

## Small Group and Personal Bible Study Guide

### **This Weeks Memory Verse: Matthew 9:37**

“The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out the workers into his field.”

### **This Weeks Lesson: Jonah – A Story About Sharing Our faith**

This short book follows the call upon Jonah as a prophet of God. How he chose to flee from the Lord rather than bring the good news to those whom he did not feel were worthy of God. God pursued Jonah and used miraculous ways to get his attention. Finally, Jonah followed God’s calling and the people of Nineveh turned to the Lord so God spared them. In this lesson we learn beyond a shadow of a doubt the words of Jonah found in Jonah 4:2 are absolute truth, “You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love.”

1. Have you ever felt a call from God to witness to people that seemed unworthy of God’s love?

A few years ago I came to a realization that I did not feel much sympathy for men living on the streets. My view was that they were just lazy, alcohol and drug addicts that chose to live the way they live and not work. I didn’t hate them but at the same time I didn’t feel any compassion. When God revealed this to me, he broke my heart and changed me from the inside out. Since then I have come to love those same men that I could care less about. I have served, taught and prayed with somewhere around a thousand homeless men in the past three or four years. God has used me to allow him to restore many of their lives and turn them from there sinful ways. Now when I see one of these men, I see them as God’s children whom he loves and I have learned to love them as well.

2. Is it difficult for you to understand how God can love and forgive a mass murderer? A terrorist? A child molester? A rapist?

I find this still very difficult to grasp. This week in the news, a driveby shooting incident in Hayward ended with two little girls being shot in the head. One was 3 years old and the other was 4 years old. You have to ask yourself, how could someone do something so wrong and how could God love and forgive them? How can he expect his people to reach out to those murders in love with a message of forgiveness?

Working with homeless men downtown at InnVision, I became best friends with many ex-cons. Several guys I have ministered to have been previously convicted of murder or other violent crimes. One of them, Greg, was sentenced to death for murder in Nebraska, but his sentence was overturned to life. He was eventually released after 25 years of prison time. In my own mind I think he should have never been released and probably should have been put to death. As a member of the Mexican mafia, Greg was convicted of two murders but told me he was guilty of many more crimes. But Greg gave his life to Christ in prison and God completely changed him. Greg is now an evangelist who walks the creek beds and alleys to minister to those hurting and stuck in sin. Greg and I became close friends. I had the honor of baptizing Greg several years ago. I invited him into my home to join our small group for a short period of time while he was in San Jose. He ate

at our family table for Christmas dinner several years in a row. I consider this man my brother. That is a transformed heart and mind, and I am talking about my heart and mind. In my old self I would hate him and feel he should be locked up still. I would find it difficult to see how God could love and forgive this man. But God convinced me he is a “gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love.” Jonah 4:2. He loves Greg and He loves every person in this world. We live in a modern day Nineveh and the Lord wants us to proclaim Him as he called on Jonah. We must ask ourselves, are we going to get on a ship and flee or go to the city and proclaim Him? Are we willing to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us?

3. What does God say about the worthiness of people to receive his love and forgiveness? Can you think of any bible verses to share that answer this question? God so loved the world that he gave his only son so how could I pick and choose whom I think should be worthy of God’s love. Jesus over and over again picked the unworthy to be loved. The thief on the cross is a perfect example. The Samaritan woman is another. The women caught in adultery is yet another.

4. What lesson do we learn from Jonah about our own calling as a witness for God? I believe we are called to go and let God use us to share his love to a lost and hurting world and he will do the rest. If we submit and ask him to help us see people the way God sees them He will change our heart.

Another truth is revealed in this story. Jonah chapter 2 is one of my favorites because it is a prayer of thankfulness and praise, but the profound truth is found in the first words of first verse, “from inside the fish Jonah prayed.” Jonah prayed, thanked God, trusted God, and praised God even before he was delivered safely. I think being inside a fish would not be the easiest place to praise and thank God, but the truth is, we cannot let our circumstances be the purpose of praise. The truth is God is the reason for praise. Because Jonah didn’t give up on God, God didn’t give up on Jonah.

5. Can you think of a time in your life that you had to thank and praise God before he delivered you or answered your prayer? What was the outcome?

### **This Weeks Reading Schedule:**

This week we will read the book of Jonah and also take a look at one of Jesus’ example in witnessing to the unworthy and loving the lost found in John 4.

Day 1: Jonah 1

Day 2: Jonah 2

Day 3: Jonah 3

Day 4: Jonah 4

Day 5: John 4 (Jesus Talks To The Samaritan Women – The Harvest)