



grow groups



## Week 3: Our Weakness and God's Power

### Jonah 3:1-10

#### GOAL:

Reflect on and celebrate God's gracious "second chances," and position ourselves to receive his grace through the practice of repentance.

#### CHECKLIST

- Prepare for the meeting by praying for yourself and your group (feel free to use the prayer below) and reading through this Leader's Guide.
- Go over the November Grow Group schedule, including Cornerstone Family Sunday and Thanksgiving week
- Encourage your group to participate in the Growth Guide devotions during the week.
- Spend time in breakout groups applying today's discussion and praying for each other.
- Close by giving the group any final words and a blessing.
- Take attendance in Planning Center, including guests/new members.

#### PREPARING THROUGH PRAYER:

*Heavenly Father, thank you that you are a God of second chances! When I take an honest look at my life, I know it's not just Jonah that needs a second chance...I need it as well. Give me the wisdom and courage to "repent and believe the good news." As I do, please transform me into the image of your son, Jesus. Teach me to extend your gracious second chances to my brothers and sisters in Christ as we live in the community that Jesus has made possible through his blood. And use me to share your lovingkindness with others as you build your kingdom here on earth - not through my giftedness, but through your grace and power, for your glory. In the name of Jesus I pray, Amen.*

---

*And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. Hebrews 10:24-25*

## CONNECT (15-20 minutes)

As your meeting begins, allow group members to visit and catch up informally. After a few moments, lead the group through the following connecting activities:

**Group Connection:** Discuss the upcoming schedule for your Grow Group, including Cornerstone Family Sunday (Sunday AM groups meet at 9:30am, worship at 11:00, lunch at 12:00) and Thanksgiving week (no groups from 11/21-27)

**Relational Connection:** In this section, spend time catching up relationally. You might want to use an icebreaker question or share “highs and lows.”

**Spiritual Connection:** Ask your group the following two questions:

- Where have you seen God at work this week?
- In what specific areas do you need God to work this week?

*This is an opportunity to praise God for the good things happening and to ask for his help in our challenges. Our natural tendency will be to focus on our circumstances, and that’s ok. But this can also be related to our spiritual lives as well!*

## PRAY (5-10 minutes)

This week, we’ll go back to our standard practice of worship-focused prayer, but we’re adding a new wrinkle to the Intercession section. For each thing the group prays for, invite them to add a “so that…” phrase to the end of each request.

For example, you might say, “Lord, please give Joe and Amy wisdom in how best to love their teenager *so that* they can be a reflection of your love and wisdom to their family.” Or, “God, please help Blake with his job search *so that* he can provide for his family and make an impact for you in his workplace.” Adding a phrase like this can help us focus not just on our immediate needs, but also on God’s purposes for us.

As a reminder, here are the three sections:

**Praise:** Spend some time praising God for who he is (his character)

**Thanksgiving:** Spend some time thanking God for the things he has done - in our personal lives, in the church, and throughout history

**Intercession:** Spend the last part of your prayer time lifting up the needs of the group, adding the “so that” phrases to each request.

---

*And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. Hebrews 10:24-25*

## DISCUSS (40-50 minutes)

- What was one thing from the Growth Guide devotions or this week's sermon that challenged you, encouraged you, or made you think?
- How does our culture feel about giving people second chances? How do *you* feel about giving people second chances? Have you ever given someone (or received from someone) a second chance?

**Leader's Note:** *Our culture seems to have mixed feelings about second chances. On the one hand, we love a good redemption story (especially if it involves a sports figure or other celebrity!) At the same time, we are definitely living in a "cancel culture," where certain mistakes appear to be irreversible in the public's eye.*

*After briefly talking about the culture's view of second chances, help them talk honestly about our own feelings about second chances. For most of us, we're in favor of them, as long as it's us who's receiving them! But extending them to others can be difficult.*

- Read Jonah 3:1-2. Does it surprise you that God entrusted Jonah with the responsibility of preaching to the Ninevites after he ran away the first time? What does this teach us about how God relates to his followers?

**Leader's Note:** *If you were new to the big story of Scripture, you would definitely be surprised that God gave Jonah a second chance after he messed up so badly the first time. You would think that with a message as important as the one God wanted the Ninevites to hear, he wouldn't leave anything to chance! You'd think that after Jonah abandoned his calling, God would find someone more suitable to the task. But instead, he gives Jonah a second chance to obey.*

*This reveals several important things about how God relates to his children:*

- **When we fall short, he forgives us.** *And when he forgives, he moves forward rather than rehashing the past. It would have been easy for God to give Jonah a lecture at the beginning of chapter 3 before he gave him the second chance. But instead, now that he's seen that Jonah is ready to obey, he simply moves forward without even referencing Jonah's failure. There are obviously lots of parallel passages in Scripture that make this point, but one I (John) particularly love is Psalm 103: "he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities...as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us."*

---

*And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. Hebrews 10:24-25*

- **He believes we can change and grow.** God knows that through the power of the Holy Spirit, we can actually become different kinds of people – ones who more fully reflect his original plan for us. As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 3:18, “we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory.”
  - **Our past doesn’t disqualify us from future service.** God doesn’t “cancel” people! When he forgives, he doesn’t keep a record of our wrongs (Psalm 130:3). He doesn’t count our sins against us (2 Corinthians 5:19). This means that no matter how we have failed God in the past, he can still use us...if we’re willing.
- Can you think of other examples of God giving people second chances in Scripture? What are the practical implications for how we relate to each other in the Body of Christ? What enables us to live this way?

*Leader’s Note: There are lots of illustrations of this truth in Scripture, but two stand out:*

*As an infant, Moses was rescued by God when Pharaoh’s daughter drew him out of the Nile River. But when he grew up, he let his anger get the best of him and he murdered an Egyptian and ran away to hide in the desert. But when God was looking for someone to lead the Israelites out of slavery, he gave Moses a second chance and used him in a significant way. (see Exodus 3)*

*Peter was one of Jesus’ closest friends, and by all appearances, one of his most devoted followers. But when Jesus was arrested, Peter denied that he even knew him. Even still, when Jesus was looking for someone to lead the new church that would be built after his ascension, he gave Peter a second chance and entrusted him with the responsibility of leading others. (See John 21:15-17)*

*This has clear implications for how we live together in Christian community! If God continues to give second chances to his followers, how can we withhold those second chances from our brothers and sisters? In fact, in Matthew 18, Jesus makes this clear: when it comes to our brothers and sisters, we aren’t supposed to just give two chances, we are to give seventy times seven (an expression implying unlimited) chances! And just as God doesn’t refer to Jonah’s past failures when he gives him a second chance, we don’t need to continue to remind each other of our failures either!*

*This isn’t easy. And it comes at a cost. But remember – the price for our reconciliation (to God and each other) has already been paid by Jesus. It is his sacrificial death that enables us to forgive our brothers and sisters and continue to give them second chances. Because Christ has forgiven us through his blood, we have the power (and responsibility) to forgive others.*

- Read Jonah 3:3-5. If you were rating Jonah’s sermon in terms of eloquence, how many stars would you give it? What does the Ninevites’ response in verse 5 reveal about how God works? How should this impact our willingness to allow God to use us?

---

*And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. Hebrews 10:24-25*

**Leader's Note:** I'm sure that the version of Jonah's sermon that we read in verse four is a summary of a longer message. But if it comes anywhere close to capturing the main idea of what he said, it definitely wouldn't go down as one of the great sermons of all time! In chapter four, we find out that Jonah didn't really want the Ninevites to repent because he believed they didn't deserve God's forgiveness. With that kind of motivation, it's not surprising that his sermon sounds a bit half-hearted.

But the amazing thing is that God isn't limited by Jonah's halfhearted sermon. He takes that imperfect offering and uses it to accomplish a miraculous outcome! The Ninevites...people that no one would have ever expected to follow God...repent of their sins and turn to him.

This shows us once again that God doesn't need our wisdom, strength, power, or intellect to accomplish his purposes. But he consistently chooses to use our imperfect contributions to fulfill his plans. Knowing this ought to motivate us to be eager to bring whatever we have to God, believing that he can do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine with it – not because of our worthiness, but because of his power.

- Read Jonah 3:6-8. What does the king call the people to do in his decree? How would you summarize these “steps of repentance” in your own words? Why is each of these steps an essential part of what it means to repent?

**Leader's Note:** As part of the king's call to repentance, he commands them to do three things:

- Mourn. Specifically, he calls them to fast and to clothe themselves in sackcloth. Both of these actions were symbols of lament. He's calling them to mourn over their sin - recognizing its seriousness and its devastating consequences.
- Pray. After they mourn their sin, he commands them to call on God...confessing their sin and asking for forgiveness.
- Turn. After asking for forgiveness, the people are to turn around and head a different direction. They aren't to just say they are sorry for their sin...they're to stop engaging in it!

Each of these three steps is an essential component of repentance and an important part of how the Spirit forms us into the image of Christ:

- Mourning over our sin helps us recognize the damage that it has done, both in our lives and in the lives of others. If we gloss over this, we can't fully appreciate the gift of forgiveness and we miss out on some of the motivation to live differently.
- Praying connects us with the source of forgiveness, restoration, and power for change – God himself.
- Turning from our sin and toward God is a non-negotiable part of repentance. It is the evidence that we truly desire to “take off” the old self and “put on the new self, which is being renewed...in the image of its Creator.” (Col 3:9-10)

---

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. Hebrews 10:24-25

- Read Jonah 3:9-10. What does the king hope will be the result of the Ninevites' repentance? How does God respond? Did the Ninevites earn God's forgiveness through their repentance? If not, what was its purpose?

***Leader's Note:** The king is hopeful that the Ninevites' repentance will lead God to withhold the judgment that they deserve. And in verse 10, we find out that's exactly what happened! When the Ninevites turned toward God, he extended grace to them.*

*It's extremely important to note, though, that the Ninevites didn't "earn" God's forgiveness through their repentance. God didn't "owe" them forgiveness on account of their repentance. On the contrary, God's grace is always a gift! (For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast" Eph 2:8-9)*

*The Ninevites didn't "earn" God's forgiveness through their repentance. Instead, they put themselves in position to receive it as a gift. And remember...the new life to which God calls us isn't an "extra" that gets thrown in along with salvation. The ability to live that new life is part of our salvation! If we don't repent, we are saying no to the salvation that God offers us through grace. Repentance and faith are the ways that we receive the gift of grace. See Mark 1:15 - "The time has come...The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news."*

## BREAKOUT GROUPS (5-10 minutes)

After (or as) people move into their breakout groups, invite each group to discuss these questions and pray together:

*How is God speaking to you through today's conversation? What steps might the Spirit be inviting you to take? (receive a second chance, let God use your imperfect efforts, repent of your sin)*

## CLOSING

After the groups are finished, call everyone back together for a brief closing. During this time, give any final thoughts you need to share and close with a brief word of blessing.

**Blessing:** (feel free to use this blessing, substitute your own, or just close with a prayer)

*This week, remember that our God is a God of second chances! By his grace, may we embrace the second chances he gives us, and may we extend second chances to our brothers and sisters in Christ as we live together in community.*

---

*And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. Hebrews 10:24-25*