



Sermon-Based Small Group Leader Notes

For the week of January 29, 2012 (week 3 of 10)

Introduction

Topic

Sermon Title: "Why Is Change So Hard?"

Sermon Series: *Flow* (week 3 of 7)

Scripture: Matthew 11:28-31

Sermon by: Dr. Tom Harrington

Goals for This Gathering

1. To allow potential participants a no-pressure opportunity to visit your group
2. To discuss the homework
3. To pray together

Prayer

- Take prayer requests and praises
- Pray for all Small Groups meeting at Northwest and in homes
- Pray for the spiritual growth of your group

Getting Started

Note to Leader: This week we will continue our study of Jonah by diving into Chapter 3. Please re-read the first two chapters of Jonah as well as Chapter 3 in preparation for the study.

In the **Getting Started** section this week we start the discussion around change and the difficulty of changing with the following question:

Question 1: Have you ever learned something and then found out that you were doing it wrong? How hard was it to unlearn and correctly relearn?

We hope this question will evoke responses about resistance to changing the way we do something. Participants may talk about how we challenge "change" even when we know that our lives may be better once the change is implemented, but that right now it would be "hard" to make the change. Others may talk about the difficulties encountered even when we have fully "bought into" a change — we want to do it — but we struggle getting out of the "habit" that we've already established.

Into the Bible

The sermon this week addresses why change is so difficult, particularly in relationship with sin and going against the "flow" of the world and instead tuning into the "flow" of the spirit. Here in the first two verses of Jonah chapter 3 we see God ask Jonah "a second time" to go to Nineveh.

You will discuss these two questions:

Question 2: Just to review, how did Jonah initially respond to God's order that he proclaim a message to the Ninevites (known also as the Assyrians, a savage nation) (see Jonah 1:3)?

We expect this to have the response that he disobeyed, ran the other way, etc.

Question 3: What do you think it says about God that he not only sends Jonah into and then rescues him from the belly of a huge fish but that he reiterates the same command that set Jonah in disobedience against Him?

The answer is in two parts:

- 1) *It appears that God was perfectly reconciled to Jonah, because he entrusted him again in his service. Renewing his commission is equivalent to a pardon. He is given the opportunity to try again. God set him free but still insists that he is tested to prove that he will follow the will of God. When God delivers us out of suffering, difficulty or hardship he expects us to hear his voice, saying to us, "Now return to the duties which you neglected" that I called you to do. God says to Jonah, like Christ said to the man in John 5:14 after he healed him, "Now go and sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee ([John 5:14](#)), a worse thing than lying three days and three nights in the whale's belly." We see God's grace in both the correction and the deliverance. The correction helps us to see the error of our ways and to change. The deliverance gives us the chance to try again.*
- 2) *The word of the Lord comes to Jonah again, to show that when God forgives he forgets, and not only does he forgive but he gives a new heart and a new spirit to the one he forgives so that they can come back into his family and he can restore them to their former estate. We know that Jonah was well reconciled to God, because he is no longer disobedient, instead "Jonah obeyed the word of the LORD and went to Nineveh" (Jonah 3:3). Jonah arose, he wasn't cranky or slow but went directly to Nineveh. It was far away and a place where, it is likely, he had never been before and never wanted to go but he went according to the word of the Lord. As God's servants we must go where he sends us and do what he asks us. **(Please note that parts of these two answers and much of the information below come from various commentaries, found on BibleGateway.com, by Matthew Henry and the Asbury Bible Commentary.)***

The sermon noted that the first step towards change and turning away from sin is: **Sin Recognition**. Meaning, we don't cover up our sins but face up to them. Your group will again look at Jonah 3:5-9.

Question 4: How do the Ninevites respond to Jonah's succinct proclamation of their imminent destruction? What does this tell us about this evil nation's ability to recognize its sinful deeds?

This should lead to a discussion about how we know right from wrong. How everyone recognizes sin and can choose to respond when they see imminent destruction as a result. We can all turn away from sin.

Question 5: Would you say that their response showed a genuine desire to change or just to avoid punishment?

We aren't looking for a definitive answer here — just some interesting discussion. It should say something about their sincerity that the God who knows the minds and hearts of man is willing to forgive and forgo their destruction.

Question 6: How do you account for God's apparent change of heart in light of the Ninevites' repentance?

Expect a discussion about God's mercy and grace. That he wants to forgive. The fact that he sent these gentiles one of his prophets to give them a "warning" says a lot about his fairness in judgment. He doesn't just suddenly rain down fire and brimstone — he gives them fair warning.

The next key step to our ability to change is **God Recovery**; recognizing and accepting his overflowing love and grace in forgiving us. Re-read Jonah 3:10. The group will discuss this question:

Question 7: How is God's response to the people of Nineveh similar to or different than his response to Jonah? What does God's response to both Israel's Prophet and a group of "ultra evil" Gentiles tell us about His love and grace?

There is no "textbook" answer — we're just looking at God's grace. Especially that it extends both to his "chosen" prophet who in theory would have been a righteous man, obeying all Jewish law etc., and to a group of people who are NOT part of Abraham's descendants and who are so disobedient and evil that God is ready to rain destruction on them like he did on Sodom and Gomorrah. In both instances they experience the nearness of death/destruction and His glorious grace and forgiveness.

The third step on the road to change is to have a **Willing Spirit**: do you WANT to flow with the Spirit and get right with God? The Ninevites believe that God is justifiably angry with them, that the depth of their evil has caused his fierce anger, and that, if he decides to destroy them there is nothing they can do about it; that they will all die. Note that they don't pray for the prevention of the overthrow (v.4) — they pray that "God may yet relent and with compassion turn away from his fierce anger so that we will not perish" (v. 9).

Read Psalm 66:18 with the group and discuss the following question:

Question 8: Assuming you don't receive regular prophetic messages proclaiming your impending destruction, what compels you to have a "Willing Spirit"? Why do you WANT to be right with God? Do you really think it possible to be right with God?

These can range from more personal answers to how God can persuade us to get right with him. Perhaps you are convicted during a sermon, by another believer, by your children, when you encounter difficulty in your life that you know you brought upon yourself through sin, etc.

The final step along the difficult path to "change" is to **Become a Steward of Grace**; keeping the flow of the spirit moving and administering grace to others. Your group will answer the following:

Question 9: How does God use Jonah in this role (steward of grace)? If you feel comfortable doing so please share a time when you experienced an opportunity to receive God's grace. What are ways you could administer His grace to others?

We are anticipating that group members will look at how Jonah brought God's message to the Ninevites as an opportunity to administer grace to others.

Digging Deeper

- The questions in this section prompt life application.
- Allow your group to answer these more personal questions as they feel comfortable. Newer groups or established groups with several new members might find less responding initially.

Prayer Requests and Closing Prayer

Close with prayer, praying for each other and for God's wisdom and power in allowing God his proper role as Lord over every part of our lives.