

Jonah

A very fishy story



Home group study material
Autumn Term 2008

With thanks to Mel for
typing out the text

This study has been downloaded from
www.christchurchandstgeorges.org



WEEK ONE: Please read Jonah Chapter 1 together

Q Who was Jonah? Discuss this briefly.

Some people think that the story of Jonah is just a parable: a story that someone made up in order to teach a deeper truth - a lot like when Jesus told the story of the "Sower" or the good "Samaritan." Neither of the lead characters in Jesus' stories were real people, and Jonah wasn't real either. Or was he?

Please read 2 Kings 14: 23-37

Q What were things like in Israel, the northern Kingdom?

Q How did God keep in touch with His people?

There was a real man named Jonah, who came from Gath Hopher in the Galilee. Try to find this on a map, it helps us understand how the story fits together.

Please read Matt. 12:38-41b

Q What does this say about Jesus' view of Jonah's story?

Jesus certainly believed that Jonah's story was true; if He didn't then His appeal would make little sense. No-one would say "as surely as the good Samaritan helped the poor, I'm going to help them" because Jesus' story was only a parable and you can't appeal to parables in that way. Jesus took the story to be true, and so should we.

Q As a "pagan" city almost 3,000 years ago, what do you think Nineveh was like?

Q Why did God suddenly decide to act? (cf Jonah 1:1)

Q Why did God decide to send Jonah? (cf 2 Kings 14:25)

Q How would you sum up a prophet's ministry? (cf Amos 3:7)

We will look a little deeper next week at how God calls people and, having called them how He also equips them.

Q How did Jonah respond to God's calling? (cf v 3)
(Again, look on a map, find Nineveh and Joppa. Tarshish, where Jonah was heading, was in modern-day Spain)

Q Having called Jonah to minister for Him in Nineveh, how did God react?

Q Why do you think God acted as He did?

We live in a culture where choice is important. We can choose when and where we do our shopping; which hospital to go to if we are ill, or which school our children should attend. Our society is based around us having the freedom to choose.

This, in itself, is not necessarily a bad thing. We would not necessarily want to go back to the days of Henry Ford who would provide cars in any colour we chose, just as long as it was black. But, there is a subtle danger in this - and that is when God calls us, we believe (wrongly) that we have the same freedom to choose.

Please read Exodus 3:1- 4:17

Q How did Moses react when God started to call him from the burning bush?

Q Moses tried four different excuses as to why he shouldn't listen to God and obey Him. When the excuses ran out he tried refusing. How did God react to that refusal? (cf v 14)

Q What did Moses end up doing?

Q In the light of this, when God Calls us to do something, do we really have the freedom to choose whether to obey Him or not? Why not?

Q How do you react when you sense God calling you?

Q How do you react when you see a need in the life of our fellowship?

Q Is this reaction what God really wants?

Next time, we will look at some of the ways God has been uniquely nurturing you, bringing you carefully to where you are today so that you may serve Him and play your part in His kingdom. Pray about it and ask God to open your heart to the possibilities.

For now, what we need to understand is that we cannot say "no" and "Lord" in the same sentence because the moment we say "no" then God is not our "Lord."

If we follow Moses' story through for a moment, although he was very reluctant to say "yes" to God, once he had said "yes" God never let him down from that point. Moses grew to be a key figure in the history of God's people - still remembered and revered today - and he grew closer and closer to God. In Exodus 34 we read how, as he met with God face to face, Moses' face would start to radiate with God's glory. Would you like a relationship with God like Moses had? It cannot happen until we start to say "yes" to God's call when He asks us to do things for Him, and step out in faith.



WEEK 2: JONAH AND YOU...

Last time we looked at Jonah, the reluctant prophet and saw how, as God called him, He was not about to take “no” for an answer. God seldom is. So, as we proceed to examine God’s call on us, be prepared to say “yes” to God...not that you will get swallowed up by a fish as you say “no”, but saying “no” to God does stop Him being “Lord” and cuts you off from his absolute best for you. There are consequences!

Please read John 15:1-17 together

Q What would you say is the main thrust of Jesus’ teaching here?

cf - v 9
v16a
v16b
v 2

Q What does this say to you?

Our first reaction to God’s call might be to say “Oh no, not me!” either because we are afraid to step out in faith, or because we feel totally unworthy: how could God use a person like me?

Please read Psalm 139:1-18

Q How well do you think God knows you?

Q How long has He known you?

Leave your thumb in Psalm 139 and go to Jeremiah 29 and read verse 11.

Q What does this say about God wanting you to serve him?

Leave another thumb in Jeremiah 29 and return to Psalm 139.

Please read V23-24. Now read Jeremiah 29.12-14a

Q If we combine these two readings, how are we to begin to subdue anxiety we might feel about serving God, and then discovering His plan for us?

Take some time to share with someone something of the anxiety you may be feeling. Perhaps you desire to serve God, but you just don’t know where, or how. Having shared, pray for one another.

Please read 1 Cor. 12:1-11

Q What does this say about spiritual gifts?

Q Who decides who gets which gift?

Q Who doesn’t get any gift at all? (cf v7)

Please read 2 Cor. 9:8

Q Why is no-one left out when God gives out His gifts by His Spirit?

Please read Heb 13:20-21

The writer to the Hebrews prayed that his readers would be equipped by God so that they could do His will, and that by doing God’s will they would please Him,

Take some time, with the person/people you prayed with before, to ask God to equip you for the ministry to which He may be calling you.

One helpful way to begin to discover how God may be calling you to serve Him is by knowing your shape. God is very good at putting square pegs in square holes and round pegs in round holes. If we end up as a square peg in a round hole it means that, somewhere along the way, someone hasn’t been listening to God. So what is our shape?

“S” is for Spiritual Giftedness

Please read 1 Cor. 12:1-7 again

- Q In verse 7, who gets a spiritual gift?
- Q Who is to benefit from those gifts?
- Q Who decides who gets what gift? (cf v11)

Please read 1 Cor. 14:1

- Q How are we to regard spiritual gifts?

There are two things we need to beware of at this point:

a) Desiring the wrong gift. This can happen when we see someone who is gifted by God’s Spirit enjoying a huge “up-front” ministry, and our desire for popularity, or just to be needed can take over. Everyone is important and the purpose of God giving us gifts is to serve Him and to benefit those around us, not to boost our “egos”.

b) Wanting everyone to be “like me”. Trying to give everyone the same gift, just because it is the one I have and the ministry I feel passionate about. God gifts us all differently and when we all use our gifts, that’s when the church grows.

One of the things that has kept the band U2 together for so long is that they have kept their entire support crew the same. They know that their concert depends not just on the up-front musicians but on every technician who plugs in speakers, checks the lights are working - right down to the person who makes the tea before the concert starts; everyone is important. Interesting, isn’t it, that three out of the four members of U2 are Christians.

Over the next few weeks ask God to show you what Spiritual Gift He wants to give you.

“H” is for Heart

Please Read Prov.27:19

- Q What do you feel this proverb is saying?

As a woodworker, I know that it is hard to cut against the grain. If you plane wood into the grain it is easily chewed up and becomes rough whereas, if you cut with the grain, the wood becomes very smooth and even shiny.

God knows the things we love to do and the things we find less pleasurable and He knows that the way to get the best out of us is to “cut with the grain”. God is not a sadist!

- Q What things do you enjoy most?
- Q How could you use these things in serving God, or adapting them for a new avenue of ministry?

“A” is for Abilities

Please read Romans 12:1-8

- Q Look at verse 6 - the first half - what does this say to you?

As God knit you together, He gave you your own unique blend of “natural” gifts and talents. Why are some people so good at music, whilst others can’t hit a note? Why are some so blessed with sporting talent, whilst others struggle even to run a bath? God has made us all different. And part of our shape is the “natural” abilities He has built into us.

- Q What things are you good at - everyone is good at something?

“P” is for our Personality

Each of us has a different personality. Some of us are “thinkers”, preferring to work things through before acting, while others are “feelers”, preferring to stumble along and hope it all works out. Some are extroverts, the life and soul of any party, while others prefer solitude because they are introverts. Neither is better than the other - it’s just that we are all different, and each one of us is needed in God’s family.

Please read Exodus 4:1-12

Q What sort of personality would you say Moses had?

Please read Jeremiah 20:7-10

Q What sort of personality did Jeremiah have?

Please read John 13:31-38, 18:10-11, 25-27

Q What sort of personality would you say Peter had?

All through the Scriptures, God has called all sorts of people with all sorts of personalities. Imagine being with James and John, the Sons of Thunder, or Mary who pondered things deeply in her heart. When God calls us, He knows who we are and He calls us because of that, not in spite of it.

Q What sort of personality do you feel you have? Ask the person you shared with earlier.

“E” is for our Experiences

When God calls us to Himself He does not sever us from our past and pretend it never happened. Although He will heal us of past hurts and forgive past mistakes, those events are still there: they have helped make us who we are.

Please read Acts 18:1-4

Q How did Paul use his own experience here?

Please read Galatians 1:13-17, Philippians 3:4-6

Q How else did Paul use his experience in Corinth?

Please read 2 Cor. 1:4

Q If God can use the good bits, how can He also use the more painful experiences in our lives to enable us to help others?

Q How much life and faith experience do you really have?

Q How can you use this to help and encourage those around you, both in Church and outside it?

Each of us is uniquely SHAPED for ministry. God knows this when He calls us. Another good reason why He won’t take no for an answer. How is God speaking to you and encouraging you to grow?

(The concept of SHAPE is taken from Rick Warren's “Purpose Driven Life”. To read more, please see his book, pages 227-280. It’s worth reading and praying through again.)

WEEK 3: GROWING IN FAITH

As we look at the story of Jonah if, after he had been thrown overboard, he had clung to some floating wreckage until he was finally washed up on a beach, then we would probably find his story more credible. After all, there are more stories of people clinging to wreckage until they are either rescued or washed onto the shore than there are stories of people getting swallowed by fish and being saved (cf 2 Cor.11:25). But, just because Jonah's story is unusual doesn't mean that it didn't happen exactly as Jonah describes it. Although they are rare, stories do exist of men being swept from their whaling ships, only to be found alive inside a whale that was caught later on their voyage. Jonah's story is certainly possible. So what actually happened?

First of all, we need to remember that we are reading Jonah's memoirs - his own personal journal written some time after the event, which enables him to give us a clear account of his experience - or at least a clear account of his recollection of his experience. Jonah did not sink to the bottom of the sea, get swallowed by a fish and then calmly recite a psalm. Put yourself in Jonah's shoes and imagine what he must have experienced - it would have been very frightening indeed: a time for prayer, certainly, but not a time for calmly composed prayers. This is Jonah's recollection of events a clear description of where his heart was as he remembers.

Please read Jonah Chapter 2

- Q Although Jonah says in v1 that he prayed from inside the fish, from verse 2 where do you think his prayer began?
- Q As Jonah struggled in the stormy sea, what happened to him? (cf v3)
- Q How did Jonah feel? What thoughts ran through his mind? (cf v4)
- Q Where did Jonah end up? (cf v5-6a)

Q As he sank down to the very bottom of the sea, what do you think happened to Jonah?

Q How does he react? (v7)

One of the things I learned when one of our children was born by Caesarean Section, is that the normal birth process squeezes all the fluid out of a baby's lungs enabling him/her to breathe. If Jonah was drowning - his lungs filling with water - for him simply to be washed up on a beach might not have saved his life. (cf v6b)

Q How does God save his life? (cf v1)

Although being swallowed by a fish and being squeezed by its muscles, would have been a terrifying experience, how does Jonah reflect on his experience? (cf v8-9)

Q What does he promise?

Q It has been said that "there are no atheists in the trenches". In other words, in places of extreme danger, everyone prays, and as people pray they often make promises: "Lord if you get me out of this, then I'll..." Have you ever made a promise like that to God, a promise that still needs to be kept?

Take a few moments to reflect and ask God to jog your memory.

From the evidence of Jonah's own testimony, it seems as if he was thrown from the ship, he sank to the depths of the ocean and began to drown. As he lapsed into unconsciousness, Jonah uttered his last prayer and in response God saved him by causing a huge fish to swallow him and deposit him safely on the shore.

Q How does your understanding of the story differ now from what you "thought" the story said?

But is it true?

Please read Matthew 12:38-41

Q In what three ways does Jesus view Jonah's story?

Q Why are these three ways important?

Please read Matthew 16:21-22

We already decided in our first study that Jesus looked on the story of Jonah as being true. You wouldn't say "as surely as Little Red Riding Hood went to visit her grandma, I'm going to visit mine" because we all know that Little Red Riding Hood is a fairy story. We appeal to solid facts, not fiction. As Jonah's story is true, Jesus then says that it is a sign, but what sort of sign? (cf Matt.12:39)

Please read Matthew 28:1-10

Just outside St George's is a sign saying "Spencer Road." The sign is not the road, the sign is just a sign. The road is the road, but without the sign you wouldn't know which road it was, it would just be another road.

Q How did the "sign of Jonah" find its real meaning in Jesus?

Please read 1 Cor. 15:12-22

Q What does the "Sign of Jonah" and its fulfilment in Jesus mean to us today?

What we believe about Scripture is important. If we believe that its stories are only legends, then this will undermine our faith. Whereas, if we take what godly people wrote down for us as being true, then our faith will be secure and become stronger. Only a strong faith is worth sharing.

Please read Matthew 7:24-27

Now spend some time in prayer.

WEEK 4: HOW STRONG IS YOUR FAITH?

Last time we saw how, when he was about to drown, Jonah cried out to God in prayer. Most people, in times of crisis, will pray. But what about those times when life is "plain sailing" and everything seems to be going well? Or, what about the simple daily routine, what is our faith like then?

Please read Hebrews 11:1-2

Q What does this say about the nature of faith?

Q In the light of Hebrews 11, if you were to die tonight could you say for certain that you would go to heaven?

Please read 1 John 5:13

Q In the light of this verse, has your answer to the previous question changed, and if so, how?

But what is the nature of faith?

Please read John 3:16-18

Q What do these verses tell us about the nature of faith? Where is it to be focused.

Q Why is our faith to be centred on Jesus?

There are several answers to this question which focus on what God has done by sending Jesus to us, and what Jesus did in His life and ministry. Explore these as fully as you can. The following verses may help.

Colossians 1:15-22

Whilst we can have faith in Jesus for who He "was" and for all that He has done for us, we can also have faith in Jesus for who He "is."

Please read John 20:1-31

- Q** What do these verses tell us about Jesus? Why can we be certain that He is alive?

Please read Matthew 28:16-20

- Q** What do these verses, especially verse 20, tell us about our relationship with Jesus?

Please read Matthew 11:28-30

One of the interesting things that J John said as part of his “Just 10” series, was that there are just 4 religions in the world that are focussed around personalities: Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam. The remainder are philosophies.

Abraham lived about 4,000 years ago and then died. None of his followers, the Jews, would claim that he is alive, or that you can have a relationship with him.

Buddha lived about 2,500 years ago, and he then died of dysentery. None of his followers would claim that he is alive or that you can have a relationship with him.

Mohammad lived about 1,400 years ago, and he then died of a fever. None of his followers, the Muslims would claim that he is alive or that you can have a relationship with him.

Jesus Christ lived around 2,000 years ago. He died as a sacrifice for our sin, to reconcile us to God. His death was no accident, nor was it by natural causes. He then rose from the dead, and every day in almost every nation on earth, millions of Christians claim He is alive and that they have a relationship with Him. That’s amazing.

- Q** If Jesus calls us into a relationship with Him, and our faith is to be in Him, and not just in information about Him, how can we improve this relationship? How can we make sure that this relationship flourishes?

It might help at this point to look at where you are now in your walk with Jesus and where you would like to be with Him. Growing our relationship with Him might not be about taking on extra things, but reviewing and changing the way we do existing things. For example, instead of reading more of the Bible, how can you get more from the Bible reading you do already? Instead of taking more time to pray, how can you make the most of the time you take to pray? Growing as a Christian is not just about doing more, that’s religion, it’s about making the most of what we have been given by God for His purposes.

Being sure of our faith in Jesus is important. If we have doubts we are not likely to be willing to speak about Jesus to our friends and neighbours. No bride or groom tells their friends “we might be getting married this summer, but we’re not really sure.” They share the news when the date is booked, and they invite their friends to join them. Similarly it is only when we are close to Jesus, sure of Him and our walk with Him, that we will speak of Him to those we know and invite them to join us.

Take some time to read prayerfully through Psalm 139:1-18 and 23-24. Don’t spend time analysing this, but keep a period of silence in order to know that the God who made you is the God who loves you, and has paid the price to redeem you. He will never let you go.

WEEK 5: JONAH THE PREACHER

The beautiful thing about Jonah's story is the opening of Chapter 3.

Please read Jonah Chapter 3

- Q What do verses 1-2 tell us about God and His relationship with Jonah?
- Q How does Jonah respond? (v 3a)

Verse 3 tells us that Nineveh was a "very important city." At the time its population was around 120,000, compared to 30,000 in Samaria and slightly less in Jerusalem. It had a defensive wall surrounding the inner part which was 8 miles in circumference, but much of the city lay outside these walls. Israeli cities were often built on hill-tops because they were easy to defend. This meant that they had limited room to expand. Nineveh was different. It was built on the Mesopotamian plain and could expand without limit. One historian claims that to walk around the expanded city, and the small settlements that focused on Nineveh, was a journey of around 60 miles, or 3 days walk as Jonah puts it.

- Q What did Jonah preach? (v 4)
- Q Do you think that this would have been the sole content of his message?
- Q How did the people respond? (v 5)
- Q Why do you think that Jonah got such a dramatic response to his message?

Please read John 1:10-13, 3:5-8, 6:44

- Q How do these verses help you with the previous question?

Not only did the people make a dramatic response to Jonah's message, the King also put on sackcloth and sat down in the dust as an act of repentance.

- Q What did the King proclaim? (v 7-9)
- Q How much does this endorse what was already happening?
- Q How does God respond to the humility shown in Nineveh? (v 10)

There are two issues that come to mind as we read this passage:

1 THE POWER OF GOD'S WORD

Please read Isaiah 55:10-11

- Q What does this tell us of the power of God's word?

Please read Hebrews 4:12-13

- Q How does this verse build up your confidence in God's word?

2 THE POWER OF PRAYER

Because "Spirit gives birth to Spirit" we could preach until we are "blue in the face" and not get a response if God does not move someone's heart to respond. Similarly, God could want to draw someone into His Kingdom but, unless the message is preached, they have no message to respond to (see Romans 10:14-15). It is a partnership, and for that partnership to work, as well as preaching we also need to pray.

FORMING A PRAYER LIST

In the space on the next page, form four lists of people: friends whom you know in the different aspects of your life.

Church Friends	Work Friends	Social Friends & Neighbours	Family

Now arrange these names, putting at the top those whom you see the most, and are the closest to. These will be the people whom you share the most with and who probably know you come to church.

Church Friends	Work Friends	Social Friends & Neighbours	Family

Now take the top two names from the “Church Friends” List. You could ask these two people to become your prayer partners. You could meet

together each week, either after church or at another time, and pray...But what for?

You can pray for the top one or two people from your other lists “Work Friends” “Social Friends and Neighbours” and “Family”. If you take one person each from each section, then that’s nine people you will be praying for each week.

But what do we pray?

- 1 Pray for God to soften their heart to his Gospel (Ezek.36:26-27)
- 2 Pray that God would give you the opportunity to share with them something of what it means to follow Jesus.
- 3 Pray that God would give you the right words to say?

P.S. DON'T PANIC

We may have tried to do something like this in the past and failed miserably. From what we have read of Jonah so far, was your failure worse than his?

Q Did God give Jonah a second chance?

Q Will He give you a second chance?

Spend some time praying and encouraging one another. The church only really grows when we do things together and support one another, and we know that we are not alone.

WEEK 6: TELLING THE STORY

Some people believe that Jonah's story is just a legend, a story that has been invented to tell a deeper truth, similar to Jesus' parables. I don't believe that. I believe that Jonah's story is true and that what we are reading is his own account of what happened when God called him to go and prophesy in Nineveh.

Although it is easy to sit here, around 2,800 years after the event and say, "I believe that this book is just a story", imagine that you were sitting somewhere in the Galilee actually speaking to Jonah. First of all you might be a little more hesitant about saying, "I believe your story is made up", because it's harder to say that to someone's face, but then, if you did say that to Jonah how do you feel he might reply? He might reply, "Oh no it isn't. Every word is true." Now you are on sticky ground because if you say, "I believe your story is made up" Jonah will reply "No it isn't...and I know, because I was there." We may be able to argue about different views of doctrine and theology, but ultimately we can't argue with someone who was there, who experienced God's hand on their life, because they were there and their experience is true, and if we disagree with them we are speaking in ignorance and actually accusing them of lying.

When we try to speak to someone about Jesus, many people will have their own views about Him, either from Sunday School or from RE lessons. Those views will generally have been passed onto them by others and, although they are not well developed, they will be held quite passionately. We however, may have quite strong views of Jesus from our Bible reading and our time in Church, and those views may be quite different from the folk we want to speak to. You can see how there may be good grounds here for a debate, if not an argument.

The best thing we can do with an argument is to avoid it and so the best way we can begin to share something of our Christian faith with another is to tell them our own "I was there" story, a bit like Jonah does here.

Please read Acts 9:1-19, Acts 22:4-16, Acts 26:9-18

- Q What happened to Paul as he went to Damascus?
- Q How does he relate this story in Acts 22 and 26?
- Q How close are these stories to what actually happened?
- Q How much do they differ?

When we tell our "I was there" story it doesn't have to be the same every time. Also, there are two ways of doing it.

First of all, we can tell the story of how we became Christians. This will be a story in three parts.

- 1.1 What I was like before I became a Christian. This part needs to be fairly short and it is usually helpful to focus on one aspect of your life that wasn't where either yourself or God wanted it to be, and which God helped you with after you became a Christian.
- 1.2 How you met with Jesus. Speak about where you were, what you experienced. Don't be ashamed to name Jesus as naturally as you would a friend.
- 1.3 Now you can speak about the difference that walking with Jesus has made to you, and how He has helped you with the thing you were struggling with in 1.1.

Try it in the boxes below. They have been kept deliberately small as this is meant to be a short, punchy story: anything too long and people will lose interest.

WHEN I MET JESUS

AFTER I MET JESUS

The second way to relate your “I was there” story is to speak of an event in your life where you felt God’s presence very closely with you. Perhaps He healed you of something, or He guided you through a difficult decision. Again this will follow three distinct sections.

- 2.1 What was I facing. Highlight the problem, although you don’t have to give too much detail if you feel uncomfortable.
- 2.2 How Jesus was with you when the problem reached its climax. Again relate how you felt and how you knew that Jesus was with you. Remember, He is your friend so don’t be afraid to speak about Him by Name.

2.3 Finally, how has the problem been overcome, and what is life like now that it’s over. For some the issue might be over and gone, but for others there may be daily consequences of what happened. For

example, if Jesus guided you to a new job, what is that job like - be honest, no job is that good ALL the time. Speak here of how you know that Jesus is still with you, helping you day by day.

Try it in the boxes below

THE DIFFICULTY I WAS FACING

HOW JESUS HELPED ME

WALKING WITH JESUS NOW

Spend some time in prayer, then each of you spend some time working out your own “I was there” story. If you have time work on both because your “how I met Jesus” story, although excellent, could be very old - especially if you have been a Christian for many years whereas

your “how Jesus helped me” story can be right up to date. You may have several of these.

When you’ve worked on one of these stories, share them around your group. You’ll be amazed how much you learn about each other, how much closer to each other you will become, and how your faith will grow because where you are walking is holy ground.

God bless

WEEK 7: SHARING GOOD NEWS

Please read Jonah 3:1-5

Whilst God called Jonah, and gave him the message to preach, I’m not sure that Jonah’s simple message would work today as effectively as it did then. Imagine going to work and saying “40 more days and this factory will be destroyed” - rather than repenting, your work colleagues would probably be phoning for the men in white coats!

Please read 1 Peter 3:15

Although we might not be called to proclaim God’s message in the way Jonah did, we are all called to be able to share something of our faith with others. Last time we looked at our own “I was there” story: our experience of God and what it means to us to be a Christian. This week I want us to look at the Biblical understanding of what it means to be a Christian.

Let me begin by saying two things:

1. There is no single way to share what the Bible says about becoming a Christian. Over the years there have been many booklets printed and courses run to help people understand the Biblical Gospel message. None of these is right or wrong, better or worse than the others, it’s just that they’re different.
2. Sadly there are no short cuts. Rather than going through the rigours of a diet, all of us want some “anti-fat cream”: just rub it on before you go to bed, then in the morning - “hey presto!”...if only. Just as there is no “anti-fat cream”, there is no “instant Gospel presentation,” we have to sit down and learn a method so that when we need it, it comes naturally to us. Those of us who learned to drive had to go through hours of tuition and learn how to use a car, and here we need to learn how to share our faith in Jesus.

I have chosen the method which follows because it can easily be

drawn out on the back of a beer-mat or another piece of paper. All the verses are worth learning although the ones marked with a * could be let go. You don't have to quote chapter and verse when speaking, but it is good to know where a verse comes from, just in case someone asks. "Great to have a friend: even better if you know where they live" - learning the verse and where it comes is best.

Please read 1 John 4:16

Q What does this tell us about God's nature?

Please read Psalm 139:13-16

Q What does this tell us about ourselves?

Section 1

God is love, and because God is love everything God does must be a loving act. This means that when He made us, He made us so that He could love us - and all He requires of us is that we love Him in return.

Please read Romans 3:23

Q What does this tell us about us?

Q What do you think sin is?

Many people at this point will go for "murder", "theft" - big things like that, things that get people sent to prison.

Please read Matthew 22:34-40

Q What does Jesus say the greatest commandments are?

Q How often do we break these commandments?

Q What happens when we do?

Section 2

In the Bible, God tells us that we "all sin and fall short of His glory" and whilst we might not be murderers or thieves, and we try our best to be good, we are not perfect. We have sinned and sin separates us from God.

Please read Romans 6:23

Q What does this tell us about what will happen to us as a result of our sin?

Section 3

Our sin not only separates us from God, it means that we are all heading for death: not just physical death as our bodies grow old and wear out, but the eternal death that follows because we are cut off from God.

Q From Romans 6:23 how can we receive eternal life?

Q Who is eternal life focussed on?

Section 4

Many people try to earn their way to God by doing good deeds, or being kind, or giving to charity or even going to church. Eternal life however, is a FREE GIFT, and as such it cannot be earned, it is a free gift that is offered to us in Jesus.

Please read Isaiah 53:4-6* (verse 6 is good!)

Q What does this passage tell us about how God bridges the gap?

Section 5

Though we can't bridge the gap to God it doesn't mean He can't bridge the gap to us. He has bridged it in his Son Jesus - who not only came to show us God's love, He also came to die for us, to pay for all our sin: to pay on our behalf the wages of sin - death.

Please read John 6:38-40

Q What does this tell us about Jesus and what He has done for us?

Section 6

It is by faith in Jesus that all our sin is forgiven and we can be reconciled to God and, having received the love He has shown us in Jesus, love Him back as we were created to do. Jesus bridges the gap that we cannot bridge and, instead of living in the shadow of death, we can enjoy a new life right now.

Please read John 10:10

Q What did Jesus come to bring us?

Q When does this start?

Section 7

As we cross the bridge, through what Jesus has done for us, so we move closer to His love and the closer we are to His love, the easier it is to love Him in return. This is what life is about.

Take your time to work through this gospel presentation. It's much better than saying "In 40 days you'll all be doomed." It's a bit more hopeful. Using the lists you made earlier, spend some time praying for your friends and family, asking God to give you the opportunity to share this "good news" with them.

WEEK 8 NOT EXACTLY REJOICING!!

Jesus tells us that when one sinner repents, heaven throws a party. I like parties and I'm sure God does too, and what better thing is there to celebrate than when someone discovers that Jesus loves them, they put their faith in Him and are forgiven and welcomed into God's family.

Please read Jonah Chapter 4

Q Why is Jonah miserable? (see Chapter 3:5-end)

Now to be fair to Jonah, the Assyrians had been Israel's traditional enemies, and throughout their history they had hurt God's people. Little wonder that Jonah might prefer to see them destroyed.

Q Do you have people who have hurt you, whom you might want to put alongside Jonah's Ninevites?

Q What does Jonah tell us about God's character? (cf v2)

Q When God forgave the Ninevites and did not destroy them how did Jonah feel? (cf v3)

It has been said that forgiveness comes in two parts. Firstly an act of the will, which is always possible, and then forgiveness of the heart, which may take years. Forgiveness, as an act of the will happens when we take the person who has hurt us off our hook and we put them onto God's hook. "Lord, I let go of my desire for revenge and I put this person into your hands." Once we have made this decision then, in time, our hearts will follow, but it may take years.

The decision to forgive may also not have the effect we desire. It may be fairly straight-forward to forgive someone, and place them on God's hook, if we hold that God is a God of vengeance. But what if God is also a God of mercy and He chooses to forgive: to let them off the hook altogether because of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross?

(Note: I am not talking here about criminals being set free just because they've become Christians. If someone breaks the law then there is a penalty to pay. I am talking about our account with God.)

Q What does God ask Jonah as he sulks because God has shown mercy on his enemies? (cf v4)

Q What happens next? Unfold the story together (verses 5-8)

Q Having acted out a simple parable, God asks Jonah a question, "do you have a right to be angry about the vine?" Does Jonah have a right to be angry?

Q Jonah feels passionately about the vine that has just helped him, and then died. He's got the point of the story. Why?

I remember once driving home from a meal out when we came across a pheasant at the side of the road which had been injured by a car. We felt sorry for it so we stopped and Helen, in her best clothes, got out and caught the bird in her coat and we took it home. We phoned the RSPB who said they'd send someone to collect it but, as it was a bank holiday, it would take some time. Sadly, the bird died before the RSPB person could arrive. We were sad...

Occasionally we get bees which fly into our house. I won't kill a bee, so I get a glass and a piece of card and carefully trap it before releasing it outside.

Sometimes we can care for birds and insects which we have neither hatched nor nurtured - we just care for them. If this is how we care for these simple creatures, how much more does God care for people whom He has made, given the breath of life and placed His image in them?

When God put us on Planet Earth, He called us to walk and to work with Him. It's part of God loving us and we loving Him back. In fact God has decided that, for anything to happen on Planet Earth, He will work with us and through us.

Please Read Genesis 30:25-43

- Q What difference would putting peeled almond branches in the water make to mating animals? (really)

Please read Exodus 14:13-22

- Q What difference does holding a staff over the ocean make?

Please read John 21:1-6

- Q Can there really be fish on one side of a boat and not on the other?

God has promised to work with us and through us and so, for His love and concern for Planet Earth to be seen by all, we must act. It's down to us. But where do we begin.

Please read Matthew 22:34-40

- Q What does Jesus say should be our first priority?
- Q In this "first priority" what would you say is the key word?
- Q Someone once asked, if you were arrested and charged with being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to pronounce you "guilty"? (Spend some time discussing this honestly - "yes" or "no" isn't enough).
- Q What does Jesus say should be our second priority?

But who is our neighbour? This is an important question and there are two answers.

Please read John 13:34-35

- Q Who does Jesus say we are to love here?
- Q Why is this important?

Please read Luke 9:1-9

- Q Who is "love" focused on here?
- Q How is this love expressed?

Please read Matthew 28:16-20, Romans 10:14-15

- Q How many reasons can you find here for showing the love of God, through the Gospel, to the world around us?

AND FINALLY....Please read Matthew 5:14-16

- Q How can we be lights as Jesus calls us to be, because following Jesus really should be our greatest delight and not make us miserable as it did Jonah.