

THE PURSUIT

A Study in Jonah

At the very beginning of the book of Acts, just before He is about to ascend back into heaven, Jesus tells His followers that they will change the world. Jesus' followers, a group of jacked up, uneducated, freaked out, Galilean peasants, had no clue what to do next. They gathered together in a stuff room on the roof of a house to pray.

After several weeks of praying, God showed up in power. And, these freaked out Galilean peasants stepped out in the market place with supernatural boldness. They proclaimed the Gospel and 3000 people became Christians in one day. Once again, Jesus' followers had no clue what to do. What are we supposed to do with all these people? How are we going to make sure that these new Christians grow? How can we continue to bring Gospel to more people in our city, country, and world?

The early church's answer to that question was Life Groups. The early church met in groups of 10 to 20 in various houses throughout Jerusalem. And, in these groups, men and women lived life together, they studied God's Word together, they challenged each other to grow together, and they lived on mission together.

What was true then, continues to be true today. Real growth, life changing growth, happens in the context of Life Group Communities. I became a Christian the summer after my freshman year of college. And, at the first Christian event that I attended, I met a group of guys who would take me under their wing. We didn't have formal times when we met together. But, we lived life together, we challenged each other, we encouraged each other, and we grew spiritually together. Later that same year, I got plugged into a college ministry. They invited me to be a part of a Life Group on campus. This Life Group was significantly more formal. We met for an hour and a half every week. We walked through a lesson, sometimes with a video. Both of these Life Groups, one more informal and one more formal, were integral in me growing in my faith as a young believer. From then until now, I have been in some sort of Life Group Community and the Lord has consistently used that community to draw me closer to Him.

Our dream at Fellowship is that every neighborhood and people group in Southwest Missouri would have some sort of Life Group Community. This is our dream because we long to see lives changed in Southwest Missouri and life change happens in Life Groups.

This curriculum is designed to make our Life Groups as effective and life changing as possible both for the participants and for you, the leaders.

CONTEXT OF A LIFE GROUP

Life Groups that flourish have three characteristics in common:

1. They are vulnerable. In our world of social media and staged instagram pictures, almost nobody has a place to be real. Our Life Groups must be a place where people can be real. They must be places where people can share the hard, messy, ugly parts of their lives, in addition to the fun, exciting, and easy parts. Leaders, this starts with you. Your Life Group will only be as vulnerable as you are.
2. They are compassionate. In our world of marketing, people feel used almost constantly. Almost nobody has a place where they are genuinely cared for. Our Life Groups must be one of those places. They must be places where people don't need to be fake, but where they can know that they are cared for. Leaders, this starts with you. You must genuinely care for people in your Life Group.
3. They are exciting. In our world of cynicism, almost nobody has a place where they can be genuinely excited about what God is doing in and through them. Our Life Groups must be one of those places. They must be places where our eyes are lifted out of the ho hum of our daily lives to the bigger picture of how God is changing us and changing our world through us. Leaders, this starts with you. No one will be more excited about your Life Group than you.

CONTENT OF A LIFE GROUP

We have all been to Life Groups that are nothing more than sterile Bible Studies. A fill-in-the-blank question here and a Sunday School answer there. And, we have all been to Life Groups that are essentially just hanging out. Frozen espresso drinks are great but coffee shops and various levels of caffeine don't change lives. Real Life Groups, Life-changing Life Groups have deep relationship and challenging engagement with God and His Word. You must have both.

The following curriculum is designed to foster both engagement with God's Word and deep community with those involved in the Life Group. Every Life Group will have four parts:

1. Connect (10 min). This usually happens at the very beginning. Much of this will be informal as people are eating cookies or just hanging out for the first several minutes. But, some should be formal. You should try to begin every Life Group with a fun or funny introductory question.
2. Discuss (35 min). Every Life Group will spend some time in God's Word. This should happen through reading a passage of Scripture and asking open-ended questions to discern what that passage means and how it applies to our life. For each passage, this curriculum will give you around 7 questions to choose from. You do not need to use all these questions. They are meant to give you tracks to run on as you plan your Life Group.
3. Relate (25 min). Every Life Group will have time when those who come can be real and vulnerable about their lives. This should be done in all male or all female groups. The two questions that should guide this time are: What has been the highlight of your walk with the Lord this week? and What has been the biggest struggle this week? Remember, leaders, you must lead out in this. This is intended to be an opportunity to confess sin/temptation and celebrate growth. And, leader, you will need to model vulnerability and engaging in heart issues not simply surface

issues.

4. Impact (5 min). Every week, your Life Group should pray about people that they are going to invite next week. Life Group is not an island. It is a launching pad for impacting people. That starts with this part of Life Group.

IMPACT OF A LIFE GROUP

There are some people in your Life Group who will become Christians because of your leadership. There are others who will be challenged to live on mission for a lifetime and they will. There are others who will become missionaries in their workplaces or overseas because of what they experience in your Life Group.

Leading a Life Group is a weighty responsibility. We prepare well for Life Group because the potential for impact is so great! But, the ripple effects of leading a Life Group this year could be felt to the ends of the earth and into eternity. Welcome to a great adventure!

RUNNING FROM GOD (JONAH 1:1-16)

CONNECT—Think of a fun-icebreaker question to ask. For example, what is something about you that most other people consider weird, but you think is totally normal?

DISCUSS

What most stood out to you from Justin's sermon this past week? What was one of your big takeaways?

What strikes you from Jonah 1:1-16? Is there something that particularly resonates with you or is particularly confusing for you?

Based on your understanding of the Old Testament, what would have been particularly scary or intimidating about going to preach repentance in Nineveh? In our world, what would be your Nineveh? Why? In your life here in Southwest Missouri, which person or type of people would be scary or intimidating for you like Nineveh was for Jonah? Why?

Justin talked a lot about running from God. Describe a time when you were running from God in an area of your life. What did it feel like? Why were you doing it? What caused you to stop running from Him?

In what area are you currently running from God? What would have to happen for you to stop running from God?

What does verse 16 teach us about how God moves?

Describe a time when God was clearly pursuing you. In what ways did that pursuit turn out to be good news for you? What does it say about God that He pursues us as He does?

Justin said that, because of Jesus, we can know that God is a good father when He pursues us. Why did Justin say this? How did Jesus succeed where Jonah failed?

RELATE—Consider splitting into guys and girls for this section.

What has been your biggest spiritual highlight this week?

What has been your biggest spiritual struggle this week?

IMPACT (Invite, Engage, Share)

Have everybody in your Life Group think of someone that they are going to invite to church next week.

GOD PURSUES US (JONAH 1:17-2:10)

CONNECT—Think of a fun-icebreaker question to ask. For example, what is something about you that most other people consider weird, but you think is totally normal?

DISCUSS

What most stood out to you from Justin's sermon this past week? What was one of your big takeaways?

What strikes you about the verses that we just read? Is there some that particularly resonates with you or particularly confuses you?

Why is it good news that God sends a fish? Do you think it felt like good news for Jonah at the time? In the belly of the fish, Jonah is alone with God. Describe a time when you have felt alone with God. What happened? What did He communicate to you?

Jonah realizes that the circumstances of his life are not random. God is moving behind them. Why is that comforting? Why is that challenging?

If you were offered all the riches, fame, and comfort of this world without God, would that be tempting for you? Why or why not? What proof do you have that having God is better than all the riches, fame, and comfort of this world?

In verses 5 and 6, Jonah poetically describes the result of his sin. How have you experienced your sin like Jonah describes in verses 5 and 6?

Justin said that Christian salvation is not a transformation for bad to good but a transformation from dead to alive. Why is that an important distinction?

How did Jonah see people differently in verse 8 than he had before?

In verse 10, the fish vomits Jonah up onto dry land because he is now ready to be used by God. How do you think Jonah 1 and 2 prepared Jonah to preach repentance to the Ninevites? Is there a time when you have experienced similar preparation?

RELATE—Consider splitting into guys and girls for this section.

What is the next step that you have identified for Next Steps Month?

IMPACT (Invite, Engage, Share)

Think of one person that you are going to invite to church this weekend. Pray for that person.

A GOD OF SECOND CHANCES (JONAH 3)

CONNECT—Think of a fun-icebreaker question to ask. For example, what is something about you that most other people consider weird, but you think is totally normal?

DISCUSS

What most stood out to you from Justin's sermon this past week? What was one of your big takeaways?

What strikes you about the verses that we just read? Is there some that particularly resonates with you or particularly confuses you?

In verse 1, "the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time." What does it say about the character of God that His word came a "second time?" How have you experienced God being a God of second chances?

Jonah 3:4 shows us the sermon that Jonah preached to Nineveh. It is not an impressive sermon! How is it possible that such a sermon could have such a significant impact in Nineveh? Why is Jonah's sermon encouraging for us as we think about sharing the Gospel with our friends?

What specific things did the Ninevites realize as a result of Jonah's preaching? Describe a time when you have realized similar truths about yourself and about God.

In verse 5, how does the king of Nineveh respond to Jonah's preaching? Why is this an appropriate response? How does the way that the king responds to sin correct the way that many American Christians respond to sin?

Christian repentance is more than just a change in your beliefs. Prove this statement from Jonah 3. As you look at your Christian life, what are some of the places where you have had to actively repent?

How does God respond to the Ninevites? What does verse 10 show us about God?

RELATE—Consider splitting into guys and girls for this section.

What is one area where the Lord might be calling you into repentance today?

IMPACT (Invite, Engage, Share)

Think of one person that you are going to invite to church this weekend. Pray for that person.

GOD KEEPS PURSUING (JONAH 4)

CONNECT—Think of a fun-icebreaker question to ask. For example, what is something about you that most other people consider weird, but you think is totally normal?

DISCUSS

What most stood out to you from Justin's sermon this past week? What was one of your big takeaways?

What strikes you about the verses that we just read? Is there some that particularly resonates with you or particularly confuses you?

This week there are going to be several times where we are going to get an opportunity to be vulnerable. Where is one area of your life where spiritual growth has seemed or currently seems painfully slow for you? Why do you think God would allow your growth there to be so slow?

Jonah loves his comfort and not the Ninevites. How have you seen yourself tempted to love your comfort? What are some ways that you have learned to fight those temptations? Who are the groups of people that are hardest for you to love? What are you doing to fight that lack of love?

Describe the time when God's grace has been most real to you. What are some ways that you forget God's grace to you? How would your interactions with people around you be different if you extended grace in the same way that God has extended grace to you?

What are some of the main things that you have learned from Jonah during this pursuit series?

Justin said that there are churches that separate themselves from the culture and churches that compromise with the culture. But, really powerful churches stand on the truth of God's character and His word, while they extend grace to people around them in the culture. What is hard about living that third option? Why does Southwest Missouri need people who are living that third option?

RELATE—Consider splitting into guys and girls for this section.

What has been your biggest spiritual highlight this week? What has been your biggest spiritual struggle this week?

IMPACT (Invite, Engage, Share)

Think of one person that you are going to invite to church this weekend. Pray for that person.