

# Small Group Questions

Small groups and individuals can use these questions to engage the content of Sunday sermons.



August 6 – September 10, 2023

## Jonah: Scandalous Grace

Jonah is a story that captures the imagination of children and adults. A wayward holy man, a big fish, and a revival – all in just a few chapters! Behind the exciting and unbelievable plot lies a story of scandalous grace. What does grace look like when we rebel? Does it look different if we repent? And what does grace look like when we sulk with deep regret? This story explores the depth of human folly and the breath of God’s love and grace.

*God may relent and change his mind; God may turn from his fierce anger, so that we do not perish. – Jonah 3:9*

**August 6, 2023**

**Rebelling Against Grace**

**Jonah 1:1-3**

### Connect:

Did you ever “run away” or want to run away from family, school, or work?

### Engage:

A bit of geography and politics may help you understand the story of Jonah. Nineveh was the flourishing capital of the Assyrian Empire, an empire that was the most feared enemy of ancient Israel. The city of Tarshish was on the opposite end of the known world from Nineveh. Joppa was the port in Israel at that time.

Read Jonah 1:1-3

1. God tells the Prophet Jonah to go to the mighty city of Nineveh and preach against it. Why do you think God was interested in the city of Nineveh?
2. What do you think it means “to preach against a city?” What do you imagine the message would be?
3. Jonah runs away in response to God’s call. Why do you think he ran away in the opposite direction? What does this response say about Jonah? About Jonah’s experience of God?
4. What does God do when we try to escape God’s call?

### Apply

Running away can seem like a good response to escape troubling circumstances. Other times, we might hope to “outrun” ourselves. How often have we wished we could disappear and start over with a clean slate? Wouldn’t you agree that our lives are always filled with challenges of some sort?

What kinds of challenges are you facing this week? How can you courageously face them rather than avoid or run away from them?

### Pray

Share joys and concerns and pray for one another, the church, and the world.

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**August 13, 2023**

**Judged By Grace**

**Jonah 1:4-16**

### Connect:

Describe a time when you have been caught in a terrible storm.

### Engage:

In the biblical world, storms represent the realm of chaos and evil. Encountering a storm evoked fear of the divine because a storm meant something triggered a cosmic battle between good and evil.

Read Jonah 1:4-16

1. When the storm hits, compare the behavior of the pagan sailors and Jonah the Prophet.
2. How are the pagans acting with more faith? How are their actions more moral than Jonah's?
3. Jonah's actions set the stage for this destructive storm. How much responsibility does Jonah take for causing this calamity?
4. The storm God sends seems to grab Jonah's attention. When Jonah asks to be thrown into the sea, do you see this as an act of Jonah taking responsibility for his actions or is this request another version of Jonah rejecting God's call?
5. How is it possible that the calamities we bring upon ourselves can be used by God as an expression of God's justice and mercy?

### Apply

God pursues us and may use our struggles to get our attention.

This week, take a moment to remember a time when you felt that God was relentlessly pursuing you.

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August 20, 2023

The Cry For Grace

Jonah 1:17–2:10

### Connect:

Have you ever had a moment when your life seemed to flash before your eyes?

### Engage:

Ponder this section of the story without debating whether this story is literal or not. Imagine the meaning behind Jonah's descent into the depths of the sea rather than whether or not a human can survive being eaten by a big fish!

Read Jonah 1:17 – 2:10

1. In chapter 1, Jonah affirmed that God is the creator of sea and land. As the ultimate creator, Jonah believes God controls the realms of heaven, earth, and Sheol (under the earth). As you read through the poem in this chapter, list the actions of God Jonah ascribes to this Divine One. What does this say about Jonah's understanding of God's power and character?
2. Jonah also describes his attitudes while down in the depths. What does this tell you about Jonah? How would you describe his relationship with God?
3. Looking at this poem, do you think Jonah has taken responsibility for his actions? How does his self-righteous pride prevent him from fully understanding God's grace? How does this prayer signal Jonah's hope in God's mercy?
4. How can this psalm teach us about prayer, especially lament?

### Apply

Jonah's cry for grace is a very human plea for help. We don't have to be perfect or spiritually mature to cry out. All we need to do is cry out to the One we believe can rescue us.

Reflect on a time when you were desperate and cried to God in hope. How did this prayer impact you?

### Pray

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**August 27, 2023**  
**Undeserved Grace**  
**Jonah 3**

### Connect:

Share a time when you saw someone get a blessing when you didn’t think they deserved it.

### Engage:

Read Jonah 3

1. Jonah decides to follow God’s call and preaches the shortest sermon ever: “Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” Why do you think the Ninevites repented?
2. The king seems to have an inkling about God’s compassion. He calls on all his people to repent and pray. How are his actions in contrast to Jonah’s prayer in chapter 2?
3. The author contrasts Jonah, a supposed prophet of God, and the pagan sailors and the wicked Ninevites. What does this tell you about judging others you deem enemies of God?
4. God changes God’s mind and relents from the promise to destroy Nineveh. What does this tell you about prayer? What does this tell you about God?

### Apply

Pagans become faithful followers, while Jonah, the Lord’s Prophet, seems to be a rebellious and reluctant actor in the story.

Is there someone or a group of people you consider unredeemable? How might you pray for them this week?

### Pray

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**September 3, 2023**

**Regretting Grace**

**Jonah 4**

### Connect:

Describe a time when things didn't go your way and you were upset!

### Engage:

Read Jonah 4

1. Often we are not happy when things turn around for an enemy. We sulk, blame God (or the universe), and wallow in the injustice of it all. How do you think Jonah was feeling and why?
2. Contrast Jonah chapter 2 with chapter 4. The same person who looked to God for compassion (without much repentance or apology) is now angry that God is compassionate towards those who turn from their evil ways! What is your takeaway about the compassion and patience of God?
3. How does God reason with Jonah? Do you think it will be effective in turning Jonah around?
4. God seems to give everyone in this story second chances. Review the entire story and how does each character change their behaviors and views of God?

### Apply

Jews read this story on Yom Kippur, the highest of their holy days, where Jews receive the complete forgiveness of God. They reflect on their failures and character and the nature of God's mercy.

Take some time this week and examine where you are like Jonah. What was can you make a course correction and change behaviors and attitudes?

### Pray

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**September 10, 2023**

**Jonah: The Musical**

### Connect:

Remember when you first heard the story of Jonah. How has your understanding of this story morphed beyond “Jonah and the Whale?”

### Engage:

The musical will reflect some of the new insights we have gained from the sermon series and may include more of the “Sunday School” version of the story.

1. How important is it to reread and study the bible stories you were taught in Sunday School? How has your “Sunday School” version of stories continued to keep you in a child-like view of the Bible?
2. Aspects of the Jonah story may distract us from uncovering the deeper meaning of the story. For example, when all folks argue about whether a fish can swallow a person, we might miss the story's more profound insights. When you find a bible story unbelievable, how can you be more open to God's wisdom expressed through the story?
3. During this sermon series, the majority of the sermons were from “non-pastors.” If you were given the chance to preach one of the sermons in this series, what would be one or two points you would want to make?

### Apply

As the kids sing about the Jonah story, how might you listen with an open heart and more appreciation for God's word?

### Pray

Share joys and concerns and pray for one another, the church, and the world.