

onechurch

bigIdea

Jonah could run from God, but he couldn't outrun God. Even in the most unlikely place—the slimy belly of a fish somewhere in the middle of the ocean—Jonah couldn't escape God's grace and mercy. Though his actions and attitudes had led him to a desperate place, God was still pursuing him. He was being disciplined.

Being disciplined is never fun. But sometimes it's only after a season of brokenness that we begin to see life more clearly. Is that why God disciplines us? Not to pay us back, but because he actually loves us?

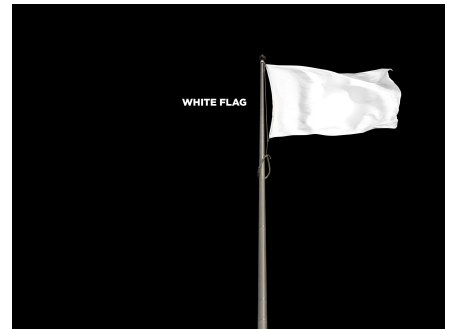
BIG IDEA: God disciplines us, not to pay us back, but to bring us back.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Were you disciplined as a child? What was your most “memorable” experience of being disciplined?
2. The main idea in this message is that God is generous with his grace and thorough with his discipline. Is it possible to be gracious and loving without ever having to discipline?
3. Why does it often take desperate circumstances for God to really get our attention?
4. When in your life have your circumstances served as a wake-up call? What did you learn from that situation?

For a moment, picture what Jonah must have been thinking about as he waited for the sailors to push him overboard. With the storm clouds circling and the sea raging, he probably looked over the side of the boat to his soon to be fate. Jonah reasoned that running from God had finally caught up to him. He was willing to die than to obey God. Drowning on the ocean floor was the price he was going to pay for his disobedience or so he thought. Yet, in four words found at the end of chapter 1, we see the depths that God will go to capture Jonah's attention. All hope seemed to be lost, 'but the lord provided' a great fish to swallow Jonah.

5. **Read Jonah 1:15-17. Jonah's worst nightmare was exactly what he needed.** What did God use to save Jonah from drowning (*Jonah 2:6-7*)? Do you believe it is possible to survive in the belly of a great fish, view this as a supernatural miracle or believe it is a fable? (*go to: www.icr.org/article/1124*) What does God's pursuit of Jonah reveal about God? How does this fact about God impact you personally?
6. God probably has an unexpected way forward for you. Jonah was rescued from the sea by a fish – probably not even on his list of ways God could save him. Has God ever used an unexpected event or circumstances to provide a way forward for you? Why do you think God uses such surprising events to move us forward?
7. What does it tell you about God that he would pursue Jonah and then provide for his rescue? How has God lifted you out of desperate circumstances?
8. How does it make you feel to know that you can't outrun God's grace and mercy?
9. **Read Jonah's prayer in Jonah 2:1-10.** What elements do you see in his prayer? (example: thanksgiving, repentance, cry for help, etc.) Why is prayer often our last resort? Share one or two words that would best describe how you view prayer? **On a scale of 1-10, rate your prayer life. What would make your prayer life more meaningful?**
10. Do you believe that Jonah's prayer in the belly of the fish is sincere and genuine or his attempt to manipulate God? What leads you to answer in the way that you did?
11. **Read Jonah 2:8.** What are some worthless idols we can cling to instead of putting our hope in God? Describe some ways we forfeit the grace of God when we trust in idols? What idols do you need to give up?



12. *Read Jonah 2:9.* “Salvation comes from the Lord!” In what ways do you think Jonah’s deliverance by God changed him? How has God brought your life “up from the pit”? How did this change you and was the change permanent? Why do we often return to our old ways once the danger is past? Would you rather God save you from an outward circumstance or from an inward struggle with sin? At salvation, how does God permanently change us on the inside?
13. Jonah realized that his “running” would mean that he would miss the things God had for him. Looking back, when have you “run” and missed something God might have had for you? Describe a time in your life when things seemed pretty bleak and you felt like surrendering, giving up. What happened? What did you do?
14. Are there recent events in your life where you felt like God was trying to get your attention? What is keeping you from calling out to him for help?
15. Think about your own story thus far. How has God been behind the circumstances in your life, using them to bring you back to him?
16. In *Jonah 2:2-2:9*, we see this is a pivotal moment for Jonah—God reaching down and saving Jonah from desperate circumstances. What is something that you can do this week to thank God for what he has done in your life?

MOVING FORWARD

We run because we think in following God we will miss something good. And as a result of running in all these different directions, what we really miss is the one relationship that we don’t want to live without – a relationship with our heavenly Father. So, are you tired of running? Resisting? Are you ready to wave the white flag and surrender? Here’s the promise: If in your distress you call for help, God will answer you.

CHANGING YOUR MIND

Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit God’s love for them. But I, with a song of thanksgiving, will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed I will make good. Salvation comes from the Lord. Jonah 2:8-9

