

I AM JONAH

CALLED, RELOCATED AND SENT



JOURNEY WITH US AS WE MOVE BEYOND BEING PASSIVE OBSERVERS AND BECOME ACTIVE DISCIPLES OF JESUS
6 - 27 September 2026

Johannesburg is a city of opportunity, ambition, diversity, creativity and possibility. BUT it is also a city where many young people experience pressure, inequality, unemployment, loneliness, violence, corruption, injustice and uncertainty about the future. For young professionals' life can easily become a cycle of work, traffic, deadlines, money, social life and survival. While unemployment creates its own issues of hopelessness, withdrawal and financial strain which often leads to mental health issues. Which grew from lives of students that were focusing on passing, graduating on time and finding success. For teenagers they face pressures of finding themselves in this busy, overwhelming and consuming world has led us to a place where even a twelve-year-old can be diagnosed with deep mental health issues. In the middle of all of this, Jesus is still calling young people to "Follow Him".

The story of Jonah is not simply about a man, a fish and a city. It is a story about a person who was called by God to make a difference in the city God had sent him. Jonah wanted to run, and at times we want to run too. Run into our careers, into entertainment, into relationships, into comfort, into busyness, running because we believe that someone else will deal with the ill that young people face in our city. BUT God calls Jonah toward Nineveh! God is calling you to Johannesburg where injustice, hopelessness and brokenness have become normal.

This series invites us to use **youth month** to move beyond being Sunday Christians and passive observers into becoming active disciples of Jesus. To say:

"I am Jonah, I have been called. I may have run. I may have struggled. But God is still sending me." The title invites us to ask deep seeking questions of who we are in relation to Jonah, if we are willing to fully submit to the will of God regardless of our own feelings, boundaries and self-justice. Moving from passive Christianity to active disciples means allowing God to control every aspect of our identity in discipleship, giving away our selfhood to take on our Christhood.

I am Jonah called to be relocated for ministry sent into Nineveh.

Blessings

Lolo: sent to be a pastor to the young flock in Bryanston by the will of God through Jesus Christ.

Called, Relocated and Sent

Series Theme:
From comfort to
calling. From
spectators to
disciples. From
the church
building to the
city

WEEK 1:

I am called

WEEK 2:

I am not too far gone

WEEK 3:

I am sent

WEEK 4:

I am sent to people I
might not choose

WEEK 4 - I am sent to people I may not choose

Ministry beyond comfort zones

Active discipleship requires us to love people beyond our comfort, preferences and prejudices. Jonah did not want Nineveh to receive God's mercy, but the mercy of God is bigger than Jonah's preferences. It is easy to love people who think like us, but Jesus is sending us beyond our comfort zones into the diverse city of Johannesburg. God's mission is greater than our preferences. All can be saved to the uttermost of salvation. Go and find a boundary of diversity to cross and see people the way God sees them.

WORSHIP SONG:

Covenant Keeping God - Khaya Mthethwa <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qVVTxvGGUc>

Jonah 4 New International Version

Jonah's Anger at the Lord's Compassion

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

⁴ But the Lord replied, "Is it right for you to be angry?" ⁵ Jonah had gone out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city. ⁶ Then the Lord God provided a leafy plant and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the plant. ⁷ But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the plant so that it withered. ⁸ 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." ⁹ But God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?" "It is," he said. "And I'm so angry I wish I were dead."

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

BIBLE READINGS:

WEEK 1:

Jonah 1:1-3

Psalm 139: 7-10

Matthew 28: 18-20

WEEK 2:

Jonah 2:1-9

Psalm 18:6

Luke 15: 11-24

WEEK 3:

Jonah 3:1-10

Psalm 103:8-13

Matthew 12:38-41

WEEK 4:

Jonah 4:1-11

Isaiah 55:6-9

Matthew 20:1-16

REFLECTION ON THIS WEEK'S BIBLE READINGS written by Bulelwa Nkolongwane

God's radical compassion: A template for ministry beyond our comfort zones

We are sent to people we may not choose. Does this statement make you feel uncomfortable? As Christians, we are confronted with discomfort on all fronts of our lives. The way we react to injustice reveals a part of our human nature that we see in Jonah. Jonah had already judged the people of Nineveh in his heart; that is why we find him in chapter 4 upset with God for having shown undeserved mercy to them. Those of us living in Johannesburg, within the community of Bryanston, may experience from the rest of the world the same judgement that Jonah held in his heart, simply because we live in the city and have been painted with all kinds of negative connotations of city living.

After resisting the call and even taking matters into his own hands by choosing to go to Tarshish, Jonah struggles in his heart and mind to understand why God would save the people of Nineveh from their own demise. Jonah 4:3, 8 and 9 express that it is better for him to die than to witness the people receiving that kind of mercy from God. He did not understand his purpose in the greater plan God had for His people. The people of Nineveh were not chosen by Jonah, but they were chosen by God: a loving, compassionate God who always finds a way to save His people from themselves, and who chooses those who are rejected by the world. Jonah was appointed as part of God's greater plan.

In Jonah 4:5-8, God provides shade to give Jonah relief from the extreme heat and discomfort. Provision seems to be a recurring theme in this story. God provides the fish, the plant, the worm and the wind. "Manah" is the Hebrew word translated into English as "provide". The original meaning of "manah" is "appointed". So when God plans, He intentionally places objects and orders a sequence of events to fulfil a specific destiny. Jonah was used as part of God's plan to save His people. This plan does not make sense to Jonah, hence the resistance and anger.

In Isaiah 55:6-9, God's plan is not for us to understand. Scripture confirms this when it says that His thoughts are not like ours and His ways are higher than ours. We are therefore called to surrender the need to understand, and to submit to the call to seek Him, know Him and align with His perfect will. That is how Jonah ended up in Nineveh. We are being invited to surrender to God's higher ways, and to surrender to loving those we are less likely to choose or favour within our church community and in our places of work, leisure and education. This call is invasive, uncomfortable, confusing and perhaps too much to ask.

In Matthew 20:1-16, to elaborate further on how far apart God's ways are from ours, Jesus shares a parable that perfectly describes the upside-down kingdom. This parable and Isaiah 55:6-7 answer the question posed to Jonah in chapter 4 verses 10 and 11. The parable depicts the same God who saved the people of Nineveh: a God who has compassion and who rewards generously, without restraint, rather than according to our standards. This principle is uncomfortable. The world we live in does not work like that. It implies that we all receive the same mercy, even though some are less worthy of it. Surely that is an injustice. When we swipe to buy groceries, pour petrol or take a run, we all belong to some kind of loyalty program where are rewarded according to how much we spent, how much we poured and how far we ran. It is simple economics: the more you do, the more you receive. It is a perfect system that we all subscribe to, whether consciously or unconsciously. That is the beauty of the upside-down kingdom. In God's kingdom, we do not need to reach certain tiers of righteousness to earn His mercy. The people of Nineveh just had to receive the Word and Jonah was perfectly placed to execute that beautiful plan.

The story of Jonah shows us how God places us within His perfect plans to show the utmost love and compassion for His children. We are shown that we do not receive His mercy because we deserve it, but because of who God is. In the parable of the workers in the vineyard, Jesus further illustrates what is meant in Isaiah 55:6-9: that God's ways are indeed higher than ours and our thoughts are not like His. The parable shows us that God does not operate on a loyalty programme or a monthly subscription to righteousness; rather, He operates on grace and generosity, which contrast with human standards of fairness.

We are being called to get uncomfortable and to seek first the kingdom; He will have mercy on us and freely pardon us (Isaiah 55:6-7). Jesus is the template to follow in answering this call. We have been chosen to be kingdom influencers, to proclaim the Good News to those whom the Spirit leads us to: in our places of work and leisure, in our neighbourhoods and in our prayer groups, wherever we move in the city of Johannesburg. It is normal to resist anything that brings discomfort. We have been chosen by God, empowered by the Holy Spirit and carried by the love of Christ to win souls for His kingdom.

GROUP AND CLASS QUESTIONS to take the reflection deeper

1. What kind of injustice have you experienced that makes you angry with God?
2. What makes you uncomfortable with ministering to people you aren't familiar with?
3. How have you experienced God's radical compassion in your life?

DAILY MEMORY VERSE AND PRAYERS

MONDAY

Verse: *"But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry."* — Jonah 4:1

Prayer: Lord, help me surrender my anger and trust Your compassion today.

TUESDAY

Verse: *"I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love."* — Jonah 4:2

Prayer: Lord, make my heart more like Yours—gracious, compassionate, patient, and full of love.

WEDNESDAY

Verse: *“Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near.” — Isaiah 55:6*

Prayer: Lord, draw me near to You and help me seek You with my whole heart.

THURSDAY

Verse: *“Let the wicked forsake their ways and the unrighteous their thoughts.” — Isaiah 55:7*

Prayer: Lord, help me turn away from wrong thoughts and walk in Your mercy.

FRIDAY

Verse: *“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the Lord.” — Isaiah 55:8*

Prayer: Lord, teach me to trust Your higher thoughts and Your better ways.

SATURDAY

Verse: *“So the last will be first, and the first will be last.” — Matthew 20:16*

Prayer: Lord, free me from comparison and help me rejoice in Your generosity to all.

SUNDAY

Verse: *“Should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh?” — Jonah 4:11*

Prayer: Lord, enlarge my heart so I can care for people with Your mercy and love.

KIDS AND TEENAGER SECTION: Family Time Devotion: I Am Jonah

WEEK 4: I AM SENT TO PEOPLE I MIGHT NOT CHOOSE

From my preferences to God’s compassion

WRITTEN BY: Amo Matlala

Scripture: Jonah 4:1–11; Isaiah 55:6–9; Matthew 20:1–16

Opening Thought

It is easy to love people who are like us, agree with us, make us comfortable, or treat us well. But God’s call often stretches us beyond our preferences. Like how Jonah was willing to go to Nineveh, but he did not want God to show mercy to the people there. He wanted God’s grace for himself but struggled when that same grace was given to them, he did not think deserved it.

We can experience something similar in everyday life. There may be people at school, work, church, or in our neighbourhood who we would not naturally choose as friends. They have diverse backgrounds, personalities, beliefs, or experiences. Sometimes we judge people before we know their stories. Sometimes we quietly decide who deserves our kindness and who does not.

This week invites us to notice where our hearts have become selective. God’s compassion is bigger than our preferences. Being sent by God means being willing to care about people we might not have chosen for ourselves. We do not have to agree with everyone, but we are called to see people as God sees them, to make room for compassion, and to participate in God’s work of bringing people closer to Him.

Scripture Reading: Read Jonah 4:1–11, Isaiah 55:6–9, and Matthew 20:1–16 together as a family. As you read, pay special attention to Jonah’s anger, God’s compassion, and the different ways people respond to God’s generosity.

Reflecting Together

Jonah 4 reveals a difficult truth: sometimes we can be comfortable receiving God’s mercy while struggling to see other people receive it. Jonah was angry because God had shown compassion to Nineveh. The people Jonah disliked were the very people God cared about. God used the situation to challenge Jonah’s understanding of mercy and to expose how limited his perspective had become.

Isaiah reminds us that God’s thoughts and ways are higher than ours. We cannot always understand whom God is reaching, why He chooses to show mercy, or how He is working in another person’s life.

Matthew's parable of the workers makes a similar point: God's generosity is not controlled by our ideas of what people deserve. Jesus teaches us to move away from comparison, entitlement, and resentment and toward trust in God's goodness.

Being sent means carrying God's heart into places and relationships that may stretch us. It means asking, "Who am I tempted to exclude?" and allowing God to replace our preferences with compassion. We may not choose every person we encounter, but we can choose to respond with dignity, kindness, patience, and love.

Discussion Questions for Teenagers (Ages 12–18)

1. Who are the kinds of people you naturally find easy to connect with, and who do you find harder to understand or accept?
2. Have you ever judged someone before knowing their story? What influenced your first impression?
3. Jonah was angry that God showed mercy to Nineveh. Why do you think we sometimes struggle when people we dislike receive kindness or second chances?
4. What would it look like this week to show God's compassion to someone you would not normally choose to spend time with?
5. Is there a relationship, group, or person you have been keeping at a distance? What is one small step you could take toward seeing them with greater empathy?

Discussion Questions for Younger Children (Ages 4–11)

1. Who is someone you enjoy spending time with?
2. Can you think of someone who is different from you? What is one good thing you could learn about them?
3. If a new child came to your school or church and had no friends, how could you help them feel welcome?
4. What would you do if someone you did not know very well asked to play with you or sit with you?
5. What do the stories of Jonah and Jesus teach us about how God treats people?

Family Challenge: "One More Seat"

Set an extra place at the table or leave an empty chair beside your family. Explain that the empty seat represents someone who may feel left out, forgotten, or like they don't belong.

Talk together about:

- * Who might feel like they have "no seat" in our school, church, neighbourhood, or community?
- * Have we ever made someone feel like there was no room for them?
- * What could we do to make someone feel welcome?

Then, as a family, choose one person this week to intentionally make room for. This could mean inviting them to join an activity, sitting with them, checking in on them, introducing them to others, or simply making time to listen.

Family reminder: God's circle is always wider than ours. We can make room for others because God makes room for us.

Prayer

Lord, thank You that Your compassion is bigger than our preferences.

Help us to see people the way You see them, especially those we find difficult to understand.

Give us humble hearts that do not decide who is worthy of Your kindness.

Teach us to welcome, listen, forgive, and serve with love.

Send us beyond our comfort zones so that our lives can reflect Your heart. Amen.