



STORY: Jonah: God's Heart (Jonah 4)

Today, we're continuing our story from the Book of Jonah.

So Jonah finally made it to Nineveh. He preached there, the people turned to God, and God had mercy on them.

Yay!

Everybody was happy ... except Jonah!

Let's read Jonah 4 together.

Older kids can read this out — either together, alternate verses for boys/girls or other creative ways.

Use paraphrased version below for younger kids; source: <http://www.essex1.com/pages/paul/bible37.html>

Prop suggestion: cut out a large green leaf to represent the leafy plant and shade your head while telling the story.

When God first called Jonah, Jonah did the exact opposite of what God asked him to do. But God didn't give up on him. God used him to accomplish his plan. It was just a little more painful than it had to be!

But now, Jonah was mad.

These people did mean, rotten and nasty things. They were famous for it! They didn't follow God, and still they had everything they wanted. It wasn't fair!

"How come they should get off so easy!" Jonah grumbled to himself. Secretly he had been looking forward to watching God really punish them good.

Now God was giving them a second chance.

"I knew this would happen," Jonah said to God. "I knew you would let them off the hook!"

I guess Jonah forgot just WHO got let off the hook in the first place.

"I knew it!" Jonah said to God. "I knew that you are full of everlasting love, and that you are always ready to forgive and to hold back from punishing."

So Jonah walked to the edge of the city and sat down to pout. Maybe the city would go up in a ball of fire anyway. That is what he was hoping to see.

Now, the sun was burning down on Jonah. Sweat was rolling down his face and stinging his eyes.

So God made a leafy plant grow up next to where Jonah was pouting, to shade him from the sun.

Jonah was thankful for the leafy plant and the comfort of the shade.

But the next morning, God sent a worm to eat the roots of the leafy plant. The leafy plant withered and died. When the sun came up, God sent a scorching eastern wind, heated by the desert. The sun beat down on



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Jonah's head until Jonah nearly fainted.

Jonah cried out to God (well, whined, more likely!) "Why don't you just take my life now, and save me from this misery!"

Poor Jonah. He was having such a rough time!

"Jonah, Jonah, Jonah!" God said to him. "Do you think I have stopped loving and caring for you? I could never do that!

"You are so upset because I let a little leafy plant die - but you want me to destroy the whole city of Ninevah! Aren't all these people worth far, far more than a little weed?"

"Didn't I forgive you, even though you tried to run away from me? I love you so much!

"Even though these people didn't know me, and they sinned against me, I love them as much as I love you."

LESSON

1. Jonah wanted Justice. God gave grace.

Jonah was angry that the wicked Ninevites didn't get the punishment they deserved.

Jonah forgot that God also gave him grace — he was disobedient to God.

ALL of us have sinned; all of us deserved punishment. But God, in His grace, did not give us what we deserved. Instead, through Jesus, He made us right and made us family.

"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus." **(Romans 3:23-24)**

2. God's heart is one of grace and compassion.

Even Jonah recognized that when He complained to God:

I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. **(Jonah 4:2)**

Many people think of God as someone up there waiting to zap us with lightning if we do the slightest mistake. Every time there is a disaster (or "calamity"), they call it, "an act of God" or that God is punishing the people.

But they do not realise that our God is gracious. Our God is compassionate.

He is NOT an angry God — He is slow to anger.

He is a loving God — abounding in love.

He is a God who relents from sending calamity — the Act of God was to send His Son to die for us on the cross instead of judgment and punishment for all of us.

3. We are important to God. God cares for you and me.

The leafy plant sprang up overnight and died overnight. Jonah was sad and angry when the leafy plant died, even though he did not plant it or make it grow.

God created all 120,000 of the people of Nineveh and all the animals in it. He cared for all of them.

Jesus reminded the people to look at the beautiful flowers in the field as a reminder that God cares for us and we don't have to worry about anything.

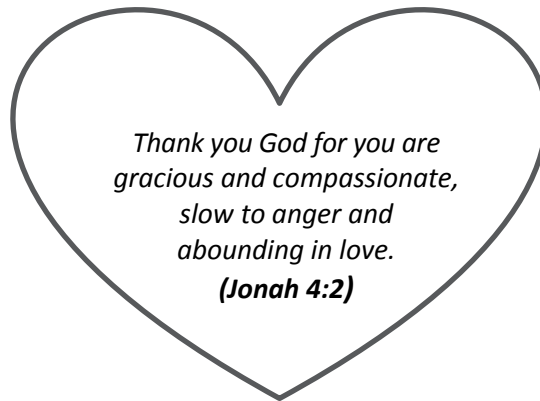
³⁰ *If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith?* **(Matt 6:30)**



ACTIVITY SUGGESTIONS

CRAFT:

- Valentine's Day card with memory verse:



- Leafy Plant craft :

