

Grace for Runners

Jonah 1:1-16 || Pastor Paul Hahn || 22 August 2021

*To CARE for one another in truth and in love,
To GROW together as followers of Jesus,
To SERVE those God has placed in our path.
– CG Mission Statement*

Icebreaker: Share about your relationship with the ocean: love it, fear it, never go near it, a favorite memory...

Worship: [Psalm 139:7-12](#) (*Remain a few moments in worship with this passage. What is God's invitation?*)

Sermon Summary for [Jonah 1:1-16](#) (*Read the passage aloud before reading the sermon summary.*)

Jonah is unique among the prophets. His story is not about his message, but about him. The book begins with a call to preach judgment against a brutal people and a runaway prophet. And it leads to a surprising conclusion: God's grace is far bigger than we ever imagined, and He is far more merciful and compassionate than we could ever hope. Like Jonah, we all run from God. But His grace and love are so magnificent that He always comes chasing after us.

How do we run from God?

Through Direct Rebellion // When the Lord called him to Nineveh, Jonah ran as far away as he could. This is the most basic of all the running strategies. It's a parent saying to a young child "Yes" and the child says "No" and tries to run away. The parent quickly scoops them up – in discipline, yes, but ultimately in love. That's how our running looks to God, for we cannot outrun His love and grace ([Ps. 139:7-12](#)).

Through Quiet Denial ([v6](#)) // After climbing aboard, Jonah went below deck and fell asleep. Sleepiness, blissful ignorance, indifference – these are all forms of quietly denying God's presence and authority. We do this as we turn a blind eye to the pain and suffering of the world, functionally ignoring God's call on our lives. We need to remember that our faith is always personal and always intended for the public good.

Through Vocal Non-Action // When Jonah can no longer hide that he is causing this storm, he begins to speak... yet does nothing! Even when he's convinced he must jump into the sea to stop the storm, he makes the sailors throw him in. Because he's all talk. We too feel that if we just talk about something, it's as good as doing it. And still, God is there for Jonah – and us – even at our most hypocritical.

Why do we run from God?

Because we're afraid of what God is calling us to do ([v1-3](#)) // Nineveh was the capital of ancient Assyria – a brutal and cruel people. Jonah was rightfully afraid to preach there. What does this look like for us? Where are we afraid to engage in service to God? Grace will find us in these places and empower us.

Because we hate the people God is calling us to serve ([Jonah 4:1-3](#)) // More than being afraid of the Ninevites, Jonah hated them – even when they repent under his preaching. *Everyone* repents, making Jonah furious with God: *"This is why I ran away! I knew you would be merciful!"* How twisted such fury makes him – and us! But God's grace meets us even in such poisonous hate. Let God's grace toward them break and melt our own hearts, even as it causes us to realize how deeply we need His grace.

Because we doubt God's goodness // Nathaniel Hawthorne once wrote, *"The reason that men fear God – and at bottom dislike Him – is because they rather distrust God's heart."* We all struggle with this. At times we feel our only choice is to run from God. Particularly when circumstances are difficult. Because we don't believe that He really is good toward us.

Where does our running from God take us? Running from God often begins easily enough, but it will always have consequences; storms will come ([v4](#)) – maybe not immediately, but they come. God pursues us in His mercy and grace, because as Tim Keller said, *“These storms are storms of love!”* Ultimately, they are a tender violence to give us a grander view of His love. Because they draw us back into His arms of grace. And there is always love underneath these tumultuous waves. Always.

Discussion Questions (*You will not be able to discuss all the questions. Pick the ones you like. Some are personal perspective and application questions for life-transforming discussions.*)

God’s love chases us down, even when we run. In what ways have you run from God?

- Which of the three ways of running (direct rebellion, passive indifference, or verbal non-action) do you most identify with in your faith journey?
 - Do any of the three describe the season you are in now? If they do not, how would you describe the season you’re in?
- [Psalm 40:10](#) reads, *“I have not hidden your deliverance within my heart. I have spoken of your faithfulness and your salvation; I have not concealed your steadfast love and your faithfulness from the great congregation.”*
 - What are the connections of this verse to non-verbal action?
 - How have you seen God’s faithfulness to you in this past week? (Or perhaps if you want to be more reflective: “in this last month or year?”)

We run because we are afraid.

- What is something you fear that is connected to this story and your faith?
 - What does the Bible say about our fears (see: [Psalm 34:4-5](#), [Psalm 23:4](#), [Psalm 27:1](#), [Luke 1:29-31](#)).
- As Tim Keller noted in a sermon on Jonah, *“Any time you run from God, a posse is coming after you.”* Do you find this comforting, or something else?

God does not chase us down to condemn us but to draw us back into His loving arms.

- Read [Romans 8:1-2](#) and reflect on the reality that, “There is no condemnation in Christ.”
 - What does this mean for believers? How can this reality be practically applied to our lives?
- Silent reflection: Is there anyone you have condemned this week? Pray for that person and for yourself.

Prayer: Share prayer requests and pray for one another in small groups. The weekly prayer guide for group or personal use is found [HERE](#).

Engage & Experience: Generous Service

“I learned about generous service for my first time attending a private Christian school. At the end of my 6th-grade year, I told our principal Mr. John that I wouldn't be back the following year because my family couldn't afford the tuition. He listened and we went our separate ways. A couple of weeks before the start of the new school year, I got a call from Mr. John explaining how he had shared my need with his community, and someone decided to cover my tuition for the whole year. My family and I asked for a name so we could express how thankful we were, but Mr. John said the person asked to remain anonymous. To this day, I still couldn't tell you who the benevolent stranger was. But I learned from personal experience: generous service includes taking moments to reflect on the ways I've been served by the community. Generous service is developing relationships that allow me to meet specific needs in my community.”

– Michael Henderson, Director Hope for LA

- This week, think about your relationship to service. Craft a group definition of generous service that reflects your relationship and vision.