



WnL CONNECT Groups

Responding to God's Call Jonah 1:1-17

MAIN POINT

Jonah was on board with his own plans that eventually led him overboard.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

- Growing up, did you ever want to run away from home? Why or why not?
- What has made or would make you want to run away from God?
- The key question we want to focus on in today's lesson is: Are we running away from God, toward God, or with God? If we're not running with Him every day, then what must happen to change our direction?

The Book of Jonah is not a story about a fish. Neither is it simply a story about a rebellious prophet. The central character in the book is God. The book reflects God's love for the lost, the tragic failure of His people to share that love, and the extreme measures God may use to move His people to obedience. In chapter 1, we read how Jonah "paid the fare and went on board . . . away from the presence of the Lord." Jonah was on board with his own plans that eventually led him overboard.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

Have a volunteer read JONAH 1:1-2.

We know very little about the prophet Jonah. He is identified in verse 1 only as the "son of Amittai." He also is mentioned in 2 Kings 14:25. According to the 2 Kings passage, Jonah had experienced past success as a prophet.



He had heard and delivered God's message to King Jeroboam II of Israel. As a result, Israel's territories had been expanded. Jonah most likely was highly popular and respected among the people of God because of this. God gave a specific command to Jonah: Go to Nineveh and preach against it.

- When you struggle to obey God, what are the most common reasons why?
- Is there anything you think God is asking you to do that doesn't make sense to you?

Have a volunteer read Jonah 1:3.

Jonah's response to God's call may have been something like: "Lord, You know I love You, but faith has limits. I will go anywhere You send me—just not to Nineveh." For some of us, our personal Nineveh might actually be a place. For others it may be a task. Our personal Nineveh may be whatever God is requiring us to do right now.

- Is there something you would have a hard time doing if God asked it of you? Why?
- Contrast Jonah's response to God's call with how other Old Testament prophets responded to His call, by reading 1 Kings 17:1-6; Isaiah 6:8-11; and Jeremiah 1:4-10.
- Is your response to God today more like Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, or Jonah?

People today attempt to run from God in a variety of ways. Being in God's will is not primarily a matter of where we are geographically but has to do with where we are spiritually. We can run from God without ever leaving our geographic location. Jonah's disobedience was an expression of a cold heart, a heart that did not beat in sync with God's. While some believers run from specific tasks God calls them to, many more simply refuse to run with God in everyday life. We fill our lives with so many activities that time for God and ministry to people gets squeezed out.

Have a volunteer read Jonah 1:4-10.

- In verse 4, what was the consequence of Jonah's disobedience?
- What are some consequences we experience today when we run from God's will?

Any believer attempting to run from God eventually will come to face the consequences of that disobedience in the hope that he or she might turn back to God. Sometimes it may be months or even years before the consequences surface. For Jonah, it was a matter of hours or days. Though it may not happen immediately, we will always face the consequences when we do not obey God. God does not quickly give up on His people who fail to do His will. In spite of our stubbornness and self-absorption, He still desires to accomplish His purposes through us.

- Lead in a discussion of some of the indicators that the church today has fallen asleep in regard to its mission. What "storms" do you think God has sent to awaken His church?



Have a volunteer read Jonah 1:11-17.

- What do you think of Jonah's request to be thrown into the sea (v. 12)? Was it a heroic, selfless act, or was it a reflection of his continuing stubborn refusal to accept God's purpose for his life?

Jonah had a better theological understanding of God, but he lacked compassion for others, as chapter 4 will make clear. The sailors showed greater concern for one physical life than Jonah displayed for a multitude of spiritual lives. Jonah learned the hard way that you can run, but you can't hide from God. Jonah also learned that God will spare no expense in pursuing those who run away from Him. God will pursue us to bring Him back to Himself. The greatest evidence of this truth is seen on the cross (Rom. 5:8).

- Read Matthew 12:40-41. What is the meaning of Jonah's entombment for Jesus? How did Jonah compare to Jesus?
- Why do you think God didn't simply raise up someone else to do the task Jonah refused?
- Why do you think obeying God is always in our best interest?

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

The Bible lets us look at the interaction between God and Jonah so we can understand better our own interaction with God. God still calls people into service and sends them to faraway nations. He also sends His servants to next-door neighbours, to friends and coworkers, to enemies and opponents. So before we condemn Jonah too harshly, let his example remind us of how we have responded or are responding to God's call. The key question each of us must ask ourselves today is this: Am I running away from God, toward God, or with God? If I'm not running with Him, then what must happen to change my direction?

- How has this lesson encouraged you? How has this lesson challenged you?
- To whom might God be sending you to share the gospel? How can you take advantage of opportunities to share with them this week?

PRAYER

Thank God for loving us enough to send storms and fish. Pray that we will run to Him and not from Him.

