



ST. JAMES CHURCH

FAMILY DEVOTION PACK 4: JONAH



WELCOME TO THE FOURTH ST JAMES FAMILY DEVOTION PACK



This pack has 8 family devotions from the Old Testament book of Jonah. It's a Sunday School favourite which makes it accessible for the whole family. But it's also full of surprises, so make sure you read carefully! Jonah is only four chapters long, but every other devotion will be a New Testament reflection with application. If you're not able to do them all consecutively, then at least try and do the chapter from Jonah and its corresponding NT devotion back to back. Each chapter of the Jonah story begins with a 'Did you know?' box, while its companion page starts with a 'Previously, in Jonah' box. It's a great way to recap the events of the story while having a bit of fun with the family at the same time. It's up to you whether you would like to print out the pages and give them to your kids to follow along, or if you prefer to keep them to yourself as a 'cheat sheet' to help you guide the discussion.

WE'VE ALSO INCLUDED TWO AGE SPECIFIC ACTIVITIES.

For the non readers: If you have little kids who aren't yet reading, there is a colouring page for each of the four chapters of Jonah. If you feel the devotion is pitched a little too high for your youngest, let them get arty while the older kids read and discuss the questions. Studies have shown that most kids listen really well while their hands are occupied, and it makes crowd control a little easier for you!

For the older teens: We recommend that the older kids (and their parents) check out this youtube link <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dLlabZc004c&t=53s> It's a 9 min overview of Jonah from the Bible project series. (You can search for it on youtube by simply typing '**The bible project Jonah**' into the search bar). The opening of the video is an overview to the book and then it walks you through Ch 1 starting at 2:10, Ch 2 starting at 4:15, Ch 3 starting at 4:35 and Ch 4 starting at 6:10. Rather than watching the clip all at once, it would be best to enjoy it bit by bit as you make your way through the book.

SOME QUICK TIPS FOR READING JONAH (AND OTHER OT NARRATIVE)

1. Read between the lines

Unlike the NT letters, you won't find many direct commands in OT narrative. However, there is still lots to learn and apply. For instance, in Ch 1:1-2 God gives Jonah the instruction to go and preach judgement to Nineveh. A great question to ask is, '**What does this tell us about God?**' The answer is that God takes sin really seriously, and will not let wickedness go unpunished. But he also warns people so they can avoid His judgment. Just from the opening verse you can already have a great conversation about the justice and the love of God (and why we need both). Don't forget that the most important character in Jonah is God himself.

2. CHARACTER'S ACTIONS OFTEN SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDS

In Ch 3 we're told that the city of Nineveh was so big it took three days to walk through it. But in verse 4 we're told that Jonah only travelled for one day and then gave what must be the shortest sermon in history (only 4 words in the original Hebrew)! Although Jonah was given a second chance by God, do you think he was fully committed to God's plan to warn the Ninevites? His actions suggest that he is only doing the bare minimum. This is confirmed by his response to God at the start of Ch 4 and reveals the real reason Jonah ran away in the first place. Often what the characters do or don't do, speaks just as loud as what they say.

3. DON'T BELIEVE EVERYTHING YOU HEAR

It's important to remember that the narrator can describe a character's actions without commending them. For instance, when God asks Jonah in Ch 4 if he has a right to be angry, Jonah answers yes. The narrator doesn't add, "But Jonah was being stubborn and didn't know what he was talking about!" Jonah's answer is rebutted by God in v10, but the reader is left to join the dots. Does Jonah have a right to be angry? Would you have been angry if you were in his shoes? How does God answer Jonah? What does that tell us about the progress (or lack thereof) Jonah has made since Ch 1? What lesson did God want Jonah to learn? Why do you think he was so slow to learn it? It's precisely because the narrator doesn't editorialize Jonah's response that we, the readers, are encouraged to ask those kinds of questions.

PRAYER

At the end of each devotion there is a prayer prompt. It's a suggestion that helps you respond to God based on what you've just read and discussed. However don't feel bound to what's on the page, it's a good idea to ask the rest of the family to share their own prayer requests too.



READ

Jonah chapter 1

DID YOU KNOW?

Nineveh was the capital city of Assyria. The Ninevites were the enemies of God and His people Israel. They had a reputation for being violent and ruthless

What do you learn about God in vv1-2?

What do you learn about Jonah in v3?

Why do you think Jonah ran away? (We only find out the answer at the end of the book, but for now, take a guess!)

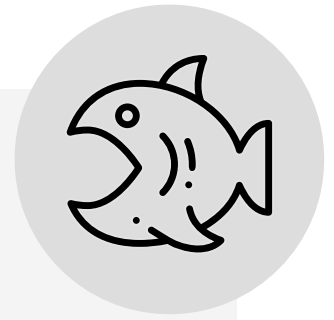
In v9 Jonah gives a textbook answer to who he is and what he believes. But based on how he acts in Ch 1 do you think he is really worshipping God the way he should?

How do the sailors react to the storm in vv14-16? Do you think this was a good way to respond? Why?



PRAY TOGETHER

Sometimes when we don't like what God says, it's easy to think we know better. Ask God that you can trust him even when you don't fully understand.



PREVIOUSLY, IN JONAH . . .

How much do you remember from Jonah Ch 1? Give each person in the family one of the following roles; the narrator, God, Jonah, and a sailor. Try retelling the story by each person speaking their part!

We saw from Ch 1:1-2 that because God cares, He doesn't let wickedness go unchecked. He will not let anyone get away with evil, which is why He wanted Jonah to warn the Ninevites about His judgment.

What are some examples of wickedness in the world that you think God cares about?

What are some examples of wickedness in your own heart that you think God cares about?

Read 2 Corinthians Ch 5:10. How is God going to deal with the problem of wickedness?

Would you rather have a God who judges sin, or a God who doesn't? Discuss your answer with your family.



PRAY TOGETHER

Thank God that he sent Jesus to give wicked people like you and me a chance to be forgiven.





READ
Jonah chapter 2

DID YOU KNOW?

Jonah wasn't swallowed by a whale? Whales are mammals, and Ch 2:1 says Jonah was inside the belly of a fish!

Do you think Jonah being swallowed by the fish is:

- a) God giving him an express ride to Nineveh?
- b) God saving him from the storm?
- c) Jonah having to face death for disobeying God?

Read Ch 2:2-4. You may want to change your answer!

Read vv8-9 again and then try and put them in your own words.
What is the lesson Jonah has learnt in v8?

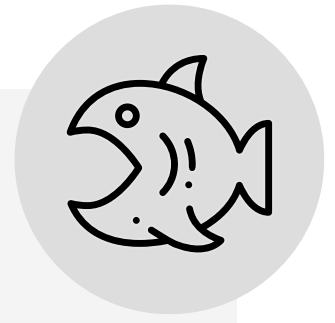
What is it that Jonah is promising to do in v9?

Jonah has real confidence that even when things can't get any worse, God will hear him when he prays. Can you think of a time when you have prayed in a bad situation and God has answered that prayer?



PRAY TOGETHER

What prayer has God answered lately?
Thank him for that!



PREVIOUSLY, IN JONAH . . .

Can you remember what happened in Ch 2? As a family, try and retell what happened inside the fish, but each person can only say one word before it's the next person's turn. See if you can get it right one word at a time!

Read Matthew Ch 12:39-40.

Jonah is the only prophet that Jesus compares Himself to. What did Jesus say that He and Jonah had in common?

That means when Jonah was swallowed by the fish, it wasn't a rescue. He knew that he was as good as dead! But what does Jonah remember at the end of Jonah Ch 2:6?

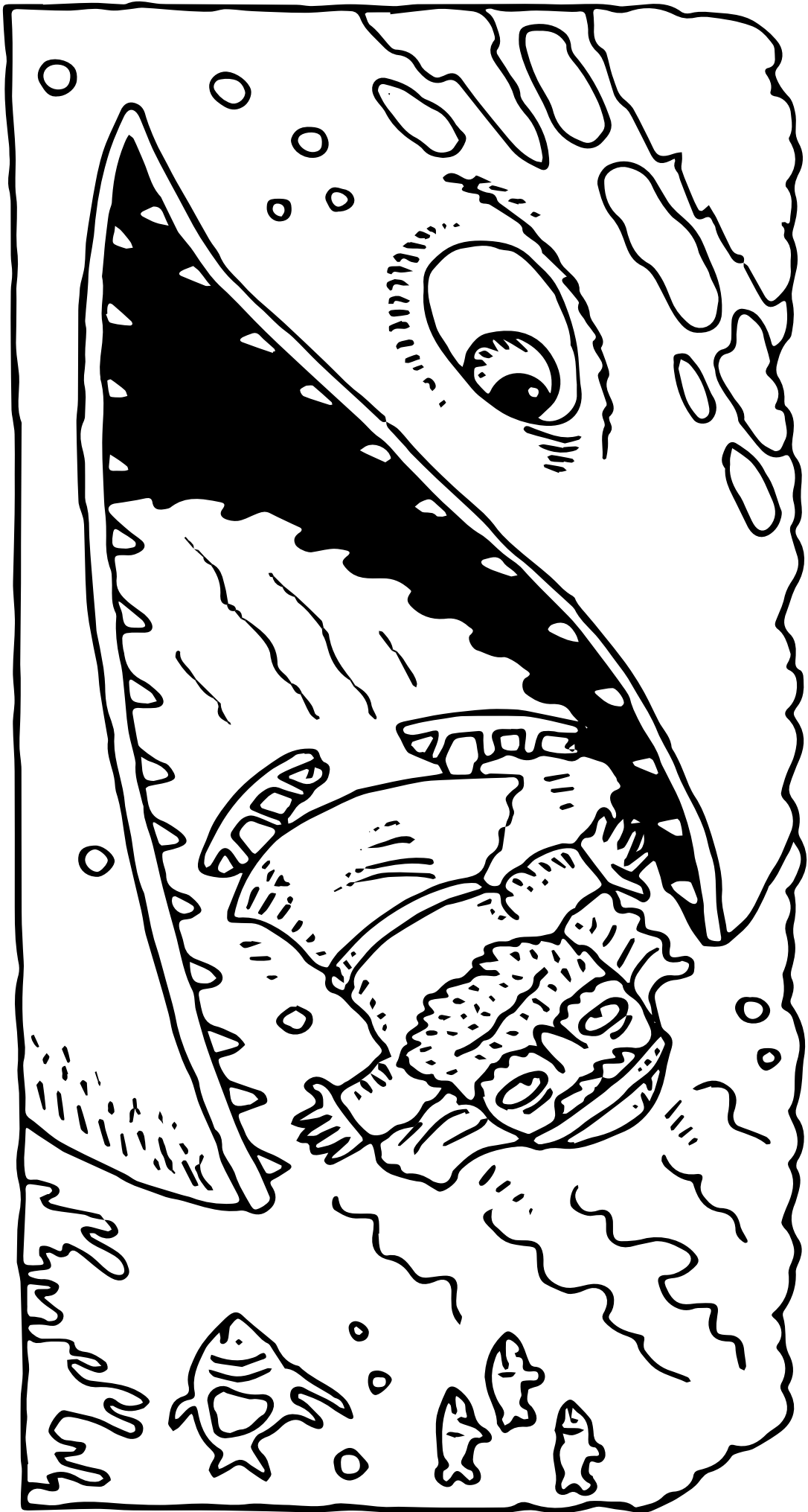
Just like God commanded the fish to vomit Jonah back to life, God also commanded death to let Jesus out of the tomb. And what does Romans Ch 8:11 say that means for us?

What do you think is the scariest thing about dying? How has what we've seen in the Bible today helped you to trust God even in the face of death?



PRAY TOGETHER

Thank God for the resurrection and that because Jesus is alive we don't have to be afraid of what happens when we die.





READ
Jonah chapter 3

DID YOU KNOW?

Wearing sackcloth and sitting in the dust was a sign that you were sad and in mourning.

At the start of Ch 3, Jonah finally obeys God and goes to warn Nineveh of God's judgment. But how would you describe his attitude in vv3-4?

When Jonah warns the Ninevites that God's judgment is coming, how do they respond?

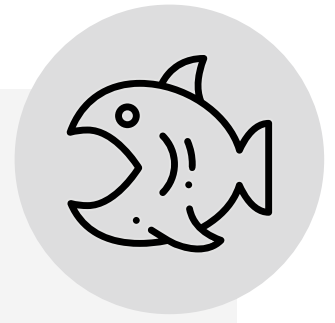
What did you learn about God from v10?

How would verse 10 help you to answer a friend who said, 'I don't like the God of the Bible because He is bloodthirsty and just wants to send everyone to hell.'



PRAY TOGETHER

Read verse 10 again and thank God that he is merciful.
Ask him to have mercy on you.



PREVIOUSLY, IN JONAH . . .

How much can you remember about Jonah Ch 3? Imagine you are a reporter and come up with a newspaper headline that sums up the big news of Ch 3.

Read James Ch 4:7-10. James is describing people who are deeply sorry and want to repent (turn back) to God.

What similarities can you find between these verses and what the people of Nineveh did in Jonah Ch 3:7-9?

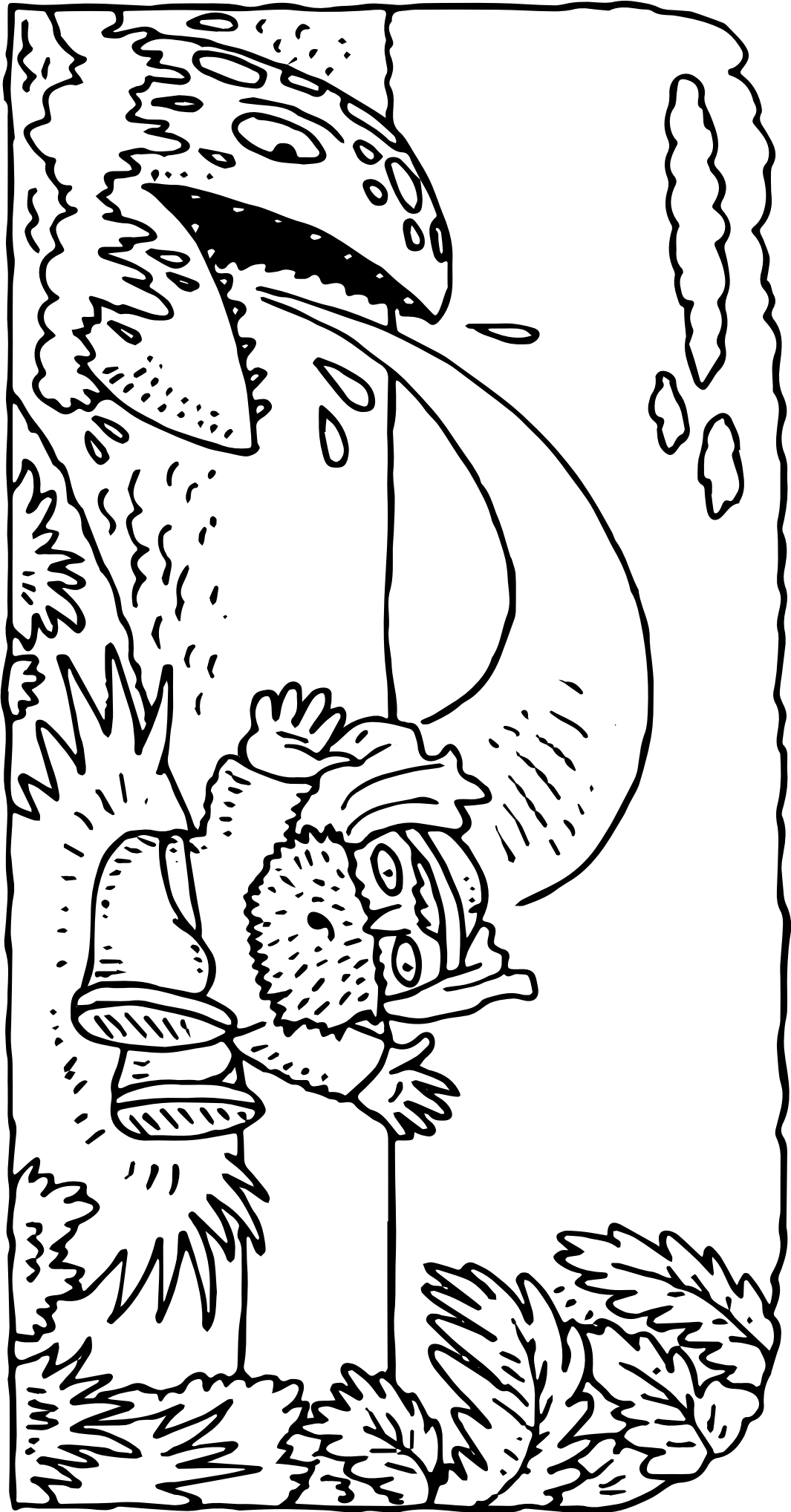
When you repent what are you supposed to be sorry for? What are you asking God to do for you?

What promise do we get in Ch 4:10? God proves it's a promise He keeps because it's exactly what He does for Nineveh in Jonah Ch 3:10!



PRAY TOGETHER

Pray and say sorry to God for the times this week you have ignored him. Thank God for his promise that everyone who humbles themselves before him will also be lifted up by him.





READ

Jonah chapter 4

DID YOU KNOW?

In Matthew Ch 12:40-41 Jesus says that God's enemies in Nineveh who repented were saved, and His own people who won't repent will be judged. God doesn't show favoritism – He loves His enemies too!

Jonah finally tells God (and us) why he ran away at the start of the story. Why did he run? vv1-2

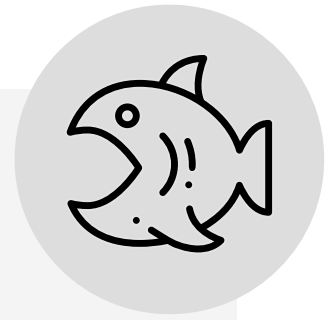
God gave Jonah a plant for shade and then took it away again. What did God want Jonah to learn from this? vv10-11

Twice Jonah is asked if he has a right to be angry with God. Jonah says yes! But do you think he was right?



PRAY TOGETHER

Pray that you would not be like Jonah and discriminate against others. Ask God that you would want everyone to come to Jesus and be saved, not just the people who are like you.



PREVIOUSLY, IN JONAH . . .

How much can you remember about Jonah Ch 4? Take turns with each person giving one thing they remember from Ch 4. Go around the circle until you run out of ideas!

The lesson God taught Jonah was that if he felt upset because the plant died, how much more upset should God feel when a whole city was going to face His judgment?

How do you feel when someone who is your enemy hurts you?

How did God feel when the people of Nineveh sinned against Him and became His enemy?

Read Colossians Ch 1:21-22. Why is it such good news that God loves His enemies?



PRAY TOGETHER

Think of someone who is your enemy and pray for them now. Ask God that they would come to know Jesus and that you can love them like he loves them.

