



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: Deck of cards, a number of cards with a Jonah picture taped to the inside (do that ahead of time – Jonah picture is at the end of this lesson plan), Jonah costume for storytelling.

Classroom Statement

This Storytelling class consists of reading the scripture, re-telling the story in Jonah's "own" words and then playing a card game/charades game that helps find a hiding Jonah and re-enacts scenes from the story.

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

- Jonah was a prophet. This means he lived as God's messenger.
- Jonah would hear something from God and then he was supposed to go tell others what he heard.
- Let's listen to this story and see how well Jonah does his job as a prophet.

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

- So did Jonah do a good job as a prophet? (No. Not really)
- He should have been fired, don't you think?
- So here's a retelling of the story you just heard.
- Listen for WHY Jonah didn't want to do his job as a prophet.
- And listen for why God doesn't fire Jonah from his job as a prophet.

STORYTELLING

Hi, my name is Jonah. And I really, really, really dislike Ninevites. Ninevites live in the city of Nineveh. It's a huge city! And it's the capital of Assyria. Assyria conquered my country, Israel. This is why I really, really, REALLY dislike Ninevites. They are my enemy.

So imagine my anger and disgust at God when God tells me while I'm praying that I am to go to Nineveh and tell them to turn around, to repent, to stop doing what they are doing. I am angry and disgusted because God wants to give them a chance to be different. I want God to destroy Nineveh and Assyria. Instead, God wants to talk to them! What kind of God is that!!!!????!!

So I crossed my arms and made lots of angry noises and decided I wouldn't do it. But that wasn't good enough. So I decided I would show my displeasure with God and go my own way. I chose to go to Tarshish. It's a wonderful city. You should go there some time.

To get there I had to take a boat. So I did. During the boat ride, a storm came up. But I was so happy to be going to Tarshish that I didn't notice the storm because I was sleeping soundly. But the men on the boat woke me up and said, "You better pray because this is a really bad storm....we're going to die!"

Well, I knew then that I was in trouble for ignoring God. If I had gone to Nineveh, I would've walked. There are no boat rides to Nineveh. But instead I had to do it my way. And because I had done it my way, I found myself in the middle of a deadly storm.

So I asked God what I should do.

God said, "It's time to go back. Do this by jumping off the boat."

Then I got angry again and told God "NO! That's CRAZY!"

So I went and helped the sailors, but they were drawing straws. I played along, but then my straw was the shortest one so then they started asking me questions. I told them that I kept telling God "No!" This scared them. I told them "Don't be scared, just throw me off the boat." They didn't want to but then they finally did.

I don't know how to swim. So I sank. Everything was so dark. But peaceful. My last thought was, "At least I don't have to go to Nineveh!"

But then I woke up in a soft dark space and I could breathe! I had no idea where I was. I had no idea how to get out – there was no door. So I prayed. I told God I was sorry. After a long time passed, the space I was in started to get smaller. It started to push me along a narrow hallway. Then suddenly I could see light...and...TEETH! But then I was outside, on the beach and there was a very large fish swimming away from me...WHAT!!!!? Are you KIDDING me!? I was in A FISH!!!!!!

Well then.

After that, when God said, "Go to Nineveh" I decided that I would.

Wouldn't you?

And when I went, the Ninevites listened. And God gave the Ninevites a second chance, just like God gave me a second chance. The Ninevites didn't deserve that second chance. But you know what? I didn't either.

ASK

- So why did Jonah not do his job well? (Because Nineveh was the enemy)
- Why did God give Jonah a second chance (Because that's who God is! Plus, it helps that Jonah, like the Ninevites, says that he's sorry).

EXPLAIN next activity

- So Jonah is now trying to hide from us in this pack of cards.
- And we're going to try and find him.
- One at a time, you'll come up and pick a card, any card from the pile.
- If you find him, he looks like this [hold up an example], then you get to sit back down.
- If you don't find him, then you have to act out a scene from the story without talking and the rest of the class has to guess what scene you're re-enacting.
- I'll be the one that tells you what scene you're re-enacting

DO

Play "Find Jonah" Card Game

Scenes from the story:

1. Jonah running away from God.
2. Waves in the storm.
3. Sailors throwing cargo.
4. Sailors casting lots.
5. Sailors rowing hard.
6. Sailors throwing Jonah overboard.
7. Then there is no motion - the storm stops (and sailors worship God).
8. Jonah is eaten, but not chewed, by a great fish.
9. Jonah prays.
10. Jonah is spat out of the great fish.
11. Jonah goes to Nineveh.
12. Jonah walks through Nineveh proclaiming: Repent (which means turn around).
13. Ninevites believe; put on sackcloth and fast.
14. God has compassion on the Ninevites.

CLEAN UP

DISMISS FOR SINGING

