

“Inside the Belly” Workshop

Jonah: The Prophet of Second Chances

Lesson Plan

Focus: Prayer

In the story of Jonah, all the people at some point turn to God in prayer. Using this as the starting point, the focus of this session is on prayer.



Overview of the workshop:

Children will explore the role of prayer in the story of Jonah. While inside a whale, they will learn about the five-finger approach to praying and use it to write a prayer. They will then hear the “Story of the Pretzel” while making a pretzel chain to take home.

Preparation and Room Set Up:

1. Review the Background Information and Lesson plan.
2. Prepare pretzel chain prayer materials in the classroom before class.
3. Make sure the whale is blown up in the Fellowship Hall and ready for entry.

Materials:

Pretzels (for “prayer” and snacking)
Ribbon (one 24” length per child)
Scissors
Photocopies of the handouts (The Story of the Pretzel and Five-Finger Prayer)
Tape
Clipboard and pen (to write the prayer)
25-foot Whale to sit inside¹
Box Fan and extension cord to blow up the whale. (Tape cord to floor to reduce tripping hazard.)

Time Guidelines:

Welcome/Introduction	5 minutes
Inside the Belly	20 minutes
Bible Study	
Talk about prayer	
Use the Five Finger Prayer to write a closing prayer	
Prayer Pretzels	20 minutes
Closing	5 minutes

¹ We were fortunate to borrow a whale from a local church (St. James United). An instruction guide to make your own is provided in a separate post “How to Make a Blow up Whale”. Or here’s a link for another plan to make a whale → <http://busybeautifulbudget.blogspot.ca/search?q=whale>. It seems since I began preparing lessons, some stuff is no longer “free” on the web, and some can’t be found. You might want to get creative here and use something to represent the belly of the whale – e.g. a tent or tarp

Important Teacher Notes:

Each workshop includes the Bible story. One of our primary goals is to improve the children's Bible literacy! Shepherds should help the children locate the stories.

Remember, that as the rotation progresses, the children will become more familiar with the story. When this happens, allow the children to tell you what they know. The children should still locate the story in their Bibles every week. Use the bold headings in their Bibles to guide your discussion. You may want to review some of the Bible notes as well. Be sure to fill in any missing information and add additional details using the Background Information to help you. One of the greatest advantages of this model is that children who come regularly learn the story in great depth.

Welcome and Introductions:

Gather the children together. Welcome the children and introduce yourself. Make sure you are wearing your nametag and that the children have picked up their nametags. Always begin each class with introductions since the children may not know you. Please include the shepherds in introductions.

Tell the children that today they will go inside the belly of the whale and find out what it might have been like for Jonah.

Opening Prayer:

Please open class with prayer each week. You may pray your own prayer or use the prayer below:

Dear God, We praise you and we thank you for all you do for us. Be with us today as we learn more about you through the prophet Jonah and his story. In Jesus' name, AMEN.
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Inside the Belly:

For this workshop, the Bible Study and discussion will be inside the Belly of the Whale in the Fellowship Hall. To enter the belly, no shoes allowed! We must take care not to hurt the big fish!

Go to the Fellowship Hall. Take the Bibles with you and the Five Finger prayer sheets. Take the clipboard and pen to write the prayer.

Bible Study:

Introduce the Story:

God raised up a prophet for Israel. His name was Jonah. Now at that time, another nation, Assyria, was very powerful. They had strong armies who tried to take over lands and people. The people of Israel worried that the Assyrian army would take over their land too. The capital city of Assyria was called Ninevah. It was a huge city with great walls surrounding it. The

people in Ninevah did not worship the one, true God. So, the people of Israel looked down on the people of Ninevah. They thought they were better than them. They also didn't like them because the Assyrian army was very cruel. The people of Ninevah were their enemies.

But, God wanted to teach his people a lesson. And so he called a new prophet, named Jonah, to show his people that God loves everyone – no matter where they live or what they do. Let's find out more about the story now.

Find the story in the Bible:

Jonah lived about 700 years before Jesus was born. Where would we find the story of Jonah in the Bible? (Old Testament)

Let's find the story of Jonah in our Bibles now. (Have shepherds help them. You can tell them what page to find the story on.)

Read or paraphrase the story as the children follow along in their Bibles. You can point out the bold headings.

While reading or summarizing the story, help the kids identify the times when prayer happens during the story:

The Prayer	Where in the story
1. The sailors pray during the storm	Chapter 1 Verse 14 Then they cried to the LORD, "O LORD, please do not let us die for taking this man's life. Do not hold us accountable for killing an innocent man, for you, O LORD, have done as you pleased."
2. Jonah prays in the belly of the great fish	Chapter 2 is Jonah's prayer of thanksgiving.
3. The Ninevites pray when they repent	Chapter 3 Verse 8, the Ninevites "call urgently on God" as part of their repentance
4. Jonah's final prayer out of anger	Chapter 4 – note that God knows how to help Jonah even when he's angry.

Since you are inside the belly, talk with the kids about what it must have been like for Jonah:

- ◆ That he was running away, and it didn't work
- ◆ That God sent the storm and Jonah knew it was because he had run away
- ◆ That if the big fish hadn't swallowed him, he would have drowned
- ◆ How did Jonah feel now? (thankful to not drown, regretting his decision to run away, afraid??)
- ◆ What did Jonah do in the belly? (he prayed)
- ◆ What did Jonah pray about?

Memory Verse:

Each rotation we encourage the children to memorize one verse. Locate the verse and review with the children at this time. This verse comes from Chapter 2, as part of the prayer Jonah says while in the belly.

“When I was in trouble, I called out to you. And you answered me.”	Jonah 2:2
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Prayer Discussion: Suggested Things to Talk About:

What is prayer?

Prayer is talking freely to God from our hearts. This communication deepens as our relationship with God grows. Prayer is telling God our fears, worries and concerns. It is telling Him about our problems and needs, and talking to Him about things we don't understand. It is sharing our joys. Prayer is conversation with God. We can talk to him as a friend.

Prayer is a time to visit with a friend, not just a time to ask for things. Good communication includes both listening and speaking. We listen when we read what God has written in His Word and to what the Holy Spirit speaks into our hearts. We speak when we share both our thoughts and our feelings to God, through words, thoughts and actions. When there is good communication between you and God, it becomes natural to come to Him during times of emergency. The line is open and everything is all clear.

There is nothing you can't say to God. There is no feeling that you can't share. (Even Jonah, a prophet, shared his anger with God and said things he probably didn't really mean.)

Does God always answer our prayers?

Yes, God always answers - but not always in the way we want or expect. He can say "Yes" or "No" or "Wait". God answers our prayers to bless us, to teach us, to guide us, or to protect us (sometimes from ourselves). He can answer our prayers even when He knows it isn't best for us, if it will teach us an important lesson. Often, God will answer our prayers to give us exactly what we need at just the right time. Sometimes His timing is different from our own - we always want things right away. But God knows that sometimes it is important to wait. He always has our best interests in mind, and we can trust Him to do what is best for us.

Write Closing Prayer:

Use the Five Finger Prayer to write a prayer for the closing of the class. Ask them to identify something to pray for each of the “fingers”.

1. People closest
2. Teachers, pastor, doctors
3. Prime Minister and leaders
4. People who are weak or sick
5. Ourselves

Someone should write down what is said so that the prayer can be read at closing time.

An example of what the prayer could look like:

1. Lord, thank you for our family and friends. Please take care of them. (thumb)
2. Lord, please be with all our teachers as we start a new school year. (pointer)
3. Lord, guide the Prime Minister and all those in government to make good decisions. (tallest finger)
4. Lord, please take care of all those who are sick. Please make those who are weak strong so that they can get better. (ring finger)
5. Lord, we ask that you be with each of us as we try harder to be better and better each day. To use the gifts you have given us, and to learn all that we can from our teachers and family. (pinkie)

When the prayer is written, return to the Sunday School room.

Five Finger Prayer

Do you ever have trouble thinking of what to say when you are praying? Do you start to pray and then just can't think of anything to say? Well, here's something that will help you when that happens. It is called the "Five Finger Prayer."

First, put your hands together in front of you as if you are praying.

1. You will notice that the closest finger to you is the **thumb**. Since it is the closest to you, the thumb reminds you to *pray for those that are closest to you*. Pray for your family and friends.
2. The next finger is the **pointing finger**. Let this finger remind you to pray for those that point you in the right direction. *Pray for those who teach, instruct and heal*. This includes teachers, doctors, and pastors. They need support and wisdom in pointing others in the right direction. Keep them in your prayers.
3. The next finger is the **tallest finger**. It reminds us to *pray for our leaders*. Pray for the Prime Minister, other leaders in government, business and industry. These people shape our nation and guide public opinion. They need God's guidance.
4. The fourth finger is our **ring finger**. This is our weakest finger; as any piano teacher will tell you. It should remind us to *pray for those who are weak*, for those who are sick, in trouble or in pain. They need your prayers day and night. You cannot pray too much for them.
5. And lastly comes our **little finger**. the smallest finger of all. Which is where we should place ourselves in relation to God and others. The Bible says, "Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought." Your pinkie should remind you to *pray for yourself*.

So the next time you are talking to God, and you can't think of anything to say, let the "Five Finger Prayer" help you.

- Author Unknown –

Make Prayer Pretzel chain:

Read or tell the “Story of the Pretzel” and then make the chain. OR, explain how to make the chain, and while the kids are working on it, tell them the “Story of the Pretzel”.

1. Each child takes one copy of the “Story of the Pretzel”, four or five pretzels, and one length of ribbon (about 24”).
2. Tape one end of the ribbon to the BACK of the “Story of the Pretzel” sheet.
3. Place pretzels in the “prayer” position so that the “hands” are on the “shoulders”.
4. Take the loose end of ribbon and weave it through the pretzels to join them in a chain. Start the ribbon at the top (“shoulders”) so that the chain will hang down. When the ribbon is woven to the bottom of the last pretzel, then weave it back up to the top of the first pretzel.
5. When weaving is finished, tape the end of the ribbon to the back of the sheet (beside the other end already taped).

Reflection and Closing Time:

Review with the children what was learned today.
Clean up room.
Nametags should be returned to Shepherd Box.

Closing prayer:

Dear Lord, we thank you for prayer. It is good to have a friend to talk to, but even friends sometimes have trouble thinking of something to say. Help us to remember this Five Finger Prayer to remember those who need our prayers.

(Read the petitions written by the class)

In Jesus name we pray. AMEN.

The Story of the Pretzel

Our modern-day pretzel has an interesting history.

One day around the year 610, a monk who was busy baking the unleavened bread that would be used during Lent decided to make a treat for the children who had learned to recite their prayers.

Christians in those days did not pray by bowing their heads and folding their hands. At that time they prayed by folding their hands across their chests with each hand touching the opposite shoulder.

This clever monk formed the dough, so the story goes, so that one "hand" was each touching the opposite "shoulder" in prayer: to look like the folded arms of children in prayer. He gave his creation the name *pretiola*, which in Latin means "little reward." They were the rewards for the children who learned their prayers. Soon it was known the world over as a pretzel.

The secret of making great pretzels is not only in the baking but also in the shaping. We, like pretzels, are made from the best ingredients, by the best hands available, the hands of our Father in Heaven.

The simple shape of the pretzel, arms folded in prayer, reminds us to pray each day. Our "Pretiola" or "little rewards" are the blessings we receive.

Every time you see a pretzel, remember prayer.

Five Finger Prayer

