

Go! No. Oh?

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[0 : 00] Hey there, my name is Ray Sweet from First Christian Church in Greensburg, Indiana, and I just want to thank you for tuning in to this audio broadcast today. And I just pray as we get into the Word of God, that most importantly, the Word of God will get into us and transform these hearts more and more into the image of Christ.

I want to say a quick thank you. For those of you who've been listening each week, you know that I have not preached the last two Sundays. I had to have a couple wisdom teeth removed that were impacted pretty badly.

And so I have been just in recovery mode and I appreciate Pastor Steve and Pastor Mitch jumping in there to help me out the last couple weeks. But also I appreciate hearing their hearts as they preach God's Word so passionately.

So, so thankful for them and their hearts to serve Christ. But I'm also excited to be back preaching this week. And I want to start off with a story.

And I wonder if you've ever heard of a man they call Wrong Way Roy. Born in 1908, Roy Regals played college football for the University of California, what we often call the Cal Golden Bears.

[1 : 14] He not only started at center on offense, but in the days of Ironman football, he also played nose tackle on defense where he excelled. Roy was also voted team captain and even more impressive, was an All-American.

And yet his legacy was more defined by one blunder in the Rose Bowl, the national championship game in 1929. Playing undefeated Georgia Tech in a close game, Regals had the chance to possibly score when the other team fumbled the ball.

He quickly picked it up, ready to run towards the end zone, but he was immediately hit. And when he was hit, he was spun around a couple times, but he managed to stay on his feet, but he lost his bearings.

And he started running in the wrong direction. And for 60 yards, one of his faster teammates chased him down, shouting, You're going the wrong way!

Until finally, he got him stopped on the three-yard line where Georgia Tech tackled him. And eventually it led to a safety where the other team got two points.

[2 : 23] And sadly, they lost that national championship game by only one point because of that confusing play by Wrong Way Roy Regals.

Now, I want to welcome you here to a new series. We're starting today in the month of August, and it's going to be over the book of Jonah. And while poor Roy Regals didn't mean to go the wrong way, Jonah couldn't say the same thing.

And while Roy ran only 60 yards in the wrong way, Jonah intentionally tried to run 2,500 miles in the opposite direction. So welcome here to this four-week series called The Runaway, where we are going to look at the famous story of Jonah as we cover one short chapter each week.

And here's the thing about this Bible story. Even those who weren't raised around Bible teaching, like myself, usually know the story of what's often called Jonah and the whale.

So I did a little experiment this week where I went to my 10-year-old son, and I asked him, I said, I want you to tell me the story of Jonah. And for probably three or four minutes, he told me the story.

[3 : 36] And it sounded similar to this. He said God told Jonah to go preach to the Ninevites, but Jonah didn't want to go. So he got in a boat headed in the wrong direction.

God made a big storm come upon the sea, and after Jonah said it was all his fault for disobeying God, the others on the boat reluctantly threw him into the sea, and a big fish swallowed Jonah.

For three days, he was alive in the belly of a fish. But even a big fish can't stomach a wayward prophet, and he was puked up on the shore. And Jonah said, okay, I think I'll go preach now.

He went to an evil people in Nineveh, and to his surprise, they actually listened. They felt terrible for their sins, and they turned and repented, and they turned to God.

But Jonah really didn't want them in heaven. And so he threw a pity party for himself and had to be taught another lesson by God. See, guys, that's the story in a nutshell.

[4 : 38] Or even in a quicker way that I've heard it explained is like this. God said go, Jonah said no, and God said oh. Now, one reason I love preaching Bible stories and passages that are so familiar is because I think we often don't take the time to go deeper and truly understand these stories and just the spiritual depth and relevance they hold in our lives today.

So go ahead, grab your Bibles for me, and turn with me to the book of Jonah. Now, I will say this one's a little harder to find.

It's towards the end of the Old Testament. And for those of you listening who may be kind of new to studying God's Word, it's okay. You've got to start somewhere. But I want you to understand that the Old Testament is the first 39 books.

The whole Bible is 66 books. But it's the first 39 books, probably about three-quarters of the Bible. And it covers, to put it very simply, from creation up until just a few hundred years before Jesus came into this world.

The New Testament is the remaining 27 books. And it covers Jesus' life through the early church. Now, another way to find Jonah is to go to the first New Testament book of Matthew, and then just hit reverse and go backwards eight short minor prophet books until you get to Jonah.

[6 : 02] Or even easier, you can go to the table of contents in the front of your Bible, and that can help you out if you need it. But as you're turning to the book of Jonah, the main theme of this book could be described a couple different ways.

One way to say it is don't be disobedient to God's will or you will walk in discipline. As Scripture teaches, God disciplines those who He loves so that He can conform us more and more into the image of Christ.

And as you'll see here in Jonah, God is compassionate. He is patient, and He's always trying to call us back to Himself. Or, you could look at the theme this way.

God is sovereign. He is in control, and we will reap those blessings when we walk in obedience to His perfect will. Now, we should be here in Jonah chapter 1, and let's go ahead and start here in verse 1.

It says, In other words, its wickedness has reached new and crazy heights.

[7 : 16] Verse 3. So let me ask you and me both this question.

Being so far removed from Jonah and his world, it's so easy to pick on this prodigal prophet and be like, Jonah, man, what are you doing?

Why wouldn't you just go and preach since that's kind of your bag, right? That's what you do.

Especially when God made it clear that's what He wanted you to do. And yet, how many of us can sit in church every week or wherever you are right now and not really follow the call that God has on our lives?

Maybe that's why the church in America is having less of an impact on our culture than our culture is sadly having on the church. But here's the question for us. And don't forget, you can always go to your outline, and you can get to that by going to the YouVersion Bible app, Y-O-U-Version Bible app.

Click on the menu, click on events, click on First Christian Church of Greensburg, Indiana, and you can get to it that way. But here's my first question for you today. I got two questions I want to ask. Are you running to or from God's calling?

[8 : 44] Are you running to or from God's calling on your life? Because for Jonah, when God said, go to the great city of Nineveh, by the way, the capital of the Assyrian Empire, 120,000 people strong.

That was a massive city in those days. Great city in size and strength. Big old wall all the way around this huge city. And God says, I want you to go there and preach.

But instead, and I wish that I could show you this map that we're going to put in our worship services this weekend. But instead of traveling 550 miles northeast to Nineveh, Jonah goes south to Joppa to get on a boat with the goal to go east about 2,500 miles to the city or the port city of Tarshish.

Or basically, what Jonah saw is one of the farthest places in the known world at the time away from Nineveh. See, this was Jonah essentially saying in the words of George H.W. Bush, not going to do it.

Not going to do it. But why? Why would he say that? I mean, this man has been used by God in some pretty big ways before. He's a prophet.

[10:00] He's a well-respected man of God, teacher of God. When he preaches, people listen and they respond to the Lord.

Why not go to Nineveh? Here's why. It could have been that he didn't want to make that hot trip over the desert land for 550 miles.

Probably not, but it could have been. It could have been that the evil reputation of these people scared him and he didn't want to be another trophy skull at the city gates.

See, their rulers were known to do some wicked, wicked things to their enemies. But one of those is they would take the skulls of their enemies and put them in a pile at the city gate to warn anyone who would dare ever come against them.

See, they were brutal in the things they did to their enemies. And yet, while I'm sure those two things were on his mind, the real reason, because he reveals it to us later, the real reason he didn't want to preach to them was because he hated them.

[11:05] He'd rather see them destroyed. I guess you could say that he was prejudiced, racist against the Assyrians. And we see this in chapter 4 during his Poor Me pity party.

See, these people were the enemy of the Jews. They were constantly attacking God's people and would eventually conquer most of Israel because of Israel's disobedience, which led to God's judgment.

And yet, we see the Lord's heart to offer salvation to the whole world. And instead of believing God's promise to Abraham, which we find in Genesis chapter 12, that Jonah would have known this by heart.

And seeing God's people as a light designed to shine into the world, to lead the other nations to their gracious God. Jonah goes all prodigal prophet on us.

And instead of shining the God of creation into the dark parts of the world, Jonah's fine just letting them face judgment on this earth and ultimately eternal judgment.

[12:08] To put it bluntly, Jonah wants them to go to hell. And as I thought about that even more, you know, that really is one pretty good gauge of where you and I are in our faith and intimacy with Christ.

Does the eternal salvation of others really matter to us? Not just when we're in church and we're supposed to quote unquote care. But when your head hits the pillow at night and you think about your friends and your family, maybe even somebody who maybe even did you dirty.

Does their eternal salvation really matter to you? Does the possibility of them spending an eternity apart from Jesus really break your heart?

And if the answer is no, it doesn't. And if we're being honest. And I've had moments like this where I realized that my heart was pretty calloused. But if it doesn't really burden your heart and mind, then we need to repent and let the Lord continue to transform our hearts where our hearts break for the things that break his heart.

See, for Jonah, not only did it not bother him, but he wanted God to destroy this city of 120,000 men, women, and children. He had allowed his heart to get so hardened that he purposely ran the opposite direction from the calling God had on his life because he didn't want to preach to them and see them turn from their wickedness.

[13:32] But once your heart is tender to the Lord and you're seeking his face, that's where the Holy Spirit will begin to reveal his calling on your life. You know, different seasons of life may bring a different calling.

And we have to always be listening to his leading. But the Lord wants to use you to tell your world about the hope they can have in Jesus Christ.

Now, this is the point where that we are notorious for saying. This is the part where we have been known as people to say, well, I just don't know what God would want me to do.

But I think we make this too complicated. First, we know God's general will for all of us who've been redeemed by his amazing grace of Jesus Christ. And let me read you just a few passages.

I could read a lot more than this. But let me read a few that help us to understand some basic things that God calls us to as believers, as disciples of Jesus.

[14:31] Micah 6.8 One more.

1 Peter 2.9 There are probably hundreds of other verses that help us to understand what it looks like to walk in Christ.

But I think you get the idea that God has a general call over all of us. But what about maybe his specific calling on your life right now?

I would give this practical suggestion to you. Take a sheet of paper. Make three columns. On the far left, write down the things that you are passionate about.

Even the things that break your heart that you want to see change. Because that's often what you're passionate about. Do that in the first column. Next to it, write down the areas where you're gifted.

[16:02] And it's not time to be like, well, I'm not good at anything. Yes, you are. When you say you're not good at anything, that is a slap in God's face. Because he made you as his creation with the gifting that he has given you.

So write down some things that you're actually good at. What are things you excel at that you seem to really have a knack for? Maybe ask the people around you if you need to.

They can tell you. And then third, make a column and write down your skill set. What are things you've been trained to do? It could be a part of your job. It could be something that you learned in a trade school.

It could be college education. It could be training through the church you've received. Wherever. What are some skills that you have learned through the years?

And as you look at all these things together, and as you seek the Lord through his word, through praying and asking him, through listening to the Holy Spirit's leading, God can begin to use those lists to show you where you can serve him and impact the lives of others.

[17:10] Can I tell you one of the biggest pet peeves that most pastors, including myself, have? We cannot stand. I'm going to let you in on a little secret, okay? And if you're a church member, do not do this.

We cannot stand when people come up to us in the church and always have this whole list of things that we need to be doing as a church, and yet they're not willing to help with it or to lead it.

See, here's my philosophy on that. I'm kind of goofy, but here's my philosophy on this. The smellier is the feller, okay? God put it on your heart, and we as pastors will get behind you.

We'll help you. We'll get you some budget, some money to do whatever it is God's called you to do. But our job is to equip the saints for the work of ministry, and you are called to do ministry just as I am.

So let me point out one more thing here before we move on. Verse 3. Verse 3, Jonah 1. After paying the fare, Jonah went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the Lord.

[18:17] Now, I was listening to a message by Skip Heidzig, and he brought to life this amazing lesson from this verse, and it just blew me away. He said, Jonah paid the fare out of his own pocket to go his own way.

And if you and I reject God's calling on our life and we go our own way, you'll always pay the fare and, like Jonah, will not make it to your destination.

You will find yourself in a place that isn't what you thought you were signing up for. It's not where you really thought you were going to go. But if you let God take control of your life, if your life is in his hands and you are following his leading wherever he leads, and you are doing that, he will pay the fare, and you will end up right where you need to be in the center of God's will.

So let me ask you again. Are you running to or from God's calling on your life? Are you running to Tarshish the wrong way? Or are you going to Nineveh where God would want you?

See, God said go. Jonah said no. And here's where we start to see God say, oh. Here's the second question for you.

[19:36] Are you a help or a hindrance to others' faith? Think about your life, your witness. Are you a help or are you a hindrance to other people's faith?

Now, for the sake of time, let me just talk through a few verses here in this story. So now Jonah and all his rebellion and disobedience is on the boat, headed in the wrong direction. He's with some guys who do this boating thing for a living, and they start on their journey, and we honestly don't know exactly how far they got, but we know God sent such a violent storm that men who practically

lived their lives on the water were going bonkers.

I mean, they were throwing gear off the ship to lighten the load. They were in full-on survival mode, scared out of their mind that they would soon drown.

The boat would end up in the bottom of the sea. That's apparently how bad it was for guys who knew what they were doing in storms. And yet, kind of an odd verse, Jonah is fast asleep below deck, even though the boat is being thrown all over the place.

The captain wakes him up in desperation and basically says, Dude, I don't know what God you worship, but you need to cry out to him right now because it can't hurt.

[20 : 56] And then it says they cast lots. I don't know if that was their religious thing or just something they did, but they cast lots to see who was responsible for the storm.

And the lot fell to Jonah. Now, understand, that's not an accurate method, not necessarily a godly method, nor is a storm usually somebody's fault.

But in this particular situation, God allowed that lot to fall to Jonah, and the storm was on Jonah because of his disobedience.

But listen to this quote from Timothy Keller. He said, The Bible does not say that every difficulty is the result of sin, but it does teach that every sin will bring you into difficulty.

All sin has a mighty storm attached to it. And the storm for Jonah and these mariners was real. And they basically start asking Jonah all these questions.

[21 : 55] What do you do? Where are you from? Who are your people? And then as the conditions are getting even worse, they ask a last question. What should we do to you to make the sea calm down?

Because Jonah admitted it was his fault. And they are like, Okay, so what are we supposed to do then to fix the problem? Now, go ahead and pick up with me here back in Jonah 1.

And let's start here. Chapter 1, verse 12. Here's what Jonah says. He says, Pick me up and throw me into the sea, and it will become calm.

I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you. Instead, the men did their best to row back to land. I mean, these guys are, they are just good guys trying to do the right thing.

It says, Instead, the men did their best to row back to land, but they could not, for the sea grew even wilder than before. See, God had a plan that they couldn't stop. Verse 14.

[22 : 54] 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.

Then they took Jonah, and they threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm. At this, the men greatly feared the Lord, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord, and they made vows to him.

In other words, they gave their lives to him. Now, these men, like I said, became followers of Yahweh, the God we worship today, not due to anything Jonah did.

It was despite everything Jonah did, because God still showed up, and he made his power and his presence evident. And how many times have we done the same thing?

When our heart's desire really is to magnify Jesus in this world, but instead, maybe our selfishness, or our pride, or our comfort, our fear, insecurities got in the way, and we do the very things we don't want to do as Christians.

[24 : 04] You know, that sounds exactly like the Apostle Paul, when through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he says these words in Romans chapter 7. I'm going to start in verse 18, and I'm going to read this from the New Living Translation, because I think it just kind of makes it a little bit more clear.

He says, And I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can't. I want to do what is good, but I don't.

I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway. You ever felt that way before? And here's what verse 20 says, But if I do what I don't want to do, I am not really the one doing wrong.

It is sin living in me that does it. Listen, this isn't Paul making excuses, saying the devil told me to do it, so I'm fine. It's Paul being honest and real, as probably one of the godliest men to ever live, basically saying, Listen, my flesh is weak, and left to my own power and my own leading, I'll mess everything up.

I will run to Tarshish instead of Nineveh. And you know what? Every one of us can say the same thing. It's only by the power of the Holy Spirit living in you, as a redeemed child of God, that you can live a holy life, that shines Jesus everywhere you go.

[25 : 22] It's Christ in you that changes everything. So I want to share with you something that I saw from Nelson's Bible maps and charts that just contrasts Jonah's behavior with this group of mariners.

Not the Seattle mariners, but the real ones that traveled the sea. See, Jonah was a Hebrew with this rich history of knowing God's faithfulness. And these guys on the boat grew up in a system that had false gods, mini-gods, polytheistic type of environment, where they had very little history of knowing much about Yahweh.

Jonah also walked in a relationship with God. And yet these men didn't. And yet in verse 5, it tells us that Jonah was indifferent toward God, kind of his heart was hardened toward God, while these guys knew very little of the Lord, and they were so concerned about doing right in his eyes. Jonah had no compassion towards Nineveh that had 120,000 souls living there. And yet these guys cared so much about Jonah, they didn't want to throw him into the sea.

In fact, they risked their own lives to do everything in their power that they, instead of throwing him over. And then in verses 16 and 17, we see that these men, whose hearts were seeking truth, were brought into worship and commitment to our God.

[26 : 48] But Jonah was still rebellious and was about to be disciplined in a big way. So that begs the question, are you and I more of a help or more of a hindrance to other people's faith?

Are we mindful that God is always wanting us to use, he's always wanting to use us to shine Jesus into this world? Because whether we're talking about our co-workers, maybe our family, our church, our community, you might be surprised how an unbelieving world is always watching us to see if they too may want to follow this Jesus guy.

Is this guy that I work with, that I see in the community, is his faith for real? Is it something that I would even want? And sadly, even though Jonah was on the boat, man, he missed the boat when it came to his witness to these group of guys who grew up worshiping these false gods.

So no question, we can call Jonah the prodigal prophet and we'd be right. His behavior fits nicely into that Pharisee box that Pastor Mitch talked about last Sunday.

But now let's show him a little bit of compassion because what really matters is how the Lord saw Jonah. And God not only valued him as his creation made in his image, he also had a great purpose for Jonah to proclaim the word of God.

[28 : 12] But to get him there, God had to draw that hardened heart back to himself. And sometimes when we aren't willing to hear his still small voice, greater steps of discipline will be taken.

It's like God kind of starts off soft and he gets a little heavier hand as we don't listen. Kind of like we do as parents sometimes, okay? And in the words of Colin Smith, God disciplines those he loves, but he does not stop loving those he disciplines.

See, the reality is that all of us can be a lot like Jonah. We can fall into rebelliousness and selfishness and hard-heartedness just the same while still holding on to our pastor card or our elder badge or our ministry leader title or praise team member or even just waving our Christian flag in general.

And it often comes because of spiritual laziness, pride, and disobedience. But listen, I am so thankful for a God who runs after us as we sometimes run away from him.

I'm so thankful for a God of second and third and 4,378 chances. A God who's not afraid to take us on a journey in the belly of a great fish so that he can draw our hearts back to him.

[29 : 41] That's what true love and grace looks like. So God said to Jonah, go. Jonah said, no. And that's when God said, oh.

And next week, we're going to talk a lot about this great fish that God prepared to house Noah for three days. But it's my prayer that our response to the Lord may always sound more like this.

When God says go, we respond in the words of the prophet Isaiah, Isaiah 6, 8. And we say that famous line, here am I, Lord, send me.

Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, thank you just for your words today that have spoken life right into us. We thank you for just your power and your grace and your mercy.

And we just pray that you will have your way in each of us. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Let me give you a quick invitation this morning. If you have questions about your faith, if you want to talk about giving your life to the Lord, once again, my name is Ray Sweet from First Christian Church of Greensburg, Indiana.

[30 : 54] You can reach out to us in a couple ways. My email is ray at FCCgreensburg.com. Or you can call the church office Monday through Thursday, 8 to 430 at 812-663-8488.
Hey, God bless you and have a great week.