

Jonah Runs from God

(Jonah)

Introduction

[Teacher, plan to start your class with the following skit: Let a child sit with his Bible, having his devotional time. He reads Galatians 5:22 out loud and then says, as if to himself, “Love, joy, peace, longsuffering – uh oh, I think that means *patience*. No way! Sorry, God, I’m just not a patient person—forget that one. Kindness—well, okay, but only if I don’t have to be kind to my brother! Goodness, faithfulness, gentleness—no problem! Self-control—do I *have to*?” Teacher steps in and begins lesson...]

When it comes to obeying God, many of us act like [Jimmy], not wanting to do what God says. One of God’s prophets thought he could get away with disobeying God when God asked him to do something he didn’t want to do.

Opening Prayer

Father, teach us how important it is to You that we obey You in every way. Give us a desire in our heart to please You in everything we think, say, and do. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.

Memory Verse

*It is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.
(Philippians 2:13)*

Lesson

How many of you already know the story of Jonah the prophet? Have you ever read the story for yourself from God’s Word? That’s what we’re going to do today.

Jonah was a real person. He was born during the time of the book of 2 Kings. He was a prophet of God. Does anyone remember what a prophet is? (A messenger of God.)

God commanded him to warn the people of Nineveh that their city would be destroyed because of their great wickedness.

Jonah 1:1-2

The LORD gave this message to Jonah son of Amittai: (2) “Get up and go to the great city of Nineveh. Announce my judgment against it because I have seen how wicked its people are.”

The sin of the people of Nineveh was very great. God loved them and wanted to warn these people that they would be destroyed unless they chose to believe Him.

There is always a punishment for sin (Romans 6:23). You have sinned, too, and your sin must be punished. But thank God, He sent the Lord Jesus, His only Son, to take your punishment (2 Corinthians 5:21). But, to receive forgiveness from God, you must believe that Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead so that your sin can be forgiven. God wanted His prophet to warn the people of Nineveh that unless they chose to believe God, they would be destroyed because of their wickedness.

Jonah 1:3

But Jonah got up and went in the opposite direction to get away from the LORD. He went down to the port of Joppa, where he found a ship leaving for Tarshish. He bought a ticket and went on board, hoping to escape from the LORD by sailing to Tarshish.

Jonah ran away from God. Here he was one of God’s prophets. He loved God; that is he *thought* he loved God. But when he heard what God wanted him to do, he refused to obey.

The people of Nineveh were Israel’s greatest enemy. He must have thought, “Go to Nineveh? Everyone knows what a terrible place Nineveh is! The people are so wicked. They might hurt me. Maybe even kill me. No! That is the last place I want to go.”

He knew that if he went to Nineveh the people might be sorry for their wicked ways and ask God to forgive them. And, Jonah wanted God to destroy the people of Nineveh. Have you ever had someone be mean to you? Have you ever wanted something bad to happen to that person? This is NOT how God wants you to react to people. Satan was causing Jonah to think these thoughts.

Now Jonah had to choose to obey God or to disobey. Because Jonah did not have a right heart attitude, he refused to carry out God's command. He deliberately rebelled against God. God wants to give you the desire to obey Him. To obey means to do as you are told.

What are some things that God wants you to do that might seem hard or even impossible? (Say you're sorry to someone you've hurt; Obey parents and all those in authority, forgive people who hurt you.) You might not feel like doing what your parents ask. You might not understand why God wants you to love and forgive people that hurt you. But God wants you to obey Him anyway. Disobedience will make you feel sad and guilty inside, and sometimes it can bring real trouble into your life.

God sent Jonah to Nineveh with an important warning, but Jonah chose not to obey God. Instead he headed off in the opposite direction.

Jonah should have known that God would be with him and help him. But Jonah was too busy listening to Satan and soon he was not only afraid to go to Nineveh, he was afraid of God. That's why Jonah was running. He was trying to hide from God.

Jonah hurried down to the seaport of Joppa. When he saw a ship was about to sail for Tarshish, in the opposite direction of Nineveh, he paid his fare and went aboard.

Once onboard he headed to the bottom of the boat. No one would find him there, he thought. But God always knows where everyone is because God is All-Knowing; He knows everything.

As the boat sailed out to sea, God sent a storm.

Jonah 1:4

But the LORD hurled a powerful wind over the sea, causing a violent storm that threatened to break the ship apart.

A fierce wind whipped up the waves. The ship tossed and plunged in the storm. Everyone on board the ship was terrified. They were sure they would all be drowned. They all started calling out to their gods.

Jonah 1:5

Fearing for their lives, the desperate sailors shouted to their gods for help and threw the cargo overboard to lighten the ship. But all this time Jonah was sound asleep down in the hold.

All this time, Jonah lay down on the floor and went to sleep.

When the captain found Jonah sleeping in the bottom of the boat, he questioned him and begged him to pray to his God for help like everyone else.

Jonah 1:6

So the captain went down after him. "How can you sleep at a time like this?" he shouted. "Get up and pray to your god! Maybe he will pay attention to us and spare our lives."

Everyone was trying to figure out why this terrible storm had come upon them. They figured it had to be because someone on board had displeased his god.

Jonah 1:7

Then the crew cast lots to see which of them had offended the gods and caused the terrible storm. When they did this, the lots identified Jonah as the culprit.

Casting lots is like throwing dice or tossing a coin. When they found out it was because of Jonah's sin, they started asking him more questions.

Jonah 1:8-9

"Why has this awful storm come down on us?" they demanded. "Who are you? What is your line of work? What country are you from? What is your nationality?" (9) Jonah answered, "I am a Hebrew, and I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land."

Jonah 1:10-11

The sailors were terrified when they heard this, for he had already told them he was running away from the LORD. "Oh, why did you do it?" they groaned. (11) And since the storm was getting worse all the time, they asked him, "What should we do to you to stop this storm?"

Jonah told the sailors to throw him into the sea.

Jonah 1:12

“Throw me into the sea,” Jonah said, “and it will become calm again. I know that this terrible storm is all my fault.”

The men did not want to throw Jonah into the water. It seemed too cruel. So they rowed their hardest to bring the ship to land.

Jonah 1:13

Instead, the sailors rowed even harder to get the ship to the land. But the stormy sea was too violent for them, and they couldn't make it

It was no use. They were helpless against the forces of the storm. They finally had to take Jonah and toss him into the ocean.

Jonah 1:14-15

Then they cried out to the LORD, Jonah's God. “O LORD,” they pleaded, “don't make us die for this man's sin. And don't hold us responsible for his death. O LORD, you have sent this storm upon him for your own good reasons.” (15) Then the sailors picked Jonah up and threw him into the raging sea, and the storm stopped at once!

Almost immediately the wind stopped and the sea became calm. Down, down he sank. The water must have choked him and he probably wondered how long it would take before he died. Suddenly a great big fish swam up to him and swallowed him in one gulp.

Jonah found himself alive and terrified in the belly of a great fish.

Jonah 1:17

Now the LORD had arranged for a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was inside the fish for three days and three nights.

For three miserable, uncomfortable days Jonah was inside the fish. He had plenty of time to think how wrong he had been to disobey God.

If Jonah had obeyed God, even though he didn't understand why God was sending him to his enemies, Jonah would not have had to go through such a terrible experience. God wants to give you the desire

to obey Him. [Teacher, discuss why it is important to obey: rules are given for your good; those in authority often know things you don't know; God is pleased when you obey.]

If you know that God wants you to do something that will be hard for you to obey, you can ask Him to give you the “want to” to obey Him and then ask Him for the power to do it. (Philippians 2:13)

Jonah didn't even ask God to help him. He disobeyed God, and then he found himself in a very frightening situation.

For three days and three nights Jonah was inside the fish. He finally prayed to God. He knew that only God could deliver him from this impossible situation in the fish's belly. Terrified, Jonah prayed to the Lord from the belly of the fish.

Jonah 2:1

Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from inside the fish.

Jonah asked God for a second chance to be obedient. God is a God of second chances. He is loving and forgiving. He doesn't want anyone to die in their sins. He is patient. He wants everyone to come to Him and to receive forgiveness for their sins. (2 Peter 3:9)

But it took Jonah three agonizing days before he was ready to come to God. After three horrible days inside the fish, Jonah prayed to God and all at once, God commanded the fish to vomit Jonah up onto dry land!

Jonah 2:10

Then the LORD ordered the fish to spit Jonah out onto the beach.

God gave Jonah and the people of Nineveh a second chance. God told Jonah again to go to the people of Nineveh and warn them about His plan to destroy them if they didn't get right with Him.

Jonah 3:1-2

Then the LORD spoke to Jonah a second time: (2) “Get up and go to the great city of Nineveh, and deliver the message I have given you.”

Jonah had learned his lesson. This time he did not disobey. At last, Jonah went to Nineveh in obedience to God.

Jonah 3:3

This time Jonah obeyed the LORD's command and went to Nineveh, a city so large that it took three days to see it all.

Nineveh was such a large city, it took three days to walk across town.

To Jonah's surprise, when he preached God's warning to the people of Nineveh, they listened and believed.

Jonah 3:4-5

On the day Jonah entered the city, he shouted to the crowds: "Forty days from now Nineveh will be destroyed!" (5) The people of Nineveh believed God's message, and from the greatest to the least, they declared a fast and put on burlap to show their sorrow.

The people of Nineveh prayed for forgiveness. They turned away from their idols and began to worship God.

When God heard their prayers and saw how sorry they were, He forgave them and decided not to destroy Nineveh.

Jonah 3:10

When God saw what they had done and how they had put a stop to their evil ways, he changed his mind and did not carry out the destruction he had threatened.

Jonah finally obeyed God the second time he was told to go to Nineveh, but he had to go through a lot of difficulty because of his earlier disobedience. If you are a believer in the Lord Jesus, will you let God give you the desire to obey Him the first time?

Think of some area in your life where you have been disobedient to God. Maybe you've been impatient with your brother or sister. Maybe you've had trouble controlling your anger. Maybe you've had trouble obeying your parents, or forgiving someone that has been mean to you. Confess that sin to God and ask Him to give you the will and the power to do what you know you should do. He will fish you out of all your troubles just like he did Jonah!

Closing Prayer

Father, thank You that you are a God of second chances. Thank You that when we are disobedient that we can come to You and You will forgive us. We ask You to give us the desire in our hearts to obey You with a right heart attitude—with joy and gladness—knowing that it is pleasing to You. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Learning Activities

Craft Corner

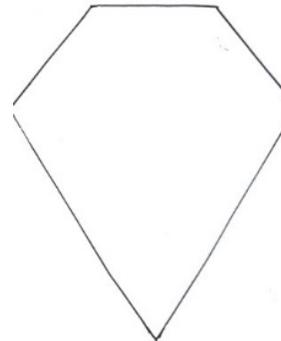
Jonah in the whale

Materials: Blue construction paper, markers

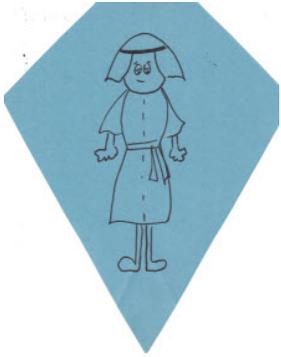
Procedure:

Don't show the children the final craft, lead them through these steps, one at a time, so they are delighted with the result:

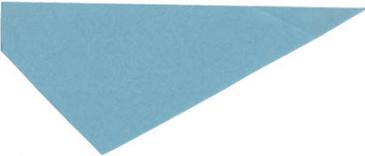
1. Cut a piece of blue construction paper to look like a diamond.



2. Draw Jonah to remind you that Jonah was a valuable prophet of God:



3. Fold the paper in half to remind you that Jonah hopped on a boat to try to hide from God. (Jonah is folded inside the fish.)



4. Fold the long-pointed end down to remind you that Jonah went overboard. (The point becomes the fish tail.)



5. Flip the paper over to see the fish that swallowed Jonah.



6. Draw a face and write a note to God on the fish's belly thanking Him for fishing you out of your troubles.

Jonah prayed to thank God for another chance to follow Him. God gave Jonah and the people of Nineveh a second chance. Think about all the second chances God gives you to obey Him.

Game Center

Charades or Pictionary

Preparation: Make cards with the following actions on them:

- Jonah running away from God
- A fish swallowing Jonah
- A fish spiting Jonah out
- Jonah getting thrown overboard
- Jonah praying in the belly of the fish
- Jonah taking a nap
- Jonah on a ship in the middle of a storm
- People throwing everything overboard
- Jonah telling God's message to the people of Nineveh
- Sailors trying to row ashore

Procedures: Divide the children into two teams. Alternate between teams. Have a member of a team draw a card and then either act out or draw that part of the story to see if they can get their team to guess what the card says. Give one minute to guess the topic. If Team A guesses correctly they get 1,000 points. If team A doesn't guess it, but Team B does, then Team B gets 500 points.

Hide or Seek?

Tell the children you are going to read some situations. They should listen to the situation and decide if the person in the situation is hiding from God or seeking God. If the person is hiding from God, they

should hold their hands over their face. If the person is seeking God, they should hold their hands up in praise to God.

1. Your friend lends you one of his toys. While you were playing with it, you accidentally broke it. You are afraid to tell him because you think he will get really mad at you. Instead of telling him, you hope that he will forget about it.
2. Your mom tells you that you can go next door to play with your friend but that you can only stay one hour. You are having so much fun, you decide to stay a little longer. When you do get home you sneak into the house and hope that your mom doesn't notice you are late.
3. A big kid is picking on a little kid on your bus. He is calling him names and making him feel bad. Instead of telling the big kid to stop, you pretend that you can't hear what the big kid is saying.
4. Your mom made a batch of cookies for the lady next door. She wants you to take them over to her because she doesn't have enough time. You don't like to be around this lady because she is always complaining about something and talking bad about your other neighbors. You decide to pray before you leave to ask God to help you say the right things to this neighbor when you go over.
5. Your dad told you not to practice hitting your baseball in the side yard, but you did it anyway. You accidentally hit the ball into a neighbor's flower pot and broke it. Instead of running away and pretending nothing happened, you go over to the neighbor and offer to buy her a new pot.

Or, use the following review questions in a game of your choice:

1. Jonah was a prophet of God. What is a prophet? (A messenger of God.)
2. Who did God want Jonah to give a message to? (The people of Nineveh.)
3. What was the message God wanted Jonah to tell the people of Nineveh? (Their city would be destroyed because of their great wickedness, unless they turned from their sinful ways.)
4. What did Jonah do when he heard what God wanted him to do? (He refused to obey and he ran away.)
5. Why did Jonah not want to obey God? (The people of Nineveh were Israel's greatest enemy; he wanted the people to be destroyed.)
6. Who was making Jonah want the people of Nineveh to be destroyed? (Satan)
7. What does obey mean? (To do what you're told to do.)
8. What are some hard things that God wants you to do? (Say, "I'm sorry." Obey parents. Forgive people who have been hurtful.)
9. Where did Jonah go when he ran away from God? (First he went to Joppa and got on a ship headed for Tarshish.)
10. What happened when they sailed off to sea? (God sent a storm.)
11. When the storm hit what did all the people do? (They called out to their gods and threw their cargo overboard.)
12. When the storm hit, where did Jonah go? (Down to the bottom of the ship.)
13. What did the captain do when he found Jonah sleeping in the bottom of the boat? (He questioned him and begged him to pray to his God for help.)

14. How did Jonah answer the sailors when they asked, "What shall we do to you that the sea may be calm for us." (Jonah told them to throw him overboard.)
15. How long was Jonah in the belly of the fish? (Three days.)
16. How long was Jesus in the tomb before he rose again? (3 days.)
17. What did Jonah finally do after three days in the belly of the fish? (He finally prayed to the Lord his God.)
18. After Jonah prayed, what did God make the fish do? (Swim close to land and vomit him onto dry land.)
19. What did the people of Nineveh do when they heard God's message that Jonah finally gave them? (They believed God, prayed for forgiveness and turned away from their idols and began to worship God.)
20. When God heard their prayers and saw how sorry they were, what did He do? (He forgave them and decided not to destroy Nineveh.)

[For more expositional lessons for children, visit <https://www.FreeChildrensMinistryLessons.com>]

