



Chapter 1

NAVIGATING GOD'S CALL

THE CALL AND THE FLIGHT (JONAH 1:1-3)

I opened the book of Jonah, and right from the start, I saw myself in his story. I've never been called to go to Nineveh, but there have been days when I'm called to make amends with someone I've hurt, or to go downstairs and apologize to Michael after we've had an argument. Whether I'm right or I'm wrong, I know that the best thing to do is to follow the Spirit which tells us to do all that we can to live in peace with each other.

The flesh is a difficult thing to combat some days as I wrestle with fear—the fear of being rejected, of being shut out, of feeling less than. But when I obey the Spirit in spite of my fear, the rewards outweigh the pain. It might take courage to follow God's will, but with each step we take, we strengthen our faith.

The other day, I took my dog out for a ride. Gabby likes to come with Nathaniel and me when we go for late night drives. Before she hopped in the car, however, I wanted to put the seat cover on, and so we asked her to wait a minute before she hopped in. Pushing and shoving her way past Nathaniel, she squeezed through his arms and planted herself on the back seat where she was determined to stay. No amount of pushing or shoving could coax her to move. She didn't understand that I had her best interest at heart, and that I had full intentions of bringing her with us. All she believed, in that moment, was that her wisdom was greater than ours.

I'm a bit like that dog some days when it comes to my relationship with the Lord. I rely on my own understanding in lieu of His plan. On those days I need to remember to trust in His wisdom, believing He has my best interest at heart.

Each day comes with its own set of challenges and opportunities to follow God's will. But even when the Spirit is willing, the flesh has a mind of its own. It tends to resist, make excuses, and fill our minds with doubt and fear. It is during these moments that we need to remind ourselves how important it is to trust in the Lord, and how beneficial it is to follow His lead. There's a still, small voice within us that guides and inspires. The call to action is not a burden but a gift—a gift that leads us to a deeper understanding of God's love and purpose for our lives.

And so, each day, as I face my own "Ninevehs," I remind myself that it is not about being perfect, but about being obedient and faithful. I remind myself that my fears and insecurities do not define me, and that with God's help, I can overcome them. I remind myself that as long as I am willing to take that first step, God will be there to guide me, to strengthen me, and to help me make the right choice.

In much the same way, Jonah thought he knew better. His name, which means "dove," echoes the symbolism found in Hosea 7:11: "Ephraim is like a dove, easily deceived and senseless." Jonah, much like a dove, manifests both purity of intent and a certain lack of wisdom in his choices. By running away, he distanced himself from God's will and opened the door to a boatload of trouble.

Interestingly, Jonah didn't just run; he ran to Tarshish, considered by many in his time as the "end of the world." It's as if Jonah wanted to get as far away from God's calling as he could, even if that meant going to the edge of the known world. His desperate dash to Tarshish underscores just how lost we can become when we think our wisdom is greater than God's. But here's a revealing twist:

If you're encountering Jonah's story for the first time, you might think he ran out of fear. However, as we learn in Chapter 4, Jonah's flight was less about fear, and more about a stubborn blend of pride and prejudice. He knew God's character—merciful and forgiving—and he didn't want his enemies, the Ninevites, to receive such grace.

Did you know?

Nineveh was the capital of the ancient Assyrian Empire, which the Bible often portrays as a great enemy of Israel. It was also known for its wickedness, which sets the backdrop for Jonah's hesitation and fear to deliver God's message to them.

In verse 3, we're told that Jonah "went down to Joppa." This phrase originates from the Hebrew word "yāraḏ," meaning to descend. But there's more to it; this word can also signify a decline in moral or spiritual conditions. It's fascinating to notice how this term appears throughout the book in different contexts: Jonah goes down to Joppa, then down into the ship, and eventually, down into the belly of the fish. These moments aren't just geographical descents; they're emblematic of Jonah's spiritual lows as well. This pattern finds its most poignant expression in Chapter 2, where Jonah prays, "To the roots of the mountains I sank down; the earth beneath barred me in forever. But you, Lord my God, brought my life up from the pit" (Jonah 2:6). Each "going down" in the story is a chapter in Jonah's journey of spiritual descent—and eventual ascent.

Then there's the fare Jonah pays to board the ship to Tarshish. On the surface, it's just money, but could it be a metaphor for the price we pay when we run from God's calling? The Bible often reminds us that sin has its costs, both seen and unseen. This fare was Jonah's immediate payment, but the storm that ensued shows us that the ultimate price of disobedience can be much higher.

This subtle yet powerful detail enriches the narrative, gently reminding us how our choices can impact our relationship with God and lead to consequences far beyond what we might initially imagine.

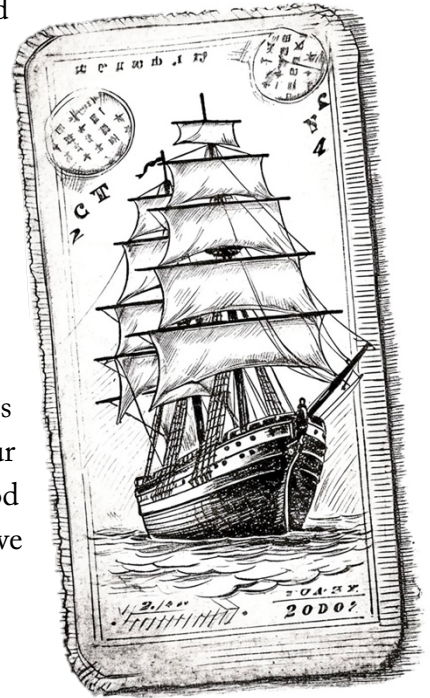
THE CONSEQUENCES OF SIN (JONAH 1:4-10)

One of my favorite places growing up was a rustic footbridge near the entrance of Happyland Park. The old wooden bridge that carried us over the creek was missing a few of its boards, which was daunting for this little girl, but even so, I loved the character of the bridge and the serenity of the calm green water below.

Like any child filled with curiosity, I had a little tradition. Each time we'd cross the bridge, I'd pause, pick up a stone, and toss it into the creek. I was fascinated by the ripples, and how they spread across the still water. One little stone is all it took to transform the serene water into a captivating array of ripples.

In much the same way, there's a ripple effect with every choice that we make. Whether good or bad, the actions we take affect others.

In verses 4-10, we see this ripple effect taking place, as Jonah's choice to turn away from God's command disrupted the calm. His



disobedience not only affected him, it also affected the others around him.

As much as we like to think that our sin is our personal business, it has the potential to cause a ripple effect in our lives. The effect of our sin reaches out further than we can imagine, destroying families, breaking up friendships, and splitting up churches. But sweet friend, here's the hopeful message nestled in Jonah's story. In the midst of the storm, God's love was inescapable and unchanging.

Did you know?

The name "Jonah" in Hebrew is "Yonah," which means "dove." Doves are often symbols of peace, but they are also known for their homing instincts. This could reflect the theme of Jonah trying to flee, but ultimately finding his way back to God's will.

GOD'S INTERVENTION (JONAH 1:11-17)

This famous account of Jonah and the whale makes for a good bedtime story, but it's far more than that. There's a profound lesson behind this chapter that I don't want you to miss: God didn't use the storm to punish Jonah, he used it to guide him back to the fold. Don't you just love that thought?

Our lives are filled with triumphs and trials, and some days we wonder why life is so hard. Throughout the Bible, we see God using tribulation to draw His people back to their faith. Here are just a few examples that illustrate this truth:

1. **The Israelites' Bondage in Egypt (Exodus 1-14):** God used the Israelites' slavery in Egypt to showcase His power and love. Despite the harsh conditions, God led His people to liberation and towards the Promised Land, showing His guiding hand even in adversity.
2. **The Israelites' Wandering in the Wilderness (Exodus 16, Numbers 14):** The Israelites' 40-year journey in the wilderness, a consequence of their disbelief, served as a lesson in trust and dependence on God, guiding them back to faith.
3. **The Babylonian Captivity (Jeremiah 25:8-12, 2 Chronicles 36:15-21):** The Israelites' exile to Babylon was a consequence of their disobedience but also served to realign their faithfulness and obedience to God.
4. **The Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32):** The prodigal son's hardship away from home caused him to reflect and return to his father. It's a parable of how our missteps can ultimately guide us back to God.
5. **Paul's Conversion (Acts 9:1-19):** Saul, who became Paul, was blinded on the road to Damascus. This experience served to open his spiritual eyes, leading him to become a dedicated apostle of Christ.

The good news in all of this is that the Lord is never far from the broken hearted. Their hardship was part of a much greater plan, that would move them to repentance and draw them closer to God. The Bible tells us there's a purpose for our pain, one that refines us, molds us, and ultimately strengthens our faith.

In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—

may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. (1 Peter 1:6-7)

Chapter one leaves us on a climactic note, showing us that things can't get any worse for Jonah. His disobedience led to a storm so violent that experienced sailors feared for their lives. In desperation and faith, they hurled Jonah into the raging sea. In the midst of the chaos, Jonah had no other choice but to solely rely on the mercy of God.

With that, I'm reminded of the powerful words of Corrie Ten Boom, "You may never know that Jesus is all you need, until Jesus is all you have."

AS WE CLOSE THIS CHAPTER

Let's pause for a moment of reflection as we close this essential first chapter. Jonah's story serves as a powerful testament to how God uses trials and tribulations to draw us closer to Him. His initial attempt to evade God led to a life-altering storm, not unlike the turbulent waters we may find ourselves in when we try to escape God's plan. Yet even in these moments, God's inescapable love is pursuing us. The choices we make, especially in times of testing, ripple outward, affecting not just us but those around us as well. Remember, our pain and our trials are not purposeless; they serve to refine us, strengthen our faith, and deepen our relationship with God.



In Jonah 1:3, Jonah tries to flee from the presence of the Lord. What does Amos 9:2-4 say about the possibility of hiding from God?

In Matthew 12:38-41, Jesus refers to the "Sign of Jonah." What does Jesus say, and how does it relate to the story of Jonah?

What some might call coincidence is often the hand of God intervening in a person's life. Sometimes His intervention is subtle, and other times it's loud and clear. Can you identify God's purpose behind the following interventions?

Jonah 1:17:

Exodus 3:1-10:

Acts 9:1-19:

Numbers 22:21-35:

Can you recall a time in your own life when you sensed God's clear intervention? What unfolded, and how did that experience reshape your path or perspective?

Jonah 1:3 mentions Tarshish, which is in the opposite direction of Nineveh. What significance might this have in understanding Jonah's disobedience?

Jonah 1:7 tells us that the sailors cast lots to find out who was responsible for the calamity. What does Proverbs 16:33 suggest about the outcome of their actions?

What is Jonah's initial reaction when he is identified as the cause of the storm?

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Jonah Chapter 1

In Jonah 1:3, Jonah tries to flee from the presence of the Lord. What does Amos 9:2-4 say about the possibility of hiding from God?

Amos 9:2-4 emphasizes that there's no place to hide from God. Whether one digs down to the depths of the earth or climbs up to the heavens, God can find and reach them.

In Matthew 12:38-41, Jesus refers to the "Sign of Jonah." What does Jesus say, and how does it relate to the story of Jonah?

Jesus says that just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. This refers to the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ which is typified in the story of Jonah.

What some might call coincidence is often the hand of God intervening in a person's life. Sometimes His intervention is subtle, and other times it's loud and clear. Can you identify God's purpose behind the following interventions?

Jonah 1:17: God uses the great fish not just as a rescue raft, but as a quiet space for Jonah to rethink his choices and turn back to God.

Exodus 3:1-10: The burning bush captures Moses' attention, signaling his divine appointment to free the Israelites from Egypt.

Acts 9:1-19: The blinding light on the road to Damascus serves to convert Saul, redirecting him from persecuting Christians to spreading the Gospel.

Numbers 22:21-35: The talking donkey stops Balaam from going down a path of disobedience, highlighting the importance of aligning with God's will.

Can you recall a time in your own life when you sensed God's clear intervention? What unfolded, and how did that experience reshape your path or perspective?

This is a self-reflection question therefore the answer will be different for everyone.

Jonah 1:3 mentions Tarshish, which is in the opposite direction of Nineveh. What significance might this have in understanding Jonah's disobedience?

Jonah's decision to go to Tarshish highlights the extent of his disobedience. He didn't just avoid God's call; he went in the opposite direction, indicating a complete rejection of God's plan.

Jonah 1:7 tells us that the sailors cast lots to find out who was responsible for the calamity. What does Proverbs 16:33 suggest about the outcome of their actions?

Proverbs 16:33 (NIV) states, "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord." This suggests that although the sailors may have used a method that appears random, God was sovereign over the outcome, guiding the lot to point to Jonah.

What is Jonah's initial reaction when he is identified as the cause of the storm?

Jonah admits his disobedience and suggests that he be thrown into the sea to calm the storm, showing some level of acknowledgment of his wrongdoing. It's as if Jonah realizes that facing the storm within him is the first step to calming the storm around him.