



**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 (4/4)  
**HG90: Jonah's Anger At God's Compassion**

**Jonah 4:1-11**

**Home Group Study Notes**

23<sup>rd</sup> March 2014 - Revd Paul A. Carr



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*

Read Paul's article in the March edition of the *Around Town Magazine* on our website here: <http://www.billericaychurches.org/html/news.php?id=412> In what ways might you, as a Home Group, be able to **'Bless, Eat & Listen'** during this season of Lent?



**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:** Have you, like Jonah (vs 1, 4 & 9) ever been angry with God? What was the situation? How was it resolved?

**2:** Vs2-4, Paul suggested that: *Jonah prayed his best prayer in the worst place (the fish's belly) and he prayed his worst prayer in the best place (at Nineveh where God was at work)*. When and where have you prayed both your best and worst prayers?

**3:** Vs5-8, have you ever been in a sulk with God? What was the situation? How was it resolved?

There's a story about a young Jewish boy who grew up in Germany many years ago. The boy had a profound sense of admiration for his father, who ensured that the life of the family revolved around the religious practices of their faith - they faithfully attended the synagogue and remembered all the feast days etc. When he was a teenager the boy's family was forced to move to another town in Germany. This town had no synagogue, only a Lutheran church. The life of the community revolved around the church and all the supposed 'sophisticated and influential' people belonged to it.

One day, suddenly, out of the blue, the father announced that the family were going to abandon their Jewish traditions and join the Lutheran church. When the stunned family asked why, the father explained that it would be good for his business. The youngster was bewildered and confused. However, his deep disappointment soon gave way to an intense bitterness that plagued him throughout his life. Not long after, he left Germany and came to England to study. He spent a lot of time at the British Museum formulating his ideas into a book where he introduced a new world view and conceived a movement that was destined to change the world. He committed the people who followed him to life without God. If I said that he once described religion as the: *opiate for the masses* you'll have some idea of whom I'm talking about. His name? Karl Marx, founder of the Communist movement. His ideas became the norm for the governments of almost half the world's people. The history of the twentieth century, and perhaps beyond, was significantly affected because his father allowed his values, and integrity, to become distorted.

When our reputation is more important than character, and pleasing ourselves, and our friends, is more important than pleasing God, then we're in danger of living to defend our prejudices and choose our preferences instead of fulfilling our spiritual responsibilities. It should be the priority of each one of us to please God, and to faithfully teach and live out his word however difficult that may be.

**Conclusion:** But the real issue isn't how Jonah answered God's question; the real issue is how you and I today are answering God's question. Do we have compassion for those who are lost? How do we show this compassion? Do we have a concern for places in our community where there is much sin and so little witness? Do we pray that the Gospel will go to every part of the world and are we helping to send it there? Do we rejoice when sinners repent and trust in Jesus as Saviour? All of those questions and more are wrapped up in what God asked Jonah. We can't answer for him, but we can answer for ourselves.

I don't know if any of you have seen the film 'Dead Poets Society' with Robin Williams? He plays a classics teacher who is trying to enthuse his students with a passion for ancient literature etc. One scene that really sticks in my mind is when he is standing on the table in the classroom quoting wrote the Roman poet Horace: *Carpe Diem!* Seize the day! **Seize the day.** Because, while we are dreaming of the future or regretting the past, the present, which is all we have, slips from us and is gone - just like the vine.

Jonah and us may be very different in outlook and personality, but we mustn't forget that God has an individually designed plan for our lives that only we can fulfil. Let's make the most of who and what we are today! Let's give God the right answers by walking with him, and not be that reluctant disciple running off in the opposite (and wrong) direction. *Carpe Diem!*

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

**Wrong Priorities (Again) vs 10-11:** Jonah still had a problem with the will of God. In ch1, his mind understood God's will, but he refused to obey it and went in the opposite direction. In ch2, he cried out for help, God rescued him, and he gave himself back to the Lord. In ch3, he yielded his will to the Lord and went to Nineveh to preach, but his heart had not yet surrendered. Jonah did the will of God, but not from his heart Jonah had one more lesson to learn, perhaps the most important one of all. In ch1, he learned the lesson of God's providence and patience, that you can't run away from God. In ch2, he learned the lesson of God's pardon, that God forgives those who call upon Him. In ch3, he learned the lesson of God's power as he saw a whole city humble itself before the Lord. Now he had to learn the lesson of God's pity, that God has compassion for lost sinners like the Ninevites; and His servants must also have compassion.

It seems incredible, but Jonah brought a whole city to faith in the Lord and yet he didn't love the people he was preaching to! Jeremiah and Jesus looked on the city of Jerusalem and wept over it (Jeremiah 9:1&10; 23:9; Luke 19:41), Paul was greatly distressed over the city of Athens, (Acts 17:16). Jonah looked on the city of Nineveh and seethed with anger. He needed to learn the lesson of God's pity and have a heart of compassion for lost souls.

Jonah's reaction to God's dealings with the Ninevites brings into sharp focus the difficulty of repentance for religious people. Religious people think they are OK and forget that faith is about commitment not ritual and about a relationship with God rather than a brief encounter. How many people has the devil lulled into a false sense of security because they think they are Christians simply because they've been Baptised or Confirmed on attend church on a semi-regular basis or signed up to the ER!

**God's Unanswered Question, vs11:** Jonah and Nahum are the only books in the Bible that end with questions and both, quite interestingly, have to do with the city of Nineveh. Nahum ends with a question about God's punishment of Nineveh (Nahum 3:19) while Jonah ends with a question about God's pity for Nineveh. Vs11: *Should I not be concerned about that great city?* It's a strange way to end such a dramatic book as Jonah isn't it? God has the first word, 1:1-2, and the last word, 4:11, and that's the way it should be. However, we aren't told how Jonah answered God's final question. I guess we sincerely hope that Jonah yielded to God's loving words and followed the example of the Ninevites by repenting and seeking God's face. Even as we draw to the end of our story, God does not seek to have the last word. Is it not the case that the story continues even now not only to intrigue but to challenge God's people? In his graciousness the Lord leaves the last word for Jonah, and for all of us who share some affinity with him: *'Should not I pity Nineveh, that great city?* The writer of this book fails to record the prophet's response to the final, telling argument that 120,000 people must be as important as a plant.

[A sad footnote to this story, recorded a few pages further on in the Old Testament book of Nahum, is that the people of Nineveh learned very little from their great deliverance and, as far as we can tell, they returned to their sins and were destroyed.]

**When Character Is Lost:** It seems to me that, in amongst all the dynamics going on in this story, Jonah was concerned about his reputation with those back home. The Jews would have wanted to see all the Assyrians destroyed, not just the people of Nineveh. When they found out Jonah had been the means of saving them from God's wrath, they would have considered him a traitor to official Jewish foreign policy! I'd want to suggest that Jonah was a narrow-minded patriot who saw Assyria only as a dangerous enemy to destroy, not as a nation of repentant sinners to be saved. Pauline spoke about this very eloquently, didn't she, a few weeks ago. We may suggest that a leader has to have several prominent characteristics, but I think we'd be hard pressed to discover a greater characteristic than integrity. Billy Graham once said: *When wealth is lost, nothing is lost; when health is lost, something is lost; when character is lost, all is lost.*

**4:** Read again the poem 'You' by Levi Yitzchak. Have you ever felt like this? Is this a good thing or a bad thing? (You may also want to read Psalm 139).

**5:** Vs10-11, In what ways might we be more concerned with church life, or our own lives, than we are for those under God's judgement? What might we be able to do to begin to see things more from God's perspective?

**6:** Our Home Group series on the story of Jonah has been short, but it has been an interesting series none-the-less. What has challenged you the most? What has encouraged you the most? What will you 'carry' with you into your future Christian life?



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



The Story Of Jonah (4/4)  
**HG90: Jonah's Anger At God's Compassion**

**Jonah 4:1-11**

**Home Group Sermon Notes**

23<sup>rd</sup> March 2014 - Revd Paul A. Carr

**Introduction:** Let's just recap the story so far: Remember how God told Jonah, 1:1-3, to: *Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come before me. But Jonah ran away from the Lord ...* and boarded a ship headed for Tarshish. Before long, God sent a storm, most of the cargo was thrown overboard, and so was Jonah, who was then miraculously swallowed by a big fish! This amazing experience caused Jonah to turn to God in prayer, 2:1-9, where he promises to fulfil what God had asked him to do. After three days and nights, he was spat onto dry land and journeyed to Nineveh to preach God's judgement. We then thought about the 'God of the second chance' who gave Jonah the opportunity to put right what his disobedience had put wrong. Jonah only spoke eight words 3:4: *Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned* and everyone, from the king downwards repented and turned to God in confession and faith. It's a wonderful story of salvation and revival, isn't it? If this book had ended at 3:10, then history would have portrayed Jonah as one of the greatest prophets of all time. After all, preaching one short message that motivated thousands of people to repent and turn to God was no mean accomplishment. Remember how Jesus used the example of the Ninevites to show the Jews how guilty they were in rejecting His witness. Matthew 12:41: *The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgement with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now one greater than Jonah is here.*

**Getting Angry With God (Again) vs 1, 4 & 9:** The heart of every problem is the problem in the heart, and that's where Jonah's problems were to be found. We know the Lord doesn't look on the outward appearance, He looks at the heart (1 Samuel 16:7) and balances our motives (1 Corinthians 4:5). That's why ch4 was included in the book, because it reveals the thoughts and intents of Jonah's heart and exposes his sins. 4:1: *But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry.* In fact, he's angry quite a lot in this final chapter, isn't he (vs1,4&9)? I find the interchange between God and Jonah refreshingly real and familiar. Have you ever felt angry with God? I have! And Jonah is furious that God has done exactly what he feared he would do: He's forgiven them. It seems to me that Jonah is doing his best Victor Meldrew impersonation here! *I don't believe it!*

**Jonah Prays (Again), vs 2-3:** For the second time in this book, Jonah prays, but this prayer was very different in content and intent than the one in ch2. *Jonah prayed his best prayer in the worst place (the fish's belly) and he prayed his worst prayer in the best place (at Nineveh where God was at work).* His first prayer came from a *broken* heart, but his second came from an *angry* heart. In his first he asked God to save him, but in his second he asked God to take his life! Once again, Jonah would rather die than let God have his way. This petulant prayer lets us in on the secret of why Jonah tried to run away in the first place. Being the good theologian he was, Jonah knew the attributes of God as 4:2: *... a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.* And he was right.

**In The Wrong Place (Again), vs 5-7:** For the second time in this book, Jonah abandoned his place of ministry. He sat down in a place east of the city where he could see what would happen to Nineveh. Jonah could have taught the Ninevites so much about the true God of Israel, but he preferred to be angry and bitter and to have his own way. What a tragedy it is when God's servants are a means of blessing to others but miss the blessing themselves!

God tries to talk to Jonah about how he is feeling, but it seems that Jonah is one of those people who just can't understand anything without concrete examples or visible object lessons. The big fish was the first and most dramatic one, but now it was time for something a little more agricultural. God knew that Jonah was uncomfortable sitting in the shelter, 4:5, so He graciously caused a vine to grow whose large leaves would protect Jonah from the hot sun. This made Jonah happy, but the next morning, when God prepared a worm to kill the vine, Jonah was angry. The combination of the hot sun and the desert wind made him want to die even more. God, as He had done in the depths of the sea, was reminding Jonah of what it was like to be lost: helpless, hopeless, miserable. Jonah was, as James 1:8 reminds us, a: *... double-minded man, unstable in all he does.* One minute Jonah's preaching God's Word, the next he's disobeying it and running away. While inside the big fish, he prayed to be delivered; but now he asks the Lord to kill him. He called the city to repentance, but he wouldn't repent himself.

**The Incredible Sulk, vs 8 - 9:** My sulks are fairly fragile. If someone tickles me or says something absurd, my glum expression is likely to crack, and once I've smiled my sulk is usually ruined. Jonah, on the other hand, is determined not to give an inch. Like the elder brother in the parable, he wouldn't go in and enjoy the feast (Luke 15:28). And if the prodigal son's elder brother is the heavyweight sulking champion of the NT, Jonah must be a front-line candidate in the Old. Jonah couldn't get away from God. I came across this poem by Rabbi Levi Yitzchak a few years ago entitled 'You!' and I can just imagine Jonah writing it. You might connect with it in some way:

*Where I go: You! Where I stand: You!  
Just You. Again You. Always You! You! You! You!  
When it goes well with me: You!  
When it goes wrong with me: You!  
Just You. Again You. Always You! You! You! You!  
Heaven: You! Earth: You! Up: You! Down: You!  
Where I turn at every end: You!  
Just You. Again You. Always You!  
You! You! You!*

**The Personal God, vs 6:** The remarkable thing, to me, is how tenderly God dealt with the sulking servant and sought to bring him back to the place of fellowship. I don't know about you, but I really like God in this story. If I'm honest, I don't always understand him in all the Old Testament accounts, particularly where mass slaughters are ordered, but I'm sure I'll understand one day. What I like about God in this story, is that, having shown such compassion and taken such trouble with the population at Nineveh, God now concentrates on one confused individual. This shows us, in a wonderful way, that God, is as interested in, and takes as much trouble with individuals as he does whole communities.

It's interesting to note that God didn't insist on Jonah sharing his intention or motivation as far as Nineveh was concerned. He simply wanted him to do as he was told. Through all this, God is still speaking to Jonah and Jonah is still listening and answering, even though he's not giving the right answers.