

# Life Group Discussion Guide

Jonah: A Tale of Two Hearts

Week 2: Journey to the Bottom • Jonah 1:17–2:10

Last week we began our message series, “A Tale of Two Hearts,” by tracking Jonah’s attempt to run from God. This week, we’ll see where it landed him.

Jonah 1:17 tells us, “Now the LORD provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.”

Having been thrown into a stormy sea and swallowed by a fish, something begins to change in the self-protective heart of Jonah. The very thing he would not do in the boat, he starts doing in the fish: praying.

Here’s how he begins, “You hurled me into the depths, into the very heart of the seas” (v. 3). Wait...who hurled Jonah into the sea? Although it was the sailors who gave Jonah the toss, he knows the ultimate cause of his journey to the bottom is God. Like Joseph, Jonah saw past human hands to the sovereign hand of God. Pastor Jon invited us to question whether we would do the same:

“The understanding of God that many people have would not allow them to say what Jonah said. They view God as a power that should be wind in their sails. In other words, they’re going somewhere, and God should come along and help them go faster. But that’s not the God of Scripture. The God of Scripture has purposes. He’s going somewhere, and he invites us to that destination.”

- To this point in your life, have you primarily viewed God as the wind in your sails or the Captain of your ship?
- What changes when we approach our life as part of God’s purposes instead of a pursuit of our own?
- Is there a situation or priority He’s asking you to submit under His authority today? What would that look like? What would happen if you did?
- Take time now to pray in repentance for pursuing your own purposes above God’s, inviting Him to captain the ship of your life.

As Jonah’s prayer continues, he cries, “I have been banished from your sight; yet I will look again toward your holy temple” (v. 4). This illustrates a key truth from this week’s text. When posed the question, “What’s the worst thing that could happen to a person?” we could give a hundred answers – like fatal illness, loss of a loved one, or financial poverty – but Jonah points to a different conclusion. Pastor Jon summarized it this way:

“The worst thing by far is to be banished from God’s sight. That’s what hell is: banishment from God’s comforting presence for eternity.”

- What comes to mind when you consider the worst thing that could happen to a person?
- What does your answer reveal about your priorities?
- How would it change your priorities to truly consider separation from God the worst thing that could ever happen to you?

God allowed Jonah to experience this feeling of separation – his journey to the bottom – for a reason: to bring Jonah back up into His presence. As Pastor Jon put it, “The way to the presence of God is through the journey to the bottom.”

- Why do you believe a journey to the bottom is the way to the presence of God?
- How have you experienced this reality in your own life?

How does a descent to our lowest place lead us into God’s presence? Pastor said it this way:

“The journey to the bottom is how God humbles us. His humbling hand descends upon us, and then we have a choice. Will we humble ourselves before God, or will we double down in our pride?”

In our lowest place, we come to see with great clarity that we are not God – over our life or anyone’s life – and that the true God is calling us to humble ourselves. 1 Peter 5:5–6 puts it like this: “God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble. Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that He may lift you up in due time.”

- Have you experienced the humbling that comes from a journey to the bottom? Reflect on that season of your life.
- If you’re in the midst of one of these journeys right now, what can you do to humble yourself before God?
- What changes when we humble ourselves before God?

The good news is that the journey to the bottom is not our final destination.

Our series is aptly named, “A Tale of Two Hearts,” not only because it exposes the conflict between God’s heart and Jonah’s, but God’s heart and ours. Unlike our prideful, self-protecting hearts, God’s is one of mercy and, as we learned this week, hesed.

“Hesed means that God will never abandon us, that He will not treat us as our sins deserve, and that when He humbles us it is always to bring us into a deeper experience of His love for us.”

God’s heart of hesed loved the wicked Ninevites, the pagan sailors, and wayward Jonah, yet it wasn’t until Jonah’s journey to the bottom that he began to see it – to grasp the hesed of God. This leads us to our Big Idea: Only when we’re humbled can we embrace God’s grace.

“We cannot continue living in pride and enjoy God’s grace. We must know that we are sinners who’ve clung to worthless idols (v. 8) and would continue to do so for the rest of our lives if God didn’t send storms to pry our fingers open and teach us to cling to His grace instead.”

We cannot save ourselves. God, in His hesed, is the one who brings our lives up from the pit. This is why Jonah confesses, "Salvation comes from the LORD" (v. 9).

God's hesed is embodied no more clearly than in the Person of Jesus Christ: the Son of God loving His enemies, doing good to those who hate Him, blessing us by the curse that fell on Him on the cross, and praying for our forgiveness.

"God sent Jesus to journey to the bottom on our behalf. There was no big fish to preserve Jesus from death. He was engulfed by death, by the fury of God's justice. The justice of God fell on Jesus, so that the mercy of God might fall on us. This is the cost of our salvation."

- Discuss the relationship between humility and God's grace.
- How have you experienced the hesed love of God in your own life?
- Are you humbled by Jesus' journey to the bottom on your behalf? How so?
- How will you respond to hesed love of God displayed on the cross?

"Only when we're humbled can we embrace God's grace. Only when we're humbled can we embrace Jesus."