

God Used a Storm to Turn Jonah Around

Lesson 02: of the Series: "Storm Stories"

1. When God told Jonah to announce judgment against the people of Ninevah Jonah ran the other way.

"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 hated the Ninevites. "What sorrow awaits Nineveh, the city of murder and lies! She is crammed with wealth and is never without victims." Nahum 3:1 (NLT)

Life Application: We can't run from God!

"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. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. If I say, 'Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me,' even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you." Psalm 139:7-12 (NIV)

"For a man's ways are in full view of the LORD, and he examines all his paths." Proverbs 5:21 (NIV)

2. God used a terrible storm to turn Jonah around.

But the LORD hurled a powerful wind over the sea, causing a violent storm that threatened to break the ship apart. Fearing for their lives, the desperate sailors shouted to their gods for help and threw the cargo overboard to lighten the ship. 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." the crew cast lots to see which of them had offended the gods and caused the terrible storm. When they did this, the lots identified Jonah as the culprit. "Why has this awful storm come down on us?" they demanded. "Who are you? What is your line of work? What country are you from? What is your nationality?" Jonah answered, "I am a Hebrew, and I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land." The sailors were terrified when they heard this, for he had already told them he was running away from the LORD. "Oh, why did you do it?" they groaned. And since the storm was getting worse all the time, they asked him, 'What should we do to you to stop this storm?' 'Throw me into the sea,' Jonah said, 'and it will become calm again. I know that this terrible storm is all my fault.' ...Then they cried out to the LORD, Jonah's God. 'O LORD,' they pleaded, 'don't make us die for this man's sin. And don't hold us responsible for his death. O LORD, you have sent this storm upon him for your own good reasons.' Then the sailors picked Jonah up and threw him into the raging sea, and the storm stopped at once! The sailors were awestruck by the LORD's great power, and they offered him a sacrifice and vowed to serve him. Now the LORD had arranged for a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was inside the fish for three days and three nights." Jonah 1:4-17 (NLT)

Life Application: Running from God is always a bad idea!

"When I refused to confess my sin, I was weak and miserable, and I groaned all day long. Day and night your hand of discipline was heavy on me. My strength evaporated like water in the summer heat."

Psalm 32:3-4 (NIV)

Life Application: Returning to God is always a great idea!

Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from inside the fish... '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! ...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.' Then the LORD ordered the fish to spit Jonah out onto the beach... the LORD spoke to Jonah a second time: 'Get up and go to the great city of Nineveh, and deliver the message I have given you.' This time Jonah obeyed the LORD's command and went to Nineveh..." Jonah 2:1-2,9,10, 3:1-3 (NLT)

"Finally, I confessed all my sins to you and stopped trying to hide my guilt. I said to myself, 'I will confess my rebellion to the LORD.' And you forgave me! All my guilt is gone... Oh, what joy for those whose disobedience is forgiven, whose sin is put out of sight!" Psalm 32:5,1 (NLT)

3. Sadly, Jonah failed to pass on the mercy and compassion God had shown him.

On the day Jonah entered the city, he shouted to the crowds: 'Forty days from now Nineveh will be destroyed!' The people of Nineveh believed God's message, and from the greatest to the least, they declared a fast and put on burlap to show their sorrow. When God saw what they had done and how they had put a stop to their evil ways, he changed his mind and did not carry out the destruction he had threatened... This change of plans greatly upset Jonah, and he became very angry. So he complained to the LORD about it: "Didn't I say before I left home that you would do this, LORD? That is why I ran away to Tarshish! I knew that you are a merciful and compassionate God, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. You are eager to turn back from destroying people. Just kill me now, LORD! I'd rather be dead than alive if what I predicted will not happen." Jonah 3:4-5,10, 4:1-3 (NLT)

Life Application: We must pass on the mercy and compassion God has shown us.

"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."
Ephesians 4:32 (NIV)

Life Application: God can use storms to turn John Schmidt around if I am willing to repent.

"This evil generation keeps asking me to show them a miraculous sign. But the only sign I will give them is the sign of Jonah. What happened to him was a sign to the people of Nineveh that God had sent him. What happens to the Son of Man will be a sign to these people that he was sent by God... The people of Nineveh will... stand up against this generation on judgment day and condemn it, for they repented of their sins at the preaching of Jonah. Now someone greater than Jonah is here—but you refuse to repent."

Luke 11:29-32 (NLT)

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Discussion Questions

1. Looking back at your notes from this week's lesson on Jonah was there anything that particularly caught your attention, challenged or confused you?
2. Read Psalm 32. Which verses can you relate to in this Psalm? Why?
3. Have you ever run away from a task or responsibility that you knew God had given you? What happened? How long did you run? How did God get your attention? What did you learn from the experience?
4. Read Jonah 1. How did Jonah respond to the storm? ...the captain of the ship? ...the crew? How do you explain the irony that Jonah identified himself as "a Hebrew, and I worship the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land" and yet was the last person on the ship to call on God?
5. Read Jonah 3 & 4. How did the people of Ninevah respond to God's message? How did Jonah respond to God's message? How do you explain Jonah's behavior? If God commanded you to share the gospel with a group of ISIS terrorists in prison for beheading a dozen Christian families in Syria would you go? Why? Why not?
6. At Centerpoint we often discuss the following four steps to knowing God more:
 - Surrender
 - Listen
 - Pray
 - Obey

Which of these steps was most difficult for Jonah? Which is most difficult for you? Why? Spend some time as a group discussing one difficult assignment from God you are facing right now. (something you know in your heart God wants you to do) Then spend some time praying for each other asking God to give you the courage and strength you need to get it done.

7. Read Ephesians 4:32. Share a time in your life when you experienced God's forgiveness and compassion. How good are you at passing it on?
8. Discuss the following quotations:

"Lord, make me less like Jonah and more like Jesus. Save me from being the kind of person who cares more about my comfort, my reputation, and my success than I do about the people You are calling me to serve. Help me to keep all of my dreams on Your altar and be ready at all times to respond with faith and obedience to Your call." Colin Smith author of *Jonah: Navigating a God-centered life*.

"The eyes of the LORD *are* in every place, Keeping watch on the evil and the good." Proverbs 15:3 (NKJV)

"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." Jesus in Matthew 12:40 (NLT)