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# AWAKE

THE CALL TO A RENEWED LIFE



RONNIE FLOYD

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## ***Don't sleep through your spiritual life. Wake up!***

Nothing refreshes like a good night's sleep. And who doesn't enjoy the occasional afternoon nap?

In at least one way, though, sleep is not good for us. In fact, it can be dangerous. I'm talking about being spiritually asleep. Life has a way of lulling us to sleep spiritually. If we allow ourselves to settle into a spiritual snooze, after a while we simply wither spiritually.

It's time to wake up!

Our greatest need as believers—your greatest need as a follower of Christ—is to experience spiritual renewal from God. That's the whole point of this study. I must warn you, though: this is not a study for those who want to maintain the status quo. When the Holy Spirit begins to bring renewal in our lives, things *will* change.

In the following pages, we will look at several places in the Bible where God called people to return to Him. Those passages are a call for us, as well—a call to experience revival and awakening both personally and in our churches.

When people have turned back to God throughout history, He has done extraordinary things and sparked great movements. Wouldn't you like to see God do that again? Join me on the journey of asking God to bring about the next great movement of renewal and turning the nations back to Him.



*Ronnie Floyd*

Ronnie Floyd has served as the Senior Pastor of Cross Church in Northwest Arkansas for over 28 years. In addition to serving as the general editor for *Bible Studies for Life*, Dr. Floyd is the president of the Southern Baptist Convention. Read Ronnie's blog at [RonnieFloyd.com](http://RonnieFloyd.com). Follow him on Twitter @RonnieFloyd.

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# SESSION 1

# RETURN TO GOD



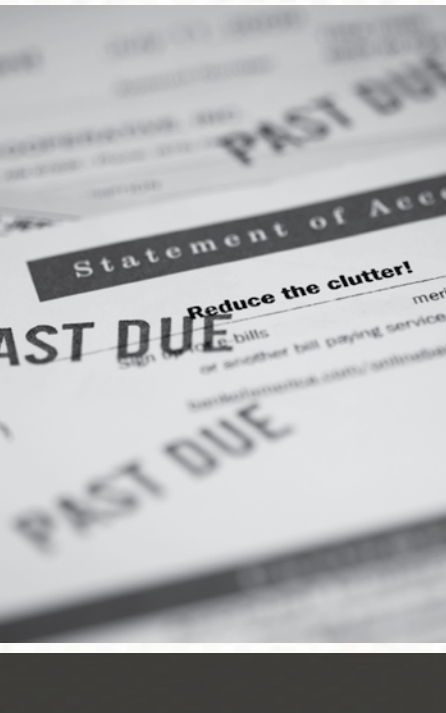
*What's a great way to catch  
your attention?*

**QUESTION #1**

#Awake

## THE POINT

*God's call to return to Him demands a response.*



## THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

"How did I end up here?" It's a common question. We start out with good intentions. We want to be great parents, do well in school, or take care of our health. But we falter somewhere along the way. It may be subtle at first, but after a while we look back and realize we're not the people we wanted to be. At that point we often wonder, *What does it take to get back on course?*

The same cycle can happen in our relationship with God. Laziness, a lack of priorities, and even outright sin has a way of lulling us to sleep in our daily walk with Jesus.

So here's the big question: if you get off track, what will it take to get your attention and bring you back to God?

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. But God got Jonah's attention in a most unexpected way. As we'll see in this study, God often acts to get our attention and draw us back to Him.

# WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

## ***Jonah 1:1-3; 3:1-5,10 (HCSB)***

**1:1** The word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai:

**2** “Get up! Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because their wickedness has confronted Me.”

**3** However, Jonah got up to flee to Tarshish from the LORD’s presence. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. He paid the fare and went down into it to go with them to Tarshish, from the LORD’s presence.

---

**3:1** Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time:

**2** “Get up! Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach the message that I tell you.”

**3** So Jonah got up and went to Nineveh according to the LORD’s command. Now Nineveh was an extremely large city, a three-day walk.

**4** Jonah set out on the first day of his walk in the city and proclaimed, “In 40 days Nineveh will be demolished!”

**5** The men of Nineveh believed in God. They proclaimed a fast and dressed in sackcloth—from the greatest of them to the least.

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**3:10** Then God saw their actions—that they had turned from their evil ways—so God relented from the disaster He had threatened to do to them. And He did not do it.

**Nineveh** (1:2)—Located on the east bank of the Tigris River across from the modern day city of Mosul, Iraq. This city served as the capital of the Assyrian Empire during its height.

**Tarshish** (1:3)—While the exact location of ancient Tarshish is uncertain, the most probable location is Spain. It was in the opposite direction from where God wanted Jonah to go.

**Sackcloth** (3:5)—Sackcloth is a scratchy, black-wool cloth usually made of goat hair. People in ancient cultures wore garments made of sackcloth as an expression of deep, personal distress.





## ***Jonah 1:1-3***

Jonah should have said “yes” to God. He should have obeyed. But he didn’t.

God called Jonah to go to the city of Nineveh and call the people there to turn away from their sin. Nineveh had “more than 120,000 people who cannot distinguish between their right and their left” (4:11). It was a big city. It was also a pagan place, full of clueless people. God wanted to use Jonah to get their attention and do something about their spiritual condition.

How did Jonah respond? He ran in the opposite direction. It’s almost comical that Jonah thought he could actually run from God’s presence—almost. Jonah failed to realize he could never escape God’s attention. God sees all and knows all.

When God brought a massive storm against Jonah’s boat, he finally began to see the precariousness of his rebellion. Jonah knew he was under God’s judgment because of his disobedience, and he was risking the lives of everyone on the boat with him (see 1:4-16). Jonah thought Tarshish would be far enough to escape God’s call on his life. He found a ship to take him there, but his journey ended in disaster.

The same principles are at work in our lives. There are times when God gives us a clear call to return to Him, but we respond by taking the first ship going in the opposite direction. We race toward a place, person, or desire we think will bring fulfillment, yet we only find destruction. **Running from God always leads to pain.**

Thankfully, the story doesn’t end there.

***Why is it sometimes tempting to flee from God?***

**QUESTION #2**

## ***Jonah 3:1-5***

Tossed overboard to spare the ship and its crew, Jonah was miraculously swallowed by a “huge fish” (1:17). He spent three days and nights inside that creature. It’s not surprising that Jonah was moved to pray and worship God during that unprecedented interlude, and he vowed to obey God’s command (see 2:1-9). When the timing was right, God caused the fish to vomit Jonah onto dry land.

Try to picture the scene: Jonah lay on the sand—exhausted, filthy, and smelling incredibly nasty. And that was the moment God called out to him a second time.

God told Jonah to tell the people of Nineveh, “In 40 days Nineveh will be demolished!” Talk about a message that doesn’t lend itself to making friends. Can you imagine walking the streets of Chicago or Dallas and yelling, “Your city is about to crumble!”? You might get arrested. You surely wouldn’t make any friends. Yet Jonah did what was difficult. It wasn’t an easy task, but he was obedient to God and faithful to His message. No doubt it’s harder to follow God than to stay in step with this world.

Then something remarkable happened: the people of Nineveh actually responded! They repented of their sins and believed God. To display their repentance, they called for a national fast and put on sackcloth. Even the king of Nineveh repented. He changed from his royal robe into sackcloth to show his own repentance before God (see 3:6). The king charged everyone in Nineveh to call out earnestly before God so that He might change His mind and not overthrow the city (see 3:7-9). God used Jonah’s message and obedience to convince the people that He was a righteous God, rightfully and fully capable of destroying them because of their evil ways.

Because they believed this about God, the people of Nineveh had the opportunity to discover another part of His character: grace.

***When have you benefited from a second chance?***

**QUESTION #3**

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

**QUESTION #4**

## Jonah 3:10

The story that weaves through the Book of Jonah is the story of what happens when people respond to what God is calling them to do. This is *exactly* the message we need to hear in order to experience a spiritual awakening.

- 1. When we fail to obey God, strong consequences can result from that sin.** Jonah spent three days in the belly of a fish. It could've been worse. He might have drowned when the sailors threw him over the side of that ship. God could have killed him right there in that moment. Instead, God was gracious. Sometimes God brings pain into our lives so that we'll wake up before we bring complete destruction on ourselves.
- 2. Blessing is found in obedience.** Even though Jonah didn't know what was going to happen in Nineveh, he was obedient—and God was faithful. The people responded. The king led the people to repentance before God, and the city was saved.

I don't know who originated this statement, but I love its truth: "Someone is waiting for you on the other side of your obedience." A huge city full of dying people was waiting on the other side of Jonah's obedience. If God is burdening your heart to do something, you can be sure He is preparing someone or something to happen on the other side of your obedience.

- ▶ Do you want to see a spiritual awakening in your family? It starts with your own repentance.
- ▶ Do you desire for God to start a great revival in your church? Let Him revive your own life.
- ▶ Do you want God to change your community? Start by letting Him change you.
- ▶ Groups and communities won't experience renewal and awakening until individuals experience renewal and awakening.

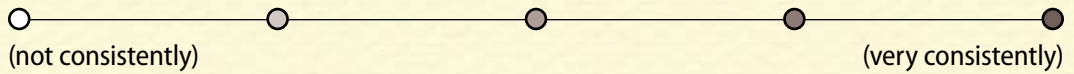
***How can our group be a safe and supportive place for returning to God?***

**QUESTION #5**

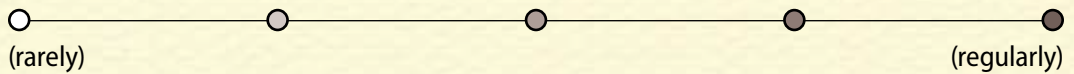
# PERSONAL ASSESSMENT: WAKE UP CALL

*Take a moment to evaluate your spiritual life. Do you need to wake up?*

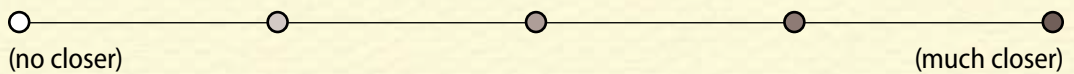
How consistently do you pray and read the Bible as a daily discipline?



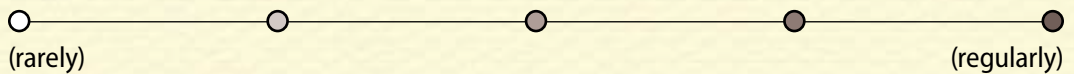
How often do you experience meaningful times of worship in God's presence?



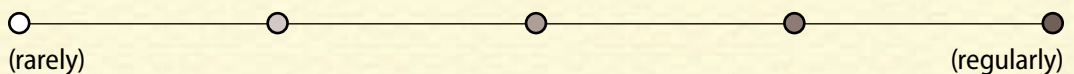
To what degree have you grown closer to Jesus in the past year?



In recent months, how often have you taken active steps to love your neighbor as yourself?



In recent months, how often have you initiated spiritual conversations with others?

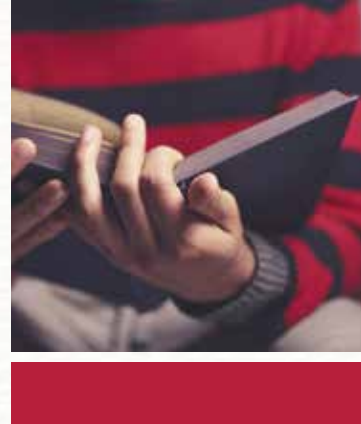


*What would you like to experience on a spiritual level throughout the course of this study?*

# LIVE IT OUT

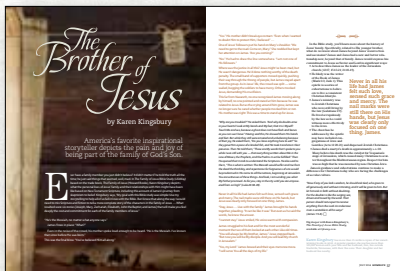
How can we be open to God's call and answer when it comes? Consider these suggestions:

- ▶ **Be sensitive to God's voice.** Don't let yourself become numb toward God. Immerse yourself in Bible study and prayer, asking God to help you be more sensitive to His voice.
- ▶ **Respond with obedience.** When you hear God telling you to do something in the days to come—do it! Repentance isn't necessary when we obey God's call in the first place.
- ▶ **Repent when necessary.** None of us will obey perfectly. When you find yourself wandering from God, repent, turn away from your disobedience, and turn back to God.



Spiritual renewal happens as we turn back to God. Be willing to always put your "yes" on the table before Him—even before He asks you to respond.

## The Brother of Jesus



***"He's the Messiah, no matter what anyone says."***

***James froze in place: "What?"***

***Even in the noise of the crowd, his mother spoke loud enough to be heard. "He is the Messiah. I've known that since before He was born."***

***This was the final blow. "You've believed Him all along."***

To continue reading "The Brother of Jesus" from *HomeLife* magazine, visit [BibleStudiesforLife.com/articles](http://BibleStudiesforLife.com/articles).



# My group's prayer requests

A series of 15 horizontal dotted lines for writing.

# My thoughts

## GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS

In order to make the most of this study and to ensure a richer group experience, it's recommended that all group participants read through the teaching and discussion content in full before each group meeting. As a leader, it is also a good idea for you to be familiar with this content and prepared to summarize it for your group members as you move through the material each week.

Each session of the Bible study is made up of three sections:

### 1. THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE.

An introduction to the theme of the session and its connection to everyday life, along with a brief overview of the primary Scripture text. This section also includes an icebreaker question or activity.

### 2. WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

This comprises the bulk of each session and includes the primary Scripture text along with explanations for key words and ideas within that text. This section also includes most of the content designed to produce and maintain discussion within the group.

### 3. LIVE IT OUT.

The final section focuses on application, using bulleted summary statements to answer the question, *So what?* As the leader, be prepared to challenge the group to apply what they learned during the discussion by transforming it into action throughout the week.

For group leaders, the *Awake* Leader Guide contains several features and tools designed to help you lead participants through the material provided.

### QUESTION 1—ICEBREAKER

These opening questions and/or activities are designed to help participants transition into the study and begin engaging the primary themes to be discussed. Be sure everyone has a chance to speak, but maintain a low-pressure environment.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Each "What Does the Bible Say?" section features at least five questions designed to spark discussion and interaction within your group. These questions encourage critical thinking, so be sure to allow a period of silence for participants to process the question and form an answer.

The *Awake* Leader Guide also contains follow-up questions and optional activities that may be helpful to your group, if time permits.

### DVD CONTENT

Each video features Dr. Ronnie Floyd discussing the primary themes found in the session. We recommend that you show this video in one of three places: (1) At the beginning of group time, (2) After the icebreaker, or (3) After a quick review and/or summary of "What Does the Bible Say?" A video summary is included as well. You may choose to use this summary as background preparation to help you guide the group.

The Leader Guide contains additional questions to help unpack the video and transition into the discussion. For a digital Leader Guide with commentary, see the "Leader Tools" folder on the DVD-ROM in your Leader Kit.



For helps on how to use *Bible Studies for Life*, tips on how to better lead groups, or additional ideas for leading, visit: [www.ministrygrid.com/web/BibleStudiesforLife](http://www.ministrygrid.com/web/BibleStudiesforLife).

## SESSION 1: RETURN TO GOD

**The Point:** God's call to return to Him demands a response.

**The Passage:** Jonah 1:1-3; 3:1-5,10

**The Setting:** Jonah, a prophet in the Northern Kingdom of Israel, had willingly been used by God to deliver a message of encouragement to his nation (see 2 Kings 14:25). However, when God commanded him to deliver a warning message to Nineveh, the capital city of Israel's oppressor, Assyria, Jonah at first refused. Only later, with reluctance, did Jonah comply with God's instruction.

**QUESTION 1:** What's a great way to catch your attention?

**Optional activity:** Encourage group members to identify ringtones in their phones that catch their attention. Ask for volunteers to play the tone they consider most attention grabbing and invite them to explain why. If time permits, vote as a group to identify who has the most attention-grabbing ringtone.

**Note:** Don't attempt this activity if you have encouraged group members not to bring their phones to the group meeting or if you meet in a space where loud noises would be a distraction for others. Rely on your best judgment.

**Video Summary:** In this opening video session, Dr. Floyd explains that when God wants to do something corporately, He starts with individuals. We see a perfect illustration of that in the story of Jonah. God wanted to return a city to Himself, and He started in the life of Jonah. And what God did in the heart and life of Jonah served as a catalyst for a great spiritual movement in Nineveh.

WATCH THE DVD SEGMENT FOR SESSION 1, THEN USE THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION POINTS TO TRANSITION INTO THE STUDY.

- What is God doing in your life personally that could impact your sphere of influence?
- What do you think God might want to do through your small group for a greater good?

### WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

ASK FOR A VOLUNTEER TO READ ALOUD JONAH 1:1-3; 3:1-5,10.

Response: What's your initial reaction to these verses?

- What do you like about the text?
- What questions do you have about these verses?

TURN THE GROUP'S ATTENTION TO JONAH 1:1-3.

**QUESTION 2:** Why is it sometimes tempting to flee from God?

This question is intended to give members an opportunity to examine the reasons it may be more tempting to flee from God's call and run toward a place, person, or desire they think will bring fulfillment.

**Optional follow-up:** What are some ways God speaks to people today?



MOVE TO JONAH 3:1-5.

**QUESTION 3:** When have you benefited from a second chance?

This question is designed to give group members an opportunity to share a personal story. Don't force people to answer what could be a deeply personal question. At the same time, don't discourage people from being vulnerable if they choose to do so.

**Optional follow-up:** When have you been in a position to offer someone else a second chance?

**QUESTION 4:** What do God's actions toward Jonah and the Ninevites teach us about His character?

Encourage group members to examine the text closely. This question will require them to personally interpret what God's actions in Jonah 3:1-5 teach us about His character.

**Optional follow-up:** What are the different ways people responded to God in these verses?

CONTINUE WITH JONAH 3:10.

**QUESTION 5:** How can our group be a safe and supportive place for returning to God?

Ending your group time with an application question should leave group members with a sense of action. Encourage them to be specific in answering as they examine together the ways their group is already safe and supportive as well as how they can make it more so.

**Optional activity:** Direct group members to complete the activity "Personal Assessment: Wake Up Call" on page 11. Encourage them to complete this activity during the week as a way of exploring their own spiritual health.

**Note:** The following question does not appear in the group member book. Use it in your group discussion as time allows.

**QUESTION 6:** Our nation needs to return to God. What must happen in our personal lives for that to occur?

It's common to ask the question, "How can I make a difference? I'm only one person." This question calls for group members to dig deep into their own lives and identify specific changes they can make and ways they can impact a nation that needs to return to God.

## LIVE IT OUT

Encourage group members to consider the following ways they can be open to God's call and answer when it comes:

- **Be sensitive to God's voice.** Don't let yourself become numb toward God. Immerse yourself in Bible study and prayer, asking God to help you be more sensitive to His voice.
- **Respond with obedience.** When you hear God telling you to do something in the days to come—do it! Repentance isn't necessary when we obey God's call in the first place.

- **Repent when necessary.** None of us will obey perfectly. When you find yourself wandering from God, repent, turn away from your disobedience, and turn back to God.

**Challenge:** As we saw in Jonah's story, God often acts to get our attention and draws us back to Himself. Could He be trying to get your attention right now? Spend time in prayer this week asking God to make you aware of areas in your life where He may be trying to draw you back to Himself. Be willing to say yes, even before He asks you to respond.

**Pray:** Ask for prayer requests and ask group members to pray for the different requests as intercessors. As the leader, conclude your discussion by thanking God for the way He demonstrates His grace through second chances. Thank Him for the second chances you've received in life and ask for the courage to respond well when you hear God's call.