

Life Group Discussion Guide

Jonah: A Tale of Two Hearts

Week 1: Running from God Jonah 1:1-16

This week, we began a new series in the book of Jonah, a short yet powerful story of two hearts colliding: God's merciful heart and Jonah's self-preserving one.

The book opens by exposing the stark contrast between God's Word—"Go to the great city of Nineveh" (v. 2)—and Jonah's response. Pastor Jon painted it this way:

"Jonah gets going, but he goes in the opposite direction. He gets busy, but not on God's mission. And then we're told why: to flee from the LORD."

- How have you fled from God and His Word in your own life?
- What has been the result?

What happens when Jonah attempts to flee from "the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land" (v. 9)? Verse four tells us, "the LORD sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up." When God doesn't get Jonah's attention through His Word, He gets it through a storm.

This leads us to an important point of clarification: not every storm that comes into our lives is the result of sin, but every sin comes with a storm. Pastor Jon described sin as a "package deal"—a storm is always included.

This is the principle behind our Big Idea: When we run from God, we run straight into a storm.

- Can you draw a connection between sin and storms in your life? When has your own decision to run from God led you straight into a storm?
- Why do you think God allows, or causes, us to weather storms as a result of our sin? What does your answer tell you about His character?

If we really believe this truth—that when we run from God, we run straight into a storm—why do we, like Jonah, choose to disobey His Word? Pastor Jon's explanation is simple: "It's easier to say we know God than it is to actually know Him."

In Jonah's life, the storm was God's way of saying something like this, "You say you fear me, but you're running from me. I'm going to show you who I really am and what my heart is like. In that process, you're going to see your own heart, and you'll have a choice to make. Will you become like me?"

Although Jonah said he knew God, his actions revealed that he cared more about national allegiances than God's heart. In the same way, God uses storms in our lives to address other identities that run deeper for us than our Christian identity.

- What have you been tempted to find your identity in before or instead of Christ? Why do you think that is?
- What happens in our hearts and lives when we align ourselves to anyone or anything more closely than to God?
- Why does God desire for our identity in Him to come first and foremost?

So how do we come to truly know God and find our identity in Him? The sailors aboard Jonah's ship provide a framework we can learn from. In the midst of the storm, they go from pursuing false gods (v. 5), to knowing about God (v. 10), to knowing God by experience (v. 16).

It's the same trajectory for all of us. Knowing about God is not enough; we must know Him personally and experientially—which is the greatest desire of God's heart.

- What is the difference between saying we know God and actually knowing Him?
- Have you come to know God by personal experience? Share how that change took place in your heart and what's been different since.
- If you haven't yet experienced a relationship with God for yourself, do you want to? Take time now to express your desire to know God personally, confessing the false identities you've sought after and clinging to the identity Christ won for you on the cross.

In closing, let's be reminded of an important truth we touched on earlier. Not every storm or trial is the result of sin. Some trials come because you're God's chosen instrument to suffer for His sake. Sometimes, running toward God takes you straight into the bumpiest ride you'll ever have.

Nowhere is this clearer than in the life and death of Jesus Christ. Jesus ran toward God, and He ran straight into the storm of God's wrath: the cross.

- Why did Jesus willingly run into the storm of God's wrath?
- Just like Jonah, each of us must choose how we will respond to God's merciful heart. Discuss how you will live in response to the cross.

"Like Jonah, we run away from God. Jesus ran to the cross to bring us back to Him."