

## False Friends

**Ever found that just when you needed strength and resilience in your life you collapsed and lost it? What is it that makes us able to weather the storms of life and come out stronger? Maybe it's all in the company we keep?**

Good friends are a great treasure in life but some of us have known **false friends** that appear to be on our side but in the end, perhaps at the crucial moment, they let us down! In our attempts to prop ourselves up and make our worlds feel more secure we can sometimes develop habits and character traits that are a bit like old friends - we turn to them again and again feeling that they give us some measure of power, control or comfort but these 'false friends' can actually end up sabotaging our lives in the long run.

In Matthew 7 Jesus taught about how to build a life that doesn't fall apart under pressure He warned that the storms of life could wreck lives built on weak foundations: *'and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.'* This series homes in on three weak life-foundations, or '*false friends*' that most of us struggle with at some point in our lives : **self pity, performance orientation and escapism** and asks how we can overcome in these areas to build a more solid foundation to life.

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Overcoming Self Pity

Jonah 4: 1-11

**Self pity is defined as 'excessive, self-absorbed unhappiness over one's own troubles' and no one likes to think of themselves as having it!** Deceptive because it can feel comforting and familiar, it reminds us of all the hurts we've experienced from life and at hands of others and can keep us living in the past. Scripture tells us that whilst God has great compassion for those that suffer He also calls his people to move into freedom from the past and to forgive those who have hurt us. It can be uncomfortable journey!

The book of Jonah tracks Jonah's commission by God to the city of Nineveh, his avoidance of God's call and subsequent life-changing encounter with a fish! It is really a book about the compassion of God and Jonah's fear and hard heartedness and the story ends with Jonah sitting under a plant on a hill wallowing in self pity and questioning God's mercy for the 'enemy'.

**Jonah 4: 1-11**

**v 1-4:** Injustice and suffering are a breeding ground for self pity. The Assyrians were a barbarous nation and the Jewish people had suffered at their hands. Why is Jonah so conflicted? How does the Holy Spirit enable us to share God's compassion? **Col 3:12 & Eph 2:4**

**v 5-8:** Can you see how Jonah's experience with the plant seems to confirm his worst fears? Have you ever experienced this yourself? Who is suffering most here? **Heb 12:15**

**v 8** God seems to have set Jonah up and what is in him, comes out! Recognising where we have moved from pain and grief into self-pity is a challenge, what is Jonah really angry about?

**v 9:** Self pity often feels justified. How does God try to get Jonah to examine himself ? How can our default mindsets begin to change? **Rom 12 : 1-2**

**v 11:** How can we keep hold of God's perspective on our lives and the people who have hurt us? What are the challenges for Jonah? What are your personal challenges in this area? **Eph 4:32**

### **Ditching the false friend 'Self Pity'**

Read Paul's account of his relationship with the church at Philippi in **Philippians 4:12-19**

Recognise that self pity is a trap that stops us from growing and moving on with our lives. Refuse to let the past define you, identify what is true, focus on God's nature, forgive those who have hurt you, choose gratitude ( eg make a list of 10 things to thank God for) and victory over your circumstances.

*Phil 4: 12: I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength.*