Study One - Jonah 1:1-16 The Reluctant Evangelist

Discussion Starter

Without opening your Bible, how would you tell the story of Jonah to a) a young child or b) an adult who had never heard the story? What did you focus on? What was different in the two versions?

Exploring the story

Read Jonah 1:1-16

1. How would you describe Jonah, from this passage, as a prophet and person?
2. What is he called to do?
3. Why is he reluctant to obey God? (See Nahum 3)
4. What are the points of conflict/tension in the passage?
5. Plot the spiritual journey of the sailors. What is significant for them?

6. On reading this passage, rather than remembering it as a Children's Bible story, did anything surprise you?
7. How would you re-tell it now?

So what?

8. Jonah ran in the opposite direction from where God wanted him - What do we run away from today?
9. In v9 Jonah speaks of his faith and worship – yet he is running away. In what ways do we struggle with integrity – how often do we say or think we are worshipping God, but other things get in the way?
10. Does this passage point forward to the life and ministry of Jesus?
11. Does this passage challenge your understanding about who God is and what he is like?

Study Two - Jonah 1:17-2:10 – A saving Lord

Discussion Starter

Have you experienced a moment that made all the difference to a situation (perhaps in sport, at work or in family life)?

Exploring the story

1. Remind yourselves of Jonah part one. What is the story so far?

Read Jonah 1:17-2:10

2. How would you describe Jonah, from this passage, as a prophet and person?
3. Is Jonah glossing over the way in which his disobedience has led him to this point?
4. Is there a sign here that whilst he is now praying, Jonah is still very much a 'work in progress'?
5. Psalms of Lament often have a five-fold structure:
   - address (introductory cry for help)
   - lament (describing the situation)
   - confession of trust
   - asking for help (for God to intervene)
   - vow of praise or praise to God

     Do you see this structure in Jonah's prayer?

6. How does the prayer speak to us about God's character? How do verses 1:17 and 2:10?

So what?

7. How can we become people of prayer – at all times? What does Jonah teach us?
8. Are we those who praise God when he answers our prayer?
9. There are a number of Psalms alluded to in this prayer – there are links and themes from Psalms 3, 5, 16, 18, 31, 42, 50, 65, 88 and 120. Pick one of two of these Psalms, and discuss if you think they would help your own prayers?

Study Three - Jonah 3 and 4 The sign of Jonah – A repentant city

Discussion Starter

Do you have a favourite film or literary character? What draws you in to their story?

Exploring the story

Read Jonah 3.

1. What are the reactions to God's call and God's message in this passage?
2. How many different signs are there of responding to God's message?
3. Are there any surprises?
4. How does the passage point forward to what God is going to do in the future? (Are there New Testament equivalents?)

Read Jonah 4.

5. What do you learn about Jonah in this section? How does the text describe him?
6. Describe the tone of Jonah's prayer in this chapter (perhaps compare it with chapter 2).
7. What is God's response to Jonah's anger?
8. How does God use a plant (and a worm) to teach Jonah something about his perspective?
9. Are you surprised by the ending of Jonah?
10. How could you sum up the meaning of these chapters in your own words?

So what?

11. Are there ways in which we can sometimes behave like Jonah?
12. What is our vision of God's concern for those who don't know and love him?
13. Jesus in Matthew's gospel 16:4 tells the religious leaders of the day that "a wicked and adulterous generation looks for a miraculous sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah". What do you think Jesus means?

14. How has the book of Jonah challenged or encouraged you?
15. Is there an attitude you need to change?