

CONNECTING FAITH AND LIFE

FAITH FORMATION FOR CHILDREN | YOUTH | FAMILY | ADULT

Talking with God - God's Voice through the Prophets Week 2 - Talking with God- God's Voice Through Jonah

KEY POINT

God is able to work in and through us even when we are not cooperative. God's reach is greater than what we can imagine.

KEY VERSE

Jonah 3:10

When God saw what they (Ninevites) did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it.

OPENING PRAYER

Begin your time together with this, or another, prayer:

God of Jonah, you sometimes call us to places we do not want to go. Be with us as we gather to study your Word. Help us to enter into the challenges, and to support one another as we grow in you. In your name. Amen.

READ

Jonah 1:1-10, 14-17, 2:10-3:5,10

ABOUT THE STORY

Jonah was a prophet in the northern kingdom of Israel, some time in the 8th century BCE. During this period, Israel's greatest enemy was the Assyrian Empire, which eventually conquered Israel in 722 BCE. Samaria was destroyed and many Israelites were deported. The Assyrians were known to be brutal, showing no mercy to the victims of their expansion.

The capital of the Assyrian Empire was at Nineveh, located on the Tigris River in modern-day Iraq. Jonah lived in Israel, which would mean that to get to Nineveh, as God instructed him, he would have had to travel for days, possibly weeks, to the east. Instead, he headed west, taking passage on a ship across the Mediterranean. While it is unclear exactly where Tarshish was, it seems likely that it was somewhere near the coast of Spain. In other words, Jonah was trying to get as far as possible from Nineveh.

The story of Jonah is not intended to be an historical account of actual events. There is no evidence that Nineveh and the Assyrians ever repented of their infamous cruelty, nor that Jonah ever preached to them. While Jonah, son of Amittai, is mentioned in 2 Kings 14:25, it is most likely that this story is a folktale that may be read as a parable. It was probably told in an oral tradition for some time before ever being written down.

The main characters of this story, Jonah and God, engage the reader in thorny theological questions throughout the action. Not only must we examine how we respond to God's call to serve, but also whether we are prepared to serve everyone that God serves. Jonah's sour grapes in the final scene of the story only reinforces the name of God that is found throughout the Old Testament, where God is known as "gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love" (Jonah 4:2, Exodus 34:6, Joel 2:13, Nehemiah 9:17, and others).

SHARE

- God often calls us to serve in ways that make us uneasy and push us out of our comfort zones. As a group, brainstorm about ways you might serve in your community. Think of those experiencing homelessness, domestic abuse, or natural disasters; those with disabilities, refugees, and others particular to your context. Pay special attention to those groups that make you most uncomfortable. Are there any that serve a group you truly do not want to engage with? Pick the three that are most difficult to imagine yourself serving. Commit as a group to reaching out to one of those three this week.
- How do you respond to Jonah's anger? Do you relate to it?
- Have you ever had a parallel experience? Share how you would have behaved in Jonah's place

PRAY

Forgiving God, you are the Lord of all. Be our protection and our guide, even when we find it difficult to understand your ways. Help us to be a witness to your love, even to those who make us uncomfortable. In your name we pray. Amen.

BLESS

Share this verbal blessing with one another: "God will be with you wherever you go. Amen."

FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION AT HOME:

- Go for a walk. As you walk, mentally mark off years or eras in your life. Notice where you ran from God's call. Notice where God gently (or not so gently) guided you back. Take a few moments to check in with where God is calling you now.
- Draw or paint a picture, or even make a collage, depicting a storm. Be sure to include yourself somewhere in the picture. Where are you? Are you on a ship? In a fish?