

Big Idea: God still loves us... even when we're disobedient.

Primary Scripture: Jonah 1-4

Supporting Scripture: Psalm 139:7-8

CAPTURE (Why should students pay attention to and care about your message?)

- When I was nine years old, I tried to run away from home but actually just went to my best friend's house, which was only three houses down the street.
- I had gotten in trouble for something, and was convinced that my parents were being totally unfair.
- I grabbed my Spiderman backpack, stuffed it with two granola bars, a juice box, and my favorite stuffed animal, and dramatically stormed out of the house.
- The plan was flawless until I realized I had nowhere to sleep, no money, and I forgot my iPad charger.
- After about an hour of sitting on my friend's porch (because they weren't even home), I got hungry, cold, a little scared.
- I went back home, and my mom simply opened the door, sighed, and said, "Are you ready to come inside now?"
- Turns out, they knew where I was the entire time.
- My little escape attempt reminds me of someone in the Bible who actually tried to run away from God Himself, but it also didn't work.

SCRIPTURE (What does God's Word say?)

- Jonah was a prophet, which means he was someone who heard messages from God and was then expected to deliver those messages to God's people.

¹ The Lord gave this message to Jonah son of Amittai: ² "Get up and go to the great city of Nineveh. Announce my judgment against it because I have seen how wicked its people are." (Jonah 1:1-2 – NLT)

- Jonah is going to travel to a great city that he's probably never even seen to share God's judgment.
- Chances are pretty good that an entire city isn't going to be thrilled to hear Jonah telling them how wicked they are.

³ *But Jonah got up and went in the opposite direction to get away from the LORD. He went down to the port of Joppa, where he found a ship leaving for Tarshish. He bought a ticket and went on board, hoping to escape from the LORD by sailing to Tarshish. (Jonah 1:3 – NLT)*

- Nineveh was east, but Jonah went west to the farthest known city in the opposite direction of where God told him to go.

⁴ *But the LORD hurled a powerful wind over the sea, causing a violent storm that threatened to break the ship apart. ⁵ Fearing for their lives, the desperate sailors shouted to their gods for help and threw the cargo overboard to lighten the ship. But all this time Jonah was sound asleep down in the hold. ⁶ So the captain went down after him. "How can you sleep at a time like this?" he shouted. "Get up and pray to your god! Maybe he will pay attention to us and spare our lives." (Jonah 1:4-6 – NLT)*

- A massive storm hit. It was so intense that even experienced sailors started to panic.
- They started crying out to their gods, just trying to survive.
- Meanwhile, Jonah was asleep.
- Have you ever wanted to avoid dealing with something, so you just went to sleep? That's what could be happening with Jonah.
- The other sailors decided to wake Jonah up so he could pray, too.

¹² *"Throw me into the sea," Jonah said, "and it will become calm again. I know that this terrible storm is all my fault." (Jonah 1:12 – NLT)*

- At first the sailors didn't want to throw Jonah overboard, possibly because they didn't think it would work and because they didn't want the death of God's prophet on their hands.
- But the storm just kept getting worse.

¹⁵ Then the sailors picked Jonah up and threw him into the raging sea, and the storm stopped at once! ¹⁶ The sailors were awestruck by the Lord's great power, and they offered him a sacrifice and vowed to serve him. (Jonah 1:13-16 – NLT)

- Imagine you're on a small boat in the middle of the fiercest storm you've seen in your entire life, and it just clears up the moment you throw some guy overboard.

¹⁷ Now the Lord had arranged for a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was inside the fish for three days and three nights. (Jonah 1:17 - NLT)

- I have a hard time wrapping my head around this part of the story. God does impossible things all the time—but this one feels especially unique.
- First, we don't know what kind of great fish swallowed Jonah, and second, I'm not even sure if a person could survive for three days in the belly of a fish.
- From here we can choose to believe this is something that happened exactly as the Bible says it did.
- We can also choose to believe that God performed some sort of miracle here that is just simply beyond our comprehension.
- Or we can make space for any number of other options that fall into the category of "Only God could have made this work."
- Even the belly of a giant fish, God still hadn't abandoned Jonah and His love never changed.
- Jonah cried out to God and the fish spat him out onto dry land.
- Jonah didn't deserve rescue, but God did it anyway.

¹ Then the Lord spoke to Jonah a second time: ² "Get up and go to the great city of Nineveh, and deliver the message I have given you." (Jonah 3:1-2 – NLT)

- This time, Jonah obeyed, going to Nineveh and delivering a warning from God.
- **The people actually listened**, repented, changed their ways, and God forgave them.

- For some reason, Jonah was furious.

¹ This change of plans greatly upset Jonah, and he became very angry. ² So he complained to the Lord about it: "Didn't I say before I left home that you would do this, Lord? That is why I ran away to Tarshish! I knew that you are a merciful and compassionate God, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. You are eager to turn back from destroying people. ³ Just kill me now, Lord! I'd rather be dead than alive if what I predicted will not happen." (Jonah 4:1-3 – NLT)

- Jonah thought the people of Nineveh didn't deserve mercy.
- Jonah's issue with Nineveh wasn't just about their behavior—it was also about **who they were**.
- The Ninevites lived in a completely different country, they worshipped different gods, they spoke a different language, and they had been enemies of Israel for generations.
- From Jonah's response, it seems like he didn't believe that God's grace should be extended to people **like them**.
- God's love is bigger than our pride, our mistakes, our disobedience, and even our prejudices.

INSIGHTS (What might this Scripture mean?)

1. You can't outrun God's calling.

- Jonah thought he could escape God's mission by sailing to the edge of the known world, but you can't run away from being who God created you to be.

⁷ I can never escape from your Spirit! I can never get away from your presence! ⁸ If I go up to heaven, you are there; if I go down to the grave, you are there. (Psalm 139:7-8 – NIV)

- God's calling on Jonah's life didn't disappear just because he bought a ticket for a boat ride.
- Have you ever tried to avoid doing homework by hiding your backpack or "forgetting" your Chromebook at school? The assignment doesn't go away just because you're not looking at it.

- That's kind of what Jonah was doing—he thought if he got far enough away, maybe God would just forget about the whole Nineveh thing.
- But God didn't pursue Jonah to punish him for running away. God pursued him because He still had a purpose for him.
- That's how God works with us, too. He pursues us because He believes in **what** He's calling us to do and **who** He's calling us to be.
- God's calling on your life doesn't have an expiration date. He's not waiting around the corner with a lightning bolt. He's waiting to help you take the next step toward what He's designed you for.

2. God gives second chances.

- Jonah didn't just disobey God—he intentionally ran in the opposite direction from what God asked him to do.

¹ Then the Lord spoke to Jonah a second time: ² “Get up and go to the great city of Nineveh, and deliver the message I have given you.” (Jonah 3:1-2 – NLT)

- God didn't write him off or move on to someone else. Instead, God gave him another opportunity to step into what He had called him to do.
- Jonah went to Nineveh, delivered God's message, and the entire city repented.
- The same is true for you. No matter how far you've strayed, how badly you've messed up, or how many times you've failed, God isn't done with you.

3. God's grace is for everyone.

- Jonah got a second chance, but so did the people of Nineveh, which is what makes Jonah's reaction so jarring.

¹ This change of plans greatly upset Jonah, and he became very angry. ² Didn't I say before I left home that you would do this, Lord? That is why I ran away to Tarshish! I knew that you are a merciful and compassionate God, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. You are eager to turn back from destroying people. (Jonah 4:1-2 – NLT)

- Jonah wanted grace for himself but judgment for everyone else.
- We love second chances when we're the ones who need them.
- But when it comes to people who have hurt us, we want justice, not grace.
- God's grace isn't based on who we think deserves it. His love isn't limited by our opinions about who's worthy.
- We're all equally undeserving of God's grace—and we're all equally loved.

ACTION (How could we live this out?)

1. Be honest about what you're running from.

- The first step toward obedience is honesty. You can't move forward until you're willing to name what you've been avoiding.
- This week, take five minutes alone—no distractions, no phone—and ask yourself one simple question: "God, what have I been running from?"
- Then listen. And whatever comes to mind, write it down.
- God already knows what you're running from. This isn't about surprising Him with new information. It's about you being ready to stop running.

2. Take one small step of obedience.

- If you've already identified something that you've been running from, this week, take **one small step** in the right direction.
- Whatever it is, just pick one specific thing you can do this week. And try to make it *small enough* that you can actually accomplish it, but *big enough* that it helps move you forward.
- God isn't expecting you to have it all figured out overnight. He just wants to see that you're willing to trust Him with the next step.

3. Choose grace over judgment.

- This week, pick one person who's been difficult to love.

- Instead of holding on to resentment, complaining about them, or hoping they get what's coming to them, choose **one way** to show **grace**.
- Grace doesn't mean letting others walk all over you or pretending that what they did was okay. It means choosing to respond to others the way God responds to you—with love instead of revenge, kindness instead of bitterness.
- Remember, God still loves us, even when we're disobedient. We can do the same for others.