

Jonah's

Bad Day

The Point: God forgives us.

Scripture Connect: Jonah 1:1–2:10

Supplies for all Session 5 activities options: pencils, prepared poster, 4 hardcover books (that won't be damaged if they fall), 2 bendable wire coat hangers, 2 inflated balloons (plus an extra, just in case!), stopwatch, Bible, a dishpan half filled with water, a plastic bowl or container, silverware (several pieces for each child), salt, 1 bag of salted sunflower seeds, paper

The Basics for Leaders

Many Christians wish they had specific instructions from God. “If he'd just tell me what to do, I'd do it,” they say. “I'm willing to follow, but I just don't know which direction to go.”

No problem for Jonah. He knew exactly where to go: Nineveh. God even told Jonah what to say when he got there.

Jonah's problem was that he didn't *want* to go, so he ran in the opposite direction, believing that hiding from God would take care of the problem.

Um ... no. Jonah was willfully disobedient—and God didn't let him get away with it.

Jonah's story is familiar to most children who've been in Sunday school. Jonah meets big fish, big fish eats him, Jonah decides if he gets out of fish alive he'll do what God says, fish throws up, and out comes a very stinky Jonah. What gets missed is Jonah's *repentance* ... and God's forgiveness. But without those, Jonah would have ended up fish food.

Today you'll discover an important lesson: *God forgives us.*

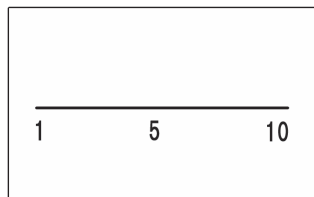
OPENING ACTIVITY—OPTION 1

HOWZITGOIN’

Time: about 5 minutes, depending on attendance

Supplies: pencils, prepared poster

Before kids arrive, draw a line on a poster. Write a 1 on the left end of the line, a 10 on the right, and a 5 in the middle. As kids arrive, ask them to pencil in their initials on the line.



Say: **If this past week was so awful you wish you’d slept through it, place your initials by the 1. If it was a great week you wish you could repeat, put your initials by the 10. Place your initials anywhere on the line that shows how you feel about this past week—except exactly on the 5. Because there’s no such thing as a week that’s exactly half good and half bad!**

After kids have signed in, give them 30 seconds each to explain why they placed their initials where they did. Be sure to include your own initials and explain your placement on the line. Kids will begin to express themselves more over time, and hearing their stories will help you adapt this lesson to make it relevant to your kids’ lives.

OPENING ACTIVITY—OPTION 2

HEAD AND SHOULDERS, KNEES AND TOES

Time: about 10 minutes

Supplies: 4 hardcover books (that won’t be damaged if they fall)

Announce that you’ve decided to bring back an activity that helped their great-grandparents have perfect posture.

Demonstrate with a volunteer how to stand with two books balanced on one’s head. Help the volunteer walk without dropping the books. Then form kids into two teams for a relay race.

Ask the first person in each team to walk to a specific spot and then back again without the books falling. If (when!) books fall, children can simply pick them up, balance them, and keep moving forward.

Encourage kids to cheer on one another. When the relay is finished, collect the books and ask children to be seated on the floor to discuss:

- What made it so hard to keep the books from falling?
- After this experience, how would you rate your usual posture?
- You had to keep perfect posture to keep the books in place. What do you do in life absolutely perfectly?

Say: **Most of us don't have perfect posture—or perfect anything else! That's why we need God's forgiveness. And so did Jonah! We'll find out why today.**

Bad Days Game

PERFECT RELAY

Time: 10 minutes or more, as desired

Supplies: 2 bendable wire coat hangers, 2 inflated balloons (plus an extra), stopwatch

Before children arrive, inflate two balloons and tie them. Place the balloons out of sight.

Announce that since the book relay went so well, you'll try another relay (mix up the two teams)—but this time with wire clothes hangers and balloons. Help children bend their hangers for the job of carrying the balloons.

Explain that the goal of the game is for each relay member to carry a balloon on a hanger to the far wall of the room and back. The catch: if the balloon hits the floor, the entire team starts over. Teams must run this relay perfectly. (Fewer than six kids? Work together as a single team!)

Run the first heat of the relay for two minutes (keep track on your watch) and see if any team has completed the course. If so, run it again to see if teams can improve their times.

When the game is over, collect the hangers and balloons. Discuss:

- How did the need to run this relay perfectly affect how fun the game was?
- What in your life do you have to do perfectly? What happens if you don't do it perfectly?

Say: **We know being perfect or doing everything in a perfect way is impossible, isn't it? Let's discover how a guy named Jonah learned that**

since we're not perfect, we need a special gift from God—we need God's gift of forgiveness!

Bad Days Bible Story

JONAH SCOOT

Time: about 10 minutes

Supplies: Bible

Ask children to sit close together on the floor, in the center of the room.

Say: **Jonah's story is here in the Bible. As I read, I'll point out different places in the room that represent places Jonah went. When I point to one of those spots, please scoot over to that place.**

With flair, read aloud Jonah 1:1–2:10. Point to the indicated spots when you read these verses:

Chapter 1:

verse 3: Left side of the room

(Joppa)

verse 3: Center of room *(getting on ship)*

verse 4: Rock back and forth where seated

verse 5: Right side of the room and keep rocking *(below deck)*

verse 11: Rock back and forth harder

verse 13: Rock back and forth even harder!

verse 14: Scoot to center of room *(going up above deck)*

verse 15: Spin in place *(tossed into sea)*

verse 15: Stop rocking

verse 17: Scoot back to the left of the room *(the fish is swimming)*

Chapter 2:

verse 10: Throw yourself forward as if you were spit out of the fish's belly!

AGE-ALERT TIPS

Alert #1: Have **older kids** read aloud Matthew 6:14–15. Then ask: *How does hearing Jesus's words change how willing you are to forgive others?*

Alert #2: Invite **younger kids** to illustrate the scene when God forgives Jonah—the fish spitting him out.

Finish by saying: **And then, when the Lord told Jonah to go to Nineveh again, that's what Jonah did—so scoot over to the center of the room!** When kids are in place, ask:

- In what ways did God seem angry or demanding?
- In what ways was God forgiving?
- When is a time you knew the right thing to do, but you chose to do the wrong thing? What happened?

Say: **God got Jonah's attention in a yucky way, but he gave Jonah a second chance to make the right choice: the choice to obey God. Jonah still had to suffer the consequences of his bad choice ... three days inside a fish—ugh! But in the end, Jonah was forgiven and got to do the right thing.**

When we disobey, we are punished too. But if we ask God to forgive us, he will. God forgives us and that's good news!

Ask children to select partners and discuss in pairs:

- How hard or easy was it for Jonah to ask God's forgiveness? Why?
- How hard or easy is it for you to ask God to forgive you? Why?

CLOSING PRAYER

BOAT FLOAT PRAYERS

Time: about 7 minutes

Supplies: dishpan half filled with water, plastic bowl or container, silverware (several pieces for each child)

Fill a dishpan half full with water. Float a plastic bowl or container in the pan. Give each child several pieces of silverware that will easily sink when children place all of their silverware in or on the container.

Practice this once so you have the right combination of container and silverware—you don't want the boat to continue floating!

Say: **Jonah thought climbing on a boat heading away from God would keep God from seeing him. Jonah was wrong.**

Our lives are like this little boat. We sail along under our own power and then do something wrong. We sin.

Place a piece of silverware on the “boat.”

Say: **Think of things you’ve done lately that were wrong, that would disappoint God. It might be a lie you told or a mean word you spoke. If there’s anything like that in your life, silently tell God about it. For each of those things, place a piece of silverware on this boat. I’ll need more than one piece of silverware; I’ll bet you do too.**

Continue until the boat sinks. Then reach under the water, empty the silverware, and float the boat again.

Say: **Here’s good news: when we tell God what we’ve done wrong and ask him to forgive us, he does. First John 1:9 says, “If we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness.”**

Let’s pray out loud and thank God for his forgiveness. When children are finished, close your prayer time.

Collect the silverware and dishpan and set them aside.

EXTRA-TIME ACTIVITY—OPTION 1

SALT SOLUTION

Time: about 10 minutes

Supplies: a pinch of salt per child, dishpan half filled with water

Place the dishpan in the center of the room. Have children form a circle around it, and place a pinch of salt in each child’s hand.

Ask children to think of something they’ve done that has disappointed God—a sin. Explain that sins are actions and attitudes that don’t obey or glorify God. Pause to let children think.

Then ask children to silently ask God to forgive them for what they’ve done wrong.

One at a time, invite children to toss their pinches of salt into the dishpan. With your hand, gently stir the water as you read aloud Psalm 103:9–14. Invite children to look at the water where the salt dissolved in the water.

Point out that’s how God forgives: thoroughly. Once and for all. The punishment of a sin may remain, but the sin itself will be forgiven.

EXTRA-TIME ACTIVITY—OPTION 2

SPITTING CONTEST

Time: about 5 minutes

Supplies: 1 bag of salted sunflower seeds, 1 sheet of paper

Say: **The big fish spit up Jonah, so let's follow his example!** Line children against a wall so they're spitting sunflower seeds in the same direction. Even better: go outside if weather and location permit. You'll give children seeds to spit in two events:

Distance: Just what it sounds like. Who can spit a seed the farthest?

Accuracy: Place a sheet of paper about 10 feet from the spitting line.

See who can come closest to landing a seed on the paper. Have a great time, but remember to clean up!

EXTRA-TIME ACTIVITY—OPTION 3

INQUIRING MINDS WANT TO KNOW

Time: 5 minutes

Supplies: none

Gather kids in a circle. Ask: **God asks us to forgive others the same way he forgives us. What's something you would find very difficult to forgive?**