

**LIFE :: Learning**  
**from Jonah!!**



**5 Studies on**  
**Jonah**

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# INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

These studies are based on *“Reading the Bible with John Harrower, Bishop of Tasmania – 16 Days with Jonah”*

Similarly, the Bible texts used in this study booklet were extracted from, *“Reading the Bible with John Harrower, Bishop of Tasmania – 16 Days with Jonah”*

I thank Bishop John Harrower (Bishop of Tasmania) for his kind permission to use his manuscript and to adapt it into these into these 5 studies on Jonah for private and group study in St Michael and St Luke Anglican Church, Dandenong during the season of Pentecost.

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# STUDY 1 – JONAH 1:1-3

## THE CALL, MESSAGE, RESPONSE [1]

**Main Text**      *Jonah 1:1*

<sup>1</sup> The word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai.

**Secondary Text** *John 1:1-5, 10-18*

<sup>1</sup> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup> He was with God in the beginning. <sup>3</sup> Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. <sup>4</sup> In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. <sup>5</sup> The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

<sup>10</sup> He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. <sup>11</sup> He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. <sup>12</sup> Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— <sup>13</sup> children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

<sup>14</sup> The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

<sup>15</sup> (John testified concerning him. He cried out, saying, "This is the one I spoke about when I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'") <sup>16</sup> Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. <sup>17</sup> For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. <sup>18</sup> No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.

**Bishop John's reflections**

God continues to speak to us as He has throughout the ages. God spoke directly to people such as Deborah, Jeremiah, Hosea and Mary, the mother of Jesus.

And in Jesus Christ, God has spoken to us in His beloved Son. The prologue

to the Gospel according to John refers to Jesus as the Word and affirms that the Word was God. This name for Jesus Christ, the Word, assures us of God's heart to communicate with us. God's desire extends to becoming a human being in order that we might understand more fully His heart for us. God speaks to His world.

God takes the initiative in our relationship. It is the word of the LORD that comes to Jonah. Similarly, the Word comes to us, taking the initiative. (The Word) came to that which was his own and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us... (the Word) came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John1:11,14)

These two great truths: God speaks to us and God takes the initiative in our relationship, give me great comfort. Why? Because when I let my love for God drift, I know that the Lover of the universe patiently, ceaselessly seeks me out to re-engage me in a living relationship of respect and dignity.

#### **QUESTIONS TO EXPLORE:**

Have you experienced and recognised the Word of God calling you?

How did you recognise that this is a call from the Word of God?

#### **Main Text      *Jonah 1:2***

<sup>2</sup> 'Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me.'

#### **Secondary Text *Jeremiah 7:1-8***

<sup>1</sup> This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: <sup>2</sup> "Stand at the gate of the LORD's house and there proclaim this message:

"Hear the word of the LORD, all you people of Judah who come through these gates to worship the LORD. <sup>3</sup> This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Reform your ways and your actions, and I will let you live in this place. <sup>4</sup> Do not trust in deceptive words and say, "This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD!" <sup>5</sup> If you really change your ways and your actions and deal with each other justly, <sup>6</sup> if you do not oppress the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow and do not shed

innocent blood in this place, and if you do not follow other gods to your own harm, <sup>7</sup> then I will let you live in this place, in the land I gave your ancestors for ever and ever. <sup>8</sup> But look, you are trusting in deceptive words that are worthless.

### ***Bishop John's reflections***

Jonah follows in the great tradition of the prophets: God's messengers sent to call people to repentance. But he is distinguished from other prophets of the Old Testament because he is sent not to the people of God but, rather, to an oppressor of them.

God created his world and it has 'a grain' to it. Consider the analogy of a piece of wood. If I run my hand in the direction of the grain, then all is well and I enjoy feeling its texture. If, however, I run my hand against the grain, I end up with splinters and pain! In like manner, it makes sense to live in the direction of God's grain to life. Living a life that follows in the way of Christ glorifies God and brings fulfilment.

Sadly, like Jonah, our innate tendency so often is to go against the grain. We disobey God, act sinfully and end up in pain. Our sinful behaviour has consequences. We need rescuing.

Throughout the Bible we see that God calls and sends His servants to bring us back to Him and the life He has for us. Jonah is called and sent by God to do His will, as are all God's servants.

#### **QUESTION TO EXPLORE:**

Do you know what the LORD has called you to do? Share with the Group!

### ***Main Text      Jonah 1:3***

<sup>3</sup> But 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.

### ***Secondary Text Acts 10:25-29, 34-36***

<sup>25</sup> As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence. <sup>26</sup> But Peter made him get up. "Stand up," he said, "I am only a man myself."

<sup>27</sup> While talking with him, Peter went inside and found a large gathering of

people.<sup>28</sup> He said to them: “You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile. But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean.<sup>29</sup> So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection. May I ask why you sent for me?” . . .

<sup>34</sup> Then Peter began to speak: “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favouritism<sup>35</sup> but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right.<sup>36</sup> You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all.

### ***Bishop John’s reflections***

The Bible is the history of God’s dealing with His people. It includes our ‘dark side’ as well as our ‘light (or good) side’.

Instead of Jonah arising and following God’s call on his life, he arises and flees from God! We would have hoped Jonah would respond as did Peter, God has shown me...so when I was sent for, I came... (Acts 10:28,29) But, it was not to be. In fact, Jonah runs to Joppa: the opposite direction to Nineveh!

I can understand Jonah’s resistance to God’s command to minister to the people of Nineveh. They had defeated and oppressed the people of Israel. We learn later, Jonah 4:2, that Jonah’s disobedience is fuelled by his distress that God would show compassion rather than punishment! But in doing so, Jonah refuses to be a part of God’s dealings with all the people of the world.

Too often, God’s people become so self-centred that they have no concern for anyone else, let alone their enemies: in this case, the Assyrians.

Over the years I have made excuses to evade God’s command to share his gospel call to repentance and a living faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. At times I have not spoken to a neighbour, assisted a work colleague or spent precious time with a distressed person. Sadly, in this way I have refused to be part of God’s work in the world.

#### **QUESTION TO EXPLORE:**

What was your response to God’s call? Share with the Group

## **PRAYING TOGETHER:**

*Speaking God, I thank you for your great love. Rescuing and Saving God, I thank you for your servants such as Miriam, Hannah, Samuel, Jeremiah and Jonah. In their different ways, they served your purposes in the world; calling people to your way of life, to a life of holiness. I thank you for them and ask that I, too, may faithfully answer your call and serve you. Calling God, strengthen me to respond with joy and commitment to your stirring voice. Forgive my failures. May the Spirit of Christ daily empower me for your service. Amen.*

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# STUDY 2 – JONAH 1:4-17

## THE CONSEQUENCE

### **Main Text**      *Jonah 1:4-10*

<sup>4</sup> Then the LORD sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up. <sup>5</sup> All 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. <sup>6</sup> The 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.”

<sup>7</sup> Then 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. <sup>8</sup> So 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?”

<sup>9</sup> He answered, “I am a Hebrew and I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.”

<sup>10</sup> This 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.)

### **Bishop John’s reflections**

This passage captivates my imagination. Here in the midst of a storm-tossed sea, a tumbling fragile ship, sleeping prophet and the desperate cries to various gods, the terrified sailors call the prophet to account.

How ironic. The sailors are calling on their gods because of the prophet’s denial of God’s call on him!

The sailors cast lots, conclude that Jonah is responsible for the storm and confront him. The prophet confesses, I am a Hebrew and I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land. Again, what irony! If Jonah truly believed that the LORD is the God who made the sea, then surely he would never have sought to flee from the LORD by going by sea!

Yet, as we see in the next reading, through the prophet’s disobedience, God



is bringing the sailors to acknowledge Him, the LORD.

I just love the captain's, (Jonah) how can you sleep? Get up and call on your God! The slumbering prophet is called to duty by an outsider!

**QUESTIONS TO EXPLORE:**

How have outsiders (i.e. people who do not believe in the LORD) challenged you faith and belief in the LORD?

Could you mention some of these in the CARE group?

How have you responded to these challenges?

**Main Text      *Jonah 1:11-16***

<sup>11</sup> The sea was getting rougher and rougher. So they asked him, "What should we do to you to make the sea calm down for us?"

<sup>12</sup> "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."

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

***Bishop John's reflections***

Here we see Jonah in a good light. He is not all bad! Jonah offers to sacrifice himself in order to calm the sea and save the ship. The sailors show themselves to be honourable. They try to avoid sacrificing Jonah by doing their best to row back to land. The sailors' care for Jonah contrasts with his lack of care for the people of Nineveh.

However, the sea becomes even wilder and the sailors accept Jonah's offer to throw him overboard. The storm is then calmed.

Now the sailors cry out, not each to his own god, but to the LORD. The sailors' openness to God is greater than that of the prophet! They ask the LORD to pardon them for killing Jonah; they fear the LORD, offer sacrifice and make vows to Him.

God has acted through Jonah to bring the sailors to acknowledge Him. Despite the sailors not being in God's initial mission for Jonah, God has used Jonah's disobedience to carry out His rescue mission. Be careful. This is no excuse for disobedience! However, it does give us great confidence in the LORD's providential work in the world - even through our mistakes and disobedience, the LORD is sovereign.

**QUESTIONS TO EXPLORE:**

Can you recall an incident in your life when your action[s]/inaction[s] still resulted in a positive outcome to you and/or your neighbours?

What have you learnt from this experience?

**Main Text      *Jonah 1:17***

<sup>17</sup> Now the LORD provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

**Secondary Text *Matthew 12:38-41***

<sup>38</sup> Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from you."

<sup>39</sup> He answered, "A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. <sup>40</sup> For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. <sup>41</sup> The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now something greater than Jonah is here.

***Bishop John's reflections***

God acts! God uses storms, sailors and a fish to save Jonah in order to save Nineveh. God does not give up on his reluctant servant. Through His servant's salvation, God has the salvation of many people in mind.

While visiting the catacombs in Rome, I was struck by the symbol of Jonah and the fish on Christians' graves. Do you recall Jesus' reference to Jonah's three days in the belly of the fish? When asked by the Pharisees and teachers of the law for a sign as to his own significance, Jesus answered, A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three



nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. (Matthew 12:39-40)

In Jesus' understanding, Jonah is a sign pointing to Jesus' resurrection.

If God is God, then resurrection life is real. In the words of Martin Luther, Let God be God. Enormous historical evidence points to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and this in turn points to God. Belief in God who is the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land (Jonah 1:9) leads to resurrection faith.

**QUESTIONS TO EXPLORE:**

How is your life a reflection of your faith in the Risen LORD?

Share and discuss.

**PRAYING TOGETHER:**

*Creator God, how easy it is for me to talk the talk, but not walk the walk of faith. Forgive me for the times when my life has denied your Lordship over all. Help me not to flee from you, but to entrust all to you. In the words of the hymn, "take my life and let it be consecrated Lord to thee."*

*Pursuing God, I thank you for never giving up on me. Thank you for pursuing me wherever I may be, at all times and in all circumstances. Please bring men and women, girls and boys, to become Jesus' disciples. Thank you for finding me. Give me your heart for all people.*

*God of Life, in the power of your Holy Spirit may my life be a sign to all around me of Jesus' resurrection life. Amen.*

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# STUDY 3 – JONAH 2

## JONAH’S PRAYER & GOD’S ANSWER

**Main Text**      *Jonah 2:1-9*

<sup>1</sup>From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the LORD his God.

<sup>2</sup> He 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.

<sup>3</sup> You 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.

<sup>4</sup> I said, ‘I have been banished from your sight; yet I will look again toward your holy temple.’

<sup>5</sup> The engulfing waters threatened me, the deep surrounded me; seaweed was wrapped around my head.

<sup>6</sup> To 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.

<sup>7</sup> “When my life was ebbing away, I remembered you, LORD, and my prayer rose to you, to your holy temple.

<sup>8</sup> “Those who cling to worthless idols turn away from God’s love for them.

<sup>9</sup> But 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.’”

### ***Bishop John’s reflections***

Inside a fish is perhaps the strangest place from which a person has ever prayed!

Jonah’s prayer recounts his dramatic descent deep in the realm of the dead and God’s bringing him to life from the pit when his life was ebbing away.

During my prayer pilgrimages around Tasmania in 2004 and 2010, I prayed from schools, prisons, parishes, hospitals, homes and mountains, but never from the belly of a fish!

It is true that certain circumstances in life seem to evoke a greater passion for prayer. Often intense times of prayer occur during sickness, unemployment, family breakdown, conflict – in other words, in times of distress.

I find it easy to ask God for things. Many an immature person wants, wants, wants, and wants! A sign of maturity is being thankful for life, even in all its turmoil, and asking where we might make a contribution.

I can learn from Jonah here. While Jonah sets out his plea to God under circumstances of his distress, nevertheless, he continues on to acknowledge God's saving work in him. His shouts of grateful praise are accompanied by his vow to make good and his affirmation that Salvation comes from the LORD.

**QUESTIONS TO EXPLORE:**

What/where has been the strangest place you have prayed? What were the circumstances that led you to pray? Why this prayer and what was God's answer?

Share that prayer/experience with others in the Group?

**Main Text      *Jonah 2:10***

<sup>10</sup> And the LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.

**Secondary Text *2 Corinthians 12:9***

But (God) said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me

***Bishop John's reflections***

God is the sovereign Lord of all. While Jonah had been at prayer, the fish had been swimming! At the Lord's instruction, the fish vomited out the reluctant prophet. Jonah had been rescued when he deserved nothing but the death he had brought on his own head! Despite all his efforts Jonah had not escaped God's call on him to be a missionary to Nineveh.

I am reminded here of Jesus' raising of Lazarus from the dead. Following his return to life, I wonder: "What would life be now for Lazarus? Was life ever the same for him? How would it be different?"

It seems to me that these questions also apply to Jonah. In being rescued from death, Jonah has learnt more of God's sovereignty and grace. His prayer rejoiced in God's mercy (2:2-9). Yet, what would Jonah's attitude be now? Will he be concerned for Nineveh's rescue? Sadly, Jonah's answer is

No! Jonah does not want God's mercy: he wants God's punishment on the Ninevites.

Like Jonah, I too can struggle with God's 'grace scales' in balancing mercy and justice. God's grace in Christ is infinite. Having experienced God's grace in my own life may I rejoice when God grants grace to others. God's sovereign grace is to be my place of rest.

**QUESTIONS TO EXPLORE:**

Can you recall a time when you experienced God's blessed grace in your life?  
How did you respond?

**PRAYING TOGETHER:**

*Listening God, I worship and adore you, ever grateful for your person and your world. Thank you that we can communicate, regardless of where I am or in what circumstances I find myself. Help me, please, to be at prayer.*

*Gracious God, thank you for the grace with which you have blessed my life. Keep me ever grateful towards you, and joyful in seeing your grace bless the lives of other people. In Christ's name. Amen.*

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# STUDY 4 – JONAH 3

## THE CALL, MESSAGE, RESPONSE [2]

**Main Text**      *Jonah 3:1-3a*

<sup>1</sup> Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time: <sup>2</sup> “Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you.” <sup>3</sup> Jonah obeyed the word of the LORD and went to Nineveh.

**Secondary Text** *Mark 10:45*

For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

**Bishop John’s reflections**

These verses are a great encouragement. Firstly, because we see God’s loving persistence and, secondly, because we rejoice that God’s servant, Jonah, obeys the voice of his Master.

God has a heart for prophets who have lost their way, as well as for people who do not know his way. God has neither given up on his prophet, nor the people of Nineveh.

Jesus taught his disciples to pray, “Our Father...your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” Thus we clearly pray for God’s will to be done, while at the same time recognizing our role in the fulfilling of this prayer. God has privileged us as participants with him in the outworking of his will.

God persists with Jonah. Thus his word comes to Jonah a second time. In our own lives and ministry it is the fact of God’s call that counts. The ministry and place of God’s vocation for us is secondary to the fact that it is God’s call on us. It is our responsibility to be sensitive to the signs of God’s calling and to enter into it with dedication and joy.

### **QUESTIONS TO EXPLORE:**

Can you share an experience of God’s persistence in your life?

How has that experience impacted your life?

**Main Text      *Jonah 3:3b-4***

<sup>3b</sup> Now Nineveh was a very large city; it took three days to go through it.

<sup>4</sup> Jonah began by going a day's journey into the city, proclaiming, "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown."

**Secondary Text   *Philippians 2:5-11***

<sup>5</sup> In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: <sup>6</sup> Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; <sup>7</sup> rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

<sup>8</sup> And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross!

<sup>9</sup> Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, <sup>10</sup> that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, <sup>11</sup> and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

***Bishop John's reflections***

Jonah finally does the mission God called him to do. His recorded prophetic words are few, but his action in finally going to his enemy's capital city to proclaim God's judgment spoke volumes. He acted courageously. His words matched his boldness, giving credibility to his proclamation.

God also calls us to deliver his message of reconciliation and peace by word and deed. We may not always see the effect of our message, but our responsibility is to faithfully proclaim God's message.

In God's kingdom the messenger is also the message. Francis of Assisi said, "Preach the Gospel at all times and when necessary use words." It is said that his lifestyle and clothing spoke so clearly of Christ that words speaking of Christ were superfluous.

The Apostle Paul reminds us that God in Christ took the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness...he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross. (Philippians 2:5-8)



**QUESTION TO EXPLORE:**

Francis of Assisi also spoke of Christ, but let us not avoid the challenge: Does my life and the life of my Christian community speak clearly of Christ?

**Main Text      *Jonah 3:5-9***

<sup>5</sup> The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.

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

***Bishop John's reflections***

Surely this is every Christian's dream! The Ninevites respond positively to the message: they believe it and repent. Everybody from the greatest to the least repents. The people of Nineveh eagerly embraced God's message through the prophet Jonah. At the first hearing of God's message they gave up their evil ways. They put on the mourning clothing of sackcloth, and fasted. Their self-denial showed the sincerity of their repentance.

The willingness of the people of Nineveh to turn to God is a lesson to the people of Israel who had gone into exile in their stubborn refusal to repent of their disobedience.

Jesus draws this out when speaking with the people of Israel, The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now something greater than Jonah is here. (Matthew 12:41)

As Jesus spoke of the need for repentance to the people of his day, so he

speaks to us today.

**QUESTIONS TO EXPLORE:**

Do I take opportunities to regularly review my discipleship walk with Christ?  
Do I love God and my neighbour as myself? Do I allow activities in Christ's service, crowd out my relationship with Christ himself?

**Main Text      *Jonah 3:10***

<sup>10</sup> When 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.

**Secondary Text *Luke 23:39-43***

<sup>39</sup> One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!"<sup>40</sup> But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence?"<sup>41</sup> We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong."<sup>42</sup> Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."<sup>43</sup> Jesus answered him, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."

***Bishop John's reflections***

God sees. God sees the genuineness of our attitudes and actions. In this passage, God saw the genuine change of mind of the people of Nineveh. Nineveh's repentance was acceptable to God. The expressions of repentance: fasting and wearing sackcloth were sincere demonstrations of their turning from evil.

Jonah's mission had been marvellously achieved. He proclaimed God's message and the people repented of their evil ways.

The Prophet Joel speaks of the divine proposition which underlies prophetic ministry: "Return to the Lord your God for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity." (Joel 2:13)

When we repent, God relents from our due punishment. He is compassionate and full of mercy. God is patient with you, not wanting

anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. (2 Peter 3:9b)

The Bible assures us of God's forgiveness in Jesus Christ:

Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:38)

If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)

**QUESTIONS TO EXPLORE:**

Have you experienced repentance and encountered God's mercy and forgiveness in your life? How has these experiences impacted on your life?

**PRAYING TOGETHER:**

*Persistent God, you call your servants a second, third and un-numbered times. Give me the will and wisdom to respond to you with thankfulness and joy. In the name of your Son who came not to be served, but to serve and who cried, "not my will but yours be done".*

*God of the Servant King, by your Holy Spirit empower me to have the same attitude of humble obedience as Christ Jesus. May my life embody your message so that "at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father".*

*Forgiving God, I ask your Holy Spirit to reveal wrong doing in my life. Empower me to repent and so walk more fully, day by day, in the way of Christ.*

*Merciful God, we thank you that, although seeing all things, you are yet patient, willing that all would come to repentance. Please be patient with Australia that we may yet turn to Jesus in repentance, and experience your mercy, in reconciliation with you and with one another. Amen.*

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# STUDY 5 – JONAH 4

## JONAH & GOD – A CONVERSATION

### **Main Text**      *Jonah 4:1-4*

<sup>1</sup> But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry. <sup>2</sup> He 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. <sup>3</sup> Now, LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live.”

<sup>4</sup> But the LORD replied, “Is it right for you to be angry?”

### **Secondary Text**      *Romans 4:7-8*

Blessed are those whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord will never count against them.

### **Bishop John’s reflections**

Jonah chapter 4 is about Jonah’s distressed response to God’s mercy towards the Ninevites. The mission of the prophet to the Ninevites now gives way to God’s continuing work in the life of his servant.

Jonah is aggrieved and angry at the Lord’s compassion on the Ninevites. Indeed, this is the very thing that Jonah feared would happen from the very beginning! Isn’t this what I said, LORD, when I was still at home?

Jonah is a person who knows grace (Jonah 2:9), responds to grace (Jonah 3:3a) and yet is incensed at grace being extended to the enemies of his people. In fact, having seen this great act of God’s compassion, he is so angry and depressed that he wants to die!

Jesus showed God’s heart of love towards all people, including those who were ‘unacceptable’: the Samaritan woman, the thief on the cross, the tax collector and the prostitute.

The Apostle Paul reminds us that we can exercise love and mercy, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who

has been given to us. (Romans 5:5)

**QUESTIONS TO EXPLORE:**

Can we love as God loves? Where do we receive the love that will motivate us to go to the 'unacceptable' people? How have we shown God's love to others?

**Main Text      *Jonah 4:5***

<sup>5</sup> Jonah 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.

**Secondary Text *Romans 5:6-8***

<sup>6</sup>You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. <sup>7</sup>Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. <sup>8</sup>But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

***Bishop John's reflections***

Jonah had found himself a good vantage point from which to observe God's punishment come upon the city of Nineveh.

Do you recall the parable of the prodigal sons and the joy of the compassionate father running through the village to welcome home the younger son who had disgraced his family and village?

The parable finishes with the unanswered question about the response of the elder son who had remained home. Would this son respond positively to the Father's plea to join in the celebration of the younger son's return? *My son, the father said, you are always with me, and everything I have is yours.* <sup>32</sup>*But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.* (Luke 15:31,32)

Thomas Carlisle's poem *You Jonah* closes with these lines:

*And Jonah stalked  
to his shaded seat  
and waited for God  
to come around to his way of thinking.  
And God is still waiting for a host of Jonah's*

*in their comfortable houses  
to come around to his way of loving.*

[Thomas Carlisle, *You! Jonah* (Eerdmans, 1968)]

### **QUESTIONS TO EXPLORE:**

Do I rejoice when people turn to Christ or do I wish that they had 'got what they deserved'? Do I love what God loves?

### **Main Text      *Jonah 4:6-8a***

<sup>6</sup> Then the LORD God provided a leafy plant 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. <sup>7</sup> But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the plant so that it withered. <sup>8</sup> When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah's head so that he grew faint.

### **Secondary Text *Psalm 139:7-10***

<sup>7</sup> (LORD), Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?

<sup>8</sup> If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.

<sup>9</sup> If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, <sup>10</sup> even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.

### ***Bishop John's reflections***

This is the third chance that God gives Jonah to respond to his heart of compassion.

Here we see the extraordinary lengths that God goes to in order to have Jonah make a compassionate response: God grows a leafy plant, gives shade to Jonah, a worm the next day, a withered plant, the sun and a scorching east wind!

God's love for us is extra-extra-extraordinary! It is so totally undeserved. God's patience and persistence show his mercy and goodness towards us, even as we have turned our back on his grace, time after time. The loving God who pursued the reluctant and wayward Jonah pursues each one of us. The God who kept on keeping on after Jonah, keeps on after us with love,

grace and generosity. God seeks our loving response to him.

### **QUESTIONS TO EXPLORE:**

How do I express my gratitude for God's grace? What lengths has God had to go to in my life to get my attention? What have I seen of God this past week? In what ways has God been calling my attention to him and his ways in the world?

### **Main Text      *Jonah 4:8b-11***

(Jonah) wanted to die, and said, "It would be better for me to die than to live."

<sup>9</sup> But 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."

<sup>10</sup> But 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. <sup>11</sup> And 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?"

### **Secondary Text *Matthew 28:18-20***

<sup>18</sup> Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'

### ***Bishop John's reflections***

God persists in confronting Jonah with his wrong attitudes towards the Ninevites.

God's first question is testing: Is it right for you to be angry about the plant? To which Jonah answers: It is, and declares for the second time: I wish I were dead! (Jonah 4:9) Jonah has got himself into quite a state!

God's second question challenges Jonah: Should I not have concern...? It seems clear to me that God would answer his own question this way: Of course, I should have concern! I am the LORD of all. Look, Jonah, at what I have been doing!

God has an underlying question here which is addressed to Jonah and, indeed, to all of God's people: If I, God, have concern, should not therefore my people be also concerned? And God's people should answer: Yes, we are concerned! This is God's question and the answer he patiently sought from Jonah and which runs throughout the Book of Jonah.

**QUESTIONS TO EXPLORE:**

Will we as God's people, care for that for which God cares? Do we really care for non-Christian people? Do we yearn for them to become disciples of Christ? Is my/our vision of God and God's world, God's vision: "to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8)

**PRAYING TOGETHER:**

*Transforming God, fill us with your love, courage and wisdom. Give us the capacity to work boldly, and with humility, embracing the challenge of mission. Use us to bring transforming life to our Christian communities, all Australians and all the world.*

*Reconciling God, help me to celebrate your grace and compassion as people turn to you. Give me your heart of love for all peoples.*

*Persistent God, give me eyes to see and ears to hear your Spirit at work in my life and in the lives of those around me. Give me a heart to love you and to love what you love. Give me hands to work for you and lips to praise you, ever thankful for your compassion and grace.*

*God of love and life, give me your heart for your world. Strengthen me through your Holy Spirit, your word and your people to fulfill your purposes in the world you love. Amen.*