UNIT 14 | SESSION 2

JONAH, PROPHET TO NINEVEH

JONAH



KEY PASSAGE: Deuteronomy 13:4

BIG PICTURE QUESTION: *Why do Christians continue to sin? Christians continue to sin because we still have a sin nature, but when Jesus returns, He will make us sinless like Him.*

CHRIST CONNECTION: Jonah spent three days in a fish so that the people of Nineveh could hear God's message, turn from sin, and be saved. Jesus was in the tomb for three days so that we could hear and trust the gospel, turn from sin, and be saved.

STORY POINT: God sent Jonah to Nineveh to tell the people to turn from their sinful ways.



PRIOR TO TEACHING THE SESSION

LEADER Bible Study

Jonah was a prophet sent by God to confront the people of Nineveh regarding their sinful ways. Jonah, however, did not immediately obey God's command. In fact, Jonah traveled in the opposite direction and boarded a boat to Tarshish. Have you ever been given clear directions from God, but ignored them out of fear or selfishness?

Because of Jonah's disobedience, the Lord sent a powerful storm on the sea, and the men on the boat feared for their lives. Knowing the storm was due to his disobedience, Jonah asked his shipmates to throw him overboard. As they threw him into the sea, the storm ceased.

In His mercy, the Lord sent a great fish to swallow up Jonah, and for three days and nights, Jonah lay entombed in the belly of the fish. Then, upon the Lord's command, the fish spit Jonah onto dry land. God again said to Jonah, "Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach the message that I tell you." This time, Jonah obeyed.

Jonah walked about the great city proclaiming, "In forty days Nineveh will be demolished!" The people of Nineveh believed God's message. In sackcloth and with fasting, the people repented and earnestly called out to God. Because of their repentance, God did not destroy Nineveh.

As we read further, we learn how Jonah grew angry over God's mercy displayed toward Nineveh. The same storm-tossed man who had received mercy from the Lord would rather experience death than see his enemies live. Ironically, disobedient Jonah prayed for God's grace in his own life, but desired for others to perish in their sin.

While Jonah did not care for the people of Nineveh, God did. The people believed Jonah's message from God and were saved. Like the Ninevites, we cannot save ourselves. But God can. When we are confronted with our sin, we have a choice to ignore it or do as the Ninevites did and repent. God sent Jesus so we could repent of sin, trust in Him, and be saved.

This week, point boys and girls to the gift of Jesus. Thank God for Jesus' death and resurrection and share how we too can believe, turn from our sin, and be saved. While we all are born far from God, Jesus bridges the gap. Just like God the Father, Jesus is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love (Jonah 4:2).



PREPARE

THE WEEK PRIOR

Prepare your heart to teach; plan the session



WELCOME

10–15 MINUTES

Greet kids and open the session



LEARN

25–30 MINUTES

Teach kids the story of the gospel



LOVE

15–20 MINUTES

Lead kids to love the God of the gospel



LIVE

15–20 MINUTES

Lead kids to live out the mission of the gospel

© 2025 Lifeway



WELCOME Kids

Greet each kid as he or she arrives. Use this time to collect the offering, fill out attendance sheets, build relationships, and help new kids connect to your group.

> **SAY** *Have you ever had to share a message with someone that you didn't want to? Tell me about it. Did you end up sharing the message? Why?*

1 ACTIVITY PAGE (5 minutes)

Invite kids to complete "Find the Way" activity page.

> **SAY** *Today, we will learn how God sent the prophet Jonah to share a message with the people of Nineveh, but Jonah didn't want to go.*

2 SESSION STARTER (10 minutes)

☐ OPTION 1: GULP!

Provide each kid with a blue plastic cup. Using cardstock, invite kids to cut out a fish's tail fin that will fit at the bottom of their cup. Glue the fin to the bottom of the cup. Then distribute googly eyes and direct kids to glue the googly eyes toward the top of the cup to complete their "giant fish."

Then form kids into pairs, standing 2 feet apart. Provide one kid from each pair with a pom-pom and challenge them to toss the pom-pom into the "fish's mouth," while their partner keeps the cup stationary in the air. If the pom-pom lands in the cup, invite the kids to say "Gulp!" Allow kids to each take turns tossing the pom-pom into their partner's cup. Then challenge kids to stand 3 feet apart and repeat the game. Play as time allows.

> **SAY** *Today, we will learn how God sent Jonah to Nineveh to tell the people to turn from their sinful ways. However, Jonah chose to disobey. As a consequence, Jonah was tossed into a stormy sea. But God was merciful and sent a great fish to swallow Jonah, saving him from drowning in the sea.*

☐ OPTION 2: COMPASSION



Tell kids that *compassion* means to feel pity and sadness for others' sufferings or situations and want to help them. Challenge kids to listen to each scenario and determine if it shows compassion. If it does, kids will run to the right side of the room. If it doesn't, kids will run to the left side of the room. Consider using the following examples and create more of your own:

- A woman makes a meal for her sick neighbor.
- A man sees someone who is homeless and offers him a job.
- A kid skips someone in line.
- A girl makes fun of a classmate.
- A boy holds the door open for an elder lady who needs help.
- A kid refuses to share his toys.

> **SAY** *Today, we will see how God had compassion on Jonah and the people of Nineveh. Even though Jonah and the Ninevites deserved death for their sin, God was compassionate to them. He took care of them and spared their lives.*

Transition from **WELCOME** *to* **LEARN**



© 2025 Lifeway



THE STORY OF THE GOSPEL

1 ACTIVITY PAGE (5 minutes)

Invite kids to complete "Find the Way" activity page.

> **SAY** "*Today, we will learn how God sent the prophet Jonah to share a message with the people of Nineveh, but Jonah didn't want to go.*"

2 REVIEW THE BIBLE STORY

> **SAY** "*Jonah was disobedient and tried to run away from what God wanted him to do. What did God call Jonah to do?* **[Allow responses.]** **GOD SENT JONAH TO NINEVEH TO TELL THE PEOPLE TO TURN FROM THEIR SINFUL WAYS.** *Even though Jonah tried to run away, God's plans cannot be stopped. While Jonah was on the ship, God sent a storm.*
>
> *To stop the storm, the men on the ship threw Jonah overboard. How did God show compassion and mercy for Jonah?* **[Allow responses.]** *God sent a great fish to swallow Jonah. God saved Jonah's life. While Jonah was in the belly of the fish, he prayed to God, thanking Him for showing him mercy and grace. Jonah did not deserve God's mercy. In fact, no one deserves the mercy of God because we are all sinners.*
>
> *Jonah eventually obeyed God and went to Nineveh. Jonah warned the people that God was going to destroy them because of their sin. What did the people of Nineveh do when they heard Jonah's message?* **[Allow responses.]** *The Ninevites repented of their sin. They turned to God and called out to Him, hoping He would be merciful. God saw they turned from their evil ways, and He showed mercy.*
>
> *But Jonah became angry that God did not destroy Nineveh. The Ninevites were Israel's enemy, and Jonah wanted God to punish them. God tried to help Jonah understand His grace and compassion through the plant, which at first provided shade and then died. Jonah was concerned for the plant, even though he didn't plant it. But Jonah didn't care for the people in Nineveh whom God made in His image. God cared for them, and in love, showed them mercy when they repented, just like He showed Jonah mercy in the storm.*"

3 GOSPEL DISCUSSION

> **SAY** "*Jonah spent three days in a fish so that the people of Nineveh could hear God's message, turn from sin, and be saved. Jesus was in the tomb for three days so that we could hear and trust the gospel, turn from sin, and be saved. Have you repented of your sin?*"

(Tip: Use Scripture and the Gospel Plan Poster to explain how to become a Christian. Create an environment where kids are welcome to ask questions about what it means to follow Jesus.)

4 QUESTIONS FROM KIDS (3 minutes)

© 2025 Lifeway

5 KEY PASSAGE ACTIVITY (5 minutes)

Show the Key Passage Poster. Lead kids in reading aloud Deuteronomy 13:4 together.

> **SAY** *"Our key passage reminds us that we should follow God, listen to God, and worship God always. God's way is always the best way, and we can trust Him no matter what."*

Form kids into two teams. Write the key passage on a dry erase board, leaving out three to five words. Place blank spaces for the letters of each missing word. Challenge teams to fill in the letters of the missing words before you draw a complete stick figure on the dry erase board. For each incorrect letter, draw a part of a stick figure. Invite each team to take turns guessing letters.

Lead kids to sing "Faithful to Him (Deuteronomy 13:4)." You may also choose to sing a worship song of your choice.

6 PRAY (2 minutes)

Invite kids to pray before transitioning to Love.

> **SAY** *"Lord, thank You for loving us even though we are sinners. Help us trust You and follow You in everything we say and do. Thank You for sending Your Son, Jesus, so we can be saved from sin. In Jesus' name, amen."*

Transition from **LEARN** to **LOVE**

© 2025 Lifeway

LOVE God by Applying the Story

1 REVIEW & BIBLE SKILLS (5 minutes)

Distribute Bibles and display the Old Testament Mediterranean Map. Guide kids to open their Bibles to Jonah 3. Remind kids that Jonah traveled from Joppa (F9) to Tarshish. Then after being spit out by the fish, Jonah went to Nineveh (E11). Consider pointing out these locations on the Old Testament Mediterranean Map.

Choose a volunteer to read aloud Jonah 3:3-5 or ask the kids to follow along as you read the verses aloud.

> **SAY** *"The first time God told Jonah to go to Nineveh, he disobeyed. The second time God told Jonah to go to Nineveh, he obeyed and told the people about God's judgment on their sin. When Jonah preached, the people of Nineveh turned from their sin and believed God.*
>
> *Today, God calls Christians to tell others to turn from their sin and trust in Jesus to be saved. Christians have received the love and mercy of God and want others to receive these gifts too. Unlike Jonah, believers rejoice when God saves someone from the punishment of sin."*

2 GROUP DISCUSSION (10 minutes)

Ask the following questions. Lead the group to discuss.

> **SAY** *"Did Jonah deserve to be saved from the sea? Did Nineveh deserve to be saved from punishment? Why not?"*

Tell kids that both Jonah and Nineveh were sinful and disobedient. They did not deserve God's mercy or grace. Share how all people deserve eternal death for their sin, but God is merciful and doesn't give people what they deserve when they trust in Jesus. Tell kids that Jesus took the punishment people deserve for sin when He died on the cross.

> **SAY** *"Jonah was in the belly of the fish for three days. How long was Jesus in the tomb?"*

Remind kids that Jesus was in the tomb for three days after He died on the cross. Tell kids that when Jesus was on earth, He compared Jonah's time in the fish to how long Jesus would be in the tomb. Jesus told the people that He was greater than Jonah. Jesus is greater than Jonah, because—while the Ninevites repented when Jonah preached—Jesus is the only One who can save people from their sin.

> **SAY** *"Who can you share the good news of Jesus with? What will you tell them?"*

Encourage kids to remember that God calls all Christians to share the gospel. Tell kids that the gospel is the good news—the message about Christ, the kingdom of God, and salvation. Invite kids to practice how they might share Jesus with someone.

Transition from **LOVE** to **LIVE**

© 2025 Lifeway

LIVE the Mission

1 ACTIVITY CHOICE (10 minutes)

☐ OPTION 1: JONAH FINGER PUPPETS

Provide each kid with a "Jonah Finger Puppets" printable and direct kids to cut out each finger puppet. Use tape to secure the tabs of the finger puppets around two fingers on one hand and three fingers on another hand. Avoid placing a puppet on a middle finger. Then retell the Bible story while kids hold up the corresponding puppet for each part. Or form pairs and invite kids to retell the story with their partner.

Additionally, you may consider playing a review game, where you ask questions about the story, and the kids will hold up the puppet that corresponds to the answer. For example, "What did Jonah board when he tried to run away from God's command?" (Kids would hold up the boat.)

> **SAY** "*Jonah was a prophet chosen by God.* **GOD SENT JONAH TO NINEVEH TO TELL THE PEOPLE TO TURN FROM THEIR SINFUL WAYS.** *God sent His Son, Jesus, to tell us to turn from our sinful ways and save us from sin. Only Jesus can save people from sin.*"

☐ OPTION 2: TAKE A STEP



Direct kids to line up at one end of the room. Tell kids to listen for words that describe God and His character. If the word describes God, they take a step forward. If the word does not describe God, they remain in place. Kids who take a step when the word does not describe God will return to the start line. Consider using the words below, and play as time allows.

- compassionate
- holy
- good
- sinful
- merciful
- unkind
- loving

> **SAY** "*The people of Nineveh stepped toward God and away from sin. They believed God and prayed God would be merciful. God is merciful. Even though we deserve judgment for sin, God sent Jesus to save us. When we repent of sin and trust in Jesus, we are saved.*"

2 REFLECTION AND PRAYER (5 minutes)

Distribute a sheet of paper and pencil to each kid. Ask kids to write about or draw a picture to answer the following questions:

- What does this story teach me about God or the gospel?
- What does the story teach me about myself?
- Who can I tell about this story?

Be sure to send the sheets home with the kids along with the activity pages so parents can continue to discuss the Bible story with their kids. If time remains, take prayer requests or allow kids to complete the Bible story coloring page. Pray for your group.

© 2025 Lifeway