



Jonah and the Fish: Jonah (chapters) 1 & 3 Lesson Plans

WRM Season 2 Session 2: Movement & Games, Storytelling, Science

OVERVIEW SECTION

How to Read This Lesson Plan

The **Overview Section** is the foundation of this lesson plan. The questions and activities for the class that you will be teaching on Sunday morning have been based (sometimes loosely) upon what you read in this section. The **Overview Section** is composed of five components (each component is underlined in the lesson plan):

How to Read This Lesson Plan (defines all components of the lesson plan)

Purpose of Sunday Morning Spiritual Formation (a reminder of why we do this)

Scripture(s) for the Session (a reminder that the scripture is to be read in every class)

Key Verses & Theology (background for teachers to ponder)

Themes to Focus on from the Scripture (the ideas that the session's lessons are based on)

The actual lesson is found in the second section, **The Sunday Morning Experience Section**. Think of this section as the step-by-step instruction guide to your Sunday morning teaching experience. There are four components to this section (again, each component is underlined in the actual lesson plan):

Preparation (including supplies needed)

Classroom Statement (a brief explanation of what will be taught/happening in the classroom)

Step-by-step process of the lesson (including the scripture to be read)

Suggested variations for age groups (Self-explanatory but not always applicable)

We encourage you to read the rest of this **Overview Section** before reading the **Sunday Morning Experience Section**.

Purpose of Sunday Morning Spiritual Formation

The purpose of Sunday Morning Spiritual Formation is, with God's help and in community, to hear and interact with the stories of our faith tradition, to pray, worship and play together, and to equip and support the building of relationships with God and with each other.

Scripture(s) for the Session: Jonah chapters 1 & 3.

Please READ this aloud in every class you teach. The actual words to the scripture can be found in **The Sunday Morning Experience Section: Step-by-Step process of the lesson**. When reading to the class, please read it from the lesson plan (not an actual Bible) as the wording of the scripture has been modified to help clarify some language issues.

Key Verses & Theology: These are provided to help the teachers think about and build a framework for understanding the story to help in answering some of the questions that the students might raise in class.

1:2 "Go at once to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before me."
3 But Jonah set out to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. In these two verses we see that the author of Jonah sees no difference between disobeying God and not being in the presence of God. The author is not saying that God is not in or at Tarshish. The author is saying that Jonah is trying to remove himself from God's presence by being disobedient. Tarshish is in the exact opposite geographical direction from Nineveh. Jonah is going the wrong way. Jonah has very reasonable reasons for doing this: Nineveh is the capital city of Israel's current occupiers. Nineveh probably will kill Jonah for bringing this message. But, however reasonable, these reasons send Jonah in the wrong direction – away from God. Compare this with Jacob and last session's story, where God's telling Jacob to go back to Esau, and Jacob has very strong fear about going, but does. Jonah doesn't even try to go. He just runs away.

2:4 But the Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea, and such a mighty storm came upon the sea that the ship threatened to break up. Thus begins the strangest part of this story: God intervenes first with winds and storms, then with a game a chance (the drawing of straws) and then by sending a great fish to swallow Jonah whole. Such stories lend themselves to thinking of God as a God that intervenes in the physical world. However, for the Israelites (the first hear-ers of the story), the concept of a storm on the water would be understood not just as a storm, but also as a symbol for chaos. So another way to think of the story is to think of how disobeying God leads to chaos. The chaos, though, doesn't happen because God punishes us and is out to get us. Instead, the chaos is part of the design of creation. We're supposed to have God in us (Genesis 3 – God breathes life into humans). If a car starts to run out of gas, what does it do? It sputters and coughs and finally comes to a stop. In this scenario, the car is not being punished (nor is it punishing you, the driver). It's simply living within its design. So it is with us and God. We and our surrounding environment start to sputter and cough when we stop receiving God. But God never gives up on us, no matter how great the storm. So if we choose to seek God again, even if it is in the middle of a great big chaotic storm, God will offer us a way out. In Jonah's case, that second chance came in form of a "Large Fish."

3:4 Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's walk. And he cried out, "Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" *5 And 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.* This is a rather remarkable turn of events. The prophet in this story has to be eaten by a giant fish in order to be obedient to God's call. The supposedly evil and godless conquerors of Nineveh on the other hand heed God's call immediately. In both instances, however, there is repentance. Repentance means to turn around. Jonah was going in the wrong geographical direction. But because he "repented" or turned around, then he was headed in the right direction. And because he was headed in the right direction, he was able to remind others to go in the right direction. And they listened!

Themes to Focus on from the Scripture: Themes are provided to help teachers understand the teaching of the *session* (not necessarily the class). Sometimes an activity in one class may not match up with any of the themes.

Disobedience: Jonah thinks he knows better than God (it's actually in chapter 4 where Jonah said he knew that God would spare Nineveh because God was a loving and forgiving God). Jonah doesn't want Nineveh to hear the word of God because Nineveh is the oppressor of Israel. It is the enemy of Jonah's people. So Jonah goes in the opposite direction. Jonah heads for Tarshish. In Jonah's running away though, he encounters a huge storm and is then tossed into the waters.

Chaos/accidents: Jonah being tossed into the raging waters of a sea in the middle of a storm is quite the scene. And a little bit scary. If you ignore the strangeness of the story and instead look at the metaphors/symbols, then the story makes a little more sense. The sea or water represents chaos. And the chaos is stirred up for Jonah because Jonah is disobeying God. The story makes it sound like God is punishing Jonah. But a better way to think about it is that chaos is a natural consequence to disobeying God. Just like if a parent tells a child to brush his/her teeth, but the child does not, the natural consequence is that the child gets a cavity. Another way to think about chaos is to think about accidents. Like a car accident for example. A car accident usually happens when one or more drivers are not paying attention for whatever reason to what they should be paying attention to. The result is an accident/chaos. This is what happens for Jonah. He should be paying attention to what God tells him what to do. Instead, he turns his back.

Repentance/turning around/metanoiya: Jonah turns his back on God and experiences chaos. In the chaos, he comes to realize his mistake and so he turns around and goes to where he's supposed to go. This *turning around* is called "metanoiya" in Hebrew. We translate that word in English to: Repentance. Jonah is repenting. And in Jonah's repenting, he still isn't completely obedient. God tells him to go through the city. It's a three days walk. Jonah only goes for a day's walk. But Jonah's obedience, if only a third of obedience, is enough. The whole city repents (turns around). Jonah who is supposed to know better has to be thrown in the water and eaten by a fish for three days before repenting. He's the prophet! But the enemy of the prophet's people hear him speaking, and they listen immediately! And what happens? God says that "calamity" (another word for chaos) will not be experienced by these people.



THE SUNDAY MORNING EXPERIENCE SECTION

Preparation

- Print out this lesson plan and bring it with you on the Sunday Mornings you are teaching
- Arrive at pre-arranged time to join other teachers, shepherds and staff for an opening prayer.
- Supplies Needed: Small, throwable bean bags (Jonahs). Milk Jug Large Fish (the way to make these is to get a number of uncrushed empty 1 gallon milk jugs (I got mine from the local Starbucks) and by thinking of the nozzle as a snout, and the handle as the top fin, cut out the bottom third of the nozzle to make an open “shark mouth.” Feel free to get creative with how many teeth you create)

Classroom Statement

This Movement and Games class consists of hearing the story of Jonah, playing a number of games that help demonstrate some concepts found in the Jonah story (God says/Jonah does [a game of disobedience], Freeze tag [a game of second chances], and a game of practice [the Jonah Throw]). Included are questions and comments to help the students reflect on the story and their recent game activities.

Step-by-Step Process of Lesson

Shepherd comes in with students

SHEPHERD ASKS “Question of the Day.”

INTRODUCE yourself

Hi, my name is ____ and I want you call me (tell the students how they may address you).

PRAY (Short and simple is perfect)

God, thank you for this day and for each other. We need your help. Help us to learn about you this day. Amen.

TELL

- The story I’m going to read to you is part of the story of Jonah.
- There are a few strange things in it.
- I want you, though, to listen carefully for what God tells Jonah to do and for what Jonah does.
- Ready? Here we go!

READ SCRIPTURE STORY (Jonah chapters 1 & 3)

Jonah 1 - 1 Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah (who was a prophet – someone who speaks for God to the people). God told Jonah, **2** "Go at once to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before me." **3** But Jonah set out to for Tarshish which was in the opposite direction from Nineveh. Jonah was trying to hide from the presence of the Lord. He did this by going down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid his fare and went on board, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord.

4 But the Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea, and such a mighty storm came upon the sea that the ship threatened to break up. **5** Then the sailors were afraid, and each cried to his god. They threw the cargo that was on the ship into the sea, to lighten the boat. Jonah, meanwhile, had gone down into the hold of the ship and had lain down, and was fast asleep. **6** The captain came and said to him, "What are you doing sound asleep? Get up, call on your god! Perhaps your god will spare us a thought so that we do not die." **7** The sailors said to one another, "Come, let us cast lots, so that we may know whose fault this is." So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. **8** Then the sailors said to Jonah, "Tell us why this is happening?" Jonah told them and the men were even more afraid, and said to him, "What is this that you have done!"

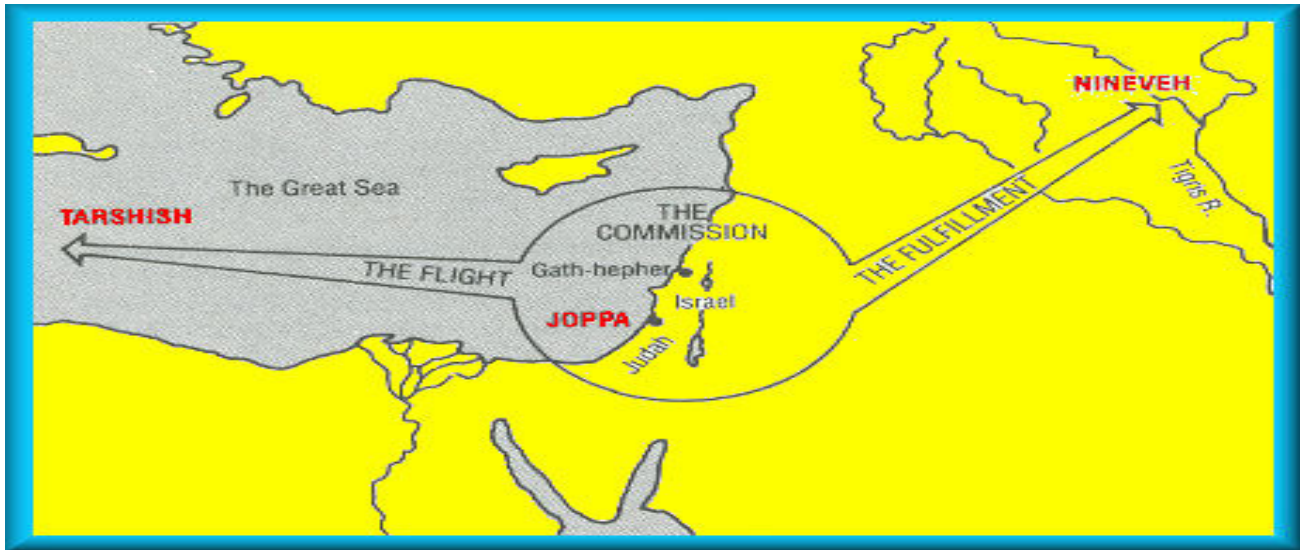
11 Then they said to him, "What can we do so that the sea may quiet down for us?" For the sea was growing more and more stormy. **12** Jonah said to them, "Pick me up and throw me into the sea; then the sea will quiet down for you; for I know it is because of me that this great storm has come upon you." **13** Nevertheless the men rowed hard to bring the ship back to land, but they could not, for the sea grew more and more stormy against them. **14** Then they cried out to the Lord, "Please, O Lord, we pray, let this be the right thing to do because we do not want to do it." **15** So they picked Jonah up and threw him into the sea; and the sea ceased from its raging. **16** Then the men offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows. **17** But the Lord provided a large fish to swallow up Jonah; and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. In the belly of the large fish, Jonah prayed to God. Then the fish spat Jonah up on a beach.

Jonah 3 - 1 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." **3** So Jonah set out and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very large city. It took three days to walk across it. **4** Jonah went a day's walk into it and he cried out, "Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"

5 And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast (this meant no one ate), and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth (very itchy, ugly clothing). **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. **7** Then he had a proclamation made in Nineveh: "I command that no human being or animal, no herd or flock, shall taste anything. They shall not feed, nor shall they drink water. **8** Human beings and animals shall be covered with sackcloth, and they shall cry mightily to God. All will turn from their evil ways and from the violence that is in their hands. **9** Who knows? God may change his mind; he may turn from his fierce anger, so that we do not die." **10** When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the disaster that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it.

ASK (answers are in parenthesis)

- What does God tell Jonah to do at the beginning of the story? (To go to Nineveh)
- Does Jonah do this? (No.)
- Where does Jonah go? (To Tarshish – a city in the opposite direction from Nineveh). **SHOW MAP**



TELL

- So as a way to demonstrate Jonah's bad behavior, we're going to play a game called "God says/Jonah does."
- This game will be sort of like Simon says. I'll start out as God (watch out!) and I'll tell you to do something.
- Then, like Jonah, you have to do the OPPOSITE of what I say! Whaddya think? Think you can do it? If you don't do the opposite, then you're out for being TOO OBEDIENT! Just kidding. You can keep playing.

DO the "God says/Jonah does" game

- God says "Stand Up" (the kids should all be seated or lying down)
- God says "Sit down" (the kids should stand up)
- God says "Take a step forward" (the kids should take a step backward)
- God says "Take a step backward"
- God says "Walk towards the door"
- God says "yell"
- God says "whisper" Etc.

If the kids are enjoying the game, let them take turns being God. But not for too long. Always leave them wanting to do more of the activity.

ASK

- How did it feel to do the opposite of what you were told to do?
- Bonus Question! Why do you think Jonah did not want to do what God told him? (the people in Nineveh were Israel's enemies. They might have killed him. – This is not mentioned in the story that is read to the class)
- After the large fish spit Jonah out onto the beach, what did God tell Jonah to do? (Chapter 3 verse 2: The exact same thing – go to Nineveh and tell them God's word).

- Why do you think God would ask Jonah to do the same thing after Jonah had been so disobedient? (God's giving Jonah a second chance).
- Does God give anyone else a second chance in this story? (Yes, the people of Nineveh.)

TELL

- We're going to now play a game of second chances.
- We're going to play a game of freeze tag.
- One person will be IT and another person will be NOT IT.
- The IT person tries to tag everyone else (but can't tag NOT IT). If you get tagged, then you're frozen.
- After you are frozen and the NOT-IT person then tags you then you are no longer frozen.
- If the IT person can get everyone frozen before NOT IT can unfreeze just one person, then IT wins.
- The NOT-IT person helps you have a second chance.
- We'll play for a little bit and then switch who is IT and NOT IT.

DO Freeze Tag

ASK

- Why do you think God gave the people in Nineveh a second chance? (because that's who God is)
- Do you get do-overs at home, school, or in sports?
- God forgave the people of Nineveh. How many times will God forgive us? (as many as it takes)
- Does anyone play piano or sports? Do you have to practice to get things right? Sometimes we need a chance to do things again and again to learn the right way to do them, don't we?

TELL

- We're going to play a game now where we'll have to practice to get better at it.
- We're going to practice throwing Jonah into the mouth of the large fish.
- The large fish is this cut up milk gallon jug. (if you have extra time, pass out markers to the kids to draw eyes and more teeth on the large fish milk jugs)
- Jonah are these bean bags/hackey sacks.
- Choose a partner.
- One of you gets the large fish (cut up milk jug). The other gets a couple of Jonahs.
- Stand about 10 feet apart and by throwing underhand, try to get Jonah into the large fish.
- See how many you can get in a row.
- In a few minutes, we'll switch roles.

DO Jonah Catch Activity

DISMISS FOR SINGING

Suggested Variations for age groups

None.