



Jonah (Part 1) – Don't Ignore the Call!

Minor Prophets #2 • July 20, 2025

Opening

Back when I was in high school, as I've shared previously, God was at work drawing me back to Himself! I'd been baptized at age 10, but a love for Jesus hadn't captured me fully. At age 15, though, I gave in to the Holy Spirit's promptings and started trying to follow Him more completely.



One of the changes I decided to make was to trade out my music for something a bit more *uplifting*. So, out went Jon Bon Jovi's "*Blaze of Glory*" soundtrack from Young Guns II, and "*Please Hammer Don't Hurt 'Em*" by MC Hammer (so old!)... and now I wanted to fill the 3-disc CD changer on my boombox with Christian music.

But I had no idea where to start. There was no K-LOVE on the radio, no internet at home to search or to stream. My youth minister gave me a couple of suggestions, though, and I began to track down albums to fill my brain and heart with lyrics that would bolster my renewed faith.



One of the artists he steered me to was a young Steven Curtis Chapman. I had to choke back a little of my musical preferences, since it was a little too...basic...for my taste. But I wanted to fill my head differently, so I listened. The first album was called "*For the Sake of the Call*" and the title track went hard into a dramatic late 80's/early 90's intro. Listen to this for a second...

[PLAY OPENING SECTION OF SONG]

Christian music has grown exponentially, and I have moved on to other artists and styles that better fit my musical tastes, but I still have a soft spot for those early albums that gave voice to my Jesus commitment. And the lyrics still swirl around in my head from time to time...like this week. As I was preparing for today's sermon, the passage cued up Track #1 on the CD in my mind and got me thinking about Steven Curtis' chorus:

*We will abandon it all for the sake of the call
No other reason at all but the sake of the call
Wholly devoted to live and to die for the sake of the call*

What is he talking about with those words, “the call”? What does “the call” mean for you and for your life? Clearly, it’s important, and it is biblical.

I need you to understand this idea before we get into today’s main passage, because “the call” plays a big role in our story and how we apply it.



The Call

Everyone here already has some sense of the word “call” or “calling” when it comes to purposes in life. The terminology is tossed around in casual conversations related to jobs. And that makes sense; the word “vocation” derives from the Latin word meaning “to call.”

An athlete might say he is “called” to be a quarterback. A singer might say she is “called” to country music.

But who is doing the call-*ing*? We’ve secularized the language, but it implies something deeper. If we are **called**, then we are called...not just to something... we are called **by someone!**

And we know Who that someone is:

“Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him...” (1 Corinthians 7:17a, ESV)

Are you “called” by God? Absolutely! Each one of us has a calling.

You may have been “called” **generally** by God. The invitation by God to find salvation in Jesus is His call to all of us:

*“He **called you to salvation** when we told you the Good News; now you can share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.”*
(2 Thessalonians 2:14, NLT)

In this sense, we are the “called-out ones” – the *ekklesia*, the Greek word for “church.”

For those of us who respond to that call for salvation, God invites and summons us to adopt certain behaviors and attitudes. We are called to “be saints” (1 Corinthians 1:2), we are called to “freedom” so we can serve others (Galatians 5:13), we are called to “hope” (Ephesians 4:4). These examples are general; they apply to all Christians or “called-out ones.”

God has a **general** call...but sometimes God calls *you* **specifically**.





The apostle Paul demonstrates this as he introduces himself in his letter to the Roman church:

*“Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, **called to be an apostle**, set apart for the gospel of God,” (Romans 1:1, ESV)*

Sometimes **individuals** receive a **personalized command**, or “a call” from **God**. The difference between a **general** calling and a **specific** call is the difference between a teacher yelling “*Line up!*” at the conclusion of recess, and her saying, “*Olivia, stand up front – you’re the line leader.*”

“The call” is a personalized command from God, specific to you. And with the call comes a choice: Do you obey it, or do you ignore it?

Do you “*abandon [everything else] for the sake of the call*”? We’d like to think our reaction would be affirmative, but far too often we **hang up** on the call instead!



The Book of Jonah

Which brings us to our main section of Scripture for today, the first two chapters of **Jonah**.

Sermon Series Recap

Last week we started a new sermon series on the Minor Prophets. As we started preaching through **a selection of** these twelve, short, prophetic books, we saw that they really matter! They are “small, but mighty” messages. Each one gives the reader a glimpse into the heart of God, revealing messages from the Divine Author that open our eyes to His heart and character. As God addresses different situations, we hear not just *about* Him...we hear *from* Him!

- In the book of **Obadiah** last week, we heard God challenge the nation of Edom (and, by extension, us) to **care about how we treat others**.
- Today, we’ll move into a more familiar story, sharing the **first of two looks** at the **most well-known** minor prophet: **Jonah**.

Jonah is probably the most familiar because it comes to us in the form of a **story** (and a dramatic one, too!). Stories are effective! They wrap truth in an easy-to-swallow package and presentation (e.g. think about Jesus and his

parables). The **truths** in *Jonah* are not more important than in *Obadiah* or *Amos*... they are just presented in a way we naturally understand.

Because of the power of story, you know the book enough to immediately think about one part of the tale: “*Jonah and the whale*.” But Jonah’s aquatic adventure is not the most important part of the book. There is more!

Let’s take a look at how his story starts.

Jonah Overview



“Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying...”
(Jonah 1:1, ESV)

Jonah, son of Amittai, was a prophet – someone who receives and declares the word of God. We know this, not just from his introduction here, but also from other parts of Scripture. In **2 Kings 14:25**, the same Jonah is shown giving messages from Yahweh. That reference helps us learn a little more about who this prophet was and when he shared this message.

Jonah was from a town in the northern part of Israel. The town was located west of the Sea of Galilee; in fact, it was just a couple of miles from Jesus’ future hometown of Nazareth. Keep it on the map – we’ll come back to it in a minute. Just remember that Jonah is an Israelite.

From the passage in 2 Kings, we also can deduce the timeframe of Jonah’s life. His prophetic ministry is during the reign of Israel’s king Jeroboam II, half a century before the northern kingdom will be destroyed by the strong nation of Assyria. At the time of Jonah’s ministry, though, Israel’s enemy – Assyria – is at a weak point. I’ll spare you all the historical details now...but know that Assyria’s weakness at this point in history makes her more receptive to the warning God is about to proclaim!

The warning needs to be delivered to Assyria’s capital city of Nineveh. And God has just the person in mind to deliver it!

In the first two chapters, we find God giving a specific call to a man, Jonah, who faces the choice to listen or to ignore.



Jonah Runs Away

God says to Jonah:

“Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.”” (Jonah 1:2, ESV)

As readers, you and I assume that a prophet like Jonah will immediately acknowledge and obey God’s direction. But Jonah shockingly takes a different path. Literally! Jonah runs away!

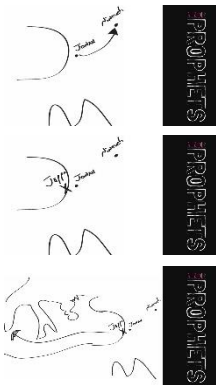


“But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord.” (Jonah 1:3, ESV)

Jonah’s escape is even worse than you think. Look at a map. Jonah does not travel northeast toward Nineveh (located in modern-day Iraq).

Instead, Jonah promptly heads west to the port city of Joppa (on the coast of modern-day Israel).

And Joppa is only a stopping point so Jonah could find passage to a place even further west, the city located (probably) in modern-day Spain or even England. His destination was about as far away from Nineveh as one could practically go in the ancient Mediterranean world and, thus, about as far away from God’s call as one could possibly go!

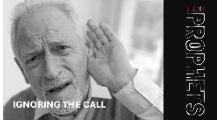


Jonah is so intent on saying “no” to God’s command, even the language of the passage shows how decisively he avoids it. Jonah does not *arise* to go to Nineveh; instead, he goes *down*: *down* to Joppa (1:3), *down* into a ship (1:5), and *down* into the bottom of the ship (1:5). The only thing that could make Jonah’s deliberate ignorance of the call more obvious is if he were to cover his ears, close his eyes and scream like a toddler, “I’m not listening!”

Why was Jonah so intent on ignoring God’s call?

Ignoring the Call

(You and I should pay attention, learning from the mistakes of someone else rather than learning from the harsh teacher of experience.)



Sometimes we ignore God's call because **we just don't listen well**. It's not like He's mumbling; God is clear when He communicates. But if you never put yourself in a position to listen to Him, or if you drown out his communication by listening to other voices instead, you'll miss His call.

Do you give yourself any space for silence? Or is your day filled with constant noise? Air Pods in the ears, car speakers blasting, speakers in the shower, TV on in the kitchen...and living room...and bedroom. Playing TV shows, movies, songs, podcasts, TikTok videos, social media posts, video games, and more. Often simultaneously.

If God wanted to break through that noise with a specific message... would you hear it? Remember:

"Be still, and know that I am God...." (Psalm 46:10, ESV)

But sometimes it isn't a matter of **not hearing** what He says. Sometimes we **hear all too well!** Jonah heard all too well.

"Didn't I say before I left home that you would do this, Lord? That is why I ran away to Tarshish! I knew that you are a merciful and compassionate God, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. You are eager to turn back from destroying people." (Jonah 4:2, NLT)

Jonah sees the evil and wickedness of the Assyrians and he doesn't want God to have mercy on them. As one commentator says, *"Not fear of failure, but fear of success prompted Jonah to run from his calling. He did not want these heathen to be saved from God's wrath."*¹

Our call from God might requires us to do something, tell someone, go somewhere, or act somehow that we don't want! We hear Him; we just stubbornly resist.



Does God's call put you in an awkward situation, one that you KNOW will require extra time, extra effort, extra grace, or extra love? Does He want you to talk to that one neighbor or coworker? Is He pushing you to

¹ Smith, J. E. (1994). *The Minor Prophets*. Joplin, MO: College Press. p. 38.

make an uncomfortable career change? Is He asking you to give up your old dream and embrace a new one instead?

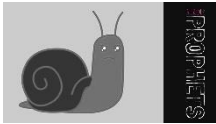
You might hear Him loud and clear. You just don't share His optimism about the situation or the request!

Faced with the choice to listen or to ignore, sometimes we (like Jonah) ignore God. But God isn't so easily thwarted. It's harder to ignore Him than we think!



God Relentlessly Pursues

A few years ago, there was a silly little thought experiment that started circulating around the internet. Different versions exist, but here is the basic idea:



You are offered \$10 million dollars. The only catch? There is also an immortal snail that will hunt you for the rest of your days. One touch from this snail will bring immense suffering - pain the likes of which you've never experienced! It always knows where you are and always is coming for you...though it moves at normal snail speeds.

Do you take the offer?²

The debate around this hypothetical scenario has been intense! At first glance it seems like a no-brainer. You're faster than a snail, so you're in no danger! Just take the money and enjoy!

But...where is the snail now? Do you know? If you go far away, are you moving closer to the snail? What if someone else carried the snail by accident? What if you built a snail-proof cage? Is there any place that you can 100% guarantee that an immortal snail can't reach? And even so, would you then have to live trapped by fear?

Suddenly, the deal seems less obvious!

You could come up with elaborate plans to avoid and detect snails. Based on snail speeds (the fastest move at about .03 miles per hour),

²<https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/immortal-snail>

you have time...but it could still get from NY to LA in a 10.6 years...or it could get on a plane! And then what happens?

When you know that the snail pursuing you will never give up... what do you do?

Long before this silly thought experiment, Jonah already lived it out. He discovered what it was like to be **relentlessly pursued**! Not by a snail, but by the Sovereign Lord of Creation. In the first two chapters of Jonah, we find a God who never gives up His persistent chase...and who moves way faster than .03 mph!



Listen to how Jonah is pursued.

“But the Lord hurled a powerful wind over the sea, causing a violent storm that threatened to break the ship apart.

Fearing for their lives, the desperate sailors shouted to their gods for help and threw the cargo overboard to lighten the ship. But all this time Jonah was sound asleep down in the hold.

So the captain went down after him. “How can you sleep at a time like this?” he shouted. “Get up and pray to your god! Maybe he will pay attention to us and spare our lives.” Then the crew cast lots to see which of them had offended the gods and caused the terrible storm. When they did this, the lots identified Jonah as the culprit.

“Why has this awful storm come down on us?” they demanded. “Who are you? What is your line of work? What country are you from? What is your nationality?”

Jonah answered, “I am a Hebrew, and I worship the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land.” The sailors were terrified when they heard this, for he had already told them he was running away from the Lord.

“Oh, why did you do it?” they groaned. And since the storm was getting worse all the time, they asked him, “What should we do to you to stop this storm?”

“Throw me into the sea,” Jonah said, “and it will become calm again. I know that this terrible storm is all my fault.”

Instead, the sailors rowed even harder to get the ship to the land. But the stormy sea was too violent for them, and they couldn't make it. Then they cried out to the Lord, Jonah's God. "O Lord," they pleaded, "don't make us die for this man's sin. And don't hold us responsible for his death. O Lord, you have sent this storm upon him for your own good reasons."

Then the sailors picked Jonah up and threw him into the raging sea, and the storm stopped at once!" (Jonah 1:4-15, NLT)

A Persistent Call



While Jonah certainly didn't feel like having faith, God would not be content with allowing him to say no. This marvelously composed narrative shows God pursuing Jonah with gusto.

- God **created the storm**.
- God **directed the lots** so that no one would bear responsibility except Jonah
- God **kept the storm going** so Jonah couldn't escape with the crew

In the face of such obvious and persistent pursuit, Jonah caves in.

He acknowledges His own identity...as well as the identity of the God he worshiped.



"...I am a Hebrew, and I worship the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land." (Jonah 1:9, NLT)

There is a note of bravery in that statement. Jonah has done his best so far to distance himself from the Lord, to say "no" to God's call. But here he has the courage to face reality, to acknowledge his mistake. Jonah now allows the fear (*both in the sense of 'reverent worship,' and in the sense of 'being terrified for your life'*) of God to surpass his fear of the Assyrians. As the timbers creaked, the salt sprayed their faces, and the howling wind made it difficult to talk, Jonah's confession was a ray of sunshine that offered hope to the desperate deckhands. By owning up to his identity and his God's identity, there was now a chance to fix the problem.

But we only get to this point because the God who pursues us *never gives up!*

God never stops pursuing us, despite our failings and rebellion. For instance, speaking about a pagan nation that had never accepted Him, God says in the book of Isaiah:



“I was ready to be sought by those who did not ask for me; I was ready to be found by those who did not seek me. I said, “Here I am, here I am,” to a nation that was not called by my name.” (Isaiah 65:1, ESV)

Jesus continues that attitude toward those who are far from Him in the New Testament.



*“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”
(Luke 19:10, ESV)*

God has always been willing to pursue the lost...the “ninety-nine”... the misguided and the sinful.



“All of us used to live that way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature. By our very nature we were subject to God’s anger, just like everyone else. But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God’s grace that you have been saved!)” (Ephesians 2:3–5, NLT)

God was willing to pursue the city of Nineveh to save them; He was willing to pursue Jonah. He’s willing to pursue you, too.

Have you been on the run from God and His purposes for you? Have you rejected His advances? Maybe it’s been a fear of following Him, knowing what you might have to surrender. Maybe it’s a fear of obeying Him, knowing that it might require a sacrifice. Maybe it’s uncertainty – the unknown of where He’ll lead you.

You might be running away, but the one pursuing you never gives up His persistent chase. And his plan is always for your (long-term, eternal) good!



When you realize that God never stops calling... what will you do?

Closing

God's call for **Jonah** didn't end when he plunged overboard into the sea. As you know, God arranges for a big fish (*not a whale, sorry!*) to swallow Jonah and puke him out 3 days later so he could try this Nineveh trip once again!

When Jonah realized that God never stops calling...he obeyed.

God's call for the **sailors** had more immediate results. They were awestruck by the Lord's power, and they immediately responded with sacrifices and vows to serve Him.

When the sailors realized that God never stops calling...they worshiped.

What about you? God is calling you. And when you are called by God – generally or specifically – He will never stop calling. So, how will you respond?

- If you are **missing** the call, **stop and listen**.
- If you **heard** the call loud and clear, **obey**.
- If you've been **ignoring** the call, **turn around**.
- If you've **accepted** the call, then **wholly devote** yourself to it...Not for a creed or a cause or a dream or a promise...but simply for Jesus!



Prayer

Invitation

Let me say it again:

- If you are **missing** the call, **stop and listen**.
- If you **heard** the call loud and clear, **obey**.
- If you've been **ignoring** the call, **turn around**.
- If you've **accepted** the call, then **wholly devote** yourself to it...Not for a creed or a cause or a dream or a promise...but simply for Jesus!

During our song of invitation, I invite you to give some thought to your response and pray for God's help in responding well.

Sermon Notes

The Call

(1 Corinthians 7:17a; 2 Thessalonians 2:14; Romans 1:1)

The Book of Jonah

(Jonah 1:1; 2 Kings 14:25)

Jonah Runs Away (Jonah 1:2-3)

Ignoring the Call

(Psalm 46:10; Jonah 4:2)

God Relentlessly Pursues (Jonah 1:4-15)

A Persistent Call

(Jonah 1:9; Isaiah 65:1; Luke 19:10; Ephesians 2:3-5)

Sermon Discussion Questions

Fellowship—Relationship with a Purpose

- What is one thing, if God asked you to do it, that you would have a hard time saying “yes” to? Why would it be difficult for you?

Growth—Thinking About Spiritual Matters

- Read Jonah 1:2. What is Jonah’s assignment?
- What should the (first-time) reader assume about Jonah’s response, knowing how other prophetic books typically go? Do his actions surprise you?
- To what lengths does Jonah go to “get away” from God? Look at the place names on a map and calculate the miles he walked and/or sailed.
- How successful do you think Jonah expected to be in his escape? If the answer is “not very,” then why run?
- Why do you think Jonah was so reluctant to go? See Jonah 4:2.
- How does Jonah’s confession in Jonah 1:9 mark a turning point in his response to God's call?
- Have you ever sensed a general or specific call from God? What was it, and how did you respond?
- What kinds of “noise” in your daily life might be drowning out God's call? Are you making space in your life for silence and reflection so you can actually hear God’s call? What could you do differently this week to listen better?
- Can you relate to Jonah’s fear or reluctance to obey God in a certain area? What is something God may be asking of you that feels uncomfortable or risky?
- What personal “Tarshish” are you running toward instead of facing God’s call head-on?
- When have you seen God pursue you (or someone else) persistently? What did that look like in real life?

- Jonah ran because he didn't want God to show mercy to people he disliked. Is there anyone in your life you're struggling to forgive or share the gospel with?
- What would it look like to "abandon it all for the sake of the call" in your current life stage?

Prayer – Taking Your Thoughts to God

- Pray for bravery to follow God's call, no matter what He asks you to do.