



grow groups



Week 1: God's Call and Our Reluctance

Jonah 1:1-16

GOAL:

Recognize the tragic consequences of sin and respond to the beautiful invitation of grace

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.
- Talk about your group's upcoming plans, including serving at Fallapalooza on Oct 30.
- 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, I praise you not only as our Creator, but also as our Redeemer. I confess that like Jonah, many times I've let your call "go to voicemail" rather than responding with obedience. Forgive me, and please help me see that your desire for my repentance is an expression of your love for me. Teach me that although sin often looks appealing at first, it ultimately leads to death. Thank you for your grace and mercy, and for sending your son Jesus to die for us "while we were still sinners." May that same grace inspire and empower me to turn away from sin and turn toward the new life you desire for me. In Jesus' name, 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 serving at Fallapalooza on Sunday, October 30th from 4:00-6:00pm. See the details in this week's GG Leader email. Finalize all plans this week.

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 be back to our worship-focused prayer. You can use this script if it's helpful, or say it in your own words:

*"As we do each week, we're going to spend some time in prayer together, focusing on worship, thanksgiving, and intercession. As we enter into this time of **praise and worship**, let's praise God for WHO he is. You might say something like: "God I praise you because you are merciful."*

(Leaders: another idea you might want to try is playing a recording of a worship song and asking the group to pray along silently as they hear the lyrics.)

Give time for prayers of praise.

*"Now we're going to share in a time of **thanksgiving**. Today, let's focus specifically on thanking God for our group and the blessing it is to each of us."*

Give time for prayers of thanksgiving.

*"We'll close with some **intercession** – praying for each other's needs. Today, let's pray not only for the needs of our group, but that the people of our community would come to know Jesus as their Lord and Savior."*

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Give time for prayers of intercession.

After a few moments, offer a brief prayer to close out this time.

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.*

- Read Jonah 1:1-2. Why do you think God wanted Jonah to “preach against Ninevah?” What was God's ultimate desire for the Ninevites? Hint: Read 2 Peter 3:9.

Leader's Note: *The first chapter doesn't tell us why God wanted Jonah to preach against the Ninevites, but we can use the rest of Scripture to answer this question! First of all, later in the story (Jonah 4) we find out that God is “concerned” about the Ninevites. In other words, he cares for them and wants the best for them! And 2 Peter 3:9 tells us that God doesn't want anyone to perish, but wants everyone to come to repentance.*

Sometimes we can picture God as an angry cosmic police officer...always on the lookout for someone stepping over the line so he can unleash his fury on them. But God's desire isn't to destroy people – it's to lead them to repentance! And as painful as it is, most of us need to be confronted by hard truth before we come to our senses and repent. But it's helpful to remember that just as a parent disciplines their child because they love the child, God's actions toward us – even the painful ones – are an expression of his love for us.

- Read Proverbs 1:10-11 & 18-19, Proverbs 5:3-5, James 1:14-15, and Galatians 6:8. What do these passages teach us about the nature of sin? How does it look on the surface? Where does it lead? How does knowing this change the way we view God's desire for us to repent from our sin?

Leader's Note: *These four passages paint a stark and sobering picture of sin! They warn us that on the surface, sin looks appealing. It is like “honey” (Prov 5) and “pleases the flesh” (Gal 6). But once it gets its hooks into you, it reveals its true nature – death! The honey turns to gall and leads to death (Prov 5). The “ill-gotten gain” takes the life away from the one who gets it (Prov 1). What pleases the flesh at first leads to destruction in the end (Gal 6). And when these evil desires are full grown, they lead to death (James 1).*

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This radically changes the way we view God's desire for us to repent. It's not about God being angry that we've violated an arbitrary rule. Instead, by choosing to follow our evil desires rather than God's good plan for us, we have set ourselves on a path that leads to destruction! God wants us to repent not only because it honors him (which it does), but also because it leads us toward the best possible life...the "new way of being human" (life in God's Kingdom) that is possible because of Jesus.

- Read Jonah 1:3. In his sermon, Larry described Jonah's response to God's call as "letting God go to voicemail." Why did Jonah let God's call go to voice mail? What can lead us to doing this with God? What price might we pay for ignoring the call?

Leader's Note: *On the surface, it might initially look like Jonah ignores God's call because he is afraid or because the trip to Ninevah would be painful. But in chapter 4, we find out the reason is much more sinister – he thinks the Ninevites don't deserve God's forgiveness.*

Sometimes, we may "ignore God's call" for the same reason...we don't want to reach out to someone that we're frustrated with because we'd rather avoid them than humble ourselves and extend forgiveness. But other times, we may ignore God's call because we're afraid of what it will cost us, because we're busy with other things, or even just because we aren't paying attention! When we ignore God's call, it's possible that he may send a storm to wake us up, but it's even more likely that we will miss out on the amazing things God wants us to experience as we follow him.

- Read Jonah 1:4. What do you think was God's purpose in sending the storm? Do you think God speaks to you through your circumstances? How might we be able to tell whether or not a particular circumstance is a message from God?

Leader's Note: *As Larry said in his sermon, you might initially think that God sent the storm because he was mad at Jonah and wanted to punish him. And while sin certainly deserves punishment, it also appears that there is a loving motivation even behind the storm. God is using "tough love" with Jonah. He's letting him experience (a portion of) the negative consequences of his sinful choices in an attempt to help him come to his senses, repent, and follow God's will.*

One problem with this idea is that it's tough to know when a circumstance is God speaking to you directly and when it's something that just happened for some other unrelated reason! On the one hand, we need to constantly be on the lookout for all the ways God may be speaking to us, including through our circumstances. On the other hand, we should be careful not to "over-spiritualize" life and assume that everything that happens carries a secret message.

WEEK 7

It reminds me (John) of a friend I had in college. She got a speeding ticket one day, and as we were talking about it, she said, "I think God must be telling me I have too much money...that's why I got the ticket." I didn't say it out loud, but my reaction was, "I think he's telling you to slow down!" 😊

Sometimes, like in this case, the message of our circumstances is pretty clear. Other times, it's tougher to see. In those cases, it's helpful to 1) pray about it, asking God to speak clearly to you, 2) read and reflect on Scripture, and 3) ask wise friends to help you discern what God is saying.

- So far in the story, what do Jonah and the Ninevites have in common? What does this teach us about God? What does it teach us about people?

Leader's Note: *At the beginning, we might view Jonah and the Ninevites differently. We see the Ninevites as evil sinners and Jonah as a godly prophet. But later in the chapter we see that they aren't so different after all! Both of them have defied God and chosen their own way rather than his. Both of them are on a path that is going to lead to destruction if they don't repent. And both of them are the objects of God's love and the targets of his rescue attempts.*

How we respond to God is much more important than who we are or where we come from. Jonah may have been a prophet, but that didn't exempt him from the responsibility of obeying God. And the Ninevites may have been "wicked," but that didn't disqualify them from being able to repent and receive God's forgiveness and restoration.

This teaches us that God is willing to forgive ANYONE who repents and turns toward him, regardless of their background. And it teaches us that all people, regardless of their background, are susceptible to sin.

- Read Jonah 1:11-16. How do the "pagan" sailors react to the storm? What values do their actions reveal? What values do Jonah's actions in chapter 1 reveal?

Leader's Note: *The pagan sailors are naturally afraid for their lives, so they turn to their gods in prayer (and ask Jonah to pray to his God). When Jonah tells them to throw him overboard, you would think they would jump at the chance! But they try everything else to avoid taking his life. And even when they do, it's with great reluctance and a prayer for forgiveness. When God rescues them, they respond with gratitude and worship.*

The sailors' behavior is unexpected, given the fact that they are "pagans." Their actions demonstrate that they value the lives of their fellow men (Jonah), even when it had negative consequences for them personally. Jonah's actions, on the other hand, revealed that he didn't value the lives of the people in Ninevah, but would rather run away than to bring them the message that could lead them to repent.

It's a healthy (and sobering) exercise to think about what values our actions reveal! That's one of the things we'll discuss in our breakout groups.

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

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 questions. After you visit, spend time praying for each other that when God calls, you'd have the courage to "pick up the phone."

- *In the last question, we talked about the fact that our actions reveal our values. What values (positive and/or negative) might your actions from the last week reveal?*
- *Where might God be trying to call you to repentance in this season?*

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, when the Spirit of God calls us, may we respond with the words of Samuel: "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening."