

# SEASONS OF GIVING

---

*Two short courses for small groups,  
taking a look at generosity, money and giving*



stewardship<sup>®</sup>

# SESSION 1: TIME TO GROW



---

## GENEROSITY AND A CHANGE OF HEART

Life, as the saying goes, is not a rehearsal. But what exactly are we supposed to do with that sort of advice? Is there any point in trying to change the way things are? Can we really hope to shift our priorities? Could there be more that God has in store for us?

### PURPOSE

**In this session you will have the opportunity to:**

- **focus on the priorities in your life**
- **develop a deeper understanding of the call to generous living**
- **draw inspiration from Jonah in relation to his first being closed, then open to God's call**
- **consider how to overcome barriers to living fulfilled lives**
- **draw out your own conclusions and take some time to pray about the issues raised**



*Watch some inspiring interviews about generosity and a 'change of heart'.  
Go to: [stewardship.org.uk/seasons](http://stewardship.org.uk/seasons)*

become

restore

**transform**

**reform**

change

shift

**obey**

grow

generous

flourish

move with the times

develop

leaven

mature

turn over a new leaf

**innovate**

be open

build up

**veer**

seek pastures new

## ICEBREAKER / ACTIVITY

### **'I can't possibly go to Nineveh because...'**



*Please refer to the leaders' notes at the back of this manual for further details of how to action this activity.*

Within your group, take it in turns to think up possible excuses that Jonah might have had for turning God down. For example: 'I can't go to Nineveh because I've got the olive harvest to bring in / I've just started a new relationship / my back's a bit sore.'

Go around the group and ask each person to repeat all the excuses that have come before, adding an original one of their own.

## INTRODUCTION: TIME TO GROW

Life is so much easier when things are black and white, don't you think?

Faith appears simpler when divided up into sacred and secular, into things that God smiles upon and things that He scorns. We readily compartmentalize our lives, separating the 'spiritual' from the rest. This has a profound impact on our priorities and determines how we decide to use our time.

The contemporaries of Jesus did not divide the world into elements that were or were not 'spiritual'. There's even a Jewish prayer – asher yatzar – to be recited after visiting the toilet. The whole of Scripture resonates with a sense of God taking pleasure in seeing his people thrive in ALL their diversity.

From the first verses to the last, the Bible offers a glorious picture of a generous Creator God who lavishes upon his work infinite care and attention. And we, made in his image, are invited to join in the adventure and travel through life with our Heavenly Father as our God and King, serving, partnering, learning from and loving Him in ALL we do.

And that simple, death-beating, life-transforming fact has profound implications for how we experience our various seasons of living.

Are we really happy to rule out great chunks of our lives as being of little or no use to God? Do we really believe that there is God-given potential within us that God has no use for? How, instead, can we be open to God's call on our lives and be ready to live transformed, generous lives? If Jesus promises life that is truly life, how can we begin to embrace that and set aside the barriers that stop us from being prepared to use our talents and skills for his purposes? Or, put more simply, isn't it time to grow in generosity?



*Read Jonah 1:1-3*

## **MAKING CONNECTIONS**

Jonah is an amazing book full of drama, plot twists and surprises. No wonder it makes a great children's story. But it isn't just for kids, and whichever approach we take the story contains some important themes, like God's passion for justice, generosity and mercy – shown not just to the Israelites, but also to the whole world. It is a book about God's timing, how God calls us, the way God cares for us and about God's concern for all He has made. It also says a lot about human nature and how we respond to God.

God is shown to be the complete model of generosity. He gave the people of Nineveh a second chance. God also offers each of us the opportunity to grow and change so that we can live lives of transformed generosity.

## **VITAL QUESTIONS**



*Read the rest of Jonah Chapter 1 (Jonah 1:4-17)*

- What did Jonah do to try to ignore God's call on his life?
- Have you experienced seasons in your life when you have felt you may have taken a wrong turning? How did Jonah get back on course?
- What is your Nineveh? Who are the people or what are the tasks that you retreat from and why?



*Read Jonah Chapter 4.*

- What new insights into Jonah's motives do we encounter in this passage?
- What stops us from being open to God's new possibilities for us?
- What barriers might stand in the way of us living fulfilled and generous lives?
- Highlight God's acts of generosity in this story.
- How might generosity have transformed Jonah's perspective?

## GOING DEEPER

### Jesus and Jonah



*Read Matthew 12:38–45 and Luke 11:29–32.*

Remember Jesus saying how He was greater than Jonah? There are lots of comparisons that we can make. Jonah complains about being 'banished' from God's sight; Jesus cried 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' (Matthew 27:46). But where Jonah was facing death, Jesus actually died. Where Jonah escaped death, Jesus came back to life.

And there's more. Take a look at the line that says: 'Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace' Jonah 2:8.

He's talking about people, and despite the fact that God is about to have mercy on his soul, Jonah shows no compassion for the people he is being sent to help. Jesus, on the other hand, went through an agonizing death because of His compassion. He is truly greater than Jonah.

When we come to think about it, most of us are more like Jonah than Jesus, aren't we?

- In what ways do we ignore so many of God's commands, as well as His grace and His love for us? How can we stop getting caught up in our own misguided view of things?
- Do we sometimes prefer that God would act with signs and miracles rather than being prepared to roll up our sleeves and get stuck into living generously?
- Give examples of how Jesus is our role model for generosity. How can we become more like Him in serving others rather than focusing on ourselves?

**'A great deal of talent is lost to the world for the want of a little courage.'** *Sydney Smith*

**'Nobody made a greater mistake than he who did nothing because he could do only a little.'** *Edmund Burke*

**'Happiness... consists in giving, and in serving others.'**  
*Henry Drummond, Scottish Writer 1851*

## IN SUMMARY: GENEROSITY AND ME

**The story of Jonah helps us to recognise where we put up barriers and try to ignore God's priorities in our lives. Whatever season of living we may be experiencing, God offers us fullness of life and is willing to equip us for what He wants us to do.**

### *action*

Think of one simple generous action you could do for someone else this week. Discuss with one other person about what you could do.

*Stuck for ideas? Go to:*

**[40acts.org.uk](http://40acts.org.uk)**

**[actionforhappiness.org](http://actionforhappiness.org)**

**[actiontracker.org.uk](http://actiontracker.org.uk)**

**[generositymovement.org](http://generositymovement.org)**

**[wear-it-out.co.uk](http://wear-it-out.co.uk)**

### *prayer*

**Let us worship together the Lord, the God of Heaven, the one who made the sea and the land. Let us urgently call upon His name that He might show us His salvation. Let us seek His forgiveness that we might know His healing love. And let us be open to a fresh anointing of the Holy Spirit to empower us for the service of righteousness and truth. Amen.**



---

# PART I: LEADERS' NOTES

---

## LEADERS' NOTES

---

### SESSION I: TIME TO GROW

#### GENEROSITY AND A CHANGE OF HEART

---

##### PREPARATION IN ADVANCE

- Enlarge and photocopy the word cloud
- Watch the short interviews and teaching points and make a note of any you would like to play during the session. You will need access to a laptop/tablet or PC in the room where you are meeting. Go to [stewardship.org.uk/seasons](http://stewardship.org.uk/seasons)

##### OPENING ACTIVITY

Display the word cloud and allow group members to reflect on the words shown. Encourage them to share any experiences of growth or change in their lives and in their journey with God. Then introduce the course and this first session as a whole.

##### ICEBREAKER / ACTIVITY: 'I CAN'T GO TO NINEVAH'

*First read Jonah 1:1-3*

Explain that Jonah certainly had some issues about his own calling. We don't know everything about why he didn't want to go to Nineveh, but we do know that he turned his back and set off in the opposite direction. We're going to add a lighthearted Old Testament twist to the memory game 'I went to market and bought a...'. Take it in turns to think up possible excuses that Jonah might have had for turning God down. For example: 'I can't go to Nineveh because I've got the olive harvest to bring in/ I've just started a new relationship/ my back's a bit sore.'

Each person has to repeat all the excuses that have come before, adding an original one of their own.

##### MAKING CONNECTIONS

Introduce and read the Bible passage Jonah 1 and discuss anything that immediately stands out.

## VITAL QUESTIONS

It is interesting to note that Jonah was clearly not a coward (see verse 12) – he was prepared to be thrown overboard. So why didn't he want to do as God asked him? Some commentators have suggested it might have been because he knew God too well. Jonah wanted an end to the cruel enemy nation, the Ninevites. He didn't want God to forgive them.

As you discuss these questions, try to get participants to think about wrong motives and likely attitudes to other people. Do we try to see them as God sees them?

Summarise the events in Chapters 2 and 3, and then invite the group to read Chapter 4 together.

Continue to look at the barriers that we put up and the excuses we try to make to God. It is easy for deep-seated prejudice to get in the way of God's call to generosity. With the tree dying, God teaches Jonah a lesson in pity that extends to the whole of creation.

## GOING DEEPER

*Introduce and read Matthew 12:38–45 and Luke 11:29–32.*

There are some quite difficult ideas to get across here. We might even have sympathy with the Pharisees who requested signs and wonders as proof that Jesus was the Son of God. Jesus did not fit their model of a Messiah at all. Often we can demand proof rather than grasping the role of the suffering servant who offers extravagant grace. Jesus gave the best gift of all, His life, that we might have eternal life.

Close in silent prayer, asking the group to reflect as individuals how they can possibly enter into another's path with Spirit-led creativity and generosity.

---

## LEADERS' NOTES

### SESSION 2: TIME TO GIVE GENEROSITY AND OUR GIFTS AND TALENTS

---

#### PREPARATION IN ADVANCE

- Enlarge and photocopy the word cloud
- Paper and writing materials for icebreaker

#### OPENING ACTIVITY

Display the word cloud and allow group members to reflect on the words shown. Encourage the group to share someone whose gifts and talents they admire. It can be someone famous or seemingly unknown.

#### ICEBREAKER / ACTIVITY: WHAT DO I DO BEST?

Encourage people to be honest here; it may be easier to suggest that the pair 'interview' each other and then share their findings with the group.

#### MAKING CONNECTIONS

Ways to describe Abigail include: intelligent, beautiful, generous, far-thinking, organized, brave, humble, protective, trustworthy, empathic, diplomatic, having negotiating skills, respected; whereas her husband Nabal was mean, self-centred, selfish and surly.

Nabal can give and should give. The culture calls for hospitality – a giving to another