



Looking Inwards (15 mins)
Caring For Each Other

*Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an **opportunity to share**, not something you have to do, however: 'It's the sharing that enables the caring!')* for:

- Thanksgiving?
- Prayer?
- Encouragement?
- Support in any way?



Looking Outwards (15 mins)
Concern For Others

*Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours; or church, which you would like to share (please be careful not to pass on anything that is **confidential** or which you think the person/people concerned would not wish to be shared) for:*

- Thanksgiving?
- Prayer?
- Encouragement?
- Support in any way?

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The Story Of Jonah (2/4)
HG89: Jonah's Prayer

Jonah 2:1-10

Home Group Study Notes

23rd February 2014 - Pauline Woolnough



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN
ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION
BEFORE THE MEETING!

Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group with you, along with any previous notes and other resources which might be helpful.



Welcome (10 mins)
Ice Breaker

Jonah was 'locked up' for three days so he could reflect on his behaviour. How did your parents discipline you?



Looking Upwards (10 mins)
Worship

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...



Looking Upwards (40 mins) Bible Study

Read the text for this study, and any references given, then answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to listen to the sermon and/or read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, your answers with your Home Group and, remember, these questions are only a guide to start your discussions.

1: Can you remember a time when you have been as desperate as Jonah? Are you able to share the situation and the outcome?

2: Can you reflect on a time when perhaps your own actions or decisions have unfavourably affected your life?

3: Have you ever been in a situation that has made you feel that God was angry with you and somehow punishing or disciplining you?

8 “Those who cling to worthless idols turn away from God’s love for them. 9 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.’” In answering Jonahs pray he was filled with thanksgiving and praise. In this terrible place when all was stripped away from Jonah he knew that his salvation comes from God, that God is merciful and in answering his prayer he vowed to serve God gladly and with praise and thanksgiving pledged his undivided loyalty. This is what God is looking for from us too when he answers our prayers, he is looking for us to give Him the glory, to praise him with thankful hearts and to learn more about his infinite love and mercy. Jonah’s disobedience would have impacted on the thousands of people that God wanted to show mercy to in Nineveh, but God showed mercy to Jonah so that he would learn to show mercy others

What Can We Learn? Jonah prays a good eloquent prayer but ultimately it was a prayer for and about himself, a prayer of thanks to God for saving his life. How often are our prayers the same. At prayer time in your HGs when we ask each other what we need to pray for, how often is it for our own concerns? Which of us suggest we pray the last half hour for the homeless, the lost, children sold into the sex trade, but also when do we ever pray for the abuser, the kidnapper, the perpetrator was it not for these same people that God sent Jonah to Nineveh for, so that people would turn from their sins and turn to him.

After watching the programme I asked my self what could I do, what could I practically do? We are sometimes left feeling helpless and somewhat guilty that our lives in comparison to others are so blessed. I can support organisations concerned with people trafficking and I can pray. Doesn’t seem like much does it but prayer is not the easy option, if it was we would all be doing more of it, we would all be clamouring to get to church prayer meetings but for some reason when it is not for ourselves prayer is often a hard thing to make time for and an even harder thing to maintain but I believe it’s the only thing that will make a difference. When we work with God and we are concerned with His Kingdom then no situation and no one is beyond redemption. I sat in the comfort of my home and of course, my heart went out to the victims, the helpless children, and I passed judgement on the abusers, I pronounced them guilty and I was satisfied at the sentence of death pronounced over them. But what do I know of their lives other than they can’t have had the same opportunities I have had and they certainly can’t know Jesus as their Saviour, my self righteousness cried out “*guilty*,” my sense of judgement felt that they deserved what they got -a lot like Jonah because here were the same people that God was sending Jonah to offer forgiveness and salvation to.

The primary purpose of the book of Jonah is to show the compassionate character of God, and challenges us to examine our own attitude and compassion for the lost. The book implores us to be merciful because our heavenly Father is merciful,- he was merciful to Jonah, he heard and answered his prayer, and the lesson we can learn about prayer from Jonah is that God answers us in mercy in order to make us merciful to others. If we want to see God’s Kingdom come and if we want to see society transformed we need to be concerned about the helpless, the victims, the fatherless, the homeless and the oppressed, but also the abuser, the gang member, the drug dealer, the sinner, Jesus came for everyone, even those that completely and utterly offend us.

“As we know Jesus better, His divine power gives us everything we need for living a godly life.” 2 Peter 1:3

He is the God of the second chance and despite our guilt and in spite of our folly God hears us and answers our prayers.

Jonah knew he was there because of God's displeasure with him, V 3 *For you hurled me into the very depths of the sea.*" God was angry with him and he needed to be disciplined and taught a lesson. Now to know that you are in a bad place and it is because of your own actions is awful but how much more devastating for Jonah knowing that he was in the situation he was in because the Lord Almighty Himself was angry and that he was being disciplined. It was a hard lesson for Jonah but God wasn't so much punishing him and paying him back for all the trouble he had caused, rather He was bringing him back. God wanted Jonah to stop running and rejecting His authority over his life, and so He allowed, and even arranged for Jonah to suffer, in order to show him how helpless he was without God. God never punishes for the sake of it, he uses the situations we find ourselves in and his purposes always involve redemption . Job 36:15 says, *"God delivers the afflicted by their affliction, and opens their ear by adversity."* We may at times feel that due to our own wilful and sinful ways we bring suffering onto ourselves and even others through unwise choices or bad decisions, but Jonah shows us that God is a God of mercy and although we may feel we deserve His judgement, when we call on him in our distress he hears and he answers us.

Nothing Is Impossible: Jonah's prayer surely shows us that nothing is impossible with God. His situation couldn't have been worse. He says that he called to God from the world of the dead, verse 2:v 5 says *"I sank beneath the waves and death was very near."* Jonah is admitting that he was as good as dead, but God reached out and rescued him! Never think your situation is so bad so complicated or hopeless that it cannot change. Being a Christian doesn't exempt us from trouble or hardship and sometimes it seems that we get hit from all sides. But we see in Jonah that although his situation seemed impossible God heard his cry and he answered and he chose to give Jonah another chance and continued to use him. We can never predict how he will answer our prayers but we can be sure that he hears and if we allow him to he will work his purposes out through us for our own good in every situation.

God's Timing: Not A Moment Too Soon! You may have prayed as Habakkuk, saying, *"How long, Lord, must I call for help, but you do not listen?"* (Habakkuk 1:2). It sometimes seems as if we pray and wait and wait and pray but the answer just never comes but for His own reasons sometimes God makes us wait and often it is at the 11th hour before our prayer is answered . Verse 7 says, *When my life was ebbing away, I remembered you, Lord, and my prayer rose to you, to your holy temple."*

Just as the life was ebbing out of Jonah, he was drifting into unconsciousness as his soul fainted, it was then that God answered him. It was at the last minute that Jonah was saved. Jonah gives us courage to persevere in our prayer, to keep on crying out to God even if we have no more energy, and to believe that God will answer in the nick of time. We need also to learn to let God be God, so often we want to tell God how to answer our prayer, we make suggestions, we waffle on about how He could do this or that, we can also be a bit dismissive and unimpressed by small changes in answer to prayer only being satisfied with the complete answer, but God often answers in stages, he chooses to save and heal in stages and sometimes those stages are not comfortable, just like the fish's belly was not comfortable but God used it as part of the process of saving Jonah

What Did Jonah Learn? He learned as V8 and 9 show us anything that comes between us and the Lord is foolishness and has the effect of us turning our backs on all of God's mercies, its like being lost adrift at sea. Any object of our desire that replaces our devotion to God is as useless as worshipping false gods or idols and we deceive ourselves with things that are ultimately empty:

4: Jonah prayed using the Psalms, familiar words learned by heart. Do you ever find it difficult to pray with others? Do other peoples prayers sometimes intimidate you? Does Jonah's example of using simple well-known words help?

5: I am assuming that due to his reluctance to visit Nineveh, Jonah's prayers were not usually concerned about the sinful people who lived there. Have you been challenged (as I have), as individuals, and as home groups about your own prayers concerning this?

6: Although he was saved at the last minute Jonah didn't have to wait long for his answer to prayer. How do you manage to keep on praying when you see no change in the situation that you are praying about? Share with each other anything that you find helps.



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



The Story Of Jonah (2/4) **HG89: Jonah's Prayer**

Jonah 2:1-10

Home Group Sermon Notes

23rd February 2014 - Pauline Woolnough

Introduction: I was watching a programme called Extreme Worlds with Ross Kemp. He had travelled to India to expose the use of very young girls in the sex industry. Hundreds of little girls as young as 8 are regularly snatched from their villages taken to the towns and sold as sex slaves. He even spoke to a couple whose child of 2 had been taken. Often the kidnappers are known to the villagers but no one ever is prosecuted because there is so much corruption in the police force. On the very slim chance that a little girl escapes she is then disowned by her village and often her family, she simply cannot win. Anyway, one village had eventually had enough and they had managed to capture 3 of the kidnappers and they lynched them. Immediately I heard that I said out loud, "good" that was my attitude, "good they got what they deserved."

Does that remind you of anyone... does that remind you of Jonah? We know from our first reading how reluctant Jonah was to take the message to the people of Nineveh. It was the most important city in Assyria, a great evil empire and Israel's most dreaded enemy. He didn't believe they deserved mercy, he knew they bad. The prophet Nahum fills us in a bit about them. He says they were guilty of evil plots against God, (Nahum 1.9) and he accused them of exploiting the helpless, (Nahum 2.12) of idolatry, prostitution and witchcraft, (Nahum 3.4). You can understand why Jonah may have been reluctant to take God's message to them. He knew the message was powerful and he knew that God was merciful and that He would forgive these people and bless them if they turned from their sin and worshipped him. Jonah would much rather have seen the people feel the full weight of God's judgement than experience his grace and mercy, after all they deserved all they had coming to them.. but the thing is... they didn't know the One true God. They were living in darkness and in ignorance.

Jonah was a prophet called by God and obligated to obey God's word yet he refused now to do what God had told him to do choosing to leave the people of Nineveh to their evil ways and all the suffering that it caused. He knew God, he belonged to a people who had been protected and provided for by God throughout their history, a people who despite God's favour and blessing had been rebellious ungrateful and disobedient, yet God had always forgiven them and shown only love and mercy, especially when they cried out to Him in times of distress. Jonah now wanted to deny the people of Nineveh their opportunity of salvation, their chance to know God as a place of safety and refuge in all situations, and the One who would hear them when they cried out for help in time of distress which is exactly what Jonah does himself here in chapter 2.

Where Jonah Prayed: An obedient fish saved a disobedient prophet, (how embarrassing for Jonah, - a fish!!), but in that fish's stomach God now had Jonah's undivided attention, and so Jonah prays. Someone in our HG described it a bit like when we were young and had got into trouble and often our mums would send us up to our rooms to think about our actions and it may be a bit of a leap from a child's bedroom to a big fish's stomach but its kind of the same.

God was essentially sending Jonah to his room to make him think and reflect on his actions. For 3 days and nights Jonah was stuck in something like a dark, smelly, wet, noisy, squishy kind of cave. He was constantly on the move going up and down a bit like a roller coaster, only he couldn't see where he was going, lapsing in and out of consciousness, probably hanging on for dear life, the rest of his time praying, and his prayer tells us a lot about him. It tells us that he was aware of the presence of God because he spoke directly to God. He was in the depths of the sea in the belly of a fish totally lost and as good as dead and although not another living soul could see Jonah or would ever find him he knew that God was right there with him, he said, "*you listened to my cry....you hurled me into the deep....you Lord brought my life up from the pit.... I remember you Lord... my prayer rose to you.*" Jonah accepted that it was his own actions that had put him where he was. He believed that God was punishing him and had banished him from his sight and although the sailors had physically thrown him overboard they were merely being used by God ,but instead of being scared, angry or even trying to get the fish to spew him out he was humbled by God's goodness. He was thankful and the belly of a large fish became a place of worship. As Jonah called out his praise to the Lord it wasn't the fish's belly that was the scary place it was the stormy seas outside that frightened Jonah, the fish was his place of safety. God had rescued him.

What Jonah Prayed: His prayer sounds a bit familiar and that's because he's reciting words from the Psalms 18:4-6, 31:22 and 107:10-15. Its not surprising really because the Psalms were the Jewish peoples prayer book, there was a psalm for every situation and one that could be said for every prayer that needed to be prayed. Jonah would have learned the psalms, he would have sung them from childhood and now in his unique and extreme situation, probably suffering from shock with little energy or mental capacity he drew on what he knew. Athanasius, the Early Church Father once said, "*Most of scripture speaks to us, but the Psalms speak for us.*" The Psalms can be a place of comfort and a helpful resource because we too can use them as prayers. Our prayers don't have to be creative; they just have to be sincere. Jonahs brief prayer is honest, spoken completely from the heart and answered in a way he couldn't possibly have anticipated.

Why Jonah Prayed: The book of Jonah comes over as a funny story and he himself is an object of ridicule but Jonah knew some things about God things that we also need to know. He knew that no matter how far away he had gone from God and how disobedient he had been God would still hear him when he called out. He knew that from the experience of others as written in the psalms that he had learned.. He would have known Psalm 107:10-15.

Jonah knew where to turn in his time of trouble and so he prayed. 2:1, 2: "*Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish, saying, 'I called to the Lord, out of my distress, and he answered me.'*" This sums up what happened when Jonah was thrown overboard and he began to sink. He had cried out to God, and God answered him by sending the fish. This one simple statement is a huge encouragement for us because it shows us that no matter how difficult a situation we find ourselves in, God hears and answers our prayers, - but hopefully not with a fish.

God Answers Prayers: Especially those ones we pray when we are in great distress and often in the most unlikely way and not always the way that we would hope or could even imagine. God answers prayers even when we are far away from him, even when we don't deserve it, even when we are defiant, disobedient, or a disappointment to Him. When we are downright wilful and in living in opposition to his plans, God hears and answers our prayers. He answers our prayers when we have turned our back on him, when we keep making the same mistakes and in our hearts we believe we will never change and there is no hope for us - God answers our prayers. More than any other time when we turn to him in our distress and cry out to him in repentance,- God answers our prayers. Jonah was in that place due to his blatant disobedience but God heard him and rescued him and gave him another chance.