

Eight Essential Bible Stories
Living the Message 2024-2025
March 2025 Study Guide
Mount Olivet Lutheran Church

March: Jonah 4 – *God's love is bigger than we think* with Pastor Lose
[Click here to watch the video](https://vimeo.com/1056040159). Or vimeo.com/1056040159

Opening Prayer

Dear God, bless each one who comes to this study. Open our ears, hearts, and minds so that we may experience your presence in our lives more deeply as we learn about your commitment to stay with us through all things. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Focus Overview

Jonah and the whale may be one of the most iconic images contained in the Old Testament. Yet few of us know much about the story. And what we do know, we tend to read as something of a morality tale: "Jonah didn't do what God wanted and was swallowed by a whale. Better do what God wants!" But that isn't even half – or even one-tenth! – of the story.

Over the years, two friends have made statements about this story that hint at the surprising and important message contained in this slim book. Statement #1: "Jonah portrays the prophet as schlemiel." Schlemiel is a Yiddish term that describes an incompetent or unlucky person or, more broadly, a fool. It is a familiar stock character in Jewish humor. Describing Jonah this way helps remind us that this story is not history or even a morality tale, but rather *satire*. Jonah, it turns out, is everything a prophet shouldn't be, and the point of the story is to teach him – and more importantly, us! – who God really is and what God really wants.

Statement #2: "Once you get the heart of the story, the episode with the whale is the easiest part to believe." Early in the story, Jonah is swallowed by a whale and lives in its belly for three days. Those who read this story literally feel the need to defend this, while those who don't take the Bible seriously dismiss it on the basis of scenes like this. Both misunderstand the heart of the story that proclaims that God's love is bigger, more expansive, and more inclusive than Jonah, or we!, ever imagined.

Scripture: [Jonah 4](#) (but also the [entire book of Jonah](#))

Questions:

1. As we are more than halfway through our series, take a moment to think about/review together the stories we've studied. How did these stories introduce you to God in a new way? How did they surprise you as you studied them this time?
 - a. Exodus 3 – *Who (not what) God is. (God is a God of relationships—get involved)*
 - b. Exodus 20 – *What does God want from us? (Ten Commandments—love one another)*
 - c. Mark 7 – *Jesus learns his mission is even larger than imagined. (Syrophoenician Woman)*
 - d. Genesis 3 – *God does not give up on us. (The Fall)*
 - e. Luke 15 – *God does not wait for us and does not put requirements on us. (The Prodigal Son)*
2. What was one of your initial takeaways from Pastor Lose's presentation?
3. What do you think about the book of Jonah as satire? Does it change how you read the story this time?
4. Although Jonah is not portrayed as a sympathetic character, are there ways that you do you identify with Jonah?
5. What was one of your favorite interactions between Jonah and God in the entire story?
6. Read this aloud as you think Jonah said it. What tone do you think he'd use? Have you ever used a similar tone when talking with God?

"He prayed to the LORD and said, 'O Lord! Is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? That is why I fled to Tarshish at the beginning; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing.'" ~ Jonah 4:2
7. What is this story ultimately about?

Closing Prayer

Dear God, thank you for reminding us that your love is bigger than we could ever imagine. Help us to love likewise in our lives today and always. In Jesus name, Amen.

Next Month

1 Kings 19 – *God shows up in the most unlikely of places.*

In-person: Tuesday, April 1, 6:30-7:30pm, Mpls Campus Room 207

Video will be emailed out Monday, March 31

Questions?

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