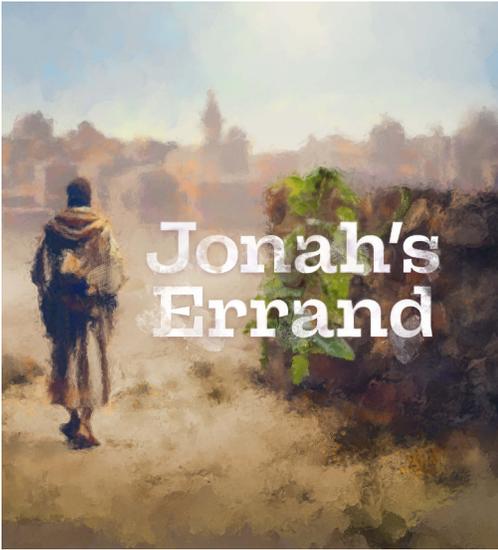




# Sermon Growth Guide

**April 14, 2024**

**Running from God**



# Sermon Growth Guide

**April 14, 2024**

**Jonah's Errand - Running from God**

**Jonah 1:1-10**

**Key Verse:** Jonah 1:4

“But the Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship threatened to break up.”

**Big Idea:** The beauty of God and His creation causes our hearts to sing.

## Foundations

Resentment against the true character of God is not new. In this passage, we see that God's desire for all people to repent and come into a loving relationship with Him extends to all people and places, including the powerful and sinful capital of ancient Assyria, the enemy of the Israelites. Jonah, on the other hand, wants God to be a “local” God, focusing His love and power only on His own people, the Israelites, God's chosen ones.

But God chose the Israelites for a purpose - they were to be a light for the nations, extending God's loving redemption to all the world. (Isaiah 49:6) God gives Jonah a very specific errand to enact this mission by sending Him to call the Ninevites to repentance. Jonah rebels. He attempts to “flee... from the presence of the Lord” (Jonah 1:3) by booking passage on a ship to Tarshish.

But God is not just a local god. Jonah cannot flee from His presence or power. (Psalm 139:7-12) God sends a storm to turn Jonah around and bring him back to the mission God has given him. The storm reveals the character of everyone in the boat. Jonah is asleep, while the sailors cry out to their gods and struggle to save the ship and everyone in it. God's intention is to turn Jonah around, not only physically, but in his heart.

## Understanding God's Word

Together, read Jonah 1:1-10.

What does this passage teach us about the character of God? God sends the storm; how do we understand this as reflective of God's character?

What does the reaction of Jonah and the sailors tell us about each of them?

## Applying God's Word

Have you ever rebelled against the character of God? How do you react to the storms God sends your way?

Read Psalm 139:7-12. How does it feel to know that you cannot flee from the presence of God?

## Witnessing God's Word

Peter teaches us that God “...is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” (2 Peter 3:9b)

Jonah flees from God because he has no love for the people to whom God sends him. Do you ever struggle to love the people whom God loves? Whom might God be challenging you to love this week?

Jonah is famous for one thing. What do you always think of when you think of Jonah? The whale! Jonah and the whale. Take a look at this video a friend shared with me. That may not seem like a lot, but imagine you are taking that yourself with a GoPro standing on a paddle board a mile out on the ocean that close to a humpback whale! These came from Jim DeJarnette, our former Music Minister who retired in 2021, and has apparently spent the last three years attempting to reenact Jonah...the whale part, anyway. Jonah is famous for the whale, they did have a particularly intimate encounter, but there is a lot more to this book. Jesus said once, "A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." (Matthew 12:39-40) It's how Jesus described His death and resurrection we just celebrated at Easter. The story of Jonah has a lot to teach us.

Jonah was given a job. **Jonah's Errand.** The job was to tell the world about God. Most prophets preached to the people of God, to correct and refine them. Jonah alone was sent out to the lost, pagan, Gentile world—and worse still, to the evil and violent Ninevites. Jonah wasn't interested. So, the story starts with a man **Running from God.** We are all tempted to flee God at times. If we keep running from God, we will keep running into storms, but, even worse, the world will not see Jesus through us. Let's look.

"The word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amittai." (Jonah 1:1) We know Jonah from 2 Kings 14. He was a Galilean. Do we know any other Galileans? The parallels between Jonah and Jesus are many. He was a prophet who served King Jeroboam II who restored the boundaries of Israel by military might. Jonah was a Hebrew nationalist. The Word of the Lord came to him. This is standard lingo for prophets. We are not told *how* Jonah heard it, but only *that* he heard it. There are many ways to hear the Word. Primary

is through the inspired Scriptures, the Bible. It's not just a book to study; it is an inspired vehicle for God to communicate with you. His Holy Spirit accompanies His Holy Word and it jumps off the page. Sometimes we hear God through others, believers or non-believers (as we will soon see). Sometimes it is a song, or a dream, or a vision—is that you, Lord? It takes an open, sanctified imagination to develop an ear for hearing from God, but He still speaks. "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me." (John 10:27). Jonah heard.

The Word of the Lord came to him. But it wasn't a word of correction for Israel; it wasn't a word for Israel at all. It was a commission, a sending, an errand: "Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me." (Jonah 1:2) The only thing more surprising than sending a prophet outside the gates is sending Jonah, a man who probably despised and feared these people more than any other. God says to go preach against them, but Jonah knows, the only reason to preach against them is to convict them to repent so that they might receive mercy. And why would God want to deliver mercy to the Ninevites, the most hated, evil enemies Israel had? The Assyrians (Ninevites were Assyrians) were terrorists in Jonah's eyes, violent to their enemies. There are bas-reliefs of Assyrian soldiers playing with decapitated heads. They slaughtered people tortuously in ways I don't want to describe. Think ISIS. Taliban. Al Qaeda. God says to Jonah the patriot, "You are now my missionary to them." Not interested. "But 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." (Jonah 1:3) As far as running from God goes, this is pretty good. Told to go east, by land, to a big city, he immediately went west, by water, to the outermost ends. Running from God.

Jonah is running from God in three ways: (1) He measures God's Word by his world,

when he should have measured his world by God's Word. When he can't find a reason why God would say what God has said, he assumes there isn't any. (2) He takes his happiness into his own hands. Like Adam and Eve before the tree in the Garden of Eden, Jonah doubts that God has good purposes for him and assumes that the world of delights is something God is withholding. Jonah thinks it is his responsibility to rob from God the things he needs, instead of trusting God's plans and timing to care for him. (3) He goes prayerless. Jonah stops praying. When he doesn't want to hear what God has to say, he stops talking to God. So, when the sailors ask him who he is, he says he worships God. "I'm a believer." But he is the worst witness of all. He is a believer who distrusts God, disobeys God's commands, won't pray, demonstrates less fear of God than the sailors have, and puts less stock in God's Word than the non-believers around him do.

But the purposes of the Sovereign Lord will not be frustrated. "Then the Lord sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up." (Jonah 1:4) The storm impacts everyone, not just Jonah. They all get to feel it and they all call on their gods. They all do what they can to survive the storm. Meanwhile the Galilean is asleep in the hull. We will talk more about storms next week. But look at how the non-believing captain finds a man running from God: "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.'" (Jonah 1:6) How can you sleep? Don't you care that we are perishing? Notice, it is the pagan leader who prompts Jonah back toward his own God. We will come back to this. It will happen twice to Jonah.

The sailors figure out it's Jonah causing the trouble, so they ask him who he is. "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?'" (Jonah 1:8) What is

your mission? Where do you come from? Who is your people? They ask the basics of identity. Jonah reverses the order in his answer. "He answered, 'I am a Hebrew and I worship the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.'" (Jonah 1:9) I am a Hebrew. He starts with race and nationality, leaving him open to the criticism that maybe these things were too important to him. When loyalty to God's Word came up against loyalty to his race and nation, race and nation won out, as we shall see. And I worship the Lord—I'm a believer, but I don't trust, don't obey, don't fear, don't pray.

What is the world to do with a non-believing believer? How will the world see God when His own people misrepresent Him? The sailors are right to criticize Jonah. The world is right to criticize the church when we fail to bring the resources of our faith to bear on the plight of humanity. We are all in the storm together. We are all in the same boat, like Jonah and the sailors. It is not wrong for the world, like the boat captain, to ask what we bring to the table. Some churches are so proclamation oriented, teaching truth and preaching for spiritual transformation, they have little interest in social goods, common good for common humanity. Other churches are so engaged in social justice and mercy, they fail to express the truth of the gospel, relying only on deeds. The best direction is neither of these. "Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth." (1 John 3:18) Word and deed together best express the truth of the gospel to the world in its storms.

This is why we celebrate things like Give Back the Blessing. First Pres is deeply committed to expressing the fullness of truth from the Scriptures, and you can come and hear the gospel every week. We are also deeply committed to relieving the pain of our city, partnering with the most effective ministry to relieve homelessness in Springs Rescue Mission, ministries for the vulnerable like Life Network or Family Life Services, and this year we are calling on volunteers to join in Spring CityServe

to build a food pantry in Sierra High School and we are funding a greenhouse to grow fresh fruit and vegetables in the food desert in southeast Colorado Springs. Literally changing hunger pangs; literally streams in the desert. What are you doing, Jonah? Won't you even pray? Won't you even wake up and help? God uses His people to demonstrate His character to the world. Light + Life for the City is our way of expressing that. Jonah says he is a believer. "I am a Hebrew and I worship the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land." (Jonah 1:9) Lot of good that does us, Jonah. God uses His people to share His gospel; God uses His people to display His character. If God is not seen in His people, if His people run from Him in disobedience and distrust, how else will the world see? How will they know?

In Deuteronomy 4, God talks about how the world will see His people. "What other nation is so great to have their gods so near? What other people has so great a set of laws as this people have been given by their god? Surely this is a special people." Then God says to be very careful not to make any idols. This is a word to believers, now, to the people of God. Of course, others worship idols. The sailors all prayed each to His own supposed god. False gods. But don't think we are immune. We, even we who know the Lord, trust other things over and above our trust for Jesus. We make idols. Money, sex, power, personal gratification, security, our own kids, our own marriages, our own homes...It's a good list. God says, please, be very careful. Don't melt down your gold and treasures in the furnace and make an idol. "But as for you, the Lord took you and brought you out of the iron-smelting furnace, out of Egypt, to be the people of his inheritance, as you now are." (Deuteronomy 4:20) Do you see it? Don't make an idol to trust in place of God; you have been fired and smelted by God to be an idol, to be His image, to bear His image and character and likeness. This is our mission. Don't make an idol; be an idol. God's likeness on the face of the earth.

We can't run from God. Or, I should say, we can't do it well. We will see how Jonah's weakness was overcome and God actually broke through to the pagan sailors despite his disobedience. In an ironic twist, God sent Jonah to preach to outsiders, Jonah ran away, and God made Jonah preach to outsiders on the boat in the storm. And they heard. God can do it despite us, but that's not the point. God wants us to cooperate. He intends to use us, His people, to display His glory in a dark world. How? How might we be a better witness to the character of God? Well, we can reverse those three ways Jonah ran from God. Instead of measuring God's Word against our world, distrusting God's goodness and shutting down prayer, we can do the opposite: (1) Measure your world against God's Word; (2) Trust God for your good; (3) Pray unceasingly. That would help. But still, how? How do I find the power to turn this around?

Look to Jesus. When you are running from God, know this: Jesus has run ahead of you. Jesus ran down the road of our disobedience and ran it all the way to its end, death on the cross. Jesus has run to the end of the road of disobedience for us. Jesus went to the outermost when He went to the cross. When you see Him there, you can hear His voice saying, "It's okay. Stop running. You can turn around now." Jesus went to the outmost reaches, He died outside the city, so you and I could live at home in the city of God. When you see that, when you understand that, maybe then it's okay to stop running, turn around, and trust.