

## Small Groups Study Guide

Luke 15:11-24

Sunday July 30, 2023

1. Short opening prayer (one person or popcorn style prayer)
2. Group sharing time (time for everyone to talk about what is going on and how they are)
3. Go over the sermon:
  - a. Before you begin, if you had to describe God as a person how would you describe God? It can be a generic description or someone you know. Take turns and describe.
  - b. If you have heard it, how would you put the sermon in your own words.
  - c. Pastor Matt's summary: God's grace, love, mercy ... whatever you want to call it ... is so much bigger than you could ever imagine. God loves you, me, and everyone else more than we can ever quantify or dream of. We see the truth of that in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.
  - d. Scripture from Jonah shows a prophet who did not appreciate the incredible, unimaginable grace of God. Jonah didn't think God could possibly love, forgive, or work through people we were their enemies and weren't Jewish. God showed Jonah quite the opposite.

Jonah 1:1-2 (NIV)

1 The word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amittai: 2 "Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me."

- Jonah was a Galilean prophet during the reign of King Jeroboam 2 (786-746 BC) ... the Assyrians enslaved and dispersed the Israelites after that in 722 BC.
- God actually cared about God's relationship with these non-Jewish enemies of the Israelites.

*\* Jonah's preaching, the Ninevites' repentance, and Yahweh's compassion comprise the primary action of chapter 3.*

*\* We skipped over the story of Jonah running from going to Nineveh. Just remember he refused to go, jumped on a ship for Tarshish but was eventually thrown overboard and swallowed by a huge fish (NOT A WHALE AS WE SO OFTEN SAY). After praying, Jonah was puked up and saved. Next ...*

- Jonah 3:1-10 (NIV)

Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time: 2 "Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you."

- o Nineveh was the capital of the Assyrian empire ... near what is today Mosul in Northern Iraq. The Assyrians were the people that ruled over the Israelites ... explains why the prophet Jonah probably wanted to go anywhere but Nineveh, its capital.

3 Jonah obeyed the word of the Lord and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very large city; it took three days to go through it.

- o Nineveh was the largest city in the Assyrian empire and the largest city in the world for decades. No wonder Jonah wandered through it for so long.

- Most likely I would not have literally taken three days ... the city wasn't that big. It would have just taken three days to go through it and proclaim his message.

4 Jonah began by going a day's journey into the city, proclaiming, "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown."

- Hebrew language is tricky. They originally didn't write out any vowels. So, there is uncertainty here. Jonah's prophecy to Nineveh is succinctly delivered in eight words (only five in Hebrew!): "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned [hapak]" (Jonah 3:4b). Jonah preaches an amazing message. The Hebrew root hapak can mean "turn over," that is, "destroy" (as with Sodom in Gen. 19), or "turn around," meaning "bring to repentance." After 40 days the future for Nineveh can be destruction or new life.

5 The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.

- God sends Jonah to Nineveh in hope that the Ninevites will be "overturned" through their repentance. Jonah faithfully proclaims this two-edged message but hopes (as we see in ch. 4) that "overturned" means the annihilation of the Ninevites. God wants to save the Ninevites ... Jonah wants to destroy them.

6 When Jonah's warning reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust.

- These are the traditional signs of repentance in the Old Testament.
- More interesting things happen in the background of this Hebrew scripture. A small chiasmic structure is commonly observed in his rising-sitting, unclothed-clothed actions.

- A He rose from his throne
- B took off his royal robes
- B' covered himself with sackcloth
- A' sat down in the dust

The king responds very differently than Jonah when he hears the word of Yahweh. Both believe the word of Yahweh (and "rose"), but Jonah "ran away" (1:3) while the king "rose from his throne," the first of his self-humbling actions. The king humbled himself when he "took off his royal robes," while Jonah was "swept over" by the waves. The same Hebrew verb describes both actions ('abar).

7 This is the proclamation he issued in Nineveh:

"By the decree of the king and his nobles:

Do not let people or animals, herds or flocks, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. 8 But let people and animals be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. 9 Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish."

10 When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.

- My commentary about this chapter said something worth noting:  
“This chapter provides a convincing demonstration of God’s argument with Jonah concerning what ought to be done with violent enemies: They should have an opportunity to hear from Yahweh, turn from their violent ways, and be forgiven.”

e. What happens next? Take a look forward in the book of Jonah.

- i. How did Jonah feel about the Ninevites repenting and being forgiven?  
Jonah 4:2 Jonah angrily says, “I knew you were sheer grace and mercy, not easily angered, rich in love, and ready at the drop of a hat to turn your plans of punishment into a program of forgiveness!”
- ii. What does the tree that grows in Jonah 4:5-11 have to do with this story?
  - Shows that God gets to choose whom to show mercy to ... not us.

f. Thoughts and questions:

- i. The whole book and story of Jonah reminds me that God’s grace is so much larger than we could ever imagine. We can’t even imagine how much God loves us, forgives us, etc. Most likely no one dreamt that God would love or forgive the Ninevites but there it was.
- ii. I think we often limit the vastness of God’s mercy and love. Can you think of a time that you perhaps sold short how much God loved someone else (especially an enemy or someone who just had failed at life so many times)?
- iii. When was the last time that you needed the deep, deep love of God in your life?
- iv. We’ll all acknowledge that it is probably impossible, but this is a good exercise. Describe to the group what God’s love/mercy is like and how big it is.
- v. If God’s love/mercy is so big and expansive then what does that mean to you? Does it change how you approach life, others, yourself, etc.
- vi. If there is time, go over this.

JB Phillips wrote a book called *Your God Is Too Small*. It shows us just how big God’s love/mercy is by showing us the many mistaken views that we end up with about God:

- Resident policeman
- Earthly parent
- Grand Old Man
- Meek and Mild One (no crazy or wild behavior)
- The Perfect One
- The Heavenly Bosom (always comforting us)
- God-In-A-Box (Think God is predictable and acts by set of rules)
- Managing Director (God is controlling the details)
- Second-Hand Knowledge (what we know about is often not from direct experience)
- Perennial Grievance (disappointed with God)
- Pale Galilean (fail to see how amazing and beautiful God is)
- Projected Image (we are seeing a God that we have created because it serves us best)
- God in a Hurry (miss that God isn’t in a hurry)

- God for the Elite (see God as the God of those who are better off)
  - God Without Personality  
See more at <https://allacin.blogspot.com/2014/07/illustrated-summary-of-your-god-is-too.html>
  - Which one most describes your view of God?
- g. This week I want you to find a new visualization for what God's love and mercy look like and focus on that every day in your prayer or another time. For example: I always visualize God as the father of the prodigal/lost son who returns home ... showering him with nothing but love. Find your image.