



LIFE GROUP STUDY MATERIAL

# JONAH

*THE MISSIONARY HEART OF GOD*

**SESSION #5:  
BARRIERS TO MISSIONS**

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# BARRIERS TO MISSIONS

### LESSON AIM

To examine the barriers in our hearts and realign ourselves with God's heart for people and His mission.

### VIDEO LESSON

Link to video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6tFQ6eCKmS0>

### SCRIPTURE READING

#### Jonah 4:5-11

**5** Jonah went out of the city and sat to the east of the city and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, till he should see what would become of the city. **6** Now the LORD God appointed a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be a shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort. So Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the plant. **7** But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant, so that it withered. **8** When the sun rose, God appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint. And he asked that he might die and said, "It is better for me to die than to live." **9** But God said to Jonah, "Do you do well to be angry for the plant?" And he said, "Yes, I do well to be angry, angry enough to die." **10** And the LORD said, "You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night. **11** And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?"

Jonah 4:5-11 ESV

### INTRODUCTION

The book of Jonah reveals not only God's mission to the nations, but also His concern for the heart of His servant. He is not only concerned about our service to Him, but also about the condition of our soul within. As the series concludes in Jonah 4:5-11, the focus shifts from Nineveh's repentance to Jonah's condition. Despite witnessing a city turn back to God, Jonah responds with anger, discomfort, and deep resistance. Through a simple object lesson involving a plant, a worm, and a scorching wind, God confronts Jonah with a piercing question: "Should I not pity Nineveh?" This moment exposes the tension between God's compassionate heart and Jonah's conflicted one.

This passage reminds us that the greatest barriers to God's mission are often not external, but internal. Jonah's struggle was not a lack of calling, knowledge, or even results, but a heart misaligned with God's compassion. In the same way, we may find ourselves resisting God's mission, not outwardly, but inwardly. As we reflect on Jonah's story, let's explore three key barriers that can hinder us from fully participating in God's mission.

## **Three Barriers to Missions**

### **1. Ethnocentricity: The Issue of Pride and Prejudice vs Loving Without Partiality**

One of the first barriers revealed in Jonah's life is ethnocentricity, a heart posture shaped by pride, prejudice, and a preference for those who are like him. Jonah's resistance to Nineveh was not just about disobedience, but about who the Ninevites were, a people he despised. At its core, this barrier says, "I love my own kind more than I love the lost." Yet God's heart has always been for all people, and His vision is a people from every nation, tribe, and language worshipping Him together. Ethnocentricity limits our reach and distorts God's mission, calling us to examine our hearts and allow Him to reshape us so we may love without partiality.

### **2. Encampment: The Issue of Blessing vs Being a Blessing**

The second barrier seen in Jonah's life is encampment, the tendency to settle into God's blessings without stepping into His mission. This reflects a heart posture that says, "I love my blessings more than I love being a blessing." Jonah desired the presence and benefits of God, yet resisted the responsibility to go to Nineveh. In the same way, we can become comfortable enjoying spiritual growth, experiences, and provision while neglecting the call to reach others. Throughout Scripture, God's blessings are never meant to stop with us, but to flow through us to others. When we remain inward-focused, we risk turning our faith into comfort rather than mission, and must instead realign our hearts to move from simply receiving God's blessings to actively being a blessing to others.

### **3. Entanglement: The Issue of Flesh vs Spirit**

The third barrier seen in Jonah's life is entanglement, a heart posture that prioritises personal comfort over God's call. This reflects the attitude, "I love my comfort more than I love God's call." Jonah was more concerned about the shade of the plant than the salvation of a city, revealing how misplaced his affections had become. In the same way, we can become so attached to our comfort, routines, and personal preferences that we resist stepping out in obedience. Entanglement shifts our focus from eternal

priorities to temporary things, causing us to value what is fleeting over what truly matters. To overcome this barrier, we must allow God to realign our hearts, loosen our grip on comfort, and cultivate a deeper compassion for people that moves us toward His mission.

### **Do You Love the People?**

This passage brings us back to the central question God asked Jonah, “Should I not pity Nineveh?” It is a question that not only confronts Jonah, but also speaks directly to us today. While Jonah had the right calling, theology, and even results, his heart was out of alignment with God’s compassion. In the same way, we may appear outwardly obedient, yet still carry inner barriers that hinder us from fully embracing God’s mission. Whether it is ethnocentricity, encampment, or entanglement, these heart issues can quietly limit our love for people and our participation in God’s purposes. Yet in His mercy, God does not give up on Jonah, and He does not give up on us. He patiently works within us, inviting us to realign our hearts with His. As we reflect, the challenge is not simply to do more for God, but to allow Him to transform our hearts so that we would see people as He sees them and love them as He does.

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

Instructions for group facilitators: Every group is different. You may modify the discussion questions to suit your group and you do not need to use all the questions in the group discussion.

**Question 1:** In Jonah 4:5–11, what does Jonah’s reaction reveal about his heart, and what does God’s response reveal about His character?

**Question 2:** The sermon highlights ethnocentricity as a barrier. Why do you think it is so easy to prefer people who are similar to us, and how might this affect the way we live out God’s mission?

**Question 3:** Encampment describes the tendency to enjoy God’s blessings without stepping into His mission. In what ways can we become inward-focused in our faith, and what might it look like to be a blessing instead?

**Question 4:** Jonah was more concerned about his comfort than about the people of Nineveh. What are some “comforts” or distractions today that might keep us from obeying God’s call?

**Question 5:** Which of the three barriers—ethnocentricity, encampment, or entanglement—do you find most challenging in your own life, and why?

**Question 6:** The key question is, “Do you love the people God is sending you to?” Who might be your “Nineveh,” and what is one practical step you can take this week to move toward them?

## NEXT STEPS

Take time this week to reflect honestly before God about any barriers in your heart that may be hindering you from participating in His mission. Ask the Lord to reveal areas of prejudice, comfort, or inward focus that may be shaping your attitudes toward others. Bring these before Him in prayer, trusting in His grace to realign your heart with His compassion. As you go about your week, ask God to help you see people as He sees them and to take one intentional step toward someone He is placing on your heart, choosing to love and respond in obedience to His call.