



grow groups



Week 2: Our Need and God's Grace

Jonah 1:17-2:10

GOAL:

Examine Jonah's prayer from inside the great fish and let it teach and shape us as we follow Jesus.

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.
- Spend time in breakout groups applying today's discussion and praying for each other.
- Talk about your group's upcoming plans, including serving at Fallapalooza on Oct 30.
- Close by giving the group any final words and a blessing.
- Encourage your group to participate in the Growth Guide devotions during the week.
- Take attendance in Planning Center, including guests/new members.

PREPARING THROUGH PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, thank you so much that you "long to be gracious" to us. I confess my tendency to turn to places other than you when I'm struggling. Teach me to keep my eyes fixed on you in all situations, and to praise you even while the rescue is still going on! Loosen my grip on the "worthless idols" that I sometimes cling to so that my hands are open to receive the grace that you always stand ready to give. Thank you for the new life you've given me through Jesus' death and resurrection. By the power of your Holy Spirit, may I walk in that new life this week. In Jesus' name 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 Fallapalooza Sunday night (if you're a Sunday morning group)*

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)

In this week's passage, Jonah prays a prayer that uses phrases from several Psalms. Using Scripture to guide our prayer is a powerful tool! We're going to take our cue from Jonah this week and use Scripture to guide our prayer. For the praise and thanksgiving sections, we'll give you a listing of passages from the Psalms. Have different members of your group read these passages aloud as your prayer. If you want, you could encourage group members to use these passages as a starting point for voicing their own prayers as well.

Praise:

Psalm 145:1-9

Psalm 145:17-19

Psalm 146:1-5

Psalm 103:1-5

Psalm 103:8-13

Psalm 150:1-6

Thanksgiving:

Psalm 30:1-3

Psalm 31:21-22

Psalm 40:1-3

Psalm 18:3-6, 16-19

Psalm 28:6-7

Psalm 34:1-7

We'll close with some **intercession** – praying for each other's needs, for the church, and for the world.

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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?

Leader's Note: *This is a great opportunity to encourage people to get back into the habit of spending time in Scripture and prayer each day using the Growth Guide devotions if they've fallen behind.*

- What are some of the ways you naturally respond to hard times? Now read Jonah 2:1-4. How does Jonah respond to the distress he has experienced?

Leader's Note: *Encourage the group to be transparent here. In our flesh, many of us can respond to hard times through a variety of sinful behaviors: becoming self-focused, giving in to fear and anxiety, responding to others with anger, becoming bitter, or escaping through alcohol, pornography, irresponsible spending, or other destructive habits. However, by the grace of God, many of us have also learned to respond in healthier ways: prayer, connecting with caring friends, reminding ourselves what is true, reflecting on Scripture, or serving others.*

Even though Jonah initially ran from God in chapter 1, when he encounters this storm in his life, he does the right thing – he turns to the Lord. May we do the same!

- What kind of attitude does Jonah's decision in verse 4 reveal? How can choosing to fix our eyes on Jesus help us "land on our feet" as Pastor Amy talked about in the sermon? Read Psalm 16:8 and Hebrews 12:1-3 for additional ideas. What might this look like practically?

Leader's Note: *Verse 4 reveals that even though Jonah had temporarily run from the Lord, deep down he believed that God was in control and was the one who could rescue him. He knew that looking to the Lord was the only way he would find salvation.*

In Amy's sermon, she used the illustration of how squirrels always manage to land on their feet when they fall by fixing their eyes on a fixed object. In the same way, even as our lives seem to be turning upside down, when we fix our eyes on a fixed object – the Lord Jesus – we can find stability even in the middle of the storm. The two corollary passages mentioned are classic verses that talk about the power of fixing our eyes on the Lord.

Spend a few minutes talking with the group about what it practically means to "keep your eyes always on the Lord" as Psalm 16 says. A few ideas:

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WEEK 8

- *Giving Jesus your attention: One way of doing this is developing the habit of “practicing the presence of God.” In other words, consciously reminding yourself throughout the day that God is with you and intentionally welcoming the Spirit into your life.*
 - *Making Jesus your first priority: When we make knowing and serving Jesus our highest priority, it helps keep everything else in its proper place.*
 - *Making Jesus your frame of reference: Like the squirrel that orients itself based on the stable object, we can view the rest of our lives in relation to Jesus.*
- Read Jonah 2:5-6. Keeping in mind that Jonah is still inside the fish, does it surprise you that he says God rescued him? What does this tell you about Jonah’s faith? What would it look like for you to praise God for his rescue while it’s still taking place?

Leader’s Note: I (John) don’t know about you, but this surprises me! I think that if this happened to me, I might view getting swallowed by the fish as just delaying the inevitable (and making it much grosser!!!) But Jonah chose to view this as God’s intervention. As Amy mentioned, he saw the fish not as a grave, but as a womb. He believed God was working for his rescue and he chose to praise him right in the middle of the rescue.

I know this is an area where I can grow! It’s easy to praise God after everything works out the way I want it to. But this passage challenges us to praise God even while the outcome is still in doubt...trusting that God is working for our good, no matter what.

- Given the fact that most of us haven’t been dramatically rescued from drowning in the ocean, is it possible for us to identify with Jonah’s sentiment in these verses? If so, how? Read Ephesians 2:4-5, John 5:24, and Romans 6:4. What might change for us if we viewed ourselves as having been rescued from certain death?

Leader’s Note: The point we’re emphasizing here is that in a spiritual sense, this is exactly what has happened for us! Most of us have a tendency to see our salvation story as a little less dramatic than this, but as the corollary passages reveal, spiritually speaking, we have been rescued from certain death and raised to new life. If we were to view ourselves in this way, it would make us more grateful, more joyful, and more motivated to serve God (including by sharing our story with others).

- Jonah had been running from God. Yet as soon as he cried out for help, God was there to rescue him. Read Isaiah 30:18-19, which was also written to people who were rebelling against God. What does this reveal about who God is and how he relates to us? How might this change our view of repentance?

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***Leader's Note:** I find these verses to be so beautiful, and such a contrast to the way the world operates! For most of us, when someone wrongs us, it takes a while for us to forgive them and to be willing to engage in relationship with them again. But God is different – as soon as we “turn toward home,” he is ready to receive us, forgive our sin, and restore us.*

Sometimes, repentance can sound like “taking your medicine.” And while there is certainly Godly sorrow involved in repentance as we recognize the impact of our sin, it shouldn't be something that we dread, as if we're going to receive punishment and rebuke from our Heavenly Father. In fact, we receive the exact opposite – unmerited grace and forgiveness!

- One translation of Jonah 2:8 reads, “Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs.” What do you think this means?

***Leader's Note:** I love this translation of verse 8! (It's the 1984 NIV in case you're interested.) We often think of idolatry as one of those things that makes God really mad and that we'll have to pay for if we fall into. And Scripture does say that idolatry angers God! But it's not because he hates sinners. It's because he loves sinners! And he knows that when we “cling to” these idols, it causes us to miss out on the amazing grace that we could be experiencing. We think that the idols are going to bring us happiness, but God knows that ultimately, they are worthless. And when our hands are occupied trying desperately to hold onto these idols, they don't have room to receive the beautiful grace that God wants to give us.*

BREAKOUT GROUPS (5-10 minutes)

After (or as) people move into their breakout groups, read (or paraphrase) the following out loud:

In your groups today, discuss the following question: “What are some of the ‘worthless idols’ you tend to cling to? How has this caused you to ‘forfeit the grace that could be yours?’ ”

After you visit, pray for each other that we would turn away from our idols and to the Lord who longs to be gracious to us.

CLOSING

After the groups are finished (or when it's time to go!), call the group 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 God longs to be gracious with you. May you praise him this week, even while the rescue is still happening!

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