



Life Group Resource #1

The word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai: “Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me.” But Jonah ran away from the LORD and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the LORD. Jonah 1:1-2

Jonah wasn't a stranger to the word of the Lord. He was a prophet, after all, known to kings like Jeroboam. How odd, then that rather than doing immediately what God told him to do, Jonah ran. Tarshish was, after all, about as far in the opposite direction from Ninevah as one could go.

Most of us know the story: Jonah got into the ship, and a terrible storm came. In order to save the crew, Jonah directed that he be thrown overboard. The moment they tossed him into the ocean, the storm cleared up. A big fish came and swallowed Jonah, and carried him for three days and three nights... and spit him up right onto the seashore. This time, when God told Jonah to go to Ninevah, Jonah didn't look for a ship to Tarshish – he got moving in the right direction!

Lots of lessons have been drawn from this Biblical account: how it is impossible to run away from God, for example, or how important it is to have courage to do what God commands. Jesus even used Jonah's experience to prepare the disciples for His death and resurrection: “For as **Jonah** was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.” (Matthew 12:40). This week, I'd like to draw attention to more two important points in this account.

First, isn't it fascinating that God cared enough for the people of Ninevah to not only send a prophet to warn them of their fate, but to change His plans when the whole city changed their ways! “When the news 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. Then he issued a proclamation in Nineveh: ‘By the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let any man or beast, herd or flock, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish.’ When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened.” What great hope this offers all who come to Christ seeking forgiveness of sins and eternal life!

Second, the city of Ninevah couldn't have turned from their evil ways unless Jonah had gone to them! In fact, Jonah's calling was so important that God wouldn't let him get away from it. Jonah's calling was so important, in fact, that God did something He'd never done before, giving the prophet a ride in the stomach of a fish, just to make sure Jonah did what he was supposed to do.

This month, we've been talking a lot about how important it is to be prepared as a student missionary to your campus this school year. Like Jonah, your calling and your direction is clear: “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.” (Mark 16:15) Begin praying now that, as you continue to prepare, God will help you have the courage you need to share the Good News with your friends and fellow students who need to hear it.



Life Group Resource #2

²Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. ⁴Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. James 1:2-4

One of the most interesting things to come along over the past few years has been the “infomercial.” You know, those thirty-minute programs that come on late-night cable, passionately hawking everything from oddly-shaped exercise machines to miracle kitchen knives. Occasionally, there’s even a brand-new diet pill or drink that guarantees weight loss without actually having to go on a diet or take part in an exercise regimen. Now, I’m a little overweight, and I’d like nothing better than to lose that weight without effort. If I could wake up in the morning with a physique more like Justin Timberlake and less like Chris Farley, I’d be one happy camper.

Let me let you in on a little secret: it isn’t that easy. The fact is that, to get any kind of return, I must invest something. For weight loss to be healthy and long lasting, I’ll need to lay off the junk food and exercise regularly.

This month’s memory verse in your Passport is James 1:4, “Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.” Now, spiritual maturity and completeness is certainly something every Christian would like to have. If I could wake up in the morning able to pray like Paul, prophesy like Daniel, and do neat things with walking-sticks like Moses, I’d be an even happier camper!

But, again, to get any kind of return, I must invest something. “...The testing of your faith,” writes James, “develops perseverance...” and that perseverance is what brings maturity and completeness. In other words, in order to grow, our faith must be exercised.

In the same way that there are a variety of exercises for the body, there are a variety of ways in which our faith is tested. The most obvious test is persecution, where we are laughed at for our faith, or even face physical peril (like Cassie Bernall at Columbine). Other tests may be in how we handle the homeless or other needy people (or anyone who is “different”), or whether or not we take part in gossip. Tests may come in how we handle anger, depression, or temptations like drugs and alcohol or sexual promiscuity, or even in how readily we share our faith with others.

How is your faith being tested this summer? How are you responding to those tests? Take some time now to ask God to help you through those trials, teaching you to respond in ways that develop spiritual maturity and completeness.



Life Group Resource #3

Acts 9:17 Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord – Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here – has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.”

All the Christians feared Saul. To be near him or have him find you meant being jailed, judged, and persecuted. Certainly, Saul had a reputation for being no friend of anyone who attended church! His life’s work had been hunting down Christians, and having them thrown in prison. Yet this was the man that God had called Ananias to talk to. You can understand why he was reluctant to talk to this man. Acts records Ananias’ reaction to being called to carry the message to Saul. Acts 9:13 tells us that “Ananias answered, ‘Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem.’”

Everyone has had thoughts like this when it comes time to share with a non-Christian. We can think of lots of reasons why we shouldn’t talk to them. Sometimes we even treat God like a fellow human being! Look at Ananias’ answer again. God, don’t you know how he has been to other Christians? It is as if Ananias thinks that God doesn’t know what type of person Saul had been. Of course, this is not the end of the story, and God’s response to Ananias serves as a real source of inspiration to all of us.

“Go, For he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel.” (Acts 9:15). Now, we have the benefit of looking back on how this entire story plays out. We know that Saul will become the Apostle Paul. He would become one of the first missionaries, and the person whom God used to write most of the New Testament. He would have a profound impact in the lives of countless people, both during his lifetime and for generations to come. Thus we know that what God said about Saul was true, even before Saul became a Christian.

How can we find encouragement in this story? Well, when God calls you to witness at school or home or in your neighborhood, remember Ananias and Saul. God has plans for the people that you are going to share Christ with. When God lays a person on our hearts, we need to trust that God knows more about what is going on than we do. How did God know about the type of impact that Paul would one day have? Simple — he is God! He is all-powerful and all knowing. He is the one that is calling you to go to these people. It is He who has given you a burden to share His son with them. No one would blame Ananias for being concerned about going to talk to Paul, but God used this situation to remind him — and us — that he is God.

Think for a minute about some people that God is calling you to share your faith with. If God is in this, then he will use these situations to spread the message. Fears are natural, but they shouldn’t keep us from being obedient to God, Who is sending us out in His Name. As you pray about these people and the fears that come with witnessing to them, remember the power of God in this story. Try to recount some of the stories in the Bible about the strength of God. Remember that God used Ananias to reach Paul and then Paul took the message to the Gentiles — that is, **all of us**. God used Ananias to reach **you!**

Chad Sentell



Life Group Resource #4

And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone. 1 Thessalonians 5:14

The runners all took their places on the track and prepared themselves to begin this race. It was no ordinary race – it was The Olympics. But more important than that, it wasn't the ordinary Olympics either, but The Special Olympics. These brave young men and women took their places in the starting blocks. The gun fired, and as the stadium cheered the race began! Suddenly, about halfway through the 50-yard dash, one of the young runners stumbled and fell, face first, onto the track. The other runners continued for a few yards more, and then, as a person, they all stopped running, turned around and went back to their fallen friend. They picked her up, dusted her off, and they finished the race arm in arm.

What a wonderful picture of what God desires of all of us! We all are prone to stumble and fall. The good news is that God has placed people around us to help us up. That's not all, though: God wants us to be the ones to pick others up when they fall!

Is there someone on your campus that needs to be picked up? In I Thessalonians 5:14, Paul writes of three kinds of people that may need picking up: **the idle, or hard-hearted, the weak or faint hearted, and the weak or broken hearted.**

Maybe you know someone like the person described in I Thessalonians 5:14 as idle or **hard hearted**. This person may have once been active in church and in campus ministry, but now they are just sitting idle and not showing any interest at all in moving. Paul tells us not to condemn them or yell at them, and certainly not to ignore them. He uses the word "warn," which has the idea of "encouraging – with an edge." They simply need some firm encouragement, much like a coach might encourage his team just before that last big play that will decide the game.

Maybe you know someone is "timid" or **faint hearted**. They want to be active in serving God but are afraid: "What if I can't do it?" "What if I mess up?" Paul says that these people need an encourager. To encourage means "to come along side and help stand." The timid people just need someone to run arm-in-arm with them and believe in them.

Finally, maybe you know someone who is "weak" or **broken hearted**. They want to be involved, and they aren't timid about it, but they have been hurt and can't seem to get their legs under them. Paul tells us to "help" these people. They need more than just coaching and encouraging, they need someone to carry them until they can carry themselves. In much the same way that the good Samaritan carried the one who was unable to carry himself, we need to drop whatever we are doing to help those that need that little extra effort from us.

As we begin a new year, I challenge you to not leave anyone behind. If someone has fallen, let's remember that they are important to God and to His kingdom. Let's not be too busy to go back and get them. Remember that it's not about getting across the finish line first – it's about getting across the finish line together.