

Jonah Is Humbled By God

Jonah 4:1-11

MEMORY VERSE

PSALM 103:11

“For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him.”

WHAT YOU WILL NEED:

Several scraps of various colored construction paper, a cup, scissors and markers.

A jump rope.

Egg cartons (enough for 4 – 6 “worm” sections) per child, 2 wiggle eyes per child, pipe cleaners and glue.

ATTENTION GETTER!

Using The Small Things

Sometimes God uses small things to get our attention. In our story today we are going to learn about a time when God used a little worm to get the prophet Jonah’s attention. Let’s look at the small things in our lives to see what lessons God may want to share with us.

You will need several scraps of various colored construction paper, a cup, scissors and markers. Have each child use a cup to trace a circle onto a piece of construction paper. Next have all of the children write their name in their circle. Cut the circle out of the paper and tape or staple each circle onto the wall just having the edges touching. This will make a colorful worm. You can then cut out one circle for the face. If you would like to you can write the scripture reference from Jonah on the finished worm.

LESSON TIME!

God had sent Jonah to preach God's message of love and forgiveness to the great Assyrian city of Nineveh. Assyria, a great but evil empire, was Israel's most dreaded enemy. The Assyrians flaunted their power before God and the world through numerous acts of violence and cruelty. So when Jonah heard God tell him to go to Assyria and call the people to repentance he ran in the opposite direction.

God had His way with Jonah and he obeyed and preached in the streets of Nineveh. No one deserved God's favor less than the people of Nineveh did and Jonah knew this. He hated the Assyrians and he wanted vengeance, but he knew that God would show them mercy and bless them if they repented. He also knew the power of God's message, that even through his weak preaching they would respond and be spared God's judgment.

It is hard to imagine that a person like Jonah who was blessed by God and a recipient of His great mercy, turning against the people of Nineveh who needed the same mercy and forgiveness from God to be saved and blessed. For, as we will see, God is compassionate to anyone who seeks Him. Everyone needs God's grace and mercy in their life. Unfortunately, Jonah did not have the heart of God. Let us see what happens in our lesson today.

JONAH 4:1-4

But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry.

So he prayed to the LORD, and said, "Ah, LORD, was not this what I said when I was still in my country? Therefore I fled previously to Tarshish; for I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm.

"Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live!"

Then the LORD said, "Is it right for you to be angry?"

Jonah's greatest fear came true; the Ninevites repented and received God's mercy. The heathen people of Nineveh believed Jonah's message and turned from their wicked ways and God responded in mercy by canceling His threatened punishment. God Himself said that any nation on which He pronounced judgment would be saved if they repented (Jeremiah 18:7-10). **God is gracious and compassionate to anyone who seeks Him.** He wishes that none should perish, but for all to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). That is the heart of God for everyone.

Unfortunately, Jonah did not have the same heart. The repentance of the people of Nineveh only made Jonah angry so he complained to the Lord about it. Jonah had run from the job of delivering God's message of destruction to Nineveh. Now that God was not going to judge Nineveh he wanted to die. Jonah was quick to forget God's mercy on him when he was in the belly of the fish. He was happy when God saved him but now he is angry that Nineveh was saved.

Jonah would learn a valuable lesson from God. God's forgiveness was not only for Jonah or the people of Israel alone; it extends to all that would repent and believe in God's grace and mercy. **God is gracious and compassionate to anyone who seeks Him.** We need to remember that there are others who need God's grace and mercy as we do. If we have been forgiven then we should be eager to see others saved that they too may receive God's blessings. We need to have the heart of God for others. Would God ever have to question our motives for helping those who need God's grace and mercy? Unfortunately Jonah did.

JONAH 4:5-8

So Jonah went out of the city and sat on the east side of the city. There he made himself a shelter and sat under it in the shade, till he might see what would become of the city.

And the LORD God prepared a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be shade for his head to deliver him from his misery. So Jonah was very grateful for the plant.

But as morning dawned the next day God prepared a worm, and it so damaged the plant that it withered.

And it happened, when the sun arose, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat on Jonah's head, so that he grew faint. Then he wished death for himself, and said, "It is better for me to die than to live."

Wiggle Worm

This game is just to release some energy. Use a jump rope and have one student on each end. Have them wiggle the rope on the floor. Have the other children jump over the rope (worm) without stepping on the worm and squashing it. Keep playing until the children tire of the game.

Jonah was so upset he went out and pouted. Instead of talking to God about his disappointment he left the city to see what would happen in the city. Why he waited to see what would happen to the city is difficult to understand. Perhaps he felt that God would change His mind and destroy the city. In Jonah's eyes the people of Nineveh deserved to die by the hand of God and he was determined to wait until Nineveh was in fact judged.

Are you not glad that God is slow to anger, not willing that any perish? If God had the heart of Jonah we would all be wiped out. Jonah was so quick to forget God's mercy towards him. He deserved death for his rebellion against God yet it was God who delivered him from the belly of a great fish to restore him to ministry. **God is gracious and compassionate to anyone who seeks Him.** When Jonah called out to God to be saved, he found God to be faithful to save him.

God decides to use an object lesson to reveal Jonah's selfishness. He provides a great plant to give the prophet shade that his crude shelter could not provide. By God's miraculous power He causes this plant to overwhelm Jonah's hut with shade to comfort him from the heat of the sun. Delighted with this relief, Jonah though he had been angry and depressed, was now overjoyed. Jonah was extremely happy to have comfort and relief from the heat, yet he had no concern for the people of Nineveh who received relief from judgment.

Early the next day God provided a worm that destroyed the plant that had brought such joy to the prophet. Now that the plant was dead, the following day God provided a scorching east wind that overwhelmed Jonah to become faint, leading him to beg with all his soul to die. The prophet's own shelter was not enough to protect him from the intense heat; death now seemed better than life.

JONAH 4:9-11

Then God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?" And he said, "It is right for me to be angry, even to death!"

But the LORD said, "You have had pity on the plant for which you have not labored, nor made it grow, which came up in a night and perished in a night."

"And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left; and much livestock?"

God asks Jonah a question to expose the selfish ambition of his heart. He wanted Jonah to see the difference between his lack of concern for the spiritual welfare of the Ninevites and his concern for his own physical welfare. Jonah had more compassion over a plant than he had for the people of Nineveh. Jonah's affections were distorted because he cared more for a plant than for human lives.

Undoubtedly most of us have been upset when something we deemed valuable has been broken or damaged, but have we wept over a friend who does not know God? It can be easy for us to pass judgment on Jonah for his selfishness, but we need to examine our own heart to see if we have that same selfishness in us.

Selfishness isn't the only problem Jonah had; he was hoping that God would follow through with His judgment on the people of Nineveh to destroy them. Sometimes we can be quick to pass judgment and destruction upon sinful people whose wickedness seems to demand immediate judgment, but God is more merciful than we think He is. He wants to demonstrate His grace and mercy to them as He devises plans to bring them to Himself. We need to develop the heart of God towards others in showing love and kindness to those in need of His mercy. **God is gracious and compassionate to anyone who seeks Him.**

Looking back through the book of Jonah we see the grace and compassion of God. He spared the sailors when they pleaded for mercy (1:14-15). God saved Jonah when he prayed from the belly of the fish. He also saved the people of Nineveh when they responded to Jonah's preaching. God always answers the prayers

of those who call upon Him. His mercy and grace are there for those who desire Him.

God ends the book of Jonah with a question to ask Jonah why He should not have compassion on all the people of Nineveh. It appears that Jonah did not know what to say. He was confronted about his self-centered values and lack of compassion for those in need of God's help. Hopefully Jonah learned to have a heart for others like God.

As you read through the book of Jonah you can see the full picture of God's love and compassion and realize that no one is beyond redemption. The gospel is for all that will repent and believe. Pray for a heart like God's and look for ways to tell others about His grace and compassion. We can learn from Jonah and pray for God to develop a love in our heart for others, and then seek to obey God by doing whatever and going wherever He leads. Then given the opportunity, we can share that **God is gracious and compassionate to anyone who seeks Him.**

Egg Carton Worm

You will need egg cartons (enough for 4 – 6 “worm” sections) and 2 wiggle eyes per child, pipe cleaners and glue.

Cut your egg carton to make a 4 – 6 section piece (your choice on how long it is based on egg carton availability).

Have the children glue the two wiggle eyes onto one end of the egg carton.

Next have them take the pipe cleaner and cut two pieces for the antennae and then decorate any other way that they might like.

PRAYER

Lead the children in a prayer of commitment to love others and share the gospel with them at every opportunity. We need to have the heart of God concerning others. If there are any children who have not yet responded to the Gospel, give them opportunity to do so.