

Why Do God's People Sometimes Run From His Call?

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[0 : 00] A couple of weeks ago, I illustrated a point in the sermon by talking about how I don't like cats. Well, I've heard a lot of comments, and I am pleasantly surprised that no stray cat has turned up in my yard since then.

No, I was going to say, let it continue as it is. But I think maybe the main reason why people like me don't like cats is because we compare them with dogs.

And everyone knows that dogs are superior to cats, right? Let me ask you this, if you just give an example. Have you ever heard of a seeing eye cat?

Almost all law enforcement agencies now have a canine division. But I've never heard of one with a feline division.

Dogs are just superior to cats in every way, and the world recognizes it. Now, dogs can even teach spiritual lessons, important lessons.

[1 : 24] They can teach us how to respond to God's call. Think about it. Call a dog, and it'll break its neck to get to you. Dogs just want to please.

Call a cat, and it'll just stare at you. Because this attitude is, what's in it for me? Now, I have to give credit to that late, great theologian, Louis Grisard, for that quote this morning.

But on a more serious note, How do you most often respond to God when He calls you to do something as you just read His Word?

He makes it clear about something you need to begin or something you need to stop. How do you most often respond to God when He calls you to do something from the pages of His Word or just from His indwelling Spirit?

Do you respond to God like a dog? Do you break your neck to obey Him because you do want to please Him? Or do you often hesitate and think, what's in it for me?

[2 : 52] We began a study of Jonah last week and focused on how we respond when God calls us to serve Him. I want to look real quickly at the three main points from last week.

God calls all of His people to serve Him in some way. Jonah was a prophet. And we looked and thought about, what's our way? Number two, God sometimes calls His people to serve Him in difficult ways.

It was a very difficult task that God called Jonah to. And some people in this room, you know it's been hard to be faithful to some of the things God has called you to do.

Number three, we saw last week, God's call can be disobeyed, but it cannot be quietly dismissed. Jonah just flat out said no, ran from God's call.

But he didn't get away. He couldn't just dismiss what God called him to do. Well, today we're going to look closer at why we sometimes choose to deliberately disobey God and run from what we know He wants us to do.

[4 : 13] Look back, if you would, to Jonah chapter 1. And I want to read the first three verses again. We'll look at some more in this book a little bit later on.

Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah, the son of Amnitai, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, 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. What kind of a person runs from God?

Now you think about it. What does it take? What kind of a person would run from God? Well, the expected answer would be unbelievers, wouldn't it? Or unfaithful believers.

[5 : 16] Well, I want us to look at the unexpected answer. Faithful believers. I don't know what your picture is of Jonah, but he's not a bad guy.

Jonah, first of all, was a prophet of God. I want you to look at how he's first mentioned in Scripture. It's in 2 Kings chapter 14.

According to the word of the Lord, the God of Israel, which he spoke by his servant Jonah, the son of Amnitai, the prophet, who was from Gath-Hefer.

He's from the northern part of Israel, not far from the Assyrians, the enemy, that we'll look at in a moment. Jonah was a prophet. And he was entrusted with a mission from God that we just read there in verse 1.

Jonah is God's man, called man. He's a prophet. He's God's spokesman. He is given a specific mission here. God knows him, knows his heart.

[6 : 25] And he calls him to do something. It's going to be a message that God's going to use to save many people. And then, Jonah was an unwavering believer, even in the midst of his rebellion.

Now look at verse 9. Chapter 1, verse 9. Jonah is in the midst of rebellion. He's on a ship headed the opposite direction of where God called him to go.

And the sailors, everybody's about to panic. They think they're going to die. They think the ship's going to be wrecked. And so they're trying to figure out who's to blame. And here's, they asked Jonah something about himself.

And here's what he said. 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.

Now I want you to look at it. In the midst of his rebellion. Running away from what he knows God's called him to do. He's not denying God. He's not denying his faith.

[7 : 35] Maybe by his actions he is. But Jonah, he was a man of God. He was a man of God called on a specific mission. And he's not renouncing his faith at any point.

Make no mistake. There are times when Jonah disobeys God and has a terrible attitude about God showing grace to people Jonah didn't think deserved grace.

But Jonah's always a prophet. He's always on a mission from God and a firm believer. What kind of person runs from God? A person like Jonah.

But number two, look in the mirror. Look in the mirror. You may be a strong believer. And you truly love the Lord.

And right now you are faithfully serving him in the life of this church. Or outside this church in some way. Don't ever think too highly of yourself and your level of commitment.

[8 : 46] Every one of us in this room could tomorrow be just like Jonah and start running from God.

If you're honest, you know there's been times when you have just flat out rebelled against God. You've disobeyed what you knew he was telling you to do as you were reading the word.

Or as you heard in a Bible study or sermon. Every one of us. There's been times when we knew what God wanted us to do. What he called us to do.

There was no doubt. But we said no. We disobeyed. We ran from him just like Jonah. Now, let's go a little bit deeper with this.

In a room this size. There are, in all likelihood, there's people in this room right now. The best way to describe you is you are running from God about something.

[9 : 57] There's something God's dealing with you about. Maybe in terms of forgiving someone. Reconciling with someone. Maybe there's something God's dealing with you about in terms of something you need to stop.

You need to repent of. Right now. Maybe there's something God's working in you. Calling you to do. To serve him in this particular way.

But right now, your answer is no. Right now, you are firm in not listening to God. So what kind of person runs from God?

A faithful man or woman of God sometimes does it. Now, as we look at running from God, Jonah doing this in chapter one.

Don't think of him for one moment as someone who has been written off by God. He is still God's person.

[11 : 00] Number two. What makes a person run from God? The story begins. The word of the Lord came to Jonah. Verse one. Verse three.

He runs. He flees. He goes in the opposite direction of where God called him to go. Why? That's just a big question.

Why would you do that? And here, there is no answer. So it may be that the author, that no one knows who the author of Jonah is, by the way. It may be that the author here, by not telling us, we're going to find out later in chapter four.

But it may be here, he wants us to guess. And the best way to do that is, why would we run from God?

Why would anybody run from God? Let's think of some reasons. Number one, we're afraid. If Jonah was running from God out of fear, we can understand why.

[12 : 03] We saw last week, Nineveh was the last capital of Assyria. The Assyrians were brutal people. They were truly, as we would look at it today, a terrorist nation.

They were masters of torture. They made the death of their enemies a long, slow, painful process. Isn't fear one of the main reasons why we don't obey God when he prompts us, leads us, calls us to do something?

In a room full of Christians, there's been times in our lives when God has called us to share the gospel with a certain person.

Maybe you can think of the time and the place and you were there. Or maybe you can think of there's a certain person that God has, really, he's put that person on my heart and mind because he wants me to make it a point to be around them, develop a relationship with them, and share the gospel.

But you haven't. And as you think about it, if you're honest, you say, I haven't or I didn't because I was afraid. I didn't know how they would respond.

[13 : 17] I didn't know what they would say or do. Or I didn't know if I might mess it up if I tried to share the gospel. We don't sometimes take a stand on the truth of God's word about a particular moral issue.

Because we are afraid of what might happen to us if we do at work. Would I be fired?

Would I be just sort of cast on the sideline and never have an opportunity for promotion? Would my friends think I was some kind of religious fanatic and just stay away from me?

Sometimes we know God wants us to do something, say something. But we let fear paralyze us or just prevent us from doing what we know God wants us to do.

A second way we sometimes respond, we think it's beyond our ability. We think it can't be done or at least I can't do that. Jonah may have thought, how could God expect one man to go to that mega city filled with evil people?

[14 : 35] He knows by being sent there and to preach this word, calling them out over their sin, over their evil. He knows the intent of God, as we'll read in a moment. He knows the intent of God is to wake them up and they repent and they're saved.

Do you think, as Jonah thought about this, even if they don't kill me, they're not going to listen to me. They've never heard of me. They've never heard of God.

Do you think for a minute they're going to listen to me? No, they won't. Why go? Why risk my life? Do you ever think that some of the things that God calls you to do, some of the things that is written clearly in his word, is impossible for you to do?

I've heard it recently, had a conversation recently along this line. Some Christians think it's impossible for them to tithe. So they run from God's call to give.

They keep spending selfishly or even foolishly. They get deeper and deeper in debt and they wonder why. But they run from God's call to be a faithful steward.

[16 : 01] Some Christians think it's impossible to forgive someone who has wounded them deeply. Some Christians think, I just cannot. God, you don't realize what they've done to me, how they have hurt me, how they have affected my life.

I just can't go to them. Or maybe you are the one who inflicted the wound. And God's telling you, you need to go and confess this to them.

Seek their forgiveness. Be reconciled. But you think to yourself, there is no way. I could never do that. They will not forgive me.

They may even hurt me. Why do people run from God? Run from God's call? Well, the third one, and this is going to be the real one.

We don't like or we don't agree with what God's calling us to do. Jonah is a man of God. Been God's spokesman.

[17 : 13] Had good success. But now, we learn from his own words that the main reason he runs is because he doesn't like it.

He doesn't agree with it. He doesn't want these people saved. Look now with me, if you would, at Jonah chapter 3, verse 10, through chapter 4, verse 2.

Jonah did go, by the way. We're going to come to that. Most of you know the story, so I'm not letting the cat out of the bag. I used the cat in a good way there. You know that Jonah does eventually repent.

He does go to Nineveh and preach. And the people respond well. But Jonah didn't like it.

Look at it. When God saw what they did, the people, how they responded, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it.

[18 : 20] But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. Look at this. And he prayed to the Lord and said, O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country?

That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish. For I knew that you are a gracious and merciful, you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from this disaster.

And the point is, and I didn't want these people to experience your grace and your mercy. Jonah resented God dealing graciously with the ruthless enemy of his people.

He thought they were unworthy of God's grace. He wanted God to give them justice. Not mercy.

Justice. Justice. He wanted them to reap what they had sown for their evil. It's hard to think of someone being more ungodly than Jonah at this point, isn't it?

[19 : 47] I mean, his arrogance is just unbelievable. But this is Jonah's prayer. Look at verse 2, chapter 4, verse 2.

Jonah prays, but it's not a prayer of confession and repentance. It's his sorry excuse for why he disobeyed God, ran from God's call.

He didn't want to be a messenger of grace to thousands of people. He wanted them to die and go to hell. That was what was going through his mind.

Now I want us to think. Is there an individual? Or is there a certain group of people in your life that you have written off?

You think they're unworthy of God's grace? If so, how are you different from Jonah?

[21 : 02] On this Sunday before July the 4th, let's think about this. Are you more contented or more committed rather?

Are you more committed to your country or to the kingdom of God? Are you more concerned about preserving or advancing the United States of America or advancing the kingdom of God?

Which is your priority? We're going to spend more time on this passage. What Jonah's attitude, Jonah's misplaced patriotism and nationalism as we go through the book.

But now we need to understand what such an attitude is, what Jonah had means. When we run from God's call because we disagree with God, we have elevated ourselves above God.

We have become our own God. We start thinking like Jonah was. Jonah's making himself God's judge.

[22 : 18] He's saying, God, you're wrong. These people should not be spared. Jonah is now trusting more in himself and his wisdom than he is in God and God's wisdom.

Let's stop and think about this. You could be a Christian who has served God faithfully in this church for many years.

But if you start or if you are disobeying God because you disagree with him, because you don't like what he says, because you think he's wrong, what does that say about you?

It's not what I intend when I do that. It's not what anyone of us in this room would say we really intend to say or do to God about this.

But we're making ourselves our own God. We're trusting ourselves more than him. When we arrogantly say to God, you're wrong. I don't agree and I'll not do it.

[23 : 34] We all know there's nothing more dangerous now or for all eternity than to be an idle worshiper, which is what Jonah was at this moment and what we are when we tell God he's wrong, that it's got to be our way, not his way.

But it doesn't have to be this way. There's some good lessons to learn from Jonah's story. What happens to a person who runs from God? Well, some experience the judgment of God because the way they ran, what happened in their life reveals they're not true believers.

Pastor Richard Phillips makes an important point about people who run from God and never stop. Look at it. He says, had Jonah never repented, had he gone off to spend the rest of his days in Tarshish, we would be justified in concluding that his profession of faith was false and that he did not believe in the Lord.

The same is true for multitudes today who say the, quote, sinner's prayer or walk down the aisle at a revival but never show the fruit of a changed life.

The Word of God makes that point even clearer in the book of 1 John chapter 2. Look at this. They went out from us, but they were not of us.

[25 : 05] For if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out that it might become plain that they all are not of us.

John's talking about false teachers who went out. They continued in their rejection of the truth. They proved themselves to be false believers.

I want everybody to understand this real clear because this is a matter of eternal life and death. If disobeying God is the regular pattern of your life, there is absolutely no biblical support for you thinking you are a Christian, even if you've been baptized, served in the church, or done whatever.

Saving faith in the Bible is continuing faith. God never stops working in the lives of His children. I want you to look at how Paul describes it in Philippians 1.6.

He says, And I'm sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Christ Jesus.

[26 : 21] What God starts, He finishes in the lives of those He saves. Do you have continuing faith?

Not perfect faith, but do you have continuing faith? It truly does not matter when you became a Christian.

What's important right now is, do you know, love, and seek to follow Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord? Is that the desire of your heart? Even when you fail, is that the desire of your heart?

And is that a general pattern of your life? What happens to a person who runs from God? Well, some experience the corrective discipline of God, which proves that they are children of God.

We're going to see next week that God did not allow Jonah to escape his call. God pursued him. And God brought Jonah to the point where he willingly obeyed his call.

[27 : 32] God does not allow his true children to just disobey him, walk away from him, and live peacefully in such rebellion.

God disciplines us if we're His because He loves us. He's not going to let us just ruin our lives. I want you to look at the passage from Hebrews chapter 12.

It's going to be on the screen, but I want you to look at this and I want you to think. Do I see God's discipline in my life at times?

Times of rebellion. Times of disobedience. Times of indifference. Look at it. Have you forgotten the encouraging words God spoke to you as His children? He said, My child, don't make light of the Lord's discipline and don't give up when He corrects you.

For the Lord disciplines those He loves and He punishes each one He accepts as a child. As you endure this divine discipline, remember that God is treating you as His own children.

[28 : 45] Whoever heard of a child who is never disciplined by its father? If God doesn't discipline you as He does all of His children, it means that you are illegitimate and are not really His children at all.

Since we respected our earthly fathers who disciplined us, shouldn't we submit even more to the discipline of the Father of our spirits and live forever?

For our earthly fathers disciplined us for a few years doing the best they knew how. But God's discipline is always good for us so that we might share in His holiness.

No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening. It is painful. But afterward there will be a perfect harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way.

God disciplined Jonah because He loved Jonah. God wasn't going to let Jonah run and hide and miss out on being used in this great way even though He didn't want to.

[30 : 00] God's not going to let us, if we're His children, just go away, drift away, and disappear into unbelief. I want to remind, sort of issue a reminder here.

The story of Jonah is about his struggle with God's grace, not his rejection of God or His grace.

A true child of God can experience some difficult times in their life because of their disobedience.

I mean, not everyone, but a lot of us in this room, and I'll be the first one to raise my hand, a lot of us in this room, we've disobeyed God. We have failed Him willingly, intentionally, and we've suffered as a result.

Physically, emotionally, spiritually, people around us have suffered as a result of our sin. But God worked in certain ways to get our attention, to discipline us for the purpose of bringing us back and not letting us just continue that way.

[31 : 23] If you can ignore God, disobey His Word, and just basically live like an atheist, as if God does not exist, He's not your Heavenly Father.

Don't deceive yourself. God's Word clearly says, that lengthy passage, God lovingly disciplines His children when they need it.

When I was growing up, my dad had a close friend named Bill. Bill made an impression on me because he was just always joking around, laughing, always joking around with me, noticing me.

That's how he had made an impression on me, how I remember him. And he had a beautiful wife. I was just 8, 10 years old, maybe 12 at the most, probably 8 or 10 years old.

And I really liked it when Bill came around because he was going to have some fun, and his beautiful wife was going to talk to me, and I just enjoyed looking at her.

[32 : 37] I remember it to this day. Bill died at a young age. He was either in his late 30s or early 40s.

I don't remember the cause of death, but I do remember it was a terminal illness that put him in the hospital several times. Well, Bill knew he was dying, and he told my dad that he knew the reason why, because he had run from God's call to preach ever since he was a teenager.

Now, my dad told me after the fact, and I thought about Bill every now and then over the years, and in thinking about this message, Bill didn't just run from God's call to preach.

Bill ran from God. He had lots of problems in his life that can be traced from his running from God.

He was basically an alcoholic. He struggled with alcohol. He had problems at home. There were times that beautiful wife left him.

[34 : 01] He had problems at work. He changed jobs a whole lot. He couldn't hang on to, hold on to any job for any length of time. Bill told my dad that he had repented of his sin.

All those years, he knew he was a Christian. He was being unfaithful to God. God disciplined him in all kinds of ways. And he thought, as he was dying, well, this is the ultimate in God's discipline.

I don't know. I'm not here, I'm not using this story to say God killed Bill as a form of discipline. He could have.

But I don't know that, and Bill didn't know that. My point is, if we are truly God's children, we cannot run from God and live peacefully in a state of rebellion.

If God's calling you to get serious about living a faithful Christian life, I mean, God's just, if he's calling you to quit playing games, quit being the hypocrite, quit being one way at work, one way at school, one way at church, one way around these people, another way around those people, if God's calling you to do that, just do it.

[35 : 34] Confess your sin. Confess you've been playing a game. Repent of it. Turn from it.

Change your mind now. Come back to him. I can promise you, you'll never find lasting peace if you don't.

And I pray that you won't. I pray that God will so work in your life that you will be miserable until you come to him willingly, lovingly, wholeheartedly.

I have prayed that I have prayed that for many people in my family over the years, friends of mine, my own self.

God, don't let them, God, don't let me be comfortable in any kind of relationship with you except a close, loving, growing relationship.

[36 : 36] relationship. Could it be that God's calling you to quit living selfishly, just pleasing yourself and start serving the people he's put in your life?

You know, God doesn't put people in your life to be your servant. He puts them in your life for you to serve. And in the process of serving them, you will find joy.

You will find contentment. You will find your own needs met. There are many reasons why Christians run from God and disobey him.

But there are no acceptable reasons. And what I want you to see in Jonah, he's a miserable man a lot of times in this book. You'll never experience this life that you truly desire as long as you're on the run from God.

So why don't you stop running now? Why don't you turn around and come back to him? If there's sin to confess, confess it. If there's new commitments that need to be made, make them.

[37 : 47] But renew your commitment, your trust, your love, your devotion to him right now. If you're not a Christian, you will never know this peace and contentment I'm talking about until you have a right relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ.

And I encourage you to trust him. If you are faithfully serving God and the last thing that you would describe yourself as being this morning is running from God, thank God but be on guard because you know the temptation will come.

it comes to all of us. Final thought. We can run from God and sometimes we do but we cannot run from God and hide from God.

We cannot find the life that we want away from him if we're truly his children. Let's pray.

Dear God, just help us see the truth about ourselves. Show us exactly how we should respond to you now and help us to do it.

[39 : 07] And let's just in an attitude of prayer do that. I'd be happy to pray with you right here at the front right now about this situation or whatever it is that you'd like to pray about. I'll be here at the front during these next few minutes.

Thank you.