

We Must Not Pray Only as a Last Resort

Message 2 of 4 in the series: "Jonah: How to NOT Be the Worst Evangelist Ever!"

A. Jesus wants all of us to be evangelists (messengers of Good News).

"Go into all the world and preach **the Good News** to everyone." Mark 16:15b (NLT)

"How beautiful are the feet of **messengers who bring good news!**" Romans 10:15b (NLT) (*Isaiah 52:7*)

"to bring Good News" = "euangelizo" (NT Greek) = "evangelism"

B. The OT prophet Jonah gave us a prime example of how to be the worst evangelist ever when he ran away from the presence of the Lord because he didn't like the way God was handling things.

"The Lord gave this message to Jonah son of Amittai: 'Get up and go to the great city of Nineveh. Announce my judgment against it because I have seen how wicked its people are.' But Jonah got up and went in the opposite direction to get away from the Lord. He went down to the port of Joppa, where he found a ship leaving for Tarshish. He bought a ticket and went on board, **hoping to escape from the Lord** by sailing to Tarshish." Jonah 1:1-3 (NLT)

Note: Jonah was angry about how God was handling things, and he didn't want to talk to God about it. "But the Lord hurled a powerful wind over the sea, causing a violent storm that threatened to break the ship apart... But all this time Jonah was sound asleep down in the hold. So the captain went down after him. 'How can you sleep at a time like this?' he shouted. '**Get up and pray to your god! Maybe he will pay attention to us and spare our lives.**'" Jonah 1:4-6 (NLT)

IMPORTANT! Refusing to pray when we don't like the way God is handling things is foolish and sinful.

- God made us, and He knows what's best for us better than we do. "The Lord says, '**I will guide you along the best pathway for your life.** I will advise you and watch over you. Do not be like a senseless horse or mule that needs a bit and bridle to keep it under control.'" Psalm 32:8-9 (NLT)
- Jesus understands all our weaknesses, trials, and pains better than we do. "**This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses**, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin. **So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God.** There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most." Hebrews 4:15-16 (NLT)
- Jesus gave His life to make it possible for filthy, rotten sinners like us to be able to talk to God about anything, anytime, anywhere. "For God in all his fullness was pleased to live in Christ, and through him God reconciled everything to himself. **He made peace with everything in heaven and on earth by means of Christ's blood on the cross.** This includes you who were once far away from God. **You were his enemies, separated from him by your evil thoughts and actions.** Yet now he has reconciled you to himself through the death of Christ in his physical body. As a result, **he has brought you into his own presence**, and you are holy and blameless as you stand before him without a single fault." Colossians 1:19-22 (NLT)
- It's impossible to escape from the Lord's presence. "Where can I go from your Spirit? **Where can I flee from your presence?** If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there." Psalm 139:7-8 (NIV)

C. Jonah finally prayed to the Lord as a last resort.

"Then the sailors picked Jonah up and threw him into the raging sea, and the storm stopped at once! ...Now the Lord had arranged for a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was inside the fish for three days and three nights. **Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from inside the fish.** He said, '**I cried out to the Lord in my great trouble, and he answered me.** I called to you from the land of the dead, and Lord, you heard me!'" Jonah 1:15-2:2 (NLT)

IMPORTANT! God is always more ready to listen than we are to pray. "**The Lord hears his people when they call to him for help.** He rescues them from all their troubles. The Lord is close to the brokenhearted; he rescues those whose spirits are crushed." Psalm 34:17-18 (NLT)

Note: Jesus spoke of Jonah's miraculous rescue via a great fish as a real, historical event. "One day some teachers of religious law and Pharisees came to Jesus and said, 'Teacher, we want you to show us a miraculous sign to prove your authority.' But Jesus replied, 'Only an evil, adulterous generation would

demand a miraculous sign; but the only sign I will give them is the sign of the prophet Jonah. **For as Jonah was in the belly of the great fish for three days and three nights, so will the Son of Man be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights.**” Matthew 12:38-40 (NLT)

IMPORTANT! If Jesus’ death and resurrection didn’t really happen, our faith is worthless. “**Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, just as the Scriptures said...** And **if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless** and you are still guilty of your sins.” 1 Corinthians 15:3b-4 & 17 (NLT)

“You threw me into the ocean depths, and I sank down to the heart of the sea. The mighty waters engulfed me; I was buried beneath your wild and stormy waves. Then I said, ‘O Lord, you have driven me from your presence. Yet I will look once more toward your holy Temple.’ I sank beneath the waves, and the waters closed over me. Seaweed wrapped itself around my head. I sank down to the very roots of the mountains. I was imprisoned in the earth, whose gates lock shut forever. But you, O Lord my God, snatched me from the jaws of death! **As my life was slipping away, I remembered the Lord. And my earnest prayer went out to you** in your holy Temple. Those who worship false gods turn their backs on all God’s mercies. But **I will offer sacrifices to you with songs of praise, and I will fulfill all my vows.** For my salvation comes from the Lord alone.” Jonah 2:3-9 (NLT)

Note: When Jonah repented for going his own way and surrendered to going God’s way, his terrible, horrible, no good, very bad trip to Tarshish finally came to an end. “And the Lord commanded the fish, and **it vomited Jonah onto dry land.**” Jonah 2:10 (NIV)

IMPORTANT! Jonah was able to praise God while he was still inside the fish because he realized God was disciplining him for his own good. “‘My child, don’t make light of the Lord’s discipline, and don’t give up when he corrects you. For **the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes each one he accepts as his child.**’ As you endure this divine discipline, remember that God is treating you as his own children.”

Hebrews 12:5b-7a (NLT)

D. In order for us to NOT be the worst evangelists ever, we must NOT pray only as a last resort.

- God wants us to pray all the time. “...**pray without ceasing**...” 1 Thessalonians 5:17 (NKJV)
- God wants us to pray about everything. “Don’t worry about anything; instead, **pray about everything**. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God’s peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:6-7 (NLT)
- God wants us to pray without giving up! “**Keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for.** Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.” Matthew 7:7-8 (NLT)
- God wants us to pray according to His will. “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; **yet not my will, but yours be done.**” Luke 22:42 (NIV)

Become **Aware** • Commit to **Prayer** • Show your **Care** • Be ready to **Share**

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Connect Group Discussion Questions:

Read Jonah 1 & 2, and then discuss the following questions:

1. Why do we often refuse to pray when we don’t like the way God is handling things? Discuss the following reasons this is foolish and sinful:
 - God made us, and He knows what’s best for us better than we do. (Psalm 32:8-9)
 - Jesus understands all our weaknesses, trials, and pains better than we do. (Hebrews 4:15-16)
 - Jesus gave His life to make it possible for filthy, rotten sinners like us to be able to talk to God about anything, anytime, anywhere. (Colossians 1:19-22)
 - It’s impossible to escape from the Lord’s presence. (Psalm 139:7-9)
2. What is the significance of Jesus speaking of Jonah’s time in the great fish as a real, historical event rather than a made-up illustration? (Matthew 12:38-40, 1 Corinthians 15:3-7 & 17)

3. Discuss the following statements about prayer:

- God is always more ready to listen than we are to pray. (Psalm 34:17-18)
- God wants us to pray all the time. (1 Thessalonians 5:17)
- God wants us to pray about everything. (Philippians 4:6-7)
- God wants us to pray without giving up! (Matthew 7:7-8)
- God wants us to pray according to His will. (Luke 22:42)

Which of these statements is most relevant to you right now?

4. Why do you think Jonah was able to praise God while he was still inside the fish? (Jonah 2:9) How did Jonah's understanding of God's calling and purpose for his life impact his interpretation of his circumstances? (Hebrews 12:5-13)

5. Using the following rhyming list of helpful steps, spend a few minutes brainstorming things all messengers of the Good News should be praying about regularly.

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