

# Sermon-Based Small Group Preparation

For the week of January 29, 2012

“Why Is Change So Hard?”

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

Matthew 11:28–31

» To prepare this week: Re-read Jonah 1 & 2 and review the following questions «

## Getting Started

- 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?

## Into the Bible

Read *Jonah 3*

<sup>1</sup> Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time: <sup>2</sup> “Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you.”

<sup>3</sup> Jonah obeyed the word of the LORD and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very important city—a visit required three days. <sup>4</sup> On the first day, Jonah started into the city. He proclaimed: “Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned.” <sup>5</sup> The Ninevites believed God. They declared a fast, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.

<sup>6</sup> When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust. <sup>7</sup> Then he issued a proclamation in Nineveh:

“By the decree of the king and his nobles:

Do not let any man or beast, herd or flock, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. <sup>8</sup> But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. <sup>9</sup> Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish.”

<sup>10</sup> When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened. (NIV1984)

- 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)?

- 3) What do you think it says about God (and Jonah’s relationship with him) that God not only sends Jonah into and then rescues him from the belly of a huge fish, but that he repeats the *same command* that set Jonah in disobedience against Him in the first place?

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. Look again at Jonah 3:5–9.

- 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?

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

- 6) How do you account for God’s apparent change of heart in light of the Ninevites’ repentance?

The second key to our ability to change is **God Recovery**: recognizing and accepting his overflowing love and grace in forgiving us. Re-read Jonah 3:10.

- 7) How is God’s response to the people of Nineveh similar to or different from 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?

The third step to real change is to have a **Willing Spirit**; to “WANT” to flow with the Spirit and get right with God. **Psalm 66:18** says, “*If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened*” (NIV).

- 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?

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.

- 9) How does God use Jonah in this role? 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?

### Digging Deeper

- 10) When have you felt that God gave you a second chance at becoming the person he created you to be? Has this impacted the way you relate to others?
- 11) Is there an area in which you are trying to change for which you’d feel comfortable requesting prayer support from your group?

### Prayer Requests and Closing Prayer

## Sermon Notes

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Four steps in the growing believer’s dance with the Spirit:

- 1) The first step is sin recognition.
- 2) The second step is “God-recovery.”
- 3) The third step is a willing spirit.
- 4) The fourth step is becoming a steward of grace.