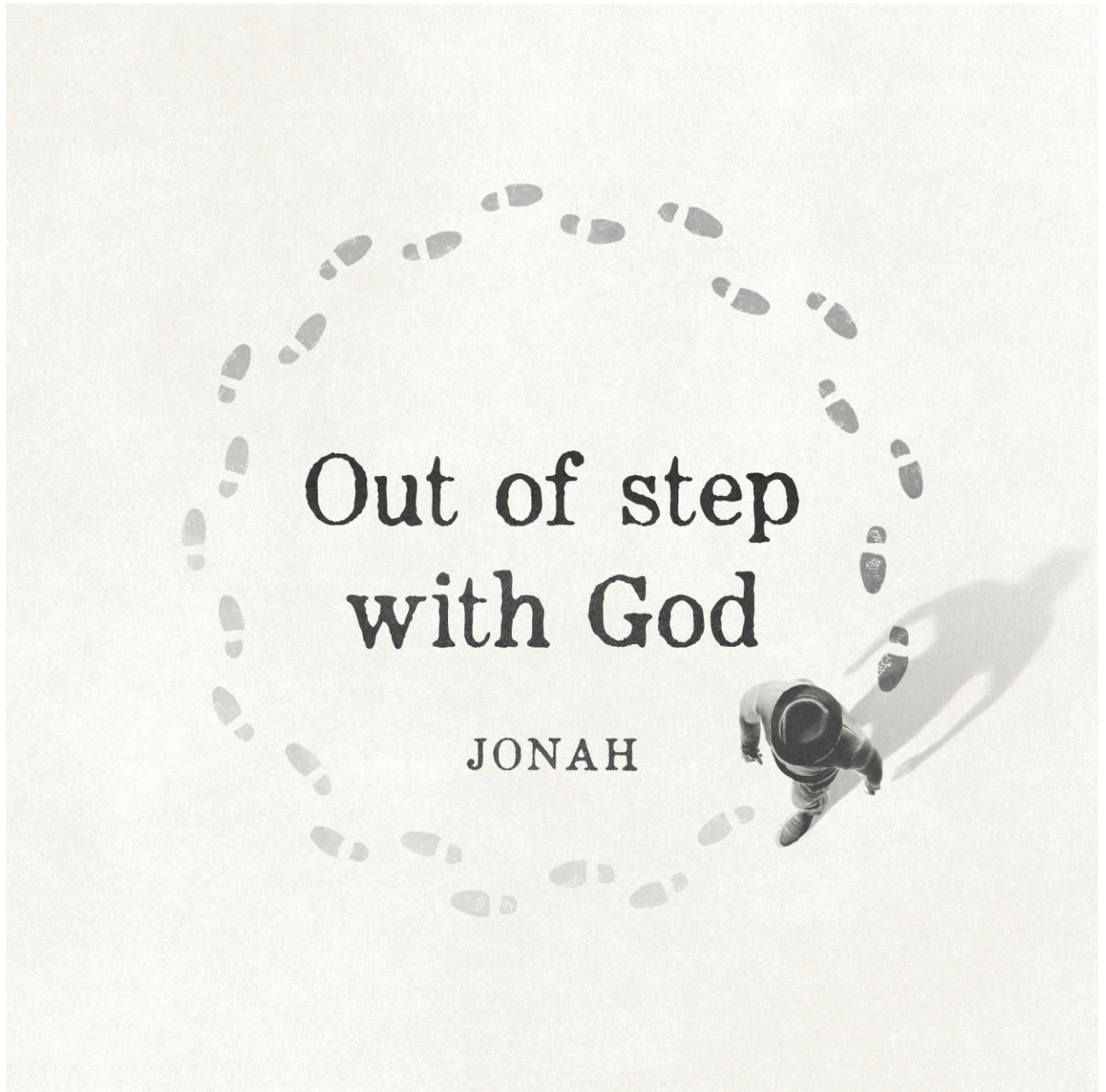


Bible Study

Jonah – Out Of Step With God



Trinity Church Adelaide
2022

Study 1 - Healthy Fear

Jonah 1:1-16

Jonah is an Old Testament book that tells the thrilling tale of a disobedient prophet from the north of Israel. We don't know with certainty when or by whom the book was written, but the story is probably set around 700BC, when Nineveh was the capital of the regional superpower Assyria. Over the next three weeks we'll consider what this book teaches us about God and ourselves.

1. What's something you're afraid of? Why?
2. Pray for our time together hearing from God's word.
3. Act out Jonah 1:1-16 (or at least read it dramatically!) You'll need volunteers to be Jonah, pagan sailors, their captain and the Lord God. You might also want to designate parts of your space as Joppa (in Israel), Tarshish, and Nineveh.
4. What are some of the possible reasons that Jonah went to Tarshish in verse 3?

5. As we acted out the story, you might have noticed differences between the characters. In the table below, contrast the differences between the behaviour and attitudes of Jonah and the sailors in the different parts of the story. It would also be helpful to consider what each character knows and says about God at each point.

	What Jonah was like...	What the Sailors were like...
When the storm started		
During the lot casting		
When Jonah is found to be responsible		
When the sea calms	N/A	

6. How is God portrayed in this story?
7. Who relates better to God in this story – the sailors or Jonah?
Why?
8. In this passage, we see the themes of “fear” and of “mercy.”
What is the relationship between these two themes in Jonah 1?
9. What do the following verses add to our understanding of “fear” and “mercy” in God’s wider story of salvation? Psalm 27:1; 34:9; 103:13; 115:11; Luke 12:4-7; 1 John 4:15-18.

10. What do the contrasts between Jonah and the sailors teach us about what it means to “fear the Lord?”

11. Can you think of areas of your life where you fear the wrong things, or don't fear when you should? What might need to change?

Study 2 - Real Repentance

Jonah 1:17-2:10

Last week, we kicked off our series in Jonah. Jonah was entrusted with a message for the city of Nineveh. Instead, Jonah fled to Tarshish by sea. His escape was cut short by a wild storm, which led to the salvation of Jonah's pagan shipmates and some unsettling hints about Jonah's reasons for fleeing Nineveh in the first place. We concluded by talking about "healthy fear" in light of Jonah's failure to fear the God he knew. This week, we pick up on a cliff-hanger. Our "hero" has been thrown into the raging seas...

1. For discussion: what makes a good apology?
2. Pray for our time together hearing from God's word.
3. Read Jonah 1:17-2:10 together.
4. In light of what we've seen about Jonah so far in the series, why do you think God sent the fish?¹

¹ For those wondering about some of the historical/scientific issues around the fish, you can find a useful discussion in Rosemary A. Nixon, *The Message of Jonah: Presence in the Storm*, ed. Alec Motyer, Derek Tidball, *The Bible Speaks Today* (England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2003), 127-135. However, it might be worth bearing in mind this comment from Smith: "And this is the tragedy of the Book of Jonah, that a Book which is made the means of one of the most sublime revelations of truth in the Old Testament should be known to most only for its connection with a whale." (Smith 492, quoted in Nixon, *Message of Jonah*, 127-128).

5. What would you expect Jonah to say from inside the fish? (You may like to consider Psalm 32:1-7; 51:1-12)

6. In small groups, read back over Jonah's prayer. Try and break it into a few (min 2-max 5) sections and put a heading next to each section that summarises what Jonah says.

7. How does Jonah make sense of his deliverance?

8. Jonah's prayer closely resembles a number of Psalms (songs from a book in the Old Testament called Psalms). In small groups, skim-read one psalm, answer the questions below, and feedback to the big group:
- What important similarities are there between Jonah's prayer and this psalm?
 - What are the big differences? (Pay attention to the context of the psalm)

Psalm	Similar	Different
18:1-27		
88		
31		
50		
116		

9. Why is Jonah's prayer the wrong prayer in this context?
10. What is ironic about Jonah's claim that "those who cling to worthless idols turn away from God's love for them" and that "salvation belongs to the Lord" (verses 8-9)?
11. What does Jonah 2 teach us about genuine repentance?
12. 1 John 1:8-10 says:

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.

What reassurance does God's character give us when we confess our sins?

13. Is confession part of your prayer life? How might this need to change?

14. Pray the following prayer together.

Almighty God, our heavenly Father,
We confess with shame the sins we have done,
 against you,
and against those whom you have made.
We have not loved you with our whole heart,
and we have not loved our neighbours as ourselves.
We are sorry, and turn from our sins.
For the sake of your Son who died for us,
forgive us, cleanse us and change us.
Set us free by your Spirit to live for you,
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
Amen.

Study 3 - A Compassionate Heart

Jonah 3:1-4:11

Over the last two weeks in Jonah, we've raised a number of unsettling questions about our story's "hero." Why did Jonah run away? Why was Jonah so calm during the storm and when facing his own inevitable death? Why did God send the fish to swallow Jonah? Is Jonah's prayer genuinely a prayer of repentance, or is something missing? Will Jonah's second trip to Nineveh go any better than the first? In chapters 3 and 4, we get to the heart of the matter...

1. Pray and read Jonah 3:1-10. As you go, underline anything that is surprising or unexpected.

2. What did you find surprising in this section?

3. Jesus says of Nineveh:

"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." (Luke 11:32)

a. In what way did the people of Nineveh provide a challenge for Jesus' hearers?

b. What about for us?

4. Read chapter 4:1-10. What is shocking about Jonah's reaction in 4:1-3?
5. How does 4:1-3 shed light on Jonah's conduct earlier in the book?
6. Why does God provide the plant?
7. How do Jonah's and God's attitudes towards Nineveh contrast?
8. How is the Old Testament portrayal of God's character consistent with what we learn about God in the New Testament? Check out Luke 15:1-7.

9. What questions does the book leave open by finishing without a clear resolution?

10. How does Jonah challenge us...²

- a. when we feel beyond the compassion of God?
- b. when we feel afraid to talk about our faith in Jesus?
- c. in our commitment to people who don't know Jesus in other parts of the world?
- d. as we engage with people who feel like "outsiders" to us?
- e. in our assumptions about who is most likely to respond positively to the gospel?

11. Spend some time praising God for his compassion and mercy and asking that we would delight and rejoice in his treatment of sinners. Pray about the issues raised in question 10.

² Pick a few of these issues to talk about.

