

# Jonah

The reluctant prophet



STUDY GUIDE

# Introduction: Jonah

You are probably familiar with the story of Jonah, but how recently have you read it?

And when was the last time you asked God to speak into your life from the story of this runaway prophet?

One question that often comes up when people hear about Jonah for the first time is whether the story is true. It's certainly set in real places, but it lacks some of the historical detail that other prophets include. Jesus refers to it, but some have considered it a parable much like Jesus' own stories. One thing's for sure, a God who can create out of nothing and raise a dead man to life can arrange for the extraordinary events recorded in this book.

The promise of Scripture is that it is all God-breathed and useful for us, so let's head prayerfully into the story of this prophet with ears open for what God is saying to us about the call to follow him.

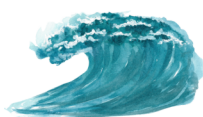
Each week there will be a sermon on Jonah at both 10am and 4pm services, so that we can all follow this extraordinary book together.

I think there is much that God has to say to us from this story of a reluctant prophet, and how God worked to use him to bring the message of repentance and forgiveness to the people of Nineveh.

If you'd like to dig a little deeper into Jonah, then I recommend Tim Keller's book, 'The Prodigal Prophet'.

May the Lord bless us as we read through it together,

Tom



## Week 1: Introduction & Reluctance

### Getting started...

What's the strangest/hardest/funniest thing you've been asked to do recently?

### Background

The book opens with a clear command from God to his prophet, Jonah: go to the wicked city of Nineveh (and history records how evil they could be). Jonah's response is just as clear— defiance. He heads for the furthest point he can think of, revealing an often-felt struggle with God's sometimes inconvenient call.

### Read Jonah 1:1-3

### Understanding what was happening...

Why does God send Jonah to Nineveh?

Is it clear at this stage that God will offer forgiveness to the city of Nineveh?

Why might Jonah have decided to do the exact opposite?

Did Jonah really think he could run away from God?

### Applying to our situations...

Would God call us to do things that can seem daunting and scary?

With Jonah in mind, should we ever feel unworthy to be used by God?

If there are times we've failed to obey God's call, is there forgiveness?

How do we know God calls us to follow him - do we have to hear God's audible voice? Are there other passages in the Bible which show that he does?

### Prayer

As well as prayer for specific things in each other's lives, why not pray that we would know the call to follow Jesus, as well as forgiveness for our occasional failures to follow his call. Ask for wisdom for one another, ask him to show us how he's calling us to follow him.



## Week 2: The Storm & The Big Fish

### Getting started...

How easy do you find it to see and admit when you're the problem?

### Background

Jonah may be running from God, but he cannot outrun His sovereignty. God hurls a great storm at the ship, terrifying the seasoned sailors. In this passage, we see the stark contrast between the piety of the pagans and the apathy of the prophet, proving God's inescapable presence.

### Read Jonah 1:4-16

### Understanding what was happening...

Does this storm remind you of an event in Jesus' life?

What is the difference in response between the sailors and Jonah?

Jonah tried to avoid telling pagans about God, but what actually happened in the end (v16)?

By the end of this chapter, who needs God's grace and rescue?

What does that tell us about the people God calls to serve him?

### Applying to our situations...

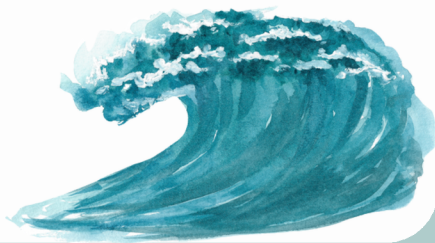
Can our own personal compromises or 'hidden' disobedience lead to 'storms' if we deliberately go against God's will?

Who are the 'sailors' in our culture today—people who don't share our faith but sometimes demonstrate some faith or passion for justice and truth?

Have you seen God use a moment of honest, humble confession of failure—your own or someone else's—to do something surprisingly powerful?

### Prayer

Pray for those who may feel like they're going through the storm. Why not pray for everyone that we would ask God to help us with our own spiritual blind spots, and the faith to trust him even in the storm.



## Week 3: Jonah's Prayer for Salvation

### Getting started...

Can you share an answered prayer that got you out of a difficult situation?

### Background

Thrown into the sea and swallowed by a great fish, Jonah sinks to his lowest point. From the depths, he cries out to God. This chapter is a powerful psalm from a desperate place, showing that no one is beyond the reach of God's grace.

### Read Jonah 2

### Understanding what was happening...

How does Jonah's faith seem to have grown since chapter 1?

What's prompted that change?

Does Jonah's prayer in vv1-6 remind you of any of the Psalms?

What is it that Jonah has learned about God from his dramatic submersion?

Does God sometimes allow difficult times so that we learn to trust him?

### Applying to our situations...

Do we go through times when we feel 'in the depths'?

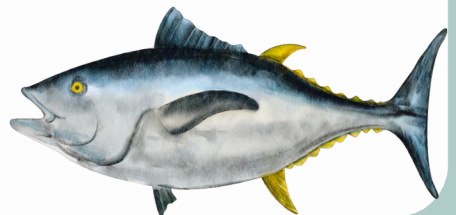
Is there a lesson here for when following Jesus takes us through difficulties?

Do you find it easy to acknowledge your need for God's forgiveness?

If we've truly answered the call to follow Jesus, will he ever let us go?

### Prayer

As this chapter is really just one long prayer, you might like to begin or end your prayer time by reading this chapter together as a prayer. We too have been rescued from the pit (of sin) and from death - into life in Christ!



## Week 4: Repentance

### Getting started...

How easy do we find it to give people a second (third, fourth etc!) chance?

### Background

God graciously gives his runaway prophet a second chance. This time, Jonah obeys and preaches to Nineveh. The response is astounding: the entire city, from the king down, repents. This chapter reveals God's compassionate heart for all nations and the power of his word to bring transformation.

### Read Jonah 3

### Understanding what was happening...

How do we see God's grace to Jonah in vv1-2?

What seems to have happened in Jonah so that he now obeys God's call?

What is the result of Jonah's message?

How does this demonstrate God's concern for justice in all nations?

How would you expect Jonah to feel as he sees this change in Nineveh?

### Applying to our situations...

Are we all called to speak of repentance and faith? (see Luke 24:46-47)

Is it reassuring that Nineveh's repentance was dependent on God's power, and not the faith of the messenger?

There are different ways of telling people about Jesus. Are there ways that you would love to be more confident doing so?

How can we commit to pray for ours and all the nations to see repentance and revival?

### Prayer

Are there particular people on your heart that you'd love to share the good news with? Why not name one or two people each and pray for faith and opportunity to talk to them in God's timing and strength.



## **Week 5: Resistance to God's plans & the need for changed hearts**

### **Getting started...**

why is it hard to forgive people who've hurt us?

### **Background**

Jonah's preaching has been a spectacular success, yet he is furious with God. Why? Because God showed mercy to his enemies. This final chapter confronts Jonah's—and our own—resentment and lack of compassion, leaving us with a powerful question about the breadth of God's love.

### **Read Jonah 4**

### **Understanding what was happening...**

Jonah's call to preach repentance has gone well, so why is he so angry?  
What does it suggest he really wanted to happen?  
Does it seem strange to hold against God just how gracious and loving he is?  
What is God showing to Jonah through the plant?  
How do you feel as the story ends, without knowing Jonah's final response?  
Does leaving it on a cliff-hanger help us 'enter into' the message of the book?

### **Applying to our situations...**

How often do we check our hearts to ensure our motivations are in line with the Lord's?  
Do we sometimes fall into the trap of entitlement in our faith, but expect more of others?  
As we seek to follow Jesus' call to share the message, are we ready for a variety of outcomes?  
Do we trust the Lord that as we obey his instruction, he will act?

### **Prayer**

As we reach the end of Jonah, is there one thing in particular that you'd like prayer for in seeking and following God's call?



Space below for your notes