

# GOD'S RELENTLESS PURSUIT OF JONAH



## Week One - 1:1-2:9

### A Note to the Parents/Teachers

*Malachi is the final word from God through His prophets to Israel, before a 400 year period of silence. Then, just as Malachi promised, another prophet (John the baptizer) would come to prepare the way for the Messiah. This book, however, is about how God's people failed at their part in the relationship. There is a harsh reality of punishment that comes with that, but there is also good news, because God does not give up on His end.*

- **Big Idea:** God has loved, still loves, and will always love His people - even though they fail to love Him

### Starter

- **Game:** 'Turn Back'  
*Have the kids walk from one end of the room to the other (away from you). Say, "Everyone wearing \_\_\_\_\_, turn back." Keep going until everyone has turned back toward you. Another option is to have the kids who've turned back tap other kids to get them to also turn. Today's story is about God calling Israel to turn back to Him, so the rest of the world would also.*
- **Video:** You can also watch this video as an introduction to the book of Malachi: <https://youtu.be/LLVzHcZVmAA>

### Sing Together

Love the Lord Your God - <https://youtu.be/vdMlxCdIY-c>

## Story

After God chose Israel to be His people, after He rescued them out of slavery from Egypt and gave them a home, after they had many kings who lived and died, after they turned away from God over and over again to trust in false gods, and after they were taken over by the Babylonians for 70 years - God made a way for Israel to finally come back home to Jerusalem, and allowed them to rebuild the temple.

But, it didn't take long for Israel to stop trusting in God again. From the outside, it looked like they were doing all the things God asked, but in reality, they were barely doing it and their hearts weren't in it. They gave bad sacrifices instead of their best. They only gave part of the money they were supposed to give to the temple. And they didn't care for the widows, orphans, foreigners, or anyone who needed help.

God sent a messenger named Malachi (*his name means 'My messenger'*) to give an important message to His people. He said: "I have always loved you. I still love you. And I will always love you."

But the people responded, "How have you loved us?!"

God said, "I called you from the beginning to be My people. I chose your ancestor Jacob, even though Esau was the older brother. And when Esau's children fought against you, I came to your rescue! I have loved you, but you have not honored Me."

"How have we not honored you?", they asked.

God replied, "I've asked for your best sacrifices to cover your sin, but you sacrifice sick, blind, stolen animals. Your priests do not honor me either."

"How have we not honored You", asked the priests.

"You accept these poor sacrifices and you use bad food sacrificed to false gods on My altar. You do not give me your best! I wish one of you priests would just close the temple doors. I do not like your worship!"

God was so upset that at one point He even told the priests He would smear the dung from the sacrificed animals on their faces! Sounds gross, right? But God wasn't just being gross or mean. See, they would take the gross parts of the animals out of their camp and burn them, so He was basically saying, "If you do not honor Me the right way, you will be removed from My camp - removed from My kingdom."

But God still loved His people, and about 400 years later He sent the perfect Priest, Jesus. He was not only the perfect Priest who honored God, he also became the perfect sacrifice offered to God, allowing God's people to come close to Him again.

*[Dialogue Questions - you may use some or all]*

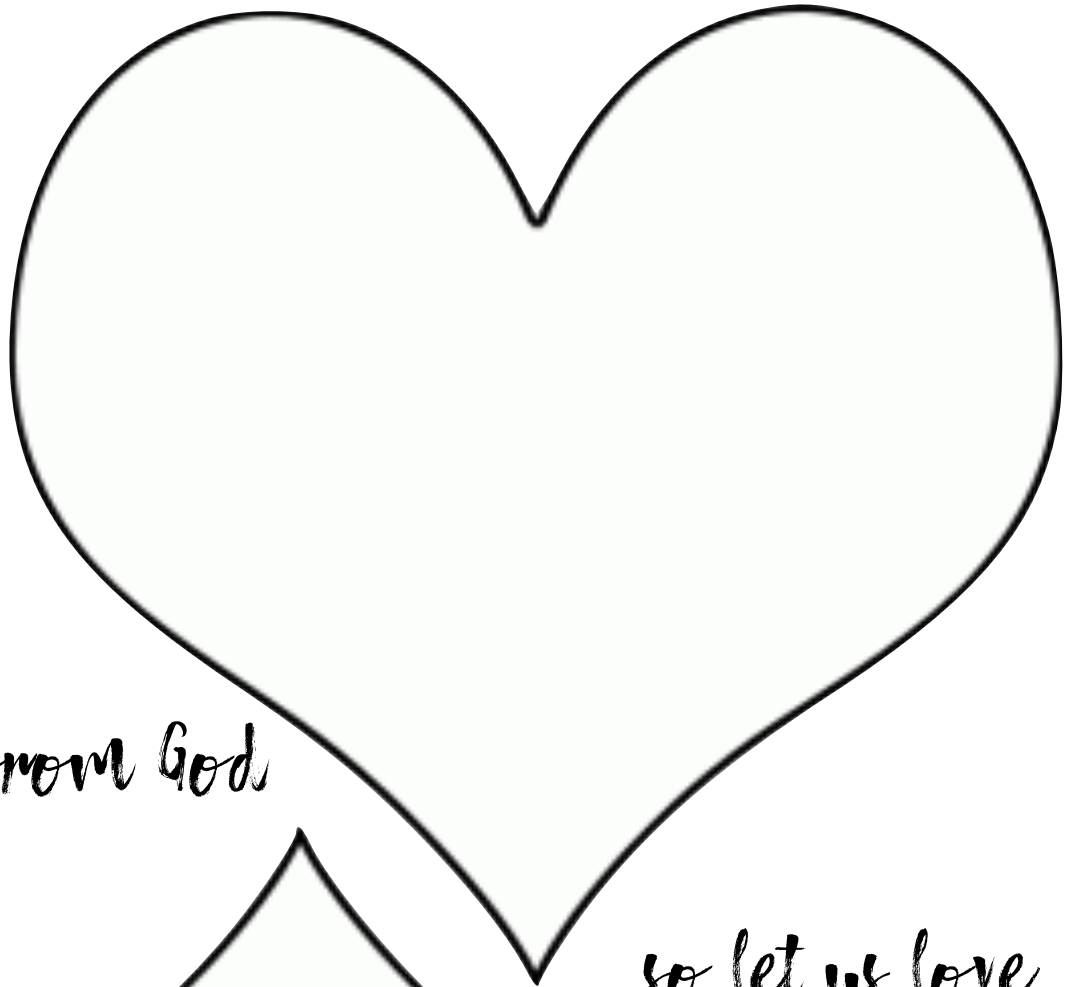
- Imagine you always did nice things for someone and went out of your way for them, and when you told them, “I love you”, they said, “Yeah right! Prove it!” That’s basically how God’s people responded to Him. How do you think God felt about that?
- God said, “I have loved you, I do love you, and I will always love you.” Do you believe that’s true? Do you think it’s not only true for the Israelites? Do you think God loves you that way?
- How can we know that God loves us? Even though the people didn’t deserve to ask for proof, God still sent proof when He sent His Son Jesus. How does Jesus show us proof of God’s love for you?

### **Breakout Time**

- **Prayer:**  
God, thank You for loving us. Help us to live lives that honor and love You. Thank You for Jesus saving us. Thank You for Your Spirit helping us. Amen!
- **Craft:**  
Using the coloring sheet attached, have the kids write down ways God has loved us in one heart and ways they can love others in the second heart.
- **BLESS Activity:**  
*\*For kids to do during the week\**  
Because this Story is true, we want to be faithful to live in it. We ask the Spirit to help us to *Bless, Listen, Eat, Speak, and Sabbath* (rest & celebrate) in ways that tell the good news of God’s Story.

This week, focus on the **Listen** rhythm. God wanted to tell His people about His unfailing love, but they wouldn’t always listen. Ask your family how you can all listen to God’s love for you this week.

*Maybe by reading something about God’s love from the Bible together, maybe by going outside and looking at His creation and reminding each other how He provides the sun, rain, and air to breathe, or maybe by showing each other acts of love and reminding each other it is because of God’s love.*



*“Love is from God*

*...so let us love  
one another.”*

