

11-17-13

**Running From God**  
**Jonah 1-3**

Jonah was an established and recognized prophet of God in his day. He had credibility and a true calling.

How about you? Do you feel the call of God on your life? It doesn't have to be toward full time ministry or even preaching or anything like that. But each of us has a call of God on our lives if we are truly children of God – washed in the Blood of Jesus - and sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

How have you responded to God's call on your life so far? Have you embraced it and followed through? Or have you run away in some sense and tried to evade that call of God for some reason or another.

I would like to look at the book of Jonah today. I did something like this when we were doing the Engage the Word series, but I would like to take a different perspective. No matter what the emphasis, it's such a powerful story with so much meaning.

The book of Jonah tells a very popular story that many people know whether they ever read the Bible or not. It's a big fish story with a happy ending – superficially. But actually, it's a big God story from start to finish. This is the story of the call of God on a person's life and how he reacted to it.

Jonah was an established prophet of God before this part of his life.

**READ: Jonah 1:1-3**

*The LORD gave this message to Jonah son of Amittai: <sup>2</sup>“Get up and go to the great city of Nineveh. Announce my judgment against it because I have seen how wicked its people are.”*

*<sup>3</sup> 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.*

I responded to the call of God for salvation in 1979, and soon thereafter in 1980, I was at a meeting of the local chapter of the FGBMFI para-church organization. We had business meeting to plan the next event in a leader's home. Someone always played a few choruses to get the meeting under weigh. One evening, I was listening to a guy, Larry, tune his 12 string guitar – and wincing a little, I guess. He looked up at me and asked – “Do you play guitar?” I quickly responded, “NO! – but I can hear you're not in tune.” I mentioned that my dad had an old guitar in the attic, but I didn't play. He said, “Why don't you bring it down and I'll show you a few chords so you can play along with us.” I suddenly got very excited for some reason. I went to Bellmore to get my dad's guitar that he never used and brought it home.

Larry gave me the chord charts to some songs, and after several weeks of practicing and having bleeding finger tips, I started to play these old choruses – like - This is the Day, Amazing Grace, etc. Out of that humble beginning, a music ministry group was born – **Earthen Vessels**. We played all over Suffolk County. Things were growing and getting more intense. I felt the need to share the Word as we played in various places, but I felt I didn't hold a position or credentials to back up that I could share the Word if asked. So I enrolled in a mail order type course to gain a certificate that would qualify me to speak the Word as part of our music ministry.

After a few courses, I was diagnosed with testicular cancer. I had surgery in April 1985, and was monitored monthly. In June of 1985 my blood markers were elevated. I was sent to Sloan Kettering for a consultation with my C-AT scan results. The report stated that my scan was negative, but my visit to Sloan revealed I had positive lymph nodes and needed surgery immediately. I had radical lymph node surgery in July and was cut lengthwise to remove 40 lymph nodes. After this I was monitored until a tumor was discovered in my right lung. This required serious Chemotherapy for a few months. The treatment left me permanently hard of hearing with serious tinnitus and numbness of my fingers and toes, which I still suffer with on a daily basis. The ringing in my ears is a 24/7/365 after-effect. The tumor shrunk but was still there, so surgery was required to remove a part of my right lung to ensure the cancer was removed. After several weeks the pathology came back negative – I was OK!

The experience only lasted one full year, but it was the longest year of my life. I was 115 pounds at the end of all this, but I am here to complain about it. I lost most of my hearing, have numbness in areas, and have scars all over my body. One thing was certain... I would never attempt to move toward a position in ministry again. Why did this happen to me? Maybe God was trying to show me that I wasn't called to ministry in this way - - that I moved into an area that I didn't belong - - that I stepped outside of where God intended for me. Now - this sounds ridiculous, but it instilled a deep fear in me that took years to overcome.

I remained faithful to the Lord, but any thought of a calling to ministry was pushed down deep inside me. The nagging feeling that I belonged in ministry kept hounding me for years. I tried to keep it pushed back – afraid to move in this direction for fear of another horrifying “punishment” if I was wrong – again. The music group fell apart and we all went different ways, but all continued to serve the Lord.

In 1989 I came to this church to hang out and recover for a while before moving on. God had different plans for my family. We are still here. In 1990 I became the Director of Music for this church, but that nagging feeling remained within me even though I was in a position of leadership. I began teaching adult Sunday school and bible studies. I became a board member and then the president of the HPYC and CTMB chairman, etc., but there still was that nagging that God wanted more, but I was afraid and I kept running from this “calling.”

Jonah – tried to go on with his life even though God was nagging him to move in a particular direction. Jonah had reasons not to obey – as we all do. What excuses have you conjured up to not completely obey God’s call on your life? Maybe He’s calling you to accept Him into your life, but you have reasons not to go there yet. Maybe He’s calling you to serve Him in the church. Maybe He’s calling you to a vocation of ministry, but you haven’t yielded to Him yet. Whatever it is – He’s calling you – Now.

**READ – Jonah 2:1-10**

God brought me to a place of discontent – where I had to seek Him and decide what I needed to do. “We become what we’re called to be by praying.” (EP) Jonah prayed from inside the belly of a fish. He had to get to a place where he had no other choice and nowhere else to run. In that disgusting place, Jonah’s life was turned around. That is often where our lives are turned around too.

I wrestled with God for a long time – many years – before I prayed to yield to His call on my life, even though I didn’t understand fully what that meant. I wasn’t sure to what level of service He was directing me, but I knew I had to move forward in the direction I felt compelled to pursue. I enrolled in the School of Ministry in 1999 not knowing exactly what I was called to do, but knowing I had to at least find out personally. Sometimes we can’t get our personal direction from others. Sometimes God calls people to a particular ministry area very clearly, and sometimes He is subtle in giving direction.

No matter what God has called you to – If you have been running from that call, He offers a second chance to respond. The blessings of answering God’s call far outweigh the false consequences the enemy will threaten you with. I had a black cloud of cancer and fear hanging over my head for many years. God doesn’t direct our paths by threats. He loves us and wants the best for us. Just pray and ask God for forgiveness for running from Him – repentance is the only requirement.

Jonah prayed - - even from inside a fish, and God heard and answered his prayer. The big fish got a bad case of agida and puked – Jonah was upchucked onto the beach alive. What a miracle.

When we come clean with God, He will have mercy and bring us back to a place of hearing Him again. The only way to hear from God is by praying. We become what we are called to be by praying. It may be inside the belly of a fish or some other restricted place in our lives, but we pray there and God hears.

**READ: Jonah 3:1-2**

*Then the LORD spoke to Jonah a second time: <sup>2</sup>“Get up and go to the great city of Nineveh, and deliver the message I have given you.”*

*<sup>3</sup>This time Jonah obeyed the LORD’s command and went to Nineveh, a city so large that it took three days to see it all.*

God called Jonah again – to the same ministry he was called to at first. This time he obeyed. God will give us a second chance to obey what He has in mind for us from the beginning. He has called each one of you/us to something specific for the kingdom of God. What is your calling? Have you obeyed that call? Is God waiting for you to go to the next level in your calling? He is giving you a second chance – or maybe a third of fourth chance. He will not let you go. He will keep calling you to respond to His voice in your life. We sing a song on Men's Retreat called Highest Praise that contains these words...

**I will go where you want me to go.**

**I will do what you want me to do.**

**I will say what you want me to say.**

So Jonah finally went to Nineveh as commanded. He did what God directed him to do, and he said what God told him to say. He stunk like fish vomit and looked pretty disgusting, but he went as directed. Word must have traveled fast. When Jonah proclaimed the Word of the Lord about the coming judgment, people there listened and were moved to repentance.

There's a book by Harry Rimmer called, *The Harmony of Science and Scripture*, where he documents a story of an English sailor who fell overboard and was swallowed by a large fish. After a couple of days, the fish was found floating on the surface. When they opened the fish, they found their fellow shipmate alive. However, his skin was white like chalk and remained that way the rest of his life.

Jonah may have had the same lasting physical effects. No wonder when he went around proclaiming the message of God, people stopped to listen. The story tells us that even the King listened and obeyed, and he commanded his city to do the same. When he saw and heard Jonah's testimony about being in the belly of the fish as God's judgment upon him and looked and sounded convincing, they believed. Jonah was living evidence that God meant what He says. The city of Nineveh was spared the judgment of God because of the ministry of Jonah in obedience to God.

Jonah's message stated that in 40 days the city of Nineveh would be destroyed. For these people this was not a sentence of doom, but a means of hope. They were given a warning with time to turn things around, and they did. However, Jonah was a prophet of God, and what he proclaimed from God did not happen. This was a bad thing to Jonah. Was he not corrected in what he thought God said? Did he say the wrong thing or do the wrong thing based on the results? NO! God called Jonah and used him exactly this way so the people would repent, and they did.

There's more to the story of Jonah, but I want to end the text here to allow us to focus on this part. What has God called you to do? Are you doing it? Or are you running from the call and from God? He is patient and waiting for you to pray it through and yield. He has all the time there is to wait for you. But our time is limited. Don't you want to be doing what He called you to do? It is a much better way than running and hiding all the time. Take time to assess where you are now and what He wants for you. Most of the time we find that He wants a little more than we are currently giving Him.