



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

Stories, Colors & More (SCM) i–iv, 11, 11a, 11b, 17, 19

basic supplies
(see p. vii)

audio stories (optional)
(see p. vii)

internet-connected
device

blankets or dome tent

candle

blue cloth

small toy boat

card-stock copies of
Grace Notes (GN) 1

Responding

Claiming

“We Don’t Like It” mural

Extra

copies of **GN 2**

GATHERING IN GOD’S GRACE

Post **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.

Before the session, write the litany found in “Loving and Serving” on a sheet of newsprint, using a different color marker for the children’s responses.

Welcoming and Preparing

LG **A** **B** **M** **MS**

Welcome each child with, “Grace and peace be with you, (Name).” Prompt children to respond, “And also with you.”

Invite children to help prepare the worship space. Provide a candle, a Bible, a blue cloth, **SCM 11a** and **11b**, and a small toy boat.

Ask the children to help you prepare a space to serve as a fish belly where you will read the story. Make it large enough for your group to sit in. Place a blanket over a table to crawl through or, if your group is small, set up a dome tent.

Ask some children to help prepare today’s “Responding in Gratitude” activities and suggest that one or two prepare to lead today’s singing.

Create a “We Don’t Like It” wall. Use mural paper with that heading and invite children to use crayons or markers to write or draw specific actions others may do that they do not like, for example, bullying, bossing, hitting, stealing, and so on. No names are to be used, just actions.

After allowing time for them to write or draw on the “We Don’t Like It” wall, wonder together how God feels about those actions. Wonder together how God feels about us when we engage in those actions.

Singing

Play and sing “God Is So Good”—**SCM 17**.

Praying

C **T** **M**

Turn on the candle as a reminder of God’s light in the world through Jesus.

Wonder aloud how God must feel when we disobey, or when we decide whom we think God should care about and love. After they have responded, suggest that they breathe deeply and quietly for a moment. Then pray:

God of mercy, give us hearts to understand your love for all people, even people we may not like. In Jesus’ name. Amen.



Preparing to Hear the Story

C L

Gather inside the fish's belly you have fashioned. Once you are inside, ask the children if any of them have seen or studied fish. Ask what it would be like to be inside a fish.

Invite children to recall what they know or have heard about Jonah from the Old Testament. Draw attention to the worship table they prepared earlier. Ask:

- ▼ What might the blue cloth remind us of from Jonah's story?
- ▼ What might the picture of the big fish remind us of?
- ▼ Why might this map be important?

It is fine for their answers to be incomplete—the point is to help them listen for the correlations as they engage the story.

Hearing the Story

B C L

Have a child open the Bible to Jonah 1 so that the children know the story is from the Bible. Place the open Bible on the worship table. Read **SCM 11** or listen to the story audio. Conclude by saying, "Word of wisdom, Word of grace," and prompt children to say, "Thanks be to God."

Read the story again, inviting children to take part in the action of the story. Ask for volunteers to hold sides of the blue cloth. When they hear about the boat, place the toy boat on the cloth. Have the volunteers wiggle the cloth, creating the storm. When the storm stops, signal to the children to place the cloth with the boat gently on the table or floor. Suggest that other children create sound effects for the story.

Draw the children's attention to the map on **SCM 11b**. Point out that Jonah was in Joppa and God called him to go to Nineveh. Together find Nineveh on the map. Ask the children where Jonah went instead of Nineveh (*Tarshish*). Together find Tarshish on the map. Comment how Jonah went in the opposite direction that God had called him to go. He was running away from God!

Reflecting on God's Grace

C

Provide card-stock copies of **GN 1** to children. Invite them to draw a picture in each puzzle piece as they recall what they heard in the story. They may choose to cut out the pieces of the puzzle if they wish.

As they draw, use these questions to guide discussion:

- ▼ I wonder, "Why did Jonah not want God to forgive the people of Nineveh?"
- ▼ I wonder, "Were the sailors scared to throw Jonah overboard?"
- ▼ I wonder, "How was the city of Nineveh different after its people believed in God's love?"
- ▼ What does this story tell us about God?



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.



Singing

Celebrate that God cares for us by singing, “God Hears Our Prayers”—**SCM 19**. Turn off the candle.

RESPONDING IN GRATITUDE

Select activities appropriate for your group and for the time available.

Claiming God’s Grace



Before the session, cut strips of white copy paper, 11" long, about 2–3" wide.

Comment that it was hard for Jonah to want God to forgive the people of Nineveh because he didn’t like them or their actions.

Look back at the actions on the “We Don’t Like It” wall created earlier in the lesson. Reflect together on how we feel about others when they act in these ways (*naming some of the disliked actions written*). Ask:

- ▼ Is it hard to love someone who _____ (*from mural*)? Why?

God asked Jonah to share the message of God’s love with people Jonah didn’t think deserved it, but God’s grace wasn’t Jonah’s choice to make.

Brainstorm messages of grace. See the sidebar for possible suggestions. Write ideas on newsprint. Then invite the children to use markers to write or draw messages of God’s grace on strips of paper. Have the children glue their messages over the “We Don’t Like It” actions. Offer a prayer asking God to help us share the message of God’s grace and love with all people.

Possible messages of grace:

I forgive you.
Stop being mean to each other.
Repent.
Listen to God.
I love you.

Celebrating God’s Grace



Remind children that Jonah started off by doing the exact opposite of what God told him to. God said, “Go to Nineveh,” so Jonah headed to Tarshish in the opposite direction. Locate Tarshish on **SCM 11b**.

Play “Opposite Actions”—whatever action you call out, they must do the opposite. If you say “sit,” they should stand. If you say “raise your right hand,” they should raise their left. Play for several minutes and move quickly. Invite volunteers to take turns being the leader calling out opposites. Discuss:

- ▼ How did it feel to do the opposite of what you were instructed? Was it confusing? Was it funny?
- ▼ How do you think Jonah felt? Was he confused? Did he think he was “getting away with it”? Was he unhappy?
- ▼ How do you think God felt when Jonah did the opposite of what God had asked.
- ▼ What could God ask of you that might be hard for you to do?



- C** *For some children, listening and speaking may take longer. Allow time for these children to feel truly a part of the session. Model leadership and compassion by being patient and encouraging children to do the same.*

Praying God's Grace

LD

Provide paper and pencils, and invite the children to write or draw a letter to God. Ask them to include in the letter:

- ▼ A prayer for someone who is hard to love.
- ▼ A thank you for God's love for all people.
- ▼ A request asking God to give them courage to love all of God's people.

Assure children that no one will see their letter, that it is a prayer, a conversation between them and God. Offer help as needed. Allow a few minutes for children to engage in prayer. Have the children put their letters in envelopes and bring them home. Encourage the children to think about their letters throughout the week.

Sing “God Hears Our Prayers”—**SCM 19**—as a reminder that the prayers they wrote will be heard.

Extra Activity

LD

Use a sequencing activity to help the children learn the story of Jonah. Hand out copies of **GN 2**. Read together the words on each picture and have the children trace the letters. As they trace, wonder what the words may have to do with that part of the story. Invite the children to color the pictures. When the children 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 forgives Jonah*) and the people of the city (*forgives them too*).

Provide construction paper and help the children cut two rectangles for covers. Suggest that they write “Jonah” on the cover or draw a picture of the big fish. Help the children staple the pages together in the upper left corner. Encourage the children to use their books to tell the story to their families.



LOVING AND SERVING GOD

Invite the children to gather, and lead them in cleaning up the worship space.

Lead children in this closing litany:

Leader: God sent Jonah.

All: God sends us.

Leader: God stuck with Jonah.

All: God sticks with us.

Leader: God forgave the people of Nineveh.

All: God forgives us.

Leader: God loves everyone.

All: God loves us. Amen.

Have the children hold one hand of the person on each side of them. Look to the child on your right and say, “Peace be with you.” Prompt the child to respond, “And also with you.” That child then exchanges the message of peace with the child who is on his or her right side. The peace exchange moves around the circle, passing from child to child and ending with you. Invite all of the children to join with you in saying, “Amen.”

Ask the children to recognize when they make a mistake during the week, and to turn to God asking for forgiveness. As children depart, give each one a blessing, saying, “(Name), 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, where they can download coloring pages, *Grace Sightings*, audio stories, and songs (see p. vii).

God calls Jonah. Jonah says, "No!" and hops on a boat.

Jonah prays from inside the fish.

Jonah preaches in Nineveh, and the people repent.

Jonah is angry at God, but God loves ALL people.



