



THE BIG IDEA

God is for our enemies.

THE BIBLE

Jonah; Romans 5:8-10; Matthew 5:43-47

WHAT? What are we talking about today?

ACTIVITY | Us or Them

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Just like last week, split your students into two teams and open with a game that pits half of your students against the other half. Which game you play doesn't matter. You could choose one of your group's all-time favorite games, or you could play this week's recommended game (Act-And-Draw Relay).*
- **NOTE:** If a white board is not in your classroom, you may use the plain paper provided in your supply envelope.
- *The goal should be to get students to embrace a friendly but competitive "us versus them" attitude. If you want to make this an ongoing theme throughout this series, you might . . .*
 - *Split your group into two teams for the duration of the series.*
 - *Give your teams a team mascot or a team color (red and blue).*
 - *Ask each team in a call-and-response, "Who's going to win?" ("Us!") "Who's going to lose?" ("Them!")*
- **NOTE:** *This week, award your winning team with a "trophy" but don't hand it to them yet — you'll need it.*

OBJECT LESSON | Trophy

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Display the trophy picture and have it on display as you teach. If you'd like, you can give it to the winning team from the opening game when you're finished with it.*
- Have you ever won a trophy? If you have, you know it feels pretty good to win, doesn't it? And if you haven't . . . well, you know how bad it feels to lose.

VIDEO | Duke vs. Kentucky

- Don't you just *hate* people who seem like they're always winning?
- In 1992, there was a major college basketball game taking place between two teams: Duke and Kentucky. This was the playoffs — only a few games away from the National Championship game.
- At the end of the game, Kentucky was up by 1 point, 103 to 102. Kentucky fans were ready to celebrate an amazing victory. But with 2.1 seconds remaining in the game, a Duke player caught a pass, dribbled once, and shot the ball. Watch what happened . . .
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you'd like to swap this story out for something else, you might recount a story of a famous person people love to hate from a movie, a book, or history. If you're going to use this story, you'll want to play [this video clip](#).*



- Duke went on to win the National Championship that year. Ever since 1992, Duke has been the team that everyone loves to hate. Duke has a pretty huge fan base and their games nearly always sell out, so they're doing just fine, but their opponents **love to see them lose**, and their opponents' fans **love to cheer against them**.

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Give your students a few moments to share in pairs or as a group. To close, ask a few students to summarize what they discussed, and then share your own thoughts.
- **Name one team, celebrity, or artist that you love to hate. Why do you hate them so much?**
- **Who does your school love to hate? Who do your friends love to hate? Who does the world love to hate?**

STORY | Talk about a time you wanted to see someone fail.

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Tell a story from your life (or ask a volunteer or student to tell a story) about a time when you wanted to see someone fail. Be sure to emphasize why you felt that way and make it clear that you now realize how wrong you were.
- I'm guessing I'm not the only person here who has ever rooted for someone else's failure. That's why I'm excited about our conversation today.

SO WHAT? Why does it matter to God and to us?

OBJECT LESSON | "OR" to "FOR" Cardboard Letters

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Using the cardboard letters from Week 1, spell the words "or" and "for" for emphasis as you teach.
- So far in this series, we've been talking about how God is *for* us, and how God calls us to be *for* others, but how that's not always easy for us.
- Today, I want to tell you a story about an enemy that everyone loved to hate . . . and how God stepped in to do something surprising.

WHO WAS JONAH?

- Last week we met a guy named Jeremiah, a prophet — someone sent by God to give people a message from God. Jeremiah was a pretty famous prophet, but he wasn't God's only prophet.
- We talked last week about how God asked Jeremiah to prophecy specifically to Israel, God's people. But today I want to introduce you to a very reluctant prophet named Jonah.
- If you grew up around church or the Bible, you may have heard about Jonah before. He's the guy whose last name you may have thought was, "And-The-Whale."
- What you may have missed about Jonah's story is that Jonah was a prophet who God called to speak to a city called Nineveh.
 - Nineveh was a huge city with a terrible reputation. Kind of like Duke, a lot of people really hated Nineveh, including Jonah.



- Why? Because Nineveh was the capital of the kingdom of Assyria. Assyrians were guilty of conquering the nation of Israel — and with all of that conquering came the rape, murder, and destruction of the nations they conquered.

SCRIPTURE | Jonah

- A lot of people hated Nineveh, but God's people, the Israelites, had a pretty justifiable reason to hate them.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Just like Jonah was a reluctant messenger of God's words, take a risk and ask a student (or a few students) to read or even act out portions of the Scripture. Print their passages in advance, reserving some sections for yourself that you can either read or summarize. We'll break it into parts for you.*
- **READ, SUMMARIZE, OR ACT OUT JONAH 1:1-3**
 - You know that feeling you get when your parents tell you to clean your room? That seems to be how Jonah felt. So Jonah did what you've probably done to your parents once or twice — he totally ignored God's directions and heads Anywhere-But-Nineveh!
 - Jonah was not interested in preaching to the Ninevites. He hated them. He didn't want to talk to them. He was probably hoping he could delay long enough that God would just destroy them instead.
- **READ, SUMMARIZE, OR ACT OUT JONAH 1:4-17**
 - The most incredible thing about this story is not that Jonah became some fish's breakfast — it's how far Jonah went to avoid God's command to help Jonah's enemies hear from God.
 - Jonah's disobedience to God and hatred for his enemies led to some pretty ridiculous consequences.
- **READ, SUMMARIZE, OR ACT OUT JONAH 2:1-3:3**
 - God gave Jonah a second chance and, this time, Jonah obeyed. He went to Nineveh.
- **READ, SUMMARIZE, OR ACT OUT JONAH 3:3-10**
 - It's a miracle! Jonah shows up, a stranger in the city, and tells everyone he sees, "Hey — heads up, God is going to destroy you if you don't get your act together."
 - For reasons we'll see in just a second, it's very possible that Jonah did a really bad job with this. You know how, when you *really* don't want to do those chores you're supposed to do, you put in as little effort as possible? That's how I imagine Jonah prophesying to Nineveh — walking around the city, repeating the same line over and over for three days.
 - But amazingly, despite Jonah's best (or worst?) efforts, the people of Nineveh believe him and repent! They turn from their evil ways and God says, "Great! Now I don't have to destroy you."
- And that's it! Problem solved! God's will is done . . . right? No — we have one more chapter to go.
- **READ, SUMMARIZE, OR ACT OUT JONAH 4:1-3**
 - Thanks to Jonah, God has spared Nineveh from destruction, but Jonah was *angry!* Jonah had wanted his enemies to burn, and now it was his fault that they had repented!



- Don't forget about all of the horrible things the Assyrian people had done to Jonah's people. You can kind of understand where he's coming from, right?
- Can you imagine hating someone, or a group of people, so much that you actually wanted them to die? Maybe you can't — or maybe you can — but here's what God had to say about it.
- **READ, SUMMARIZE, OR ACT OUT JONAH 4:4-10**
 - God's asking, "Really, Jonah? You're going to be sad about a dead plant, but be totally in support of 120,000 dead human beings?"
 - Jonah hated his enemies so much that it seems he stopped seeing them as people. To Jonah, they weren't human — they were disposable.
 - The hatred and indifference Jonah felt for the people of Nineveh is the kind of hatred and indifference that has caused some of the darkest moments in human history. God needed Jonah to understand that Jonah had it all wrong.

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Give your students a few moments to share in pairs or as a group. To close, ask a few students to summarize what they discussed, and then share your own thoughts.
- **What are some reasons people hate each other or see each other as enemies?**
- **Have you ever wanted to see someone fail? What happened, and how do you feel about it now?**

SCRIPTURE | Romans 5:8-10

- For the last two weeks, we've talked about how **God is for us** and how **God calls us to be for others**. And not just "our" people — the ones who are kind and loving to us. God calls us to be for *everyone* — even our greatest enemies.
- But God would never ask us to do something that God was not willing to do. God modeled this for us. We read this passage two weeks ago, but let's revisit it . . .
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Read Romans 5:8-10 together.
- Like the people of Nineveh, we were once enemies of God. But aren't you glad God didn't treat us with hatred and indifference? Instead, God treated us with compassion and love.
- Through Jonah, God showed compassion and love to the people of Nineveh. Through Jesus, God shows compassion and love to you and me. We were all once enemies of God, but aren't you glad God doesn't treat us with hatred or indifference?
- God's message to Jonah is the same message God gives to us today. Just like God is for us, **God is for our enemies too**.

NOW WHAT? What does God want us to do about it?

REFLECTION | Who is My Enemy?

- Don't hear me say this is simple or easy. It's not.
 - Jonah's attitude toward the people of Nineveh wasn't completely unjustified. Remember, the Assyrians had conquered, abused, and killed Jonah's people.



- You may have experienced something just as terrible as Jonah did. If you have, God understands your anger, and I am so sorry.
- If someone has hurt you, I'm not here to tell you to forgive and forget. In fact, **if someone has hurt or abused you in any way, please tell an adult today so we can help you walk through this — don't try to process it alone.**
- But if you have an "enemy" for any other reason, I'm inviting you to have a conversation with God like the conversation Jonah had with God.
- I don't know who comes to mind for you when I say "enemies." Maybe you're holding a name or two very clearly in your mind, or maybe you're thinking, "I'm not sure I have any enemies." Either way, take a moment to reflect on these questions . . .
 - Who has hurt me?
 - Who haven't I forgiven?
 - Who would I love to see fail?
 - Who do I wish everyone else disliked as much as I dislike them?
 - Are there any people, or groups of people, I kind of wish God would just destroy already?
- Now that you have some names or faces in mind, take a few more moments to reflect on these questions . . .
 - How does it feel to hear that God is "for" that person?
 - What do you want to ask or say to God?
 - How do you need God to transform the way you see that person?
 - What would it look like for you to be "for" them?

GOD IS FOR OUR ENEMIES

- So what would it look like for you to be *for* your enemies like God is for them? It's hard work to do, but it's worth it.
- The darkest moments of human history may have happened because of hate, but the brightest moments in human history have happened because of compassion and love.
- Just like God brought us hope when we were God's enemies, we get bring hope to others — even the people who are hard for us to love.
- We get to be a light in the darkness — people who show compassion and love to even the most unlovable people, because every person is made in the image of God, our Creator.
- This week, I hope you decide to **show your enemies that you are for them because God is for them.** Watch what God does when, instead of getting angry or choosing hate, you choose to show compassion and love.

DISCUSSION

- **Without naming names, is there anyone you see as an enemy right now? Why do you see them that way?**
- **How does it feel to hear that God is "for" those people? What would you like to ask or say to God about them?**
- **How do you need God to transform the way you see your enemies?**
- **What would it look like for you to be "for" your enemies?**



- **Read Matthew 5:43-47. Why do you think Jesus tells us to pray for our enemies? What good would that do?**
- **This week, what's one step you'd like to take toward being "for" an enemy?**
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Spend time as a group praying for your enemies — not by name, unless the prayer is silent. "God, this is tough, but I want to pray for _____. I believe you know what happened, and that you love me just like you love them. Please show me how to be for them, and then help me do it. I can't do this without you."*