

A Ship, a Storm, and Sailors

We often talk about our desire to pursue God, but what's easy to forget is that God is also constantly pursuing us! And nowhere in the Bible is this more evident than in the book of Jonah, whose story reminds us that we cannot outrun or outpace the relentless pursuit of God.



INTRODUCTION

Pastor David started a new series, "Relentless Pursuit," that will take us right up to Easter. He began the series by explaining the ways in which God reaches out to us in ways that are expected (and sometimes unexpected) and in ways that are welcome (and sometimes unwelcome).

STARTER QUESTION

Besides not attending church and not reading the Word, what are additional ways that we may run from God?

INTO THE WORD

1. Read through Jonah Chapter 1 again. What part of Jonah's story in this chapter speaks to you the most? How can you relate to Jonah? God is good for sure. Out of Jonah's disobedience, the pagan sailors came to know God. Sometimes we can't see the good when we're in the middle of the storm, but there is always good. Think back to a storm that you have faced and identify the good in that situation. Did you recognize it at the time?
2. Today we were reminded that the story of Jonah is not a simple fable about a man and a fish as we may remember it from our childhood Sunday school class. In the first chapter of Jonah, we learn that Jonah did not trust God. Trust is mentioned in the Bible 147 times. There are many stories in the Bible of people trusting in God. Imagine how things might have turned out if they had not trusted God. Refer to the following verses about the importance of trusting God: Psalms 62:5-8, Psalm 56:3-4, Isaiah 40:31, Matthew 6:25, Mark 9:23, and I Peter 5:6-7.

APPLICATION

3. Pastor David talked today about how God relentlessly pursues us and one of those ways is through other people. This also means that God could be using you to relentlessly pursue someone else. When He does use you in this way, it can feel like a big responsibility. It can feel as if God is trusting you with that one person. Can you think of a time, past or present, when God called on you to help Him reach a friend or family member? What does that responsibility look like to you? Are you living your life in surrender and trust?
4. Can you think of a few ways to describe the thought of being relentless? Are there any areas in your life that you might consider yourself to be relentlessly pursuing? Have you ever thought about God having a deep, personal love for you and how He pursues a relationship with you in this way?
5. It can be difficult to trust God and surrender to Him. For example, we may have a habit that we would like to quit, such as overeating, smoking, overspending, or cursing. It is easy to run from God and ignore His "talks" with us, even though we desperately want to stop the unwanted habit. Why do you think it's so hard for us to trust God and surrender to Him? Is God relentlessly pursuing you right now? What do you need to surrender to Him?

6. Are there some ways in which you've seen God working in your life to help you weather and/or navigate various storms or challenges? Would you say that God allows these trials for a purpose? Can you share an experience in which you felt that God was using to pursue a closer relationship with you, shape you, or transform you?

PRAYER

Father God, we know You are always good, and thank you for relentlessly pursuing us. If we run from You when something happens that we don't like, we pray that You will lovingly call us back with forgiveness. We know that you may sometimes 'hurl' a storm at us, but we can rest in our trust that You will help us through. In Jesus name, we pray, Amen."

SUGGESTED ANSWER GUIDE / MORE FOOD FOR THOUGHT FOR SELECTED QUESTIONS:

QUESTION 1 - In Jonah 1, we see how God is relentlessly pursuing Jonah when he ran from God. As Pastor David explained, we sometimes run from God when we struggle to trust in His goodness. God's Word teaches us to trust Him as He is always working in our lives, in all things and for our good (Romans 8:28-30). Our trust in His goodness does not come from our own strength or wisdom, but as we surrender our lives to God (Hebrews 12:10, Proverbs 3:5-6) and look to His Word for wisdom and strength.

QUESTION 5 - There are many verses in the Bible to encourage us and give us the peace that God offers us no matter what storm we are going through at the moment. Look up Proverbs 16:3, Psalms 29:11, Isaiah 26:3, Romans 5:1-2 and Zephaniah 3:17. How do these verses make you feel? If you have one, share a verse with the group that helps you through difficult and/or challenging times.

In the book of Jonah, the men on the ship began to throw off the cargo in order to bear the storm. Like the cargo, sin can weigh us down and cause us to run off course in our relationship with God (Hebrews 12:1-3). By the power of the Holy Spirit and our own self-discipline, we can turn away from sin and pride and fully surrender our life to the Lord, who will transform us into His image (2 Cor. 7:1, Eph. 4:24). By surrendering our lives to Him and accepting Jesus as our personal savior, we are made holy by His grace and mercy. We can accept His will for our life, knowing that He loves us and provides all we need in every storm (1 John 4:4).

QUESTION 6 - A fellow Christ follower told of a time when she wanted to quit smoking, and God was relentlessly pursuing her to quit using all three of the ways that Pastor David mentioned in his sermon. One day, with a cigarette in one hand and a lighter in the other, she prayed for a solid 30-40 minutes for God to help her to not smoke. She put the cigarette down and hasn't touched one for almost seven years. When people ask her how she quit, her answer is always, "By the grace of God and my faith in Him."