

A  
**JONAH**  
SERMON SERIES



**CATCH ME IF YOU CAN**

2022 JULY MISSIONS MONTH

**MISSIONAL CELL GROUP MATERIALS**

# Welcome

This July Missions Month, we will be covering the popular Sunday School story of Jonah. It is easy to get caught up with the dramatic details of the story of the prophet, Jonah who tried to flee from God but was swallowed up whole by a big fish. However, the story of Jonah is truly a story of God's heart and God's mission. It tells of a loving God who pursues His people relentlessly whether a renegade prophet or a sinful city. It speaks of a merciful God who is always ready to give people a second chance. And it shows us a compassionate God who is working in our hearts even as He challenges us to be missional.

The story ends with God asking the question. "Should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh?" (Jonah 4:11).

This question challenged Jonah, and continues to challenge us today. It demands a response from us—one which can change us and align our lives to the purposes of God. For the story of Jonah is really a story about God—about who He is, how He loves us, and what He expects of us. May we be challenged and have our hearts realigned to His.

## Chapters

1. The Unpleasant Task
2. The Unhealthy Perspective

## Source Material

Robert M. Solomon, *God In Pursuit: Lessons from the Book of Jonah*, (Singapore: Discovery House, 2017)

STUDY ONE

# THE UNPLEASANT TASK



BY DANIEL LIU

## STUDY ONE

# THE UNPLEASANT TASK

## Introduction

Wouldn't it be nice to be tasked by God to do things that converge with what you like? If you enjoy talking to people, for example, wouldn't you be happy if God sends you to talk to someone? Or, if you enjoy travelling, God gives you work that involves a lot of travelling? It is easy to obey God when we also enjoy doing what He asks of us.

### Ice Breaker Question:

- 1. If God were to grant you your dream job/career, what would it be? Describe your dream job/career? And why?**

But God doesn't always assign enjoyable tasks. Why? Because He is often more interested in what sort of people we become when we carry out His tasks. This often means doing unpleasant tasks, or suffering unpleasant consequences when we obey Him. God may send a man who fears crowds to preach to one, or tell a man terrified of academic studies to undergo rigorous theological training in preparation for future service for Him. In our text, we read of an unpleasant task given by God to Jonah, Jonah's response and God's response to Jonah's response.

**Text** (Jonah 1:1-17) New International Version

<sup>1</sup>The word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai: <sup>2</sup>"Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me."

<sup>3</sup>But Jonah ran away from the LORD and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the LORD.

<sup>4</sup> Then the LORD sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up. <sup>5</sup> All the sailors were afraid and each cried out to his own god. And they threw the cargo into the sea to lighten the ship.

But Jonah had gone below deck, where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep. <sup>6</sup> The captain went to him and said, "How can you sleep? Get up and call on your god! Maybe he will take notice of us so that we will not perish."

<sup>7</sup> Then the sailors said to each other, "Come, let us cast lots to find out who is responsible for this calamity." They cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah. <sup>8</sup> So they asked him, "Tell us, who is responsible for making all this trouble for us? What kind of work do you do? Where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?"

<sup>9</sup> He answered, "I am a Hebrew and I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land."

<sup>10</sup> This terrified them and they asked, "What have you done?" (They knew he was running away from the LORD, because he had already told them so.)

<sup>11</sup> The sea was getting rougher and rougher. So they asked him, "What should we do to you to make the sea calm down for us?"

<sup>12</sup> "Pick me up and throw me into the sea," he replied, "and it will become calm. I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you."

<sup>13</sup> Instead, the men did their best to row back to land. But they could not, for the sea grew even wilder than before. <sup>14</sup> Then they cried out to the LORD, "Please, LORD, do not let us die for taking this man's life. Do not hold us accountable for killing an innocent man, for you, LORD, have done as you pleased." <sup>15</sup> Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm. <sup>16</sup> At this the men greatly feared the LORD, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows to him. <sup>17</sup> Now the LORD provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

## Discussion Questions

God uses two words to describe Nineveh (Jonah 1:2). First, it was a "great" city. Its "greatness" refers to its political, cultural, and architectural splendour; merchants talked about how great Nineveh was for business, while foreign envoys diplomatically praised it to remain in powerful Assyria's good books. In calling it "great", God was just quoting what people of the time were saying about the city. The second word God used was "wickedness." Nineveh was certainly not known for its morality, humanity, or compassion. A century later, the prophet Nahum would describe its wickedness thus: it was guilty of plotting evil against God (Nahum 1:11); cruelty and plundering in war (Nahum 2:12; 3:1, 19); violence and falsehood (Nahum 3:1); prostitution and witchcraft (Nahum 3:4); and commercial exploitation (Nahum 3:16). God saw through the superficial "greatness" of the city of Nineveh, through the thin veneer that hid the rot within. Hence, He called it a city full of "wickedness."

**2. What might have been going through Jonah's mind when God sent him to preach against the wicked city of Nineveh?**

Jonah must have thought that the best way to avoid doing God's unpleasant and unwelcome task was to flee as far as possible. Resigning from his job as a prophet, he "slipped" away from God's grasp. Theologian William Banks notes in his book *Jonah: The Reluctant Prophet*, "When a person decides to run from the Lord, Satan always provides complete transportation facilities."

**3. Faced with an unpleasant task, how have you responded?**

**4. If you were in Jonah's shoes, would you have done the same by running away?**

People have different reasons for running away from God. Perhaps they fear that it is dangerous to get too close to Him, as He might ask them questions they cannot or do not want to answer, or He may ask them to do things that they are unwilling or afraid to do. He might even ask them to give up precious possessions, habits, or relationships that are not right in His sight.

**5. Are there any areas where you are running from God?**

People also have different ways of running away from God: a) by keeping their distance, b) by freezing in disobedience, or c) by indulging in false piety.

- a) Some people try to follow Christ at a distance. After Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, Peter "followed him at a distance" (Matthew 26:58). Perhaps he truly wanted to follow Jesus, but was afraid of what might happen to him if he stayed too close. Self-preservation seems to be the overriding motive when people try to keep a safe distance from God. But this is foolish. The safest place is not far away from God, but near Him, in the shadow of His wings. As Psalm 91:1-2 says:

*'Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, "He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust."*

- b) Some people run away from God by freezing in disobedience. They live with what they consider "small" or "respectable" sins, believing that they don't need to be rescued from them, or that these sins are not as bad as the "big" ones like murder and adultery. But Jesus did warn us about such sins—they hinder us from growing in our relationship with God.
- c) Then there are those who, like the Pharisees, indulge in false piety and construct religious scaffolding to avoid facing the full implications of trusting and loving God. The Pharisees devoted themselves to technical issues of the law, such as detailed rules of Sabbath, while neglecting the real demands of the law. Jesus exposed their spiritual bankruptcy and hypocrisy. He knew that while they acted as if they were drawing closer to God, they were actually running away from Him and avoiding a real relationship with the living God. They feigned obedience, but were in fact being disobedient.

**6. Can you relate to these 3 different ways one runs away from God? How are you running away from God in relation to these 3 ways?**

Jonah's reply to the sailors "I am a Hebrew and I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land" (Jonah 1:9) was theologically sound, and it would have scored an "A" on any religious examination. However, while it shook the sailors to the core of their souls and drew a response (Jonah 1:10), it had no impact on Jonah whatsoever. It is easy to become like Jonah. We can sing wonderful songs of praise to God and profess to know Him, but our daily lives may show otherwise, or show that we do not care much about what we have declared. Our confession of faith through the singing of worship songs, prayers or even this bible study can remain theoretical or ritualistic, and have little impact on our actions and choices in life.

**7. How can Christians be guilty of the same thing? What effect does it have on individual Christians, the church, and society? How can this be resolved?**

God went immediately to work and pursued Jonah. Every action of God is met by a further act of disobedience on Jonah's part, which is then matched by a further gracious act of God. We see a number of "buts" and "thens" that reflect God gracious pursuit of Jonah.

**8. What were Jonah's "buts"? And what were God's "thens"?**

Reflect on how God interacted with Jonah and how He demonstrated His sovereign power and grace.

**9. Have you experienced God pursuing you with love and grace, even when you disobeyed Him?**

## Closing Words

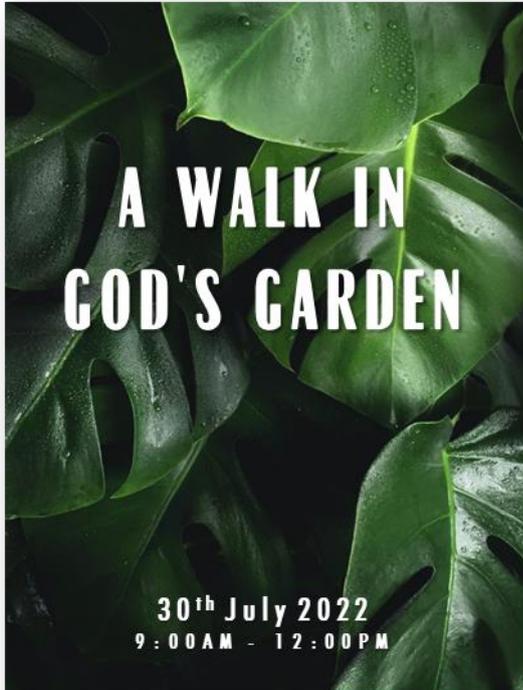
Is there hope for such people who run away from God? Can they be rescued from their disobedience? The short answer is “yes.” There is no depth of sinfulness beyond God's reach. We are always on His radar screen, and He is ever ready to rescue us if we acknowledge Him and His ways.

God has compassion for those who have strayed away, even when they think they are better off without Him. He called shepherds in Israel to look for the sheep who strayed from His flock. And when the shepherds themselves strayed, He took it upon Himself to be the divine shepherd looking for them (Ezekiel 34:1-16). In the parable of the lost sheep, we read about the shepherd leaving his 99 sheep to look for the one that was lost (Luke 15:3-7). Whether on a ship being tossed about by angry seas or deep underwater in a fish's stomach, one can always receive God's love and grace.

Like the prodigal son, we can always turn back to the Father—He is only a prayer away.

## July Missions Month Workshops

Being missional can often be an unpleasant task. Consider taking one step this July Missions Month by attending one of our workshops during our Missions Weekend on 30<sup>th</sup> July 2022.



### Workshop 1

Spend 2 hours reflecting the work of God's hand, strolling through Dairy Farm Nature Park.

When God created Humanity, His first commandment was for them to care for His creation (Genesis 1:28, 2:15). This commandment continues today as part of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20).

During the walk, we will have opportunities to reflect on our interdependent relationship with creation. Particularly the environmental impact resulting from human sin.

Dairy Farm Nature Park is located beside Hillview MRT. Please wear a pair of good walking shoes.

Workshop Facilitator: Foong Swee Kong is a partner with Creation Care Singapore since 2000 and has served with Scripture Union for 2 years.

### Workshop 2

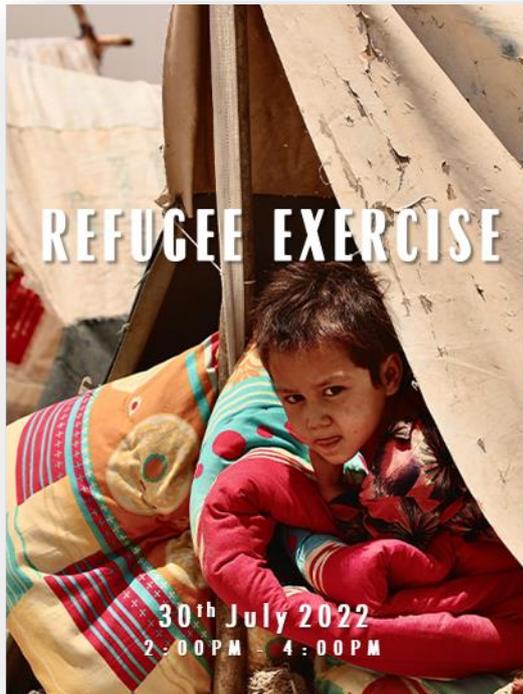
When missionaries return home after serving God abroad, it's not only an issue of "Home Sweet Home". It's both a departure - of their time in the field, and a return to an unfamiliar 'home'.

This often means grieving the loss of what was once familiar, alongside the readjustment process. With the constant need for adaptation and change, our missionaries benefit from intention re-integration.

As their home community, an understanding of how transitions affect our missionaries allows us to better provide support to their transition when they return.

Workshop Facilitator: Henry and Janet Armstrong have more than 30 years of missions experience in South East Asia. The Armstrongs bring a vast personal experience of living cross-culturally and awareness of what missionaries face.





### Workshop 3

Imagine being forced to flee your home, your family, your safe space - not knowing where you are going.

That's reality for nearly 26.4 million refugees, around half of whom are under the age of 18. Missionaries on the frontlines in war-torn countries serve God in these difficult circumstances, knowing they face these same risks!

Imagine being denied a nationality and access to basic rights - education, healthcare, employment, freedom of movement - from the country you thought you called "home"

Through The Refugee Exercise, a one-of-a-kind experiential workshop, we recreate the frustrations, struggles, and pains of global refugees. Don't miss this!

Workshop Facilitator: Lim Nan is a partner with Interserve Singapore and an associate Lecturer with SIM Global Education. He served in the middle east for 5 years as a Superintendent of an African refugee school.

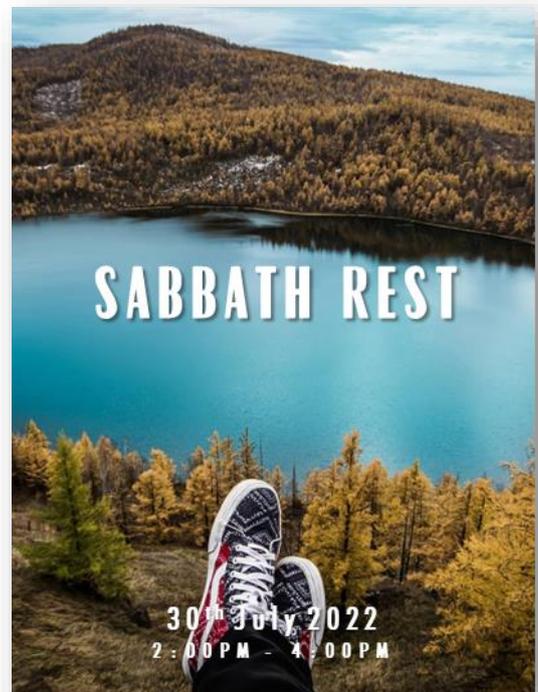
### Workshop 4

Sabbath rest is an act of submission to God by enjoying His presence, without being distracted by the noise of this over-stimulated, digital world.

When missionaries return, we're keen for them to share their experiences, and we look forward to catching up with them. Yet, we often overlook their post-field exhaustion, sense of loss and frustration. It is no wonder then that rest is mandated by God.

With a better understanding of Sabbath rest, we hope the church will be equipped to provide much needed support to returning missionaries. In addition, this workshop also hopes to help members understand the importance of Sabbath rest in their own busy lives.

Workshop Facilitator: Rev Dr Tan Soo Inn is the Founding Director and Chairman of Graceworks, an organization dedicated to the promotion of spiritual friendship in church and society through publishing and training.



**Sign Up via:** [www.bccmissions.com/jmmworkshops](http://www.bccmissions.com/jmmworkshops)



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## Source Material

Robert M. Solomon, *God In Pursuit: Lessons from the Book of Jonah*, (Singapore: Discovery House, 2017), pp 17-29, 37-39, 44.

STUDY TWO

# THE UNHEALTHY PERSPECTIVE



BY AMY JI

## STUDY TWO

# THE UNHEALTHY PERSPECTIVE

### Introduction

From the first study, we learnt about God's heart for the runaway prophet being sent to a sinful nation. We considered what it meant to work in our dream job and vice versa. Then we reflected on our own spiritual journey—were there times we were running away from God? We then concluded that no sin is too great for the love of God. We can and ought to always turn back to Him in our time of greatest need.

Icebreaker Question: *Leaders can choose to do either one in the interest of time*

**1. What makes you happy? What do you love doing?**

**2. What frustrates you? What makes you angry/upset?**

**Text** (Jonah 3:1-10) New International Version

<sup>1</sup> Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time: <sup>2</sup> "Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you."

<sup>3</sup> Jonah obeyed the word of the LORD and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very large city; it took three days to go through it. <sup>4</sup> Jonah began by going a day's journey into the city, proclaiming, "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown." <sup>5</sup> The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.

<sup>6</sup> When Jonah's warning reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust. <sup>7</sup> This is the proclamation he issued in Nineveh:

"By the decree of the king and his nobles:

Do not let people or animals, herds or flocks, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. <sup>8</sup> But let people and animals be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. <sup>9</sup> Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish."

<sup>10</sup> When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.

### **Discussion Questions**

**3. Describe the events in chapter 3 made Jonah "exceedingly displeased" (Jonah 4:1 [ESV])? Give possible reasons for Jonah's displeasure.**

**4. Are there any aspects of God's character that frustrate you? Has God done anything that made you exceedingly displeased?**

**5. Do we behave like Jonah?**

**a. Recall a time when we ourselves might have been willing to work FOR God, but not WITH God.**

**b. Recall a time when you sensed a clear call of God. How did you respond to that call?**

**Text** (Jonah 4:1-11) New International Version

<sup>1</sup> But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry. <sup>2</sup> He prayed to the LORD, "Isn't this what I said, LORD, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. <sup>3</sup> Now, LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live."

<sup>4</sup> But the LORD replied, "Is it right for you to be angry?"

<sup>5</sup> Jonah had gone out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city. <sup>6</sup> Then the LORD God provided a leafy plant<sup>(a)</sup> and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the plant. <sup>7</sup> But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the plant so that it withered. <sup>8</sup> When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah's head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, and said, "It would be better for me to die than to live."

<sup>9</sup> But God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?"

"It is," he said. "And I'm so angry I wish I were dead."

<sup>10</sup> But the LORD said, "You have been concerned about this plant, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. <sup>11</sup> And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left—and also many animals?"

**6. What excites you? What makes your heart beat faster, makes you feel like time is passing very quickly? What are you passionate about? What do you spend most of our time doing?**

