

## Week 8: "The Belly of the Whale"

### Lesson Objectives:

- Give examples of Biblical men who endured great suffering and were transformed.
- Discover that we can learn more from suffering and failure than success.
- Prepare emotionally for the day you will have a belly of the whale experience.
- Deduce from Jesus and other Biblical men, what made their experience transformational.
- Conclude that in order to go to a deeper level, some things in us must die.

### Preparation:

- PPT of the Spiritual Journey Paradigm of Jesus (5 Stages) or the handout.
- Print out copies of discussion questions for Learning Task 2 for each participant.

### I. WELCOME and INTRODUCTION and Announcements (5 mins) **Facilitator**

**Reminder of our purpose:** *"Learning to trust each other, to share from the heart our wounds, fears, hurts, and failures with each other that we may help each other heal, and become healthy, spiritual men."*

### II. BRIDGE: Homework Questions from Inventory Sheet

#### Learning Task 1:

1. What were the 2 or 3 most surprising things you learned about yourself or your life? What do you want to change?
2. How did you feel going through the process? Was it helpful, painful, revealing, or discouraging?
3. What do you think you need to do now to help you change areas that you found are obstacles to finding peace in your heart?

Did it help you to share this with a trusted friend? How did it help you?

### III. **BODY:** The Belly of the Whale: Show 5 Stage of Jesus Journey slide or handout

**Facilitator Mini Lecture:** The "Belly of the Whale" is a metaphor that was used first by Jesus when the Pharisees asked him for a sign that he was the Messiah. He said, "The only sign you will get is the sign of Jonah who spent 3 days and nights in the "Belly of the Whale." He was referring to his death. "The Belly of the Whale" is a term that is used metaphorically to mean entering an experience that is emotionally or physically painful for an extended period of time. This time is full of uncertainty, it is difficult, you do not know when or how it will end, it seems hopeless, all your support systems like friends, family, community, church, job

might be taken away-it is emotional suffering and sometimes physical to. It can be something you bring on yourself a moral failure (business fraud, an affair, addiction to alcohol/drugs, etc), or the death of a child, loss of spouse or job, or an accident. How you respond to the “Belly of the Whale” experience depends on the quality of your desert experience. If you had little or no desert experience, the “Belly of the Whale” will be almost unbearable but one must persevere. “The Belly of the Whale” can lead to significant transformation, and new way of being conscious to one’s own soul and to God.

No change can happen in your soul unless something dies first. There is no new life without death first.

When one ‘accepts Christ,’ you climb up on the right road but nothing really changes. You add new behaviors like going to church, tithing, reading the bible, stop drinking and beating your wife, etc. You learn new things from Bible. You stop doing bad things, and try to do good things. But what died? What really changed? In God’s timing, usually around mid-life between the ages of 35-55, people experience the “Belly of the Whale.” Then, they either preserve and live through it and are totally transformed, or they rip open the Belly and run. Those people continue to live a dead life, transfer their pain and deadness to others (family, friends, colleagues, and church).

1. Use Handout or Show PPT of Jesus Spiritual Journey- Review Jesus Baptism, what he learned in the desert, his year or so of popularity, and focus on the slide of his arrest, betrayal, suffering, torture and death on the cross. This was the Belly of the whale Jesus was talking about.

**Facilitator Point:** Without death, there is no resurrection. Without death, there is no new life. Point out Jesus’ resurrection which brought new life to the world.

2. **Learning Task 2:** In pairs, study the metaphorical death(s) of Joseph, Jonah, the Apostles, Job, Mary and David, and their experience in the “Belly of the Whale.”

Use your bible to look up if you have it.

**Pair 1-**The 3 metaphorical deaths of **Joseph** (son of Jacob)

**Pair 2-**The metaphorical death of the **Apostles** and followers of Jesus

**Pair 3-** The metaphorical death of **Job**.

**Pair 4-** The many metaphorical deaths of **Mary** (mother of Jesus).

**Pair 5-** The metaphorical death of **King David**.

**Pair 6-** The experience of **Jonah** in the Belly of the Whale.

### Discussion Questions for Partners:

- What was their life like before their crisis? Were they pursuing the ladder of success? Were they too comfortable? Did they have lots of material items to fall back on?
- How do you know they struggled deeply with God for an extended time?
- What died in their lives? What was resurrected?
- What transformation did you see?

Each Group Shares- Take notes of what they were like before and what they were like after, and any other thing of interest.

**Facilitator Question** for large group discussion: From listening to each other, what did you find in common about the stories each group studied. What relates to your own spiritual journey?

#### IV. **Build:** “Accepting Life on Life’s Terms”/Sacred Wounds, Sacred Spaces.

**Facilitator Note:** Accepting Life on life’s terms means that we accept suffering and tragedy as part of the human condition. Most of us become angry and resentful because suffering and tragedy enter our stage of life. It is not part of plan and when our plan is interrupted, we become disappointed with others and God. When a crisis or suffering enters our stage, we become fearful because we do not understand it and we cannot control it. Then we live in FEAR and work on controlling our stage to keep out life’s circumstances. It does not work. Sooner or later, like Mary, the Apostles, Jacob, Job, we going to be placed in a situation where we cannot control anything, and we will meet God in a whole new way. Then we will say like Jacob in Gen. 28:16: “Surely the Lord was in this place and I was not aware of it.”

Those who have truly been through a metaphorical death, can now see it as a gift, a sacred wound like Jacob’s hip. We don’t have to control everything anymore, and we can accept personal tragedy, disappointment, suffering and uncertainty as the way life is for people. We no longer live in fear, and have no need to control our stage/life and fear things we do not understand.

#### LEARNING TASK 3:

1. Each participant is asked to tell what Biblical Character’s Spiritual Journey is most like theirs and why.
2. Each participant shares how this group has helped them over the last 2-3 months.
3. Prayer for each other.

