**Confronted**

Jonah 1:4-17

Jonah shows us what NOT TO DO when it comes to God’s calling. ***Jonah is the opposite of Jesus.*** When God said GO, Jonah said NO. But Jesus said YES. Jesus obeyed God immediately and completely. Jonah ran the other way.

“‘Arise, go to Nineveh…’ But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish… away from the presence of the Lord.” Jonah 1:2-3

***Jesus willingly left the Father’s side*** in heaven to live among us. He wasn’t running from the presence of God, ***He was bringing the presence of God to earth***. Jonah refused to bring God’s mercy and grace to Nineveh.

***So what does God do when His prophet goes rogue?*** We just heard the answer in Jonah chapter 1. God does everything He can to get that prophet’s attention and get him back on track. We will see in this chapter are **four ways God intervenes in our lives to redirect us**.

**God’s Gracious Intervention for our Redirection:**

1. Intense **Situations**

“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.” Jonah 1:4

***The first tool God used*** to steer His wayward prophet back is a massive storm. The description is dramatic. Notice it does not say that “God allowed” a hurricane to form around the vicinity of the eastern Mediterranea. It says, ***“the Lord HURLED a great wind.”*** It’s a like a professional bowler taking aim at that final pin. Or a closing pitcher who can throw 100 miles per hour taking aim at that small stack of 3 cans at a carnival.

Jonah tried to run away from the presence of God, but the problem with that goal is what David expressed in Psalm 139 - “If I dwell in the depths of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast” (v. 9-10). ***There is no escaping the presence of the omnipresent God.*** By nature, God is everywhere. There is nowhere to run; no way to hide.

Jonah went down to Joppa and went DOWN into the hold of the ship. Verse 5 says he was down in the inner parts of the ship where he laid down and fell asleep. This was probably an effective way to escape the people of Gath-Hepher, King Jeroboam 2 and all Israelites who would have no way of knowing where their prophet had gone. But Jonah could not escape from God’s all seeing eyes.

And neither can we. **God sees all we do**. He looks into the depths of our heart and discerns our inmost thoughts and intentions. We can resist His leading and when He says go east we can go west, but whatever we do God knows about it and His love will always keep calling us back to Himself and His mission.

Jonah gives us a small **window into life experiences**. These poor unsuspecting sailors thought they had an easy charge in this wealthy Jewish man who paid a fare to cross the entire Mediterranean Sea. They had no way of knowing who he was or why he was running from the Creator God. The sailors thought they were going to die. The ship’s owner would have been rightly worried about losing his ship and all crew and cargo. It turns out this bunch was superstitious enough to immediately assume a storm like this was judgment form some god or other. That was the mindset of ancient times.

***How do people respond when bad things happen to them?*** Why does God allow hurricanes and earthquakes, famines and diseases? More than that, in this case at least, God didn’t just allow the storm He very deliberately HURLED IT. One of the biggest challenges people have - believers and non-believers - is understanding the goodness of God in a world with so much evil and suffering.

Now hear me. ***I’m not saying that all natural disasters and all illnesses are God’s direct discipline against wayward believers***. Most diseases and disasters are simply the result of this broken, fallen world we live in and God’s general call to all people to remind us that life is short and fragile and we better think about judgment and eternity.

A situation came up like this in Jesus’ day that **a tower fell** and killed 18 people. Jesus used that incident to teach this lesson:

**God’s Gracious Intervention for our Redirection:**

1. Intense **Situations**

“Do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.” Luke 13:4-5

Jesus said that accident was not a direct judgment on the worst 18 people in the region of Judea - but that it WAS **a call to everyone in the region** to think deeply about their lives and how they stood with God. Disasters, pain and suffering are instruments God uses to call people to REPENT. That’s what Jesus was saying in Luke 13. And that’s what God was doing in Jonah 1. He was calling His prophet to repent.

***To repent simply means to TURN AROUND.*** Jonah was going exactly the wrong way. God chucked a giant storm at him to get his attention. Unfortunately, Jonah did not get the memo. But the sailors on board sure did! And that’s the second tool God uses to redirect us.

**God’s Gracious Intervention for our Redirection:**

1. Insightful **Connections**

“Jonah… was fast asleep. So the captain came and said to him, ‘What do you mean, you sleeper? Arise, call out to your god!’” Jonah 1:5-6

The fact that Jonah was down in the ship, fast asleep, even in the drastic movements of a huge storm gives us a helpful principle for life. It is very possible for believers to feel totally fine about their rebellious decisions. Somehow Jonah had justified his decision to do exactly the opposite of what God told him to do. ***He literally did not lose a wink of sleep*** over this choice. In fact, he probably thought he had gotten away with it scott free!

It seems like **he was RELIEVED** to be sailing away from his assignment, with no feelings of guilt, no twinges of conscience.

This captain, and ***these sailors didn’t know the God of Israel***. They were ancient mariners, who all had a deep respect for the sea and were universally superstitious. Before waking up Jonah, as soon as the storm swept down on them all of the sailors, according to verse 5, cried out to their gods even as they hurled the cargo overboard to lighten the ship. They did everything they could PRACTICALLY to ride out the huge storm, and they did everything they could SPIRITUALLY as well. ***These guys were covering their bases!***

When the storm just kept getting worse, they started searching the ship, looking for stragglers. Jonah appears to be the last straggler - and the captain himself went down and shook him awake. “What are you doing, you sleeper?” This is no time to be napping! Get up and call on your god!

***Do you feel the irony of this moment?*** A pagan, superstitious sailor is rebuking a tested prophet of the Lord and calling him to pray! The lifelong Jew, trained in the Law of God who had been leading the people of God in worship and prayer for years was the LAST ONE to think, “Maybe I should pray about this storm.”

And don’t miss the fact that even though he was just commanded to pray by the captain of the ship, ***there is no sign that Jonah ever actually obeyed that command!*** We picture him rubbing sleep out of his eyes and staggering up the steps of the heaving ship as thunder boomed and waves crashed over the bow.

Sometimes a crisis is not enough to actually get our attention. Sometimes we need a friend or a group of strangers to point us back in the right direction.

This reminds me of **John Wesley’s conversion story**. He was caught in a ***massive storm*** in the middle of the Atlantic. He was going to America to preach the gospel to the Indians but he had not yet experienced the personal grace of God, he was trying to make himself acceptable to God by his pure life, his disicplined prayer and rigorous service. He would have said at that point that he was trusting in Jesus for salvation - probably he was preaching that message - but he did not yet feel the peace and joy of REALLY trusting Jesus for salvation.

The terrifying **storm got his attention**. But it was this group of ***Moravian believers on board who showed Him the power God’s grace***. He - the gospel preacher from England - was cowering in terror, afraid to die in the storm. These lay people, women and children were calmly singing praises to the Lord, simply praying together and praying for him with perfect peace, even if they died.

After two years of unsuccessful ministry among the Indians, John and his brother went back home. Soon after their return John overheard someone reading a tract by Martin Luther on the change God works in the heart through faith in Christ, and he felt his heart “strangely warmed” - later concluding that at that moment ***he put his FULL FAITH in the Lord Jesus*** and felt the joyful release of knowing that his salvation did not rest at all on him and his efforts but was based entirely on the grace of the Lord Jesus.

Wesley wasn’t running away from God’s call like Jonah - he was crossing the ocean for better reasons. But God still used an intense storm and some insightful connections to get his attention and get him back on track.

***How is the Lord speaking to YOU these days?*** Are you going through some intense situations? Is the Lord using crisis or pain or illness to help loosen your hold on this world and strengthen your faith in HIM? Is the Lord bringing people into your life to encourage you and guide you?

One of the greatest **gifts you can give another person is LOVING CORRECTION**. We often think the best thing we can do is be NICE to people. But if your neighbor’s house is on fire you are not loving them well by quietly, nicely texting - not wanting to intrude on their night’s sleep. The fire is about to intrude on that sleep. You keep ringing the bell, you keep pounding on the door, keep calling them, shouting.

If you see ***a brother or sister drifting into worldliness and sin*** you are not loving them by ignoring their path or being “nice” as they inch ever closer to the deadly traps of the devil. I’m not saying we should all become obnoxious morality police, pouncing on each other for every appearance of worldliness.

But this is one of the reasons to have an ***accountability partner*** or to be in a Discipleship Group. We all need 1-2 people with whom we can be completely honest and transparent. We need people who know us well enough to see when we are kidding ourselves.

The whole point of this series is to encourage one another, to ***“stir up one another to love and good deeds.”*** We can all drift off course when it comes to kingdom service. The current of this world - which is a very powerful current - is toward comfort, self-indulgence and self-advancement. Everything in the world tells us to “have it your way,” and “it’s all about you.” The worst cultural sin these days is imposing your beliefs and values on someone else.

But Christianity calls us to exhort and encourage one another. Lovingly, graciously help each other see past our blind spots and our lack of faith to move forward in obedience to God’s call. God will use intense situations, insightful connections - and third:

**God’s Gracious Intervention for Redirection:**

1. Internal **Impressions**

“So they cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah… ‘I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and dry land.’” Jonah 1:7,9

Again, these sailors were ***a superstitious group***. When everyone on board, so they thought, had called on their various gods to save them but the storm just got worse and worse, they got out the dice and used some process of elimination to single out one person as the cause of their danger. Pretty quickly the lot fell on Jonah. And only then - when the spotlight was unavoidably on him - and only after the sailors peppered him with very specific questions - did Jonah finally ‘fess up to what he was doing.

**God’s Gracious Intervention for Redirection:**

1. Internal **Impressions**

“Then the men were exceedingly afraid… for the men knew he was fleeing from the presence of the Lord because he had told them.” Jonah 1:9-10

Back in verse 5, when the storm came upon them, ***the sailors were afraid***. But when they finally heard from Jonah about the God He served - the CREATOR of the land and sea - then they were ***utterly terrified***. Suddenly Jonah’s apparently insignificant reason for going to Tarshish, away from his god, took on new relevance. His god was no joke! This GOD controlled the wind and the waves! This God could aim a hurricane directly at one ship!

But Jonah knew what they had to do.

**God’s Gracious Intervention for our Redirection:**

1. Internal **Impressions**

“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…” Jonah 1:12

***How did Jonah know that this was the solution?*** It doesn’t say the word of the Lord came to him or that he had a dream or vision. He just knew. The only way to stop this storm is if you throw me overboard. In other words, I have to die. That’s the only thing that will save the rest of you.

Now keep in mind, **Jonah knew his Bible**. He was a prophet. He had, no doubt, preached to Israel about the consequences of rebellion. If your son curses the Lord, bring him before the elders of Israel and stone him to death. If someone breaks the Law of God willfully, like Achan with the devoted things from Jericho - he and his family had to die. Some rebellion could be punished with banishment - being thrown out of the camp, out of the city, out of the fellowship. But some rebellion was explicitly punishable by death.

***Jonah knew that the consequence for his willfull disobedience to God’s clear command was death.*** He had obviously hoped to avoid this fate - but chapter four shows us that he might well have went out to see deliberately seeking death. He would rather die than see God forgive wicked sinners like the Assyrians.

***The Holy Spirit’s conviction is like a REFEREE’S WHISTLE***. Do you know the Holy Spirit in this way? When you are straying from the path, do you sense the Spirit whispering to your heart? When you step out of bounds, do you hear that whistle correcting you?

Sometimes it might be ***a little chirp*** and other times a long, piercing cry. But the point is that you hear it and respond. You feel that internal sense, you hear that still, small voice.

That’s what Jonah knew, deep down. He just knew that the only way the storm was going to stop was if he got tossed right, directly into it. And that sets up our fourth and final point.

**God’s Gracious Intervention for our Redirection:**

1. Sacrificial **Protection**

“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.” Jonah 1:13

In spite of Jonah’s clear direction to them, ***the sailors did all they could to save Jonah’s life***. They knew that being thrown overboard in the middle of a hurricane was certain death. It was dangerous enough on a ship. Being thrown off the ship was ***game over***. But again, do you see the irony here? Jonah showed no concern whatsoever for their safety and wellbeing. He went on that ship and went straight to bed, knowing there was a decent chance his act of rebellion could impact every sailor on board. The prophet of the Lord didn’t care about the pagan sailors, but those good ‘ol sailors, for some reason, cared about the wayward prophet.

But it was useless. They couldn’t make any headway against the storm. There was no accessible port in which to hide. So they prepared to do what Jonah told them to do.

**God’s Gracious Intervention for our Redirection:**

1. Sacrificial **Protection**

“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.’” Jonah 1:14

We might miss this critical detail, but those ancient sailors did not. What they were doing by throwing Jonah overboard was **HUMAN SACRIFICE**. They were surrendering one life to the “gods” in order to save the rest of their lives. That was a common practice in ancient times. It was so common that God explicitly commanded Israel that they were never to participate in it.

The sailors weren’t happy about it - but they were desperate enough that they felt they had to take that extreme step. Still, before just tossing him overboard, ***they offered up a prayer*** to Jonah’s God, who - they had been told - was the creator of the land and the sea. “Let us not perish for this man’s life.”

They wanted to be sure Jonah’s Creator ***God rightly interpreted*** what they were doing. They were not trying to be disrespectful to the Lord by killing his prophet. They were just doing what the prophet told them, which was God doing as He pleased. They were forced to it.

**God’s Gracious Intervention for our Redirection:**

1. Sacrificial **Protection**

“So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging.” Jonah 1:15

Don’t you love that word, **“hurled”**? God hurled a wind. The sailors hurled the cargo overboard. Jonah told them to hurl him overboard, and finally - they did. Lots of hurling in Jonah 1. They didn’t just drop Jonah over the side, they chucked him. Heave ho!

And just like that, the storm stopped and the sea grew calm. ***The sacrifice of Jonah was accepted.*** God’s anger was appeased. The storm was over.

Now, the Veggie Tales movie shows Jonah bobbing on the surface in his little floaty. But if you listen to Jonah 2 it seems Jonah’s experience was different.

**God’s Gracious Intervention for our Redirection:**

1. Sacrificial **Protection**

“All your waves and your billows passed over me… The waters closed in over me to take my life; the deep surrounded me; weeds were wrapped about my head.” Jonah 2:3,5

From Jonah’s perspective, when he was thrown from the ship, **he was swallowed up by the raging ocean**. Now remember, ***the ocean represented evil and chaos***. So think about the significance of this moment: in order to save the sailors above, Jonah had to be cast down. In order to bring peace and calm and salvation to them, Jonah had to enter chaos, evil and danger. In order to protect the lives of the sailors, Jonah had to die. There had to be a sacrifice - and Jonah was that sacrifice.

Here is the primary way God intervenes in our lives to get us back on track: ***He reminds us of the gospel!*** He shows us the truth and glory of what JESUS has done for us. Listen to the last verse of Jonah 1. It should sound rather familiar.

**God’s Gracious Intervention for our Redirection:**

1. Sacrificial **Protection**

“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.” Jonah 1:17

Why three days and three nights? Was this a long, dark, extremely stinky time out? Yes. But it was **mainly a SIGN**. When the Jewish leaders wanted Jesus to perform a sign and prove that he was the Messiah he refused, but said, “I’ll give you one sign - the sign of Jonah. Sit on that for a little while and for some of you, you’ll finally get it.”

***The ultimate sign in all of history is the RESURRECTION of JESUS.*** Crucified, dead and buried. Sealed away in the tomb. Guarded and watched by Roman soldiers. But on the third day, Jesus walked out of that tomb and proved, once and for all, that He is the Son of God, He is the sovereign Lord. He is who He said He is.

* Jonah was thrown into a turbulent ocean.
* Jesus was thrown into the chaos of our sin.
* Jonah was sacrificed to save the lives of the sailors above him.
Jesus gave up his life to save all who will put their faith in him.
* Jonah deserved to die - since he rebelled against the command of the Lord.
* Jesus did not deserve to die - he suffered the death you and I deserved.
* Jonah was in the belly of the fish for 3 days and three nights in the heart of the ocean.
* Jesus was sealed up in the tomb - buried in the heart of the earth.
* Jonah came back from the dead (at least figuratively), spewed out of the fish’s mouth.
* Jesus came back from the dead (literally), walked out of the grave.

Do you need a **SIGN FROM THE LORD** today to get back on track with the Lord? In case the intense situations of life, the insightful connections and the internal impressions have not been enough - I have a sign for you today.



Ok, not something quite so obvious.

The sign I will give you is the one Jesus gave - the sign of Jonah. The prophet, the servant of the Lord thrown into the chaos and evil of the ocean - hurled into the abyss of death - emerged from that tomb after three days and three nights in the belly of the fish and preached repentance to sinners.

God gave that same sign again in Jesus.

**God’s Gracious Intervention for our Redirection:**

1. Sacrificial **Protection**

**“**For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.” Matthew 12:40

Amazingly, the people of Nineveh repented when they heard the resurrected prophet preach. After Jesus rose from the dead, many people repented and put their faith in him. The sign of Jonah is the sign of resurrection. It is the sign that forgiveness and eternal life are available in the one who died and rose again.

***Jesus offers His sacrificial protection to all who will come to Him in faith.***

The Lord uses all kinds of things to get our attention and steer us back on track. But the main tool the Lord uses, over and over again, is the reminder of His love for us in the gospel. Let His kindness move you to repentance. Let His infinite grace inspire you to serve Him.

Jonah never caught on. But John Wesley did. Through a storm, a group of faith-filled Moravians, and a gospel tract from Martin Luther - the Lord awakened in Wesley a deep confidence and joy in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. From that moment on Wesley was moved not with obligation but with joy and gratitude. Those are the best motivators. Soon after feeling his heart strangely warmed and surrendering to the full grace of the Lord Jesus, Wesley wrote:

“My song shall be always of the loving-kindness of the Lord: with my mouth will I ever be showing forth thy truth from one generation to another.” John Wesley

May this be our response to the Lord’s sacrificial mercy in our lives as well!

Let’s pray.