



Week Four: Reversal

OPENING PRAYER:

Dear Gracious and Merciful God, we adore you. We give thanks for all the blessings that you have bestowed upon us. Help us grow in grace, moving forward in our faith. Open our hearts to share freely with each other and with you. In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen!

ENCOUNTERING GOD:

**Where have you seen God at work in your life this week?
What good have you done for others this week?**

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WEEKLY SCRIPTURE READING:

Jonah 4:1-5

“But this was very displeasing to Jonah, and he became angry. He prayed to the Lord and said, ‘O Lord! Is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? That is why I fled to Tarshish at the beginning; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing. And now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.’ And the Lord said, ‘Is it right for you to be angry?’ Then Jonah went out of the city and sat down east of the city, and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, waiting to see what would become of the city.”

REFLECTION:

Jonah obediently but begrudgingly preached to the Ninevites. The Ninevites turned from their evil ways, turned to God, and revival broke out among the people. The Ninevites responded positively to his message instead of killing him, running him out of town, or sending him to prison, which was the plight of some prophets.

Jonah’s response: his nostrils burned with anger. Jonah had hoped for Nineveh’s destruction, but God gave them restoration.

The proper response was celebration, but Jonah could not get beyond his personal distrust and dislike of the Ninevites. Jonah was focused on who the Ninevites used to be rather than who they could become. The Ninevites became a people transformed by God’s grace. Pastor Todd said, “Jonah ends in the same spot where he began: after preaching (and personally experiencing) the divine grace of God, he holds onto his hold grudges, his compunction to see others (enemies) as unworthy of God’s message, redemption, and love.” Jonah does not move forward in Christian love; Jonah goes in reverse. Traditionally, we have called this backsliding. Backsliding occurs when a believer decides to return to pre-conversion pattern of sin, choosing their own way over the way that leads to eternal life.

WC ENCOUNTER GROUPS CURRICULUM

JONAH

WEEK FOUR

Is it right to be angry when God blesses our enemies? Anger is a healthy thing when it motivates us to right a wrong in a way that reflects the light and love of Jesus Christ. Anger is unhealthy when we seek the destruction of others and/or ourselves. Unhealthy anger causes us to regress and reverse.

I was recently talking to a pastor friend of mine, Jon Farrar, and he said, "It is understandable to be angry when God blesses your enemies, but you miss out on the blessings of God in the process." Jonah missed out on the joy that comes from helping bring people into a right relationship with God. Secondly, Jonah missed an opportunity to be in a right relationship with the people of Nineveh. Lastly, he missed the opportunity to move forward, to be set free of the grudges that lived in his heart. Moving forward is called sanctification. Sanctification is a process of being cleaned up and continuing to grow up, looking more like Jesus every day. The goal of Christianity is to live like and to love like Jesus. Reaching this goal is not impossible. God's grace enables and empowers us to live and love like Jesus Christ.

GROUP REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

Encounter the Head:

What is backsliding?

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What is sanctification?

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How do we see God (God-images) and how does that affect the way we expect God to act?

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Encounter the Heart:

Is it okay to be angry at God? Why or why not?

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Has your anger cost you anything? Professionally? Relationally? Spiritually?

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GROUP REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

What are some spiritual practices that can help us move forward in our growth and development?

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Encounter the Hands:

Share your prayer concerns and celebrations.

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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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