**LIFE GROUP NOTES SUMMER 2025 – Jonah**

**SESSION 1 Life Groups: 3rd/4th June**

***Text: Jonah 1:1-16***

***Jonah Flees From the Lord***

*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.”*

*3But 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.*

*4Then the Lord sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up. 5All 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. 6The 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.”*

*7Then 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. 8So 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?”*

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

*10This 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.)*

*11The 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.”*

*13Instead, the men did their best to row back to land. But they could not, for the sea grew even wilder than before. 14Then 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.” 15Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm. 16At this the men greatly feared the Lord, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows to him.*

**General Historical Background**

Author: Jonah son of Amittai

Time set: 790 - 760 BC (1 Kings 14:25)

At this time Israel was on the ascendency and was experiencing military success and great prosperity. Their biggest threat came from the Arameans. Assyria (where Nineveh was situated) was in a season of decline and was suffering from internal political instability. Only a century before Assyria had been the largest power in the area and had authority over Israel, Judah and Aram. The capital city was Calah, not Nineveh, and there were a number of rebellions that had left Assyria weakened.

A short while after this books events, in 745 BC, Tiglath Pileser III and his successors Shalmanaser V, Sargon II and Sennacherib ruled over Assyria at the height of its power. The Assyrian empire reigned for another 100 years. Nineveh became the capital and extensive building projects were completed including a grand palace and reinforced city walls, contributing significantly to its prominence.

**Biblical Background**

Apart from in the book of Jonah, the only Old Testament reference to him is in [2 Kings 14:25](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2%20Kings%2014%3A25&version=NIV). There we find him as an expansionist prophet encouraging the growth of the kingdom of Israel, presumably by military occupation of other nations. This makes it even more curious as to why Jonah should run away from God’s instruction to declare his judgement on Assyria, planning to travel over 2,000 mile in the opposite direction!

In addition, it involved travel by sea, a means of transport which the Israelites were not familiar with. Indeed, the image of the sea in the Old Testament is one of threat and danger, containing the monster Leviathan.

Keep that question, as to why Jonah ran away, in mind as we go through these studies.

This opening chapter highlights our tendency to resist God's will, especially when it involves difficult or uncomfortable tasks. We are often called to do things that we don't want to do, whether it's sharing our faith, serving others, or making difficult choices.

**Opening Question**

1. Describe your most memorable sea/lake/river journey either good or bad (or both)

**OR**

2. Are there particular groups of people or types of individuals with whom you would find it difficult to share the gospel? If so, why?

**Worship**

Read the following verse:

*For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. 2 Corinthians 5:14*

Play the song “I the Lord of sea & sky (Here I am Lord)” together or via the following link

<https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=i%20the%20lord%20of%20sea%20and%20sky%20youtube%20videos&view=detail&mid=DCBF0D9C4B4BCFF4A737DCBF0D9C4B4BCFF4A737&ajaxhist=0>

Praise God for his love in Jesus for all people. Thank him for those who brought the good news of Jesus to Britain and through succeeding generations and to you personally.

**Study Questions**

1. Read the passage together. What stands out for you in this passage?
2. Many commentators believe that this story is more of a satirical parable than a factual account. If the story isn’t literally true, does it necessarily lose its impact on us as readers? (compare with Jesus’ parables)
3. At this point in the story, it is unclear exactly why Jonah ran off in the opposite direction. What do you think might have been his motivation; fear, disagreement with God, pride, or something else? Have you ever felt like running away from God? How did that work out?
4. Israel and Assyria were both expanding their empires towards each other by taking over parts of Syria. What do you think this chapter might be telling us about the depth of Jonah’s feeling towards Israel’s enemies? How does that relate to Jesus’ teaching to love our enemies?
5. The chapter finishes with the sailors worshipping the God Jonah disobeyed. This demonstrates the sovereignty of God as he can even work though our disobedience to bring others to himself. To what extent do you truly believe that God can work through you despite your imperfections? (N.B. This doesn’t mean we don’t strive to be better!)
6. Do you ever feel that following Christ is too hard and that God asks too much of his disciples?
7. Have you considered that God may be calling you to serve others through a ministry in the local church or beyond?

**Frontline Focus**

Over the next four Life Group sessions we will be picking up on the fish outlines used in the “On The Beach” notes from the end of May. If your group didn’t do this, we suggest you ask them to prepare a list of names of people they are in regular contact with who are not yet committed to following Jesus.

During the next 2 weeks prayerfully consider which 3 names from those on your fish you believe God is calling you to have a specific prayer focus upon. Come to the next meeting ready to share those names. If you feel it is awkward to share their actual name, just use the first letter of their name (for instance use D if their name is David).

**SESSION 2 Life Groups: 17th/18th June**

***Text: Jonah 1:17 – 2:10***

**Jonah’s Prayer**

*17Now the Lord provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. 2 1 [*[*a*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Jonah%201%3A17-%202%3A10&version=NIV#fen-NIV-22550a)*]From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the Lord his God. 2He 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.  
3You 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.  
4I said, ‘I have been banished  
    from your sight;  
yet I will look again  
    toward your holy temple.’  
5The engulfing waters threatened me,[*[*b*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Jonah%201%3A17-%202%3A10&version=NIV#fen-NIV-22554b)*]  
    the deep surrounded me;  
    seaweed was wrapped around my head.  
6To 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.  
9But 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.’”*

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

**Biblical Background**

Here Jonah is reaching out to God in prayer, reminding us that prayer is a lifeline. It also shows us that it is equally important to give thanks and worship to God (“grateful praise”) no matter where we are or what our situation looks like.

In verse 9 Jonah may have been talking not about his vow to be a prophet but stating that he would later give thanks for his current deliverance. However, in verse 6 he refers to God raising his life from the pit. This may suggest that he is either looking back to a former time when God was there for him in a crisis or simply expressing a confidence in God’s power to deliver him even in the midst of his distress.

There are echoes in this prayer of some of the Psalms of lament by David. Some scholars see a particular parallel with Psalm 69:13-18.

**Opening Question**

Describe how you think it would be like to be physically inside a huge fish for three days and nights. Use your imagination!

**OR**

Have you ever been in a situation in your life where you felt trapped and unable to get out? What was the outcome?

**Worship**

Read aloud Psalm 103:4: “He (God) redeems your life from the pit” slowly several times. Spend some time in silence reflecting on that verse. Offer prayers of gratitude to God for delivering us out of numerous difficulties throughout our lives.

**Study Questions**

1. Read the passage together. What stands out for you in this passage?
2. What do you think we can learn about prayer from this chapter?
3. Can you think of a time when you cried out to God for help? How easy or difficult did you find it to give “grateful praise” in that situation?
4. Are there times when rather than feeling thankful you feel let down by God and frustrated by unanswered prayer? How was that feeling resolved, or do you still feel that way?
5. In verse 8 Jonah speaks of the reality of God’s love and not turning away from it. How easy or difficult have you found holding on to that reality through both the good and bad times in life? What helped you most?
6. Verse 1 speaks of God providing a huge fish to rescue Jonah, though it may not have felt much like a rescue to him at the time! Have you ever seen other instances where God has helped in strange and unexpected ways?
7. How do you think Jonah felt towards God when emerging on dry land? In Jesus God has given us a solid rock on which to build our lives instead of shifting sand. How genuinely grateful do you feel towards him?

**Frontline Focus**

Share the names of the 3 people you feel God is asking you to focus on in prayer. This doesn’t mean that you don’t pray for anyone else, simply that these folk will be a particular prayer focus.

Link with one other person in the group and agree to pray each day for each other’s list, as well as your own. Do this in pairs. Where there is an odd number of group members a group of three can be formed, but no one should be praying for more than one other list than their own.

Commit to pray daily (we’re not talking about long prayers!) for your and your prayer partner’s list. Simply bring them before God – he knows them and their needs. You could imagine them in a similar situation to Jonah, trapped and needing rescued, though not in a fish. Cry out to God for them.

Come to the next session ready to share any feedback

**SESSION 3 Life Groups: 1st/2nd July**

***Text: Jonah 3:1-10***

***Jonah Goes to Nineveh***

*3 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.”*

*3Jonah 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. 4Jonah began by going a day’s journey into the city, proclaiming, “Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown.” 5The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.*

*6When 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. 7This 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. 8But let people and animals be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. 9Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish.”*

*10When 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.*

**Biblical Background**

In this chapter we find Jonah, albeit reluctantly, preaching the message to the Assyrian people. Although it would take three days to walk across the city, they responded within the first 24 hours!

Each of the local areas had their own prophets and the Assyrian kings were known for taking prophecy seriously (see 1 Kings 22:2-7). If the warning came from a foreign prophet his words would have possibly been taken more seriously due to the trouble he had endured to deliver it.

**Opening Questions**

Do you prefer living in the city/town or in the country? Why?

**OR**

What is the most difficult, enjoyable, or reluctant walk you have ever undertaken? It’s not necessarily a matter of distance! It could be simply walking up to an individual to confess or ask forgiveness.

**Worship**

Play or sing “Lord, have mercy on us. Come and heal our land” (Graham Kendrick). Respond in prayer.

**Study Questions**

1. Read the passage together. What stands out for you in this passage?
2. Jonah repented and fulfilled God’s calling because of being in dire straits. To what extent do you think that getting in trouble maybe a causal factor in people reforming and turning to God?
3. God relented on his threat of judgement on Nineveh when he saw their reaction according to his promise in Jeremiah 18:7-10. (Read it together). How do you think we can interpret this passage today?
4. The Ninevites fasted as a sign of their turning to God. What part do you think fasting could or should play in our Christian lives today? What is your experience of fasting?
5. The Assyrians were seen as one of Israel’s mortal enemies and hated generally in that day for their cruelty to other nations. What do you think Jonah might have been hoping for as a result of his preaching; repentance or destruction? How do you respond to Jesus’ telling you to love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you (Matthew 5:44-45)?
6. Repentance is a central theme in the story of Jonah, both personal (Jonah) and corporate (Nineveh). It remains a key to Jewish tradition, and this book is read at Yom Kippur, the day of Atonement. What do you think Jonah teaches us about the meaning and scope of true repentance that pleases God?
7. One commentator sees the book of Jonah as teaching us that reconciliation must always be our goal with our enemies, not their destruction. This would apply at both an interpersonal & international level. To what extent do you agree with this? Is reconciliation always possible?

**Frontline Focus**

Share any significant developments in your relationship with the individuals on your list. If your prayer partner is not present, make sure they receive your feedback too.

Jonah had to change his attitude as well as direction to reach out to the people of Nineveh. Pray for each other that the Holy Spirit will be nudging them towards any changes in their own life or lifestyle that he requires for them to be more effective in their witness, especially towards those on their list. Continue that prayer over the next two weeks

**SESSION 4 Life Groups: 15th/16th July**

***Text: Jonah 4:1-11***

***Jonah’s Anger at the Lord’s Compassion***

*4 But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry. 2He 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. 3Now, Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live.”*

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

*5Jonah 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. 6Then the Lord God provided a leafy plant[*[*a*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Jonah%204%3A1-11&version=NIV#fen-NIV-22575a)*] 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. 7But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the plant so that it withered. 8When 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.”*

*9But 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.”*

*10But 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. 11And 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?”*

**Biblical Background**

The climax of the story finds Jonah sulking and angry because the people repented as a direct result of his preaching. He knows that God is merciful, but Jonah appears to desire judgment instead of forgiveness. It emphasises Jonah’s hatred of the Assyrians, bordering on prejudice. He knows God loves them but seems to find that very difficult to accept.

Even when given an object lesson Jonah still remains stubbornly angry “enough to die!”

**Opening Question**

What sort of things make you angry?

**OR**

What do you do when you feel angry with someone? (e.g. Count to 10 etc)

**Worship**

Read all of Psalm 103 together, which speaks of our loving and compassionate God. Respond in prayer.

**Study Questions**

1. Read the passage together. What stands out for you in this passage?
2. Have you ever been seriously angry with God? How did you deal with it?
3. Jesus quotes the story of Jonah and uses it as a reference to his resurrection, Matthew 12:38-41 & 16:4; Luke 11:29-32. What do you think we can learn from these passages?
4. Jonah appears unwilling to accept that God could ever care about them, thus limiting God’s love to the limits of his own ability to love. In what ways do you think we, in our minds, limit God’s love? How might we address this tendency?
5. Some commentators think that this whole story is about God challenging Jonah to address his prejudice against the Assyrians. How conscious are you of your own prejudices against individuals or groups of people? Dare you ask God to let you see them through his eyes? Do you think that might change your perspective?
6. Could part of Jonah’s anger arise from a feeling that God had made a fool of him? Have you ever been in a situation where you’ve been ashamed or embarrassed by what God has done despite your attitude?
7. What is the overall message that has emerged for you from these studies in Jonah?

**Frontline Focus**

Again, share any significant developments in your relationship with the individuals on your list, or anything that God has been saying to you. If your prayer partner is not present, make sure they receive your feedback too.

Over the next fortnight commit to pray for a deepening of the relationships with those on your and your prayer partner’s lists. Pray together as a group for each other about this.

Keep on the alert for these developments in relationships, particularly including small things, such as discovering a common interest or experience. Things that on the surface may not appear spiritually very meaningful can prove significant. But equally don’t rule out a major work of God. It certainly happened with Jonah!

Come to the next session ready to share encouragement of answers to prayer.

Be aware that God often works “alongside” our prayers not just in ways we hadn’t thought of, but also in people we weren’t necessarily focusing our prayers upon. In other words, be ready for exciting surprises. As the hymn says, God does, “Thrill us and surprise us with his sovereign power.” He certainly did that for Jonah, though he wasn’t quite so thrilled.