this be.
Dr. Robbie Taggart:	00:19:06	Prophetic utterance is urging, alarming, forcing onward as if the words gushed forth from the heart of God, seeking

entrance into the heart and mind of man." What you sense is that God feels deeply. God has a special attentiveness for those who suffer in the world. God has a special attentiveness for those who have been ignored or marginalized or rejected. When they suffer, the heart of God breaks and in the breaking of the heart of God, the prophet gives voice to this anguish. I'll finish this with one more couple of sentences from Heschel. He says, "The language is luminous and explosive. There's a radiance, a brilliance." You've talked on your show about how the prophets use poetry. Poetry consecrates language. It elevates it. It brings these images that are charged, that are so vivid. There's a luminosity to the prophetic message because it is a message from God, but it can be explosive in the face of people who are not living the way they should be living.

Dr. Robbie Taggart: 00:20:15 The prophet is intent on intensifying responsibility. That's the reason they don't let Israel off the hook easily. They say, "You have been chosen. You have been led through the wilderness. You have been selected by God to be a different kind of people. You can't live like the rest of the world." The prophet's words are simultaneously stern, sour and stinging, but behind his austerity is love and compassion for mankind. The prophetic arc starts with wickedness leads to destruction, but eventually it's going to lead to, "But because of the love of God, that is not where the message ends." Now this is Heschel again. He says, "Almost every prophet brings consolation, promise, and the hope of reconciliation along with censure and castigation." He begins with a message of doom. He concludes with a message of hope. That in a nutshell is the message of the prophet Amos.

Hank Smith: 00:21:13 Wow. Robbie, I want to make sure I'm seeing this first part right. So as I'm seeing this for three transgressions, this is verse three, of Damascus and for four. He does it again in verse six with Gaza. Verse nine, Tyrus, I want to say Edom, verse 11, 13, Ammon. The people are going, "Yeah, they're the worst. Every one of those are the worst. Moab, yeah." Then Judah, and at this point, maybe Judah and Israel are not the best of friends.

Dr. Robbie Taggart: 00:21:47 They're not, but this is a Judahite prophet. Amos is from Judah, so he's acknowledging my people too. And they're like, "Okay, yeah."

Hank Smith:	00:21:54	I wonder if in the crowd they're, "What's coming next?" I wonder.
Dr. Robbie Taggart:	00:21:57	Yeah, he's circling closer and closer. Boom.
Hank Smith:	00:22:01	Yeah, chapter two, verse six. What an interesting way to teach. What an interesting way to get attention. Yes, your enemies are bad. Yes, they are. Okay, let's keep going. What about this enemy?
Hank Smith:	00:22:13	Okay, let's talk about you. I have you. It's almost like an entrapment parable, a little bit. I have you now. That's fascinating. Robbie, I may be overly gushing here, but when I talk to you, I sense two things from you. One is a devotion to God and you, and of course many, many of my friends are this way, but I feel this especially from you, is a care for people. What a perfect lesson here because in my mind, I'm like, "Oh, if I had to name one of the teachers I teach with who care deeply, deeply about people and poetry, it's Robbie." For me, this is a perfect lineup.
John Bytheway:	00:22:55	I was watching the Bible Project on YouTube preparing for this, and they showed these large circles, Amos is drawing, and then it gets closer and closer and closer, and then it's what? It's us. I thought of the same thing, Hank, it's kind of like an entrapment parable where yeah, them, yeah, them, yeah, them. And then it's like, okay, and we're in the center of it. I wanted to go back because you said God's special attention or hearing the prayers of the oppressed the most. Can you find that line again?
Dr. Robbie Taggart:	00:23:26	It just came from me, but I do think the God of Israel, there are certain groups of people that have a special attentiveness from God, and it's going to be the widows, it's going to be the fatherless, it's going to be the poor, and it's going to be the stranger. These are the very people. As Israel is expanding its borders, we also have in the archeological evidence, we see that this is the time when there begin to be larger houses and smaller houses. There begin to be class divisions going on here. He says these summer houses and winter houses are going to be destroyed. These houses of ivory are going to be destroyed. He uses a really sharp stinging metaphor in chapter four. He says, "Hear ye this word, ye kine of Bashan," kind of cows, you cows of Bashan that are in the mountains of Samaria. Samaria is the capital city of Israel, "which oppress the poor and crush the needy, which say to their masters, bring us and let us drink." He's likening these Israelites in their

opulence to these cows that are going across the fields eating everything inside.

Dr. Robbie Taggart: 00:24:42 He's saying, "Your selfish, greedy way of being is animalistic and opulent. It will lead to devastation and destruction." But yeah, to your point, he's saying you cannot disregard the people who have no power, the people who are powerless just because you have the capacity to do so, just because you can build big houses. He's going to talk about people who make the ephah small and the shekel heavy. So he's going to say basically when people are coming to buy what you give them in grain because you possess the grain, you're going to make that small and make them pay more than they need. He says, you cannot engage in oppressive economics. That is not the way of God's people. Every blessing that comes from God is designed to be shared.

John Bytheway: 00:25:33 I loved what you said, the special attentiveness from God to the widows, the afflicted, because I imagine what are the prayers of the widows and the orphans and the poor? How much more attention from God are they getting, if I can put it that way? And it reminded me of when Alma and Amulek are talking to the Zoramites about the fact that God will have a son, but they use a verse, Alma 33:11, "Thou didst hear me because of mine afflictions and my sincerity, and it is because of thy Son." They use it to show that God will have a son, but look at that first part, "Thou didst hear me because of my afflictions and my sincerity." When you're afflicted, that's when the prayers go up of those among us that are afflicted. Where else can they go if their fellow man isn't trying to help them?

Dr. Robbie Taggart: 00:26:22 Yeah, amen.

Hank Smith: 00:26:23 James chapter one, verse 27, pure religion undefiled before God and the Father is this, "To visit the fatherless and the widows in their affliction." Robbie, I ran over. I don't know if I can run in my scriptures, but I hurried and went over to Matthew 22 when you said, "Israel's problem in the Old Testament is forgetting God and forgetting the poor." I don't know if you noticed, but you made a quick reference to Jesus saying, "What are the two great commandments?" He says, "Love God and love your neighbor." I'd never connected that. Those are ancient Israel's two problems. They forget God and they forget the poor. Robbie, I don't think early in my career I would've said that. If you would've said, "What's the major problem of the Old Testament?" I'd say, "Oh, their problem's idolatry." But more and more, as I

have read, that's half the problem. The other half, and it comes up a lot, is you grind the faces of the poor.

Dr. Robbie Taggart: 00:27:21 We got to go back to the Abrahamic covenant from the word go. God says, "I'm going to make you a blessing to all the nations through you and through your seed. All the people of the earth will be blessed." Your goodness is not supposed to be a hoarded goodness. It's supposed to be a generous goodness that is shared with everyone. Repeatedly, there's these two Hebrew words that Israel is supposed to live up to, and you see it in chapter five, verse seven. There's a sharing of these two ideas of seeking the Lord and seeking the good of other people. You have in chapter five, verse four, "Thus saith the Lord in the house of Israel, seek ye me and you shall live." If you'll return to me, this is not the end of the story. In fact, five times in chapter four, he said, "All these things have happened." End of verse six, "Yet you have not returned unto me, saith the Lord." Verse eight, "Yet ye have not returned unto me, saith the Lord." Verse nine, "Yet ye have not returned unto me," saith the Lord.

Dr. Robbie Taggart: 00:28:26 He says, "But if you will seek me," in chapter five, verse four, "You will live." He repeats it in verse six, "Seek ye the Lord, and you will live, lest he break out like a fire in the house of Joseph." There is this fire of destruction that comes when we live in self-destructive ways, and there'll be none to quench it in Bethel, which is one of their holy sites. And then he says this, these are the two words, verse seven, "Ye who turn judgment to wormwood and leave off righteousness in the earth." When you were talking with Ross Baron, Isaiah uses these words, "Mishpat is judgment and tzedakah is righteousness." Mishpat as judgment or justice, it is making the world a just place. It's a restorative justice. It's making sure existence is equitable. He says, "This is the way I want my people to live." I sent you into the world to bring restorative, healing, transformative justice, and instead what you brought forth was wormwood, which is this bitter, toxic plant.

Dr. Robbie Taggart: 00:29:36 You, through your actions, have been bringing forth the opposite of justice. You've been bringing forth injustice, you've been bringing forth oppression. And then he says, "You've left off righteousness, tzedakah." Often it's a synonym for charity, for caring for the vulnerable and for caring for the poor. He says, "Look, in verse 21 of chapter five, there's this real intense condemnation of empty worship. He says, "I despise your feast days." Well, God is

the one who has commanded them to keep feast days. Why would God say that? He says, "I will not smell in your solemn assemblies." The burnt offering and the incense was thought to be a sweet smelling savor to God. The scent of praise, the scent of sacrifice, the scent of worship and adoration. But he says, "I don't want to smell that anymore. Though ye offer me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I won't accept them.

Dr. Robbie Taggart: 00:30:34 Neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts. I'm not going to take your external religious offerings. Why? I'm not going to listen to the noise of your songs or hear your melody of your viols because here's what I want. Verse 24, let judgment, mishpat, run down like waters. I want you to be healers of the world. I want you to make this place into the kind of place that we actually need. We speak of justice in four ways in the scriptures. We often think of it in this kind of punitive or retributive way. You're going to get what you deserve because of the wickedness that you've done. And sometimes it feels like that's what's going on here in these passages. Because of your wickedness, I'm just going to let Assyria come and destroy you. There's also this form of justice, which is kind of most common in the Old Testament, which is what God is pleading for his people do.

Dr. Robbie Taggart: 00:31:35 I want you to make the world just, equitable, fair. This is like this social justice. I want you to care for those who don't have enough. That's what he's saying. I want that to flow down. There's also what we would call procedural justice where God basically says the laws apply the same to everybody. And if the law is that wickedness never was happiness, then I will let you choose what you want and receive the consequences thereof. What we usually read as retributive or punitive justice is actually kind of God saying, I will allow your agency to be authentic. I will allow you to claim the consequences of your decisions. Elder Renlund once gave a talk that I absolutely love where he says, when we get off the path to God, to holiness, to light, God is saddened because he knows that this eventually but invariably leads to diminished happiness and forfeited blessings.

Dr. Robbie Taggart: 00:32:40 He says in the scriptures, getting off the path is referred to as sin and the resultant decrease in happiness and forfeited blessings is called punishment. In this sense, God is not punishing us. Punishment is a consequence of our own choices, not his. When we talk about judgment running down like waters and righteousness as a mighty stream,

we're not only getting what God wants us to do, but I think we're starting to get to the kind of God we actually have. If you'll indulge me, could I share a random story from my adolescence?

Hank Smith: 00:33:17 Please.

Dr. Robbie Taggart: 00:33:18 When I was a teenager, I think Hank knows this, I played in punk bands and I was leopard spotted hair and mohawks or whatever. One day my friends and I are driving down the street in our neighborhood and we see this brown couch on the side of the road and it has this sign on it that just says free. We start thinking about all the things we could do with this brown couch. We think about maybe we could hike it up to the mountains and we have this favorite camping spot and we'll just go let it be our place we go. And then we start thinking, oh, it's going to get mildew and snails and stuff. Maybe we could hike it up to the mountains, our favorite hiking spot and chuck it off a cliff. And then my friend's like, maybe we would hit someone and we shouldn't do that.

Dr. Robbie Taggart: 00:33:57 And I'm like, okay, good idea. And then one of my friends is like, what if we took it down by the lake, slashed it up with knives, doused it in gasoline and lit it on fire? And just the brilliance, the perfection of that idea just distilled on all of us. We thought, yes, this is exactly what we need to do with this couch. This is what we are looking for. So we go home, we take out the seats of my parents' minivan. We go pick up the couch. We bring the gasoline, the fire extinguisher, the knives. We go down by the lake. And I'm not encouraging this, I'm just telling the story.

Hank Smith: 00:34:33 This is descriptive, not proscriptive. Okay.

Dr. Robbie Taggart: 00:34:35 Yeah, exactly right.

Hank Smith: 00:34:36 Yeah.

Dr. Robbie Taggart: 00:34:37 So we go down by the lake and it is everything a teenage boy wants it to be. We're howling and laughing and slashing and it's half terrifying and half thrilling and we're throwing the couch stuffing and the cushions and then we're like, douse it. And so we douse it in gasoline, we chuck a match on it and immediately it just erupts into flame. I think part of the reason that this story came to my mind as I was reading Amos is because of this, for three transgressions and for four, I will send a fire. For three transgressions and

for four, I will send a fire. And this wasn't really transgressions. It was just stupidity. But the stupidity here can sort of be, it can stand in for the ways that we don't live up to maybe how we ought to be living. We're making decisions that maybe aren't in the best interest of the world.

Dr. Robbie Taggart: 00:35:25 The couch is on fire. There's this enormous blaze. There's this pillar of smoke, like the one that led the Israelites through the wilderness pouring forth into the sky. I say to my friend, put it out with the fire extinguisher. And he runs up and he squeezes the fire extinguisher and either it's lost pressure or something, but nothing comes out. It's just like a tiny little drizzle. And he looks at me with just this panic in his face, just like, what are we going to do? One of my friends is like, move the van. That's the first thing. We move the van so that if everything catches fire, it doesn't explode. I'm looking for something in the van. I find a towel. I take it out. I start trying to hit the flames. It does nothing but kind of fan them higher. We're in this stand of cottonwood trees, a little bit off the roads because we thought we could be not noticeable by people.

Dr. Robbie Taggart: 00:36:12 And all of a sudden the flames are licking the trees and we start hearing this crackling. One of my buddies is like, there's a bog of mud he had been out exploring. We're running, we're grabbing armfuls of mud, we're chucking it at this couch. The fire is spreading onto the grass. And just as we're kind of experiencing this panic, this school bus drives by on the road that we thought wouldn't be able to see us and they're clearly visible and they're driving really slowly. We're panicking and scrambling and I get scratched because in order to get to the mud, we got to step over this little fence and I'm bleeding and I'm covered in mud and we're sweating from the heat of the fire. And then the school bus drives back the other way really slowly. And then we hear this siren, and my heart just sinks.

Dr. Robbie Taggart: 00:37:02 And I picture us getting in trouble. I picture this police officer showing up and cuffing me and taking me home and having to explain things to my dad. For a lot of my younger years, I think because I didn't always do the things that I knew God wanted me to do like these Israelites right here, I thought of God as someone who is trying to catch me doing something wrong and was trying to punish me for the wrong that I was doing. But what happened that day taught me something different about God. Instead of a police officer, it was a little firetruck from the little local city, just

one firefighter and he walks by us silently with this enormous fire extinguisher and he passes by, he doesn't say anything and he just sprays for, I don't know, a couple of minutes. It was really long to be standing there in silence as he's just spraying this couch out and the grass and everything else.

Dr. Robbie Taggart: 00:38:00 Finally, one of my friends is like, "You talk." And I was like, "Okay." The firefighter turns to us and he says, "So what are you doing?" And I said, "We're just being idiots." And he just looks us in the eye and he says, "Well, sometimes being an idiot catches up to you." And then he turns and he gets in his truck and he drives away. And I look at my friends and I'm like, "Are we not in trouble? Are we okay?" And I'm like, "Get in the van." And we drive away and my friends are lying down in the back of the van trying to hide. For years, we just sort of laughed about it at the time we almost got in big trouble lighting this couch on fire. But it was when I was on my mission, I was teaching this woman who felt like she had lit her life on fire.

Dr. Robbie Taggart: 00:38:42 She was drug addicted. She had destroyed every relationship in her life. And we came to her and we said, "You have a God who still loves you. You can still turn to him. Even though you have taken the gifts he's given you and turned them into wormwood, his invitation is to return, to seek him, and God will be found to change your life and let judgment run down like waters and righteousness as a mighty stream." And as I was talking to her, I thought about this moment and I realized that is the image of God that the prophets always give. The prophets are warning, if you light your life on fire, you will suffer. It's not a threat. It's just a cosmic reality. It is just the way things are. It's procedural, not punitive justice. God will honor your agency. If you choose the things that bring suffering, you will experience suffering.

Dr. Robbie Taggart: 00:39:43 But into that suffering comes the prophetic voice that says this isn't the end because the God that we have can put out any fire. The God that we have shows up to restore our lives. That's the fourth kind of justice that is talked about in scripture. There's punitive, which I think frankly, most of the time when it's depicted that way, it's really procedural or it's restorative. God gives us what we need in order to be healed or transformed instead of what we deserve because of what we've done. And what did these Israelites need? They needed to see that where they were taking their lives wasn't going anywhere good. And if they continued in this

oppressive, selfish, self-indulgent, empty ritual way, they weren't going to have their relationship with God. They weren't going to know the God who desired to bless them. Eventually, the final verses of Amos, after he's seen Israel as a basket of summer fruit, they're overripe.

Dr. Robbie Taggart: 00:40:52 They're about to rot in chapter eight. And he says, this passage that is super familiar to us in chapter eight verse 11, "Behold the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread nor of thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord and they shall wander from sea to sea, from the north to the east. They shall run to and fro and seek the word of the Lord and not find it." That's not a threat. He's saying a prophetic silence comes when you repeatedly reject the prophetic message. Literally it has just happened. It is in response to something. Remember he's up in the Northern Kingdom in chapter seven, verse 10. Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, which is the holy site in Israel, sent to Jeroboam, King of Israel, saying, "Amos, this rascal prophet from the south has conspired against thee in the midst of the house of Israel.

Dr. Robbie Taggart: 00:41:56 The land is not able to bear all his words. Amos prophesied destruction on us." Amos has told us why he's going to prophesy destruction in our other most famous verse. And maybe we go there and then we'll end here and then we'll go to chapter nine. But in Amos three, verse seven, surely the Lord God will do nothing, save he reveal his secret unto his servants, the prophets. It's right after these poetic couplets where he says, verse three, "It's these really obvious things. Can two walk together except they be agreed?" How awkward is it to be walking side by side with someone that you haven't decided to walk with? One of you is going to pick up the pace or slow down. When people are walking side by side, it's because they have a plan to walk side by side. Will a lion roar in the forest when it hath no prey?

Dr. Robbie Taggart: 00:42:43 No, a lion's going to be quiet until it finds its prey, then it's going to roar out. Will a young lion cry out of his den if he has taken nothing? The answer is no, no, obviously no. Can a bird fall in a snare where there's no gin from? Can a bird get trapped in a trap that nobody has ever set? The answer is no. No. No. Will one take up a snare from the earth if there's nothing in it? No. Will a trumpet be blown in the city and the people be not afraid? If there's a trumpet of war coming, the natural consequence is someone is going to be afraid. Will there be evil done in a city or harm done in a

city? This is on the heels of, I'm going to send a fire for all the wickedness of these nations and the Lord hath not done it.

Dr. Robbie Taggart: 00:43:29 The ancient Israelite conception is that everything comes at the hands of the Lord. So when they depict punishment and judgment, it's because the God who set the world in motion, who honors our agency and lets us be destroyed, it all comes because this is the natural order of things. It's the way that God has to honor existence. But then surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he reveals his secret to his servant the prophets. Verse seven, the lion has roared. The natural consequence is to be afraid. The Lord has spoken. Who can but prophesy? Well, the time comes in Amos seven where Amaziah, this priest who has complained to King Jeroboam actually comes to Amos in verse 12 and he says, "O thou seer, go. Flee away into the land of Judah. There eat your bread, prophesy there, but prophesy not anymore at Bethel. It's the king's chapel and the king's court." And Amos said, Look, I didn't ask for this.

Dr. Robbie Taggart: 00:44:30 Like I said at the beginning, if God calls you, you have to talk. Sometimes the prophet feels like some of those images of being caught in a snare or a lion roaring. He's like, "Look, I fear God. God has captured me. God has captured my heart and I have to do the thing that God has asked me to do. I was no prophet. I didn't seek this. I wasn't a prophet's son. I wasn't following after the prophetic vocation. I was just a herdman. I was a gatherer of sycamore fruit. I was going about my life. And the Lord took me as I followed the flock and the Lord said to me, Go, prophesy to the people, Israel. This is why I'm here. I'm here to be faithful to what God has asked me to do because that is the role of the prophet. That is all I can do.

Dr. Robbie Taggart: 00:45:18 Then he says, now if you continue to reject the word, if you say go, don't prophesy here. He says in verse 16, "Wherefore hear thou the word of the Lord thou sayest, prophesy not against Israel. Drop not thy word against the house of Isaac." Well then end of verse 17, Israel will surely go into captivity. Then chapter eight, verse 11, the days are going to come that there's going to be this famine in the land. Apostasy is always because of the agency of a people who reject the words of prophets. But the prophet says, "But I'm not just here to prophesy doom and I'm not just here to prophesy destruction." The end of Amos' prophecy is verse 11, "After all of this destruction, in that day, I will raise up the tabernacle of David that has fallen. The

		covenant people who have been broken down, David was promised that he would always have an heir on the throne and I will raise up his ruins.
Dr. Robbie Taggart:	00:46:14	I will build it as the days of old." The days are going to come verse 13, "When the plowman will overtake the reaper and the treader of grapes, him that sows seed." He's saying these are images of this extravagant abundance. And it's cool that Amos, this sheepherder and farmer, uses all this agricultural image in his poetry. And he says, "And the mountains will drop sweet wine and the hills will not. There's going to be an abundance. There's going to be a restoration. And I will bring again the captivity of my people, Israel, and they'll build the waste cities. They will inhabit them. They will plant vineyards and drink the wine. They will make gardens and eat the fruit thereof, and I will plant them upon their land and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land." The stunning message of the prophets is that God is so good that despite all of your rejection, all of your infidelity, all of your oppression, all of your absence of compassion, I will still choose you.
Dr. Robbie Taggart:	00:47:21	I will still work with you. It may just be a remnant of you that I get the chance to work with. Amos uses a couple of remnant images. He talks about when a lion captures a lamb and only a leg is left. He's like, "That's what Israel is going to be like." And it seems like there's no hope for that leg, but he says, "I'm going to use that little remnant and bring something back." Or he says, "It's like when you separate the chaff out in a sieve." He says, "No kernel, no goodness is going to be destroyed. The goodness of Israel is going to be preserved even through this destruction. The destruction is always with the intention of creating a people who are prepared to receive and embody the blessings of God for them." And that's the way that the book of Amos ends.
Dr. Robbie Taggart:	00:48:07	It is full of warnings. It is full of these devastating prophecies, but it's also full of a ton of hope and this promise that one day righteousness and justice are actually going to flow down and God's goodness is going to pour forth and heal and redeem us.
Hank Smith:	00:48:26	Let me catch my breath, John.
John Bytheway:	00:48:28	So good. Yeah, I'm taking a ton of notes here. This is beautiful.

Hank Smith:	00:48:33	I love how you said, "Look, I didn't want this job. I was doing fine. I liked where I was." Elder Holland said way back in 2003, he said, "Do we love and sustain local and general leaders imperfect as they are?" And then this, "for their willingness to accept callings they did not seek in order to preserve a standard of righteousness they did not create."
John Bytheway:	00:48:59	I like what you said about Amos 8:11 and 12. A prophetic silence comes when you repeatedly reject the prophetic message. I was writing as fast as I could.
Hank Smith:	00:49:10	Robbie, can we work quickly on a scripture skill? I know you teach your students. We occasionally as Latter-day Saints, and I think everybody does this, we'll cherry pick a verse and we'll grab it and take it out of its book and use it. When we're talking about surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secrets unto his servants the prophets. In context, this is, look, would prophets be there if there wasn't a reason for them? Do two people walk together if they don't mean to? No. Does a lion roar if there's nothing to hunt? No. Do prophets come if they're not needed? No.
Dr. Robbie Taggart:	00:49:49	And if there's not a loving God to send them. Yeah, absolutely.
Hank Smith:	00:49:52	Then the other one that we have a tendency to do this with is the famine. We might take this out and go, oh, there was a great apostasy. But in context, in its book, he's saying, keep rejecting prophetic messages and they do go away.
John Bytheway:	00:50:07	And they'll stop.
Hank Smith:	00:50:09	We can liken that to the great apostasy, but in context, is that what he's saying?
Dr. Robbie Taggart:	00:50:14	Yeah, exactly right. And all the things that you've filled yourself with, like the kine of Bashan, are going to be empty and you are going to find yourself hungry because the things that are going to nourish you are going to be these eternal truths, this sense of who you are and your purpose and your objective.
Hank Smith:	00:50:31	If I get frustrated with a prophet at General Conference, at least I can think he didn't call me a fat cow in the grass,
Dr. Robbie Taggart:	00:50:37	Right?

Hank Smith:	00:50:39	Robbie, before we move on to Jonah, I want to ask you something. I was writing as fast as I could too, John. Poetry consecrates language. I would just like you to tell us about your passion for poetry because obviously Amos uses it. You're showing us, oh, he's using literary art in the way this story's being told. Tell me a little bit more about what you mean by that. I want to appreciate poetry more.
Dr. Robbie Taggart:	00:51:03	Poetry has a way of startling us out of our prosaic way of inhabiting our lives. We go through life expecting these certain things to happen. We expect people to articulate themselves in a certain way. If they start rhyming or there's meter or there's an impressive image, it calls us up short. It shocks us out of the ways we're accustomed to inhabiting our lives, and it shows us that we could see something differently. It shows us a different way of being in the world. For me, that's what I mean when I say poetry consecrates language. It takes this common everyday thing and it elevates it to a higher purpose. It shows us that there's a richness. There's a capacity to convey something that is more than what is on the surface, more than something superficial. It's profound, it's deep, it's eternal. And I think that's why you have Amos using all this imagistic language and using these repeated refrains that help bring me back to a sense of, why did he say it that way?
Dr. Robbie Taggart:	00:52:01	Why did he say it that way?
John Bytheway:	00:52:03	But does it have three stanzas and then four?
Dr. Robbie Taggart:	00:52:05	Yeah. Okay. Maybe to give you a little bit of background, I was reading the book of Amos years ago and I was feeling overwhelmed with this sense of why are we so greedy, so selfish? Why is it so hard for us to show compassion? Why is this the world that we've created for our children to inherit? I was just feeling the burden of it, and I was reading Amos. At that time, my next door neighbor and my friend, Mary, was in a terrible motorcycle accident. She was coming down the canyon and her brakes failed. She crashed up against a barrier. It was a horrific accident that ended up costing her her leg. She now has a prosthetic leg. But what happened at that time is I watched what so often happens with covenant communities where when someone is in need, the floodgates of love open up, this distributive justice, this flow of righteousness comes and it brings this healing and this love.

Dr. Robbie Taggart:	00:53:11	A bunch of her artist friends got together and they put on a show at the Compass Gallery in downtown Provo and they donated all their artwork and anyone who bought that art, it went to Mary's hospital bills to take care of her in this time of her need. And I thought the covenant people aren't all that bad. The covenant people, there's a lot of goodness. There is a lot of justice and righteousness that we manifest. So the poem is called Send a Fire, Set a Table. The shepherd prophet stands in the midst of his flock, lighting the sheep on fire one by one and sending them to the nations, a burnt offering of sorts for three transgressions and for four, I will send a fire. God holds his nose and refuses to inhale the mirth of unholy dances, the not so sweet smelling savor of empty worship.
Dr. Robbie Taggart:	00:54:09	They're dancing on the faces of the poor whose clean teeth crave relief. God has plugged his ears to shut out the violence of their viols for three transgressions and for four. Some wander to and fro seeking just a morsel of God's piquant grace. I get the prophetic passion, the plea to stop selling the unfortunate for a pair of shoes, but in this world of light and mud, other ways abound as well, some awake every morning to ask, who can we nourish with God's delicious love today? The other day while my friend who paints radiance rode her motorcycle down the canyon, brakes failed, she smashed into a concrete median and lost her leg. At first, no one thought to pick it up as they rushed her to the healers. They had to go back between mountains to retrieve it. As she lay in the hospital, her artist friends gathered their creations like a flock of multicolored sheep or a basket of summer fruits and offered them for her healing, turning the shadow of death into mourning.
Dr. Robbie Taggart:	00:55:17	I imagine God unplugs one divine nostril and breathes in the munificence of this community and inclines his ear to the music of kindness, running like waters and righteousness as a mighty stream. Ah, the mountains drop their sweet wine and God sets a table for all who care for the crushed. With sycamore figs and the succulent fruit of God's eternal garden, a table is set. Come and eat together.
Hank Smith:	00:55:49	Wow.
John Bytheway:	00:55:50	Beautiful.
Hank Smith:	00:55:51	That is beautiful.

John Bytheway:	00:55:52	You heard so many phrases from Amos in there. Yeah, thank you. What did you say? Poetry consecrates language.
Hank Smith:	00:56:02	It really does. That was a perfect example of that. I have to tell you both, the year was 2012. We had three children and quickly in one day added two more. It was a lot. And then at that exact same time, my wife's mother was diagnosed with stage four liver cancer and over that next year after the twins were born, she passed away, my wife's best friend. We were suffering. Many, many people came to our aid, but I'd like to just highlight this, Robbie, what you said, this covenant community. In our ward are Jake and Heather Barlow who had just recently lost their child, their daughter. Well, they saw our need and said... I'm just going to tear up with the end of your poem there. They said, "Come to our house and eat." And they fed our entire family every Sunday for a year and a half.
Dr. Robbie Taggart:	00:57:09	Wow.
Hank Smith:	00:57:10	A year and a half every Sunday. And they were suffering themselves. At first, I thought, "Oh, we can't do this to these people. This is such a burden." And they said, "No, no, no. We want these babies here. We miss ours."
Dr. Robbie Taggart:	00:57:27	That is what God always intended with the covenant people, that kind of living. He says, "I want you to be a non-tribal tribe. I want you to be an expansive, generous, welcoming, nourishing presence in the world." I have a daughter on a mission right now, and she says before she ever had a testimony of the gospel, she had a testimony of the church, of this group of people who from the time she was a little girl, loved her, taught her, cared about what happened in her life. That is what I think Amos is lamenting not happening in Israel, and it is what God is beckoning us toward.
Hank Smith:	00:58:02	Wow. Wow. Beautiful. Robbie, where is Sister Taggart, your missionary? Where is she?
Dr. Robbie Taggart:	00:58:08	She's in North Dakota, the Bismarck Mission.
Hank Smith:	00:58:11	Yeah. Well, if anybody out there sees Sister Taggart, let her know. Her dad's incredible. I'm sure her mom is as well.
Dr. Robbie Taggart:	00:58:19	Amazing. Even better. Absolutely. She's just crushing it, loving the mission, so good.

Hank Smith:	00:58:25	Oh, I love that. Robbie, you've completely changed the book of Amos for me. You want to do that to the book of Jonah?
Dr. Robbie Taggart:	00:58:31	Can we do Obadiah first real quick?
Hank Smith:	00:58:33	Oh, yes. I forgot Obadiah.
Dr. Robbie Taggart:	00:58:35	So Obadiah is the shortest book in the Bible, and I feel like there's a lot to recommend it, so I get why we're like, let's just skip over it. Obadiah, the context is during the Babylonian exile, Edom, they are Israel's brother. I mean, literally, Jacob and Esau are the ancestors of Israel and Edom. This is Esau who, yes, sold his birthright for a mess of pottage, but also had his blessing taken from him by a brother who deceived him, who, yes, wanted to kill his brother Jacob as soon as their dad died, but also offers one of the most beautiful examples of forgiveness in the entire Hebrew Bible, Old Testament. Edom and Israel are not just neighbors. They really are family. There's this sense that when the southern kingdom of Judah was taken captive into Babylon in exile, that Edom stood by and didn't do anything.
Dr. Robbie Taggart:	00:59:37	This is why Obadiah sends forth this doom prophecy or oracle against them. It says in Obadiah 1:11, "In the day that thou stoodest on the other side, in the day that the strangers carried away captive his forces and foreigners entered into his gates and cast lots upon Jerusalem, even thou wast as one of them. Thou should not have looked on the day of thy brother in the day that he became a stranger. Neither should thou have rejoiced over the children of Judah in the day of their destruction. Neither should thou have spoken proudly in the day of their distress." He says, look, you should have helped. You shouldn't have stood by. You shouldn't have rejoiced. You shouldn't have taken part in the spoil. You are their brothers. You are their family. Family looks out for each other. Even though you're different kingdoms, you have similar roots, you have similar ancestry. I actually think that's a beautiful lead in because the book of Jonah is about who deserves God's mercy, who deserves God's grace.
Dr. Robbie Taggart:	01:00:46	As Latter-day Saints, we've often taken this final prophecy in Obadiah, this final verse, which is about how Israel or Judah is going to be brought back. There are going to be, again, saviors coming up on Mount Zion and they will judge the Mount of Esau and the kingdom will be the Lord's, that when Israel is restored, they'll be restored to all their blessings. There'll be all these helpers that help them come

back. But some of our prophets have applied this to the work that we do in temples as we talk about saviors coming up on Mount Zion and the kingdom being the Lords. The reason that's cool is because the work that we do in temples is the work that transcends every boundary, that sees that every person is a brother. We can't be apathetic about the fact that someone didn't have the gospel decades or centuries ago, but we see them as a brother or we see them as a sister and we take their names to the temple.

Dr. Robbie Taggart: 01:01:46 We treat them with the holiness and the dignity that is required of every single child of God. As we do so, we raise up, not only are we gathered Israel back to the lands of our inheritance, back to the relationship with God, but we are the gathered gatherers. We are the healed healers. We are the beloved lovers. If Israel from its very inception is supposed to be something that blesses all the nations, the condemnation in Obadiah is you saw them as others, you saw them as strangers that didn't deserve your love and compassion and care, but Israel ought to see each other as brothers, ought to treat each other as brothers. Jonah is going to push that to its extreme. It is going to ask the question of who does God care about? If we can go back to Amos for one little tiny snippet of universalism or universality, you have all throughout Israel's scriptures this assertion of the chosen status of Israel.

Dr. Robbie Taggart: 01:02:56 And as John in your book, Isaiah for Airheads beautifully talked about, Israel's chosen to do the work. Israel's chosen to be the ones who are blessing everybody else. Amos hints at the fact that Israel's not the only chosen nation. There's this really fascinating moment in Amos chapter nine, verse seven, "Are ye Israel not as the children of the Ethiopians unto me, O children of Israel," aren't you as beloved as the Ethiopians who they think of as these Africans, these outsiders, have not I brought up Israel out of the land of Egypt and the Philistines from Kaftur and the Syrians from Kur? Wait a minute, we don't know those stories. He's like, Just like I've been working to redeem you, to deliver you, to choose you, to guide you, to protect you, to bless you, I have been working in the lives of other people in ways you have no idea.

Dr. Robbie Taggart: 01:04:09 I've been doing a bigger work than you've ever been aware of. Philistia, the Philistines, are you for real? God's like, Yeah, they're my chosen people too. I've delivered them in ways you're not aware of. You have this amazing sense that the Syrians who have had some conflicts with Israel and

Judah throughout the years, he's like, yep, they're also my chosen people. And you're like, wait a minute, God, what are you doing here? And God's like, Well, something bigger than you imagine. That's the perfect intro to the book of Jonah. We have in the book of Jonah the exact inverse of the prophet Amos. It's almost like a parody of the prophetic call narrative where a prophet doesn't want to do the thing God asked him to do, but trusts in God and goes and does it and always fails but is faithful anyway. The hope is this long-term hope.

Dr. Robbie Taggart: 01:05:09 Eventually you'll get redeemed, but the book of Jonah is utterly different. There is a fascinating passage in 2 Kings 14 that talks about a prophet from Gathhepher, which is up in the Galilee region whose name is Jonah, the son of Amittai. And scholars fight about whether this is the historical same person, if this story, or if this is a story that was set in that prophet's voice to give you the Assyrian context to make this just the most devastating group of people that he's supposed to go to because Assyria has perfected the art of brutality. Assyria has perfected the art of cruelty. Assyria has perfected the art of empire. If that's the context, it makes the story all the more miraculous, all the more surprising. For the most part, the prophetic texts don't have narrative. Jonah is almost completely narrative. You are going to have a poem or a Psalm in chapter two, but in the prophetic text, there's going to be promises or prophecies.

Dr. Robbie Taggart: 01:06:18 You don't get any of that in Jonah. Jonah is literarily, I think, one of the most perfect short stories ever written. The characterizations, they're overdrawn, they're exaggerated, they're over the top. A lot of commentators who write about it talk about its humor. When I was an undergraduate at BYU, one of my best professors was a man by the name of Steve Walker, and I have lost contact with him. So Steve, if you're listening to this podcast, will you reach out to me at BYU because I miss you and I want to reconnect? But Steve taught a class called The Bible as Literature, and one of the most beautiful things he did is yes, he took us through some of the genres of the sacred texts and helped us see when different genres were being used and how the genre influenced the way that you read a text.

Dr. Robbie Taggart: 01:07:08 But more than anything, he encouraged us to read these sacred texts the way that you would read a good novel or the way that you would read a good short story, looking for what am I learning through the characterization? What am I learning through the voice of the person, through the

dialogue? He wrote a book that I brought called Illuminating Humor of the Bible. He has a whole chapter called Jonah as Joke. He talks about how incredibly funny the book of Jonah is. Part of the reason I loved his class is because he gave me a way of enjoying the scriptures that I'd never experienced before. I came to see these people as human, as having personalities, as being flawed. I came to ask questions of the text like I would of a good novel. There is a real deliberate craft to the book of Jonah.

Dr. Robbie Taggart: 01:08:03 There's irony all throughout. There's exaggeration all throughout. The name Jonah means dove. Is Jonah supposed to be an harbinger of peace? Because if he is, his brief sermon doesn't quite live up to the peace bringing intention there. What I've learned is a really good story often ends like a really good joke, sort of a punchline at the end. My youngest daughter, little 12-year-old, her name is Tessa, she's a storyteller and she's gone to the Timpanogos Storytelling Festival. She's 12. A couple of times and she's told with these professional tellers. There's something about the arc of a story where you're introduced to these loose ends and then they get tied up really nicely at the end. So you're getting introduced to the character of Jonah, you're getting introduced to the drama and the problem of Jonah. And by the time we get to the bizarreness of the Assyrian cattle fasting and wearing sackcloth and ashes, the perfection of the tale is the final line.

Dr. Robbie Taggart: 01:09:10 And we'll give it away right now and then we'll go back into the text and sort of look at why it's so ideal. But a really good folktale can end with this punchline. God says in verse 11, "Should not I spare Nineveh? That great city we're in are more than six score thousand persons who can't discern between their right hand and their left." And then this line, "And also much cattle." The joke there is God saying like, "Jonah, this is above and beyond repentance. This is beyond anything you would anticipate to see." What I loved about Steve Walker is he made the scriptures come alive for me. He helped me see that it's okay to see the humanity, to see the humor in these sacred texts. What it did is it actually made them more real to me. It made the people of scriptures three-dimensional.

Dr. Robbie Taggart: 01:10:04 It gave them a sense of relevance and applicability in my life. I will forever be grateful for the way that he taught me the book of Jonah. But from the word go, we have Jonah behaving in ways you don't expect. The word of the Lord, verse one, came unto Jonah, the son of Amittai saying,

Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city and cry against it their wickedness has come up before me. That is totally what you would expect. The word of the Lord comes, it's a doom message because of wickedness. Then the word but, but Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He goes in the complete opposite direction and scholars fight about where Tarshish is, but probably Spain, for sure it's to the west. Assyria is to the northeast. He went down to Joppa, he found a ship going to Tarshish and he paid his fare and went down into it.

Dr. Robbie Taggart: 01:10:57 Instead of this kind of ascent of the prophet into the presence of God, there's this down, down, down, down to Joppa, down to Tarshish, down into the ship. We sometimes tell this story as if Jonah is afraid to go to Nineveh, and there is all the reasons in the world for Jonah to be afraid to go to Nineveh. I read one commentator saying, this would be like God asking a Jewish person to go to Berlin in the middle of the Holocaust. This is a terrifying place to be where they're on a campaign of brutality, taking over the ancient Near East, they're beheading and maiming and mistreating all of their prisoners. And so God to say, "Go there." And we think Jonah goes out of fear. Well, tuck that away because Jonah doesn't not go out of fear, but we'll get there. But eventually we have to see the Lord sent out a great wind to the sea.

Dr. Robbie Taggart: 01:11:57 There was a tempest in verse four, "The ship was like to be broken." And then what we end up finding is mariners who are more righteous, they are Gentile outsiders. Jonah should have this relationship with God, but he doesn't. He runs from this relationship with God. And here you have these people and Jonah's down in the sides of the ship, fast asleep, maybe depressed because he's running away from who he knows he's supposed to be. And the shipmaster came to him and said, "What meanest thou, sleeper? Arise. Call upon thy God if it so be that God will think on us and perish not." They've been crying out to their own gods. They've been throwing their wares oversea to try to lighten it. And Jonah, the one who actually should have a connection with God, all these people who should have no connection with God according to the Israelite imagination who should be heathens, they're doing all within their power while Jonah's doing nothing.

Dr. Robbie Taggart: 01:12:55 They cast lots, a lot falls on Jonah, this divine suggestion that he's the reason from it. "Who are you?" They say. "Why is this thing happening?" He says, "I'm a Hebrew."

Then this ironic phrase, "I fear the Lord. I fear Yahweh; Yahweh is my God. The God of heaven, which made the sea and the dry land." And they're like, "And you thought you could escape the God who made the sea and the dry land by running across the dry land and getting on a boat and going across the sea?" And there's just a sense of the futility and the ridiculousness of this. And the men are afraid and they said, "Why did you flee from God?" And they say, "What can we do?" And he says in verse 12, "Take me up, cast me forth into the sea. For my sake, this great tempest is upon you." There's this sense of...

Dr. Robbie Taggart: 01:13:44 Jonah may really sense that there's no more for me. I have tried to run from the God of heaven and earth. He may be trying to save them by sacrificing himself, but it may be a moment of utter despair and discouragement. But you see this generosity of spirit. You see this courage and this selflessness in these gentile mariners. The men rode hard to bring it to land, but they couldn't. The sea wrought and was tempestuous against them because God's got a plan. God is the God of the sea and the land. They cried unto the Lord and that's so cool. Jonah's first unwitting converts to Yahweh are these mariners. It's not that he's done anything, but now they have experienced. He was supposed to go share the message with Nineveh. He goes off on this boat heading to Tarshish, but what God does is bigger than Jonah ever imagined.

Dr. Robbie Taggart: 01:14:42 Jonah thought to flee, and God thinks to use this as an opportunity to introduce the power of Yahweh to these people. They cry unto Yahweh, they beseech him, let us not perish for this innocent man's life. And they take him up and they cast him into the raging sea. Then they offer a sacrifice unto the Lord and they made vows. Stunning. And if you're an Israelite reading this story like, wait, what? These outsiders are the righteous people in this story? They're the ones who are in right relationship with God. They're the ones who are praising and praying to and worshiping Yahweh while Jonah sinks to the bottom of the sea, which in the Israelite imagination, the mount of Jerusalem where the temple is, that's the closest proximity to God and the depths of the ocean, that is as far away as you can get from the presence of God.

Dr. Robbie Taggart: 01:15:39 But the Lord had prepared a great fish. Here's your shout out, John. The Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. As Christians, we love this because when Jesus

		is asked for a sign, he says, "Well, I'm not going to give you any sign, but the sign of Jonah." And he says, "I'm going to be in the earth three days and three nights like Jonah was." And here's the beauty of this. For Jonah, without knowing the end of the story, for Jonah, like Jesus' disciples on Good Friday, this feels hopeless. This feels like the end of the story. Jonah's in the depths, in the belly of a great Leviathan, which is often sort of this sea creature of chaos and hopelessness, even an image of death or Sheol or the grave.
Dr. Robbie Taggart:	01:16:34	It seems like there's no hope for Jonah now, but that is not the end of the story. Jonah is a story of hope against hope. Jonah is a story of another opportunity. Jonas is a story of descent and darkness and then rising again and hope. Despite all of Jonah's intentions, God is going to bring forth beauty out of this rebellion, out of this refusal to sort of follow the invitation, the beckoning to be an instrument of God's love. That's chapter one. Anything you guys want to say about that one?
Hank Smith:	01:17:10	Is this meant to be a funny part where prophets usually will do anything to get converts? Jonah gets converts by running away.
Dr. Robbie Taggart:	01:17:20	Yeah, absolutely.
Hank Smith:	01:17:22	It reminds me of some missionaries who think he's the most disobedient missionary and he's baptizing all these people. Are you serious? I wonder if they finished chapter one going, people just converted because he was there, because he said, yeah, I'm running from God and what do we do? Well, toss me into the sea. I'm convinced. I get baptized. I'm in.
Dr. Robbie Taggart:	01:17:44	Every expectation is turned on its head. People expect the prophet to be rejected. This prophet is just embraced by the least likely of free time. Yeah, absolutely.
John Bytheway:	01:17:54	Yeah, just looking at verse 12 going, Jonah's saying, "I will die so that you may live." And when Jesus comes, he says, "One greater than Jonah is here," but I just thought that was cast me into the sea voluntarily. So maybe a little type of Christ there. I don't know. What do you think?
Dr. Robbie Taggart:	01:18:12	My friend Kim Matheson once gave a wonderous scripture lecture at BYU where she talks about the Greek word for

type is tupos. It's the mark left by a blow. It's like on a typewriter, the blow leaves this mark and that's the type. What she ends up saying is the life of Christ is so explosive, so powerful that you end up seeing Christ-shaped divots all throughout history. And I think that anytime that there is generosity, compassion, selflessness, we're starting to see this Christ-shaped divot. And there's no question that Jonah is a type of Christ who is the actual prince of peace, the actual one whose experience in the depths brings forth this new life, whose willingness to descend below all things makes it possible for everyone to ascend above all things. What I love about the types is often it's unlikely characters, but Christ says, "I will show up in the least likely places." As the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins says, "Christ plays in 10,000 places, lovely in limbs and lovely in eyes, not his, to the father through the features of men's faces." We are going to start seeing Christ everywhere if we're looking for the influence.

Dr. Robbie Taggart: 01:19:33 And I think you're right. I think you're exactly right to see a type of Christ there. Chapter two, we have Jonah prayed unto the Lord, his God out of the fish's belly. And then most scholars assume that this is a Psalm that has been inserted here that kind of matches. It isn't really a repentance. He doesn't ever say, "I did something wrong." It's more of a Thanksgiving Psalm. He expresses out of the belly of hell, I cried. You heard me. This is a God who is inescapable, who is everywhere. "Though thou has cast me into the deep and the floods compass me about, thy billows and waves passed over me, I said, I will look again toward thy holy temple." That's the repentance piece. That's the moment where he is like, I'm going to look back to God. I'm going to look back to the thing that God is asking of me.

Dr. Robbie Taggart: 01:20:23 Then we have these symbols that we can all sort of recognize in our lives because we all have waters that compass us even to the soul or to the neck, the nefesh, the depths closed about us and the weeds wrapped around our heads. What terrible situations do we get ourselves into? This is me with the couch on fire that I've found myself in this sort of devastating moment. This is a God who shows up in those circumstances. This is a God who shows up when it feels like there's no hope. "When my soul fainted" verse seven "within me, I remembered the Lord. My prayer came unto thee in thy holy temple." Those who observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy. That's the procedural justice that we talked about earlier. If you walk

away from what God is extending to you, you forsake your own mercy.

Dr. Robbie Taggart: 01:21:14 And that is a problematic passage in Hebrew, but we won't get into that. He says, "But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving. I will pay that I have vowed. Salvation is of the Lord and the Lord spake unto the fish and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land." That is an intense verb, that vomiting back up into this newness of life. There really is something about the pathway to spirituality, the pathway back to the presence of God. It often does feel like a descent. Sometimes we want it to be an ever-increasing step upward into the light, into the clouds, into the presence of God, but Jonah had to go down, down, down. I think about those moments in our lives. I think that's what the Christ story tells us in part, that the way into newness of life is sometimes the abandonment of an old life.

Dr. Robbie Taggart: 01:22:08 It is sometimes the death of an old self that wasn't serving me. And it sometimes is very painful to go through this belly of the fish experience. Sometimes when we're in the middle of one of those belly of the fish things, we think it's because God is mad at us. But if we believe in restorative justice as we've been talking about, God's intention in preparing this miraculous fish was to transform and turn around Jonah to get him back where he needed to be. If we could approach the belly of the fish moments in our lives, those deep moments of seaweeds wrapped around our head and darkness all around us as opportunities to look back to the light, to see again, even if it feels like an unwelcome or unpleasant experience, if it's transformative, this is what Christ shows us. The way to new life is through death and it's through allowing the suffering to transform you into the kind of being you really want to be.

Hank Smith: 01:23:05 Wow. Well said. It's not necessarily a, I'm just going to punish you. It's this is the road home. It's through this dark place. I really like that. When I read chapter one and two, I think of Elder Kearon, God is in relentless pursuit of you. And I picture Jonah saying, "That's the problem." What does Joseph Smith call it? I think he calls it divine tentacles reaching out to grab you and pull you back. No, leave me alone. No, I am in relentless pursuit of you, even if it takes a fish.

Dr. Robbie Taggart: 01:23:40 And we said at the beginning that we would be getting into these theological questions, these theological affirmations, because the narratives are given to us to reveal the nature

		of God. That's the point. It's what we call narrative theology. God is revealed in the way God interacts in these stories. We've seen God turning darkness into light with the prophetic arc, but here we see a God who is a God of no matter what love, a God of no matter what efforts and trying. Like you say, that is exactly the phrase that came to my mind, this God who is in relentless pursuit of Jonah.
John Bytheway:	01:24:17	You brought it up before, but I have it marked that he's supposed to go up to Nineveh, but then he goes down to Joppa, goes down into a ship and is cast down into the sea. Then the fish, it says in verse 10, vomited out Jonah up on the dry land. We have a lot of listeners that are addiction recovery missionaries and things. There's a certain mercy in letting people hit rock bottom, and I don't know if that's the same thing here, but just the idea that you were just talking about. If we keep moving the bottom, they never hit rock bottom, but there's a certain point where that's a merciful thing to be able to turn and start over again, and then you get vomited up. That was his first step of coming up through that violent verb of being... What's the Hebrew for vomit? Is it ipecec?
Dr. Robbie Taggart:	01:25:10	I honestly don't know. We could look it up. That's funny.
Hank Smith:	01:25:11	Ipecec.
Dr. Robbie Taggart:	01:25:14	All I know is Robert Alter translates it as vomit also, which I love. That clearly is what the verb is doing there. It is this guttural kind of experience that's happening there.
Hank Smith:	01:25:24	Even the fish is like, "You disgust me. Get out of here."
Dr. Robbie Taggart:	01:25:30	We're going to see Jonah take the new opportunity that has been given him, and the book ends in a question mark, and I think that that's on purpose. We are supposed to finish the story. What happens next? Because what happens next isn't as good of a redemption story as I want it to be. You know what I'm saying? Here he goes. He's going to go do his work. Chapter three, the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time saying, "Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee. So Jonah arose and went this time to Nineveh." Steve Walker would often say, "What did he smell like as he stepped onto that shore covered in whale bile and bleached by his experiences inside the whale?" I just loved the way he made it come alive for me.

Dr. Robbie Taggart:	01:26:21	"What did he smell like? And was that the reason they were so quick to repent? Any God who would do that to somebody is a God I don't want to be on the wrong side of. But Jonah, this great city, three days journey, this is hyperbolic, this is wild, this city 60 miles across or whatever, like modern day LA. Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey. This is his only recorded message. This is his sermon,
Hank Smith:	01:26:47	Eight words in English.
Dr. Robbie Taggart:	01:26:49	I think it's five in Hebrew. "Yet 40 days and Nineveh shall be overthrown. It doesn't feel conditional. It doesn't offer them a way out. It says nothing about God. It's just a threat. It's just you're all going down. This would catch any ancient Israelite off guard when so the people of Nineveh believed God and proclaimed to fast put on sackcloth from the greatest even to the least. Oh, we're going to be destroyed. Then maybe if we believe in the God that he's not even telling us about, there is an opportunity to turn. This is every prophet's dream, every prophet's unfulfilled dream, every prophet but Jonah. Jonah's so ticked off that these people fast in these hyperbolic ways. The king makes this proclamation. He takes off his robes, covers himself with sackcloth. He causes this proclamation to go throughout the land. Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock taste anything.
Dr. Robbie Taggart:	01:27:58	Let them not feed nor drink. Now that is you try not feeding a cow, telling them, no, no, no, no, you may not graze here. We're showing humility to the God who we're trying to appease. And then the notion of putting sackcloth, let man and beast be covered with sackcloth. You picture these uncomfortable cows being humbled by this thing. It is designed to sort of get a sense of the over the top response. They are going above and beyond anything that is required of them, and it's just in the possibility. Verse nine, "Who can tell if God will turn and repent and turn away from his fierce anger that we perish not?" I guess verse eight, this is their repentance. "Yea let them turn everyone from his evil way." So that verb turn, shuv, repent teshuvah is used all throughout there. They say, "We're going to turn, we're going to change, we're going to transform."
Dr. Robbie Taggart:	01:28:55	This is what God is interested in, and maybe God will turn this wrath away from us. "And God saw their works, they turned from their evil, and God turned from the evil that he said he would do unto them, and he did it not. Now, we

		should see the camera panning over to Jonah just rejoicing. This is the most beautiful story of repentance. This is the most beautiful story of God's mercy. Jonah has experienced it. He was going the wrong way, but out of God's grace, he was able to turn around and start afresh. He goes into these Ninevites, these Assyrians who are going absolutely the wrong way, and the king of the Assyrians brings about this massive repentance throughout all his people. Here's an interesting thing. To this day on Yom Kippur, which is the day of atonement, the day that Jews celebrate this possibility of repentance and forgiveness and the grace and mercy of God, they read the entire book of Jonah.
Dr. Robbie Taggart:	01:29:58	They read it in the synagogue. On Yom Kippur. Why do you think Jonah is a perfect Yom Kippur text? What is it about this text that is worth reading and remembering every day of atonement?
John Bytheway:	01:30:11	Are we okay when God extends mercy and atones for everybody? Are we okay with that?
Hank Smith:	01:30:16	No.
John Bytheway:	01:30:18	We should be.
Hank Smith:	01:30:20	Yeah. What did Elder Holland say? Surely, the thing God loves most about being God is the thrill of being merciful. He's merciful to Jonah. He's funny, but it's also frustrating.
Dr. Robbie Taggart:	01:30:33	Yeah. It's about the bigness of God's forgiveness. I want it for me. I want God's mercy for me. I want God's forgiveness for me. But the day of atonement is supposed to be a day when Israel embodies its Israelite identity, where because I have been forgiven much, I too must forgive that because God has been so generous with me, can I extend that mercy and grace to those who have wronged me? And that's the question that chapter four raises that doesn't really get resolved. It's supposed to be provocative. It's supposed to be provocative for all of us as we sit in synagogue or all of us as we read this text. We see this is a God who doesn't give up. This is a God who relents from the harm that we deserve and instead gives us the good that we need, but then this shocking turn in chapter four.
Dr. Robbie Taggart:	01:31:26	But it, the repentance of the people, the forgiveness of God, the mercy extended, displeased Jonah exceedingly and he was very angry. And he prayed unto the Lord and he said,

"O Lord, was not this my saying when I was yet in my country? This is why I went to Tarshish. I wasn't afraid of Assyria. It wasn't the discomfort of being a prophet. I ran away because I knew that thou art a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness." And you do turn away from the destruction that you decree. I ran away because I knew you would forgive them. I ran away because I didn't want them to be forgiven. I didn't want them to experience your mercy. That description is straight out of Exodus 34. That is the description of God. And this is the God we have, a gracious God, merciful, slow to anger of great kindness.

Dr. Robbie Taggart: 01:32:31 This has always been the God of Israel. Israel has always wanted that God to be their God. But Jonah says, "I don't want to extend that to somebody else. I don't want all these other nations that deserve destruction to be forgiven." I think it's important to not minimize that if this is being set in historic eighth century with Assyria, it's a group of people that a lot of us would look at and we would say they don't deserve forgiveness. They don't deserve mercy. Can you allow God to be the God of everybody? Can you allow the bigness of God to encompass people you don't think deserve it? Can you allow God to overspill every expectation you have of who's in and who's out? Because as we've reiterated over and over and over again, the purpose of Israel was always to not be exclusivist, but to be inclusive, to welcome everybody into the embrace of this big, big God.

Hank Smith: 01:33:31 John, didn't we learn this last year? Over the course of Joseph Smith's life, he learns, wow, God is merciful. Wow, God is merciful. Wow. And then we get to section 76 where it's actually heaven is big and hell is small. And a lot of people struggled. Didn't we learn about that, John? Am I remembering that right? A lot of people, including Brigham Young thought, I don't know if I can accept that.

John Bytheway: 01:33:55 Yeah. Brigham Young said, “I do not reject it, but I don't understand it.” It should have been so wonderful. And maybe it was for some people, but I see Jonah saying, Here's all the people I want mercy for, but there's a few I would like justice for. If you can be a God of justice for them, punitive justice as you said, Robbie.

Dr. Robbie Taggart: 01:34:16 God's like, I'll give them justice, but it will be restorative. It'll be transformative. It'll be healing.

John Bytheway:	01:34:21	No,
Dr. Robbie Taggart:	01:34:21	No,
John Bytheway:	01:34:21	No, no, no. I want punitive justice. I want you to let them have it, but I want mercy personally.
Hank Smith:	01:34:28	Robbie, you teach the New Testament at BYU. How many parables does Jesus tell with a very similar message of people being frustrated with another person's mercy? You've got the prodigal son, you've got the laborers in the vineyard. Yes, I want you to be merciful, but not that merciful and not to them.
Dr. Robbie Taggart:	01:34:50	Yeah. God is constantly inverting our expectations of who's in and who's out and widening the circle. The very ministry of Jesus was this manifestation. He walked to eat with those who nobody dealt with. He stepped to the marginalized so that the margins would be erased until all we can picture is one big circle where nobody's outside and everybody's inside. I think it's hard. I don't mean to minimize the difficulty of forgiveness. There are some social scientists who have talked about the neuroscience of forgiveness. We know it's good for us, but it's also difficult. There's a researcher who has done some research on how you actually come to forgive the people who have harmed you the most. And he says, "You make a list of the people who've harmed you from small ways to big, and you start with the smallest thing, and then you just try to offer a little bit of grace or mercy or wish something good for them.
Dr. Robbie Taggart:	01:35:51	And it doesn't always need to be healing or reconciling the relationship." He says, "Once you've built that forgiveness muscle, you go to the next person. It builds up your capacity eventually to extend mercy and forgiveness to everybody." God throws Jonah right into the midst of this thing, and you can understand why it's so hard. There are people listening for whom forgiveness is a very difficult topic, and it is only possible because we have been extended such great mercy, and it is only possible because we have a redeemer who can empower and enable us to become something different, to become better than we are. This is a provocative story. It is beckoning us to expand the borders of our love, of our compassion, of our mercy, and of our forgiveness. I wish what it said next is, "And Jonah was stoked about that and he forgave him." It says this, "And now therefore," verse three, "O Lord, take my life.

Dr. Robbie Taggart:	01:36:48	It's better for me to die.” I would rather be dead than see my enemies forgiven. That's extravagant. I love the way God just asked the question. Jonah, doest thou well to be angry? Yes.
John Bytheway:	01:37:01	How's that working for you? A modern translation: How's that anger working for you?
Dr. Robbie Taggart:	01:37:06	Yeah. Is this doing you good? Jonah goes out to the east of the city. He builds himself this little booth and he's just going to watch because maybe the Assyrians are going to fall back into their sins and get what's coming to them, or maybe he has to watch them actually be forgiven. There's such wonderful strangeness here. I think this is part of the humor. The Lord prepared a gourd and made it come up over Jonah, so it was a shadow to deliver him from his grief. This generous God is still giving. Jonah doesn't deserve it. Jonah doesn't want it. God's like, "Here you go, Jonah. You're in a hot, uncomfortable place. Let me show forth the kind of God I am."
Hank Smith:	01:37:46	Yeah. Give you some shade.
Dr. Robbie Taggart:	01:37:48	Give you some shade.
Hank Smith:	01:37:49	You're frustrated.
Dr. Robbie Taggart:	01:37:52	And Jonah is exceedingly glad of the gourd. Jonah falls in love with this castor bean plant or whatever it is. Then God, the number of times that God prepares, God prepared a gourd, God prepared a whale, God prepared a worm. This is a God who has power over all things. And that was the God that was being described in Amos in some of the passages. But God prepared a worm when the morning rose and it smote the gourd that it withered and God prepared a vehement east wind and the sun beat on the head of Jonah that he fainted and he wished himself again dead and he said, "It's better for me to die than live." And God said to Jonah, same question, "Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd?" And he said, "Yes. I loved that gourd. I do well to be angry even unto death." And then this piercing provocative question that ends it, "Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for which thou hast not labored, neither madest it grow, which came up in a night and perished.
Dr. Robbie Taggart:	01:38:48	Should I not spare Nineveh?" Jonah, the humor of the cattle aside, these are my kids. So what do you want me to do? I

		love them the way that I love you. I love Israel like I love Ethiopia, like I love Syria, like I love Philistia. I love Gaza like I love Israel. I love Democrats like I love Republicans. I love everybody. My love is universal. And until you get it, you are not Israel yet. Until you recognize that what we are doing is designed to envelop the entire world in the mercy of God, designed to heal every broken heart, designed to transform every wounded soul, then you have not understood me. Until you understand me, you can't open your mouth and speak for me. I have to take all the love I want for myself and my loved ones, all the love and mercy I've experienced, and I have to try pushing it as far as I can.
Dr. Robbie Taggart:	01:39:50	I've got to let it extend beyond every border until eventually I can be a participant in this work that is destined to reach and redeem the entire world because that's what God's doing. So the question is, do you want to be on board with this kind of work or do you not? It's going to take courage. It's going to take selflessness, but more than that, it's going to take mishpat and tzedakah. It's going to take me being generous and charitable and compassionate and loving and it's got to flow. It's got to flow from the people of Israel till it fills the whole world.
John Bytheway:	01:40:25	Beautiful. It reminds me of King Benjamin's speech. Are we not all beggars? And if you have begged and he has given this to you, King Benjamin's speech to me, that part almost says, "Do unto others as I, God, have done unto everyone."
Dr. Robbie Taggart:	01:40:42	Exactly right.
John Bytheway:	01:40:44	I'd never noticed that while you're looking at person that cannot discern between the right hand and left and also many cattle, you think that could be in a parentheses or something. Not to mention the cows.
Hank Smith:	01:40:58	It's almost like God winking at the end. Didn't you see the cows repenting?
John Bytheway:	01:41:03	All these people. And also not even to mention the beef steak out there, huh?
Hank Smith:	01:41:08	Yeah. And then clothes. It's like a great little thing.
Dr. Robbie Taggart:	01:41:13	Yeah.

Hank Smith:	01:41:14	Yeah. I alluded earlier to the laborers in the vineyard. I wanted to read a portion of that. Elder Holland shares the parable that Jesus told, very similar messaging as Jonah. He says, "Brothers and sisters, there are going to be times in our lives when someone else gets the blessing or receives special recognition. May I plead with us not to be hurt and not envious when good fortune comes to another person? We are not diminished when someone else is added upon. We are not in a race against each other to see who is the wealthiest or the most talented or the most beautiful or even the most blessed. The race we are really in is the race against sin." And then he goes on. He talks about envy a little bit, but it was the question you asked Robbie, the pointed question. Elder Holland says, "In the Parable of the Labors in the Vineyard, there's a piercing question. Why are you jealous because I am kind?"
John Bytheway:	01:42:13	The whole problem starts when we start comparing. When the laborers got their payment, it was great. But as soon as they look sideways, what did you get? What did you get? That's when the problem starts and I see why you could connect that to Jonah. Hey, you can't forgive them. Forgive me.
Hank Smith:	01:42:33	Elder Holland's talking about the parable, but listen to this. We could just apply it to Jonah. This is a story about God's goodness, his patience and forgiveness and the atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is a story about generosity and compassion. It is a story about grace. It underscores the thought I heard many years ago that surely the thing God enjoys most about being God is the thrill of being merciful, especially to those who don't expect it and often feel they don't deserve it.
Dr. Robbie Taggart:	01:43:04	And Nineveh doesn't expect it. They say, who knows? Maybe. And God swoops in. Yeah, I love it. I love it.
Hank Smith:	01:43:12	Robbie, how do I get there if I want to be? As I've talked to people who have been hurt deeply by others, and I think it's okay to say that Jonah has maybe been hurt by Assyria in personal ways. I want to forgive. I really do. But it's almost like I didn't choose this. I didn't choose this pain. I didn't choose this hatred. It was inflicted upon me and now I'm supposed to get rid of it, and I don't know how.
Dr. Robbie Taggart:	01:43:43	First of all, through the grace of Jesus Christ, we need a power beyond ourselves. And if we can picture that person in their childhood, I have a friend who was raised by drug

addict parents and they made his life a really miserable experience. His dad was eventually taken into government custody and in a mental hospital and years after finding healing through Jesus Christ, he went to visit his dad. First of all, his dad didn't recognize him and he had to tell him who he was. Once he finally recognized him, his dad says, "I saved a Christmas present for you that I meant to give you years ago." And he goes and he grabs this old bag of beans and this old t-shirt. And my friend said that he, for the first time, saw the woundedness of his dad who had wounded him. This was a man whose own life had been brutalized.

Dr. Robbie Taggart: 01:44:42 And I have to believe that when the work of grace has cleared away all of the genetic and cultural and situational experiences of our lives, that what will be left is inherent goodness. What C.S. Lewis says when he says it's a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, that's what we'll see, this pulsating radiance, this capacity, this potential. Anything I can do to imagine myself into the humanity of another, to picture them as a baby in somebody else's arms, to picture them being sung to sleep at night, to picture them as an adolescence going through the awkwardness of junior high, to imagine even if you tell whatever most generous story you can about what would've led them there, then possibly we're going to get ourselves into a yearning even for them to receive the kind of grace that we want for ourselves and our loved ones.

Dr. Robbie Taggart: 01:45:39 This is kind of random, but I have two poems from Jonah. They ask the question, what happened next? One of them imagines him going through the process that I've just described. The first one imagines him continuing on in his hatred. It's worthless. And I'll only read you parts of that. It's called On the East Side of the City. It's hot in here in the booth of my wrath. There's an east wind blowing on the head of my hatred. I love that gourd, God. Why'd you go and kill it? And then Jonah picks up this desiccated gourd and he buries it and he has a funeral for it because it's the only thing he loves. He says, Jonah knows his affection for this no longer green thing has a hint of the ridiculous, but is any love ever wasted? He's become a spectacle for angels, the chuckle of God, algae in his socks and a heart, devoid of the mercy he might have found inside that dark belly.

Dr. Robbie Taggart: 01:46:36 Our own suffering should give us patience, compassion, empathy for the suffering of others. Our own experiences of love that meet us where we most need it should give us a desire to extend that to others. Here's the happier of the

two. I shortened that first one, but here's the happier of the two. It's called the Testament of Jonah. Many years have passed since that piercing question. He sat in silence three days remembering his love for that red bright plant. He stood up and reentered the city he had condemned, the scent of sorrow clinging, 120,000 stories to learn. He determined to love them all. The first person he met was a child, a bright-eyed girl of eight or nine. The light flowed from her like water. Tell me the songs you sing in the night when you are afraid, the names of your sisters and brothers, your favorite passage in the Enuma Elis.

Dr. Robbie Taggart:	01:47:37	He kept all their words in a book. The dreams of Assyrians kept him up at night. It took him 12 years to meet every person he had wished dead. For some it required hours of listening before he found it, the radiance at the depth of their souls, the breeze that lifted the wings of their being like bees humming in bright rays. He came to drink in their feasts to share their fires and love their songs. He returned to his home in Gath-hepher, the hopes of those who were once strangers swirling through him, eddying like infinite streams surging toward one ocean. He purchased a field, sowed six score thousand seeds and watched over each with mythical tenderness. He walked through the rows of vines, the red leaves outstretched like open hands into which he poured his heart. He spoke their names like some monastic chant. A castor bean plant christened for every one of his friends.
John Bytheway:	01:48:37	A gourd.
Dr. Robbie Taggart:	01:48:39	A gourd. He leans in and learns their stories and senses their humanity and then spends the rest of his life honoring them, living as if their lives mattered to the God who cares for every life.
John Bytheway:	01:48:54	Wow, that's beautiful. I had a Longfellow quote. Your poem was more beautiful than that, but...
Dr. Robbie Taggart:	01:48:59	Nope, I highly doubt it.
John Bytheway:	01:49:02	No, this is a Longfellow... Henry Wadsworth Longfellow said, "If we could read the secret history of our enemies, we should find in each man's life sorrow and suffering enough to disarm all hostility."
Dr. Robbie Taggart:	01:49:17	Ooh. Yeah, that's way better.

John Bytheway:	01:49:20	There's backstory that we don't know that might help. Like you said, imagining them as a child. And since God knows all that, like you said, some of it is going to require strength beyond our own. We just have to hand it to God who knows all those backstories and he can sort out justice and mercy perfectly.
Hank Smith:	01:49:40	Robbie, thank you for that. Your poetry is fantastic. Well, I can't wait for all the works of Robbie Taggart to be published.
Dr. Robbie Taggart:	01:49:50	Yeah, we'll see if that ever happens.
Hank Smith:	01:49:54	I really want it. I've come to a new love for poetry today.
John Bytheway:	01:49:59	Got to get them in the hymn book too with music.
Hank Smith:	01:50:01	Yeah. Yeah. Jonah's second chance started in, I guess when the whale saved him from drowning, which is kind of odd to say, but the whale really did save him from being overcome by the water. When God gives us a second chance, that experience is supposed to change us to where we become people who offer chances, second chances. It's not that anybody should stay in abusive relationship. That's not at all what this is about and that's not what Robbie's saying, but if you've been offered a second chance and a third and a fourth and a fifth, the expectation, isn't it from the Lord that not only do you receive that, but also learn how to do it? What is the parable? Should you not have had mercy on your fellow servant even as I had mercy on thee? I think that's from Matthew 18. Robbie, thank you for that.
Hank Smith:	01:50:54	John, I can feel it in my heart, a softening for people I have some angst against. See their humanity, insert compassion into the equation.
John Bytheway:	01:51:05	There's probably things we don't know and God does and hand it over to him.
Hank Smith:	01:51:13	Robbie, I have a question for you before we let you go. Knowing you personally and getting to know you over the last few years, and I meant what I said earlier about you being a very caring person, and you're one of these wonderful human beings that you don't really jump to conclusions about people. I've watched you in conversation being very measured and thoughtful and careful about how

people feel and what they may be experiencing. Where does that come from?

Dr. Robbie Taggart: 01:51:38 I told you that I grew up as a punk rocker, so I think that's part of it. I started sensing that there was a real beauty to these people that life had kind of treated harshly as I'd go to shows and you'd fall down and you'd immediately get picked up, you'd lose a shoe and somebody would hold it up. There was a real generosity. There was a sense of community there. There was a sense of real holiness and beauty in this unexpected place. The sad thing is I started as a teenager judging anyone who wasn't punk, and so I'd sort of draw my tight circle and I only wanted to be friends with those who I thought liked the same music or you were only interesting to me if you were a certain way. And then I went on my mission to Mexico and I'd meet these people who I had nothing in common with and never would've met in a thousand years.

Dr. Robbie Taggart: 01:52:29 But as you talk to them and you're welcomed into their life, you have this sense that, wow, this human being is so beautiful, so beloved, so holy, so important in the eyes of our heavenly parents. I was actually really nervous about coming home from my mission because I got to the point on my mission where I'd knock on someone's door and they'd open it and it didn't matter if they accepted us or rejected us. I just felt this surge of divine love. Like I was this instrument of God flowing through me, and I was nervous to come home and lose that. I was nervous to sort of miss that sense of everybody's sacrality. I had an experience on BYU campus. The first semester I was back, I was wearing punk clothes and I was thinking people would look at me on the outside and they'd just judge me as some punk, not worth getting to know, but they don't really know the depth of experiences that I've had.

Dr. Robbie Taggart: 01:53:20 As I was having these thoughts, I just made eye contact with this person who was walking toward me. As I looked into her eyes, I just felt how much God loved her. For the next five or eight minutes, as everybody that came towards me in between classes, just this mass of people walking toward me, I just choose someone, look in their eyes and just feel this overwhelming flood of love that God loves this person, God cares about this person, God knows their story, even if I don't know their story. To this day, it's one of my favorite things on campus as I'm walking to teach. President Nelson, when I was in the MTC said, "The eyes are the window to the soul." And you can't help but look in the eyes of

somebody and sense that there's more courage, more beauty, more holiness than ever reaches the surface, but there's also more pain, more yearning, more uncertainty than you could ever know to try to live inside that incandescence.

Dr. Robbie Taggart: 01:54:12 And I don't want you to overemphasize my capacity for that because it is not something that comes... I don't think it comes easy to any human being, and I feel heaven knows more times than I want to, and I hurt people in ways that I don't intend and that keep me up at night, but I do think there are practices, but it ultimately does feel like a gift of grace, right? If I can pray for that gift of charity, like Moroni seven says, then maybe I'll be filled with this love. Maybe I'll be able to see the way that God sees.

Hank Smith: 01:54:43 Thank you for your time today, Robbie. Thanks for sitting with us and opening up these three books. John, I used to say this early on, how did we get this? How did we get this job?

John Bytheway: 01:54:57 This is so good. I thought we did this four years ago. I learned a bunch more today, different things, great things. Thank you so much, Robbie. I don't know what to say. That was just so interesting.

Hank Smith: 01:55:10 It was so interesting and so fun. Truly, when you get a wonderful teacher and incredible content, it's a joy to be a part of it. And then John, people come up and thank us for this.

John Bytheway: 01:55:22 I know. I'm just like, "I just sit here and nod. I don't do anything." Yeah.

Hank Smith: 01:55:26 Yeah. It's wonderful to sit here and open my scriptures and take notes and then to be thanked for doing it.

Dr. Robbie Taggart: 01:55:34 That's part of what makes your show so compelling is your warmth, your graciousness, and the way you deflect the attention. But what you're doing here is a beautiful work to create a space for conversations that are hopefully going to bless people that can attest to the bigness of God and the ways God will reach out to different people in their times of need.

Hank Smith: 01:55:54 You got it. Thank you, Robbie. We're so excited and grateful. If any of you out there are feeling like John and I

today and just overflowing with what you felt, there's a couple ways that you could let Robbie know that. One, you could come onto YouTube and leave a comment there. You could come to our website and there you could type up a message or actually our incredible David Perry has made a way for our listeners to leave a voicemail or a voice message for our guests, and we will make sure that they hear your voice. That's beautiful. You've heard their voice and they get to hear yours. We would love to offer that. Sadly, we do have to wrap up. With that, we want to thank Dr. Robbie Taggart for taking time with us today. We want to thank our executive producer. Thank you, Shannon Sorensen, our sponsors, David and Verla Sorensen and every episode.

Hank Smith: 01:56:53 This is what it was all about for him, Steve Sorensen. We hope you'll join us next week. We still have a couple of lessons left in the Old Testament on followHIM. As a thank you to our wonderful listeners, we'd love to gift you the digital version of our book, Finding Jesus Christ in the Old Testament. It offers short, meaningful insights drawn from our past Old Testament episodes. Visit followhim.co, that's followhim.co, to download your free copy today, and you'll also find the link to purchase the print edition. Thank you for being part of our followHIM family. Of course, none of this could happen without our incredible production crew, David Perry, Lisa Spice, Will Stoughton, Krystal Roberts, Ariel Cuadra, Heather Barlow, Amelia Kabwika, Sydney Smith, and Annabelle Sorensen.



Hank Smith:	00:00:00	Welcome to followHIM Favorites. This is where John and I share a single story to go with each week's Come, Follow Me lesson. John, we're in the book of Jonah. You know it well, Jonah and the Whale, and I have a story for you. I didn't go into the belly of a whale, but I did go into the belly of the Wilk. John, you know the Wilkinson Center at BYU.
John Bytheway:	00:00:20	Yeah. Okay.
Hank Smith:	00:00:21	So years and years ago, this is back in the 1900s, I was an EFY counselor. As EFY counselors, you would sometimes get extra duties. So this time I was on lunch duty and lunch at BYU EFY is massive. I mean, we're talking a thousand kids or more all eating lunch at the same time. And EFY had basically, I think, contracted with Kentucky Fried Chicken to bring in lunch every Tuesday. And it came in a semi. That's how many lunches there were. It was so much Kentucky Fried Chicken. One of those boxes with two pieces of chicken and a mashed potatoes thing and a biscuit and that spoon-fork thing weapon.
John Bytheway:	00:01:04	Yeah, a spork.
Hank Smith:	00:01:06	I think we had 1500 boxes of these every Tuesday. It was just wild. I'm sitting there watching the youth and they're devouring their Kentucky Fried Chicken. When a girl came up to me and another counselor, the counselor's name I still remember, Annie Valentine, she comes up to us and she's in tears. And this is when lunch is almost over. She said, "I left my retainer in my box of Kentucky Fried Chicken and threw it away." And she said, "Can you help me find it?" And I was like, "No, no, not at all. You're just going to have to tell your parents." And Annie, of course, is this faithful, faithful girl. And she says, "Yes, let's do it." So we went to where she threw it away, okay, John. And we asked the custodian, because it was empty, and I said, "Well, where did you put this trash?" And he said, "I've emptied that five times in the

		last hour, just that one trash." Annie of course said, "Can you show us where you put it?" John, I don't know if you've ever been to this spot of the Wilk, but you can go down a couple of hallways and then go down some stairs and it gets darker and smellier and darker as you go down there.
Hank Smith:	00:02:16	It was bad. The door's open. It is this room like a church gym and it's just trash bags.
John Bytheway:	00:02:27	It's a dumpster. Oh my goodness.
Hank Smith:	00:02:29	I told a Laman and Lemuel, I was like, "We tried. Let's go back." Annie of course said, "No, let's get in there." So she climbs over this little wall. There's got to be five or six of us in the trash. We would open these bags. Oh, it's just even gross just thinking about it. We would open these bags that have been tied up so we're untying something that was never supposed to be untied. You would open the box and you just don't know what you're going to find. And stuff would flip up on your face when you'd open the box and you're like, oh, it was so gross. It was so gross. I am watching all these counselors looking through these boxes of Kentucky Fried Chicken. One time when I looked at Annie, she had a piece of chicken skin in her hair and she moved it like her hair behind her ear.
Hank Smith:	00:03:19	She was like, "Hank, Hank." And I was, "Ah." She stops me and she said, "Hank, I know what's wrong." And I was like, "Did you just figure it out? We're in the garbage. That's what's wrong." And she said, "We haven't prayed." And I was, "No, no, I'm not praying in the garbage." I refuse to pray in the garbage. They said the prayer and we went back to looking. I get this new trash bag and I open it up and I'm on the fifth box. And by this time I would open it and throw it, open it and throw it. On the fifth box, I opened it, threw it and caught it. And I pull this thing back and I look in it and there is this retainer.
John Bytheway:	00:04:00	Unbelievable.
Hank Smith:	00:04:01	30 seconds after we prayed, I walk it over to Annie. I'm just mad that I found it. I'm like, why did I? I didn't even want to pray. I didn't want to be here. I walk it over to Annie and I hand her the box. I'm leaving. And so I turn around, I hear her scream. I look back and she's holding this retainer up like it's Simba. The other counselors are looking at it like it's glorious. She said, Hank, it's a miracle. I was like, Annie, it's

		disgusting. That's what it is. It's absolutely disgusting. I've got to go burn my clothes. I went back to my dorm and I changed my clothes. I don't think I ever wore that shirt again because it had oil on it, oil spots on it. To this day, John, I still struggle with it. I drive by and that old man's looking at you with that big smile and you're like, stay away from me old man.
Hank Smith:	00:04:56	So years go by John, and I'm back at the Wilk. I'm an EFY teacher. You've done this many times. We were down eating lunch. I went back to my classroom and then realized, oh no, I left some of my files, my papers back at where we had lunch. So I went jogging back to the Wilk, searching for where the room we had lunch. I come across that stairwell. I had not thought about it. I think I had blocked it from my memory. I looked down that stairwell and I though, oh yeah, we found the retainer in the garbage. I had laughed about it a little bit. And then on my way back to my classroom, I realized there were hundreds of bags of trash in there. There were so many. And we prayed and not within 30 seconds of praying. And I had completely missed it.
Hank Smith:	00:05:47	I had such a bad attitude about the whole thing that I did not see God's hand. I just thought this whole thing is gross and disgusting and I want to go, I want to get out of here. When we were discussing Jonah this week, I thought that's kind of similar to Jonah. He just does not want to see God's hand.
John Bytheway:	00:06:04	Yeah.
Hank Smith:	00:06:05	He is not interested in seeing God's mercy, right? Do you wonder if sometimes we miss out on what could be awesome opportunities? Because Jonah totally misses out. All these people in Assyria, they all repent. It should be miraculous, right? But no, he totally misses it. He goes up onto the cliff and he wants to watch Assyria burn.
John Bytheway:	00:06:26	He's irritated that they repented.
Hank Smith:	00:06:28	Yeah, he's irritated. And I guess I was Jonah. I was just irritated about the entire afternoon and that I had spent the afternoon in the trash. I wonder if he comes out of the whale going, "I smell." I thought the same thing. Jonah went back to his dorm and burned his clothes, I'm sure. Don't be a Jonah. Yeah, you might be missing out on miracles and

		answers to prayers and God's hand around you just because of your attitude.
John Bytheway:	00:06:50	And Jonah, when he came up out of that giant fish, he must have been slimy, kind of like that retainer that they found inside the [box].
Hank Smith:	00:07:00	Annie, if you're out there, I still love you, but man, that was gross. Hey, we hope you'll join us on our full podcast. It's called followHIM. You can get it wherever you get your podcast. We're with Dr. Robbie Taggart this week and wow, wow, John, he is so good. It's almost like “where has this guy been hiding?” What a masterful teacher. And then come back here next week. We'll do another followHIM Favorites.