



# Jonah

**Goal: To recognize our mistakes and turn to God.**

## RECOGNIZING GOD’S GRACE . . .

### . . . In Jonah 1–4

God told Jonah to go to Nineveh, but Jonah didn’t want to go there. The Ninevites were foreigners, enemies of the Israelites, and Jonah didn’t want anything to do with them. So he boarded a ship headed for the other direction, to escape (1:3). In a great storm, the sailors consulted their gods about who was the cause of the trouble. The finger pointed to Jonah.

Jonah was tossed into the sea to save the ship. The sea calmed. Then, “The Lord sent a big fish to swallow Jonah, and he was inside the fish for three days and three nights” (based on v. 17). From its belly, Jonah prayed in thanksgiving and with belief in God’s power to save (ch. 2). The fish vomited Jonah on the shore.

Now, Jonah obeyed God and went to Nineveh. The people responded to Jonah’s message of God’s judgment and to “stop being sinful and cruel” (based on 3:8). God withdrew judgment and granted mercy. But this made Jonah “upset and angry” (based on 4:1). He hadn’t wanted God to be merciful to his enemies. When God sent a plant to shade Jonah, and the plant died, Jonah was upset. God said Jonah was upset about a vine he did not plant. So why shouldn’t God “be concerned about that big city?” (based on 4:11).

God showed mercy. For Jonah, the mercy given should have been a source for gratitude. This interesting parable in the Old Testament invites us all to consider the people to whom God wants us to show grace, mercy, and kindness.

### . . . In Your Children’s Experiences

This story is often understood to be about a big fish, when really it’s a story about difference and diversity, and the immensity of God’s love and mercy. Children learn about having friends and being friends when they are very young. As they age and have more experiences outside the home, they learn about people who are mean, those we might call an enemy. Adults work to help children understand about enemies and ways of responding that are both healthy and wise. These experiences will provide a great path into hearing the story of Jonah, one of God’s prophets; he knew the Ninevites were his enemy, and so he didn’t think they merited God’s love or mercy.

### . . . In Your Relationships with the Children

Say the word *Jonah* and listen for the children’s first responses. In most children’s Bible storybooks, the story is remembered because of the big fish. The larger meaning of the story about a prophet who didn’t want to go to people whom he considered his enemies is one that we all can connect with. Telling this story and engaging in the learning activities will help the children imagine ways they can live as God’s prophets by responding with mercy and love to everyone, even their enemies.

*Dear God, bring me home when life feels dark on stormy seas.  
Hear me pray and be with me—always. Amen.*



## Supplies

### Music & Melodies

[bit.ly/GGGMusicMelodies](http://bit.ly/GGGMusicMelodies)

### Stories, Colors & More (SCM) i–iv, 11, 11a, 11b, 21

basic supplies  
(see p. vii)

internet-connected  
device

blanket or mats

snack

## Guided Play

choice 1: water play  
table or large tub of  
water, plastic tablecloth  
or drop cloth, bowls of  
different sizes, cups,  
measuring cups

choice 3: copies of  
**Grace Notes (GN) 1**

## Exploring

choice 1: copies of **GN 2**,  
blindfold

choice 2: copies of  
**GN 3**

choice 4: copies of **GN 4**

Water play is a very soothing activity for young children. Supervise them carefully and remind the children of a few simple rules, such as no splashing. Remind them to share the bowls and cups with one another. Consider providing plastic smocks to keep their clothes dry.

## GATHERING IN GOD’S GRACE

### Before the Children Arrive

Designate a story corner, and lay out a blanket or individual mats for the children so their backs will be to the door.

Use **SCM i–ii**, “Your Visual Schedule,” to provide clear expectations and a visual cue for the group.

See **SCM iii–iv** for the key to icons (for example, **LG** **T**) and ways to adapt for children who have special needs or disabilities.

Select the activities that will work best for you and for your children. You do not need to do everything suggested!

Before the session, cut out the figures of Jonah, the city, the boat, and the big fish from **SCM 11a** and **11b**. Glue or tape a large craft stick to the back of each picture so they can be held up as you read the story.

“Exploring God’s Grace” choice 1 requires more prep.

### Welcoming and Guided Play

**TD B M MS F FM C**

Greet children as they arrive, and say, “Grace and peace be with you.” Prompt them to respond, “And also with you.” Be sensitive to any children who might be coming for the first time. Introduce yourself to parents/caregivers whom you do not know personally. Tell the parents that today’s story is about Jonah and how he prayed to God. Invite the children to choose a guided play activity to start:

**1. Playing with Water**—Tell the children that today’s story is about Jonah. At one point in the story, he is on a boat. Invite the children to play in the water with different-size bowls and measuring cups.

- ▼ Place a plastic tablecloth or drop cloth on a low table or on the floor under the water play area.
- ▼ If you use a tub of water, set it on a low table.
- ▼ Put bowls and cups near the water table or tub, and invite the children to play with the items in the water.

**2. Making Fish**—Invite the children to play with play dough. Invite them to make shapes like fish and boats.

**3. Letters and the Story**—Hand out copies of **GN 1** and invite the children to color. Ask them if they know what the large letters are on the picture (J, F, and P). If any child’s name begins with one of those letters, make the connection. Tell them that they will hear a story today about a man named Jonah (point to the J), a fish (point to the F), and why Jonah prayed (point to the P).

**C** *For some children, listening and speaking may take longer. Allow time for these children to feel truly a part of the session. Be patient and encourage other children to do the same.*



## Transitioning to Story Time

When you sense the children are ready to move into group time, call them to the story corner, playing “Alabad al Señor (Let Us Give Praise to God).” Encourage the children to march as they come together.

### Jump and Shout

MS T

Say the following poem and do the motions indicated, inviting the children to repeat each phrase.

God made me to jump and shout, (*jump*) /  
God made me to move about, (*wiggle hips*) /  
God made me to wiggle around, (*wave arms and turn in a circle*) /  
and God made me to sit right down. (*sit cross-legged on the ground and fold hands in lap*) /

### God Will Listen

L T

Invite the children to sing with you the following song to the tune “Mary Had a Little Lamb”:

God will listen when we pray, when we pray, when we pray,  
God will listen when we pray, any time of day.

We can listen to our God, to our God, to our God,  
We can listen to our God, any time of day.

**T** Younger children need routine. The security of order is how they know what comes next. Remember to use the visual schedule to reinforce the routine.

### Hearing the Story

C

Open the Bible to the book of Jonah so that the children know the story comes from the Bible. Tell the children that they are going to hear a story about Jonah and why he prayed to God.

Read **SCM 11**. Express the emotions of the story in your voice, gestures, and facial expressions. Conclude the story by prompting the children to say, “Amen.”

Read the story again, using the figures of Jonah, the city, the boat, and the fish. Invite four volunteers to hold up the figures as you mention them in the story. Ask the other children to make sound effects for the story.



Today's story can be found in *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible*, edited by Elizabeth F. Caldwell and Carol A. Wehrheim (Louisville, KY: Flyaway Books, 2018), [www.pcusastore.com](http://www.pcusastore.com).



Review the story with the children, using the following questions:

- ▼ What did God ask Jonah to do?
- ▼ What did Jonah do instead?
- ▼ Why do you think Jonah prayed to God?

Explain that Jonah knew he had not done what he was asked to do. He had done something wrong, so he prayed to God. Jonah told God what he did wrong and asked for forgiveness. God forgave Jonah and gave him another chance to do what he was asked to do.

## EXPLORING GOD'S GRACE



### 1. Pin Jonah in the Big Fish

MS TD SD

*Before the session, make extra copies of GN 2, if you have more than six children. Cut apart the Jonah figures on GN 2 so that each child will have a Jonah figure.*

Remind the children that Jonah prayed to God in the belly of the big fish. It was the place where he recognized his mistakes and turned to God, asking for forgiveness.

Draw a big fish on a sheet of mural paper, and draw its large belly (stomach) inside the middle of the fish. Attach it to a wall. Give each child a figure of Jonah from GN 2. Invite the children to color Jonah. Put each child's name on their Jonah figure. Tell the children that they are going to play a game where they each try to put their Jonah in the belly of the big fish. Place a piece of rolled tape on the back of each child's Jonah figure and have them take turns being blindfolded and placing their Jonahs on the fish. Guide the children as necessary. Encourage the children to cheer for each child.

When everyone has had a turn, invite the children to repeat the line "We're sorry, God" or "Thank you, God" when you say it.

Dear God, sometimes we run away from our problems.

**We're sorry, God. /**

We may not be in the belly of a big fish, but we feel bad.

**We're sorry, God. /**

Help us do better.

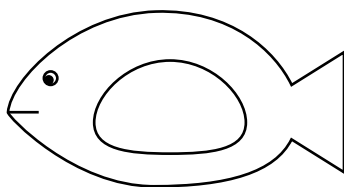
**Thank you, God. /**

We know you always love us.

**Thank you, God. /**

Amen.

**SD** *Some children may be uncomfortable being blindfolded. Help these children by altering activities to avoid the situation or offer an option such as closing their eyes or holding the object behind them.*





## 2. Jonah Story Sequence



Use a sequencing activity to help the children learn the story of Jonah. Hand out copies of **GN 3**, and invite the children to color the pictures. When they have finished coloring, help them cut apart the pictures. Encourage the children to put the pictures in the order of the story. Ask prompts such as, “What happened first?” and “What happened next?” When the children have sequenced the story, have them take turns telling what happened in each scene. Reinforce what Jonah is doing in the belly of the big fish (*praying to God, telling God he is sorry*), and what God does for Jonah (*God forgave Jonah*) and the people of the city (*forgave them too*). Put the children’s pictures in an envelope to take home, so they can share the story of Jonah with their families.

## 3. Praying Positions



Have the children recall the letters from “Guided Play” choice 3. Remind the children that “P” is for praying. Jonah prayed to God when he was in the belly of the big fish. He prayed to God because he was sorry. Invite the children to follow your instructions and repeat after you as they move into different positions of prayer:

- ▼ Kneel on the floor like Jonah knelt in the fish. Say, “God, I’m sorry.”
- ▼ Stand up and bow your head. Say, “God, I’m sorry.”
- ▼ Lay face up on the floor. Say, “God, I’m sorry.”
- ▼ Sit cross-legged on the floor. Say, “God, I’m sorry.”
- ▼ Stand up with arms raised. Say, “God, thank you for forgiving me.”

## 4. Coloring Page

Hand out copies of **GN 4** and crayons. Invite the children to color the picture of Jonah. Engage the children in conversation as they color, using the following wondering questions:

- ▼ I wonder, “How large was the big fish that swallowed Jonah?”
- ▼ I wonder, “How did Jonah feel when he got out of the big fish?”
- ▼ I wonder, “What does it feel like to be forgiven by God?”

**T** *Transitions can be difficult. This may be a good time for some quick physical activities, such as wiggling like a fish, crawling like a crab, diving like a dolphin, and so forth.*

Use “wonder” questions that do not force a child to remember facts. Wondering questions help a child think aloud. Answers are neither right nor wrong. They help teach children to speak from their hearts.



## LOVING AND SERVING GOD

Have the children help clean up the space.

Call the children together, singing “God Hears Our Prayers”—**SCM 21**. Repeat words and phrases as seems appropriate. Remind the children that Jonah prayed to God when he was sorry for not listening to God. God forgave Jonah. Tell the children that they can tell God they are sorry too and God will forgive them.

If you would like to share a snack, now would be a good time. Pray:

A, B, C, D, E, F, G. Thank you, God, for feeding me.

H, I, J, K. Hear us pray.

L, M, N, O. Here we go.

P, Q, R, S, T, U, V. Thank you, God, for hearing me.

W, X, Y, and Z. Thank you, God, for loving me.

Amen!

As the children leave, bless them: “(Name), God hears your prayers. The grace of God is with you.”



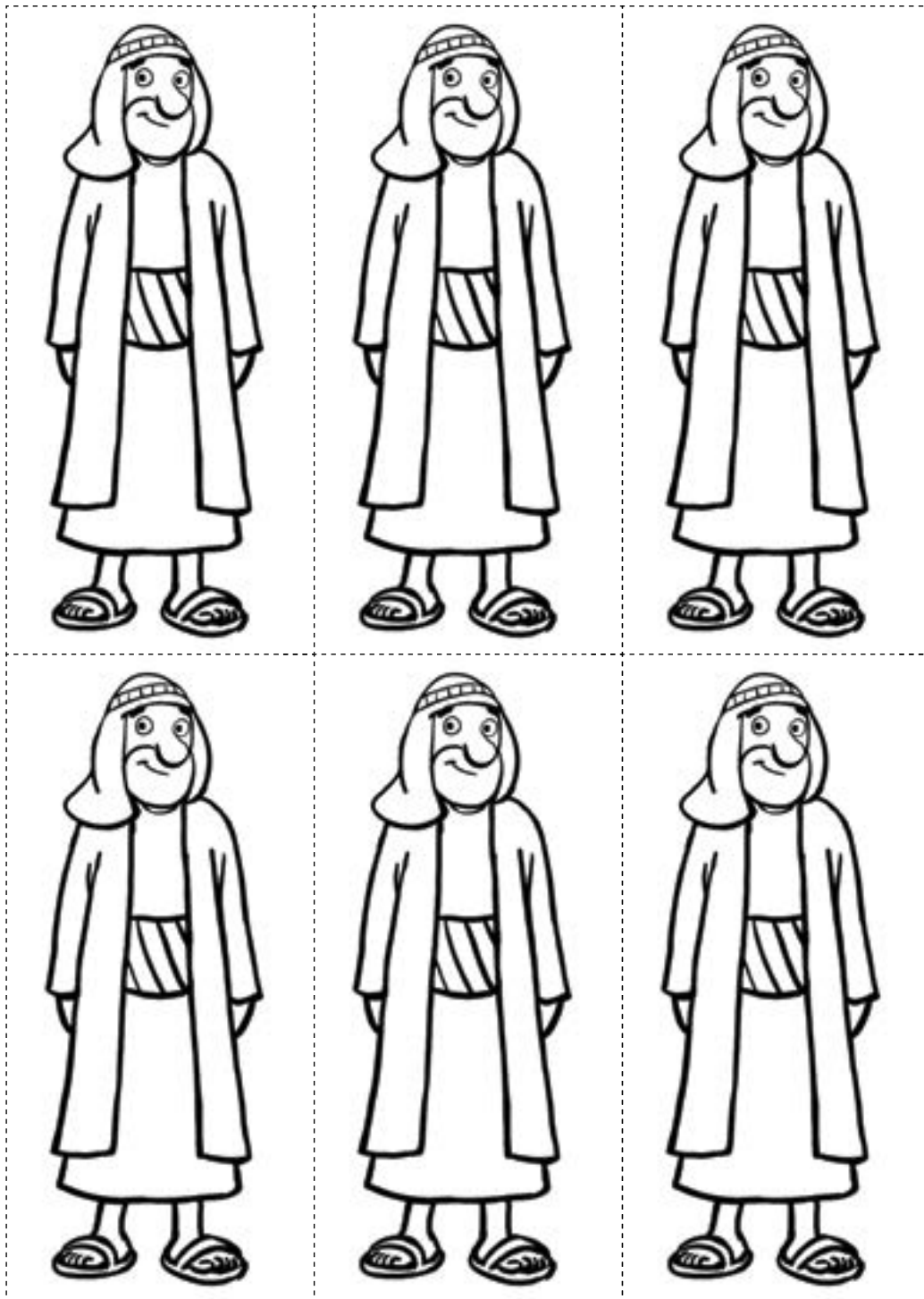
Ask parents and caregivers for their email addresses so that you can provide them with the link to [www.pcusastore.com/GGGdownloads](http://www.pcusastore.com/GGGdownloads), where they can download coloring pages, *Grace Sightings*, audio stories, and songs (see p. vii).



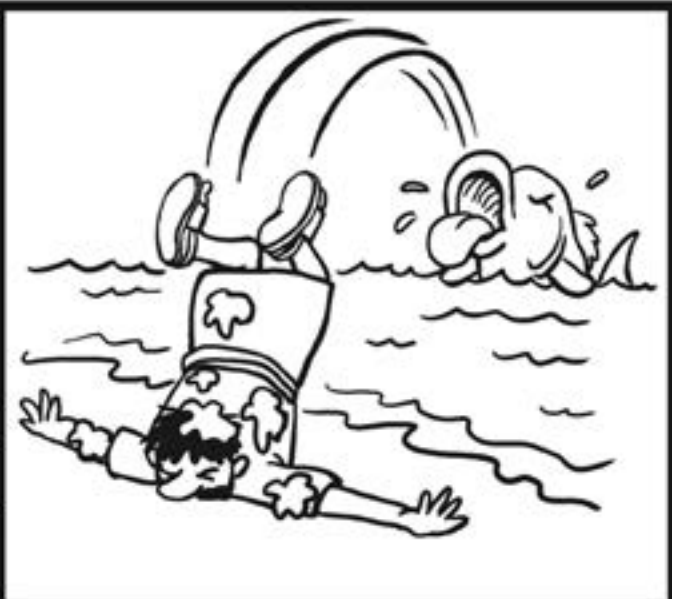






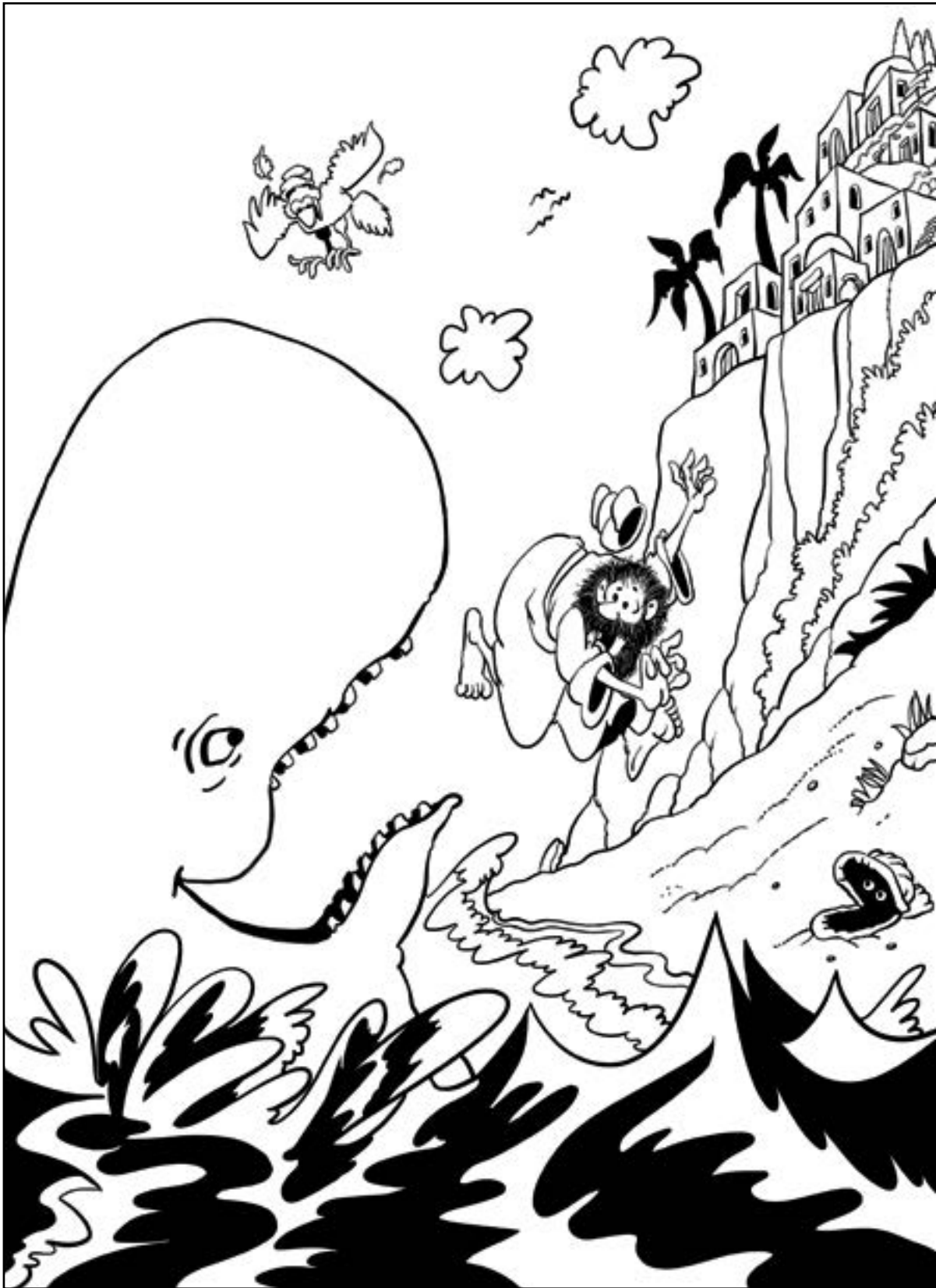








# Jonah



God sent a big fish to help Jonah. Jonah prayed in the belly of the fish.

