



June 27-July 4, 2021

Discussion Questions

Discussion questions for week 1: The Story of Jonah

Before discussing these questions, read the story of [Jonah](#) in the Bible. It's divided into 4 short chapters and is easily read through in one sitting. Even if you are very familiar with this book, try to read it as a story—feel its intrigue, wit, plot twists, and challenges.

1. What insights did you gain from the message this past Sunday? What was most helpful for you? What did you find uncomfortable?
2. The speaker on Sunday suggested that many stories in the Bible are best interpreted "literarily" rather than "literally" because stories, whether based on fact or fiction, can convey deep truth that a recounting of the facts alone could never do. How do you feel about this "literary" approach? What are some of the downfalls of a literal approach to the Bible? What are some of the dangers of a non-literal approach?
3. In this story overall, how do you relate to Jonah? Where do you feel empathetic? Where do you feel critical of him?
4. In chapter 1, how are the sailors portrayed? How does their character evolve in just a few verses? How does this compare to Jonah? What do you think is the author's purpose in this part of the narrative?
5. In chapter 2, the speaker on Sunday suggested the poetic lament is almost recited sarcastically and in criticism of Jonah's hypocrisy. Do you agree? When Jonah blames God in verses 3-4, do you feel this is justified? Reflect for a moment on your own life. Are there any areas of your life where you might be twisting your interpretation of your own narrative to make yourself a victim rather than an empowered agent? How might God be speaking to you through this example of Jonah?
6. In chapter 3, the Ninevites own their wrongdoing and repent. Take a moment of quiet self-reflection. Don't judge yourself, but in an atmosphere of honesty consider how you have contributed to injustice. How have you been complicit and/or silent in systems of injustice? Where have you personally treated or judged people unjustly? What does repentance look like for you in these situations? What do you need to do?
7. In chapter 4 we see Jonah's true colors. He is angry because he feels wrongdoers who see the wrong of their ways and want to change should still get their comeuppance, whereas God is merciful and forgives. Take a moment to honestly reflect on ways in which are you judgmental of others. What might a more merciful approach look like for you?

Practice for the week—The Examen

This week take some time each evening (or as many as you can manage) to reflect back on your day. Home in on situations when you were judgmental or critical of others. Reflect for a moment on how a more merciful approach might have affected your attitude or actions. Remember that a merciful approach does not validate wrongdoing; you are not turning a blind eye to unjust or harmful actions. You are simply bringing mercy to the situation rather than judgment. After your reflection, invite God to empower you to bring mercy into such instances tomorrow, and then be more conscious that day of similar situations.

Discussion questions for week 2: The Parable of the Sower

Before discussing these questions read the parable of the sower in Matthew 13:1-23

1. What insights did you gain from the message this past Sunday? What was most helpful for you? What did you find uncomfortable?
2. Look again at Matthew 13: 10-17 in which Jesus quotes the great Hebrew prophet Isaiah (13-14). How do you feel about what Jesus is saying? Does it seem fair? In what way is Jesus inviting us? In what way is Jesus challenging us?
3. Read vs. 4 & 19.
 - How do you relate to the hard soil of the paths? What are some hardened areas in your own heart?
 - Reflect on how life during the pandemic may have caused you to develop some unhealthy habits. What do you need to do about this?
 - Reflect on how life during the pandemic may have positively disrupted unhelpful patterns of behavior in your life. How could you build on this?
4. Read vs. 5-6 & 20-21. The speaker on Sunday suggested the issue here seems to be impatience and disappointment
 - Where have your expectations about outcomes been disappointed? How has this impacted your heart?
 - Reflect honestly on ways in which bitterness towards God, others, or even yourself has taken root in your life. How could you let go of this?
 - Where have you given up but need to persevere?
5. Read vs. 7 & 22.
 - How has the pandemic affected you financially? Are you more, or less comfortable materially? How has this impacted you spiritually?
 - How have your values and priorities changed over the past year or so? What anxieties and concerns do you need to let go of?
6. The speaker on Sunday suggested that the author of Matthew has already previously alluded to what the nature of the "good soil" is in vs. 8 & 23. For each of the following reflect on how you could nurture more of this quality in your own life:
 - Repentance (read Matthew 4:17)
 - Ownership (read Matthew 9:10-13)
 - Humility (read Matthew 5:3-5)
 - Non-judgment (read Matthew 7:1-2)
 - Fruit bearing (read Matthew 7: 15-20)

Practice for the week – Fruitfulness

This week set aside some time to reflect on fruitfulness in your own life. Write down a list and then celebrate and give thanks. Remain in a positive spirit of thankfulness and then consider areas of your life in which you wish to be more fruitful. Reflect on what adjustments need to be made in the “soil” of your heart. Invite God into this space and surrender to whatever action you sense God inviting you to take.