



SESSION 3 of 4

Jonah

MEETING AIM

To explore how God gives us chances to come back to him.

BIBLE PASSAGE

The book of Jonah

BACKGROUND

The story of Jonah is a well known one, and is often taught from a young age. Today's session looks at the overall message of Jonah. It's a good one to be creative with, as it's such a bizarre story! While having fun with this story, we need to remember that it's a story about the second chances God gives us. He loves us even when we're hard to love, and invites us to turn back to him when we're far from him, or even when we're running away!

5 CIRCLE TIME

Welcome the group to the new session, introducing the theme of Jonah. Provide refreshments, if convenient, and catch up with the group, asking them about their week. Ask the children if they have any stories of times when they tried to get out of doing something they were meant to do!

5 INTRO ACTIVITY

You will need: a large space to run around in
Ask one person to be a big fish. They should run after and tag someone to 'catch' them. Once they've tagged someone, this person has to join hands with the original fish and the fish gets bigger. Then the two run around holding hands and tag another person, who also joins the chain. This carries on until the last person is caught!

Play a few rounds if you have time. The last person to be caught can be the fish in the next round.

10 BIBLE STORY

You will need: equipment to make a den (eg chairs, blankets, garden canes, pegs); cushions; large tent (optional)

Show the children the equipment you have provided and encourage them to create a den-like environment. Put cushions on the floor. Alternatively, put up a tent. Then sit the group inside your den or tent.

It's likely that the group might know the story of Jonah quite well, or bits of it at least. Ask the group to tell the story together, going through the different points. It might be quite helpful to have a children's version of the story and to familiarise yourself with the book of Jonah. In this way you can fill in the gaps as the story goes along, adding key points, such as God wanting Jonah to give a message of repentance and a second chance to the people of Nineveh, and Jonah not wanting to because he didn't think they deserved it!

5 CHATTING TOGETHER

The story of Jonah is one that many children are taught, but use this time to try to understand it at a deeper level. What does the story teach us and what can we learn from it today? Having gone through the story, use this time to unpack some of its meaning. Use these questions to chat about the story together:

- Why did Jonah run away to Tarshish?
- Can you relate to that feeling of wanting to run away?
- What do you think God wanted the people of Nineveh to know?
- Why do you think these people were so important to God?
- What kind of things do you think they needed to hear?
- Do you think they wanted to hear what Jonah had to say?
- What difference did it make to them that God sent Jonah with his message?
- Who do you think God wants to send messengers to today?

10 CREATIVE RESPONSE

You will need: Fimo or air-drying clay
Jonah's job was to warn the people of Nineveh that disaster was coming, but also to encourage them to turn back to God, who would help them. Sometimes we need to remember that when we've turned away from him, or when we feel scared, God is big enough to help us and compassionate to give us a second chance. There was a second chance for the people of Nineveh and a second chance for Jonah. He got thrown overboard, but God sent a fish to swallow and rescue him.

Interestingly, the fish symbol has been used to represent Christianity for centuries, right from the time of the early Christians. It came from the Greek word for fish: *ichthys*. Early Christians made an acrostic from this word: **I**esous **C**hristos **T**heou **I**os **S**oter, which means 'Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour'. The fish was the unexpected saviour

for Jonah, and Jesus is still our saviour today. As a creative response, you can make fish symbols to take away and remember that God always gives us second chances, even when we feel far away from him.

Using your Fimo or clay, invite each group member to make a simple fish symbol that can be hung somewhere as a prompt for prayer or reflection. As you work, continue your conversations about the story.

5 PRAYER

You will need: paper; pens; instructions to make an origami boat (search online for a suitable method)

Before the session, make a prototype boat using your chosen instructions. Jonah tried to run away from God's instructions to go to Nineveh and went to Tarshish on a boat instead. Because of this, God sent a storm to rock the boat, which ended when Jonah was thrown overboard!

Give each child a piece of paper and a pen (coloured or patterned paper will make the activity more fun and visual).

Ask each of the children to write a prayer in response to what you've talked about today. It might be a prayer of thanks to God for being compassionate and giving us second chances to come back to him. Or it might be a prayer that asks God to help us be more compassionate to others and give them second chances!

Once they've written their prayers, show them your sample boat and go through the origami steps of folding their prayers up into boats. To finish, ask the group to hold their boats out and close their eyes while you say a concluding prayer.

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