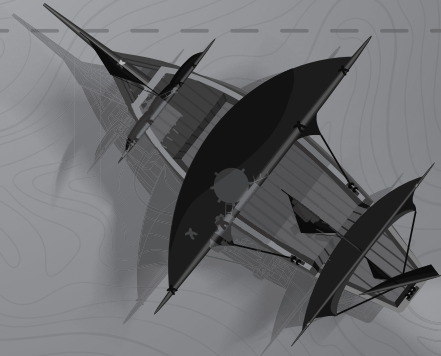


WOWWAGE



2024 LIFE GROUP LEADER'S GUIDE

VOYAGE

OVERVIEW

LESSON 1: LOST

MAIN POINT

- When we run from God, we make a shipwreck of our lives.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

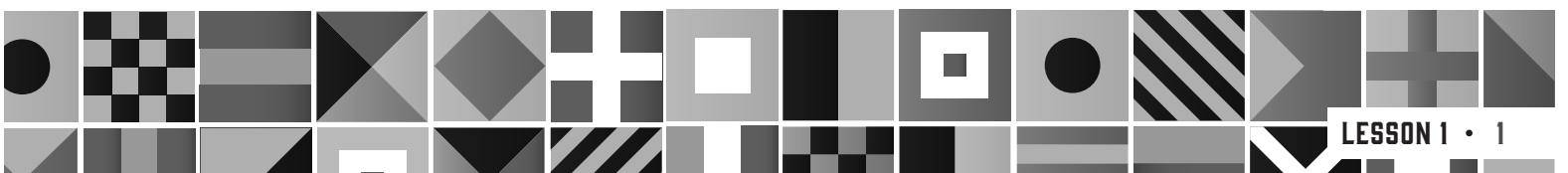
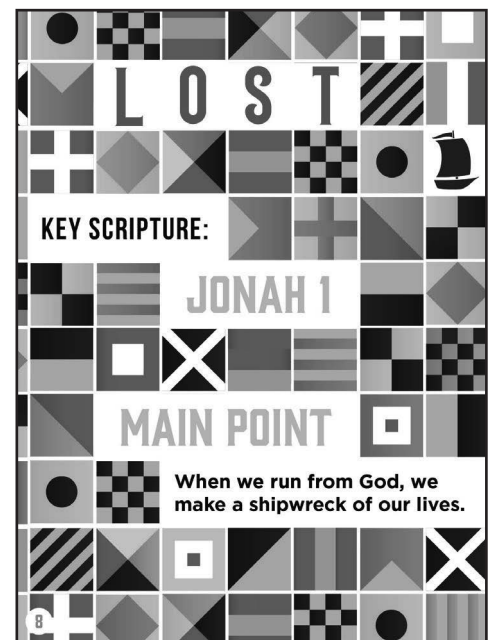
- Jonah 1

PREP

- Read Jonah 1
- Spend time praying for each of your kids by name.
- Review the “Jonah & Maps App”
- Review the “Memory Verse Decoding with Nautical Flags”

MEMORY VERSE

- “But God proves his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” - Romans 5:8



VOYAGE

LESSON 1: LOST

Say: **Welcome to our Life Group!** I am so excited you are all here! **Not only are we going to be competing for the Spirit Stick together with our Rec squad** *(give your squad a shoutout!),* **we will also meet together every day for Life Group Bible Study.**

Say: **I want to know—what are you most excited for this week at camp?** *(Allow time for responses, then share what you're most excited for.)*

Say: **During our Life Group time, we're going to be learning from stories in the Bible. The Bible is God's true Word. It is from God, about God, and it tells us everything that we need to know in order to know the God of the universe. This year, every story we read will come from only one book of the Bible.**

Say: **In fact, just by coming to Life Group Bible Study, you will read through an entire book of the Bible this week! That's an amazing accomplishment! So be sure to bring your Bible and Bible study booklet with you every day! We are going to read the Bible to learn more about God and His love for us.**

Say: **Now, I haven't even told you what book of the Bible we are going to study yet! Can you guess what it is? Here's a clue: Our theme this week is Voyage. Can you think of any stories in the Bible that involve a voyage or journey of any kind?** *(Allow responses)*

Say: **Yes - it's Jonah. And through the book of Jonah, and the story of his life, we are going to learn about our lives and about the God who cares about every single detail of our lives. God has a grand adventure in store for each of us.**

Say: **We were lost and separated from God because of our sin. But through Jesus, God made it so that there was always a way back to Him. In our time studying Jonah, we will set sail to discover what it means to be lost and what it means to be found. And just like Jonah, we will learn what it means to embark on a voyage to find who God made you to be.**



VOYAGE

KICKOFF

Say: **Let's find the book of Jonah. Does anyone know where this book is found in the Bible? Is it in the Old Testament or New Testament?** *[Give kids time to answer.]* **Right! It's in the Old Testament. Now, is it toward the beginning, near Genesis, or toward the end, near Malachi?** *[Give kids time to answer.]* **Toward the end is right! It's in the group of 12 shorter books called the Minor Prophets.**

Say: **So let's turn to Jonah 1. Your booklet has colored flags all around it and a map on it. You're going to need to pay attention to that map in a minute, so make sure you have it in front of you.** *[Give kids time to get there in their Bibles and booklets.]*

Say: **Now before we read, let's learn about one of our main characters, Jonah. He is the author and the main human character in the story. Who was Jonah? That's a big question. So let's ask some little questions to fill in the answer. What country was Jonah from?** *[Give kids time to answer.]*

Say: **He's from Israel, which is the country that makes up God's people in the Old Testament. He worshiped the Lord, the God of Israel. And what was Jonah's job?** *[Give kids time to answer.]*

Say: **He was a prophet of God. That means his job was to listen to God and tell the people what God says. Now usually, what country do you think the prophets in the Bible were talking to?** *[Give kids time to answer.]*

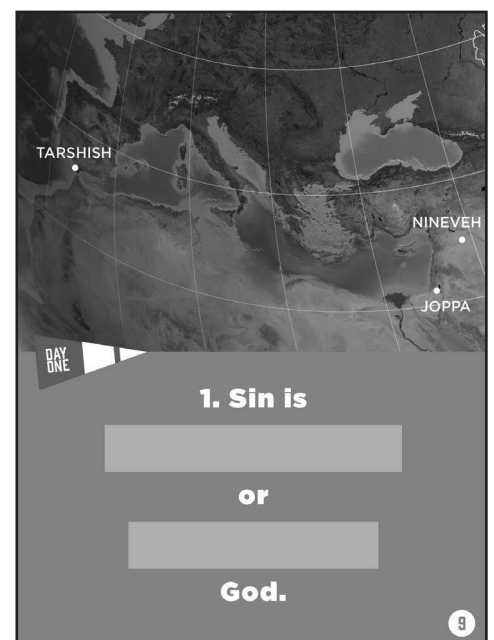
Say: **That's right, Israel! God usually had messages for His own people that He spoke through the prophets. But that's where this story is a little different! OK, that's enough backstory. By now, everyone should have found Jonah in their Bible and the right page in their booklet. So now, it's time to read.**

 Read aloud Jonah 1:1-3.

ACTIVITY: Jonah in Our Map App

Say: **Now we have to figure out where we are for this to make sense. Jonah didn't have this ability back in his day, but we are going to do work on our map to help us understand what's happening. Find the map in your booklet on page 9.**

Say: **On this map, I need you to do a few things. First, I want**



VOYAGE

you to draw a dotted line from where Jonah was in Joppa to where God called him to go, which was Nineveh. *[Give kids time to mark their maps.]*

Say: **Second, I want you to draw a line of where Jonah actually tried to go. Now—spoiler alert—Jonah doesn't actually make it all the way to Tarshish, so you can stop your line somewhere in the sea, with an arrow at the end of it.** *[Give kids time to mark their maps.]*

Say: **So those locations matter because they are teaching us something about Jonah's actions. In particular, they show us how much Jonah sinned against God.**

Say: **Here are two things that we need to see: 1.) God gave very clear commands to Jonah. And what were those commands?** *[Give kids time to answer.]*

Say: **God told Jonah to go to Nineveh, which was about a 500-mile journey over land to the East. But what did Jonah do?** *[Give kids time to answer.]* **Jonah rebelled against God's commands. He went in the exact opposite direction. Instead of getting on a camel or starting to walk to Nineveh, Jonah got on a boat and went in the opposite direction.**

Say: **But did you notice that it wasn't just that Jonah tried to go to the wrong place, Jonah tried to go away from God's presence (*Jonah 1:3*). This is what the Bible calls sin. What is sin?**

Say: **Look at your booklet. There are some sentences with some blanks. So get your pen ready to fill in the blanks as I talk.**

Say: **Sin is REJECTING or IGNORING God. The Bible teaches us that sin is not just something small that we do sometimes that causes problems in our lives. Sin is actions, attitudes, words, or thoughts that do not please God. God created everything, including us. He created us to know and love Him. But when sin entered the world, the first humans in the world (Adam and Eve) chose to reject God and ignore what He said would happen if they did that resulted in separation from God and death. But we need to understand that what Adam and Eve did—rejecting or ignoring God—was also what Jonah did in this story.**

Say: **You see that white and red flag in your booklet? Let's fill it out. On the white side, write down the ways that Jonah was rejecting or ignoring God in this story.** *[Lead kids to talk about their answers, and encourage them to say these things in their own words. Talk through the answers with the kids as they write.]*

Say: **But guess what? Jonah is not the only sinner we know. Do you guys know any other sinners? Do you know anyone else who rejects or ignores God? Do you know anyone else**



VOYAGE

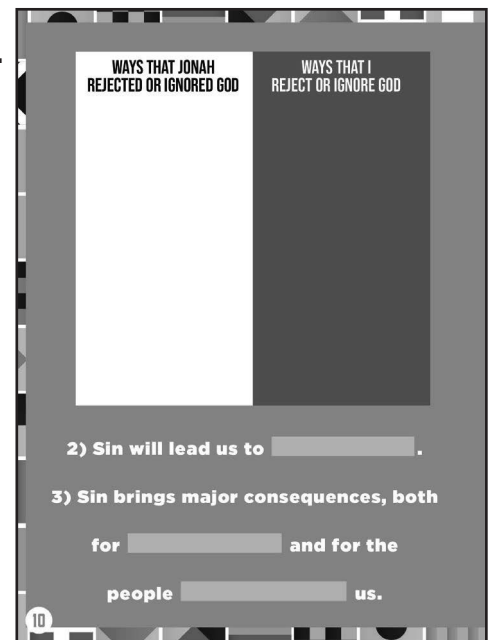
who chooses not to listen to God, but instead chooses to do whatever they want? *[Pause for the kids to think.]*


Say: **There is one sinner that you should be thinking the most about right now. You know this person really, REALLY well. Any guesses who it is? *[Pause for the kids to think.]* It's you! You and me—we are sinners. We are just like Jonah. We do the same sorts of things all the time.**

Say: **In the same way that we listed the ways that Jonah rejects and ignores God, we need to do the same thing for our lives. Let's write out some of the ways we reject or ignore God on the red flags in your booklets. *[Provide examples of ways we reject or ignore God such as lying, disobeying parents, being unkind, acting pridefully, and so forth.]***

Say: **Our sin leads to problems. For example, if we disobey our parents, we might get a time out or a phone taken away. Those are called consequences. Sin may bring things we want in the short term, but almost always creates hurt and broken relationships in the long term. In fact, sin results in broken fellowship with God.**

Say: **Some consequences are instant, but some take more time. The main point of our Bible study today is that when we run from God and sin, we make a shipwreck of our lives. There are major consequences for our actions and choices. And I want you to see exactly how that happens in Jonah's story. So here's what I am going to do. I am going to read Jonah 1:4-16. While I read, I want you to close your eyes and try to see all of this happening in your imagination. Visualize what is happening on the ship, picture the characters in the story and their actions.**



 Read aloud Jonah 1:4-16. *(Read with excitement and energy. Your goal is to make the kids feel like they are a part of the story.)*

Say: **Remember what we said about sin and consequences? Sin brings negative consequences. We've got two more sentences that we need to fill in. Let's look at the next set of fill-in-the blank sentences.**

Say: **Let's get ready to write! Sin may feel good or right when we are in the moment, but it usually leads us to UNHAPPINESS. Remember, Jonah was sinning by running away from God. At first, after Jonah ran away, do you remember what he was doing on the boat? It's in verse 5. *[Give kids time to answer.]***



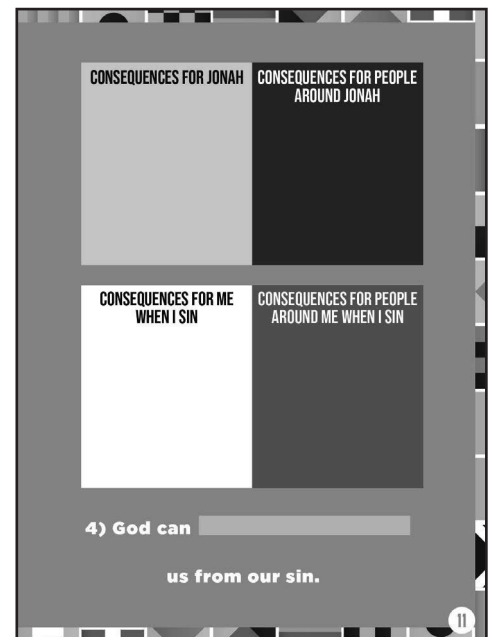
VOYAGE

Say: **He was sleeping! I don't know about you guys, but I am pretty happy when I am taking a nap. Soon after Jonah realizes that his sin caused a giant storm on the sea, he's not so happy anymore.**

Say: **Now let's fill in the last sentence. Sin brings major consequences, both for us and for the people AROUND us. Did you notice all the consequences for Jonah affected not only Jonah but all the people on the ship with Jonah? Let's use that next flag in our booklet to write those consequences down. On the yellow side, let's write down the consequences that Jonah experienced.** *[Guide kids to talk about their answers, and encourage them to say things in their own words. Talk through the answers with the kids as they write.]*

Say: **Now let's do the other side. What were some of the consequences that the people around Jonah experienced due to Jonah's sin?** *[Direct kids to talk about their answers out loud, and encourage them to say things in their own words. Talk through the answers with the kids as they write.]*

Say: **Now, just like we did earlier. We have to think not just about Jonah's sin and consequences, but also the sins we commit and the consequences for those sins. In your booklet, there is space for you to write about yourself. Jonah's sin and consequences lead to us thinking about our own sins and consequences in our lives.** *[Instruct kids to work silently. Provide example sins such as grounding, getting something taken away, losing privileges. For consequences, consider prompts like the whole family losing an opportunity for something special, or a friend being hurt by something you said or did. Encourage kids to pause and write their own answers.]*



Say: **Let me tell you something—I don't like to think about my sin and consequences. It's not very fun. But it is important to think about our sins' consequences so that we learn to turn away from the sin that caused them. God does not send consequences in our lives because He is mean, but because He cares about us.**

Leader note: "God does not send consequences in our lives because He is mean, but because He cares about us." This statement is so important. Oftentimes, talking about sin can lead kids to feel shame, but it's God's kindness that leads us to repentance of sin. Consider pausing and allowing kids to ask questions about God's kindness.

Say: **God wants to save us from the things that will shipwreck our lives. Remember that**



VOYAGE

when we run from God, we sin and we make a shipwreck of our lives. Sin brought a lot of really bad things into Jonah's life, as well as the lives of those around him. And that is exactly what will happen to us if we don't turn around and run back to God.

Say: **Even in the story of Jonah, there is a picture of God's grace. Because when God looks at sinners, He looks at them with mercy. When God sees that we have made a shipwreck of our lives, God comes to the rescue. So let's fill in the blank of our last sentence. Find number 4, and fill in the blank. God can RESCUE us from our sin.**

 Read aloud Jonah 1:17.

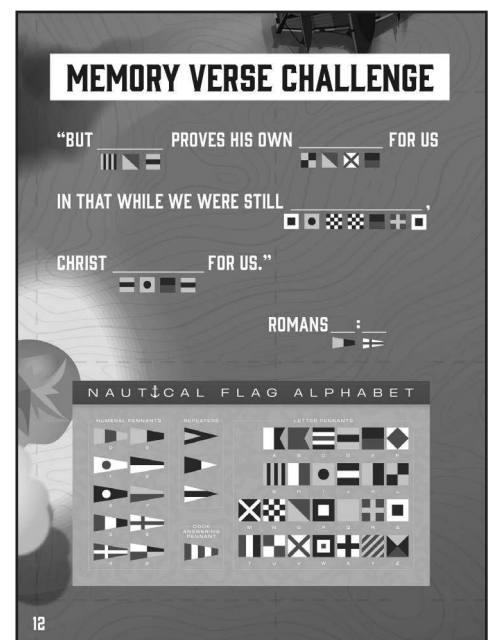
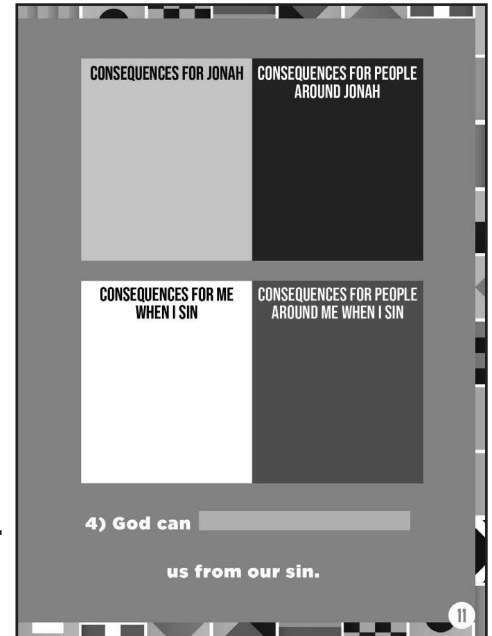
Say: **So how does God rescue Jonah? In a very surprising way! With a big ol' fish! Jonah's sin had gotten his ship caught in a storm, and then it got him thrown overboard into the raging sea. But God looked on Jonah with mercy, and He commanded a great big fish to come and rescue Jonah from drowning.**

Say: **We're coming to the end of our Bible study, and the end of Jonah 1. But the way the story ends is super important because it's actually the whole reason why we're here at camp. We are here because we want to make sure every single kid hears about what God has done to rescue us from our sin. For Jonah, God sent a great fish. But for us, God sent His only Son.**

Say: **I want to read one last verse of the Bible—it's actually our memory verse. But I want you to notice how this verse is true for Jonah's rescue, and it's also true for us who need to be rescued from our sins. The verse is Romans 5:8, "But God proves his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."**

Say: **For Jonah, while he was still a sinner, running from God and tossed into the sea, God sent a rescue for him. And for us, while we were still sinners, God sent a rescue for us when He sent Jesus to die on the cross for our sins. We are going to spend all week thinking about what that means.**

Say: **Let's pray!**



VOYAGE

OVERVIEW

LESSON 2: FOUND

MAIN POINT

- When we turn to Christ as our Savior, we are rescued from death and given new life.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

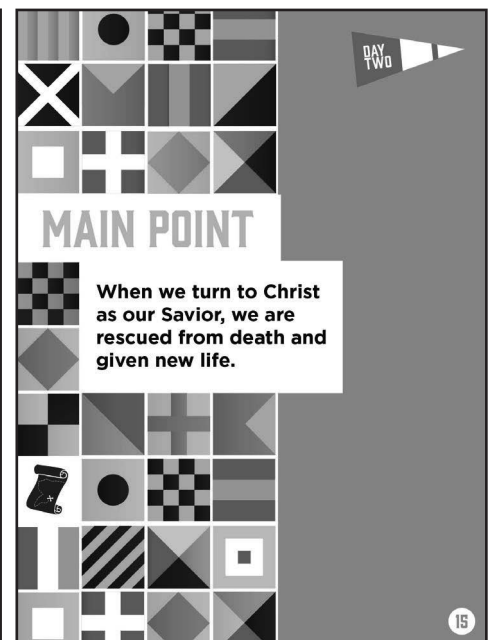
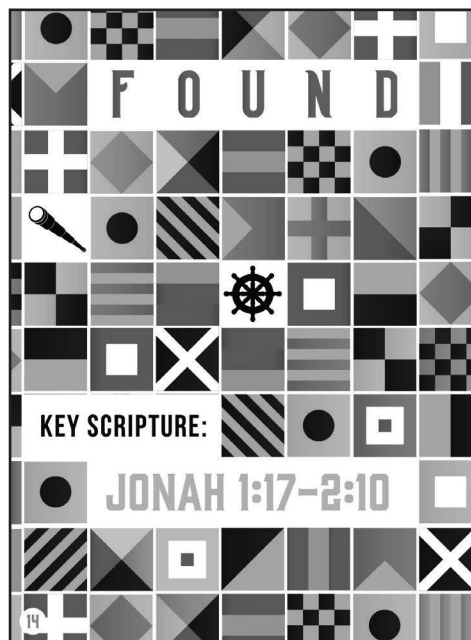
- Jonah 1:17–2:10
- Romans 3:23; 6:23; 5:8; 10:9 (otherwise known as the Romans Road)
- Matthew 12:40

PREP

- Read Jonah 1:17–2:10; Romans 3:23; 6:23; 5:8; 10:9 Matthew 12:40.
- Review the “Once Upon a Time, One Word at a Time” Activity.
- Review the “Doodling the Connections” Activity.
- Review the “Write Your Own Prayer of Praise” Activity.

MEMORY VERSE

- “He has rescued us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son he loves. In him we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” - Colossians 1:13-14



VOYAGE

KICKOFF

ACTIVITY: Once Upon a Time, One Word at a Time

Say: **To get us started today, we're going to make up a story. And we are all going to come up with the story together—one word at a time. So here's how it works. We will get in a circle. Then I will start the story each time with this phrase, "Once upon a time, there was a ..." and then I'll stop. From there, you all have to take it over. Each person has to add one word—and only one word—to keep the story going. So you have to listen to the person in front of you and follow after them, adding something to the story. Our story is going to be about some sort of rescue. But we need characters, we need something they need to be rescued from, and we need the story of their rescue. As you all tell the story, I may jump in from time to time to give the plot some new elements or to help us wrap up the story.**

[As you listen, jump in and add something like: "Then, all of a sudden, a giant panda bear escaped from the local zoo" or "Then, all of a sudden, everyone's clothes turned into helium balloons and they all began to float away into the sky." Insert something fun or crazy into the story as the kids work.]

Say: **Before we get going, there are two rules: Rule 1, no one in this room can be a character in the story. We are going to leave ourselves and friends out of it. Rule 2, no inappropriate words, bad words, and no bathroom humor. Everyone, got it? OK, let's get started. "Once upon a time, there was a ..." [Pass off the story and see how it goes! Cut off the story with a, "Then they all lived happily ever after," if necessary.]**

Say: **That was an interesting story to say the least! Great job, everyone. Now, the reason we started that way today is because that's right where our story left off—with a bit of a cliff-hanger yesterday. Let's recall a little bit about where the story left off. Turn in your Bibles to the book of Jonah.**

Say: **Remember, Jonah was running from God. God told him to do something that he didn't want to do. So Jonah disobeyed and bought a ticket on a boat going the opposite direction. But when Jonah sinned and ran from God, he made a shipwreck of his life. Literally, the ship he was in almost tore apart in the storm that God sent. After realizing what was happening, the sailors throw Jonah overboard into the raging sea. Then all of a sudden, God had a rescue plan. Let me read that one verse.**

 Read aloud Jonah 1:17.

Say: **Jonah was a sinner, running away from God. But even while he was in his sin, God sent a rescuer for Jonah—a big fish! But before we go any further, let's read Jonah 2:10.**



VOYAGE

 Read aloud Jonah 2:10.

Say: So to recap: God sent a fish to swallow Jonah and give him a three-day and three-night cruise back to Israel. After that time period, God caused the fish to have an upset stomach, and Jonah got vomited onto dry land.

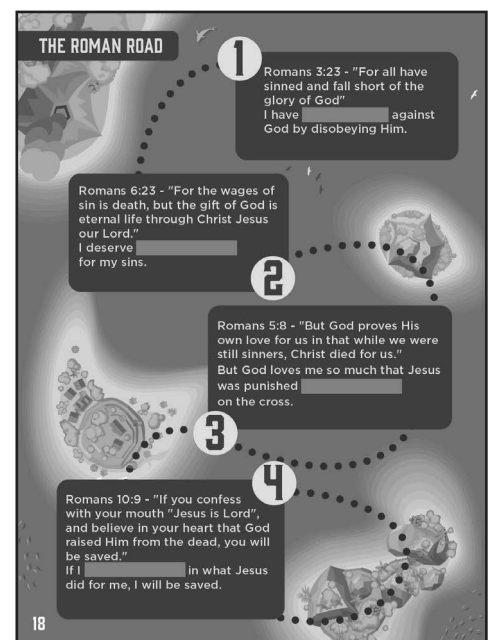
Say: Did you know that when we read that story about a big fish, we are actually supposed to think about Jesus? A big fish with a human being in its belly is supposed to make us think of Jesus. Now, you might be thinking, “How?” How is a fish supposed to make us think of Jesus? Well, don’t just take my word for it.

Say: Turn in your Bible to Matthew 12:40. Matthew is in the New Testament, which means it’s in the time of Jesus. Matthew is a Gospel, which means the whole book is about Jesus’ life and teaching. This verse, Matthew 12:40, is Jesus telling us this part of Jonah’s story. Jesus says, “For as Jonah was in the belly of the huge fish three days and three nights, so the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights.”

Say: So what is the story of Jonah being rescued in the belly of the fish pointing us to? It points to how JESUS rescued us. And how did Jesus rescue us? By dying, being buried for three days in the heart of the earth, and then by being raised from the dead. Jonah was vomited out of the fish and that pointed us to Jesus coming out of the tomb! Isn’t the Bible amazing!? Isn’t God amazing!? God uses this story about a sinful man and a big ol’ fish to teach us more about Jesus and how we can trust in Him to save us from our sins! Jonah and fish are meant to teach us about Jesus and the gospel!

Say: Now, you’ve probably heard that word gospel before. It means “good news.” Just like Jonah’s rescue was good news for him, the Bible has even greater news of rescue for us. Our Rescuer is Jesus and the good news is what He has done. The Bible has even greater good news of rescue for all of us. And it’s all about Jesus and what He has done for us.

Say: So we need to look at a few more Bible verses before we eventually go back to Jonah 2. Look at your booklet at page 18. On that page, you are going to see four verses from the New Testament book of Romans, written by a man named Paul. Paul was a sinner that was saved by Jesus. Then he spent the rest of his life telling people about what Jesus did for sinners. In your booklet you have four verses from the book of



THE ROMAN ROAD

- 1** Romans 3:23 - "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" I have _____ against God by disobeying Him.
- 2** Romans 6:23 - "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord." I deserve _____ for my sins.
- 3** Romans 5:8 - "But God proves His own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." But God loves me so much that Jesus was punished _____ on the cross.
- 4** Romans 10:9 - "If you confess with your mouth 'Jesus is Lord', and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." If I _____ in what Jesus did for me, I will be saved.

18

VOYAGE

Romans that will help explain the good news, and reveal the truths that all people need to know about Jesus.

Say: **The first stop is at Romans 3:23.** It says, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” This verse is saying that we have all—from Adam and Eve to Jonah to all of us in this room—sinned against God. We have rejected God, ignored God, and disobeyed God. Because sin is the biggest problem in our lives, we need to be rescued. The first thing that has to happen for us to be rescued is for us to admit that we have sinned and that we need to be rescued. Now, fill in the blank of the verse in your booklet. You may have already guessed what word needs to go in that blank, but here it is: “I have SINNED against God by disobeying Him.” Just like Jonah did, we have all disobeyed God in countless ways.

Say: **Which moves us on to stop 2 on the Romans Road. This is Romans 6:23. Does anyone want to read that verse for us?** *[Call on a volunteer to read this verse aloud. Here’s what it says: “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”]* **Great job reading! Now, let’s fill in the blank of the sentence that goes with that verse. Get ready to write: “We deserve PUNISHMENT for our sins.” Because God is so good, so perfect, so big, and so important, our sins against Him are never small and unimportant. Our sins are always a big deal.**

Say: **In fact, they are such a big deal that they bring about separation from God. That’s what happened to Adam and Eve. They sinned and humans were separated from God. Jonah sinned and was helpless until the fish came along. Your sins deserve punishment, and they actually deserve really big punishment, which is judgment and separation from God.**

Say: **And that leads us to stop 3. So on the Romans Road, stop 3 is Romans 5:8. Would anyone else want to read that?** *[Call on a volunteer to read aloud Romans 5:8: “But God proves his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”]*

Say: **Where have we heard that verse before? It was the memory verse yesterday! We have sinned against God, and our sin is so bad that we deserve to die for it. But God loves us so much that He made a plan to rescue us. God sent His only Son, Jesus, to come to earth, live a perfect and sinless life, and die for our sins.**

Say: **Jesus never sinned, never disobeyed, never fell short in any way, never did anything that deserved punishment. But Jesus chose to take the punishment that our sins deserved. On the cross, Jesus willingly chose to take the punishment for our sins—to die in our place, so that we could live. When Jesus died on the cross and rose again three days later, He made a way for us to spend eternity with Him. He did all of that because**



VOYAGE

of how much He loves us. Let's fill in the blank that goes with stop 3. Here it is: "But God loves me so much that Jesus died IN MY PLACE on the cross."

Say: This leads us to the last and probably the most important stop on the Romans Road. Follow along as I read Romans 10:9. "If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." The good news is only good if we believe that it is true. We must admit, believe, and confess that we are sinners. We must understand and trust that Jesus did everything needed in order for us to be rescued. Let's fill in the last blank: "If I TRUST in what Jesus did for me, then I will be saved."

Say: Some of you have already done that—you have trusted in Jesus to save you, but some of you have not. We are here to talk to you if you want to talk about what it means to trust in Jesus. That's why we came here this week. To turn to Christ as your Savior, and to be rescued from death and given new life.

Activity: Doodling the Connections

Say: So I hope you see how all of this is connected. There's even a little set of pictures in your booklet that is meant to help you see how the story of Jonah leads all the way to your heart. Our pictures start with Jonah in the fish, but they need some extra drawings from us. So draw a little stick man of Jonah in the belly of the big fish.

Say: But remember, Jesus said that the story of Jonah being in the belly of a fish for three days and three nights was a sign that Jesus would one day be killed, spend three days in the grave, and rise again! So Jonah coming out of the fish points us to Jesus coming out of the grave. Draw some lines around the empty tomb picture.

Say: Jesus' death and resurrection are the basics of the gospel's good news. When we believe in Jesus and what He did for us, we can be rescued from our sin. The empty tomb leads us to the Romans Road. What does the Romans Road lead to? What is that last picture? *[Give the kids time to answer.]*

Say: That last picture is supposed to be you! It's a place for you to draw a self-portrait. Draw your face, your hair, and try to make it look like you. Where is the arrow from the Romans Road going?? *[Give kids time to answer.]* That's right—to your heart. All of this



VOYAGE

story is meant to get to your heart—for you to believe.

Say: **What are your hands doing in your self-portrait?** *[Give the kids time to answer.]* **That's right—they are lifted up in praise. Why do you think that is?** *[Give the kids time to answer.]* **That is how you are supposed to respond when you are rescued! When Jesus Christ rescues you from sin and death the only right response is worship! To thank Him and praise Him for what He has done.**

Say: **And guess what? That's exactly what Jonah does after he is rescued. Jonah praises God. So let's all turn in our Bibles to Jonah 2. As I read Jonah 2:1-9, notice how Jonah praises God.**

 Read aloud Jonah 2:1-9.

Say: **Remember that Jonah sinned and was running from God. But God had a rescue plan. God rescued Jonah by sending the fish to save him. Jonah cried out to God for help, and God sent the fish to rescue him. Does our story sound a bit like Jonah's? Where Jonah was trapped in a fish, we are trapped in our sin and in need of rescue. But does our praise sound anything like Jonah's prayer or song of praise in Jonah 2? If not, it should! The question for us is: if we have been rescued from our sin, do we sound anything like Jonah, praising God for what He has done? Jonah's prayer or song of praise is what we should sound like.**

Say: **You may have noticed that we spend time praising God and singing at camp. But what we want to do now is give you a chance to do this on your own. Just like Jonah, we want you to write your own prayer of praise to God. There's a space for you to do that in your booklet. Just like Jonah uses his prayer to talk about what God did for him, I want you to write a prayer of what God has done for you. Jonah also thanked God in his prayer. Be sure to include your thanks to God for what He has done to rescue you too!**

Say: **Our memory verse for today is printed in your booklet—it might help you as you write. Colossians 1:13-14 says, "He has rescued us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son he loves. In him we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."**

ACTIVITY: Write Your Own Prayer of Praise

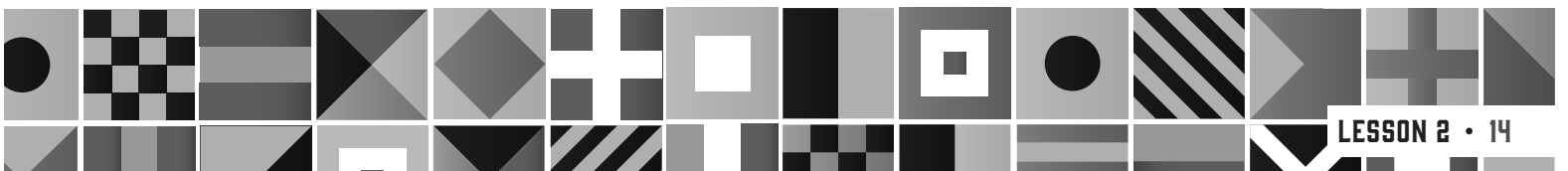
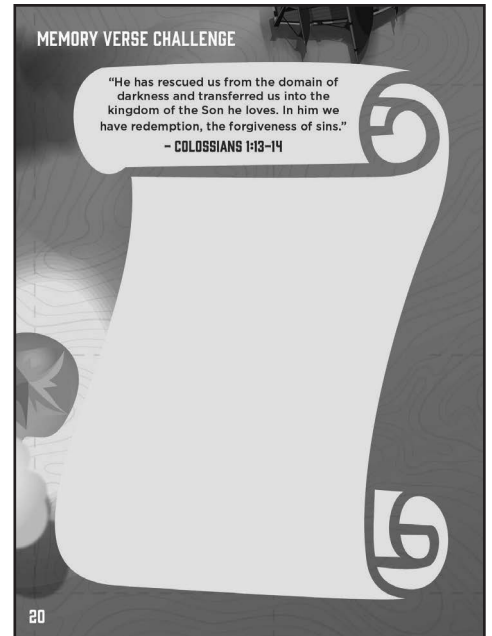
Say: **Start to write out a prayer. It can be just a few sentences or you can take up the whole page. Feel free to borrow some of Jonah's words from the book of Jonah, or Paul's words from the books of Romans or Colossians.** *[Give the kids a few minutes to write their prayers. Consider playing a worship song to keep everyone focused in the quiet. Allow 2-4*



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minutes for kids to finish writing their prayers.]

Say: **Would anyone like to close us in prayer, using the prayer that they just wrote?** *[Call on a volunteer to pray. If no one volunteers, close in prayer, thanking God for the way He rescues us.]*



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OVERVIEW

LESSON 3: HOMEWARD

MAIN POINT

- When we know Jesus as our Savior, we join in His mission to the world on our journey homeward.

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

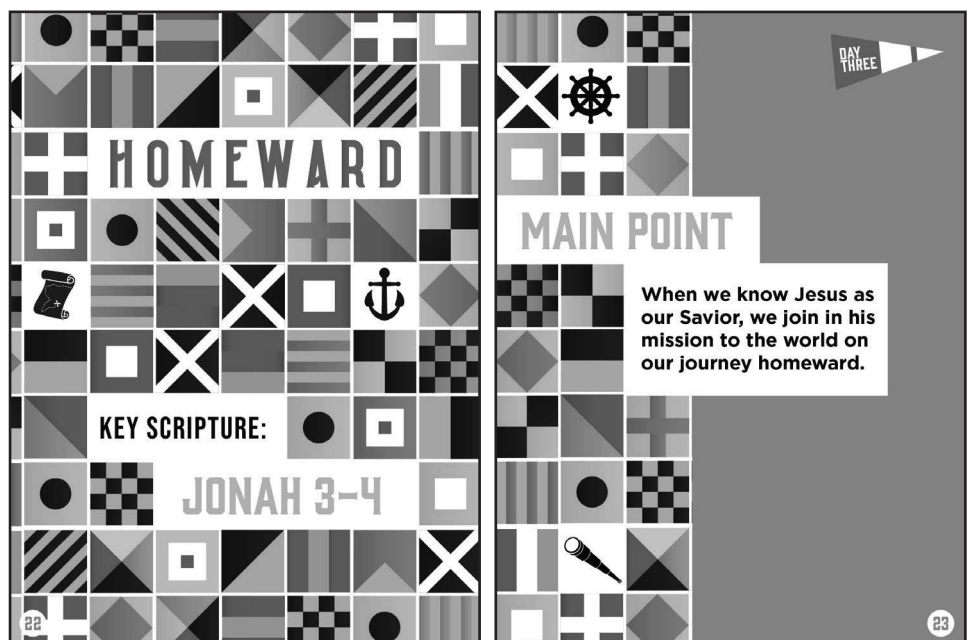
- Jonah 3-4

PREP

- Read Jonah 3-4
- Spend time praying and thanking God for the gift of the Holy Spirit.
- Review activity: “Well, That Was Unexpected”

MEMORY VERSE

- “Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us. We plead on Christ’s behalf, ‘Be reconciled to God.’”
- - 2 Corinthians 5:20



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KICKOFF

ACTIVITY: Well That Was Unexpected!

Say: **This is our last day of Bible study! We're going to finish the book of Jonah. If this was your first time reading Jonah, would that part of the story was unexpected?** *[Let the kids shout out an answer.]* **Here's the thing about the rest of the story: there are EVEN MORE unexpected parts to come. The story of Jonah makes lots of unexpected turns.**

Say: **So before we get to the story, we're going to get started with an activity called, "Well, That Was Unexpected" And here's how we'll play it. I will make some sort of statement describing a scenario of some kind. And then the scenario will suddenly end, and you will be left to fill in the final detail. But here's the catch—everyone will have to fill in that detail themselves. In fact, everyone is going to write down an answer in the blank on page 26 of their booklet. Each time through, we're going to share our answers and see whose answer is the MOST UNEXPECTED. Does everyone understand?** *[Pause for questions.]*

Say: **OK, one final thing. There are two rules: 1.) No potty/inappropriate words, and 2.) Don't include anyone in our group in your answer!** *[The idea is that no one ever gets made fun of in any way.]* **Ready for the first scenario? Here it is.**

1. **Scenario 1: Your mom brings home what appears to be a giant, juicy watermelon. She puts it on the kitchen counter, cuts into it, and suddenly gasps! The inside of the watermelon is filled entirely with _____!**

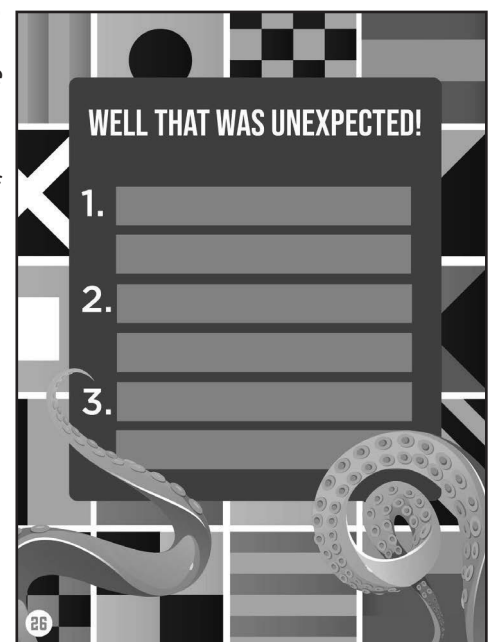
- Say: **I'll give everyone a second to think and write.** *[Pause a second, maybe whistle tune while you wait.]* **OK, let's share!** *[Go around the group and take answers.]* **Now let's vote!** *[Narrow it down to 3 each time and vote by show of hands.]*

- Say: **Truly, that was unexpected! Let's do scenario 2!**

2. Say: **Scenario 2: It's the night before the first day of school. Your parents get an email saying that the school has just hired a brand new principal, but they don't say who it is. You show up the next day and the new principal is standing out front greeting all the kids. To your astonishment, your new principal is _____!**

- Say: **I'll give you a second to write them down again. Let's share a final vote.**

3. Say: **Scenario 3: You buy a ticket for a surprise raffle at a fall festival. They say it's a big prize, but that the prize is a**



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mystery until they announce the winner. At the end of the night, they finally announce the winner—and it was you! You walk up to the stage and they declare that you have just won 50,000 _____!

- Say: **Again, write down an unexpected answer to that. I'll give you a second to write them down again.** *[Pause a second, maybe whistle tune while you wait.]* **OK, let's share!** *[Go around the group and take answers.]* **Now let's vote!** *[Narrow it down to 3 each time and vote by show of hands.]*
- **Truly, that was unexpected!**

Say: **Great job.** Those were some creative, hilarious, and very unexpected answers. Now the reason we played that was because of what I said earlier about Jonah. The book of Jonah makes a lot of unexpected turns that we will read about today. So turn in your Bibles to Jonah 3.

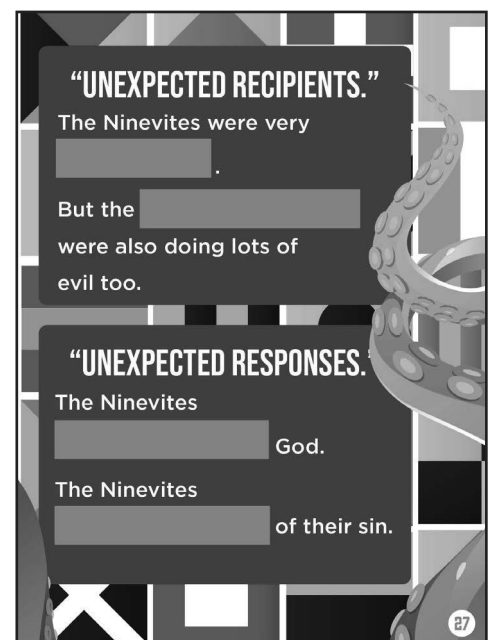
Say: **But before I read, does anyone remember the name of the place where God told Jonah to go?** *[Give the kids time to answer. If no one can remember, look back at Jonah 1:2 for the answer.]* That's right, God told Jonah to go to Nineveh. God wanted Jonah to go and preach to the people living there. Even that part of the story is a little unexpected! There are at least two reasons why. So let's get ready to fill in the blanks under the section in your booklets called "Unexpected Recipients."

Say: Reason number 1 for why it was unexpected that God would send Jonah to Nineveh to preach was because 1.) The Ninevites were very EVIL. Fill in that blank.

Say: They were infamously evil. They were known for how badly they treated other people, for how they did not worship the living God, and for lots of other terrible things. The Ninevites had a bad reputation as sinners. In light of that, we might say that it is unexpected that God is sending a preacher to give these really evil people a chance at forgiveness.

Say: **But there's another reason why it was unexpected from God to send Jonah to Nineveh. The second reason is: 2.) The ISRAELITES were also doing lots of evil too. During Jonah's time, the people of Israel were actually doing evil as well. Remember, Jonah is from Israel. He is a prophet of Israel.**

Say: **A prophet is a messenger from God who speaks God's words. So, Jonah was supposed to listen to God and tell people what He said and how they should live. But the people of Israel were not living right either. Their king did not follow**



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the Lord. [See 2 Kings 14:23-29 for a glimpse into this time period.]

Say: **It is really unexpected—especially for Jonah—that God would send him away from Israel to Nineveh. Israel needed to turn from sin too. But God sent Jonah to Nineveh, and that is super unexpected. OK, now we know all of that, let’s read what happens next in the story.**

 Read aloud Jonah 3:1-5.

So Jonah obeys this time. Jonah goes and preaches to the great, big city of Nineveh and tells the people that because of their sin, God is going to send a major punishment to them all. He says that punishment is coming really soon—in 40 days! But then what happens in the hearts of the people of Nineveh? What exactly does Jonah 3:5 say? [Allow kids to answer.]

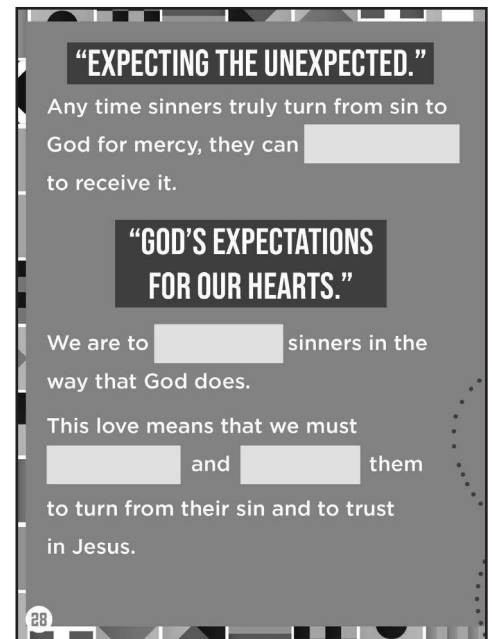
Say: **That’s right! We’re told they do at least 2 things. First, the Ninevites BELIEVED God. They believed His message that God was going to punish them for their sins. And then, as a sign of their believing, second, the Ninevites REPENTED of their sins. Repent a big Bible word. Repentance is a change of heart and a change of mind that results in a change of life.**

Say: **But there’s more. Look at Jonah 3:6.**

 Read aloud Jonah 3:6-9.

Say: **So who else received the message? [Give kids time to answer.] The king of Nineveh, the most important guy there. And what does he tell the people to do? [Give kids time to answer.] Right, he tells them to fast from eating food and to put on the sackcloth to show their sadness over their sin. But then the king tells them to do two more things. First, He tells them to “call out” (or pray) earnestly to God. He tells them desperately to ask God for forgiveness. Second, he tells them to turn around from doing any more sin. He tells them to quit doing evil deeds, to quit doing what is wrong, to quit being violent. All of these signs are proving a point to us: they actually believe God’s message!**

Say: **But I have a question for you. As you think about the story: Is the Ninevite people’s response of belief expected or unexpected? What do you think? Let’s vote. Who thinks the Ninevite response is unexpected? [Let kids raise their hands.] OK, well why do you think that? [Let kids give some answers.] All right, those are good answers. But now, let**



“EXPECTING THE UNEXPECTED.”
Any time sinners truly turn from sin to God for mercy, they can [] to receive it.

“GOD’S EXPECTATIONS FOR OUR HEARTS.”
We are to [] sinners in the way that God does.
This love means that we must [] and [] them to turn from their sin and to trust in Jesus.



VOYAGE

me ask: Who thinks the Ninevite response is expected? When they turn and believe, did you think that was exactly what evil people like them would do? *[Let kids raise their hands.]* OK, same question: Why do you think that? *[Let kids give some answers.]*

Say: Here's something we need to remember: God can save anyone, anytime, anywhere. There is no one too far from God that He will not save. The Bible is teaching us that, when it comes to God's power to save, we should change our expectations. There is nothing that God cannot do. There is no one that God cannot save. That can be true of the people of Nineveh and the people in parts of our world that hate God. We should never be surprised, but rather amazed at God's power to save anyone. We should be amazed that God would be so gracious and merciful to really bad sinners. And guess what? That's exactly what happens in our story. Look down at Jonah 3:10.

 Read aloud Jonah 3:10.

Say: So how does God respond to the people of Nineveh? *[Let kids give some answers.]* He spares them of the punishment they deserve. He does not destroy them. So let me ask another question about expectations. Is God's response expected or unexpected? Let's vote. Who thinks God's mercy to the Ninevites is expected? *[Let kids raise their hands.]* Now, who thinks God's mercy is unexpected? *[Let kids raise their hands.]* It's really kind of both! Let me explain.

Say: God's mercy, His willingness not to punish the people, is kind of unexpected because the people really did deserve that punishment. They should not have expected to receive mercy because of all the evil they had done. At the same time, any time a person turns from their sin and turns to God for mercy, God promises forgiveness. *[If time allows, read Ezekiel 18:21-23.]*

Say: The Bible tells us that if anyone confesses their sins and turns from them, God is faithful and just to forgive anyone of their sins. God's response to the Ninevites' repentance is actually expected because that's exactly what God promises to do. Sinners don't deserve mercy, but any time they truly turn from sin to God for mercy, they can expect to receive it. Let's write that down under the section "Expecting the Unexpected." Any time sinners truly turn from sin to God for mercy, they can EXPECT to receive it.

Say: And I know we talked about this yesterday, but the moment you decide to turn from your sin and trust in Jesus, you can expect that God will forgive you. Just like He did to Nineveh, He forgives every sinner who turns away from sin and asks for forgiveness in Christ.

Say: Now, if the book of Jonah ended right there, it would be really neat. It would feel like a great, happy ending. But actually, there's more. And the "more" is really unexpected.



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 Read aloud Jonah 4:1-10 as excitedly and energetically as you can.

Say: Like I said, there's some unexpected turns here. And those unexpected turns happen inside of Jonah's heart. What is the word used to describe how Jonah feels? *[Let the kids answer.]* Angry! Furious! Jonah is super mad. But why is Jonah mad? *[Let the kids answer.]* He is mad because He knew that God is gracious and compassionate, and that He would forgive the people. Jonah was mad that God loves sinners.

Say: This is probably clear, but who does Jonah not love? *[Let the kids answer.]* Right, Jonah does not love the Ninevites. In fact, in this story, what does Jonah love more than the Ninevites? *[Let the kids answer.]* Here's the point: Jonah's heart was not like God's heart.

Say: Who does God love? *[Let the kids answer.]* God loves all sinners! He loves the Ninevites! He loves the Israelites! He loves people from *[Insert your hometown.]* He loves Jonah! He loves me! And He loves you!

Say: And once we have been saved by God, we join with Him on the voyage of taking the love of God to the world. When Jesus becomes our Savior, we join Him in His mission to rescue others. And part of being on that mission means that we have to show God's love to others. Look in your booklet under the section "God's Expectations for Our Hearts".

Say: Let's get ready to fill in these blanks. Jonah 4 teaches us that: 1.) We are to LOVE sinners in the way that God does, and 2.) that love means that we must GO and TELL them to turn from their sin and to trust in Jesus.

Say: Our memory verse from today is 2 Corinthians 5:20 which says, "Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us. We plead on Christ's behalf, 'Be reconciled to God.'" God is trying to teach us through the book of Jonah to love others enough to tell them the good news about Jesus. Although we have all sinned against Him and deserve punishment, Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead to forgive everyone. So our job is to love other people and tell them about Jesus!

Say: Is the book of Jonah calling us to hate or love others? *[Easy answer.]* What are some ways we can love others? *[Let the kids answer.]*

Say: Those are good answers! Here are 3 ways that we can love



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others. We can: 1.) Pray; 2.) Give; and 3.) Go to those who are sharing the Gospel of Jesus in places we can't get to yet.

Say: In your booklet, we are going to take time to write down people we can pray for, people we can give to, and people who are sharing the gospel around the world! Let's all take time to respond to the prompts that say "Pray" and "Go" in your booklet. We'll talk more about the "Give" blank later. *[Give the kids some time to answer.]* Does anyone want to share some of what they wrote? *[Discuss answers.]*

Say: Those are great answers! As we think about the giving portion, I want to tell you about our missions offering. In the blank on that last picture, I want you to write 3 letters. Write I, M, and B. *[Or write the name of the country/people we are giving to.]*

Say: This year, we are excited that we are supporting missionaries in Ethiopia. Among the various people groups throughout Ethiopia and its neighboring countries, nearly half still have no gospel witness among them. Our hope is to help the IMB as they empower and equip national believers to reach the unreached peoples of the Horn of Africa on their way to reaching the world. We want to see Jesus known and worshiped among these unreached and unengaged peoples.

Say: Today, we will be taking up an offering right now in our group. When we become a member of God's kingdom, we get to help in His Kingdom expanding work. God doesn't need us, but He chooses to use us because He sees you and me as valuable in His Kingdom.

Say: Now, let's take up that offering and pray for people of Ethiopia to know and love Jesus. *[Close in prayer.]*

MEMORY VERSE CHALLENGE

Find the underlined words from your memory verse in the puzzle!

"Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us. We plead on Christ's behalf,
"Be reconciled to God"
2 CORINTHIANS 5:20

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