

Lets Go Week 1

Intro

There's a story in the Bible in which God tells Abraham to take his son, Isaac, up to a mountain and sacrifice him. God tells Abraham, "GO to the region of Moriah." So Abraham gets up early the next morning, starts packing up his family, and he goes. Period. God told him to go, so he does not hesitate.

How often do we know that God has called us to do something, but we hesitate? We seek confirmation, we ask friends for advice, and we ... wait. I would be willing to bet that there are some of you who know God has told you to go do something—talk to a friend about Jesus, serve someone, take a risk in your faith. But, for some reason, you are hesitating. This is your moment to take that first step toward doing what God is calling you to do. This is the weekend to declare that your life is not your own, that you will follow God wherever He has called you. That you will go beyond yourself and find joy in giving your life away for the sake of others.

During our Bible studies, we are going to look at three people whose stories are recorded in the Old Testament, and who God called to go. Each had a much different response. The first one said, "Here I am, I won't go." That is Jonah. Let's turn to Jonah and discover why he refused to go.

But before we dig in, let's open up our discussion with a fun question: Name a place you would love to be sent to and a place you would never want to be sent.

Bible

(Suggestion, assign different students throughout your group to read the separate passages. Or if it's a long passage break it up to involve different students)

Jonah 1:1-3

Jonah 3:1-4:11

Discussion Questions

1.) Why do you think Jonah refused to go to Nineveh?

Notes: For Jonah, nothing could seem more terrible than being sent to Nineveh. Jonah is a Hebrew prophet, an Israelite. Nineveh is the capital of Assyria—a nation with a long history of brutality in war. In 722 B.C., Assyria crushed the Northern Kingdom of Israel, sending its people into exile. The Assyrians are the enemy of God's people.

Yet God tells Jonah, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me." As I heard one pastor say, "God is concerned about what happens in the darkest corners of the earth, and He sends His people to be a presence in those dark places."

Jonah arises just as he had been commanded. But he doesn't go to Nineveh. Instead, he flees in the opposite direction and catches the first ship headed to Tarshish. Tarshish is in southern Spain, as far away as he could get from Nineveh in the ancient world

2.) What are some excuses people often use for not doing what God has called them to do? Have you ever wanted to turn away from something you knew God wanted you to do?

Notes: Excuses can be broken down into a few different themes. Either:

1. *I am not ...* (good enough, capable enough, smart enough, gifted enough)
2. *What you are asking is too ...* (difficult, uncomfortable, risky)
3. *God, you ...* (should ask someone else; are not in charge of me and I will go where I want to; are asking too much)

3.) Imagine yourself as Jonah in chapter 3, washed up on a beach near Nineveh, and God calls you to go a second time. How would you feel? Why do you think God calls Jonah to that city a second time?

Notes: We don't know whether or not Jonah went out of obligation or went because he realized he could not escape God's sovereign plan. But either way, Jonah walks into the city and begins making his way up and down the city streets, proclaiming, "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned."

There are several reasons why God would ask Jonah to go a second time. For one, maybe He wants to offer Jonah a second chance. Two, God is not done teaching Jonah and has a lesson for Him still left to go. Three, God is still not done with the people of Nineveh. The God of grace is still extending an invitation to them for repentance and mercy.

4. How was Nineveh's response to Jonah's message surprising?

Notes: The response is surprising because the people repent—even the king, who upon hearing God's message, does something totally unexpected: he gets off his throne, takes off his royal robes, puts on sackcloth, covers himself in ashes, and sits low in the dust. He sends a royal decree throughout the city declaring that everyone fast and wear sackcloth—even the animals.

Nineveh's response to God is an example of true repentance. Verse 10 says, "When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it." God acts when people repent.

Repentance was at the heart of everything Jesus did. Everywhere He went, He preached, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near" (Matthew 4:17). And it was repentance that Jesus was talking about when He made reference to Jonah in Matthew 12.

In that passage, some Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus to give them a sign. Jesus responded by saying, "A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The people of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now one greater than Jonah is here." (Matthew 12:39-41)

Both the story of Jonah and the life and ministry of Jesus are centered on the powerful act of repentance. They are an invitation to turn from sin and return to the life that God created us for. What are the habits, patterns, behaviors, and ways of thinking, speaking, and living that we need to leave behind because God created us for so much more? What new habits, patterns, behaviors, and ways of thinking do we need to replace them?

This story is amazing for the simple fact that the people who Jonah was sent to followed God's call, but Jonah, as far as we know, did not!

5. Why is Jonah exceedingly angry and displeased in chapter 4?

Notes: The story comes to a climax in chapter 4. In verses 1-3, Jonah reveals why he refused to go to Nineveh. He knew God would be gracious and merciful to the people of Nineveh if they repented. Jonah did not want that to happen because his heart was filled with hatred toward the Ninevites. Jonah wasn't *afraid* to go to Nineveh; he lacked compassion for the people of Nineveh.

Jonah missed out on a quality of God that is absolutely essential in being a part of His plan to "go and make disciples of all nations." He lacked compassion for people and did not understand their value to God. The ONLY thing eternal, other than God Himself and His Word, are PEOPLE!

You may look inside and say, "I don't hate people," but indifference is just as equal according to Scripture. Who does your world revolve around—yourself or others? Do you show compassion toward others? Do you love the least of these and your enemies?

6. What is God teaching Jonah with the plant and east wind?

Notes: Just as God treated the people of Nineveh with grace, He treated Jonah graciously. God appointed a plant "to save him from his discomfort" (v. 6). The word "appoint" is the same word used to describe the fish in 1:17. This made Jonah happy, but God also "appointed" a worm to eat the plant, which then made Jonah angry. Bitter Jonah became angry enough to die. Jonah revealed that he was more concerned about his comfort than the salvation of the Ninevites. But God revealed that He was more concerned about the salvation of 120,000 people than He was with Jonah's comfort.

APPLICATION

1. What do we learn about each character in the story (God, the Ninevites, Jonah)?
2. What do you see in the story Jonah that reminds you of yourself?
3. In what ways are we more concerned about our "comforts" (i.e. the vine providing shade) than people?
4. In Matthew 28:18-20, we are given a command to "go." God has called us to the mission of going and making disciples. What is keeping you from being obedient to His command? How is this story helpful for you?

