

Case Study
SIX

Jonah



SLOW OBEDIENCE



Slow Obedience

Now the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me. But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. Jonah 1:1–3



pulse point

Following God
is a decision.



Analysis

The story of Jonah provides a picture of a man who relied on his reasoning rather than trusting in God's infinite wisdom. Because of our sin nature, we will always have limited vision and insight, but God's vision is never clouded.

Many parents have said to their children, "Slow obedience is disobedience." If we believe this, then why do we tolerate slow obedience in ourselves? Perhaps we're more like Jonah than we realize, with a quiet stubbornness of our own.

Jonah

The prophet Jonah is listed as the "son of Amittai," sent by God to prophesy in Nineveh. The Bible introduces us to Jonah in the middle of his life, at the time that he received his assignment from the Lord to go and "cry against" Nineveh "for their wickedness." This was a potentially hazardous assignment, as the city of Nineveh had a dangerous reputation (see Jonah 1:2). The word *wicked* also translates as "bad, disagreeable, evil, unpleasant, and unkind."

Jonah had no way of knowing whether the people of Nineveh would listen, but he obviously decided that running from the assignment seemed like a better option.

Observations

1. Jonah was running from _____, not just from an assignment.

But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.
Jonah 1:3

God said, "Go," but Jonah's behavior said, "No."

Is there any place we can run to where God cannot find us? God has unlimited abilities, so Jonah was embarking on a very pointless journey. There truly is no way that Jonah could have run "from the presence of the LORD," but that didn't stop him from trying.



define

"Jonas" is the Greek form of "Jonah."



2. Jonah's _____ affected others.

Then said they unto him, What shall we do unto thee, that the sea may be calm unto us? for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous. And he said unto them, Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea; so shall the sea be calm unto you: for I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you. Nevertheless the men rowed hard to bring it to the land; but they could not: for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous against them. Wherefore they cried unto the LORD, and said, We beseech thee, O LORD, we beseech thee, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not upon us innocent blood: for thou, O LORD, hast done as it pleased thee. Jonah 1:11–14

When Jonah paid his fare and boarded this ship, his decision made him a marked man. The other passengers on the ship did not know that they were transporting someone who would put their lives in danger. They faced an extremely difficult decision: to keep Jonah on board the ship and die with him or sacrifice Jonah's life to save their own.

So they took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea: and the sea ceased from her raging. Jonah 1:15

Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto the LORD, and made vows. Jonah 1:16

3. Jonah's was very costly.

Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. Jonah 1:17

Jonah's consequence for running "from the presence of the LORD" was swift and severe. Imagine Jonah's absolute horror as he was tossed into the sea, only to then face the wide-opened jaws of a fish that had a mouth large enough to gulp him down whole!

Read Jonah 2:1–9.

It is important to note that God worked many miracles here:

- The sea became calm again. Only God could cause the storm to cease as soon as the mariners threw Jonah overboard (Jonah 1:15).

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- God “prepared a great fish.” Only God could tell a fish where to swim (Jonah 1:17).

- The “prepared” fish swallowed Jonah precisely according to God’s plan. Only God could tell a fish what to eat and when (also Jonah 1:17).

- Jonah had the presence of mind to cry out to God in prayer in the midst of his fish-tomb. Only God could keep him in his right mind in such a traumatic situation (Jonah 2:1–9).

- God spoke to the fish, and the fish “vomited out Jonah upon the dry land.” Only God could speak to a fish, keep it from digesting its prey, and instruct the fish where to deposit the contents of its stomach (Jonah 2:10)!

4. Jonah ultimately obeyed but with an _____ spirit.

And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not. Jonah 3:10

But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry. Jonah 4:1

If you're a parent, you've probably experienced those times when you gave your child an instruction, and they followed it with an "attitude." Jonah was obeying God, but his expectations didn't match God's plan for Nineveh. The Lord wanted to have mercy on Nineveh, but Jonah seemed to prefer their destruction instead.



define

The word *repented* in Jonah 3:10 means that God pitied the people and was moved to compassion.



Let's look at this story in parts:

- God said "Go" a second time, and Jonah obeyed immediately.

And the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the second time, saying, Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee. So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days' journey. Jonah 3:1–3

- The message Jonah delivered achieved the desired results.

And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown. So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them. Jonah 3:4–5

- The king of Nineveh understood that in spite of the nation's sin, God could still show them mercy.

For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. And he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing: let them not feed, nor drink water: But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands. Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not? Jonah 3:6–9

- Jonah did not welcome God's mercy on Nineveh.

And he prayed unto the LORD, and said, I pray thee, O LORD, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil. Therefore now, O LORD, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live. Jonah 4:2–3

- God used an object lesson (the gourd) to aid Jonah's learning.

Then said the LORD, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night: and should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle? Jonah 4:10–11

Relevance

1. We don't have to understand everything that God is doing. We simply need to obey.

Man's goings are of the LORD; how can a man then understand his own way? Proverbs 20:24

There may be times when we simply cannot comprehend why God is allowing certain circumstances in our own lives, or why He is delaying punishment for those committing obvious offences. Trusting God should not require that we understand what He is doing.

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2. Life has both a right and a wrong direction.

The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way. Psalm 25:9

There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death. Proverbs 14:12

If we'll submit to God's leadership, He will guide us in the course He has chosen for our lives. Without submission on our part, we forfeit God's leadership and trade it for the "way which seemeth right" but which ends in devastation.

There are many people that have made “Jonah-decisions” to do things their own way, resulting in self-inflicted pain.

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3. Incorrect decisions often have harmful outcomes.

Thorns and snares are in the way of the froward: he that doth keep his soul shall be far from them. Proverbs 22:5

Good understanding giveth favour: but the way of transgressors is hard. Proverbs 13:15

Faulty decisions lead us in the wrong direction and usually have difficult lessons accompanying them. The wrong way is the hard way by design, making willful sin costly and uninviting. Which seems harder to you: following God down a path you may not prefer, or living with regrets for taking a route that God had not ordered for you? The best time to consider our options is before we take action. This requires a pause to pray and wait on the Lord. He is able to deliver us from anything—even from ourselves.

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4. A clean heart and a right spirit are related.

Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Psalm 51:10

We can't make our own hearts clean, and we cannot renew our own spirits. This is in the "God-realm." Naturally, the Creator of our hearts and the Giver of our spirits would have the ability to grow us and improve our weaknesses.

Without a clean heart, we will struggle with an unwholesome spirit, which will affect our thoughts in a negative and draining way. Place a high value on these essential spiritual qualities, asking the Lord in prayer for the creation of a clean heart and the renewal of a right spirit.



Your Life

Following God is a decision that will affect our direction in life. Jonah ultimately obeyed, but his story would have been different if his obedience had been immediate. God's second chance for Jonah is educational for us. We may fail, but as long as we have life, God can grant us a "do over."

We are all patterns for someone else. When people look at our lives, what do they see: a person who is walking as closely with the Lord as possible, or a person on the verge of running away from God? Walking with God is the path of obedience. Running from God is the path of rebellion. One path has sweet fruit, while the other way is hard and bitter.

Take a moment to jot some notes about any area in your life that you would like to commit to the Lord for repair. Turn these personal notes into prayer requests.

Copy That

The word *way* in Scripture describes a “road” or a “journey.” Our lives are a journey, and God has a course that He has designed for us if we’ll follow Him. Copy these verses as reminders of the importance of following God.

As for God, his way is perfect: the word of the LORD is tried: he is a buckler to all those that trust in him. Psalm 18:30

It is God that girdeth me with strength, and maketh my way perfect. Psalm 18:32

Apply

- **Proverb-a-Day:** Has this system become a habit for you by now? If so, continue. If not, try connecting your Bible reading to something else that you’re already doing daily, such as Bible and breakfast. If you’re a commuter, try using an audio Bible during your commute.
- **Psalm 119:67 and 119:71:** Study these verses to prepare for the closing lesson.



pause

“Doing the will of God leaves me no time for disputing about His plans.”

—George MacDonald





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This image shows a full page of blank primary-ruled paper. It features multiple sets of horizontal lines designed to guide handwriting. Each set consists of a solid top blue line, a dashed middle blue line, and a solid bottom blue line, providing a clear structure for letter formation. The background is white, and there are no margins or other markings on the page.

