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Family Faith Talks- The Story of Jonah

Week 1

Listen: Jonah 1: 1-6

Unpack: In today's reading we see Jonah experiencing something we have ALL experience- fear. No matter how old you are or how brave you are, everyone has been afraid before. The thing that makes Jonah's fear a little different is that he is afraid to do something that God has asked of him; to go to the city of Nineveh & tell them to change their ways & start following God. Jonah was scared because he thought the people in Nineveh would be very angry with him for showing up & telling them to change their lives. He was scared to do what God asked, so he ran! We don't usually think of being scared to do something God asks us to do, because we know it will always be the right thing to do. But sometimes, the right thing to do is also a very hard thing to do. It might even be a scary thing to do. It's important for us to remember that following God will not always be easy. It will take courage & bravery to be the people God created us to be.

Discuss: What is something you are afraid of? Do you understand how Jonah might have been feeling? Have you ever felt like what God wanted you to do was something you didn't want to? Maybe that meant sitting with the new kid, or telling your friends it isn't cool to make fun of someone. What are ways that we can remind ourselves to be brave because God is with us, even when we're really afraid to do something?

Pray: God, thank you for understanding our fears & not judging us when we are scared. Remind us that no matter what we face or how difficult it may seem, nothing is impossible with You. Amen.

Do: One of the things that helps me when I am afraid is to do a "power pose". Think of it like this; if you were a superhero, what would your superhero pose be? It should be something that makes you feel strong, like you can do anything! Have each person in your family come up with a power pose & share it.

Week 2

Listen: Jonah 1: 7-17

Unpack: Wow! Jonah has been thrown into the ocean and now he is in the belly of a whale. All so that he didn't have to do what God asked of him & go to Nineveh. I can't imagine how scared

those other people on the boat must have been, knowing that no matter where Jonah fled, he could not hide from God. Jonah knew exactly why this huge storm had come, and it seems like he was ready to accept the consequences so that the storm would stop. Even though this was a very scary experience for Jonah and the people on the boat, it also reminded them of God's power & presence everywhere. Jonah tried to run from God, but he is probably realizing now that there is no place he could go that God would not know where to find him. This is not meant to be scary, it should actually make us feel safe! God kept chasing after Jonah because God knew that Jonah was the right man for the job.

Discuss: What do you think Jonah will do now that he is in the belly of this big fish? Will he give up hope, or will he turn to God for help? I wonder how Jonah is feeling about his decision to run away from what God asked him to do.

Pray: Ever-present God, we know you are with us even when we cannot feel it. You are in the air we breathe, the love we share, & even in our family & friends. We are so glad that You will never leave us, even when we try to run away. Your love will always find us. Amen.

Do: Play a game of hide & seek in your house! We may be able to hide from each other, but God knows each & every hiding spot already. Who is the best hider & who is the best seeker in your family?

Week 3

Listen: Jonah 2: 1-10

Unpack: Jonah does the only thing he can think to do in this situation; pray! When we feel like we have made bad choices, are out of options, or feel like no one can help us & we are all alone, praying is a great choice, because it reminds us that no matter how bad things seem, God can make a way forward for us. In Jonah's case, this means being spit up by the giant fish (gross!). Jonah is doing a couple important things in this prayer; he is admitting that he messed up, and he is asking God for help. Both of these things can be hard to do, because no one like to admit when they are wrong, and some people think they can do everything on their own so they don't like to admit when they need help. Can you imagine how he must have felt, praying to God while he sat in the belly of a whale in the middle of an ocean? What a funny sight to think about.

Discuss: When do you pray? Is it mostly when you are sad, happy, or worried? Do you pray at a similar time every day, like in the morning on the way to school, before a meal, or at night right before you go to sleep? Praying can sometimes feel frustrating because we don't usually hear God talking straight back to us, but it is SO important. How can your family better include prayer in your everyday lives?

Pray: Lord, remind us that prayer is a way to connect with you in every circumstance. There is no feeling you are not big enough to handle. We can bring you all our sadness, anger, joy & fear. Help us to pray more often as we seek to be closer to You. Amen.

Do: Make a prayer calendar and put it somewhere in your house you will see it every day (I suggest the fridge, everybody eats!). Have a person in your family assigned to each day of the week, & that is their day to pray whenever your family does daily prayer. This helps everyone get in the practice of praying instead of just the same family member doing it every time.

Week 4

Listen: Jonah 3: 1-10

Unpack: Jonah finally listens to what God has been asking all along & goes to Nineveh to tell them to turn from their evil ways and follow God. To Jonah's surprise, they are not angry with him. Instead, they listen! Even the king realizes that the city of Nineveh must change its ways. To signify this, they put on a special kind of clothing (sackcloth) & they fasted, which means they did not eat or drink for a specific amount of time. They did these things so that they could repent of their bad ways and start new with God. To repent is just a fancy way of admitting we have done wrong & asking for forgiveness (just like Jonah did in the belly of the big fish). The people of Nineveh were not sure if God would accept their repentance, or punish them for the ways they had turned away from God before Jonah arrived. But God saw that they really were sorry and wanted to change, so God did not destroy Nineveh.

Discuss: Why do you think the people listened to Jonah, this stranger who showed up in their city & demanded they change their ways? I wonder if the people of Nineveh could tell that God was with Jonah. How do you think it feels when we repent to God, admitting that we are wrong and asking for forgiveness? I wonder how the people felt towards God when God decided not to destroy Nineveh. I wonder how Jonah felt when the people listened to him?

Pray: God, thank you for the story of Jonah & the people of Nineveh. May this story remind us how important it is to listen closely for what you want us to do in our lives, and to know that we are never doing it alone. Amen.

Do: Write the names of each person we have met in Jonah's story on different strips of paper: Jonah, God, a man on the boat with Jonah in the storm, and a person living in Nineveh. Place all the strips of paper in a bowl and have each family member draw one out. Pretend that you are that person in the story. How would you have behaved similarly or different to the person in the story you have studied? Do this for a couple rounds & imagine being in this story.