

CONCEPTS that will be covered in the lesson

- Reiterate who / what Nineveh was in relationship to Israel
- Highlight Jonah’s resistance and how good help is hard to find – even for God
- Even when God can’t find good help, God can make a little help go a long way

Materials needed:

1. Movie clip (available on rfour.org) from *Gulliver’s Travels (2010)*
2. Electronics that show the video clip
3. A bamboo stick about 6 feet long (Home Depot and Lowes tend to carry them) or you can use drinking straws taped together or a light-weight fishing pole without the reel.
 - a. You will want the item to be about 6 feet long, pretty straight, and as light as possible.

THE LESSON

OPENING PRAYER

OPENING QUESTION

- One of the things we do every class is ask and answer the opening question at the beginning of class – because it helps us 1. Learn more about each other and 2. Helps “warm us up” for some of the ideas in the upcoming lesson. So we’re going to do that now.
- So here’s the opening question for today’s class. I [the teacher] will ask the question and then to give you some time to think of an answer, I will answer first.
- Once I answer the question, we’ll go around the circle and each of us will answer.
- When it’s your turn, start with your name and then answer the question to the best of your ability.
- **Here’s this week’s question:** What is your least favorite chore?

TRANSITION TO VIDEO CLIP

- Last class, we started a session of stories about Jonah and Jesus.
- The first two stories will be about Jonah and will hopefully help us better understand the third story about Jesus.
- In the Jonah story that we read last week, Jonah ignored God’s call to go to Nineveh and instead went to Tarshish.
- Traveling to Nineveh would’ve taken Jonah on a land route, but the route to Tarshish was a sea-route.
- And so, Jonah found himself in a stormy situation
- Knowing that some of it had to do with him going in the opposite direction than God, Jonah tells the sailors to throw

him into the sea.

- The storm stops and Jonah ends up in a fish.
- Basically, all of that happens because Jonah *really* didn't want to help God with God's plan about Nineveh
- It's like his least favorite chore
- What we'll see in today's story is that though Jonah has had a change of direction, he really hasn't had a change of heart.
- In fact, he mostly only pretends to try.
- To help us think about what only pretending to try looks like, let's watch the following clip from *Gulliver's Travels*.
- In it, Gulliver has found very little people, and has been staying with some of them.
- They have been paying him in food and lodging with the understanding that he would protect them from their enemies.
- In today's clip, that moment has arrived.
- Let's see how committed Gulliver is to his job of protector.

WATCH VIDEO Clip

ASK

- When Gulliver first reached the boats, did he try and destroy them? (No)
- What did he do instead? (Told them to turn around and leave while he pretended they were fighting)
- Did Gulliver's plan work? (No)
- Why? (Because the enemy didn't cooperate)
- But was Gulliver successful despite his lack of commitment to try? (Yes)

TELL

- It's not super clear from the clip, but the main reason Gulliver is reluctant to do his job is because he's afraid of getting hurt.
- That's why the "I'm invincible" moment is a turning point in the clip.
- Once he realizes he's safe, he's much more committed to his job.
- Overall, though, I think Jonah's behavior in today's story is pretty much just like Gulliver's behavior.
- The only thing that's different is that Gulliver's job is to destroy, while Jonah's job is to encourage the citizens of Nineveh to receive God's forgiveness.
- A quick review, then: Nineveh was the capital of Assyria – the kingdom that had conquered the (Northern) Kingdom of Israel (but not the [Southern] Kingdom of Judah – which is where Jonah was from).
- In other words, Nineveh was a very dangerous place to go to, not just in general, but also because it was the enemy's stronghold.
- But, God wants Jonah to go to Nineveh and them that God is aware of what they have done, but is willing to forgive them.
- Let's see what Jonah does and what the people of Nineveh do.

READ Jonah 2:1, 2:10 and 3:1-10 (recommendation: Have class read it aloud; one person per verse)

2:1 Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish...

2:10 Then the Lord spoke to the fish, and it spewed Jonah out upon the dry land.

Chapter 3:1-10

The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time, saying, 2'Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you.' 3So Jonah set out and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly large city, a three days' walk across. 4Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's walk. And he cried out, 'Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!' 5And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth.

6 When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. 7Then he had a proclamation made in Nineveh: 'By the decree of the king and his nobles: No human being or animal, no herd or flock, shall taste anything. They shall not feed, nor shall they drink water. 8Human beings and animals shall be covered with sackcloth, and they shall cry mightily to God. All shall turn from their evil ways and from the violence that is in their hands. 9Who knows? God may relent and change his mind; he may turn from his fierce anger, so that we do not perish.'

10 When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it.

ASK – Roslyn

- In verse 2:1, Jonah ended up inside a fish after being tossed from the ship. What did he then do? (he prayed)
- What would YOU do if you ended up inside a fish?
- In verse 2:10, what happens after all that praying? (fish spits him out)
- Verse 3:1 and 2 -- What does God tell Jonah to do, again? (go to Nineveh)
- Verse 3 – what does Jonah do? (He goes to Nineveh – *finally*)
- Any thoughts about why he decided to go this time around? (maybe because he's learned that his own way doesn't work very well or maybe because he realizes God just won't leave him alone until he does it)
- Still in verse 3: How big of a city is Nineveh (takes three days to walk across it – so somewhat big!)
- In verse 4: Did Jonah walk the whole city? (nope – he didn't try very hard; only spent one day walking and talking)
- Does that remind you of someone else who we've recently discussed? (Gulliver and his reluctance to actually try)
- Verse 5 – how do the people respond to Jonah and his message? (they believed him; they listened to him; they changed their behavior)
- Verse 6 – how does the king respond? (he too changes his behavior and sends out a proclamation)
- Verse 9 – what is the King hoping will happen? (That God may change God's mind)
- Verse 10 – Does God change God's mind? (yes)

TELL

- In the same way you don't like to do your least favorite chore and in the same way Gulliver didn't want to fight, so too did Jonah not want to walk through the city of Nineveh and tell them God's message.
- But that's Jonah's job, right!? He's a prophet. That's what he supposed to do!
- What's probably happening, though, is that he's afraid, just like Gulliver was afraid.
- In the last bit of the Jonah story, what we hear, though, is not that Jonah is afraid of Nineveh, but that he's afraid that God will forgive them.

- Even for God, it appears, good help can be hard to find.
- But, despite his fear, Jonah *did* do at least part of what he was supposed to do.
- At least 1/3rd of his job.
- But here's the thing that is pretty impressive, I think: Even with Jonah giving such meager and unenthusiastic help, Nineveh still responded.
- And in some ways, Nineveh was just the opposite of Jonah, right?
- The minute they heard about what God was going to do, they changed their behavior, they changed the direction they were going in, which is what the word "repent" actually means – to change direction.
- The people of Nineveh repented/changed direction very quickly.
- Ironically, they were far quicker at it than Jonah was at listening to God and repenting earlier in the story.
- So, even though good help was hard to find for God -- just the littlest bit of help, no matter how sullen or half-hearted the attempt was, provided a really impressive change in the people of Nineveh.

TRANSITION TO ACTIVITY

- To help us think about how just a little bit of help can sometimes go a long ways, we're going to do an activity called "Helium Stick"
- To start, we'll all line up, shoulder to shoulder, all facing the same way
- Next, you'll need to stick out your pointer finger from just one of our hands at about chest height.
- I'm then going to lay across your fingers this 6 foot bamboo (or staw-built) stick
 - Once I do that, go ahead and get situated so that you are equally spaced between the ends of the stick (but you must all remain on the same side of the stick)
- **Note:** The stick must rest on your finger - the stick cannot be grasped or pinched, especially by curling the tip of your finger. This is part of the challenge.
 - If it appears that you cannot help yourself from grasping or pinching the stick, then the entire team will be instructed to rest the stick on the top / outside of their fingers
- Now, without putting any pressure on the top of the stick or pinching it or grasping it, the idea is to *lower* the stick to the ground as a team.
- The one, big, catch is that the stick cannot lose contact with your finger or any of your teammate's fingers.
- I will be watching and letting you know if you need to start over due to someone losing contact or because someone was pinching it.
- Successful completion will be when the underside of your fingers that are holding the stick then touch the ground.
- Any questions?

NOTE for teachers: The activity is called "Helium Stick" because the stick tends to go up, instead of down. The activity, as you'll see, is quite difficult. Be quick to start them over when they lose contact. It will happen a lot. And they will get discouraged. Keep encouraging them, but most likely they are going to want to give up. *Eventually*, respond to their claims that it is too hard and that they cannot do it.

DO HELIUM STICK ACTIVITY

EVENTUALLY INTERRUPT ACTIVITY

- What's happening to the stick? (It's going up instead of down!)
- So in other words, you're going the wrong direction, right?
- Maybe you need someone who can help you reverse your direction
- Would you like someone to help you reverse direction?
- First, remind me what another word is for reversing direction? (That's right, *repent*)
- I *suppose* I will help. But I'm going to be just like Jonah and not try very hard in helping you, not because you don't deserve it, but because good help is hard to find sometimes.

What to do next

- At this point, have the students set up again and then walk over to the other side of the stick, and with a very bored and disengaged demeanor, place one finger on top of the stick in the middle of the stick.
- Then, apply pressure to the stick with that one finger while the group slowly moves the stick to the ground.
- The pressure from your one finger should be enough pressure to keep the stick against everyone's fingers, even when one part of the line of the team lowers their arms faster than the other part of the team.
- **NOTE: if your class DOES complete this activity**, then instead of interrupting the activity, you'll want to congratulate them and then have them identify what made the activity challenging.
- Then tell them you want to do it one more time to illustrate how just one finger would've made the challenge much easier.

FINISH activity and sit down

ASK / TELL

- What happened once one person reversed their direction? (the whole team succeeded)
- The activity you were asked to complete was not impossible, but it was difficult to do.
- So, even though you could've done it, eventually, it was a lot easier with the help, right?
- I think that's what we see in today's story as well.
- It's pretty impressive, I think, that one person – whether it's Jonah or Gulliver or in our activity, me – can have such an effect on others.
- I also think this story is also wanting us to think about is what kind of effect a person or a group of people might have if they *were* enthusiastic about helping God.
- Probably something that is pretty amazing.
- I bring this up because I think it is still true today that it is hard for God to find good help.
- Not because we don't care about God, but because we maybe don't think we could possibly help God
- Or, we don't necessarily think that God needs our help.
- But what we see in today's story is that...
 - 1. God needs people to help out
 - 2. God can make even a little bit of our help go a long, long way.
 - 3. If we're wanting to help God, then our effectiveness will be even farther reaching than Jonah's help. And Jonah's help was pretty effective.
- And that's the good news for today

CLOSING PRAYER

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