God Wrecked My Plans
Fish Food
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Key Scripture:
Jonah 2:1–10 (NLT)
1 Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from inside the fish. 2 He said,
"I cried out to the LORD in my great trouble,
and he answered me.
I called to you from the land of the dead,
and LORD, you heard me!
3 You threw me into the ocean depths,
and I sank down to the heart of the sea.
The mighty waters engulfed me;
I was buried beneath your wild and stormy waves.
4 Then I said, 'O LORD, you have driven me from your presence.
Yet I will look once more toward your holy Temple.'
5 "I sank beneath the waves,
and the waters closed over me.
Seaweed wrapped itself around my head.
6 I sank down to the very roots of the mountains.
I was imprisoned in the earth,
whose gates lock shut forever.
But you, O LORD my God,
snatched me from the jaws of death!
7 As my life was slipping away,
I remembered the LORD.
And my earnest prayer went out to you
in your holy Temple.
8 Those who worship false gods
turn their backs on all God's mercies.
9 But I will offer sacrifices to you with songs of praise,
and I will fulfill all my vows.
For my salvation comes from the LORD alone."
10 Then the LORD ordered the fish to spit Jonah out onto the beach.

TALK IT OVER

Start talking. Find a conversation starter for your group.

- What's the strangest place (physically, emotionally, or spiritually) you've ever found yourself because you were avoiding something you didn't want to do? How did that experience shape you in the end?

Start sharing. These questions are to help get your group thinking and to create openness.

- **Read Jonah 2:1-10.** Jonah only prays after drawing lots and being swallowed by a fish—when he runs out of options. Why do you think prayer often becomes our last resort instead of our first?

- In **Jonah 2:7,** Jonah says, "I remembered the Lord". What was a moment in your life where that phrase could describe your return to God? What caused you to remember Him—and what changed afterward?

- The sermon emphasized that God hears the prayers of runners. Have you ever felt disqualified from prayer or from being heard by God? How does Jonah's story challenge or affirm your beliefs about who God listens to?

- God's discipline is described as "harsh," but not punitive. How do you discern the difference between God punishing you and God disciplining you in love?

- Jonah's prayer focuses more on God's mercy than on his misery. When you share your testimony or struggles, how much do you emphasize God's grace over the pain?

- Like Jonah, what is one area of your life where God might be patiently waiting for your surrender? What would it look like to say "yes" this week—even if it's a small step?

Start doing. Commit to a step and live it out this week.

- Take time to pray as honestly as Jonah did. Write down one line from your prayer to reflect on and share with someone this week.

Start praying. Be bold and pray with power.

- Lord, we thank you for your mercy and grace, that you hear our prayers even when we don't deserve it. We confess that we desperately need you and ask for your forgiveness and help to stop running away from you. Please help us to be obedient and to seek your perfect will always. Amen.

Question: "Does God punish us when we sin?"

Answer: For believers in Jesus, all our sin—past, present, and future—has already been judged on the cross. As Christians, we will never be condemned for our sin. That was done once for all: "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). Because of the sacrifice of Christ, God sees only the righteousness of Christ when He looks at us. Our sin has been nailed to the cross with Jesus, and we will never be "punished" for it, in the sense of being condemned. At the same time, God does discipline His children when they err, as any good father would. So it could be said that Christians are "punished" for sin, but only in the sense of being lovingly disciplined. The remainder of this article will refer to "discipline" to avoid the suggestion that Christians receive "punishment" (condemnation) from God for their sin.

If we continue to act in sinful ways and we do not repent and turn from that sin, God brings His divine discipline to bear upon us. If He did not, He would not be a loving and concerned Father. Just as we discipline our own children for their welfare, so does our heavenly Father lovingly correct His children for their benefit. Hebrews 12:7-11 tells us, "As you endure this divine discipline, remember that God is treating you as his own children. Whoever heard of a child who was never disciplined? If God doesn't discipline you as He does all of His children, it means that you are illegitimate and are not really His child after all. Since we respect our earthly fathers who disciplined us, should we not all the more cheerfully submit to the discipline of our heavenly Father and live forever? For our earthly fathers disciplined us for a few years, doing the best they knew how. But God's discipline is always right and good for us because it means we will share in his holiness. No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening—it is painful! But afterward there will be a quiet harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way."

Discipline, then, is how God lovingly turns His children from rebellion to obedience. Through discipline our eyes are opened more clearly to God's perspective on our lives. As King David stated in Psalm 32, discipline causes us to confess and repent of sin we have not yet dealt with. In this way discipline is cleansing. It is also a growth catalyst. The more we know about God, the more we know about His desires for our lives. Discipline presents us with the opportunity to learn and to conform ourselves to the image of Christ (Romans 12:1-2). Discipline is a good thing!

We need to remember that sin is a constant in our lives while we are yet on this earth (Romans 3:10, 23). Therefore, we not only have to deal with God's discipline for our disobedience, but we also have to deal with the natural consequences resulting from sin. If a believer steals something, God will forgive him and cleanse him from the sin of theft, restoring fellowship between Himself and the repentant thief. However, the societal consequences of theft can be severe, resulting in fines or even incarceration. These are natural consequences of sin and must be endured. But God works even through those consequences to increase our faith and glorify Himself.

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