



# 1 | JONAH 1:1-5

## RUNNING FROM GOD

*It is possible for a Christian to become so comfortable with earthly comforts, that he becomes uncomfortable with God. We may run from God, but in his unrelenting love he will find us and make us useful.*

### Outline

1. **WE'RE DEADENED BY EARTHLY EASE (1:1)**  
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Hardships Make Us Sleepy  
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### Call to Worship

Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever!  
<sup>2</sup> Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom he has redeemed from trouble <sup>3</sup> and gathered  
in from the lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south.—  
Psalm 107:1-3

### Songs

*Shout to the North*  
*How Great Thou Art*  
*How Great is Our God*  
*His Mercy Is More*  
*All I Have is Christ*

## Announcements

**WELCOME:** We are glad you are here! Be sure to grab a Welcome Packet if you are visiting with us.

## Introduction

God's plan for **the gospel is worldwide**. But God's people often are too comfortable to reach the world, so we run from God. This is true all the way back to the Old Testament, here in the book of Jonah. God has a plan for salvation since "salvation is of the LORD" (2:9). With the prophet Jonah, we come face to face with a leader who is **comfortable preaching in place he is familiar and at ease**. About the year 755 B.C. the "word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai" (1:1). We find Jonah so attached to his comfort, that he is willing to **run and hide from the presence of God**.

A pastor phoned the home of some recent visitors to his church, and a voice on the other end of the phone answered with a hushed whispered "Hello."

The pastor asked, "Who is this?"

The whisperer said, "Jimmy."

The pastor said, "How old are you, Jimmy?"

"Four."

"Well, Jimmy, can I please speak to your mom?"

"She's busy."

"Well then, Jimmy, can I please speak to your dad?"

"He's busy."

"Jimmy, are there any other adults in your home?"

"The police."

"Can I speak to one of the police officers?"

"They're busy."

"Jimmy, who else is there?"

"Firemen."

"Well, Jimmy, can you put one of the firemen on the phone?"

"They're all busy."

"Jimmy, what are they all busy doing?"

"They're busy looking for me."

Like Jimmy, a lot of people in life are hiding. **Jonah's not just hiding but running from God**. Jonah's story begins with him running from God and ends with him arguing against God, which raises the interesting question of **when his book was written**. You can't write under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit when you are arguing with God, so I assume that Jonah wrote this book **late in his life** and that his account offers his **mature reflection on the triumph of God's grace**. Some people teach us by **their example; Jonah teaches us by his confession**.<sup>1</sup>

We are studying the book of Jonah, the story of **the greatest missionary dropout**, who God refused to allow to dropout.

Key Thought: It is possible for a Christian to become so comfortable with earthly comforts, that he becomes uncomfortable with God. We may run from God, but in his unrelenting love he will find us and make us useful.

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<sup>1</sup> Colin S. Smith, *Jonah: Navigating a God-centered Life* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2012), Kindle edition.

Here was a man who had served God, been religious for years, but when the test came, though he could teach about God, it seems **it had been a while since Jonah had experienced the reality of God in a meaningful way.** He froze. He backslid. He fell badly.<sup>2</sup> His comforts choked his spiritual life.

Jonah was so comfortable on earth, that he ran from God and his heavenly plan. Really Jonah 1:1-5 is the story of how comfortable Christianity can numb us and kill our Christian life.

**Jonah 1:1-5** | Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying,<sup>2</sup> "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me."<sup>3</sup> But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord.<sup>4</sup> But the Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship threatened to break up.<sup>5</sup> Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried out to his god. And they hurled the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them. But Jonah had gone down into the inner part of the ship and had lain down and was fast asleep.

You **can have the greatest prosperity and good doctrine**, but if you are not experiencing the living God, you are going to a "**whited sepulcher**" **like the walking dead**. Why do we run from God?

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## 1. WE'RE DEADENED BY EARTHLY EASE (1:1)

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Jonah loved earthly ease more than heavenly blessing.

### THE EASE OF COMFORT

**Jonah 1:1-2** | Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying,<sup>2</sup> "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me."

Jonah was now in the midst of his prophetic career. He was **the most popular prophet of his day** due to his consistently optimistic forecasts regarding the military successes of Jeroboam II.<sup>3</sup>

*2 Kings 14:25, NLT* | Jeroboam II recovered the territories of Israel between Lebohamath and the Dead Sea, just as the LORD, the God of Israel, had promised through Jonah son of Amittai, the prophet from Gath-hepher.

Jonah had supported Jeroboam's aggressive military policy to extend the nation's power and influence. The original readers of the book of Jonah would have remembered him as intensely patriotic, a highly partisan nationalist.<sup>4</sup>

Jonah had no idea of how self-absorbed he had become until God disturbed his comfortable life. He was devoted to ministry and listened, as a prophet, to the voice of God. But **while he was ministering to others, his own heart had grown cold** and, when God called Jonah to something new, the hidden layers of his inner life were revealed.

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<sup>2</sup> Timothy J. Keller, *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive* (New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013).

<sup>3</sup> James E. Smith, *The Minor Prophets*, Old Testament Survey Series (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1994), 101.

<sup>4</sup> Leslie C. Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1976), 202.

## THE EASE OF MINISTRY SUCCESS

Jonah 1:1a | Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai.

**Born in a godly home**, and raised with knowledge of the truth, Jonah quickly developed a love for God and a heart for ministry. People in his hometown of **Gath Hepher** (near Nazareth) enjoyed Jonah's preaching, and he soon established a **sterling reputation** as a much loved and **deeply respected teacher of God's word**.<sup>5</sup> Just one thing was missing. He had drifted in his relationship with God. Jonah couldn't tell at first.

He was like a **person with numb feet who stepped on a nail**. He was blind about his own heart and spiritual state. His conscience was fine, even though he had become far from God. He became more interested in laying up treasure on earth than in heaven. His heart was filled with earthly ambitions (Col 3:1-3; Mt 6:19-21).

Jonah **numbed himself** with the **success syndrome**. "Things are going well, so I must be right with God." This was one of the **most prosperous times** in northern Israel, and the boundaries of the promised land are being reestablished, far **beyond the borders of Israel north into Syria**, and all the way south to the **Dead Sea**. It's an unparalleled time of prosperity and expansion. **But don't confuse prosperity for God's blessing**.

Jonah's selfish, self-indulgent heart is laid bare. You can know God's word and be a prophet and be so comfortable that your soul is lean. The Bible says in Psalm 106:15 that God can "grant our request" of earthly comfort but also **send "leanness" to our souls**, like those who died in the wilderness. Jonah was living in a materialistic culture like you and I live in today in the West.

Jonah is a powerful and convicting book to study because of the place **incomparable comfort and luxury** and ease we are experiencing here in Western culture. We are like Israel of old, with their culture of comfort came a culture of immorality. As it was in the days of Jonah, so it is today. Paul says, "in the last days perilous times shall come" (2 Tim 3:1). We are in dangerous, perilous times for God's people. The love of money and comfort is choking people's spiritual lives. We are going to see today that comfortable Christians will run from God. You've been saved. **You've started down that journey of sanctification, but you've become comfortable**. You've stopped being careful. Your heart has dulled. You've become lukewarm, even backslidden.

## THE CALL TO AWAKE

Listen to your call, saint of God!

*Ephesians 5:14* | Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.

This series in Jonah is a **wakeup call for comfortable, sleepy Christians**. Wake up! There's a Nineveh out there. You're here, and you are happy, but you don't care as much about the lost anymore. You've lost your passion for evangelism. Maybe you've been **beaten down by life**. And you have even **become distrusting of God**. You are **stuffing your soul with earthly ease** to try to quell the conviction of your conscience. Wherever you are today, this message is for you. This message is a path back to the fear of God, and the love of God.

**DEPTHS OF GRACE**: Jonah is a book about the depths of God's grace for those who run from him. We need the heavenly blessing of God more than all earthly riches. We need **grace upon grace!** We need to be growing from one level of glory to the next.

We all know that Jonah is a book about **God's prophet running away** from the will of God— that's **sin**, and **God chases after Jonah** — that's **grace**. His grace is greater than your sin. What sin are you

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<sup>5</sup> Smith, *Jonah*, Kindle Edition.

hiding? What sinful habit do you keep telling God, "I'll deal with it later." Don't run from God. He wants to heal you. He wants to help you.

**APPLICATION: Do you desire heaven's blessings** more than earthly comfort?

Let's consider another reason Jonah and all of us run from this amazing God we serve.

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## 2. WE DRIFT FROM GOD'S PRESENCE (1:2)

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We can become so familiar with a superficial knowledge of God that we take him for granted, and we drift from God's presence. Oh, how Jonah drifted, but he didn't even know it.

Jonah certainly was **comfortable preaching** to his crowds in **Samaria**. Jeroboam II must have been please as God was giving Jonah prophecies about the **expansion of the northern kingdom** that rivaled the times of **Solomon**.

The main reason Jonah can try (unsuccessfully) to run away from the presence of God in his call, is because **Jonah had already drifted away in his own heart**.

We can become so insulated and self-righteous when everything is going so well. We forget about the lost and dying world because **we embrace our own self-righteousness and drift from the love of God**. Holiness is simply being set apart to know and love God. What we find out is that **Jonah is a descent prophet, popular** even. But he's drifted from knowing the heart of God. He's drifted because of **passivity**.

God tells Jonah to arise out of his comfort and go to the most nightmarish place he could ever imagine. Think of the worst person and the worst people imaginable. God wants to save them!

There used to be a segment on a political show called "**worst person in the world**." Well, the worst group in the world for Jonah was the people of Nineveh, the **capital city of the great Assyrian empire**.

### DON'T DRIFT FROM GOD'S AMAZING LOVE

Doing God's will can be hard because of a self-righteous view of ourselves. Jonah thought he was more righteous and pure than God.

<b>Jonah 1:1-3a</b>   Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, <sup>2</sup> "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me." <sup>3</sup> But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.
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Of course, God is offended with evil. He is pure and holy and cannot dwell with evil. But God always acts in pursuing love and grace toward the worst of sinners because of his covenant of grace through Jesus. **The Lord enlists Jonah to "arise and go."** "Go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature," even the Ninevites. Jonah wants nothing to do with it! He hates the Ninevites. Because of this he has been called, "the world's worst missionary"!

God wants to save the people Jonah and Israel most feared. In Jonah's mind, he had good reason for fleeing. They were **the most ruthless terrorist state** in the ancient world **the ISIS of the ancient world**.<sup>6</sup> They were dreaded. They were like an army of the worst Nazis. They were **worse than 9/11 hijackers**. When you understand the **tactics of the Assyrians**, you understand a little more why he hated them. The Assyrians were so **brutal** in the way they handled their prisoners of war. They would torture women and children. They had such sophisticated torture that they made serial killers look tame.

Their **torture** was so fearful and ruthless that when people heard the Assyrians were coming, a whole town or village would **just commit suicide**. They would rather **kill themselves** than experience what

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<sup>6</sup> James Bruckner, *Jonah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2004), 28-30.

was coming. That's how feared the Assyrian empire was; they were that dreaded and that hated. Even though Jonah is eventually going to bring a revival to Nineveh (circa 755 B.C.), not much more than thirty years later **in 722 B.C., Assyria is going to destroy northern Israel** so that they will **never recover**.

**Barbaric Practices.** You can read the barbarous practices of the Assyrians in history books. Records brag of live dismemberment, often leaving one hand attached so they could shake it before the person died. They forced friends and family members to parade with the decapitated heads of their loved ones elevated on poles. They pulled out prisoners' tongues and stretched their bodies with ropes so they could be flayed alive and their skins displayed on city walls. They burned adolescents alive.<sup>7</sup> Then once they were dead, they would behead them, and they would take the heads of all of the prisoners of war, and they would make a pyramid of heads outside their city to say to the rest of the world, "This is a city that we conquered."

Those who survived the destruction of their cities were fated to endure cruel and violent forms of **slavery**.<sup>8</sup> When you understand the depravity of these evil practices, maybe you have a little more mercy for Jonah when he says, "I don't want to go there. I hate these people."

**FRIEND OR RELATIVE.** It's almost certain that Jonah had a **relative or a friend**, or someone who'd actually experienced the **horrific mayhem** of the Assyrians. Jonah had good reason to despise the Assyrians. Yet God says, "I want you to go and bring them to repentance." In Jonah's mind, he had legitimate reasons why he didn't want to obey God. "I don't want to live in heaven with Assyrians forever." Or maybe he said, "There are some people God should just not forgive."

Yet it was this **barbaric nation** that was the object of God's missionary outreach and his **unrelenting love**.<sup>9</sup> **God's lovingkindness and compassion and grace is not limited to good people**, but to **brutal, murderous, idolatrous pagans**. The self-righteous and the self-indulgent all need Jesus.

Have you drifted from the amazement of the gospel! Paul as a self-righteous Pharisee had to be humbled to the dust. He declared his own unworthiness above all the wicked people of the earth, he was most wicked and most unworthy.

*1 Timothy 1:15* | The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.

## **DON'T DRIFT FROM GOD'S AMAZING POWER**

We know that Jonah was given a call to preach in a pagan city. "The word of the Lord came to Jonah" (1:1), and he disobeyed the call of God because he knew God's power. He knew God could transform the hardest of sinners. And Jonah wanted nothing of it.

**Jonah 1:2-3a** | Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me. <sup>3</sup> But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.

**Jonah was fine with the Assyrians dying and going to their eternal punishment.** He didn't want to see them saved. He was uncomfortable with the idea of them coming into the kingdom of God.

### **HISTORY OF NINEVEH**

**What a history Nineveh had.** The infamous **Nimrod** was the founder of Nineveh. Nineveh's ruler had called himself "the almighty." This was a city full of idols.

**God wanted to change their history**, and he had the omnipotent **power** to do it. But **he calls earthly messengers to bring heaven-sent, supernatural power**. Nineveh means "fish city" and

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Keller, *Rediscovering Jonah*, 11.

<sup>9</sup> Timothy Keller, *Rediscovering Jonah: The Prodigal Prophet* (New York: Penguin Publishing Group, 2018), 11.



they **worshipped Dagon**, the fish god, like the Philistines. So God sends them a prophet that's literally going to be **vomited out of a fish!**

He was clear what he wanted Jonah to do. He wanted Jonah to go to this place that was way outside his comfort zone. Jonah was to call out against the people of Nineveh. **The evil was so great**, we have this picture of it **piling so high** it touched the heavens. God says, "their evil has come up before me" –the stench of their vile lives stank in the nostrils of God.

God's **power is so great** that he could bring the entire city of Nineveh to repentance. **God can work in the hardest hearts!** We know that Jonah was from a town called Gath-hepher near Nazareth where our Lord was later raised. Jesus mentions Jonah in Matthew 12. **They repented in a greater way** with Jonah's weak preaching than those who were eyewitnesses of Christ's ministry.

*Matthew 12:41* | The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and, behold, a greater than Jonah is here.

Jonah was **glad for the power of God to be displayed in Israel**, but he was content to never see God work in places like Assyria. I'll tell you, God is all about getting us to a place where his power is at work among us and then **in the most unlikely places and people!**

## DON'T DRIFT FROM GOD'S AMAZING PLANS

*Jonah 1:3a* | But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.

God has amazing plans not just for you, but for the whole world. Jonah as a prophet was also a **theologian**. **He knew he could never outrun the presence of God**. Yet, as Peter would later confess, it is possible to drift away from God that you can forget everything you know about God.

*2 Peter 2:9* | Whoever lacks these qualities [*of Christian growth*] is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins.

Jonah had become so self-righteous and comfortable that he was angry with the mercy of God. When Jonah heard God's plan and ran as fast and as far as he could **in the opposite direction!** Jonah ran because he felt he had better plans than God. But God says:

*Jeremiah 29:11* | For I know the plans I have for you," says the LORD. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.

Jonah **doubted the goodness, wisdom, and justice of God**. We have all had that experience. We sit in the doctor's office stunned by the **biopsy report**. We despair of ever finding **decent employment** after the last lead has dried up. We wonder why the family we had always dreamed of and hoped for—is not what we thought it would be. Maybe for some of you it has crashed and burned. It just seems like God doesn't know what he's doing.

Listen, you may have allowed circumstances to blind you. You desperately need to get your eyes back on the gracious, loving God who has plans to prosper you and see you conformed to Jesus Christ (Rom 8:29).

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## 3. WE QUIT GOD'S CALL (1:3)

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Have you ever tried to run from God? When trials and difficulty come, we have a temptation to escape to worldly distractions—easy outs. The smallest distraction can turn us into practical atheists, where our minds can escape from the thought of God and his call on our lives.

God has a call on every Christians life. You can try to run from it, but you cannot escape it. The sooner you open up the sewers of your flesh life and clean your heart by the power of the Spirit, the sooner you will see the power of God's call on your life.

Jonah needs a great fish to crush him. He comes out of that fish, covered in the acid of the fish's stomach, probably looking like an albino on the shores of Nineveh.

## QUITTING IS POINTLESS

Don't resist God's call. You can't quit God's call. **Peter tried. Moses tried. Elijah tried.** You can't quit dear brother. Jonah tried to quit.

**Jonah 1:3** | But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the LORD.

We all know we can't escape physically by fleeing from the presence of God, the way Jonah did. But we're **experts at quitting** by ignoring the plain teaching of God's word, distracting ourselves with **busyness**, and offering **alternative plans** and **rationalizations** in place of full obedience. There are no offramps to sanctification for the Christian.

No matter how we rationalize and excuse ourselves, our rebellion leads only to pain and suffering. There are always plenty of boats sailing in the wrong direction. When God calls us to fulfill his plans and purposes for our lives, it is futile to run from God's call because he is everywhere. **You can't outrun God.** You **can't quit God's call.**

*A walk to Joppa.* What was Jonah's response to God's call? Jonah's response to the call is quite immediate and quite clear. **Jonah runs from the call of the God of grace.** Look at the *lengths* he goes to in order to *avoid* God's call! It says here in verse 3 that he goes "down to Joppa" (a seaport), and he pays his fare and gets on a boat and heads to Tarshish. I want to give you an idea of how far Jonah was willing to go to avoid the call of God. **Jonah lives near Nazareth**—a very short distance from the shores of the Sea of Galilee. He was willing to go by foot to **Joppa, which is 50 miles away.** Fifty miles by foot is the picture of a man who wants to get far away!

*A boat ride to Spain!* But that's just the beginning of his journey! Jonah wants to get on this boat and go to Tarshish. **Tarshish is in modern day Spain, near the Rock of Gibraltar.** That's **3000 miles away on the opposite side** of the Mediterranean Sea! Jonah wanted to go to the other side of the then known world. Jonah is running as far as he can run from God!

## QUITTING IS IMPOSSIBLE

Jonah was turned around when he thought he could exit God's plan and his presence. He thought he could quit. He thought wrong.

**Jonah 1:3a** | But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.

If God has called you, and you are a child of God, you can't quit until God is finished with you. Look at Jonah. He's so unwilling. So God sent a fish. How many fishes does God own? How many ways can God chase you down. If God wants you to do something, you can't contend with the power of the almighty over your life. You are predestined for holiness.

**Romans 8:28-29** | We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. <sup>29</sup> For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son.

This promise is rooted in the Abrahamic covenant. God promised to bless all nations through the Seed of Abraham, which is Christ. He doesn't depend on us to accomplish this covenant of grace.



**ABRAHAMIC COVENANT:** God's covenant with his people from the beginning is a monergistic covenant. Abraham was asleep when the Abrahamic covenant was cut. He was asleep for a reason. God was the only one that could perfectly keep the covenant.

**GOD WILL CHASE YOU DOWN. FORD F-350.** You are going to fail, but God never fails. **His plans always, always, always come to pass**, and you are part of God's plan. So get this in your heart: you can't quit. God will chase you down. He can use a fish. For me he used a Ford F-350. It was a massive truck. It mowed me down in 2018. That was four years ago. I needed that truck! I praise God for that truck.

**PSALM 139:** God twice reveals that Jonah's intention is to "flee from the presence of the Lord." When I think of the story of Jonah, I often think of the striking verses in Psalm 139. **There is no where we can flee from God's presence.**

*Psalm 139:7-10* | Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? <sup>8</sup> If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! <sup>9</sup> If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, <sup>10</sup> even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me.

We are often as deluded as Jonah was! *We cannot run from God*, for he is *omnipresent!* The one thing you will never be able to do is *run from the presence of God.*

Remember this. You may try to quit God's calling on your life, but as God's child, he's put his omnipotent Spirit inside of you.

**A YEAR TO SAIL TO SPAIN.** Why did he sail for Tarshish? He was far from God. He was angry with God. He was sickened by God's plan. So he took a very long, long trip! One commentary said that **it would take about a year to sail** from where he was to where he was going. That's a lot of running.

You can take years off your life trying to run from God, but God's plan is to conform you to Christ! Your life is predestined to lead to your sanctification.

You can't quit. You can't stop God's call on your life. You can try to exit, but **every exit leads right back to God.**

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## 4. WE'RE ASLEEP IN GOD'S STORMS (1:4-5)

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We know what happened. Jonah got on a boat. He went 3000 miles to Tarshish, near Gibraltar in Spain. It takes a year to get there. He's got a lot of time on his hands. Sometime in the journey, God sends a terrible storm, and **Jonah's outer body matches his inner spirit.** He is **asleep.** And truly Jonah was a sleepy, backslidden prophet. He had fallen away like the prodigal's son. And **don't you know that God loves prodigals?**

### HARDSHIPS MAKE US SLEEPY

**Jonah 1:4-5** | But the LORD hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship threatened to break up. <sup>5</sup> Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried out to his god. And they hurled the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them. But Jonah had gone down into the inner part of the ship and had lain down and was fast asleep.

Jonah's **hatred for the Assyrians** made him spiritual dead and **sleepy.** Jonah boards a year-long cruise to Tarshish in Spain, and somewhere along the way he sleeps.

*Trying times today can make us sleepy.* The toxins of modern politics draws us in and deadens us with fear and hatred. Many Christians watch the news cycle much more than they read their Bibles or commune with God. This will make us sleepy! The apostle Paul said that "in **the last days perilous times shall**

**come**" (2 Tim 3:1). I believe we are living in those perilous—dangerous—days. These are days of great uncertainty. We face uncertainty in the financial realms of our country. **Corporate scandal** and increased government programs are costly to everyone. We face uncertainty in the job and financial markets because of **runaway inflation**. We face concerns about terrorism and wars around the world. These are days of **political and social unrest**—not to mention **moral unrest**. The **homosexual agenda** is making inroads into the fabric of our society. There are still hundreds of **abortion mills right here in our state of Illinois** where babies are being murdered. We witness a continuing **moral decline** with a tidal wave of pornography sweeping away the strength of our nation's men and women—both young and old. **Drug and alcohol use** is increasing. Kids are dying of **overdoses** more now than any time in our history. The **family unit** continues to disintegrate. **Divorce**, adultery, premarital affairs, and **unmarried couples living together** are commonplace. **Entertainment** is increasingly laced with sensuality, **violence**, and materialism.<sup>10</sup> **God calls his backsliding people** to get out of the storm and return to him.

*Jeremiah 3:22* | Return, faithless people; I will cure you of backsliding. "Yes, we will come to you, for you are the LORD our God."

God will bring **whatever storm necessary to humble you** so you are fit for his love and his leading. God had to send a storm to Jonah in order to bring him back.

**DIDN'T KNOW HOW FAR DRIFTED**: When I lived in Louisiana, I loved to go canoeing. Once I got in a canoe with my friend Chris. We were young kids, maybe 12 years old. He had made this canoe with fiberglass with his dad in his garage. And we got to talking. Then, we looked up, and I was like, "Where's your house?" It took a minute, but I had lost track of where we were. I didn't know where I was for a moment. We had drifted several houses down and we didn't even know it until we looked back at our point of reference. **We hadn't realized just how far we had drifted.**

Some of you, you may be able to relate, because maybe months or years ago, **you were really close to God**. You know what I'm talking about. You're praying and God answers your prayers. You walked with God. God would prompt you to do something or say something, and so you do it or say it and then, He'd bless you. And you were like: "Whoa, that's just amazing." His word was a valuable part of every day, and you'd open it up and you're like, "Man, that was for me, and, and that was for me, and God was speaking," and you'd go to church, and it'd be like, "God's speaking to me. It's like I'm the only one in the room. And you'd have these divine appointments with people, where you're like, "I think I was supposed to say that, and that really helped."

**But slowly church, and the fellowship of believers slowly became less important to you**, and you put down his word and you stopped reading it so much. And then you didn't pray as much, and then you didn't see as much of the God activities in your life, and then one day, "Like, how did I get so far from God?" It wasn't that you were running as much as you were drifting from him.

Notice the pattern: **Jonah denies the presence of God**. Jonah **falls asleep**. This is the pattern of sin. We turn off God's presence in our lives, and then we begin to drift spiritually. Examine your life. Where are you asleep? Where is your soul deadening? Awake!

We have all made decisions that have left us with scars that we will not erase until glory. We all have within us the temptation to flee to our **own personal Tarshish**. We must not try to take control of our own lives. God is in ultimate control of your life. How foolish it is to run from the loving God who wants his peace and joy to fill your life.

Don't be so worried about the ships that God is breaking. Stop trusting in worldly comfort or earthly security. Trust in the Lord and come back to him if you have been straying.

What kind of storms is God using to get your attention? What is the storm revealing to you? Are you trusting in earthly refuges? Have you realized how good God is to tear them down? How long will it take for

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<sup>10</sup> Jim Berg. *God is More than Enough* (Greenville, SC: BJU Press/JourneyForth, 2010).

you to have a change of heart? How is God using the storm to change the way you think about him and his mercy toward others? What has God asked you to do that you haven't done?

## GOD NEVER SLEEPS

**God never sleeps. He never slumbers. He never nods off** and accidentally allows you to stumble. No. Everything God does is intentional. He wants you to be broken and molded into Christ's image.

*Psalm 121:4* | Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.

The Lord is your **good shepherd and watchman**. He always watches over us. He's always in hot pursuit of his people. He'll never leave us or forsake us. The Bible says something amazing of **God's pursuit of the child of God**.

*Psalm 23:6* | Surely goodness and mercy [*hesed*] shall pursue me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

I love the Hebrew word for mercy, *hesed*. It means God's unrelenting love. God chases us down and throws us overboard into a place of helplessness where we can finally know God's sufficient grace and enjoy his unrelenting love. We ought to be like the Shulamite farm girl in the Song of Solomon, who, now married to King Solomon, looks back at how she loved to run with the king through the fields of Jezreel near her home of Shulem.

*Song of Solomon 1:4* | Draw me after you; let us run.... We will exult and rejoice in you; we will extol your love more than wine.

We ought to be calling to God, "Let us run together! Your love is better than the best wine!"

God promises to do **whatever it takes to soften his hardened child**. He never, never sleeps. He did that for Jonah by sending a great storm. God will do whatever it takes to bring you back home, on your predestined path of having a heart like Jesus. You are being molded into his image. If God needs a storm to make that happen, he'll bring it.

If God sent his own dear Son down to earth to die to retrieve you, don't you think he'll send as many storms as he has to in order to keep you holy?

### Conclusion

Jonah's worst nightmare was exactly what he needed. I can remember praying for my sister to come to Christ. God answered by allowing her to become anorexic. She was divorced before she was 21. She was self-medicating and really on the verge of death. That's not the answer I wanted from the Lord. But she had to come to that nightmare scenario in her life to see how badly she needed Christ. She tried running for years, but **finally God chased her down**. Now her husband is the pastor of a Bible preaching church in Independence, Louisiana. She could run, but she couldn't outrun God.

God loves you. He's going to chase you down. He's going to chase your loved ones down. No one can outrun the love of God!