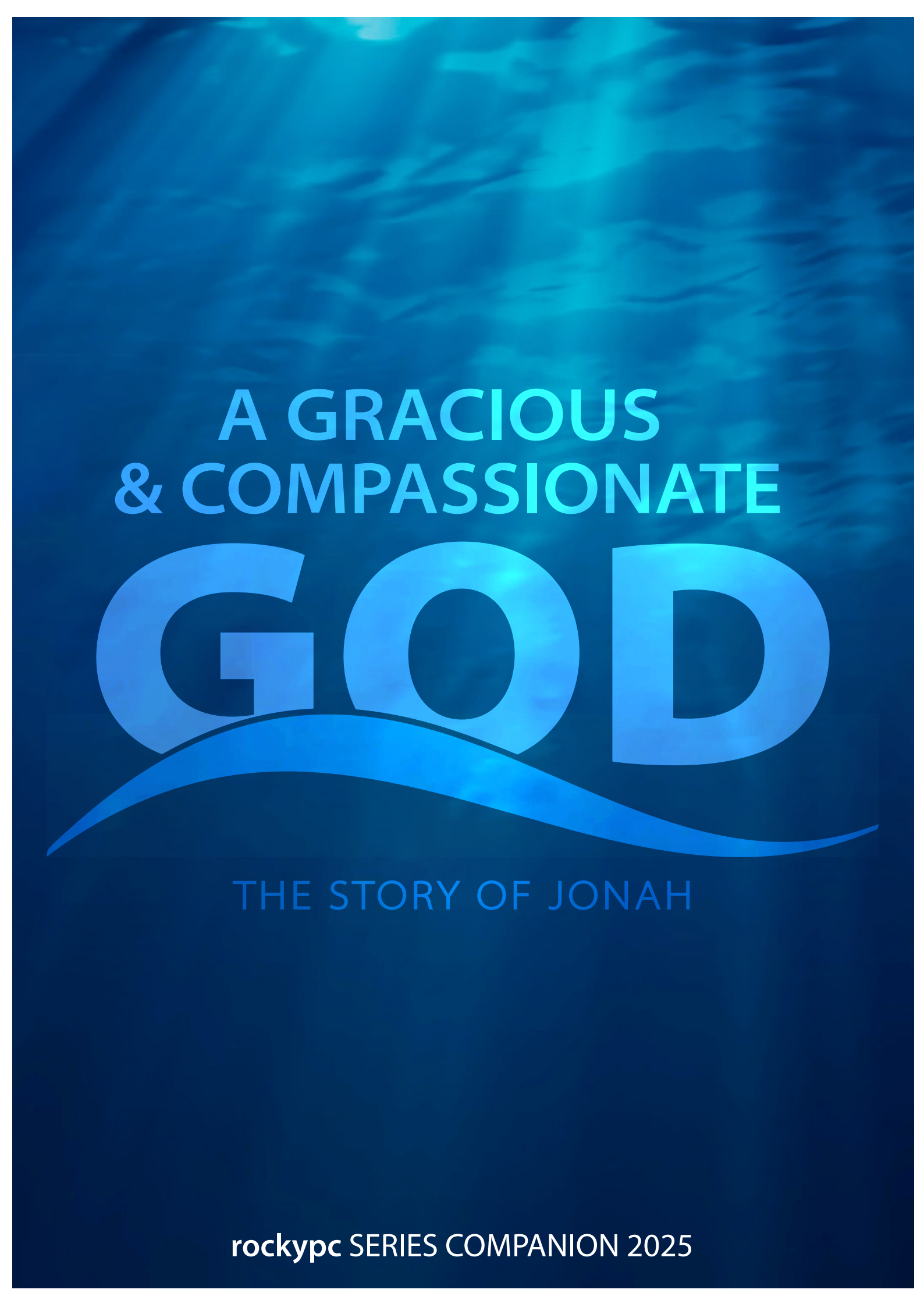




A GRACIOUS
& COMPASSIONATE

GOD

THE STORY OF JONAH

rockypc SERIES COMPANION 2025

*growing
disciples*
sacrifice. serve. speak

A GRACIOUS & COMPASSIONATE GOD

THE STORY OF JONAH

Jonah is a cracking tale of a wild storm, rescue-by-fish, fiery judgement that's avoided and an angry prophet. We are familiar with the large fish from kids' story Bibles, but the rest of the story can get a bit hazy. This term, we're going to spend some time diving into this fascinating book to see how it fits into the bigger story of the Bible, showing us God's character and his plans for salvation through Jesus.

AUTHOR, DATE, GENRE

The book doesn't identify its author (as is common in the Old Testament). It is named after the prophet Jonah, but he's unlikely to be its author, given how negatively he is portrayed. Jonah is only mentioned one other time in the Old Testament (2 Kings 14v23-29) where he prophesies about the expansion of the northern kingdom of Israel's borders to King Jeroboam II around 793–753 BC. The book is a satirical narrative with a psalm inset into Ch 2. The satire is seen in all of the unexpected inversions — like pagans who repent and worship God (even pagan cows), and a petulant prophet who disobeys God.

SETTING

Jonah is from the northern kingdom of Israel. To their north, lay the superpower, Assyria. One of its prominent cities was Nineveh, built by King Sennacherib. Assyria was known for its cruelty. God eventually used Assyria to punish Israel and carry them into exile (2 Kings 17 — 722BC). In Jonah's day, Assyria was Israel's bitter enemy.



THEMES

REPENTANCE

Pagan sailors demonstrate repentance by making sacrifices and vows. The pagan Ninevites demonstrate repentance by wearing sackcloth, sitting in the dust and praying. But does Jonah ever demonstrate repentance for disobeying the LORD?

GOD'S CHARACTER

What is God like? Can his character be depended upon? To whom does he show mercy and to whom does he show justice/punishment? Is he fickle and changes his mind? Is he sovereign and all powerful?

MISSION

Israel is not directed to go out and convert other nations to their God. Jonah is an exception. But all nations are always in view in God's plans. From Abram in Genesis 12, God declares his promise to bless all nations through the one family. A handful of pagan converts are drawn into the nation, eg Rahab and Ruth. The law expects foreigners to find refuge with the people of Israel (Leviticus 19v33-34) and for their law to show how good God is to outsiders (Deuteronomy 4v5-8). And the prophets have an expectation that all nations will stream to Jerusalem (eg Isaiah 49v6). It is not until Jesus comes that this overarching story of the God who brings salvation to all peoples shines most clearly (Luke 24v44-47).

RESURRECTION

Jonah spends 3 days and nights in the belly of the fish. Jesus picks up this sign to talk about his own death and resurrection. He is raised on the third day. Jesus' death and resurrection is a sign of judgement on the unbelieving Pharisees of his day (Matthew 12v38-42). Yet it is also a sign of God's salvation for those who believe.

BIBLE LINKS

The book of Jonah contains many hyperlinks to other parts of the Bible. As we read his story, it is meant to bring to mind other stories (such as Sodom and Gomorrah, Genesis 19), songs (Jonah's song in Ch 2 stitches together numerous Psalms), other prophets (for example, Joel 2 asks an identical question to the King of Nineveh — who knows if the LORD will forgive those who repent?) and significant numbers (such as 40 days — Genesis 7). Jonah's story is riffing off all of these other parts of the Old Testament, as it is embedded in this bigger story and fleshes out what is happening in Jonah. Ultimately, Jesus says this story is pointing to him, the one who is greater than Jonah.

HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF THIS SERIES COMPANION

ON YOUR OWN—Take your time reading through each passage and following up on the links to other Bible passages. If you have time, work through the questions before your GROWTH GROUP so that you've started thinking about the topic before you arrive.

WITH YOUR GROWTH GROUP—Don't be afraid to stop and talk about things that grab your attention or raise questions for you.

ON SUNDAY—Make sure you bring your SERIES COMPANION along with you, so that you can keep track of any questions you have and record the way that God's Spirit is helping you to understand His Word and grow in your love for Jesus.

FROM THE LORD

JONAH 1 & 2

IN THE SPACE BELOW YOU CAN TAKE NOTES FROM THE BIBLE TALK. (IF YOU'RE USING THIS ON A DEVICE YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO CLICK AND START TYPING.)

Something I Never Knew:

Something I Was Reminded About:

A Question I Still Have:

Something I Was Challenged To Think Differently About / Do Differently:

Something I Can Share:

A Key Verse:

My prayer in response to God's word:

What are you like when you are on or in the water? Do you get sea sick? Are you a strong swimmer?

Jonah is a short Old Testament book, with a riveting story. We're familiar with some parts of it, from kids' Bibles. But this term we're going to take a deep dive, to see God's character on display. And we'll see how Jesus answers the questions the book of Jonah asks.

READ JONAH 1v1-2

1. Who is Jonah? What task is he given?

The 'LORD', in all caps, is our translation's way of signifying God's personal name 'YHWH' or 'Yahweh'. This is the name he revealed to Moses (Exodus 3), meaning I AM WHO I AM. It brings to mind God's close connection with his people through the covenant of Mt Sinai (Exodus 19-20).

Jonah stands in a long line of prophets that the 'word of the LORD came to', like Samuel, Nathan, Ezekiel etc. Jonah's name only pops up one other time in the Old Testament (2 Kings 14v25). He is a prophet to the king of the northern tribes of Israel (which had split from the tribe of Judah centuries earlier). Jonah is said to have prophesied, from the LORD, that Israel's borders would expand (a sign of God's blessing). This is a surprising time for this to happen because it is during the time of an evil king, Jeroboam II. Yet, Jonah tells this oppressive king about God's plan to restore Israel.

Nineveh was the capital city of the Ancient Near East superpower, Assyria (modern day Mosul, in Iraq). As a neighbour to Israel, it was synonymous with proud and ruthless civilisations that were opposed to God (Genesis 10v6-12; cf 11v1-9). In 2 Kings 14, Israel's borders had expanded, but by 2 Kings 17, Israel was invaded and its people carried off into exile by the Assyrian enemy. This was punishment for Israel's idolatry, disobedience and refusal to repent. After this exile, Israel largely disappeared as they continued in the idolatry of Assyrian gods. Even though they were instruments of God's judgement on Israel, Assyria's cruelty would eventually lead to their own destruction at God's hand (see the book of Nahum).

The story of Jonah comes before the calamity of the Israelite exile, and the subsequent punishment of the Assyrian empire.

READ GENESIS 4v9-10; 6v5-7; EXODUS 3v23-25

2. What does it show about the LORD that he sees wickedness and hears the victims?

READ JONAH 1v3

3. Can Jonah really run away from the LORD? see Psalm 139v7-12

We don't know Jonah's motives for running away yet. That question is left hanging in the air for later in the book. STAY TUNED!

READ JONAH 1v4-6

4. How do the sailors react to God sending a storm? How does Jonah react?

READ JONAH 1v7-16

5. What do you make of Jonah's solution to the problem of the storm?

6. Notice how many times in this chapter, the sailors are afraid. What scares them? (see also Amos 9v1-6; Psalm 115)

7. How do the sailors respond to the rescue from the LORD?

It appears to the Gentile sailors that Jonah's death is the means by which they are saved. But it is not the end for Jonah! Inside the famous fish, Jonah sings a song, as we hear his interpretation of what happened. It is common in the Bible for songs to be inset into narrative sections. These songs highlight God's salvation with cosmic descriptions of what has been happening in the story eg Exodus 13-14 & 15; Judges 4 & 5; 1 Samuel 1 & 2. Jonah's song taps into these other songs of salvation, as we hear a poem of yet another salvation through the waters (like Noah, Moses and Israel from Egypt).

READ JONAH 1v17-2v10

8. How does Jonah describe his descent into the waters? Who is responsible for his near-death?

9. Where does Jonah's only hope lie, as his life ebbs away?

10. As you reflect on chapters 1 & 2, do you see Jonah repenting of his disobedience? Where? What is surprising about this?

Jonah is a very reluctant prophet. While Moses and Jeremiah question God's calling of them (Exodus 3 & Jeremiah 1), Jonah runs away from what God tells him to do. The Old Testament story leaves us longing for a prophet who delights to speak God's word. The story longs for the one who will intercede for the people by giving his life for them. It longs for the one who can save from the chaos of the waters and the realm of the dead (Sheol).

READ MARK 4v35-41

11. How can Jesus be the one to save us?

READ MATTHEW 12v38-41

12. What is the sign of Jonah that will be repeated for that generation?

13. How will this be a sign of judgement on that generation? How is it a sign of salvation for us?

growing disciples

At **rockypc** we have 5 core values — we want to be growing disciples who are DEEP IN THE WORD, SEEKING GOD, on MISSION, as we SERVE in COMMUNITY together.

What have you learned about the LORD today?

What have you learned about his salvation?



How will you respond to the LORD and his salvation?



PRAYER IDEAS

- Praise the LORD, the God of heaven, the maker of the sea and the dry land. Acknowledge that we can't run away from him.
- Praise God that he sees wickedness in his creation. Praise him that the cries of victims reach his ears and he acts in justice.
- Praise God that he is in charge of the wind and the waves. He rules over the chaos of life and death.
- Praise God that he rescues those who cry out to him. Thank him for rescuing us from the grave, bringing us life in Jesus. He is the one to worship.
- Thank God that Jesus went to the grave and rose again as a sign of our salvation, and judgement on those who reject him. Pray that we'd turn to him and be saved.

WHO KNOWS?

JONAH 3

IN THE SPACE BELOW YOU CAN TAKE NOTES FROM THE BIBLE TALK. (IF YOU'RE USING THIS ON A DEVICE YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO CLICK AND START TYPING.)

Something I Never Knew:

Something I Was Reminded About:

A Question I Still Have:

Something I Was Challenged To Think Differently About / Do Differently:

Something I Can Share:

A Key Verse:

My prayer in response to God's word:

What does our culture associate with the word 'repent'?

In Jonah 1v3, Jonah runs away from what the LORD tells him to do. He nearly dies, as a result. But when he's at the gates of the underworld, he cries out to God, who rescues him. The reset button is pressed.

READ JONAH 3v1-4

1. What is different in Jonah's response the second time around?

Nineveh was a 'great city', large in size. But it is unlikely to have taken 3 days for someone to walk its diameter or circumference. And Jonah only walks for 1 day.

2. What do you think is happening with the 3 days and the 1 day?

Hint: Think about where we've heard about 3 days already in the story and what it might signify about Nineveh. Think about what we've seen of Jonah's attitude to God's word.

3. What stands out to you about Jonah's message?

READ GENESIS 6v6-7; 7v11-12

4. What might be the significance of '40 days' before God's judgement is carried out?

5. What reasons could there be for the delay between Jonah's proclamation and the judgement date?

READ GENESIS 18v20-21; 19v24-25

6. What is the parallel between Nineveh and Sodom and Gomorrah?

The word 'overthrow' is strongly associated with the destruction and judgement God justly rains down on wicked people. But there is a pun in Jonah.

The same word can mean a change of heart, eg what happens to King Saul when he receives God's Spirit

'The Spirit of the Lord will come powerfully upon you, and you will prophesy with them; and you will be changed [overthrown] into a different person.' 1 Samuel 10v6

It gets us wondering what God means to happen in Nineveh.

READ JONAH 3v5-9

7. How does the average Ninevite respond to Jonah's message?

8. What about the King?

Don't get distracted by the animals at this point! We'll see more about the animals next week.

READ JOEL 2v12-14; JEREMIAH 18v7-12 (If you have time, also check out EXODUS 32 & 1 KINGS 21v20-29)

9. What should repentance look like for God's covenant people? Is this what they do?

10. Should a pagan city like Nineveh expect God to relent in bringing disaster?

READ JONAH 3v10

11. Does this turn of events surprise you? Why/why not?

READ LUKE 23v39-43

12. What is Jesus' response to this repentant sinner? Can we have the same confidence?

READ 2 PETER 3v7-13

13. What does the delay of God's judgement demonstrate about his character?

growing disciples

At **rockypc** we have 5 core values — we want to be growing disciples who are DEEP IN THE WORD, SEEKING GOD, on MISSION, as we SERVE in COMMUNITY together.

How has seeing God's character today stirred your heart?

Is he fickle in changing his mind when sinners repent? How do you know?

Is he unjust to forgive sinners? How do you know?



SEEKING GOD

What have you learned about repentance today? Have you done this?

What does a repentant heart and life look like for you?



SEEKING GOD

PRAYER IDEAS

- Praise God for his vast compassion that extends to the most wicked of sinners, like us. Praise God that he doesn't want us to perish, but to respond to his warnings of judgement.
- Confess that we do deserve his anger at our sin and rebellion. Repent and humbly turn to him. Pray that our lives would be marked by repentant hearts, seeking God.
- Praise God that he relents from giving us what we deserve, when we cry out to him. Praise him that we can depend on his mercy and compassion. Thank God that he is not fickle or changeable.
- Praise God that he is always just and righteous. Thank him that he was just at the cross as Jesus bore our punishment and guaranteed our forgiveness. Pray that we'd have certainty in this hope. Thank him that we are looking forward to a new heaven and earth, instead of destruction.

A COMPASSIONATE GOD

JONAH 4

IN THE SPACE BELOW YOU CAN TAKE NOTES FROM THE BIBLE TALK. (IF YOU'RE USING THIS ON A DEVICE YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO CLICK AND START TYPING.)

Something I Never Knew:

Something I Was Reminded About:

A Question I Still Have:

Something I Was Challenged To Think Differently About / Do Differently:

Something I Can Share:

A Key Verse:

My prayer in response to God's word:

In his speech at Charlie Kirk's memorial service, Donald Trump said '[Charlie] did not hate his opponents, he wanted the best for them, that's where I differed from Charlie: I hate my opponents.'

Have you ever had an opponent that you hated/didn't want the best for? Be honest! Why do you think this attitude comes naturally to us?

God sent Jonah to Israel's violent enemy with a message of judgement. The Assyrians in Nineveh fast, sit in the ashes in rags and hope God will show them compassion and turn from his fierce anger. And he does! He relents from the destruction he threatened. The scene switches back to Jonah.

READ JONAH 4v1-4

1. What do we learn about Jonah's motivation in running away from the LORD in Ch 1?

The LORD made a covenant with Israel to be their God, and it was like a wedding (Exodus 19-20).

While Moses was up Mt Sinai receiving the terms of the covenant on tablets of stone, the rest of Israel were making golden calves and worshiping them as their rescuing gods (Exodus 21-32). The LORD threatened to wipe out the people and start again with Moses. Moses interceded for the people, and the LORD relented. Then he explained to Moses who he really is. The LORD explains his character, the core of his being. And these famous words are quoted numerous times throughout the rest of the Old Testament (around 27 times). This self-description of the LORD's character is key to understanding who he is, and why he acts as he does. These words are quoted to praise the LORD and to ask him for his compassion and grace, because he can be relied upon to show it.

READ EXODUS 34v1-7

2. How does Jonah feel about the LORD's compassionate character?

READ JONAH 4v5-7

3. What shelters Jonah as he waits to see if God will actually destroy the evil Ninevites?

Jonah has 2 shelters — 1 he builds himself and 1 the LORD provides. It reminds us of a festival Israel held to remember the Israelites' wandering in the desert after the LORD rescued them from Egypt and before they entered the Promised Land.

READ LEVITICUS 23v39-43

4. How is Jonah's sheltering different/the same as this festival? What is significant about this?

READ PSALM 121

5. How is the LORD described here?

READ JONAH 4v7-8

6. Where does God's provision leave Jonah?

READ JONAH 4 v9-10; DEUTERONOMY 6v10-12

7. What is wrong with Jonah's anger about the plant?

8. What is the LORD more concerned about?

Save talking about the animals until the end, if you have time. See some info at the end of the study.

The Hebrew does not actually say '120 000' people (although Hebrew does have words for that).
Instead, it says 12 x 10 000s.

READ EXODUS 24v3-7; DEUTERONOMY 5v32-33

9. How does the LORD's description of the Ninevites emphasise his concern for these non-Israelite people?

10. What do you think the Israelites are meant to learn from the book of Jonah?

READ 1 JOHN 4v9-10

11. How has the LORD shown his abounding love most beautifully and completely?

READ LUKE 15

12. How are the Israelites of Jesus' day still demonstrating the same attitude as Jonah? What should be their attitude to God's compassion?

growing disciples

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What are you rejoicing about in the LORD's character, as you've read today?



SEEKING GOD

Can you think of a time you've been angry that God has shown compassion? Who would you hate to see receiving God's grace?

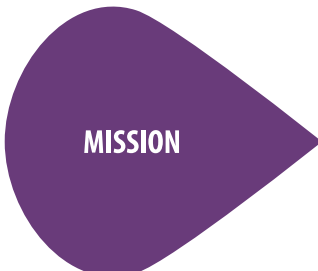
Where can you go in these moments? How can the book of Jonah help you?



SEEKING GOD

How has God's compassion stirred you to pass it on to others?

How do you have concern for all nations, just like the LORD?



MISSION

PRAYER IDEAS

- Praise the LORD that he is always gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. Praise him for his compassion in sending His Son, Jesus. Praise him for loving us as Jesus became an atoning sacrifice for our sins.
- Praise God that he always provides for us. He is our shelter and refuge, in Christ. Pray that we would receive his shelter as a gift, rather than thinking we can do it on our own.
- Ask forgiveness for times we've hated God's kindness and for wishing he wouldn't show compassion for others. Pray that we would rejoice instead, even when the most sinful people repent and our enemies are saved.
- Pray that we would pass the LORD's compassion on to others. Pray for family and friends to receive his grace.
- Thank God that he has concern for all nations. Ask that we would be part of sharing his abounding love to all peoples in Rockhampton and Gracemere, and throughout the world.

WHAT ABOUT THE ANIMALS?

God isn't just concerned for people, but also the animals. God created humanity to subdue and rule over the rest of creation (Genesis 1v26-31). This order is inverted as Adam and Eve are ruled by a creature (Genesis 3v1-15). The whole of creation is subject to frustration, groaning and decay by the sinfulness of humanity (Romans 8v20-21). So that in Jonah 3v7-8, even the Ninevite animals are in mourning over the people's sinfulness. Because of the cross and resurrection, one day all of creation will be restored along with humanity, in the new heavens and earth (Isaiah 1v1-11; Romans 8v18-25; Revelation 4-5).