

An Encouraging Word From Dr. Tim Watson
Series: The God Of A Second Chance- A Study In Jonah
"Lessons On Leaving God"

I want you to think back to a time when you left something behind that you really needed. Isn't that a sick feeling? In June of 2012, I flew with my three children to Key West, Florida for a week of vacation, but I was mainly in Key West to officiate at a wedding. Shortly after arriving in Key West, I took a shuttle bus to another part of the island for the purpose of renting a car. I have the bad habit of laying my wallet beside me because I don't like to sit on a bulky wallet.

I laid my wallet beside me on the seat of the shuttle bus. I was the only passenger on the bus. We arrived at the rental car business, and as soon as the doors of the shuttle bus closed and I was walking up to rent a car, I realized I left my wallet on that bus! The bus had driven off with my wallet that contained \$200 cash, credit cards, debit card, driver's license, and my even Social Security card.

I was in Key West, Florida with three kids, no money, no credit cards and no personal identification. I felt so sick to my stomach, I felt like walking 60 miles into the Gulf of Mexico to Havana, Cuba to ask Fidel Castro for a loan. As of September the 14th, 2025, I am still looking for that wallet. Have you ever left anything behind that you really needed? It's a terrible feeling. It leaves an emptiness inside of us when we leave something that is dear to us.

The Prophet Jonah left something behind. As a matter of fact, he left behind a lot when he chose to leave God. Open your Bible to the Old Testament book of Jonah. Jonah 1:3-10. We are continuing in our series of messages entitled The God of a Second Chance. Jonah was an eighth-century minor prophet. The Book of Jonah was written between 782 and 745 BC. That is approximately 800 years before the birth of Jesus Christ.

God commanded Jonah, a Jewish prophet, a preacher to leave the northern kingdom of Israel and travel between 500 and 600 miles to the north and to the east, to the city of Nineveh, which was the capital city at that time of the Assyrian empire. Nineveh was located in what is now the modern country of Iraq. The old city of Nineveh is located very close to Mosul, Iraq.

[Bring up Map of Gath Hopher to Nineveh]

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God commanded Jonah, who was Jewish, to go to the city of Nineveh, a city of about 120,000 people, and tell them that God loves them, and if they will repent from their sinful ways, the God would spare their lives and spare their city.

Jonah did not want to go to Nineveh and tell them about God's love because the Assyrians had been so cruel to the Jews and had mistreated them. As a matter of fact, the people in the northern kingdom of Israel were captured and carried off into slavery by the Assyrians in approximately 722 BC. The very name Assyria became associated with cruelty and atrocity. The Assyrians were known for skinning their prisoners alive, cutting off various body parts, pulling out the tongues of their victims.

Would you want to go and tell these people that God loved them? Despite the hatred and animosity the Jews had toward the Assyrians, God commanded Jonah, this Jewish prophet, to go and tell the Assyrians to repent of their sins. The theme of the Book of Jonah is God's love has no limits. God even loves our enemies. So let's look at Jonah's reaction when God told him to go to Nineveh.

Let's read the word of the Lord today in Jonah 1:3-10: **3** *"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, and after paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the Lord. 4 Then the Lord sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up. 5 All the sailors were afraid*

*and each cried out to his own god, and they threw the cargo into the sea to lighten the ship. But Jonah had gone below deck where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep. **6** And the captain went to him and said, 'Jonah, how can you sleep? Get up and call on your god, maybe he will take notice of us so that we will not perish.' **7** And the sailors said to each other, 'Come, let us cast lots to find out who is responsible for this calamity.'*

*They cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. **8** 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?" **9** And Jonah answered, "I am a Hebrew and I worship the Lord, the God of Heaven, who made the sea and the dry land." **10** This terrified them and they asked, "What have you done?" (For they knew that he was running away from the Lord because he had already told them so.)*

Our message today is entitled Lessons on Leaving God. Many times we talk about what it costs to serve God. We say if you're going to serve the Lord Jesus Christ, it will cost you. There are sacrifices to be made, and that is true. It costs something to serve God. But rarely do we talk about what it costs to leave God.

Rarely do we talk about the price we pay when we choose to disobey God and

not do what he has commanded us to do. The book of Jonah paints for us a vivid picture of what it costs to leave God and do things our way rather than God's way.

Lessons On Leaving God

Lesson #1- When you leave God, you leave your aspirations.

Verse 3: "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, and after paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the Lord."

[Bring up Map of Jonah's Journey]

Jonah had a calling from God to go to Nineveh. This was God's will for his life. He was a man of God, a prophet of God, and he had aspired to know God's way until he made the choice to leave the will of God. And when he chose to leave the will of God, he also chose to leave his aspirations. He chose to leave behind his desires to attain higher goals and purposes. That word **aspiration** literally means **the hope, the desires, the ambition of achieving something.**

If you think about it, everything in the book of Jonah obeyed God except God's own man. God commanded the wind to stir up a great storm in verse 4 and the wind obeyed. In verse 7, when the soldiers cast lots to see who was responsible for the storm, the lots obeyed and pointed toward Jonah. The storm obeyed God in verse 4. In Jonah 1:17, we will see next week, the fish that swallowed Jonah obeyed God.

Later on, we'll see in Jonah 4:6, God commanded a vine to grow over Jonah's head to give him shade, and then in Jonah 4:7, God commanded a worm to eat that vine that provided Jonah with shade, and even the worm did what God commanded. Everything in the book of Jonah obeyed God except his own man, Jonah.

Sometimes we may think that we can continually live our lives outside of God's will, and even if we are knowingly disobedient, we think we can still maintain our Christian aspirations and our Christian desires at the same time.

We think we can still achieve all the goals and purposes God wants us to achieve. You may be able to achieve some measure of success, but you will never be able to achieve everything God desires for your life if he has commanded you to go to Nineveh and you're on a boat headed to Tarshish. It's easy for us to sit here and point the finger at Jonah, but the question is, what about you? Are you fulfilling your purpose?

Are you in the will of God today? Is there a place of service, a ministry position, a dream that God has commanded you to pursue,

but you find yourself leaving God's will and finding a boat headed for Tarshish? Is there an area of your life in which God wants you to totally surrender to him and you are refusing? One thing is certain. When we leave God, when we choose to do things our way rather than God's way, we leave our aspirations behind.

We leave behind many of our hopes, our desires, and our godly ambitions. So when you leave God, you leave your aspirations.

Lessons On Leaving God

Lesson #2- When you leave God, you leave your obligations. You become insensitive to the obligations and responsibilities to which you have been called. Look at Jonah 1:4, 5, and 6: **4** Then the Lord sent a great wind on the sea and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up.

5 All the sailors were afraid and each cried out to his own god, and they threw the cargo into the sea to lighten the ship. But Jonah had gone below deck where he laid down and... fell into a deep sleep. **6** The captain went to him and said, "Jonah, how can you sleep? Get up and call on your god. Maybe he will take notice of us so that we will not perish."

Verse 4 says that God intervened with the weather.

Verse 4 says, "God sent," literally God hurled, He cast forth a sudden violent storm. Josephus, the Jewish historian, tells us there was a black north wind off the coast of Joppa that was sudden and violent. There is a natural breakwater where there is a jetty or levy that juts out from the coast of Joppa that makes this area off the seacoast of Israel susceptible to turbulent weather. It would be similar to living in parts of the United States that we commonly refer to as Tornado Alley.

Verse 5 says, "All the sailors were afraid and each cried out to his own god. And they threw the cargo into the sea to lighten the ship. But Jonah had gone below deck where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep." These are professional sailors. They had seen many bad storms on the Mediterranean. It would have taken quite a

storm to get them alarmed because they don't panic easily, but they are panicking now.

Let me tell you how afraid these professional sailors were. Did you notice, in verse 5 it says, "They began to throw cargo into the sea." In the ancient Near East when life was short, a long voyage of 2,000 miles across the Mediterranean Sea could take several months. It could be your one chance at wealth in traveling to Tarshish, a Phoenician island off the coast of Spain where there was money and fortune.

These sailors have packed on this ship their most precious valuables and now, as they're in a life and death situation, they are throwing these valuables overboard. Things were so bad that these pagan sailors began to cry out to their own god. The writer, John Ortberg, says, "*When the sea is calm, any old name for any old god will do. But when a storm hits, everything changes, and now you're hoping one of those gods turns out to be real.*" These sailors are fighting for their lives and where is God's prophet Jonah?

Verse 5 says, "But Jonah had gone below deck where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep." Literally in the language of the Old Testament, Jonah went into the deepest recesses of the ship. When it says he had gone below, it is a word for the deepest and innermost part of a cavern or a cave. This is a place where the ship came together at the keel and there in that deepest part of the boat, Jonah is asleep when normally sleep would have been impossible.

Notice in verse 5 it says, "He fell into a deep sleep." It is the same Hebrew word that was used for when God put Adam in a heavy, deep sleep to remove one of his ribs to create the first woman named Eve. But Jonah's sleep is a deep sleep of misery and depression because he's running from God. Verse 6, "The captain went to him and said, 'Jonah, how can you sleep? Get up and call on your god. Maybe he will take notice of us and we will not perish.'" Isn't this verse ironic?

The pagan ship captain is calling the man of God to prayer. The pagan is doing what prophets do, issuing a call to prayer, and the prophet is doing what pagans do, sleeping when it's time to be praying. It reminds us God's servant running away from the will of God can look worse and sometimes act worse than unbelievers around him or her. There's nothing worse than being a Christian out of the will of God and the non-believers around you look better and act better than you do.

With Jonah sound asleep in the deep recesses of this boat during this horrific storm, it illustrates how insensitive he had become. He's running from God. He's running from the obligations to which he had been called. And it reminds us how hard, calloused and how insensitive he had become to the things taking place around him. He's sleeping in the middle of the storm.

Now, before we point a finger at Jonah, it may be that many of us need to take an inventory of our lives.

Could it be that many of us as followers of Jesus have become so hardened, so calloused, insensitive to the things taking place around us, that like Jonah, we find ourselves sleeping through the storm? In Psalm 95:7-8, the psalmist said, "Today, if you hear God's voice, do not harden your hearts." Every time God calls us to do something and we say no and we continue on our ship to Tarshish, we become a little less sensitive to the Holy Spirit...

The callousness around our hearts gets a little thicker and before long, we become insensitive to God's call. God continues to call us, but the problem is it becomes harder for us to hear His voice. We are asleep in the bottom of the ship. I observe some Christians who appear to be bored in the Christian life, they're just going through the motions, and it may be that you're bored because you have continually said no to God and no to His Holy Spirit, and God has allowed the consequences of your choices to run their natural course.

The Lord is speaking to some of you this morning whose heart used to be warm and tender to the things of Jesus. You used to aspire to do great things for the Lord Jesus Christ, you used to take seriously your obligations and your responsibilities as a believer, but something happened along the way. Like Jonah, you turned aside and you tried to forget what God wanted you to do. It is my prayer you will see the spiritual fog that you're in and you'll turn to the God of a second chance before it is too late.

Lessons On Leaving God

Lesson #3- When you leave God, you leave your communication.

When you leave God's will, you leave behind the ability to hear God's voice, you lose a lot of your ability to communicate with God. Look at verses 6 and 7. **6** The captain went to him and said, "How can you sleep, Jonah? Get up and call on your God. Maybe he will take notice of us and we will not perish." **7** Then the sailors said to each other, "Come, let us cast lots to find out who is responsible for this calamity." They cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah.

When the storms of life are bearing down upon us, many of us become believers in prayer, which was the case of these Pagan sailors. Notice in verse 7, the sailors on this ship, they practiced an ancient ritual of casting lots in times of danger or indecisiveness. It would be similar to rolling dice to see whose fault it was when the lots fell at a man's feet or the lots fell in a certain way, he was the guilty party.

Lots were cast among the Roman soldiers as to who would get the clothes of Jesus when he was nailed to the cross; lots were cast when the disciples were looking for a twelfth disciple to replace Judas Iscariot in Acts 1:26. When they cast lots, Jonah is sweating and he's saying to himself, "Dear God, don't let those lots land at my feet." This may have been the only time in the early part of the Book of Jonah that Jonah thought about praying to God.

Now we know that later on in Jonah he calls on God, but while the captain of the ship is begging Jonah to call on his God, Jonah is silent. And you know why he wasn't calling on his God? Because at this point, he was having trouble communicating with God. He was hanging onto sin in his life, he was willingly disobeying God by running from Him and as a result, the lines of communication were blocked between Jonah and his God.

Psalm 66:18 says, "If I regard, if I keep wickedness in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." When we live with open and unrepentant sin in our lives, Psalm 66 verse 18 says we block the lines of communication between ourselves and God. God chooses not to hear our prayers because He is a holy God. I believe verse 7 is a sad verse. It's a sad verse because God had to speak to Jonah through the storm, He had to speak to Jonah through casting lots, He had to speak to Jonah through unbelieving sailors.

God may allow some storms to come into our lives because that is the only way He can get our attention, and He'll even use unbelievers to get our attention as well.

Lessons On Leaving God

Lesson #4- When you leave God, you leave your reputation.

When you leave God, you leave behind your reputation. Jonah 1:8-10: **8**"So they ask him, 'Tell us, who is responsible for making all this trouble from us? What do you do? Where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?' **9** And Jonah answered, 'I am a Hebrew and I worship the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land.' **10** This terrified them and they asked, 'What have you done?' (They knew he was running away from the Lord because he had already told them so.)"

Many of you will notice in your Bibles, in many of your translations that verse 10 concludes with parentheses.

And in the parentheses it says, ("They knew Jonah was running from the Lord because he had already told them so.") The parentheses

tips us off that something interesting is happening here because of the language the writer uses for describing God. In the Hebrew Scriptures, three main words are used to describe God. **Elohim**, E-L-O-H-I-M, was the generic word for God. This word could refer to any gods, gods with a little "g".

Adonai, A-D-O-N-A-I, is often translated Lord. In the ancient world, Adonai, or Lord, was a generic title of respect for one in authority. But **Yahweh**, Y-H-W-H, was the most holy and sacred name for God. It is the name God used to reveal Himself to His people. The name Y-H-W-H, Lord, was so sacred, Jews would not even pronounce that name. In most English translations, when Lord is spelled with all capital letters, **L-O-R-D**, capital letters, it is translated Yahweh.

This name is not generic. It refers only to the God of Israel. In Jonah 1:5, when it says the pagan sailors prayed to their own god, the word is Elohim, a generic word that refers to any number of gods. But in verse eight, when they asked Jonah, "Who are you and where are you from?" And he says in verse nine, "I am a Hebrew and I worship the **Lord**." He uses the word Yahweh. And you will notice in verse 10, the Bible says, "This terrified them." Literally, they feared with a great fear because Jonah is using the name Yahweh that even the Gentiles would have known.

It scares them to death because Jonah says, "My God tells people His name. My God wants to be known. My God, Yahweh, is the Lord who created the land and the sea, and He is the one who created this storm." And the pagan sailors look around and they see the power of God, and they know Jonah is telling the truth. How sad it is, Jonah shares his testimony, his relationship, his calling to the God of the universe with these sailors.

And they are looking at him thinking, "Jonah, what in the world are you doing out here on the Mediterranean? Why are you running from your God? We would love to know a personal God like you know, Jonah." Jonah was the only man on board that ship that knew

the one true living God, Yahweh, and now in leaving God, he also left his good reputation behind. Before we point a finger at Jonah, we need to stop and ask, what kind of reputation do I have?

Some of you have worked in an office, a warehouse, in a place of business for years and people at work don't even know that you're a follower of Jesus. Perhaps you're a junior high, high school, college student. If someone at your school asked the question, "Are you a Christian? Is so-and-so a Christian?" What would people at your school say about you? How embarrassing it must have been for Jonah to admit to those sailors that his life did not match what his lips were professing.

Verse nine, he says, "I worship God." And the sailors replied in verse 10, "Well, what have you done? Jonah, you say you worship God, and then why are you acting the way you're acting?" Are people saying the same thing about us? You say one thing, but you're acting another way. Reputation. What kind of reputation do you have? It may be that you're on a ship to Tarshish. God has called you to go in one direction, but you're headed in another direction.

The good news is, it's not too late. A loving God is willing to give you a second chance as he gave Jonah a second chance. And the question is, will you continue to go in your direction or will you turn your ship around and head in God's direction?