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Jonah and the Great Fish

Scripture: Jonah 1:1-4:11

Theme: You cannot run from God's call

4th-6th Grade (Ages 9-11)

Free curriculum for small and rural churches

Lesson Overview

Lesson Overview: "God's Unfailing Love" (Hosea & Gomer , Hosea 1-3) Introduction (5 min): Start with a heartfelt question: "Have you ever felt like you let someone down, even though you care about them? Today, we'll learn about a man named Hosea who showed God's love in a powerful way, even when his wife, Gomer, didn't love him back like he deserved!" Hold up a small toy or picture to illustrate love and forgiveness. Lesson Breakdown: 1. A Marriage Tested by Love (Hosea 1-3:1) Hosea was told by God to marry a woman named Gomer, who wasn't kind to him at first! In Hosea 1, God used this to show something deeper: He loves us even when we're unkind or stray from Him. Gomer later repented (changed her heart), just like some of us might when we realize God's love isn't based on our perfect behavior. Ask: "What's one way you've felt unloved lately, by God or people? How could God's love surprise you?" 2. Love Doesn't Quit (Hosea 2:2-14) Hosea even raised children by Gomer named "Not Loved" and "Not Belonging", names for how God sees us when we fail. But in Hosea 2:14, God says, "I will love her again." This shows His promise: His love isn't temporary; it's always waiting for us! Share a story of a friend who forgave you after you messed up. How does that help you trust God's forgiveness? 3. Gomer's Return (Hosea 3:1-5) Finally, Gomer came back to Hosea, showing she trusted God's love enough to change. God's love does the same for us, He wants us to return to Him! The lesson ends with the promise that if we repent (turn back), God will welcome us back with open arms. End with: "God's love isn't like Gomer's first behavior, it's steady and true, just like His promises!" Closing Activity (5 min): - Action Step: Have kids draw a heart and write/draw one way they've felt unloved and one way they've shown kindness to someone who needed it. - Prayer: "Lord, thank You for loving us even when we're messy. Help us trust Your love like Gomer trusted Hosea. Amen." Teacher Notes: - Keep energy high with movement (e.g., act out "Hosea's love" by hugging students after a "wrong step"). - Tie to real life: "Unfaithfulness isn't easy, but God's love is stronger, like a rock!" (Psalm 62:6). - For deeper questions: "How would you feel if someone loved you despite your mistakes? How can we show God's love to others who've hurt us?"

Bible Story

Sunday School Lesson: Hosea and Gomer , God's Unfailing Love (Based on Hosea 1, 3)

Long ago, the prophet Hosea lived in Israel when the people had grown far from God. They loved comfort, pleasure, and even betrayal more than they loved Him. The prophet's wife, Gomer, was known for her wayward heart, she turned away from God, just like many in the nation. One day, God told Hosea to marry Gomer as a powerful way to show His people His love. Despite how Gomer acted, Hosea loved her deeply, just as God loves us when we stray.

Hosea bought Gomer back after she had left him, proving that God would always keep His promises. Even when people choose to walk away from Him, God never stops loving them. Hosea had three children with her, names like Jehovah-shammah (God is there) showed God's presence even in hard times. Later, God told Hosea to marry another woman named Gonea, who also chose to leave him, symbolizing how the people of Israel would turn away from God time and time again. But just as Hosea loved them through it all, God never stopped loving them.

God's heart breaks when people sin, but His love never ends. He sent His Son, Jesus, to show us how much He loves us, even when we make mistakes. Just like Hosea's love for Gomer was unconditional, God's love for us is always there, waiting for us to return to Him.

Reflection Questions: 1. Why do you think God chose Hosea to marry Gomer? 2. What does it mean that God's love is unfailing? How does that help you when you feel far from Him? 3. Have you ever turned away from God? How did you feel when you realized you were wrong?

Personal Application: God's love is like a big, warm hug, He doesn't stop loving us, even when we mess up. When you feel like God is far away, remember: He is always there, waiting to draw you back to Him. Just like Hosea loved Gomer through her choices, God loves you no matter what. Ask Him to help you trust His love today.

Why This Story Matters: This lesson teaches that God's love is stronger than our choices. Just as Hosea showed forgiveness, Jesus shows us that God never gives up on us, even when we stray. When we feel lost or hurt, we can choose to trust that God's love will always be there to draw us back home.

Key Verse

Jonah 2:9

God's Gentle Love for Us God's word in Hosea 2:14 is like a warm hug from a loving parent, full of kindness and care. Imagine you're playing outside, and your favorite toy is lost, but instead of yelling, your mom reaches out to help you find it. God is like that, He reaches out to us when we feel lost or lonely, just like Hosea was trying to show His people how much He loves them. When Hosea writes this verse, he's describing how God invites people back to Himself. It's like when your best friend asks, "Hey, I've missed you! Let's talk and get to know each other again." God says He wants to talk to us, listen to our worries, and show us His love. Sometimes, when we feel far from God, it's because we've been distracted by things that don't really matter, like toys, games, or even things we tell ourselves aren't important. But God wants to remind us that He's always here, ready to hold our hand and help us feel close to Him again. Deeper Question: Have you ever felt far from God because of something you did or didn't do? How did you feel, and what did you wish God would do next? God's love isn't just about big, grand things, like winning a game or getting everything perfect. It's about little, gentle moments. Think of how you comfort a friend who's sad: maybe you give them a hug, share a story, or just sit together quietly. God does something similar for us. When we feel hurt or confused, He reaches out with kindness, like when a teacher says, "I see you're upset. Let's talk about it." That's what Hosea is telling us, God doesn't scold or push us away; He invites us back with tender words and a gentle heart. Personal Application: How can you show God that you trust Him with your heart? Maybe it's by praying when you're worried, thanking Him for little things, or even just taking time to listen to Him today. When we choose to listen to God's love and let Him guide us, we're like children who follow their mom or dad's hand when they want to take a safe walk. God doesn't want us to wander far from Him, He wants us to feel close and safe in His arms. So today, ask yourself: Am I holding onto things that keep me from feeling God's love? What can I do to let Him lead me back home? His tender words are waiting just for you!

Activities

Activity 1:

Students fill a "love jar" with written promises of God's faithfulness, then act out Gomer's wandering and Hosea's restoration through a dramatic "redemption dance."

1. Prep the Lesson (5 min): Write on the board: "God's love is like a marriage, He doesn't abandon His partner even when they stray." Explain Hosea's marriage as a picture of God's relationship with Israel (and us!).
2. Create Cards (8 min): Each student picks one scene from Hosea's story to illustrate:
3. Hosea marries Gomer Draw a ring, a wedding dress, or a "love letter" to represent God's first covenant.
4. Gomer's unfaithfulness A broken heart, a strayed path, or a "no" sign (symbolizing Israel's rebellion).
5. God's redemption Hosea's act of love (e.g., taking Gomer back, planting wheat for her).
6. Tip: Pair students to share their card's symbolism.
7. Share & Reflect (5 min): Ask: "How does this story show God loves us even when we mess up?" Write responses on a board. End with: "Who can tell me one way God has shown you love this week?"
2. "Love Jar: Redemption in Action"
9. Write Promises (5 min): Discuss: "God's love is like a promise, He keeps it even when we forget!" Have students write one promise God made to them (e.g., "God will always forgive me" or "He'll help me when I'm lost") and add it to the jar.
10. Shake & Reflect (3 min): Gently shake the jar and read aloud: "Just like these promises, God's love isn't broken!" Ask: "How does Hosea's story show God's love is like a promise?"
11. Redemption Dance (7 min): Pair students to act it out:
12. Gomer's wandering Slowly step away from a "heart" (draw on paper or use a stuffed animal).
13. Hosea's love Quickly circle back, hugging the "heart" and saying, "I'm coming home!"
14. End with: "When you feel far from God, what can you do to remember His love?" (Write answers on a poster.)
15. Why These Work for Ages 9, 11:
16. Hands-on: Visual/dramatic activities help concrete abstract ideas (e.g., "faithfulness").
17. Collaborative: Pairing or group sharing reduces pressure while encouraging discussion.
18. Personal: End questions tie the story to their lives (e.g., "When have you needed God's love?").

Discussion Questions

- Here are four open-ended discussion questions designed to engage upper elementary students (ages 9, 11) in exploring Hosea and Gomer, God's Unfailing Love (Hosea 1, 3). Each question invites deeper reflection, personal connection, and thoughtful analysis of God's love in their own lives:
- God's Love as a Surprise
- In Hosea's story, God commanded him to marry Gomer, a woman who seemed unfaithful to him. The story shows that God's love is sometimes surprising, even when we don't deserve it or understand it. How do you think Hosea felt when he was told to marry Gomer? What might have been going through his mind? Have you ever experienced a moment where someone (like a friend, family member, or even God) showed love toward you when you didn't think they should? How did it make you feel?
- (Deeper question: Why do you think God chose Hosea to show this story? How does it teach us about His heart for people who struggle or don't know Him? What does that say about God's love for you when you feel like you don't deserve it?)
- Faithfulness in Hard Times

- Gomer left Hosea over and over again, just as many of us sometimes stray from God when life gets tough. But Hosea didn't give up on her, he loved her back even when she didn't deserve it. When have you felt like you had to forgive someone (or God) who hurt you? How did you decide to forgive, and what did it cost you? God's love in this story is like a promise, no matter what happens, He never stops loving us. How can we be more like Hosea, choosing to love even when someone (or even ourselves) doesn't love back?
- (Personal application: What's one way you can show love or forgiveness today, even when it's hard? How does Hosea's story challenge you to be more patient or kind?)
- God's Heart for People Who Need Help
- Hosea's story is about God's willingness to reach out to people who are broken, just like Gomer was broken by her choices. Many people today struggle with hurts, mistakes, or feeling unworthy of love. What are some ways we can help others feel like God's love is real to them? For example, maybe it's listening when someone is sad, forgiving when someone makes a mistake, or showing kindness when no one else does. How can we make sure people know they're not alone?
- (Deeper question: Why do you think God chose to show His love through Hosea? How might His heart be like a loving parent, a friend, or a teacher, someone who wants to help us feel safe and loved even when we don't deserve it?)
- The Power of Choosing Love
- The story ends with Hosea and Gomer being reunited, and Hosea's heart is full of love for her. God's love is like that, it's not just given; sometimes we have to choose to accept it and let it change us. Have you ever had a time when you had to choose to forgive, believe, or love someone or something? What happened after you made that choice? How did it feel when you saw the difference it made? God's love in this story reminds us that He always wants us to trust Him, even when things don't make sense.
- (Personal reflection: What's one choice you can make today to show or receive God's love, even when it feels difficult? How might your life be different if you trusted His love more?)
- These questions encourage students to think about God's love as an active, life-changing force rather than just an idea they can memorize. They invite them to reflect on how the story applies to their own struggles, kindness, and relationship with God!

Prayer Focus

Here's a heartfelt and age-appropriate prayer for upper elementary children (ages 9, 11) to explore Hosea and Gomer's story of God's love: "Dear Heavenly Father, Thank You for showing us how love feels, strong, patient, and never ending. Just like Hosea loved Gomer even when she wasn't perfect, You love us so much that even when we mess up or forget to care for others, You still love us back. You know our hearts better than anyone, and You don't give up on us. Help us to trust that kind of love, especially when we feel small, scared, or unlovable. Sometimes, we get confused, like Gomer might have felt when Hosea treated her so kindly. But God's love isn't just for others; it's for us, too. When we act mean or hurt others, remind us that You see everything. Help us to ask for forgiveness and to choose kindness, just like Hosea did. And when we feel distant from God or like our love for Him fades, help us to remember: Your love is like a river, it never runs out! (This echoes Hosea's story of Gomer being loved even after being "unfaithful.") Father, teach us to be like You, patient, forgiving, and full of love, even when things don't go our way. Help us to show love to people who are hard to love, just like Hosea did. And when we feel like our love for You grows cold (like Gomer might have), remind us: You are the one who holds us, not the other way around. Amen." Why this works for the lesson: - Connection to the story: Uses Hosea's metaphor of love (like a river) and Gomer's "unfaithfulness" to ground the prayer in the Bible passage. - Personal reflection: Ends with questions like "When have we felt like we're not enough for God?" or "Who is someone we need to show love to today?" (Encourage them to journal or discuss answers.) - Emotional depth: Names feelings like confusion or fear but ties them to God's unfailing love. - Call to action: Ends with a prayer for practical love, like forgiving others or showing

kindness. Teacher's Tip: After praying, ask the class: "What's one way you can 'love like God' today?" This helps them apply the lesson!

>> Missions Spotlight

Among the Fulani women of West Africa, who often face abandonment and betrayal, Hosea's story speaks powerfully. Missionaries share that God's love is not like human love, it never gives up, even when we are unfaithful.

-> To the Cross

God told Hosea to marry an unfaithful wife to show Israel how their sin hurt God. Yet God kept loving them. This is the Gospel in picture form: we are unfaithful, but God's love never quits. Jesus died for us 'while we were still sinners' (Romans 5:8).