



Pastor Kyle Mercer
Running From Responsibility

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Series: Jonah
Jonah 1

BIG IDEA – EVERYTHING STARTS WITH GOD'S WORD

All right, Two Cities family. Are you guys ready for the book of Jonah? Find that book. It's a very short book in your Old Testament. While you're finding that, let me kind of update and celebrate what God is doing here. We're going to be in Jonah for four weeks. It's four chapters. We'll be in it for four weeks. That's leading up to our Heights Conference, September 6-8.

If you're new, this is new for us. It's our first time ever doing a conference. When you think *conference*, think camp-like experience. We're putting a lot of time, energy, and effort into making this very, very special. We're excited about the pastors who are going to be joining us. We're calling it *The Heights* because the hope of The Heights is for you, and all of us, to have a mountaintop experience together as we head into the fall.

We think it's so important for you to be there that we realized, if we're going to ask you to be here Friday night, then ask you to be here Saturday night, then ask you to come back on Sunday, we're going to have to (and we're eager to do it) provide full childcare for Friday night and Saturday night as well as Kids ministry on Sunday. Here's what we're going to do. This is really special.

For the first graders through fifth graders, we're going to be having a movie night downstairs both Friday night and Saturday night. On Friday night they're going to be watching *Gladiator*. Saturday they're going to be watching *Braveheart*. I'm kidding. These will be awesome, age-appropriate movies. We have a whole team that's thinking about this. There are going to be snacks. There's going to be popcorn. It's going to be an incredible time. Your kids are going to love The Heights Conference and what it means for them.

Then I have one other thing I need to celebrate. If you're new, this is going to seem like it's a silly thing to celebrate, but I need to celebrate it, because it's such a big deal for our church. Last week, we opened our completed, brand-new parking lot. I talk about this a lot, but I'm humbled to have... I still can't believe we have 13 acres in downtown in 2024.

I can't believe that within a few months, we were able to transition three of those acres to over 200 parking spots. It's so humbling. We're doing this in preparation for the fall. There are always two things we're trying to prepare: the property and the people. We feel like the property is ready. In fact, I want to encourage you to park over there. When you park over there, you're going to go, "This parking is incredible." It's some of the best parking. We just opened up.

Also, guys, this is our way to say we are very expectant of what God is going to do in, through, and beyond us this fall. The Heights Conference is a big way that we're going to prepare ourselves for what we believe God is going to do in the fall and beyond. So, let's take a moment and pray. Hopefully by now you've found the book of Jonah, and I'll meet you there in a few minutes. Let's pray.

Lord, thank you for the opportunity to host The Heights Conference. I pray right now that it's a mountaintop experience. We know we can't live on the mountains all the time. There are valleys and there are the plains, but we need the mountaintop moment milestones in our lives.

I pray that you would use Friday night, Saturday night, and Sunday for that in so many individuals' lives, for so many couples that need it, and for so many families that need it. Lord, we are so grateful for the parking lot. Now that we have a space for people, a parking space, it means we have a place. It means we can invest in them and disciple them and come alongside their families. We're excited to do that. In Jesus' name, amen.

Well, hopefully you found Jonah. This is a really small book. I'm going to meet you there in a few minutes, but before I do, let me just talk about the book of Jonah, just some introductory thoughts. Everybody loves the book of Jonah. If you grab a kid's Bible, what you're going to find on the front is usually a picture of Jonah and the big fish, among other stories. It's a favorite. It kind of grabs the imagination of kids.

Adults love the book of Jonah because it's one of the only books we've read in the Old Testament, if we're honest. It's a short book. It's not as confusing or long as Leviticus. We feel like we kind of get it. Well, let me tell you what the book of Jonah is *not* about and *is* about.

The book of Jonah is not about the fish. We'll talk about the fish next week. The fish shows up for three verses. There are 48 verses in the whole book. It's a small part of the book, but people have all of these questions. "Was it a whale?" and "How did it happen?" and all those. We'll get there next week. But it's not ultimately about the fish. The fish is just another picture of God's pursuit of sinners like Jonah and us.

Secondly, you need to understand the whole structure of Jonah... Some of you like this. You take notes through the whole series. You want to know how the whole book fits together. The book repeats itself. The same things happen in chapters 3 and 4 that happen in chapters 1 and 2. Chapter 1 and chapter 3 are the same. Chapter 2 and chapter 4 are the same.

Here's the outline for the book. The word of God comes to Jonah. Jonah responds. Jonah interacts with unbelievers. Jonah has a conversation with God. That's what happens in chapters 1 and 2. That's what happens in chapters 3 and 4. It's repeating itself.

Here's what you really need to learn. If you've never read Jonah before or haven't read it in a while, here's what you need to realize. This is what makes this book so endearing, if we're honest. Jonah is the worst person in the book. I mean, he is a religious leader. He is a professional prophet. He is a Bible teacher, and he's the worst person in the story. It's supposed to be almost comical.

He's the only person in the story who doesn't listen to God. When God speaks to the fish, the fish listens. When God speaks to the storm, the storm listens. When God speaks to the sailors, the sailors listen. When God speaks to the Ninevites, they respond and listen. Jonah is the only one who's not listening.

This book is a critique on the religious spirit, which is very, very prevalent in Winston-Salem. The heart of the religious spirit is it only thinks about itself. Particularly, Jonah thought salvation was only for himself. God is trying to get Jonah to share his faith with other people. In fact, Jonah may be the most missional book we have in the Old Testament.

With that said, I want you to turn to chapter 1, verse 1. We're going to cover the whole chapter today. It says, "**Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying...**" So, here's how it starts. The word of God comes to Jonah. How did it come to Jonah? I don't know. We don't know. Was it an audible voice? Was it a strong impression? Was it a vision? Was it a dream?

Here's what you need to know. This is the big idea. *Your life needs to start where the book of Jonah starts...with God's Word.* Everything in your life needs to start with God's Word. People are so confused about who they are. Your identity needs to start

with the Word of God. Your marriage needs to start with the Word of God. Your business needs to start with the Word of God.

Your family needs to start with the Word of God. Your dreams, your desires, your aspirations, and your finances need to start with the Word of God. See, people end up in all of these other places, and when they end up in all of these places where they don't want to be, they always ask the question, "How did I get here?" The answer is always "Not overnight, but over time." Normally, it's where you started.

So, the book of Jonah starts with the Word of God. Your life needs to start with the Word of God. Here's how the Word of God comes to all of us. Yes, Jonah is special and is a prophet and all that, but I think there are principles that I'm going to show you right now in verses 2 and 3 of how the Word of God comes to us.

Look at verse 2. "**Arise...**" No one talks like that today. Let me translate it. "Get up." That's literally what it means. "Get up." Some of you need to hear that today. "[Get up], **go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.**" Three things happen when God's Word comes to you, and they happen every time God's Word comes to you.

Here's the first thing. The Word of God always comes to you, and is very simple and straightforward. We wish it was harder to understand, because then we would have excuses. In fact, one of the attributes of Scripture... If you ever get a systematic theology (and I hope you do one day)... A systematic theology is a book that asks, "What does the whole Bible say about these topics?"

If you open up a systematic theology to the Word of God, the first chapter will be on the attributes of God's Word. The first attribute of God's Word is his authority, but the second attribute of God's Word is its clarity. You're never going to be able to stand before God when you die on judgment day and say, "God, I didn't understand what you were saying." Mark Twain said something like, "It's not the parts of the Bible I don't understand that scare me; it's the parts of the Bible that I do."

So, the Bible comes with simplicity. You know this. In fact, one of the best hacks someone ever taught me in Christian counseling... I'm not a great counselor, but one of the hacks was so helpful. They said, "When you counsel people, about 90 to 95 percent of the time they already know what they need to do." It's like, "Forgive your dad. Repent of that sin. Confess it to a friend. Give generously. Serve. Bear one another's burdens." The Bible is so crystal clear.

Secondly, when the Word of God comes to you, it's always action-oriented. The Word is never "Sit and stay there, do nothing, and just say you believe." It's always "Get up

and go." So, it's not just believe. Belief is important, but you're going to do what you believe. If you want to know what you believe...

You're so complex you have no idea what you believe. You have to watch yourself like a stranger for multiple days, and then you can go, "That's what I believe about money. That's what I believe about marriage. That's what I believe about parenting. That's what I believe about sex." You have to watch yourself. That's the only way to know what you believe.

So, it's action-oriented. Basically, God is coming to Jonah and saying, "I want you to obey." This will be a change for some of you. You've never been in a church that has this before. We believe in obedience-based discipleship, not knowledge-based discipleship. So much discipleship curriculum, so many college ministries, and so many church settings are based on knowledge-based discipleship.

It's like, "Here are a bunch of big books. Read these. Read your whole Bible, and make sure any question I ask you know the answer to." People think they're more mature. How many of *you* might think this? You think you're more mature because you know more of the Bible than somebody else. That's knowledge-based discipleship, not obedience-based discipleship.

Obedience-based discipleship says, "I'm only as mature as the amount of things I know that I'm actually obeying." Somebody could know less but be more mature because they're obeying everything they know. Let me say it another way. The purpose of the Bible is not so much to give you more information but to change your life.

Now look. As a Bible teacher, if I could be honest for a second, there's nothing I love more than the aha moment. Every once in a while, I can feel it. I've been doing this for a while now. I can feel the aha moment. I can feel the "Ha-ha-ha! I don't think they knew this. They've never heard that. They never saw that. They didn't know that word meant that." That's fun. It's fun for you. It's fun for me. "Whoa! I never knew this." That's not the purpose of the Bible. Or, that's step one.

Let me say it another way. Insight is not the same as obedience. We love... "When I was listening to *The Bible Recap*, I couldn't believe it. Tara-Leigh Cobble... I mean, I never even knew that Matthew..." No, no, no. That's great. Tara-Leigh Cobble is great. *The Bible Recap* is great. That's not the point. The point is...*What are you going to do with what you know?* The Bible, as someone famously said, is like paint. It's meant to be applied. That's the purpose.

Thirdly, the Bible will often (not always) ask you or command you to do something you're afraid to do. "Go to the Ninevites? Are you kidding me?" That was Israel's

greatest enemy. That would be like God coming to us today and being like, "Hello! I want you to go to Kim Jong Un. Figure out how to get to North Korea, and then go preach to them." You'd be like, "Uh, I think you dialed the wrong number, God. I don't know that we want to..."

You're going to have to face your fears. God is often going to ask you to do something you're afraid to do. By the way, here's a great thing to know about fear: you feel the same amount of fear whether you do something or don't do it. You're like, "I am so afraid to ask her out." You're going to feel the same fear whether you don't ask her out or you do ask her out, so ask her out. It's so freeing to know that. "Wow! I'm going to feel the fear no matter what. I might as well just obey, because I'm going to feel the fear."

Now, if you're reading this story for the first time, you're like, "Okay." Normally (almost always), God comes to a prophet, and through different means tells the prophet to do something, and the prophet basically says, "Yes, sir. Right away." Not *this* time. Let me show you what happens. Verse 3: **"But Jonah..."** That's never good. "But God" is good. "But you" is not normally good.

"But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish..." I love what *The Jesus Storybook Bible* says. It basically says, "Jonah was told to go to Nineveh, but instead he went to not Nineveh." That's exactly what happened. **"But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD."** We look at this, and we're like, "This is so ridiculous." Then we realize this is exactly what *we* do. God tells us something. It's simple and straightforward. We're afraid to do it. It's action-oriented, and (this is the amazing thing) we do the exact opposite.

By the way, we're supposed to read this story and go, "Who would do this?" Then we're like, "Me." You're supposed to read this and be like, "This is so ridiculous." Then you're like, "This is exactly what I do." In fact, here's the big idea for the rest of our time together, and I'll try to unpack everything under this. *God calls us to get up, but instead we go down.* That's the whole message of chapter 1.

So, his word is "Get up" or "Arise, go." That's the first word God gives him, but instead of getting up, he goes down. It's right in the text. Look. Continuing in verse 3: **"He went down..."** That language is intentional. He's called to go up, but he goes down. **"...to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare and went down..."** Hold on. He went down twice? Yeah, he went down to Joppa, and then he went down to the ship.

"...went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the LORD. 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. Then the mariners [sailors] 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..."

How many times do you need to tell us he went down? I get it. That's the point.

"...and was fast asleep."

Going down is a picture of sin. At some level, to sin is to be subhuman. Now, the great thing about being made in God's image is that we are image bearers. When you wake up in the morning, you should think to yourself, "I exist to make the invisible God visible with how I live." Wow!

You have this dignity, value, significance, and worth. Every time we sin, we choose a lesser level. We are subhuman in some sense. You know this. If you've ever just given in to some sin (and we all have)... Maybe it was just a few hours. Maybe it was a weekend. Maybe it was a vacation. Maybe it was a season of your life.

We've seen people who renounce their faith or are a prodigal for a season. When they come back, they basically all say the same thing. "I was like an animal." The psalmist says that. The psalmist himself says, "I was like a beast. The lowest, most base instincts of me took over, and I was all about immediate, cheap pleasure."

Jonah is called to get up, but instead he goes down. I want to talk about why we're not getting up and doing what God has called us to do. For Jonah, running from God was the exact same thing as running from responsibility. He was fine hanging out and calling himself a Christian until God asked him to do something he didn't want to do.

By the way, if you're new and you're not a Christian, how do you become a Christian? You take responsibility for your sin, and then you say, "Jesus, I give it to you." But I have to first take responsibility for the way I'm living and the situation I got myself in. Well, I want to talk about why we need to get up. Jonah is told to get up. Why do we need to get up? Because there's so much to get done.

Guys, dream with me for a second. Think about your city. Think about your family. Think about our nation. If you can, think about the world, and then think about your involvement in it with me, with all of us together. Think about how much darkness there is to push back.

Dream with me about how many missionaries there are to be sent, how much money there is to be given, how many churches there are to be planted, how many disciples there are to be made, how many people there are to be reached, how many hurting people need help, and how many prayers there are to pray.

I'm hoping that as I'm saying this, part of you... Maybe there's only 5 percent of it left, but the best part of you is like, "Yes!" For some of you, I genuinely wonder, especially some of you men... Where is your on switch? Have you ever looked at some guys and been like, "Where is his on switch? He's asleep in the light. There's so much to do."

Listen. You can't *get* up until you *grow* up. This is important. You have to get over yourself to get up, and you have to grow up to get up. So, why aren't we growing up? Getting up is for grown-ups, and arising is for adults, so why aren't we doing that? Well, I spent a lot of time looking into that, because I'm obsessed, in some sense, with why we are like we are. Why are we avoiding responsibility? Why are we not doing what God has said?

I found out there are two main categories. I found this interesting. I think you'll find it interesting. There are two main reasons we're not growing up. One is what they call *psychological barriers*, and the other is what they call *social barriers*. Basically, everything in our culture... And it has probably been this way all the time, but I'm going to talk about the ones I see. Everything in our culture is working against us so we don't grow up, so we don't get up, so we don't do what God has told us to do.

There are psychological barriers. The first one is the fear of failure. Okay, listen. You're going to fail. You just want to fail when you're young. You want to fail fast. You want to fail forward. You want to set goals, and it's okay to fail. Here's what happens if you don't set goals: you fail all the time, but you don't know it until you're 40. It's a horrible thing to meet somebody who has been failing their whole life and didn't know it because they wouldn't set a goal and they wouldn't set a target.

Here's another reason people don't grow up: they have the victim mentality. "I am just somebody to whom things happen." I was listening to a psychologist talk about this. I'm not a psychologist. I'm not a biologist. I'm not any of that stuff, but he was basically saying that he, as a clinical psychologist, can look at a person's face and see if they have a victim mentality. It's like a soft, passive look on the face, as if "I'm helpless, and things just happen to me."

Here's another one: the bystander effect. "Somebody else will take care of this. Somebody else will disciple my kids. Let me just get them into youth group and get them into a Christian school. Somebody else will disciple them. Somebody else will pay for everything. Somebody else will serve. Somebody else will go to the Ninevites."

Blame shifting is a huge reason people don't grow up. People love to blame everything. They love to blame their genetics. They love to blame their parents. They love to blame their personality. "Well, I just couldn't because I'm a Three on the Enneagram." Who cares? Be defined by the fruit of the Spirit, not your Enneagram number.

Then there are social barriers. Unfortunately, the family, the government, and the culture are working against us in responsibility. This took me a long time to figure out as I was reading this week. Basically, how is the family undermining responsibility? Passive and permissive parenting, pampered parenting. You know, little Junior and little Johnny can do no wrong.

Helicopter mom and snowplow dad. The snowplow dad goes ahead of you and removes every barrier. You have goofy, silly situations in which moms are calling bosses after interviews where their son was part of it, asking what he did wrong. Unfortunately, that's a real story. People are raising pampered, privileged, irresponsible children who are not ready.

Secondly, in our culture, there are no longer stigmas. There are no longer societal expectations. It used to be embarrassing to live in your parents' basement in your 30s. It used to be like, "Go to church. Get married. Get a career, not a dead-end job. Reinvest in society, and be a good citizen." None of that is there anymore.

Then during COVID, basically, the government told a bunch of you, "Put a mask on. Get in your basement. Don't work. We'll send you a check." Some of you are still there. It has been four and a half years. So, when you have the government, the culture, and the family working against you, and then you have all of these internal things to tell you you don't have to do anything, you never end up getting up and growing up.

Okay. Why am I talking about all this? Because for the rest of our time, I'm going to show you what happens if you don't grow up. You need a counter-vision for your life. We're going to do an autopsy on Jonah's life. We're going to do a little anatomy of where sin leads you if you don't take care of it.

So, let me show you. We'll go back to verse 3 to show you this. If you don't get up and grow up, this is what will happen. Verse 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."***

Jonah is running from God. I don't know where you're running from God today. Some of you are like Usain Bolt running away from God. You know, fast and far. A lot of us run from God in one area of our lives. You run from God wherever you're doing the reverse of what God's Word says.

Why do we run from God? Let me simplify this. We run from God wherever we think God got it wrong. We don't articulate these things, but this is what we do. It's like,

"God, you don't understand how much fun alcohol is. I do, so I'm running from you, because you don't understand drunkenness."

"God, you do not understand the fun of fornication." Some of you are like, "I've never heard that *F*-word before." That means sexual relations with someone who's not your spouse. It's like, "God, you don't understand how money should be spent." You have to have this deep conviction in your heart. It's hard for *me* to have this conviction all the time. Everything God's Word teaches is for human flourishing, even when it may initially or immediately feel like it's doing the opposite in your life.

Here's what I want you to know: when you run from God, there will always be a ship ready to take you somewhere else. Let's go back to verse 3. This verse has a lot in it. ***"But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. He went down to Joppa and found a ship..."*** Yes, he was looking for a ship.

I don't think this is an overstatement. I don't think there has ever been a time in human history when it has been easier to find a ship to run away from God on. Some of you, when you try to run from God, look at the ship as a sign. "Oh, this is it." No, it's a sign to turn around. You're heading in the wrong direction.

I've been doing this for 20 years. Let me tell you the three common ships people jump on to leave a relationship with God, to run away from their responsibilities God has called them to, to run away from the church and Christ and all that. The ship of *places*, the ship of *people*, and the ship of *pleasure*.

There are different places people run from God, but let me give you the number one place, the number one ship if we called it a place: college. I mean, people go to college, and everything their parents invested in them and their church prayed for them they ruin by fall break of their freshman year.

Anybody who has been to college knows this. No one is neutral in college. It's either a spiritual greenhouse or a spiritual wasteland. Period. That's it. There's no other option. If you're going to college, you basically have six weeks to decide if you're going to drop the anchor for Christ or get on a ship and go somewhere else.

And you have to do three things. You have to find a local church, you have to find a college ministry, and you have to, as soon as possible, publicly identify with Christ. That is so important. It only gets harder to identify with Christ. Put back on the "WWJD?" bracelet. Just do it. Whatever you have to do.

The second place where people often run from God is cities. Cities have idols. You know that, right? Every city has an idol. LA is fame. New York City is money. Boston is intellect. Miami is vanity. People run to certain cities to engage their hearts in those

idols while hoping (this is what sin always wants) to remain anonymous. "My family isn't here. My friends aren't here. My youth group leader is not here, and I can engage in all of these things."

Second are the ships of people. There are many different types of people. You know how ships have names? The name of the ship that takes away the most people from a relationship with God is the ship called *non-Christian boyfriend or girlfriend*. If you start saying, "He believes in God. He used to go to church. He's willing to go to church again..." Missionary dating leads to miserable marriages in most cases.

That leads to the third ship: the ship of pleasures. Let's be honest. This is the one we're all tempted to jump on. Here's why the ship of pleasures is so difficult for us and so tempting. It's docked on every device. It's on your iPhone. It's on your iPad. It's on your computer. You can get on this ship.

Sometimes it's just a good thing that has become a god thing in your life. For some of you, it's the moment the kids go down. It's streaming services and social media and sports. It's shopping and hitting that easy "Buy Now" button on Amazon. It could be something more deviant. It could be something as seemingly innocent as hobbies.

I want you to see something else in verse 3. When you get on the ship, there's this interesting thing that we're told happens. So, one principle is when we run from God there will always be a ship, but look at what it says in verse 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..."***

Now, I told you Jonah is 48 verses long. There's just not that much in Jonah to give us a lot of details. You could easily leave out the detail of "And he paid the fare." Who cares? The reason God put that in there is he wanted us to know something else about running from God. Yes, there will always be a ship, but here's the other thing: running from God will always cost you.

How many people has running from God cost them financially? Right? We were talking about shopping earlier. For some of you, your materialism and consumerism... For some of you young people, your desire to have your parents' lifestyle in your 20s when it took them 30 years to have it...

All of a sudden, you wonder, "Why can't I afford anything? Why can't I be generous? Why do we have so much consumer debt?" Oh man. It has cost you. Some people look back over their life, and they're like, "Dude, I have wasted so much money on my goofy, sinful pursuits. It could have been saved. It could have been given. It could have been invested." That's obvious. It costs you financially.

It costs you physically. There's a principle in A.A. (Alcoholics Anonymous): whatever you abuse abuses you back. It will cost people their health. Sometimes running from God costs people their physical health. Have you ever gone to a 10-year or 15-year reunion for your high school, and you saw someone you hadn't seen in 10 years, and they looked 25 years older? You're like, "What have you been doing to yourself?"

By the way, if you want to know what someone worships, you need to see what they sacrifice. It's the same word in the Old Testament. So many people are willing to sacrifice their physical health for some addiction in their life.

It costs us our youth. I've been wondering for a while why the Baby Boomer generation was the first generation obsessed with youth. They were the first generation to dress like their kids. I don't know this for sure. I think one of the reasons people get obsessed with youth is they have... Maybe it's just their subconscious. They realize they've wasted theirs. The Bible says, "Do not give your youth and your strength to that which is evil."

It costs people relationally. Everybody else can see it when someone is doing something. I'll give you the extreme example. You know, the guy who leaves his family and runs away with a girl half his age. You're like, "Dude, you have four kids. They love you, man. You could have the best relationship in the world with those four kids. Dude, that was the wife of your youth. She was all in, man."

They can't see it in the moment. You watch people break their parents' hearts. It's like, "Dude, your parents invested in you. They've been praying for you to become everything you could be. You're doing the exact opposite." Here's the last one. It costs you time. It's part of youth, it's part of health, but it costs you time.

An unsophisticated, shallow, low-resolution view of sin is "I'm doing bad things." So, you might be like, "Well, I was looking at things I shouldn't for a few hours." Well, that would be stage 1 of sin. Stage 2 is "What are all of the good things left undone because you've been engaging in sin?" Not just what are the bad things you're doing. What are all of the good things you could have done that there's now a hole because you didn't do them?

Here's the next point. When you run from God, it will always affect others. Let me show you this. Verse 5: ***"Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried out to his god."*** How afraid do you have to be to be a sailor and afraid on a ship? One of my rules is when I fly and there's turbulence, I just look at the flight attendants. If they're not freaking out, I'm not freaking out. If they're freaking out, I'm freaking out, because they do this all the time.

They're freaking out. ***"And they hurled the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them."*** Okay. Jonah, you're sleeping still. (He hasn't been woken up yet. I've jumped back in the story.) Jonah, you're sleeping, and you don't even realize how your sin is affecting everybody else.

See, we have this idea... And I'm all about individualism, autonomy, the individual person, personal responsibility, and all that, but we have this false notion that what we do doesn't affect anybody else. I wish that was true. Here's the problem. Just think about this. Every time you sin, you become a worse, more selfish version of yourself, and then that version of you goes and interacts with everybody else. For that reason alone, your sin is always going to affect a ton of people.

Think about it this way. We all know stories of the great grandfather, the grandfather who was great. You meet someone every once in a while, and you're like, "Dude, how are you able to...? You can't afford that house." "Well, my grandfather, years ago, bought this property, and he had this vision. He started this company." You're like, "Whoa, dude. Somebody else made a bunch of decisions that affected you for good."

We've all known the grandfather stories that are also sad. "Well, my grandfather became an alcoholic. My grandfather left my grandmother" or "My grandfather became obsessed with his hobbies; therefore, my mom is the way she is." We wish we were not as connected to each other as we are.

Let me say it in a positive way. How much better would everybody else around you be if you were better? It's a terrifying question to ask. How much better would your family be if *you* were better? How much better would your business be if *you* were better? It's a terrible question, because the answer is "Probably a lot." Well, then we need to start working on these things.

Here's another principle. When you're running from God, God will always send a storm. When you're running away on a ship, sometimes you may say to yourself, "Why is everything in my life getting more difficult?" God is sending a storm. By the way, obviously, I'm not saying every storm that comes into your life is because of some sin in your life.

But I do think every once in a while a family needs to come together and go, "Some strange things happened in our family. It has been a lot harder than it should, and our marriage isn't..." By the way, often the wife will feel this first, because she's more sensitive to negative emotion. "Something is wrong."

Sometimes it'll be about one of the kids. "Something is wrong with Junior." The dad is normally like, "Oh, he's fine." "No, no. I think he might be hiding something." I mean,

if you read the Old Testament, it's about families. Sometimes you may go, "Dude, is there...?" As they used to say back in the day, "Is there sin in the camp?"

A lot of times, the answer is "No," but remember in the book of James where it says if you go ask the elders to pray for you, confess your sins? I've told you all stories about that before. When someone asks for prayer, you sometimes go, "All right." It's a terrifying question to ask someone. "Before I pray for you, is there something you'd like to confess?" A third of the time, the answer is "Yes."

So, God sends a storm, but let me show you something else. Let's follow along. It gets hopeful toward the end. Verse 7: ***"And they said to one another, 'Come, let us cast lots...'"*** They're trying to figure out why this storm is happening, so they're casting lots.

"...that we may know on whose account this evil has come upon us.' So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. Then they said to him, 'Tell us on whose account this evil has come upon us.'" They start asking him questions. ***"What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?"***

So, they wake him up. There's a huge storm, and Jonah doesn't immediately confess. When you're in sin, there are usually two options. You confess or you get caught. Jonah basically gets caught and gets confronted into confession. So, this is what Jonah says. This is maybe the biggest word for some of us. Remember, Jonah is running from God down in the bottom of the ship, sleeping, being selfish, only thinking about himself, and here's what he says.

"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.' 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."

Okay. What is my biggest concern for this room right here? It's not that half of you are about to run from God in some dramatic way or that you're living a rebellious, prodigal life. Obviously, I think there are people like that in here. That's not the main group. I think the main group struggles with the sin Jonah just had there. Do you know what it is? It's to have good theology but never obey it.

In student ministry, they talk to the students about the difference between the right answer and the real answer, which is really important to talk about with people who grew up in church, because everybody knows the right answer. Have you ever heard that story of the kid and the Easter Bunny?

He's in the VBS class, and they ask, "Who shows up at Easter and has ears and brings eggs?" He says, "It sounds like the Easter Bunny, but...Jesus?" Because we're told, "Here's the right answer," but it may not be what I'm feeling. It may not be what I'm experiencing. The real answer is "This is actually how I feel."

So, Jonah says, "Oh, yeah. I fear God." No, you don't. The scary thing about growing up in a Christian church and a Christian home is you learn to speak Christianese where you say, "I'm struggling with something" when you're not. It's like, "Okay. You're struggling with sin. Let's look at the footage. Nope. You dove right in. The moment your parents left you went right to it. Do you want to use a different word?"

People say things like, "I'm praying about something." No, you're not. I'm not even sure you're thinking about it. You might be thinking about it. You're definitely not praying about it. See, one of the things you want to ask yourself is "What do I say I believe about God that I don't actually believe?" People say, "I believe God is in control," and then they constantly are anxious and worried.

They use big words like, "God is sovereign, and he's orchestrating his providential hand to bring all of the nations into submission to himself," and then they freak out if their candidate doesn't get elected. People say they believe God is forgiving, but they can't forgive themselves or they can't forgive their sister. It's like, "Okay. Let's just admit you don't believe that then."

How many men have so much theology about marriage...? "Oh, Ephesians 5. A husband should be sacrificial and Christlike." It's like, "Your wife hates you." Right? Those guys drive me crazy. The overly religious, book-reading, theological answer for everything, and their life is a wreck. There are a lot of people like that. It's horrible to see. You have to apply what the Word of God says. So, let's pick up the story. This is an interesting moment for Jonah. This is a little confusing, but let me show you this.

"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. 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.'"

Now, think with me for a second. Why would Jonah ask to be thrown into the sea? Why wouldn't he just jump overboard himself? If he's so eager to do this, and he knows it's the right thing to do, why doesn't he just go, "All right. See you, guys!" and just jump over? Why does he ask them to throw him over? This is a deep but important principle that has to do with Christian community.

Sometimes we need to ask other people to help us do what we can't do by ourselves. Sometimes a son needs to look at his dad and say, "Dad, take away the video game

system, please." Every once in a while, a friend needs to say to another friend, "Dude, I have an addiction, and I need to go to this meeting, and I'm afraid to go for the first time by myself. I know you don't struggle with this, but would you come with me?"

This is where you say something like, "I need to confess something to my parents that I've not told them, and I'm really afraid to tell them. If it's just me, I won't tell them, but if you would come with me, I think I would have the courage to do it." This is why we've built our church on Community Groups and DNA Groups. There are a bunch of things we know we need to do, but if we're honest, by ourselves we can't do it.

Some of you need to open up, tell somebody what you're struggling with, and ask them for help. Listen. If you could have done it by yourself, you would have. You would have already done it if you could do it by yourself. You can't do it by yourself, so there are those moments where you say, "Throw me over." Well, they don't want to throw him over. Look.

"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. 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.' So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows."

The last lesson is both terrifying and comforting, as the Bible often can be at the same time. Here's the last lesson from Jonah, chapter 1: God will use us even in our disobedience. Think about it. What was the game plan? What was God's plan A for Jonah? Plan A for Jonah was, "Jonah, I want to use you in the life of other people to bring grace, life, and transformation, so let's do this together. You head in this direction, and we'll lead these people to the Lord."

Jonah says, "I'm going to leave *not* in that direction." If you look to verse 16, it appears, by all accounts, the sailors believe in Yahweh and make sacrifices. They become believers. Are you telling me God used the disobedience of Jonah to bring the sailors to saving faith? Yes. In fact, here's a prayer you don't ever need to pray: "God, use me." You don't need to pray that. God is using everybody.

Every once in a while, you'll see a leader fail, and people will say, "I don't know. It's so sad because God was using him" or "God was using her." "God is not using them anymore." God is using them in a different way. Mom and Dad, God can use you to be examples. It's like, "This is what it's like to walk with God in a crazy culture and raise a family and be faithful in marriage."

I mean, God can use you as an example of *what* to do or God can use you as an example of what *not* to do, to be a counter-vision for your kids. I hate to say this out loud, but in a room this size, there are some of you whose entire life may just end up being an example of what not to do. That's not how anybody wants to head to their deathbed.

Jonah says at the very end, "Throw me overboard," so they throw him overboard. This is a picture, by the way, of substitution. If you want to know the central teaching of Christianity, it's that we're saved through a substitute. Jonah says, "Guys, throw me over." Here's what Jonah basically says: "I will die so you can live." In their minds, they throw him over, he's dead, and they get to live.

Well, guess what? That's exactly what happens when Jesus comes, but Jesus wasn't *thrown* overboard. He willingly, because he had the strength, went overboard himself, not into the ocean but onto the cross, and not to deal with the waves but to deal with God's wrath. See, the amazing story of Jonah that I want us to be overwhelmed by is that even in our running and even in our rebellion, God pursues us.

Here's the great news about God. No matter how far and how fast you've been running, God is very fast. If you turn around, he'll be right there. That's what repentance is. Repentance is turning around. I was walking in one direction, and now I want to turn around and walk in the other.

So, I don't know where you are today. I don't know if you're just beginning to head in the opposite direction, and you can see the clouds in the distance. You can hear the thunder and the lightning. It's getting darker out, and you go, "Okay. There's a storm coming." A storm is there to say, "Turn around."

I don't know if others of you would say, "You know what? I know what I need to do, and I don't have the strength to do it, so I have to get into a Community Group. I have to get into a Weekender. I have to build some relationships, because I need someone else to throw me over into what God is calling me to do."

We're going to be here. In fact, if you want to come forward, after I pray and this last song, we're going to pray for you. Also, for anyone in this room who either is or knows somebody who is currently on a ship headed in the opposite direction of where God wants them, we're going to pray, "God, would you please destroy the ship but save the sinner?" Let's pray together.

Lord, that's our prayer. In this room, we have brothers. We have moms and dads. We have sisters. We have aunts and uncles. We have exes. We have people we love, and it breaks our hearts that when we go on social media, we see them living a life apart from God, often celebrating sin. We're not angry at them. We're not mad at them. We

just ask that you would destroy the ship they're running away on. We pray that you would send the storm, Lord, for their good and for your glory.

I pray for people in this room right now who feel like they have something, and they can't deal with it themselves. I pray you'd bring some sailors around them to say, "We're going to help you do what God is calling you to do. We're going to do it together." Lord, I thank you for the truth of the gospel that, Jesus, you pursue us even when we are running away from you. We thank you for the gospel. We thank you for all you've done for us. In Jesus' name, amen.