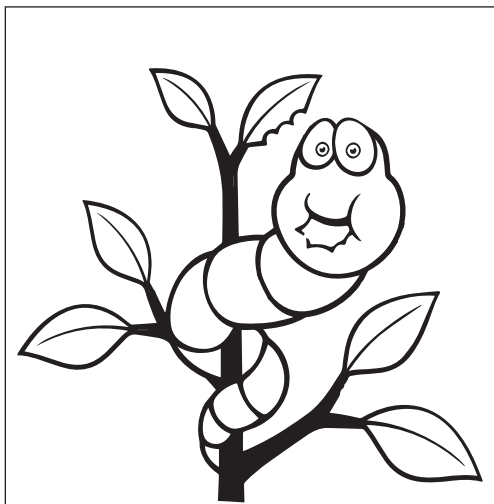




Jonah is angry

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Jonah 4

Jonah was really upset and angry. So he prayed: "Our Lord, I knew from the very beginning that you wouldn't destroy Nineveh. That's why I left my own country and headed for Spain. You are a kind and merciful God, and you are very patient. You always show love, and you don't like to punish anyone, not even foreigners. Now let me die! I'd be better off dead."

The Lord replied, "What right do you have to be angry?" Jonah then left through the east gate of the city and made a shelter to protect himself from the sun. He sat under the shelter, waiting to see what would happen to Nineveh. The Lord made a vine grow up to shade Jonah's head and protect him from the sun. Jonah was very happy to have the vine, but early the next morning the Lord sent a worm to chew on the vine, and the vine dried up. During the day the Lord sent a scorching wind, and the sun beat down on Jonah's head, making him feel faint. Jonah was ready to die, and he shouted, "I wish I were dead!"

But the Lord asked, "Jonah, do you have the right to be angry about the vine?" "Yes, I do," he answered, "and I'm angry enough to die." But the Lord said: "You are concerned about a vine that you did not plant or take care of, a vine that grew up in one night and died the next. In that city of Nineveh there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell right from wrong, and many cattle are also there. Don't you think I should be concerned about that big city?"

Commentary

What a moaner Jonah turns out to be! He seems to be the sort of person who is never happy, whatever happens. In this part of the story, he is angry because his preaching has been successful. The Ninevites have turned away from doing bad things and they have said sorry to God. Most people would be overjoyed to see this happen, but Jonah still can't understand that enemies—and foreign enemies at that—can be loved by God and can come to worship him. He knows all the right words to say about God, as his prayer shows, but he clearly doesn't believe it deep in his heart. He goes off in a sulk, hoping that God will change his mind and destroy the city after all.

God is patient with Jonah. Through what happens to the plant, God tries to show him that he can't help but care for people, from whatever city or country they come. Everyone is welcome in God's kingdom, not just a favoured few.

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Questions

- ▶ How do you react when things don't go according to plan?
- ▶ Might we sometimes, like Jonah, know all the right things to say about God but not really believe them?
- ▶ Can you name some people you find it difficult to like? Now can you really believe that God loves them as much as he loves you?
- ▶ What do you think Jonah might have said to God next?



Visual aid

On a map, find a part of the area where you live. Look at the streets and homes and try to understand how much God loves every single person who lives there.



Activity idea

Make a list of the things that make you angry. Now talk about them together. Is your anger fair? Are you angry only because, like Jonah, you don't get your own way? Talk about what God thinks about your anger. How can we control our anger? Do you think God ever gets angry?



Prayer idea

Use the map of the place where you live as a focus for prayer. Put stickers or sticky notes with the names of people you know next to the streets where they live. Now pray for all those people, along with their neighbours. God loves each one of them as much as he loves you. Use the words of the key verse from the story below in your prayers.

Key verse

You are a kind and merciful God, and you are very patient. You always show love (Jonah 4:2).

New Testament story link

Matthew 12:38-41: Jesus says that what happened to Jonah is a sign of what will happen to him, and that what the people of Nineveh did is an example for everyone to follow.



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