

Series Intro: Big Fish

"All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives." 2 Timothy 3:16 NLT

This truth certainly applies to the Book of Jonah. As much as any other historical, biblical account that surrounds it, Jonah's story strikes us with awe and wonder. We're likely no strangers to the lengths people will go to run from God, but we should never cease to marvel at the God who uses His power to pursue them.

Beyond the wonder, this brief but compelling story is a personal invitation to hold Jonah's choices up to our own and be real – with ourselves, with God and with others. Nineveh had a bad reputation, but Jonah had a high calling and a mighty God.

In a culture we may not always understand, among people we may not always like, we are called to live on mission in the world around us. Like Jonah, we are reluctant, willful, and even rebellious. But God, in His unchanging nature, still wants our whole heart.

If we'll take the first step to be real, Jonah's cautionary tale will point us toward the truth that we too have a "big fish" demanding our attention. And if we'll ask Him to, God will deliver us from its grip and transform us into the mission-driven disciples He's created us to be.

DAY 1 - MONDAY

Title: God Says "Go!"

Intro: God gives Jonah clear directions and Jonah plans to run far, fast. If you were to plot his intended travel on a map, you'd see Jonah board his ship east of Israel with a ticket to Tarshish (modern-day Spain), as far west as he can get. But God...

Read: Jonah 1

Explore the theme: Chapter 1 opens with a battle of wills between God and Jonah. What is God sending Jonah to Nineveh to do and why? Why do you think Jonah wants to flee so far from his calling? How are the sailors' lives impacted by the storm and Jonah's presence on the ship?

Ask God: Think about a time in your life when you were tempted to run from God. What kind of "storm" did that stir up, whether within you or around you? What did that experience teach you about yourself? What did you learn about God?

Live it Out: While Jonah was using the ship to escape from God, God was using the sea to reaffirm His plans to Jonah and reveal His power to the sailors. How has God used the storms you've endured to prepare you to draw others nearer to Him?

DAY 2 - TUESDAY

Title: God Sends a Lifeboat

Intro: God created the heavens and the earth, so a big fish seems small in comparison. Nonetheless, no one was likely more surprised to be swallowed up than our reluctant prophet. His attempt to escape foiled, Jonah finds himself in the belly of a very large fish.

Read: Jonah 2

Explore the theme: What message do you think God is sending Jonah by providing this fish? How long is Jonah in the belly of the fish before he begins to pray, and what does this tell you about him? Take a few moments to reflect on Jonah's prayer. What most stands out to you?

Ask God: Compare Jonah's approach and attitude toward God now to that when he boarded the ship to Tarshish. In what ways has Jonah's perspective been changed? How does Jonah's prayer encourage or challenge your experience of God's presence in your life?

Live it Out: Jonah closes his prayer with a repentant heart and a recommitment to the calling God has placed on his life. What's your "big fish"? Identify any obstacles (spiritually, emotionally or relationally) keeping you from wholeheartedly serving God. Offer God your own honest prayer of repentance, recommitment or gratitude.

DAY 3 - WEDNESDAY

Title: God Gives Second Chances

Intro: Asking for a do-over takes courage and humility. Aren't you glad God never runs out of grace and mercy? A challenged and changed Jonah is delivered on shore with a second chance and now, he's ready to pay it forward.

Read: Jonah 3

Explore the theme: This time is different. What is Jonah tasked with doing? Rather than run, what compels Jonah's response to God? What does His message to Nineveh and His insistence that Jonah deliver it reveal to you about God's heart toward the city and the prophet?

Ask God: Nineveh was large and God's message was heavy, but Jonah didn't waste any time delivering the news. Consider the people and places you encounter on a daily basis. What evidence is there of your willingness to obediently and urgently tell others about God? Tell God what you need to more confidently share His truth in the world around you.

Live it Out: Jonah was no fan of Nineveh or its people, and still he delivered God's message "from the greatest to the least," and they were saved. Where or with whom in your life are you a reluctant messenger? God will do the saving, but what's a practical and meaningful first step you are willing to take to reach the lost around you?

DAY 4 - THURSDAY

Title: God is God, and Jonah is Not!

Intro: Just when we think we're headed toward happily ever after, our prophet's temper takes a turn. Jonah is anointed, but he's also human – flawed, forgetful and prone to sin. God, however, is kind, merciful and patient. So once more, He puts creation on display to prove His point.

Read: Jonah 4

Explore the theme: Jonah's expectations are revealed when he realizes Nineveh will be spared. In the midst of expressing his anger, what does Jonah highlight about God's character? Why do you think those characteristics are so upsetting to Jonah right now?

Ask God: Reflect on a time when your feelings toward another person got the best of you. What does God's object lesson with the plant and worm tell you about the way He sees and knows you? What does it tell you about the way He values the other party involved? How could the practice of seeing both sides from God's perspective help you surrender your right to be right?

Live it Out: God chose compassion for a city and a people who had sinned against Him. He forgave them because He saw them for who they could become, rather than for what they'd done. How does that mindset equip or inspire you to live on mission as a disciple of Jesus?

DAY 5 - FRIDAY - SERIES CLOSE

If we're being real, we must confess there's a bit of Jonah in us. We too are prone to forget what's good, right and true and in turn, we lose our way. We too have reluctant and rebellious moments and rather than obey God, we chart our own course.

Yes, Jonah missed the mark after three days in the belly of a fish, but there is good news. Jesus defeated death and saved us after three days in the tomb.

It's Jesus' heart, not Jonah's, that is our aim. It's Jesus' compassion and mercy to the lost and to the unreached – those we don't understand or agree with or even like – that should compel us to offer hope to the world around us.

Jesus lived out the great commission in His lifetime and He calls us to live on mission as disciples and disciple makers, sharing the good news of the gospel in our homes, classrooms, workplaces and communities.

As we close this week in Jonah, use this space to respond to Jesus. Journal your thoughts or write a prayer inviting Him to make your heart more like His.