

MARK OF A DISCIPLE

Disciples of Christ do their best to share God's message.

SCRIPTURE

JONAH 3:1-10



BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

Nineveh is referred to as "that great city" in this passage (v. 2). As the center of the growing Assyrian empire, it is believed to have had a population of nearly one million people in and near the city, which was fortified by towers and walls.¹ As a city far from the ways of God (thus the need to send Jonah), it was a sinful and violent place (Jonah 3:8; Nahum 3:1-3). This might be part of the reason Jonah ran from God's calling the first time. But fresh from the belly of the big fish (Jonah 2:10), Jonah was much more receptive to God's instruction when it came the second time. God's message through Jonah drastically changed "that great city" of Nineveh for the better.

Check out the *Teacher Prep Video* for this lesson: <https://vimeo.com/817793063>

FACILITATOR NOTE: We're giving you a lot of teaching material. Don't feel like you should cover everything here. You know your group better than anyone. Choose the material that will best fit your students and skip over the rest.

OPENING

PRAYER

1-2 minutes

Start your small group by asking the Lord to bless your discussion and time together.

OPTIONAL: Give students an opportunity to lead the prayer.

OPENING QUESTIONS

3-5 minutes

- How was the week? What's the best thing that's happened? Anything major going on?
- Where would you go if you had to move to a different country? What would be the scariest thing about moving?



EXPLORE

EXPLORE GOD'S WORD

3-5 minutes

Today we're looking at Jonah's ministry to the city of Nineveh. When God first called Jonah to go to Nineveh, he wanted nothing to do with it. You've probably heard about Jonah's encounter with the big fish. He was thrown into the sea, swallowed by a giant fish, and then vomited out after three days. After he got spit out, Jonah finally obeyed God's call. He went to Nineveh, told the whole city to follow God, and everyone listened! Following God's call and telling others about your faith can be scary, but *disciples of Christ do their best to share God's message*. When we step out in courage to obey God, big things can happen!

Read Jonah 3:1–2 and discuss 1–2 of these questions:

7–10 minutes

- What's the scariest part of sharing your faith with others?

Answers will vary—rejection, ridicule, failure, etc. Encourage your students that it's normal to be nervous about sharing their faith, but also remind them that they don't have to let that fear stop them.

- What's holding you back from sharing your faith with others?

Answers will vary. There are many personal reasons and fears that keep us from sharing our faith. Some answers may be similar to the previous question's but see what your students have to say!

- Why do you think Jonah was so afraid to preach in Nineveh?

Nineveh had a bad reputation. Jonah was probably fearful for his own safety! He didn't think they would ever turn to follow God, so why even bother with them?



Say something like: You might think the scariest part of sharing God with others is figuring out what to say. What if you get it all wrong? What if they ask questions you don't know the answer to? Here's the good news: you're not sharing your message; you're sharing God's message! God told Jonah to proclaim "the message that I tell you" (v. 2). Through the Holy Spirit, God will also help us figure out what to say.

Read Jonah 3:3–5 and discuss 1–2 of these questions:

7–10 minutes

- How did the Ninevites show their repentance (vv. 6–9)?

The king made a decree, so they all fasted, put on sackcloth (a sign of mourning), and called out to God.

- Have you ever tried and failed to share your faith? What happened?

Answers will vary but remind your students that when people reject the Gospel, they reject God, not your students.

- Jonah was preaching the message, but it says, "the people of Nineveh believed God" (v. 5). Why doesn't it say, "the people of Nineveh believed Jonah"?

It was God's message; Jonah was just called to preach it. The same is true for us. We're preaching God's Word, not our own.



Say something like: We have no idea how others will respond to God's Word. The only thing we can do is share it as best we can. Sometimes sharing our faith will be easy, sometimes it might be uncomfortable. But that shouldn't stop us because talking about God can lead to big things!

FACILITATOR NOTE: If you have extra time, go through the next set of questions. If not, skip to the Connection section.

Read Jonah 3:6–10 and discuss 1–2 of these questions:

7–10 minutes

- God relented from destroying the city once they repented. What does that teach us about who God is and how he works?

God wants people to be saved. Repentance leads to salvation! We can be saved from eternal death when we turn toward God and accept his grace.

- What kind of things could happen if you are obedient like Jonah was in the end?

Who knows! God can work beyond our imaginations. Maybe small, unnoticeable changes would take place. Maybe big, city- changing things would happen!



Say something like: When Jonah finally obeyed God's command, Nineveh was totally changed. Everyone listened to his message and repented. Even the king passed new laws ordering the entire city to follow God! Because of their overwhelming response and repentance, God relented and didn't bring judgment upon the city. When Jonah was finally willing to obey God, a whole lot changed! What could God do with your obedience?



CONNECT & APPLY

CONNECTION

5-7 minutes

Show your students how Scripture connects to their lives: Use the example below OR share a personal story of how you were afraid to share your faith.



Example: You might be familiar with The Lord of the Rings. Frodo, the tiny hobbit, is called on to carry the One Ring to Mordor—the most dangerous place in Middle Earth—and destroy it in the fires of Mount Doom to defeat evil and save all that is good. Why didn't they give the responsibility to a mighty warrior, a wise elf, or a powerful wizard? Surely they were better equipped for such a dangerous mission! But it was Frodo's calling, and nobody else could take his place. When he tells Gandalf how afraid he is and wishes he didn't have to do this terrible thing, Gandalf tells him that we cannot choose the time we live in and "all we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us."²

Nobody can answer your calling for you. Maybe there are people who seem to know more about the faith than you, who can articulate their beliefs better, or who have more experience, but they can't answer your unique calling!

- Do you ever feel unequipped to answer God's call? What's holding you back?
Answers will vary. There are many ways we can feel unprepared for what God has called us to do. We might not ever feel fully ready! But we can prepare as best we can through practice, study, and prayer. Whenever the calling comes, be ready! God will guide you and fill in the gaps.

MARK OF A DISCIPLE

2-3 minutes

Disciples of Christ do their best to share God's message.
 Use the Mark of a Disciple to reinforce the lesson and challenge students to apply it to their lives.

APPLY IT

5-10 minutes

Amazing things can happen when we're willing to follow God's call in full obedience. It's natural to feel fear or uncertainty when sharing your faith. Jonah felt fear, so he tried to run away from God! When he finally obeyed, an entire city was saved. God's call always has a purpose. God called Jonah to preach in Nineveh. What is he calling you to?



Be specific:

- What are you going to do?
- When are you going to do it?
- Is there someone who can keep you accountable?



FACILITATOR NOTE: Allow students who are comfortable to share their plans for application. This may encourage or spark ideas for other students, plus add a level of accountability.



CLOSING

PRAYER

2-3 minutes

Take a moment to ask for prayer requests. Take time to let your students pray for each other's applications in the upcoming weeks. Spend some time praying for courage to overcome our fears and step out in bold obedience as we share our faith with those who need to hear it.

Write down any prayer requests mentioned and ask your students about them at your next meeting.

MEMORY VERSE

Send the memory verse graphic included in your download to your students later this week to keep the conversation going.

"For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control."

2 Timothy 1:7 (ESV)

NOTES

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¹ Warren W. Wiersbe, Wiersbe's expository outlines on the Old Testament (Colorado Springs, CO: Victor Books, 1993).

² "The Fellowship of the Ring Study Guide," *Sparknotes* (SparkNotes), accessed February 19, 2023, <https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/fellowship/quotes/>.

