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TNT Training Workshop: The Book of Jonah, Study Version

published by

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Welcome!

You’re holding the **Study Version** of the Jonah Workshop curriculum for TNT training.

The Study Version is designed to help you prepare before you go and teach others. It includes:

- instructions for each session
- fuller explanations of the concepts to be taught
- suggested questions and answers about each passage for you to work through yourself so that you understand what you want the learners to discover from each passage

The other version of this curriculum is the Workbook Version. It has less material and more room to take notes. You will want to give the Workbook Version to learners before the workshop to read through and to do preparation work in so that they can come prepared to discuss the things you will learn about during the workshop. You may also want to use the Workbook Version as a teaching outline, with your notes included in it.

May the Lord bless you, challenge you, and change your heart as you study His Word, teach others how to study and teach it, and discover more of who He is through it.
## Contents

Workshop Introduction and Overview .................................................................................. 7

Session 1: Discussion  
An Overview of the Training ........................................................................................... 13

Session 2: Demonstrate  
Preaching Jonah 1:1-16 ................................................................................................. 19

Session 3: Dig/Discover  
A Basic Approach to Inductive Bible Study .................................................................. 25

Session 4: Dig/Discover  
The Egg Yolk: Studying the Text and Its Literary Context ....................................... 39

Session 5: Do  
Jonah 3:1-10 .................................................................................................................. 47

Session 6: Dig/Discover  
The Egg White: Understanding the Historical Context ............................................ 51

Session 7: Do  
Jonah 4:1-11 .................................................................................................................. 61

Session 8: Dig/Discover  
The Egg Shell: Understanding the Larger Biblical Context .................................... 65

Session 9: Dig/Discover  
Discovering the Big Idea of a Book of the Bible .......................................................... 83

Session 10: Demonstrate  
Preaching the Big Idea of the Book of Jonah ................................................................. 95

Session 11: Discussion  
Reflecting on the Workshop .......................................................................................... 105

Appendix  
Pre-Assignment for 2 Timothy ....................................................................................... 111
Evaluation of Stated Outcomes ......................................................................................... 112
Training Report Forms ..................................................................................................... 113
Workshop Introduction and Overview

Welcome!

This workshop on the book of Jonah was designed by Leadership Resources International as a part of TNT (Training National Trainers), a strategy for training pastors and church leaders around the world.

This workshop on Jonah is one in a series of eight workshops designed to equip pastors and church leaders to:

- Study God’s Word
- Accurately teach His Word in the power of the Holy Spirit
- Train others as well how to study and teach God’s Word

The model for this kind of training comes from Paul’s instruction to Timothy: “[The things] you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Timothy 2:2).

God has spoken to us in His Word. How can we better grasp what He is saying? How can we better give ourselves to Him? How can we better teach and preach His Word? One of the main responsibilities of pastors and teachers is to become skillful, diligent students of God’s Word. This workshop will help in that process.

How does it work?

Over several intensive days of training, pastors and church leaders come prepared to study a significant portion of God’s Word together – learning new skills for studying the Bible, hearing sermons that preach God’s Word faithfully, and having the opportunity to practice what they have learned by preaching short sermons and offering feedback to one another. Ultimately, we come in order to know God more by listening to what He says to us through His Word.

What are the parts?

The workshop is like a three-legged stool. Each leg is necessary for the stool to be of any use. Similarly, each part of the workshop is necessary for it to be useful and effective. The workshop has three kinds of sessions that allow us to:

- Demonstrate
  The purpose of these sessions is to model expository preaching and teaching. Expository preaching and teaching seeks to answer two fundamental questions: (1) What did this passage mean to the original audience, and, in the light of that, (2) What does this passage mean for us today?

- Dig/Discover
  The purpose of these sessions is to give hermeneutical principles to the learners and to practice using them so the learners can be better equipped to discover the Bible’s message and clearly explain it to others.

- Do
  The purpose of these sessions is to help the learners become better expository preachers and teachers of the Word of God by giving them an opportunity to preach and receive feedback from their peers.
Why study Jonah?

Jonah is a great book to study. It is short, just forty-eight verses or four chapters long. Its brevity allows us to see the parts in connection with one another and quickly grasp the message of the book as a whole. It is also a narrative—to be more precise, a drama in two major acts (1:1–2:10 and 3:1–4:11). This makes it rich with characters, plot, and sub-themes, but all these build to one overarching and compelling point (as dramas or narratives often do). Beyond that, this drama draws us in, holds us captive, and confronts us with the same question with which Jonah is confronted at the end of the book (4:11).

This study is inductive in nature. It introduces and works with concepts—like observation, context, the Big Idea of the book, Biblical theology, and application—that help the learner to better grasp what God is saying.

At the same time, this study continues to build spiritual truth into the life of the learner. What is the heart of God like? What is His vision for ministry? What does it mean to be His servant and how do we serve Him in a way that pleases Him? In Jonah, we see that God wants His messenger to share His own heart of mercy for the lost. God uses these critical questions and the intriguing life of Jonah to confront and equip us to better give ourselves to Him.

What do we hope to gain through this study?

Overall, we want the learner to

- Gain a better grasp of God’s Word—to grow in his ability to observe, interpret, and apply the Bible
- Grow in his ability to communicate God’s Word—to better learn how to develop a text into a message
- Become captivated by God’s own heart and vision for ministry—a major theme of Jonah

Specifically, we will introduce and practice new concepts and skills so that the learner will

- Learn several different ways to observe a text in its literary context using The Egg illustration (the yolk)
- Learn how to interpret a text within its historical context using The Egg illustration (the white)
- Learn how to interpret a text within the context of the entire Bible (seeing how Jonah fits into the whole of the Bible) using The Egg illustration (the shell)
- Seriously reflect on his or her own heart towards unbelievers, asking and probing the question, “Is my heart like Jonah’s or God’s?”
- Become a better preacher/teacher by preparing and preaching a message from Jonah

There are also specific ideas we want the learner to explore through the book of Jonah:

- God’s pursuit of sinners. What does it mean to share God’s heart of compassion for the lost?
- The idea of true repentance. What does true repentance look like?
- Obedience contrasted with disobedience, sin, and wickedness. What does wickedness really look like in this book and in our lives? What does obedience look like?
- The connection between judgment and mercy. How did God’s mercy come? What did it begin with?
Instructions

Before the Workshop

1) Send out Pre-Assignments to participants so that they can begin to study the book of Jonah before they arrive at the workshop. See a copy of the Pre-Assignment for Jonah below.

Pre-Assignment
Preparing for Jonah

We look forward to our time with you and believe it will be rich. We are asking God to speak powerfully through His Word and continue to change our lives and ministries for His own glory. Please pray with us and give yourself fully to the following preparations.

General Preparation

Read the book of Jonah at least five times. From your reading alone (do not consult commentaries or other Bible-study aids), answer the following questions. Be sure to write down verse references.

1. Who are the main characters in the book of Jonah?
2. What words or concepts are repeated throughout the book?
3. What important comparisons and/or contrasts do you find in the book of Jonah?
4. What questions do you have about the text? Write down at least fifteen.
5. What questions are found in the text of Jonah itself?
6. Where is the climax of the book? How do you know?
7. Is there a key verse that sums up the book?
8. Where do the major shifts or transitions occur in the book?
9. What is the Big Idea or overarching theme of the book? (Hint: look at the beginning and end of the book.) Try to state it in a sentence.
10. How does the book of Jonah fit into the larger story of the Bible?

Preparation for Preaching

Prepare a three to five minute talk on either Jonah 3:1-10 or 4:1-11. Do not worry about an introduction, conclusion or illustrations for a sermon. Instead, focus in on the following questions as you prepare.

1. How does this passage fit into the flow of the book as a whole (the context)? What unique contribution does it make to the book and how does it further our understanding of the writer’s message as a whole?
2. How is the passage put together (the structure)? In other words, what are the parts of the passage (and the major ideas within those parts) that together support the message of the passage?
3. What is the main idea of the passage? What, in a sentence, is this passage saying (the Big Idea)?
4. How does this passage fit into the flow of the Bible’s history and message (Biblical theology)? Does this passage anticipate Christ or point to Him in any way? If so, how?
5. Answer the following question only after fully engaging with questions 1 through 4: What does this passage have to say to the group I am teaching in the twenty-first century? What am I attempting to get across to the listeners (the aim/application)?

Teacher’s Note: In addition to these pre.assignments, assign devotions for each morning (see the suggested schedule below) to a different learner so each will grow in his ability to communicate God’s Word.
2) Create a schedule for the workshop. See the example below.

### Suggested Schedule for the Workshop on Jonah

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Day 1</th>
<th>Day 2</th>
<th>Day 3</th>
<th>Day 4</th>
<th>Day 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9:00</td>
<td>Session 1: Discussion An Overview of the Training</td>
<td>Session 4: Dig/Discover The Egg Yolk</td>
<td>Session 6: Dig/Discover The Egg White</td>
<td>Session 8: Dig/Discover The Egg Shell</td>
<td>Session 10: Demonstrate Message on the Big Idea of the Book of Jonah</td>
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<tr>
<td>10:00</td>
<td>Break</td>
<td>Break</td>
<td>Break</td>
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<tr>
<td>12:00</td>
<td>Questions and Contributions</td>
<td>Questions and Contributions</td>
<td>Questions and Contributions</td>
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<tr>
<td>12:30</td>
<td>Lunch and Break</td>
<td>Lunch and Break</td>
<td>Lunch and Break</td>
<td>Lunch and Break</td>
<td>Lunch and Break</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:00</td>
<td>Session 3: Dig/Discover A Basic Approach to Inductive Bible Study</td>
<td>Column 2 or Column 3 material</td>
<td>Column 2 or Column 3 material</td>
<td>Column 2 or Column 3 material</td>
<td>Local Leadership and LRI Staff: Evaluation and Future Plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:00</td>
<td>Column 2 or Column 3 material</td>
<td>Column 2 or Column 3 material</td>
<td>Column 2 or Column 3 material</td>
<td>Column 2 or Column 3 material</td>
<td>Local Leadership and LRI Staff: Evaluation and Future Plans</td>
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<tr>
<td>4:00</td>
<td>Break</td>
<td>Break</td>
<td>Break</td>
<td>Break</td>
<td>Break</td>
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<tr>
<td>4:15 to 5:00</td>
<td>TNT Field Reports and Prayer</td>
<td>TNT Field Reports and Prayer</td>
<td>TNT Field Reports and Prayer</td>
<td>Dedication of TNTers</td>
<td>Summary and Prayer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3) Assign passages for devotions to specific TNTers.
During the Workshop
Each session in the material that follows has specific instructions for how to teach or lead that part of the workshop. Teaching tips and ideas are also included.

Begin the workshop by getting to know or becoming reacquainted with each other and giving an overview of what the workshop is about and what you hope to accomplish together (see “Welcome and Overview” in the first slot of the suggested schedule above). You may want to especially talk about what is written above in “Why study the book of Jonah?” and “What do we hope to gain through this study?” (see page 8). Sometime during the beginning of the workshop, be sure to take time to pray and ask God to help all of you in this time of study to know Him more through His Word.

Toward the end of the workshop, devote a session to evaluating the workshop and reflecting on what you’ve learned (see Session 11: Reflecting through the Workshop on page 105).

At the very end of the workshop, devote a time to pray for each TNTer individually or have them pray with each other as they go back out to train others and to minister to God's people.

After the Workshop
1) Fill out the evaluation forms included in the Appendix.

   With the information you have gathered from the learners in Session 11: Reflecting on the Workshop, fill out both the Evaluation of Stated Outcomes (page 112) and the Training Report Form (page 113) and send them to the appropriate person.

2) Follow up with the learners on their efforts to go out and train others and on any post-assignments you have given to them.
Introduction and Overview
Session 1

Discussion

An Overview of the Training

Quick View

This very first session with a new group of TNTers sets the course by explaining where we are going in the next four years of this TNT training - the things we will learn, why we want to learn them, and how we will learn them together.

Objectives

The teacher will explain:

- **The Things We Will Learn**
  - the three columns of our TNT training
  - an overview of the principles in the Hermeneutical Tools Scheme

- **Why We Will Take This Approach**
  - the primary need to know how to listen to and proclaim God’s Word, and not our own, to His people
  - the necessity of having the heart of God in ministry
  - the desire to help with specific needs in the learners’ own context

- **How We Will Do It**
  - the three-legged stool of Demonstrate, Dig/Discover, and Do
The Things We Will Learn

TNT is pastoral training designed to last over a four-year period. It seeks to address the most important and pressing needs that you have in pastoral ministry as a shepherd of God’s people. The charts below give an overview of how the training is designed; they also give an overview of the three main areas of learning, as well as specific topics and principles we will cover.

Instructions for “The Things We Will Learn”

In this very first session with the TNTers, as you begin four years of training with them, be sure to give the group a broad overview of the things they will learn. We want them to see where all of this is going. A helpful way to do this is by explaining to them the three-column chart that gives an overview of the TNT curriculum, as well as the chart that lays out the “Hermeneutical Tools Scheme.”

The TNT Curriculum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Workshop</th>
<th>Core Curriculum</th>
<th>Non-Core Curriculum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Word of God</td>
<td>The Heart of God</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How to Preach</td>
<td>How to Pastor</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The Ten Landmarks (Core Values)</td>
<td>Adequate: Ministry in the New Covenant</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Developing a Biblical Worldview</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Servant Leadership</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Healthy Relationships and Personal Integrity in Ministry</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Marriage and Family</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Finishing Well in Life and Ministry</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Loving and Serving the Church</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Disclaimer: The topics in the second column are still being developed and may not be the same in the future.
Teaching Idea – Questions, Interaction, and Listening
Think about beginning this session by asking the TNTers what needs they face in ministry as pastors. This exercise isn’t meant to make an exhaustive list. It’s designed just to get their minds thinking, help them to begin interacting as a group, and also for you to learn more about their needs.

After you have a sufficient list, explain the three-column chart, the areas and topics you all will learn about, and where each of the needs they listed might fit into the design of the next four years of training.

The Four-Year Timeframe and Schedule
TNT is a training we will work through over a four-year period, meeting twice a year for one-week workshops.

The Three Columns of Curriculum
The three columns of curriculum, or three areas of learning we will explore, in TNT are:

1. the Word of God – learning how to study and understand God’s Word, how to apply it to our own lives and the lives of our people, and then how to teach and preach it faithfully
2. the heart of God – from our study of the Scripture, learning the heart of God and how to minister to and pastor people with His heart; learning the Bible’s model for ministry
3. specific needs or issues which you identify and want to learn more about – you may face specific challenges to ministry in your area; we want to help you, or find someone to help you, address those needs

The Design of Each Workshop
Each workshop is designed around and flows out of a study of a book of the Bible, or some large portion of Scripture (except for the Expositor’s Review).

Everything we learn that week will flow out of that study of a book, especially the things from column one and two – skills for studying and preaching God’s Word, and lessons about a Biblical view of ministry. (What we learn in the third column may not necessarily have as strong of a connection to our study of the book, but should still have a strong Biblical basis or connection and help us to think from a point of view that says, “What does the Bible say?”)
Hermeneutical Tools Scheme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principle of Hermeneutics</th>
<th>Inductive Bible Study Area</th>
<th>Jonah</th>
<th>2 Timothy</th>
<th>Genesis 1-11 (Biblical Theology)</th>
<th>Gospel of Mark</th>
<th>Expositor’s Review</th>
<th>Ephesians</th>
<th>Psalms</th>
<th>Genesis 12-Revelation 22 (Biblical Theology)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Basic Approach to Inductive Bible Study</td>
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<td>Beneath the Surface of Expository Preaching</td>
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<td>Staying on the Line</td>
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<td>Text and Framework</td>
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<td>The Egg Illustration (understanding context)</td>
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<td>Asking Good Questions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Traveling Instructions</td>
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<td>The Importance of Structure</td>
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<td>A Matter of Genre</td>
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<td>Getting the Big Idea</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discovering the Big Idea of a Book</td>
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<tr>
<td>Finding the Meaning of Important Words and Phrases</td>
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<tr>
<td>Christ: The Focus and Fulfillment of Scripture</td>
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<td>From Text to Sermon</td>
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<tr>
<td>From Text to Life (Application)</td>
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<td>The Final Goal: Glorify God and Enjoy Him Forever</td>
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F = Foundations, O = Observation, I = Interpretation, A = Application

**Hermeneutical Tools**

Each workshop, through a study of a book of the Bible, is designed to introduce you to new tools, or principles, for how to read and study the Bible (or, more accurately, how to approach, read, study, interpret, apply, and preach the Bible). Each workshop continues to build on the principles learned in previous workshops. Later workshops review certain principles or help us to think about how to use all of the principles we’ve learned in the past. The end result, hopefully, is that you have a complete set of tools to help you adequately handle and rightly divide the Word of truth.
Why We Will Take This Approach

There is a primary motivation behind the things we will learn. It comes back to our conviction of the need for the Word of God and the heart of God in ministry.

Instructions for “Why We Will Take This Approach”

If the learners do not see the great need for what they will learn, there will not be much motivation to learn it.

Here, make the case for learning hermeneutical principles, studying through books of the Bible, and from that gleaning a theology of ministry and discovering the heart of God.

Why Study Hermeneutical Principles?
We teach hermeneutical principles so that you will be able to study God’s Word for yourself. Instead of telling you what the Bible says, we want to give you the tools to understand for yourself what it says and what it means.

Why Study through a Book of the Bible?
Our workshops are centered around studying through a book of the Bible so that
- we can practice using the principles and skills we are learning
- we can glean a Biblical view of ministry directly from what the Bible says
- we can discover the heart of God through Scripture and allow Him to change our hearts to be like His

Teaching Idea – More Interaction
Go back to the list of needs that the pastors identified earlier. Ask which of the needs is the most important. Suggest, or help them to see, that the most important has to do with God’s Word. For, if we have a true understanding of God’s Word and truly live it out, all of the other needs, most likely, will be met. At least we will have the right basis for knowing how to go about meeting those other needs.

So, it all comes back to God’s Word – first, knowing how to rightly understand it, and then, with our hearts transformed, teaching others what it means and how to live it out as well.

The Importance of the Word of God
Our approach comes back to our conviction that the primary need of the pastor centers around the Word of God – the need to study it, understand it, be transformed by it, and explain it to our people. That is why in TNT we focus on God’s Word. We believe that if we address this primary need of pastors, then we will have the foundation to address so many other secondary needs.

The Importance of the Heart of God
It is not enough to understand the Bible and explain it to others. We need God to transform our hearts through it. In the Bible, we discover the heart of God and God’s view of the ministry He has called us to. We know that we must have His heart in order to do the work He has called us to do in the way He has called us to do it.
How We Will Do It

It is not only important what we learn, but how we learn. In TNT, we want our training to be interactive, giving everyone the opportunity to practice and to learn from each other.

Instructions for “How We Will Do It”

Besides explaining the three-legged stool, emphasize the hands-on nature of our training, the interaction we want to see, and the value of learning God’s Word together.

Teaching Idea – Illustration

For the explanation of the three-legged stool, draw a three-legged stool and label each leg with “Demonstrate,” “Dig/Discover,” and “Do.”

The Three-Legged Stool

Our approach to the training in each workshop is like a three-legged stool. Each leg is necessary for the stool to be of any use. Similarly, each part of the workshop is necessary for it to be useful and effective. The workshop has three kinds of sessions. They allow us to:

- **Demonstrate**
  The purpose of these sessions is to model expository preaching and teaching. Expository preaching and teaching seeks to answer two fundamental questions: (1) What did this passage mean to the original audience, and, in the light of that, (2) what does this passage mean for us today?

- **Dig/Discover**
  The purpose of these sessions is to learn hermeneutical principles and practice using them so the learners can be better equipped to discover the Bible’s message and clearly explain it to others.

- **Do**
  The purpose of these sessions is to help the learners become better expository preachers and teachers of the Word of God by giving them an opportunity to preach and receive feedback from their peers.
Session 2

Demonstrate

Preaching Jonah 1:1-16

Quick View

Expository preaching and teaching seeks to answer two fundamental questions:

 What did the passage mean to the original audience?
 In light of that, what does the passage mean for us today?

Someone once observed that expositional preaching tends to be caught as much as taught. For this reason, the teacher will use this session to demonstrate preaching an expositional message from God’s Word.

Take Away

The learner will

 observe how the exposition of God’s Word is delivered through the unique giftedness and personality of the preacher
 consider what elements and skills are involved in preaching expositionally
 consider what God is saying to his own heart through His Word

Instructions

This “demonstrate” session should model for the learners the process of exposition, and through that, help them with the study of the book of Jonah. While a sample sermon is provided on the following pages, you should prepare and teach your own message from this passage.

After you have preached your message, take advantage of a valuable teaching moment and allow the learners to have a discussion about what they have just heard and seen demonstrated in your exposition of the passage.

Teaching Tip

A valuable teaching moment can occur just after the modeling of the expositional message. Don’t let it slip by. Ask them, “What did you just see happen here?” Let them think about how you worked through the passage and explained its meaning – both for the original hearers and for us today.

It might be even better to have another teacher lead the discussion so that the learners don’t feel so obligated to be overly complimentary. The other teacher can lead with questions and observations and help make the discussion more honest yet still edifying.

At the same time, don’t think that this session is all about a teaching moment. Allow the Holy Spirit to lead and guide. The message may stir hearts and call for a response, a time of sharing, or a time of prayer. Be sensitive to the Lord about the best way to proceed.
Sample Sermon
Below is a sample expositional sermon on Jonah 1:1-16. Again, while this is provided as an example, you should prepare your own expositional message from this passage.

An opening Demonstrate sermon should also introduce the book the group is studying for the week, start to raise questions that the learners should begin to think about, and hint at or point to the Big Idea of the book.

The Folly of Fleeing: Jonah 1:1-16

I imagine a fairly ordinary morning when the Word of the Lord came to Jonah. Surely he wasn’t expecting it to come right then and there. Jonah had probably already planned out his day—breakfast at 7:30, the prophet’s fellowship at 9:00, writing until lunch at noon, and then a meeting with one of the king’s advisors at 3:00. Jonah had probably made plans not just for that day, but for that week, and perhaps even for the rest of his life. It was on just such a morning that God blasted into Jonah’s life to declare, in effect, ‘I am changing your plans!’

Most of us don’t like change. We prefer routine and predictability, even more so as we age. We adhere to the simple philosophy, make a plan and then work the plan. God, on the other hand, loves change. It’s one of the primary tools He uses in our lives to shape us into the image of His beloved Son. Let’s learn about the changes that God was about to bring to Jonah, to a group of sailors, and to the residents of a great pagan city. God ordained that their lives would intersect in a strange and marvelous way.

Now the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.” (1:1-2)

“Go to Nineveh.” I can imagine Jonah responding in horror, “No! Of all the cities of the world, anywhere but Nineveh.” For Nineveh was a great city, the capital of the Assyrian Empire. This Empire, known for its cruelty and wickedness, had been the greatest power in this region of the world for the past five or six centuries. Nineveh and Assyria had been bitter enemies of Israel. In fact, within 30 years of this prophecy, Assyria will sweep down upon Israel, destroy her land, and take her captive.

Jonah’s assignment was a daunting one: to call out, or to preach, against Nineveh. It’s one thing to bring good news to an enemy, but an entirely different challenge to bring bad news to this same enemy. Sometimes the messenger does get shot!

But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare and went on board, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the LORD. (1:3)

Jonah could not bring himself to obey this word from the Lord. He refused to change, and in fact, Jonah tried to change God’s plans by running as far away from God as possible. We’re not exactly sure where Tarshish was, but some scholars think that Tarshish was in Spain, on the far end of the Mediterranean Sea, about as far from Joppa as you can get.

Jonah’s decision was a calculated one. He concluded that there was more to be gained by sinning than by obeying. Anytime we sin, we are making the same calculation—we say, in effect, that God cannot satisfy us and that there is more to be gained by disobeying God. Of course, this is sheer lunacy. The great Lover of our souls knows precisely what will bring us the greatest joy and the deepest fulfillment. How foolish of us to twist His mercy and grace in such a way that we view Him as the stealer of our joy rather than as the source of it. Sin believes Satan’s lies regarding God’s intentions toward us.

Not only is it lunacy to flee from God, it is also folly. Did Jonah really think that he could run away from God? Surely he was familiar with Psalm 139:

O LORD, you have searched me and known me!
You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. 
You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. 
Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether and are acquainted with all my ways. (Psalm 139:1-4)
The psalm begins with an awed acknowledgement of God’s omniscience—He knows every intimate detail of our lives. He knows our ways, our words, our thoughts—even before we ourselves know them. The psalmist goes on to marvel at God’s omnipresence—He is everywhere at all times.

Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence?
If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!
If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me. (Psalm 139: 7-10)

This psalm is a great comfort to those who walk in the light, but a fearful one for those who choose the darkness. Jonah is about to learn the truth of this psalm—that there’s no place to run and hide from God.

But the LORD hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship threatened to break up. (1:4)

The Lord began to chase Jonah down. He sent a wind and a storm against the ship. The text makes it clear that the storm did not arise because of a low pressure system over the eastern Mediterranean Sea, but because the Lord hurled the storm upon them.

Francis Thompson published a poem entitled, “The Hound of Heaven” in the 1890’s following a long period of rebellion against God that included opium addiction, near-starvation and attempted suicide. Listen to his experience of being pursued by God.

I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;
I fled Him, down the arches of the years;
I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways
Of my own mind and in the midst of tears
I hid from Him….

From those strong Feet that followed, followed after.
But with unhurrying chase,
And unperturbed pace,
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,
They beat—and a Voice beat
More instant that the Feet—
“All things betray thee, who betrayest Me.”

At the beginning of the book of Jonah, we are introduced to a number of themes that weave their way through the book. First, God is a pursuing God who draws rebels to Himself (whether they want to come or not!) Second, God’s purposes will not be thwarted—He will accomplish all of His will, with or without the cooperation of His people. Third, God controls all of the events of life—He is providential and sovereign. These glorious themes are illustrated throughout the book in the lives of the sailors, the Ninevites, and of course, in and through the life of Jonah.

Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried out to his god. And they hurled the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them. But Jonah had gone down into the inner part of the ship and had lain down and was fast asleep. So the captain came and said to him, “What do you mean, you sleeper? Arise, call out to your god! Perhaps the god will give a thought to us, that we may not perish.” (1:5-6)

Notice the stunning contrast between Jonah and the sailors. The sailors are running around on deck in a panic, while a few feet below them, Jonah is sleeping! Why is Jonah sleeping? The truth is, sin exhausts us, draining life from us. Sin may be exhilarating for a while, but eventually it proves to be a wearying, emptying affair.

Ironically, the pagan sailors look more like believers than Jonah. In desperation they urge Jonah to start praying, something he should have been doing all along! These unbelieving sailors were “getting religion,” but it was an ignorant religion, because they did not know about the true and living God. They wondered aloud, “Maybe he will take notice of us” (1:6, NIV). The sailors realized that they needed help outside of themselves, that what they were facing was bigger than they were. The storm and Jonah’s disobedience were all a part of God’s process to show mercy to these sailors and to draw them to Himself.
People all around us ask these same questions about God. Especially in times of crisis, people wonder if God really does notice, if He really does care. Do you know someone right now who is going through a crisis? Perhaps, now more than ever, he or she has come face to face with his or her limitations and needs. Perhaps the Lord is pursuing them—drawing them to Himself. Be listening for their questions. Be ready to tell them about the God who takes notice of them and who is gracious and compassionate to those who call out to Him.

And they said to one another, “Come, let us cast lots, that we may know on whose account this evil has come upon us.” So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. (1:7)

The sailors wanted to know why the terrible storm had come. The sailors knew that their world was a moral one, that the universe is a cause and effect universe and that there were consequences to the choices people make. They realized that things happen for a reason, not merely because of luck or chance. Though pagan, they had some sense of a sovereign and providential God ruling the affairs of men.

The Lord is turning up the pressure on Jonah, by revealing Jonah as the culprit. God is exposing Jonah and his sin. Can you imagine the embarrassment, the chagrin? This may have been one of the most humiliating moments in Jonah’s life, but it was also a moment of opportunity and freedom for him. How would he respond? Would he “own up” to his disobedience and sin? For this is the beginning point of true change in our lives—to acknowledge who we really are. Even though it didn’t feel like it, the Lord actually gave Jonah a great gift—a public “outing” of his sin.

When God’s Word comes to us and exposes the ugliness in our lives, how do we respond? Do we justify our sin and cover it over, or are we honest with ourselves, with others, and with God? The first step down the road to repentance is honesty, admitting that we have sinned.

Then they said to him, “Tell us on whose account this evil has come upon us. What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?” And he said to them, “I am a Hebrew, and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.” Then the men were exceedingly afraid and said to him, “What is this that you have done!” For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the Lord, because he had told them. (1:8-10)

The sailors were amazed, appalled, and afraid, all at the same time. Not only was Jonah sleeping in the midst of a great crisis, but he had the nerve to blatantly disobey God. They began to pepper Jonah with questions once they realized that he was responsible for the storm. The sailors were searching for answers, for understanding, for a way of escape.

Jonah began to explain about himself and his God and how they had arrived in this desperate situation. Interestingly, Jonah immediately began to tell them of the God of heaven and earth, the God of creation. Even though the sailors did not specifically ask about God, Jonah realized that he couldn’t really fully explain the situation without talking about God, for God is at the center of his story. Is this true of you? When you describe the story of your life, does your storyline automatically include God? Would it be possible to fully tell your story while leaving God out of it? Jonah can be criticized on many points, but he does acknowledge the centrality of God to his life. His story would simply not make sense without God. Fortunately, Jonah (and we) don’t need a perfect story in order to talk about God’s nature and ways. Most unbelievers are not expecting perfection in us; they simply want to know whether or not God makes a real difference in our lives.

Then they said to him, “What shall we do to you, that the sea may quiet down for us?” For the sea grew more and more tempestuous. He said to them, “Pick me up and hurl me into the sea; then the sea will quiet down for you, for I know it is because of me that this great tempest has come upon you.” (1:11-12)

Many observers have noted that a distinguishing mark of American culture in the 21st century is a growing inability to take personal responsibility. Ours is a therapeutic culture which seeks cures for our ailments while ignoring root issues—our sinful choices and the personal responsibility that must accompany those choices. “It’s not my fault” has become a popular refrain. Blame is willingly placed upon parents, teachers, businesses, governments, our heredity or our environment, while blame is rarely placed upon ourselves by ourselves. Jonah, to his credit, takes responsibility for the mess that he and the sailors were in.
With the increasing intensity of the storm, God was turning up the pressure on Jonah and the sailors yet once again. He was going to squeeze them until they would cry out to Him. Jonah wasn’t ready to cry out to God just yet, but he did the next best thing—he took responsibility for his sin. “It’s my fault.” The first step to forgiveness and freedom for Jonah was honesty. The second step was taking responsibility for his sin. He had not fully repented yet, but he did take the next step down the road of repentance.

Nevertheless, the men rowed hard to get back to dry land, but they could not, for the sea grew more and more tempestuous against them. Therefore they called out to the Lord, “O Lord, let us not perish for this man’s life, and lay not on us innocent blood, for you, O Lord, have done as it pleased you.” (1:13-14)

Ironically, it was the sailors who first cried out to the Lord. Jonah should have been crying out to God all along, but it’s not until chapter two and the new crisis of being consumed by a great fish that we find Jonah calling upon the Lord.

God continued to crank up the pressure. The sailors were desperate and they knew it. They had exhausted all of their resources and human efforts and come up woefully short. Their sea savvy and maritime experience were no match for the tempest that they were battling. They had a growing awareness that the God behind the storm was no local deity, but One who could do as He pleased. He was not a God to be trifled with, but one who held their very lives in His hand.

At the same time, the sailors held Jonah’s life in their hands. Jonah had told them to throw him overboard, but all their instincts warned against it. How would this God respond to the murder of His prophet?

So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging.

Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows. (1:15-16)

The sailors had been afraid before, but now they were terrified! The calm after the storm was worse than the storm itself. They knew that storms like this didn’t just suddenly stop. In the midst of the eerie silence, they must have wondered, who was this God that tames typhoons? What kind of God was this who overrules the winds and the waves? They no longer had any doubts that he was “the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea” (Jonah 1:9). They were facing a new reality—a God of unlimited power. The thought terrified them, as the writer of Hebrews well understood, “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Hebrews 10:31).

In great fear, the sailors slaughtered a sacrifice to God and made vows to Him. The text suggests that at least some of these sailors actually became believers.

It turned out to be a very long day for these sailors. When they left port that morning, they probably had given little or no thought to their gods. Instead, they likely were focused on their departure and several days of boredom en route to their destination.

Who were these sailors? We actually know very little about them. We don’t know their names, don’t know where they came from, don’t know about their families. Jonah probably didn’t even notice them as he boarded that ship, too consumed and blinded by his own guilt and shame. Yet God knew them. In fact, He knew them before they were born. He not only knew them, He loved them enough to chase them across the Mediterranean Sea in order to draw them to Himself. Amazingly, God used Jonah and Jonah’s disobedience as part of the process to save these sailors. God’s purposes will not be thwarted—not even by sin.

There are people in your life that God is pursuing. They may seem at the moment to be completely uninterested in spiritual things. Yet, He may be, at this very moment, turning up the pressure on them in order to get their attention, to provoke serious questions, to cause them to cry out to Him. Perhaps God will use you in their lives to tell them that God takes notice of them and is gracious and compassionate to those who call out to Him. May God use you as a part of the glorious process to draw them to Himself.
Session 3

Dig/Discover

A Basic Approach to Inductive Bible Study

Quick View

Inductive Bible study is the bedrock of good preaching and teaching. The skills required to do it (the skills of observation, interpretation, and application) do not come naturally to us, but they can be developed with time and effort. This session explains the method of Inductive Bible Study and teaches the learner the skills for doing it.

Take Away

The teacher is expected to cover the following objectives concerning . . .

The hermeneutical principle (under “The Principle Explained”):
The learner will understand
- a clear definition of “inductive” and how it contrasts with “deductive”
- the need for and importance of inductive Bible study
- the three basic stages of inductive Bible study

The Book of Jonah (under “The Principle Practiced”):
The learner will
- explore the first chapter of Jonah by practicing the skills of observation, interpretation, and application

The heart of God for ministry (under “The Text Applied”):
The learner will
- reflect on Jonah chapter 1 and think about any application he can make in his life and ministry
- grow in commitment and humble submission to the authority of God’s Word in his life and teaching
The Principle Explained
(Understanding the Hermeneutical Principle)

Instructions for “The Principle Explained”
As you explain the concept of inductive Bible study, make sure to emphasize the importance behind this approach – understanding the Bible by starting with the text and letting it guide our interpretation.

As you work through each part of inductive Bible study (observation, interpretation, and application), there are a lot of suggested questions. Don’t get bogged down in these. Emphasize the purpose of each part (asking “What does it actually say?” “What does it mean?” and “What does it mean for us today?”). Give them something clear and simple to remember. Use the suggested questions as you practice inductive Bible study with them by working through the suggested passage.

What Is Inductive Bible Study?

- “Inductive” describes a kind of approach to learning or to understanding something. It means to begin with the facts and then to let those pieces of evidence lead you to a conclusion. It is the opposite of “deduction” – beginning with a conclusion and using it to explain the facts.
- Inductive Bible study begins by paying close attention to what the Bible actually says and letting it form our conclusions. It works hard to see what is there and, with God’s help, to understand it. It begins by looking into what the Bible says before looking to what others say – whether in teaching or in books – since it holds the conviction that the Bible says enough to answer the necessary questions we may ask of it, if we will rely on God’s help and look closely enough.

Teaching Idea – Illustration – Inductive vs. Deductive

The following examples illustrate the difference between the inductive approach and a deductive approach:

A good medical doctor uses the inductive approach all the time. He asks many questions about the symptoms, makes a thorough examination, asks more questions still, then arrives at his conclusion, the diagnosis, and ultimately decides on a treatment. Even then, further investigation may sharpen or alter his prior conclusions. He starts with basic facts then proceeds to a conclusion.

A lawyer, on the other hand, approaches his work in a deductive manner. He starts with a conclusion (whether a person is innocent or guilty) then sets out to prove it. Sure, he may look at all the facts, but he emphasizes only those facts that will help win the case and downplays those that will jeopardize it. He starts with a conclusion then points to, or proceeds to, the facts.

basic facts, or pieces of evidence

The inductive method starts with the basic facts, sees how they fit together, and leads to a conclusion.

A lawyer, on the other hand, approaches his work in a deductive manner. He starts with a conclusion (whether a person is innocent or guilty) then sets out to prove it. Sure, he may look at all the facts, but he emphasizes only those facts that will help win the case and downplays those that will jeopardize it. He starts with a conclusion then points to, or proceeds to, the facts.
The Importance of Inductive Bible Study

- When we study the Bible, we experience its richness not by putting some idea into it that isn’t there, but by drawing out the meaning that is already there.
- Inductive Bible study begins with the Bible and tries to discover what it has to say for itself – not starting with our own ideas or with materials that tell us what the Bible says or means.
- Inductive Bible study takes God’s Word seriously and approaches the Bible on its own terms and allows it to tell its own story and proclaim its own message (and not our own). It works hard to see what is there, understand it, and take hold of its message. It is concerned to hear God speak – through His Word.

The Three Parts of Inductive Bible Study

Inductive Bible study involves:

Teaching Tip
When teaching the three parts, or stages, of inductive Bible study, consider first giving a brief overview of all of the stages – observation, interpretation, and application. Then, go back and combine a more in-depth explanation with the practice exercise for each part (found under “The Principle Practiced”). For example, explain the stage of observation more in depth and then give the group an opportunity to do the practice exercise for observation. After that, move on to an in-depth explanation of interpretation.

Observation

- Asking “What does it say?”

Teaching Idea - Illustration - Observation

The ways in which we fail to observe carefully might be illustrated in the following way:

“Would someone give me some paper money in the local currency? [Ask for a particular denomination that has a picture of a famous, but not too famous, historical person on the bill.] This is a _____ bill. You all know what this is – it’s very common. Who is pictured on the bill? [Expect embarrassed laughter. Have fun with it – tease them for not knowing who it is.] Isn’t it funny? You’ve seen and handled this hundreds or thousands of times, yet you didn’t know who is on it. How can that be? Often we look, but do not see. We miss things ‘right under our noses!’”

Other examples you might use:
- Which color is the top color in a traffic light? (red)
- What letters go with the number “1” on the telephone pad? (There are no letters on the 1 button.)
- Which is the “on” position for a light switch? (usually “up”)
The problem of “looking but not seeing” happens in Bible study as well. We’ve all had the experience when we’re reading a familiar passage and all of a sudden something jumps out at us. It had been there all along, but we just saw it for the first time. **Clear and accurate observations are essential to effective Bible study.** We can become better observers of the Bible. Our goal in this session is to train our eyes to see better.

Specific things to look for:
- **Key words.** Look for important words that are used.
  - **Biblical or Theological Words.** Are there words mentioned that are important in the message of the Bible?
  - **Transition Words.** Are there words that indicate a change in action or a shift in thought (like “but,” “therefore,” or “then”)?
  - **People.** Who are the people named? Who are the major characters? Who are the minor characters? Who was the writer? Who were the recipients?
  - **Places.** What places are mentioned? Are there cities or nations named? Are there landmarks or buildings described?
  - **Events.** What key event or action is described? Who was behind it? How did it happen or unfold? When did it happen in history?
- **Repetitions.** Are there any words or concepts that are repeated in the passage?
- **Surprises.** Is there anything surprising here?
- **Comparisons/contrasts.** What important comparisons or contrasts do you find?
- **Context.** Are there any key words or ideas in the surrounding context that connect with this passage?
- **A Key Verse.** Is there a key verse that sums up the message of the passage?

**Teaching Note – Basic Questions**

You may find it helpful to use the basic question words to help learners to begin making observations. Tell the learners to look for the answers to the basic questions of “Who?” “What?” “When?” “Where?” and “How?” (The question of “Why?” should be saved for later under the step of interpretation.)

Some basic questions to answer:
- **Who** are the characters (the major characters, the minor characters, the writer, the recipients)?
- **What** are the key ideas, words, and/or events?
- **When** did it occur (the date of writing, the event described, the point that this was in the life of Israel or the church)?
- **Where** did it occur (the names of places, landmarks, buildings, cities, nations)?
- **How** did it happen?

These questions may be used as a helpful way for learners to begin thinking about making observations of the text. However, these are basic questions. You will want to guide the learners toward more specific things to look for (as in the list before this Teaching Note) as they get better at making observations.
Teaching Tip

The Difference between Observation and Interpretation

It’s important to point out the difference between observations and interpretations. Observation is a description of what is there in the text that no objective person would disagree with. (“This word occurs five times in this passage.” “The passage begins with a question.”) Observations might seem very basic. But that’s where we need to begin before we jump to a conclusion about what something means. If someone could make an argument against the statement (even if it’s right), you’ve probably slipped over into interpretation. It’s important not to jump to interpretation, but to focus on observations and what the text actually says.

Teaching Idea – Illustration – Observation

See the illustration for Observation under “The Principle Practiced.”

Interpretation

- Asking “What does it mean?”
  - Interpretation is like putting together the pieces of a puzzle. Interpretation takes the facts discovered from observation, brings them together, and works to understand their connection and relationship to one another.
  - Interpretation discerns the difference between major points and minor ones and determines how one defines and illuminates the other. It strives to figure out the meaning and significance of the parts, and their connection and meaning as a whole.

Teaching Idea – Illustration – Interpretation

“The Blind Men and the Elephant”

In the farthest reaches of the desert there was a city in which all the people were blind. A king and his army were passing through that region and camped outside the city. The king had with him a great elephant, which he used for heavy work and to frighten his enemies in battle. The people of the city had heard of elephants but never had the opportunity to know one. Out rushed six young men, determined to discover what the elephant was like.

The first young man, in his haste, ran straight into the side of the elephant. He spread out his arms and felt the animal’s broad, smooth side. He sniffed the air, and thought, “This is an animal; my nose leaves no doubt of that, but this animal is like a wall.” He rushed back to the city to tell of his discovery.

The second young blind man, feeling through the air, grasped the elephant’s trunk. The elephant was surprised by this and snorted loudly. The young man, startled in turn, exclaimed, “This elephant is like a snake, but it is so huge that its hot breath makes a snorting sound!” He turned to run back to the city and tell his tale.

The third young blind man walked into the elephant’s tusk. He felt the hard, smooth ivory surface of the tusk, listened as it scraped through the sand, then as the elephant lifted the tusk out, he could feel its pointed tip. “How wonderful!” he thought. “The elephant is hard and sharp like a spear, and yet it makes noises and smells like an animal!” He turned to run back to the city and tell his tale.

The fourth young blind man reached low with his hands and found one of the elephant’s legs. He reached around and hugged it, feeling its rough skin. Just then, the elephant stomped that foot, and the man let go. "No wonder this elephant frightens the king’s enemies,” he thought. "It is like a tree trunk or a mighty column, yet it bends, is very strong, and strikes the ground with great force.” Feeling a little frightened himself, he fled back to the city.
The fifth young blind man found the elephant’s tail. “I don’t see what all the excitement is about,” he said. “The elephant is nothing but a frayed bit of rope.” He dropped the tail and ran after the others.

The sixth young blind man was in a hurry, not wanting to be left behind. He heard and felt the air as it was pushed by the elephant’s flapping ear, then grasped the ear itself and felt its thin roughness. He laughed with delight. “This wonderful elephant is like a living fan.” And, like the others, he was satisfied with his quick first impression and headed back to the city.

But finally, an old blind man came. He had left the city, walking in his usual slow way, content to take his time and study the elephant thoroughly. He walked all around the elephant, touching every part of it, smelling it, listening to all of its sounds. He found the elephant’s mouth and fed the animal a treat, then petted it on its great trunk. Finally he returned to the city, only to find it in an uproar. Each of the six young men had acquired followers who eagerly heard his story. But then, as the people found that there were six different contradictory descriptions, they all began to argue. The old man quietly listened to the fighting. “It’s like a wall!” “No, it’s like a snake!” “No, it’s like a spear!” “No, it’s like a tree!” “No, it’s like a rope!” “No, it’s like a fan!”

After the illustration ask, “What was the problem there?” (Answer: Each of the blind men had observed but failed to accurately interpret – to put all of the pieces of information together. And actually, if they had taken the time to observe more carefully, they would have arrived at a better interpretation.)

Some **specific questions** to answer in interpretation:

- What does this word or phrase or idea mean in light of the rest of the passage or the whole book? In other words, how does the big picture of the rest of the passage help us to understand the meaning of a smaller part?
- What is the passage saying as a whole? What is the main thought or the Big Idea?
- Why is this passage here? Why does the author say these things in this way here? What is his purpose in writing this?
- What is the significance of this passage in light of the rest of the book? How does the passage fit into the larger story of the Bible?
- How do these words point to or speak of Christ?

**Application**

- Asking “What does it mean for me or for us today?”

- In determining the application of a passage, consider the following suggestions:
  
  - Look for clues in the text. The best application flows directly out of the intended purpose and application of the text. When you have done a good job of observing the text and arrived at a correct understanding of its meaning (interpretation), then the application will not feel contrived or forced but will flow freely from the passage.
  
  God’s Word is constantly applying its own message. When we discover the direct or indirect application already there in the text, we don’t have to come up with our own ideas – the Word of God does the work for us.
Apply God’s Word as He does it. God uses variety by giving commands, but He also makes appeals. He instructs, but He also paints pictures to help us understand more clearly. He addresses our activities and behaviors, but more often our thoughts about Him and others. He addresses all of us – our hands, heart, and mind.

He also appeals to us on the basis of His relationship and the grace He gives us. God’s own application in His Word is rooted in who He is and what He has done for us. We also should set the application of His Word in the frame of His redeeming love and purposes for His people.

Approaching application by seeing it deeply rooted in the text will make it poignant and compelling for yourself and your listeners.

Here are three specific questions that may be helpful to ask for application:

- Is there an application already in the text? Does the passage give some command or exhortation for how we should live?
- How does the situation of our lives today correspond with the situation of the original audience? What is similar? What did God say to them about that, and how would that apply to the similar circumstances in our lives?
- What does this passage tell us about God? How should we live in light of that?
The Principle Practiced
(Seeing the Principle in Our Study of the Book of Jonah)

Begin to practice the skills of inductive Bible study by working through the stages of observation, interpretation, and application with the passage below.

Instructions for “The Principle Practiced”
The important thing in this session is to give the learners the opportunity to actually do inductive Bible study themselves. Give them plenty of time to work, but make sure to portion the time so that they have the opportunity to work through each stage of observation, interpretation, and application.

Instead of taking a lot of time to explain concepts, try to keep the lecture time to a minimum. Briefly explain each stage first, then let them practice, then have them give you some of their answers. They will understand better and more clearly after they have had the opportunity to try and practice for themselves.

Suggested Questions
Below are exercises and suggested questions to help you guide the learners through their study of the passage. Work through them yourself first so that you understand the points to bring out from the passage. At the back of this session are suggested answers to help you think through your answers even more.

Jonah 1:1-17 (or, as an alternative, Jonah 1:1-6)

- Observation
  
  Write down 10 observations.

Teaching Tip – Feedback
After letting the learners practice making observations, ask them to share some of the things they found with the rest of the group. As you listen to the answers, give suggestions or corrections to help them understand more clearly and specifically what they should be looking for as they make observations.

Do this for the stages of interpretation and application as well. Have them share some of their answers, and then give encouraging and helpful feedback. We can’t know what learners are actually learning unless they share it with us.
Teaching Idea – Illustration – Observation

The following illustration would be good to read after the learners have made a few initial observations. It is adapted from a story told by a former student of a professor of natural science at Harvard, Jean Louis Agassiz. It helps us to see what is involved in making careful observations.

Professor Agassiz brought me a small fish, placing it before me with the rather stern requirement that I should study it but should on no account talk to any one concerning it nor read anything relating to fishes, until I had his permission so to do.

“What shall I do?” I asked.

He replied, “Find out what you can, and by and by I will ask you what you have seen.”

I was disappointed. I concluded that gazing at a fish did not relate to the study of insects – which was my desire. In ten minutes I saw all that could be seen in that fish. Half an hour passed, an hour, another hour – the fish began to look loathsome. I turned it over and around; looked it in the face – from behind, beneath, above, sideways, at a three-quarters’ view – just as ghastly. I was in despair. So I decided it was time for lunch. For an hour I was free!

On my return, I slowly pulled forth my mute companion, that awful fish, and with a feeling of desperation, I looked at it again. At last a happy thought struck me – I would draw the fish. With surprise, I began to discover new features in the creature. Just then the professor returned.

“That is right,” said he, “a pencil is one of the best eyes. So what have you seen?”

He listened attentively to my brief rehearsal of the parts of the fish. When I finished, he waited, expecting more, and then, with an air of disappointment said, “You have not looked very carefully; why, you haven't even seen one of the most obvious features of the animal, and it's plainly before your eyes! Look again! Look again!” And he left me to my misery.

I was mortified. Still more of that fish! But now I set myself to my task with a will, and I discovered one new thing after another, until I saw how correct the professor’s criticism had been.

The afternoon passed quickly, and at the end of the day, the professor asked, “Do you see it yet?”

“No,” I replied, “I am certain I do not, but I see how little I saw before.”

“Well,” he said, “put away your fish and go home; perhaps you will be ready with a better answer in the morning.”

This was disconcerting. Not only must I puzzle over my observations of my fish all night when I didn’t have it in front of me, but the next day I was going to have to give an exact account of my discoveries without verifying them, and I had a bad memory! So I walked home by the Charles River, pondering over my problem.

After a sleepless night, I arrived at the lab the next morning. The professor seemed to be as anxious as I that I should see for myself what he saw.

“Do you mean perhaps,” I asked, “that the fish has symmetrical sides with paired organs?”

“Of course! Of course!” He said. He was thoroughly pleased.

Then I ventured to ask, “So what should I do next?”

“Oh, look at your fish!” he said. And so for three more long days he placed that fish before my eyes, forbidding me to look at anything else or to use any artificial...
aid. “Look, look, look,” was his repeated injunction. Only later did I come to realize that this was not only one of the best lessons of my life but a turning point as well.

After this story you might ask, “So, what does this story have to do with studying the Bible? Is there anything to learn from it?”

Then encourage them to look again at the passage and write down 10 more observations.

- **Observation**
  Write down 10 more observations. (Continue to make observations from the assigned passage, but feel free to make connections with observations from the rest of the book.)

- **Interpretation**
  What does this passage mean? (Use the questions suggested above in “The Principle Explained” as you seek the answers and write down your thoughts.)

- **Application**
  Apply the message of the passage to yourself and your listeners. What does it mean for you today? Write down some key applications from this passage. (Again, use the three suggested questions above in “The Principle Explained.”)
The Text Applied
(Discovering the Heart of God for Ministry)

It is not enough to know the skills for studying the Bible inductively. The purpose is to listen to what God is saying through His Word, apply it to our lives, and to ask Him to change our hearts through it.

Instructions for “The Text Applied”
After discussing the learners’ suggested answers for the application stage as they study Jonah 1 (under “The Principle Practiced”), lead them in a time of discussion and reflection. We want them not just to learn skills for their minds but to have their hearts changed by God as they reflect on what His Word says. Give them an opportunity to do that at the end of the session.

What application did you think of for your own life and ministry from the text we studied today?

A Closing Word
The Assyrians were enemies of Israel who worshiped pagan gods. When God told Jonah to go to the capital city of his enemies and preach to them, Jonah bolted in the other direction. Jonah willingly accepted God’s forgiveness and compassion, but he was unwilling for his enemies to receive these. He was so filled with bitterness that when the people of Nineveh repented, “it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry” (Jonah 4:1).

Who are your enemies? Do you love them? Do you desire their salvation? Do you pray for those who persecute you? Is your heart broken over their unbelief? Or are you angry and bitter toward your enemies—wishing for God’s judgment to fall upon them?

Do you view your enemies with contempt or with compassion? Remember that God was compassionate and forgave you when you were still His enemy (Rom. 5:10). What is the condition of your heart? Do you have Jonah’s heart or Jesus’ heart? Confess your sin to God. Ask Him to break your heart and give you His heart of compassion and forgiveness toward your enemies. Be God’s minister of love and grace.
Sample Questions and Answers
from The Principle Practiced

Jonah 1:1-17 (or, as an alternative, Jonah 1:1-6)

The suggested answers below are for Jonah 1:1-17.

Observation

Write down 10 observations.

- The story begins with the word of the Lord coming to Jonah (1:1).
- God gave Jonah three commands: “Arise,” “Go to Nineveh,” and “Call out against it” (1:2).
- The reason God gave for His command to Jonah is “for their evil has come up before me” (1:3).
- “Evil” is repeated three times (1:2, 7, 8).
- The idea of fleeing “from the presence of the LORD” is repeated three times (1:3 [twice], 10).
- The sailors were praying to their gods while Jonah was asleep (1:5).
- The idea of the sailors’ being afraid or fearing happens three times (1:5, 10, 16).
- The idea of fearing the Lord occurs twice – once for Jonah and once for the sailors (1:9, 16).
- The captain hoped Jonah’s [G]od may give a thought to them so that they may not perish.
- Jonah admitted that he knew the storm had come upon them because of him (1:12).
- The sailors asked the Lord that they may not perish for Jonah’s life (1:14).
- The idea of perishing appears twice (1:6, 14).
- The idea that the sailors hoped or prayed that Jonah’s God would not allow them to perish appears twice (1:6, 14).

Write down 10 more observations. (Continue to make observations from the assigned passage, but feel free to make connections with observations from the rest of the book.)

- Jonah’s attempt to flee to Tarshish is further described (twice) as “[away] from the presence of the LORD” (1:3).
- Jonah did not immediately admit that he knew why the storm has come upon them after the captain asked him to pray to his [G]od (1:6) or before the sailors decided to cast lots (1:7).
- Jonah had told the men at some point earlier before the storm that he was fleeing from the presence of the Lord (1:10).
- After the lot fell on Jonah (1:7), the men wanted to know on whose account the evil had come upon them (1:8). They also wanted to know what Jonah’s occupation was, where he came from, what his country was, and of what people Jonah was (1:8).
- Jonah responded that he was a Hebrew, but besides that, his answer had to do with the God he feared, who God is (the God of heaven), and what He made – specifically the sea and the dry land.
- The sailors wanted to know what they could do to Jonah to solve the problem – so that the sea would quiet down.
- Jonah predicted that if they would pick him up and throw him into the sea, then the sea would quiet down for them.
- After Jonah told them what to do, the sailors did not immediately do what Jonah suggested; first the sailors tried to row back to land.
- The sailors called out to the Lord before they threw Jonah over. They asked that they would not perish for Jonah’s life and that the Lord would not lay on them “innocent blood.”
- The sailors said that the Lord had done everything “as it pleased [him]” (1:14).
After the storm ceased, the men feared the Lord and offered sacrifices to Him and made vows.

The Lord appointed a fish to swallow Jonah.

Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and nights.

The word “hurl” occurs four times (1:4, 5, 12, 15). The Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea. The sailors hurled cargo overboard. Jonah told the sailors to hurl him into the sea. And the sailors finally did hurl Jonah overboard.

Outside of chapter 1, the word for “evil” occurs seven times (1:2, 7, 8; 3:7, 8, 10 [twice]; 4:1, 2, 6).

Besides appointing a fish, the Lord also “appointed” a plant, a worm, and a scorching east wind (4:6, 7, 8).

In 3:1-3, just as in 1:1-3, the word of the Lord came to Jonah (this time, a second time). The Lord said to Jonah, “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it.” This time, however, the words “the message that I tell you” are included instead of “for their evil has come up before me.” Jonah arose and went (but this time to Nineveh instead of to Tarshish).

Interpretation

What does this passage mean? (Use the questions suggested above in “The Principle Explained” as you seek the answers and write down your thoughts.)

Some significant interpretive thoughts:

- Although God had told Jonah to go preach against Nineveh because of their evil that had come up before Him, Jonah, in stark disobedience to God’s command, brought evil on himself and on those around him.
- The sailors seemed more concerned about the situation and about God’s disposition toward them than Jonah did. They were more quick to pray to God than Jonah was, to ask that they would not perish, to be concerned for someone else’s life (Jonah’s), and to turn to the Lord in worship.
- God was very active in all of this: sending His message about Nineveh to Jonah, sending a storm when Jonah disobeyed, calming the storm when the sailors threw Jonah over, and sending a fish to swallow Jonah.

How would we summarize the passage? Perhaps, “After Jonah’s disobedience to God’s command, God sent a storm that caused the sailors to turn to God for mercy and Jonah to be thrown overboard to a fish appointed by God.”

How does this passage fit into the larger message of the book? The Big Idea of the book may be said to be: “God wants His servant to share His heart of mercy for the lost – even when called to proclaim His message of judgment against them.” This passage shows how Jonah does not share the heart of God for the lost – first, by disobeying and refusing to go to Nineveh to preach God’s message to them; and then, by endangering the lives of the sailors around him without any concern for them or repentance of his own. But it also shows how God wanted His servant to share His heart of mercy for the lost – first, by chastening Jonah with the storm and stopping him from continuing to run in the opposite direction that God commanded him to go; and second, by continuing to show Jonah His mercy by appointing a fish to save Jonah and keep him alive to fulfill the mission.

Why is this passage here? The author is showing the outward reaction of Jonah’s heart, which does not share God’s compassion for the lost. Only later in the book will the inner reasons of Jonah’s heart come out.

What does this passage mean as a whole (what is the Big Idea)? Perhaps:

“Despite Jonah’s disobedience and endangering the people around him, God sovereignly and mercifully spared the sailors, leading them to fear Him, and spares His servant, as He continued to fulfill His plan of mercy.”
or

“Despite the perilous chastening that comes from Jonah’s disobedience, God mercifully spared the sailors and His servant, and continued to work out His plan of mercy.”

How does this passage point to or speak of Christ? Unlike Jonah, Jesus is the true prophet and servant of God who truly shares God’s heart of mercy for the lost. He did not run in the opposite direction but obeyed and came willingly to earth to preach God’s message, which He knew would ultimately mean death from His enemies, but mercy and forgiveness as well for those who turned to God in repentance.

› Application

Write down some key applications from these passages. (Again, use the three suggested questions above in “The Principle Explained.”)

Is there an application already in the text? Does the passage give some command or exhortation for how we should live?

No, not directly.

How does the situation of our lives today correspond with the situation of the original audience? What is similar? What did God say to them about that, and how would that apply to the similar circumstances in our lives?

If we compare ourselves, as God’s servant or God’s people, with Jonah, we see what blatant disobedience looks like and what it leads to. We see that our hearts (we find later that the heart was the real issue with Jonah) can become so resistant to God that we are capable of doing something completely opposite of what He told us to do in an effort to run from Him. We also see that our disobedience can endanger the well-being of everyone around us.

First, we should examine our hearts to see if they are right with God. We need Him to align our hearts with His so that we share His desires and purposes and are ready to obey when He tells us to do something.

Second, if we find ourselves in disobedience, we should be more like the sailors than Jonah and plead to God for mercy, fear Him, and worship Him with our lives as He deserves.

(1) What does this passage tell us about God? (2) How should we live in light of that?

(1) It tells us that God is serious about obedience, that He will chasten and discipline us in our disobedience. But we see (from the rest of the story) that God ultimately has a purpose in disciplining us – He is, in His sovereignty and power, continuing to carry out His good purpose and plan. While God desires our loving obedience, our disobedience is not able to thwart His will. He desires our heart, our loving obedience, and that we share His heart.

(2) In light of this, we should know that God is serious about obedience. We should ask Him to conform our hearts to His and change our hearts when we aren’t inclined to obey or follow His will. If we are under His discipline, we should realize that He is being merciful to us and wanting to work out His good purpose in our lives. We should turn to Him and thank Him for His mercy and His goodness that leads us (and others) to repentance (Romans 2:4).
Session 4
Dig/Discover

The Egg Yolk:
Studying the Text and Its Literary Context

Quick View

Careful observation of God’s Word is critical to understanding it. One of our primary goals in these lessons is to train our eyes to see those things in the text that are easily overlooked. In this session, we will observe together some of the most basic elements of the book of Jonah and in the process begin to develop observation skills that can be used with any book of the Bible.

Take Away

The teacher is expected to cover the following objectives concerning . . .

The hermeneutical principle (under “The Principle Explained”):
The learner will
- be introduced to the Egg Illustration and be given an explanation of each part of “the Egg”
- understand what the literary context of the text, or passage, is
- be introduced to the different aspects involved in studying the text within its literary context
- know specific questions to ask to help him think through studying the text within its literary context

The Book of Jonah (under “The Principle Practiced”):
The learner will
- describe the ideas that connect chapter 2 with the rest of the book

The heart of God for ministry (under “The Text Applied”):
The learner will
- consider what he might learn for his own life and ministry after studying Jonah’s prayer
**The Principle Explained**  
(Understanding the Hermeneutical Principle)

**Instructions for “The Principle Explained”**

In this session, begin by giving an overview and explanation of each part of the Egg Illustration. Then, focus more thoroughly on the Yolk – studying the text and its literary context.

Be sure to give a clear explanation of what the literary context is, and give them something clear and helpful to use by introducing them to the questions that will help them think through how to study a text within its literary context.

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**Teaching Tip – The Egg Illustration**

[Draw an egg, showing the yolk, the white, and the shell.]

The Yolk (The Text and Its Literary Context)

The White (The Historical Context)

The Shell (The Biblical Context)

What is this? It’s an egg!

What are the basic parts of an egg? [Label the different parts of the egg in the drawing.]

This illustration is a helpful way of thinking about studying the Bible.

The yolk represents the text and the literary context of a passage we are studying – in other words, not only the words, phrases, and sentences of the passage but also the surrounding paragraphs and chapters of the book as well.

The white represents the historical context – that is, what was going on in the world and culture of the people in the book or the passage. (This may not just be the historical context of the people written about in the text, but it may also be about the historical situation of the people the book was written to or of the person the book was written by.) The book of Jonah involved real people and took place in a real place at a particular time in history—the book of Jonah has a historical context.

Finally, the shell represents the larger Biblical context in which the text is placed. For example, the book of Jonah is one of the books of the Old Testament. The Old Testament, in turn, serves as the foundation for and precursor to the New Testament. The book of Jonah does not stand alone, but is part of God’s larger communication to mankind, which begins with Genesis and ends with Revelation. In other words, Jonah has a Biblical context.
Studying the Bible

- **The Egg Illustration** – Thinking about the different parts of an egg is a helpful way to think about studying the Bible.
  - **The Yolk** represents the text and literary context of a passage you are studying – including the words, phrases, and sentences of a passage as well as the surrounding paragraphs and chapters of the book.
  - **The White** represents the historical context – what was going on in the history and culture of the people in the book or the passage. (This may not just be the historical context of the people written about in the text, but it may also be about the historical situation of the people the text was written to or of the person the text was written by, such as the writer of one of the psalms.)
  - **The Shell** represents the Biblical context – the place where the text stands within the Old or New Testament and within the overarching message of the whole Bible.

Focusing on the Yolk – the Text and Its Literary Context

- Bible study and teaching and preaching must begin and end with the text. *The text must always shape and determine our message. And the literary context shapes our understanding of the text.* Our task as teachers and preachers of God’s Word is to study and understand the text within the context of the book in which it was written.

- **Studying the Text and Its Literary Context Will Involve:**
  - **Observation and Interpretation** – Using the skills we learned for inductive Bible study. We’ll first ask, “What does the text say?” Then, we’ll look to the surrounding literary context for clues on how to interpret it. We’ll seek to discover how ideas in the rest of the book shed light on our passage. We’ll ask: “What does the text mean in light of what comes before and after it?”
  - **Connections** – finding connections between the words, phrases, and ideas of the passage you are studying and the words, phrases, and ideas of the surrounding paragraphs and chapters of the book.
  - **The Big Idea** – discovering the overall message – what we will call the Big Idea – of the passage and of the book. We’ll ask: “What’s the Big Idea of the text?” “How does that fit into the Big Idea of the book?”

Understanding a Passage In Its Literary Context

Here are some helpful questions to ask:

- What are some important ideas found throughout this passage? Where do some of those important ideas from the passage appear in the rest of the book?

- What is the Big Idea of this passage – the main point the passage is getting at? How does the Big Idea of the passage relate to the message of the rest of the book?
Teaching Idea – What Kind of Book Is It?
Part of understanding the literary context is knowing what kind of literature, or genre, the book is. Depending on the opportunity you have with your group of learners, you may want to discuss this more in depth. In any case, we will discuss the types of literature we find in the Bible in later workshops.

Not all books of the Bible are the same. What kind of book is Jonah?

› **A Prophetic Book** – Prophetic books form a very important part of the Old Testament. What are some of the other prophetic books? There are 15 or 16 prophetic books in the Old Testament. By the way, how many prophetic books are in the New Testament? What are some characteristics of prophetic books?
  • Reminders of God’s greatness and holiness
  • Explanation of God’s purposes
  • Confrontations and warnings regarding sin
  • Judgments threatened and predicted
  • Future blessing predicted
  • Reminder of God’s activity in the world

› **A Historical Book** – It’s about real people and real places. Now some people don’t believe that Jonah is a historical book. Why might some doubt it? Because of the fish! In a later session, we will discover that Jonah really is a history book and that the fish was a real fish that first swallowed and then regurgitated Jonah. In other words, if you were to travel in a time machine back to the correct time and place, as you walked down the beach, you would stumble across Jonah dragging himself onto the shore, gasping for air.

› **A Drama** – It is like a two-act play, with all the characteristics of a great drama, including:
  • Interesting and complex characters
  • Several different scenes which flow from one to the next, forming a whole, coherent story
  • Dramatic tension and conflict
  • Resolution of the conflict (or, at least, a partial resolution)
  • Life lessons to be learned

› **Poetry** – Jonah also contains poetry. Chapter 2 is a poem. Perhaps it was originally sung as a song. What are some unique characteristics of Biblical poetry or songs?
  • Emotional language, speaking to the heart
  • Graphically visual language, using lots of creative imagery
  • Poetic forms, including Hebrew parallelism
The Principle Practiced
(Using the Principle to Study the Book of Jonah)

Studying the text and its literary context means being familiar not only with the text of the passage itself but also with the entire book as well.

Instructions for “The Principle Practiced”
In this session, we want to see how studying the literary context helps us interpret the text of a passage. In this case, we want to better understand Jonah’s prayer in Jonah 2 by looking at how it fits into its literary context and how it connects with major ideas and the overall message of the book of Jonah.

Suggested Questions
Below are suggested questions to help you guide the learners through each of the passages. Work through them yourself first so that you understand the points to bring out from the passages. At the back of this session are proposed answers to help you think through your answers even more.

Teaching Tip
As you study Jonah 2:1-10, you may have the learners work through the questions individually, in small groups, or with the group as a whole. Mix it up. Keep it moving. Keep it fun. Encourage learners as they make new discoveries.

Understanding a Passage In Its Literary Context

- Jonah 2:1–9
  How is chapter 2 different from the rest of the book of Jonah? How is that significant?

  What are some important ideas that come up or run throughout this passage?

  Where do some of those important ideas in chapter 2 come up in the rest of the book of Jonah?
What is the Big Idea of this passage – the main point the passage is getting at?

**Teaching Tip**
Since this is one of the first passages these learners are studying as a part of TNT, help guide the learners through it with helpful questions. Here are a few suggested questions:

- **How does Jonah describe the kind of situation he is in?**
  
  Verse two summarizes it at the very beginning: Jonah is in distress. The “for” in 2:3 helps us to see that verses 3-6 give a more specific picture of what Jonah has described at the beginning in verses 1-2. Again, it is a picture of distress (being cast into the deep, the waves rolling over him, thinking of being driven away from God’s sight). Verses 7-9a give us a conclusion. Again, his life was “fainting away” but there is also hope that he will live to worship the Lord with sacrifices and vows because of what God has done.

- **What actions does He describe God doing?**
  
  “He answered me” (2:2); “You cast me into the deep” (2:3); “Yet you brought up my life from the pit, O Lord my God” (2:6). In 2:7-8, it is implied that the Lord heard his prayer and answered it in His steadfast love.
  
  The description of what God does in 2:6 is important, because this is in the section that specifically describes Jonah’s situation. At the very end, when the “bars closed upon me forever” and the entire situation looked hopeless, God did something: He “brought up my life from the pit.” This goes along with the major idea that comes out at the beginning and end of the passage (see the next question).

- **How does the passage begin and end? What idea does the beginning and end have in common?**
  
  The idea of God’s salvation. At the beginning, Jonah says that he cried out, and “[he] heard my voice.” Then even more clearly at the end, we read, “Salvation belongs to the Lord.”

How does the Big Idea of Jonah’s prayer in chapter 2 (“Salvation belongs to the Lord”) relate to the message in the rest of the book of Jonah?

The big question after chapter 2 is: “Does this prayer mean that Jonah has repented?” How does understanding the rest of the book (the literary context) help answer that question?
The Text Applied
(Discovering the Heart of God for Ministry)

Think about how the passage we have studied might apply to your life and ministry.

**Instructions for “The Text Applied”**
Lead the learners in a time of discussion and reflection. We want them not just to study ideas in the passage but also to reflect on what God’s Word says. Give them an opportunity to do that, perhaps with the suggested question below.

Was there anything clearly missing in Jonah’s prayer to God, especially when we compare his response to the response of others in the book and to his own response in the rest of the book? When we find ourselves running from God, do we truly repent, or do we think we have come back to Him by simply praising Him?

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**A Closing Word**

What is true repentance? The Ninevites repented and the sailors seem to repent, but what about Jonah? In chapter 2, Jonah sounds repentant as he begins his praise to God by saying, “I called out to the LORD out of my distress, and he answered me” (2:2). But was Jonah’s heart truly changed? Was Jonah eager to preach to the Ninevites? Did he pray for them? Did he worship God for His kindness in saving them?

Jonah could recite the Scriptures, but his life was not consistent with his words. Although his mouth praised God, his heart was not humbled before Him. Jonah may have been sorry about the consequences of his sin that placed him in the stomach of a fish, but he was not repentant over his sin.

Being sorry for the consequences of sin is not the same as repenting from sin. Praising God without repentance does not honor Him. Surface obedience without an inward change does not glorify God. Are you mouthing words of praise to God but harboring sin in your heart? Is your life consistent with what you preach?

As teachers and preachers of God’s Word we may say the right things and look like we are worshiping God, but He is not interested in an outward show. Repent from your sin. Do not merely mouth words of praise to God, but worship Him with a true heart.
Sample Questions and Answers
from The Principle Practiced

Understanding a Passage In Its Literary Context

- **Jonah 2:1–9**

  How is chapter 2 different from the rest of the book of Jonah? How is that significant?
  
  We should notice very quickly that most of chapter 2 is a different type of literature than the rest of the book. It is poetry instead of narrative, or story, as we find in the rest of Jonah.
  
  “The psalm is more than a simple continuation of the narrative. As in other passages of Scripture, the change from narrative to poetry replays the events in a different key. . . . The psalm invites the readers to enter more fully into the meaning of the events.”

  What are some important ideas that come up or run throughout this passage?
  
  Distress, being (driven) away from God; God’s answering prayer and saving activity; the hope of worshiping God in His temple.

  It is interesting that the idea of repentance is not very clear in the psalm, if it is there at all.

  Where do some of those important ideas in chapter 2 come up in the rest of the book of Jonah?
  
  The distress of the sailors; the distress of the city of Nineveh; Jonah’s running away from the Lord’s presence and being cast into the sea; God answering the sailor’s prayer for mercy and calming the sea; and God’s seeing the repentance of Nineveh and relenting from His predicted judgment upon them.

  What is the Big Idea of this passage – the main point the passage is getting at?
  
  In our hopeless situation, God can save us, for salvation belongs to the Lord.

  How does the Big Idea of Jonah’s prayer in chapter 2 (“Salvation belongs to the Lord”) relate to the message in the rest of the book of Jonah?
  
  Jonah knows that salvation belongs to the Lord (4:2), yet he still does not share God’s compassion for others who need it. He has the right theology, but not the right heart. God is still working to make Jonah see that. It seems that Jonah has yet to really repent.

  The big question after chapter 2 is: “Does this prayer mean that Jonah has repented?” How does understanding the rest of the book (the literary context) help answer that question?
  
  Immediately after Jonah’s prayer in chapter 2, we read in chapter 3 that Jonah obeys when the Lord tells him a second time to go to Nineveh (3:1-3). If we are reading the story of Jonah as if we have never read it before, it would seem at this point that Jonah has repented because he prays and then does what God calls him to do.

  However, when we look at the entire book, especially chapter 4, we begin to wonder if Jonah really has repented. Yes, he obeys and does what God tells him to do, but we see that underneath, his heart is angry at God. He still has the resentment about God’s mercy that caused him to flee to Tarshish in the first place (4:2). So we wonder if Jonah has really turned to the Lord and repented in his heart.

  Looking at the entire book (the literary context) helps us see that even though Jonah may have said a nice prayer full of praise and with words of the correct theology (Are there really any words of sorrow and repentance, though?), his heart does not yet seem to be truly been repentant at all.

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Session 5

Do

Jonah 3:1-10

Quick View

This session will help learners become better expository preachers and teachers of God’s Word by giving them the opportunity to practice doing it. Each participant who has prepared a message on the passage will present a short version of how they would preach it. The other participants will offer helpful feedback about how the sermon communicated the message and meaning of the passage.

Take Away

The learners will sharpen their skills of exposition by
- preparing and presenting a message on the text
- discussing the text and sharing feedback with each other

Questions for Discussion

As you listen, make notes to answer the following questions:
- How did the presenter express the Big Idea of the passage?
- What were the main points of the passage (the structure)?
- How did the presenter explain how this passage fits into the message of the whole book (the context)?
- How does the passage point the listener to Christ (Biblical theology)?
- What does the passage have to say to us about our lives today (the aim/application)?

Instructions

- Remind the group who will present.
- Explain how things will proceed in the Do session.
- Assign a responder for each presenter.
- Assign a time keeper.
- Instruct the first presenter to read the passage and then to pray. Let the other presenters know that they can simply begin to preach when it is their turn. They can pray if they like.
- Allow presenter #1 to go.
- Allow presenter #2 to go.
- Allow presenter #3 to go (if applicable).
- Allow each of the responders to go (without any discussion in between).
- Facilitate the discussion with the rest of the group.

The teacher’s primary role is to listen and lead the discussion after the presenters are done. After the presentations have been completed, stand up and begin on a positive note by thanking the presenters for their work and preparation. Then, lead a discussion and let the small group give feedback on how the sermon communicated the message and meaning of the passage. The questions above are helpful to focus the discussion on how well the sermon explained what the passage was saying.
Teaching Tips

- Take notes. Otherwise, it will be easy to forget your observations once you start leading a discussion.
- After the presenters are finished, a good opening question to the responders is:
  - “What about the message spoke to your heart?” (This helps to diffuse a purely critical, intellectual response.)
- After the responders are finished, a good opening question to the group is:
  - “What are some of the things you liked about the message(s) we just heard?”
  - (For other good follow-up questions, see “Questions for Discussion” on the previous page.)
- Some questions to ask the presenters might be:
  - Tell us the Big idea of your sermon in one sentence.
  - Did you struggle with any part of the passage?
- The aim is not to tell the presenter how you would have preached the sermon. Instead, the aim is to help the presenter communicate what God’s Word says clearly and faithfully according to the gifts and abilities God has given to him.

Sample Conclusions

Jonah 3:1-10

Teaching Tip – Sample Conclusions

The teacher should study through and know the passage for each Do session thoroughly before the workshop. This will help him evaluate the sermons in light of the text and discuss the sermon and text with the group.

The following are sample conclusions from a study of this passage. It is okay if your conclusions or the presenter’s are slightly different or worded differently.

Context

Chapter three is significant for the structure of Jonah. The opening lines of this chapter (3:1-2) along with 1:1-2 serve as opening markers for the two-part structure of the book. Chapters 1–2 are about getting Jonah to go to Nineveh. Chapters 3–4 are about getting Jonah to serve Nineveh with God’s heart.

Structure

Seeing the big picture of this chapter is the best way to understand it.

- “Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time...” is the way this chapter begins. Pay close attention to what is actually said and how it is similar and different to 1:1-3.
- Jonah’s response is obedience, unlike in 1:3. He goes to Nineveh. But what we may miss is that this is only half the equation. The word that controlled his going (compare verses 2 and 3) is also the word that controlled his preaching (compare verses 2 and 4).
- Nineveh was a sizeable city (3:3). This makes what happens all the more amazing.
- Repentance overtakes Nineveh. Many surprises are found here. Some of them include the fact that
  - It is widespread. All respond, from the “greatest to the least.”
  - It is profoundly humble. The King expresses profound humility. Unlike Jonah himself, there is not an ounce of presumption on his part (see especially verse 9).
  - It is amazingly immediate. Do the math (3:3, 4; see also 4:5).
- This chapter ends with God’s compassion (verse 10). Rather than destruction, He gives His grace and mercy to the Ninevites. It is worth noting that this verse resolves the tension of verse 9. If we did not have verse 10 we would be left hanging as to the question of God’s grace and mercy.
A suggested outline of the structure:

3:1-3a The word of the Lord comes to Jonah a second time, and Jonah obeys.

3:3b-9 At Jonah’s preaching, Nineveh repents.

3:10 When God sees Nineveh’s response, God relents of the disaster He said He would bring on them.

Key Verses
3:1-2, 10

A key statement in this chapter comes, no doubt, in verse 2: “Go to Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you.” There is nothing new about the command to go to Nineveh (see 1:2), but the command to “proclaim to it the message I give you” (verse 2b) is completely new. This sets the events of chapter 3 in motion and carries them through to the end. Even God’s response at the close (verse 10) is directly tied to it. Verse 10 is also key as it resolves the great tension of verses 1–9.

Big Idea
God is pleased to express His grace and mercy through the faithful preaching of His Word.

(Another related possibility:)
God loves to show mercy when people repent and cry out to Him.

Aim/Application
(1) To reveal God’s heart for what it is – full of mercy and grace; (2) to underscore our need as preachers and teachers of the Word to be faithful to proclaim God’s Word and not our own.

Teaching Tip – Sample Conclusions
If you would rather have suggested discussion questions, you will find them below. The answers come from the same material that you will find above in “Sample Conclusions,” but it is simply in question and answer format.

Key Questions
1. Walk me through the passage. Help me see the big picture. What actually happens?
   - How does this chapter begin (verse 1-2)?
     “Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time...” is the way this chapter begins. Pay close attention to what is actually said and how it is similar and different to 1:1-3.
   - What is Jonah’s response (verse 3a)? What does that mean for Jonah once he arrives in Nineveh (think about verse 4 in relation to verse 2)?
     Jonah’s response is obedience, unlike in 1:3. He goes to Nineveh. But what we may miss is that this is only half the equation. The word that controlled his going (compare verses 2 and 3) is also the word that controlled his preaching (compare verses 2 and 4).
   - What do we learn about Nineveh (verse 3b)?
     Nineveh was a sizeable city (3:3). This makes what happens all the more amazing.
What happens in Nineveh (verses 4-9)? Is there anything surprising about it? If so, what?

Repentance overtakes Nineveh. Many surprises are found here. Some of them include the fact that
- It is widespread. All respond, from the “greatest to the least.”
- It is profoundly humble. The King expresses profound humility. Unlike Jonah, himself, there is not an ounce of presumption on his part (see especially verse 9).
- It is amazingly immediate. Do the math (3:3, 4; see also 4:5).

How does the chapter end (verse 10)?

This chapter ends with God’s compassion (verse 10). Rather than destruction, He gives His grace and mercy to the Ninevites. It is worth noting that this verse resolves the tension of verse 9. If we did not have verse 10 we would be left hanging as to the question of God’s grace and mercy.


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3. Is there a key statement(s) in this chapter? If so, what is it? Why do you think it is the key to the chapter?

A key statement in this chapter comes, no doubt, in verse 2: “Go to Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you.” There is nothing new about the command to go to Nineveh (see 1:2), but the command to “proclaim to it the message I give you” (verse 2b) is completely new. This sets the events of chapter 3 in motion and carries them through to the end. Even God’s response at the close (verse 10) is directly tied to it. Verse 10 is also key as it resolves the great tension of verses 1-9.
Session 6
Dig/Discover

The Egg White:
Understanding the Historical Context

Quick View

A key task of a teacher or preacher of God’s Word is to understand what a given text means. To be relevant to our audience, we must tell them what the text means for them. But, before we can understand what God’s Word means for our audience, we must first understand the world in which the author’s original audience lived. In this session we will focus on the historical context of the book. By historical context we mean the historical, cultural, religious, geographic, political, and linguistic context that would have shaped the meaning of these words to the original audience. We will seek to answer the question, “What did these words mean to the people who first heard them?”

Take Away

The teacher is expected to cover the following objectives concerning . . .

The hermeneutical principle (under “The Principle Explained”):
The learner will
- consider the difference between the literary context and the historical context
- discover the different aspects or pieces of what we mean by “historical context”
- learn the importance of understanding a book the way the original hearers would have understood it
- learn how to “travel” in time, first to the time and place when the words were first spoken, and then into our own time to apply what the Bible says

Jonah (under “The Principle Practiced”):
The learner will
- explore the geographical context of the book by finding key places on a map
- search out other texts that explain the historical and political context of Jonah’s time
- learn more about the religious context of Jonah’s world

The heart of God for ministry (under “The Text Applied”):
The learner will
- consider how to preach a message of judgment against the world and its sin while still sharing God’s heart of mercy for it
The Principle Explained
(Understanding the Hermeneutical Principle)

Instructions for “The Principle Explained”
Continue with the Egg Illustration by explaining what we mean by the historical context of a passage. Two things are important here:
- Help the learners see the difference between the literary context (which is concerned with what we read in the actual words of the book surrounding the passage) and the historical context (which has to do with world and events behind, and maybe not explained in, the words of the book).
- Help the learners to think about all of the different aspects of the historical context and how those things might influence our understanding of the text (this should become more evident as you work through the questions under “The Principle Practiced”).

Teaching Tip – The Egg Illustration
[Draw an egg, showing the yolk, the white, and the shell.]

What did the yolk represent? The text and the literary context of the passage we are studying. But the passage also has a historical context, represented by the white of the egg. And we use the label “historical” to refer to many aspects of the real-life context of the people and events of the passage, as well as the author who wrote it. The historical context includes the
- historical and political events
- family/tribal/ethnic relationships
- religious practices and ideas
- culture
- language
- geography

that made up the real-life, historical setting of the passage – the world in which the people of that day lived and thought.

Teaching Idea – Illustration
To illustrate what is involved in the historical context and why it is important, perhaps bring a newspaper article from a different place and read some of it to the learners. Help them to see that without much background knowledge of previous events, the people involved, or the ways things are done in that place, some of the information might seem unclear or unimportant to you. To fully comprehend what the article says, you need to know more about the historical context.
The Historical Context
The historical context of a passage is the real-life world of the time and place that surrounded the people that the passage was written about, written to, or written by. The historical context is made up of different elements including the
- historical
- political
- cultural
- linguistic
- family/tribal
- geographic
- religious

Why Is It Important?
- Understanding the historical context is important because we could wrongly interpret a book or passage if we don’t understand how the original hearers understood it.

How Do We Get There?
- If we are to interpret a book or passage correctly, we must travel back in time to the place where the original readers lived. If we are going to understand the text, we must first understand the text how the original audience understood it – and that means understanding the historical context.
The Principle Practiced
(Seeing the Principle in Our Study of the Book of Jonah)

Understanding Jonah

In order to understand the book of Jonah, we must understand the historical context, and that means traveling back to Northern Israel in the 8th century BC.

Instructions for “The Principle Practiced”

Help the learners see what difference understanding the historical context can make by working through the questions and passages below.

Suggested Questions

Below are suggested questions to help you guide the learners toward understanding the historical context of Jonah. Work through the questions yourself first so that you understand the points to bring out from the passages. At the back of this session are suggested answers to help you think through your answers even more.

- In order to understand the historical context of Jonah, we will focus especially on the following:
  - the geographical context
  - the historical and political contexts
  - the religious context

The Geographical Context of Jonah

Instructions for “The Geographical Context of Jonah”

Show a map of the Mediterranean Sea and surrounding lands. Label key places listed below, including the Fertile Crescent.

What places are mentioned in Jonah? Where are those places on a map?

Read 2 Kings 14:23-28. What other places do we learn about in this passage?
What do we learn about those places?
The Historical and Political Context of Jonah

- Israel lies at the crossroads of Asia, Africa, and Europe. Over the centuries, armies have marched back and forth across this land. Israel is geographically vulnerable. During the time of Jonah, Egypt was a great power to the south and Assyria was a great world power to the north. Assyria actually invaded and destroyed Israel a few decades after the time of Jonah (in 721 BC). To the west, Babylon was rising, destined to become a great world power within a few decades. Nineveh itself was destroyed in 612 BC by a coalition of nations led by Babylon. The book of Nahum is a prophecy of this coming destruction of Assyria and its capital Nineveh.

What else does 2 Kings 14 tell us about the history taking place during the time of Jonah?

The Religious Context of Jonah

We’ve already learned that Jonah was a prophet of the Lord. What was a prophet’s role?

What was the spiritual condition of the northern kingdom of Israel? (Read 2 Kings 14:26-27.)

What would it have been like to be a prophet in this situation?

We’ve learned about the religious context of Israel and Jonah, but the other characters in the book of Jonah also had a religious context. What do we know about the religious context of the sailors – their world of beliefs and their religious impulses?
What do we know about the religious context of the Ninevites?

**Should Jonah Be Understood as History or Allegory?**

Would the original hearers of the book of Jonah have understood this book as history, as an allegory, or as a parable?

- A basic rule of good Biblical interpretation is: *Interpret the text naturally*. We interpret a text literally unless there's a reason not to.

What clues do we discover from the book of Jonah and other places in the Bible that tell us that the book is true history and not allegory?

- What clues do we find about the person of Jonah?

- What clues do we find about Nineveh?

- What clues do we find about the fish? (See also Matthew 12:38-41.)
The Text Applied
(Discovering the Heart of God for Ministry)

**Instructions for “The Text Applied”**
Help the learners think about what they’ve learned in this session and how it might apply to their own lives and ministries.

Jonah had seen God’s mercy extended to Israel, even when they didn’t deserve it. Later, though, Jonah was unwilling to share God’s mercy with other people who didn’t deserve it – namely Nineveh.

We’ve been given the mercy of God in Christ. Are we willing to share it with the world? How are we supposed to preach a message of judgment against the world and its sin while still sharing God’s heart of mercy for it?

A Closing Word
Throughout the pages of the Bible we see God’s heart as the Savior who seeks lost people. Jesus explained His mission by saying He “came to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10).

God has given you the privilege and high calling of working together with Him to seek lost people and bring them the gospel so that God would save them. The apostle Paul wrote, “How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?” (Romans 10:14).

Are you intentionally taking the gospel to lost people? Are you seeking them? Are you preaching the gospel of repentance and faith in Christ alone so that sinners call upon the name of the Lord and are saved? God called Jonah to proclaim repentance and faith in Him, and Jonah finally did - with a stubborn heart.

Be faithful to the high calling and privilege God has given you. Ask God to place a fire in your heart to seek lost people with the saving gospel of Christ. Be like Paul who said, “Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel” (1 Corinthians 9:16).
Sample Questions and Answers from The Principle Practiced

The Geographical Context of Jonah
What places are mentioned in Jonah? Where are those places on a map?
- Joppa - Sounds like it was a significant seaport.
- Tarshish - Where’s this?! We actually don’t know. Certainly it’s far away. Perhaps it was the port city of Tartessos, on the far end of the Mediterranean Sea in modern day Spain. Another possibility is Tarsus in Asia Minor.
- Nineveh - Nineveh was the capital of the Assyrian empire, which had been the most powerful nation in the region for several centuries. What does the text say about Nineveh? It’s “a great city” (three times! in 1:2; 3:2; 4:11).
- The Great Sea (Mediterranean Sea) is not mentioned but is present in the story.

Read 2 Kings 14:23-28. What other places do we learn about in this passage? What do we learn about those places?
- Samaria - The religious and political capital of the northern kingdom of Israel.
- Gath Hepner - Small town where Jonah lives. Jonah is about to “see the world!” The Lord pushes Jonah way out of his “comfort zone.”
- Israel - Israel’s borders were expanded during the time of Jonah. In fact, he predicted this.
- Israel is at the end of the Fertile Crescent. Abraham, the father of the nation of Israel, traveled the Fertile Crescent from Ur of Chaldea north to Haran and then south to Israel. The Fertile Crescent is a well-watered, agriculturally productive area surrounded by desert.

The Historical and Political Context of Jonah
- Israel lies at the crossroads of Asia, Africa, and Europe. Over the centuries, armies have marched back and forth across this land. Israel is geographically vulnerable. During the time of Jonah, Egypt was a great power to the south and Assyria was a great world power to the north. Assyria actually invaded and destroyed Israel a few decades after the time of Jonah (in 721 BC). To the west, Babylon was rising, destined to become a great world power within a few decades. Nineveh itself was destroyed in 612 BC by a coalition of nations led by Babylon. The book of Nahum is a prophecy of this coming destruction of Assyria and its capital Nineveh.

What else does 2 Kings 14 tell us about the history taking place during the time of Jonah?
- Jonah lived during the 8th century BC during reign of Jeroboam II (reigned 793–753 BC).
- Jonah occurred during the time of the divided kingdom. Jonah was a prophet to the northern kingdom, known as Samaria or Israel.
- The people of Israel at this time were “bitterly suffering.” This suffering was likely due to other nations, since God’s response is to “save them by the hand of Jeroboam.”
- Jeroboam II was a wicked king. He “did what was evil in the eyes of the LORD” (2 Kings 14:24).
- Jeroboam II was militarily aggressive. He expanded Israel’s borders, with God’s help. He even conquered Damascus to the north (the capital of modern-day Syria), which rarely was included within Israel’s borders.
- Meanwhile, during the time of Jeroboam II, there were two kings (Amariah and Azariah, also know as Uzziah) in Judah who both “did what was right in the eyes of the LORD.” See 2 Kings 14–15 and 2 Chronicles 25–26 for more background on these two kings of Judah.
- There was conflict between Judah and Israel during these days.
The Religious Context of Jonah

We've already learned that Jonah was a prophet of the Lord. What was a prophet's role?

- To remind of God's greatness and holiness
- To explain God's purposes
- To warn against sin
- To announce coming judgments
- To predict future blessing
- To remind of God's activity in the world

What was the spiritual condition of the northern kingdom of Israel? (Read 2 Kings 14:26-27.)

Terrible! All the kings of Israel were wicked kings. Samaria became a center of false religion that sought to parallel the true worship in Jerusalem, but instead pursued idol worship, prostitution, and evil sacrifices. Samaria was an abomination to the Lord.

What would it have been like to be a prophet in this situation?

Very difficult! Very discouraging. It is amazing that the Lord would still keep His covenant with His people. Read 2 Kings 14:26-27. He loves people, even when they are full of wickedness. He warns them through His prophets. He keeps blessing them through His prophets and even gives their wicked king military success.

Israel, at this time in its life, is no different from the rest of the nations, frankly. In fact, the name of the king is significant: Jeroboam II. What was Jeroboam I (the first) like? It says, “He did not depart from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat” (2 Kings 14:24, italics for emphasis). Then there is a significant statement: Jeroboam II restored the borders of Israel (2 Kings 14:25). Why is God blessing Israel by restoring their borders? It’s a huge act of mercy in the life of Israel.

And then it says, “according to the word of the Lord, the God of Israel, which he spoke by his servant Jonah” (14:25). What would it be like to see the mercy of God in a significant way when Israel didn't deserve it? Israel was suffering bitterly (14:26). Then Jonah brings the word of mercy to Israel who didn't deserve it. Here's the prophet who has experienced God’s mercy to a people who didn't deserve it, who are no different than the world. He's seen God’s mercy extended there. Why would he be so against God’s mercy being extended to the rest of the world? He didn't want to share it.

And here's the application for us: We've been given the mercy of God in Christ. Shouldn't we be willing to share it? Do we just preach judgment against the world, or do we want to share God's mercy with the world through the gospel? Do we preach God's mercy just for the church and God's judgment for the world? Do we just leave it at that, without expressing to the church that we pray God will show His mercy to the world even when they don't deserve it?

So God wants His servant to share His heart of mercy for the world, even when preaching a message of judgment against it. It's easy to just look at the world and preach, “God's against you and your sin.” It's easy to miss and not share God's heart of mercy. We need to pray, “God, would you show the world your mercy, your kindness, and lead them to repentance? We would pray that you would show them mercy.”

We've learned about the religious context of Israel and Jonah, but the other characters in the book of Jonah also had a religious context. What do we know about the religious context of the sailors -- their world of beliefs and their religious impulses?

We see the sailors crying out to their gods. Later, we see them calling out to the Lord.

What do we know about the religious context of the Ninevites?

We see the Ninevites repenting and fasting after learning of the coming judgment of God. We see all of the major characters crying out to the true
and the living God. What an amazing God we have—He shows mercy on Israel; on a group of pagan sailors; on the wicked, pagan city of Nineveh; and even on Jonah himself.

**Should Jonah Be Understood as History or Allegory?**

Would the original hearers of the book of Jonah have understood this book as history, as an allegory, or as a parable?

- A basic rule of good Biblical interpretation is: *Interpret the text naturally.*
  
  We interpret a text literally, unless there’s a reason not to.

What clues do we discover from the book of Jonah and other places in the Bible that tell us that the book is true history and not allegory?

- **What clues do we find about the person of Jonah?**
  
  Jonah is real, historical person
  
  - He’s the “son of Amittai” (1:1; not, “There once was a (unnamed) man . . . .”)
  
  - “The word of the LORD” is a real word that comes to real people!
  
  - 2 Kings 14:25 affirms Jonah’s historicity

- **What clues do we find about Nineveh?**
  
  Nineveh was a real city, the capital of the Assyrian empire, known for violence and ruthlessness. Nineveh had walls 35-meters high and thick enough to provide a two-way street for chariots on top of the wall!

- **What clues do we find about the fish? (See also Matthew 12:38-41.)**
  
  - “The word of the LORD came . . . .” Anytime we see this phrase, we take it seriously and literally. It’s a real word being spoken to real people in a real time and place.
  
  - The entire book has a factual, matter-of-fact tone about it. Even the part about the fish is understated – the fish isn’t described as a six-headed monster but rather as simply “a great fish.”
  
  - How does Jesus view Jonah in Matthew 12:38-41? Clearly as historical. In fact, He compares the three days between His coming death and resurrection with the three days Jonah spent in the belly of the fish.
Quick View
This session will help learners become better expository preachers and teachers of God’s Word by giving them the opportunity to practice doing it. Each participant who has prepared a message on the passage will present a short version of how they would preach it. The other participants will offer helpful feedback about how the sermon communicated the message and meaning of the passage.

Take Away
The learners will sharpen their skills of exposition by
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- Remind the group who will present.
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The teacher’s primary role is to listen and lead the discussion after the presenters are done. After the presentations have been completed, stand up and begin on a positive note by thanking the presenters for their work and preparation. Then, lead a discussion and let the small group give feedback on how the sermon communicated the message and meaning of the passage. The questions above are helpful to focus the discussion on how well the sermon explained what the passage was saying.
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  - “What about the message spoke to your heart?” (This helps to diffuse a purely critical, intellectual response.)
- After the responders are finished, a good opening question to the group is:
  - “What are some of the things you liked about the message(s) we just heard?”
  - (For other good follow-up questions, see “Questions for Discussion” on the previous page.)
- Some questions to ask the presenters might be:
  - Tell us the Big Idea of your sermon in one sentence.
  - Did you struggle with any part of the passage?
- The aim is not to tell the presenter how you would have preached the sermon. Instead, the aim is to help the presenter communicate what God’s Word says clearly and faithfully according to the gifts and abilities God has given to him.

Sample Conclusions
Jonah 4:1-11

Teaching Tip – Sample Conclusions

The teacher should study through and know the passage for each Do session thoroughly before the workshop. This will help him evaluate the sermons in light of the text and discuss the sermon and text with the group.

The following are sample conclusions from a study of this passage. It is okay if your conclusions or the presenter’s are somewhat different or worded differently.

Context
With chapter 4, we reach the end of the story in the book of Jonah. The climax of the book has just happened in chapter 3: after Jonah’s preaching, Nineveh repents, and God relents of the disaster He had said He would bring. So, chapter 4 brings us to the resolution of the story, the explanation in light of the event. The resolution brings out the important things that help us to see the underlying message and point of the story.

Structure

4:1-4 God asks Jonah if he does well to be angry over God’s compassion on Nineveh.

4:5-9 In response to God’s question, Jonah says that he is doing well to be angry enough to die over a plant that shaded him.

4:10-11 God asks Jonah, in light of Jonah’s compassion for a plant, if He should not have compassion on Nineveh.

Alternately, the structure could be simply:

4:1-4 God asks Jonah if he does well to be angry over God’s compassion on Nineveh.

4:5-11 God asks Jonah, in light of Jonah’s concern over a plant, if He should not have compassion on Nineveh.
**Big Idea**

It is not enough for us to faithfully proclaim God’s Word; we must also do so with His heart.

(Another way of putting it:) God wants us share His heart of compassion for lost people, even our enemy.

**Aim/Application**

(1) To engage the listener in an exploration of God’s heart as well as his or her own heart, (2) to help him or her see just how broad the chasm between God’s heart and his or her own heart actually is, and (3) to invite the listener to pray for God’s work to change his or her heart to reflect God’s own heart.

**Key Questions**

1. Who are the main characters in chapter 4? How would you describe their attitudes and actions? Support your answers with specific references from the chapter.
   
   The main characters (as in the rest of the book) are Jonah and God. Jonah is angry and his anger grows the further we go into the chapter. God is true to His name (4:2; Exodus 34:6), and remains so to the very end (4:10-11), even with Jonah (4:5-8).

2. Are there any repetitions in this chapter? Is so, where? How do these repetitions inform the structure of the chapter?
   
   Repetitions are found in vv.3 and 8 and also in vv.4 and 9. Verses 3 and 8 reveal Jonah’s suicidal despair, “it is better for me to die than to live.” Verses 4 and 9 present God’s probing question, “Have you any right to be angry?” The second occurrence of the question (v.9) draws from the visual aid God employs to challenge Jonah’s heart and so adds “about the vine” (v.9). Observing these repetitions is key to seeing the inherent structure and getting the main idea.

3. Is there anything surprising in this chapter? If so, what?
   
   So much is surprising in this chapter. Surprising, isn’t it, that...
   - Jonah grows angry (4:1) while God pours out His compassion (3:10).
   - Jonah’s anger is expressed through prayer (4:2).
   - Jonah, having kept his reasons buried so long, finally reveals (4:2) why he never wanted to go to Nineveh in the first place (1:3).
   - Jonah’s anger is directed toward God’s character (4:2).
   - Jonah would rather die than live alongside a forgiven Ninevite (4:3).
   - Jonah, already knowing the outcome of God’s mercy, should wait to see what happens to Nineveth (4:5). Why doesn’t he pack it up and go home? Does he think God will alter His nature to forgive (4:2)?
   - The worm, the wind, and the sun heed God’s voice while Jonah turns a deaf ear.
   - Jonah cares more about his creaturely comfort than the lives of real people (4:10-11).

4. What is surprising about the way the book ends? Why do you think it ends this way and not another? Why did the writer bother to include chapter 4? Why didn’t he include a chapter 5? What effect does this ending have upon the reader?
   
   Surprisingly, the book ends with a question. If the writer had ended at 3:10, we would have a book about God’s driving compassion for sinners. If he had included a chapter 5, then we might learn whether Jonah ever repents. Instead, the writer ends with a question. He draws us into the question and

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2 Jonah is one of only two books in the Bible to end with a question. The other book is Nahum. Ironically, the question in Nahum (3:19) is about Nineveh as well. While the question asked by God in Jonah focuses on God’s desire to have compassion on Nineveh, the question in Nahum, also asked by God, but many years later, focuses on the scope of Nineveh’s unceasing evil, for which God will surely bring judgment on them.
calls for an answer not just from Jonah, but also from us. Are we really like God? Do we share His heart of compassion?
Session 8
Dig/Discover

The Egg Shell: Understanding the Larger Biblical Context

Quick View

In this session, we will explore another aspect of context—the larger, Biblical context of Jonah. We will seek to understand how the book of Jonah fits in with the larger story of the Bible.

Take Away

The teacher is expected to cover the following objectives concerning . . .

- **The hermeneutical principle** (under “The Principle Explained”):
  - The learner will
    - understand what we mean by the larger Biblical context
    - learn the different ways to think about how the book of the Bible fits into the larger Biblical context
    - begin to consider what the overall message, or Big Idea, of the Bible is

- **Jonah** (under “The Principle Practiced”):
  - The learner will
    - identify Jonah’s place in the canon and in the overall storyline of the Bible
    - identify connecting themes that Jonah shares in common with the rest of the Bible and discover where those themes originate in the Old Testament and how they are developed in the New Testament
    - think about how Jonah contributes to the overall message, or Big Idea, of the Bible
    - explore how the book of Jonah relates to our Lord Jesus Christ

- **The heart of God for ministry** (under “The Text Applied”):
  - The learner will
    - reflect on God’s purposes and plan that we see in the overall picture of the Bible and how that affects his view of ministry
Instructions for “The Principle Explained”
Help the learner to see the last and broadest area of context – the Biblical context. Begin by helping him to see what we mean by the Biblical context and then the different ways we can find how a book of the Bible connects with themes and the overall message of the rest of the Bible.

Teaching Tip – The Egg Illustration
[Draw the Egg Illustration once again.]

- The Yolk (The Text and Its Literary Context)
- The White (The Historical Context)
- The Shell (The Biblical Context)

The broadest level of context is represented by the shell of the egg. The shell addresses these questions:
- How does the passage or the book fit into the rest of the Bible?
- In other words, what major themes or ideas found in the rest of Scripture emerge in this book or are expanded upon by this book or passage?
- What do the things in this passage or book have to do with Christ?

Understanding Biblical Context – Seeing the Big Picture of the Bible
- Understanding the Biblical Context of a passage or book means seeing the big picture of the story of the Bible and how a particular book or passage fits into it.
- The overall plan of God is progressively revealed through the Scriptures. Every book of the Bible is either a continuation or expansion of what God has revealed before or may be further explained by what will come afterwards in the rest of Scripture. Important truths begin in seed form in the early chapters of the Bible and then grow and fully develop as Scripture unfolds.
- The overall story of God’s plan undergirds each book of the Bible. That plan is also known as
  - the “Big Idea of the Bible” or
  - the “Story of Redemption” or
  - “Salvation History”
How to Look at the Text in the Broader Biblical Context

- First, think about where the book you are studying fits into the canon and storyline of the Bible.

  Is it in the Old Testament or New Testament? What smaller section of the Old or New Testament is it in? What part do those books of the Bible play in revealing God’s message? Where does this book fit into the overall storyline of the Bible?

- Second, look for connecting themes that the book or the passage has in common with the rest of the Bible.

  What are the major ideas or themes in the passage or book you are studying? Where do those themes appear in other parts of the Bible? Where do they begin in the Old Testament? How are they developed? How are they fulfilled in the New Testament and in the person of Jesus Christ?

- Finally, look at the Big Idea of the Bible and how the book or passage you are studying connects with that overall message.

  What is the main message of the Bible? How does the book or passage you are studying contribute to that overall message, or Big Idea?

The Big Idea of the Bible

- Thinking about the Big Idea of the Bible and how to capture all of the details of the Bible into one sentence may seem overwhelming. However looking at the beginning and end of the Bible gives us clues to finding the Big Idea.

- The Bible is not a collection of random books. It has a deliberate design, a natural flow, and a clear focus.

- By observing the beginning and the end and a bit that flows in between, we can see the overall message of the Bible. It is a book about God who claims a people for Himself to live and dwell with Him for eternity. They will be His people and He will be their God.

- At the center of the Bible stands Jesus. He is the clear focus. All roads in the Bible lead to Him, and in Him God’s work to redeem a people for Himself is accomplished. Seeing Jesus at the center shapes the way we think about and communicate any book or passage in the Bible and draws us into a deeper relationship of love and commitment to Him.
The Principle Practiced
(Using the Principle in Our Study of the Book of Jonah)

Think through the categories and passages below to discover the way that Jonah connects with the larger Biblical context.

**Instructions for “The Principle Practiced”**
Help the learners see how Jonah fits into the larger Biblical context by
- looking at Jonah’s place in the canon and storyline of the Bible
- finding the connecting themes that Jonah shares in common with the rest of the Bible
- seeing how the story of Jonah points to Jesus Christ
- seeing how Jonah fits into the Big Idea of the Bible

**Suggested Questions**

Below are suggested questions to help you guide the learners to discover how Jonah fits into the larger Biblical context. Work through the questions yourself first so that you understand the points to bring out from the book and other passages. At the back of this session are suggested answers to help you think through your answers even more.

- **Jonah’s place in the Bible**
  - Where does Jonah fit within the canon of the Bible?
  - Where does the book of Jonah fit into the overall storyline of the Bible? How does it fit within the overall flow of Biblical history?

- **Themes from Jonah in the Rest of the Bible**
  - What are some important themes we find in the book of Jonah? In other words, what major ideas or themes from the rest of the Bible also appear in the book of Jonah?
God’s Compassion for the Nations and for the Lost

- Let’s look at one theme that we find in Jonah – God’s compassion for the nations and for the lost – and let’s find
  - where that theme begins in the Bible
  - how it develops in the rest of the Old Testament, and
  - how it is fulfilled in Christ and explained in the New Testament.

Teaching Tip – Chart

Following this section of questions is a helpful chart that maps out the theme of God’s compassion for the nations through Jonah and the rest of the Bible, as well as Jonah’s place within the Big Idea of the Bible. Use the chart and the questions below to help you and the group trace the theme of God’s compassion for the nations through the Bible. You may try to draw the chart in some way on a white board as you work through the questions. It may help the learner to see the connection of this theme throughout different parts of the Bible in a visual way.

- Where do we first find the idea of God’s compassion or mercy for the nations in the Old Testament?

- Where else do we see the idea of God’s compassion or mercy for the nations in the Law (the first five books of the Old Testament)?

- Where do we find the theme of God’s concern for the nations in the Writings (especially the Psalms)?

- How do we see the theme of God’s compassion for the nations developed in the Prophets?
In the Gospels, how do we see God’s compassion for the nations and for the lost embodied and fulfilled in the person and work of Jesus Christ?

How does the rest of the New Testament reflect on and explain God’s compassion for the nations and how it is fully expressed in Christ?

**Teaching Idea – Extra Questions**
You may want to work through the next two questions on your own. You may not have the time to go through these questions as you teach your group of TNTers, but the questions are good to work through and understand to help you in your teaching.

What does the book of Jonah teach about the God of Israel? What does it tell us about His heart for the Gentiles?

Jonah and the Big Idea of the Bible

Teaching Tip
You may not have time to work through all of the following questions as you teach. Working through the chart and tracing the theme of God’s compassion for the nations will take a significant amount of time.

If you find yourself with only a few minutes left, consider the following option: Instead of working through all of the questions below, have the TNTers reflect on how the Bible ends and begins, the devastating effects of sin, and how the person and work of Jesus Christ changed everything. Then, simply suggest a Big Idea of the Bible instead of having the learners take the time to work through it. In a later workshop, a discussion on the Big Idea of the Bible will happen again, and you can use that time to work through the Big Idea of the Bible more thoroughly. After coming up with a Big Idea of the Bible, then discuss with the learners the significance of the book of Jonah in light of the Bible’s larger story.

Look first at the end and then at the beginning of the Bible for clues that will help you discover the Big Idea of the Bible.

Revelation 21:1-3
- What do these verses actually say?
- What is surprising about it?
- Do these verses remind you of any others found in the Bible?
- Why are these verses so important? Think about this in the light of the broader context of the chapter and the Bible.
Genesis 1:1-2:3

- What is going on in this passage?

- How does Revelation 21:1-3 shape our understanding of Genesis 1:1-2:3?

Between Genesis 1:1-2:3 and Revelation 21:1-3 comes Genesis chapter 3 (along with a lot of other material) . . .

Genesis 3

- What does Genesis 3 do to the story?

- With the broken relationship between God and man described in Genesis 3, could the story of the Bible ever have led straight to the wonderful things described in Revelation 21:1-3? Why or why not?
• What makes the difference? What takes us from the condition of Genesis 3 to that of Revelation 21:1-3? (You may wish to consider Revelation 5 for part of your answer.)

• What is the significance of Luke 24 for the Big Idea of the Bible?

• After looking at these verses, how would you state the Big Idea of the Bible?

• What is the significance of the book of Jonah in light of the Big Idea of the Bible?
How the Book of Jonah Fits into a Biblical Theology of God’s Heart for the Lost/Nations

Genesis 12:3 - I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you. (NIV)

Revelation 7:9 - After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb...

Isaiah 49:6 - he says: “It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel: I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”

John 1:1-4
John 3:16-17
Matthew 5:14-16
1 Peter 2:9-10
Matthew 28:18-20
Ephesians 2:11-22
Philippians 2:5-11
1 Timothy 1:12-16

Exod 34:6
Psalm 67
Jonah
Jonah 4:2

Psalm 67
Jonah

God’s abundant mercy revealed in Jesus

Matthew 11:28
Matthew 28:19
Isaiah 49:6
Isaiah 56:3-7

Isaiah 56:3 - Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the Lord say, “The Lord will surely separate me from his people”; and let not the eunuch say, “Behold, I am a dry tree.”

John 4:4

Isaiah 56:7 - these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.”

Mark 11:17
Jn 10:14-16

Jesus’ words were not new to Israel. He was saying what God had said all along.

Deuteronomy 10:18 - He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing.

Leviticus 19:10, 33-34; 23:22; Numbers 15:15; Deuteronomy 24:19

Is the size of my heart growing to fit the size of God’s mercy?
The Text Applied
(Discovering the Heart of God for Ministry)

Understanding the overarching story of the Bible should not just influence our understanding of Scripture. It should also change our hearts as we see more of who God is and what His purposes are in Christ.

Instructions for “The Text Applied”
Bring the understanding of the Biblical context of Jonah home to the learners’ hearts by helping them to connect a change in their perspective of the Bible with a fresh view of God and His purposes.

Teaching Ideas – Questions to Ask
Reflect on how understanding the overall picture of the Bible helps us to better see the purposes and heart of God. Below are some questions you might ask to generate some thoughtful discussion:

- What does the big picture of the story of the Bible tell you about the purposes and heart of God?
- How does seeing God’s heart and purposes change the way you think about ministry to people?

God’s Overarching Purposes and Our Ministry for Him
Reflections:

A Closing Word
What is God’s ultimate purpose in saving lost people? The goal of redemption is the glory of God. God’s ultimate purpose in saving lost people is the manifestation of His glory through creating a people for His Son who will praise and worship Him forever (Phil 2:9-11).

Our motivation for evangelism is the glory of God. As we seek to glorify God, we delight in what He delights. God delights in saving lost people. Jesus said, “There is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents” (Luke 15:10).

All of heaven rejoiced when the Ninevites repented. Jonah, however, was oblivious to God’s glory and tragically out of step with His joy. Instead of rejoicing, Jonah was so depressed that he wanted to die (4:3, 8, 9).

Are you passionate about God’s glory? Do you desire lost people to be saved so that God will be continually glorified? Do you delight in His joy over saving one lost sinner? Pray that God will give you a passion for His glory. A passion for God causes us to yearn with compassion over the lost. When we love God, we love what He loves. God loves lost people (John 3:16).
Suggested Questions and Answers from The Principle Practiced

- Jonah’s place in the Bible
  - Where does Jonah fit within the canon of the Bible?
    The book of Jonah is found within the Prophets in the Old Testament, specifically among the minor prophets. The prophets reminded the people of God how they should be living in light of the law – the covenant that God made with them through Moses (found within the first five books of the Old Testament).

    The Prophets contain the written record of the messages that God gave to His people through the prophets – about how they should be living, warning against sin, and predicting both judgment as well as restoration and hope. Jonah is unlike any of the other prophets, though. Instead of containing the messages of the prophet, Jonah is mostly a story about what happens to the prophet – and to the other nation he preaches to. Yet, it was still written to Israel, and implied in the story is a message for Israel to consider and take to heart.

  - Where does the book of Jonah fit into the overall storyline of the Bible? How does it fit in with the overall flow of Biblical history?
    Jonah lived and ministered a few decades before the northern kingdom of Israel was sent by God into exile at the hands of the Assyrians (Nineveh was a key city of the Assyrian empire).

    Just to review, though, we can think of the history of the Old Testament in terms of a few important people.

    First is Adam. God creates the world and people, and everything in it is very good. Then sin and death enter the world through Adam’s disobedience to God.

    Then there is Abraham. We see God initiating a plan to restore the relationship between Himself and mankind. He begins by forming a people for Himself, through His covenant with Abraham, through whom all the nations of the earth would be blessed.

    Then, later, Moses. God forms a nation from the promised descendants of Abraham, and God establishes a covenant with them through Moses, giving them the law and eventually leading them through Moses to the Promised Land.

    Then David. After the people live in the land, God gives them a king. God chooses David and establishes a covenant with Him, saying that David’s throne would be established forever.

    After Solomon, David’s son, the nation is torn into two kingdoms (in 931 BC), and after a little less than two hundred years, we come to the time of Jonah. Soon afterwards, in 722/721 BC, the northern kingdom will go into exile under the Assyrians. Later, in 586 BC, the southern kingdom of Judah will be exiled under the Babylonians. After seventy years, according to God’s promise, people begin to be released and come back.

    After 400 years, God begins to fulfill all of His promises through the birth of Jesus, the long-awaited King. We read about His birth, life, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension back into heaven.

    After this, we read about the beginning of the church on Pentecost and the spread of the gospel, not just in Jerusalem and Judea, but into the rest of the world.
Themes from Jonah in the Rest of the Bible

What are some important themes we find in the book of Jonah? In other words, what major ideas or themes from the rest of the Bible also appear in the book of Jonah?

(Answers will vary, but here are some:)
- God’s mercy or compassion (on the Ninevites but also on Jonah)
- Perhaps more specifically, God’s compassion for the lost or for the nations
- Disobedience
- Repentance
- Worship
- The judgment of God
- God’s sovereignty (sending a storm, causing the lots to fall on Jonah, appointing a fish, appointing a plant, and so on)
- God speaking
- The patience of God (related to God’s mercy)

God’s Compassion for the Nations and for the Lost

Let’s look at one theme that we find in Jonah – God’s compassion for the nations and for the lost – and let’s find:
- where that theme begins in the Bible
- how it develops in the rest of the Old Testament, and
- how it is fulfilled in Christ and explained in the New Testament

Where do we first find the idea of God’s compassion or mercy for the nations in the Old Testament?

Genesis 12:1-3
Here, God not only wants to bless Abraham and create a people for Himself through him, God intends for His blessing to go through Abraham to all the families of the earth.

When the Lord passes down the same promise to Isaac (in Genesis 26:4), the promise is even more explicit: “In your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.” The blessing will go out through the offspring of Abraham and Isaac to all the nations of the earth. We will see later that this was supposed to be through Israel, but ultimately it was through the true offspring, the true representative of the people of Israel, Jesus Christ.

Where else do we see the idea of God’s compassion or mercy for the nations in the Law (the first five books of the Old Testament)?

Exodus 34:6-7
This is a landmark verse in the Old Testament, and the description it gives of God’s character is repeated or restated in many other places in the Old Testament (Psalm 86:15; 103:8; 145:8; Joel 2:13). And of course the description is repeated as a central and key verse in the book of Jonah (4:2). It begins by describing God’s character as “merciful and gracious.”

Deuteronomy 10:18
We see that God is not just merciful and gracious to people from Israel, but He also loves those who come to Him from other nations as well. He loves the sojourner, or “foreigner” or “stranger.”

Other verses in the law that show God’s concern for the sojourner are Leviticus 19:33-34 – where God commands His people as well to love the sojourner – and Leviticus 19:10, 23:22, and Deuteronomy 24:19 – where God commands His people to leave enough when they harvest their crops for the sojourner (and the widow and orphan) to gather and have for food to eat.

Where do we find the theme of God’s concern for the nations in the Writings (especially the Psalms)?

Psalm 67
This psalm expresses the desire for God to be gracious to and bless His
people. Why? So that God’s saving power may be known among all nations (67:1-2; an idea that echoes God’s promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:3). The psalmist wants all the nations, all peoples, to praise and fear God, for He judges the peoples with equity and guides the nations upon the earth (Psalm 67:3-5).

- **How do we see the theme of God’s compassion for the nations developed in the Prophets?**

  We see it especially in Isaiah.

  Isaiah 49:6
  
  This verse is among the “Servant Songs” of Isaiah, where God is speaking to or about His servant – referring ultimately to His Son, Jesus. God says that it is not enough for His servant to restore the people of Israel and Judah. Instead, “I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”

  Other important verses are Isaiah 56:3, 7, where God says that He will not reject the foreigner and that He will gather “others” (besides the outcasts of Israel) to Himself.

  Also, in Isaiah 19, Isaiah speaks of the day in which God will do His work among the Egyptians, causing them to turn to Him (19:22). He has said of them “Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my inheritance” (19:25).

  In Isaiah, we see glimpses of the plan that God has for His salvation to reach out beyond the borders of His people Israel to other nations and peoples of the earth.

- **In the Gospels, how do we see God’s compassion for the nations and for the lost embodied and fulfilled in the person and work of Jesus Christ?**

  John 3:16-17
  
  “God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”

  Matthew 28:18-20
  
  With all authority given to Jesus by the Father, Jesus commands His disciples to go and make disciples of all nations.

- **How does the rest of the New Testament reflect on and explain God’s compassion for the nations and how it is fully expressed in Christ?**

  Ephesians 1:4-6
  
  Paul, writing to Gentiles – those of other nations, outside of Israel – says that God, in His love, predestined them (or, “us”) for adoption through Jesus Christ. This was according to the purpose of His will, to the praise of His glorious grace.

  Ephesians 2:11-22
  
  Paul says (to the Gentile believers he is writing to) that they were once alienated from the people of Israel, having no hope and without God in the world (2:12). But now in Christ, they who were once far off have been brought near through Christ’s death on the cross (2:13). Christ has reconciled both Jews and Gentiles to God (2:15-16). Christ came and preached peace, and through Him both Jews and Gentiles (those from other nations) have access in one Spirit to the Father (2:17-18).

  Revelation 7:9-10
  
  In the book of Revelation, we see a picture of the fulfillment of God’s plan to have compassion on the nations through what Christ has done. First in Revelation 5:9, it says that Christ was “slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.”

  And then in Revelation 7, it describes a “great multitude . . . from every
nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes . . . crying out . . . ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!’” (7:9-10).

Teaching Idea – Extra Questions

The next two questions you may want to work through on your own. You may not have the time to go through these questions as you teach your group of TNTers, but the questions are good to work through and understand to help you in your teaching.

- **What does the book of Jonah teach about the God of Israel? What does it tell us about His heart for the Gentiles?**
  It teaches us that He is “a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster” (Jonah 4:2). This is a central, key verse in the book, for it gives the foundational description of God’s character. The description comes from Exodus 34:6-7, where the God of Israel Himself proclaims who He is to Moses. These are verses that would have been familiar not just to Jonah, but to any Israelite who knew the Old Testament.
  
  The book of Jonah teaches us about God’s character through more than the words of the description in 4:2. The story in the book of Jonah shows us God’s heart in what He does and says. We see God’s mercy, specifically for Gentiles, as He spares the sailors after they cry out to Him and as He has compassion for Nineveh by relenting from disaster after they repent and turn from their evil ways.
  
  In the last chapter, God teaches a lesson to Jonah by comparing Nineveh with the plant that Jonah was so concerned about. In it God implies that He made the people of Nineveh (even if they are Gentiles), so He will be concerned about them. He has the right to have mercy on them.

  The New Testament helps us to see that in the book of Jonah, we have just a small foretaste of God reaching out and having mercy on the nations. God would finally and fully extend His mercy and salvation through Jesus Christ. Like Jonah, Jesus preached and was a “sign” to an evil generation that needed to repent (Matthew 12: Luke 11:29-32). But unlike Jonah, Jesus obeyed God fully with God’s heart of mercy and compassion.
  
  We see Jesus begin to reach out to other nations in the lives of people like the Samaritan woman (John 4) and the Roman Centurion (Luke 7:1-10). Jesus had a concern for the Temple (which would later find its true reality in Him and His body, the church) to be what God intended it to be: a house of prayer for all nations (Mark 11:15-17). And at the end of His ministry, He told His disciples that because He had been given all authority in heaven and on earth, they should go and make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:18-20).
  
  In the rest of the New Testament, we see the proclamation of the gospel to all nations beginning to happen through the church and especially through the life and ministry of the Apostle Paul to the Gentiles. In Acts, in a message that has echoes of Jonah’s preaching, Paul told the men of Athens, “The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead” (17:30-31). Just like in Jonah, the message of coming judgment was meant to bring God’s mercy to all who would turn to God, through Christ, in repentance and faith.
Session 8

Jonah and the Big Idea of the Bible

Teaching Tip
You may not have time to work through each of the following questions as you teach. You may have to simply suggest to the learners what you think the Big Idea of the Bible is. (See the Teaching Tip in “The Principle Practiced” above for more details.)

Look first at the end and then at the beginning of the Bible for clues that will help you discover the Big Idea of the Bible.

Revelation 21:1-3

• What do these verses actually say?
  John saw a new heaven and a new earth. The first heaven and first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. He also saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God – beautifully adorned. The message John heard was that God’s dwelling place is with man. He will dwell with them. They will be His people and He will be with them as their God.

• What is surprising about it?
  It’s surprising that God will dwell with man. The repeated phrase is “with man” or “with them” (21:3). God comes to be with us!

• Do these verses remind you of any others found in the Bible?
  There are many passages in the Bible that use similar words to speak about God’s promise that “They shall be my people, and I will be their God” (Genesis 17:8; Exodus 6:7; Jeremiah 7:14; 23:10; 30:22; 31:33; Ezekiel 11:10; 36:24; 37:23, 27; Zechariah 8:8; 2 Corinthians 6:16; Hebrews 8:10).
  In particular, the verses in Revelation remind us very much of Ezekiel 37:27. In Ezekiel (37:15-28), God promises that He will gather His people who are scattered because of the exile and their sin. He will save and cleanse them from their sin, set His servant David as king over them, put them in the land He has promised to them, make an everlasting covenant of peace with them, and set His sanctuary in their midst forevermore. “My dwelling place shall be with them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”

• Why are these verses so important? Think about this in the light of the broader context of the chapter and the Bible.
  They show us that God, in the end, does fulfill His promise to create a people for Himself and to dwell with them as their God. In Revelation 21, we see the picture of that glorious fulfillment (see further 21:22-27). They will be His people, and He will be their God, and He will dwell with them (21:3). His words are trustworthy and true (21:5).

Genesis 1:1-2:3

• What is going on in this passage?
  God creates the heavens and earth and all living things, including people, in six days. On the seventh day, God rests.

• How does Revelation 21:1-3 shape our understanding of Genesis 1:1-2:3?
  Revelation 21 shows us that the first world that God created in Genesis will one day be no more.
  God’s main concern about the new creation, as it must have been in the first creation, is clearly His dwelling with mankind.

Between Genesis 1:1-2:3 and Revelation 21:1-3 comes Genesis chapter 3 (along with a lot of other material) . . .
Genesis 3

- **What does Genesis 3 do to the story?**
  - It changes everything about the way things are in God’s creation. When Adam and Eve sinned, their eyes were opened to know good and evil and the shame of sin. Pain and fear and death entered the world. The creation was cursed. Most of all, the relationship between God and man was broken. Separation came between God and people, first as Adam hid from God in shame and fear because of his disobedience, and then as God put Adam and Eve out of the Garden (where there had been fellowship between God and man) for their own good.

- **With the broken relationship between God and man described in Genesis 3, could the story of the Bible ever have led straight to the wonderful things described in Revelation 21:1-3? Why or why not?**
  - No. The separation between God and man and the cause of that separation – man’s sin – had to be dealt with.
  - Later, the law of Moses helps us see that man’s sin could not simply be ignored, overlooked, or brushed aside. God’s justice required the judgment of it. And though God was willing to let a substitute take the penalty and atone for our sins, His righteous standard would only accept a man who was sinless to stand in our place.

- **What makes the difference? What takes us from the condition of Genesis 3 to that of Revelation 21:1-3? (You may wish to consider Revelation 5 for part of your answer.)**
  - The atoning, cleansing, justifying, redeeming, reconciling work of Christ.
  - Jesus is the offspring of woman whose heal would be bruised by the serpent, but who would bruise the serpent’s head (Genesis 3:15). He was the promised offspring that represented all of humanity, taking on man’s sin and paying the just cost by dying on the cross. Yet He was God’s Son, and in Him all God’s promises were fulfilled, and because He was obedient and righteous, He was raised to life. In Him, the problem of man’s sin and separation from God was taken care of.
  - As Romans 5 says, death came into the world and spread to all men through Adam. But the grace of God and justification abounded to many through Jesus Christ. “For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous. . . . Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (5:19-21).
  - Revelation 5:9 says that Christ was “slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.”

- **What is the significance of Luke 24 for the Big Idea of the Bible?**
  - Verse 27 says that “beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, [Jesus] interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.” This means that the Old Testament Scriptures were pointing to and speaking of Jesus Himself. So, the Big Idea of the Bible, in a similar way, should speak of the person and work of Jesus Christ in fulfilling God’s purposes and promises.

- **After looking at these verses, how would you state the Big Idea of the Bible?**
  - (This is just one suggestion:) Through the justifying work of Jesus’ death on the cross and resurrection from the dead for those who repent and believe, God is creating a people for Himself to reign over and live with eternally.

- **What is the significance of the book of Jonah in light of the Big Idea of the Bible?**
  - The book of Jonah shows us that God’s purpose throughout history (and
even before Christ) was to reach out to people of all nations in His mercy, calling for them to repent and turn to Him. Jonah, like Adam, is a type of Christ, but with failures and faults. He makes us look forward to Jesus, the true, obedient servant of God who would proclaim God’s message with God’s heart – telling of judgment against sin but offering mercy to those who repent and turn to Him.
Session 9

Dig/Discover

Discovering the Big Idea of a Book of the Bible

Quick View

When we study the Bible, we often look long and hard at the Bible’s details and miss the larger picture. This instruction teaches that each detail in a book of the Bible makes up and contributes to the message as a whole. This instruction helps the learner detect that major theme and understand how a given book uniquely contributes to and fits into the Bible as a whole.

Take Away

The teacher is expected to cover the following objectives concerning . . .

- **The hermeneutical principle** (under “The Principle Explained”):
  The learner will
  - know what the Big Idea of a book of the Bible is
  - learn helpful suggestions for discovering the Big Idea of the book
  - understand the importance of identifying the Big Idea of the book
  - know how to state the Big Idea of a book of the Bible

- **Jonah** (under “The Principle Practiced”):
  The learner will discover
  - the major ideas of the book of Jonah
  - the ideas that connect the beginning and end of the book
  - the Big Idea of the book of Jonah

- **The heart of God for ministry** (under “The Text Applied”):
  The learner will
  - examine his own heart to see if he shares God’s compassion for the lost
The Principle Explained
(Understanding the Hermeneutical Principle)

Instructions for “The Principle Explained”
Help the learners get a clear understanding of what we mean by the Big Idea of a book of the Bible and how everything in the book relates back to that central and overall message. Also, make sure to help them understand the importance of finding and understanding the Big Idea of a book.

What is the Big Idea of a Book?

- The Big Idea of a book is a statement that captures the main idea of what the book is really saying – its central message.
- The Big Idea is the overall message of a book. It is the theme that runs through it and unites all of the thoughts together as a whole.
- The statements in a book of the Bible are not isolated and arranged in a random, thoughtless way. Rather, they are meaningfully connected and flow from an overarching theme. The better we understand the theme – the Big Idea – the better we will understand each statement and communicate each part of the book.

Teaching Tip – Suggested Illustrations
The following might help us picture what the Big Idea of a book is like:

A great river system (like the Amazon or Nile)
All the many streams feed into the main river and contribute to its volume and flow.

A great oak tree
All of the single leaves are connected to twigs, and all of the twigs are connected to branches, and all of the branches are connected to a trunk which sends down its roots deep into the earth. You cannot fully understand the leaf you are examining unless you see it in relation to the rest of the tree. The leaf is a part of the tree as a whole.

The melodic line* of a song
When you hum a tune or sing a song, you don’t simply make up your own words and melody. Rather, having listened to what the composer wrote, you try to reproduce his song with your voice. (There are often many notes in a song – we must listen carefully to them all in order to hear and sing the melodic line.)

Fuller explanation:
A song is made up of three things: melody, harmony, and rhythm. Melody is, perhaps, the most important part of all. It refers to the movement of notes and the main theme they produce. Individual notes are strung together to give shape to and produce a melody or melodic line.

Sing a line or two of a well-known song, perhaps “Amazing Grace.” What did you do? If you said, “Well, I sang a line or two of the song,” then think harder. What did you really do?

Whose song did you sing? Your song or another person’s song?
What did it sound like? Was it happy, sad, contemplative, or confident?
How were you able to sing it? Did you hear it in the past, learn it, and then make it your own?

What were you doing as you sang the composer’s song? Were you conveying your

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own message, the composer’s, or both? Which one was primary?

Hearing the melodic line is necessary for understanding the composer’s message and faithfully singing his or her song.

Each book of the Bible, and even the Bible itself, has a melodic line. Unfortunately, we often fail to see or hear it. We see the notes but miss the arrangement. We hear the different sounds but miss the melody they produce. If we are committed to singing the composer’s song, however, we must work hard to discover and use the melodic line.

Why Is the Big Idea Important?

It acknowledges that the writer had a message he was trying to communicate through the whole book, not just different ideas in separate passages.

When we discover the message of the book, we will be more faithful in communicating what God is saying through His Word. What He is saying will be more clear to us, and we will be less prone to teach our own thoughts and ideas.

How Do We Find the Big Idea of a Book?

Finding the Big Idea of a book is hard work, but these are helpful suggestions:

1. **Read through the book several times.**

2. **Ask lots of questions.** Try to understand the questions the book is deliberately raising and answering. We start with our questions, but we must move beyond them to the questions that the text is concerned to answer. The questions the text is raising and answering are the important ones for determining the meaning and the Big Idea.

3. **Look for clues to the Big Idea in the way the book begins and ends.** Often a writer introduces the main reason he is writing as he opens the book and comes back to it as he closes.

4. **Break the book into smaller sections** and try to summarize what those sections are about. The major ideas in the sections of the book make up the supporting ideas for the larger Big Idea.

5. **Ask: What are the connections of thought between the major ideas of each section of the book?** Understanding how they relate helps us to see what the author is getting at.

6. **Look for patterns, like the repetition of key words and ideas.** Also look for contrasts and progressions.

7. **Capture the Big Idea by stating it as one complete sentence.** In order to do that, ask **two questions:**
   - What is this book talking about?
   - What is it saying about what it’s talking about?

   The answers to those two questions can be put together to state the Big Idea.

   **Example:**
   What’s this book talking about?
   Answer: Enduring in ministry

   What’s it saying about enduring in ministry?
   Answer: That it depends on God’s grace and power.

   Big Idea: We should depend on God’s grace and power in order to endure in ministry.
How Should We State the Big Idea?

Just like the Big Idea of a passage, state the Big Idea of a book in a sentence. First, answer the two questions, “What is this book talking about? What is it saying about what it is talking about?” Then state the answers to those questions as a complete thought in a sentence: “This book is saying that ________________________.”

How Should We Use the Big Idea of a Book?

• Work hard to understand how a passage in a book connects to the Big Idea of the book.
• Allow the Big Idea of the book to shape the message we preach or teach.
• When preaching, draw attention to the Big Idea regularly. That will bring clarity and power to our preaching.
The Principle Practiced
(Seeing the Principle in Our Study of the Book of Jonah)


Instructions for “The Principle Practiced”
Use the suggestions above in “The Principle Explained” to help the learners find the Big Idea of Jonah.

Suggested Questions
Below are suggested questions to help you guide the learners through finding the Big Idea. Work through them yourself first so that you understand the points to bring out from the book. At the back of this session are proposed answers to help you think through your answers even more.

› An Initial Attempt
  - Now that you have heard an explanation of the Big Idea of a book, and since you are familiar with the book already, give it a first try. Before we work through more questions, what would you say is the Big Idea of the book of Jonah?

› Further Discovery
  - As we work to discover the Big Idea of Jonah, we will wrestle with how the book is put together and the main idea that holds it together. There may be many ideas (or “messages” or “themes”) in the book, but there is one Big Idea (or message, or theme) that holds the book together.

Look at the End and the Beginning
One way to get at the Big Idea of the book is to observe the way the book begins and ends. First we’ll look at how it ends.

  - Just like a great novel, the book of Jonah waits to reveal so much until the end. How does Jonah end? Look at 4:10-11. Is there anything curious or striking about it? Why isn’t there a chapter 5? Why does the author choose to end his book this way? What effect does it have?
Now consider 4:1-9 and its broader context. How would you describe Jonah’s attitude? Why is he so angry? Why is chapter four included in the book of Jonah? Why didn’t the author just end his story with 3:10? What is God doing with Jonah in chapter four?

Now look at the beginning. Read 1:1-3. What do you notice about the way Jonah begins? How do these opening verses set the tone and direction for the book as a whole?

Other Major Ideas
Now looking at the major ideas in the beginning and end of the book, what are some other major ideas found throughout the rest of the book?
Who is the main character of the book? Why?

What is the main subject of the book of Jonah? What is the book of Jonah talking about?

What is the book of Jonah saying about what it's talking about? What is the book telling us about that main subject?

Sharpen Your Work

In light of the questions above, especially the answers from the last two questions, make another attempt to write out the Big Idea of the book of Jonah.

Write down a statement that is broad enough to take in, yet sharp enough to catch, the main thing the writer is saying. What did you come up with? Did it change from your previous attempt? How so? What did you see in the text as we studied it further that influenced you to change your previous attempt at the Big Idea?
Teaching Idea – The Mountain Peak Illustration

In addition to all of these questions above, or as a way of working through them, you may consider using the “mountain peak” illustration to help the learners identify major ideas in the book.

If we were standing on a mountain and looked out across a mountain range, we may not be able to see all of the land in the distance, but we could see the mountain peaks. In the same way, we can look back at the book of Jonah. Instead of looking at the details of the story, we can try to think about the major ideas that stand out – like mountain peaks – as we look back at the story in the book.

On the board, write the title of the book at the top. On the left draw a mountain peak for the idea that you have identified at the beginning of the book. On the right side, draw the mountain peak for the end of the book and label it with the major idea that you find there. Then ask what the other “mountain peaks” are throughout the book – the major ideas or themes that appear and run through the book. (You may want to work through the book chapter by chapter: “What are the major ideas that stand out in chapter one? Chapter two? Chapter three? Chapter four?”)

Draw a mountain peak for each major idea and label the peak with the description of the idea. After identifying all of the major ideas, ask the two important questions to find the Big Idea: “What is this book talking about?” Then, “What is the book of Jonah saying about (what it’s talking about)?” Use the answers to form a complete sentence that captures the Big Idea of the book.

Jonah

[Major idea] [Major idea] [Major idea] [Major idea] [Major idea]

[Statement of Big Idea]
The Text Applied
(Discovering the Heart of God for Ministry)

We see that a major theme in Jonah is God’s heart of compassion for the lost. We see it ultimately fulfilled in Christ. Do you share God’s heart for the lost?

Instructions for “The Text Applied”

After the time of learning about major themes in the book of Jonah and the rest of the Bible, allow the learners to reflect on how these things affect their own hearts and lives. Do these themes run through their life and ministry as well?

If those you are teaching find themselves lacking (as most of us might), avoid focusing on what they should do, since we cannot make our hearts into what they should be; instead focus on a time of asking God to change our hearts, for only He can, and that is what we need most.

A Closing Word

Throughout the book of Jonah we see God’s heart of compassion – to the sailors, to the people of Nineveh, and to Jonah, His prophet. Perhaps God’s compassion is most clearly displayed to Jonah because Jonah knew the most. He knew God and he knew the Scriptures.

Amazingly, Jonah told God the reason he disobeyed Him was because he knew what He was like! “That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster” (4:2).

You know God, and you know what He is like. You are studying the Bible to know Him better and are also teaching others how to study. Do you have the heart of the God who wrote the Scriptures? Are you studying about God, but your heart is cold? Jonah knew God’s heart is gracious and merciful, but he did not share God’s heart. Do you share God’s heart of mercy and love toward lost people?
Sample Questions and Answers
from The Principle Practiced

An Initial Attempt

Now that you have heard an explanation of the Big Idea of a book, and since you are familiar with the book already, give it a first try. Before we work through the questions below, what would you say is the Big Idea of the book of Jonah?

Answers will vary. The point here is to get learners to start thinking – to get them to think through the ideas in the book of Jonah and its message.

Further Discovery

Look at the End and the Beginning

One way to get at the Big Idea of the book is to observe the way the book begins and ends. First we’ll look at how it ends.

Just like a great novel, the book of Jonah waits to reveal so much until the end. How does Jonah end? Look at 4:10-11. Is there anything curious or striking about it? Why isn’t there a chapter 5? Why does the author choose to end his book this way? What effect does it have?

The striking thing is that it ends with a question. “And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city . . .?” (4:11). It’s a question asked by God to Jonah, and it tests what is in Jonah’s heart. But since we never have an answer and don’t know how Jonah responds, the reader is left with the question in his own mind, and the effect is that the question seems to be asked, not just to Jonah, but to the reader as well.

Now consider 4:1-9 and its broader context. How would you describe Jonah’s attitude? Why is he so angry? Why is chapter four included in the book of Jonah? Why didn’t the author just end his story with 3:10? What is God doing with Jonah in chapter four?

Jonah’s attitude is one of anger. He’s angry that God is having mercy on the Ninevites and relenting from the disaster He said would come upon them (4:1-4). Then we read that Jonah is angry because of a plant that died, causing his own discomfort (4:5-9). We see that Jonah is more concerned about himself than all the people in Nineveh.

Chapter four is included to teach us what’s really going on in the story in the book of Jonah. It is a reflection or an explanation after the main events of the story. It shows us, after everything we have read about Jonah, that Jonah did not share God’s heart of mercy and that, even if Jonah completed the task God wanted him to do, God wanted even more for Jonah to understand and share His heart of mercy for those God sent him to preach to.

In chapter four, God, in His mercy, is reasoning with Jonah to get Jonah to see things from God’s perspective. God is seeking to change Jonah’s heart.

Now look at the beginning. Read 1:1-3. What do you notice about the way Jonah begins? How do these opening verses set the tone and direction for the book as a whole?

The word of the Lord comes to Jonah. God simply says to Jonah, “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me” (1:2-3). God doesn’t ask Jonah, He simply tells him to go.

We see that this is a mission initiated by God. It is His purpose and plan. He decides who this mission should be to – the people of Nineveh. And God decides who to use – Jonah.

It also starts out on serious and fearful note – “for their evil has come up before me” (1:3). Later we will learn, in fact, that God intends for Jonah to preach a message of judgment against them (3:1-4). But God has a long-term purpose of mercy that becomes clear only at the end of the book (though Jonah knows it from the beginning).
Other Major Ideas

- After looking at the major ideas in the beginning and end of the book, what are some other major ideas found throughout the rest of the book?
  - The answers should be something like:
    - God’s mercy (on the Ninevites but also on Jonah)
    - Disobedience
    - Evil
    - Repentance
    - Obedience
    - Worship
    - The judgment of God
    - God’s sovereignty (sending a storm, causing the lots to fall on Jonah, appointing a fish, appointing a plant, and so on)
    - God speaking
    - The patience of God (related to God’s mercy)

- Who is the main character of the book? Why?
  - Though many people may say Jonah, when we really look at the book, we see that God is the main character. The story is about what He is doing in the lives of the sailors, the Ninevites, and Jonah. Through all of it, He is displaying His character of mercy and desiring Jonah to share His heart of mercy as well.

- What is the main subject of the book of Jonah? What is the book of Jonah talking about?
  - God’s mercy.

- What is the book of Jonah saying about what it’s talking about? What is the book telling us about that main subject?
  - That God extended it to Nineveh by not sending judgment on them after they repented.
  - That God wanted Jonah to share His heart of mercy.

Sharpen Your Work

In light of the questions above, especially the answers from the last two questions, make another attempt to write out the Big Idea of the book of Jonah.

Write down a statement that is broad enough to take in, yet sharp enough to catch, the main thing the writer is saying. What did you come up with? Did it change from your previous attempt? How so? What did you see in the text as we studied it further that influenced you to change your previous attempt at the Big Idea?

(Below are some suggested answers:)

“God wants His messengers to share His heart—a heart of compassion for the worst of sinners.”

or

“God wants His servant to share His heart of mercy for the lost – even when called to proclaim His message of judgment against them.”

or

“God is at work in His messenger to form in him His own heart.”

What you write may vary, but the essence of it will probably be much the same as this.
God wants His servant to share His heart of mercy for the lost – even when called to proclaim His message of judgment against them.
Session 10

Demonstrate

Preaching the Big Idea of the Book of Jonah

Quick View

Expository preaching and teaching seeks to answer two fundamental questions:

- What did the passage mean to the original audience?
- In light of that, what does the passage mean for us today?

Someone once observed that expositional preaching tends to be caught as much as taught. For this reason, the teacher will use this session to demonstrate preaching an expositional message from God’s Word.

Take Away

The learner will

- observe how the exposition of God’s Word is delivered through the unique giftedness and personality of the preacher
- consider what elements and skills are involved in preaching expositionally
- consider what God is saying to his own heart through His Word

Instructions

This “demonstrate” session should model for the learners the process of exposition, and through that, help them with the study of the book of Jonah. While a sample sermon is provided on the following pages, you should prepare and teach your own message from this passage.

After you have preached your message, take advantage of a valuable teaching moment and allow the learners to have a discussion about what they have just heard and seen demonstrated in your exposition of the passage.

Teaching Tip

A valuable teaching moment can occur just after the modeling of the expositional message. Don’t let it slip by. Ask them, “What did you just see happen here?” Let them think about how you worked through the passage and explained its meaning – both for the original hearers and for us today.

It might be even better to have another teacher lead the discussion so that the learners don’t feel so obligated to be overly complimentary. The other teacher can lead with questions and observations and help make the discussion more honest yet still edifying.

At the same time, don’t think that this session is all about a teaching moment. Allow the Holy Spirit to lead and guide. The message may stir hearts and call for a response, a time of sharing, or a time of prayer. Be sensitive to the Lord about the best way to proceed.
Session 10

Sample Sermon
Below is a sample expository sermon on the book of Jonah. Again, while this is provided as an example, you should prepare your own expositional message from this passage.

Concern for the Heart of God:  
Treasuring What Matters to Him

Not long ago I got my first pair of prescription eyeglasses, and that experience has been amazing. If I take my glasses off while I’m speaking, people in the front rows are a blur, like the hazy figures in a painting by Claude Monet. But when I put them back on, I see everyone, even people in the back rows, with the clarity and detail found in paintings by the great Dutch masters. I can hardly believe the difference.

Before I got glasses, I was clueless about my need for them. I thought I was seeing just fine. Then I went to see an ophthalmologist. As he began a battery of vision tests, he asked, “Are you seeing well these days?” “I think so,” I replied.

As the doctor examined my eyes, he asked more questions: “Do you have trouble seeing things from a distance? How is it when you’re driving at night?” It wasn’t long before he said, “Todd, you need glasses.”

When I picked them up a few days later and put them on, I could not believe my eyes! I was seeing twenty-twenty. Until I put on those glasses, I had no idea how poor my vision had become, no idea of how much I was missing.

There’s a parallel here between physical sight and spiritual sight. In the same way that glasses help us to see physical things more clearly, God’s Word helps us see spiritual things more clearly. When we look through the lenses of His Word, a whole world opens up to us. We see things about ourselves and about God that we never knew before. Now that is scary, but it is also exhilarating. So I want to invite you on a journey through the book of Jonah. I challenge you to be scared—and exhilarated. I ask you to take a look at a world that has faded from sight or, perhaps, that you never knew existed.

Some time ago my wife and I decided to downsize the library of our young children. We had not done that before, but it was clear that we needed to do so. One by one we reviewed the books. Then I picked up one that told the story of Jonah and began to read it.

I must admit that I lacked enthusiasm from the start. But by the time I finished, I found myself frustrated. In an attempt, I suspect, to make the story more understandable to children, the author softened the sharp edges. As he brought the story to a climax, he asked, “Did you know . . . Jonah knew he never wanted to run away from God again, and he happily obeyed Him?” The book’s illustrator did his best to support the writer’s description. There is a beaming Jonah in vivid color, knapsack over his shoulder and walking stick firmly in hand, as he gleefully makes his way to Nineveh, eager to preach God’s Word.

Is that the way it really happened? In this case, the author, whether consciously or unconsciously, came dangerously close to turning the story of Jonah into a fairy tale that ends “and he lived happily ever after.” I don’t mean that he doubted the historical authenticity of the book, but he was probably unaware that he was guilty of something far more subtle. As he softened the sharp edges of the story, he robbed it of its bitter sting.

Jonah chapter 4 shows us the real condition of Jonah’s heart, a condition that has existed all along, but doesn’t become clear until we get the rest of the story:

Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry. He prayed to the LORD, “O LORD, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee 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. Now, O LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live.” (4:1-3, NIV)
The second part of our summary sentence describes the object of God's work: book. He is at work from start to finish.

In the story, we meet Jonah, the main character. He is called by God to go to Nineveh, his capital, with the message of repentance. When Jonah refuses, he is swallowed by a great fish and later spat out onto dry land. He tries to flee, but God stops him in his tracks. The book is a story of Jonah learning the lesson of repentance. He waits, disgruntled, to see what God will do.

As I reread Jonah, I discovered something that revolutionized my thinking and brought me squarely in line with the logical answer to the question of who the main character is: God. He is the one who is at work throughout the book, driving the events and bringing the story to its climax.

The logical answer to the question of who the main character is would be “Jonah.” After all, he plays the “title role” since the book bears his name and he appears in every chapter. We meet him in the opening scene, and he is still there at the end. As we read, we engage with what this man is thinking and feeling. We are drawn along as he takes the roundabout route to Nineveh (1:1-3; 3:1-3) and then waits, disgruntled, to see what God will do (4:5). The evidence seems compelling that Jonah is the most likely candidate to be called the main character, but there is more to it than what first meets the eye.

If you were to ask a young boy to identify the main character of the book, he might well answer, “The big fish,” and who could blame him? After all, to describe this “fish story” as incredible, extraordinary, or even astounding would fall far short of what Jonah actually experienced. The fish is larger than life, and what he did defies description. And yet he does not show up until chapter 2, and once he has made his appearance, we never see him again. The great fish is pretty great, but like an actor in a cameo role, his role is significant only in that it is part of a much bigger plot. Other “characters” in Jonah do this as well: a vine (4:6), a worm (4:7), a scorching east wind (4:8), and a blazing sun (4:8). These are not nearly as fantastic as the fish, but they still play significant roles.

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As I reread Jonah, I discovered something that revolutionized my thinking and brought me squarely in line with the logical answer to the question of who the main character is: God. He is the one who is at work throughout the book, driving the events and bringing the story to its climax. He captures us and calls us to respond. Let’s take a closer look at each part of that summary statement.

The first part is that God is at work throughout the book. As we begin to look at the details of the story, take note of the opening words: “The word of the LORD came to Jonah” (1:1, NIV).

Notice that Jonah is present, but he is not center stage. That place is reserved for the words of the LORD. We must not underestimate the value of this verse, because it, along with the words of Jonah 3:1—“The word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time”—form the structural framework for the book as a whole: God is the initiator. And His word, not Jonah’s, carries the book to the end. In other words, God is in the driver’s seat. Jonah is His passenger and is along for the ride until God stops the car. No sooner does the car leave the garage than Jonah begins to learn this lesson. He tries to flee, but God “stops him in his tracks” “The LORD sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent wind arose that the ship threatened to break up” (1:4, NIV).

Later, as the sailors feverishly attempt to row to shore, “they could not, for the sea grew even wilder than before” (1:13, NIV). Finally, after Jonah is hurled into the sea, “the raging sea grew calm” (1:15, NIV). Who is driving the torrential winds and the raging sea? There is no doubt in the sailors’ minds: “At this, the men greatly feared the LORD, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows to him” (1:16, NIV).

All this would seem to be more than enough, wouldn’t it? But the writer continues: “The LORD provided a great fish to swallow Jonah,” (1:17, NIV) and “The LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land” (2:10, NIV). The last chapter picks up right where chapter 2 left off. Now the Lord provides the vine (4:6), a worm (4:7), and a scorching east wind (4:8). We see God everywhere in this book. He is at work from start to finish. He is the main character.

The second part of our summary sentence describes the object of God’s work: “God is at work in His messenger.”
What kind of book do you think Jonah is? We typically classify it as one of the prophetic books. A prophet speaks God’s words for Him. He receives God’s message and then delivers it to people who have rebelled against God and gone their own way. When we read the prophetic books of the Bible, that is what we expect to find.

When I began studying Jonah, that is what I expected too. As I read, “The word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai” (1:1, NIV), I thought, “Just as I expected. Jonah is a prophet. God’s word came to Him, and now he will speak it to a rebellious people.” But as I read, I didn’t find Jonah speaking. I found him fleeing. So I made a mental note of that and continued to read. Soon something else struck me: Only one verse in the entire book records what Jonah said to the people of Nineveh. This is what it says:

“For forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned.” (3:4, NIV)

That’s it—the sum total of Jonah’s sermon—all that is recorded in the book that bears his name. If one of my sermons were to have been recorded in the Scriptures, I would have hoped for a little more press. But one line is all Jonah gets. What insight does this give about the nature of the book? Just this: Jonah is not so much about the prophecy of the book as it is about the prophet of the book. It is not so much about Jonah’s words as it is about Jonah himself. In other words, it is not about the message; it is about the messenger. To get right down to it, the messenger is the message. That’s why we get so many details about Jonah and so few words from Jonah. That tells us that God is concerned about the lives of His messengers.

I don’t mean that Jonah’s words are unimportant. God did something astounding through Jonah’s words that day in Nineveh. God’s message had hardly fallen from Jonah’s lips when repentance broke out everywhere. Eager to respond, the Ninevites believed God, declared a fast, and put on sackcloth (3:5). All of them, from least to greatest, responded to what Jonah said (3:5). Even the king’s heart was pierced, and he bowed his head, bent his knees, and urged everyone within the borders of his kingdom to repent. Here is the eyewitness report:

“When the news 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. Then he issued a proclamation in Nineveh:

“By the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let any man or beast, herd or flock, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. But let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish.” (3:7-9, NIV)

What a remarkable response on the part of the king! It is amazing that one so used to making demands of others demands nothing from God. Everything about his demeanor and his words drips with unqualified repentance: Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish (3:9).

Can this be the same king and the same Assyria who some fifty years earlier swooped down on the northern kingdom of Israel and wreaked havoc on her people? Who would ever have believed that such a wicked king could demonstrate such profound repentance? But that is exactly what happened—by God’s power through the words His messenger preached.

What does your own repentance look like? If I’m honest, I suspect that mine is often characterized by the secret thought that God owes me something in response to my repentance: that if I take a step toward Him, He should take a step toward me. But we see nothing of that attitude in the king’s words. He knows God owes us nothing.

Now, as amazing as the Ninevites’ response was, that is not the stand-alone message of the book. In fact, it was a setup, part of God’s plan to reveal the coldness of Jonah’s heart. We even see a touch of humor here as Jonah arrives in Nineveh. Picture it: He reluctantly walks into town, pulls out his notes, and almost before he begins to preach, people fall all over him to repent. That should make him happy, but it is the last thing he wants. In fact, it is what he feared all along:

But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry. He prayed to the LORD, “O LORD, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee 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. Now, O LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live.” (4:1-3, NIV)

Now we discover why Jonah fled to Tarshish in the first place: (1) He hated the Ninevites. Jonah’s ancestors had, no doubt, been ravaged by their violence. Some from his family had likely tasted death at their hands. The resentment he had held on to for years more than explains his refusal to go. But Jonah’s hatred for the Ninevites wasn’t his only reason. There’s more. (2) Jonah was stingy with the mercy and compassion of God. He did not want his enemies to taste or enjoy it.

Jonah’s coldness of heart toward the Ninevites is certainly understandable, but it is also unacceptable. For years Jonah had basked in the pleasure of God. In recent days he had experienced a phenomenal outpouring of it. What right did he have to live, let alone be the servant of God’s grace? When he fled from God, God lovingly pursued him. When he flagrantly disobeyed God’s voice, God did not slay him; instead He showered Jonah with mercy and compassion. Even while Nineveh repented, God’s blessing was falling on Jonah’s own soul. God’s mercy is the reason Jonah lived to see another day. God’s compassion is the reason God used Jonah in Nineveh. God is at work in His messenger. What kind of work is He doing?

Now we come to the third part to our summary sentence: “God is at work in His messenger to form in him.” The second part pointed out where God is working: in His messenger. This third part unpacks the work He is doing: He is forming something in His messenger.

Have you noticed that the writer of the book of Jonah has a specific “take” on the events he describes? He is not concerned primarily with information, although he gives us a lot of it. He is also not taken up primarily with facts, although he is certainly factual. Instead, he carefully selects both information and facts to reflect a particular focus.

A number of years ago my brother-in-law invited me to go shoot some clay pigeons—small clay disks that are launched high into the air. Since I had never shot a gun before, much less clay pigeons, I was excited to give it a try. He launched a disk into the air then I shot. But each time the clay pigeon simply fell to the ground. My brother-in-law kept saying, “Look through the scope. Let the pigeon fall onto the crosshairs then pull the trigger.” But each time I continued to miss. In retrospect, I think I was trying to lead the pigeon much like a quarterback would throw a pass in front of a receiver. Finally, I got his point. The pigeon fell onto the crosshairs of the scope and I pulled the trigger. Wow! What a difference! The pigeon shattered into a million pieces. I shot again, and again, each time making proper use of the crosshairs and hitting the mark.

In many ways, this is an apt description for the book of Jonah: In God’s determination to shape His messenger, it is as if He looks through the scope of a “spiritual rifle,” sets the crosshairs on Jonah’s heart, and relentlessly pursues him until He “gets His man.” The difference is that He is not out to shatter Jonah’s heart but to change it.

When I was young, I thought Jonah was a story about obedience—and it is. Later I believed it had to do with how one man’s obedience effects change in others—and it does. But the story of Jonah could simply have ended with the Ninevites’ repentance—but it doesn’t. And we have to ask why.

Chapter 4 is the key that unlocks the whole. There the writer focuses on Jonah’s reaction. He is furious: “Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry” (4:1, NIV).

He is angry not only because the people of Nineveh repent but also because he knows how God will respond to their repentance: “When God saw what [the Ninevites] did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction He had threatened” (Jonah 3:10, NIV). In fact, Jonah knows God will respond that way even before it happens because he knows God’s character:

He prayed to the Lord,

“O LORD, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee 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. Now, O LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live.” (Jonah 4:2-3, emphasis added)

It is God’s nature to forgive. He takes joy in giving His mercy and compassion. This is the way God revealed Himself to Moses: “I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim
my name, the Lord, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion” (Exodus 33:19). This was the God who threatened to destroy the people of Israel for their ingratitude and rebellion, and yet in the end, He responded to Moses’ plea on the Israelites’ behalf and poured out His mercy and compassion on them. Jonah knows that God will do it for Nineveh, too, because he knows that is just like Him. So Jonah erupts in anger and he runs headfirst into the brick wall of God Himself.

Ravi Zacharias tells the story of his meeting with the daughter of Joseph Stalin. As they talked, she described the day her father died. Stalin was lying on his bed and had not spoken or responded to anyone for some time. Suddenly he stood up on his bed and shook his fist toward heaven, then lay down and died. He could not come to grips with the sovereign authority of God. Only death forced him to acknowledge it.

Jonah, too, “shook his fist toward heaven.” We have already seen something of Jonah’s cold heart. But just how icy his heart has grown becomes apparent only in the unfolding of chapter 4. It’s alarming to note the intensity of Jonah’s hatred—he asks the Lord to take his life (Jonah 4:3). In response, God asks him: “Have you any right to be angry?” (4:4, NIV).

The answer would seem as plain as day to any levelheaded observer, but Jonah chose to bury himself in bitterness and refused to respond. Instead, “Jonah went 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” (4:5, NIV).

Why does Jonah stick around? Why does he bother to wait and see what God will do? He already knows God will extend mercy, so he might as well pack it up and head for home. Does Jonah secretly hope that Nineveh’s repentance will prove less than sincere or that God will fail to see the people’s response? Regardless of the condition of Jonah’s heart, God gives him something completely undeserved: The Lord God provided a vine and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the vine (4:6).

In spite of Jonah’s ingratitude, God graciously provides for his physical comfort. But that’s not the end of God’s work to shape Jonah. There is more. God graciously and lovingly gives His servant an object lesson:

At dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the vine so that it withered. 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.” (Jonah 4:7-8)

Jonah is so self-absorbed that he misses the point of this perfectly designed visual aid. He recognizes no one but himself, not even God. Ungrateful for the grace he has received, he doesn’t want his enemies to enjoy it either. He refuses to acknowledge that God’s grace is God’s to give. He, too, “shakes his fist toward heaven.” He is angry enough to die. How could this attitude come from a prophet of God? The very idea makes us recoil. But if we are honest, we have probably been stingy with the mercy and compassion of God a time or two. And the truth is, this is God’s world, not ours. He is totally free to work His will as He sees fit.

A second time God asks, “Do you have a right to be angry,” and adds, “about the vine?” (4:9, NIV). Still unmoved, Jonah responds exactly as before: “I do,’ he said, ‘I am angry enough to die!” (4:9, NIV). Is it beginning to look as if God’s compassion will be lost on him?

So, God is at work in His messenger to form something in him. That leads us to the next question: What is God forming?

The last part of our summary sentence asserts “God is at work in His messenger to form in him His own heart. Why does God bother? Why does God refuse Jonah’s death wish? This is one of the astonishing mysteries to which the book gives no clear answer. But could it be that the reason God refuses to grant Jonah’s wish is that He prizes Jonah’s heart more than He would his death? I think that is precisely the case. God wants Jonah’s heart more than He wants his hide.

I love the way this book ends. God uses a question to probe and to astound Jonah:

“You have been concerned about this vine, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty
thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city?” (4:10-11)

God uses this probing question to prick the bubble of Jonah’s self-absorption and get him to think about something outside himself. There he is, sitting and stewing, disgruntled and disgusted at Nineveh’s repentance—and even more at God’s response. He knows God is “a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity” (4:2, NIV). Yet Jonah longs for Nineveh’s destruction. When a vine appears and grows to shield his head from the sun, now, at last, there is something for which Jonah has a use. The vine complements his existence and brings pleasure to his heart. But no sooner does Jonah begin to enjoy its comfort than God takes it away. In its place come a scorching east wind and a blazing hot sun. Again Jonah is deeply angry. But he did not create the vine. He did not tend it or cause it to grow. Yet he is again furious. When we boil it down, we find that the thing that brought Jonah pleasure had been stripped away. That is the reason for his fury.

What a pity! Jonah has so much concern for things that do not matter and so little for things that do. He has no use for Nineveh and no place in his heart for her citizens. For Jonah, pleasure would mean Nineveh’s destruction, not its deliverance. Yet there are so many people there—not to mention cattle—who, like children, don’t know their right hand from their left. They understand so little about the living God. No wonder God asks, “Should I not be concerned about that great city?” (4:11, NIV).

Jonah was a prophet of the living God and claimed to worship Him (1:14-16, 1:9). Could he possibly imagine that God would not be concerned or that God would not respond in mercy and compassion? When we consider the value of the vine and then the value of Nineveh’s citizens, there is no comparison. Shouldn’t Jonah be concerned as well? Shouldn’t he share God’s heart of mercy and compassion? Or did he hope to win God over to the feelings of his own heart.

We can appreciate the power of this ending most when we look at it in light of the structure of the whole book. Jonah falls neatly into two halves, chapters 1 and 2 and chapters 3 and 4, each half introduced by the same phrase: “The word of the LORD came to Jonah” (1:1 and 3:1, NIV).

Let’s take a look at the first instance:

The word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai: “Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me.” (1:1-2, NIV)

As we have seen, Jonah fled from the word of the Lord. More precisely, though, he fled from the Lord of the word. Chapter 1 records the futility of his flight, and chapter 2 describes his path back to God. And although Jonah spared no expense in fleeing from God, in the end, God spent much more to get him back.

The second time this phrase occurs is in chapter 3:

Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time: “Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you” (3:1, NIV).

This time when God tells Jonah to go and speak the word He gives him, Jonah obeys. He proves faithful to the task. But when the Ninevites respond, Jonah is angry. He knows God will extend mercy and compassion, and this reality horrifies him more than death, so he asks God to end his life. Instead, God graciously rebukes him and instructs him. What, then, does chapter 4 tell us about the message of the book as a whole, and why does it leave us with a question? It tells us that the book of Jonah is really all about God and His desire to form His own heart in Jonah. The first half is about how God gets Jonah to go to Nineveh. The second half is about how God gets to Jonah’s heart. The first half is about obeying God. The second half is about obeying Him with the right heart attitude. That is what God wants from Jonah. It is what He wants from us as well.

I have long admired the parenting ability of a friend and his wife. Their children, now adults, have always been a delight to be around. So when my friend once shared with me his thoughts about raising children, I was eager to hear what he had to say. This is what he told me: “We found that the first part of training children was to get them to obey. The second part—by far the most difficult—was to teach them to do it with the right heart.”

I felt as if someone had turned on the lights that day. Not only did I see the task of training children more clearly, but the message of Jonah also made sense: It is not enough for us to obey God. He calls His messengers to obey Him with the right heart, His heart.
The question that ends the book of Jonah, “Should I not be concerned?” (Jonah 4:11), leaves us begging for something more: “Please, tell me. I want to know the rest of the story.” Does God’s question ever penetrate Jonah’s icy heart? Does Jonah repent? Does he ever share God’s heart? Like parents who stop reading at an exciting point in a story so their children will be eager to listen to more tomorrow, the writer disappointingly refuses to satisfy our curiosity. He simply leaves us with God’s question. And like an echo bouncing off canyon walls, it continues to reverberate through the centuries: “Should I not be concerned? Should I not be concerned? Should I not be concerned?”

What an astounding question! The more I hear it, the less I think about Jonah, and the more I think about myself: Do I share God’s heart? God is at work in His messenger to form in him His own heart.

At the beginning, I invited you to look at the story of Jonah through the lenses of God’s Word. I said you would see things about yourself and about God that would be both scary and exhilarating. Now that we’ve made a trip through the book, let’s look at those two aspects.

First, Jonah is scary. When I think about the message of Jonah I am frightened, terrified to the core. It forces me to look deep within, to ask hard questions: What things concern me? Do I obey God? Do I ever run from Him? Who are my enemies? Do I want them to know and experience God’s mercy and compassion? What effect does good theology have on the thoughts and motives of my heart? Do I willingly take risks so that others will come to experience eternal life? Do I share my Father’s heart? Honestly, I don’t like the answers I find. I look at the wonder and beauty of God and realize there is an infinite chasm between His heart and mine. Jonah and I make a good pair.

As I studied Jonah, I couldn’t help but think about America’s enemies. Since 9/11, we have become much more aware of names such as Osama bin Laden, al Qaeda, and the Taliban. But America is not the only nation with enemies. In every part of the world, hatred leads to bitterness of soul. One day, seemingly out of nowhere, I was confronted with this question: What if God called me to take the gospel to the Taliban? What if He called me to preach the Good News in a country where the government sanctions the arrest, torture, and execution of believers? Would I be willing to go? What would I hope the outcome to be for that nation—God’s wrath or His mercy?

Although it has been some time since 9/11, the memory is still fresh in our minds. In light of what we’ve seen in Jonah, we need to ask ourselves some honest questions:

- What kind of prayers have I prayed?
- Have we asked only that God protect our loved ones and bring justice to our enemies, or do we also plead with Him to pour out His mercy and save the souls of those who are our enemies?
- Do we really see ourselves as fellow sinners who need just as much mercy and grace as those who are our enemies?

Although nations must implement protective measures for the safety of their citizens, it is easy to allow the spirit of patriotism to blind our eyes to our real enemy—Satan—and the real issue, our common need for forgiveness and eternal life. We have all rebelled against God, and without the mercy of Christ, we all stand condemned before Him, no more and no less than Osama bin Laden does. As long as we reject that truth, we will not be able to minister the mercy and compassion of God to others.

Do you find it difficult to identify with these thoughts? Are you thinking, “God would never call me to minister in such a distant place or to such a difficult person. I think I’m safe—and I do not need to stretch.” Well, maybe God won’t call you to a distant land, but you don’t need to travel across the globe to find enemies. What about people who live close to home? Is there anyone you consider an “undesirable”? Maybe it’s someone you would rather not be around. Someone who rubs you the wrong way. Someone who has violated your trust. How do you feel when you picture that person’s face? The way you feel when you think about that person may be an indication that deep down you consider that person an enemy. Is God calling you to minister His mercy and compassion to that person or to stand ready to do so when He does call you? What would that mean? What would it look like in that situation?

I’m not asking these questions because I have all the answers. In fact, it’s hard to even know the right questions to ask. I do know that when I consider these things, I realize that my own heart is not where it should be. I do not care enough. I do not weep enough. And I certainly do not give enough. I am often unfeeling and self-absorbed and have nothing to give to others and nothing to say to them. The truth is, I have no resources of my own. And the story of Jonah is scary because when I look at
myself, I see that often I do not share the heart of God. My heart needs the same kind of work Jonah’s did. Left to my own devices, I am doomed.

Fortunately, that’s not the end of the story. There is hope—hope beyond me and hope beyond measure. That brings us to the second aspect of the book of Jonah.

Jonah is exhilarating! I am struck by Jonah’s words: “I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity” (4:2, NIV).

This is the electrifying, exhilarating truth of Jonah: God is gracious and compassionate. Now, this is not merely good theology. It is good theology that has profound and practical significance. Just ask the people of Nineveh: They deserved nothing from God, but they enjoyed the reality of His good name. Ask Jonah: He deserved death, yet he experienced an abundance of God’s generosity and grace. This is not just good theology. It is truth in which the lost and rebellious can revel.

When I read these words and see how God delights in forgiving, relenting, and showing mercy, my heart says, Yes! This God is worthy of my praise. He deserves my affection. He deserves all my heart. I stand in awe.

This God is like no other. No one else is so forgiving. No one else shows such compassion and grace. No matter how long you search, you will find no one else with a heart like His. He is truly one of a kind.

So while it frightens me that I am not like God, I am exhilarated that He is not like me! I want to taste and know Him, to bask in His compassion and grace. Indeed, the more I know of Him, the more I want to know Him and the more I desire to be like Him.

There is one more thing: the question God raises at the end of the book:

“Should I not be concerned . . . ?” (4:11, NIV)

At this, Jonah falls silent. He knows he has failed the test of sharing God’s heart. At this point we might wonder, If this prophet doesn’t share God’s heart, then who will? Years pass, and still no one fits the bill, no one wholeheartedly shares all of the Father’s concerns.

Then we meet Jesus. In Him the Father gives us the definitive answer to that question. Consider the way He lived: Suffering the pain of countless rejections, He still cried out: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!” (Luke 13:34, NIV).

As He approached the city before suffering His ultimate rejection on the cross, He wept and said, “If you, even you, had known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes” (Luke 19:41-42, NIV).

Mercy and compassion characterize not only the way Jesus lived; they also characterize the way He died. He voluntarily and willingly accepted the humiliating death of the cross. He became like a capital criminal in order to unleash the limitless depth of the Father’s concern for those who are lost. Look at the way the apostle Paul describes this wonder:

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him! For if, while we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! (Romans 5:6-10, NIV; emphasis added)

Paul is amazed at the thought of God’s mercy and compassion. He attempts to convey his wonder by piling descriptive upon descriptive: “When we were still powerless . . . while we were still sinners . . . while we were God’s enemies,” God saved us through Jesus Christ. The wonder of God’s grace, at
least in part, is in the timing of the cross. He extended His mercy and grace to those who were His enemies.

“Should I not be concerned?” God asks in Jonah. “Who will share My heart?” The answer is Jesus. His life and death forever proclaim just who Jonah said He is: “…a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love” (4:2, NIV).

That is an exhilarating truth! If you want God’s heart for your own, then bask in the message of Jonah: God is at work in His messenger to form in him His own heart.
Session 11

Discussion

Reflecting on the Workshop

Quick View

This session is an important opportunity to evaluate the workshop—what has been taught, what has been learned, and how to improve and sharpen the training next time. It's also a time to reflect on what God has done in each of our lives through studying and listening to His Word in fellowship with each other.

Objectives

The teacher and learners will:

- **Evaluate the Workshop**
  - The teacher will find out from the learners
    - what they have learned
    - how to improve the workshop next time

- **Reflect on What God Has Done**
  - The participants will have the opportunity to share
    - what they have learned about God
    - what work God has done in their hearts and lives
    - how God has changed their perspective about ministry

- **Think about Next Steps**
  - The teacher will discuss what the learners need to do to
    - reinforce and further develop what they have learned
    - multiply the training by passing it on to others
    - prepare for the next training workshop
Discuss and Evaluate
Take this time to discuss what we’ve learned and to think about how to make the workshop better.

Instructions for “Discuss and Evaluate”

General Discussion
Begin by leading a broad discussion that will allow the learners to reflect on and process what they’ve learned through their study of Jonah.

Evaluation of the Workshop
Let that discussion lead to an evaluation of the workshop.
First, ask questions that will help you determine, by the learner’s answers, how well the specific learning objectives of the workshop have been met (see the bottom of page 8 for those objectives). Don’t just ask yes or no questions. Make them answer in a way that helps you to measure what they have learned. Through this time we are trying to determine what we were really able to accomplish in our training and what the learners actually learned. Ask for brief, concise answers to help you get through all of the questions. Try to evaluate each learning objective.
Second, allow the learners to evaluate the workshop more generally. Try to determine what was helpful and what could be improved.
Allow about 20 minutes for this part of the discussion.

Teaching Idea - Suggested Discussion Questions

General Discussion
- In the last few days, we have studied a lot of the Bible. What have you learned?

Evaluation of the Workshop
Concerning Specific Learning Objectives (see bottom of page 8)
- The Pre-Assignment. How helpful was the pre-assignment in preparing you for our study together? Is there some other way we could better prepare before we come together for a workshop?
- A Basic Approach to Inductive Bible Study. What are the basic steps or stages of inductive Bible study? Can you explain the difference between each step?
- The Egg Illustration. What are the different parts of the egg? How does this illustration about context help you study a passage in the Bible?
- Finding the Big Idea of a Book of the Bible. What do we mean by the Big Idea of a book of the Bible? What are some helpful tips in finding it?
- Do Sessions. Was preparing two short messages from the book of Jonah helpful for your experience at this workshop? How can we make that learning experience better?

In General
- What was most helpful to you this week?
- What one or two things did you learn that will be especially helpful to you in your life and ministry?
- What could have been improved? What changes would you suggest for the next training time?
Reflect on What God Has Done

Think about what God has done in your heart and life this week through His Word. Pray about what changes He may be calling you to make.

Instructions for “Reflect on What God Has Done”

We aren't just looking for what knowledge the learners have gained. We want to know how it has affected their hearts.

General Discussion

Ask the learners how they can apply the truth of what they’ve learned from God’s Word to their own hearts and their approach to ministry.

Thinking about Change

Ask the learners what changes they feel God may be calling them to make in their ministries and in their lives.

Taking Time to Pray

Be sensitive to how God may work during this time and how and when you might conclude in prayer.

Allow 20-30 minutes for this part of the discussion.

Teaching Idea – Suggested Discussion Questions

General Discussion

▪ What do the things we learned about in Jonah mean for you and for me today?
▪ In response to God’s Word, what one or two applications does God have for you personally from the book of Jonah?

If necessary, you may want to ask some of the following questions. However, only ask them if they will help you move the learners to personally apply God’s truth to their lives and ministries.

▪ What do we learn about God from the book of Jonah?
▪ What has God been teaching you through our study of Jonah?
▪ In what ways will knowing the message of Jonah make you a better disciple of the Lord Jesus? How will it make you a better shepherd of God’s people?
▪ Your life is part of a very big plan. Yet, it is also very personal. How has God’s grace been at work in your own life? How did He bring you to Himself and how is He continuing to build into you what He wants for His own glory?
▪ When in your personal life or ministry do you find it most difficult to take God at His Word? Why do you think it is so difficult?

Thinking about Change

▪ What change is the Lord calling you to make in your life and ministry based on what you have learned from Jonah? Be very specific and personal.
▪ What changes to your ministry and the way that you study, teach, and preach God’s Word will you seek as a result of what you learned this week?
Next Steps
What do we need to do to pass on this training to others and further what we have learned? What do we need to do to prepare for our next time together?

Instructions for “Next Steps”
Help the group think through what they need to do in order to multiply the training by going out and teaching others. Also, think about any assignments that will help reinforce what they have learned and also to prepare them for the next time of training you will have together.

- Be sure to give out the Study Version of the training material for the Jonah Workshop.

Allow 5-10 minutes for this part of the discussion.

Teaching Idea – Suggested Post-Assignments
Below are suggestions for post-assignments to help learners multiply the training and continue in what they have learned through this study of the book of Jonah.

- Form a plan to go out and teach this workshop on Jonah to others. Make a list of pastors you want to train. Contact them and begin teaching this workshop on Jonah within the next month, if possible. (Suggest working together as a group of two or three, if possible, to plan and teach a workshop to other pastors.)
- Preach through the book of Jonah in your church.
- Begin reading through the next book of the Bible we will study. Prepare one or two short (five minutes each) messages from that book.

Perhaps hand out the Pre-Assignment and Workbook Version for the next workshop during this time as well.
Appendix
Appendix

Pre-Assignment for 2 Timothy

We look forward to our time with you and believe it will be rich. We are asking God to speak powerfully through His Word and continue to change our lives and ministries for His own glory. Please pray with us and give yourself fully to the following preparations.

General Preparation
Read the book of 2 Timothy at least five times. From your reading alone (do not consult commentaries or other Bible-study aids), answer the following questions. Be sure to write down verse references.

1. Who is the author of this letter?
2. Who is the recipient?
3. From the letter itself, what do we learn about the life situation of the author and the recipient?
4. What words or concepts are repeated throughout the letter?
5. What important comparisons or contrasts are found?
6. Are there any commands? If so, what are they, and where do we find them?
7. How would you describe the tone of the letter (for example: warning, instruction, etc.)?
8. Where is the climax of the letter? How do you know?
9. In one complete sentence, what is the Big Idea or overarching theme that runs through the book? (Hint: Look at the beginning and end of the book.)
10. How does 2 Timothy fit into the larger story of the Bible?

Preparation for Preaching
Choose two of the following passages from 2 Timothy: 2:1-7; 2:8-13; 2:14-19; 2:20-26. Prepare a three- to five-minute talk on each of the two passages you choose. Don’t worry about an introduction, a conclusion, illustrations, or application. As part of your preparation, answer the following questions:

1. How does this passage fit into the flow of the book as a whole (the context)? What unique contribution does it make to the book and how does it further our understanding of the writer’s message as a whole?
2. What is the main idea of the passage? What, in a sentence, is this passage saying (the Big Idea)?
3. How does the writer unpack the main idea? In other words, what are the key points that support the main idea of the passage (the structure)?
4. How does this passage fit into the flow of the Bible’s history and message (Biblical theology)? Does this passage point to Christ in any way? If so, how? What does it say about Him?
5. Answer the following question only after fully engaging with questions 1 through 4: What does this passage have to say to the group I am teaching in the twenty-first century? What am I attempting to get across to the listeners (the aim/application)?

Teacher’s Note: In addition to these pre-assignments, assign devotions for each morning (see the suggested schedule for the 2 Timothy workshop) to a different learner so each will grow in his ability to communicate God’s Word.
Evaluation of Stated Outcomes

As a result of the preaching workshop on the book of Jonah, how much progress do you think the group made? For each of the “Specific Desired Outcomes” listed below, rate the extent to which the learners demonstrated...

1. A Lot of Progress
2. Some Progress
3. Not Much Progress.

Did the learners...

1. Learn several different ways to observe a text using The Egg illustration (the yolk). Are they able to ask good questions and identify key words, repetitions, contrasts, transitions, and summary verses?

2. Learn how to interpret a text in light of the historical context of the book using The Egg illustration (the white)?

3. Learn how to interpret a text within the context of the entire Bible (seeing how Jonah fits into the whole of the Bible) using The Egg illustration (the shell)? In other words, can they articulate how Jonah fits into the whole of the Bible?

4. Seriously reflect on his or her own heart toward unbelievers, asking and probing the question, “Is my heart like Jonah’s or God’s?”

5. Become a better preacher/teacher by preparing and preaching a message from Jonah?
Training Report Form
(to be completed immediately after each first-generation training event)

Venue: ____________________________  Today's Date: ______________________

Trainer: ____________________________  Training Dates: ____________________

☐ Pre-TNT Event  ☐ Ongoing Group  Number of times group has met: _______

_______ Number of first-generation TNTers in this group

_______ Number of TNTers who serve in a pastoral role

_______ Number of TNTers participating in this training event

Name(s) of ethnic and/or tribal groups represented: ____________________________

What language was this training conducted in? ________________________________

Have you uploaded 4-6 properly labeled/key-worded pictures to the LRI server?  ☐ Y  ☐ N

First-Column Sessions
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Second/Third Column Sessions
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Instructor/Trainer: __________________________________________________________

Instructor/Trainer: __________________________________________________________

Books/Materials Provided
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
1. How did the TNTers respond during and after the training?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

2. Please provide one or two encouraging story kernels from your time with this group. 
(Please rate each of your story kernels along the left-hand margin in regard to potential impact, with a 1 representing an amazing story of God’s work, a 2 representing a compelling story, and a 3 representing an encouraging story.)

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

3. What strengths and challenges were encountered as the TNTers engaged with the curriculum and TNT training sessions?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

4. What other topics/subjects/materials might prove valuable to teach in the future?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

5. What, if any, significant observations do you have concerning group or training dynamics? What changes might you adopt when returning to this venue and teaching this group?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

6. What spiritual lessons did you personally learn from this training?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
Training Report Form
(a summary report for each 2nd-generation training group since the last report)

2nd-Generation Group Name: ____________________________ Today’s Date: ____________

Trainer(s): __________________________________________

1st Generation Group: ____________________________ Number of times group has met: ______

_________ Number of people presently in the training group

_________ Number of people in group who serve in a pastoral role
(ongoing preaching/teaching ministry, provision of spiritual care)

Name(s) of ethnic and/or tribal groups represented: ____________________________

Language the training was conducted in: ____________________________

TNT Workshops Completed:  ____________________________________________

Trainer(s):

__________________________________________

__________________________________________

__________________________________________

Additional Sessions Taught: ____________________________

Instructor/Trainer:

__________________________________________

In what ways has God been working since your last report that seem to be a direct result of the TNT ministry?

_________ Number of new preaching points

_________ Number of new believers

_________ Number of new churches/congregations

What encouraging or challenging issues have arisen as a result of your TNT ministry? What prayer requests do you have?

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________
Training Report Form
(a summary report for all 3rd-generation training groups that correspond to or originated in the 2nd-generation group on the previous page or reverse side)

2nd Generation Group Name: ___________________________  Today’s Date: ____________

Trainer(s): __________________________________________

1st Generation Group: _________________________________

_____  Number of all 3rd-generation training groups
   (corresponding to the 2nd-generation group on the previous page or reverse side)

_____  Number of people presently in all 3rd-Generation training groups

_____  Number of people in group who serve in a pastoral role
   (ongoing preaching/teaching ministry, provision of spiritual care)

Name(s) of ethnic and/or tribal groups represented: ________________________________

Language the training was conducted in: __________________________________________

TNT Workshops Completed:
________________________________________
________________________________________
________________________________________

TNT Workshops in Progress:
________________________________________
________________________________________

In what ways has God been working since your last report that seem to be a direct result of the TNT ministry?

_____  Number of new preaching points

_____  Number of new believers

_____  Number of new churches/congregations