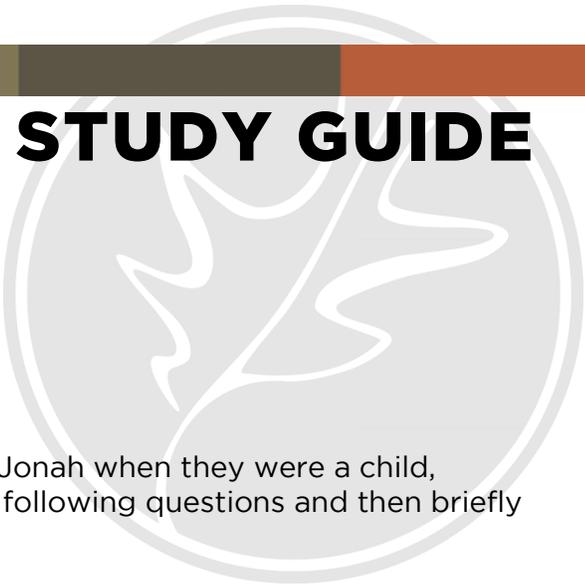


STUDY GUIDE



WEEK 1: 10.08.2017

“RUN”

[set up]

Take a quick poll of your group: Who heard the story of Jonah when they were a child, whether from a church or from pop culture? Answer the following questions and then briefly share them with your LifeGroup.

What encourages you most in the story of Jonah?

What is hardest for you to believe?

Who is the main character in Jonah?

What is the moral of this story?

Why do you think God gave us this account?

Jonah is a unique book of the Bible. It is considered part of the “Minor Prophets” of the Old Testament, it is (presumably) told by Jonah himself, includes one of the most remarkable miracles in the Old Testament, and prophesies about Jesus being in a tomb for three days. As we study the book of Jonah, we find out that this book is not really about Jonah and everything that happened to Jonah. Rather, the book is about the LORD and his compassion for even the worst of sinners. God’s character and His relentless love for the lost is on display in the midst of Jonah’s rebellion.

[digging deeper]

Read Jonah 1:1-3. The Word of the Lord came to Jonah and told him to “arise” and go to Nineveh. Jonah “rose” but did the opposite of God’s command by going the complete opposite direction to Tarshish. Why did Jonah disobey God?

Verse 1 says that Jonah ran from God, he tried to flee from “the presence of the LORD.” The great irony is that one can never flee from the presence of the Lord. Think of your life. Has there been a time where you tried to run from the presence of God. Did you succeed? (briefly share in your LG)

Read Psalm 139:1-12. How do we flee from God’s presence? What patterns, practices, or mindsets do we use to flee from the Lord?

How do we run from God or His God's plan for our lives?

On a large Post-it note, write this question: "How do we (as individuals and as a church community) run from God's mission to reach the lost?" Now brainstorm all that comes to your mind. Walk through each of those response and offer a counter-tactic to those ways we run.

In the eyes of the Israelites, the Ninevites were "those" bad, wicked and horrible people. This fueled Jonah's resistance to God's plan for Nineveh. For you, who are "those" people? What people do you see as bad, wicked or hard to love? How does God challenge us to change the way we view other people in Colossians 1:21-22?

Verse 1 says "the word of the LORD" came to Jonah. Read Genesis 1:1-5 and John 1:1-5. What about "the word of the LORD" was concealed in the Old Testament is now revealed in the New Testament? (Hint - Who is the Word of the Lord?)

What was the mission of "The Word?" in His own words seen in Luke 19:10?

If you are a follower of Jesus, then the Word of God has come to you and It is now your mission to live out God's mission. Congratulations, you are a Jonah! The question is whether you will run to or away from your mission. Welcome also to "Unleash", CVC's initiative to more greatly share the news of New Life in Christ by increasing our reach to our neighbors, the nations, and the next generation.

As we "unleash" our resources for greater impact in Northeast Ohio and beyond, It will require us to step up and take risks at greater levels. Riskier prayers. Riskier conversations. Riskier relationships. Riskier giving. Of those areas, sometimes the area people are most touchy about is giving. How is being a generous investor in God's Work part of obeying God's call to reach the lost? What are common barriers that keep Christians from being more generous investors in God's work? How can we (A) individually, (B) as a LifeGroup and, (C) as a church community increase our obedience and participation in this area (share a few ideas for each of those three categories)?

[living it out]

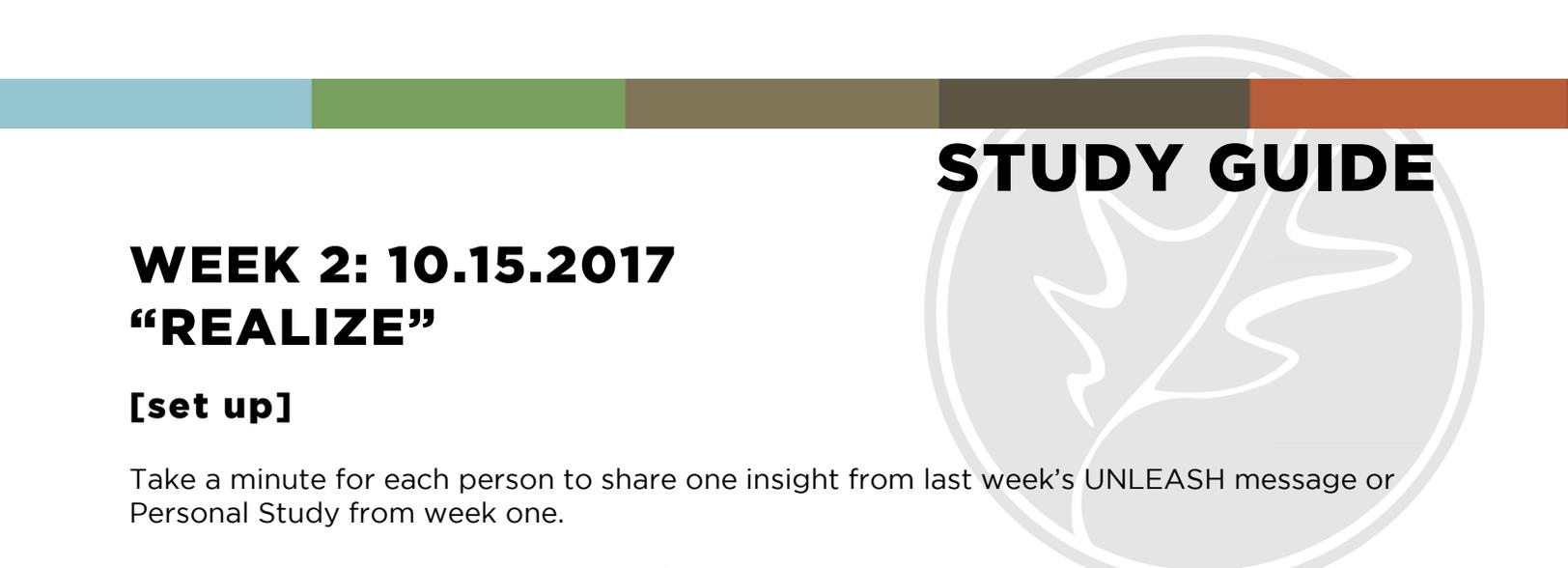
As you reflect on this study time, is there something in your life that God is confronting? Is there an area you are running from Him? Where is God wanting you to make a "course correction", especially in the area of praying, sharing the Gospel, building relationships with "other" not like you and giving?

Write your answer here: _____

How can this Group help you in your course correction?

We at CVC have a great desire to see the Nations reached with the Gospel. Indonesia is a nation with THE largest Muslim population in the world. In Indonesia, "Pearl Island" alone has 3 million people, most of them have even heard of Jesus. Spend some time in prayer over our "Nations" target of Pearl Island. Pray for our missionaries T&K, for the few believers on the island to grow into a church planting movement on the island, for the Bible we want to see translated in their own language, and for your own hearts to grow in compassion for the lost of Pearl Island.





STUDY GUIDE

WEEK 2: 10.15.2017 “REALIZE”

[set up]

Take a minute for each person to share one insight from last week’s UNLEASH message or Personal Study from week one.

Fall is here! In your group, share your favorite experience, traditions, or changes about the fall. Spend some time discussing how you could leverage those things for an opportunity to be a LifeHouse.

Have one person in the group take 3-5 minutes to share their personal testimony of a time when God brought them from resistance to His calling to obedience through love in Christ. When was the moment in their story that they realized they were off-course and felt a course correction to what God was wanting?

[digging deeper]

Read Jonah 1. Jonah decided to disobey God, even though he heard the word of the Lord very clearly. We think if we were Jonah, we would have done the right thing. Who would hear the word of the Lord and disobey? But we hear the Word of the Lord all the time. Jonah didn’t have the entire Bible as we do. When we read the Bible, we are hearing the Word of the Lord. We should use Jonah as a mirror into our own hearts, lives, and attitudes.

In the book of Jonah, God’s prophet is not the hero of the story. He’s more like the villain. In fact, the nonbelieving pagan sailors responded more spiritually than rebellious Jonah did to the situation and the storm. Why is it so personally distressing when we see other Christians acting more like villains in the Gospel narrative than like heroes? Give an example of this. In 2 Corinthians 5:20, God gives us a role, a job, and a message. What is the role called? What is the job? What is the message? In light of that, what should be our response to when we realize we are in sin and rebellion?

Read Jonah 1:7-10. Jonah shares with the pagan sailors the right facts about God though Jonah is disobeying God’s command. Jonah knows about God (theology) but is not living according to that knowledge (ethics). There is a disconnect between his head and heart. Jonah still wants to be identified as a religious person, but he is not living a right life. We do the same! Why do we sometimes know what we should do but fail to do it? How does God help you realize when there is a disconnect between your head and your heart? What is the next best step to take once God helps us realize that we not only know *what* to do, but then to actually *do* it?

Some people say that Jonah being swallowed by the fish isn’t real. Maybe it’s a fictional story or a parable. Some people do not believe that God is or can be involved in His creation to change its normal course of events. Dr. Gary Habermas defines a miracle as an event whereby God “temporarily makes an exception to the natural order of things, to show that

God is acting.”¹ Why is the belief in miracles essential to the Christian faith? How can we live faithfully even when we may never personally see such miracles?

Read Matthew 12:38-41. It seemed that Jesus believed that the story of Jonah was real and historical, but the tide of culture pushes harder and harder against belief in miracles. This is due to believing a worldview that makes no room for anything outside nature or the natural world. What problems arise when we only believe in what we can experience with our senses? Can you see how that would pose problems personally? For how we understand things like goodness and wickedness, or what is valuable? What good would prayer be?

Look again at chapter 1. What are the differences between the lives of Jonah and Jesus and between their three-day events?

It's easy to look with condescension at Jonah, who was resistant to share the story of God's forgiveness with a people who hated him and his God. But then we are struck with the realization that we all have family, friends, neighbors, co-workers, people we know and love and that may know and love us, yet we are still resistant to sharing the gospel with them. What ways should we not be like Jonah and more like Jesus? On a Large Post-it note or piece of paper, brainstorm as many practical steps that come to your mind for how we can be more like Jesus and less like Jonah. Now have each person in your group put a check mark next to the action step they are most drawn to taking. If time allows, have them give a brief answer as to why they felt drawn to that tangible action.

Take four minutes to watch “Annie’s story”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dy6t9TjJwIQ>

What made Annie hesitant to reach out to her neighbor? What was her moment of realization to make a change? How does this relate to what we are learning in Jonah? How can you relate to Annie? When listening to her story, what encouraged or affirmed you? What convicted you?

[living it out]

CVC's UNLEASH campaign is about having greater obedience to God when it comes to loving our neighbors, the nations, and the next generation. What is harder for you to love? Your neighbors? Or is it foreign countries you have never been to that have people of another faith who do not know Jesus? Or is it the next generation, which may hold different attitudes and beliefs than you? What will you do differently during UNLEASH to make a step in greater personal and relational risk to connect with that group?

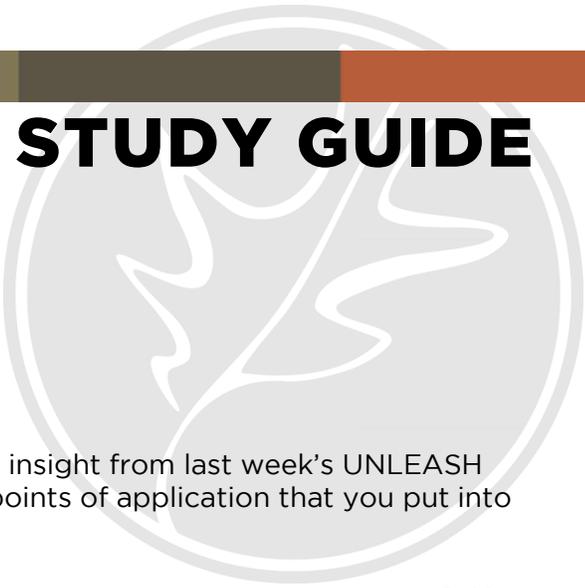
We can all be like Jonah, identifying as religious but not living a life in accordance with the Word of God. Ultimately, it does not matter if you know all the right things or consider yourself religious. It's our love of God that is expressed in obedience that is most important. Like Jonah, we can be sleeping while the lives and souls of others around us are in danger. Spend time in prayer repenting of hypocrisy, sleepiness and disobedience, and ask God for an obedience that comes from a deeper love of Him. Just like Jonah had the realization that he was personally responsible for what was happening around him, ask God to show you, to help you realize where you too may have dropped the ball or fallen asleep on the job.

Spend some extended prayer time praying for the group you have a harder time connecting with and reaching out to—Neighbors, Nations, or Next Generation.



¹ Douglas, Geivett, R. and Gary R. Habermas, In *Defense of Miracles: A Comprehensive Case for God's Action in History*, (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1997). 62-63.

STUDY GUIDE



WEEK 3: 10.22.2017 “REPENT”

[set up]

Take a minute and offer each person a chance to share one insight from last week’s UNLEASH message or Personal Study from week two. Are there any points of application that you put into practice?

Reflect on one of the darkest times of your life. How did God sustain you through that time? How did you sense God’s presence? How has that time been used to change you?

[digging deeper]

Jonah 2 is Jonah’s 3-day prayer while in the belly of the fish. This is most likely a summary or condensed version of Jonah’s sermon. He probably prayed the entire time! Read through Jonah 2 at least two times. Can you break down the prayer into topics or emphases? Is there a progression in Jonah’s prayer?

If you were to summarize Jonah’s prayer in one word, what word would you choose?

Read Matthew 4:17, Luke 5:31-32, Acts 3:19-20, Romans 2:3-4.

Jonah repented in the belly of the fish. Charles Spurgeon defines repentance as “a discovery of the evil of sin, a mourning that we have committed it, a resolution to forsake it. It is, in fact, a change of mind of a very deep and practical character, which makes the man love what once he hated, and hate what once he loved.”² Martin Luther, the 16th century Reformer, said “When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said “Repent,” he intended that the entire life of believers should be repentance.”³ The New Testament was written in Greek, and the Greek word for repentance is *metanoeo*, which literally means “to turn around.” It assumes a turning away from something and a turning toward something.

On a separate sheet of paper or a large Post it-note, make two columns. In one column, write “What is repentance?” and in the other, write, “What repentance is not.” Go around the group and fill in the columns. As you look over these columns, can you identify an attitude in each one of them that you have most personally experienced? What has been the outcome of a time where you chose repentance or when you didn’t choose repentance?

What is the difference between belief and repentance?

Do you think Jonah’s repentance was legitimate or not? In the following chapters, we see Jonah frustrated and angry at God for having mercy on the Ninevites. Jonah wanted the Ninevites to pay for their sin even though God delivered Jonah from the consequences of his sin. Do you think Jonah was faking his repentance? Or do you think he was legitimately repentant but, again, fell into disobedience?

How do we know when we are truly repentant rather than just being ashamed or sorry we got caught?

² <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/what-is-repentance>

³ <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/luthers-first-thesis-and-last-words>

Psalm 51:7-12 is a psalm written by David after being caught in adultery and arranging a murder. From this passage, what are components of repentance? Does David's response differ from Jonah's? In our lives, what is true of us when we truly are repentant instead of being sorry we got caught or letting ourselves down?

It took being confined to the dark, wet, foul-smelling belly of a huge fish for Jonah to finally repent of his disobedience of God. How can we grow in repenting of our disobedience long before we have to be in a dark place that provokes surrender?

Jesus never sinned and never needed to repent. Jesus loved us so much that He was willing to take on our sin on the cross so that we could repent and be saved. Jesus never turned His back on God but was willing for God to turn His back on Jesus so we can be saved. Jesus "Unleashed" us from our sin, from a debt we could never pay on our own. How does the gospel help us to live a life of repentance? How does believing the gospel help us to have genuine repentance?

Turning from our sin and toward God is what it means to put your faith and trust in Jesus. It's a powerful pointer to the gospel when Christians publicly and/or personally repent of sin. Sometimes people think that Christians have perfect lives, but we know that is not true! How does hearing a Christian publicly and/or personally repent of sin help a nonbeliever understand the gospel? When you share your testimony/new life story, are you articulating the moment of your repentance well (Who you were as you walked in disobedience. How God met you in that place, perhaps a dark place, where you finally surrendered. How you were freed from that old and dying self that was trapped in sin)?

Do you notice how what we do with our bodies and what we do with our money are significant indicators of whether we are repentant or not? Why is that?

Two of the most personal aspects of our lives are money and sex. But, these are also two aspects of our spiritual lives that need the most work. What principles can we learn about how to honor God with our money and our bodies from the story of Jonah?

Because UNLEASH is about freeing up resources for more of God's work, when the topic of money comes up, it can reveal areas of unrepentance in our finances. Repentance brings freedom! We are free to experience joy again! We are free from shame and guilt! We are free to pray boldly! We are free to share openly! We are free to give generously! Jesus said in Matthew 6:21, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Many of us need to repent of greed. Greed is present when we assume that all or most of our money is for our own consumption. What is true of a person who has repented of the sin of greed and lives generously? Would you say that is true of you? If not, what steps do you need to take to repent of greed and turn toward generosity out of a changed and repentant heart?

[living it out]

Pair up. Have each person take a minute or two to share a time where God brought you to a place of repentance and you confessed and moved on to freedom. It's wise to select a time that you share in your testimony/new life story.

Gather back together. As you did this study, did God reveal an area in your heart that you need to repent of? If you feel comfortable, share in your LifeGroup.

As you prayerfully consider your involvement in UNLEASH, what is a next best step to take as an investor in God's work to express your new life in Christ and the freedom you have because of your repentance and Christ's forgiveness in your life?

Close your group time praying out of confession and repentance as a group. As a group, how do you need to confess and repent of disobedience, greed, spiritual slothfulness. Continue to pray for your neighbors, the nations, and the next generation.



STUDY GUIDE

WEEK 4: 10.29.2017 “REACH”

[set up]

Take a minute for offer each person a chance to share one insight from last week’s UNLEASH message or Personal Study from week three. Are there any points of application that you put into practice?

Who was a special or specific person that God used to reach out to you when you didn’t know Christ?

[digging deeper]

Read Jonah 2:10-4:1. Jonah has been freshly vomited out of the belly of the fish. His near-death experience caused him to now obey God’s command to give God’s message to Nineveh. After hearing the message, Nineveh repents of their sins by putting on sackcloth and fasting. Even the king of Nineveh repents.

This week we talked about reaching the lost. On a large Post-it note or piece of paper, make two columns. In the first column, list some of the most compelling reasons that we reach out to those who do not know Christ? In the second column, list some of the reasons that we are hesitant to sharing the gospel and reaching the lost.

The Bible is not about us or about the people in the story. It’s ultimately about God. He’s the main character. He’s the hero. His mission to reach the lost is the storyline. Think of Jonah chapters 1-3. What can we know about God, His heart, and how He works? List those out on the piece of paper.

We see that the people of Nineveh, upon hearing God’s message, repented immediately. Sometimes it takes people many encounters with the gospel to believe, but sometimes it only takes one! Did it take you many or a few times to hear the gospel before you believed? What does that mean for your efforts to share the gospel?

Why do you think the repentance of the Ninevites “displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry”? Does it feel like God is unjust when he forgives wicked people? How do we square God’s justice with His mercy and grace (3:10)?

Read John 6:44. Only God opens the heart for belief to take place. How does that bring relief to us as people called to be relational, risk-taking missionaries for the gospel of Jesus?

Yet, God does invite/call/commission us to go and reach the lost with the good news of Jesus

Read the following verses:

Matthew 28:19 Mark 16:15 Acts 1:8 Acts 13:47 Romans 10:14-15 Proverbs 11:30

Summarize these verses in a sentence: _____

Summarize them in a word: _____

If that word captures God’s calling for us to reach others, on a scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high) how would you rank yourself in obeying that call? _____

The heart behind UNLEASH is to reach our neighbors, the nations, and the next generation for Christ. UNLEASH is a plan to unleash our church to reach more people with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Jonah was unwilling to go to Nineveh initially, but eventually he went and many came to faith. Have you been unwilling? It's never too late to repent and obey God's call.

Neighbors – Jesus said to love our neighbor (Mark 12:31) and be about our neighbor's good (Romans 15:2). If CVC has 900 households and each household is actively praying for, caring for, and sharing the gospel with their 8 immediate neighbors, that's a reach of 7,200 people! Even if 10% of those people respond to the gospel that's 720 new lives in Christ! Does your heart break for your neighbors? Are you an active LifeHouse? How can you individually, we as LifeGroups, and our church as a community collectively help reach the neighbors that surround us in Northeast Ohio? What are you willing to pray? What are you willing to do? How are you willing to give?

Nations – There are still over 6,900 distinct people groups that are unreached for Christ. https://joshuaproject.net/people_groups/statistics CVC can't reach them all, but we can make the effort to reach at least one in the next several years. The Bible calls the city of Nineveh "an exceedingly great city" based on their population. There are about 1.6 billion Muslims in the world (23% of world population) [1]. As CVC, we are praying for and going to Pearl Island, Indonesia, an island with over 3 million people known as the "Soli." That is an exceedingly great city. Should not our hearts break (4:10) for those people? What is your role in reaching the lost of Indonesia? Prayer? Financial support? Going?

Next Generations – Skittish and skeptical. Biblically illiterate. Increasingly unchurched and uninterested in church, the next generation is slowly (often it feels rapidly) drifting from Christian influences. But they are passionate. They are intuitive. They are tech-savvy and innovative. And they are hungry for meaning, purpose, and truth. God tells us to pass our faith in the Lord down to the next generation (Psalm 78:6, Psalm 145:4, 2 Timothy 1:5). We are to raise up disciples in the next generation. How are you personally invested if you have children or grandchildren? How are you investing in the next generation as a single person, a young adult, or even a teenager? Are you answering the call to build up and pass on a spiritual legacy of Jesus Christ? If so, how is it evident in how you pray, seek out young people, and give?

[living it out]

In light of all that was shared about reaching the lost, what sacrifice are you willing to make in the following categories in order to better reach the lost?

Time _____
Prayer _____
Skills _____
Learning _____
Giving _____

Turn Matthew 9:37-38 into a prayer for sharing our faith, for UNLEASH and for each initiative within UNLEASH (Neighbors, Nations, Next Generation) and linger in prayer over these objectives as you close your time:

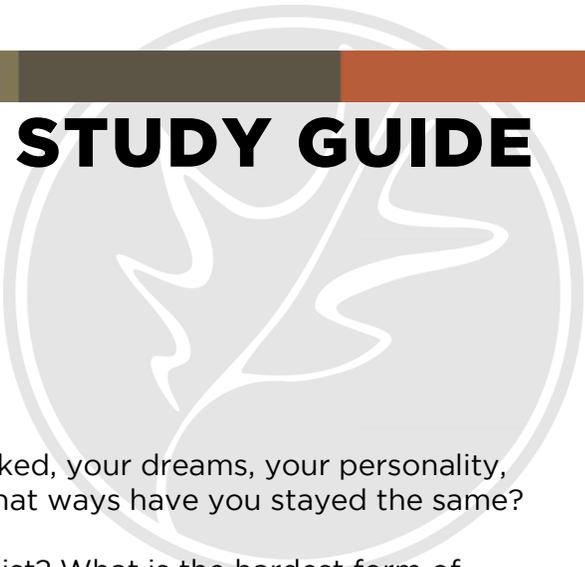
- Pray for your neighbors. In your LifeHouse zone, where do you sense the Lord is opening doors of spiritual conversation with an unbeliever? Is there a legitimate reason not to go ahead and share the gospel with them? If not, then do it this week and ask God to go before you and prepare their heart.
- Pray for the Nations, especially Pearl Island and our missionaries "T&K" who serve there among the Soli people
- Pray for the Next generation, especially those within your sphere of influence that God would give you the courage to share and them the heart to hear and believe.



Still uncomfortable sharing your faith? Review our 3 Circles training. It can be found at <http://www.cvconline.org/resources/3-circles/>

[1] <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/01/31/worlds-muslim-population-more-widespread-than-you-might-think/>

STUDY GUIDE



WEEK 5: 11.05.2017 “REALIGN”

[set up]

Think back on when you were in high school, what you liked, your dreams, your personality, your preferences. In what ways have you changed? In what ways have you stayed the same?

Why is change hard? What makes it hard/why do we resist? What is the hardest form of change?

[digging deeper]

Read Jonah chapter 4. Verses 1-4 are very ironic, almost sad and humorous. How was Jonah shown grace and mercy in the same way the Ninevites were?

Look back to 2:7-9 and to 4:1-4. What are the similarities of Jonah and Nineveh’s salvation?

God gave Jonah a plant to shelter him from the scorching heat. When God took away the plant and Jonah’s comfort was taken away, it was just too much for Jonah. It is easy to love our comfort instead of the often painful work of being realigned with God’s purposes. What areas of your life are you most at risk for settling for comfort rather than God’s purposes? How can you stay aligned with God’s call and purpose in your life?

Read Psalm 139:23-24. The psalmist encourages God to test him to see if there are any dark places in his heart. What keeps us from praying this sort of prayer?

Why is it important to accept our imperfection? What happens when people realize their own sinfulness in comparison to Christ’s perfection? How can that help the people we are trying to reach out to actually embrace our message of Christ?

Jonah is in major need of realignment in his heart. Jonah’s issue was a heart issue. His mouth said what God wanted him to say, his body went to Nineveh, but his heart was certainly not in it. How has your life been realigned in the past? What heart issue has God dealt with in your life? What brought you back to a place of realignment?

What is the relationship between the internal integrity and the external evidence when we are aligned with God?

Read this article. <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/lord-align-my-heart-with-yours>
What was said that helps you understand alignment with God? Is there anything you disagreed with or think could have been stated stronger?

What is said in Romans 12:2 that helps us know how to align ourselves with God?

What principles can we draw from James 4:7-8 to help us align with God?

Scholars note how bad Jonah looks throughout this book. Even at the end Jonah is pouty, weak-willed, and emotionally uncontrolled. But, everything within the book points to Jonah as the author of the book. This may have been on purpose, for this may be Jonah showing his own sinfulness in light of God's goodness. We see this pattern throughout the Bible. For example, the Bible is careful to mention that Paul used to arrest Christians, Peter denied Jesus and battled with racism later in his life, Thomas doubted, Moses was not permitted to enter the promised land due to sin, Abraham was not a good husband, and many, many other examples. Do you think Jonah eventually repented of his sin and submitted to God? What would be true of Jonah if he did?

What is the biggest area of sin in which God has given you freedom and newness? How can you use this area of growth to point others to Christ?

What is the most significant attitude or action that has been keeping you out of alignment with God?

[living it out]

As you reflect on the last five weeks of study, on a scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high), how aligned do you feel your heart is with the Lord's purposes currently? _____

What prayer will you pray to increase your alignment?

What action step will you take to increase your alignment?

What question can your LifeGroup members ask you to test alignment?

Related to UNLEASH, using the same 1-5 scale, where would you place yourself in these categories?

- ___ Neighbors
- ___ Nations
- ___ Next Generation
- ___ Praying for these initiatives
- ___ Serving in the areas of these initiatives
- ___ Generously giving to UNLEASH to increase resources for these initiatives
- ___ Being a champion of these initiatives for others in our body

On November 5, we will all be submitting commitment cards for our commitment to unleash CVC to greater reach our neighbors, the nations, and the next generation. Spend some time during group in private prayer about it. If you are married, you and your spouse spend time praying together.

