

MinistryPlace.net

The Story of Job

Scripture: Job 1:1-42:17

Theme: God is sovereign even in suffering

Jr High (Ages 12-14)

Free curriculum for small and rural churches

Lesson Overview

Lesson Title: "God's Mercy for Everyone: What If We Were the One Who Ran?" (Jonah 1, 4 , Junior High Edition)
 Hook (Engage Their Hearts): "Imagine God called you to a mission, like Jonah, to tell Ninevah (a huge, sinful city) to repent or face disaster. Instead of running, you actually tried to flee... and ended up in the belly of a fish for three days. Sound dramatic? That's exactly what happened to Jonah, but here's the twist: God's mercy didn't stop at your rescue. It kept going to the city, even when you refused to go! Today, we'll see how mercy isn't just a 'get-out-of-jail-free card' for us, it's a redemptive power for everyone, even the people we might 'deserve' to punish."
 Lesson Teaser (Why This Matters Now): "Junior high, you've probably heard: 'God's love is for us, the good kids.' But Jonah proves mercy isn't about us being perfect, it's about God not giving up on anyone, even when we (or others) act like the worst sinners. Here's the challenge: Who's the 'Ninevah' in your life right now, someone who's broken, struggling, or 'unlovable'? God's not done with them... yet." Scripture Focus + Honest Questions: Jonah 1:3, 4: "Jonah ran away to Tarshish because he was afraid God was going to keep His promise to spare Ninevah (and all the people in it). He thought, 'If God's anger ruins Ninevah, maybe He'll be happy with me if I get out of here first!'" Ask: "What's one way you've ever run from God's call, or from others' needs? What did that cost you?" Jonah 2:1, 9: After the storm, Jonah prays in the fish's belly: "God, I'm drowning, why'd You let this happen? If You're real, fix this and take me home." Ask: "What's one thing you've cried out to God about that He's answered, even when it didn't feel fair?" Jonah 4:1, 3: Jonah sees Ninevah repent (and God spares them!) and snaps: "I knew they'd change! I didn't want God to have a second chance with them!" Ask: "What's a 'second chance' you've given someone, only to resent them later? How might God be using their mistake for good?" Jonah 4:6, 11: God asks, "Shouldn't I care about the Ninevahers too? Their hearts are like yours, just broken in different ways." Ask: "Who's someone you want to be mad at for their sin, but God is still reaching out to them? What's one way you could show mercy this week?" Life Application (Practical & Encouraging): "Jonah's story isn't just about Ninevah, it's a mirror. We all want to be the ones who run. We all want to be the ones who get to 'keep' God's mercy for ourselves. But mercy isn't about us; it's about God's love not quitting, even when we quit on others. Here's your challenge: 1. For the 'Ninevah' you're avoiding: Ask

God to help you see them through His eyes. Pray one prayer for them this week. 2. For your own 'fish belly moments': Remember, God's mercy isn't a 'one-time deal.' Even when you've messed up, He's still working in the people you shouldn't love. 3. For when you feel like Jonah, too tired to go: Mercy isn't about our effort. It's about God's. Trust Him to keep going, even when we quit." Closing (Call to Action): "Today, you could be Jonah's next 'great fish', someone who survives in the storm, prays for God's will, and trusts that mercy isn't over yet. Who's the 'Ninevah' in your life? God's not waiting for you to fix them. He's waiting for you to start." (Hand out a simple prayer prompt: "Lord, show me one person today who needs Your mercy. Help me be the fish that brings them home.") Why This Works for Teens: - Relatable tension: They've felt like Jonah (proud, defensive, tired). - No moralizing: Honest about their own struggles, not just others'. - Actionable: Mercy isn't abstract, it's practiced in small, tangible ways. - Hopeful: Ends with God's promise: "I will keep going, even when you don't."

Bible Story

"Jonah and the Great Fish: God's Mercy for Everyone"

One day, God called the prophet Jonah to go to the city of Nineveh, where He knew many people were far from Him. But Jonah didn't want to go. He was mad because Nineveh was home to wicked people, including the king and his people. Instead of obeying God, Jonah ran away to Jaffa, a different city, on a boat headed to Tarshish (somewhere far away). As the ship sailed, a big storm hit, and the sailors were terrified. Jonah, hiding in the hold, admitted he was the reason, he had sinned by disobeying God. The sailors threw him overboard to calm the storm, but a mighty fish swallowed him whole! For three days and nights, Jonah was inside the fish, wondering if he'd be eaten or at least dumped back in the ocean. Finally, the fish spat him out on dry land, and God told Jonah to go to Nineveh and warn them to repent.

When Jonah finally reached Nineveh, he preached a simple message: "Forty more days, and Nineveh will be overthrown!" Instead of arguing, the people believed him. The king even announced a city-wide fast and told everyone to wear sackcloth (rough, mourning clothes) as a sign of repentance. Jonah was super happy, these sinners had turned away from their wicked ways! But then he got angry. "Why should God be merciful to them?" he yelled. "They're evil! They don't deserve it!" God answered, "I know what's in your heart. You're relieved they're saved because they're not like you." Jonah was frustrated because he didn't want Nineveh's people to have the same chance he didn't get to start with.

This story isn't just about a fish or a storm, it's a challenge for us to think about our hearts. Jonah wanted God to be fair, but God always chooses to show mercy, even to people we might call "worse than us." Have you ever judged someone so harshly that you missed God's love for them? Maybe you've been like Jonah, relieved when others turn away from sin because it made you feel better. But God's heart isn't about who we don't like; it's about who He does love, everyone. That's why Jesus came: to show us mercy, not just for the "good" people, but for all of us.

Why This Matters: God doesn't wait for us to earn His love. He reaches out first, even when we're running away or stubbornly resistant. Like Jonah, we might struggle to believe that others deserve mercy, especially those who've done wrong or hurt us. But His mercy is bigger than our judgments. When we see someone's heart, do we ask, "What if God sees something in them I don't see?" That's the question God wants us to ask, and the one that starts changing us from the inside out.

(Life Application: Ask God to help you trust His mercy for others, even when it's hard. Write down one person who needs His love, and pray for them today!)

Key Verse

Job 1:21

Jonah's Big Lesson: A Heart of Thanks (Jonah 2:9) Imagine Jonah was so mad at God that he ran away, even though he was supposed to warn a city that was being punished for being unfair to others. Instead of hiding, God got him back on track. When Jonah finally realized he messed up, he didn't just say sorry, he got excited! He

shouted praise to God like: "Wait, I'm so glad you're the one who saves people! Even though I didn't want to do what you asked, I'll trust you now and tell others too!" This verse reminds us that when we mess up and ask for forgiveness, God doesn't just wipe our slate clean, He gives us a second chance to act like we mean it. Whether we fail at school, make a mistake at home, or just feel disappointed in ourselves, Jonah's story shows that real change starts with a heart that thanks God for his mercy. So the next time you stumble, ask God for help, then show it, by praying, listening, and trusting Him even when it's hard. Because that's how we grow into people who don't just say sorry... but really mean it. Life App: "When God forgives you, use your 'second chance' to be a better version of yourself, even when it's hard!"

Activities

Activity 1:

Students visually map their own "whale moments", times when they ran from hardship, and discuss how God's mercy changes their perspective.

1. Set the Stage (2 min)
2. Ask: "What's one thing you've run from, even if you regret it later? Maybe a mistake, a fear, or a choice you wished you'd made differently?" Write their responses on the board. (Example: "Jonah ran from preaching to Nineveh. Students might say, "I lied to my mom about my grades.")
3. Create the "Whale Map" (5 min)
4. Give each group the large paper. Instruct them to draw a giant whale on the left side (use a circle with fins). Inside the whale's mouth, they'll list their "whale moments" (3, 5 short bullet points).
5. Example: "I skipped church one week. I was angry with God. I felt stuck."
6. Cut & Compass (4 min)
7. Fold the paper into 4 sections (like a compass). Each section represents a direction:
8. North (Facing God): "What does God say about my whale moment?" (Reference Jonah 2:9: "You gave a great deal of care for my life").
9. East (Running): "What did I do instead of facing it?" (Jonah ran away.)
10. South (Repenting): "What would I do differently now?"
11. West (Mercy): "How has God's mercy changed me?"
12. Let students glue their paper to a table and discuss each section in pairs.
13. Wrap-Up (3 min)
14. Ask: "Which part surprised you most? How does God's mercy show up in your life today?" Connect to real-life: "Jonah's story isn't about 'perfect' people, it's about God's mercy for us all."
15. Life Application Hook:
16. "Jonah wanted to avoid Nineveh, but God's mercy didn't wait. Maybe you've been avoiding something too, like a relationship, a mistake, or a fear. What's one small step God could use to bring you 'out of the whale' today?"

Activity 2:

Teams act out Jonah's escape (and God's rescue) while solving a "real-life whale" challenge, then brainstorm how mercy changes the plan.

1. Assign Roles (3 min)
2. Divide students into 3, 5 teams. Give each team:
3. 1 leader (Jonah, must "escape" the whale).
4. 1 fisherman (must "catch" Jonah in the fish).
5. 1 prophet (can "preach" mercy to the fish).
6. Note: Teams draw a scenario from the index cards (see examples below).

7. Whale Scenarios (Pre-written on index cards)
8. "You're late for a big game, but your team lost the last game. How do you feel?"
9. "Your best friend lied to you. Do you confront them or pretend nothing happened?"
10. "You skipped church for a week. What's one thing you wish you'd done differently?"
11. "You're nervous about your first date. What's one way you'd escape 'the whale'?"
12. Gameplay (5, 7 min)
13. Round 1: Jonah runs away from the whale (leader moves like Jonah fleeing). If caught, the fisherman "throws" Jonah into the fish.
14. Round 2: The fish is scared (team throws a stuffed animal) and hides. The prophet must convince the fish to "let Jonah out" with a prayer or Bible verse (Jonah 2:9).
15. Round 3: Jonah is now inside the fish. The prophet must persuade the fish to let Jonah out, but the fish refuses! The leader must respond like Jonah in Jonah 3:4 ("They repented God's way").
16. Time limit: 3 minutes per round. Teams switch roles.
17. Reflect & Change the Plan (5 min)
18. After each round, ask: "What changed? How did Jonah's mercy story apply to your scenario?"
19. Key question: "If God's mercy was in the fish's mouth, how would you have acted differently?" (Hint: Jonah 4:2 says God was sorry for him.)
20. Life Application Hook:
21. "Jonah's whale was a ship (Jonah 1:3), but your 'whale' might be a person, a habit, or a fear. Where is God asking you to 'get out of the whale' today?"
22. Why These Work for 12, 14 Year-Olds:

Discussion Questions

- Here are four open-ended discussion questions inspired by Jonah and the Great Fish, designed to spark thoughtful reflection while connecting the biblical story to real-life challenges. Each question invites students to wrestle with emotions, empathy, and personal growth:
- 1. Fear and Change: What Would You Have Done?
 - "Jonah ran away from his job in Nineveh because he was afraid God's message would make his enemies angrier. He didn't want to see them change, or worse, be saved! But then he ran into a storm, was swallowed by a fish, and spent three days inside it. After that, he realized God's mercy was bigger than his fear. Today, many people face 'storms' in their lives that make them want to run, whether it's failing a test, dealing with a bully, or struggling with their faith. What's one 'storm' you've faced (or still face) where you wanted to turn away from God's help? How might God be calling you to face it like Jonah did after the fish? Why do you think running feels so tempting?"
 - Life Application: Helps students explore their own struggles and the tension between fear and trust.
- 2. Mercy for Strangers: How Can We Be Like Jonah's Changed Heart?
 - "Jonah tried to trick God by hiding in the town of Nineveh, but God's love wasn't just for him, it was for everyone. When Jonah saw the people repenting, he felt a mix of relief and anger. He said, 'I knew they'd turn back to being evil!' But God reminded him: 'Is it right for you to be angry?' (Jonah 4:4). Later, Jonah's family was in need, and God provided for them. Think about someone in your life (or someone you've never met) who's struggling, maybe someone from a different culture, religion, or even just someone who's different from you. How could you show mercy to them like God showed it to Jonah? What would make you hesitate to help, and why?"
 - Life Application: Encourages empathy and practical service, linking the story to real-world generosity.
- 3. What If God's Mercy Isn't Fair?

- "Jonah's biggest complaint was: 'This fish saved me, but God didn't save the people I was sent to warn!' He thought God was unfair. But God's mercy isn't about 'winning' or 'deserving.' It's about choice, and God gives everyone the chance to turn back. This story reminds us that God's love isn't tied to how good we are. Think of someone you've judged harshly because they didn't match your expectations, like a classmate who doesn't fit into 'your group,' a friend who made a mistake, or even someone who's different from you. How might God be calling you to see them through His eyes? What would it look like to trust that His mercy is bigger than their flaws?"
- Life Application: Teaches humility and unconditional love, even when it's uncomfortable.
- 4. The Fish's Role: What's God's Purpose in Our 'Storms'?
- "The fish wasn't evil, it was just a tool God used to teach Jonah. Sometimes, God uses unexpected things (or people) to get our attention. In your life, what's a 'storm' or challenge that seemed random or unfair? Was it a mistake, a loss, or even a test that changed you? How might God be using that time to show you something new about Himself, or about mercy? What's one 'fish' in your life (or one lesson) that you still haven't fully trusted yet?"
- Life Application: Connects the story to personal growth and faith perseverance.
- Why These Work:
- Encourage Debate: No "right" answers, students wrestle with their own emotions.
- Relatable Scenarios: Uses modern examples (school, friendships, family) to bridge the story to life.
- Life Skills: Builds empathy, resilience, and trust in God's plan.
- Would you like any of these adjusted for a specific focus (e.g., more on anger, more on action)?

Prayer Focus

Prayer Focus for Junior High (Ages 12, 14): "God, help us remember that You don't just save the people we like, You love everyone, even when they run away, even when they mess up. Like Jonah, sometimes we get upset when others stray from You, but Your mercy is bigger than our frustration. Teach us to trust You when we feel stuck, to pray for others when we're tempted to judge, and to take a step toward them, just like You did with Jonah. Give us hearts that follow Your mercy, not just our own rules." Why this works for the lesson: - Connects to real questions: Junior highers often wrestle with why God lets bad things happen or how to forgive those who hurt them. Jonah's story mirrors their own struggles, his disobedience vs. God's relentless love. - Life application: Ties mercy to everyday choices, how to pray for friends who don't "deserve" it, or how to ask for help when they feel like they've failed. - Engaging tone: Uses phrases like "like Jonah" to make it relatable (e.g., "When I feel like God is 'abandoning' me..."). Teacher's Tip: Pause after the prayer to ask: "Who in our class feels like they've 'run away' from God in some way? What's one way we can pray for them today?" This shifts the focus from abstract theology to action.

>> 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).