

Conversation Starters

- Have you ever run from something you knew you should do?

Discuss

So far this summer we've about men or women in the Bible who have tipped closer to God, and while Jonah eventually did, his story is different. His name was Jonah. And yes, this is the same Jonah from the Jonah and the Whale story you might be familiar with from childhood. But how much do you know about him really?

Jonah was a prophet, which means he was called by God to communicate God's messages to people. However, Jonah was a prophet unlike all any other. While most are presented in a hero's light throughout the Bible, Jonah is presented as a disobedient, unforgiving, rebellious prophet who seemed to prophesy against his will. More accurately, he is a prophet of irony and contradiction. We see this from the opening of the book bearing his name:

¹ "The LORD gave this message to Jonah son of Amittai: ² "Get up and go to the great city of Nineveh. Announce my judgment against it because I have seen how wicked its people are. ³ 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" (Jonah 1:1-3 NLT).

Jonah had an opportunity to tip towards God, but instead he ran the other way. Before jumping to conclusions about Jonah, though, we have to realize that Ninevah was the capital of the most evil empire of the day. This would be like God asking one of us to go to deliver his message to ISIS today.

- Have you ever felt like God was asking you to do something uncomfortable? What did you do?
- Can you actually escape from God or his presence?

Read Jonah 4:2.

- Why did Jonah run from God's call to go to Ninevah?
- When someone wrongs you, is your first thought to pray for them or to pray for something bad to happen to them too?

Read Jonah 1:7-16.

- Jonah chose to run away by God by taking a boat across the sea, then God sends a storm to remind Jonah that he can't escape his presence. Have you ever run from God only to be reminded of his presence? How did he remind you?
- Jonah had to think he was going to die if he was thrown into the ocean in the middle of a storm. Why do you think he was that desperate to escape God's call on his life? Can you relate?

Read Jonah chapter 2.

- When in the story did Jonah's prayer take place – before or after his deliverance? What does that tell you about his sincerity? What might it tell us about our own?
- Look at verse 6. There's a turning point in this verse where Jonah starts to focus on God's goodness and deliverance. Remember, he's still in the stomach of a fish at this point. What does Jonah's posture here tell us about how might approach God when we're in the middle of a mess, even if the mess is one of our own making?

After Jonah goes to Ninevah like God asked, the people repent and God changes is mind about destroying them. Now read Jonah chapter 4.

- Jonah's gratitude for God's salvation was sincere, but he didn't change his heart in light of that salvation. He still wanted God's judgment to come down on the people of Ninevah. Is there someone you hold a grudge against because of their fortunes, or are there times when you find it hard to forgive someone even though you know God has?
- Do you think you earned your relationship with God while others have more work to do before they can have that same privilege?

Next Steps

- What step of faith do you need to take this week? What is God calling you to do that you've been ignoring or running from?

Pray

Father, thank you for continually pursuing us no matter what we do. Thank you for not giving up on us; help us to have the faith not to give up on you. Please bring our friends and family who don't know you to belief in Jesus as Lord and Savior.