



Swallowed Up: *Jonah* and *Finding Nemo* for Grownups

Let's be clear from the start, the whale saved Jonah's ass.

The theme of being swallowed by a whale appears in the Bible story of *Jonah*, and in the classic Italian children's story *Pinocchio* and, more recently, in Disney's *Finding Nemo*.

In *Finding Nemo*, Marlin is the ultimate helicopter parent. Always hovering. Always trying to control the situation. He's lost a lot in life and he is not going to risk losing the only thing he's got left – his son. Only he does. The whole movie is about Marlin searching for his lost son, a little clown fish named Nemo. But mostly, it's about Marlin searching for and finding himself. First, he has to realize that he's lost.

The turning point, the key scene, is when Marlin and his friend Dory are swallowed by a whale. He's sure he's going to die, and the crisis becomes a catalyst for Marlin's moment of realization. Revelation. Epiphany. Marlin sees the truth about himself. About how he holds on too tightly. About his fear of losing control over what he never really had control of anyway. He's still scared. It's scary to find out you don't have control. That maybe it's *you* that is out of control.

Dory, his loyal but dingy friend, tells Marlin it's time to let go, that everything will be alright.

"How do you know?" demands Marlin. "How do you know something bad isn't going to happen?"

"I don't," replies Dory.

Dory is an honest friend and spiritual guide. Something bad may happen. That's life. Still, it's time to let go.

- Let go of what you thought you knew.
- Let go of the fear that holds you back.
- Let go of disbelief.

Marlin is so unsure, but finally, he, too, let's go. When he does, he is spewed out by the whale and finds that he's joyfully alive and free. Being swallowed up and spit out changed him. As it did Jonah. And Pinocchio. And as it changes us.

We call that *transformation*. In the story of Jonah, it might be called repentance. In Pinocchio, becoming real. By whatever name, that kind of deep life change often starts with a crisis, and it requires letting go. Something must die before something new can be born in us.

Whether in Jonah or Nemo, the whale is just a literary device – a metaphor for what's really eating us.

Sometimes it takes a crisis to see ourselves honestly. When we feel swallowed whole, it's hard to believe that what is eating our ass may, finally, be what saves our butt. That on the OTHER side of that hard, honest look at ourselves – if we let go of our fear and pain—we can be joyfully alive and free. And that's called grace.

Pastor Deb

- Watch [Inside the Whale scene in *Finding Nemo*](#) (2:47.) Or watch the movie again as a family.
- Read Jonah in the Old Testament. At only four chapters it's a quick read, but more nuanced than Nemo.