

Hide and Seek

Whenever I see a tin can, it brings back some awesome memories of my childhood when we played a game called "Kick the Can." Actually, it was just a way to add some excitement to the old game of "Hide and Seek." This is how the game is played: The person who is "it" stands beside the tin can, closes his eyes, and counts to fifty while everyone else hides. Then, the person who is "it" goes searching and tries to find everybody. Whenever a person is found, he races back to the home base and tries to kick the can before the one who is "it" tags them. Doesn't that sound like fun? Even if you have never played "Kick the Can," I am sure you have played "Hide and Seek."

Do you think anyone ever tries to play "Hide and Seek" with God? Do you remember the story of Adam and Eve? After they had eaten the fruit that God had told them not to eat, they heard God walking in the garden. They were ashamed of what they had done and didn't want God to find them. What did they do? They ran and hid among the trees. Did God find them? Sure he did. You can't hide from God.

When I was in my late teens and early twenties, I remember being overwhelmed with the knowledge that God sees me, ALL. THE. TIME! I couldn't do anything without him knowing about it. There was no place to hide!

Have you ever done something wrong and tried to hide it? I'm sure we're all a little guilty of that. You may have some secret sins that you think no one will ever find out about. However, even if you are the best hider in the world, God knows all and sees all. You cannot hide your sins from Him.

In today's story we are going to read about Jonah - one of God's prophets that tried to hide from Him. He thought he could just run away and God wouldn't know where he was. Just like when playing Hide and Seek, if you can't see the seeker, then the seeker can't see you. Right? Hmm, I'm not so sure about that one. Let's see if God was able to find Jonah or not...

Not far from Israel there was a country called Assyria. Assyria was very mean to Israel. Soldiers would often come and fight. The Assyrians wanted to take the land away from Israel and make slaves out of the people. Jonah was a prophet of the Lord who lived in the country of Israel. He did not like Assyria one bit!

Jonah often gave messages from God to the people but this time God had a different kind of job for Jonah. God had a message for the people of Nineveh. He told Jonah to go and tell the people of Nineveh that he would destroy their city if they did not follow him.

Jonah could not believe it! Not Nineveh! Nineveh was a city in Assyria. How could God send him to those bad people? Jonah didn't even like those people. He decided that he would ignore God. Nineveh was to the north of Israel so Jonah travelled south. Maybe God would forget about it if he travelled far enough away.

After the ship was out to sea, a huge wind began to blow. The ship was tossed about until it began to break apart. All of the sailors were afraid of what might happen to them. What was causing this terrible storm?

Jonah knew what was causing the storm. He knew that the Lord was punishing him for trying to run away from his important job. Jonah told the sailors to throw him overboard into the sea. Then the storm would stop.

The sailors were frightened. They did not want to throw Jonah overboard. He would drown. No one could survive the terrible storm! The sailors tried to row back to shore but the storm was too strong. Finally, they tossed Jonah overboard into the rolling waves. They just knew Jonah would die.

But Jonah did not die. Instead, the Lord saved him. The Lord caused a big fish to come and swallow Jonah. The fish did not chew him up – it just swallowed him and Jonah was safe inside. Meanwhile, as soon as Jonah was thrown from the ship, the storm stopped and the water became calm again.

Jonah was inside the fish for three days. What do you think that Jonah did in there? Well, there isn't much to do inside a big fish so Jonah prayed to God. Jonah told God that he was sorry for trying to hide.

Jonah said that he was ready to obey the Lord now.

Then an amazing thing happened. The big fish spit Jonah out of its mouth onto dry land! Jonah knew that God had saved him for a special reason. God spoke to Jonah and told him again to go to Nineveh. What do you think Jonah did this time? He obeyed God! He went to Nineveh and taught the people about God.

Jonah preached about God but he didn't think anyone would really listen. After all, these were enemies of Israel. But Jonah preached anyway. He told the people of Nineveh that God would destroy their city. Then the people did something that Jonah did not expect. They listened! They were sorry for all of the bad things that they had done. They prayed to God and said that they wanted to obey him. When the Lord heard the prayers of the people of Nineveh, he decided not to destroy their city.

Jonah sure did cause a lot of trouble for himself didn't he? You know, when you think about it, we're not so different from Jonah. We may never run away and hide at the bottom of a ship and get swallowed by a huge fish, but sometimes we do try to hide

from God when we are scared, ashamed, embarrassed, or just don't want to do what he says.

Have you ever done something wrong and then tried to cover it up or go hide in your room and hope that your mom and dad wouldn't get too mad when they found out? If you did, you were acting just like Jonah. It doesn't do any good to hide does it? Sooner or later you have to face up to what you did.

You may be able to hide things from your parents and friends, but you can't hide them from God. The Bible says, "Nothing in all creation can hide from him. Everything is naked and exposed before his eyes. This is the God to whom we must explain all that we have done."

When you are scared about something, instead of running away and hiding, God wants you to come to him and ask him for strength to face up to your fears. And when you do something wrong, instead of trying to forget about it, or hiding from it, God wants you to tell him about it, and to ask him for forgiveness. The Bible tells us that, "If we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from every wrong." 1 John 1:9 So instead of trying to hide your sins from God, tell God what you did wrong and he will forgive you.

Like I said before, we can't hide from God. He knows all about us. He knows what we are going to say before we say it and what we are going to do before we do it. It is foolish to play "Hide and Seek" with Him. Besides, the reason God comes seeking is because he loves us and wants to bless us. Why would we want to hide from his blessing?



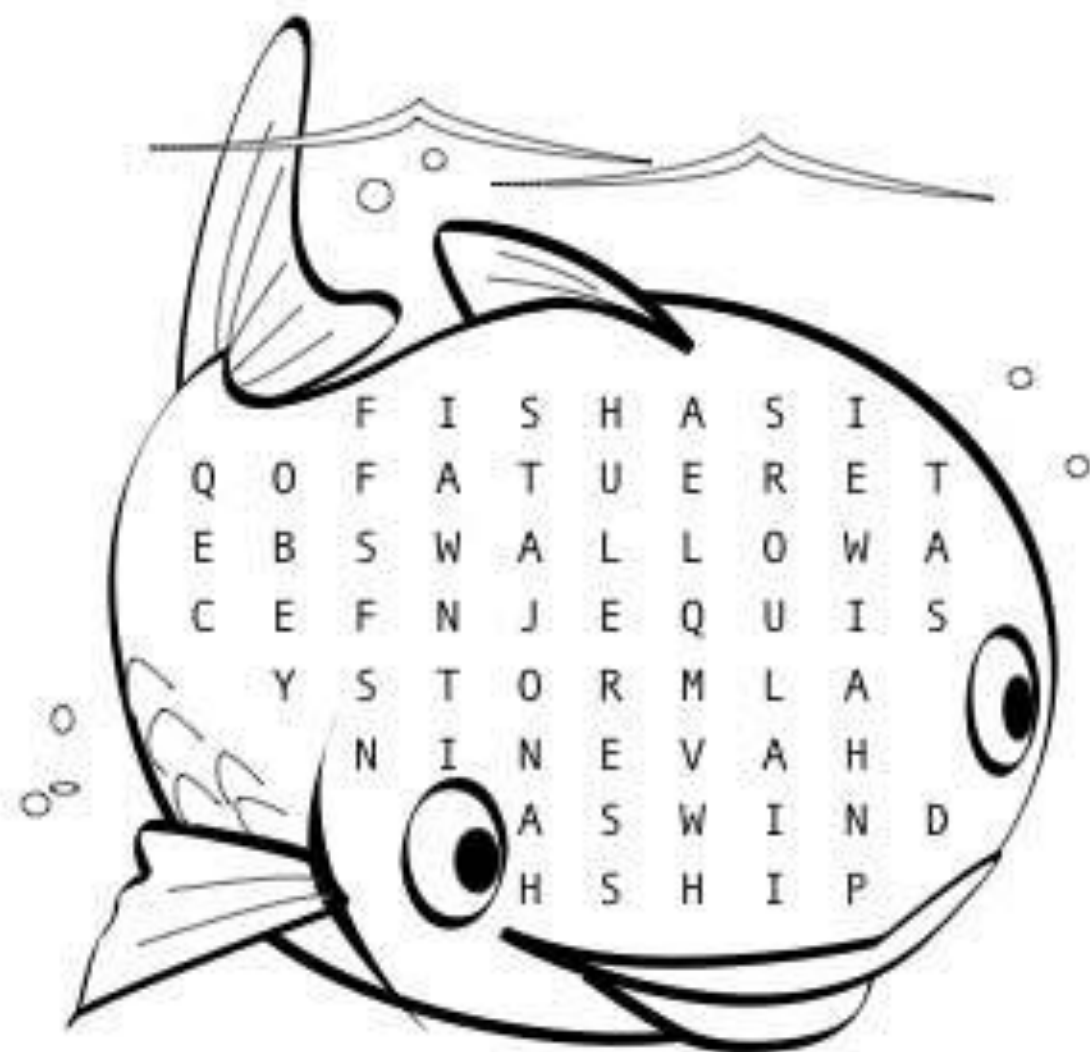
The whale
spit Jonah out on
dry land!



Jonah and the Big Fish

Word Search

Find the words on the list that are hidden in the puzzle. The words can be left to right, up and down, or diagonally.



FISH
JONAH
NINEVAH

OBEY
SEA
SHIP

STORM
SWALLOW
WIND

Jonah and the Big Fish Word Line Up

Unscramble each of the clue words. Take the letters that appear in the circled spaces and unscramble them for the final question.

DIWN _ _ _

SIFH _ _ _

NADL _ _ _

BOYE _ _ _

SAVEW _ _ _

LOSSARI _ _ _ _ _

HIPS _ _

Where did God tell Jonah to go? _ _ _ _ _

Jonah and the Big Fish

Help Jonah get past the Big Fish

