



# Jonah

**Goal: To recognize grace in God's steadfast love.**

## 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 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" (1:17). From its belly, Jonah prayed in thanksgiving and 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" (3:8). God withdrew judgment and granted mercy. But this made Jonah "upset and angry" (4:1). He hadn't wanted God to be merciful to his enemies. When God sent a plant to shade Jonah and it 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?" (4:11).

God showed mercy. For Jonah, 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 would call an enemy. Adults work to help children understand about an enemy and ways of responding that are both healthy and wise. These experiences will provide a great way into hearing the story of Jonah, one of God's prophets who knew the Ninevites were his enemy, and so they didn't merit 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

- basic supplies  
(see p. vii)
- audio recordings  
(see p. vii)
- blankets, optional: dome tent
- candle
- blue cloth
- small wooden boat
- copies of **Grace Notes (GN) 1**
- Stories, Colors & More (SCM) 12, 24–25, 27, 32, 36–39**
- Music & Melodies (MM) 2017–2018**

## Responding

### Claiming

- “We Don’t Like It” banner

### Bonus Activity

- copies of **GN 2**

## GATHERING IN GOD’S GRACE

Post the visual schedule shown in **SCM 36–37** to provide clear expectations and a visual cue for the group.

See **SCM 38–39** for the key to icons (for example, **LG T**) and ways to adapt for children who have special needs or disabilities.

### Welcoming and Preparing



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, blue cloth, **SCM 24**, **SCM 25**, and a small wooden boat.

Ask the children to help you prepare a space to serve as a fish belly where you will read the story. Make it adjacent to the worship table and large enough for your group to sit in. Place a blanket over a small 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 banner paper with that as the heading and invite children to draw or write in crayon specific actions others may do that they do not like, but not specific names: for example, bullying, bossing, hitting, stealing, and so on.

After allowing time for them to fill 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

Gather the group together in the worship space. Play “Wherever I May Wander”—**MM 1**; **SCM 27**—and sing along.

### Praying

Turn on the candle.

Wonder aloud how God must feel when we disobey, or when we decide whom we think God should 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



Enter the fish's belly. Once 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. Allow them to remember and speak anything. 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 on **SCM 24** remind us of?
- ▼ Why might the map on **SCM 25** be important?

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

### Hearing the Story



Have a child open the Bible to Jonah 1 and place the open Bible on the worship table.

Challenge the group to look at the map on **SCM 25** as you read the story. Each time you mention Nineveh, Joppa, Tarshish, the giant fish, and the storm, have volunteers find these places or items on the map.

Read the story from **SCM 12** or ask a volunteer to read. Use your voice and expressions to set the tone of Jonah, the sailors, and even the Ninevites. Conclude by saying, "Word of wisdom, word of grace," and prompt the children to say, "Thanks be to God."

### Reflecting on God's Grace

Provide 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 their 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 teach us about God?

### Singing

Give God an offering of music. Play and sing together "Listen to the Word That God Has Spoken"—**MM 23**; **SCM 32**. Turn off the candle.



Children could glue **GN 1** on cardboard, then cut the pieces out. This would make it sturdier.



## RESPONDING IN GRATITUDE

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

### Claiming God's Grace

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 banner)? 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.

Use markers to write or draw messages of God's grace 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.

### Celebrating God's Grace

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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 25**.

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. Discuss:

- ▼ How did it feel to do the opposite of what you were instructed—confusing? Funny?
- ▼ Wonder together how it felt for Jonah: Was he confused? Did he think he was "getting away with it?" Was he unhappy?
- ▼ Wonder together how 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?

#### Possible messages of grace:

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



### Praying God's Grace

Provide paper and pencils and invite 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
- 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. Collect the letters and tell the children that you will keep them safe and will pray for them. Encourage the children to think about their letters throughout the week.

### Bonus Activity



Point out to children that Jonah spoke harsh words to God at the end of the story. One might expect God to punish Jonah. But God didn't. God heard the feelings that were beneath Jonah's words.

Talk about how people sometimes say things they don't mean when they feel hurt, scared, or angry. See if any volunteers want to share situations in which they said or heard harsh words that were not really meant.

Distribute copies of **GN 2**. Challenge the children to identify what might be happening in each of the pictures, and how the main person is feeling.

Form pairs or groups of children and allow them to work together to make a skit about the picture that they choose. If time allows, let the groups select another picture to create a skit.



## 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."

As children depart, give each one a blessing. Say to each:

*(Name)*, the grace of God is with you.

Ask parents and caregivers for their e-mail addresses so you can send the Grace Sightings link, or invite them to visit [gracesightings.org](http://gracesightings.org).

**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.**





