



DISCUSSION NOTES

WEEK 1 THE REBEL PROPHET JONAH 1:1-3

JONAH

INTRODUCTION

The hero of the story of this great book is the living God. Jonah, on the other hand, is depicted as a rebel, running from God. We can identify with Jonah as we too often run from God and experience death, not life. However, God relentlessly and lovingly pursues Jonah and brings him to the end of himself. Similarly, God seeks to bring us to an end of ourselves and (through his grace) offers himself to us.

The book of Jonah ultimately displays the good news (gospel). While Jonah ran from God, God ran after Jonah in order to rescue him and through him (Jonah) rescue others.

OBSERVATION/INTERPRETATION

- Compare Jonah 1:2 with 4:11. How is the underlying message of God's impending judgement of Nineveh's evil (Jonah 1:2b) really motivated by His love?
- What is Jonah's reaction to God's command? (Jonah 1:3)
- Why do you think Jonah attempted to flee from the "presence of the Lord"? (Hint: read Jonah 4:1-2)

APPLICATION

- In which ways might you be like Jonah, attempting to run from the presence of God and His will/mission for your life?
- Among other things, it would seem as if Jonah's motivation for fleeing from God was his prejudice/hatred toward the Assyrians who were the oppressive enemies of the people of Israel. Are there people in your life who you, like Jonah, would be angry if God had shown favor and love towards?

PRAYER

Ask God to reshape your heart to love those whom he loves even though they may have harmed you.

Ask God to use you as his instrument to show (by works) & share (by words) his message of grace, to those who are blinded by their sin (who don't know their right hand from their left - Jonah 4:11).

COMMUNITY GROUP DISCUSSION

- **Information:** Read the passage/answer the questions.
- **Transformation:** Being honest/transparent, discuss how God through the gospel intends to change you.
- **Mission:** Pray together. Surrender to God's mission.

FAMILY DEVOTION DISCUSSION

- **Information:** Have your child read the passage.
- **Transformation:** Make it personal. Help them to see God's love through what He's already done for them.
- **Mission:** Pray/sing together, give yourselves to God.



DISCUSSION NOTES

WEEK 2 A WATCHING WORLD JONAH 1:4-17

JONAH

INTRODUCTION

Jonah's sin of running from God created problems for many people, not just himself. Often times we believe that our sin is private and will not affect others. Yet, in the the story of Jonah, we discover that what we do and how we act will have an impact on others for good or for evil.

OBSERVATION/INTERPRETATION

- As Jonah ran away, God intercepted him by raising a storm in the sea (1:4). Because of Jonah's sin, these other men were negatively affected. How did the sailors respond when they came to know that Jonah was running away from God? (1:10)
- In Jonah 1:4 it says, "God hurled a great wind upon the sea and there was a mighty tempest." In reality, this wasn't an act of anger from God whereby he was seeking to destroy Jonah but rather it was an intervention. Have you ever experienced God send something in your life as an intervention in order to bring you back to himself? Give examples.

APPLICATION

- Have you ever run from doing what God has called you to do? Give some examples.
- Because Jonah was running away from God, his faith was not functioning in a helpful way to the broken world around him. What are some of the ways in which you running from God has ruined opportunities to demonstrate the gospel?

PRAYER

Ask God to help your faith in him to practically be of benefit to those around you.

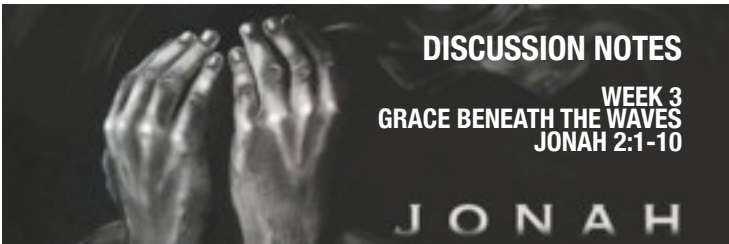
Ask God to help you to not run from him in fear, but rather trust in him as a loving father.

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DISCUSSION NOTES

WEEK 3 GRACE BENEATH THE WAVES JONAH 2:1-10

INTRODUCTION

In his loving grace, God brought Jonah to the end of himself by calling a great fish to swallow him. He saved Jonah from death. It was from within the belly of this fish that Jonah's heart softened toward God in repentance. Frederick Buechner (a scholar) observed, "No matter how deep the fish dove, no matter how dark the inside, no depth or darkness was enough to drown the sound of Jonah's prayer." God's unique "rescue" of Jonah at sea by the fish was a strong reminder that though Jonah was a great sinner running from God, God was an even greater deliverer.

OBSERVATION/INTERPRETATION

- Read Jonah 2. How does Jonah see and describe himself and the condition he is in?
- How does Jonah see and describe God? How did Jonah's view of God appear to change during his prayer?

APPLICATION

- God often uses and even ordains circumstances to bring us to the end of ourselves. It is in these moments that we can either become bitter or we can surrender. Why do we sometimes resist God, even though we in theory know, his intentions toward us are good?
- If you or someone in the group has had a moment like Jonah's where severe circumstances brought you to a place of surrender, share that experience with the others as a means of giving testimony to God's great faithfulness.

PRAYER

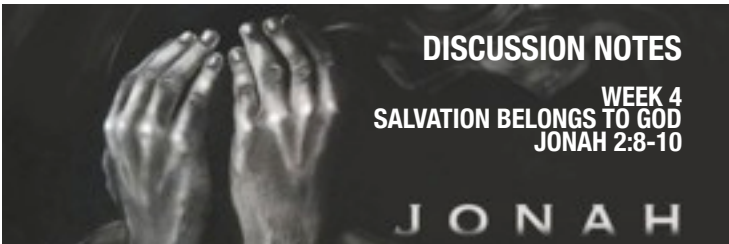
- Ask God to give you an heart that is soft and moldable in his hands.
- Thank God for his loving faithfulness toward us, even though we are seldom faithful to him.

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INTRODUCTION

At the root of Jonah's eagerness to run from God was that something else occupied the place of highest regard in his heart. The Bible describes those things (people, ideas, places) we trust in over God, as idols. Though the story doesn't state explicitly what Jonah's idols were, it does state that Jonah knew God would joyfully forgive the Ninevites (Jonah's/Israel's enemies) as willingly as he would forgive the Jews (Jonah's countrymen). This made Jonah angry (Jonah 4:1-4). Perhaps the idol of Jonah's heart which enslaved him was his own nationalism?

Before we can effectively proclaim the gospel to others the gospel must first set us free. From inside the great fish Jonah cried out to God in a moving prayer of repentance as he was confronted with his own sin. God was beginning to crush the idols of his heart. Salvation (life) is ultimately only found in Jesus and He will stop at nothing to make that a reality in our hearts!

OBSERVATION/INTERPRETATION

- In verse 8, who do you believe Jonah is referring to about clinging to worthless idols? Specifically, was it the people of Nineveh, the sailors, himself? Why do you believe that?
- To, "pay regard to a vain idol", means to place something above loving and serving God. In light of this, how do the desires of our hearts affect how we live?

APPLICATION

- How are we sometimes like Jonah and do not remember the LORD until we are under extreme distress?
- What "idols" are you tempted to place above God?
- How does the gospel capture and realign (or in other words, "rescue/save") our desires and turn us from reluctant disobedience to joyful obedience?

PRAYER

- Ask God to reveal anything in your heart that may be an idol you are depending on and trusting in.

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INTRODUCTION

Throughout scripture God offers redemption to people who never seem to get it right the first time. Beneath God's gracious actions lays a desire to ultimately change this world. This transformation frees the world from being in bondage to sin, suffering and death and leads to life, joy and righteousness. On a smaller scale this is what God intended for Nineveh. To accomplish this great task God called Jonah to deliver his message. Though Jonah ran from God the first time (Jonah 1:1-2), God gave Jonah a second chance. God used Jonah to confront and change the destructive idolatry of Nineveh. Yet, there can be no doubt that God used Nineveh to confront and change the destructive idolatry in Jonah's heart.

OBSERVATION/INTERPRETATION

- In response to Jonah's prayer and recommitment to the task (Jonah 2-3), one scholar wrote, "if the insubordinate prophet had been subdued, he had not been persuaded." Do you think this statement is true? Why or why not?
- In the introduction, the final sentences read, "God used Jonah to confront and change the destructive idolatry of Nineveh. Yet, there can be no doubt that God used Nineveh to confront and change the destructive idolatry in Jonah's heart." Do you think this is true? In what regard?
- Have there been circumstances in your life that God has used to point out the broken areas of your heart/life? Explain.

APPLICATION

- Obviously, just like Jonah, it's possible to do the right things and not have a right attitude.
- Are there areas currently in your life where you are doing the right things but in your heart there is bitterness, anger, and insubordination?
- As in the story (Jonah 3:1-3), God gave Jonah a second chance. How have you found God's grace extended to you by way of a second (third, forth, etc) chance?

PRAYER

- Ask God to use you as an agent to bring real transformation through the Gospel in your sphere of influence.

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WEEK 6 THE ACTION THAT FREES JONAH 3:5-10

JONAH

INTRODUCTION

Jonah preached (probably reluctantly) an eight (8) word sermon and the entire city of Nineveh turned to God. This story reveals an interesting paradox. On the one hand there was Jonah (the Jewish prophet) whose *actions* appeared to be in alignment with God's while his heart (*desire*) was not (he *despised* the Ninevites & God *loved* them). Yet, on the other hand the Ninevites (the pagan sinners) who had not been in alignment with God, humbled themselves, repented & turned to God, and He received them. This paradox shows that it's possible to do the right things (*actions*) while possessing a heart (*desires*) that is not in alignment w/ God's. The story clearly illustrates what James 4:6 states, "God humbles the proud and he gives grace to the humble." In addition it reveals to us that those who often arrogantly assume they are righteous and accepted (because of their status, religion, theology, or nationality) are not, while those who are aware and sorrowful over their unrighteousness, are accepted.

OBSERVATION/INTERPRETATION

- Jonah 3:5-8 says, the Ninevites, fasted from food and water, put on sackcloth, sat in ashes and prayed mightily to God. What do you think this action (fruit) revealed about their heart (root)?
- How is repentance different from remorse? (read 2 Corinthians 7:10)

APPLICATION

- The introduction suggested that, as in the case of Jonah it's possible to do right things (actions) with a wicked heart (desires). Conversely, the bible reveals that when our hearts (desires) are made right, our actions will be made right, and repentance is the door which leads to this. How does the gospel transform our hearts from hardness to repentance? (read Romans 2:4)
- Extra: What do you think Martin Luther meant when he stated that, "He (Jesus) called for the entire life of believers to be one of repentance."

PRAYER

- Ask God for transparent and repentant hearts.
- Ask God to transform your desires so that your actions (works) would be good/beneficial to others and glorifying to God.

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DISCUSSION NOTES

WEEK 7 GOD'S LIBERATING LOVE JONAH 4

INTRODUCTION

God has just used Jonah as an instrument to bring about the repentance of the largest city on earth. As the story concludes, God's heart for Jonah and the Ninevites becomes more fully revealed. Regarding Jonah, his heart reveals his nationalism, racism and religious self-righteousness which lead to death. In contrast, God's heart reveals His restorative love, compassion and grace, toward the rebellious prophet, the sinful Ninevites as well as fallen creation which lead to life.

OBSERVATION/INTERPRETATION

- Read Jonah 4:2. What are some of the ways in which Jonah describes God?
- Rather than the above descriptions of God providing comfort and security for Jonah, they made him displeased and angry? Why? (read Jonah 4:1-2)

APPLICATION

- Have you, like Jonah, ever gotten angry at God because he didn't do as you wanted/expected? From those occasions what have learned about yourself? God?
- At the end of the story, God revealed just how superficial Jonah's love was, by pointing out how he had more love for a vine, than for fallen people created in the image of God. How was this revelation an act of love and mercy from God toward Jonah?
- Why would God be interested in making our love more genuine, authentic and real? What are some ways in which He's been doing this in your life?

PRAYER

- Ask God to reveal the superficiality of your love in order to expose it.
- Ask God to reveal to you the depth of his love, in order to bring life and transformation to you.

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