



# **SINK, SWIM, OR SOAR?**

EMBRACING & NAVIGATING THE 9 WAVES OF LIFE  
FROM THE BOOK OF JONAH

**PASTOR ROB CARLSON**





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# CONTENTS



Introduction: Sink, Swim, or Soar?	5
The Book of Jonah	12
<b>WAVE 1</b> Dream	16
<b>WAVE 2</b> Decision	20
<b>WAVE 3</b> Direction	24
<b>WAVE 4</b> Destination	28
<b>WAVE 5</b> Destiny	32
<b>WAVE 6</b> Doubt	36
<b>WAVE 7</b> Discouragement	40
<b>WAVE 8</b> Declaration	44
<b>WAVE 9</b> Deliverance	48
Conclusion	52
Small Group Tips	55



# INTRODUCTION

## *Sink, Swim, or Soar?*

Life will not be perfect. Challenges will happen. Adversity is certain, as is suffering. Storms will rage against us, and waves will crash upon us. But we don't have to sink or drown. We can do more than tread water with our heads barely above the surface. We can soar. We can rise above the waves and live a victorious and successful life. But it will require intentionality, faith, wise decision-making, firm resolve, and deep commitment.

The waves of the sea are often used as a metaphor for life because they symbolize the ups and downs, the constant change and unpredictability that we experience. Like the waves, life can be both calm and turbulent, bringing moments of joy and challenges. Embracing and learning to navigate these fluctuations can lead to growth and resilience.

I love going to the ocean and watching the waves roll in. They never stop. They are unceasing. They are constant. I've also enjoyed being in the middle of the ocean and watching the waves rise and fall. Sometimes the waves are peaceful and tranquil, while other times, they are nasty and fierce. Waves are powerful and should not be ignored.

For me, the waves of the ocean are a metaphor for life. I want you to join me in considering nine waves of life that must be acknowledged, embraced, and navigated well if we are to experience our best life. Today, many people are satisfied with just surviving, getting through this day and on to the next. But God wants more. He wants you to soar. He desires you don't settle or become satisfied with the status quo but dig deep each day and grow. He desires the best for your marriage, family, faith, relationships, service to others, educational pursuits, career development, financial discipline, and more. He wants you to soar.



There is a little bit of Jonah in all of us. Remember that guy from the Bible? Jonah struggled with obeying God. He tried to run, experienced doubt, sank into the depths of discouragement, and made wrong decisions. He settled, became satisfied, and stopped seeking more. And it took him down to the depths. He did not embrace or navigate the waves of life well. Fortunately for him and others, he got some things mostly right in the end. But only by the grace of God. I can't help but wonder how things could have been better if he had dreamed God's dream, made wise decisions, and moved in a God-honoring direction from the start.

How about you? Are you struggling with trusting God like Jonah? After all, there is a little Jonah in all of us. What is God's dream for your life? What decisions must you make that will move you in a God-pleasing direction? What bouts with doubt are you struggling with today? Are you heading in the right direction, aimed at reaching the right destination, and enjoying God's very best for your life?

Understanding how to embrace and navigate these nine waves well is crucial to soaring in life. These waves are constant, ongoing, all-encompassing, sometimes turbulent, and at other times peaceful. But to ignore them is unwise, and to minimize them is foolish. You can make wrong decisions, move in the wrong direction, and still survive in life. But God wants you to reach for more. He wants you to live with a mindset to experience and accomplish more than survival. He wants you to live your best life. If we're going to live our best life, we must succeed at navigating each of these nine waves well. Your best life depends on it. And your entire life will benefit because of it.

What nine waves must we navigate well to live our very best life? Let me introduce you to them here.

## **Wave 1 DREAM**

It starts here. We need to have a dream. What is your vision for your life? Seriously. What is the big picture? The earlier we clarify the dream, the better. But even if you think you've blown it or ruined your life, I want to encourage you to dream again. Dream again for your



marriage, finances, relationships, and faith. Make the rest of your life the best of your life. The best time to clarify your dream may have been 20 years ago, but in reality, the best time is now. Dream. Dream again. Believe. Don't stop dreaming. Living your best life starts with a dream and vision for a preferred future. Don't settle. Clarify God's dream for you.

## **Wave 2** **DECISION**

Life is one decision after another. Bad decisions can sink us. Good decisions can make us soar. Indecision can leave us barely treading water. Think about some of the significant decisions in life: Marriage—Marrying the right person versus the wrong person. Finances—Spending more than you make over and over versus saving vigorously and rigorously and living on a budget. Relationships—Lacking empathy, compassion, understanding, and communication can lead to sinking relationships. Are the decisions you are about to make pleasing to God? How do you make wise and God-honoring decisions? In a very real way, the decisions you make will determine the life that you live. Don't be okay with mediocre decision-making. Get it right. Your best life requires that you make good decisions consistently.

## **Wave 3** **DIRECTION**

Our life trajectory is set by the dreams we value and the decisions we make. But even when our vision is clear, and our decisions are sound, things can still drift off course a little or a lot. Life happens. Waves crash against us. Come-ups occur. And sometimes, we need to make course corrections. Making wrong decisions is not great. But not correcting them when we can is worse. Continual evaluation of the direction of our life is vital. Is your marriage moving in the right direction? How about the growing development of your faith? Are you becoming more or less devout? How about your finances? Are you living a lie by living beyond your means? Today is the ideal time to right the ship before you sink. What decisions do you need to make? What bad decisions do you need to correct? Is the trajectory of your life on track? Realigning and recalibrating our life trajectory is always vital.

## Wave 4 DESTINATION

Getting to where we want to be in life is a byproduct of our dreams, decisions, and movements in the right direction over time. As James Clear says in his book *Atomic Habits*, “Focus on making small, incremental improvements in your habits, as they can lead to significant long-term changes.” He calls this “the 1% rule” and says consistent movement in the right direction over time will lead to good results and a desired destination. We don’t wake up one day and say I want to have a college degree and there it is. We have to work at it, and it takes time. But the critical thing to remember is that our destination is the byproduct of staying true to our dream, making healthy decisions, and paying attention to whether or not the direction of our life is on course and, if not, to make course corrections. A college degree results from faithful and consistent hard work over time. One can apply the same truth to our marriage, family life, parenting, finances, career, etc. Getting to where I want to be in life is essential. While we don’t have total control over all things in life (crisis, cancer, calamities, and more), many of us have the incredible privilege to dream and make wise decisions that lead in a specific direction, resulting in a desired destination. Where do you want to be one day in your: Marriage? Finances? Faith? Education? Career?

## Wave 5 DESTINY

Influence, impact, and legacy are all important subjects to think about. What do we want to be remembered for? You might think you have nothing to offer or have made too many mistakes. That is nonsense. Start today to build your legacy. You may not be able to undo poor decisions or eliminate past mistakes, but you can make the rest of your life the best of your life, and you can start now. Too many people spend too little time thinking about why they are here on earth. The truth is, if we are alive, God has a plan and purpose for our lives, and the sooner we start, the better it will be for us and those around us. What good things do you hope your family and friends will say about you at your funeral? You are writing your epitaph every day. To some, that sounds ominous, but it is wise to those seeking their best life. You have been blessed to be a blessing. You have been shaped for significance. You have been gifted for greatness. Now is the time to get serious about living your best life.

## **Wave 6 DOUBT**

We all have bouts of doubt. We all know that life can be unpredictable at times. We live much of life in the fog of ambiguity, incongruence, and unforeseen predicaments. Quandaries about work choices can be complex. Difficulties with children can be painful. Puzzles concerning finances can be challenging. And confusing health choices can be overwhelming. How we face our dilemmas will either defend our dream or derail it. Doubt is a wave that we know will pound us over and over. To not think about it or plan for it is foolish. To live our best life, we must wisely navigate the wave of doubt. God wants to help us if we let him. How will you face the doubt, dilemmas, and dissonance in life? Will you sink beneath them? Barely tread water, struggle to swim, and just keep your head above water? Or will you soar above the wave of doubt, dilemma, and dissonance? Not everything in life is immediately clear, and frankly, there are many times when things don't make sense. While some sink under the weight of doubt, living our best life requires us to find God's strength to rise above. God wants us to experience more. He wants us to soar, even when facing dissonance and doubt.

## **Wave 7 DISCOURAGEMENT**

Discouragement, disappointment, and despair can grab hold of our lives and cause us to sink into a deep dark place. How well do you deal with disappointment? Does change and uncertainty discourage you? Is it hard for you to navigate through difficulty and pain? You're not alone. Maybe you have felt like you were drowning in despair at one time or another. Perhaps that time is now. How we deal with discouragement and disappointment is crucial to living an overcoming life that thrives instead of barely surviving. But how do you soar above the suffocating and stifling seasons of disappointment? Learning and growing through times of discouragement is one of the most challenging and vital keys to soaring. To live your best life will require you to persevere through times of pain, heartache, discouragement, and difficulty. Suffering and hardship sink many people into the depths of despair. But some powerfully and inspirationally rise above it. How do they do it? What can we learn about how to navigate discouragement and rise above it?

## **Wave 8 DECLARATION**

What are the faith statements that guide you? Living life by principle and having a set of core values is a must if we hope to soar. Folks who barely survive are bounced back and forth by the waves of life. Letting life “just happen” and push the narrative is a problematic way to live. Without a dream, direction, or destination clearly articulated, many are lost at sea. And many are unprepared to effectively handle dilemmas and disappointments, which will surely occur for all of us. What are the principles that guide your life? What core convictions do you fall to when times are tough? What non-negotiable absolutes do you declare that keep moving you forward in the right direction? Even when life is challenging, and you find yourself at the bottom of the sea, so to speak, or even in the belly of a whale, what faith statements do you declare that keep you centered and true? There are absolutes and core convictions that God wants us to hold to regardless of what life throws at us. We can live our best life even when the winds and waves of life blow hard against us. It is not only possible to grow in faith when times are tough, but it is also the best time for growth. We see this to be true all over the Bible. God wants to build and refine our faith, and He often uses difficult circumstances to mold us and grow us if we let Him.

## **Wave 9 DELIVERANCE**

Faith in God means there is light at the end of every tunnel. This is not a Pollyanna statement but a gloriously true one. Living life with hope is the best way to live. While not everything will turn out the way we want in this life, we know that everything will be better than we can imagine in the life to come. Heaven will be time-free, tear-free, and trouble-free. It will be more glorious than we could ever imagine. And living with the hope of Heaven in mind also helps us live with hope in this life. It gives us much-needed perspective and allows us to see the big picture. In the Bible, we see that seas are parted, the dead are raised, prayers are answered, guidance is given, impossibilities are made possible, and more, all because of God. God is in the deliverance business. He sent Moses as a deliverer and Joseph and Esther, too. And, of course, He sent Jesus as the ultimate deliverer of all and for all. While we can't explain why some things happen the way they do,

and others don't happen the way we want, we must live with hope. The Bible is full of people like you and me who experienced God's help, healing, and deliverance. So we choose not to live with hopelessness but to live with hope. Hope in God. Hope that He will help and heal. Hope that He knows what is best and that He desires my best. Hope that God hears my prayers. My hope is in God, and I believe He is all-powerful, loving, and wise.



Life is like the ocean, and the waves of the sea are a great metaphor for our lives. I love the ocean. I love watching the waves: ever crashing, pounding, relentless, ongoing, never-ending, sometimes overwhelming, but always necessary to navigate and navigate well. God wants you to live your best life. To set your aim "beyond survival." We all have the choice of whether we will sink, swim, or soar. Many sink. Some barely tread water and swim. Few soar. Don't just barely survive. Choose to thrive. God has a dream for your life, and he wants more. He wants you to soar. So let's navigate the waves of life well, and thinking deeply about these nine waves is a great place to start:

**Dream. Decision. Direction.**  
**Destination. Destiny. Doubt. Discouragement.**  
**Declaration. Deliverance.**

Let's choose to soar!

*Pastor Rob*

# The BOOK of JONAH

Read the book of Jonah before each session. The text is provided here in the New International Version.

## Chapter 1

**1** *The word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amittai: 2 “Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me.”*

**3** *But Jonah ran away from the Lord and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the Lord.*

**4** *Then the Lord sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up. 5 All the sailors were afraid and each cried out to his own god. And they threw the cargo into the sea to lighten the ship.*

*But Jonah had gone below deck, where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep. 6 The captain went to him and said, “How can you sleep? Get up and call on your god! Maybe he will take notice of us so that we will not perish.”*

**7** *Then the sailors said to each other, “Come, let us cast lots to find out who is responsible for this calamity.” They cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah. 8 So they asked him, “Tell us, who is responsible for making all this trouble for us? What kind of work do you do? Where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?”*

**9** *He answered, “I am a Hebrew and I worship the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.”*

**10** *This terrified them and they asked, “What have you done?” (They knew he was running away from the Lord, because he had already told them so.)*

**11** *The sea was getting rougher and rougher. So they asked him, “What should we do to you to make the sea calm down for us?”*

**12** *"Pick me up and throw me into the sea," he replied, "and it will become calm. I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you."*

**13** *Instead, the men did their best to row back to land. But they could not, for the sea grew even wilder than before. **14** Then they cried out to the Lord, "Please, Lord, do not let us die for taking this man's life. Do not hold us accountable for killing an innocent man, for you, Lord, have done as you pleased." **15** Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm. **16** At this the men greatly feared the Lord, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows to him.*

**17** *Now the Lord provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.*

## **Chapter 2**

**1** *From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the Lord his God. **2** He said:*

*"In my distress I called to the Lord, and he answered me. From deep in the realm of the dead I called for help, and you listened to my cry. **3** You hurled me into the depths, into the very heart of the seas, and the currents swirled about me; all your waves and breakers swept over me. **4** I said, 'I have been banished from your sight; yet I will look again toward your holy temple.' **5** The engulfing waters threatened me, the deep surrounded me; seaweed was wrapped around my head. **6** To the roots of the mountains I sank down; the earth beneath barred me in forever. But you, Lord my God, brought my life up from the pit.*

**7** *"When my life was ebbing away, I remembered you, Lord, and my prayer rose to you, to your holy temple.*

**8** *"Those who cling to worthless idols turn away from God's love for them. **9** But I, with shouts of grateful praise, will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed I will make good. I will say, 'Salvation comes from the Lord.'"*

**10** *And the Lord commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.*



## Chapter 3

**1** Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time: **2** “Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you.”

**3** Jonah obeyed the word of the Lord and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very large city; it took three days to go through it.

**4** Jonah began by going a day’s journey into the city, proclaiming, “Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown.” **5** The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.

**6** When Jonah’s warning reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust. **7** This is the proclamation he issued in Nineveh:

“By the decree of the king and his nobles:

Do not let people or animals, herds or flocks, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. **8** But let people and animals be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. **9** Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish.”

**10** When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.

## Chapter 4

**1** But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry. **2** He prayed to the Lord, “Isn’t this what I said, Lord, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. **3** Now, Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live.”

**4** But the Lord replied, “Is it right for you to be angry?”

**5** Jonah had gone out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city. **6** Then the Lord God provided a leafy plant

*and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the plant. **7** But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the plant so that it withered. **8** When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah's head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, and said, "It would be better for me to die than to live."*

***9** But God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?"*

*"It is," he said. "And I'm so angry I wish I were dead."*

***10** But the Lord said, "You have been concerned about this plant, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. **11** And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left—and also many animals?"*



# Wave 1 DREAM

It's been said that "nothing happens until someone starts dreaming." That's not only true for organizations; it contains more than a kernel of truth for us as individuals. What is your dream for your: Marriage? Life? Faith? Finances? Future? Relationships? Career? Education? Other? The Bible is full of stories, sagas, seasons, and situations where someone dreamed a dream that became a vision of a preferred future.

## DISCUSS

1. What are the components of a Godly dream? Part of Jonah's problem is that his vision for the future did not align with God's vision for the future. Discuss this Jonah dilemma. How does this become a problem? Read and discuss Jonah 1:1-4.

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# DISCUSS

2. What are some stories of people who had a God-dream and those whose vision didn't align with God's? You don't have to use people's names. You may even want to share times in your own life when you got it right, and times you did not. A God-dream is one that is in alignment with the will and purposes of Christ. Read and discuss Jonah 4:1-4. Why was Jonah in cross-purposes with the Lord? What were his issues? What can we learn from Jonah about God's vision for our lives and future?

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3. The Bible is full of dreams and visions aligned with God. Consider the visionary Joseph. Take a moment to read and discuss Genesis 37:1-11. What were his dream and vision for the future? How were they in alignment with God? As you consider the Joseph story, answer these questions: a) Why is it so important to have a dream? b) Why is it so important to clarify the dream? c) Why is it so important to persist in pursuing the dream?

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# DISCUSS

4. Compare and contrast Jonah and Joseph. One had a God-dream, and one had a man-dream. One was more interested in pursuing the purposes of God, and one was more interested in pursuing his own purposes. One was compassionate and caring. The other, not so much.

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5. What role does perseverance have in developing a God-vision for life?

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# MEMORIZE

*For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. JEREMIAH 29:11*

# APPLY

Take a moment and write out your dream for each of these areas of your life. Then clarify it. Add a few other areas that come to mind.

	VISION STATEMENT	PRESENT REALITY	NEXT STEPS
<b>Family</b>			
<b>Future</b>			
<b>Faith</b>			
<b>Finances</b>			
<b>Friendships</b>			
<b>Fitness</b>			
<b>Focus</b> <i>(Specific hope or prayer)</i>			
<b>Forgiveness</b> <i>(In your relationships)</i>			
<b>Forward</b> <i>(Growth goals)</i>			
<b>Other</b>			



# Wave 2

# DECISION

Life is full of decisions. We all make them every day. Sometimes we make wise decisions, while at other times, we make decisions we regret. How can we make wise decisions, especially in the major areas of our lives?

## DISCUSS

1. Read Jonah 1:1-3. Jonah did the exact opposite of what God asked him to do. Look at a map. God asked him to go to Nineveh, but he went to Tarshish instead. They are as far apart as you can get in ancient times and the exact opposite of what God intended. Making a bad decision is one thing. Deliberately disobeying God and running in the opposite direction of His vision and will is another thing altogether.

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# DISCUSS

2. How do you make wise decisions? Share principles you follow as a general rule.

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3. We make decisions every day, some big and some small. How do we know if we are following God's Will?

- Who should I marry?
- Where should I go to college?
- What career path should I choose?
- How do I handle this situation with my kids?
- What move should I make regarding my marriage?
- What should I do about the choices my doctor just gave me?
- I know I need to deal with this problem, but how?
- Where should we move? What house should we buy?
- Is this a wise investment?
- What is the best way to deal with this financial decision?
- Should I make a life change and truly follow Jesus Christ?

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# DISCUSS

4. What does James 1:5 say about wise decision-making?

James 1:5—*If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously.*

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5. What does Proverbs 3:5-6 say about wise decision-making?

Proverbs 3:5-6—*Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him and he will make your paths straight.*

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# MEMORIZE

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him and he will make your paths straight. **PROVERBS 3:5-6***

# APPLY

In his book *Decision Making and the Will of God*, Gary Friesen lists seven road signs to help us make wise decisions. Apply this to a significant decision you have just made or one coming up. If you can't think of one, come up with an example decision. Walk out your decision by completing the following chart.

ROAD SIGN	What are the Implications for my Decision?
<b>BIBLE</b> What does the Bible say? <i>(Ps 119:97-112; 19:7-11)</i>	
<b>CIRCUMSTANCES</b> What doors are open or closed? <i>(1 Cor 16:8-9)</i>	
<b>HOLY SPIRIT</b> What does the inner witness of the Holy Spirit say? <i>(Rom 8:14; John 16:13; Gal 5:18)</i>	
<b>MATURE COUNSEL</b> What do Godly advisors say? <i>(Ps 1:1-6; Prov 24:6; 13:10)</i>	
<b>PERSONAL DESIRES</b> What is your heart saying? <i>(Ps 37:4; Phil 2:13)</i>	
<b>COMMON SENSE</b> What does wisdom say? <i>(Acts 6:3; 1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:8; Dan 2:20-21; Prov 3:13-14)</i>	
<b>DIVINE GUIDANCE</b> Is there handwriting on the wall or an audible voice? <i>(Acts 8:26; 9:3-6; 10:3,10)</i>	
While some of these are more commonly available to us than others, all seven are in the Bible and worth considering. Write a summary conclusion regarding your decision after applying all seven road signs:	



# Wave 3

# DIRECTION

Stop and evaluate the direction of your life. Look at every part: your faith, marriage, finances, attitude, work ethic, career, attitude, and disciplines. I believe that the least emphasized discipline in life is evaluation. People are content to go in the wrong direction and not make a course correction. That's foolish. The trajectory of your life starts with a dream, which leads to decisions that determine your life's direction. Where do you need to make a course correction?

## DISCUSS

1. Read Jonah 1:3. God had a dream to save Nineveh. He wanted to use Jonah. But this was not Jonah's dream, so he decided to run in the opposite direction. Why do you think Jonah did that?

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# DISCUSS

2. Discuss Jonah chapter 1. Where have you run from God's Will in your life? Share if you feel comfortable. Or share a story of someone you may know. What is the outcome of running from God? It may not result in you being thrown overboard and being swallowed by a great fish, but what were or are the results of disrespecting God's voice and ignoring His Will?

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3. Jonah did not correct his course, and things went from bad to worse. He ran away from God, and his disobedience caused a catastrophe at sea. He was thrown into the waves. He sank further and further down. His life pattern was destructive, and he was willing to ruin his own life and those of others around him. Where do disobedience and selfishness align? Why does disobedience result in destruction? Were it not for the grace of God, Jonah would have drowned. Disobedience leads to separation from God and death, spiritually and otherwise.

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# DISCUSS

4. How do we make a course correction when we find ourselves running in the wrong direction? Where did Jonah miss the warning signs that caused him to be thrown overboard?

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5. Read Proverbs 6:16-19, commonly known as the “seven deadly sins.” What are the seven listed here, and what do they mean? One of the sins many Christians tend to “overlook” is gossip. Would you put gossip in the top 10 sins God hates? Many would say no, but God places it in His top 7. Why is disobedience to God so destructive? Why does God hate sin?

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# MEMORIZE

*Submit yourself, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn, and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up. **JAMES 4:7-10***

# APPLY

Jonah blew through multiple stop signs and opportunities for course corrections on his way to full-throttle disobedience. Read James 4:7-10. What does the Bible say about the heart attitude we must cultivate if we are to have a heart after God, not against Him? Notice the ten commands God gives us to root out sin and pride. How did Jonah miss God, and how can these ten help us live to please the Lord?

Heart Attitude God Desires	How it Changes me for God and for Good
Submit	
Resist	
Come near	
Wash your hands	
Purify your heart	
Grieve	
Mourn	
Wail	
Change your laughter to mourning	
Humble yourself	





# Wave 4 DESTINATION

Dreams lead us to make proactive decisions for our life. Decisions determine life direction and the trajectory of our life. We make decisions, and then our decisions make us and set us in a direction that leads us toward an eventual destination. As Stephen Covey says in *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, we'd be wise to start with the "end in mind." In other words, where do we want to end up in life?

## DISCUSS

1. Read Jonah 1 again. By the end of Chapter 1, Jonah's dream (or "anti-God-dream") resulted in a bad decision (disobedience), a dangerous direction (Tarshish, not Nineveh), and a dead-end destination (bottom of the ocean). Tragically, far too few folks think through and evaluate where their dreams, decisions, and life direction will lead them. Why is that?

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# DISCUSS

2. Imagine if more people started with the end in mind. What if we thought about the destination of our dreams, decisions, and directions in life? How could that improve our marriage, parenting, financial management, faith development, relationships, educational pursuits, career growth, selfless servanthood, gossip-less-ness, and more?

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3. Read Jonah 1:15. The destination of a life of disobedience is relatively predictable. With a bit of thought, prayer, and planning, anyone can know that going the wrong way will not lead you to the right place. Jonah is a lesson and picture of this. What life applications does this bring to your mind?

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# DISCUSS

4. Where do you want to end up in life? Where do you want your marriage, children, finances, career, education, and more to go? Jonah did not seem to care where his dream (or anti-dream), bad decisions, and wrong direction would lead him. He was steadfast in his determination to go the wrong way and end up at the wrong place, which was unwise.

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5. We don't have control over every area of our life, but we can have a dream, which can be a God-given and God-pleasing dream. We all can make wise God-honoring decisions, which can lead us in a godly direction resulting in destinations that are pleasing to Christ. So while we can't control everything, how are we doing with what we can choose? Jonah's end was a dead-end before God intersected his disobedience with godly grace. What can we learn from Jonah to help us not make the same mistakes he did?

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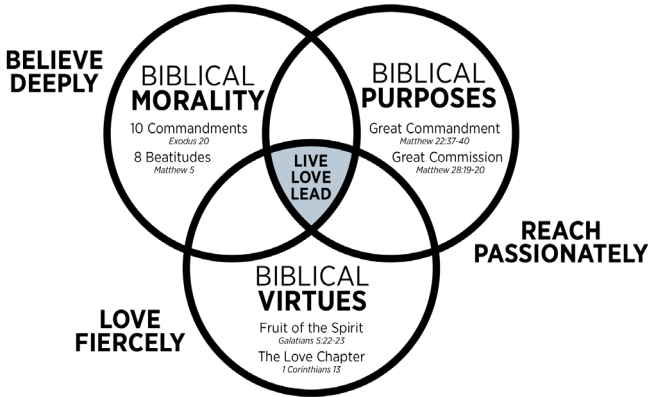
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# MEMORIZE

*However, I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the good news of God's grace. **ACTS 20:24***

What is your Biblical Worldview? Here is mine:



A Biblical Worldview is a rudder guiding your ship to its preferred destination. Without a rudder, you are like a ship at sea without direction. You will not reach your desired destination. As people of faith, we want to LIVE, LOVE, and LEAD like Jesus. That means we need to be anchored in biblical morality, find ways to build bridges to lost people and fulfill biblical purposes while living out biblical virtues by emulating the compassion and empathy of Christ. All three are crucial to LIVE, LOVE, and LEAD like Christ. We must believe deeply, reach passionately, and love fiercely: all three at once and all the time.

Write out your Biblical Worldview below. Be sure to make it biblical by adding key scriptures.

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# Wave 5 DESTINY

Influence, impact, and legacy—all big words that feel far away. But we must ask ourselves the question because not doing so is a copout ignoring the fact that God has a plan and purpose for each of us. So, let me ask you, what do you want your legacy to be? Jonah is not remembered as a guy who got it all right like Joseph (see his story in Genesis 37-50), but he did make a few course corrections here and there that helped. And God did use him in the end. But juxtapose Jo—nah with Jo—seph. Two Jo-s with two very different life trajectories. Joseph is considered a type of Christ. His character, attitude, obedience, faith, testimony, integrity, perseverance, and more are flawless. Jonah mostly struggled—bad attitude, disobedient, angry, unforgiving, ungrateful, graceless, and vengeful.

## DISCUSS

1. Death is a scary subject for many people, but I think it is a wise topic to consider. At your funeral, how do you want to be remembered? Consider this about funerals: a eulogy is something other people remember you for, and a resume is something you say about yourself. So the question is, what will other people remember you for?

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# DISCUSS

2. You are building your legacy every day. Fulfilling God's dream requires that you have one, you've clarified it, and you are pursuing it with all that is within you. You make decisions and follow a path to reach a destination that is pleasing to the Lord. When done well, you build a life and legacy of someone who has done life well. Why is this important?

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3. What is the value of "starting with the end in view," as Covey says in *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*? Why take any time at all to consider our death and funeral? The main reason is to help focus our lives today: To live with the perspective that life is short and no one gets out of here alive. We work and live each day to honor God and bless others. How does thinking about death, destiny, and legacy make a difference in how we live?

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# DISCUSS

4. Consider the resume of Jonah vs. Joseph. You might have to dig into this a little. Now consider their epitaph. What would you say at their funerals if you were asked to speak? While you could find good things to say about both, there is no denying that one lived life better than the other. One lived his best life and honored God in all things. The other was more hit-and-miss. What can you learn from their examples?

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5. Some people tend to over-spiritualize the word destiny. My purpose here is to talk about how the life we live builds the legacy we will one day be remembered for. Discussing destiny also challenges us to stop and evaluate whether or not we are on track to fulfilling the purposes of God. And if not, how can we get back on track? Ask yourself, "In what areas of my life do I need to step up to fulfill God's calling on my life?"

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# MEMORIZE

*Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers. **GALATIANS 6:7-10***

# APPLY

How are you doing in building the legacy today that you will be remembered for tomorrow? Using the same 9 Fs from Wave 1's application exercise, evaluate your current progress in fulfilling God's purposes and reaching God's dream for your life. Feel free to add other categories as it is helpful to you. The big idea here is evaluation, which most people do far too little.

	Am I on Track?	What Corrective Steps Must I Take?
<b>Family</b>		
<b>Future</b>		
<b>Faith</b>		
<b>Finances</b>		
<b>Friendships</b>		
<b>Fitness</b>		
<b>Focus</b> <i>(Specific hope or prayer)</i>		
<b>Forgiveness</b> <i>(In your relationships)</i>		
<b>Forward</b> <i>(Growth goals)</i>		





# Wave 6

# DOUBT

Sometimes things just don't make sense. Sometimes in life, we just can't see a way forward. The fog of life can be thick, and the confusion of life stifling. But Scripture teaches us that we can trust God. Faith is trusting when we can't see it, believing when we can't understand it, and obeying when we can't feel it. We have all had a bout with doubt. And perhaps even been knocked out or at least knocked down by it. In Chapter 3, Jonah did not agree with God. It's crazy to think that Jonah believed he knew more than the Almighty, but that's the picture here. I wonder if we have ever done that? You know, there is a little Jonah in us all. When we step back for a moment and see our circumstances from God's perspective, we are reminded that God is always right and His Word is always true. God always knows what's best and has our best interests at heart.

## DISCUSS

1. Read Jonah 4:1. It says that "to Jonah this seemed very wrong and he became angry." Why did Jonah disagree with God? Why does it not make sense to disagree with God? Why do we do it anyway? How do we train our hearts and minds during times of dissonance and faithlessness to agree with God, trust in God, and have confidence that God's ways are always best?

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# DISCUSS

2. Unpack dissonance here. Life's dilemmas create a fog and confusion, and we begin to believe something is wrong. And if we go as far as Jonah, we even think that God doesn't know what He is doing. Why do so many people lose faith in God during times of doubt? What is the cure for doubt?

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3. The Bible says we "look through glass dimly but one day soon we will see face to face." We don't understand everything in this life, but we know God does. So we choose to trust Him. Does God always have our best interest at heart? What does the verse mean, "His ways are not our ways," and why must we understand and internalize this truth? Why does this matter so much when life is confusing, ambiguous, foggy, uncertain, and it seems God doesn't care or see?

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# DISCUSS

4. Does God always care about us and others? Discuss why Christ came, how He cares, and what we can know for sure. Make a list of absolutes we can always know, especially when times are uncertain and confusing.

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5. Personalize this point. Where do you need to grow in handling this relentless wave of dissonance or doubt? What is going on that is confusing to you in your life right now? How is this messing with your faith? Remember, for God, there is never confusion. Only to us. How can we learn to see with God's eyes, heart, and purposes?

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# MEMORIZE

*For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. As the heavens are higher than the earth so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. **ISAIAH 55:8-9***

# APPLY

Doubts and fears and anxieties can all roll together. Take a moment to deal with your doubts, face your fears, and answer your anxieties head-on by completing this chart.

Area of Doubt, Anxiety, & Fear	Why I Can Have Faith & Confidence	Key Scripture to Build My Faith



# Wave 7 DISCOURAGEMENT

The problem of pain and suffering is real. Many people give up on God because they struggle to understand how a good God could allow such bad things to happen to them or others. I understand that, but Scripture teaches us repeatedly that we will have troubles in this world. Suffering will occur for everyone, even those of deep faith. But the difference is that God will be with us during our pain. He hears us when we hurt. He will walk with us always. And He can turn evil into good, brokenness into growth, and pain into perseverance. The truth is that discouragement and disappointment can sweep over us like a mighty ocean wave. We must be aware and prepared. Because if we are not, it can engulf us and bury us.

## DISCUSS

1. How have others inspired you by rising above deep disappointment and discouragement? Share a story of someone who has demonstrated incredible spiritual maturity and strength in the face of profound challenges.

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# DISCUSS

2. Read all of Jonah 4. His anger and discouragement is palpable. Why was he so angry and discouraged? How have you handled your seasons of discouragement? What has helped you, and what has hurt you?

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3. The wave of discouragement is relentless and overwhelming. If you don't rise above it, you will sink below it. Why do so many people lose their faith, lose their joy, lose their perspective, and fail to persevere through, around, and over discouragement?

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# DISCUSS

4. Jesus said in this world, we will have trouble. Read John 16:33. We know the wave of discouragement will engulf each of us at one point or another. How is it best to prepare for that certain eventuality without being fatalistic? Don't you think figuring this out and learning how to soar above it is wise? We can choose to sink under the waves of discouragement, barely tread water and swim, or soar above it in the power of Christ.

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5. Read 2 Corinthians 4:16-18. What faith-building principles does Paul outline in this passage? How does this help us prepare for and face adversity and discouragement?

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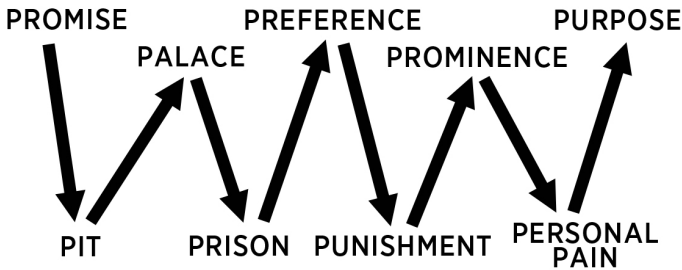
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# MEMORIZE

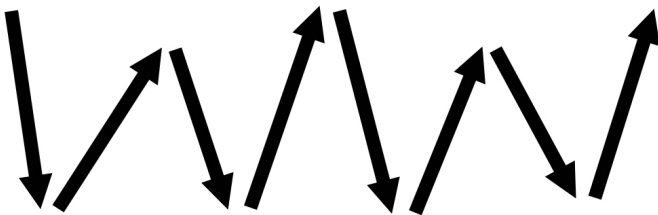
*Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.* **2 CORINTHIANS 4:16-18**

The story of Joseph in Genesis 37-50 is one of the most extraordinary examples of someone who has risen above discouragement after discouragement. He could have become bitter, but he chose to become better and is a powerful example. I call this diagram the Panorama of Perseverance. It's the story in picture form of Joseph's many ups and downs in life.



We all want to live on top, but as Joseph shows us, much of life is lived on the bottom. That's not fatalism; that is realism. His unrelenting resolve to prove faithful to God is nothing less than inspiring and informative.

Chart your story on the visual below. Write yourself into the narrative. Where are you in life right now? Where were you a few years ago when dealing with disappointment and discouragement? Where will you be when facing future waves of despair? Put your story on this panorama and decide where you are right now. And prayerfully consider how you will meet life's challenges in the future.







# Wave 8 DECLARATION

It seems that the idea of “self-talk” is minimized by many people of faith, but I think it is important to celebrate our convictions and reiterate our core values. A declaration of faith reminds me of what I believe and value. Preaching to myself is vital if I’m going to soar and not sink, especially when life is hard. Peter, Paul, John, and so many other Bible writers articulated, wrote down, voiced, and repeated over and over their convictions, values, and faith statements. Writing out what you believe and why you believe it is crucial as you navigate the waves of life.

## DISCUSS

1. Read Jonah 2. What are Jonah’s faith statements? Discuss and write out 5 or more faith statements (affirmations of truth) in this chapter. Write at least one faith statement for each of these bulleted verses below. Maybe you see more than one. A “faith statement” is an affirmation of truth, a conviction, and a strong belief that guides our life and mind and helps us rise above and soar, not sink or barely tread water.

- vs. 2: \_\_\_\_\_
- vs. 3-4: \_\_\_\_\_
- vs. 5-6: \_\_\_\_\_
- vs. 7: \_\_\_\_\_
- vs. 8-9: \_\_\_\_\_

# DISCUSS

2. Jonah makes the most sense in chapter 2. He reminds us of the importance of glorifying God in all things. Of the faith statements you listed in question one, which one(s) mean the most to you and why? Copy them down, think about them, and share why you chose those above the others.

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3. Notice Paul's faith statement in Romans 1:16. Don't you think this potent affirmation of faith powered him through persecution, discouragement, and pain? I think so. What other Declaration of Faith statements in the Bible come to mind? Write down 5-6 and celebrate them.

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# DISCUSS

4. Take a few moments to brainstorm faith statements that you believe about the character of God. He is all-wise, all-loving, etc. Attach Scripture to each one. Start with one or two and allow this list to grow. When times are tough, many Christians turn to key Scriptures, like the 23rd Psalm, that have been special to them over the years. These Scriptures have become faith statements that remind them of the goodness and greatness of God.

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5. Read Joshua's declaration of faith statement in Joshua 1:9. What is he saying here about God, the people of God, and their future with God? Why is this so important? Why would it have mattered significantly to them back then? How can you contemporize this Scripture and make it your declaration of faith statement for today? What does this Scripture mean to you personally as you do so?

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# MEMORIZE

*Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go. **JOSHUA 1:9***

# APPLY

When I was in college (just a couple of minutes ago), I wrote out what I called “principles that guide my life.” You might call them core values today or maybe personal declaration-of-faith statements. Regardless of what you want to call them, everyone should have them. Here are mine:

- 1 > The priority principle. *John 15:5*
- 2 > The passion principle. *Gal 2:20; Luke 9:23; John 3:30*
- 3 > The purity principle. *Dan 1:8*
- 4 > The perseverance principle. *Heb 12:1-3*
- 5 > The prayer principle. *Luke 18:1; Matt 26:40-41*
- 6 > The purpose principle. *Matt 28:18-20; Matt 22: 37-40*
- 7 > The power principle. *Gal 5:25; Zech 4:6*
- 8 > The promise principle. *Ps 1:1,2; Matt 4:4*

Now I want you to create your own list of principles that guide your life. Be sure to add scriptures to them to anchor them deep.

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# Wave 9 DELIVERANCE

While the waves of discouragement and disappointment pound against us, we know that there is always light at the end of the tunnel. There is always hope in the morning. For Jonah, things were as dark and dismal as possible. He was sinking fast and taking on water. Until God delivered Him. God will deliver us, too. In the life to come, heaven is our blessed hope. The grandest deliverance awaits all who believe. In this life it is a little more difficult, while God doesn't always heal as we might ask, answer as we might hope, provide as we might think we need, He is always walking with us and beside us and living within us. We have hope always because of Christ.

## DISCUSS

1. Read Jonah 1:17 and 2:10. Discuss the Jonah story and think of other miracles of deliverance in the Bible (the two most significant being the parting of the Red Sea and the Resurrection). What do they have in common? How are they different?

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# DISCUSS

2. How important is hope and deliverance to you as you think of your life, family, faith, finance, leadership, and more? How do you understand it, and how does it work in your life? Do you have hope? Is the hope of God's provision real to you? You could argue that Jonah didn't deserve it, but God sent the big fish anyway. What does hope in God's provision and deliverance do in your life?

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3. We don't like to think or talk about death, but as believers, one of the greatest realities of hope and deliverance is ours. We know that when this life is over, we will go to heaven and live with Christ forever and ever and ever. Read Revelation 21:1-7; John 14:1-6; John 11:25-26; and 1 Corinthians 15:51-58. What other Scriptures on Heaven, the Second Coming, and Eternal Life are your favorites?

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# DISCUSS

4. Compare and contrast Jonah's deliverance with Moses' (Ex 14) and Daniel's (Daniel 6) and the men in the furnace (Daniel 3). What is true in all four? What is the same? What is different? What applications can you apply to your own life?

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5. We know that God may choose to heal in this life or in the life to come. God is God. He knows what is best, and our hope is in Him. He may provide in ways other than what we prayed. What do you know for sure about hope and deliverance? Why do you place your hope in Christ? What about serving Jesus gives you hope for this life and the life to come?

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# MEMORIZE

*Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die,; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?*

**JOHN 11:25-26**

# APPLY

Take a moment now to complete this deliverance and hope chart. What area of your life are you deeply concerned about? Unsaved loved ones, health challenges, financial concerns, marriage and family miracles needed, or something else?

AREA	PRAYING FOR	DELIVERANCE & HOPE	SCRIPTURE TO LEAN ON



# CONCLUSION

The waves of life are relentless. We get pounded on occasionally, but there is a certain rhythm and cadence to life that we can know. There are certainties that we can prepare for. And there are preparations we can be intentional about. The Jonah story brings to the surface nine different waves in life that we need to learn to navigate well. If we do, we can soar. If we don't, we will sink. Far too many settle for trying to swim and barely tread water in life's biggest waves. God wants more: He wants us to soar. We also need to want more and to soar.

In this study, we learned about the nine significant waves we need to prepare for. Some waves blow hard against us. Some are difficult to weather. And in other cases, there are waves to catch that can propel us forward in life.

Prepare yourself to embrace and navigate all nine waves of life. Like waves in the ocean that are relentless, powerful, beautiful, and also treacherous, there are waves in life that are equally so. Relentless always. Powerful each one. Beautiful when navigated well. Treacherous when not. Which of the nine waves are you already navigating well? Where do you need to rise up in order to soar? God does not want you to barely survive; He wants you to thrive in your marriage, faith, family, finances, relationships, self-leadership, and more. So will you?



**1 Dream → 2 Decision → 3 Direction →  
4 Destination → 5 Destiny → 6 Doubt →  
7 Discouragement → 8 Declaration → 9 Deliverance**

It starts with a dream. What is God's vision for my life, leadership, faith, family, future, education, career, finances, and more? I need to have a dream, clarify the dream, and then pursue the dream.

It requires a decision. I will move forward in the direction of my dreams. How will I best step toward achieving the dreams God has placed in me?

It determines direction. The dream I have and the decisions I make will lead me in a specific direction.

It results in a destination. Dreams, decisions, direction, leads to a destination.

It sculpts a destiny. Dreams, decisions, direction, and destinations in life, over our whole life, result in a legacy. Legacies are built day by day. What is the legacy I am building?

It goes through seasons of doubt and dissonance, when trust is strained, faith is tested, and belief is scrutinized. How we prepare ourselves for those certain eventualities will determine whether we sink, swim, or soar. Choose to soar more.

It will undoubtedly include days of discouragement. While no one wants to admit it, there is no getting around it. Discouragement, disappointment, and despair will happen, and often. The waves of discouragement are powerful. And their current is strong. It will suck you under if you are not ready. Getting ready is challenging but critical.

It will demand declarations of truth. We need to write out and review often the principles that guide our life: core convictions and faith statements that we repeat to ourselves repeatedly. Anchored in Scripture, they become core values.

It also holds out hope for deliverance. Trials and hardships are inevitable, while deliverance in this life may look different. But it is sure in the life to come. Hope and faith in God assure us that this life is not all there is. God will help us walk through our pain and strengthen

us. He wants us to persevere through our problems and know Heaven awaits the faithful. And there will be no more tears, time, or troubles in Heaven. He promises to be with us through everything in this life, and therein lies our hope of deliverance and strength.

Life will not be perfect. Challenges will happen. Adversity is certain, as is suffering. Storms will rage against us, and waves will crash upon us. But we don't have to drown or sink. We can do more than tread water with our heads barely above the surface. We can soar. We can rise above and live a victorious and successful life.

# SMALL GROUP TIPS

Want to use this devotional book with your Small Group? Here are some tips for using this guide in a group setting, a sample meeting agenda, and some tips for leaders.

1. This devotional book is a guide, not a rulebook! Don't worry if the group responds to a session unexpectedly. Sometimes the most honest, authentic, and beneficial conversations come up spontaneously. If you or someone else has additional discussion questions, use them!
2. Open and close each session with prayer – for each other, your time together, and for wisdom, insight, and growth to occur each week. Track your group's requests so you can keep them in your prayers and follow up on them. Feel free to share contact info to help you connect during the week.
3. Have fun! Be encouraged to spend time with each other outside your "scheduled" meeting time. The more time you spend together, the better friends you will become, and greater growth will occur! Have a party, invite each other for dinner, use your imagination!

# EXAMPLE MEETING AGENDA

## **1. Have food as people arrive. (15 minutes)**

You certainly don't have to prepare a full meal every week, but having snacks such as dessert and coffee can help make everyone feel welcome! The early church often gathered and enjoyed eating together. We should too! It helps to break down barriers and eases people into conversations.

## **2. Share about your week. (15 minutes)**

After people have snacks and are settling in, let them share about their week! This is a great time for fun icebreakers. This doesn't have to be a deep conversation, but it's a chance to let everyone know what has been happening since you last met.

## **3. Discussion time. (45-60 minutes)**

Whether you jump right into discussion questions from the weekend sermon, start to read Scripture, or turn on a video, this is the central part of the group. Start promptly, no later than 30 minutes into the group time, to ensure enough time to talk.

## **4. Pray and close. (5-10 minutes)**

Ask for prayer requests or praise reports and pray for the group before dismissing. Feel free to use the prayer log in each chapter to see how God is working in everyone as the group continues to meet!

# GROUP Leader Tips

## CONFIDENCE

### **It's normal to be nervous!**

Leading a group isn't complicated, but it can be intimidating if this is your first time! Remember, God is in control and excited to use you. As you serve by leading this group, you will be blessed, and you will be a blessing to others.

### **Be yourself!**

God uses a variety of people in the Bible to accomplish amazing things, and He does this while using their individual gifts and personalities. Don't try to be someone you are not. Be authentic, and don't worry if you make a mistake or don't have an answer! Please feel free to contact a pastor if you need advice.

### **You're not alone.**

The members of your group all have unique skills. Some of them may even enjoy the opportunity to help you! Whether it's finding someone to bring snacks, take attendance, or email out weekly prayer requests, you shouldn't do everything by yourself. Look for opportunities for others to serve the group, and don't be afraid to ask them to step up.

## CHARACTER

### **Spend time with God.**

Pray regularly for your group members and for God to be present when you meet. Celebrate when prayers are answered!

### **Invest in your people.**

Everyone in your group has a story and is searching for a community. Spend time talking about their lives, dreams, struggles, and successes. This is often a great way to begin each group session before starting videos or discussion.

## CLARITY

### **Set clear expectations.**

At your first group meeting, it's wise to set some ground rules for the next few months so everyone knows what to expect. Some standards for all BCA Groups are no alcohol during Group meetings, avoiding bringing sick children to the group, etc.

### **Encourage participation.**

Remember, you shouldn't do all the talking! A general rule of thumb is that leaders should talk no more than 25% of the time. Let people take turns leading the discussion questions and reading the Scripture. Of course, it may take time for everyone to feel comfortable opening up and talking, and that's okay. Be patient when asking questions - allow people to share when they are ready and thank them for their input. Preparing your answers ahead of time to prompt conversations is helpful.

### **Maintain the atmosphere.**

For many people, joining a group is a big step of faith! Sharing personal details about their life with people they have just met may also be a bit scary. Be sensitive to group members who are not ready to talk, pray, or do anything yet. Everyone is at a different stage in their faith journey, but God is working in them in ways we can't always see! It's essential that people feel comfortable sharing as much or as little as they can and knowing that no judgment is present. It's equally important to ensure that everyone gets a chance to participate and that no one person controls the conversations.

## CONSISTENCY

### **Set a schedule and stick to it.**

The best way to foster growth in a group is to be consistent. Many people have busy schedules, so knowing what to expect each week is helpful! Set a schedule, and don't cancel group meetings. People set their expectations of the group based on your availability and willingness to "stay the course." Show them that they are a priority! Even if only one other family comes, God will be present, and you'll still build that relationship.





# THE 9 WAVES OF LIFE

**WAVE 1** Dream

**WAVE 2** Decision

**WAVE 3** Direction

**WAVE 4** Destination

**WAVE 5** Destiny

**WAVE 6** Doubt

**WAVE 7** Discouragement

**WAVE 8** Declaration

**WAVE 9** Deliverance