



“Jonah: Resistance is Futile”

EPIC FAIL

Small Group Plan

Dear Lord, today I thought of the words of Vincent van Gogh: “It is true there is an ebb and flow, but the sea remains the sea.” You are the sea. Although I experience many ups and downs in my emotions and often feel great shifts and changes in my inner life, you remain the same ... O Lord, sea of love and goodness, let me not fear too much the storms and winds of my daily life, and let me know that there is ebb and flow but that the sea remains the sea.

By Henri Nouwen from “*Ebb and Flow*”

OPEN IT / INTRODUCE IT ...

- What are your earliest memories of prayer?
- What do the very young teach us about prayer?
- What do the very old teach us about prayer?

LOOK AT IT / STUDY IT ...

ON THE BOAT

Jonah 1:1-3

¹ *The word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai: ² “Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me.” ³ But Jonah ran away from the LORD and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the LORD.*

- Why did Jonah disagree with God?
- Do you identify with Jonah’s desire to let the evil Ninevites suffer the consequences of their own lifestyle?
- Why did Jonah change his travel plans?
- Who are the Ninevites in your life? Tastefully, carefully and generally share who you find it difficult to be around (no names please).
- What is your Tarshish, your place of false security, your distraction from God’s will?

THROUGH THE STORM

Jonah 1:4-10

⁴ Then the LORD sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up. ⁵ All the sailors were afraid and each cried out to his own god. And they threw the cargo into the sea to lighten the ship. But Jonah had gone below deck, where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep. ⁶ The captain went to him and said, "How can you sleep? Get up and call on your god! Maybe he will take notice of us, and we will not perish." ⁷ Then the sailors said to each other, "Come, let us cast lots to find out who is responsible for this calamity." They cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah. ⁸ So they asked him, "Tell us, who is responsible for making all this trouble for us? What do you do? Where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?" ⁹ He answered, "I am a Hebrew and I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land." ¹⁰ This terrified them and they asked, "What have you done?" (They knew he was running away from the LORD, because he had already told them so.)

- Why did God send the storm?
- Why didn't Jonah notice the storm?
- Why didn't Jonah pray?
- How did Jonah's personal disobedience endanger many others?

IN THE FISH

Jonah 1:17, 2:2-10

¹⁷ But the LORD provided a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was inside the fish three days and three nights

² He said: "In my distress I called to the LORD, and he answered me. From the depths of the grave I called for help, and you listened to my cry. ³ You hurled me into the deep, into the very heart of the seas, and the currents swirled about me; all your waves and breakers swept over me. ⁴ I said, 'I have been banished from your sight; yet I will look again toward your holy temple.' ⁵ The engulfing waters threatened me, the deep surrounded me; seaweed was wrapped around my head. ⁶ To the roots of the mountains I sank down; the earth beneath barred me in forever. But you brought my life up from the pit, O LORD my God. ⁷ "When my life was ebbing away, I remembered you, LORD, and my prayer rose to you, to your holy temple. ⁸ "Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs. ⁹ But I, with a song of thanksgiving, will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed I will make good. Salvation comes from the LORD." ¹⁰ And the LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.

- Pick out the words that describe Jonah's plight. What images, definitions and emotions do these words bring to mind?

- Describe Jonah's hard heart, and how did his "distress" soften it?
- How do you understand what some writers call "God's harsh grace?"
- How do some misunderstand God's severity?
- Why is God's discipline a necessary part of spiritual growth?
- Find these words "threatened" "surrounded" "wrapped" "barred." How are they used, and what do they tell you about Jonah's state of mind?
- Does his "fish" experience change his feelings about Nineveh? Does it put him back on course? Explain.

AT THE CITY

Jonah 3:1-10

¹ Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time: ² "Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you." ³ Jonah obeyed the word of the LORD and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very important city — a visit required three days. ⁴ On the first day, Jonah started into the city. He proclaimed: "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned." ⁵ The Ninevites believed God. They declared a fast, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth. ⁶ When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust. ⁷ Then he issued a proclamation in Nineveh: "By the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let any man or beast, herd or flock, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. ⁸ But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. ⁹ Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish." ¹⁰ When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened.

- Why did God give Jonah a second chance and why did He give Nineveh any kind of chance?
- Thus far in the story, what have you learned about God's character?
- Why does Jonah finally follow God's orders?
- Why did God say "40 days" instead of "the day after tomorrow?"
- How would you describe Nineveh's response to Jonah?
- What was God's will — to destroy Nineveh or to save it? Explain.

USE IT / APPLY IT ...

- Jonah is driven to prayer by his situation. Under what circumstances do most people today pray?
- What is the difference between being “instructed” on how to pray (Matthew 6:9 – The Lord’s Prayer), and being “driven” to pray (Luke 22:44 – The Garden Prayer)?
- When have you felt driven to pray? What drove you there?
- Jonah says, “*When my life was ebbing away, I remembered you, LORD.*” Why does a threatened life remind us of the One who created our life?
- Does it bother you that God says, “I do not change” (Malachi 3:6; 1 Samuel 15:29), and yet He does not destroy Nineveh? Explain.
- How can this group support you in prayer this week?