

## Introduction to Jonah

Jonah. The story is one of the best known and most popular Bible stories, but one of the least looked at in detail.

Jonah is a book which will probably make you laugh, but like a lot of good humour, what makes it funnier and more poignant is that we can identify with the characters. They have the same sort of reactions that we can see in ourselves.

The book raises all sorts of questions. For example...

We might think in theory that God can do anything, but do we believe it when we end up in a mess?

We can say that God is loving and compassionate, but do we always want him to be?

We might agree that telling others the good news about God's love is a good thing, but what if it's you who must do it?!

We say that 'all things are possible for God' –but could God use me? ...for his mission?? Impossible!

I hope you'll have fun as you read and explore a great story –but also that you'll grow stronger in your faith as you're challenged by God's word.

### **To Find out More...**

If you want to see one quick analysis of the book, you could try watching The Bible Project's short video at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dLlabZc0O4c>

*Toby*

# 1: To Boldly Go... or Not?!

## WELCOME

*Spend time relaxing & sharing together. You could try this...*

**Each Share:** What's your favourite type of comedy? What do you find funny? Why?

## WORSHIP

*Use music, silence, prayer, meditation, reflection, songs, hymns, etc. or be creative with drawing, writing, symbols, poetry etc to help people to draw near to God. You could try this...*

One of you read Matthew 8:23-27. Ask everyone else to close their eyes & imagine they are one of the disciples. Pause after each verse for about 30 seconds. Encourage people in the silence to consider how they feel about themselves (as a disciple) and about Jesus. At the end encourage people to talk to Jesus, expressing their thoughts/feelings towards him (in silence or out loud).

## WORD

It's not often that you get the chance to read a whole book of the Bible in a Growth Group, but Jonah's not too long, so...

### Read Jonah 1-4

Read the whole of the book of Jonah straight through – either out loud or quietly individually, for speed (about 5 minutes).

**Discuss** your initial reactions to the whole book:

- Does anything in the passage jump out at you? Why?
- Does anything connect with something you've been doing, reading or thinking about?
- Is there anything you haven't noticed before?

Now use **some** of the questions below (*and set a time limit to leave yourselves time to pray!*)

- What were the main parts of the story? How might the story work as a comedy for theatre/TV/panto/radio?
- Jonah hears God's voice clearly enough to run off in the opposite direction (Chapter 1:1-3)! Have you ever clearly sensed God calling you to do something (big or small)? How did you respond? or if not, how would you?
- In what ways does God call us all to do what he was asking Jonah to do?
- In 4:1-2, Jonah gives his reasons to God for running away. He even quotes the Bible to God (from Psalm 145:8 & other places). Are you convinced by Jonah's reasons? If not, what do you think his reasons were? What reasons do we give for not doing what God wants?
- In chapter 4, Jonah directs his anger at God. Is this a good thing to do?
- In this story, do you think God seems 'gracious and compassionate' or not? Where do your sympathies lie –with Jonah, God or the Ninevites?

## WHAT NEXT?

- **Make a PI Chart (Prayer & Invitation):** For these next few weeks, and as part of the Thy Kingdom Come initiative... Each think of a few people who you would like to become Christians. Write down their names on paper and then pray for them as a group each week. Also think what church event you could invite them to – a service, social, community event or Alpha (January). You might want to add others as you go along. Just be a bit careful not to break any confidentiality in talking about them.
- **Share:** What do you find difficult about sharing your faith? In what current situations do you find it hardest? Pray for one another for God's help.
- **EXTRA:** During the week, you could re-read Jonah 1 and reflect on Psalms that appeal to God for mercy, such as Psalm 6

## 2: One of our Agents is Missing!

### WELCOME

Spend time relaxing & sharing together. You could try this...  
Each share: What makes you feel hungry?

**The Word and Worship sections are reversed this week. Even if you don't always use the worship suggestion, please do this week as it's part of the story...**

### WORD

Having got the big picture, this week let's go back to the start of Jonah & ask what the story reveals about Jonah, God and us.

#### Read Jonah 1

**Discuss** your initial reactions to the passage:

- Does anything in the passage jump out at you? Why?
- Does anything connect with something you've been doing, reading or thinking about?
- Is there anything you haven't noticed before?

Now use **some** of the questions below (**Leave yourselves longer for the last 2 sections this week!**)

- Do you think Jonah deserved what he got in chapter 1?
- If you were God, how would you have treated Jonah?
- Do you think God treats us (or would treat us) as he treated Jonah? Why?
- What does this story show about God?
- Verse 17 says: 'The Lord provided a great fish to swallow Jonah'. How do you think Jonah felt about God's 'provision'? Have you ever had a similar experience?
- How do you feel about God's persistence in using Jonah (or you) in his plans? Have you ever wished he'd leave you alone?!

- Are there times when you've been tempted to blame God for things that are your fault?
- It's easy to say: 'God knows best' but does he really?!

### WORSHIP

#### Read Jonah 2

- In Jonah 2:1&7, we see what it took before Jonah turned to God. In Jonah's position, what would you say to God? Have you any personal experience to draw on?
- Try writing your own prayers individually as if you were Jonah – either from his position or a similar one you've experienced.
- Pray them to God, then share them if you feel you want to.
- You could finish by reading Psalm 86 – a Psalm by David that reflects some similar themes.

### WHAT NEXT?

Spend some time sharing things to pray about –as a group or in 3s-4s. Then pray for them using only short prayers. Some things to pray for...

- People today's story has brought to mind –maybe particularly people facing difficult decisions or people who are running away from God
- Pray for the people you've listed on your PI Chart. Are there other people you want to add?
- Situations in your own life that the story has reminded you of
- Places in the world known to you where people desperately need to hear the good news of God's love.

### 3: Good Guys or Bad Guys?

#### WELCOME

*Spend time relaxing & sharing together. You could try this...*

Discuss: Who would/wouldn't like to be Jonah's friend? Why?

#### WORSHIP

*Use music, silence, prayer, meditation, reflection, songs, hymns, etc. or be creative with drawing, writing, symbols, poetry etc to help people to draw near to God. You could try this...*

Use Matthew 15:32. Jesus calls his disciples to him and says 'I have compassion for these people'. Focus worship on God's compassion – expressed towards us, towards those around us and towards the world. You may want to listen to/sing a relevant song, or bring in cuttings from newspapers/the internet of people who are hungry (physically & spiritually) to help worship/pray.

#### WORD

##### Read Jonah 3

**Discuss** your initial reactions to the passage:

- Does anything in the passage jump out at you? Why?
- Does anything connect with something you've been doing, reading or thinking about?
- Is there anything you haven't noticed before?

Now use **some** of the questions below (*and set a time limit to leave yourselves time to pray!*)

- We find two groups of people who didn't worship God in this story –the Ninevites (1:2 & 3:1-10) and the sailors (1:3-16). How do they each respond to God? How does their response compare to Jonah's?

- If you were one of the sailors, what would you feel towards Jonah? What would you feel about God –before/after these events?
- What would you think of Jonah & of God if you were a Ninevite? Think about non-believers who you encounter in your daily life.
- What do they think of Christians when we do what God wants or don't?
- Is how they view Christians different from how they view God?

##### Read Jonah 4

- Both Jonah and the Ninevites turn away from God, but God saves them both. Jonah is happy to be saved, but not happy about God saving the 'nasty' Ninevites! Are there times when you expect God to treat others differently from how he treats you?
  - Do you think Jonah has 'a right to be angry about the vine' (4:9)? Why?
- In 4:10-11, God implies that Jonah is much more concerned about his own needs than about compassion for others.
- To what extent is this true in our own lives as Christians –are we needs-focused or mission-focused?
  - To what extent is it true of our attitudes towards the church, worship, God...?

#### WHAT NEXT?

- Who do you think most needs God's forgiveness in your home/workplace/community? Pray for them.
- Pray for one another that you would have the same attitude of compassion that God has for others.
- Pray for the people on your PI Chart

## 4: Jonah – Comic Relief

### WELCOME

*Spend time relaxing & sharing together. You could try this...*  
Vote on your favourite chapter of Jonah: 1, 2, 3 or 4.

### WORSHIP

*Use music, silence, prayer, meditation, reflection, songs, hymns, etc. or be creative with drawing, writing, symbols, poetry etc to help people to draw near to God. You could try this...*

The story of Jonah has mentioned several people who God gave a second chance to. In Mark 11:25, Jesus talks directly about forgiveness. Use the worship time to say sorry (individually, maybe with quiet background instrumental music) to God for any grudges you are holding now, and for times when you have been slow to forgive. Ask God for forgiveness. Then thank God (together) for the forgiveness he shows to us.

### WORD

#### Jonah

*We've done quite a bit of looking at the story of Jonah over the last few weeks. This is a chance to bring together some of that thinking in a more creative and, hopefully, entertaining way (although it may also be hard work!)*

*You may want to do this exercise as a whole group, but you may find it easier (and more fun) if you split into smaller groups and then share your ideas together. Allow plenty of time to get going & try to include everyone. There are no right or wrong answers!*

**EITHER:** Go through the book of Jonah and try re-writing it as a modern-day story or short movie or play –using characters and situations from today.

**OR:** Try writing 'Jonah –the Sequel' –What happened next?!

### It doesn't have to be a masterpiece!

These questions may help you:

- Who would be the modern-day characters: e.g. Jonah, the Ninevites, the sailors, the worm, the whale etc??
- What would the setting be –e.g. a Bond movie, a church, an office, a school, Iraq, a vegetable patch, a boat, a pub etc etc??
- Which bits of the story will you change & which bits keep the same?
- Would your ending to the story be the same?

### Now act or read out your creations!

**If you've time**, you may like to watch and discuss a video version of the story of Jonah. This one's quite old but thought-provoking from the Testament series (25 mins). You can find it at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=COqCDtdUphY>

### WHAT NEXT?

- What have you liked or disliked most about looking at the story of Jonah? How has it challenged you? What are you going to do about it –individually or as a group?
- Pray for one another
- Pray for people on your PI Chart
- Pray for Ninevah-like situations in the world