

6 *Psalm 88*
Have you ever known times of utter despair where you felt lonely, abandoned, and in total darkness?
What kept you going?
Could you sense the protecting embrace of God, sheltering you from the storms of life (*see 91:1-4*)?

7 *2 Timothy 2*
Timothy is repeatedly encouraged by Paul to be strong, to persevere, to stand firm in his faith and in his mission.
What are the biggest barriers in your Christian journey, barriers that might lead your faith to falter or fall?
How do you overcome them?

8 *2 Timothy 4*
Paul notes the tendency of some to only listen to what they want to hear, rather than be open to God's truth (vv.3-4).
How do we guard against this in our own lives?

9 *Isaiah 3*
Do you think that most people really engage at all with the impending judgment that, one day, awaits them?
Do you?
What can the Church do about this?

10 *Isaiah 9*
“For to us a child is born ... to us a son is given ...” (v.6).
What are your reactions to reading this so familiar prophecy in its original context?

Closing

Be still for a minute or two, silently reflecting on the discussion you've had and praying for God's strength to help you with any commitments you may have made as a result of it.

Close by saying together the words of the Grace.

SACRED

Group Resources

Month 23

Opening Prayer

O Jesus,
Be the canoe that holds me in the sea of life.
Be the steer that keeps me straight.
Be the outrigger that supports me in times of great temptation.
Let thy Spirit be my sail that carries me through each day.
Keep my body strong, so that I can paddle steadfastly on,
in the long voyage of life.
Amen.

(A New Hebridean Poem)

General Question

- 1 What has been the most memorable passage of Scripture you have read this month?
How has God spoken to you through it?

Activity

Although it's four chapters long, Jonah is actually quite a short book. Given this, the activity this month is to spend some time 'listening' to it once again. Ideally, play a CD of Jonah being narrated, or find someone to pre-record it, so that the whole group can 'listen' rather than one person having to read it out.

As you listen, consider what are both the 'facts' and the 'feelings' that underlie Jonah's faith at different points within the story.

How does the tension between the 'facts' and 'feelings' (in so far as there is any) play out? And how have these helped to a development in Jonah's relationship with God?

Spend some time discussing this after you have heard the story.

Further Ideas

As usual, the intention is not to work through all these ideas, just to take on some of them as the group chooses.

- 1 *Numbers 31*
When you feel the desire for vengeance, what do you do to contain it?
- 2 *Numbers 33*
Think of a long journey you have made for reasons other than tourism. Where and why did you go?
What do you remember most about the journey?
Was it what happened at the destination, or some of the incidents that occurred along the road?

In what ways is this also true for your spiritual journey?
- 3 *Psalms 86*
The psalm lists several characteristics of God: so he is forgiving, good, loving, compassionate, slow to anger, faithful... Which of these stands out most for you?
- 4 *Jonah 1*
Are there times when *you* have run away from God?
Did it lead to a downward spiral in *your* fortunes as it did for Jonah's? What was the 'great fish' that rescued *you*?
- 5 *Jonah 3*
The theme of confession continues.
Notice how heartfelt repentance is – the sailor's anguish in the boat, Jonah's prayer from inside the whale, the Ninevites clothing themselves in sackcloth ...

In comparison, are we too soft when it comes to confessing our sins before God? How might this be remedied?