

# **Farther Than We Could Ever Go** (Jonah 1-2)

Have you ever been upset with God? So much so you wanted to run as far away from him as you could? Maybe that describes you right now. The book of Jonah is the dramatic story of an ancient prophet who is angry at what God is asking him to do. So caught up in his own ideas of what is fair and good, so afraid that God's love will go "too far" – he runs. And in the most unexpected way imaginable, God doesn't stop pursuing Jonah. We're given a breathtaking picture of love and mercy that reaches farther than we could ever go.

## **1. Running away from God's presence** (Jonah 1:1-3)

A rebellious prophet of the Lord who tries to run from the presence of God.

Baring his hatred for the Ninevites and their potential repentance, Jonah boards a boat headed in the opposite direction, far from where he believes God to be. This presence of the Lord is tied to Exodus 33 and 34 when Moses encountered the back side of God's glory as he passed by. The self-identification of God to Moses starts with the mercy and grace of God that Jonah believes will be shown to his enemies.

## **2. God doesn't stop pursuing** (Jonah 1:4-17)

Once Jonah tries to get away, God is not confused or alarmed as he sends a storm to slow the ship Jonah is on. The storm worsens and while Jonah is asleep, God is getting ready to show himself to the unknowing sailors aboard the ship. The God of Israel is not just some other god that the sailors would have known about, the God of Israel is THE GOD.

As the sailors try to figure out what to do, God is pursuing his rebellious prophet and despite the sinfulness of Jonah, he is revealing himself as well to the sailors. The purposes of God are complex and multi-layered but one thing God always does is pursue because of his steadfast love.

The story of Jonah shows us that God pursues us even in our rebellion and will not stop at anything to rescue to the uttermost.

## **3. Unexpected rescue and clarity in the darkness** (Jonah 2)

Jonah has been tossed overboard in order to save the sailors and is rescued from drowning by a great fish that God sent to swallow him. While in the belly of the fish, Jonah prays a heartfelt prayer to God.

- As Jonah experiences hopelessness and hope in the fish, he concludes two important truths for us all. The idols of our hearts and willful creation can never match up to the steadfast love of God.
- God is the one who rescues and saves.

### **QUESTIONS** (Pray, read the passage and pick 4-5 questions to discuss. Trust the Holy Spirit to guide.)

1. The Ninevites are sworn enemies of Israel and subsequently, Jonah. What surprises you about Jonah's response? What doesn't surprise you and how can you relate to his response?
2. As the story of Jonah unfolds, the sovereignty of God sends a storm and then a fish to corner Jonah. How does this comfort you? What stories of God's sovereignty in your life do you have to share? What stories of God pursuing you?
3. How does the story of the sailors show the multi-layered purposes of God?
4. Jonah's prayer in the darkness brings him clarity and some conclusions. What are those conclusions? How could we apply those conclusions to our lives? See Jonah 2:1-9
5. Often times "idols" are hard to identify in our lives. First, what is an "idol"? Second, how does the book of Jonah expose our own self-righteousness, feelings of superiority and hypocrisy?
6. The idols of our hearts will never measure up to the steadfast love of God. How does the hope and warning of Jonah 2:8 encourage you?
7. Maybe you are tempted to feel that some sin you committed in the past (or continue to struggle with) puts you beyond the reach of God's grace. What encouraging news does the book of Jonah have for you? How can you encourage others who struggle with the same temptation?
8. Jesus is the perfect prophet we need. He obeyed perfectly, loved his enemies and willingly went into the storm of God's just wrath. What other parallels do you see between Jesus and Jonah?