

God in the Dock

Keith Simon | Jonah 1

Sermon Discussion Participant's Guide

Purpose of Discussion: To repent of the ways we run from God's calling.

Icebreaker: If you could go anywhere in the world next week, where would you go?

Discussion:

Read:

[Jonah 1:1-2](#)

The word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amittai: ²“Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me.”

Comment: Nineveh was the capitol of Assyria, a nearby rising empire known for its willingness to use extreme violence. Assyria had already made raids on Israelite towns wreaking havoc. A couple other prophets (Amos and Hosea) even foretold that Assyria would destroy the Israelites and take them into exile.

1. Why should we expect that God will sometimes call us to do something that we don't understand or that we don't want to do?
2. What is your Nineveh—the hard things God might be calling you to do that you would prefer to avoid?

Read:

[Jonah 1:3](#)

³But Jonah ran away from the Lord and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the Lord.

Comment: Tarshish was an almost legendary, exotic location to the Israelites, known for bringing exotic and wealthy gifts to trade like gold and silver. Some ancient scholars place it around Spain. Some doubt it was a real place at all, but more a legend. Either way, it's the exact opposite direction of Nineveh.

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3. What's your Tarshish—what you might be tempted to think will make you happy apart from God? Or what do we medicate ourselves with instead of God? If I could just have _____, than I would be happy.

Read:

[Jonah 1:4](#)

⁴ Then the Lord sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up.

4. What does it tell us about God that he sends storms into our lives? Has God ever put a storm in your life to wake you up?

Read:

[Jonah 1:5-16](#)

⁵ All the sailors were afraid and each cried out to his own god. And they threw the cargo into the sea to lighten the ship. But Jonah had gone below deck, where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep. ⁶ The captain went to him and said, "How can you sleep? Get up and call on your god! Maybe he will take notice of us so that we will not perish."

⁷ Then the sailors said to each other, "Come, let us cast lots to find out who is responsible for this calamity." They cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah. ⁸ So they asked him, "Tell us, who is responsible for making all this trouble for us? What kind of work do you do? Where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?"

⁹ He answered, "I am a Hebrew and I worship the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land." ¹⁰ This terrified them and they asked, "What have you done?" (They knew he was running away from the Lord, because he had already told them so.)

¹¹ The sea was getting rougher and rougher. So they asked him, "What should we do to you to make the sea calm down for us?" ¹² "Pick me up and throw me into the sea," he replied, "and it will become calm. I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you."

¹³ Instead, the men did their best to row back to land. But they could not, for the sea grew even wilder than before. ¹⁴ Then they cried out to the Lord, "Please, Lord, do not let us die for taking this man's life. Do not hold us accountable for killing an innocent man, for you, Lord, have done as you pleased." ¹⁵ Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm. ¹⁶ At this the

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men greatly feared the Lord, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows to him.

5. Jonah's top identity as a Hebrew or Israelite takes precedent over his identity as a worshiper of Yahweh. What identities do we and other Christians allow to eclipse our identities as Christ-followers? Why do we do that?
6. Jonah has head knowledge about who God is, but doesn't really believe it in his heart. How can we better live what we say we believe?
7. How are the sailors more responsive to God's correction than Jonah?

Sharing and Prayer:

Either split into men or women to have people share a way they have been headed to Tarshish, but want to take steps to head toward Nineveh. Pray for each other.

Or, have a time of silent confession, then close with this prayer:

"Eternal God, you are truth.

We have been deceived;
Misguided by lies,
And disoriented by darkness.

In our error,
Correct us.

In our repentance,
Forgive us.

In our ignorance,
Illuminate us.

Jesus, your name is above every other name:
We worship You."

- Kari Kristina Reeves, *Canyon Road: A Book of Prayer*