God's Grace in the Belly of Darkness

Week 5 | Jonah 1:17–2:10 | God's Pursuing Grace

LEADER PREPARATION

*This week's discussion invites honesty and vulnerability. The central question—**What is your "belly of darkness" experience?**—may touch on painful circumstances, sin, or seasons of feeling stuck.*

***Leaders, model vulnerability first.** Consider sharing an appropriate example from your own life. Create space for others to share without pressure. Our goal is not simply to recount hardship, but to recognize how God's grace meets and transforms us there… and how that becomes part of our story to share with others.*

OPENING | Where Do You Feel Stuck?

Jonah finds himself in the belly of a fish—rescued from drowning, yet still trapped, helpless, and uncertain of what comes next.

DISCUSS

- What is a "belly of darkness" experience for you—either in this season or from your past? Where have you felt stuck, overwhelmed, or unable to find your way forward?
- Looking back—or even in the middle of it now—how has that experience revealed your need for God?

1. GOD'S GRACE MEETS US IN THE DEPTHS

Jonah 1:17–2:2, 5–6

Throughout Jonah's story, we see a repeated descent:
↓ 1:3 — Down to Joppa
↓ 1:3 — Down into the ship
↓ 1:5 — Down into the inner ship
↓ 1:15 — Down into the sea
↓ 2:6 — Down to the pit

Jonah reaches a place where he cannot save himself. Yet it is precisely there that God's grace meets him. Sometimes it is only when we reach the end of ourselves that we recognize how desperately we need God. There is no depth beyond the reach of his grace.

DISCUSS

- Why do we often need to come to the end of ourselves before recognizing our dependence on God? Where have you experienced this?
- Jonah's descent came through his own rebellion, yet God pursued him even there. How does knowing God's grace reaches deeper than our failures or circumstances change how we approach him?

2. GOD'S GRACE COMFORTS AND ASSURES US

Jonah 2:1–8

READ JONAH 2:1–8

From the depths, Jonah calls out to God—and God hears him. He doesn't need to fix himself first. Instead, he acknowledges his sin and remembers the Lord's steadfast love (*hesed*)—his faithful covenant love that does not depend on our performance.

DISCUSS

- When you're struggling, are you more inclined to call out to God, withdraw in shame, or try to fix things yourself? Why?
- What is the difference between confessing our sin and explaining or justifying it? How does God's steadfast love give us freedom to honestly acknowledge our failures?

LOOKING TO JESUS | The True and Greater Jonah

- *Jonah descended because of his disobedience; Jesus willingly descended to rescue the disobedient.*
- *Jonah deserved judgment for his sin; Jesus bore judgment for sinners.*
- *Jonah was brought up from the depths by God's intervention; Jesus rose victorious over sin and death.*
- *God appointed a fish to preserve Jonah's life; God gave his Son to death and raised him to secure eternal life for us.*

Our assurance rests not in what we have done, but in what Christ has accomplished.

3. GOD'S GRACE TRANSFORMS US FOR OBEDIENCE AND MISSION
Jonah 2:9–10

READ JONAH 2:9–10
Jonah's experience of grace produces thanksgiving and renewed commitment: "Salvation belongs to the Lord!" Grace doesn't simply rescue us from difficulty; it reorients our lives toward grateful obedience. And God rescues Jonah not merely for his comfort, but to send him back into the world with his message.

DISCUSS

- How has experiencing God's grace shaped your gratitude, desires, or obedience? Where might God be calling you to respond differently today?
- How might your experience of God's grace become part of the story you share with others? Who might need to hear how God has met you in your weakness or struggle?

CLOSING | Remembering and Responding to Grace
Approximately 5–10 minutes

REFLECT: Where do I need to stop trying to rescue myself and instead rest in the steadfast love of God?

PRAY TOGETHER
Pray for those experiencing their own "belly of darkness." Ask God to comfort them, assure them of his love through Christ, and transform their lives through his grace. Pray that our stories of God's faithfulness would become opportunities to share his goodness with others.