

Life Group Study Guide- April 15th – Jonah Chapter 1

“Fleeing or Following: A Thousand Times No”

For the next four weeks, we are going to study the book of Jonah. As you begin to examine this powerful book of the Bible I want you to ask yourself these questions:

- *Have you ever felt God calling you to do something that you did not want to do?*
- *Have you ever gotten an answer from someone that you did not expect?*
- *Have you felt yourself restless and wandering in correlation with disobeying The Lord's Will?*

God calls and your reply is full of reluctance and reservation.

The definition of reluctance is the **“unwillingness to do something or lack of eagerness or willingness.”**

Before you read Jonah Chapter 1, spend some time in prayer. Are you reluctant in obeying The Lord? Ask The Lord to show you if there is any area in your life where you are unwilling to follow His call. It could range from giving up a website or a particular genre of music to teaching a class, going on a mission trip, or serving where you sense God is leading.

If you are listening to God's voice, He will direct you. The challenge for this week is will you say **YES** when He does?

Read Jonah Chapter 1

Jonah did not want to follow the Word that the Lord had given him. I did a little research and found that Tarshish actually stood more than 2,500 miles from Israel in the opposite direction of Nineveh. It was the most remote destination available for Jonah to escape God's call. He did not want to go and minister to the Assyrians.

Verse 3, *“But Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish **from the presence of The Lord**. He went down to Joppa, and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid the fare, and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish **from the presence of The Lord**.”*

From the presence of The Lord are six very powerful words. I don't know about you but they make me just a little uncomfortable. The presence of The Lord should be something that you and I want to partake in and draw closer too- not

run away from. Jonah thought he could board that boat and hunker down in the lowest part of the ship and sleep off this assignment (verse 5). He was escaping. The fact that he went to the lowest part of the ship tells a story in of itself.

My dad answered the call to ministry, however, not before he ran from that call for over a year. I heard him share this part of his testimony many times over and God told me I was to write about it this week as part of this guide.

My mom and dad were married in their early 20's. Dad had a job as a mechanic and my mom worked at Cryovac. They were involved in a local church, however, did not plan to serve in the ministry. The Lord began working in my dad's heart and life. He would share that "The Lord clearly called me to the ministry and my answer was a resounding NO. **A thousand times I said no.**" Dad did not share this call with anyone, however, just continued to work. I can remember him saying, "I thought if I just went on with my life as normal then He would call someone else. I did not think I was qualified to serve The Lord as a pastor." The Lord continued to speak to my dad, however, he did not answer. One morning The Lord spoke to my dad and told him that "his time to accept the call was coming to an end." My dad went to work that day with a heavy burden. If you have ever ran from The Lord, no matter what the call, it is just simply a miserable experience. That day he was working maintenance on a large truck at Spartan Leasing and an explosion occurred. He suffered third degree burns and was taken to the burn center. He would often show a photo when he shared this story of him sitting in the burn unit completely covered with physical evidence of what it looks like to spiritually disobey God's call. He knew that this was his "Tarshish" experience. My dad went on the recover from his intense burns and surrendered to the call to ministry. He faithfully pastored for 32 years, however, I can vividly remember him talking about the 1.5 years that he ran from the call. He told me a month before he died that he was ready to meet The Lord and to reunite with my mom. He then said, *"Julie- I know that I will have to answer for that time that I ran from God. I have always wondered how much blood will be on my hands for those I was supposed to lead to The Lord when I was too busy running the other direction."* My dad was a faithful servant for a long time. However, that period of time when he tried to hide from God's call underneath the hood of a truck, always bothered him. It should bother you and I when we deliberately disobey what God is asking from us.

Have you ever ran from the presence of The Lord? If so, what was the outcome?

The lack of fear and respect in our current society for authority continues to amaze me. We should all stand in awe of the God of the Universe. The men on this ship were so afraid of The Lord that they picked Jonah up and threw him overboard to calm the raging sea (verse 15). The following verse says, "The men

were seized by great fear of The Lord..." We should all have a holy reverence of the God we serve. We should teach that to our children, grandchildren, teenagers- anyone that God grants us the privilege and ability to invest in.

We could make guesses as to what initially made Jonah run. Fear. Comfort. Lack of control. Disregard for God's chosen audience for the message. Perhaps he wanted a different assignment. The Lord came to Jonah and said to "get up" and in the very next verse he did "get up" however not to answer the call (verses 2 and 3). I have often wondered if Jonah thought about changing his mind during those two verses. How many thoughts ran through his mind as he stepped onto the ship headed in the wrong direction. He knew that his actions would adversely affect those around him, yet he did it anyway.

How often do you and I do the same thing? There have been many times when I have chosen my way over God's way. My plan over His.

The theme of this week is simple. As you close out your time with the Lord ask yourself the questions listed below. God certainly stepped on my toes this week as I was preparing this guide.

- Is God giving you a particular assignment? If so, are you fleeing or following His command?
- Are you saying yes or are you telling him **a thousand times NO** I will not follow you?

We can try to make it sound better by quoting the reasons why we can't do what he is asking. These are some that I often hear when someone is wrestling with a call from the Lord:

- "I just don't think it is the right time."
- "I can do that later. I am not sure I am ready now."
- "In order to follow His call, I am going to have to give up so much. I may have to move or sell my house." "How will this affect my family?"
- "What if....." You can finish that sentence. We have all, myself included, asked a million "What If" questions.

However, no matter our reasoning, a no is just a no. If God is calling you, then He wants you to do it, not someone else. God will never call you to a task for you to then ask someone else to complete. If He wanted them to do it, then He would have given them the instructions. **To Flee or To Follow- Will you say Yes or a Thousand Times NO- the choice is Yours.**