J.D. GREEAR

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JONAH

A NEW KIND OF OBEDIENCE

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J.D. GREEAR
WITH CURRICULUM BY
SPENCE SHELTON

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JONAH

A NEW KIND OF OBEDIENCE

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

J.D. GREEAR is the lead pastor of the Summit Church, in Raleigh-Durham, NC and author of *Gospel: Recovering the Power that Made Christianity Revolutionary* (2011) and *Stop Asking Jesus into Your Heart: How to Know for Sure You Are Saved* (2013). Two main things characterize the Summit Church: its gospel focus and its sending culture. The gospel is not merely the diving board off of which we jump into the pool of Christianity, it's the pool itself. Joy, reckless generosity, and audacious faith all come by learning more about and experiencing God's extravagant love found in Christ.

God has blessed the Summit Church with tremendous growth. Under J.D.'s leadership, the Summit has grown from a plateaued church of 300 to one of more than 7,000, making it one of Outreach magazine's "top 25 fastest-growing churches in America" for several years running.

J.D. has also led the Summit to further the kingdom of God by pursuing a bold vision to plant one thousand new churches by the year 2050. In the last ten years, the church has sent out more than 300 people to serve on church planting teams, both domestically and internationally. J.D. completed his Ph.D. in Theology at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary where he is also a faculty member, writing on the correlations between early church presentations of the gospel and Islamic theology. Having lived serving among Muslims, he has a burden to see them, as well as every nation on earth, come to know and love the salvation of God in Christ.

He and his beautiful wife Veronica live in Raleigh, NC and are raising four ridiculously cute kids: Kharis, Alethia, Ryah, and Adon.

SPENCE SHELTON is the small groups pastor of the Summit Church. Spence found the church as a college student 10 years ago and has had the privilege to participate in the amazing movement of God taking place through the Summit in Raleigh-Durham.

Spence holds a BSBA from UNC-Chapel Hill and an M.Div in Christian Ethics from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. God has given Spence a passion for leading the local church to live out its calling to be a gospel-driven, life-giving community. Spence teaches around the country on the gospel and discipleship in the local church. He's written and published several articles and small-group studies. His first book, *The People of God* co-authored with Trevor Joy, is due to be released by B&H in the spring of 2014.

Spence and his stunning wife Courtney live in Durham, NC and are the proud parents of Zeke the Wise, Ben the Brave, and Ellie the Beautiful.

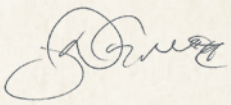
WELCOME TO
THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JONAH

The Book of Jonah is not just about a runaway prophet and a big, magical fish. Jonah is first and foremost about a gracious God in relentless pursuit of those He loves. Yes, the Book of Jonah tells the story of a man who ran from God and was swallowed up by a fish because of that. But Jonah also puts on display the heart of a God who would pursue us even to the point of death.

You likely will see some of your own story in Jonah's. The Jewish people have a tradition on Yom Kippur—after the Book of Jonah is read the congregation stands and says in unison, "We are Jonah." This is true. But on a more profound level, we are Nineveh. We were the ones so wicked that no one could fathom why, or how, God would show us mercy. Yet God pursued us. And He cast Himself into the sea of His own wrath, entering the bowels of death for 3 days, so that we could be saved.

That is the gospel according to Jonah. Seeing that, experiencing that, produces a whole new kind of obedience in us—an obedience that comes not as a response to threats but from a heart that desires God. Gospel obedience comes not from the fear of being swallowed by fish; gospel obedience comes from seeing that God's love was so great that He would be swallowed up by death for us.

Jonah has become one of my favorite books in the Bible. Studying it brought profound changes in the church I lead and in me personally. I read it often and share it with my children. I pray it has the same effect on you. May God open your eyes to how wide, and how high, and how deep, and how long, is the love of God for you in Christ.



HOW TO USE

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JONAH

EXPERIENCE

WELCOME to a six-week journey through the Book of Jonah that we hope will lead to a gospel-enriched experience for you personally as well as for your church. Here's how the study works:

Introduction: Each session begins with a narrative overview of the weekly topic. You will probably want to read this before your group meets so that you'll better understand the topic and the context for your time together. Summarize for those who may not have read it.

Warm-Up: Your actual group time will most likely begin here with an icebreaker that is designed to help you ease into the study and get everyone talking. Some questions for review are included to help everyone remember what was discussed in the previous session and also to allow the group to dialogue about their personal time with God the week before.

Video Setup: A brief description of J.D.'s teaching helps to set the stage for hearing from God during each 15-minute video teaching segment.

Video Guide: The video guide is an outline of the main teaching points to help you follow along with J.D. and serves as a reference point for further discussion.

Video Feedback: This part of the group experience allows everyone to make sure they got the main teaching points and gives the opportunity to process and share as a group so that you can learn from each other.

Group Discussion: These questions will help the group study passages that reinforce J.D.'s teaching in the video. Each question is designed to lead the group deeper into the gospel so that the gospel will become a part of who they are. These questions facilitate the work that the Holy Spirit is actually accomplishing in the life of the individual and the group. You may want to summarize the opening paragraph and only read key Scriptures from some of the lengthier passages.

Wrap-Up: This part of each session serves as a conclusion to the group Bible study and summarizes key points. It also offers a final challenge and a prompt to pray together. Ideas for the challenge can be found on the DVD-ROM in the Leader Kit.

Personal Study: Three devotions are included for each session. These devotions allow group members to spend more time in the Book of Jonah which will enrich the Bible study experience. QR codes can be found with several of the devotions offering further video teaching or illustration from writer and small-groups pastor Spence Shelton.

Leader Guide: The Leader Guide helps you prepare for each session and the study as a whole. The DVD-ROM includes video teaching help from Spence for each session as well as possible answers to discussion questions to help you prepare for the group discussion.

Appendix: A gospel presentation is included with the study. Group members are encouraged to make sharing the gospel a priority whether they use this appendix as a guide or another method that they are more comfortable with. Once we are saturated with the gospel, it is natural to not only live it out but to proclaim the gospel to others.

Week 1

I AM JONAH

INTRODUCTION

I love stories. I love suspending my disbelief and immersing myself in the storyline. I love trying to relate to the hero, even the tragic ones, placing myself in his shoes to ask myself what I would do in his situation. As a culture we are story-driven. If you want to communicate your message in a compelling way, get a testimony of someone whose life has been changed by your message and let them tell their story. We may or may not get your message, but we will connect with someone's story.

The Book of Jonah tells a short, fascinating story. In all of the Bible, Jonah is one character you do not want to emulate. Jonah defied God, sat in a fish belly for three days, preached to his most hated enemy, and then got into a shouting match with God. Bottom line, "WWJD" is not short for "What would Jonah do?"

Yet in Jonah we see a dangerously honest reflection of ourselves. He was a nice guy who deep down held a frustration with a God who was acting in ways Jonah couldn't believe to be fair or good. But in Jonah's story we also see a bigger story that Jonah himself missed. A story of love and grace. A story that, when understood, gives us hope that there will be more to our story than there was to Jonah's.

GROUP STUDY

Warm-Up

1. Growing up, did you have any big moments where you rebelled against your parents? What happened?

2. What forms of discipline have you seen or experienced that you are grateful for? Did you always feel that way? Explain.

Video Setup

In this session J.D. will look at Jonah's rebellion against God's command in chapter 1 of the Book of Jonah. We will hear how this depicts our own relationship with God, and how Christ meets us in our rebellion, offering us restoration instead.

Play Video 1: "Rebellion."

Video Guide

The notes below are designed to help you follow along with the video. Do not feel restricted to only these notes. We encourage you to write down other key thoughts that impact you.

Jonah had _____ _____ against Nineveh.

Rebellion is simply saying _____ to God.

If you want to _____ , there will always be a ship prepared to take you to Tarshish.

The downward progression of sin starts with _____ _____ and ends in total spiritual disaster.

Our _____ always affects others.

God sends storms into the lives of His people to wake them up from the _____ of sin.

That storm in your life is not there to _____ you back for your sin, but to _____ you back from your sin.

That storm is not designed for _____; it's designed for _____.

Video Feedback

What resonated with you from this first video session?

Looking back in your life, what has God used, like Jonah's storm, to bring you back from your sin?

If you missed this session, you can download the video teaching from *www.lifeway.com/Jonah*

Group Discussion

DANIEL 3

Chapter 3 of the Book of Daniel recounts a well-known story which provides a helpful contrast to the opening chapter of Jonah's story. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are the main characters in this story. They were all men of Jerusalem living basically as captives of Babylon. Babylon sacked Jerusalem and so they were at this point under Babylonian rule. These three guys, along with Daniel, were chosen by the king's men because they were on the Who's Who of Israel's young guys and the Hebrew Top 30 Under 30 lists. They were intelligent, handsome, and wise, and came from well-to-do backgrounds. But they got into a couple of skirmishes with the king because they refused to compromise their worship of God for favor with the king. Which brings us to chapter 3 when Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were given an ultimatum to either worship King Nebuchadnezzar's gods or be thrown into a fiery furnace.

Read Daniel 3:13-15

> 13 Then in a furious rage Nebuchadnezzar gave orders to
> bring in Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. So these men
> were brought before the king. 14 Nebuchadnezzar asked them,
> "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, is it true that you don't
> serve my gods or worship the gold statue I have set up? 15 Now
> if you're ready, when you hear the sound of the horn, flute,
> zither, lyre, harp, drum, and every kind of music, fall down
> and worship the statue I made. But if you don't worship it, you
> will immediately be thrown into a furnace of blazing fire—
> and who is the god who can rescue you from my power?"

1. While on the surface these two stories couldn't be more different, how are the circumstances facing Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego similar to the opening scene in Jonah's story?

2. Few in the Western world are faced with martyrdom like these guys were. Many can hide in a pseudo-Christian subculture without ever having to face consequences for following Christ. But those hiding places are dwindling. Is there anywhere in your life right now where following Christ puts you at risk? How?

Read Daniel 3:16-18

16 Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego replied to the king,
"Nebuchadnezzar, we don't need to give you an answer to
this question. 17 If the God we serve exists, then He can
rescue us from the furnace of blazing fire, and He can rescue
us from the power of you, the king. 18 But even if He does
not rescue us, we want you as king to know that we will not
serve your gods or worship the gold statue you set up."

3. What words or phrases stand out to you in the reply these three guys gave to the king in the face of death? Why?

4. There's an old saying: Your true colors show when your feet are put to the fire. Jonah and the three men in Daniel 3 were all men of God. They all knew the same things about God. Why then did Jonah flee whereas the others stood firm?

5. What do you think keeps us from seeing and valuing God like the men in Daniel 3? Why do we drift into a Jonah-type relationship with God so often?

6. How would you articulate the promise of God we can cling to that gives us such joyful certainty in God's love and care for us? Feel free to share a favorite Bible verse.

Read Daniel 3:19-30

19 Then Nebuchadnezzar was filled with rage, and the expression
on his face changed toward Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.
He gave orders to heat the furnace seven times more than was
customary, 20 and he commanded some of the strongest soldiers in
his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and throw
them into the furnace of blazing fire. 23 And these three men,
Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego fell, bound, into the furnace of
blazing fire. 24 Then King Nebuchadnezzar jumped up in alarm.
He said to his advisers, "Didn't we throw three men, bound, into
the fire?" "Yes, of course, Your Majesty," they replied to the king.
25 He exclaimed, "Look! I see four men, not tied, walking around
in the fire unharmed; and the fourth looks like a son of the gods."

[26] Nebuchadnezzar then approached the door of the furnace
of blazing fire and called: "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego,
you servants of the Most High God—come out!" So Shadrach,
Meshach, and Abednego came out of the fire. [27] When the satraps,
prefects, governors, and the king's advisers gathered around,
they saw that the fire had no effect on the bodies of these men:
not a hair of their heads was singed, their robes were unaffected,
and there was no smell of fire on them. [28] Nebuchadnezzar
exclaimed, "Praise to the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and
Abednego! He sent His angel and rescued His servants who
trusted in Him. They violated the king's command and risked
their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own
God. [29] Therefore I issue a decree that anyone of any people,
nation, or language who says anything offensive against the God
of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego will be torn limb from
limb and his house made a garbage dump. For there is no other
god who is able to deliver like this." [30] Then the king rewarded
Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon.

7. What are the similarities between the outcomes of Daniel 3 and Jonah 1?

8. How does this impact the way we view our love for and obedience to God?

Wrap-Up

REVIEW

1. Rebellion is simply saying "no" to God.
2. Our disobedience always affects others.
3. God sends storms into the lives of His people to wake them up from the slumber of sin.
4. The storms in our lives are not designed for retribution but for restoration.

CHALLENGE

In the box below, write out one achievable action step you can take this week in response to what you've discussed in this group.

PRAY TOGETHER

Notes

PERSONAL STUDY

The personal study portion of the weekly guide is designed to take you on a slow walk through the Book of Jonah. The hope in doing this is that you take time to consider what God is saying in these verses and what the implications are for your life. This week you will be in the opening chapter of Jonah. As you interact with the story, take note of what stands out to you and what God is teaching you. Use the questions at the end of each segment to help you consider the implications of this chapter for your life.

1. Jonah flees. Jonah 1:1-4

I (Spence) am a parent of three kids under the age of five. This new phase of life has thrown me headlong into the journey of molding a child's character. From little things like, "Son, you should not stand on your brother's head" to big things like teaching courage, honesty, and love, parenting is a wild ride. Just about any parent will tell you raising children is simultaneously one of the most exhausting and rewarding endeavors one can undertake.

It should come as no surprise to us that God's most common metaphor for teaching us how we relate to Him is the parent-child relationship. God loves and cares for each of us as a parent does a child. He knows what is best for us, and that's what He wants! He disciplines us to shape our character. We, like children, have a choice to make in our relationship with God. When His commands contradict our desires, we can choose to obey Him or our own desires. This is the dilemma so many longtime churchgoers have created in their minds. It presents itself as a choice to either do what I want to do, or do what God wants me to do.

This appears to be Jonah's dilemma here in the opening verses of chapter 1. Jonah's flight reveals his heart. His fears and hatred associated with Nineveh were more powerful to him than God is. So though he probably knew it wouldn't turn out well, he disobeyed and fled. Like a child, I often do the same thing. Though I know I cannot win this battle on my own, I just don't want to do what my Father is telling me to do. The only

real solution to my disobedience isn't behavior modification, but belief transformation. Only when we begin to believe God is more valuable than anything else will we begin to live as if it is true. Like a loving parent, God is after our hearts, not our behavior.

Between you and God, what keeps you fighting against Him?

How would seeing obedience to God as delight rather than duty alter your relationship to Him?

In your opinion, what has to happen to reorient your relationship with Him?

Go to *www.lifeway.com/Jonah* for a video devotion with Spence Shelton.

2. God sends a storm of mercy. Jonah 1:4-11

"Then the LORD."

You have to wonder what Jonah's mentality was as he set out on that ship. As land faded away, did he have a glimmer of hope that maybe he had successfully fled from God? Regardless, by the time the storm on the sea showed up, Jonah knew what was happening. Despite his disobedience, God was not finished with Jonah. One thing you have to notice in these verses is the reaction of the sailors. We can assume they were not all rookies to storms on the sea. When it gets to the point where they give up on tactical maneuvering and start crying to their gods, you know it's a bad storm. The author (presumably Jonah) lets us know each man was crying out to "his god." He's setting up something for the readers here.

In an almost comical twist of irony, God redeemed Jonah's disobedience. Jonah ran from God because he didn't want to see God have mercy on Nineveh (see 4:2). Now God is even going to show mercy to the pagan sailors Jonah is using in his escape plan. When the lot fell to Jonah, the men finally questioned his identity, and in what sounds more like a confession than a mere answer, Jonah acknowledged he worshiped the one true God (1:9). In a panic, the sailors looked for an answer from Jonah. The seas were worsening.

The storm was a wake-up call for Jonah. Literally. It wasn't punishment; it was mercy. In the middle of a storm on the ocean, Jonah finally came clean about his flight. He was out of places to run. He'd gone down to Joppa, down to the dock, and down into the ship's lowest level. The story of Adam echoes in Jonah's hiding. This is everyone's story. We run from God, reject His Word, and follow empty escape plans filled with false promises of fulfillment. While often painfully hard to perceive in the moment, whatever "storm" God uses to draw us back to Himself is nothing short of mercy. While we don't want the storm, we should worship a God willing to save us through it. Not all storms are sent by God for such purposes, but God can bring great redemption through any storm.

What storms are going on in your life right now? Could any of these be places where God is trying to get your attention?

Jonah's confession in verse 9 is a simple, powerful admission of his own futility. How does his confession of who God is help you process your own life situations right now?

3. God saves the sailors, God saves Jonah. Jonah 1:12-17

"Pick me up and throw me into the sea."

What Jonah? Throw you in? Do you see what's going on? I've always had trouble with Jonah's request here. Couldn't Jonah have just repented and asked God to stop everything? Why did he need to go overboard? But Jonah's story is part of a bigger story, a story of God's plan to reconcile people of all nations to Himself. The story of Jonah is not really about Jonah. It's about a God who loves His rebellious children and is pursuing them to bring them back to Himself. That's the story of Scripture. From Genesis 3, God is pursuing and redeeming His people.

In Jonah's case, the storm is not just a wake-up call to Jonah. It's a wake-up call to the sailors. In a scene that feels similar to Elijah on mount Carmel, the sailors' gods have no power. Only Yahweh, the one true God, has the power to save them. So in compliance to a rather absurd request, the sailors toss Jonah into the sea, and then verse 15 tells us the storm stopped raging. God showed His power, and the sailors' vows let us know in that moment they came to worship the one true God. God used Jonah, even in his disobedience, to weave more souls into His great salvation story.

But God was not done yet. Verse 17 tells us God saved Jonah as well. God wasn't finished using Jonah to save people, and so He saved Jonah. This is a major point. No one, not even the castaway hurled into the sea, is too far gone for God to save. This is where we take hope. Our God is not One to give up on us. He pursues us, reconciles us, and even when we don't see how, He make us ministers of reconciliation to others. God uses people to bring His message of hope to other people. And the message is the same. Our God is the one true God, and He saves.

Who in your circle of influence may God be using you to tell His story to?

How does the realization that your story is about God and others, not just you, change how you perceive your life situation right now?

What does the story of an ancient prophet who rebelled against God and was swallowed by a fish have to teach the modern man?

Through a six-week examination of Jonah, this study invites you into a world fraught with missteps, disobedience, idolatry, and mistaken "identity." It's a world most of us would recognize in our own lives. The Book of Jonah is not just about a runaway prophet swallowed by a big fish. Jonah is first and foremost about a gracious God relentless in pursuit of those that He loves. Through this study, group members can recognize the "Jonah" in themselves and channel this revelation into a deeper personal faith and a greater passion for helping others meet God. *The Gospel According to Jonah* is really a study of Jesus, His story of redemption, and how He calls us to a life of obedience.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JONAH

THIS MEMBER BOOK INCLUDES:

• Sound Bible teaching • Viewer guides • Weekly devotions
• Links to video devotions by small groups pastor Spence Shelton
• Evangelistic tool for sharing the gospel

For those who have been running from God as well as for those who have served Him out of a burdensome sense of duty, this study will encourage you to *a new kind of obedience!*

DR. J.D. GREEAR is the lead pastor at the Summit Church in Raleigh-Durham, NC. He is committed to the local church and to church planting, having undertaken the goal of planting 1,000 churches by 2050. In the last ten years, the church has sent out more than 300 people to serve on church planting teams, both domestically and internationally. J.D. has written *Gospel: Recovering the Power that Made Christianity Revolutionary* (2011) and *Stop Asking Jesus into Your Heart: How to Know for Sure You Are Saved* (2013).

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