

RUNAWAY

A grown-up story about childish ways

Often we view the book of Jonah as a children's story about a prophet who ran from God, found himself in the belly of a whale, came to his senses and finally obeyed God - then all was "happily ever after." But we fail to see the heart of Jonah and how the story truly ends. Jonah was a prophet who ran from God, not because he was afraid or lazy or distracted/preoccupied with other things or because he misunderstood God. Jonah ran because he knew God as a loving, forgiving God even toward **others** whom Jonah didn't love and wouldn't forgive. Jonah viewed the Ninevites as **other** - not deserving God's grace and redemption - and didn't want them to receive it.

DAY 1

To begin our series, **READ Jonah 1**. In your notebook/journal, **DIVIDE** the page into 3 columns; **God, Jonah, People of Nineveh (Ninevites)**. Under the appropriate column, **WRITE** what the verses say about each character. **WRITE** down what they do, say, their attitudes and the actions they take. Pay close attention to details which provide insight to an attitude, frame of mind, prejudice, and personal character. Throughout the series we'll refer back to what you've written for each chapter.

When Jonah ran away from the Lord, he actually chose to run toward something that, under any other circumstance, he would have avoided – **the sea**. At that time, people were fearful of the sea. It was associated with chaos and mythical powers. The Mediterranean Sea was also known for unpredictable, dangerous storms.

Whenever we choose to walk away from God, we move toward lesser things and ultimately destructive things. **DESCRIBE** a time you moved away, or even deliberately ran, from God. Can you identify choices you made during that time that you wouldn't typically make? What was the result? How did your decision affect others in your life?

DAY 2

READ Jonah 2 - 3. In week 4, we'll look closely at the song of salvation Jonah sang to God (chapter 2). Today we focus on chapter 3 and what they tell us about **God, Jonah, and the Ninevites**. Using your notebook/journal columns from Day 1, **NOTE** as much as you can in each column. **WATCH** for details giving insight to attitudes and character. Remember to **WRITE** down what they did and the actions they took.

What, *if anything*, is surprising about this chapter? What happened when the Ninevites were confronted with their sin? How did their attitudes and actions affect God's plans of bringing destruction upon them? To whom do you relate most in today's story? Why? How do you respond to a God whose love, compassion, and forgiveness is so radical that it extends further than we can imagine - even to those who we see as "other" or not deserving?

DAY 3

READ chapter 4 and use your columns in your notebook. We gain insight into the heart of Jonah from chapter 4. We see selfish and childish behaviors. A few years ago Pastor Paul led us through a series called **CONTEMPT**. **CONTEMPT** - *a self-certain, self superior disdain for anything we consider beneath us and thus worthy of disrespect, criticism, scorn or ridicule.* **CONTEMPT** - Wikipedia - *an intense feeling or attitude of regarding someone or something as inferior, base, or worthless—it is similar to scorn.*

Did you notice any of the symptoms of contempt in Jonah as you read through chapter 4? **Sarcasm, ridicule of the sacred, negativity, resentment, pride, bitterness, disrespect, disbelief in the power of character & change, isolation and division, arrogance, judgment, anger and rage, certainty of being right.**

DAY 4

Sending Jonah to preach repentance and forgiveness to the Assyrians was like asking a Jewish prophet to go to Berlin in 1940 and preach repentance so God could forgive the sins of the Germans! Because of their wickedness, Jonah desired evil to come upon the Assyrians, yet he desired grace and forgiveness for himself. Clinging to a false sense of personal justice can be a subtle, yet powerful toxin which produces bitterness and contempt.

READ Matthew 5:43-45. **WRITE** down in your journal's "God column" what you read in these verses about Jesus. What does Jesus teach with regard to our enemy? **READ** through the things you've written this week under the columns titled **Jonah** and **God**. Is your spirit more like Jonah's or God's? Have you experienced hurt or disappointment from people which in turn caused you to desire bad things to come to them? Will you choose to pray for them - for God's grace and goodness toward them? Is there someone specifically you need to forgive? Is there someone or certain people you have made as "other?"

DAY 5

READ Luke 15:11-31.

In what ways is Jonah's behavior and attitude like that of the older brother? What similarities do you see in God's actions toward the repentant Ninevites and the father toward the younger brother? **LOOK** back at what you've written under the various columns in your journal. What have you discovered about Jonah this week? Does it surprise you? What has God revealed about attitudes and/or behaviors in your own life this week?

PRAY that God would open your eyes to any unforgiving attitude or behavior in your heart as we study the story of Jonah. **ASK** His Spirit to keep you humble and to drive out any contempt which has crept into your heart.