

Staff Work

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Jonah's Example

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Jonah's Example

Abstract

"I see myself in God's relationship with Jonah. God speaks, I feign ignorance. God responds, I go in the opposite direction."

Posting about true obedience to God from *In All Things* - an online hub committed to the claim that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has implications for the entire world.

<http://inallthings.org/jonahs-example/>

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Disciplines

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Comments

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 [inallthings.org /jonahs-example/](https://inallthings.org/jonahs-example/)

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Daily Scripture Texts

[Psalm 51](#)

[Jonah 4:1-11](#)

[Romans 1:8-17](#)

Can you find yourself in Jonah's story?

How many of us walk around in fear, understanding that God has called us to proclaim good news to the poor and bind up the brokenhearted, yet refusing to be obedient? We wonder what God will need to do to convince us to proclaim the message he has laid on our hearts. Will it take a giant fish swallowing us? Even then, will we turn back and neglect the message we have been given? Because, well, we know better, don't we? We are not called to what is easy, but to what is good; instead of obedience, we cling to our worthless idols and turn away from God's love for us. In our selfishness, we refuse to allow God to love the people that he desires to love through us.

Jonah was told to go to Nineveh. Instead, he hopped on a boat—even being so bold as to tell the sailors that he was running from God. Soon, the Lord—the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land—made the sea rougher and rougher. The wind roared as the great storm threatened to break the mighty ship. The sailors cried out to their gods, but the storm grew stronger as the God of heaven and earth showed his supremacy. No god could stop Jonah's God. In an act of participatory obedience, the sailors did what Jonah ordered: they threw him overboard into the angry waters of the sea, and the waves became calm. Jonah lacked the courage to obey God, needing the men to intercede and throw him overboard.

Most people I know would prefer mountains or oceanside resorts for a three-day retreat, but in Jonah's case, the Lord provided a huge fish to swallow him. It was there he lived for three days and three nights. I grew up reading the story of Jonah, and I still can't help but pause here. Believing this story takes great faith. Picture yourself reading the Bible for the first time—how could you not conclude that Christians are crazy? Either that, or the God of the land and sea is exactly who he says he is—one who provides for his children, going to lengths as extreme as vomiting them into the midst of the very people who need to hear his message.

Jonah went to Nineveh warning the people, and they responded immediately, calling urgently on God. For Jonah, God's messenger, belief took an angry storm, three days in the belly of a fish, and a second chance at obedience, but God knew the hearts of Nineveh were ripe for obedience. They repented, and God relented. Jonah, on the other hand, moped.

Angry with God's interpretation of righteousness, Jonah asked for God to take his life. He could not fathom the grace offered to Nineveh and accepted by its people. After all, he had endured the belly of the fish, and he was the prophetic voice of God. Dissatisfied, Jonah was not confident in what God could do with the hearts of the 120,000 Ninevites, so he grabbed a seat outside the city to watch its pending destruction. God even provided his servant with a shade tree for a day, before taking it away the next morning. Disgruntled yet again, Jonah sulked in the hot sun, pleading with God for death. God answered one more time, showing his compassion, his control of all things, and his grace for those whom he chooses.

God showed Jonah that everything he had was a gift, and that he could take it away at any time.

I see myself in God's relationship with Jonah. God speaks, I feign ignorance. God responds, I go in the opposite direction. It seems to take a lot to get through, but God is faithful. How many times haven't I told God what he was

supposed to be seeing? After all, I had surveyed the facts, laid out my plans to respond to the needs of his world, and told God exactly what his next move was meant to be, all the while avoiding the truth as I refused to go where he would have me. But God is in control. God knows all things. Still, this does not give me a free pass at half-hearted obedience that asks him to bless my all-too-convenient plans.

Who is your Nineveh? What is your fish? What storm are you fighting, and what message is the Lord trying to deliver? Perhaps we should be more like the people of Nineveh and learn to listen the first time.