



Sometimes life throws us into a storm we didn't expect. It could be the storm of health issues, financial struggles, broken relationships, or deep personal failure. And while some storms come simply because we live in a fallen world, others like Jonah's, come because of our own disobedience. Jonah thought running from God meant running away from his own responsibilities and consequences. But instead, he found himself in a situation where his choices didn't just affect him, they endangered everyone around him. Still, even in the midst of his rebellion and chaos, God's mercy and sovereignty are on display. The storm, the sailors, and even the great fish all remind us that God is in control, pursuing his people even when they try to run.

ICEBREAKER

What's the worst storm, (literal or metaphorical,) you have ever been through in your life?

READ IT

Read Jonah 1:4-17

GET IT

1. Who sent the storm that threatened the ship?
2. How did the sailors react when the storm hit?
3. What was Jonah doing while the storm raged?
4. How did Jonah explain the reason for the storm?
5. What happened after Jonah was thrown into the sea?

LIVE IT

“The opening chapter of Jonah is set in the midst of an intense storm, a really intense storm. Modern meteorology has documented the development of tropical cyclones in the Mediterranean Sea, which is where this takes place. A violent tempest, we know from meteorological records, can reach an excess of ninety miles per hour – that is hurricane level, and even beyond that – and create surging waves as a result of those kinds of horrible, terrifying winds. And this is the kind of storm that one might assume was going on in Jonah’s story. But really it was something qualitatively different than that.”⁵

The storm wasn’t random – it was sent by God to get Jonah’s attention and redirect his course. While storms can feel like punishment, they are often expressions of God’s mercy and grace, designed to wake us up and bring us back to Him.

6. How do you see God’s grace and mercy even in sending a storm?

⁵ <https://www.gty.org/sermons/80-393/jonah-the-worlds-greatest-fish-story>

7. How have you seen God used hardship to draw you closer to Him or to redirect your path?

Ironically, Jonah's disobedience became a platform for the sailors to hear about the one true God. Even as Jonah resisted the call to Nineveh, God used Jonah to display His power and sovereignty.

8. What do you think the sailors learned about God through this storm?

9. How does it encourage (or challenge) you to realize that God can even use our failures as a testimony?

10. The sailors felt the consequences of Jonah's sin. How does this still happen in our lives? How does one individual's sin and its consequences impact the lives of others around them?

Jonah set sail to cruise away from God's goal for his life. I imagine him standing on the upper deck while waving goodbye to all his responsibilities. As the land disappears over the horizon, so do all his perceived problems. He takes a deep breath of salty air, sighs in relief, stretches out his arms, and snuggles up for a much-needed nap. As he's drifting off into a deep sleep, the boat drifts into a severe storm. Waves toss the little boat back and forth like a ping-pong ball getting paddled across a table. This storm is so strong that all the men aboard assume it has to be a Divine delay. They shake Jonah awake and ask, "What on earth did you do, dude? You show up, and now we are about to get swallowed up by the sea."

Jonah knows that this storm is proof of God's pursuit, so he hatches a peculiar plan. "Just throw me overboard," he announces. Let that sink in (pun intended). Jonah basically tells these guys that they should sacrifice him. Even a skilled sailor would only survive seconds in rough water like this. Naturally, the crew refuses, saying, "There has to be another way." Seriousness sweeps over his face as the rebellious prophet assures that this is the only path to protection for them. Ironically, this is the first time Jonah starts moving towards God's calling.

Sometimes, obedience after resistance is far more difficult. If he had just obeyed originally, things would have looked drastically different. There'd have been no storm. There'd have been no plunge into water. He'd just have to walk on a paved path for a couple of days.

God used a storm to stop Jonah. Jonah was delaying God's call, so God chose to intervene. Here is a critical question. What are you supposed to do that you're delaying? Maybe you need to reconnect with a friend. Maybe you need to start being more generous. Maybe you need to initiate forgiveness with someone. Maybe you need to stop returning over and over again to the same sin. Whatever it is, don't delay it any longer. God may send a storm to wake you up. Like Jonah, some of us are sleeping. We are sleeping on our potential. We are sleeping on our calling. God wants to wake us up from our slumber, and He may use a storm to do it.⁶

11. Jonah surrenders and tells the sailors to throw him overboard. In what ways does Jonah's surrender foreshadow the sacrifice of Christ?

⁶ Garrel, Jackson. Circles Discussion Guide Jonah, 2020.

12. What does it look like for us to surrender our will to God in the midst of our storms?

13. God's prophet to the pagans is in the sea, and the pagans on the boat have a revival! (v.16) What does this show us about how we should think about those saved and unsaved? What is the difference between God's people and pagans?

The passage ends not with Jonah's destruction, but with God's provision - a great fish swallows him alive. While it may not have been the rescue Jonah would have chosen, it was God's way of saving him.

14. How does the fish reveal God's mercy toward His rebellious prophet? Does it display God's mercy toward anyone else in the story?