

# **Bible Expedition**

## **“Journey to Nineveh” Manual**

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# Bible Expedition

## “Journey to Nineveh”

The goal of Bible Expedition is to offer Scriptural teachings and Gospel-oriented materials to other churches and to equip others for children’s ministry. We hope to be a blessing to other churches and to spread the Gospel message. We desire to provide high quality, doctrinally-sound, Christ-centered, engaging VBS programs and teachings.

“Journey to Nineveh” is a Bible-centered, Gospel-oriented event designed to teach children about truths found in Scripture. Through this event, kids are able to meet and interact with characters from the book of Jonah. Those characters share their stories of how God has and is working in their lives.

“Journey to Nineveh” is a three-day program with each day’s activities lasting 2 hours and 15 minutes. See Figure 1 for a sample schedule:

Figure 1

Time	Entering K-1	Entering 2-3	Entering 4 -6
6:15-6:30	-----Registration-----		
6:30-6:45	-----Opening Group Worship-----		
6:50- 7:10	Bible Lesson	Games	Crafts/Snacks
7:15-7:35	Games	Crafts/Snacks	Bible Lesson
7:40-8:00	Crafts/Snacks	Bible Lesson	Games
8:05-8:15	-----Closing Group Worship-----		
8:15-8:30	-----Checkout-----		

Each day is centered on a specific passage from the Book of Jonah and will include time for group worship through singing, teaching, activities, crafts and a snack. There is also an optional “Camp-In” when families can camp overnight in the church and conduct family-led devotions with their children focused on the lessons learned during the program.

This manual is designed to make “Journey to Nineveh” simple for churches to set up and have a quality, Scripturally-based VBS program. This manual includes an outline of events, scripts to use during Group Worship, detailed teaching lessons, family devotion questions, music lyrics and ideas for games, activities, crafts and decorations.

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# Bible Expedition: “Journey to Nineveh”

## Outline and Skits

### Day 1

#### Characters:

- Emcee
- Mariner captain: Rough, pirate-like fellow. Note, although the mariners in Jonah were not pirates, some artistic license is taken for dramatic and comedic impact.
- Possibly additional mariners.
- As an alternative to performing the skit live, a pre-recorded version of the skit can be downloaded from the website.

#### **“Jonah flees and is thrown into the sea”**

**Memory Verse:** Romans 3:23

**Registration** 6:15pm

**Opening Group Worship:** 6:30- 6:45pm

(Emcee) Hi everyone! Thank you for coming and welcome to your journey to Nineveh!

Over the next three days, we’re going to trace the steps of one of the most successful prophets in the entire Old Testament...Jonah himself! Now although Jonah was successful in calling out the Word of the Lord so that an entire city repented and turned from their evil ways, we’ll see that Jonah was not the most obedient or compassionate person...but God still chose to use him.

We’ll also get to meet several characters who will give eyewitness accounts of what Jonah was like, what he struggled with, and more importantly, how God used Jonah, and creation itself, to bring over 100,000 godless, sinful people to the Lord.

One word of caution...the story of Jonah is one that I’m sure many of you are familiar with from cartoons or coloring sheets, but trust me, you’ll be surprised by what you learn actually happened and what’s recorded in the Bible.

Well, I'm getting a little ahead of myself. What do you think about us bringing out our first eyewitness, one of the first to really interact with Jonah as this story begins?

*[Briefly wait for audience response]*

Let's give a warm, salty welcome to the captain of the mariner ship!

*[Lead clapping and invite the mariner Captain]*

(Captain) Shiver me timbers! What a rough looking bunch of scallywags we have here! Ahoy there!

(Emcee) Thanks for coming here today Captain. We were hoping you could tell these fine folks about how you met the prophet Jonah and what happened on your ship.

(Captain) Indeed...meeting Jonah was one of the worst things, and best things, that ever happened to me and me crew.

(Emcee) How so Captain?

(Captain) Well, ye see, when we met that landlubber Jonah, we were making our normal run from Joppa to Tarshish, carrying cargo to and fro across the Mediterranean.

He was hitchin' a ride with us, as some do from time to time. But Jonah was a prophet of the Lord Himself!

(Emcee) That must have been pretty awesome, right?

(Captain) Well ye'd think so... but no. This biscuit eater was a prophet of the Lord who, get this, WAS TRYING TO RUN FROM THE LORD!

(Emcee) Huh?

(Captain) That's right, this scallywag thought that he could get away from the presence of the Lord, the creator of the heavens and earth, the land and the sea, the maker of everything, by jumping on OUR ship.

See, we didn't know any of this until we were well under way. We were a ways out into the Mediterranean, when we came upon a mighty tempest, ye would call it a storm.

Well this was like no storm this old salt had ever seen before or since. This was a terrible storm that was threatening to tear me beloved ship from stem to stern. We had battened down the hatches but I just knew me ship, crew, and all me precious cargo would be sleepin' in Davy Jones' locker for sure.

I'm not too proud to say that yours truly was truly terrified! Me hearties and I didn't know the Lord at that time, so we called out to our god (little g) ...but nothing happened. The storm she kept a ragin'.

(Emcee) Oh man! What did ye...I mean YOU, do then Captain?

(Captain) Well as much as we hated to, we had to lighten the load on the ship, so we started throwing our precious cargo overboard.

(Emcee) That must have been a tough decision...did it help?

(Captain) Not in the slightest! I went down to the belly of me ship to see what else we could get rid of when I saw something that shocked me.

(Emcee) What was that?

(Captain) I saw Jonah, lying down, sawing logs.... he was sleeping!

(Emcee) What did you do Captain?

(Captain) Well I said, "Avast ye you little..."  
...Well I think it would be better to read from the Bible what I actually said.  
Chapter 1 verse 6 of the Book of Jonah...ahem...

“So, the captain” that’s yours truly, “So the captain came and said to him, ‘What do you mean, you sleeper? Arise, call out to your god! Perhaps the god will give a thought to us, that we may not perish.’”

(Emcee) What did Jonah do?

(Captain) Didn’t seem that he did a bloomin’ thing. So, me crew decided to cast lots (you’d call them dice), so we could find out on whose account this evil had come upon us. So, we cast the lots and you know who the lot fell on....it was landlubber Jonah!

So, we did a bit of inquirin’ to ole Mr. Jonah as to what his deal was. Where he came from and such.

(Emcee) What did Jonah have to say for himself?

(Captain) Jonah had been pretty quiet to this point but responded very confidently the he was a Hebrew, that he feared the LORD, the God (big “G”) of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.

Needless to say, we were pretty scared at that point, because we knew Jonah was trying to run away from the presence of God.... which I don’t need to remind you is impossible.

(Emcee) What did you do then?

(Captain) Well we had no choice but to ask Jonah what we could do so that the ragin’ sea might settle down. And Jonah responded in a most peculiar way. He told us that the only way to get the storm to stop would be to pick him up and heave him overboard.

We didn’t like that option, so me and me men really put our backs into it and rowed harder than we ever had before. I tell you that was some workout!

(Emcee) Did it work?

(Captain) Not in the least! The sea got even worse, so we had no choice but to heave Jonah overboard. Before we did though, we wanted to make sure we



didn't anger Jonah's God, so we called out to Him. I'll read it again so as to get it right...

Chapter 1 verse 14 from the Book of Jonah, "Therefore they called out to the LORD, 'O LORD, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not on us innocent blood, for you, O LORD, have done as it pleased you.'"

Then we threw him overboard.

(Emcee) What happened then?

(Captain) It was the most amazin' thing this ole Seadog had ever experienced. As soon as Jonah hit the water, the sea went dead calm.

Needless to say, me crew and I knew this was from the LORD and it shook us to our very core. We feared the LORD and offered a sacrifice to Him and made vows to walk with Him.

So, though this was a terrible situation, I'm so glad it happened, because I now belong to the one true God, the maker of heaven and earth, the maker of the sea and dry land. So that's why I say that meeting Jonah was the worst, and best, thing that ever happened to me and me crew.

(Emcee) What happened to Jonah?

(Captain) Truly, I don't know, but we heard tell of him being swallowed by a great fish and being taken to Nineveh...but you'll have to come back tomorrow to find out for sure.

(Emcee) Well I can't thank you enough Captain for that amazing eyewitness account. What do you say kids that we thank the Captain and then sing a song before you go with your group leaders to explore Nineveh?

*[Captain waves goodbye and exits stage]*

*[Lead group in a song]*

## Day 2

### Characters:

- Emcee
- The Great Fish: A younger, fast talking, high energy teenage girl for voice. Think 80's valley-girl...for sure. Chewing gum during the skit is recommended. If the skit is performed live, then for the great fish, use a fish puppet, someone in a fish mask, or maybe an animatronic (robot) fish with a controllable mouth.
- Ned E. Terranean: On location reporter interviewing Wanda, the Great Fish. Think 60's TV anchorman (such as Walter Cronkite), kind-of stiff and likes to overuse...dramatic pauses, preferably a man with a deep resonant voice with good enunciation. Ned stays almost entirely off camera.
- As an alternative to performing the skit live, a pre-recorded version of the skit can be downloaded from the website.

### **“Jonah in the great fish”**

**Memory Verse:** Romans 6:23

**Registration** 6:15pm

**Opening Group Worship:** 6:30- 6:45pm

**Emcee:** Well it's great to see you back at Journey to Nineveh! Are you excited about day two?

*<Kids positively respond>*

**Emcee:** Great, me too! Well, we've got a treat for you tonight and one I doubt any of you have experienced before. Our guest tonight was:

- an eyewitness called directly by the Lord
- saved Jonah's life after the mariners tossed him from the ship
- lives in the ocean
- ...and get this, she's as big as a house!

That's right, we've got the great fish in tonight as our special guest. Well, as you can imagine, we'd be hard-pressed to get her on stage, but we've got the next best thing. We contacted a local reporter who has agreed to interview tonight's guest. Please give a warm Mediterranean welcome to THE GREAT FISH!

*<If using the pre-recorded video, the Emcee draws attention to the large TV or screen>*

*<The Great Fish taps on microphone and clears throat>*

**The Great Fish aka Wanda:** <taps microphone a few times> Like, is this thing on? ... Yeah?... Okay, great!

Well, like hi everyone! Yeah, I'm the great fish and everything...although I wouldn't necessarily call myself great, I'm pretty good, I guess. But God did call me to do something that was pretty radical, so I guess you can call me great...but my friends just call me Wanda.

Well, like I'm so excited to talk to you tonight, and because I tend to talk a little fast when I get excited, I asked my friend Ned to help keep me focused. He's a reporter and stuff and he's real smart.

**Ned:** Thank you Wanda. Hello everyone. My name is Ned E. Terranean and I'm Joppa's very own news anchor from everyone's favorite maritime, disco, country, hip-hop, oldies, news, and poetry station...K-E-L-P.

Wanda, I think the first thing our viewers would like to know tonight is just how you ran across...Jonah the prophet.

**Wanda:** Uhh, like, yeah. Well, I was minding my own business hanging out with my girlfriends. We were looking for outfits and eating plankton and krill and stuff. My friend Abby was going to town on a krill burger, and I was like, whoa there Abby, you need to take a chill pill on that krill, because it'll definitely show up on the scales, if you know what I mean.

**Ned:** Uh hum, yes...well when would you say you met Jonah the prophet?

**Wanda:** Oh, that's like sooo easy, it was right after the Lord called me to swallow him.

**Ned:** Excuse me? You're saying that the Lord, the creator of the heavens and the earth, called you to swallow Jonah?

**Wanda:** Oh yeah, for sure. You can totally read about it at the end of chapter 1 in Jonah, "And the Lord appointed a great fish" ...like, that's me... "to swallow up Jonah." And even though I had probably eaten too much krill and way too many plankton fries at the food court, I totally didn't want to disobey the Lord.

**Ned:** So, you don't normally go around swallowing humans.??.

**Wanda:** Uhhh, gag me with a spoon! That's like sooo grody, I would only do that if the Lord told me...and He like totally did.

**Ned:** Well after you swallowed Jonah, what did the Lord tell you to do then?

**Wanda:** Well, nothing really. But I totally knew I needed to motor north, because Abby and I had dates with these two cute guys, Charlie and Nemo, later that week in the northern Mediterranean and I was tootally not going to miss that...not even!

**Ned:** So...you went north?

**Wanda:** Totally!

**Ned:** Well...how long did you keep Jonah in your belly?

**Wanda:** Doy! You can totally read about that at the end of Jonah chapter 1.

**Ned:** Ah yes, I see it here at the end of Jonah 1:17. It says "And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights."

<surprised reaction> My goodness, three days and three nights! What was Jonah doing that whole time?

**Wanda:** Like to be honest, I don't really know. You see, when I found Jonah in the water, he was totally drowning and stuff...all wrapped up in weeds. It was awful...like barf me out. I thought he was a gonner, for sure.

But I did what the Lord told me to do and I totally kept swimming north.

Right after I swallowed him, he didn't move a whole lot and I wasn't sure he was going to make it until at the end of the three days, he did something that was totally radical.

**Ned:** What was that Wanda?

**Wanda:** Jonah like prayed a beautiful prayer.

**Ned:** Hmmm. Wasn't Jonah running from the Lord at the time?

**Wanda:** Yeeaah, he was totally TRYING to run from the Lord, but God had finally gotten his attention.

And he called out from my belly, talking about:

- how he called out to the Lord in his distress and stuff
- how God had cast him to the deep
- but that God had totally saved him
- and that those who worship idols like totally abandon God's real love
- and that he would totally do what the Lord had told him to
- and that Salvation only belongs to God

You'll totally have to read about it later Ned, it was totally righteous!

**Ned:** I will Wanda....I TOTALLY will.

Say Wanda, this was at the end of the three days and scripture tells us Jonah was in your belly for three days. What happened at that point?

**Wanda:** Well, I just spit him up on the beach nice and easy, we high fived each other, and then we totally went to Nineveh together.....PSYCH! That's not what happened at all.

See, the Lord spoke to me again, but this time He caused me to get real close to the beach, closer than I really like to go.

Well, as I was heading to the beach, my stomach started feeling really weird, and before I knew it, I had vomited Jonah right out of my stomach.

And this wasn't a normal vomit either. I vomited Jonah so far that he landed on the dry land....it was totally grody to the max!

**Ned:** Well I would say so Wanda. That is some eyewitness account. Is there anything else you'd like to share with the group before we sign off?

**Wanda:** Well, if you're ever at the food court with Abby, make sure you get your plankton first, because she likes to hog it all. Next, if a cute guy says he's going to call back....

**Ned:** <interrupting Wanda> Wanda! I meant is there anything else about your experience ...with JONAH that you'd like to tell ...the children?

**Wanda:** Oh yeah, for sure. Well kids, the first thing I can tell you is that you should always do what the Lord tells you to through His word and His Holy Spirit.

Also, in addition to loving God with all your heart, mind and soul, you should totally love your neighbor and that includes telling them about Jesus.

**Ned:** Well...I could not think of a better way to conclude than that. For Wanda and me and all of us at Joppa's favorite maritime, disco, country, hip-hop, oldies, news, and poetry station...K-E-L-P, this is Ned E Terranean, saying keep your oars in the water and stay classy Joppa.

*<Emcee comes back on stage after skit or video concludes >*

**Emcee:** Well that sure was something!!!

Wow, isn't it amazing to see how God can use ANYONE or ANYTHING, even a great fish...to do His will?

What do you say we sing a song before we head out with our groups to explore Nineveh once again?

*<Lead group in a song>*

## **Optional “Camp-In” event**

The “Camp-In” event is an optional event held on Friday night prior to Day 3. The “Camp-In” is designed to allow parents to spend time with and disciple their children. It also provides opportunity for church fellowship. For safety reasons we recommend that all children be accompanied by their legal guardians during the event.

Recommendations:

- We recommend preregistration of attendees. Preregistration should help organizers in planning activities and meals.
- We recommend parents/guardians accompany and maintain responsibility over children participating in Camp-In activities.
- We recommend having different camp sites such as classrooms or fellowship halls be available to sign out by families.
- We recommend a “lights out” time and appropriate nighttime security procedures be taken such as locking the doors to ensure the safety of the children.
- “Camp-In” activities can include campfire, smores, games and Christian movies.
- We also provide devotional questions based on the “Journey to Nineveh” lessons for families to discuss with their children.

## Day 3

### Characters:

- Emcee
- The king of Nineveh (aka KoN, or King): A male character with a California skater/surfer dialect and mannerisms (think Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventure from the 90s). Blonde wavy hair, sunglasses, zinc oxide sunscreen on nose, Hawaiian shirt, surf shorts, surf board or boogey board, etc. ...whoa dude.
- An alternative is to go with more of a traditional Assyrian look with the long square beard.
- As an alternative to performing the skit live, a pre-recorded version of the skit can be downloaded from the website.
  - Common phrases include dude, bro, chill, classic, epic, awesome, etc.
  - Amped – feeling excited, pumped up
  - Benny – a person who is not a local
  - Corduroy to the horizon – When the waves are perfectly lined up, like the ribbing on corduroy pants
  - Gnarly – nasty, unpleasant
  - Header – to fall off a surfboard
  - Latronic – Later, man
  - Spew – vomit
  - Washing machine – getting rolled around underwater by a breaking wave
  - Wave hog – a surfer who will not share a wave
  - Worked – getting knocked off by a wave and then being in the washing machine

### **“Jonah finally heads to Nineveh”**

**Memory Verse:** John 3:16

**Registration:** 10:15 – 10:30am (Saturday morning)

**Opening Group Worship:** 10:30-10:45am

(Emcee) Good morning everyone! We're so glad you made it back for our last day of Journey to Nineveh ...can you believe it's been three days already?

*[Briefly wait for audience response]*

So far, we've heard about Jonah being called by the Lord to call the city of Nineveh to repent...but did Jonah obey?

*[Briefly wait for audience's response of "No"]*



That's right, he didn't. Jonah actually went in the totally opposite direction and tried to board a merchant ship to run away from God...did that work?

*[Briefly wait for audience's response of "No"]*

That's right, it didn't. Jonah nearly got himself and a group of sailors killed because of his disobedience until Jonah convinced them to throw him overboard...did that get Jonah away from the Lord?

*[Briefly wait for audience's response of "No"]*

That's right, that didn't work either. Jonah was about to drown in the sea when God called a great fish to swallow him until he repented and agreed to obey what God had told him to do in the first place...what happened after that?

*[Briefly wait for audience's response of "the fish vomited Jonah onto the beach"]*

That's right! You guys really know your stuff! Jonah was vomited up on the beach by the great fish. Thanks for helping me recap what we've covered the past couple of days.

Well, I don't know about you...but I can't wait to hear about what happened next to Jonah after he hit the beach.

So, what do you say we bring out this morning's guest who has a firsthand account of what Jonah did and the impact he had on the wicked city of Nineveh.

Please give an epic welcome, to the King of the city of Nineveh!

*[the King enters the stage]*

(King) Whoa, what's up lil' dudes!

(Emcee) Good morning, your majesty, we're honored to have you join us this today.

(King) Amped to be here bro, but you can crush the "your majesty" talk, my bros just call me King, or sometimes KoN.

(Emcee) KoN?

(King) You know KoN...Kay – Oh – En....as in King of Nineveh...KoN!

(Emcee) Well, it's great to have you here with us today King. The past several days we've heard from other eyewitnesses of Jonah who have told us about his disobedience and failed attempts to run away from the Lord.

You're definitely unique because you can give a firsthand account of Jonah when he actually obeyed the Lord and allowed the Lord to work through him to save over 120,000 in the city of Nineveh.

(King) Classic!

(Emcee) Well could you tell us a little bit about your experience with Jonah?

(King) I would be most honored bro. But first, you gotta understand me and my peeps in Nineveh and how wicked we were...and I mean wicked in the worst way.

See Nineveh was capital of Assyria located in the U-M...which is the Upper Mesopotamian region of Assyria...you know this area now as Iraq. Well, our entire history was filled with a reign of violence, terror, torture and killing. We weren't just slapping people with fish, if you know what I'm saying.

When we conquered the nations around us, we not only killed them, we would carry home parts of their leader's bodies as souvenirs of war. We thought this was a way for us to intimidate others and remove any chance of rebellion, but it was just cruel.

Although we had not attacked the nation of Israel at this point, we had a truly gnarly reputation all over and nobody messed with us, or even liked us...including the Israelites. But God had other plans...

(Emcee) Like what? Is this how Jonah comes into the picture?

(King) Exacta-Mundo my dude! See, something else you need to know about us Ninevites is that we love fish. Now I'm not talking about us just eating at Captain D's or Long John Silver's all the time, when I say we loved fish, we actually worshipped fish. Our god at the time was a fish-god named Dagon and you can read about how others falsely worshipped him in the books of Joshua, Judges, 1 Samuel, and Zephaniah.

Well when Jonah came on the scene, we heard about this dude who had been swallowed by a great fish, spewed by a great fish, and lived to tell about it because his God, the maker of heaven and earth, protected him and was telling him to give us a message directly from the Lord.

So, here's this dude, smelling like three day old sushi, looking like he's just gone through the spin cycle of a washing machine because he's spent 3 days in the belly of a fish, with a message from the Lord...you better believe we were going to listen.

(Emcee) What great message did Jonah have to give from the Lord?

(King) He said, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"

(Emcee) ....and what else?

(King) That was it.

(Emcee) That was it?

(King) That was it.

(Emcee) So what did you do?

(King) We believed God and repented big time dude! We turned from our sin and asked Jonah's God, the maker of heaven and earth, to forgive us!

The people called for a fast and put on sackcloth, which meant they didn't eat and wore clothes of sorrow made of goat's hair.

When word finally got to me, I was so convicted that I removed my kingly clothes, put on sackcloth too, and decreed that no one – not men, women, children, or even animals – should eat or drink anything and should be covered in sackcloth. I also decreed that everyone call out to God and turn from their violence in hopes that God would turn from His anger that we may not perish.

(Emcee) So what happened?

(King) God destroyed us.

(Emcee) What?

(King) Just kidding bro! When God saw what we did, that we were asking for forgiveness and had turned from our sin, God in His mercy forgave us and did NOT destroy us.

(Emcee) Whew, you had me worried there for a second.

(King) Yeah, it was amazing that God chose to show us mercy through the message given by the reluctant prophet Jonah. Through him, God chose to spare the entire city, made up of over 120,000 people.

And if God can use Jonah to speak with us Ninevites, He can definitely use any of you to speak with someone about the salvation that only comes through Jesus Christ.

(Emcee) Well that is a great way to conclude our discussion, and I'm so thankful you were able to visit us today King.

(King) No problemo dude, it was my pleasure.

(Emcee) Kids, let's thank the King for visiting us today and telling us more about how God used Jonah to save the evil city of Nineveh from their sin and impending destruction.

(King) Latronic dudes!

*[King waves goodbye and exits stage]*

(Emcee) What do you say we sing a song before you go with your group leaders to explore Nineveh one last time?

*[Lead group in a song]*

# 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.]

# Journey to Nineveh: Preschool 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)**

**1 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)

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

God says "its wickedness has come up before me."

Their sin was in direct disobedience to God and His holiness.

***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.***

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! God is everywhere!)

***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)

***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 who get hurt because of our sin. 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 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 it from Jonah himself.

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

- **What kind of work do you do?**
- **Where are you from? What is your country? From what people are you?**

**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)

**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.

**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 helped these sailors better understand 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.

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

But I have great news to share with you today.

Even though we don't always obey God like we should, God loves us and He is willing to forgive us.

God can forgive us because of what His Son, Jesus, did for us on the cross.

How many of you know the story of Adam and Eve?



A long time ago, God created the first humans named Adam and Eve. God gave Adam and Eve one rule to follow. But Adam and Eve broke that rule. Ever since then, every person has broken God's rules.

For instance, God tells us to obey our parents. How many of you have ever disobeyed your parents?

We have all disobeyed our parents at some time. We have all broken God's rules.

(Romans 3:23 "For all have sinned and fall short of the Glory of God.")

Well what happens when you disobey your parents and break their rules?

You get a punishment. Some of you may get a time out or lose a toy.

The punishment for breaking God's rules is that we are not allowed to be with God in heaven. Our sin separates us from God forever!

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

When your parents go to work, they earn money for what they do. That's their wages.

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)

The good news is that Jesus, God's Son, died for us. He took away the punishment for everyone who believes in Him.

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)

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 on the cross. Three days later, God raised Jesus from the dead. Jesus is alive today. Those who believe in Jesus and trust in Him will be saved from the punishment of their sins.

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 gift of salvation.]

# Journey to Nineveh Preschool: 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 Journey to Nineveh.

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

Today, we will find out what happens.

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 find out.

Inside the belly of a fish it would have been dark. So, we are going to turn out the lights.

Now Imagine noises at the bottom of the ocean. What do you think it sounds like at the bottom of the sea? Perhaps Jonah could hear the waves crashing above. Perhaps, he heard a continuous shush sound from being under water. Let the kids hear the ocean by putting a seashell to their ear.

[Turn on crashing waves sound]

It would have been stinky. How many of you have ever smelled rotten fish or fish bait? All around Jonah was stinky 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!

[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?

What would you do if you were stuck in a fish?

Would you get mad? Ok. Everyone make a mad face.

Would you get sad? Ok. Everyone now make a sad face.

Would you get scared? Ok. Everyone make a scared face.

What do you think Jonah did?

Let's find out and read from Jonah chapter 2. Jonah 2:1 (NIV) "From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the LORD his God."

Jonah made the best decision. Jonah prayed!

We can pray to God too!

How many of you pray to God?

God listens to our prayers and comforts us.

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

So, can anyone tell me what happens to Jonah? Did he stay inside the big fish forever?

God rescued Jonah. After 3 days, the big fish spit Jonah onto dry land. God saved Jonah.

And I have great news to share with you today.

God is still saving people today.

Can anyone tell me how God saves people today?

God saves people through His Son, Jesus.

How many of you know the story of Adam and Eve?

A long time ago, God created the first humans named Adam and Eve. God gave Adam and Eve one rule to follow. But Adam and Eve broke the rule. Ever since, every person has broken God's rules.

For instance, God tells us to obey our parents. How many of you have ever disobeyed your parents?

We have all disobeyed our parents at some time.

How many of you have ever lied?

We have all lied.

(Romans 3:23 "For all have sinned and fall short of the Glory of God.")

Unfortunately, the punishment for breaking God's rules is that we are not allowed to be with God in heaven. We actually deserve to be sent to a place of punishment called Hell forever.

However, the good news is that Jesus, God's Son, died for us. He took away the punishment for everyone who believes in Him.

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)

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. 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.

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

So just as God saved Jonah from drowning in the sea, God can save us from the penalty of our sins. All we need to do is accept His gift by believing and trust in Him.

Let's pray.

[Pray and thank God for His gift of salvation.]

# Journey to Nineveh: Preschool 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."**

Since Jonah disobeyed God the first time, 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!

**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)

We don't really know how big Nineveh was, but it was a big city with lots of people.

**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 did the people do that showed they were sorry for their sins? (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)

Do we always respond to God the way the Ninevites did? Are we sorry for our sins and turn from the quickly, like they did?

**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 not said anything about God forgiving them. But the Ninevites must have had a general understanding of God’s mercy and grace, and His willingness to respond when we are sorry for 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."***

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 given 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 sorry and he submitted 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)

Imagine a town or city where the people are known to be very bad. 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 taken his life!)

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)

***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 plant or the people? (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 wasn't worth much; 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.

**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 to people we may not like. 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? You can tell them about Jesus and what He has done for us!

\* 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, we all do things that are wrong.

But I have great news to share with you today.

Even though we don't always obey God like we should, God loves us and He is willing to forgive us.

God can forgive us because of what His Son, Jesus, did for us on the cross.

How many of you know the story of Adam and Eve?

A long time ago, God created the first humans named Adam and Eve. God gave Adam and Eve one rule to follow. But Adam and Eve broke that rule. Ever since then, every person has broken God's rules.

For instance, God tells us to obey our parents. How many of you have ever disobeyed your parents?

We have all disobeyed our parents at some time. We have all broken God's rules.

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

(Romans 3:23 "For all have sinned and fall short of the Glory of God.")

Well what happens when you disobey your parents and break their rules?

You get a punishment. Some of you may get a time out or lose a toy.

The punishment for breaking God's rules is that we are not allowed to be with God in heaven. Our sin separates us from God forever!

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

When your parents go to work, they earn money for what they do. That's their wages.

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)

The good news is that Jesus, God's Son, died for us. He took away the punishment for everyone who believes in Him.

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)

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 on the cross. Three days later, God raised Jesus from the dead. Jesus is alive today. Those who believe in Jesus and trust in Him will be saved from the punishment of their sins.

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

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 gift of salvation.]

## **“Journey to Nineveh” Family Devotion Questions**

**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.”**

1. Jonah was called to preach against Nineveh because of its wickedness. Why is wickedness an offense to God? Discuss wickedness in the world today. Are we very different than the Ninevites? Contrast man’s wickedness with God’s righteousness.

**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.**

2. Discuss Jonah’s disobedience. Why did Jonah choose to disobey God? Is it possible to run from God? Read Psalm 139:1-7

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

3. God used a huge storm to accomplish His plan. Read Romans 8:28 (ESV) “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.” Discuss ways in which God has used “storms” (difficulties) in your life to get your attention and used that “storm” for good.

**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.**

4. What happened when the men threw Jonah into the Sea? (The storm stopped)
5. What happened to the sailors? (They feared God, offered sacrifices and made vows to the true God)
6. Even in Jonah’s disobedience, God used Jonah to reach the lost sailors. What does that show us about God? (God cares for the lost). What does that show us about Jonah? (Jonah didn’t care about the lost sailors. Jonah was being selfish). There are also many people in our lives who don’t believe in Christ. Do we care about them? Are we sometimes like Jonah?
7. Share how and when you believed in Jesus with your kids. What would happen if everyone stopped telling others about Jesus and His gift of salvation?
8. Discuss how you as a family can be more proactive about sharing the Gospel with others.

## Journey to Nineveh: Decorations and Costumes

### Decoration Overview:

- Rooms/Themes
  - Fellowship Hall (check-in, skit, snacks, crafts)
    - Port City of Joppa
  - Stairwell
    - Underwater
  - Main Classroom (lesson)
    - Day 1 – Ship
    - Day 2 – Belly of Fish
    - Day 3 – Cliff overlooking Nineveh
  - Preschool Classroom
    - Underwater
- Room Decoration Specifics:
  - Fellowship Hall
    - Sign in/out “Ticket Booth”
      - Cardboard walls decorated with “wood grain” (fat & thin sharpie)
      - Hanging sign of travel locations (cardboard & paint)
      - “pier” off to the side (cardboard sheets & shipping tube “moorings”)
    - “Big fish” for pictures
      - “water” on floor (blue paper sheet with white painted “waves”)
      - Grey spray-painted paper bag “rocks” separating “water” & rest of floor
      - 2 options
        - 2D cut-out open-mouth “big fish” (cardboard & paint held up by fishing line from ceiling)
        - 3D paper lined “big fish” with red blankets in the mouth
    - Stage “fishing dock”
      - “wood grain” floor (brown paper, fat & thin sharpie)
      - Cardboard shipping tube “moorings”
      - Nets & other fishing decorations hung up above
      - Chairs lined up in rows in front
    - Snack & craft window “Joppa Java”
      - Window decorated as a shop window
      - Joppa Java “wooden” (cardboard & paint) sign in the window
      - Cardboard. Paint & marker “menu” to the side (full of puns & references)
      - Colored bed sheet overhang above window with cardboard supports

- Tables out front decorated like wooden spools brown paper & sharpies
  - Cardboard lanterns on the tables
- Exit from fellowship hall “city gate”
  - Cardboard wall with cardboard “stone bricks” all painted with textured grey paint
  - Gate made from cardboard painted like wood with “nails” along edges (silver painted ping-pong ball halves)
  - “torches” on wall (cardboard & tissue paper)
- Stairway
  - Walls covered in blue paper “water”
    - Textured yellow “sand” along the bottom
    - Painted white “bubbles” spaced out
  - Various “coral”
    - Cut pool noodles
    - Painted spray foam
    - Tissue paper
    - Colored mesh
  - Ceiling draped with blue streamers
    - “fish” hanging with fishing line (cut & painted paper plates)
    - “jellyfish” (coffee filter with taped on ribbons)
- Main Classroom
  - Day 1 “Ship”
    - Blue paper on wall with painted “water” & “sky”
      - Painted Birds
    - Wooden spool as a table up front
      - Unfinished game of go-fish
      - “mast” going up through the center (shipping tube)
      - 2 chairs behind
    - Rows of chairs
      - Cardboard “wood” on the seat & back (fat and thin sharpies)
    - “wood grain” floor (brown paper, fat & thin sharpies)
    - “ship sides” along walls (modular cardboard paneling)
  - Day 2 “Belly of Fish”
    - Red paper lining front and back wall
    - “ribcage” lining ceiling and side walls
      - White pool noodles
      - Connected with dowel rod connectors
      - Red paper lining between “ribcage” & ceiling/walls
    - Red blankets on the floor
    - “fish head” outside the door
      - Frame in cardboard



- Base coat of blue paint
  - Inner lined with red paper
  - “scales” on outside head
    - Cut paper plates with blue glitter spray paint
  - Eyes made of paper plates with black paper “pupils”
  - Paper curtain “throat” on door frame
    - Red paper & black paint
  - Blue pool noodle “lips”
- Day 3 “Cliff”
  - Floor covered with “sand” (tan paper with textured spray paint)
  - Walls covered with “sky” & “mountains”
    - Blue paper “sky”
    - Cut tan paper & textured spray paint mountains
  - “booth” off on side wall
    - Frames made of painted PVC
    - Colored bed sheet cover
  - “plant” on rear wall
    - Cardboard frame
    - Covered in brown paper
    - Green paper leaves
    - Sharpie detailing
  - “campfire” in center floor
    - Up facing fan with red, yellow and orange tissue paper “flames”
    - Paper bag rocks around
    - Cord under paper leading to wall
  - “cliff” in far corner
    - Floor paper cut & propped up with paper bag “rocks”
    - Elevation difference between “cliff top” & “valley floor”
      - Both made in textured spray-painted paper
  - “Nineveh” 2D model on the same corner
    - Cardboard, paint and sharpie
  - Carpet pads on the floor around campfire for people to sit on

## ➤ Costumes

- Use sheets to make costumes
  - Cut to size and tied together with safety pins
- Actors/volunteers wear sandals

## Journey to Nineveh: Music

### ➤ Music

- “Journey to Nineveh” includes two worship songs that can be downloaded from the website and used freely. Lyrics are below:
- Song 1 lyrics: “Trust and Obey”

I’m gonna trust, and obey, for there is no other way  
Now I am living in the Spirit, I will listen to Him each and every day

When Jonah ran from God’s commands  
He took his life into his own hands  
He left on a boat that was headed down for Tarshish and freedom  
But when the storm came out at sea  
The sailors threw him over, oh my, oh me  
He decided it was better to be eaten by a fish than go and preach  
And as he sat in the belly of the whale,  
He wished he had listened, cause now he’s in fish jail!

I’m gonna trust, and obey, for there is no other way  
Now I am living in the Spirit, I will listen to Him each and every day

And as his life was ebbing away,  
He remembered the Lord and he prayed,  
I will sacrifice to You with SHOUTS of grateful praise  
And what we learn is that when we obey,  
And trust in the Lord, His word we proclaim

I’m gonna trust, and obey, for there is no other way  
Now I am living in the Spirit, I will listen to Him each and every day  
Listen to Him each and every day  
TRUST AND OBEY!

- Song 2 lyrics

“SALVATION”

Salvation comes from the Lord  
Not from anything I do, or anything I am  
Salvation comes from the Lord  
Apart from His grace, we’re like a lost lamb

He is our only hope  
Something we did not deserve  
He sent His Son to die  
That through His death, He might preserve us

Salvation comes from the Lord  
When He had mercy on us, He made a way  
Salvation comes from the Lord,  
It is the gift of His grace we must accept today

He is our only hope  
He calls His chosen unto Him  
He sent His Son to die  
And with His love each one can enter in

Salvation comes from the Lord  
Salvation comes from the Lord

- For additional music, we encourage VBS servants to work with your church’s worship leader who can select children’s music based on their own church’s worship style and preferences. “Seeds of Faith” is not affiliated with Bible Expedition but may be a good option for those seeking Scripturally-based children’s worship music and lyrics.

<https://www.seedsfamilyworship.com/>

## Journey to Nineveh: Crafts

### Day 1: Jonah necklace/keychain (Jonah 2:2)

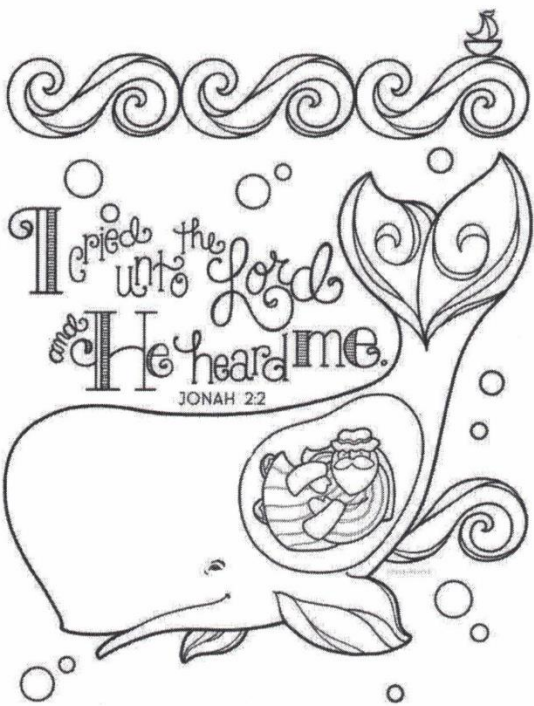
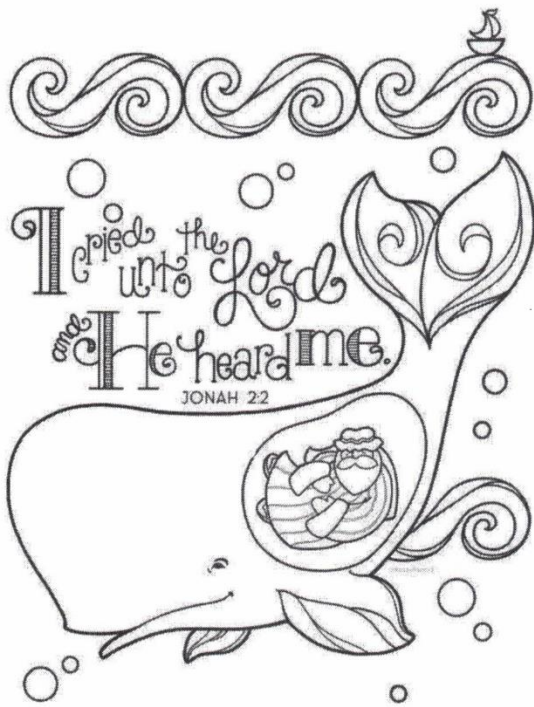
#### Materials:

Shrinky Dink inkjet creative pack  
Jonah coloring page (attached on next page)  
Inkjet printer  
Scissors/paper cutter  
Washable or permanent markers or ballpoint pens  
Hole punch  
Colorful string and/or key chain ring  
Oven to bake Shrinky Dinks

#### Directions:

Print Jonah coloring page (below) on Shrinky Dink paper. Each sheet should be cut into four separate coloring pages for kids to color with washable markers/permanent markers/ballpoint pens. Once colored, hole punch coloring page where necklace string or keychain ring will go and trim/shape page as desired. Shrinky Dinks should be baked according to manufacturer's instructions. After baking, each piece can be made as a keychain using metal loop or necklace using colorful string.





## Day 2: Oil & water discovery bottle (Jonah in the belly of the fish in water)

Materials:

Water

Oil

Funnel(s)

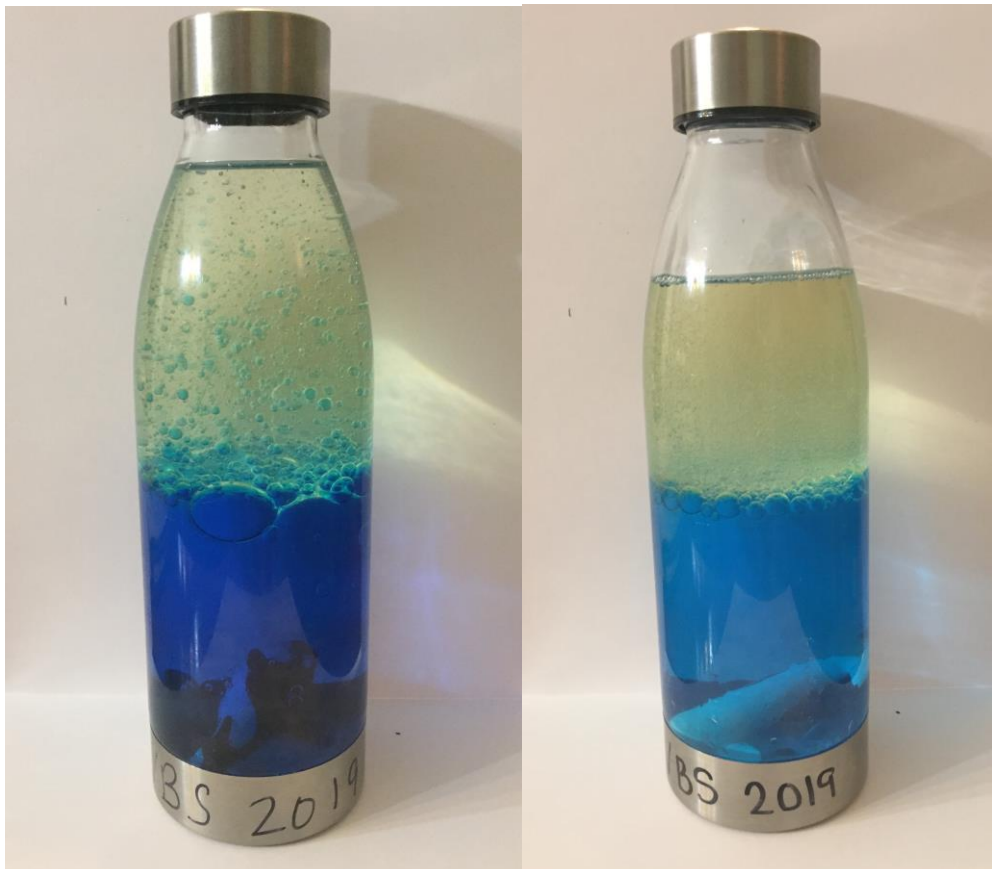
Blue food coloring

Plastic bottles (1 per each child)

Mini sea/ocean figures (whale specifically) that will fit in the opening of bottle

Directions:

Each water bottle should be filled half with water and half with oil. Add blue food coloring, tighten top on plastic bottle, and shake until coloring is thoroughly mixed. Remove top and place mini whales (and/or sea life figures) into the water/oil mixture. Replace top and enjoy shaking and watching water, oil, and figures move!



### **Day 3: Grow your own gourd (Vine and worm from story of Jonah)**

#### **Materials:**

Potting soil

Gourd seeds (2 per child)

Pot (1 per child)

Jumbo craft stick

Colorful pom poms

Craft glue

Googly eyes

#### **Directions:**

Fill each pot with potting soil and bury gourd seeds in dirt. For the worm, glue pom poms on the craft stick to create a worm shape. Add googly eyes. Place "worm" in pot as a reminder, water seeds, and watch the gourd grow!



## Journey to Nineveh: Activities and Games

### **Day 1: Jonah: Cross the Ocean**

- This is a great ice breaker game for kids.
- Choose two kids to be “sharks.” The rest of the kids are “fish” carrying Jonah. The sharks stand in the middle of a field or gym. The fish stand on the other side. The sharks yell, “cross the ocean” and the fish have to run to the other end of the field or gym and avoid being tagged by the sharks. If they are tagged, they become “seaweed” and have to sit down and wiggle their arms like sea urchins. The seaweed can also tag fish crossing the ocean. The game ends when there are 2 fish left and they become the sharks in the next round.



**Day 2: Journey to Nineveh Fish Belly Obstacle Course:** Deliver God's message to the Ninevites through a "Fish Belly Obstacle Course."

- Gather the kids together and briefly discuss what obstacles are.

The Bible teaches us that in this world we will have challenges and difficulties, but we can have victory through Jesus Christ. John 16:33 (ESV) says, "I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart, I have overcome the world." 1 Corinthians 15:57 says "But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Jonah had challenges. His pride and his desires led him to disobey God's instructions.

Those who obey God and complete the tasks that God gives them in their life will be rewarded in heaven. Revelation 22:12 (NIV) says, "Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done."

- Provide the children instructions on how to complete the obstacle course. Kids who complete the obstacle course according to the instructions given will get a small prize.
- Obstacle Course set up: The obstacle course can be set up according to the number and ages of kids attending VBS. It can be set up inexpensively. Many of the items can be bought at dollar stores.
  - Ideas may include: fish skeleton run, ball toss in the fish's mouth, army crawl through a fish, walk the plank balance beam;
  - Inexpensive supplies to make obstacles: pool noodles (for fish skeleton), hula hoops, jump ropes, cardboard boxes, 2x4's for balance beams.

### Day 3: Journey to Nineveh Bible Challenge:

Do your part in reaching kids around the world with the Gospel message. Figure out clues and answer Bible questions to get Nineveh bucks. Use Nineveh bucks to bargain for gifts at the Nineveh market. All gifts will be used for Operation Christmas Child.

Setup: Set up a market with different prices for different items. Each child is given three Nineveh Bucks just for participating.

Have a list of questions to read to the kids. A list of sample questions is provided. Some questions can be specific to your VBS event, that perhaps visiting kids would be able to answer. Other questions are about the story of Jonah and Bible knowledge. Have Bibles available for kids to look up answers. Children that answer correctly receive “Nineveh bucks,” a currency which can be used to buy market items.

#### Questions for “Journey to Nineveh Bible Challenge”

1. What was Jonah’s profession?
  - a. King of Israel
  - b. Priest
  - c. Prophet
  - d. Farmer
  - Answer: Prophet
2. Jonah’s father was named:
  - a. John
  - b. Amittai
  - c. Jonathan
  - d. Bill
  - Answer: Amittai
3. God told Jonah to go to what major city?
  - Answer: Nineveh

4. Approximately, how many years ago did the story of Jonah happen?
- 5000
  - 1000
  - 3000
  - 10,000
- Answer: about 3000 years ago
5. The Bible in Jonah chapter 1 describes Nineveh as what kind of city?
- Wealthy
  - Poor
  - Nice
  - Wicked
- Answer: Wicked
6. Instead of obeying God and going to Nineveh, Jonah disobeyed and went the opposite direction. What is the name of the city Jonah fled to?
- Answer: Tarshish
7. On his way to Tarshish, Jonah went to a port city. What was the name of the port city that Jonah went to?
- Answer: Joppa
8. From the port city of Joppa Jonah travelled towards Tarshish. What means of travel did Jonah use to flee to Tarshish?
- a horse
  - an airplane
  - a dinosaur
  - a ship
- Answer: A ship
9. A great storm came and the mariners of the ship were frightened. What was Jonah doing while the mariners were frightened?
- Answer: Jonah was sleeping
10. The mariners cast lots to find out who was responsible for the storm. Who do the lots fall on?
- Answer: Jonah

11. Jonah told the mariners the sea would become calm if they threw him into the water. So, Jonah was thrown into the water and swallowed by a large animal. What kind of animal swallowed Jonah?
- Answer: a big fish
12. How many days was Jonah inside of the fish?
- Answer: 3 days
13. While inside the fish, Jonah repented and turned back to God. How did Jonah get back to dry land?
- Answer: the fish vomited him out onto dry land
14. Jonah obeyed God and preached to the Ninevites. God's message to the Ninevites was that because of their wickedness they would be overthrown in how many days?
- Answer: 40 days
15. How did the Ninevites respond to the message?
- Answer: They believed God and repented (turned away) from their wickedness
16. God is gracious and merciful. God forgave the Ninevites of their sin and did not destroy Nineveh. What was Jonah's response to God's grace toward the Ninevites?
- Answer: Jonah was angry
17. Jonah sat on the East side of Nineveh and was hoping that God would destroy the city. It was hot and God made a plant for Jonah to provide him shade. What was Jonah's response to God giving him shade?
- Answer: Jonah was thankful
18. God then prepared an animal to eat the plant. What type of animal ate the plant?
- Answer: a worm
19. What was Jonah's response when the worm killed the plant?
- Answer: Jonah became angry again.
20. God's response to Jonah showed that He cared about the Ninevites a lot more than a silly plant. The Bible tells us there were how many persons in Nineveh?
- a. 100

- b. 1000
- c. 10,000
- d. more than 120,000
- Answer: more than 120,000

21. The story of Jonah is meant to point us to Jesus. Jesus came to the world to save what type of people?

- Answer: sinners

22. Jonah was in the belly of the fish for 3 days. How many days was Jesus in the grave before He rose again?

- Answer: 3

23. The Bible says in Romans 3:23, "For all have \_\_\_\_\_ and fall short of the glory of God"

- Answer: sinned

24. The Bible says in Romans 6:23, "For the wages of sin is \_\_\_\_\_, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord"

- Answer: death

25. John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever \_\_\_\_\_ in him should not perish but have eternal life."

- Answer: believes

26. What must we do to be saved from our sin (wickedness)?

- Answer: believe and trust in Jesus

27. Once we have believed and trusted Jesus, what should we do?

- Answer: tell others about Him