

Study Series: Running from Mercy

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 Lesson Title: “Divine Appointments” (pp. 35-48)

Session 3

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The main point of this lesson is: Our efforts to break the appointments God sets for us leads us to the depths of distress.

Focus on this goal: To help adults embrace their appointments with God, even if they have attempted to avoid such appointments in the past

Key Bible Passage: Jonah 1:17–2:2

Before the Session

1. Invite some (or all!) learners to bring their personal or family calendars with them to your time together. (Steps 1 and 7)

2. Have a marker and a board or large piece of paper ready for three short statements. (Step 6)

During the Session

Step 1. Create Interest / Jumpstart Discussion

**Ask** learners to take out their personal or family calendars. Briefly **overview** your commitments for the coming few weeks; **invite** a few learners to do the same. **Ask:** *If I told you I’d need you to cancel everything on your calendar for the next month, what would you say?*

Engage learners in discussing why their calendars are important: it keeps them up-to-date on their health, business commitments, children’s activities, and so forth.

**Ask rhetorically:** *What if we could look at God’s appointment book? What might that look like?* **Say:** *God had a divine appointment set up with Jonah; he wouldn’t miss it.*

Step 2. Appointments with God, Part 1

Briefly **recount** the first sixteen verses of Jonah. **Say:** The last time we met, Jonah had been picked up by the sailors and tossed into the sea (Jonah 1:15).

**Invite** a volunteer to read Jonah 1:17.

**Read** the Day One paragraph (p. 35) that begins, “When the word of God came to Jonah
. . . .”

As a group, **consider** the amazing statement from the first few words of verse 17: “The Lord appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah,” focusing not on the craziness of a man being swallowed by a fish, but on the One who has the power to make that happen.

Step 3. Appointments with God, Part 2

**Say:** *Let’s consider a few inexplicable means God used to meet with His people.* **Invite** two volunteers to read Exodus 3:2 and Numbers 22:28-30. **Challenge** learners to identify some other inexplicable acts of God in Scripture (the parting of the Red Sea, the plagues, etc.).

**Invite** a volunteer to share a personal story of an unexplainable act of God in his or her own life.

**Explain** that God’s means are not only inexplicable, but also unforgettable. **Share** one unforgettable moment from your own walk of faith with the Lord; **include** how it changed not only your faith but also your life course.

Step 4. Appointments with God, Part 3

**Reread** all of Jonah 1:17, **pointing** to God’s absolute power in appointing the fish and appointing the times. If comfortable doing so, **jokingly observe:** *If God sent a great fish to swallow me, I might be inclined to listen after only thirty seconds!*

**Engage** learners in dwelling on God’s provision to set Jonah aside and force him to wait on God.

**Ask:** *What have you learned, heard, or felt during times of waiting?* **Remind** learners that we grow in faith as we wait; we are unwise to attempt to rush God’s perfect timing simply because we don’t agree.

**Read** Jonah 2:1-2 and the last Day Three paragraph (p. 41).

Step 5. The Will of God: Prayer, Part 1

**Invite** volunteers to read Psalms 81:7 and 120:1. **Say:** Jonah wasn’t the only person to call out to God in his distress. He is so faithful; even after Jonah’s deliberate disobedience, God answered his prayer.

**Read** the first Day Four paragraph (p. 41), **pointing** out that our prayers may come from depths, from distress, or from discipline.

**Help** learners praise the Lord for answering even our last-minute prayers after years of disobedience. **Encourage** them to schedule regular times of prayer into their lives.

Step 6. The Will of God: Prayer, Part 2

On a board or large piece of paper, **write:** It’s never too late. You’re never too far gone. God hears and God saves.

**Stress:** Many times, Christians read the Bible and remember the characters; instead, we should remember God and what He reveals about Himself. **Challenge** learners to consider what they can learn about God in what you’ve studied in Jonah so far.

**Direct** attention to the words on the board and **say:** The message of Jonah is not that God called and Jonah didn’t listen; the message is that Jonah cried out and God heard! **Read** the Day Five Note (p. 44).

Step 7. Practical Application – Live Out the Lesson

**Invite** learners to look at their calendars one more time. Emphasize: God’s got an appointment with you. We look at these calendars and we tell God we’re too busy, we’re too tired, or we’re too stressed. But those are the exact reasons we must meet with Him as our most important appointment of each day.

**Challenge** learners to schedule a recurring, daily time of prayer and Bible Study so they can clearly hear God speak and spend time responding.

**Close in prayer.**

