

# **CALLED TO SERVE**

## **Introduction – Hearts**

The heart can be described in many ways – loving, hateful, deceitful, pure, angry and obedient to name a few. When we say, “we have a heart” for something, we don’t mean the organ for pumping blood around the body! We can mean that we have a desire for something or someone. We can also be said to, “set our heart on something”. In other words, it is our focus and our desire.

All of us are made up of many moods, and these desires and focuses are not always good ones. In these studies, we are going to look at some Bible characters and see what types of hearts they had – both good and bad, in order to learn from them.

In the next 7 weeks, we will be looking at the following hearts:

**Week 1: Jonah - The Disobedient Heart**

**Week 2: Jonah – The Angry Heart**

**Week 3: Daniel – The Praying Heart**

**Week 4: Philip – The Missionary Heart**

**Week 5: Esther – The Courageous Heart**

**Week 6: Ruth – The Faithful Heart**

**Week 7: Paul – The New Heart**



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## **Week 1: Jonah – The Disobedient Heart**



### **Live**

Where you disobedient as a child/do you have any disobedient children? Share any funny stories.



### **Love**

Listen to or sing a worship song praising God for who He is and how he has blessed us.



### **Grow**

Read Jonah Chapter 1 and 2.

1. The picture of Jonah literally running in the opposite direction when God commanded him is quite comical! But why did he run? Was he scared of what the people of Ninevah would do to him?
2. In verse 4 we see that God has a way of catching up on us. In this case, He sent a storm to stop Jonah. Has anyone has an experienced something like this – when God blocked their way when they were avoiding doing what he wanted?
3. Do you feel sorry for the other passengers and sailors on the ship? Sometimes our actions have consequences that affect other innocent people. The sailors reluctantly threw Jonah into the sea when he told them that this was the answer to their plight. What was the result?
4. How might Jonah have felt when he was inside the whale? What did he do? What did God do?



### **Live**

Have you ever been in a situation of great despair that made you turn to God? Did you pray? What was the result?

We mentioned in the study that our actions can have consequences that affect others. Discuss any relevance of this in your present circumstances.

Return to both these thoughts this week to see if they have an impact on your week.





## Serve

Jonah's story teaches that we cannot run from God's call on our lives. Are there any areas in your life where you feel you are being called to serve, but are being disobedient?

## Prayer

Pray for one another over the issues raised – how our actions affect others, issues where we feel we're running from God, help to hear God's call on our lives etc.

## Leader's Notes

1. No, quite the opposite! He was worried God would be too lenient and kind to the Ninevites, when Jonah thought they should be judged.
- 2.
3. The sea stopped, seen in v 15. The crew were awestruck and worshipped God.
4. He felt it was the end!  
He reflected on his situation, repented and prayed.  
God spoke to the whale and vomited Jonah onto dry land (2 v 10)



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## **Week 2: Jonah – The Angry Heart**

### **Live**

Have you ever given someone a second chance? How did it work out?

Spend a few moments at the start of this study reflecting on the last week and whether any of your actions had significant consequences on others, either negative or positive. Pray over any issues raised, if you feel the need.

In the first study we saw what happened when Jonah went against God's will. Is there anything in our lives where we feel we are going against God's will? Don't worry if this is the case, God gives us second chances.

### **Love**

Listen to or sing a worship song praising God that he forgives us and never leaves us.

### **Grow**

Read Jonah Chapter 3 and 4.

1. Jonah doesn't get off the hook! Chapter 3 starts with, "The Lord spoke a second time..." What happened? Why did God give Jonah a second chance? Have you ever felt that God was giving you a second chance?
2. What was the reaction in Ninevah when Jonah preached God's message?
3. How do you think Jonah felt (Ch. 4 v.1)? Do you think his reaction is amazing? In v.3, Jonah angrily and inadvertently praises God and all of His greatest attributes! How odd! So why was Jonah angry?
4. Was Jonah right to be angry (v.4)? Have we felt angry when we should have been grateful?
5. Jonah was angry with God and sat outside the city to see what would happen. Even with his bad attitude, God cares enough by showing Jonah how he views the situation through a "parable in action" with the leafy plant and the worm. What was it trying to teach him?
6. When things don't go our way, do we behave like Jonah? If a tragedy happens, are we right to be angry with God? What do you think the Lord would say to us?
7. There is no happy ending to this book. What happens to Jonah? We don't know! Why do you think this is?



## Prayer

Pray over this study, thanking God that He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and filled with unfailing love.

## Leader's Notes

1. He was given another chance to redeem himself. It would have been so easy for God to leave Jonah in the whale and find a replacement to do the job. But God is interested in us as people and cares about what happens to us.
- 2.
3. Why was Jonah angry? Bitterness, because he wanted to see his enemies suffer. Foolishness, because his predictions which he wanted to be fulfilled would not happen now.
- 4.
5. See v.9.
- 6.
7. The Bible leaves it like this because this is a question that is as relevant today as it was then. It is the same merciful God of "second chances" who sent his son to rescue us from hopelessness and certain death. When you are tempted to blame God for terrible events then remember the God of this passage; merciful, loving and cares for each one of us individually.



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## **Week 3: Daniel – The Praying Heart**

### **Live**

What are your personal experiences of answered prayer?

In our last study, God showed his love and mercy to the enemies of his people. Jonah reluctantly obeyed God. Have we been able to do what God asked of us in the last few weeks? Is there anything we have done which we really did not want to do?

### **Love**

Praise God with words of adoration. Try spending 5-10 minutes in silence, having asked God to speak to you in whatever way he wishes. Finish by asking the group if they have any thoughts to share, either about the experience of waiting in silence, or about thoughts they think might be of God from this time.

### **Grow**

Read Daniel 6 v. 1-28 and Daniel 9 v. 4-23.

1. Why do you think Daniel was so successful in his work?
2. Why then did the other administrators plot against him?
3. Notice how the administrators flatter the King so they could get what they wanted (v. 6-8). Do we do this sometimes?
4. What was Daniel's response in v.10?
5. What was the King's response in v.14?
6. What do the King's words in v.20 say about Daniel's reputation?
7. What was the final outcome of Daniel's faithfulness to God and prayer? (v. 25-28)
8. In Chapter 9, how does Daniel start his prayer?
9. What other things does God want us to say in prayer?
10. How quickly was Daniel's prayer answered?
11. Why was Daniel so successful at prayer? What lessons can we learn from Daniel?
12. How can we apply it to our own lives?

### **Prayer**

Pray over what we have learnt through this study. Thank God for the example of Daniel and what we can learn from him. Pray for help to be repentant and full of praise in our prayers.

Finish with a brief discussion about how you could conduct your prayer life over the next week, with a view to being accountable for that to everyone at the next meeting.



## **Leader's Notes**

1. He trusted and prayed to God, v.3.
2. Jealousy, v.4-5.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
6. That he was known for his prayerful faithfulness to God.
7. God was glorified.
8. With praise to God.
9. He wants us to confess our sin.
- 10.v.23
- 11.He was faithful, righteous and God loved him



# **CALLED TO SERVE**

## **Week 4: Philip – The Missionary Heart**

### **Live**

Spend some time sharing and reflecting on your prayer life since the last session. Have we experienced any answered prayers? How did that make us feel?

### **Love**

As a contrast to last week, play some vibrant and lively worship songs. Encourage the group to offload any stresses and give glory to God, with a spirit of joy.

### **Grow**

Read John 1 v. 43-51.

1. Philip seemed to be a natural evangelist from the moment he decided to follow Jesus. What do we need to have in order to share our faith?  
Read Acts 8 v. 1-13 and 26-40.
2. At this time, the early church was under great persecution after the death of its first martyr. What was Philip's reaction to the persecution?
3. Despite the persecution, what was the response of the listening crowds?
4. It doesn't seem very logical to go down a desert road where no one lived, but Philip obeys (v.26). What is our reaction when God tells us to do something, which doesn't seem to be right?
5. The result of his faith was the apparently fortunate meeting with the Ethiopian official (v.27) who would have been a proselyte (a non-Jew who took on the Jewish faith), as we was returning from worshipping in the temple at Jerusalem. Philip still needed boldness to ask the official what he was reading. Are we willing to be bold in our evangelism?
6. What did the spirit prompt Philip to do? What was the result of Philip's obedience?
7. How do we become confident in our own evangelism?

### **Prayer**

Pray that God would help us to be obedient, bold and intelligent in our witness and evangelism. Pray for help to spot opportunities and for the boldness to take them. Pray for genuine concern and love for others.

### **Leader's Notes**

1. E.g. enthusiasm, prayer, genuine concern for the person we want to speak to, an eye for opportunity, boldness, etc.
2. v.5.
3. v.6, v.7, and v.8.
- 4.
- 5.
6. v.29. The official was led to Christ in v.30-39.



# **CALLED TO SERVE**

## **Week 5: Esther – The Courageous Heart**

### **Live**

Has anyone had to opportunity to share their faith with anyone since the last study?

### **Love**

Listen to or sing along to a piece of worship music. Try to encourage a new way of worship – e.g. if you normally sit, why not try standing or kneeling?

### **Grow**

See the Leader's Notes section for a quick summary of the book for those who aren't familiar with it.

Read Esther Chapter 3 v. 8-11, Chapter 4, Chapter 5 v.1-8, Chapter 7 v. 1-6 and Chapter 9v. 1-4.

1. How serious was the threat of this decree to the Jews?
2. What was Mordecai's reaction to the decree?
3. Approaching the King when you weren't invited was risky business, even more dangerous when he may have killed Esther anyway if he knew she were a Jew! Do you think Esther may have been tempted to just save herself by keeping quiet? How would you have felt in this situation?
4. What did Mordecai say to her?
5. Are there situation where you should have spoken up and didn't? How did you feel? Did it make you feel better or worse?
6. What might help you in a situation where you have to risk yourself/your image/your reputation?
7. What happened when Esther went to the King?
8. What was the King's reaction to her request? How do you think she felt?
9. The Jews were saved, and Mordecai was honoured – all because Esther acted courageously and stood up to be counted for! What can we learn from her?
10. Do you know anyone who has stood up for what they believed in? Do you admire them for it?

### **Serve**

What can we take from this story when we have to sometimes put ourselves on the line and serve others?



## **Prayer**

Pray for courage when we have to stand up for what we believe in. Pray for the strength of personality to act as we should when faced with a tough situation.

## **Leader's Notes**

Who said the Bible was boring?!

If you haven't already read this book, here is a quick outline. The Jewish nation is in captivity in Persia, where the King of Persia's queen is disobedient so she is sacked. A beauty competition is held to find a replacement and a Jewess, Esther wins it and become queen, but she keeps her nationality a secret. Esther's uncle, Mordecai is the King's faithful servant and is hated by the upstart, Haman, who is promoted to second in the kingdom. Mordecai refuses to bow down to Haman so Haman plans to wipe out the Jews as revenge. Haman gets the King to sign a decree to murder them all. Mordecai encourages Esther to put a good word in with the King. Everyone is saved, the King honours Mordecai and everyone lived happily ever after (apart from Haman, who was executed).

- 1.
2. See Chapter 4 v.1
- 3.
4. See Chapter 4 v.13
- 5.
6. Prayer, trust in God, focus on the wider picture and seeing things through God's eyes.



# **CALLED TO SERVE**

## **Week 6: Ruth – The Faithful Heart**

### **Live**

Last week's study encouraged us to be brave and stand up for what we believe in. Has there been an issue where we had to do this recently?

### **Love**

Listen to or sing along to a piece of worship music that encourages us to be still and rest in God's presence. E.g. Be Still for the Presence of the Lord.

### **Grow**

Read Ruth Chapter 1 and Chapter 4 v.13 – end.

God can change a life and change the world through faithfulness. This story illustrates how God uses Ruth to continue the line to his son Jesus. Through faithfulness, God honours Ruth and rewards her.

1. Do we get discouraged when things are hard for us? Does God seem far away? Do you feel that he has abandoned you sometimes? Has he?
2. What do you think of Ruth's reaction to her situation?
3. How would we react if moving to a foreign land, and a foreign religion?
4. Do you think there was much chance of Ruth re-marrying if she went to Judah? (NB: Jews were commanded to be apart from foreigners)
5. Would we look after someone to this extent?

### **Serve**

Consider those who we are called to be faithful to. Reflect on how easy or difficult this is and how we cope with it.

### **Prayer**

Pray for help to be faithful to God and to each other, even when our own feelings tell us otherwise.

### **Leader's Notes**

Often considered as the loveliest book in the Bible, God is not mentioned by name, but his love and influence are written all over it. It is a tale of tragedy, difficult times and great faithfulness despite it all. If anyone was entitled to give up, it was Ruth! A Moabite, she was born outside of God's favoured people, the Jews, and would have been considered a heathen gentile. She married in the Jewish family of Naomi, who had fled from Judea after a famine. After 10 years of childless marriage, she was widowed, together with her sister in law, Orpah. So Naomi, Ruth and Orpah were left completely alone without



support. Together with the fact they had no children the situation was disastrous. So what were they to do? Naomi decides to return home as the famine has now receded. She bids the 2 daughters in law to return to their homes. Although Orpah does, Ruth remains faithful to Naomi and travels to Judah where she meets Boaz who is kind to her and eventually looks after her by marrying her. As a result, she is linked in the line of descendants to Christ.

- 1.
2. See Chapter 1 v.16 and 17



# **CALLED TO SERVE**

## **Week 7: Paul – The New Heart**

### **Live**

If you could have the ability to transform into any animal, what animal would it be?

### **Love**

Listen to or sing along to a worship song about how God transforms our hearts and lives.

### **Grow**

See the Leader's Notes section for a quick summary of Paul's story.

Read Acts Chapter 8 v. 1-3 and Chapter 9 v. 1-31.

1. How would you describe Paul's heart at the beginning of this reading?
2. How would you describe it at the end?
3. How do you think he felt when he heard the voice of Jesus after the light struck him down? In v.5 he asks whom the voice belonged to, do you think he might have suspected anyway?
4. What do you the soldiers who were with him thought was happening?
5. What else happened to Paul, and how did he respond during the next couple of days?
6. How did he originally plan to arrive in Damascus? How did he actually arrive? Does God take the wind out of our sails too, sometimes?
7. How would you have felt if you were Ananias? How did he react?
8. Do you think it is true that God breaks us down to build us up?
9. What does God promise to all people if they have faith?
10. After an initial reluctance on the on the part of the Christians, what did Paul's conversion mean for the Church, the world and Christians today?

### **Build**

How does Paul's transformation encourage us in our evangelism?

### **Prayer**

Thank God that He can change people's hearts, like he did with Paul. Ask God to change our hearts for His glory.



## Leader's Notes

What a transformation story this is! Imagine it, Saul; a murder, torturer, religious bigot and the No.1 enemy of Christ's new church. God wants him, strikes him down and transforms him! Saul, now Paul, put 100% into everything he did. Whatever side he was on he gave it everything he had. What a catch! The Devil must have been livid! This study demonstrates God's great ability to forgive us, how he can restore and use us for his work.

- 1.
2. Broken, contrite, completely different, transformed, new, etc.
- 3.
4. See v. 7
5. He went blind and didn't eat.
- 6.
7. See v. 10
- 8.
9. A new heart, a new attitude, allegiance and enthusiasm.
10. He became a pillar of strength to the new Church. Through his missionary journeys the world heard about Jesus which changed the course of history and through his writings in the New Testament we have guidance, reproach and comfort for our daily lives.