

Running From God

When I was young, I remember my mother often saying, "Do what you are told, when you are told." That was good advice as a child and is essential advice as a follower of Jesus Christ. Today we are talking about running from God.

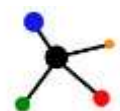
We have all been there. We know the Lord is asking us to do something or say something. It may make us feel self-conscious, or be something that moves you outside your comfort zone. Nonetheless, God has asked you to do it or say it. I have learned over the years that you cannot run from God. He has a plan for each one of us, and He is going to do what it takes for that plan to become complete.

Jonah was running from God and the task that God had for him. God had asked him to go and preach repentance to the city of Ninevah. Jonah didn't want to. He thought it was a waste of time and therefore, he was not going to do it. As he tries to escape the call God had on his life he caused some great distress for some sailors. As they put out to sea in their small ship a storm arose. The wind and the waves got more and more fierce. They were all trying to figure out what was going on. Let's read Jonah 1:7-17

Jonah 1:7-17

(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. (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) He 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?" (They knew he was running away from the LORD, because he had already told them so.) (11) The sea was getting rougher and rougher. So they asked him, "What should we do to you to make the sea calm down for us?" (12) "Pick me up and throw me into the sea," he replied, "and it will become calm. I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you." (13) Instead, the men did their best to row back to land. But they could not, for the sea grew even wilder than before. (14) Then they cried out to the LORD, "Please, LORD, do not let us die for taking this man's life. Do not hold us accountable for killing an innocent man, for you, LORD, have done as you pleased." (15) Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm. (16) At this the men greatly feared the LORD, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows to him. (17) Now the LORD provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

Jonah was running from God, and the Lord was trying to get his attention. God's plan for Jonah had not changed. However, God needed Jonah to get on task. Once the sailors figured out Jonah was the cause of their distress and they had no other choice, they threw him overboard. But again, God's plan was still alive for Jonah. Verse 17 tells us that God provided for Jonah's survival. God sent a huge fish, or some Bible translations say whale, to swallow Jonah and save him from drowning in the sea. If you continue reading the book of Jonah, you will read that he repented and prayed while in the belly of the fish and the fish spit him out onto dry land 3 days later. Jonah got on task after that. He preached against the city



of Ninevah and the city was saved. God had a plan, and He was going to make sure that it got accomplished.

Elijah was a prophet in Israel in the days of King Ahab. He was a great prophet, but he also was human. He had his fears and doubts. He was strong in the Lord, though. We read in 1 Kings 18 how he defeated the prophets of Baal and then killed them all in the name of the Lord. But in the very next chapter, we read how the king told Jezebel what Elijah had done and she swore to kill him, and Elijah feared and ran. Let's read about Elijah in 1 Kings 19:1-10.

1 Kings 19:1-10

(1) Now Ahab told Jezebel everything Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. (2) So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to say, "May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them." (3) Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, (4) while he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness. He came to a broom bush, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, LORD," he said. "Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors." (5) Then he lay down under the bush and fell asleep. All at once an angel touched him and said, "Get up and eat." (6) He looked around, and there by his head was some bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again. (7) The angel of the LORD came back a second time and touched him and said, "Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you." (8) So he got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he traveled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God. (9) There he went into a cave and spent the night. And the word of the LORD came to him: "What are you doing here, Elijah?" (10) He replied, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too."

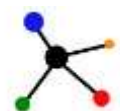
Elijah was feeling sorry for himself. He was feeling alone and depressed. The Lord listened and comforted him and then sent him back to anoint a new king and a new prophet to follow him. God also told Elijah that there were still 7000 people in Israel who had not bowed to Baal. So Elijah was not alone.

We all get depressed or dejected from time to time because we think we are alone in doing whatever it is God has called us to do. We get upset thinking God has set us up to fail, but He hasn't. God's plan is more important than our desires and fears. He will use our desires, fears, worries, and zeal to accomplish His purposes.

There is another example we would like to share. It is the Apostle Peter. Let's read what Jesus says to Peter during their last supper together before Jesus was arrested and crucified. Let's Read Luke 22:31-34

Luke 22:31-34

(31) "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat. (32) But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers." (33) But he replied, "Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death." (34) Jesus answered, "I tell you, Peter, before the rooster crows today, you will deny three times that you know me."



We could go on to read that after Jesus was arrested, Peter followed at a distance. While Jesus was being questioned, Peter stood in the courtyard warming himself by a fire with some others. When asked if he was one of Jesus' disciples he denied it. Some translations even say he cursed. Just as he denied knowing Jesus the third time Jesus turned and looked right at him. Peter got up and ran.

Peter was fearful. Like Elijah, he was fearing for his life. Earlier he had said he would follow Jesus, even to death. But now, he was confronted with that very possibility and he ran. Fortunately, later we read that after Jesus' resurrection from the dead he spoke with Peter and restored him to his place of ministry. Peter went on to do amazing things for the Lord, including being the first Apostle to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with Gentiles or non-Jews.

Friends, you cannot hide from God. Let's read what David has to say in Psalms 139:7-10.

Psalms 139:7-10

(7) Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? (8) If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. (9) If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, (10) even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.

We cannot hide from God. No matter how far you run or where you hide, God is there. He loves you. He loves every one of us. He loves us too much to leave us to our fears and insecurities.

God was with Jonah in the belly of the fish. God was with Elijah when he sent his angels to feed him and met with him on the mountain. God was with Peter when Jesus looked at him when he denied being a disciple of Jesus. In all these situations God had asked someone to do something that caused them some distress. It stretched them and pushed them outside of their comfort zone. But, God was there to protect them, provide for them, and encourage them.

Friends, there is one more verse we want to share with you. As you do whatever it is God has asked you to do, do it with passion. Do it with zeal. Just do it. We can find inspiration in something the Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy, a young pastor. Let's read 2 Timothy 1:7.

2 Timothy 1:7 (New King James Version)

(7) For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

Don't put off what God asks you to do. If he has asked you to do or say something, He has already equipped you, empowered you, and given you what to say. Trust Him. Putting it off won't make it get easier; it will get more difficult. Make no mistake, whatever He asks of us will be accomplished eventually.

The journey may be smelly, dirty, uncomfortable, and terrifying at times, but God promises to never leave us or forsake us. He will always be with us.

