



Parkway Fellowship

Epic Fails • I Know Where I'm Going...Jonah's Run from God • Jonah 1:1-3; 3-4:3 •
11/17/2019

MAIN POINT

When we fail, God gives us a second chance.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

In the day to day of life, would you say you most often know exactly where you're going or are just going wherever the wind blows? Explain.

Describe a time in your life when you thought you knew the way you should go, but it turned out you were wrong. How did you handle that situation?

When you go in a wrong direction in life, are you more likely to double down and keep going or quickly acknowledge your error and take a new path? Why?

In the Book of Jonah, we see a man who got off course in His relationship with God. Jonah's move away from God's instruction wasn't subtle; he flatly refused to listen to God, thinking he knew the way to go better than God. But God got Jonah's attention in a most unexpected way. There are some among us who have blatantly walked away from God. Others have gradually gotten off course in our walk with Him. As we'll see in this study, God acts to get our attention, draws us back to Himself, and gives us a second chance.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| Ask a volunteer to read Jonah 1:1-3.

What did God say that got Jonah's attention? What was Jonah's initial reaction? Why do you think Jonah reacted the way that he did?

Why is it sometimes tempting for us to flee from God? What are some ways we do that?

There are many reasons why fleeing God can seem like a better idea than obeying God. In our pride, we may feel that our limited understanding of the circumstances is more trustworthy than God's eternal and perfect understanding. We may simply love something or someone else more than Him, and that ultimately drives our disobedience. Regardless of the reasons, obedience is always preferable to sin, and that is a lesson we will continually learn until we die.

| Ask a volunteer read Jonah 3:1-9.

What do God's actions toward Jonah and the Ninevites teach us about His character?

When have you benefited from a second chance? When have you been in a position to offer someone else a second chance?

When is it hard for you to give someone else a second chance? Has it ever been hard for you to trust that God gives you a second chance?

The response of God's reluctant missionary in 3:3 is what it should have been in 1:3. Jonah obeyed the Lord and went to Nineveh. God is good. He had extended His grace and mercy to His servant Jonah. He now would use His servant to extend His grace and mercy to the sinners of Nineveh. Both the messenger and his message would be evidence of God's love and compassion for people in need of His grace.

With whom in Nineveh did repentance begin? By what two actions did these Ninevites demonstrate their repentance?

How do you know when someone is genuinely sorry for something wrong he has done? In what ways do we publicly portray repentance and humility before God in our culture?

In the Old Testament era, fasting and wearing sackcloth were signs of seeking God and repentance. Christians today often think of repentance as primarily an inward, personal action, and it is. The Bible, however, also stresses the need for external signs of the inward decision to repent. The king's act of sitting in ashes symbolizes humility (see Job 2:8). Humbling ourselves is always a necessary step in a relationship with God.

| Ask another volunteer to read Jonah 3:10-4:3.

Does God change His mind? What does it mean that “God relented”? What does this mean for us?

In this week’s message we learned, “God desires the heart of your enemy just as much as He desires your heart.” How should this truth impact your relationships this week?

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

What is God calling you to do? What is the next step of obedience?

What are some practical ways you can respond well to the second chances God gives you? That God gives other people?

How can our group pray for you this week?

PRAYER

Thank God for being a loving God of second chances when you fail Him. Ask God for the courage to take risks, a greater awareness of the need to be dependent on Him, and a love for people that extends His mercy and lovingkindness.

COMMENTARY

| Jonah 3:1-10

3:1 If we read the Book of Jonah in one sitting, these words will be familiar, for 3:1-2 is strikingly similar to 1:1-2. In a sense Jonah was back to where he began. However, the Jonah in chapter 3 is somewhat different from the person found in chapter 1. Much had happened, and many lessons were learned, but the process of discipleship obviously was not yet complete. The text simply points out that God spoke to Jonah again. There is no mention of reproach for the prophet’s former disobedience. The Lord simply repeated his command. While Jonah had taken quite a detour since the first command, God’s will remained steadfast.

3:2 Although the precise content of the message Jonah was commanded to preach to this Assyrian city is not yet mentioned, two things are made clear: where he should preach and the source of the message. Jonah was given specific “marching orders” about the destination. He also was reminded that the message would not come from him nor from anyone else, but

only from the Lord. His job was to deliver the message, not to critique or revise it.

3:3 Clearly God cared deeply about the Ninevites, whom he had created in his image. Therefore he sent this prophet with a message that would ultimately lead to their turning.

3:4 Jonah's arrival in Nineveh probably was dramatic. His clothing was no doubt different from the norm, his bearing gave evidence of a different lifestyle, and a possibly bleached skin color provided for much attention. The message from the Lord, imparted by Jonah, was a relatively short one. In the Hebrew the message was only five words long. While it is not clear that this was all he had to say, the text does suggest that God's message was brief and that Jonah simply preached it repeatedly. If these words were the sum total of the message, no reason for the destruction was given, nor was the manner of destruction described. There was not even an explicit call to repentance. Although Jonah apparently did not mention the possibility of deliverance in response to repentance, both he and his audience may have assumed it. At least his audience hoped for it. If this were not so, why had Jonah's deity given them forty days?

3:5 Jonah's message, heard by many and no doubt shared with others, spread to every part of the populace. Not only did they hear his message, they believed that it was a serious one. Thus the residents of Nineveh sought to avert their destruction. Like the reaction of the sailors in 1:5, the Ninevites' reaction is conveyed by three verbs: "believed ... declared ... put on." These describe three stages of response: inward, articulated, then outward.

3:6 The turning of Nineveh began with the common people, not with royalty. The king rose from his throne, the seat of his royal power, and humbled himself with the common people. He laid aside his robe, which was a large and beautifully embroidered mantle. In its place the king put on sackcloth as a sign of mourning, and he sat in ashes, a sign of deep humiliation. He who was the highest in the empire took the lowest position of abasement.

3:7-9 The previous verse shows the personal response of the ruler of Nineveh. This verse further details the official response. By the issuing of a proclamation the king added official sanction to that which already was underway. The decree called for four behavioral responses to Jonah's message: fasting, wearing sackcloth, pleading with God, and turning from evil and violence. The inclusion even of animals in this royally mandated fast is the act of a desperate monarch and a desperate people.

3:10 As the king and people of Nineveh had hoped, God relented. God pulled back his hand of judgment, though not forever. As prophesied by Nahum, Nineveh later experienced total destruction. The very thought of God "changing his mind" causes difficulty for some believers. In perfect consistency with his justice, righteousness, and mercy, he spared Nineveh. There

is absolutely no contradiction here. God's character and his promises do not change. This passage speaks of the incredible mercy of God's heart, of his incredible love.