

# Journey to Nineveh K–6<sup>th</sup> Grade: Teaching for Day 1

Helpful aids:

- Map of the area (Nineveh, Joppa, Tarshish)

Welcome to the first day of our Journey to Nineveh.

We are going to learn about a prophet named Jonah, how God called him to deliver a warning to the people of Nineveh, how he disobeyed God and ran away, and how God worked in Jonah's life to show that He is all-powerful and in full control.

Let's read the first 16 verses of the first chapter of the book of Jonah and discuss what happens:

## **Jonah 1:1-16 (NIV)**

**The word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai: 2 "Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me."**

What do you think it means when it calls Nineveh a "great city"? (Large, powerful, influential, wealthy)

Nahum 2:9 (NIV) says of Nineveh, "Plunder the silver! Plunder the gold! The supply is endless, the wealth from all its treasures!"

So, Nineveh was a very wealthy city, very large, powerful and influential. It was one of the capitals of the Assyrian Empire.

Why was God sending Jonah to Nineveh? (To warn them that God was aware of their evil)

When God said "its wickedness has come up before me" what do you think He meant?

The words mean "to my face." Their sin was a bold affront to God's holiness and was directly against God Himself.

***3 But Jonah ran away from the LORD and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the LORD.***

Isn't it ironic that God was declaring His displeasure with Nineveh's disobedience, and Jonah responds by disobeying!!!!

Why do you think Jonah chose to disobey God's orders? (maybe fear of the people in Nineveh, maybe hatred for the people in Nineveh) (we will get a hint at his reason later in the book!)

Look at this map. Here is where God told Jonah to go (Nineveh) and here is where Jonah decided to go (Joppa to take a ship to Tarshish). What do you notice about the direction Jonah headed? (the completely opposite direction from where God told him to go)

Have you ever deliberately disobeyed one of God's commands, or maybe a command from your parents? (yes, we have all done this!)

What does verse 3 say Jonah was trying to do? (run away from the Lord)

Is it possible to get away from God? (NO!)

Let's read Psalm 139:1-7 (ESV):

1 O LORD, you have searched me and known me! 2 You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. 3 You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. 4 Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether. 5 You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me. 6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it. 7 Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence?

So, could Jonah really get away from God? (NO!)

It's possible that Jonah realized he could not get away from God's presence completely, but maybe he was trying to get away from God's calling. Some Jews in his day believed the "spirit of prophecy" existed only in the land of Israel, so if he left Israel, he could escape the sense of God's calling and command.

***4 Then the LORD sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up.***

What did God do to get Jonah's attention? (He sent a huge storm, so bad that the ship was in danger of being destroyed)

Notice, God has many ways of bringing our sin out of the dark and into the light. Others may not know what we have done, but God does. For Jonah, God sends a huge storm to get his attention!

**5 All the sailors were afraid and each cried out to his own god. And they threw the cargo into the sea to lighten the ship. But Jonah had gone below deck, where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep. 6 The captain went to him and said, "How can you sleep? Get up and call on your god! Maybe he will take notice of us so that we will not perish."**

How did the sailors on the ship respond to the storm? (they were terrified; they prayed to their gods; they threw cargo overboard to lighten the ship)

These sailors were probably seasoned, experienced sailors, so this storm must have been a whopper to scare them so badly!

What was Jonah doing? (he was asleep inside the ship)

Did Jonah seem very concerned that he was disobeying God? (No)

What are some ways in which we respond when we know we have disobeyed God? (we may ignore it, we may blame someone else, we may pretend nothing is wrong, or we may admit we were wrong and ask God to forgive us)

Notice that, when we sin, we are not the only ones affected by the consequences. Not only was Jonah in danger, but so were all the people on the ship with him. Our sin does more than hurt us, it hurts those around us!

**7 Then the sailors said to each other, "Come, let us cast lots to find out who is responsible for this calamity." They cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah.**

Do you know what it means to cast lots? (it is like throwing dice to determine the truth about something – God allowed the lot to show that Jonah was to blame for the storm)

**8 So they asked him, "Tell us, who is responsible for making all this trouble for us? What kind of work do you do? Where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?"**

Even though the lot pointed to Jonah being the cause for the storm, the sailors did not jump to conclusions. They wanted to be sure they got the full story. They were being very fair with Jonah. So, they asked him, "who is responsible for making all this trouble for us?" They needed to hear Jonah confess his disobedience in case the lot was wrong.

The sailors also wanted to know more about Jonah. They asked:

- ***What kind of work do you do?***

Maybe they thought his occupation might be one that led him to be a trouble-maker.

- ***Where are you from? What is your country? From what people are you?***

Knowing where he was from might help them understand why he could be the cause for the storm. If he was a Chaldean, they were known for divination. If he was an Arabian, they were known to be thieves. If they could find out what country he was from, they would know what god he served, and whether or not they believed his god could have caused the storm or could rescue them from the storm.

***9 He answered, "I am a Hebrew and I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land."***

What was Jonah's response to all these questions from the sailors? (I am a Hebrew, I worship the LORD, the God of Heaven)

So, he does provide answers to their questions. By admitting to be a Hebrew, they would know he was from Israel. He tells them directly what God he worships, and actually he indicates his occupation – he is a servant of the one true God of the whole earth, not a specific god from a specific country!

***10 This terrified them and they asked, "What have you done?" (They knew he was running away from the LORD, because he had already told them so.)***

Why did this scare the sailors? (Because Jonah had already admitted that he was running from God, and now they were seeing how powerful Jonah's God really was and how foolish it was for Jonah to disobey! - "What have you done!?" – "How could you!?" )

They could actually see God's response to Jonah's disobedience. They may have been thinking, "If Jonah's God responds this fiercely against one disobedience by a man who serves Him, what could He do to those of us who do not worship or obey Him at all?"

Notice that Jonah's confession would have been painful – he was admitting that he serves and worships the one true God, yet he had also admitted that he was running from God.

But even though Jonah had disobeyed God and was now having to confess his disobedience to these sailors, maybe he saw that this was an opportunity to help them come to know God and to help them see that the gods they worshipped were not real, but his God is the one true God, the One who had created everything and who could control even the wind and the sea!

**11 The sea was getting rougher and rougher. So they asked him, "What should we do to you to make the sea calm down for us?" 12 "Pick me up and throw me into the sea," he replied, "and it will become calm. I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you."**

The sailors now understood that the storm was Jonah's fault, but did they lash out at him? (No, they asked him what should be done)

What did Jonah tell the sailors to do to him? (throw him into the sea)

Why didn't Jonah just jump into the sea on his own to save everyone else? (maybe he was too scared, maybe God wanted the sailors to be part of Jonah's punishment)

**13 Instead, the men did their best to row back to land. But they could not, for the sea grew even wilder than before. 14 Then they cried out to the LORD, "Please, LORD, do not let us die for taking this man's life. Do not hold us accountable for killing an innocent man, for you, LORD, have done as you pleased."**

Did the sailors throw Jonah into the sea at first? (No, they tried to row back to land)

Why do you think they were reluctant to kill Jonah in order to save themselves? (Seeing his humility and confession, maybe they had pity on him)

Who was stopping them from being able to get back to land? (God!)

When they realized they could not save themselves or the ship, what did they do? (they prayed to Jonah's God asking not to be blamed for what was about to happen to Jonah, and they recognized that God was the one who was in control of the situation)

So even in Jonah's rebellion against God, he brought these sailors into a better understanding of the one true God!

**15 Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm. 16 At this the men greatly feared the LORD, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows to him.**

What happened when they threw Jonah into the sea? (the storm stopped)

How did the sailors respond? (they had great fear and respect for God and they offered sacrifices to Him)

So even though Jonah was not being a good representative of a believer in God, these sailors still got a glimpse of the true God and worshiped him the best they knew how!

How do you think their lives may have changed after this encounter with the true God? (maybe they tried to learn more about Jonah's God, maybe they stopped worshiping false gods)

**Here are a few things we can learn from Jonah's disobedience to God:**

- We can never get away from God. He is all-powerful and His presence is everywhere.
- God is in complete control of everything, including nature. Remember when Jesus was in a boat with His disciples and a terrible storm came up. They were terrified and thought they were going to die, but all Jesus had to do was speak to the wind and the waves and they immediately calmed down. Our God is all-powerful and in complete control!
- When we disobey, we will get caught. It is only a matter of time. Galatians 6:7 (NIV) says, "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows." We should not run from God when we disobey, but instead we should admit that we were wrong, ask God to forgive us, try our best not to disobey again, and ask God to help us obey Him.
- We represent the true God, the creator of heaven and earth. We should take that responsibility seriously and be good examples to other people so they will want to know our God too.

\* Much of the information in this lesson came from the Matthew Henry Commentary on the Whole Bible (Complete)

## **Gospel Presentation (optional for Day 1)**

The story of Jonah reminds us that everyone fails to obey God completely.

The Bible teaches that we are all born with a heart problem. That problem is called Sin.

When God created the first man and woman, Adam and Eve, He gave them only one rule to follow. They were not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They could have anything else they wanted. God told them that if they ate from that tree, they would die. Adam and Eve chose to disobey that one rule. That was SIN. And because of their sin, everyone who has ever been born since then has been born a sinner. We all break God's rules.

So, Jonah was no different. Even though he believed in the one true God, he still did not obey Him perfectly. And neither do we.

The Bible says, "For all have sinned and fall short of the Glory of God." Romans 3:23 (NIV)

The Bible also says, "For the wages of sin is death." Romans 6:23 (NIV)

What we earn (our wages) when we sin is death.

But the Bible doesn't stop there with this bad news. The rest of that verse says, "but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Romans 6:23 (NIV)

Even though our sin earns us death, separation from a holy God, God has chosen to give us the free gift of eternal life, all because of what His Son Jesus Christ did for us on the cross.

The Bible says, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8 NIV)

God loved you so much that He sent Jesus, His only Son, to die for you and take the punishment for your sins. Jesus, God's only Son, came down to earth from heaven. He lived a perfect life. He never once broke God's rules. He loved you so much that He gave His life to save yours. Jesus let people kill Him by nailing Him to a cross. But three days later, God raised Jesus from the dead, proving that Jesus' sacrifice satisfied God. Jesus is alive today. Now, if we believe in Jesus and accept His gift of salvation, we will be forgiven for the sins that we commit.

Salvation is a gift of God. You can't earn it.

Ephesians 2:8 (ESV) says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God."

But not only does God forgive us for all of our sins. He also makes us His very own children.

John 1:12 (ESV) says, “But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.”

When you believe in Jesus, God becomes your heavenly Father. You can then have a relationship with Him. And one day you will live forever with Jesus in heaven.

Let’s pray.

[Pray and thank God for His forgiveness and gift of salvation. Provide children an opportunity to respond by placing their faith in Christ.]

[For kids who respond and want to place their faith in Christ, have leaders available to discuss salvation further with them individually. Dismiss others to their next rotation.]



## Journey to Nineveh K-6<sup>th</sup> Grade: Teaching for Day 2

Helpful aids:

- A room where you can turn out the lights
- Crashing wave audio
- Large sea shells to pass around to kids
- Stink bait
- Slime
- Wipes for cleaning slime

Welcome back to Day 2 of Journey to Nineveh.

So yesterday, we learned that Jonah disobeyed God and was thrown into the great sea.

Today, we will discover what happened to Jonah after he was cast into the sea.

In Jonah 1:17 (NIV) it says, “Now the LORD provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.”

So, Jonah was swallowed by a big fish and he was stuck in the fish’s belly for three entire days. Can you imagine what that would have been like for Jonah?

Well, today, we are going to experience what Jonah could have felt, heard and smelled.

Inside the belly of a fish it would have been completely dark. Jonah couldn’t see for three days. So, would someone turn out the lights?

Now Imagine noises at the bottom of the ocean. Perhaps, Jonah could hear the waves crashing above. Perhaps he heard a continuous humming from being under water.

[Turn on crashing waves sound or pass around large sea shells for kids to hear the ocean]

It would have been stinky. How many of you have ever smelled rotten fish or fish bait? All around Jonah was stinky, decaying sea animals and weeds. The smell alone probably made Jonah feel sick. So, we are going to let you each smell rotten fish.

[Pass around containers with stink bait]

Imagine what Jonah touched: slimy contents of a fish’s belly. We have some fish slime here. Whoever wants to can touch some icky fish slime! Now imagine being inside a pool of slime.

[Pass around containers of slime]

Imagine how Jonah felt. He had disobeyed God and made a big mistake. He probably felt scared, alone, hopeless and trapped. He was trapped inside a fish. He probably thought he was going to die.

[Turn on lights and offer wipes for those who touched slime]

So how did you feel pretending to be in a fish's belly?

[Ask several kids to share how they think Jonah would have felt]

Hopefully, none of us will ever be swallowed by a fish. But like Jonah, all of us will experience difficulties in this life. The Bible in John 16:33 (NLT) says, "Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world." For instance, how many of you have ever been sick before? How many of you have ever felt sad or experienced something that was difficult? We all have.

Jonah was in the midst of a very difficult trial.

However, for the first time in this story, Jonah did something right.

Let's read how Jonah responded when he was in trouble. Perhaps we can learn something.

Jonah 2:1 (NIV) "From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the LORD his God."

When Jonah was in trouble, he prayed to God.

Jonah responded in PRAYER.

There are many ways we could respond to difficulties. Some of us have pity parties. "Oh, poor me, bad things always happen to me and now I am stuck in the belly of this stinky fish."

Some of us become angry. "I am so mad. How come this happened? Why did this fish eat me?"

Some of us become fearful. "Oh no, I'm in the belly of a fish. I'm stuck. What am I going to do?"

However, the best thing to do in a difficult situation is to pray.

Philippians 4:6 (NIV) says, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."

Psalms 145:18 (NIV) says, "The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth."

So, in this situation, Jonah did the right thing. He cried out to God in prayer. The Bible records Jonah's prayer for us. Let's read Jonah's prayer today starting in Jonah chapter 2 (NIV).

From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the LORD his God. He said:

“In my distress I called to the LORD,  
and he answered me.”

“From deep in the realm of the dead I called for help,  
and you listened to my cry.

<sup>3</sup>You hurled me into the depths,  
into the very heart of the seas,  
and the currents swirled about me;  
all your waves and breakers  
swept over me.

<sup>4</sup>I said, ‘I have been banished  
from your sight;  
yet I will look again  
toward your holy temple.’

<sup>5</sup>The engulfing waters threatened me,  
the deep surrounded me;  
seaweed was wrapped around my head.

<sup>6</sup>To the roots of the mountains I sank down;  
the earth beneath barred me in forever.”

“But you, LORD my God,  
brought my life up from the pit.

<sup>7</sup>“When my life was ebbing away,  
I remembered you, LORD,  
and my prayer rose to you,  
to your holy temple.

<sup>8</sup>“Those who cling to worthless idols  
turn away from God’s love for them.

<sup>9</sup>But I, with shouts of grateful praise,  
will sacrifice to you.  
What I have vowed I will make good.  
I will say, ‘Salvation comes from the LORD.’”

<sup>10</sup>And the LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.

### **Here are a few things we can learn from Jonah's prayer:**

1. God heard Jonah's prayer. Jonah was in great distress and when he cried out to God, God heard him. We know from the Bible that God hears our prayers too! When we are having a difficult time, we can pray to God and know that God will hear us.
2. God answered Jonah's prayer. We know the end of the story. Jonah was saved from the fish. Well we can also know that God answers our prayers too! The Bible tells us that prayers can be powerful and effective!
3. Even in the belly of a fish, God gave Jonah hope. Unless God performed a miracle, Jonah had no hope. What would have happened to Jonah if God did not intervene? The fish could have eaten him or Jonah could have drowned. But God gave Jonah hope in a hopeless situation. When we trust God through our difficulties, God can give us hope too if we trust in Him!
4. God saved Jonah from destruction. Despite impossible odds, the fish brought Jonah to the safety of dry land. Guess what? God can save us from destruction as well.

And that is what we are going to talk about for the remainder of our time here. You see, the story of Jonah is meant to point us to an even greater story.

We find hints of that story in the book of Matthew. Matthew 12:40 (NIV) says, "For 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."

Can anyone tell me who "the Son of Man" is? (answer Jesus). Yes, the Son of Man is Jesus. The story of Jonah is meant to point us to Jesus who can rescue us.

You see the Bible teaches that we are all born with a big problem. That problem is worse than being swallowed by a huge fish. That problem is called Sin.

A long time ago, God created the first humans named Adam and Eve. God gave Adam and Eve one rule to follow. They could eat fruit from every tree in the garden except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If they ate the fruit from that tree, the consequence was death. Well, many of us know what happened. Adam and Eve disobeyed God by eating the fruit anyway. They broke God's rule. They sinned. Ever since then, we have all been born as rule breakers. We are all sinners.

For instance, the Bible tells us that it is wrong, or a sin, to lie. How many of you have ever lied before? The Bible also tells us to obey our parents. Have any of you ever disobeyed your parents? We all have. That's because we are sinners.

Can anyone tell me Romans 3:23, yesterday's memory verse? (Romans 3:23 "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.")

Romans 3:23 tells us that all of us have sinned and fall short of God's perfect standard.

Unfortunately, there is a big consequence for those who break God's rules. The Bible teaches us that the consequence of sin is death. Romans 6:23, today's memory verse, says, "For the wages of sin is death." This death is not just our body dying. This death is an eternal separation from God in a place called Hell. Hell is a real place. It's a place that is worse than being in the belly of a big fish. Because of our sins, we all deserve to be punished forever in Hell.

That's pretty bad news. However, I have great news to share with you today!

The Bible says, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8 NIV)

God knew that without Him we have no hope. God loves us so much that He sent Jesus, His only Son, to die for us and take the punishment of our sins for us.

Jesus, God's only Son, came down to earth from heaven. He lived a perfect life. He never once sinned. Jesus then let people kill Him on the cross. Three days later, God raised Jesus from the dead and Jesus has been alive ever since. Those who believe in Jesus and accept His gift of salvation will be saved from the punishment of their sins.

So just as God saved Jonah from drowning in the sea, God saves those who believe in Him from the penalty of our sins.

We can't earn our way to heaven. We can't be good enough to make it to heaven on our own.

Acts 16:31 (NIV) says, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved..."

Romans 6:23 says, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Salvation is a gift from God. All we need to do is accept His gift by believing and trusting in Him. You can do that today.

Let's pray.

[Pray and thank God for His gift of salvation. Provide children an opportunity to respond by placing their faith in Christ.]

[For kids who respond and want to place their faith in Christ, have leaders available to discuss salvation further with them individually. Dismiss others to their next rotation.]

# Journey to Nineveh K-6<sup>th</sup> Grade: Teaching for Day 3

Welcome to the final day of our Journey to Nineveh.

Yesterday we learned what happened to Jonah while he was in the belly of the giant fish, how he prayed to God, and how God rescued him.

Today we will see what happened after Jonah was thrown up on the shore by the giant fish.

First, let's read chapter three from the book of Jonah:

## Jonah 3 (NIV)

***1 Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time: 2 "Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you."***

What do you notice about the second time God gave Jonah an instruction? (He gave him the exact same command)

God could have considered Jonah untrustworthy and refused to use him again, but He was giving him a second chance to do the right thing!

We don't know how long it was after Jonah was freed from the giant fish that God called to him again, but we can imagine it was pretty quickly.

Is Jonah told what to say to Nineveh? (Not yet, God says he is to proclaim the message He gives Jonah, which isn't specified here. He must trust God to tell him what to say.)

***3 Jonah obeyed the word of the LORD and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very large city; it took three days to go through it.***

How does this verse describe the size of Nineveh? (it would take three days to go through it)

There is debate on what this expression means. Some say it refers to the width of the city (3 days to walk across), some say it refers to the amount of time it would take to visit the whole city, and some say it is a figurative expression to give a sense of how big the city was, like the expression "He has a smile a mile wide and an inch deep."

Some report that Nineveh covered around 1850 acres, or between 3 and 4 square miles, and that the distance around the walls was about 7.5 miles and had 15 gates. Nineveh was one of

the most beautiful cities in the Near East, with gardens, temples and palaces. The king's palace was extravagant. It is even believed that the Hanging Gardens that were one of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world were actually at Nineveh and not at Babylon.

We may not know for sure the exact size of Nineveh, but since it was one of the capitals of ancient Assyria, the term "great city" implies it was a large, beautiful, wealthy and influential city.

***4 Jonah began by going a day's journey into the city, proclaiming, "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown." 5 The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.***

Notice that Jonah wastes no time in obeying God's command. He begins proclaiming God's warning as soon as he enters Nineveh.

After just one day of Jonah warning the city of Nineveh of God's anger at their sin, what happened? (they repented)

What were some of the outward signs that the people were serious about their repentance? (they fasted (went without eating), they put on sackcloth)

What do you think of when you hear the term "sackcloth"? (sounds like a rough, uncomfortable material, like burlap!)

How many Ninevites repented? (all of them, from the greatest to the least)

In other words, Jonah's message went viral and everyone heard about it!

Think about the difference between how the Ninevites responded to God's warning and how the Israelites repeatedly responded to God's warnings:

- God sent multiple prophets to Israel, but only one to Nineveh.
- Some prophets performed miracles to get Israel's attention, but there is no indication that Jonah did anything miraculous for the Ninevites.
- The prophets to the Israelites were their own kinsmen, but Jonah was a stranger to the Ninevites.
- The prophets to the Israelites gave many messages and warnings from God, but Jonah gave only one simple warning to the Ninevites.
- The prophets to the Israelites would tell them the good things God would do for them if they repented, how He would forgive them and restore them, but Jonah's message to the Ninevites did not offer any hope of forgiveness. Yet, Israel would often refuse to

repent, in spite of the blessings God offered, but the Ninevites repented, not knowing whether or not they would receive mercy and forgiveness from God.

No wonder Jesus said in Luke 11:32 (ESV), “The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.”

**6 When Jonah’s warning reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust. 7 This is the proclamation he issued in Nineveh: “By the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let people or animals, herds or flocks, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. 8 But let people and animals be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence.”**

How did the king of Nineveh respond when he heard about Jonah’s message? (he repented too, took off his royal robes, put on sackcloth and sat down in the dust; he also declared a fast for everyone, people and animals, and he required everyone to call on God for mercy and to turn from their evil ways)

**9 “Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish.”**

Did the king know for sure God would forgive them? (No, Jonah had given them no indication that they could be forgiven, yet the Ninevites must have had a general understanding of God’s mercy and grace, and His willingness to respond when we repent of our sins)

**10 When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.**

What does God’s response to the Ninevites say about Him? (He is loving, merciful, forgiving)

Psalm 51:17 (ESV) says, “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.”



Now, let's continue with the last chapter of the book of Jonah to see how he reacts to God being merciful to the Ninevites.

#### **Jonah 4 (NIV)**

***1 But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry. 2 He prayed to the LORD, "Isn't this what I said, LORD, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. 3 Now, LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live."***

In chapter 1, Jonah was **fleeing from** the face of God.

Now, in chapter 4, Jonah is **flying in** the face of God.

What do you think about Jonah's reaction? (he is very unloving, very selfish, very hard-hearted; he knows the mercy and love of God but does not want it to be extended to people he considers to be his enemies)

How different is this prayer from the prayer he offered while in the belly of the great fish? (in the fish, he was repentant and submissive to God; here he is arrogant and angry with God)

Would you feel comfortable talking to God the way Jonah did? (No!)

How serious was Jonah about his anger and disgust? (he just wanted to die)

Isn't it amazing that Jonah was so thankful to be brought out of the belly of the great fish alive, but now, when He sees the mercy and grace of God poured out on the Ninevites, his life has no value to him!

Imagine a town or city that is known to be very wicked. How would you feel if you went to a place like that, told them about Jesus, and they all repented and turned to God for forgiveness? (we would be excited and thrilled)

Why do you think Jonah was so angry that the Ninevites had repented and God was not going to destroy them? (maybe he considered them to be enemies and wanted them to be destroyed; maybe it made his own people, the Israelites, look bad in comparison, because they constantly disobeyed God and would not repent; maybe he was afraid he would look bad because his prediction of their destruction was now not going to come true, making him look like a false prophet (i.e. his pride!))

**4 But the LORD replied, “Is it right for you to be angry?”**

Keep in mind, what could God have done to Jonah for his attitude and reaction? (he could have granted his wish and killed him!)

But God deals gently but firmly with Jonah to try to get him to see how wrong he is to react the way he did.

**5 Jonah had gone out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city.**

Why do you think Jonah went outside the city and watched? (maybe he was hoping God would still destroy the city and he wanted to see it)

Sounds like he is sitting there pouting, doesn't it? Instead of being thankful that God had spared an entire city from destruction, he is angry and complaining about it!

He could have gained a huge number of new friends, but instead, he shows his hatred toward them.

**6 Then the LORD God provided a leafy plant and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the plant.**

What did God do to make Jonah more comfortable in the hot sun? (He made a leafy plant grow up to give him shade)

What else had God prepared at the end of chapter 1 to save Jonah's life? (He prepared a giant fish to swallow Jonah so that he did not drown in the storm)

**7 But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the plant so that it withered.**

**8 When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah's head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, and said, “It would be better for me to die than to live.”**

What did God do to the plant? (He let a worm chew it and kill it)

So not only was Jonah back in the hot sun, but what else did God send? (a scorching east wind)

How did Jonah respond? (he wanted to die again; he seems a little dramatic, don't you think?)

Have you ever been outside when it is scorching hot? It can be miserable. But have you ever said, “I wish I would just go ahead and die”? (probably not!)

***9 But God said to Jonah, “Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?” “It is,” he said. “And I’m so angry I wish I were dead.”***

Again, God gently reprimands Jonah for his anger and attitude. But does Jonah admit his sin? (No!)

Have you ever felt as angry as Jonah seems to be? How did that make you feel?

***10 But the LORD said, “You have been concerned about this plant, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. 11 And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left—and also many animals?”***

Did God owe Jonah any explanation for His actions toward Nineveh? (No, He is God!)

God compares Jonah’s concern for the plant to His own concern for the people of Nineveh. Which is more important? (the people!)

What do you think God meant by “120,000 people who cannot tell their right hand from their left”? (possibly small children; maybe people who were so far from God they could not tell right from wrong)

Compare Jonah’s concern for the gourd to God’s concern for the people of Nineveh:

- There was only one gourd plant, but there were thousands of people in Nineveh
- Jonah had nothing to do with the gourd growing or dying, yet God had everything to do with the Ninevites – they were human beings created in His image
- The gourd grew quickly and passed quickly, so it was of little value; Nineveh was an ancient city full of valuable human beings whose souls would live forever, either with or without God

Matthew 16:26 (ESV) says, “For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?”

So, in God’s eyes, our soul is priceless!

We can see the huge difference here between God's love for mankind and the lack of love Jonah had.

Is there a specific person, or even a type/group of people, that you don't like?

God wants us to show His love to everyone, even those we consider to be our enemies. If you struggle with loving someone, pray and ask God to help you. There is a slogan that says "Fake it 'til you feel it." That means we can show God's love to others, even if we don't feel like it, and many times our feelings toward them will start to change!

**Here are a few things we can learn from Jonah's reluctant obedience to God and God's response to the Ninevites:**

- God is a forgiving God. When Jonah repented of his disobedience, God forgave him and offered him a second chance to obey. When Nineveh repented, God cancelled the destruction He had warned them about.
- We have no right to be angry, prideful, or complaining when God does good to others, even though we don't think they deserve it. Always remember, God has done so much for us that we don't deserve!
- God is very patient. He was patient with Nineveh. He could have destroyed them a long time before he sent Jonah, but He gave them another chance and sent them a warning. He was also patient with Jonah and his selfish, angry, complaining reactions.
- We are to show God's love to everyone, even those we consider to be our enemies. God loves us and has shown us grace and mercy, so we have no right to NOT show love and mercy to others as well. Our response to God's mercy and grace in our lives should be to want to share the Good News of Jesus with others. We can ask God to give us a desire to share the Gospel with those who don't yet know Him. Do you know someone who does not believe in Jesus? I encourage you to share God's gift of salvation with them.

\* Much of the information in this lesson came from the Matthew Henry Commentary on the Whole Bible (Complete)

### **Gospel Presentation (optional for Day 3)**

The story of Jonah, and especially the repentance of the Ninevites, reminds us that everyone has disobeyed God and deserves to be punished by Him.

But God loves us and is willing to forgive us for our sins, just like He did for the Ninevites.

The Bible teaches that we are all born with a sinful nature and we all do things that are wrong.

When God created the first man and woman, Adam and Eve, He gave them only one rule to follow. They were not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They could have anything else they wanted. God told them that if they ate from that tree, they would die. Adam and Eve chose to disobey that one rule. That was SIN. And because of their sin, everyone who has ever been born since then has been born a sinner. We all break God's rules.

The Ninevites were no different. They were evil people who had rebelled against God Himself.

The Bible says, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Romans 3:23 (NIV)

The Bible also says, "For the wages of sin is death." Romans 6:23 (NIV)

What we earn (our wages) when we sin is death.

But the Bible doesn't stop there with this bad news. The rest of that verse says, "but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Romans 6:23 (NIV)

Even though our sin earns us death (separation from a holy God), God has chosen to give us the free gift of eternal life, all because of what His Son Jesus Christ did for us on the cross.

The Bible says, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8 NIV)

God loves you so much that He sent Jesus, His only Son, to die for you and take the punishment for your sins. Jesus, God's only Son, came down to earth from heaven. He lived a perfect life. He never once broke God's rules. He loves you so much that He gave His life to save yours. Jesus let people kill Him by nailing Him to a cross. But three days later, God raised Jesus from the dead. Jesus is alive today. Now, if we believe in Jesus and accept His gift of salvation, we will be forgiven for the sins that we commit.

Salvation is a gift of God. You can't earn it.

Ephesians 2:8 (ESV) says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God."

But not only does God forgive us for all of our sins. He also makes us His very own children.

John 1:12 (ESV) says, “But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.”

When you believe in Jesus, God becomes your heavenly Father. You can then have a relationship with him. And one day you will live forever with Jesus in heaven.

Let’s pray.

[Pray and thank God for His forgiveness and gift of salvation. Provide children an opportunity to respond by placing their faith in Christ.]

[For kids who respond and place their faith in Christ, have leaders available to discuss salvation further with them individually. Dismiss others to their next rotation.]