**Contemplation Sunday: Jonah**

**Setup:** Using masking tape, mark out Israel, the Mediterranean sea, Joppa, Tarshish and Nineveh. Mark out the boat and the whale. Print a ticket for each person. Set aside an area for people to sit outside the city of Nineveh.

**Supplies:** A marshmallow fish for each person, a sour worm for each person, a green leaf and a dry leaf (crushable) for each person, cardboard boxes, a candle to light.

**Worship:** Songs that focus on giving praise to God

Today we are going on a journey – the same journey that Jonah went on. If you allow yourself to become part of his story you will find help for your own spiritual journey!

**Jonah 1**

**The Call from God**

*1One day long ago, God's Word came to Jonah, Amittai's son: 2"Up on your feet and on your way to the big city of Nineveh! Preach to them. They're in a bad way and I can't ignore it any longer."*

You are Jonah, the son of Amittai, a prophet from Gath in Israel. God had appointed you to speak on his behalf during the reign of Jeroboam, the King of Israel 760 years BC. This was the century during which Assyria took Israel into captivity. You were one of the leaders among the "schools of the prophets" when Elisha was nearing the end of his ministry. One day God spoke to you – God initiated the encounter and gave you a clear directive – go to a city known for their immoral behavior, and preach to them – warning them to repent and convert to God's ways.

You are going to reflect on Isaiah 6:1-9 and when you sense that God has said something to you through the passage, go and write it on the paper provided.

**Activity:** Youth reflect on Isaiah 6:1-9 (read and on the screen), hear God speak to them through it and get up and write it on paper.

**Activity:** A leader lights a candle while youth write.

What a privilege to be a prophet –you can’t wait to get to Nineveh to preach God’s Word!

**Jonah’s Response to God’s Call**

*3But Jonah got up and went the other direction to Tarshish, running away from God.*

**Activity:** (1) Walk to **Joppa.** (2) Brainstorm things that lead us away from God. (3) Blow out the candle.

Why did you run away from God? What was it about God’s call that made you go in the opposite direction? Was it: Fear? Prejudice? Pride? You knew God? This was it!!! You knew God was a merciful God, and that if Nineveh cried to God and repented, the Assyrians would be spared – you wanted them to die.

How could God be calling you to preach to the Ninevites? They were wicked! They were Assyrians – enemies of israel. They were the Nazis of those days who showed no pity to their captives. They would hold them down, reach into their mouths and pull their tongue out by the roots. Victims were skinned alive, and their skins stretched out on the walls. In every city they conquered, they built a pyramid of human skulls.

What is God calling you to do for him that might tempt you to run in the opposite direction? Jonah got into a boat to get away from God. Can you think of someone who has really hurt you, who if they came to know the Lord and were forgiven of their sins, you would be really annoyed? Maybe you've practically prayed, "Lord, I don't want them to get off that easy. I want them to pay for their sin." Well, they are not getting off that easy. Remember, their sin cost the Lord His life. Also, if you want people to pay for their sins, be consistent. You'll have to be willing to pay for your sin!

*3He went down to the port of Joppa and found a ship headed for Tarshish. He paid the fare and went on board, joining those going to Tarshish-as far away from God**as he could get.*

**Activity:** Get each person to buy a ticket for the journey from you – they can pay with anything – but must pay something before they get into the boat.

When Jonah ran he had to buy a ticket. Running from God will always cost us something, and usually it is not something we get back. What you sow you shall reap. We all pay if we run. We could avoid so much hassle if we'd just go God's way in the first place. A perfect example is the prodigal son. He lost all his inheritance and his relationships.

**Activity:** Move into the place marked out as the boat and **stand** in the boat.

*4But God sent a huge storm at sea, the waves towering. The ship was about to break into pieces. The sailors were terrified. They called out in desperation to their gods. They threw everything they were carrying overboard to lighten the ship.*

**Activity:** Have youth throw boxes and anything else out of the boat.

*5Meanwhile, Jonah had gone down into the hold of the ship to take a nap. He was sound asleep. 6The captain came to him and said, "What's this? Sleeping! Get up! Pray to your god! Maybe your god will see we're in trouble and rescue us." 7Then the sailors said to one another, "Let's get to the bottom of this. Let's draw straws to identify the culprit on this ship who's responsible for this disaster." So they drew straws. Jonah got the short straw. 8Then they grilled him: "Confess. Why this disaster? What is your work? Where do you come from? What country? What family?" 9He told them, "I'm a Hebrew. I worship God, the God of heaven who made sea and land." 10At that, the men were frightened, really frightened, and said, "What on earth have you done!" As Jonah talked, the sailors realized that he was running away from God. 11They said to him, "What are we going to do with you—to get rid of this storm?" By this time the sea was wild, totally out of control. 12Jonah said, "Throw me overboard, into the sea. Then the storm will stop. It's all my fault. I'm the cause of the storm. Get rid of me and you'll get rid of the storm." 13But no. The men tried rowing back to shore. They made no headway. The storm only got worse and worse, wild and raging. 14Then they prayed to God, "O God! Don't let us drown because of this man's life, and don't blame us for his death. You are God. Do what you think is best." 15They took Jonah and threw him overboard. Immediately the sea was quieted down. 16The sailors were impressed, no longer terrified by the sea, but in awe of God. They worshiped God, offered a sacrifice, and made vows.*

Do you remember how you felt when you were woken up and you realised that you were the cause of the storm and that the sailors were suffering because of you? Their lives were in your hands – they could die because of you! Would you come clean and tell the truth?

Thank goodness that God loves you – because even though you disobeyed him, he did not let you go that easily. The storm, the sailors, the ship, the captain were really God’s provisions. Even when you were out of God’s will – God pursued you! God will complete the work he has begun in you!

Take a moment to reflect:

\* Are you sailing on the wrong boat?

\* Are you headed in the wrong direction?

\* Is there anything that you and God are arguing about?

\* Is there an area in which you are reluctant to obey God?

\* Is there someone who might not hear about God’s love because you are disobeying him?

\* Who will be negatively affected if you do not obey God?

*17Then God assigned a huge fish to swallow Jonah. Jonah was in the fish's belly three days and nights.*

**Activity:** Switch off the lights – **sit** in the belly of the whale.

You thought you were going to die for sure – thrown overboard – but God was with you and sent the whale to swallow you! Remember God is in you! He has invested His life in you, He's gifted you. He's called you. He cares! It may take a while, but the raging waves and the storm can be calmed, if you will just trust God.

**Jonah 2**

**At the Bottom of the Sea**

But do you remember how alone you felt for those three days? Did you enjoy rolling around in the digestive juices of the belly of the whale? Those three lonely days taught you so much – in fact, you even captured it in a psalm that you wrote:

*1Then Jonah prayed to his God from the belly of the fish. 2He prayed: "In trouble, deep trouble, I prayed to God. He answered me. From the belly of the grave I cried, 'Help!' You heard my cry. 3You threw me into ocean's depths, into a watery grave, with ocean waves, ocean breakers crashing over me. 4I said, 'I've been thrown away, thrown out, out of your sight. I'll never again lay eyes on your Holy Temple.'*

**1. Pain makes us accept God's will for us**. God will use pain in our lives to bring us in line with what he wants us to do for him.

*5Ocean gripped me by the throat. The ancient Abyss grabbed me and held tight.*

*My head was all tangled in seaweed at the bottom of the sea where the mountains take root. 6I was as far down as a body can go, and the gates were slamming shut behind me forever—Yet you pulled me up from that grave alive, O God, my God!*

**2. Pain reminds us that all is not well** – pain has a way of getting our attention and making us face reality!

*7When my life was slipping away, I remembered God, And my prayer got through to you, made it all the way to your Holy Temple. 8Those who worship hollow gods, god-frauds, walk away from their only true love.*

**3. Pain makes us remember that God is our first love**. We cannot hold onto God's resources and our idols at the same time. We lose the grace that God has for us when we worship idols.

*9But I'm worshiping you, God, calling out in thanksgiving! And I'll do what I promised I'd do! Salvation belongs to God!"*

**4. Pain makes us thank God for who He is and what He has done**. When we worship God we are ready to do what he wants us to do or what we promised we would do.

So, pain is not necessarily mean to punish us but to bring us to our senses; to preserve us from a wrong path that we are taking; to remind us that we have run away from God’s presence and need to return and to help us repent and return to our first love with God.

*10Then God spoke to the fish, and it vomited up Jonah on the seashore.*

After you had finished praying and had learnt what God was teaching you, God told the whale to spit you out and you washed up on dry ground!

**Activity:** Youth eat a marshmallow fish to celebrate their escape from the whale.

**Jonah 3**

**Jonah Speaks for God in Nineveh**

*1Next, God spoke to Jonah a second time: 2"Up on your feet and on your way to the big city of Nineveh! Preach to them. They're in a bad way and I can't ignore it any longer." This time 3Jonah started off straight for Nineveh, obeying God's orders to the letter. Nineveh was a big city, very big—it took three days to walk across it.*

This time you heard God’s commission and you went in the right direction. A journey over mountains and desert plains – over 500 miles – but you had learnt the lesson of running away from God and you were not going to do that again. There were over half a million people in the city and it took three days to walk across it! It was a big city!!!

*4Jonah entered the city, went one day's walk and preached, "In forty days Nineveh will be smashed."*

And your message? Not exactly a gentle encouragement but a serious warning that in 40 days God was going to destroy the city! Do you remember how you struggled with mixed emotions as you shared the message – it was hard to preach love to these evil people!!!

**Activity:** Have youth share their personal testimony of how they came to know Jesus as Lord and Saviour.

**The People Respond with Repentance**

*5The people of Nineveh listened, and trusted God. They proclaimed a citywide fast and dressed in burlap to show their repentance. Everyone did it—rich and poor, famous and obscure, leaders and followers. 6When the message reached the king of Nineveh, he got up off his throne, threw down his royal robes, dressed in burlap, and sat down in the dirt. 7Then he issued a public proclamation throughout Nineveh, authorized by him and his leaders: "Not one drop of water, not one bite of food for man, woman, or animal, including your herds and flocks! 8Dress them all, both people and animals, in burlap, and send up a cry for help to God. Everyone must turn around, turn back from an evil life and the violent ways that stain their hands. 9Who knows? Maybe God will turn around and change his mind about us, quit being angry with us and let us live!" 10God saw what they had done, that they had turned away from their evil lives. He did change his mind about them. What he said he would do to them he didn't do.*

You watched as the people and the king, repented of their sin and even put on sack cloth and covered themselves with ashes – symbols of grief and mourning. Here 150 kilometers northwest of modern day Baghdad the biggest revival in history took place. God came through and blessed your preaching with tangible results – how did you feel? Thrilled?

**Jonah 4**

**Jonah and the Lord**

*1Jonah was furious. He lost his temper. 2He yelled at God, "God! I knew it—when I was back home, I knew this was going to happen! That's why I ran off to Tarshish! I knew you were sheer grace and mercy, not easily angered, rich in love, and ready at the drop of a hat to turn your plans of punishment into a program of forgiveness! 3"So, God, if you won't kill them, kill me! I'm better off dead!"*

You had tried to stop the will of God – you hoped you could stop God showing mercy to the Ninevites. But God is a God of mercy and compassion and he always shows mercy to people! You even asked God to kill you if he was not going to kill your enemies.

*4 God said, "What do you have to be angry about?"*

What was God saying to you? “Jonah, do you have a right to be angry that I am a God of mercy, when you yourself have benefited so greatly from that mercy? So, I can show you mercy, but I can’t have mercy on this great city?”

*5But Jonah just left. He went out of the city to the east and sat down in a sulk. He put together a makeshift shelter of leafy branches and sat there in the shade to see what would happen to the city.*

**Activity:** People move outside the city and sit down to watch what will happen.

You were still hoping that God would nuke the city!

*6God arranged for a broad-leafed tree to spring up. It grew over Jonah to cool him off and get him out of his angry sulk. Jonah was pleased and enjoyed the shade. Life was looking up. But then God sent a worm. 7By dawn of the next day, the worm had bored into the shade tree and it withered away.*

**Activities:** (1) Give youth a green leaf to hold and feel. (2) Give them a sour worm to eat. (3) Give them a dry leaf which they must crush (they drop the green leaf)

*8The sun came up and God sent a hot, blistering wind from the east. The sun beat down on Jonah's head and he started to faint. He prayed to die: "I'm better off dead!" 9Then God said to Jonah, "What right do you have to get angry about this shade tree?" Jonah said, "Plenty of right. It's made me angry enough to die!"*

**Activity:** Switchon a gas heater and have youth pile cardboard boxes in between them and the heat source. Get a fan aimed at them to symbolise the hot wind.

While the Ninevites were praying for deliverance, you were praying for destruction. You made your way outside the city and found a great seat to watch it get destroyed. But God was about to put together an object lesson that would finally get through to you – and show you what he is like. God got your attention first by making you glad – he grew the vine that gave you shade in the heart of the day. You were thrilled! But at sunrise God sent a worm that killed the vine – and once more you shook a fist at God.

*10God said, "What's this? How is it that you can change your feelings from pleasure to anger overnight about a mere shade tree that you did nothing to get? You neither planted nor watered it. It grew up one night and died the next night. 11So, why can't I likewise change what I feel about Nineveh from anger to pleasure, this big city of more than 120,000 childlike people who don't yet know right from wrong, to say nothing of all the innocent animals?"*

It would take you a while but you learnt that:

1. God loves His creation and he looks after it and makes it grow. (10)

2. God loves people whether they please Him or not. (11)

God had put his arm around you and said: “Jonah, think about what you're saying. Let me give you a little perspective on what has just happened to you. It has all been designed to teach you something about me, yourself and others. What did this plant really mean to you? Your attachment to it could not be very deep, for it was here one day and gone the next. You were motivated by self-interest and not by genuine love. You were never devoted to it like a gardener is to his garden. What would you expect a gardener to feel if he had tended a plant and then he watched it wither and die? This is how I feel about Nineveh, only much more so. All those people, all those animals – I made them, I have loved them all these years. Nineveh means the world to me. Your pain is small compared to mine when I think about their destruction.”

This is the heart of God – He is kind and loving and wants everyone to come to know him and experience his love and his perfect plan for their lives.

What has God said to you today?

\* Will you tell others about God?

\* Will you tell people you don’t like that Jesus loves them?

Isaiah 6

*New Living Translation*

It was in the year King Uzziah died that I saw the Lord. He was sitting on a lofty throne, and the train of his robe filled the Temple. Attending him were mighty seraphim, each having six wings. With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew.

They were calling out to each other,

“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Heaven’s Armies!

The whole earth is filled with his glory!”

Their voices shook the Temple to its foundations, and the entire building was filled with smoke.

Then I said, “It’s all over! I am doomed, for I am a sinful man. I have filthy lips, and I live among a people with filthy lips. Yet I have seen the King, the Lord of Heaven’s Armies.”

Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a burning coal he had taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. He touched my lips with it and said, “See, this coal has touched your lips. Now your guilt is removed, and your sins are forgiven.”

Then I heard the Lord asking, “Whom should I send as a messenger to this people? Who will go for us?”

I said, “Here I am. Send me.”

And he said, “Yes, Go!”

**How God Fix Jonah**

Jonah was a prophet.

God put Him hand on Jonah

But Jonah head be hard.

Jonah head be hard too much.

Lord God Almighty can fix the thing.

Can fix hard head

Can fix weak back

Can fix crooked leg.

God can fix anything.

Hear how He fix Jonah.

God say, "Jonah, O Jonah!"

Jonah say, "Yea Lord!"

God say, "Jonah

Go down to Nineveh and preach My Word."

Nineveh be one wa-wa place

And Jonah fear that town too much.

And he fear God, but small.

He make like he go, but he hide.

Jonah go to the waterside

He look them boats what sail.

He say to cap'n for one boat, "What side you go?"

The man say, "Nineveh."

Jonah say, "No."

Nother cap'n come and Jonah say, "What side you go, man?"

The man say, "Tarsus."

Jonah climb aboard

And when the boat shove off he lay down low

And on the waterside no man can see him.

Lord God Almighty say, "Ho!"

When God say "Ho" it make a mighty wind

And waves run on the boat

And rock it so the crew mens fear.

The crew mens do all that they can.

They throw the cargo overboard

They take in sail

They put out oars

They hold, they pull,

But all the time more water come inside.

They fear.

They crew mens say the waters want somebody on the boat.

They make a trial with sassa wood to see what man bring trouble.

They watch the stick go round about

And pass up all but Jonah.

And Jonah say,

"For true.

The palaver be on my own head for true.

I run to hide from Lord God Almighty

Who rule all the wind and run all the water.

But if I make my bed in hell

I know He find me."

Lord God Almighty say "Ho" again.

The wind holler louder

The water rise higher

And all men see His power.

Then the cap'n and the crew mens take a hold on Jonah.

They lift him up and throw him in the sea.

It make the boat ride easy.

The wind go soft and still

The sea make like a river.

The crew mens look about and say, "Lord God Almighty!"

God say, "Jonah, O Jonah!"

Jonah say, "Yea, Lord!"

God say, "Jonah,

Go down to Nineveh and preach My Word."

Jonah don't know where at he live.

But God done make a special fish

When the crew mens throw Jonah overboard

That fish take Jonah up.

Three days the fish ride Jonah.

The fish carry man in him belly

Three days, and Jonah ain't savvy.

The fish carry Jonah to the Nineveh beach.

Lord God Almighty talk to the fish.

The fish open up and puke Jonah out.

Jonah wash in the sea and dry in the sun

And he go to Nineveh to preach the Word.

Graham, L. 2000. *How God Fix Jonah*. Boyds Mills Press. Pennsylvania.