



## **Jonah Week Four - Community Group Questions**

### **The Work**

I want to welcome you to week four of our study on the book of Jonah. As I am sure you know, our Community Groups focus on the principals of “in,” “out” and “up.” “In” refers to group members growing closer together, “out” is our focus on others outside our group and “up” refers to our focus on God and growing spiritually. This study will focus primarily on the “in” and “up”. One way to focus on “out” is by inviting others to join your group and warmly welcoming them when they do. Groups may also want to think about a ministry project to focus on “out” this fall. Begin your time with an opening prayer and read Jonah Chapter 3

1. Chapter three begins with an almost word for word repeat of chapter one. Again God calls Jonah to go to Nineveh. Moving past my familiarity with this story, I find the beginning of chapter three amazing. Jonah has defied God and in total rebellion run from Him. But God, after hearing Jonah’s prayer for repentance, immediately restores him and speaks to Him. God’s call to Jonah restores his place as a prophet, and restoring his mission gives Jonah’s life dignity and purpose. Jonah could have been told to go home in disgrace or he could have been demoted, but In the face of Jonah’s unfaithfulness God is faithful. The beginning of Jonah three reminds me of 2 Timothy 2:13 ”if we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot disown Himself.” As I read Jonah three in light of my own failures, it fills me with hope. I am also encouraged to see that Jonah at least momentarily has learned his lesson and he finally obeys God’s call. I truly believe God’s renewed call to Jonah reveals His faithfulness, love and mercy. Our response should be the same as Jonah: obedience.

- Do you see God as faithful, loving and full of mercy or do you tend to see Him as angry and vengeful?
- How does your view of God affect your relationship with Him?
- Share with your group about a time when you were momentarily faithless but God was faithful to you.

2. In Jonah 4:4 we see Jonah has arrived in Nineveh and he is finally doing the work he was called to do. Back in week one of this study I shared that I believe God calls us to hard places, our own “Ninevehs.” Your Nineveh will be something difficult that you really don’t want to do but is important, and will make an impact. Our Ninevehs might be a difficult conversation with a friend or family member, installing some discipline in our lives around spending or exercise or spiritual growth. It might be to begin the process of forgiveness or, like Jonah, our Nineveh might be to reach out and share a message that God has put on our heart for someone else. If you obey God and confront your Nineveh, you may find that actually doing the work that God is calling you to is very different from hearing the call, planning the work, or procrastinating the work; it’s the great adventure. I know it may be counter intuitive to see something difficult and uncomfortable as an adventure, but believe me, there is nothing like obeying God and stepping out of your comfort zone.

- Do you have at this moment an awareness of a place that God is calling you, a Nineveh of your own? If you are comfortable, share that with your group.
- Are you now or have you in the past procrastinated obeying God’s call? How do you think someone stops procrastinating and starts to do the work? How might you?
- I know it may be counter intuitive to see something uncomfortable and difficult as an adventure, but have you stepped out to obey God and found it to be fulfilling?

3. Jonah 3:5-9 contains the response of the residents, King, and nobles of Nineveh; it’s almost unbelievable, they repent. They did the two things in the ancient world that people did to show they acknowledged their guilt and they wanted to change: they fasted and put on sackcloth. Imagine Jonah’s surprise. Why did the Ninevites respond to Jonah’s message so dramatically? In his book on Jonah, Tim Keller says “Historians have pointed out that about the time of Jonah’s mission, Assyria had experienced a series of famines, plagues, revolts, and eclipses, all of which were seen as omens of far worse things to come. This state of affairs would have made both rulers and subjects unusually open to the message of a visiting prophet. Some have argued this was God’s way of preparing the ground for Jonah.” We do know there was a total eclipse in 768 B.C. possibly just preceding Jonah’s entrance to Nineveh. The story of Jonah reminds us that when God calls us, He has gone before us and that obedience to God produces results, sometimes amazing results.

- If it is true that God has gone before you how should it affect your obedience?
- How did it affect you when you saw the fearsome, intimidating Assyrians have such a soft heart toward God we saw Jonah, God’s prophet, display such a hard heart; It was the same thing we saw in chapter two with the sailors?

4. Jonah 3:10 reveals God's heart of compassion. God has now shown compassion to Jonah for his rebellion and on the entire city of Nineveh for the wickedness of the inhabitants. God's action is in line with what He revealed through the prophet Jeremiah in Jeremiah 18:7-8 "If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, and if that nation repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned." We see that God again is true to His Word showing His heart is for both Justice and Mercy. Think for a moment about those two concepts: Justice, getting what you deserve and Mercy, receiving compassion and forgiveness instead of what you deserve. Consider Zechariah 7:9 "This is what the Lord Almighty said: 'Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another.'" God wants both Justice and Mercy. This truth affects all of us, we deserve Justice, to simply get what we deserve. But the truth is, if God gave Jonah or Nineveh or us what we deserved, we would be punished. Instead, God gives to Jonah and Nineveh and us, mercy, on the condition of repentance. Instead of seeking Justice against us, God justifies us, He has mercy and forgives us. God is able to have both Justice and Mercy because His son Jesus Christ paid the price, He bore our sin on the cross so that, on the condition of our repentance, we could be forgiven. As it says in Romans 3:25-26 "God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of His blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance He had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished— He did it to demonstrate His righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus." Jesus is the answer to how God can have Justice and also Mercy.

- Do you agree that God wants both Justice and Mercy? Do you see how those opposing principals create tension?
- What does it mean to you personally that God resolved the tension between Justice and Mercy by sending His Son to pay the price that we might receive God's mercy and salvation?
- Does that affect your willingness to obey God and go to the Ninevehs in your life?

5. As you think back over Jonah chapter 3 and these community group questions, what do you think is your main take away — what is the most important thing you have considered or learned from this study?