



PREPARATION

Spend the week studying Jonah 2:1-3:3. Consult the commentary provided and any additional study tools to enhance your preparation

DETERMINE | which discussion points and study questions will work best for your group

PRAY | for our pastors and this week's message, the upcoming group time, your group members and their openness to God's Word.

LANDING POINT | God lovingly welcomes back those who repent and turn back to Him in obedience.

◦ Remember the 4 Rules for Small Group Discussion

- 1. Confidentiality.** What's said in the group stays in the group.
- 2. No cross-talk.** Be considerate of others as they share. Refrain from side conversations and texting during group time.
- 3. No fixing.** We are not in the group to fix each other. Jesus does that part.
- 4. Sharing.** Be sensitive to the amount of time you share. Don't talk too much or too little. Every person brings something valuable to the group.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Last week your group discussed how we are a people on the run. We run from responsibility. We run from doing or saying the right thing. When we look at our life, we see many situations where we acted like Jonah. That is, God gave us a command and we ran in the opposite direction.

But what happens when you're tired of running? What do you do when your running has left you exhausted and wanting a new start with God? This week we will look at the next scene in Jonah's story where he spent three days inside a fish. Remarkably, we're given a glimpse into what Jonah's experience was like. When Jonah came out of the fish, he was a different man. He had surrendered to God and obeyed His call.

God is ready for rebels to return home. The truth is, you've never messed up so much that you're beyond God's grace. You can start over with God; He is the God of New Beginnings. This week we'll look at what the path back to God looks like.



INTRODUCTION [CONT'D]

Can you recall a time when God gave you a second chance at something? If so, share your experience with the group.

In your own words explain what it means that God is “the God of New Beginnings.”

LEARN

Select 2-3 questions to discuss as a group.

◦ A prayer of thanksgiving

In Jonah’s darkest hour—when he was closest to death—God intervened. After being thrown overboard into stormy waters, God sent a fish to swallow Jonah. In the belly of that fish Jonah experienced radical change.

God was also disciplining Jonah. But it was a discipline of love. God wouldn’t let Jonah run forever. Parents discipline their children, because they hope it will bring about change in them. Sometimes a professor allows you to fail a test, because it will cause you to change your study habits. God knew Jonah had to change in order to be obedient. His heart needed to be turned back to God. In his prayer, Jonah looks back at his experience and he thanks God.

Jonah’s running had brought him low. Very low. He had hit the proverbial rock bottom. That’s what running from God will do. It brings you low. And when you hit the bottom, that’s when God is ready to bring you back up. Jonah cries out to God for deliverance. God hears Jonah and responds by saving Him.

Split the group into pairs. Read Jonah 2:1-3:3 and retell this scene from Jonah’s story in your own words.

How do you see God’s discipline differently knowing it’s out of love?

◦ On the road to Nineveh

God commands the fish to vomit out Jonah. Jonah had survived. Again God commands Jonah to go to Nineveh and speak against the city. This time Jonah obeyed. He knew what he had to do and started on the path to Nineveh. The author describes Nineveh as “an exceedingly great city.” But that didn’t deter Jonah. Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian Empire, was no match for Jonah’s God.

Jonah’s story shows us that one of God’s greatest gifts in life is a Second Act. And as we will see next week, Jonah made the most of his opportunity to start again with God.



LEARN [CONT'D]

Why does genuine repentance require action on our part?

Where in your life might God be calling you to repent or be obedient?

LIVE

Select 2-3 questions from this section to answer.

There are three important observations from Jonah's prayer. Let's look at each of them.

◦ **Jonah called, God answered**

First, Jonah called out to God. In the middle of his affliction, Jonah knew to whom he needed to turn. Obviously, Jonah was in a bad place. One can only imagine the anguish and terror of being swallowed by a fish. The way Jonah describes it, he had gone as low as possible. For a moment it felt like God had abandoned him. Jonah cried out to God when he was helpless and hopeless, and God heard him. Corrie ten Boom once said, "There is no pit so deep, that God's love is not deeper still." Like Jonah, God's love is with us when our running has brought us to rock bottom.

What's your typical response when you're in trouble or affliction? Do you cry out to God? How could you change your response to be more like Jonah's?

How would you explain Corrie ten Boom's quote to a nonbeliever?

◦ **Jonah remembered God**

Jonah also remembered God. He remembered God's character. That He is faithful, compassionate, forgiving, merciful, good and loving. Jonah also remembered God's Word. In v.4 he recalls the Israelite ritual of praying towards the temple, which symbolized God's presence with His people. Jonah knew God was with him, even when it looked or felt like all hope might be lost.

The best thing you can do in the middle of life's hardships is to claim the promises of God. The Bible is full of God's promises. And every time He has proven faithful to keep them. Our God is trustworthy.

Why is it important to remember God's character in your prayers?

What's one promise of God you need to claim in your life right now? Share with the group.



LIVE [CONT'D]

◦ Jonah surrendered to God

Finally, Jonah surrendered to God. His words revealed a man, who was genuinely repentant. Jonah was tired of running from God and turned back to Him. Jonah surrendered, and God brought him back to life.

God delights to answer your prayers. But how you pray is important. Your posture needs to be one of surrender. When you pray, surrender everything to God. That means surrendering your will and agenda in favor of His. Maybe it's choosing a major in college. Maybe it's deciding whether to go on that mission trip overseas. When we surrender to God, He moves in powerful ways to answer us.

Highlight different ways God has answered your prayers over the years and share with the group.

What's one change you could make this week to take a posture of surrender in your prayers?

LEAD

Select 1 question from this section to ask your group.

◦ Responding in obedience

God knows that sometimes He needs to give us an experience to wake us up. Often these experiences can be difficult, but they teach us. God wants our attention and desires our obedience. Jonah responded to his difficult experience with obedience.

Do you see God's goodness and grace in your life? Has He given you a second chance somewhere along the way? Take that opportunity and respond in obedience like Jonah.

Describe someone you know who exemplifies obedience to God in their life. What do you learn from them?

How can your group encourage one another to be obedient to God this week?



♡ PRAY

Recite Jonah's prayer together as a group. Spend time praising God for His character and saving actions in your life. Ask Him to reveal areas in your life where you need to repent. Finish with a call to surrender everything to God and turn in obedience to Him.

💬 FOLLOW UP

Midway through this week, send a follow-up email to your group with some or all of the following:

- Read Psalm 40 and identify how David's psalm is similar to Jonah's prayer.
- Ask the group to share any stories or lessons learned where they see God at work in their life.

📄 COMMENTARY

◦ Tradition of psalms in the Bible.

Jonah's prayer can be classified as a thanksgiving psalm. Psalms were common throughout Israel's history. The purpose of these psalms (or songs) was to lead God's people in prayer and worship of God. The psalms span the full-range of human emotions (e.g., love, praise, confusion, hope, despair, anger, lament, etc.). Sometimes the psalms are presented from an individual perspective. Other times they are presented corporately, calling God's people to honor and worship God as a group. In many ways, the psalms are honest expressions of human beings trying to understand a God, who is transcendent and beyond our full comprehension. Countless believers have treasured the psalms, because they excite the imagination and help God's people navigate life's journey.

◦ Repentance.

"The Greek word for "repentance" derives from a verb meaning 'to radically change one's thinking.' Repentance refers to an event in which an individual attains a divinely provided new understanding of their behavior and feels compelled to change that behavior and begin a new relationship with God (Heb 6:1; Acts 20:21). While the Greek language can represent the concept of repentance as an independent action, the Semitic background of the New Testament writers demanded that appropriate actions follow the event of repentance (Matt 3:8; Acts 26:20)."¹ Jonah displays real repentance by showing a change in thinking (see Jonah's prayer) and his action (going to Nineveh).

1. Brendan Kennedy, "Repentance," ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).