

This study guide is designed to help you to become more familiar with the Bible. Study these passages on your own, with a friend, or with a group.

Week 1 - The Retreat

Monday - Read Jonah chapter 1. How do you identify with Jonah? Has there been a time when you took your life purposefully in the opposite direction from God? Have you experienced a nudging from God to do something or to serve God's mission but you just don't want to?

Tuesday - Read Jonah chapter 2. Jonah finds that he can run away, but he can't outrun God. God even encounters him in the belly of the fish! At the end of our running or the end of our hiding, we realize that God is present...that God has been with us all along! Have you had that kind of experience in your life? When? Do you think God meets us in those moments for anger and judgment or for forgiveness and love?

Wednesday - Read I Kings 18:16-40 and 19:1-3. Today and tomorrow we will look at the story of another runner. Today is the set up. Elijah confronts and takes on the King of Israel and 450 prophets of a false god, a task that required great courage and faith. Upon the dramatic completion of that mission, Elijah gets news that Queen Jezebel (staunch believer in the false god) has him in her sights and this frightens him and he runs! It's like his great faith suddenly disappears and fear wins. Does this ever happen to you?

Thursday - Read I Kings 19:1-16. Even in Elijah's fear and running, notice what God is doing (sustained him and met him in his hiding place). The stories of Elijah and Jonah both tell us that God doesn't abandon us when we run, although we may feel like God does at the time. God remains faithful and renews the call, empowering us to overcome our fear and follow God's will...to do something we have fears about doing and in so doing, discovering the life that really is life!

Friday - Read Luke 15:11-32. This is a famous parable about a runner. What do you think Jesus wants us to see about God? What about how God handles the younger son - the runner? How is the older son also a runner (not doing something his father asks him to do) and how does God handle that relationship? How is the God revealed in this story like or unlike the God we see in the stories of Jonah or Elijah? Like or unlike the God you have encountered in your running?

Big Fish

Week 2 - The Return

Monday—Read Jonah chapter 1. God chose Jonah for a task: prophesying not only to his own people, Israel, but also to the enemy, the Ninevites. Jonah was reluctant, to say the least. Have you ever been reluctant to speak for God? God's call to Jonah challenges Jonah's self-sufficient, arrogance, and indifference. God employs the sailors as a pathway of growth for Jonah. Jonah encounters people with hearts softer toward the Lord than Jonah, the prophet. Has ministry become a pathway for your growth? How so?

Tuesday—Read Jonah chapter 2. Jonah's prayer language is the vocabulary of the Psalms. Read these phrases: "my distress" from Psalm 18:6; "all thy waves and thy billows passed over me" from Psalm 42:7; "my soul fainted within me" from Psalm 142:3; and "deliverance belongs to the Lord" from Psalm 3:8. Has there been a time when you have been lost, frightened, or in the depths of despair? Has there been a time when you did not know how or what to pray? We're often challenged to "pray anyway." How might you do this?

Wednesday—Jonah chapter 3. Jonah receives God's direction one more time. This time he's obedient. He calls the people of Nineveh to repent. What is Jonah's message? What do the people do? We can only assume that Jonah's message was more than one simple sentence. What might he have said that would lead the people to such a radical response? Why is repenting so hard for us? What is God's response when we turn from what is wrong?

Thursday—Read Jonah 4. Are you ever like Jonah appears in this passage? Do you ever become angry when God doesn't do what you think God should do? Do you sometimes judge people and become angry when you see their gratitude? Do you ever miss God's big plan while trying to get your needs met? What kind of spiritual maturity is displayed when you are obedient, but with a reluctant, bad-tempered obedience?

Friday—Read Matthew 12:38-41. Jesus has been asked for a sign to prove that he is the Messiah. He tells them the only sign they will get is the sign of Jonah. He's referring to Jonah's 3 days in the whale and the three days he, Jesus, will spend in the tomb. The sign will be a resurrection. Jonah was down and out, as was Jesus, but for God, someone being down and out is never the last word. What is Jesus' word here about the people of Nineveh and repentance?

Big Fish

Week 3 - The Resentment

Monday—Read Jonah chapters 1 and 2. In light of Sunday's message, how do you now see these chapters? What indicators do you see about Jonah's motive for running from God? What was God's end goal in asking Jonah to do this task? We often make this story about Jonah, but who is it really about? What is God's end goal in this story? As Jonah sits in the belly of the fish and prays, does he see the end goal yet?

Tuesday—Read Jonah chapter 3. Again, in light of Sunday's message, how does this chapter speak to you? What does this chapter say about Jonah? About God? About the people of Nineveh? Do you think that Jonah's message to the people of Nineveh was really just one sentence? If it was, how could those words have made such an impact? Could it be that God's spirit prepared their hearts before they heard the message?

Wednesday—Read Jonah chapter 4. Here we see the clash of agendas—God's and Jonah's. What is God's? What is Jonah's? What lesson was God demonstrating to Jonah with the vine and its death? How does this relate to you? Would you say that you have surrendered to God's grace—acknowledging that ALL people matter to God, accepting God's love for people you dislike, or even hate?

Thursday—Read Matthew 15:11-15. How is Jonah's story similar to the Prodigal son's. How do we see God's grace reflected in the father's actions? Notice in this story, like Jonah's, we're not told about the outcome, the older son's response. As with Jonah this is very intentional. We are required to place ourselves in the story and apply the teaching to us. How might you be more graceful? How might you need to surrender to God's will—what you do; God's direction—where you'd go; and God's grace—how you love?

Friday—Elijah was one of the most famous prophets of old. He had fought a hard battle against a wicked queen and her forces and fled into the wilderness. Like Jonah, he prayed to simply die. And like Jonah, God did not honor that prayer. **Read 1 Kings 19:3-8.** Elijah was at the end of his rope. How did God respond? Jonah wanted to die out of selfishness, Elijah from hopelessness and exhaustion. What do their stories tell about God's plans for our lives? What do their stories tell us about surrender? About God's providence and love? How do their stories relate to yours?