



SESSION 3 of 4

Jonah

MEETING AIM

To explore how Jonah has a deeper relevance for young people than just being a story about a fish.

BIBLE PASSAGE

The book of Jonah

BACKGROUND

Our general understanding of Jonah's story is about a big fish and 'doing the right thing' when God asks us to do something. However, there are deeper questions to ask in this story around themes of justice and radical forgiveness, and our attitude towards and trust in God. There is even a prophetic reflection of Jesus and the crucifixion. Allow your group to really dig deep, and allow God to challenge and speak to them through the questions.

10 GATHERING TIME

Welcome your young people to the group and share any refreshments you have. If you can, get hold of some sushi as a themed alternative to your usual snack. Use it to get everyone talking about what they like and don't like eating, and why. What would be the funniest or most disgusting toast toppings?

10 INTRO ACTIVITY

Ask the group to imagine a hot air balloon carrying a number of passengers is in trouble. You will give them some information about the passengers and they must decide who should be thrown out to save the others. First, tell them who each passenger is and let them discuss it for a few minutes. Then reveal each additional detail one at a time, pausing for more discussion.

PASSENGER A: Child

1. Has no parents
2. Has terminal cancer
3. Is the only person with a phone

PASSENGER B: Doctor

1. Specialises in accident and emergency
2. Is 89 years old
3. Has links with radical Islamist groups

PASSENGER C: Astronaut

1. Highly experienced expedition leader
2. Is transgender
3. Depressed and suicidal

PASSENGER D: Teacher

1. Accidentally caused this disaster
2. Is deaf
3. Daughter of the bishop

PASSENGER E: Bishop

1. Is female
2. Is willing to die for the group
3. Knows the area extremely well

PASSENGER F: Mother

1. Recently lost a baby
2. Works as a prostitute
3. Is an aeronautical engineer

10 BIBLE EXPLORATION

Read the following story. You could ask the group to act it out as you read.

The wind was howling so loudly that the sailors couldn't hear their own voices. The waves crashed in front of the ship; the wind and rain tore the sails to shreds. The crew was exhausted and very nearly spent...as was the boat.

Each prayed to their own god: "Please stop the storm!", "Save us!", "Don't let me die!"

Nearby, the captain shouted to his terrified crew over the bellow of the storm: "Grab some of this stuff! Get it overboard! We need to lose weight, quickly!"

They grabbed heavy crates and bundled them over the handrail. People everywhere were rushing about, stumbling and tripping, desperately offloading all their possessions along with any cargo and equipment that wasn't absolutely essential.

"Where's Jonah?" the captain shouted.

Two or three of the crew staggered below deck to look for him. They returned moments later pushing Jonah in front of them.

"Have you been asleep?" the captain bellowed at Jonah. "Get praying to your god. Maybe he will save us!"

Then one of crew started fishing around in a leather pouch. "Let's cast lots to find out who is responsible for this hurricane!" he yelled.

They all picked out a counter from the bag and the lot fell on Jonah.

The crew turned to him. "Who are you? Where are you from?"

"I am Jonah, a Hebrew. I worship the Lord, who made the heavens and the Earth."

The crew members were terrified. The sea was getting rougher and they didn't know what to do. Another huge wave smashed against the starboard side. Jonah fell and slid across the deck, sprawling into someone's legs, with another landing on top of him. The first guy pushed him off and someone kicked him in the side as he stood.

"Captain!" Jonah screamed. "Throw me overboard! I'm running away from doing God's will. Throw me over and you will all

live! Do it now! Before it's too late!"

When you have finished the story, read Jonah 1:1-3 to the group to discover why Jonah ran away. Consider Jonah's motivations. Can you ever run away from God? Finally, briefly retell the whole story of Jonah.

10 CHATTING TOGETHER

Ask the young people these questions, making sure everyone has a chance to contribute and allowing the conversation to go off at (relevant) tangents:

- What did you like (or not) about the story?
- How did it make you feel? Did you sense God saying anything to you?
- What emotions do you think Jonah had at this point? Had he always felt this way?
- What incidents of forgiveness or judgement are there in the story? Who deserves which?
- Is this story similar to other Bible stories you have heard before? What have you learned about God through this story?
- What have you learned about yourself from your own reaction to it?

10 CREATIVE RESPONSE

You will need: art materials; pens; paper

In order to help the young people explore passionate emotions within their faith, invite them to imagine a modern-day version of the story, eg God has asked them to go and preach to members of ISIS or a different extreme or nationalist organisation. Ask them to write a poem or draw a picture to express their feelings about it, and to be as passionate and expressive as possible. They could touch on their feelings towards God and his decisions, or their feelings towards the people they have been sent to. Alternatively, they could imagine what it would have been like on the boat / inside the big fish / under the plant. If they are willing, display or read some of them out afterwards.

5 PRAYER

Finish with a time of quiet, giving the group space to talk to God about their prejudices, fears, trust and obedience, and to ask him if he is 'sending' them to any groups in particular. If you can, play some reflective music as the group does business with God.

JOEL TOOMBS

is an experienced mentor and volunteer youth worker.

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