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*Hey leaders! We are in week 1 of our series, “**Man Overboard**”! In the book of Jonah, God is a missionary God who shows compassion on His enemies in Ninevah. God is also a missionary God to His own prophet, and He pursues the repentance of a whole city with the same passion as the one person who runs into the belly of the fish. We all run from God, and we all must turn back to Him in repentance.*

NEED A RESOURCE, HAVE A QUESTION, OR WANT TO HAVE A CONVERSATION?
Let us know how we can help! Contact your groups director or discipleship@rockbridge.cc

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“Jonah concluded that, because he could not see any good reasons for God’s command, there couldn’t be any.”

[Tim Keller, “Prodigal Prophet”]

LEADER RESOURCES || Leader Note *We do our best to equip, empower, and encourage you to shepherd your group well. Access a resource by clicking on the underlined title and share them with your group!*

- **Passage Summary**
 - The opening scene of Jonah has disobedience, absurdity, and theology. It highlights the mercy of God and the folly of disobeying. God’s mercy and gracious, sovereign purposes are always a step ahead of Jonah’s rebellion. God is after Jonah in a way that is loving, gracious, and transforming—the same way He is after Ninevah.
- **Book of Jonah Summary**
 - Bible Project summary of the book of Jonah. This would be a good resource to share before your group meets.
- **Book of Jonah Read Aloud**
 - Here, you can listen to the book of Jonah.

ENGAGE & CONNECT || Leader Note *The goal for the icebreaker is to prepare your group for the conversation ahead by connecting with one another’s hearts and building joy together.*

If you could have a big fish express cough you up on any shore, where would you like to go?

BEGIN WITH PRAYER || Leader Note *Begin your time together thanking God for his presence and praying His word back to Him. Ask a few people to pray, taking a posture of humility and dependence!*

Lord, help us see ourselves in the story of Jonah—I pray that any part of us that is in hiding would be revealed so we can come back to the God who pursues us with love and compassion.

“For as Jonah was in the belly of the huge fish three days and three nights, so the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights.”

[Matthew 12:40, CSB]

BIG IDEA || Leader Note *Read this aloud so your group knows the theme of today’s reading and discussion.*

God is a Missionary God—both to His enemies and to His own people who run from His presence.

PASSAGE & DISCUSSION || Leader Note Have people read aloud the passage as instructed. Your role is to FACILITATE, so keep your group moving along, encourage people to share, and look for opportunities to point out the grace and glory of God! Here are two reminders: 1) Every question does not have to be answered ... go where the Spirit leads! 2) Answers do not have to be read aloud ... they're for guidance!

1. In the sermon we heard, *"We all tend to seek a "place" (our Tarshish) where we can nurture pride and exercise control.* Where do you tend to go to escape? What do you run to when you're rebelling?

Have someone read aloud Jonah 1:1-16. Consider having someone else read it aloud again, possibly in a different translation to gain another perspective (i.e. CEB, the Message, Amplified).

2. What was your impression of what Jonah was about before this series started? *Answers might be along the line of "belly of a whale guy" or maybe "book about obeying God or else," but there might have been some good teaching on Jonah in some participants' pasts that they can share here. This question is here to gauge the place between "what we've been taught" and "what we're learning now."*
3. How have you run from God? *This question is for personal confession, but it might be helpful for you to go first and consider ahead of time how you have run from God, whether you have repented yet or not. Confession and repentance aren't just for "those other people" but for us, and we cannot teach it unless we do it.*
4. What problems have you had with God? *One way of hiding or running is simply not wrestling with difficult portions of our relationship with God. This is not a space to try to fix the problems, but to sit with and accept the tension—we're not used to feeling that gap between how we think and how God thinks. We will deal with facing the problems again as part of the actions to take through the week. Some answers may be things like genocide commanded in scripture, the killing of Achan's family along with him, God not being explicit on certain subjects in the Bible, or homosexuality.*
5. Think of the enemy who has done the most harm to you, your family, your culture, or those you love. If God sent you to them with a promise of mercy, would you be tempted to pull a Jonah and refuse to go? *Answers may vary here. There's a lot of opportunity in our minds to pull away from the idea that "we are also Jonah" and judge him for how he acted—but he LOVED Israel, and Ninevah was the capital of Assyria, who were mighty and brutal enemies.*
6. Read Luke 15:11-32. Who is your lost brother (or sister)? Are you angry about what they did? *This could be a coworker, friend, family member, etc. This is a very good place to acknowledge the anger hovering through this story and likely many of us—he is angry about his unmet desires and about his brother's getting "preferential treatment" in a way that is eerily similar to Jonah. Anger can make a brother kill another—like Cain did Abel—or it can make us keep working our field while our brother starves, and we murder by neglect. We have to get to the bottom of it.*
7. How is it that people who were once so close to God, like Jonah who had heard and given God's word to people, can still rebel? *Answers may vary. Our relationship with God is not linear—we can draw close then pull away. We can obey, then rebel, then repent. We cannot rely on our own past faithfulness as some kind of salvation—only the blood of Jesus saves. Judas followed Jesus for years, too. We're to take up our cross daily and follow Jesus—and we're in a Jonah sort of danger on the days when we do not.*
8. Read Mark 4:35-41, then reread Jonah 1:4-6. How are these scriptures mirrors of each other? *There's a sleeping person in the boat. There's a moment of panic and awakening. There's the*

knowledge that God is the one who commands the winds and waves and an acknowledgement that it is Him we fear more than the storm.

9. Have you ever been stuck in someone else's storm when you just happened to be working on the wrong boat? *This is a space to acknowledge that we're not always experiencing trouble because of our own fault—but we can be witnesses to God working in the lives of those around us if we look closely.*
10. Has the Lord "appointed" a great fish of a problem in your life to bring you tough grace? *This could be a past situation or a current one that hasn't resolved yet. Sometimes we're only grateful for a tough grace of God after the fact—during the situation, it looks like terrible trouble.*

STEP OF OBEDIENCE || Leader Note *This is an opportunity for people to put into practice what the Spirit is inviting them to do and live in obedience to God for the sake of love! You can encourage your group to be accountable to one another and use these to follow up with one another throughout the week.*

God is a missionary God **both for His enemies and His children.**

As you consider your next step, reflect on: 1) Who have you been sent to with a message of mercy? 2) What problems you've had with the Lord can you take up again in a bold, hard conversation with Him this week?

Give your group a few moments to reflect on their answers to the questions above. Then have your group answer the question aloud. Feel free to separate into smaller groups of 2 or 3 for this question, so each person has others praying with them for the needs they're taking before the throne. The possible next steps of faith below are not for discussion, but simply a resource for your group members.

Step of Faith Ideas

1. Bring up a scripture that shows an aspect of God you struggle with. You may need to search a bit to find what you're looking for, and that is not just okay—it's often super valuable!
2. Be on a mission of mercy like the God who loves you enough to send big fish to bring you home to His table again. Who do you need to reach out to?

PRAYER FOCUS || Leader Note *Be intentional about saving at least 5 minutes to pray together. Try the prayer activity below or pray for one another's personal requests!*

Mission of Mercy

We worship a God of mercy who sends grace in all shapes and sizes—from big fish to famines to friends—and He loves His enemies and His children enough to do what it takes to reach us.

- Look out for mercy in unusual shapes and sizes this week
- Look out for opportunities to love your enemies and your family
- Look out for God to bring up in you places of anger that need healing. Be ready to ask Him to heal it!
- Close your time by reading this prayer together:
 - *"Merciful Father, full of lovingkindness and grace, You have pursued us with everlasting love. Fill us with Your love, and remove any barrier that might keep us from pouring out that love and getting to watch You transform enemies into Your family. Your kingdom come; Your will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven."*