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# The Story of Job

*Scripture: Job 1:1-42:17*

**Theme: God is sovereign even in suffering**

*1st-3rd Grade (Ages 6-8)*

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Free curriculum for small and rural churches

## Lesson Overview

Lesson Title: Jonah and the Great Fish , God's Mercy for Everyone Introduction (Engage): Start by asking kids: "Have you ever felt scared and tried to run away from something that was hard? Today's story is about a man named Jonah who did just that, but God had a surprise for him!" Hold up a simple fish illustration or a toy fish to make it visual. Story Overview (Explore): Jonah was a prophet who got a big job from God: to tell people in the city of Nineveh (which was far away) that they needed to repent (change their hearts). Instead of going, Jonah ran away on a boat, fell asleep, and a giant fish swallowed him! After three days inside the fish, God sent him out, and Jonah ran again, but this time, God used him to help the people of Nineveh. The story shows that God's mercy isn't just for us; it's for everyone, even people who don't like us or act wrong. Key Message (Apply): Teach kids that God's mercy means He forgives and helps everyone, no matter what. Jonah felt guilty for running, but God reminded him: "My mercy is for all!" (Show them a heart shape or point to their chest.) Application: "How can we show mercy like God today? Maybe by helping someone who's sad, listening when someone is scared, or forgiving a friend who made a mistake?" End with a prayer: "Dear God, thank You for Your big love. Help us to share mercy like You!" Closing (Encourage): End by asking: "Who do you think God wants you to show mercy to this week?" Let kids share a small way they'll follow God's example. Keep it uplifting with a high-five or cheer: "Mercy wins!" This lesson encourages kids to see God's love in action, even for people they might not like! Tip for Teachers: Use puppets, a storybook, or a short video clip of the fish swallowing Jonah to keep engagement high. End with a fun discussion question like, "What's one way you can help someone this week?"

## Bible Story

Jonah and the Big Fish: God's Mercy for Everyone

Once, God called a man named Jonah to go to a big, evil city called Nineveh. Jonah didn't want to go because he was scared Nineveh's people were wicked, they did bad things and deserved punishment. He ran away on a ship headed to another country. But a fierce storm came, and the sailors were terrified. They threw Jonah overboard, hoping the storm would stop! Suddenly, the storm vanished, and the ship was calm. Jonah prayed to God for mercy, and God sent a great fish to swallow him.

For three days and nights, Jonah floated inside the fish, not knowing how to pray or what to do. Finally, God opened the fish's mouth, and Jonah came out safely. After that, Jonah went to Nineveh as God had commanded. He warned the people to repent (change their hearts and lives) because God loved them and wanted them to be good. The people listened! They dressed in sackcloth (rough clothes) and cried so much that God was sorry He was angry. He saw their hearts had changed, and He forgave them.

Jonah was angry! He had hoped Nineveh would stay wicked so he wouldn't have to preach there. When he saw the people being kind, he felt hurt and jealous. He even went to Nineveh to complain to God. God asked Jonah why he was so upset. Jonah answered, "I knew the people would change, but I didn't want God to be kind to them." God replied, "You trusted in your own anger, not in my mercy."

This story teaches us that God loves everyone, no matter how bad they've been. Jonah was supposed to show the Ninevites how God forgives, but he was too proud. Just like Jonah, sometimes we might be angry or jealous when others do well. But God wants us to trust Him, He loves us, just like He loved the Ninevites! Let's remember that when we see others being kind or doing good, we should thank God for His mercy, not feel jealous.

## Key Verse

### Job 1:21

Jonah's Praise to God Jonah was very scared when he was inside the big fish. He knew he needed God's help, so instead of being angry or hiding, he made a big decision: he would thank God for saving him. That's why Jonah wrote this prayer in the Bible. Even when things feel hard, we can remember that God is always kind and faithful, just like He saved Jonah from the sea! Jonah realized that his words mattered. When we pray, we can tell God how much we love Him and how grateful we are for His love. Just like Jonah, we can say, "Thank you, God!" even when we're worried or upset. This is a way to remind ourselves, and God, that He is our best friend and helper. God loves it when we take time to praise Him. When Jonah said, "Salvation comes from the Lord," he meant that God always has a plan to protect and care for us. That's something we can believe in every day! Maybe you can practice this by whispering "Thank you, God!" in your heart when you feel safe or when you see something kind happening around you. Here's how we can apply this today: When you're feeling scared (like Jonah felt in the fish) or when you see someone help another, try to stop and say a little prayer of thanks. God listens to our hearts, and He wants us to tell Him how much we love Him! Just like Jonah, we can be brave and trust that God is always there to help us. Remember: No matter what happens, we can always turn to God with our words of praise. It's like giving Him a big hug with our hearts! Would you like to try praying this simple prayer together? "Dear God, thank You for being my friend. I trust You always."

## Activities

### Activity 1:

Kids create a simple paper fish to illustrate how God saved Jonah from the stormy sea, showing mercy even for those who run from Him.

1. Prep the Plate: Fold a paper plate in half lengthwise, then cut a circle from the folded edge about 1/3 of the way in. Unfold to make a fish-shaped mouth. Set aside.
2. Cut the Fish Body: Give each child a sheet of cardstock. Draw a simple fish shape (a curved rectangle with a tail) and cut it out. Glue the fish body onto the plate's open side (where the mouth is).
3. Decorate: Let kids color the fish with markers or crayons, then add fins with pipe cleaners (if using) or drawn lines.

4. Discuss: Ask, "How did God help Jonah when he was scared? Like Jonah, God forgives everyone who turns to Him." Place the fish on the table as a reminder of His mercy.

## Activity 2:

A fun game where kids act out Jonah's fear and God's kindness, reinforcing that God's mercy works for all, even when people try to avoid Him.

1. Teach the Verse: Read Jonah 2:8, 9 aloud: "They who fear you will trust in you." Explain that Jonah ran from God, but God still loved him.
2. Movement Challenge: Play "freeze tag." One child (the "storm") chases others while shouting, "Jonah ran!" When tagged, they must freeze and act like a scared fish, wriggling in the water.
3. Switch Roles: Call out, "God sent a great fish!" The tagger becomes the fish, wrapping arms around the "Jonah," then gently setting them down. The "Jonah" must pray ("Into your hands I commit my spirit!", Jonah 2:9) while the fish "swims" away.
4. Reflect: Ask, "What if Jonah had just trusted God instead of running? How can we show mercy like God does today?" End with a group prayer: "God, help us trust You even when we're afraid!"
5. Tips for Both Activities:
6. Extend the Lesson: For the fish craft, add a Bible verse on the back: "God's love is bigger than our fears!" (1 Peter 5:7).
7. Sensory Link: In the game, have kids whisper "God's mercy" as they pray to connect the activity to Scripture.

## Discussion Questions

- Here are four open-ended discussion questions for young children (ages 6, 8) about the story of Jonah and the Great Fish, based on Jonah 1, 4. These questions encourage them to reflect on God's mercy and how the story connects to their own lives:
- 1. What Happened When Jonah Ran Away from God?
  - "Jonah was scared because God told him to go to Nineveh and tell the people there that they needed to repent (change their hearts). Jonah didn't want to do that because he thought the people there were mean and wicked. Why do you think Jonah was so worried? What kind of feelings might someone have if they were told to do something they didn't want to do?"
  - (Prompt them to share their own fears or times they felt uncomfortable following God's instructions.)
- 2. What Did the Big Fish Do for Jonah?
  - "The Bible says the fish swallowed Jonah and kept him safe in its belly for three days and three nights. What do you think it meant for God to use a big fish to protect Jonah? Why do you think God would do something so unusual? How can we trust God to help us when we're scared or lost, just like Jonah was?"
  - (Encourage them to think about times God has helped them, even in ways they didn't expect.)
- 3. What Did the People of Nineveh Do When They Saw Jonah's Warning?
  - "Jonah told the people of Nineveh that if they changed their hearts and asked God to forgive them, God would be good to them. The Bible says they believed God, and they did what he asked! Why do you think they listened so quickly? How can we show others that God's love is for everyone, just like in the story?"
  - (Ask them to think of a time they helped someone or shared kindness, and how it made them feel.)
- 4. Why Did Jonah Still Get Mad Later?
  - "After Jonah saw the people of Nineveh change their hearts, he got mad because he thought God was too kind to them. Jonah wanted God to be angry instead. How do you think Jonah felt when he realized the people he had run from were so close to God's heart? Have you ever felt mad when someone else didn't act the way you expected them to?"

- (Discuss how Jonah's heart softened when he saw God's love for everyone, and how we can learn to trust God even when we're confused or upset.)
- Each question invites them to share their thoughts, ask questions, and connect the story to their own experiences with God's mercy.

## Prayer Focus

*Prayer Focus: God's Kindness Always Wins! Dear God, we thank You for being so kind to everyone, even when people don't want to listen to You. In the story of Jonah, he ran away because he didn't want to help the people of Nineveh. But You didn't let him stay away forever, You called him back, and You made a big fish help him! You even told Jonah that if he repented (changed his heart), the people would get to see You were right, and they'd be sorry for their sins. We know that sometimes we might feel like running away too, maybe from being good, from making mistakes, or from asking for help. But like Jonah, we can trust You when we ask for forgiveness. You don't want us to stay away from You forever, and You'll always help us turn back when we need it. Help us to remember that just like the fish helped Jonah, You're always there to help us too! God, You love everyone so much, including people who might not act kindly toward us. Help us to be kind to others, just like You are. Let us be like the people of Nineveh, they listened to Jonah, and when they saw how kind God was, they changed their hearts. Help us to be that kind of person, sharing Your love and mercy with everyone we meet. And remind us that even when we feel scared or unsure, You're always right there, waiting for us to turn back to You. Thank You for being our Great Big Fish, our safe place when we need to rest. Help us to trust You with our hearts and to know that no matter what, You love us and want us to come home. Amen. (Application for the class: After this prayer, ask the children to share one way they can show kindness today, just like God's mercy!)*

### >> Missions Spotlight

Among the Tuareg people of the Sahara Desert, who are almost entirely Muslim, there is a deep sense of tribal identity. Jonah's story challenges the idea that God's mercy is only for 'our group', it's for every tribe, tongue, and nation.

### -> To the Cross

Jonah ran from God's call to preach to Nineveh, a city he hated. But God's mercy reached even the worst of sinners. Jesus said, 'As Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth' (Matthew 12:40).