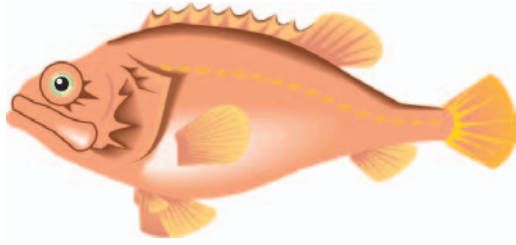


Above and Beyond:
Hearing God's Call
in Jonah and Ruth

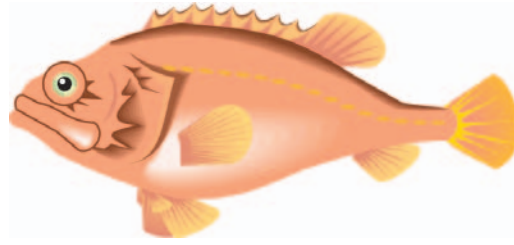


Three themes Jonah and Ruth
have in common:

- _ Both bear witness to a God whose love will not let us go.
- _ Both suggest that God's mind may be broader than our own.
- _ Both call us to a deeper commitment of faith.



Above and Beyond:
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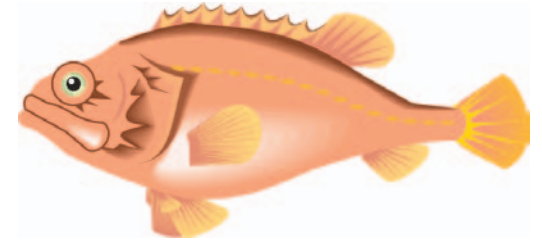


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Above and Beyond: Hearing God's Call in Jonah and Ruth
Lesson 2

	What we expect	What happens in this story	What we learn about . . .
Group 1: Call of Jonah <i>(Jonah 1:1–3)</i>			Grace: God: Ourselves:
Group 2: The sailors act <i>(Jonah 1:4–16)</i>			Grace: God: Ourselves:
Group 3: Jonah's fate <i>(Jonah 1:17)</i>			Grace: God: Ourselves:

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Lesson 3

Jonah 2:1–9 (NRSV)

Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the belly of the fish, saying,

“I called to the LORD out of my distress, and he answered me;
out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and you heard my voice.
You cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the flood surrounded me;
all your waves and your billows passed over me.
Then I said, ‘I am driven away from your sight;
how shall I look again upon your holy temple?’
The waters closed in over me; the deep surrounded me;
weeds were wrapped around my head at the roots of the mountains.
I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever;
yet you brought up my life from the Pit, O LORD my God.
As my life was ebbing away, I remembered the LORD;
and my prayer came to you, into your holy temple.
Those who worship vain idols forsake their true loyalty.
But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you;
what I have vowed I will pay.
Deliverance belongs to the LORD!”

In pairs, read Jonah’s prayer and do the following:

1. Underline expressions of praise to God.
2. Circle words that express lament over one’s circumstances.
3. Draw a box around words that express thanksgiving to God.
4. Draw a wavy line under sentences or phrases that seem particularly to apply to Jonah’s situation.

Then consider the following questions:

What would you say is the overall tone of Jonah’s prayer?

Jonah’s prayer contains no confession of sin. What else do you imagine Jonah saying to God from inside the big fish that is not expressed in his prayer?

What does Jonah’s prayer imply about God’s grace?

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Lesson 4

Jonah 3

Narrator: The word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time, saying,

God: “Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you.”

Narrator: So Jonah set out and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly large city, a three days' walk across. Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's walk. And he cried out,

Jonah: “Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!”

Narrator: And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth. When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. Then he had a proclamation made in Nineveh:

King: “By the decree of the king and his nobles: No human being or animal, no herd or flock, shall taste anything. They shall not feed, nor shall they drink water. Human beings and animals shall be covered with sackcloth, and they shall cry mightily to God. All shall turn from their evil ways and from the violence that is in their hands. Who knows? God may relent and change his mind; he may turn from his fierce anger, so that we do not perish.”

Narrator: When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it.

Group One: Focus on Jonah. What does he actually preach to the Ninevites?
How does Jonah's sermon compare to the sermon ideas our group created?

Group Two: Focus on the Ninevites. What do they do?
How do their actions compare to the list of responses our group created?

Group Three: Focus on the king. What does he do?
How do his actions compare to the list of possible responses our group created for the mayor of the city?

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Lesson 5

Group One: Focus on Jonah

You have 15 minutes to do two tasks:

1. Skim *Jonah 4* and practice reading Jonah's part in unison, paying attention to the tone you think represents Jonah's intent.
2. Prepare to defend Jonah's actions and words. Based on what you know about humans' responses to enemies, be ready to say what you think Jonah would think and do and why he would take this position.

After a reading of *Jonah 4*, during which you will read Jonah's part as a group, you will be asked to explain Jonah's position.

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Lesson 5

Group Two: Focus on God

You have 15 minutes to do two tasks:

1. Skim *Jonah 4* and practice reading God's part in unison, paying attention to the tone you think represents God's intent.
2. Prepare to defend God's actions and words. Based on what you know of God's character, be ready to say what you think God would think and do and why God would take this position.

After a reading of *Jonah 4*, during which you will read God's part as a group, you will be asked to explain God's position.

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Lesson 6

Read the instructions for your group. Be prepared to tell the whole group your findings.

Group 1: Skim the first three sections of Lesson Six, looking for characters, their names, and the meaning of these names. Prepare for the whole group a poster-size list and comment on why you think these names and meanings are significant.

Group 2: Skim the book of *Ruth* looking for the names of all the characters and their relationships to one another. Create a poster-size genealogy chart showing these relationships and point out the important connections for the group. (A study Bible may be helpful to you.)

Group 3: Skim the book of *Ruth* for the names of other women who are referenced. List their names on a poster and find out as much as you can about them. Why do you think their names are included? Briefly name them for the whole group and describe who they are. (A study Bible and Bible dictionary will be helpful to you.)

Group 4: Skim the book of *Ruth* for all the places God (the Lord/the Almighty) is named. Note how God’s name is used and what is implied about God. List all these references in order on a piece of poster board and tell the whole group what you discovered, including any insights you have about God’s place in this book.¹

¹For an excellent summary of this, see “The Place of God in the Story,” pages 14–16, in *Ruth (Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Preaching and Teaching)* by Katharine Doob Sakenfeld (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1999).

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Lesson 7

Mark each statement from Lesson 7 as follows:

SA = Strongly Agree
A = Agree
D = Disagree
SD = Strongly Disagree

- ___ “Sometimes it’s hard to see the way God works in our lives.”
- ___ “Just because we have a difficult time recognizing God’s hand, that doesn’t mean it isn’t there.”
- ___ “God often works from behind the scenes.”
- ___ “[A] coincidence is simply God’s way of remaining anonymous.”
- ___ “Perhaps part of the way we can ‘hear the call’ is to search our own stories for divine coincidences.”
- ___ “Part of hearing God’s call is in being willing to act faithfully in everyday situations.”

When you have finished, turn to another person and talk about one statement of your choice.

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Lesson 8

Chesed (steadfast and determined love) “... means the kind of love that goes above and beyond the call of duty. It is love that puts the welfare of the other person ahead of one’s own . . . that keeps on loving even when there is ‘nothing in it for me’” (page 38).

In your group, examine the instance of *chesed* in your passage from *Ruth*.

Group 1: *Ruth 2:10–12* Ruth’s actions toward Naomi, as pointed out by Boaz

Group 2: *Ruth 2:13* Boaz’s actions for Ruth, as noted by Ruth

Group 3: *Ruth 2:20* Boaz’s actions for Ruth that also benefit Naomi, as praised by Naomi (*chesed* translated as “kindness”)

Group 4: *Ruth 3:10* Ruth’s actions toward Boaz, as praised by Boaz (*chesed* translated as “loyalty”)

Discuss these questions in relationship to your group’s passage:

1. Review the characters’ actions and their contexts. Consider the hard circumstances facing the recipients of the actions and note how the actions demonstrates love “above and beyond the call of duty”.
2. This lesson compares our calling and character with our ability to trust God and act faithfully. Do you think the actions praised here demonstrate trust and faithfulness? If so, what was at risk? What is to be praised?
3. What do you find difficult about trusting God and acting faithfully in the face of uncertainty? Who do you go to for help in discerning what to do? How do you accomplish your course of action?

Be prepared to tell the whole group two of the difficulties your group identified, and some of the ways people find help with discernment and action.

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Above and Beyond: Hearing God's Call in Jonah and Ruth
Lesson 9

For Lesson 9, invite groups to use one or more of the following exercises.

Option 1

Find a partner. Take the parts of Ruth and Naomi.

Imagine you are sitting together on a quiet evening, watching the eight-year-old Obed sleep. Have a conversation reflecting on all that is past and wondering aloud about God's part in all of this. Remember that hindsight brings new wisdom.

Wrestle with questions such as:

- _ Where did you see God's presence at the time and where can you see God's presence now that you couldn't see then?
- _ What does this mean for your lives now?

Option 2

Alone or in pairs, write a prayer as Naomi and Ruth, expressing your praise and thanksgiving for God's activity in your lives. Specify what God has done for you and how this affects the way you live.

Option 3

In pairs or threes, consider what groups of people continue to be excluded, labeled or counted as foreigners, treated differently and/or unjustly in your community? In this country? In the world?

Why does this matter to us?

What can we do to create change?

Option 4

In light of this story, answer these two questions:

1. What discourages me about my own world when I reflect on this story?
2. What gives me courage and hope?

Think of one way to act on what gives you courage and hope.

Above and Beyond: Session 9

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