



Jonah

(based on Jonah 1–4)

Many years ago, a man named Jonah lived in the land of Israel in the coastal city named Joppa (JAH-puh). One day, God told Jonah to take a message to Nineveh (NIHN-eh-veh).

“Tell the people of Nineveh that I am not happy with the way they behave,” declared God. “They do not love me. They are mean to each other. I have decided to punish them.”

Jonah did not want to go to Nineveh. The people of Nineveh were enemies of the Israelites. He did not want to take a message to these foreigners he didn’t know. Jonah decided to run away; he jumped on a boat headed to Tarshish (TAHR-shihsh)—in the opposite direction.

God sent a terrible storm. It tossed the ship up and down—up and down—up and down. The sailors were afraid that it might break apart and sink. “Why is this happening?” they moaned.

Jonah realized the storm was his fault. He told the sailors that he was running away from God. When they heard Jonah’s story, they lifted Jonah up and threw him over the side of the boat.

Jonah landed in the sea with a big splash and the storm stopped. A big fish came along. It opened its mouth wide. Whoosh! Suddenly the fish swallowed, and Jonah was inside!

Jonah stayed inside the belly of the fish for three days! He had plenty of time to think and pray.

“Dear God,” Jonah prayed. “Thank you for rescuing me. I’m sorry that I ran away from you. I’m sorry that I didn’t do what you wanted.”

Right away the big fish swam toward the land and spat Jonah right up onto the beach!

Once again, God told Jonah to take a message to Nineveh. This time, Jonah went. He walked all the way to the city of Nineveh and shouted, “God is not happy with the way you behave. You do not love God, and you are mean to each other. God has decided to punish you.”

The people heard Jonah’s message and believed what he said. They told Jonah they were sorry and wanted to change the ways they treated others. Even the king listened to Jonah.

God heard the people’s prayers and forgave the people. They were jubilant when they realized that God was not going to punish them.

But Jonah was angry with God. “I want you to punish the people,” he shouted.

“Why are you so angry, Jonah?” God asked. “Thousands of people live in Nineveh. I chose to be gracious to them as I was with you when you disobeyed me.”



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(based on Jonah 1–4)

Use one or more activities from each section to explore grace and gratitude with your children this week.

Recognizing God's Grace

- Read and enjoy the story with your children—imagine and wonder.
- Show your children how to draw a fish with only two lines. Make a semicircle from left to right. Starting at the right end, make an inverted semicircle, and end it by crossing the first semicircle on the left, to make the tail. After they've drawn the fish, they can add an eye and a big mouth if they like.



Responding to God's Grace

- God's love is steadfast. Do an Internet search of synonyms for the word *steadfast*. Help your children make a "wordle" or word cloud. Write the word *steadfast* in large letters. They could even write it inside the big fish they drew in "Recognizing God's Grace." Then write the synonyms in smaller letters. If the children are using the fish outline, keep all the words inside the fish shape.
- Jonah sat under a squash plant. Buy a winter squash and look for a recipe for honey roasted winter squash. Leave out the ingredients that don't work for your family. Enjoy this nutritious winter treat.
- Read *Swimmy* by Leo Lionni. Enjoy how Swimmy becomes a leader, looking out for other fish.

Celebrating in Gratitude

- Find Psalm 136:1–9. Read the verses of the psalm, letting your children join in the refrain, "for his steadfast love endures forever."
- The symbol for infinity is a figure 8 on its side. Lie on the floor with a flashlight, and trace a figure 8 on the ceiling. Think about how God is infinite, and how God's love endures forever.
- Pray this prayer:

*Thank you, God, for taking care of us always.
Amen.*