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JONAH

AND THE GOD OF
SECOND CHANCES

STUDENT SMALL GROUP LESSONS

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Introduction to Jonah

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The story of Jonah is a famous tale that lots of people love, especially as a bedtime story! It's super dramatic because it tells how a man named Jonah, who was a prophet (someone who speaks for God), got swallowed by a giant fish.

Why did this happen? Well, God told Jonah to go to a very bad city called Nineveh and tell the people there to change their ways and stop being wicked. But Jonah didn't want to go! He tried to run away from God's mission, which led to his big fish adventure.

More Than Just a Fish Story

- Even though the big fish is the most famous part, this short book in the Bible is about something much bigger.
- It shows us how much God cares about everyone in the world, not just a few people. This is called God's heart for the nations.
- It teaches us about God's grace, His free and undeserved kindness and forgiveness. The whole Bible is about God's plan to save people through grace, and Jonah's story is a small picture of that whole plan.
- This book helps set the stage for the most important person in the Bible: Jesus, the Messiah. It prepares the world for His arrival.

A Lesson in Second Chances

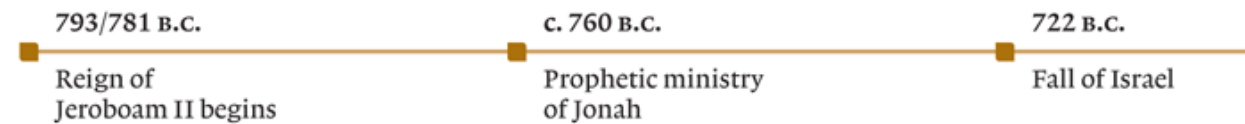
The story makes us think about God's amazing character and what He asks us to do. It also makes us look at how we respond to His goodness.

- Jonah's story shows that even when we've experienced God's kindness and know Him well, we might still not fully understand just how big and wide His grace is.
- God's grace and His call for people to change (repentance) aren't just for those who don't believe in Him yet. They are also for people who have been following Him for a long time—like Jonah!

So, the book of Jonah isn't mainly about a man and a fish. It's about a God who gives second chances to everyone, including Jonah, the people of Nineveh, and us.

What do you think the people of Nineveh did when they finally heard God's message?

Timeline



Author and Date

Jonah lived a long, long time ago, around 782 to 753 years before Jesus was born (B.C.).

- He was a prophet (a messenger for God) in a time when a king named Jeroboam II (2 Kings 14:23–28) ruled the country of Israel (the northern kingdom).
- This was a good time for Israel—they were peaceful and rich. 😊
- The country that God told Jonah to visit, Assyria (where Nineveh was), was not a danger to Israel at this time. This is important because Jonah might have run away simply because he didn't like them, not because he was afraid they would attack his people.

Overview

God told a man named Jonah to go to a huge, powerful city called Nineveh. God wanted Jonah to give the people there a serious warning.

But Jonah didn't want to go! He tried to run away from what God asked him to do. He went to a city by the sea called Joppa and got on a boat sailing all the way to Tarshish, which was far away on the other side of the big sea.

In the end, though, Jonah changed his mind. He finally listened to God and traveled all the way to Nineveh.

Theme

The most important lesson in the book of Jonah is that God's kindness and forgiveness are HUGE; they have no limits!

- God's compassion isn't just for "us" (meaning Jonah and the people of Israel who already knew God).
- It's also for "them" (meaning the sailors on the boat and the people in the wicked city of Nineveh).

The story shows that God loves and wants to forgive everyone, no matter who they are or where they come from!

Key Themes

Big Lessons from Jonah

1. God is in Charge of Everything.
 - God is the boss of everything that happens on Earth—the storms, the fish, the kings, and the people. Nothing happens without God allowing it.
2. God Wants Everyone to Hear His Message.

- God is determined to get His message of love and forgiveness to every nation and every person in the world, not just a select few.
- People need to change their ways (repent).
- People need to say sorry for the bad things they do (sin).
- Especially, they need to stop being so self-centered (only caring about themselves) and stop being hypocritical (pretending to be good when they are not).

3. God Promises to Forgive.

- God makes a promise: If people truly change their minds and turn away from their sins (repent), He will forgive them! He is a God of second chances.

Outline

Part 1: Running Away!

The first half is about Jonah trying to escape and what happens next.

- Scene 1 (A): God tells Jonah what to do, but Jonah runs away!
- Scene 2 (B): Jonah is on a ship with some sailors. A big storm hits! The sailors are scared and finally ask Jonah for help.
- Scene 3 (C): Jonah gets swallowed by the big fish! From inside the fish, he prays a happy, thankful prayer to God.

Part 2: The Do-Over

The second half is a lot like the first, but this time, Jonah actually obeys!

- Scene 4 (A'): God tells Jonah to go to Nineveh again (a do-over!), and this time, Jonah finally goes. 🚶
- Scene 5 (B'): Jonah tells the people of Nineveh to change their ways. The people in the city listen and turn back to God.
- Scene 6 (C'): God forgives the people of Nineveh. This makes Jonah mad! He prays an angry prayer to God.

Part 3: The Big Lesson

This last scene is the most important part of the whole story!

- Scene 7 (D): God teaches Jonah a lesson about compassion (kindness and mercy), showing Jonah how much He loves everyone, even the people Jonah didn't like.

The Setting of Jonah

c. 760 B.C.

Jonah lived during a really good time for his country, Israel. They were peaceful and had a powerful king named Jeroboam II (2 Kings 14:23–28).

At that time, the people of Assyria (the bad guys in the story) were busy fighting in other places. This allowed King Jeroboam to take back lots of land, making Israel stronger.

Then, God told Jonah to go to Assyria's huge city, Nineveh, and tell the people there they were going to be punished.

Lesson 1

Jonah didn't want to go! He tried to run away from God's mission by getting on a ship and sailing far, far away to a place called Tarshish on the other side of the sea.

But eventually, Jonah realized he couldn't run from God. He finally listened and traveled all the way to Nineveh, the main city of the Assyrian Empire.¹



¹ Adapted from <https://www.esv.org/resources/esv-global-study-bible/introduction-to-jonah/>

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When You'd
Rather Sail Away
Than Obey

Icebreaker

If you had to spend a week in a city you'd least want to visit, where would it be and why?

Daily Devotions

Day 1 : Read It

Read Jonah 1:1-3.

Get It

1. Where did God tell Jonah to go?
2. What was Jonah to do when he got there?
3. How did Jonah respond to the word of the LORD?
4. Where did Jonah go instead?

Day 2 — Today's Theme: Do You Hear God Calling?

Read Jonah 1:1.

Imagine you're relaxing in your room, and you hear your mom call your name. You might try to "ignore" her because you think she's going to ask you to do chores or homework!

Well, God spoke to Jonah! And just like you might try to ignore your mom, Jonah didn't want to do what God was asking him to do.

But how does God talk to *us* today?

The Bible says that Jesus is our Shepherd, and we are His sheep. A good shepherd always guides and talks to his sheep. Jesus says in the Bible, "*My sheep hear my voice.*"² This means He is always trying to talk to us!

How God Speaks to You

You need to learn to recognize Jesus' voice. Here are four ways that God speaks to us:³

- a. The Bible: When you read the Bible, you are reading God's words and learning about what He is like and what He wants you to do.
- b. Prayer: When you pray and listen quietly, you can talk to God, and He can talk to you.
- c. Circumstances: God can use things that happen in your everyday life—good or bad—to teach you lessons and guide you.
- d. Church: God speaks through other people, especially when you are with your church family (like your pastors or Sunday school teachers).

So, when you read, pray, and pay attention to what's happening around you, you can hear God calling you, just like He called Jonah!

5. **Jonah fled God's call immediately. What are the deeper reasons that people (including ourselves) run away from what God asks?**

6. **Have you ever felt like you knew God wanted you to do something, but you chose to go the opposite way? What were the immediate and long-term consequences of running away from that calling?**

7. **Can you share a time when God spoke to you? How did you know it was God speaking to you?**

² John 10:17

³ Blackaby, Henry. "God speaks by the Holy Spirit through the Bible, prayer, circumstances, and the church to reveal Himself, His purposes, and His ways." <https://www.lifeway.com/en/articles/7-realities-of-experiencing-god>

Day 3 — Today's Theme: Danger

Read Jonah 1:2.

In the TV series *Lost in Space*, Will Robinson had a "pet" robot as his companion that would essentially go wherever Will would go. The Robot would shout, "Danger, Will Robinson! Danger!" The Robot said that to warn the boy, Will, about something dangerous coming.

In the story of Jonah, God wanted Jonah to be a "Robot" for the city of Nineveh. God wanted Jonah to shout a warning: "Danger! Stop doing wicked things, because God's punishment is coming!"

Now, imagine God wants to use *you* in a similar way at your school.

- You know that all students are doing things that are wrong (sin).
- God wants you to be like Jonah and share a warning and a solution!

The warning is: Doing wrong things leads to eternal separation from God.

The solution is: You can be safe! If people are truly sorry for the wrong things they've done (repent), and if they believe that Jesus died and came back to life to save them, they can find salvation (being saved from the bad consequences of sin).

God is sending you to your school to speak up and share that amazing news!

Who does God want you to warn?

8. The warning is that doing wrong things (sin) leads to separation from God. Why is this warning often difficult or scary for us to share with people we care about?

9. What is the message that God wants us to share with our friends and family who don't know Jesus?

10. What is one specific group, club, or circle of friends at school that you can commit to intentionally pray for and find a way to share God's message with this week?

Day 4 — Today's Theme: Repent

Running Away

When I was a kid and got into trouble, I sometimes knew I was going to get a spanking. I didn't want that! So, guess what I did? I ran away! My parents would literally have to chase me around the house and catch me in order to discipline me.

In the Bible story, God asked Jonah to go to the city of Nineveh and tell the wicked people there to stop their bad behavior.

But Jonah didn't want to go! So, what did he do? He ran away from God! He got on a ship and sailed as far away as he could go, in the opposite direction, toward a place called Tarshish. Nineveh was 500 miles northeast across the desert and Tarshish was 2000 miles west—the opposite direction.

Flee is the same word used of Moses fleeing Pharaoh. It's the effort to walk away from the relationship and start on a new set of terms. Jonah didn't like what God doing in his life, so he decided that he was going to flee and try to build his life outside the boundaries of God's presence.

Have You Ever Run From God?

Have you ever known exactly what God wanted you to do—maybe be kind to a sibling, or stop cheating—but you chose to do the exact opposite? In those moments, you are basically running away from God.

What should you do instead? You need to repent. Repentance is a 180-degree turn.

- If you are walking away from God and toward bad choices (sin)...
- Repentance means you stop, turn completely around, and start walking back toward God!

It means choosing to follow God's way instead of your own.

11. What are some specific situations in *your* life where God was nudging you to do something (like be honest, forgive someone, or volunteer), but you actively chose to run in the opposite direction? What feeling usually drives that choice to "run"?

12. Which is usually the hardest part of the "180-degree turn":

- a) Stopping the bad behavior?
- b) Turning around (admitting you were wrong)?
- c) Starting the new behavior (walking toward God)?

13. If you were to be completely honest right now, what is one area of your life where you feel like you are currently running *away* from God (your personal "Tarshish")? If you want to make a "180-degree turn" in that area, what is the first small step you can take to start walking back toward God *today*?

This study was written by Pastor Mario Arindaeng, based on the adult study by the VBC pastoral team.