

Responding to God's Call

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[0 : 00] Well, I want us to begin with a little word association game. You know how it works? I'm going to say a word and you just say out loud the first word that comes to your mind. Night.

Everybody said the same word, right? Summer. Different words, good. Jonah. I think everybody. Whale or fish or something like that. Most people in church are out. If they've ever heard the story of Jonah, if in a word association game, if you say Jonah, they're going to say fish, whale, big fish or something.

Because that's the first thing that people think about. In fact, a lot of people, that's the only thing they know. There's a whale that swallowed Jonah. Have you ever thought about, if you've read the story, just how little is really said about the fish?

There are a total of 57 verses in the book of Jonah. Only three even mention the fish.

[1 : 16] Several commentators have noted this and said that most people think that the story of Jonah is a story about a great fish. But it's really a story about the great God.

And I want to be a little bit more precise. Jonah is a story about our great God's amazing grace. And how Jonah had such a hard time understanding it.

He had a hard time applying it to other people. I want to begin a series through the book of Jonah today.

This is going to be like a summer Bible study on Sunday mornings. I'm going to call this a struggle with God's grace. Because as we go through this book, we're going to see that Jonah struggles with God's grace.

We're also going to see as we go through this book that we've got a lot in common with Jonah. We sometimes struggle to understand God's gracious working in our lives, don't we?

[2 : 25] And don't we sometimes, if we're honest, we don't like the way God shows grace to certain people that we know.

We don't think they deserve it. Or we just don't want God to show grace to them. We're going to see some of that in Jonah.

But be honest. Sometimes some of that is in us. Let's begin our study by thinking about how we respond to God's call in our lives.

Let's read Jonah chapter 1 verses 1 through 4 and verse 12 this morning. This is going to be sort of an introductory message. There's a lot that we're not going to cover.

But it's coming next week in the weeks that come. Look at it. Jonah 1.1. Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah, the son of Amittai, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it.

[3 : 34] For their evil has come up before me. 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. 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.

And for this morning's message, just so everybody understands, Jonah understood that God caused that storm because he was not going to let Jonah run away.

Look at verse 12. Jonah said to those sailors in the midst of this horrible storm where their lives were all threatened, Jonah said in verse 12, 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.

Let's look first. God calls all of his people to serve him in some way, and Jonah's way was to be a prophet. At some point in his early life, God called this man Jonah to serve him as his spokesman,

to be a prophet.

[5 : 04] He is identified here in verse 1 as the son of Amnitha. To make it clear, he's the same prophet spoken of in the book of 2 Kings chapter 24.

This is not the first time Jonah appears in the Bible. People who would have heard this would have heard, Oh yeah, that's the guy that served King Jeroboam, Jeroboam II in the northern kingdom of Israel.

Just as a reminder, after Solomon's death, the nation of Israel, God's chosen people, they broke up. The northern ten tribes, they were called Israel.

The southern two tribes, they were called Judah. The northern kingdom gave, were the most disobedient and rebellious. That's where Jonah served under this king, Jeroboam II.

Now, we are also, if we're people of God, we're called to serve God in some way, and I want us to think very quickly, what is your way? God calls everybody, if you're a Christian, a child of God, God calls you to serve him in some capacity in this church.

[6 : 30] You're a member of the body of Christ. Paul talks about it on two different occasions.

We're the body of Christ as a church, and every part is a hand, a foot, every part is a body part.

And your body functions the best when every part of the body works as it was designed. So what is your way of serving God? How has God prepared you?

Think about this. How has God shaped you? I hope most of you remember how we have used this acronym, SHAPE, to think about how might God want me to be involved in ministry.

Rick Warren came up with this. I want to look at it very quickly because this is not the focus of the message, but it can help us think about, identify where we need to be serving. Number one, what are your spiritual gifts?

What special gift has God given you as a Christian that you might serve this church or through this church? H is your heart.

[7 : 31] What's the desire of your heart? What's your passion? What is it that really gets you excited? A, your ability.

What can you do? What have you developed? What abilities do you have that might be used? Look at your personality. What does your personality indicate?

Are you sort of an outgoing person? You like to be out in front doing things that doesn't bother you for people to see you? Or are you more of a person who likes to be quiet, reserved behind the scenes?

Are you more of a task-oriented person? Tell me what you need me to do. Leave me alone. Or let me just work quietly and I'll get the job done. Or are you a people person?

Whatever you do, you've got to be involved with people. You just can't be alone because you're just outgoing people. You want to love people, touch people, be involved in people's lives in a good way.

[8 : 35] And then what about your experiences? What have your life experiences prepared you for in terms of serving God?

What have you learned that you could now use in serving God, serving people in or through the life of this church? How has God shaped you?

Secondly, where has God called you to serve Him in ministry? Where is God calling you? With adults, youth, children, preschoolers? Most people are better with one over the other.

In the area of teaching, in music, helping us with technology, security. Maybe you like to help people with certain needs.

Maybe you have a heart for homebound people. Maybe you've been through a divorce and you have a heart for people who are struggling right now in their marriage.

[9 : 42] Maybe you like to do outreach. Maybe you work through the music camp this coming week. Maybe you did our sports camp. Maybe you're involved in a wanna. It could be that you're a member of this church and you know, you see a lot of things going on, but none of it really sort of fits you.

It may be that God has shaped you and put you in this church to help us start something new.

That's what you need to do. Help us to begin something we're not now doing, but you are shaped for it.

And there's probably other people that are as well. And if you would take the initiative to get it going, it could be something that God uses in a great way in the life of our church. I want you to

understand, God calls all of us as His people, church members, to be involved in some aspect of our church's ministry.

But God also calls us to serve Him outside the church. Your home is the first place in your life. You need to look at your home as your first priority in terms of serving the Lord as a husband, as a wife, as a parent, as a child, as a grandparent.

Think about your workplace, your school campus, or something in this community that you're involved in. Jesus called us to be salt and light.

[11 : 07] He called us to exert Christian influence by the way that we treat people. By the way we do our work.

By the attitude that we show people. Here's what I want us to understand. God does not allow us to be spectators or cheerleaders in the game of life.

You can't be in a close relationship with God, walking with Him in close fellowship, and just be a spectator when it comes to serving the Lord in ministry in and or outside this church.

And I don't want to hurt anybody's feelings who gets into this. But we don't need any cheerleaders. I don't want to hurt your feelings, burst your bubble.

I've never understood wanting to be on the sideline cheering people who are actually in the game on. Again, I know I'm a bad guy in saying something like that. But in the game of life that we are a part of as God's people, we need to be involved.

[12 : 26] Playing some position. Serving in some capacity. In the way that God has shaped us. No one can do it all.

Nobody should try to do it all. And if you're involved in some kind of ministry that you just absolutely hate, that's obviously. Either you've got a problem with God, with people, or you're not working according to your shape.

And so you may need to change what you're doing. Because if you're close to the Lord, walking with Him, doing what God shapes you to do, you'll enjoy it. It will be meaningful to you.

And there will be some good things that happen as a result of it. God calls all of us to serve Him.

That's what I want to say at the very beginning. But next, God sometimes calls His people to serve Him in difficult ways.

Look at verse 2. God called Jonah to proclaim His word of judgment to one of the most powerful, ruthless, and ungodly nations on earth.

[13 : 28] I want you to look at two aspects of Jonah's God-given mission. First, it was unprecedented. Look at what God called Jonah to do in verse 2.

Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it. Tim Keller, the pastor, describes how it was unprecedented.

Look at what he says. It was a call for a Hebrew prophet to leave Israel and go out to a Gentile city. Up until then, prophets had been sent only to God's people.

While some pronounced a few prophetic oracles and addressed to pagan countries, they are brief. And none were actually sent out to the nations in order to preach.

What this is saying is, God called Jonah to do something no other prophet had ever done. It was unprecedented for God's man to leave his country, Israel or Judah, and go to the pagan, unbelieving people with a message from God.

[14 : 41] The second thing we see about this, it was unexpected. Nineveh was the last capital of Assyria. It was the reigning superpower of that day, and they were Israel's number one enemy.

Some of you know this from history as well as Bible history. Assyria destroyed Israel in 722 B.C. Some of you also know this.

Assyria was one of the most cruel and violent empires of ancient times. Old Testament commentator James Bruckner describes some of the cruelty that this nation, these rulers were known for.

Look at it. The Assyrian kings were proud of their cruel and terrible reputation and went to great trouble and expense to record their exploits for posterity. They made parades of heads, human heads, requiring friends of the deceased to carry them elevated on poles.

They boasted of their practice of stretching live prisoners with ropes so they could be skinned alive.

[16 : 05] And I've read some of the more acceptable things to read in public like this about the Assyrians. They were a terrorist nation. And that was where God called Jonah to go and preach and call them out over their evil.

What we're seeing should alert us to the fact that our comfort, our ease is not God's primary concern when he wants to use us.

We need to understand that. Joel Osteen and those preachers of the health and wealth prosperity gospel will tell you that God wants you to be healthy. He wants you to be wealthy.

All you got to do is name it and claim it kind of thing. Well, that's just not true. That is not what the Bible teaches anywhere. Sometimes God may call you to be involved in something, to do something with your life that will result in you'll make more money.

You may be healthy. But God could call you to be involved in something that you're going to turn out to be poor. You may not ever have good health.

[17 : 32] God could even call us to something that where we go and we're faithful and we die doing it. God may call us, understand this, not just Jonah.

God may call us to serve him in a way that will take us far out of our comfort zones. It could be unprecedented. Something you have never thought of.

Something you would never even imagine. For example, Josh and Shannon Jennings are serving God right now as church planters in the middle of the New Age capital of North America, Sedona, Arizona.

Josh preached here back in March. We as a church have been helping them, supporting them financially. Some of you have been out there to help lead a sports camp. I think we've gone out there two or three summers going again this summer.

A group's going. We're involved with Josh and Shannon Jennings. But I want you to know that what they are doing for them was unprecedented. They're both from upstate South Carolina.

[18 : 44] Except for a short time they lived in Louisville, Kentucky. For him to go to seminary, they have always lived in either Anderson Pickens or Spartanburg counties. They're not world travelers. They're homebody.

Upstate South Carolinians. But about six or seven years ago, they went on a vacation out west. They went. I think the big thing they were going to do was see the Grand Canyon.

And as a part of that trip, they just spent a few days in Sedona. But after the trip, Josh said that God began to work on him, caused him to think about planting a church in Sedona.

He would never have thought about that in a million years, he said. And when he first told Shannon what he was thinking, well, she just totally dismissed it and him and said, you're crazy.

I'm not going to Sedona, Arizona. But God began to work in her. And God changed their minds.

About two years later, both Josh and Shannon enthusiastically said yes to God's call to move their family and their life to Sedona, Arizona.

[20 : 06] Start a Letheia church that is really having an impact on that town. Doing things to serve people, to reach people with the gospel, to change people's lives.

God could use you. They're just like us. And God called them to do something just out of the blue, unprecedented for them.

Could he be calling you in the same way? Doing something totally different. Don't dismiss it as if it couldn't happen to me.

What God could do, just be just totally unexpected. There was a time when Phil and Jennifer Payne, they would have laughed if you told them that one day you are going to adopt a little boy from China.

And by the way, I have their permission to share this. I would never do that without permission. But God worked in their lives over time in an unexpected way.

[21 : 17] And now they and their family and our church family are all blessed to have a little boy from China named Jojo right here with us.

Just another example of how sometimes God's most rewarding things he calls us to do begin as something totally unexpected.

Something that could be the most meaningful thing you ever do experience. Could be something you never thought of before. Could be something that just out of the blue, God got your attention. Jonah teaches us that sometimes God calls us to do things we wouldn't just make up. But there's something else God or Jonah shows us.

There's going to be as much going through this study. Jonah shows us a few things from a good example. He shows us a lot of things from a bad example. Number three, God's call can be disobeyed, but it cannot be quietly dismissed.

[22 : 33] It's there. You know the story. God allowed Jonah to defiantly disobey him. Look at verse three again. 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 did the very opposite of what God called him to do. Instead of going a little bit north and east to Nineveh, he went the opposite direction to Tarshish, or he tried to.

Look at the map. Just to give you a point of reference. Jonah went down to Joppa to go to Tarshish as far west as he could go at that day and that day as he was thinking in Spain.

Instead of going up a little bit and east to Nineveh. What I want you to note in verse three is how Jonah's attempt to disobey God's call is an attempt to get away from God.

[23 : 40] Look at it. But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. Old Testament commentator Doug Stewart explains what Jonah was trying to do.

Look at it. Jonah attempted to flee to a place where no fellow believers would be found, hoping that this would help ensure that God's word would not come to him again.

If he stayed in Israel, he could expect to hear more from God. But if he left, he might hear nothing further. That may have been what was going through Jonah's mind. Isn't that similar to what we do or think about doing when we want to try to run from what God's calling us to do?

Don't we try to get away from God's presence by ignoring the Bible and not praying? You know, if God's dealing with you about something and you don't want to do it, he's calling you to confess a certain sin.

To start doing a particular thing that he wants you to do. But you're just not willing to do it. Every time you pray, you get under conviction.

[24 : 50] That's all you can think about so you stop praying. You stop looking at the Bible. You may stop being involved in church. Or even attending church.

When we're trying to run from God, suppress what we know he wants us to do, just not do it. We don't want to be around Christian people.

We don't want to be around people who might talk about God or the things of God because it makes us feel guilty. I want us to understand. We can disobey God when he calls us to do something just like Jonah did.

But sooner or later, we learn the same lesson that Jonah learned the hard way. Look in verse 4. But the Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea and there was a mighty tempest on the sea for that the ship threatened to break up.

And verse 12, as we just read a little bit ago, Jonah knew it's because of me. We're going to look at how Jonah tried to run from God next week.

[26 : 03] But what we see happening to Jonah clearly reveals there are always consequences to our disobedience. Make no mistake.

You can say no to God. You can shake your fist at him. You can try to ignore him. You can try to just get him out of your mind. You can defy God.

But you cannot dismiss him. He will not go quietly away. And if you're his child, he will not leave you alone. Just like he didn't Jonah.

You know, the old saying is true. Sin will take you farther than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay, and cost you more than you want to pay. God has a history of calling some of his people to do unprecedented and unexpected things.

You see it throughout the Old Testament, for example. He called Moses to stand before the most powerful person in his world, Pharaoh. And to say to Pharaoh, the pagan leader, the Lord says, let my people go.

[27 : 18] Crazy, wasn't it? The Lord called a virgin teenager named Mary to be the mother of his son. Wild, isn't it?

But Moses and Mary, they weren't like Jonah. Moses argued at first. But Moses and Mary said yes to God's call.

The most difficult call of all was given by God the Father to God the Son. God called his son to leave the glory of heaven that he'd always experienced as the second person of the Trinity.

God called his son to leave heaven and to come into this fallen sinful world and die a cruel death on a Roman cross. The Lord Jesus, God's son, willingly obeyed his father's call because he loved and trusted his father.

He knew that his father's will was always good, was always right. He also knew that part of God's goodwill was that his death would be followed by his resurrection.

[28 : 39] And the result would be that he was going to win a victory, a decisive, eternal victory over sin and death and the devil. Jesus knew that his obedience to the Father's call would provide salvation for all who believe in him.

And that's us this morning if we're Christians. Jesus heard and answered the Father's call to come into this world and do everything necessary for us to be saved.

And if you're trusting in him, you are eternally thankful that he was obedient to God's call. You're forgiven. You're a child of God.

You have eternal life, which is forever. If you're not a Christian, you can come to know Christ today. If you'll turn from your sin and trust him as your Savior and Lord, he will save you now.

Jesus knew that his obedience to the Father was good, it was right, and it would have eternal blessings for so many people.

[29 : 56] What I want us to see here now is that Jesus, not Jonah, shows us how to respond when God calls. Even when it's something unprecedented and unexpected.

Make no mistake, Jonah can be a model. He shows us that we can disobey God. But he also shows us, and we're going to see a lot more in the weeks to come, he also shows us while you can disobey God, you cannot dismiss him.

You can't write him off. You can't get away from him. So right now, who is your model for responding to God?

Is it Jesus who loved his Father, trusted his Father, knew his Father's will was always good and best, even if there was pain in the process?

He obeyed. Or are you following the model of Jonah, who thought he knew better than God, who didn't trust God and love God enough to just do what he said, and he suffered the consequences?

[31 : 15] God calls us in big ways and small ways to serve him in our church, in our world, to serve him in sometimes easy ways and sometimes very hard ways.

But the question we want to leave here with, God calls you at various times to do various things.

Are you, is your track record, and is it going to continue to be, are you going to follow the model of Jesus?

Or are you going to follow the model of Jonah? Let's pray together. Father, I pray for people in this room who are dealing with your call about something in their life.

I pray, Father, for those who are running from it, trying to disobey, trying to just put it out of their minds, trying to put you out of their minds.

I pray, Father, that you will use this message to let them know they can never be successful at it. They can never dismiss you and be right with you. They never know real peace in their life and not obey you.

[32 : 37] So, Father, help them to give it up now. If it's something they need to stop, they need to repent of, help them to do it. If it's something that needs to change, help them to do it.

If it's something they need to add to their life, they need to start. Give them the faith to trust you.

Father, I pray for people who are seeking to be faithful but are having a hard time.

Help them to see, dear God, that just because something's hard or painful doesn't mean that they're out of your will. Help them to see that sometimes being obedient to your call will be everything but easy and comfortable.

But help them, dear God, to trust you, to know that you love them and that your plan for their life is what's best. It's what will most glorify you, Father, and most positively impact other people.

And, Father, help them to see that if they will just embrace it and trust you and love you in time, it will be meaningful to them.

[34 : 08] In an attitude of prayer, just listen to God and obey Him. If I could pray with you, I'll be happy to do that. But hear from Jonah. God calls us.

We can run from it, but we cannot escape Him or His call. Pray, listen to God, and obey Him. Once more or so, God says.

Once more or so, There promises us that the Lord is to die and accept the help but will always be your equal and being opened and begitu. What we have done finally above is that those money or the people are on our call and arising that are not life in the world in the world within your tongue and being animated from God.