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| A picture containing object, thing, clock  Description generated with very high confidence | Running from God |
| MATT BLACK, Wed, June 21, 2017 |
| [livinghopechurch.net](http://www.livinghopechurch.net/) | Jonah 1:1-4, “Into the Storm” series |

**Introduction**: Open your Bible to Jonah. We are beginning a series in Jonah called “Into the Storm.” Tonight’s study is entitled: “Running from God.”

**The God of All Grace**

Have you ever come across a phrase in your Bible that jolted you? You saw it before, but God dowsed it with His presence and gave a deeper understanding. Have you ever had a Great Awakening through a Bible verse? I had several this week, but none like a verse in **1 Peter 5:10**. God is called by a title there that is very important to you this morning. God is called by a name that you need to hear in your ears and let it ring in your soul.

He is “the God of all grace”. That’s a title that I need God to have. You see I need grace. I need grace more than I need water and food and the love of others on this earth. I need grace more than I need anything!! My biggest problem in this life that I am living and your biggest problem in this life is one thing: we turn to many other things for help and grace, and none of those things can give us what we need. You see God is “the God of **all** grace.” There is no grace outside of Him. If I run away from Him, I run away from “**all** grace.” I may find temporary relief in distractions, I may find the pleasures of sin for a season, but I can never find the highest human pleasure in the universe—that pleasure is found only in God’s grace, and there is no grace outside of Him!

**Five Reasons I want to study Jonah**

(1) Grace for **you** – We need grace! I want to go through Jonah, because he is a religious man in a religious culture and he needs grace. I can relate with that. Religious people need grace!

(2) Grace for **your city** – Your city / family / neighbors need grace! God loves your neighbors more than you do.

(3) Learning to **pray** – I want to learn to pray like Jonah in the fish. We learn to pray best when we are convinced of the reality of our helplessness.

(4) The **Gospel** – Jonah is a type of Christ – like he was as good as dead for three days, so Jesus was actually dead for three days. As Jonah is “resurrected” from the fish, so Jesus is resurrected from the grave. Jonah is a good reminder of the power of the Gospel.

(5) Most importantly, **God**. You and I need to get to know a merciful, loving God who is in relentless pursuit of you and your neighborhood. We serve a gracious God.

**Sin and Grace in Jonah**

Jonah is a book about God’s grace. We all know that Jonah is a book about Jonah running from God – that’s sin, and God chasing after Jonah – that’s grace. Sin and grace. Running and chasing. You cannot outrun God. His grace is greater than your sin.

We run from God all the time. Was there a time this week when you ran from God? Did you have a time this week when **you thought your plan was better than God’s plan**? Was there a moment when you **denied the presence of God**? Did you make a decision this week where you acted as if God was not right there with you? Is there yet this evening some place in your life where you are running from God?

It is shocking to me that I find myself at times running from God. I feel like Peter when he said, “I’ll never deny you Lord!” and then failing miserably. The spirit is indeed willing, but the flesh is weak. There is a war in every Christian’s life—a battle between the flesh and the spirit. A Christian has a willingness to love and obey God, but the flesh is stubborn, proud, and unwilling. What do you do when you feel like running from God? Well, we ought not do what Jonah did. Let’s find out what he did when God told him something in his flesh, he did not want to do.

**A Study about Victory**

Now don’t go thinking this is a study that’s going to excuse your sin and laziness and normalize a carnality in your life. This study is one of holiness. Mercy and love from God always are intended for your holiness and victory.

When Adam and Eve sinned, they ran and hid from God. That’s the old life. The new life is how God has caught us in the storm.

So really Jonah 1:1-3 is the story of what it’s like to return to our life before we knew Christ. We were running from God. No Christian should return to that life. Jonah found it convenient to return to that life of running from God.

**No Christian Can Life in Perpetual Sin**

No true born again Christian can take as the prominent identity marker of their life a sinful lifestyle. One who has no victory over sin is not born again. This is clearly an identifying mark from the book of 1 John 3.

If you run from God, God has a storm for you. That’s what Jonah is all about. God won’t let you return to a life of running. God is chasing you. That’s the point of this story. That’s the story of all our lives. Sin is us **running** from God. Grace is God **chasing** us. Running and chasing. Sin and grace.

You cannot pray if you are running from God. You cannot receive from God and be used of God if you are running from God. So this first lesson is all about how unreasonable and unhappy it is to run from God. God is the God of “all grace.” He wants you to live in the power of his grace, in the power of answered prayer tonight.

Let’s read **Jonah 1:1-3**, “Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying,**2**“Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.” **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.”

**Introduction**

***The book of Jonah was written for believers who sometimes don’t understand why God asks them to do hard things***. Have you ever struggled with not understanding God’s will? Welcome to Jonah’s world. We have to avoid running from God when we don’t understand why He would desire us to do certain things that are excruciatingly hard for us.

1. We often run when God asks us to do very hard things, (1:1-2a).

***Sometimes God calls us to do VERY hard things – things we often do not understand***. We all have to accept that this evening. God did not call us to a life of ease, but to die to self. He calls us to be crucified to our own agenda – to get on a cross and follow Him to our own death!

Sometimes God’s will just does not make sense. Tragedy. Your health. Your marriage. Your job. Wherever the trial comes, it seems so hard to understand. **Proverbs 3:5-6**, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. 6 In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.”

**It’s Hard because of a Self-Righteous View of Ourselves**

**Jonah 1:1-3**,“Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying,**2**“Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.” **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.”

God is offended with evil. He enlists Jonah, but doesn’t tell him his plan. But Jonah has an idea about God’s plan. He quotes **Moses** in **Exodus 34:6**. **Jonah 4:2**, “O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster.”

So God is offended with evil, but it seems Jonah is even more offended with evil than God. Jonah is dealing with a spiritual disease called “self-righteousness.” God is a God of grace, he knows that.

**The Ruthlessness of the Assyrians**

Jonah had good reason for fleeing. The Assyrians were the ISIS of the ancient world. They were actually worse than ISIS. When you understand the history of Nineveh, or the Assyrian empire, you understand a little more why he hated them. The Assyrian empire, of which Nineveh was the capital city, were so brutal in the way they would handle the captives of the cities it conquered. They would torture them and be so destructive that, occasionally, when it was rumored that the Assyrians were going to be attacking, sometimes a whole town of people would just commit suicide, because they would rather die that way than experience what was coming. That’s how feared the Assyrian empire was; they were that dreaded and that hated.

**The Barbaric Practices of the Assyrians**

You can read this in history books. This is what they would do. They would go in and they would take over a city. They would kill anyone in sight, then they would rape the surviving women before they would kill them. They would often even rape the little girls. They would torture some of the kids, and then they would take the husbands, who were prisoners of war, outside the city and skin them alive. Then, once they were skinned, they would actually bury them in the desert’s sand up to their necks. You can imagine the pain they would be in. Then, they would take their tongues and they would pull their tongues out, and they would drive a stake through their tongue so they would go crazy as they were dying of thirst in the middle of the desert. You can just start to imagine the horror of a stake driven through your tongue, and most people would go crazy before they would die. 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.”

When you know that, maybe you have a little more mercy for Jonah when he said, “I don’t want to go there. I hate these people.” It could have been that he had a relative or a friend, or someone who’d actually experienced that. Jonah had good reason to despise the Assyrians. God said, “I want you to do something,” and in his mind, he had legitimate reasons why he didn’t want to obey God.

**Context**

We are looking to day at God’s call to Jonah, which was unimaginably difficult. What do we know about Jonah and his call? We know Jonah ran far away from God’s call. Other than that, we don’t know a lot about him. There is only one other mention of him in the Old Testament in **2 Kings 14:25**.[[1]](#footnote-1) We know that Jonah was from a town called Gath-hepher near Nazareth, where our Lord was later raised.

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

**Location of Nineveh**

We know that Jonah was given a call to preach in a pagan city. The infamous Nimrod was the founder of Nineveh. God told Jonah, “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me” (**verse 2**). Nineveh is located across the Tigris river near **Mosul, Iraq**. There were many prophets who were given a call to prophesy against the evil of the surrounding nations. But they were all allowed to make those prophecies from the comfort of Israel. Jonah’s call is unique. He is called to leave his town and go to what God calls “that great city of Nineveh”.

Jonah’s call is a hard call for a number of reasons.

* Nineveh’s ruler had called himself “the almighty.”
* This was a city full of idolatry.
* There is a high possibility that no one in Nineveh would be receptive to a Hebrew prophet proclaiming the judgment of a foreign God. We ought not to be too hard on Jonah. Consider the difficulty of his call. See your struggle to obey God without questioning in Jonah.

**God’s Call is Sometimes Dangerous and Unsettling**

God’s call to Jonah was *dangerous* and *unsettling*. And so it is with us at times. God’s call to us is not always comfortable. He does not call us to rest in the fortunes of this world, but to be *faithful*. God’s plans for us are not always *easy*. God plans things for us that we would *never* have planned for ourselves, that we would never have imagined! God asks us to do things often in the Christian life that we would never choose. Are you *willing* to do whatever God calls you to do? Has He given you a hard task recently? I may not make sense to you. Can you do what He asks *joyfully*?

**Bear Story: Sometimes We Think We Know Better than God**

The Word of the Lord will come to you. That’s the good news. The challenging news for many people is this: when God comes to you, He will often ask you to do some things that you don’t want to do. And the reason we don’t want to do them a lot of times is because we really like to believe that **we know what is best**. We like to try to convince ourselves that we really know what is better.

I heard the story of a family who went camping. They went on a little hike, and a lady came running up to them and said, “You guys have to leave here, now!” The father was like, “Look, we came here. This is a public place. Why?” and she’s like, “You just have to leave here, now! Get out of here, now.” And the father is like, “Why?” and she said, “Because there is a bear up in that tree.” Oh, I see. Okay? And there was. There was a little bitty black bear, a really cute little baby black bear, and she just said, “Get out of here, now.” So, guess what they did? Do you think they left? No, the father took his phone out. It had a little camera on it. They got as close as they could, taking pictures. You know, cute little bear. Yep, look at it … baby bear. Baby, baby, baby, baby bear,” and all this stuff, and she came up again. She said, “Get out of here, now!” The father is like, “Why? It’s just an innocent little baby bear, and she said, “Whenever there’s a baby bear close by, there’s usually a momma bear,” so they got out of there! The father didn’t understand the whole story. He didn’t understand the context. We think we know better.

A lot of times, we feel like we know what is best, and we don’t want to obey when the Word of the Lord comes to us. This was the context of Jonah, and we see this actually take place in verse 2. Here is the command. God says to him, “Go to the great city of Nineveh and,” do what? God said, “I want you to preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me.” Now, you might wonder, “Well, okay, Jonah is a prophet and that is what he does. He preaches God’s Word, so why didn’t he just obey this very simple assignment?”

With the brutality of the Assyrians, Jonah is a reasonable man. He doesn’t want them to be saved. They are Israel’s ISIS! Worse than ISIS. But God knows best, amen? So the first point is that *sometimes God calls us to do some very hard things* – things we often don’t understand.

**Delayed Obedience is Disobedience**

We need to obey God regardless if it makes perfect sense to us at the time. Maybe the Word of the Lord has come to you and you thought, “Okay, I know what I’m supposed to do, but I don’t want to do that now. I’ll do it later. I’ll do it later. I’ll get to it. I’ll get to it later.” Remember this. Delayed obedience is really disobedience.

**Lag Time**

The mark of maturity is lag time. You can tell the maturity of a person between the distance of the command of God and the obedience. If the lag time is short, they are mature. If the lag time is long, it is immaturity. I am so afraid that we have a church full of people in our churches that there is lag time, if obedience at all. When God commands us to do something, there should be immediate obedience. The Word of the Lord will come to you. He’ll often tell you to do some things that you don’t want to do.

**Questions for Reflection**

In his mind, Jonah had legitimate reasons for not wanting to preach to the Ninevites. Describe a time when you disobeyed God’s direction and faced the consequences.

Share something God asked you to do that you didn’t want to do, but you did. What was the result? Who or what is currently the Nineveh in your life?

1. We can often run from God’s will because there are always boats sailing in the wrong direction, (1:3).

When God calls us to do hard things, ***it is futile to run from God’s call because He is everywhere***.

**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.”

Listen, there’s always a boat drifting in the wrong direction.

***Context***: 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”.

**The Great Distance to Joppa and 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!*** 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 ancient world. Jonah is running as far as He can run from God!

Look at the futility of Jonah’s ***Intention***. Look back at **Jonah 1:3**. God twice reveals that Jonah’s intention is to “flee from the presence of the Lord”. We are often as deluded as Jonah was! Brothers and sisters, we can run from a location, and you can run away from something God wants you to do, but ***you 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*! Running from God is like trying to empty the ocean with a spoon! We cannot run from a being of infinite presence!

***Explanation***: Turn over to **Psalm 139:7-10**. There is no where we can go to get away from God’s presence. Look what David says here in **Psalm 139:7-10**, “Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? 8 If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! 9 If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, 10 even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me.” You cannot run from God’s presence. It is futile! We cannot escape the presence of an *ever-present* God.

Yet Jonah is determined, so he gets on a ship in the seaport city of Joppa and heads to the other side of the ancient world.

**Running in the Wrong Direction**

Jonah said, “I don’t want to go there. I don’t want to have anything to do with those people. They make me angry.” Remember this. God will speak to you, and He may tell you to do something you don’t want to do. Whenever God does speak, you can always find a boat sailing in the wrong direction. You can always find a ship moving in the wrong way. Some of you know what I’m talking about. You say, “Hey, I want to obey God. I want to do what He’s called me to do,” and all of a sudden, your old buddy comes up and says, “Hey, don’t go that way – you don’t need to be so extreme in following Christ. Let’s go back to what we used to do. Hey, let’s go back to the old life.”

Watch how it happens here in Jonah. God says, “I want you to preach to the Ninevites.” **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.”

Why did he sail for Tarshish? Because he wanted to run from God. What did God say? God said, basically, “Go east to Nineveh,” and Jonah said, “nuh, uh, I’m going west to Tarshish,” **2,500 miles away** from the target destination. That’s how far it was, twenty-five hundred miles away. 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.

Some of you, right now, you can relate. You may be sitting next to someone who thinks you’re absolutely on track, but you know in your heart you’ve been running, and you’re a long way from God. The Word of the Lord has come to you. “Here is what I want you to do,” and somewhere along the way, months or weeks or years back, you said, “No, no. I know that’s what You want, God, but I don’t want to obey You.” You’ve been on the run, and you think you can get away with it. You need to understand, you can run for a while, but you can’t run forever. Maybe you are not on the run as much as you are just drifting. You are just drifting.

**Drifting in the Wrong Direction**

When I lived in Louisiana, I loved to go canoeing. Once I got in a canoe with my friend Chris. He had made this canoe. 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 day, 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.

When we disobey the commands of God intentionally or even unintentionally, we are drifting. We are separating ourselves from Him, the Jonah in all of us. The Word of the Lord will come to you. It may not be what you want to hear. When you run, you can always find a boat sailing in the wrong direction.

**How Do We Run from the Presence of God?**

It says Jonah fled “from the presence of the Lord” (1:3). How is that possible? Before we criticize Jonah this evening, let us all recognize that this week, there have been times when we have run from the presence of God.

* Perhaps you had a ***conversation*** recently that you would not have had if you had simply recognized the presence of God. Words were said and attitudes were displayed that you never would have displayed had you recognized God’s presence.
* Perhaps you entertained ***thoughts*** in your mind that you would not have entertained had you been conscious of the presence of God.
* Perhaps you let your ***eyes*** and your ***heart*** wander somewhere that your eyes and heart never would have wandered if you had turned your heart to the presence of God.
* Perhaps you made a ***decision*** that you never would have made had you been walking with your mind conscious of God’s presence.
* Is there any place in your life as a believer where you are tempted to deny the presence of God?

***Warning***: The most dangerous thing about denying the presence of God is that you as a finite human being are taking your life into your own hands. You were not meant to control your life. It’s way too precious and too easy to mess up. You taking control of your life is like a little child taking control of a running chain saw. Not much good can happen. The child is too weak to do anything other than great damage!

Yet 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. You must see that God is in ultimate control of your life. Do not run from Him!

**Question for Reflection**

In your spiritual life, which direction are you running: towards God, away from God, with God, or behind God? Share a time when you thought you could ignore or run from God? Where did you end up? What does our running from God reveal about our concept of God?

1. When we run, God sometimes has to send a **storm**, (1:4).

**Jonah 1:4**, “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.”

God may send a storm to grab your attention. Now, this was ship full of sailors that were transporting cargo, so this was a very strong ship. This was such a great wind, we are talking, you can only imagine, “boom!” and the boat going up and down, and everybody screaming, “Help! What are we going to do? We’ve never seen a storm like this,” so much so that the integrity of the ship was at risk. They’re starting to say, “Who’s fault is this? What’s going on?” and they drew straws and they say, “Well, it’s Jonah’s fault.” And they said, “Who are you, and what did you do to bring this on?”

**Jonah 1:5-10**, “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. 6 So the captain came and said to him, “What do you mean, you sleeper? Arise, call out to your god! Perhaps the god will give a thought to us, that we may not perish.”

7 And they said to one another, “Come, let us cast lots, that we may know on whose account this evil has come upon us.” So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. 8 Then they said to him, “Tell us on whose account this evil has come upon us. What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?” 9 And he said to them, “I am a Hebrew, and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.” 10 Then the men were exceedingly afraid and said to him, “What is this that you have done!” For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the Lord, because he had told them.”

So they’ve thrown their livelihood overboard – all the cargo. They try rowing back to shore. That doesn’t work. Finally, Jonah finally owns up to it.

**Jonah 1:11-17**, “Then they said to him, “What shall we do to you, that the sea may quiet down for us?” For the sea grew more and more tempestuous. 12 He said to them, “Pick me up and hurl me into the sea; then the sea will quiet down for you, for I know it is because of me that this great tempest has come upon you.” 13 Nevertheless, the men rowed hard to get back to dry land, but they could not, for the sea grew more and more tempestuous against them.

14 Therefore they called out to the Lord, “O Lord, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not on us innocent blood, for you, O Lord, have done as it pleased you.” 15 So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging.

16 Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows. 17 And the Lord appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.”

So we see Jonah says, “Okay, guys, I’m sorry. Pick me up. Throw me into the sea, and it will become calm. This whole storm, it’s my fault,” he said. So, the sailors, they’re going to have mercy on him, because they really care about him, even though they know him. And they said, “We’re not going to do that to you.”

“Let’s throw our cargo off the boat.” This was their livelihood. Okay? “Let’s throw it off the boat. We’re going to get rid of everything and try to save you.” That didn’t work, okay?

“Let’s row back to shore.” Row, row, row your boat … Okay, that didn’t work, either, and finally, it’s like, “Okay, we’re all going to die. I guess we need to throw you off.”

And so they said, “God, forgive us (vs. 14). We’re sorry. We don’t want to do this to Jonah. Jonah, we’re sorry,” and they throw him overboard, and the sea goes calm. Then, something unbelievably bad in our human mind happens to Jonah.

If you know the story, he got swallowed up by a big fish. People say, “Jonah and the whale”. It was not a whale. Original text says it was a fish. Doesn’t really matter. It was big. It was nasty, okay? He was in the fish for three days.

**God Gets Your Attention in the Storm**

Some of you right now, you may be facing what you would consider is your nightmare.

I mean, **financially**, you may be like, “I’m done. It’s over.” And God may say, “Okay, now do I have your attention?”

Some of you may be facing a **relationship** that you think it just couldn’t get any worse than this, and God may say, “Okay, do I have your attention?”

It could be your **health**. He wants to draw you near. Remember God is a gracious God and full of mercy.

Romans 8:28, God in his providence directs all things (evil and good, sin and righteousness) together for work good for you who love God. What we would consider is our worst nightmare so that He can fully get our attention. It conforms us into the image of Christ.

**Questions for Reflection**

What kind of storms has God used in the past (or present) to get your attention? What did your storm reveal to you? How long did it take for you to have a change of heart?

How did God use 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? (Is there any area of disobedience in your life?)

**Conclusion – my sister**

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 Mount Calvary Baptist Church in Independence, Louisiana. She could run, but she couldn’t outrun God.

How about you? Jonah is a believer. He fears the Lord. Yet he runs. What boat are you on that’s taking you in the wrong direction?

The Word of the Lord will come to you, and you have a choice: obey or disobey. When God speaks to you, you can always find a ship sailing the wrong direction. If you do not obey, He may send a storm to grab your attention. If that doesn’t get it, He may allow you to face your worst nightmare. When He does, understand this. It’s all because He loves you, because He has something for you to do, and He has a city or a group of people for you to impact. You’ve got a choice. You can keep running, or you can come back to Him.

1. He restored the border of Israel from Lebo-hamath as far as the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the LORD, the God of Israel, which he spoke by his servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet, who was from Gath-hepher (ESV). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)