

BARF ON THE BEACH
Chicken of the Sea: How to Tell If You're Running from God
A Study of Jonah 1:1-16

Characteristic of Completeness: Christian Life

Big Idea: Are you tuned in or turned out?

Related Scriptures: Proverbs 11:14; 27:17; John 7:17; 14:21; 16:13;
1 Thessalonians 5:17; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Hebrews 10:24-25; James 1:5

Introduction

I'd like to begin this morning with a question. What does it look like when someone runs away from God?

Today, we're beginning a study titled "Barf on the Beach." (And Pastor Bob gets all the credit for the series title.) It is a study of the Bible book of Jonah. If you have a Bible, I invite you to turn there. Jonah is a little book in the Old Testament that's a little hard to find, so don't be embarrassed to use the Table of Contents in your Bible if you need to. I had to. Jonah was a prophet. As a prophet, Jonah was chosen by God to warn people about their evil ways and about God's impending judgment if they did not repent.

For the sake of time, I am only going to read the first 3 verses and then paraphrase the rest of the story. So let's begin. ►

^{NKJ} Jonah 1:1 Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, 2 "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me." ►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.

► Nineveh is roughly 500 miles from Jonah's home—about like from here to San Diego. Nineveh was the capital of the Assyrian Empire. They were enemies of Israel, known for their extraordinary cruelty. Tarshish, on the other hand, was in the exact opposite direction. ► So Jonah boards a ship and heads away from where God wanted him to preach. Once at sea, God causes a great storm. The boat hands try frantically to stay alive. They pray to their gods and they throw weight overboard to lighten the ship. Finally, the captain heads below deck where Jonah is fast asleep. Discovering that Jonah is the reason for the storm, they ask him what they can do to make the wind stop. Jonah says, "Throw me overboard." His ship mates don't want to but finally agree, toss him in, the wind stops and they praised God.

► Well, that's Jonah's story of running from God. Our text describes it three times as fleeing ► "from the presence of the Lord"—twice in Verse 3 and again in Verse 10.

But what is the presence of the Lord? Does running from God always mean a physical relocation? I don't think so.

The Hebrew word translated ► "presence" is *lipnay*. It literally means "to the face" of something, almost always another person. So to be in someone's presence means to be eyeball to eyeball. It's an honest look-me-in-the-eye kind of relationship.

It also carries the meaning of being at the disposal of another, being at their service.

AS I stand here and look you in the eyes, that's *lipnay*. When I do this, that's not *lipnay*. I am still physically here, but not *in your presence*. That's why you could be at church this morning but still running from God.

Also, the Hebrew word translated "the LORD" is Yahweh. It is the personal, proper name of God. It is not His title; it is His personal name. It's like calling me Patrick because you know me instead of Pastor because you see me up here.

So, putting it all together, to be in ► "the presence of the Lord" is to maintain personal channels of communication and submission with God.

From the story of Jonah, I want to show you that there are a number of channels of communication God uses to speak to us. It's like a ►big-screen television with a split-screen, picture-in-picture feature, where you can watch multiple channels at the same time. When you have all these channels open, that's being fully in the presence of God, listening to what He is saying to you. That's being tuned in.

But, we don't have to be tuned in. We can turn the channels on and off anytime we want, in any combination. We can just turn off the channels we don't like, and we often do. And that's how we run from the presence of God. Instead of being face to face at God's disposal, we simply turn our back. We may not physically stop going to church, we simply turn around.

And that brings me to my big idea this morning: ►Are you tuned in or turned out? Are you tuned in to the channels God is using to speak to you? Are you tuned in to discover God's will for your life? Or is your back turned to some of the ways God communicates?

So, what are these channels God uses to communicate with us?

The first channel is the ►word of God. It's when God communicates directly to us using language. It's the straight delivery of His word, orally or in writing.

This channel is represented in Verses 1:►

^{NKJ}Jonah 1:1 Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah . . .”

You say, “Well, I'd have no problem if God spoke to me as directly as He spoke to Jonah.” ►But, God doesn't normally speak audibly to us today. You see, we have something that Jonah did not. We have the Bible. It is our final and complete authority. The Bible contains what God wants us to know to prepare us for the work He wants us to do. It's the primary channel through which God communicates His will for our lives.

Are you tuned in to the channel of God's word? Or are you turned out?

A second channel God uses to speak to us is ►circumstances. God communicates to us through life situations. Look in verses 4-5:►

^{NKJ}Jonah 1:4 But the LORD sent out a great wind on the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship was about to be broken up. 5 Then the mariners were afraid; and every man cried out to his god, and threw the cargo that *was* in the ship into the sea, to lighten the load. . . .

Notice who's orchestrating the circumstances here. It's the Lord. He's trying to communicate. God is creating circumstances to get Jonah's attention.

It is interesting to see what Jonah was doing at this point. Look at verse 5. ►

^{NKJ}Jonah 1:5 . . . But Jonah had gone down into the lowest parts of the ship, had lain down, and was fast asleep.

How could Jonah be sleeping in the midst of a life-threatening storm? We are not told. ►But maybe Jonah is using sleep as a way of turning off the channel of circumstances. Sleep can be a form of escape. If you don't like the circumstances in the conscious world, then being unconscious is one way to escape. Jonah is turning off the channel of circumstances because he doesn't like what God is saying.

Are you tuned in to the channel of circumstances? Or are you turned out?

A third channel God uses to speak to us is ►people. God communicates to us through what others have to say. Let's look at Verse 6. ►

^{NKJ}Jonah 1:6 So the captain came to him, and said to him, "What do you mean, sleeper? Arise, call on your God . . ."

The captain issues two commands here: ► "Arise" and "call."

You say, "Okay, so what's the big deal about *arise* and *call*? Let's look back at Verse 2 for a moment. ►There, God says to Jonah,

^{NKJ}Jonah 1:2 "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it . . ."

Two of the commands from God to Jonah are ► "arise" and "cry." The Hebrew words translated "arise" and "cry" in Verse 2 are exactly the same words translated "arise" and "call" in Verse 6. Coincidence? I don't think so. I believe God is using the words of the captain to reiterate his message to Jonah. This is not unusual. ►Sometimes God uses people to communicate to us, particularly godly people within the church.

Are you tuned in to the channel of people? Or are you turned out?

A fourth channel God uses to speak to us is the ►Holy Spirit. God communicates through the intangible inner promptings of the Holy Spirit. Let's look at Verse 7. ►In the midst of the storm at sea, it says,

^{NKJ}Jonah 1:7 And they said to one another, "Come, let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this trouble *has come* upon us." So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah.

You might be asking, "What does this have to do with the work of the Holy Spirit?" Let me briefly explain "casting lots."

The casting of lots involved some article like a stone which was thrown or allowed to fall in a way to determine a choice. The Old Testament in the Bible contains many instances of the Jews and other people using this method to determine the will of God. For example, Saul was chosen as Israel's first king by lot (1 Samuel 10:16-26). The last recorded use of lots in the Bible was to choose a replacement for Judas as the twelfth apostle (Acts 1:26). This was just before God sent the Holy Spirit to indwell believers in a way that had never occurred before. There are no instances of the use of lots in the church after the coming of the Holy Spirit. As a means of making decisions, lots were replaced by God's Spirit now living in us.

So, we do not cast lots today to discern God's will. ►We rely on the Holy Spirit and the other channels of communication from God. The Bible tells us that the Holy Spirit guides us into all truth.¹ He helps us apply the truth of the Bible to our lives. He helps us discern the truth of His will. He helps us discern the truth about another person. He helps us discern the truth regarding both sides of a tough decision.²

Are you tuned in to the channel of the Holy Spirit? Or are you turned out?

So, there are four channels God uses to communicate His will to us. But how does this work? What might this look like for us this week? Let me show you.

I think it's important to recognize we all probably have a default. When I get a chance to touch the remote control at my house, the first channel I turn to is 28 to see which Law and Order rerun is on. It's my default. For some of you it's ESPN or HGTV or the

¹ John 16:13.

² Swindoll, *Flying Closer to the Flame*, 96-97).

cooking channel. And when it comes to the channels of God's communication, we probably have a default too. Nothing wrong with that, unless our default is the only channel we look at. Being in the presence of God is being tuned in to all 4 channels, not just one. The four channels work together to reveal God's will for us. And if we have turned our back on one, we might be missing something important that God is trying to tell us. It might help the other channels make sense.

If you get all your news from Fox News, you might have a different view of an event than someone who gets all their news from CNN. The danger in always relying on your default channel is missing perspective from the other channels.

When Jen and I got married, I had envisioned our kids in Christian school. Frankly, it was a non-negotiable for me. ► I thought the Bible was clear: Christian kids don't belong in public schools. We would home school before we would put our kids in a public school. That was the Bible picture on my screen. And frankly, I wasn't really interested in listening to what other people had to say. Any circumstance that challenged our ability to keep them in a Christian school was simply a test to trust God more. It couldn't actually be God trying to send me a message, a- because I wasn't looking for a message and b- it contradicted my default channel. I am not even sure I knew how to find the Holy Spirit channel at the time.

You see, tuning in to one channel and turning my back on the others did not put me or my decision in the presence of God. In fact, I was running from what God wanted and I did not even know it at the time.

There is danger in viewing only one or two channels. The danger in viewing the Bible channel alone is that we can become arrogant, intolerant and legalistic.

There is also danger in solely ► tuning in the circumstance channel? The trouble with this channel all by itself is that we don't always know who caused the circumstance. Was it God? Maybe it was Satan? Is this the result of my own poor choices? Are these good circumstances due to my hard work? You see, circumstances can't be the only channel because God is not the only cause. All by itself, this channel forces you to form conclusions with insufficient information. I had a person tell me once, "God made this happen to me so I would turn back to him, but I will not be bullied into coming back to God." Instead of asking, "Lord, *what* do my want to do with this?" my friend was forced to ask, "Why did You do this?" This person formed conclusions without the Bible, other people, or the Holy Spirit.

Then there's the scary channel. ► When we only watch the people channel, we run the risk that they may be wrong. Even godly Christian people give bad advice. Oh, they may mean well, but they aren't perfect. I remember being in a small group once when someone shared something kind of personal they were struggling with. Another group member, trying to be helpful, said, "Honey, you just need to stop worrying and give it to God." Well, the truth is, "honey" needed some help. Honey needed someone to say, "You know what, I notice this about you. I think you should talk to someone." This person got bad advice from a caring Christian trying to help. This person didn't need to give it to God. This person needed to recognize that God was trying to communicate something.

See, it's ok to have a default channel. ► I think the goal is to up the channels we look for. To maybe recognize our default channel and looks for ways to view other channels. When we tune in to some and turn out to others, we are only seeing a part of what God wants to communicate.

So what can we do with this?

Some of us need a new TV. We need to start watching all God's channels instead of just one or two. In fact, you may be thinking right now of the channel you neglect most often. This would be a good time to think about ways to tune in the channels you don't tend to watch.

Finally, I would like everyone to actively participate in a Life Group. I know it is my job to say that but before you tune me out, let the Bible, circumstances, other people and the Holy Spirit complete the picture. A life group is a small group of people that get together regularly to do what the early church did: worship God, connect with other believers, grow in our faith and serve others. What better place to watch the big screen of God communicating than in a Life Group? We talk about what the Bible says. We talk about our circumstances. We interact with other people and I hope the Holy Spirit shows up from time to time. I cannot even begin

to tell you how many decisions my Life Group has helped me make. I don't even know! Since the Bible is my default, I can usually find out what the Bible is saying. But my Life Group helps me look at my circumstances; I listen to them and they pray with me and for me regularly seeking guidance from the Holy Spirit. Very few major decisions in the last several years have I made without the input of my Life Group. They help me tune in where I would naturally turn out. Some of us are ready for that next step. Next Sunday, we will even have some Life groups set up around the auditorium between services so you can scope them out and find one that works.

Are you tuned in or turned out? Will you pray with me?

Father, thank you for your word. Please help us to identify our default channels and help us tune in the channels we tend to neglect. And Lord, if at all possible, help us find a Life Group where we can tune in instead of turn out.
Amen.