

PPT Title

## Jonah Runs from God

**Main Point:** God pursues people because He loves them.

**Key Verse:** *I can never escape from Your Spirit! I can never get away from Your presence!* - Psalm 139:7 NLT

**Props:** A sign with a large arrow on it, 3 straws - one shorter than the other two.  
**Optional prop:** A "Chinese finger trap"

### BACKGROUND/REVIEW

**Say:** We have studied many prophets in the Old Testament. **Ask:** Who can name one of the prophets we've studied? *Elijah, Elisha, Daniel* **Say:** A prophet is a person that is chosen by God to be His messenger. God told His prophets about important events that were going to happen, ahead of time. The prophets then told God's message to everyone who would listen. Sometimes the messages were great blessings, and sometimes they were serious warnings. God's messages were always intended to bring people back to Himself. If you brought your Bible today, hold it up high in the air. Awesome! I love to see you with your Bible. Very often the messages that God sent through His prophets were written down, and those words make up a big part of your Bible. Okay, everyone turn in your Bibles to the book of Jonah. (You may want to instruct the kids that Jonah is a really short book, near the end of the Old Testament. It's about 20 pages before the New Testament.)

**Say:** It's important to note that the people that God chose to be prophets did not earn their position. They were not super important or super good. God chose them by His grace. Some were more devoted to God than others. Today we'll learn about a prophet who sinned greatly against the Lord.

### JONAH RUNS AWAY FROM GOD (Jonah 1:1-3)



**Say:** There was a prophet named Jonah who lived in Israel. **Refer to map.** At this time, the people of Israel were not following the Lord (Hosea 4, Amos 5:6). Prophets had begged them to repent of their sin and turn back to God, but they would not (Hosea 7:10, Amos 4). So the Lord called on the prophet Jonah to go to a people who were not Israelites. These people lived in a big, famous city called Nineveh, in Assyria (which is modern day Iraq). **Refer to map.** Nineveh was full of sin. The people of Nineveh were devoted to worshipping false gods. In fact, there was a huge wall around the whole city. The wall had 15 gates, and each gate was named after a different god. There was even a temple built to the goddess Ishtar. The Ninevites didn't know about the one true God. They didn't understand His holiness and that He forgives those who put their trust in Him.

**Say:** *A message from the Lord came to Jonah. He was the son of Amittai. The Lord said, "Go to the great (big) city of Nineveh. Preach against it. The sins of its people have come to My attention." But Jonah ran away from the Lord. He headed for Tarshish. So he went down to the port of Joppa. There he found a ship that was going to Tarshish. He paid the fare and went on board. Then he sailed for Tarshish. He was running away*

from the Lord. - Jonah 1:1-2



**Say:** Jonah started in Israel. Refer to map. God told him to go to Nineveh. But Jonah didn't want to go there. So he went to the port in Joppa, hopped on a boat, and headed to Tarshish. **Teacher:** Hold up your arrow sign pointing to your left. **Say:** God clearly said to go this way. But Jonah decided (clearly turn the sign upside down so the arrow points the opposite way) he wanted to go that way! In fact, the boat that Jonah chose to get on was heading nearly 2,000 miles away from where God had instructed him to go.

**Ask:** Why do you think Jonah tried to run away from God? Listen for answers. **Say:** We might think that Jonah was afraid of the sinful people in Nineveh. But that wasn't the case at all. The reason is actually quite shocking, coming from a prophet of God. The Bible tells us that Jonah knew how wonderfully forgiving God is. He knew that when the people of Nineveh heard the good news that God loved them and wanted them to turn from their sin and follow Him, they just might do it! Then God would certainly forgive them. Jonah simply did not want God to forgive the Ninevites! (Jonah 4:2) Perhaps the Ninevites had been enemies with the Israelites so long that Jonah couldn't see past his dislike for them. Or maybe, Jonah feared that if these godless people turned to God, then the Israelites - who were God's chosen people - would look even worse because they would not turn toward God even though they had EVERY opportunity to do so. Whatever the reason, Jonah decided that *he* knew better than God. **This was SIN.** Jonah left town, and he left the Ninevites in their sins.

**Application:** Jonah did not understand that *his* sin was no different from the sin of the Ninevites (James 2:10). Jonah decided that the Ninevites didn't **deserve** to have the opportunity to turn from their sin. **Ask:** Do any of us **deserve** the opportunity to receive God's forgiveness? *No.* We each have the free choice to sin or not to sin, and every one of us has chosen to sin (Psalm 53:3). We **deserve** to be punished and separated from God forever (Romans 6:23). It is only by God's grace that He sent His Son to die for us and give us the opportunity to put our trust in Him (Romans 8:32). We do not **deserve** God's forgiveness. It is not what WE have done, but what God has done FOR US. He saves us by His grace! When we realize how icky our own sin is to God, and how amazing His free gift of forgiveness and new life is, we will be excited to share it with EVERYONE.



### **GOD PURSUES JONAH** (Jonah 1:4-16)

**Say:** Jonah may have run away from Nineveh, but he could never run away from God. Jonah was on a ship full of professional sailors and fishermen. They were not followers of the one true God.

*The Lord sent a strong wind over the Mediterranean Sea. A wild storm came up. It was so wild that the ship was in danger of breaking apart. All of the sailors were afraid. Each one cried out to his own god for help. They threw the ship's contents into the sea. They were trying to make the ship lighter.*

*But Jonah had gone below deck. There he lay down and fell into a deep sleep. The captain went down to him and said, "How can you sleep? Get up and call out to your god for help! Maybe he'll pay attention to what's happening to us. Then we won't die."*  
- Jonah 1:4-6

**Say:** These men made their living by sailing back and forth across the ocean. They had been through some terrible storms, but this storm was one of the worst they had ever seen. The waves were fierce. The boat would soar up on a wave, then come crashing down again. Boards were coming loose, and water was pouring in. The sailors threw everything they could over the side to make the boat lighter so they wouldn't sink. The rugged sailors were afraid for their lives. These men worshipped false gods, and now they were calling out to those false gods for help. Of course, their gods could

do nothing for them (Jeremiah 16:19). The non-believing sea captain had to wake up Jonah and challenge him to pray to his God! But Jonah did NOT repent, or even pray to the Lord. He remained silent.

The sailors cast lots to see whose sin caused for the terrible storm. This was something like "drawing straws." **Teacher:** call up 3 volunteers. Hold the straws in one of your hands. Hide the ends of the straws, so they all appear to be the same length. Have each volunteer chose a straw, and then hold them up for the group to see. **Say:** We might say, "Jonah drew the short straw." Thank your volunteers.

**Say:** God made it clear that Jonah was the problem. Urgently, the soldiers asked Jonah who he was, where he came from, and what in the world he did to make his God so angry. Jonah told them that he was an Israelite who worshiped the God of heaven who made the sea and the land. He also told him that he was running away from the Lord.

*The sea was getting rougher and rougher. So they asked him, "What should we do to you to make the sea calm down?"*

*"Pick me up and throw me into the sea," he replied. "Then it will become calm. I know it's my fault that this terrible storm has come on you."*

*Instead of doing what he said, the men did their best to row back to land. But they couldn't. The sea got even rougher than before.*

*Then they cried out to the Lord. They prayed, "Lord, please don't let us die for taking this man's life. After all, he might not be guilty of doing anything wrong. So don't hold us accountable for killing him. Lord, You always do what You want to." Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard. And the stormy sea became calm.*

*When the men saw what had happened, they began to have great respect for the Lord. They offered a sacrifice to Him. And they made promises to Him. - Jonah 1:11-16*

**Say:** The only hope for the sailors was to throw Jonah off their boat. This seemed like an awful choice to the men; they couldn't make themselves throw a man overboard. They tried with all their might to row back to land, but they couldn't do it. They were powerless against the will of God. Remember, Jonah spoke God's message, and God's message was that Jonah had to go into the sea! The sailors finally realized that they could not save themselves; they had to trust God's plan. So, they prayed to Jonah's God. They asked forgiveness for what they were about to do, and then over he went. Splash!

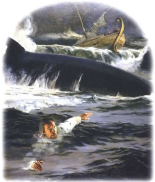
Instantly, the sea was silent. Can you imagine the look on the sailor's faces as they sat on the perfectly smooth sea in their severely battered boat? These men knew who the real God was now! They began praising God and offered a sacrifice to Him. Not only were the sailors saved physically, but they were also saved spiritually (Romans 4:5).

### **GOD'S RESCUE PLAN FOR JONAH** (Jonah 1:17)

**Say:** Throwing Jonah overboard was God's rescue plan for the sailors. God also had a rescue plan for Jonah.

*The Lord sent a huge fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was inside the fish for three days and three nights. - Jonah 1:17*

As Jonah sank deep into the blackness of the sea, he was sure he would die there. He believed he had finally outrun God. But the Bible says, "How can I get away from Your Spirit? Where can I go to escape from You? If I go up to the heavens, You are there. If I lie down in the deepest parts of the earth, You are also there." (Psalm 139:7-8)



There was no depth that Jonah could sink to that was out of God's reach. God sent a huge fish to swallow Jonah. We often think of this as a whale, but the original word used can mean any really big fish. We all want to know more about this fish, but the Bible doesn't say much about it. That's because the fish is not the main point of the story - Jonah and his relationship with God is!

Here's what we do know: The fish swallowed Jonah whole. Actually, fish almost always swallow their food whole. Most fish have some form of teeth, but they don't use them to chew like we do. They use their teeth to catch and hold their prey until they can swallow it whole. And even though the belly of a fish must have been a really STINKY place to be, God protected Jonah there. God allowed enough air for Jonah to breathe for three days.

### **JONAH'S PRAYER** (Jonah 2)

While Jonah was inside the great big fish, he prayed to the Lord (Jonah 2:1).

*I had almost drowned in the waves. The deep waters were all around me. Seaweed was wrapped around my head. I sank down to the bottom of the mountains. I thought I had died and gone down into the grave forever. But You brought my life up from the very edge of the pit. You are the Lord my God. When my life was nearly over, I remembered You, Lord. My prayer rose up to You. It reached You in Your holy temple in heaven. - Jonah 2:5-7*

**Note to Teacher:** In some Bible translations, verse 2:9 says, "What I have vowed I will make good." This does not refer to going to Nineveh, but making a sacrifice to the Lord. Jonah could not very well make a sacrifice while detained in the fish's stomach, so he vowed he would do it once he was released. If Jonah had repented and was confirming a vow to go to Nineveh, God would not have had to repeat His command to Jonah in verses 3:1-2.

This was a beautiful prayer, but it was not a prayer of repentance. Jonah was very thankful that God had saved him, but Jonah had not changed his mind about his sin. He did not even mention his running from God and turning his back on the people of Nineveh. Jonah promised to offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving to the Lord once he was out of the SMELLY belly of the great big fish. Even from the depths of the ocean, God heard Jonah's prayer (Jonah 2:7).

*The Lord gave the fish a command. And it spit Jonah up onto dry land. - Jonah 2:10*

Notice that the fish obeyed God's command to spit Jonah out. This wild animal obeyed God, while God's prophet stubbornly disobeyed. So there sat Jonah, smelling rather fishy, probably right back on the same shore where he started out.



**Say:** You know, when Jonah ran away from God, God could have let him go. But God went after Jonah. Why would God go to such great lengths to pursue Jonah? God didn't **need** Jonah to accomplish His plan. He could have used someone else. But God chose Jonah by His grace. It was an honor and a blessing to be chosen by God to preach truth to the huge city of Nineveh (Romans 10:14-16). As a believer, there is no greater joy than to be a part of someone coming to know and follow the Lord. And by His grace, God went after Jonah to give him another chance to obey. Next week we will continue our story and see what Jonah chose to do next.

**Application:** God cares about all people. He pursues lost people so they will come to know Him, and He pursues believers to be a part of His plan (Ephesians 1:11-14). He has a wonderful plan for each of you. God's will is always the best plan for your life. Let me be very honest. God doesn't **need** your help to fulfill His plan (Psalm 33:11). He invites you into His work because He wants to bless you! You don't deserve this blessing. He gives it by His grace.

I believe that the book of Jonah is given to us so that we can learn a very important lesson. You can run away from God's commands as Jonah did, but just like Jonah, things will NOT go well for you. You think you will be free from what you don't want to do, but God pursues because He knows what is best for you. When you run from God, you will find your life in chaos and you will never have peace. Just the opposite, there is peace, joy, and blessing when you submit to God and obey His commands.



**Optional Illustration:** Running from God is sort of like using a "Chinese finger trap."

**Teacher:** place fingers in trap and pull fingers outward, causing the trap to contract. The harder you pull away, seeking freedom, the more you are caught in the trap. When you finally give in (push fingers together) you find true freedom. God pursues you because of His overwhelming love for you.

**PPT Verse**

**Key Verse:** *I can never escape from Your Spirit! I can never get away from Your presence!* - Psalm 139:7 NLT

**PPT Main Point**

**Main Point:** God pursues people because He loves them.

**Note to Teacher:** We flee, but God pursues. While we are on the lam, we think we are free. But all the while life is unraveling. Here is the real problem in all our running. When we refuse to be found by our Creator, we are in exile from who we were made to be. We strive to make a home in a foreign land, and it never quite works. But the longer we stay away, the less memory of our true homeland we have. The longer we run, the greater the chaos grows. As Francis Thompson wrote in *The Hound of Heaven*, "all things betray us, when we have betrayed our God."  
- Gerrit Scott Dawson, *Called by a New Name*