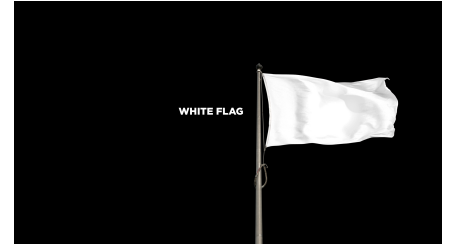


bigIdea

Many of us believe we stopped running from God years ago. Some of us would claim we never ran from God at all. For all of us “holy” people who aren’t running from God, we need to ask ourselves a question—are we as concerned about all people—even those who aren’t like us or vote like us?



BIG IDEA: We run from God when we make religion all about us and not about others.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Describe a time when someone did something good for you when you didn’t deserve it.
2. As you look back, have you ever resisted doing something for someone else because they didn’t deserve it? Do you ever feel resentful when something good happens to someone else? Where do those feelings come from?
3. Why do some people want God to extend his goodness towards them, but not towards everyone?
4. *Read Jonah 3:1-2.* When has someone given you a second chance? How did it make you feel?
5. *Read Jonah 3:4-9.* The people of Nineveh responded very enthusiastically to Jonah's message. How do you expect people to react when the conversation turns to God?
6. Too often, when it comes to talking to others about God, we feel that success depends on us. We think we have to have a polished and well-researched presentation about Christianity. That was not Jonah's message (3:4). In light of this, a better way to define success would be “faithfulness to the opportunities God gives us.” Jonah simply did and said what God told him to and then left the results to God. What do you think about this approach to sharing your faith?

What would have caused the population of Nineveh and even the King of Assyria to respond as they did? At first glance, it seems incredulous that the preaching of a foreign prophet would elicit such repentance from such a large and powerful city. However, it is likely that some recent events had prepared the people of Nineveh to be very receptive to a message of impending doom. We know that a solar eclipse occurred on June 15, 763 BC. To the Assyrians, this would have been a dire omen of impending divine wrath. Another omen of divine wrath was an earthquake, and there is a mention of an earthquake that took place during the reign of a king named Ashur-Dan (there were several of them), one of which (Ashur-Dan III) would have been king during this same time period (773-756 BC). Assyrian literature also mentions a famine (or a series of famines) between the years 765-759 BC, along with several rebellions that took place during this same time. Also during this time, the nation of Urartu to the north was handing the Assyrians several military losses. Taken together, the solar eclipse, earthquake, famine, rioting, and military losses could have prepared a very captive audience for Jonah (Stuart, 491-492).

7. Throughout the book of Jonah, God is working behind the scenes, orchestrating events to bring people back to him. It seems from historical records mentioned above that the people of Nineveh were primed to hear Jonah's message. In your relationships, do you tend to believe that God is actively working behind the scenes or does it seem that he is “asleep at the wheel”? What evidence do you see that God might be working in the lives of the people around you?
8. *Read Jonah 4:1-11.* How does the final chapter of this book sit with you? Why do you believe Jonah’s heart never turned towards God? What is God trying to teach us through this ending?
9. *Read Jonah 4:6-8.* What three things did God provide Jonah? Are you surprised with Jonah’s response to God’s kindness? Did Jonah have a right to be angry about God sparing Nineveh? When have you experienced anger towards God? How did this affect your outlook? How can we resolve our anger towards God?
10. What do the vine, worm and hot sun reveal about God? About Jonah? Did Jonah have a right to be angry about the vine? What lesson was God trying to teach Jonah, through the vine? What do you think God meant when He said the Ninevites couldn’t tell their left hand from their right?



11. What is God's reaction to Jonah's anger? Try paraphrasing God's response in verses *Jonah 4:9-11*. What message is God trying to convey to Jonah?
12. What temporary things are you more concerned about than the eternal destinies of other people?
13. How can you keep yourself from becoming uncaring about others, especially those outside the faith?
14. As you review Jonah's story, are there areas/relationships in your life in which God is inviting you to move beyond your comfort levels to extend kindness and compassion?
15. Jonah was surrendered to God's will for his life—go to Nineveh—but was unconcerned with God's heart and purpose for those outside Jonah's people. Jonah is one of the few books of the Bible that ends with a question. Since chapter 5 does not exist, we have no way of knowing how Jonah responded. From the picture we do have of Jonah, how do you think the events unfolded afterwards? Did Jonah repent or remain stubborn?
16. Like Jonah, we all want to receive God's forgiveness, but we are not always willing to give forgiveness. To whom are you unwilling to extend God's grace and forgiveness? What can result when we hold on to anger, even when it seems justified? Why do we struggle with giving forgiveness more than receiving forgiveness? What are some reasons (or excuses) we use for not for- giving? How do we benefit from forgiving?
17. What or who are you concerned about? What do you get angry about?
18. How does your time, skills, passions, money, etc. intersect with God's purposes in the world?

MOVING FORWARD

Many people narrowly understand *surrender* as submission to the moral will of God—they are content with just being “good” people. But God is concerned with all people. Somewhere along the way you have intersected with someone whose time, talent, and money intersected with God's purposes for the world - and you are better for it. As you consider what you've heard, where might you surrender fully to God's purposes in the world.

CHANGING YOUR MIND

But the Lord replied, “Is it right for you to be angry?” Jonah 4:4

