

Living the Word:

Teaching Youth God's Story

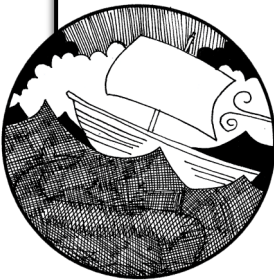
Narrative Lectionary, Year 3

Jonah: Finding God in the Belly of a Fish

Jonah 1:1-17; 3:1-10 [4:1-11]

Lesson #3-9

November 6, 2016



Spirit and Truth Publishing
www.SpiritAndTruthPublishing.com

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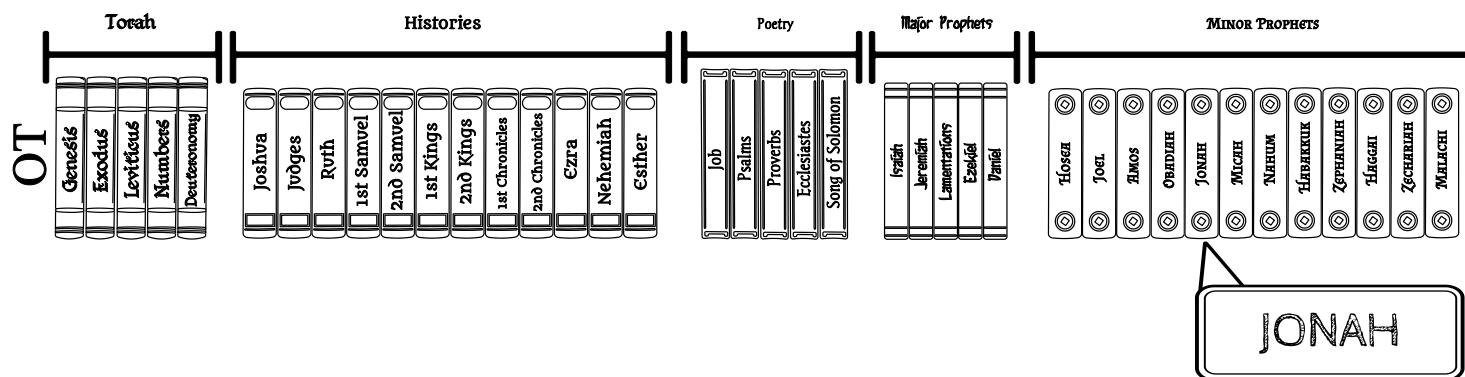
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Jonah: Finding God in the Belly of a Fish

Jonah 1:1-17; 3:1-10 [4:1-11]

Jonah did not like the assignment that God had for him, so he took off in the other direction thinking he could flee God's presence. After a stormy trip, Jonah made an about-face while sitting in a fish's stomach.

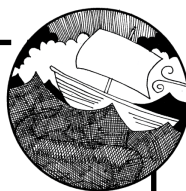
Story Connections

Elijah the prophet willingly followed God's direction to the brook and to the home of the widow of Zarephath. Both he and the widow did as God commanded. Many during that time walked in their own ways, worshipping many gods, with no regard for the one true God. The prophet Jonah was told to preach repentance to Nineveh, a city known for its evil ways. Jonah's prophetic message extended God's love to the Israelites' enemies in Nineveh, and this was difficult for Jonah to accept.

Lesson @ A Glance

#3-9: Jonah:

Finding God in the Belly of a Fish
Jonah 1:1-17; 3:1-10 [4:1-11]



The Point: The story of Jonah illustrates how difficult it is for us to follow God, but in return God's love for us never wavers.

Making Connections: Promises Made, Promises Broken

Spiritual Practice Emphasis: Prayer

Bible Nuts and Bolts: Repentance

Story Summary

Jonah: Finding God in the Belly of a Fish

(Note: please avoid debate on the varying views about the fish in this story. The focus of this story is the reality of God's forgiving love and our call to repentance. We should not allow the fish to distract us from that important message in this passage.)

God told Jonah to go to Nineveh and tell the people what would happen if they did not repent. Jonah did not want to do this, so he headed in the opposite direction. While he was at sea, God caused a storm. Jonah slept in a lower level of the ship, while

others threw their belongings off the boat to keep it from sinking. Jonah knew the storm was raging because of his actions so, when the others awakened him, he told the crew to throw him overboard. God spoke to Jonah again and told him to speak to the Ninevites. This time Jonah obeyed, and upon hearing Jonah's warnings, the people in Nineveh repented.

But the Lord provided a large fish to swallow up Jonah; and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.
Jonah 1:17

The Point

The story of Jonah illustrates how difficult it is for us to follow God, but in return God's love for us never wavers. God is always there to forgive and to help us get back on the path to following God. God's love for us is not a result of our actions or our ability to stay on track. God loves us as we are.

Bible Nuts & Bolts: Repentance

Repentance is a change of mind, a reorientation of life. Although it includes being sorry for sins, it is more than that. Repentance is recognizing the sin in what we are doing and making a deliberate about-face—an active decision to walk in the direction toward and with God and away

from a particular behavior and way of thinking.

For Your Reflection:

1. *When have you felt that you were too tired or did not have time to do an act of service that you felt led to do?*
2. *When have you experienced personal rewards through the response of those you have served?*
3. *In a culture that is becoming more and more "me" centered, how will you stress the importance of serving others with your youth?*

Spiritual Practice: Service

Service can include doing favors, offering physical help, and meeting material needs. Service can also mean being bold to share the love of God with others through our lifestyle and or through direct words. There are people who are longing to hear and know that they are loved—loved by God. Serving others by sharing and telling of God's love can mean a life changing experience for the recipient of this service and for the servant.

Overview, Objectives, and Materials You'll Need

Core Elements

Short on time?
Items marked +
can be adjusted to be done with
what you probably already
have in your pocket or
classroom.

+Into the Story

10 min.

- › Paper
- › Pens or pencils

Listen and Follow

Listen to instructions once and try to follow them.

+Learning the Story 20 min.

- › Bibles
- › Pens or pencils

Finding God in the Belly of a Fish

Read the Scripture passage to follow the heart to repentance.

+Living the Story 15 min.

- › White board
- › Markers
- › Optional: cell phones

Sharing the Message

Create and send text acronyms about God's love.

+Sending the Story 5 min.

- › None

Extending the Learning:

Hands On <i>Jonah's Journey</i> <i>Chart Jonah's journey.</i>	10 min.	› Road map › Paper › Colored pencils
Mixed Media <i>Modern Day Jonah</i> <i>Create a Jonah comic book.</i>	20 min.	› Bibles › Internet-connected devices › Optional: paper, pens or pencils
+The Competitive Edge <i>Something is Fishy</i> <i>Solve a Jonah puzzle.</i>	20 min.	› Activity Sheet #3-9.A › Fish snack crackers › Paper › Pens or pencils
Simply Serving <i>Provisions</i> <i>Plan the project.</i>	20 min.	› Activity Sheet #3-9.B › Pens or pencils › Optional: white board, flip chart, or chalk board; marker or chalk
+Worship Connection <i>Jonah's Song</i> <i>Add a verse to Jonah's song.</i>	15 min.	› Internet-connected device › Paper › Pens or pencils

Into the Story: Listen and Follow (10 minutes)

Listen to instructions once and try to follow them.

BEFORE CLASS:

1. Create your own example; follow the steps in number 2 below.

DURING CLASS:

1. Distribute paper and pencils
2. **This is a listening game. I am going to talk through a series of tasks that you will then do on your paper, making certain marks in certain places. No instruction can be given twice. You cannot see each other's papers. You cannot see my paper. Are you ready?**

Supplies:

- › Paper
- › Pens or pencils

- **Make a plus sign in the upper right corner.**
 - **Beneath the plus and diagonally to the left, make a tiny, shaded square.**
 - **Cough a little as you say, Draw a triangle with one point downward in the lower left of the paper.**
 - **Make a squiggly line from the triangle's bottom to the top of the plus sign.**
 - **Make an X in the middle of the paper.**
 - **Draw a circle on top of the X.**
 - **Speak a bit faster. Draw five circles, placing each of the four about midway on each side of the page and the fifth inside the triangle.**
 - **Write your initials somewhere in the upper half of the page.**
3. After the game is over, give the youth time to compare their pictures with each other and with you.
 4. **Sometimes we give and receive directions in different ways, so the way one person describes a step may not make sense to another, and we may not do exactly what was expected. Today we will read about someone who knew what he was told to do, but he still did not do it right.**

Learning the Story:

Finding God in the Belly of a Fish (20 minutes)

Read the Scripture passage to follow the heart to repentance.

DURING CLASS:

Supplies:

- › Bibles
- › Pens or pencils

1. For the following verses, ask volunteers to do the reading.
2. **Read Jonah 1:1-3.**
3. **Why do you think Jonah arose and fled? Why did he not want to do what God asked?** *[Answers will vary. Jonah thought people who were wicked might hurt him if he spoke a message against their wickedness; he was afraid; he thought they did not deserve a chance...]*
4. Read Jonah 1:4-9.
5. **Jonah said he feared or respected and followed the Lord. How did his words contradict his actions?** *[His disobeyed; he hid, sleeping in a ship.]* **When have your words about following God seem to have been contradicted by your actions?** *[Answers will vary.]*
6. **Read Jonah 1:10-17.**
7. **Why do you think God bothered to place a fish in the sea for Jonah? Why not just let him drown after such disobedience?** *[God is a God of second chances, God still loved him, etc.]*
8. **Read Jonah 3:1-8.**
9. **Why do you think the Ninevites believed Jonah so quickly and started to repent?** *[Answers will vary.]*
10. **Does the repentance of the Ninevites give us any insight into what our hearts should be like when we repent?** *[Answers will vary. Deeply sorry for sin.]*
11. **After the Ninevites repented, Jonah was angry. He felt that God should not have forgiven them. What would you say to Jonah about that?** *[Answers will vary.]*
12. **Look back at the requests made of Jonah in Jonah 1:1 and Jonah 3:1-2. Now look at the outcome in Jonah 3:5. What hints does this give you about the work of God getting done?** *[It will get done somehow because God wants all to know God's love.]*
13. **Look back over the reading and find all of the consequences for behavior (positive and negative). Share them with us.**
14. **If you like to mark in your Bible, draw an X when Jonah did the wrong thing and a check mark when he did the right thing. Draw a U-turn arrow when someone or group of people repented.**

Living the Story:

Sharing the Message (15 minutes)

Create and send text acronyms about God's love.

DURING CLASS:

1. **God reached out to Nineveh through Jonah because God loves people, even those who turn their back on God. God wanted to give the people of Nineveh a chance to repent because of God's great love.**
2. **There are many different ways that we can reach out to others with the message of God's love.**
3. **More and more, people and businesses are using acronyms to communicate messages. Whether you use text messaging or speak in text acronym lingo, there are chances you have heard acronyms such as LOL. Have you heard of GWP? It means "God Will Provide". I just made it up.**
4. **Now it is your turn. Think of something we could tell someone about God. As you get ideas, write an acronym for your idea. When the board is full, we will guess what the acronyms mean.**
5. **After the activity, ask the youth to choose your favorites from our acronym list, and text message, plan to text, or plan to say the acronyms to friends. Be prepared to explain what they mean when asked.**

Supplies:

- › White board
- › Markers
- › Optional: cell phones

Hands On: Jonah's Journey (10 minutes)

Chart Jonah's journey.

DURING CLASS:

1. Open a map and spread it on the table. Pick two locations on the map, and ask the youth to use their fingers to follow the routes on the map to get from the first to the second.
2. **After reading of Jonah's travels, what do you think Jonah's map looked like?** *[Answers will vary but probably include land and sea, going far in the direction opposite of the destination, and traveling underwater.]*
3. Close the map that was on the table and distribute paper and colored pencils.
4. **Make a map of Jonah's journey the way that you picture it in your mind. It does not have to look like anyone else's. First put the places on the map, and then draw the route. You can refer to the story in the book of Jonah to help with labeling places.**
5. When the maps are finished, give the youth a chance to share their maps. If you have Bible maps in your church or in your Bible, show the possible route.

Supplies:

- › Bibles
- › Road map
- › Paper
- › Colored pencils

Mixed Media: Modern Day Jonah (20 minutes)

Create a Jonah comic book.

BEFORE CLASS:

1. Access the following and be prepared to show it up front or with the youth gathered around a computer: <http://www.readwritethink.org/parent-afterschool-resources/games-tools/comic-creator-a-30237.html>.

Supplies

- › Internet-connected devices
- › Optional: paper, pens or pencils

DURING CLASS:

1. **Use the online comic creator to tell Jonah's story as we read it from the Bible, or modernize the story and make Jonah a youth who is having a difficult time serving God because of peer pressure. You are welcome to use a different modern day scenario if you have an idea for one.**
2. Allow about 10-15 minutes for this activity. Allow students to work in pairs if they would like to.
3. **Share the final products with the class.**

The Competitive Edge:

Something is Fishy (20 minutes)

Solve a Jonah puzzle.

DURING CLASS:

1. Divide the class into teams.
2. **I am going to read a “Who or What am I” puzzle question. Discuss your answer as a team. When you have decided on the answer, write it down and show it to me, but do not let the other teams see it. When I nod that the answer is correct, go back to your area and use the book of Jonah to find a verse that supports the answer you gave me. Return and read it to me. Each time your group completes a full piece of the puzzle first, and correctly, your team earns five fish crackers. The team with the most fish crackers at the end wins.** Note: a full piece of the puzzle means both parts—answer and verse or verses.
3. When one team has correctly identified the speaker and found the verse, read the next statement. Re-read it for groups that are behind.
4. When the game ends, pass around more crackers for the youth to snack on.

Supplies:

- › Activity Sheet #3-9.A
- › Fish snack crackers
- › Paper
- › Pens or pencils

Simply Serving: Provisions (20 minutes)

Plan the project.

BEFORE CLASS:

1. Make copies of Activity Sheet #3-9.B, one per youth.
2. Write the following on the board, placing a check next to the first item to show that it was completed last week.
 - Determine the service project. How can we share the message of God's love through this project? Pray and ask God to use us. Food drive or food related service.
 - Week 2: Work out the logistics, make lists and assign tasks.
 - Week 3: Make preparations.
 - Week 4: Do the act of service.

Supplies

- › Activity Sheet #3-9.B
- › Pens or pencils
- › Optional: white board, flip chart, or chalk board

DURING CLASS:

1. **This week we will work out the logistics, make lists and assign tasks, for our service project. In order to complete our service project in three weeks, we need to determine if we are collecting food and distributing it from here, if we are serving something here when we distribute food, or if we are collecting and bagging food for others at church to take from us and drop off at certain locations.** The youth need to make the final decision, but what they decide has to work with the time frame of the youth sessions, the availability of the facility, and the availability of those receiving the service.
2. **When the decision has been reached, distribute Activity Sheet #3-9.B.**
3. **Answer the questions on Activity Sheet #3-9.B in detail. When the questions are answered, create a schedule using the chart on the back of the Activity Sheet.** (You may also want to draw the chart on the board.)
4. When the plan is complete, remind the youth of their tasks and deadlines and the responsibility of doing their part. You might want to follow up with some of them during the week if they are tasked to do something by the next gathering.

Worship Connection:

Jonah's Song (15 minutes)

Add a verse to Jonah's song.

BEFORE CLASS:

1. Access https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vhYdVj7A_FU and be prepared to play it.

Supplies

- › Internet connected device
- › Paper
- › Pens or pencils

DURING CLASS:

1. Watch “In the Belly of a Whale (Newsboys)”, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vhYdVj7A_FU. Note: the Bible does not say this was a whale, but rather a big fish.
2. **What do you think Jonah's song would have sounded like after he returned and did what God asked him to do?**
3. **Work together to put words to the tune of the “In Belly of the Whale” to finish the song and sing it as worship.** You may need to play the song again for the youth to do this.

Sending the Story (5 minutes)

Remember to send “The Story @ Home” take home sheet with students before dismissing them.

Jonah somehow thought he could run from God’s presence. The people of Nineveh turned their backs on God. What was Jonah’s turning point like? *[He had a long conversation with God; he repented in the belly of a fish.]* **What was Nineveh’s turning point like?** *[The mourned their own ways and removed anything that reminded them of their old ways; they committed to following God.]* **What was God’s response?** *[God accepted their repentance and kept on loving them.]*

Stand in a circle where everyone faces out instead of in, and pray together:

God, help us to turn around and make a new start today. Amen.

The Competitive Edge: Something is Fishy

Solve the Jonah puzzles.

1. I am a city with a bad reputation. (Nineveh)
2. I am a city where you can catch a boat to Tarshish. (Joppa)
3. I can sleep through anything. (Jonah)
4. We are scared of storms and scared of God. (The marines/boat crew)
5. I am not afraid to say I fear (respect) God, but I appear afraid to live that way. (Jonah)
6. Someone higher than I stirs me up and calms me down. (The Sea)
7. I could have jumped myself, but I waited to be thrown. (Jonah)
8. We cast lots. (The boat crew)
9. My stomach got a big surprise. (Fish)
10. I gave Jonah the same assignment twice. (God)
11. Time in the fish and time to travel across Nineveh. (3 days)
12. I traded my robe for sackcloth. (King of Nineveh)

Simply Serving: Provisions

Plan the project.

Check one of the following and cross out the others:

- ☐ collecting food and distributing it from here
- ☐ serving something here when we distribute food from here
- ☐ collecting and bagging food for others at church to take from us and drop off at certain locations.

What food will be collected?

Will we ask for donations from church members? Friends and neighbors of the church? Local food stores or businesses?

If so, how will we go about asking?

Who will be assigned to that task?

What donations will we ask for?

Who exactly are we planning to serve, and about how many people will this include? We need to have enough to go around.

What amount of donations will we request?

What arrangements will we make for picking up or having donations delivered to us?

Who will be involved in that process?

Who will send the thank you letters for the donations?

Who will make sure that the names of those who donated will be mentioned during the actual act of service?

How will we store the donations?

How will we package the donations for the day we give them away?

If we serve hot drinks and cookies when we distribute donations, who will prepare these?

What supplies do we need?

Who is going to help package the donations, and when?

Are we going to include notes, Thanksgiving cards, or Scripture with the donations? Can we ask a local Christian bookstore for donations of New Testaments?

How will we get word out that we are doing this? Will someone contact the local soup kitchens and shelters or Social Services? Will someone put up flyers? If flyers are put on posts on the streets, permission has to be received from the local government. Who will request that permission? (It may take longer to get approval than the time we have.)

Who will make the flyers?

Who will clean up?

Will we need any money to make this work? If so, how will we get that?

How will we organize the event? There will need to be a smooth process from the moment the act of service starts to the moment it ends.

Simply Serving: Provisions

Plan the project.

Task	Details	Due Date	Assigned to:



The Point

The story of Jonah illustrates how difficult it is for us to follow God, but in return God's love for us never wavers. Today's story is important because God is always there to forgive and to help us get back on the path to following God. God's love for us is not a result of our actions or our ability to stay on track. God loves us as we are.

Story Connections

Elijah the prophet willingly followed God's direction to the brook and to the home of the widow of Zaraheth. Both he and the widow did as God commanded. Many during that time walked in their own ways, worshipping many gods, with no regard for the one true God. The prophet Jonah was told to preach repentance to Nineveh, a city known for its evil ways. Jonah's prophetic message extended God's love to the Israelites' enemies in Nineveh, and this was difficult for Jonah to accept.

Story Summary

Jonah: Finding God in the Belly of a Fish

God told Jonah to go to Nineveh and tell the people there what would happen if they did not turn back to

God. Instead, Jonah headed far away in the opposite direction. He ran away by land and sea. While he was at sea, God caused a storm that tossed the ship around and made water come aboard. While Jonah slept in a lower level of the ship, others threw their belongings off the boat to keep it from sinking. The captain woke up Jonah and asked him to call on his god. Jonah knew the storm was raging because of his actions, so he told the crew to throw him overboard. Not wanting to be responsible for Jonah's death in the sea, the men tried to row the ship safely to land. They ended up having to throw him overboard, where God had a big fish waiting for Jonah. Jonah was in the fish's belly for three days and nights. God spoke to him again and told him to speak to the Ninevites. This time Jonah obeyed. The people in Nineveh responded to the message by repenting, and God did not have to render judgement on Nineveh.

Spiritual Practice: Service

Service can include doing favors, offering physical help, and meeting material needs. Service can also mean being bold to share the love of God with others through our lifestyle or through direct words. There are people who are longing to hear and know that they are loved—loved by God. Serving others by sharing and telling of God's love can mean a life changing experience for the recipient of this service and for the servant.

Last Week/Next Week

Last week, we heard of the prophet Elijah and the ravens delivering God's provisions to him. This week we heard the story of Jonah finding God in a most unusual place—the belly of a fish! Next week we hear the calling of Isaiah, a prophet through whom God will deliver oracles and sermons to the Israelites.

Bible Nuts and Bolts: Repentance

Repentance is a change of mind, a reorientation of life. Although it includes being sorry for sins, it is more than that. Repentance is recognizing the sin in what we are doing and making a deliberate about-face—an active decision to walk in the direction toward and with God and away from a particular behavior. God has a way of life for us to live, and repentance is a process of change and transformation toward this new life.

Finding God in the Belly of a Fish

Going Deeper

As you hear and study these stories each week, consider what God has to say to you and your family. What is God's message to us? Consider the following basic pattern as a way of forming family devotions:

- ✠ Light a candle to help you focus this time as "God time." Pray a simple prayer together.
- ✠ Take a moment to check in with each other; what are each person's "highs" and "lows" today?
- ✠ Read aloud from the Daily Bible Readings from below. Discuss the questions following each.
- ✠ End with a blessing, by simply tracing a cross on each other's forehead. The Lord's Prayer is a good way to end your devotion time. If you used a candle, extinguish it as a sign of the end of the devotions.

Note: This is only a suggested pattern. It will vary with your household's context and patterns. What works best for you? First thing in the morning? Over breakfast? Bed time? Be creative and flexible with how you practice and keep your devotions!

Daily Bible Readings

Sunday - Read Jonah 1:1-17; 3:1-10

[4:1-11]

Jonah finds God in the belly of a fish.

- Do you think that Jonah really thought he could run away from God's presence? Explain.
- When have you felt that you either wanted to escape or get closer to God's presence?

Monday - Read Jonah 1

Jonah tries to run from God.

- How was Jonah able to sleep during that storm?
- Where in this passage do you sense that Jonah begins to feel a sense of guilt?

Tuesday - Jonah 3

The conversion of Nineveh.

- What if you are the only chance another person might have to hear about God's love? How many have heard from you?
- What motivated the Ninevites to change their ways?

Wednesday - Read Jonah 4

Jonah's anger.

- Who do you think is undeserving?
- Why did Jonah think that the Ninevites should not be forgiven even after God forgave Jonah?

Thursday - Read Exodus 33:7-23

Moses sees God.

- What do you think it would be like to see God face to face?
- What do you think God sees when God looks at you?

Friday - Read Exodus 40:18-38

Moses sets up the Tabernacle.

- Why do you think the Tabernacle had such a specific setup?
- Imagine the sanctuary at church. Why do you think it is set up as it is?

Saturday - Read Exodus 40:34-38

The glory of the Lord.

- Who do you know whose smile and aura radiates the love of God?
- How can you become like that?