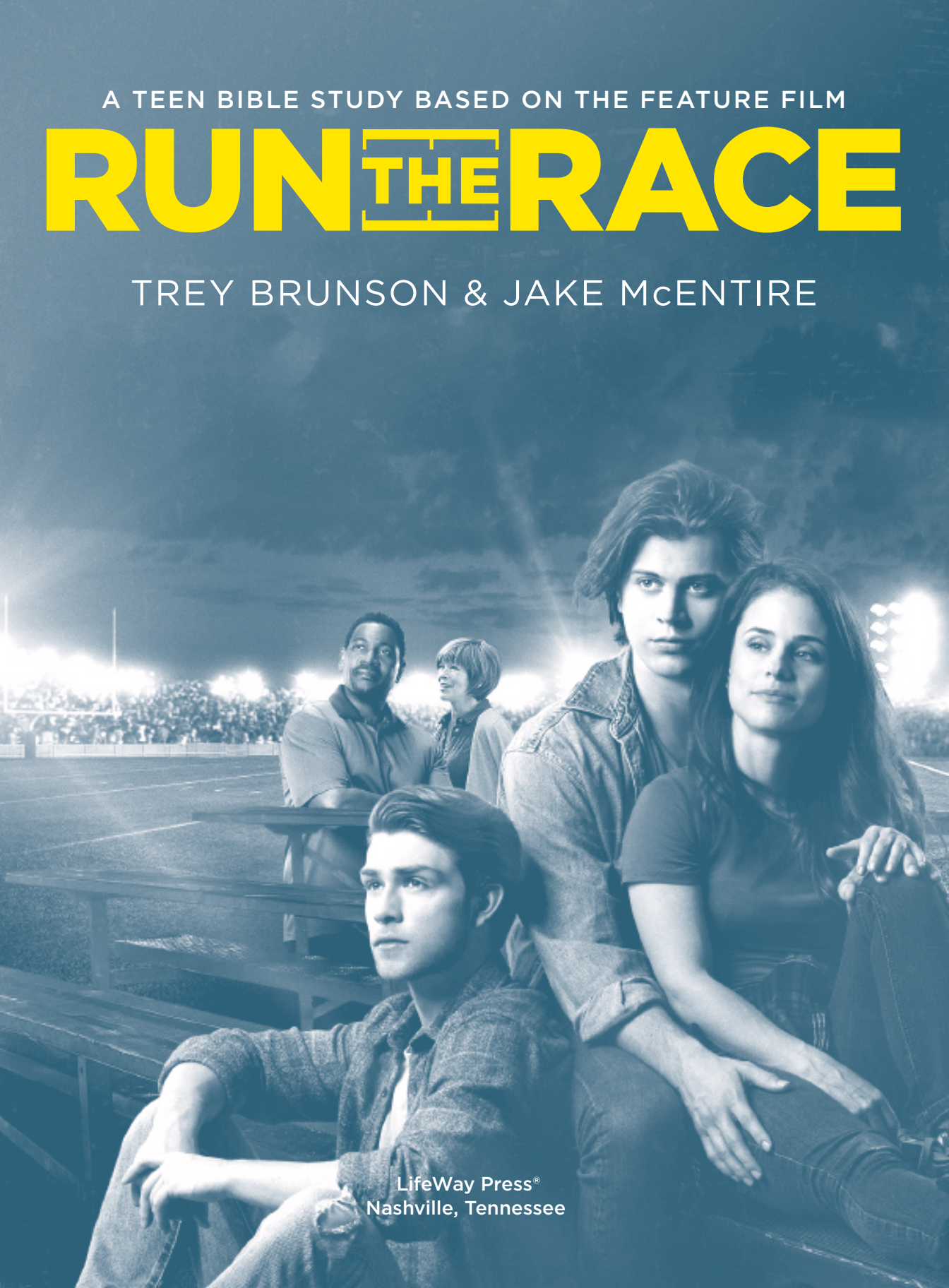


A TEEN BIBLE STUDY BASED ON THE FEATURE FILM

# RUN THE RACE

TREY BRUNSON & JAKE McENTIRE



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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



**TREY BRUNSON** has served as a pastor in Texas, Florida, and California, and he currently serves as the Director of Communications for Southeast Christian Church in Louisville, Kentucky. He was an Executive Producer for *Run the Race* with his best friend and creator of the movie, Jake McEntire. He feels called to chase the next generation with the hope of the gospel because of God's gracious work in his life as a high school student. He earned his bachelor's degree from Dallas Baptist University where he also met his wife, Rachael, and his best friend, Jake. From there he served on staff at First

Baptist Church Dallas, First Baptist Church Jacksonville where he was ordained, then he planted Story City Church in Burbank, California, and served on staff at Crossings Ministries before coming on staff at Southeast Christian Church. He is currently working on his Master of Divinity in Biblical Counseling at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He is married to his amazing wife, Rachael, and they are blessed to be the parents of Wyatt Bear McCall (5), Judah Knox (3), Scout Helena (1), and their newborn son, Rivers Haddon.



**JAKE McENTIRE** is a passionate actor, writer, and producer. He is a graduate of Dallas Baptist University where he first wrote the screenplay for *Run the Race*. While there he met his best friend Trey Brunson, who would become his ministry partner and an Executive Producer on the movie. Together they feel called to encourage people, especially the youth of America, to run after Jesus Christ as the giver and meaning of all life. They believe one of the best ways to do this is through powerful stories and film. Still a resident of North Texas, Jake is a member of The Village Church in Flower Mound, Texas, where he has

served as a homegroup leader. He's been married to his lovely wife, Charity, since 2007 and together they have one son, John "Silas" McEntire (1).

## NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

I will never forget the day I met Jake. We were in the same spiritual disciplines class at Dallas Baptist University, and when the professor dropped a bad joke, we were the only two who laughed. After that class, we connected and quickly became best friends. Over the next four years, I heard Jake talk about an idea for a movie. I finally told him I never wanted to hear him talk about the idea again, because if he didn't start writing a script, no one would see the movie and it wouldn't matter. Next thing I knew, he handed me almost 200 pages of a script.

What you will see on whatever screen you watch this movie on, is the answer to over 10,000 prayers. Jake and I walked with this story for over fourteen years before God finally allowed us to share it with you. It's a miracle that we made the movie, and we pray for it to be a catalyst for many more miracles. The Lord gave us fourteen years of waiting and three years of working on this movie to sift our hearts and make sure we really believed the message we wrote and filmed. We want you to know Jesus is better than anything in this world. Life can be overwhelmingly difficult, but that doesn't mean God isn't there or isn't doing something very good. We hope the movie helps students and their parents see this story (largely based off true stories) and be encouraged that they can trust God. *You can trust God.*

As for this book, we pray that students will walk through the content and clearly know the gospel. You need to know who God is, who you are, what Jesus has done, and what that means for you and the rest of the world. The six sessions in this book are a gospel presentation of sorts. Packed inside those sessions are some of the most important truths the Lord has allowed me to learn and grow in. Student ministers, I pray that this would be a weapon to help you fight for the next generation's hearts. Student ministry leaders and volunteers, I pray this helps you understand and communicate the most amazing story about God's love for you and the students you pour into. Students, I pray this book points you to how big God is and how big God's love for you is. Jesus can change everything in your life. Nothing has been the same in my life since I surrendered to Jesus. God not only has a plan for your life to bring Him glory, but He has also designed things to bring you serious amounts of joy. Jesus is enough, and I pray this study helps you see His excellency, supremacy, and crazy love for you.

To the praise of His glory,

*Trey Brunson*



# INTRODUCTION

What do you think of when you hear the words *Run the Race*? You may think of the 100-yard dash in the Olympics, a long cross-country marathon, an extensive journey, or the span of one's life. The words *Run the Race* can bring many different situations to mind, but they are all associated with movement from one place to another. Every race has a starting point, then the gun sounds and you venture out to the finish line. You gradually leave one place and arrive at another.

In writing the story and screenplay for *Run the Race*, I wanted to show a person on a journey, running after his dreams and everything else he thinks might bring him happiness and joy. He's running only to discover it's impossible to get the most joy out of life apart from the One who made joy and life. The old saying is, "Life is about the journey, not the destination, so enjoy the journey." This type of thinking will leave you empty and discouraged because you are relying on your circumstances to bring you comfort and peace. You're relying on your own will to white knuckle a smile and act like everything is okay. Let's be honest, sometimes the journey is horrible with no end in sight. Sometimes the pain of life is overwhelming, and you wish you could make it all go away. Are you just supposed to enjoy the journey then?

Our goal for anyone who sees the movie or participates in this study is that you would learn to look to Jesus, understand that God made you in His image for a relationship with Him, and know that your purpose can only be found in Him. The life He gave you is your race with a start and end point. The race will be filled with many ups and downs, but no matter what your life journey brings you, if you can find your identity, purpose, and joy in Jesus Christ, then you have made it. At that point, you have won your race, and you will eventually spend eternity in the presence of the living God.

*Run the Race* isn't about enjoying the journey, but finding and looking to Jesus Christ during your journey, enjoying Him no matter what happens to you. It's about knowing that if you have Him, you have everything you'll ever need.

*Run the Race* has been a 14-year mission for me and my best friend, Trey Brunson. The journey has been painful at times, but God has also given us some unbelievable, miraculous stories of happiness. Either way, it has motivated us to press in and run after Jesus a little bit more each day, relying on Him for our salvation, purpose, peace, and overall joy. We pray that you'll be encouraged to do the same.

God bless,

*Jake McEntire*

# HOW TO USE

*Run the Race* is an six-session study to help your students understand the power of and the importance of sharing the gospel, while equipping them to share their faith with their friends. Prior to beginning this study, we encourage you to set aside time to watch the feature film, *Run the Race*, with students.

The study consists of four main elements: watch, discuss, apply, and on your own.

## WATCH

Each session contains video clips from the *Run the Race* movie as well as a summary of how those clips apply to that session's lesson.

## DISCUSS

This section digs deeper into the main theme of the video with cultural and biblical examples and questions.

## APPLY

Building on the Discuss section, Apply breaks down Scripture to help students learn how to walk out what they've learned through the group study. This section contains Scripture reading and summaries, as well as questions for deeper growth.

## ON YOUR OWN

This section contains three days of personal study. These studies are built to help students continue to connect with what they learned in the group session throughout the week.

## LEADER GUIDE

In the back of this book, we've provided tips, suggestions, and bonus content to help leaders as they walk through the study with their students.

*"Therefore since we also have such a large cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us lay aside every weight and the sin that so easily ensnares us, and run with endurance the race that lies before us, keeping our eyes on Jesus, the source and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that lay before Him endured a cross and despised the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of God's throne."*

**HEBREWS 12:1-2**

SESSION 1

**WE ALL  
HAVE A  
PLAN,  
BUT GOD...**

PROVERBS 16:9



## WATCH

In this scene, we see Dave and Zach celebrating the good news that the University of Florida is interested in Zach. It's in this moment of celebration that we see a plan being formed. Zach has wanted to get out of Bessemer for a long time, and now he has found the way. He has a "plan."

## DISCUSS

Do you have a plan for your life? Your plan could be to go to college, get married, become a doctor, lawyer, or maybe a barista at Starbucks. Maybe you're the kind of person who plans the entire day, or maybe you're the kind of person who just plans to enjoy whatever the day throws at you. We all have a tendency to try to create and control our future. The problem is that none of us can control what happens next.

### **How do you try to plan and control your life?**

For instance, I love to spend time outdoors, particularly backpacking. Who doesn't enjoy sitting around a campfire with friends, making s'mores? One of the first (and most important) rules campers learn is: Make sure the fire is completely out! Here's a simple "how-to": Drown the campfire with water. Scrape all glowing embers off sticks that were burning. Stir the coals and water together. Then add more water!

The problem is, many people don't take this seriously enough, and from time to time, a spark remains. Then, the wind blows just right and carries the ember to dry leaves, and *whoosh!* Someone's carelessness turns into tragedy for many.

### **What happens when your plans don't go the way you hoped?**

In 2017, wildfires spread across the western U.S. and scorched more than 66 million acres, destroying thousands of homes and killing dozens of people. It's possible one large fire in Oregon was started by teens playing with firecrackers. *Firecrackers!* They'd likely planned to have a little innocent fun, but something so small, harmless, and seemingly under control turned out to be completely devastating.

Have you ever felt like things were out of control in your life? We all make plans—that's normal and healthy. But what do we do when things don't go as planned? Zach and Dave's plan is probably not so different from some plans you've made in your life. Proverbs 16:9 tells us that we can make plans, but ultimately the Lord is the One in control of our lives, and that's definitely a good thing!

**Describe a time you set a goal you failed to achieve.**

**What does it look like to submit to God's plan instead of making your own?**

## **PLANNING OR SUBMITTING—THE STORY OF JOSEPH**

We all have goals and dreams for our lives. In some sense, this is vital, because we need direction and vision. But we can all be tempted to control our lives in unhealthy ways. Here's a perfect example: How many unedited pictures are on your social media feeds, how many have the perfect filter, and how much time have you spent polishing your image? That's control. If not achieving one of your goals would be crushing, you might have an issue with control. We all have this dangerous tendency of thinking we are in control of our lives, when in reality, we can control very little.

**When have you believed you were in control of something in your life only to have that very situation spiral out of control completely?**

No one struggled with this more than one of the first major characters in the Bible: Joseph. Genesis has two parts—the creation of the world (Gen. 1-11) and the creation of the nation of Israel (Gen. 12-50). The second part is broken into four smaller parts, each focusing on one of four men: Abraham (Gen. 12-25), Isaac (Gen. 25-26), Jacob (Gen. 27-36), and Joseph (Gen. 37-50). Joseph is one of the fathers of Israel, and God gave him a dream as a young boy. He dreamed twice that his brothers would bow down to him and that he would rule over them. Of course, Joseph decided to tell all his brothers about his dream.

If you have a brother or sister, you can probably guess what happened next. Joseph's brothers didn't respond well to hearing about a dream where they bowed before their

brother. In fact, they were enraged. To make it worse, Joseph was their father's favorite, and Israel (their father) gave him a special coat. Because Joseph had the coat and the dreams, his brothers hated him so much they couldn't even muster a kind word to him.

One day while his brothers were out working, Joseph's father sent him to check on them and the sheep. As God revealed in the dream, Joseph would rule one day, but he'd been pampered and became prideful. He was exercising control in a way God hadn't designed it. As a result, Joseph wound up in a pit.

## APPLY

### Life in the Pit (Gen. 37)

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What things are under your control? Can you make tomorrow happen? Can you keep your heart beating while you sleep? Can you ensure that a semitruck won't run you off the road on the way to work or school in the morning? As best as I can see it, I can only control my attitude and my response to what happens. Each one of us attempts to control our lives, from social media to our futures. From a biblical perspective, only One person is in control, and that is God. He simply spoke the world into being, and He continues to make happen the things He wants to happen. Daily, we struggle with control, and this reveals something profound—none of us is God. I'm not, and you're not. We can try to make things happen, if we don't learn that we aren't God and we can't control things, we'll end up in a pit like Joseph.

**How do you try to control your life? What are you trying to control right now?**

**Knowing God is in control, what changes will you make?**

### Life in the Prison (Gen. 39-40)

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Joseph didn't stay in the pit, though. His brothers sold him into slavery, and despite his plan to rule, he wound up as a servant. He worked for Potiphar, who was an officer of Pharaoh in Egypt. While there, Joseph was accused falsely and imprisoned; it was as if he couldn't get any lower. From the pit to the prison, Joseph seemed to be spiraling down. Realizing we cannot control our lives can be a dizzying experience. Joseph was shaken, and he wound up far from home, in a desperate place, with no ability to control or change

his circumstances. When Joseph could do nothing he learned something powerful. He was not God—but God is God, and He was at work bringing His plans to reality.

Joseph was essentially dead to those who loved him and forgotten by those who knew him, but God showed up. Two men were sent to the prison, the king's baker and cup-bearer, and Joseph was assigned to care for them. When Joseph heard these men had dreams they didn't understand, he proclaimed, "Don't interpretations belong to God?" (Gen. 40:8). While Joseph could not control his life, he could not stop God's plan for his life either. Joseph learned that no matter where he was, God is God and God is in control.

**When have you felt like your life was out of control? How can remembering that God is in control bring comfort?**

God used this situation to get him out of prison and bring him before Pharaoh, because Pharaoh also had a dream.

*"Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'I have had a dream, and no one can interpret it. But I have heard it said about you that you can hear a dream and interpret it.' 'I am not able to,' Joseph answered Pharaoh. 'It is God who will give Pharaoh a favorable answer.*

**GENESIS 41:15-16**

God showed up again and proved that He was in control and had a plan for Joseph's life.

## **Life in the Palace (Gen. 41)**

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As Joseph began to realize God was in control and had a plan, He submitted to God and saw that God was doing something profoundly greater than he could have ever imagined. Joseph's original dream was that his brothers were bowing down to him. If you have siblings, you know this is a pretty amazing dream—but it was far too small.

*"So Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one as discerning and wise as you are. You will be over my house, and all my people will obey your commands. Only I, as king, will be greater than you.'"*

**GENESIS 41:39-40**

Joseph went from a prisoner to the second in command over Egypt. It turned out that Joseph became the second in command over the entire world!

Let me ask you an honest question—whose plan was better? Joseph’s original plan, or God’s bigger plan? Joseph learned he was not God, God alone is God, and God is good. God’s plans are better than our plans because He is good and always does good things.

**In your own life, where have you wanted control but realized God may have something significantly better for you if you’d just let go?**

I believe one of the most powerful verses in the Bible comes from Joseph’s story. As God had planned all along, Joseph’s family wound up coming to Egypt, bowing down to Joseph just as he’d seen in his dream, begging for food. After they found out the one they bowed to was Joseph, his brothers realized Joseph had every right to kill them. They panicked and grasped for control of the situation. But Joseph had learned something important about God: He alone is God, and we are not.

*“Joseph spoke up and told them, ‘Don’t be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You planned evil against me; God planned it for good to bring about the present result—the survival of many people. Therefore don’t be afraid. I will take care of you and your children.’ He comforted them and spoke kindly to them.”*

**GENESIS 50:19-21**

Have you experienced God's goodness? If not, maybe God has you exactly where you are, like Zach and Dave, to learn who He is.

**How could God’s plan for your life be better than having your dreams or goals come true?**

# ON YOUR OWN

## DAY 1

### **JONAH'S MISSION: I'M NOT GOD**

Read Jonah 1. Jonah is a little story about a big God. It's one man's journey, but it describes all of our lives. The primary message of this book is that we are not God.

#### **Jonah's Plan** (Jonah 1:1-3)

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The first thing we learn about Jonah is that God had a plan for Jonah's life. God has a plan for all people, including you. He made you, He loves you, and He has a plan for your life. You may be reading this and thinking, "I don't even believe in God," but it doesn't change those facts.

God's plan for Jonah's life involved him going to Nineveh, a city filled with Israel's enemies. Jonah had a plan for his life too—and it didn't involve going to Nineveh. So Jonah ran! We all run from God and say with our choices, "No thanks, my way is better." We resist God's plans for our lives, and even rebel, in countless ways.

When Jonah did his own thing, it didn't work out very well. Look at the passage. How many times do you read the word *down*? That's a tool the writer uses to show us Jonah's trajectory—not up, but down. He was digging a pretty big hole for himself. Notice specifically where he's going. Tarshish isn't just the opposite direction of Nineveh, but on maps available at the time, Tarshish would have been the end of the world. Jonah was trying to get as far away from God as possible. But it's impossible to get away from God. As Jonah would find out—God is everywhere! However, in trying, Jonah got himself into a sticky (literally) situation.

**Could our way ever be better than God's way? Explain.**

## God's Plan (Jonah 1:4-17)

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Not all detours are disasters. Learning that we are not God is not always a fun process, but the detours are all designed to point us away from our controlling hands to God's gracious hands. And the detours we experience along the way help us to give up control and trust in God.

**What has God called you to do? Did you obey? What happened?**

Jonah ran away from God's plan and right into some serious detours.

First, God sent a storm. This wasn't just a little rain—it was a raging storm, strong enough to terrify experienced sailors. Then God used the casting of lots to identify Jonah as the guilty party. Jonah might have assumed this was all just a coincidence, but God cleared that up quickly. Since the storm and the casting lots didn't get his attention, God sent a big fish that literally swallowed Jonah alive.

Even though being thrown over the side of a ship in the midst of a crazy storm and being swallowed by a massive fish sound like the worst things imaginable, these detours Jonah experienced weren't disasters at all—they were acts of God's grace. God was helping Jonah understand who is God and who is not. God has a plan for your life. It's bigger, better, and brighter than anything you could ever imagine. Despite the storms you might be experiencing today, despite the detours you've experienced, God is not finished with you. He's teaching you that you aren't God. Are you listening?

**Did you know that God has a plan for your life? What do you think that plan is? How will you respond if you find out it's something else?**



## DAY 2

### **JONAH'S MESSAGE: GOD IS GOD**

Read Jonah 2. Have you ever been stuck? Stuck in traffic, stuck in a conversation you can't get out of, or maybe stuck in the longest line imaginable? We all get stuck, like when strong winds blew through an amusement park in China and shut down power to one of the park's coasters. This wouldn't have been so bad, except the sixteen thrill-seekers were stuck in the middle of the ride, and left hanging upside-down for half an hour until park workers could get them down.<sup>1</sup> Being stuck stinks.

#### **Stuck (Jonah 2:1)**

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Jonah was stuck and it stunk—it literally smelled like fish guts. Three days he sat in the belly of this fish, wallowing in his misery. After all, what else is there to do while stuck inside a fish? A better idea is to pray, and Jonah finally figured that out. Chapter 2 in the Book of Jonah records his prayer. He cried out to God from the lowest possible point. And in that moment, one thing became very clear. Jonah finally acknowledged that God is God.

#### **When have you been at a low point and cried out to God? What happened?**

Keep in mind what was happening: Jonah had been tossed by the waves, swallowed by a fish, and buried deep in the sea. At that moment, he knew clearly that things were completely out of his control. But Jonah called out to God.

When do you pray the most? If you are like most people, it's when you feel desperate. You likely pray the most when you realize you cannot control something. We need to remember that in our lives and in our pain, just like in Jonah's situation, God is always there. Even though Jonah tried to run away, God was always with him, and Jonah came to understand his own weakness and God's strength.

#### **Delivered (Jonah 2:2-10)**

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Jonah said he called (2:2), he cried (2:2), he looked up (2:4), and he remembered (2:7). Since God is God—as He makes very clear—then our calling, crying out, looking up, and remembering Him is not just about our inability, but it's all about His ability. When we hurt, it's often in that moment of pain and questioning that we realize He is God, and He

is in control. God did what only He could do for Jonah—He rescued Jonah out of the fish and placed him on dry land and gave Jonah a second chance.

**What do you think it felt like to be stuck inside of the fish for three days?**

God brought Jonah to this place of need to reveal very clearly that He was in control and still had a plan for Jonah's life. This plan involved Jonah's realizing that God alone is God. He alone is in control. Jonah prayed, and he wrote down his prayer for us to read. Jonah's message to everyone throughout history is that we have a great God who is sovereign over our lives.

**When things go wrong in your life, what do you do? Who do you reach out to? After reading this, what do you think you should do differently next time you're stuck?**

**How powerful is prayer? What do you pray for regularly? Why do you think prayer is so important?**

## DAY 3

### **JONAH'S MIRACLE: GOD IS GOOD**

Read Jonah 3 and 4. *Who is God?* Have you ever stepped back to consider that question? If a friend asked you today, "I heard you believe in God, who is He?" how would you respond? Creator, sovereign Lord, heavenly Father, holy—maybe one of the best ways to describe God is—He is good. The psalmist said it this way, "Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good; His faithful love endures forever" (Ps 107:1). If we learn anything from Jonah, it's that God is good.

### **God Is Good to His Enemies (Jonah 3)**

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The whole reason Jonah was sent to Nineveh was to proclaim to people who were far from God: "There's hope!" They weren't only far from God in terms of distance (from Israel and the temple), but they were also far from God spiritually. They were His

enemies. They had their own gods, they regularly and brutally attacked Israel, and they lived a lifestyle characterized by terrible sin.

The Bible actually says that *all* sinners are God's enemies. In Romans 5:10, Paul said, "For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, then how much more, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life." The people of Nineveh, as big and bad and proud as they were, were very much like we are today. Apart from God's intervening, we have no hope. Yet, because God is good, He does good things, such as sending a messenger to His enemies. God sent His only Son to die for His enemies—sinners—you and me.

**Describe the feelings that come to mind when you think about being God's enemy.**

We need to remember that God is not taking care of His friends in high places. Rather, He is loving, serving, and giving to those who have rebelled against Him as His enemies. This seems unthinkable! Yet, God does it because He is good.

## **God Is Good to His Children (Jonah 4)**

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God not only loves and reaches out to His enemies, but He also is good to His children. Everyone in Nineveh believed God and they were spared from destruction. They threw a huge party celebrating the mercy and goodness of God—and Jonah hated it! In many ways, Jonah had every right to feel this way. The Assyrians were evil and had killed many of Jonah's (and God's!) own people. Nonetheless, God has chosen to show mercy, and He patiently worked with Jonah through his struggles.

"We need to remember that God is not taking care of His friends in high places. Rather, He is loving, serving, and giving to those who have rebelled against Him as His enemies."

**When have you been upset because God showed mercy to someone you believed undeserving?**

The last chapter of Jonah's book can be seriously confusing, but don't miss the fact that God continued to be good to Jonah. In many ways, He showed Jonah not just how He cared for Nineveh, but also how He had been good to Jonah every step of the way, caring for him like a son. Despite Jonah's pain, God had a purpose to reveal Himself more clearly and to make Jonah more like Him.

Despite what you feel, do you know that God is good? It may take some work, but look back on your life and I'm sure you will see His kind hands shaping your life. Maybe the place you are at today, like Jonah on the hill, is designed to teach you who God is. God is good and we are called to look back and remember His goodness and to look forward, expecting to "taste and see that the LORD is good" (Ps. 34:8).

**How have you seen God work powerfully in the life of a friend or family member? In your own life?**

**If God could change the whole city of Nineveh just through Jonah's few words, what could God do through your life? Why do we sometimes assume God doesn't want to use us to do important things?**

Have you ever asked God to use you? Have you ever prayed a big dream that only God could do through you? Take a few minutes and ask God what He could do through your life that only He could do if you were willing to obey Him no matter the risk. Write it down. Pray over it and ask God to give you confirmation and encouragement to follow Him, even if it takes you into the belly of a big fish!