




The Body of JONAH

A dark blue graphic of a whale's tail, positioned to the right of the word 'JONAH' and extending from the top of the letter 'H'.

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Our Mission:

At Youth Ministry Conversations, we believe you know your group best. This means our resources look a little different than what you may have experienced in the past. We try and create a “buffet” of material so you can choose and pick what works best for your group. You will find ideas, instructions, and possibilities in this packet all related to the theme of “The Body of Jonah.” How you use them, and how you structure your study is up to you. We hope you enjoy this resource and return in the future to check out other materials.

This Study:

You’ve heard the story about Jonah and the whale, but what about the rest of the story? “The Body of Jonah” is a four-lesson series on the book of Jonah. Each lesson is designed to help students encounter God’s mercy and compassion by looking at the structure of this quirky biblical story. Students will explore themes of call, prayer, grace, and God’s love.

Lessons Included:

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The Writer:



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Lesson 1 – Responding to God’s Call

Focus: This lesson begins the focus on the “body” or structure of the book of Jonah. Students discuss God’s call to Jonah to go to Nineveh and Jonah’s response to God’s call.

Scripture: Jonah 1

Supplies:

- Bibles
- A camera or phone for the Instagram activity (to use for the entire series – see “Instagram Picture” section)
- A small whiteboard and markers for captions (see “Instagram Picture” section)
- Jonah poster from The Bible Project (to use for the entire series – see “Jonah Poster” section)
- Reader’s Theater handouts
- A large map of the Mediterranean world in Old Testament times (to show Tarshish’s and Nineveh’s locations)
- Swedish Fish candy (one small packet and one candy per participant – see Small Group and Tangible Item sections)
- Small print-outs of Jonah 1:17

Background on Scripture and Topic:

Most of us have heard the story about Jonah and the whale, but there is so much more to this strange little book of the Bible. In this book, we encounter a God who calls a prophet to proclaim compassion and mercy to outsiders. The only problem is that this prophet, Jonah, is not really the hero of the story. He’s got issues with the Ninevites and with God’s mercy. Teenagers can connect with a

story about a messed-up hero who still manages to do what God asks (albeit reluctantly and kind of does it for the wrong reasons and then has issues with God's mercy).

Parent Email Prompt:

For the next four weeks, the students will be studying the book of Jonah. We will reflect on God's call to Jonah, Jonah's response, God's compassion, and what that means for us today. Since this is a story with some funny elements and really bad experiences (Jonah is swallowed and thrown up by a BIG fish!), it could be good to share personal stories with your kids about obstacles you've encountered in life and how God helped you through them. You may also want to ask and discuss this question with your student: what do you think God is calling you to do or to be?

Text Prompt the Night Before:

Tomorrow we will begin a series on the story of Jonah. Hope you will join us!

Activity: Instagram Picture

Divide your large group into smaller groups of 4-5 people each. Have each group read Jonah 1. The group has five minutes to read the story and make a picture using themselves as the characters and props, as if the picture was going to be on Instagram. One person in the group will hold up a caption for the photo (written on a small whiteboard or chalkboard or a piece of paper). Keep the same groups all four weeks and at the end upload the pictures to Instagram and tag your students, or print them off to look like a comic strip.

Prayer Time: Pray or ask a volunteer to pray these words -

God of Mercy, help us to hear your call in our lives more clearly during this study. As we learn more about the story of Jonah's response to your call, help us to ask ourselves how we hear and respond to your call in our own lives. Let us not judge Jonah too harshly; rather let us see ourselves in the story and listen for where you may be calling us. We pray this in the name of Jesus who gives mercy to those who are merciful. Amen.

Activity: Jonah Poster

Have your youth review the Jonah 1 section of The Bible Project Poster.¹ This resource can be downloaded and printed or purchased. It is a great way to visually illustrate the “body” of the book throughout the series. Introduce the poster to your youth. Have students place the poster on a prominent wall in the youth space. Each week the students will review this poster. If possible, allow them to color it if you or they want.

Scripture Reading: One way to read Jonah 1 is to have a reader’s theater with different students reading different characters parts. The handout is at the end of this lesson. Print out enough copies for everyone to have one.

Large Group Discussion Questions :

- What does God ask Jonah? How does Jonah respond?

Note: Here is where the Mediterranean map will be useful. Point out just how opposite Jonah responds to God. Tarshish is as far west from Nineveh as possible.

- What do we do in times of stress?
- How do we respond when we are asked to do something we don’t want to do? Does it matter *who* it is that asks us to do something?
- Why do you think Jonah is so opposed to going to where God calls him?

Small Group Questions Activity:

Break the whole group into smaller discussion groups. Each student gets one piece of Swedish Fish and can eat it once they share something *new* they learned about the Jonah story *and* something they can do in response to the story.

¹ The Bible Project, “Jonah,” *The Bible Project*, 2018, <https://d1bsmz3sdiplr.cloudfront.net/media/Posters%20Download/33-Jonah-FNL.jpg> (accessed January 2, 2019).

Tangible Item They Take: If you can find snack-size Swedish Fish packs, you could send each student home with a pack (or make your own with plastic bags). Put a small print-out of Jonah 1:17 on or in the bag.

Remind Youth: Next week we will talk about Jonah and the big fish. We will also look at Jonah's prayer to God.

Jonah 1 Reader's Theater²

Narrator: Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai, saying,

God: 'Go at once to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before me.'

Narrator: But Jonah set out to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid his fare and went on board, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the LORD.

But the LORD hurled a great wind upon the sea, and such a mighty storm came upon the sea that the ship threatened to break up. Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried to his god. They threw the cargo that was in the ship into the sea, to lighten it for them. Jonah, meanwhile, had gone down into the hold of the ship and had lain down, and was fast asleep. The captain came and said to him,

Captain: 'What are you doing sound asleep? Get up, call on your god! Perhaps the god will spare us a thought so that we do not perish.'

Narrator: The sailors said to one another,

Sailors (whole group in unison): 'Come, let us cast lots, so that we may know on whose account this calamity has come upon us.'

Narrator: So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. Then they said to him,

² All scripture citations are from the New Revised Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

Sailors (whole group in unison): 'Tell us why this calamity has come upon us. What is your occupation? Where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?'

Jonah: 'I am a Hebrew, I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.'

Narrator: Then the men were even more afraid, and said to him,

Sailors (whole group in unison): 'What is this that you have done!'

Narrator: For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them so. Then they said to him,

Sailors (whole group in unison): 'What shall we do to you, that the sea may quieten down for us?'

Narrator: The sea was growing more and more tempestuous. He said to them,

Jonah: 'Pick me up and throw me into the sea; then the sea will quieten down for you; for I know it is because of me that this great storm has come upon you.'

Narrator: Nevertheless, the men rowed hard to bring the ship back to land, but they could not, for the sea grew more and more stormy against them. Then they cried out to the LORD,

Sailors (whole group in unison): 'Please, O LORD, we pray, do not let us perish on account of this man's life. Do not make us guilty of innocent blood; for you, O LORD, have done as it pleased you.'

Narrator: So they picked Jonah up and threw him into the sea; and the sea ceased from its raging. Then the men feared the LORD even more, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows. But the LORD provided a large fish to swallow up Jonah; and Jonah was in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights.

Jonah 1:17

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 (NRSV)

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