

Jonah: Poor Response to Correction

Jonah 2

By Dave Urbanski

All of us need correction from time to time — but it's not always easy to receive correction, is it? Humanly speaking, we much prefer to think that we're doing things the right way (or, ahem, OUR way). But sometimes it takes a perspective outside ourselves to let us know we're off course. It can be quite humbling, but receiving correction — and receiving it with gratitude — is necessary.

In fact, receiving correction is so important from God's perspective that he says in Proverbs 12:1 that those who hate correction are "stupid." (Yes, that's an accurate translation!)

God is in the business of bringing about change in our hearts, and it was no different for Jonah. This past Sunday we studied Jonah 2, which describes what he does after the fish swallows him. Pastor Scott described that event as a "detour" — no doubt! Before that moment, as we learned the previous Sunday, Jonah was busy running from the will of God, which we also were reminded is a futile endeavor.

But just as it's impossible for Jonah to escape the Lord's reach, God is certainly powerful enough to take Jonah's stubborn, disobedient heart and give this more-than-reluctant prophet the detour he needs. Pastor Scott reminded us about God allowing the Israelites to experience 40 years of wandering in the desert — and emphasized that this was not some kind of divine punishment; rather it was the Lord's grace and a training time so that they might learn how to better trust Him. So if the Lord is giving you a detour — rejoice! That means He isn't through with you yet.

In the case of Jonah, we also learn from him in chapter 2 that the first thing we must do if God gives us a detour is pray. It's an important part of the repentance process — and just as there's no way Jonah could possibly run far enough to escape the Lord's presence, also there's nothing so awful Jonah could do that God would cease to hear him. That same principle applies to us as well!

Let's look again at Jonah's prayer from inside the belly of the fish:

"I called out to the Lord, out of my distress,
and he answered me;
out of the belly of Sheol I cried,
and you heard my voice.
For you cast me into the deep,
into the heart of the seas,
and the flood surrounded me;
all your waves and your billows

passed over me.
Then I said, 'I am driven away
from your sight;
yet I shall again look
upon your holy temple.'
The waters closed in over me to take my life;
the deep surrounded me;
weeds were wrapped about my head
at the roots of the mountains.
I went down to the land
whose bars closed upon me forever;
yet you brought up my life from the pit,
O Lord my God.
When my life was fainting away,
I remembered the Lord,
and my prayer came to you,
into your holy temple.
Those who pay regard to vain idols
forsake their hope of steadfast love.
But I with the voice of thanksgiving
will sacrifice to you;
what I have vowed I will pay.
Salvation belongs to the Lord!"

Pastor Scott told us that because God loves us, He gives us detours when we need correcting. But experiencing a detour doesn't necessarily mean we've sinned. Of course, that is the case for Jonah — but just keep in mind that the Lord also can use detours to get our attention for other reasons.

In Jonah's prayer, we find that he's overwhelmed and has come to end of himself. In fact, there's nowhere else for him to run from the Lord! He's out of options and cannot escape the belly of this great fish. So now he's able to cry out to his creator and determine to do what is right, to do what God commanded him to do. With that, the Lord made the fish vomit Jonah to dry land.

Pastor Scott also spoke of the Lord's "hessid" — or the faithful, unconditional, unfailing love of God. He said it's so BIG that we can "fall back into the hessid" wherever we are. Pastor Scott added that the Lord's favorite word in the New Testament is "grace" — and that "grace" is the same in concept as "hessid." Indeed, no matter how far we've run and no matter what we've done, we can always fall back into the waiting arms of God's grace.

We also see that Jonah lifted up a "voice of thanksgiving" to the Lord amid his prayer — even though he was still in the belly of the fish! Pastor Scott told us that recognizing the importance of giving thanks to the Lord — indeed of expressing gratitude —not because God needs to hear our thanksgiving, but so WE will be changed by our own thanksgiving.

So on this day, stop what you're doing and ask God to show you what he wants from you today — or if you already know, ask yourself if you're doing that thing. And if you're not — or even if you're running from Him — remember you can fall back into the "hessid" of the Lord anytime, and he will catch you and put you back on the right road.