

LESSON 7

JONAH IS SENT TO NINEVEH



OBJECTIVES

1. To learn that, in times of weakness, we should turn towards God, not away from Him.
2. To learn how God's compassion leads us all to salvation.
3. To understand that God wants us to extend this same compassion to those around us.

MEMORY VERSE

"And when Jesus went out He saw a great multitude; and He was moved with compassion for them, and healed their sick."

(Matthew 14:14)

PRAYER

1. Thank God for guiding and protecting us during the week so that we can come to Him in Spirit and in truth.
2. Praise God for His loving mercy on all people.
3. Ask God for the love to overcome prejudice and proactively include outsiders.



Overview

1. **Jonah's Disobedience**
2. **Jonah Is Swallowed by a Fish**
3. **Jonah Goes to Nineveh**
4. **Linking to the Ten Basic Beliefs**—The Holy Spirit brings us God's love so that we can show Christian love to those around us, including those we consider outsiders.
5. **Life Application**—Jonah rebelled against God's command to help the Ninevites. God wants us to show concern to people outside our own group.
6. **Activity**—"Jonah's Journey" Storyboard



Background Knowledge for Teachers

Flight of Rebellion

After Jonah received the instructions from the Lord to go to Nineveh, instead of traveling there, he went from his hometown of Gath Hopher (2 Kgs 14:25) to Joppa, located to the south by the coast. From there, he proceeded to take a boat west to Tarshish, the capital of Assyria, a city near Gibraltar in the southern part of Spain. Nineveh was located to the northeast of Israel, in modern-day Iraq.



Reaching Out to Your Students

Students at this age find comfort in the familiar, deriving validation and happiness from being with like-minded peers. Help them see the value in groups and communities outside of those with which they're familiar by emphasizing God's love for all people. Instill in them a sense of purpose, one that asks them to lead others into God's church through their actions. Share examples of different groups, communities, or cultures that the students may not belong to, but which they may be aware of or even like (such as cuisine, music, practices, etc.).



Opener

5 Minutes

To start our lesson, think about the last time you went to a new place, a place where you didn't know anyone. Do you remember how lonely or scared you felt at the time? How you wished your friends and family were with you? If, in that moment, someone came over, greeted you, and brought you to meet other people, how would you feel? Probably relieved, happy, or grateful, right?

What if you could be that good person who greeted newcomers? What if you could help another person feel happy, relieved, and thankful that someone approached them in their time of loneliness? What if you could share God's love and compassion with a stranger so that he or she could also experience God? What if this new visitor became a brother or sister in your local church because you had helped them that one day when they were lonely and far from God?

Today, we will study the story of Jonah, a person who learned to do just that: to reach out to strangers to teach God's love and compassion to them.



Vocabulary

tempest: a storm
mariners: sailors
perish: to die



Bible Discovery & Spiritual Teaching

30-35 Minutes

Today, we're going to be learning about a man named Jonah, the son of Amittai. Now, if you've heard of Jonah before, do you remember what he is very famous for? (He is famous for being swallowed by a great fish.) You probably know the general idea of what had happened to Jonah, but we're going to take a closer look at the actual events and learn why they happened.

Jonah's Disobedience

Our story begins with God's instruction to Jonah, who was a prophet at the time. Let's open our Bibles to Jonah 1:1-3 and read it together. What does Jonah do after God commands him to travel to Nineveh? The very first thing Jonah does is run away! This is very unusual for one of God's prophets. But why did he run? Let's take a closer look at Nineveh, the city to where Jonah was sent.

The Bible mentions Nineveh multiple times. Nineveh was not an Israelite city, but rather a part of one of their neighboring nations. It was the capital of Assyria, a nation with which Israel had long been in conflict. The Book of Jonah isn't the only book that mentions Nineveh. God also directs Nahum to prophesy against the city. In Nahum 3:1, 3-4, he says,

"Woe to the bloody city! It is all full of lies and robbery. Its victim never departs. [...] There is a multitude of slain, a great number of bodies, countless corpses—they stumble over the corpses—because of he multitude of harlotries of the seductive harlot, the mistress of sorceries, who sells nations through her harlotries, and families through her sorceries."

From these verses, we can see that the people of Nineveh were full of pride, greed, and violence, among other things, and as we just read, the Book of Jonah says that Nineveh's sin was so great that their "wickedness [had] come up before [the Lord]." Knowing this, why do you think Jonah tried to run from God? [Allow students to discuss.] Let's continue with our story and find out.

Jonah ran to a port outside of Israel called Joppa, and while there, paid a captain to take him to Tarshish, a city far from Israel's borders. [If possible, prepare a map beforehand to show the students the region Jonah was traveling in.] The verse says that Jonah chose Tarshish in order to flee from God. Why do you think Jonah thought he'd be able to escape from God if he went there? Would he have been able to had he reached Tarshish? [Allow students to answer.] Of course not. Although Jonah was a prophet, he forgot that not only is God's power absolute, but also that His presence extends far beyond any borders that have been drawn by man.

FOR TEACHERS

Hand out the Bible Discovery worksheet to your students and have them work on Part A, either individually or as a group.

Jonah Is Swallowed by a Fish

Let's go back to the boat Jonah hired. It was headed for Tarshish, a very long way from Jonah's hometown, and probably in the opposite direction of Nineveh. Let's read Jonah 1:4-5. Can you believe that Jonah had fallen asleep during that huge storm? It seems that Jonah truly believed that he had managed to run from God, and fell right to sleep with no worries or anxieties. Amazed that he was asleep, the sailors woke him up, and then decided to cast lots to see who was to blame for the storm. Of course, the lot fell on Jonah! Let's read verses 10-17 together.

The sailors were so scared of the storm that they were forced to agree with Jonah's suggestion to throw him into the sea. But when the weather immediately calmed around them, they no longer feared the power of nature. Instead, they feared power of the LORD in heaven and quickly made a sacrifice to Him. Even though Jonah was a disobedient worker, God was able to show His glory through the demonstration of His power over all creation.

Verse 17 says that Jonah was in the belly of the great fish for three days and three nights. What do you think Jonah did during this time? He prayed! Let's read verses 1 and 7 in Chapter 2. These two verses show us very clearly that Jonah repented of his ways. He must have been incredibly scared when the sailors threw him off the ship! But it was during this time of fear that God reached out and saved him from death. In this time of fear, when Jonah was unsure of what would happen next, he prayed to God.

Just as there are times when we want to run and hide from our problems, there are also times when we feel like we are trapped, unable to do anything. When Jonah tried to run, God proved that He exists everywhere, not just within the borders of Israel. When Jonah was tossed into the sea, God proved that He can save us from anything because He has power over all creation. Surely, if God can make and calm a storm so easily, He can help us with any other problems that we might have! Since that is the case, we should try to remember that when we are in trouble, we don't have to solve the problem by ourselves; we can fully rely on God in times of need or distress.

FOR TEACHERS

Ask students to work on Part B of the Bible Discovery worksheet, either individually or as a group.

Jonah and the Ninevites

After Jonah repented, the LORD spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land, where God once again told him to go to Nineveh. This time, Jonah went! Let's read Jonah 3:1-4 together.

Remember, at the beginning of our lesson, we learned that Nineveh was not an Israelite city. This means that its people were not Hebrews, nor were they part of God's chosen people. Most of them had probably never even heard of the LORD when Jonah came along. So, what do you think their reaction was? Let's read on in verses 5-10.

In an amazing turn of events, the Ninevites truly believed Jonah's message, despite being Gentiles! Jonah's message even reached the king and his nobles, and the entire city repented of their sins! Their repentance was so immediate and so genuine that God, who had said the city's wickedness had "come up against [Him]," relented and decided not to punish the city.

FOR TEACHERS

Have students work on Part C of the Bible Discovery worksheet, either individually or as a group.

This story teaches us many things, but one of the most important things is the power of repentance. When we truly repent of a sin that we have committed, we can rely on God's love for forgiveness and for His mercy, which is shown in this story. Jonah was saved from the sea when he repented, and the Ninevites, wicked liars and corrupt thieves, dissuaded God's decision to destroy their city when they thoroughly repented of their deeds. Surely, if God was willing to show mercy to such a wicked city, He is also willing to show the same mercy to us! All we need to do is repent of anything that we have done wrong, and strive to do better in the future.



Linking to the Ten Basic Beliefs

2-5 Minutes

Salvation is given by the grace of God through faith. Believers must rely on the Holy Spirit to pursue holiness, to honor God, and to love humanity.

Although we are God's chosen people, we cannot simply lock ourselves in a room and wait for salvation to come. We cannot run away from the duties that God has charged us with: to preach the gospel of salvation and spread His Word with love. Jonah believed that the Ninevites didn't deserve salvation, so he ran away from his duties. It's easy for us to feel the same way! However, we have to remember that one of our duties is to love those around us, even if they aren't members of our church. And what better way to show our love than to guide them to salvation? Of course, preaching the message of salvation can be an intimidating task. However, preaching doesn't necessarily only involve talking to others about our church; it can also involve **showing God's love through our actions** by refusing to conform to the values and morals of the world around us.



Check for Understanding

5 Minutes

- 1. What was the first thing Jonah did when he received God's instructions?** He ran away and refused to follow His instructions.
- 2. Was Nineveh an Israelite city?** No, it was the capital of Assyria, one of Israel's enemy nations at the time.
- 3. What were some of the sins of Nineveh that made God want to destroy the city?** Pride, greed, violence, and immorality.
- 4. What happened after the sailors threw Jonah off the boat?** The storm disappeared and they made a sacrifice to God after witnessing His great power.
- 5. How many days was Jonah in the great fish?** Three days and three nights.
- 6. What happened when Jonah preached to the Ninevites of their impending destruction?** They miraculously believed, and the entire city repented.

HOMEWORK ANSWER KEY

1. He tried to flee to Tarshish.
2. A great fish swallowed him.
3. The whole city repented.
4. Answers may vary.



Life Application

10 Minutes

1. RUNNING TOWARDS GOD

Jonah's first reaction to God's instruction was to run away. But why did he think that running away would allow him to escape from God? Although he was a prophet of God, Jonah forgot one very important thing: God's **presence**, or His **omnipresence**.

When we encounter tribulations in school or at home, it always seems easier to run away. Sometimes, we don't even want to bother thinking of a solution, much less face the problem head-on. It would be much easier to do as Jonah did, and try to escape to a far-off place. However, as God's chosen, we have a very unique advantage that we may forget at times: God is always present! This means that no matter what trial or tribulation we are facing, God is always standing there with us with the power to help us overcome our problem. We only need to remember to **run towards God, not away from Him**.

Refer to the following verses, and write down what each verse says about how we should face our problems.

Verse	How to Act
Psalm 119:105	<i>Use God's word as a guide for our decisions.</i>
Philippians 4:6	<i>Tell our problems to God in prayer.</i>
Joshua 1:9	<i>Be strong and courageous, and remember that God is always with us.</i>
Romans 12:2	<i>Don't make decisions based on worldly influences.</i>
2 Timothy 1:7	<i>Act with love and self-control.</i>

Finally, read the following passage and discuss the following questions as a group.

"My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him." (Jas 1:2-5)

1. Is it wrong to ask God to just take the problem away?
2. Sometimes, it feels like praying doesn't seem to do anything. Does this mean that God isn't listening?

* * * * *

2. SHARING GOD'S LOVE

God has showered us with many blessings in our lives because He loves us. Instead of keeping these blessings to ourselves, we should take every opportunity to share it with others.

Read the scenarios below, and answer the questions that follow.

Scenario 1

Vanessa's mom had met some nice friends from church at the local supermarket. They had invited Vanessa's mom to come with her family to one of their Sabbath services. As they parked in the church parking lot, Vanessa was feeling a bit scared. She didn't know how the other kids would look at her or treat her because she was new. She was afraid that they might ignore her, or worse, make fun of her. This Holy Spirit that her mom's friends talked about intrigued her, but she was unsure whether she would like to be around a group of strangers. Her mom's church friends were warm and thoughtful, but what if the kids her age were not as welcoming?

Visitors often come to our church or Bible studies to learn more about God. They might also come looking for God's love and presence through His body, the church and its members. What is one reason that makes you afraid to reach out to someone outside of your own group? What does the Bible say about making an effort to share God's blessing with others? (Acts 10:37; 2 Cor 5:14-15)

Scenario 2

Manuel knew he was in trouble. He had broken Grandma's favorite teapot when he was kicking the ball around the house, even after she had told him to play outside. He tried to put the pieces back together, cutting himself in the process. Grandma walked in, saw what had happened, and rushed to his side. Expecting to be yelled at and punished, he started apologizing. Without a second look at the teapot, Grandma gently held his bloody hand and took him to the bathroom to clean and cover the cuts on his hands. As she cared for his wounds, she explained that she had warned him to play with his ball outside, not because she was afraid he'd break her things, but because she didn't want to see him accidentally hurt. He knew that he deserved to be punished for his disobedience, and was moved that his grandmother had been compassionate and forgiving.

In the Bible, we have many examples of how God was merciful to a variety of people. In our world today, we continue to see these examples in our families and in our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. Name a time when God showed you compassion when you didn't deserve or expect it. What does the word of God teach us about being compassionate? (2 Cor 1:3-4; 2 Sam 22:26; Mt 5:7; Lk 6:36)

Scenario 3

Breathe and smile, breathe and smile. Noah was nervous seeing all the many pairs of eyes looking at him as he stood at the front of the class ready to share his testimony. His hands were sweaty and he felt his face flushing. Then he remembered the plan his dad had suggested to help him get through his presentation. Any time he felt unsure, was still trying to remember a line, or was getting distracted by someone's look, he just had to breathe and smile. By planning ahead and remembering to breathe and smile, he was able to share his testimony with his fellow students. (Prov 16:9)

By thinking about what to do beforehand, it can be easier for us to react well when we encounter a situation. Think from a visitor's perspective: what would they like us to do for them? List two ways that you can actively reach out to people you don't know and share God's love and compassion with them.

**Activity****"Jonah's Journey" Storyboard***10-15 Minutes*

Objective: To summarize Jonah's story and help the students recall the main themes.

Materials

- Card stock
- Pencils
- Colored pencils, markers
- Stapler, optional

Instructions

1. Together with the students, divide the story of Jonah into four or five major scenes. An example would be:
 - a. Jonah hires a boat to flee from God.
 - b. Jonah is thrown overboard in the storm.
 - c. Jonah spends three days and three nights in the belly of a great fish.
 - d. Jonah preaches to Nineveh.
 - e. Nineveh repents.
2. Write the scenes down on the whiteboard.
3. Have the students illustrate the scenes on the card stock. Depending on the size of the class and the speed of their work, you may ask them to work in groups to illustrate the whole story, or simply ask them to illustrate one or two of their favorite scenes from those listed. Hand out the appropriate number of sheets of card stock to each student, depending on what you want them to do.
4. Post their illustrations on the wall in the order of when the events occurred. If each student illustrated the entire story, create story booklets using a stapler, and have them write their name and the memory verse on the back.

JONAH IS SENT TO NINEVEH

Part A: Running from God

We probably have encountered times when we really wanted to run away and hide from our problems. It's natural to want to hide when we are stuck in situations that are embarrassing or hurtful, and it's natural to want to run when we are ashamed, lonely, or scared. During these times, we need to remember that, while we may want to just run away and hide, God is the one person to whom we should be turning for help, guidance, and strength.

Read the following verses and then write down **who** was in trouble, **what** kind of problems they were facing, and **the actions** they took to solve it.

Verse	Who was in trouble?	What was the problem?	What actions were taken?
1 Samuel 1:5-11	Hannah	She was unable to bear a child.	She prayed to God for a child, promising Him that her child would be dedicated to serve God all his life.
1 Samuel 26:1-4, 7-12, 23-25	David and Saul	Saul was pursuing David and, one day, David had the opportunity to kill Saul.	David chose not to kill Saul because he was the Lord's anointed. Because David spared Saul's life, Saul also chose to spare David's and to stop pursuing him.
Luke 22:39-46	Jesus Christ	Jesus Christ knew that He would soon be betrayed by Judas and hung on the cross.	In His agony, He cried out and prayed to God earnestly.

Part B: The Sign of the Prophet Jonah

Jonah, despite his disobedience, was a very important prophet of God. This is because his actions prophesied something that would occur far into the future, in the New Testament.

Open your Bible to Matthew 12:39-40 (NKJV), and fill in the blanks below.

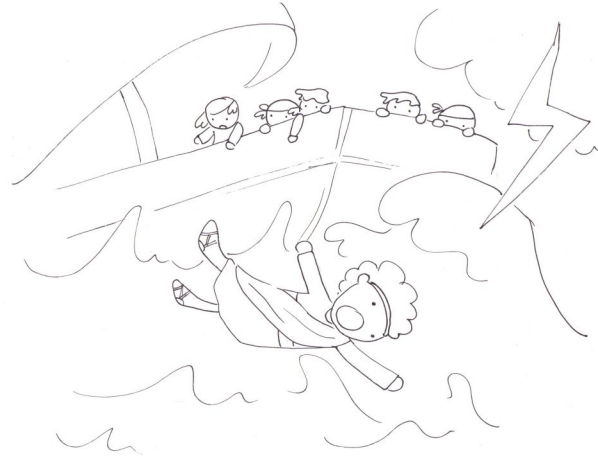
"But He answered and said to them, 'An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.'"

1. Who is the Son of Man? *Jesus.*
2. What does the Bible mean when it says that He will be in the "heart of the earth"? *He would experience death.*

JONAH IS SENT TO NINEVEH

Part A: Running from God

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Read the following verses and then write down who was in trouble, what kind of problems they were facing, and the actions they took to solve it.

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"But He answered and said to them, 'An _____ and _____ generation seeks after a _____, and no sign will be given to it except the _____ of the _____. For as Jonah was _____ days and _____ nights in the _____ of the great _____, so will the _____ of _____ be three days and three nights in the _____ of the _____.'

1. Who is the Son of Man?
2. What does the Bible mean when it says that He will be in the "heart of the earth"?

Part C: God’s Mercy Is for Everyone

The fact that the Ninevites—Gentiles from a foreign nation—were willing to repent was a miracle that should have been celebrated. But Jonah’s reaction was quite the opposite! Let’s read Jonah 4:2. Jonah didn’t want the Ninevites to be saved! Why do you think this was?

Consider the differences between God’s compassion and human prejudice. Then, think of real-life scenarios that show each of the following:

God’s Compassion	Human Prejudice
<p>“Through the Lord’s mercies we are not consumed, Because His compassions fail not.” (Lam 3:22)</p> <p>“But He, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and did not destroy them. Yes, many a time He turned His anger away, and did not stir up all His wrath.” (Ps 78:38)</p> <p>“The Lord is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and great in mercy.” (Ps 145:8)</p> <p>“And Jesus, when He came out, saw a great multitude and was moved with compassion for them, because they were like sheep not having a shepherd. So He began to teach them many things.” (Mk 6:34)</p> <p>“Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt.” (Mt 18:27)</p>	<p>“Then Jesus answered and said: ‘A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side.’” (Lk 10:30-32)</p> <p>“But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and he laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, ‘Pay me what you owe!’ So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you all.’ And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt.” (Mt 18:28-30)</p>

RUNNING TOWARDS GOD

Jonah's first reaction to God's instruction was to run away. But why did he think that running away would allow him to escape from God? Although he was a prophet of God, Jonah forgot one very important thing: God's **presence**, or His **omnipresence**.

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Finally, read the following passage and discuss the following questions as a group.

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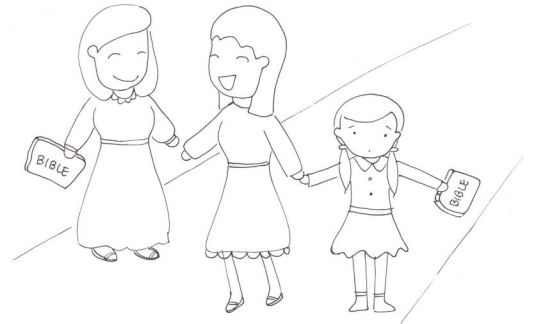
SHARING GOD'S LOVE

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Scenario 1

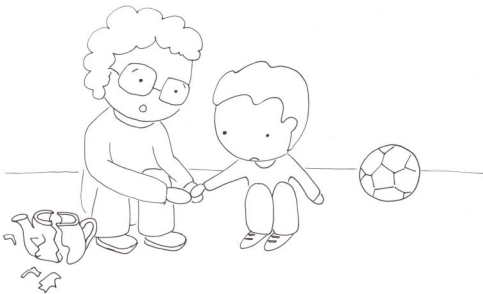
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Visitors often come to our church or Bible studies to learn more about God. They might also come looking for God's love and presence through His body, the church and its members. **What is one reason that makes you afraid to reach out to someone outside of your own group? What does the Bible say about making an effort to share God's blessing with others? (Acts 10:37; 2 Cor 5:14-15)**

Scenario 2

Manuel knew he was in trouble. He had broken Grandma's favorite teapot when he was kicking the ball around the house, even after she had told him to play outside. He tried to put the pieces back together, cutting himself in the process. Grandma walked in, saw what had happened, and rushed to his side. Expecting to be yelled at and punished, he started apologizing. Without a second look at the teapot, Grandma gently held his bloody hand and took him to the bathroom to clean and cover the cuts on his hands. As she cared for his wounds, she explained that she had warned him to play with his ball outside, not because she was afraid he'd break her things, but because she didn't want to see him accidentally hurt. He knew that he deserved to be punished for his disobedience, and was moved that his grandmother had been compassionate and forgiving.



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Scenario 3

Breathe and smile, breathe and smile. Noah was nervous seeing all the many pairs of eyes looking at him as he stood at the front of the class ready to share his testimony. His hands were sweaty and he felt his face flushing. Then he remembered the plan his dad had suggested to help him get through his presentation. Any time he felt unsure, was still trying to remember a line, or was getting distracted by someone's look, he just had to breathe and smile. By planning ahead and remembering to breathe and smile, he was able to share his testimony with his fellow students. (Prov 16:9)

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