



Week One: Running

OPENING PRAYER:

Dear God, give us the courage to run to you and what you have called us to do. In the name of Jesus Christ,
Amen.

ENCOUNTERING GOD:

Share where you have seen God at work in your life this week.
Share one good thing that you have done for someone else.
Ask yourself silently, "Did I do any harm this week?"

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WEEKLY SCRIPTURE READING:

Jonah 1:1-3 (CEB)

“The LORD’s word came to Jonah, Amittai’s son: ‘Get up and go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it, for their evil has come to my attention.’ So Jonah got up — to flee to Tarshish from the LORD! He went down to Joppa and found a ship headed for Tarshish. He paid the fare and went aboard to go with them to Tarshish, away from the LORD.”

REFLECTION:

For a short period of time, I ran from my calling to preach the Gospel and serve in pastoral ministry. I ran for about three years. I wasted time and energy pursuing my own desires and plans. I even tried to work out a compromise with God; I told God that I would enjoy my 20s and 30s and later pursue pastoral ministry. Well, I learned that you cannot negotiate with God. You either accept God’s purpose and calling on your life or you reject it. I grew exhausted in my attempt to do the impossible, outrun God. So, I started the process for pastoral ministry when I was 23 years old.

The ability to run is a gift given to us by God that helps us escape danger, improve health through cardiovascular exercise, and move quickly from one place to another to accomplish an urgent task or mission. Slaves run from captivity, but they run to freedom. Offensive football players run from defenders, but they run to the endzone. People run from natural disasters, war zones, fires, and abusive relationships but they run to safety. As you read this, I ask you, is there something in your life that you are running from? Secondly, what are you running to?

In our text today, Jonah is commissioned by God get up and preach against Nineveh, a large and powerful city that was filled with

WC ENCOUNTER GROUPS CURRICULUM

JONAH

WEEK ONE

wickedness. Some scholars choose to use the word “to” rather than “against” Nineveh. Jonah gets up, but he does not go to Nineveh. Instead, he runs from God and the calling that God had placed on this life. In fact, he runs to the seaport city of Joppa, pays the fare to travel in the opposite direction to Tarshish (four times the distance to Nineveh). He spent two precious resources, time and money, in a futile attempt to run away from the Lord and the Lord’s mission. This attempt was futile. Because one of God’s attributes is omnipresence, meaning there is no place that God is not present or that God’s grace cannot reach, God was present in Tarshish, too. However, the mission field was Nineveh.

Nineveh is the place where God wanted the prophet Jonah to preach so that the people would be made aware of their evil ways and understand the consequences. The personal salvation of individuals was not the goal of the mission trip; the goal was corporate salvation of a city. It is possible to be a “great city” and be an “an evil city” - these two things are not mutually exclusive. The city was great due to its size and strong economy.

A common theme in the Old Testament is that the king and the king’s advisors point to prosperity as a sign of the people’s proximity to God. The logic follows that if you do good, then you get good, so it’s all good. Then God sends a prophet who speaks out against the sinful behavior of the people. The sinful behavior is often inclusive of the worship of idol gods, mistreatment of the poor, and the lack of hospitality to strangers in their lands. Primarily, these prophets are met with resistance. Sometimes, their presence may lead to imprisonment and other forms of persecution. Can you imagine being the most hated man or woman in a city? Therefore, is understandable why Jonah chose to run. When God calls us to do something that we find completely terrifying, it is an opportunity to grow in our faith. Instead of running from God and the mission field, we need to trust that God has gone before us and has sent others to prepare the way. We need to get up and run to where God has commanded us to go. There, we will find new life, not death.

GROUP REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

Encounter the Head:

What is omnipresence?

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What was the most impactful thing that you learned from the scripture, sermon, podcast or discussion guide?

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Why is it so hard to choose faithfulness over comfort and security?

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Encounter the Heart:

What is your Nineveh? Share what you are running from. What are you running to?

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How/when are we prone to “flee from the presence of the Lord”?

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GROUP REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

Share a time when you may have run away from a responsibility, your calling, a place, or a person. What did you learn about yourself? Other people? God?

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Encounter the Hands:

Write down the names of people who are interested in serving at the Encounter Group Kick-off. We need registration table volunteers, hosts and runners. Email those names to rsmith@whiteschapelumc.com.

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PRAISE AND PRAYER REQUESTS

Encounter The Hands:

Please go around the group and have each person share a praise for this week and a prayer request/

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CLOSING PRAYER

Have a volunteer lead closing prayer: asking for prayer concerns and lifting up the needs of the group.

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DAILY REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

We encourage everyone to do a daily reflection. This can be done alone, as a couple, or with your family. This spiritual practice will help answer the questions you have and it will improve your ability to see where God is at work in your life, and in the lives of those around you. Please answer the following questions during your personal devotional time at the end of the day.

Where have you seen God today? For the children, we say, “what made you happy today?”

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What broke your heart or made you sad today?

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What good thing did you do for someone else today?

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What are you thankful for today?

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