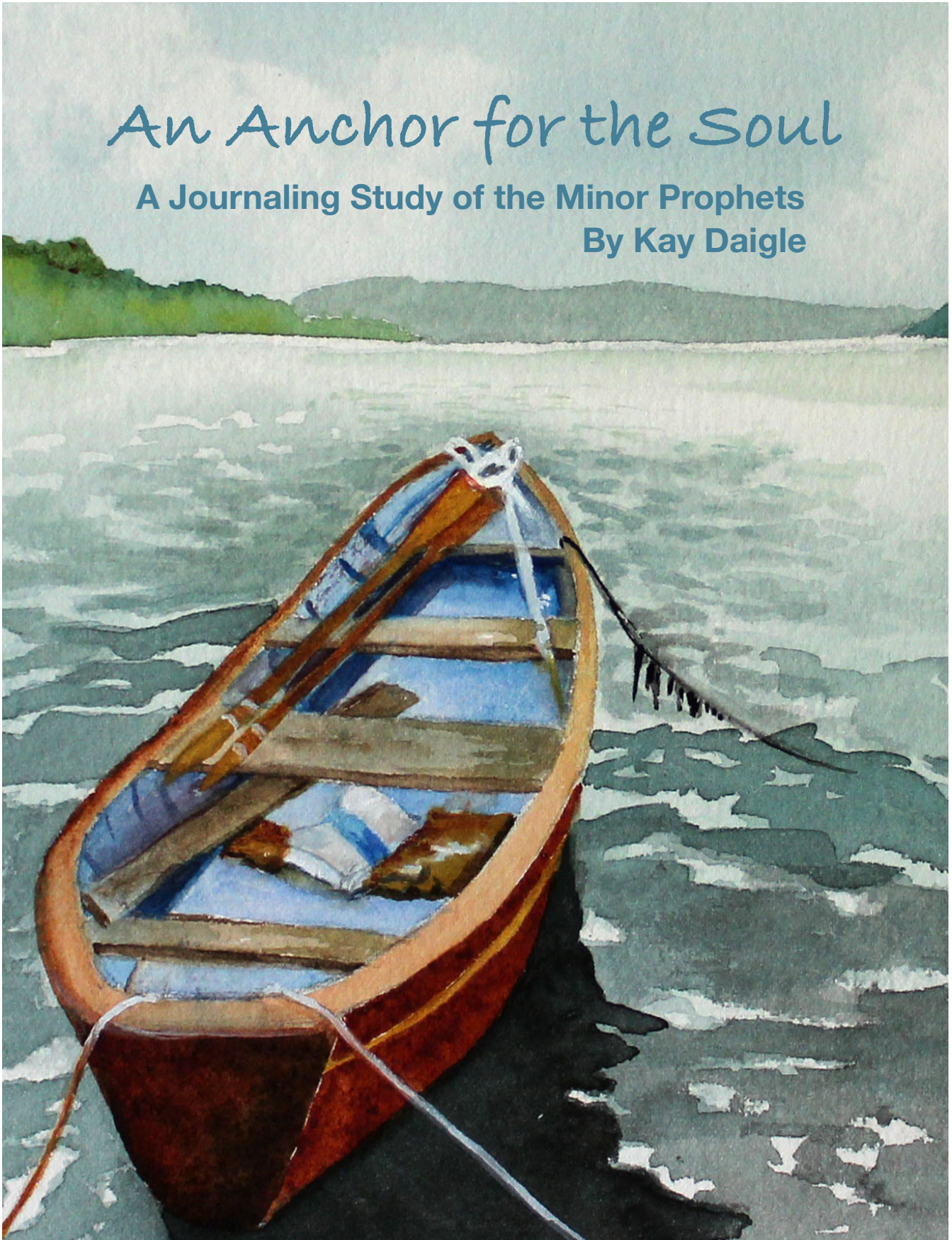


An Anchor for the Soul

A Journaling Study of the Minor Prophets

By Kay Daigle



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What to know about this Study Guide

What is a journaling study?

Well, it's not about art, and we don't ask you to color or draw anything.

It is about listening to God through his Word, being directed by open questions, and responding to what you've read and heard by writing your thoughts down.

We've divided each week's study into three parts to make it easy to split it up or not, depending on your preference.

See beyondordinarywomen.org for previews of our other journaling studies or for information on large group downloads.

The simplicity of journaling doesn't equate to shallow

This study demands your involvement. Although the layout is simple, how deeply you go depends on you. As you spend time talking to God and journaling your thoughts, he may lead you to other cross-references, but he will certainly give you insights into the verses. Don't stop with initial surface answers, but ask God to clarify and speak to you from it. The time you spend in the scriptures with God gives him space to speak. Listen well, journal your thoughts, share them with your small group, and glean from others' insights.

Studying through three parts a week

If you like doing a little study at a time, each week's study is set up in three parts, but feel free to study through it in any way that works best for you. If you prefer daily time in the Word, consider spending two days on each part, journaling about the optional starred section the second day. You may be amazed at what you see by reading the same passage twice. If you prefer to do the week's study in one sitting, you may want to read all the passages first and then journal at the end. Of course, it's great to be in God's Word each day, but you may have other ways of doing that. Stick to what works for your schedule.

Additional reading and background information

I have inserted background information pertinent to your understanding. Feel free to do your own research when you have interest or questions, but the group conversation will be focused on the passages studied by everyone. You may want to look over the chart “History of Old Testament Israel” as you begin to read each new prophetic book. It is found in the Appendix section “Putting the Prophets’ Messages into Historical Context.”



A star identifies optional verses or suggested study for those with time and interest. The additional reading will help you wrestle with deeper insights into the passages.

Words to Anchor your Soul

The verses that begin each week’s lesson are great choices for memorization and/or discussion.

What you need

- A quiet place, if possible.
- A Bible that you can understand. If you don’t have one, ask your group leader for suggestions, or email us at info@beyondordinarywomen.org. Modern versions are available as downloads, through Bible apps, or in print at any bookstore. (We are using the NET Bible at lumina.bible.org, a free online Bible translation with study helps.)
- A notebook, laptop, or tablet to use as a journal which can be taken to your group meetings. If you prefer paper attached to the lesson, add a blank piece of paper or notebook paper after each lesson. (See Journaling 101 in the Appendix.)
- The commitment to listen to God and write out what you hear as you read and pray.
- Someone, or even better a group of women, to discuss this with you and provide support, encouragement, and spiritual challenge

Best practices for group get-togethers (Appendix & Videos)

Plan a regular place, time, and leader.

The leader should—

- read the section “Tips for Leaders” in the Appendix.
- watch **BOW’s free, short videos:** “Tips for Leading a Journaling Study” (<https://vimeo.com/album/4256789>) and the series [Listening Well](https://vimeo.com/album/4256789) (<https://vimeo.com/album/4256789>)

4065298). If your group includes Millennials, watch the free series [Millennials: The Good, the Bad, and the Ministry](https://vimeo.com/album/5118401) at <https://vimeo.com/album/5118401>.

- start on time, not waiting for late arrivals.
- move the group along, being sensitive to God's Spirit.
- encourage everyone to share without forcing it.
- be a great encourager.
- avoid dominating the conversation.
- keep the focus on the women, not herself and her own thoughts.
- provide time for the group to think and share from their journals.
- contact absent group members to encourage them.
- email the group weekly to remind them of the upcoming meeting, and share her excitement.

As a group—

- come prepared and on time with your study, journal, and Bible.
- share freely and honestly.
- encourage one another.
- don't interrupt the speaker.
- love one another.
- don't try to fix the other members of your group or their problems by giving advice.
- pray for one another and entrust each other and your problems to God.
- be honest and vulnerable, but wise in how much detail you share personally.
- stay in touch with each other between meetings for support and encouragement.

If your group meets within a larger group in a church setting

- Look for a woman gifted in teaching God's Word to teach a short time after the small group discussion. Watch the short, free video "[Why Use Live Teachers, not Video?](https://vimeo.com/209323216)" at <https://vimeo.com/209323216>. (For help in preparing to teach, see our collection of videos at <http://beyondordinarywomen.org/bible-teaching/> or contact us at <https://beyondordinarywomen.org/contact-alternative/>.)
- Because the discussion isn't about the teacher's comments but focuses on the members' personal study, the discussion should precede the teaching time.
- The teacher may spend 15-25 minutes adding to the background of the lesson, beginning and ending within the allotted time frame. The majority of the time together should be invested in small groups.
- The teacher's role is to clarify and extend what the group has studied, not to retell what they have discussed.

Stories

Each week's study includes a true story at the end that relates to the lesson. Some of our journaling studies have such stories on video, but this study includes them in written form in the lessons. The names have been changed in some cases to protect people involved.

Icon/image for each book

To help you remember the message of the various prophets, I have included an icon or image that relates to the primary idea of each book. You will find that many of the same themes are repeated throughout the Minor Prophets—subjects that connect to sin, judgment, and repentance, so it's difficult to clearly distinguish some of them from others. You may have other ways to help your group remember.

Introduction

Our world is in turmoil, our country divided by race and politics, and we are more and more burdened by depression and despair. Although Jesus prioritizes our oneness (John 17), many Christians seem more concerned about politics than the unity of the church. The way out of division is to look to Christ and seek him over all other allegiances. After all, we are aliens here, not citizens. The church cannot lead the way when we are embroiled in conflict over what is fading away instead of loving what is forever. We must seek God's worldview.

It's as if we are living in the Old Testament world. Despite the fact that the Jews of that era had the Scriptures and the temple, etc., their faith was superficial. In their hearts and lives they actually served idols, not God, and put their faith for peace in alliances with ungodly nations instead of trusting the Almighty.

But our great and gracious God is always reaching out to his people, even the disobedient and rebellious. In that day he sent prophets to warn his people to return to him and live out their faith by loving others. The prophets speak for God about what doing right looks like.

When we try to understand and apply prophetic messages written to another group of people in a very different culture and time, we must jump into their world. I've provided background as we go through the study, but feel free to use commentaries and the notes in your Bible to help you understand what is happening and why. Remember that although God's Word was not written directly to our generation, God's character is eternal and what he values is transcultural. I hope that these messages will speak to your heart about our world today, shift our focus to God, and prioritize the unity we have in him over anything that divides us.

Keep in mind that the promises and warnings are specifically written to the Jewish people. But also remember that they are God's people just as we in the church are. As God's people, we are judged for our corporate sin although he forgives us as individuals. God doesn't change. The things that he hates about sin and unfaithfulness to him remain the same. The ultimate promises of a time of complete restoration and peace will include all of God's people. (There is more explanation in the Appendix section "Understanding the Prophets," page 81.

If you want to avoid misinterpretation, keep verses in the context of the original audience. Focus on what you learn about God's character and what it means to image him to the world.

Kay Daigle
September 2018

Section One

Jonah

Jonah's Message to Nineveh
Sometime in the 8th century B.C.



An Anchor for the Soul

Week One Study

Jonah: God's Mercy to the Nations

Words to Anchor your Soul

You are gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in mercy, and one who relents concerning threatened judgment.

Jonah, speaking of God in Jonah 4:2b (NET)

How familiar are you with anchors? I grew up near the Texas Gulf coast and spent many hours there with my friends riding the waves in inner tubes or on floats. We generally paddled out past the breakers and floated back until we got caught in them; then, we pushed back out and started over. Eventually we found ourselves far from “home,” the area of beach where we began and where all our stuff was. I remember one scary day when a strong storm blew in, pushing us far out and way down the beach very quickly and violently.

The only way to prevent items from floating away with the current is to be attached to the ocean floor by an anchor.

Picture your soul anchored well so that you don't drift away from God—either slowly by simply letting culture carry you away or quickly because of a brewing storm. Although God's prophets wrote their messages thousands of years ago, they still speak to us today, warning us when we have drifted from God and calling us back home. Often we are unaware of how far from home we've gone.

I've personally floated away from God by drifting slowly as well as quickly in a violent personal storm. If God had not hung onto me by his Spirit and the truth of his Word, I would still be adrift today. Even now danger looms if I let go of the anchor and listen to other voices.

As you study the Old Testament, keep in mind that God is the same God he has always been. Although the original audience had a different culture, we can apply the message to today.

Part One Study: Background and Context

To understand the Bible, context is crucial. This section provides background to help you understand what you'll be reading and journaling about. (If you aren't familiar with journaling or if that sounds hard, read Journaling 101 in the Appendix.)

THE ONE STORY

Let's start by putting the prophetic books into the context of the entire Bible.

The Bible is one big story that connects many shorter stories and other writings. (If you have never studied God's big story, you may want to download our journaling study The ONE Story at <https://beyonddordinarywomen.org/the-one-story/> which puts the whole Bible in context—a must to understand it.)

I grew up in a Christian home and a Bible-teaching church. I knew all the major Bible stories and understood that Jesus died for me and loves me. But somehow I never grasped the ONE story behind them that brings all the stories together. So to help those of you who have never really studied the big picture of the Bible, here is a quick summary of the parts of the One Story.

*Before people rebelled against the God who made and loved them, creation was perfect. It was a time we call **Paradise**. The first people lived in harmony and unity without sin, disease, or death in perfect relationships with God and one another. But Paradise didn't last because they rebelled against the God who made and loved them, marring all their descendants and even all creation. **Ruin** ensued and is characterized by the hatred, disease, and broken relationships we all experience because we align ourselves with other “gods” instead of the Creator, just as our ancestors did. Although creation has been marred, glimpses of what used to be remains because we are all still made in God's image although it is now distorted.*

Since the Ruin, God has been at work to heal broken lives and relationships by realigning people with himself and his great purposes. Although he constantly seeks the best for people, we go our own way instead of loving God—the core issue in the dysfunction of sin.

The meta-narrative (big story) of the Bible tells us that some time after the Ruin occurred, God reached out to Abraham and his descendants, known as the children of Israel and later called Jews. He designated them as his representatives to the world and the people through whom

he would send his ultimate agent of restoration. God blessed the Jews with special revelation so that they could know and worship him and experience right relationships with one another. Despite this honor, God's chosen people rebelled against him over and over, unwilling to worship him alone. But God's love is persistent, and he continued reaching out to them through the Old Testament prophets. These men who spoke for God provided encouragement to persevere, warning of God's judgment, and promises of the future King or Messiah.

Eventually the Promised One came to earth as the man Jesus, one with God the Father and the Spirit, and brought **Reconciliation** between God and mankind by his own death and resurrection. He heals those who follow him from their brokenness with God and gives them power to restore their relationships with one another. His death made the way for all people who align their lives with him to be restored to God's original purpose. When Jesus left earth for heaven, he sent the Holy Spirit to empower and lead the church comprised of all who believe.

Although Reconciliation between humans and God has been made possible, the effects of the Ruin linger. Those who believe in who Jesus is and what he has done for us are now to exhibit a taste of what his kingdom is like to the world around us. This period of time is often called the Already but not Yet because we enjoy many of the blessings of God's kingdom, but not its fullness. His kingdom is our real home, and we are aliens in this world. Our loyalty to God alone brings unity among his people.

Thankfully, the story gets even better. Someday Jesus will return and institute a new and perfect world according to all the promises the prophets have spoken. God will fix all that is ruined by sin and recreate paradise. We call this **Restoration**.

THE MINOR PROPHETS

This study's focus is the books called the Minor Prophets.¹ They record the messages of men who spoke for God, known as prophets, as they preached to a world in Ruin in the centuries before Jesus came. Their writing brought God's people hope of Messiah and a coming Restoration.

All of these prophets lived in the centuries after the Jewish nation was divided into two parts and before Jesus's birth: Israel in the north (ten tribes) and Judah in the south (two tribes).

¹ The prophets from Hosea to Malachi are called Minor Prophets not because their messages were minor but because their books are shorter than those of the Major Prophets.

Although their messages were initially for a particular people at a specific time long ago, the underlying principles apply to the present time between Reconciliation and the final Restoration, the time of the Already but Not Yet.

We will move somewhat chronologically through the Minor Prophets. The dating comes from clues within the books or educated guesses by scholars. (See the Appendix “History of Old Testament Israel” on p. 87 in the section “Understanding the Prophets.” After studying Jonah, we will work our way through three periods of prophetic messages: the time preceding the Assyrian Exile of the ten tribes called Israel, the period of Babylonian power and exile of the southern two tribes, and the era after the Jews returned from their Babylonian captivity.

With each book of prophecy, I’ve added an icon/image representing its message.

THE STORY OF JONAH

Although its date isn’t precise. Jonah’s book is likely the earliest of those that we’ll study. He prophesied in the 8th Century B.C. during the reign of King Jeroboam II, who ruled from 793-753 B.C.² Jonah is very different from the other Minor Prophets. Instead of recording Jonah’s message, it provides a biographical story of the prophet himself. It won’t take you long to figure out why I’ve chosen an image of a backpack for Jonah.

There has been much controversy about the book’s historicity. Many scholars insist that these events are impossible and interpret it as a parable or allegory. Others insist upon a literal meaning, partly in response to those who criticize it on the basis of human reason. Jonah’s literature is similar to the narratives about Elijah and Elisha in 1 Kings which are called “prophetic narrative.”

Dr. Robert B. Chisholm, Jr. of Dallas Seminary comments:

Unlike the exodus and the resurrection of Jesus, the historicity of the Book of Jonah is not foundational to redemptive history and the biblical faith. Unfortunately, the debate over the book’s historicity has often distracted interpreters from focusing on its theological message, which is not affected by how one understands the book’s literary genre. Whether the book is labeled historical narrative, legend, parable, or something akin to a historical novella, its themes seem apparent.³

² Robert B. Chisholm, Jr., *Handbook on the Prophets* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 406.

³ Chisholm, 408.

In other words, don't let your perspective of its historicity prevent you from believing its message. Jesus used stories to teach, and perhaps that is what Jonah did, but God is perfectly capable of bringing these events to pass literally.

Read more background in the Appendix section "Understanding the Prophets" on pp. 81-87.



Search in your Bible for introductory material to the prophets, or use commentaries or resources to discover more about the prophetic books or Jonah specifically.

Journal about this section's reading, recording your questions or thoughts.

Part Two Study

Now that we have a sense of the historical context for the Minor Prophets and Jonah in particular, let's dive in. Because it's his story rather than a message from God, it's a lot easier to understand, and yet, it contains deep truths and timeless principles.

One more background detail that may help you with the story: Nineveh was the capital of Assyria, the nation that would eventually conquer Israel, the northern kingdom. At this time the Assyrians were still gaining power and were not yet a direct threat to God's people.

Read Jonah 1-2, or since it's a short story, you may want to read it all at once.



Read Hebrews 12:5-13 and journal about its relationship to Jonah's story.

Journal your responses to these questions:

- In what way do you identify with Jonah's response to God's instructing him to go to Nineveh?
- How do you see God's sovereignty (his rule) over all things in Jonah's story so far?
- What do you learn about God's worldview that Jonah didn't embrace?
- What is God saying to you from this story?

Part Three Study

Begin by asking God to speak. Then review what you've already read of Jonah's story.

Read Jonah 3-4.



Compare what you see about God's mercy in the story of Jonah with 2 Peter 3:8-9.

Journal your insights on these topics:

- The Ninevites' response to Jonah's message.
- Compare Jonah's sources of anger and happiness in Chapter 4 and what they reveal about you.
- Ask God to reveal if you have hardened your heart against showing mercy in any way to any people groups. (A few ideas: wealthy, poor, immigrant, uneducated, highly educated, intelligent, unintelligent, Democrat, Republican, Black, White, Asian, etc.) Confess that sin before God and your group.

Jan's Story

Years ago while I was living in New York, my pastor called me into his office, along with his assistant pastor. He said that the Bible teacher at the Presbyterian Old People's Home on Long Island was moving away and they needed someone to take her place. Both of them had prayed and God told them I was to be the new teacher. I said that was impossible because I was just learning the Bible, I didn't have the gift of teaching, and I'd never been around old people as all of my grandparents had died while I was a baby. They told me to go home and pray about it for a week before giving them my answer. I went home and once again fell to my knees sobbing to God about this impossible situation and as I was praying, God changed my heart and gave me a desire to teach this class.

Our four children were all in grammar school, so I drove out there for my first class and told them that I felt like Moses when God told him to lead His people out of Egypt. I told them that I was just learning myself and would have to use the Living Bible. One of the women raised her hand and said that was fine with them. She said that I had a loud, clear voice and that's what was most important to them. Every Friday, God kept my children healthy for the next three years while I taught. Then my husband was transferred to Houston and on my final day, they gave me a farewell party. Once again I cried all the way home because I would miss all of these grandparents whom God had given to me.