

## LIFE'S STORMS

**-There are many kinds of storms in our world today. There are snowstorms, rainstorms, ice-storms, hailstorms, sandstorms and others that you may have experienced throughout your lives.**

**-But, there are also “non-physical” storms that we as humans go through as well. We tend to call them “life’s storms”. Things that come upon all of us that may turn our world upside down. Like a storm of circumstances that sweeps through our lives and changes everything, sometimes bringing devastation to our souls.**

**-Can you list some life changing storms that people may go through?** (Death of a loved one, divorce, sickness, loss of health, marital or family struggles, financial loss, a move away from loved ones or all that we are familiar with, etc.)

**-How many of you feel like you may be in a “life” storm right now or just coming out of one? Or maybe you know of someone just entering one?(...)**

**-Life is like that, there are stormy times and then there are times of peace after the storms. The storms are not fun, and sometimes they cause us great struggles in our own faith! But, today we are going to look at a man in the Bible who will help us understand this in a very practical way. His name is Jonah! How many of you are familiar with him?** (His story is in the OT book of Jonah.)

**-Using Jonah’s story, we are going to talk about 3 kinds of “life” storms that God allows us to go through to get our attention or the attention of others for His great purpose.**

**-We are going to name these 3 storms the “Correcting Storm”, the “Perfecting Storm” and the “Protecting Storm”.**

**-Now, to understand this, let’s first talk about Jonah. What can you tell me about his occupation?** (He was a Prophet of Israel about 800 years before Christ.)

**-Does anyone remember where God wanted Jonah to go to preach from the book of ‘Jonah’ in the Bible? And why?** (The Ninevites, that they would repent so the Lord would not destroy them for their great wickedness.)

**-Does anyone in here know anything about the Ninevites?** (According to their own historical inscriptions, they were a very cruel nation. They were enemies of Israel and were known to flay their enemies alive, make heaps of their skulls and did other unmentionable cruel deeds. They were popular for their wickedness.)

**-After knowing this, did Jonah immediately obey God and go to Ninevah? Why or why not?** (No, because he hated and feared the Ninevites for what they had done. He was probably afraid for his own life as well.)

**-Are there times, just like Jonah, that we directly disobey God for fear of the outcome? (...)**

**-Even though he was a prophet, he was a man in some ways like us and we can learn from him.**

**-Let’s read aloud our 1<sup>st</sup> verse together on our Verse Sheet to see what he did instead of obeying God:** (Jonah 1:3 “But Jonah ran away from the LORD and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the LORD. “)

**-How many times in this verse does it reference Jonah running or fleeing from the Lord?**

(Twice)

**-Why do you think the Lord had the writer say this twice in one verse?** (Possibly to help us understand how much Jonah was determined to get away from what God had called him to do.)

**-Have you ever tried to run from God, whether it was mentally or physically, because He called you to do something you didn't want to do or think you could do? Whether it was to forgive someone who didn't deserve it or move into a new situation or circumstance that you weren't ready for?(...)**

**-Let me ask you this, can we really flee from the Lord? Why or why not?** (He is everywhere He chooses to be and He chooses to be with us!)

**-Let's read aloud verse #2 on our Verse Sheet to help us understand this:** (Psalm 139:7-12

"Where can I go from Your Spirit? Where can I flee from Your presence? If I go up to the heavens, You are there; if I make my bed in the depths, You are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, *even there Your hand will guide me, Your right hand will hold me fast.* If I say, 'Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me, even the darkness will not be dark to You; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to You.'")

**-According to this verse can you hide from God? (...)**

**-What does it say about God's character when the psalmist wrote "even there your hand will *guide* me, your right hand will *hold me fast*?"** (That in every circumstance God is there guiding and holding us till the end.)

**-So according to these verses we cannot hide from God. Even when we are in the midst of a storm, whether through disobedience or not, He is there. If we will just turn to Him, He will uphold us and guide us in the direction He knows will be best.**

**-As we continue, we realize Jonah could not hide from the Lord. So, let's look at the "Correcting, Perfecting & Protecting Storm" that God brought to change Jonah's heart to stop him from running.**

**-As we continue his story, we find him in a boat heading for Tarshish, trying to run from the Lord. Let's read verse #3 together to see what God does:** (Jonah 1:4 "Then the LORD sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up.")

**-Out of Jonah's disobedience what did God send?** (A Violent Storm)

**-Do you think this violent storm was a "Correcting Storm" for Jonah? Why or why not?** (Yes, because God wanted to wake him up to his disobedience and to correct his ways.)

**-Why do you think God sends "Correcting Storms" into our own lives?** (To get us back on track in fellowship with Him, being one in Spirit with Him, so He can accomplish the work in us that He has planned that will bless us and others as well. He does this because He loves us!)

**-Let's read our next verse together, #4, on our Verse Sheet to help us understand this better:** (Heb. 12:6 "Because the Lord disciplines those He loves, and He punishes everyone He accepts as a son.")

**-If you had/have children, when they were young, why did you discipline them?** (To guide them onto the right path because you loved them.)

**-Much like good parents will discipline their children out of love for them, so does our "Heavenly Father" discipline us out of love for us.**

**-Now let's talk about how this "Correcting Storm" in Jonah's life turned into a "Perfecting Storm" *not only for him, but for those around him as well.***

**-To get us started, let me first ask you... “Do you think your life and how you respond to your situations affect those around you, whether it is your family, friends, or acquaintances? (Absolutely!) Give me some examples of how? (...)**

**-Now, let’s get back to Jonah to see who was being affected that was around him. Do you think he was alone in that ship, and if not, who was with him? (No, there were sailors, and possibly others.)**

**-So his disobedience to God’s will was affecting those around him as well. Much like Jonah, our own disobedience in any area of our heart to the Lord and what He has asked us to do DOES affect those around us!**

**-The sailors knew He was fleeing from God because Jonah told them he was! According to Jonah chapter 1, while Jonah was SLEEPING, the sailors were battling for their lives, trying to do everything to stop sinking into the stormy waters that he had created because of *his* disobedience to God, not theirs!**

**-Let us ask ourselves this question again, are there people around us that may be struggling and sinking in their hearts because of our attitude of complaining over our situations or maybe even disobedience to the Lord in some matter? (...)**

**-If so, we need to stop running and bring it to the Lord so He may perfect our hearts and souls to be a blessing and encourager to others.**

**-When they finally confronted Jonah and asked him why he had done this to them, how do you think he responded? (He did not defend himself.)**

**-Let’s read verse #5 to hear what Jonah has to say: (Jonah 1:12 “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.")**

**-Was he defensive? (No, he became humble.)**

**-God does a “perfecting” work in our hearts to get us where we need to be, humble, so we can repent and be and do what He has called us to.**

**-When someone addresses you about your attitude in your circumstances, are you humble or defensive? (...)**

**-Let’s let God work in our hearts, to “perfect” them, to get us to where He wants us to be so we can receive the blessings He has for us, blessings of peace and hope, so we may share that encouragement to those around us.**

**-So we now see how the “Correcting Storm” for Jonah became a “Perfecting Storm” in his heart, where he humbled himself before God and men. Let’s read who else’s hearts were “perfected” at this time because of all they saw. It’s #6 on our Verse Sheet: (Jonah 1:13-16 “Instead, the men did their best to row back to land. But they could not, for the sea grew even wilder than before. 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.” Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm. *At this the men greatly feared the Lord, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows to him.*”)**

**-According to these verses, can anyone tell me what the sailors did at the end of their journey? (They feared the Lord. They gave offerings and made vows to the one true God.)**

**-So whom did God “perfect” here as well? (The sailors, they came to know Him as Lord.)**

**-Do you think that your gift of humbling your heart to God and what He is calling you to do, whether in attitude, word or deed, is affecting those who are watching you? (...)**

**-Is their view of God better or worse because of your reaction? (Hopefully better.)**

**-How we respond to the storms in our lives does affect others view of God as they watch us go through them, just as these sailors view of God changed as they watched Jonah humble his heart and submit under God's plan.**

**-We have talked about the "Correcting Storm" and "Perfecting Storm" in Jonah's life and how it relates to our own lives. Now let's talk about the final storm, the "Protecting Storm", that God put in Jonah's life and how it relates to us as well.**

**-From what you know of the story, what did God send to "protect" Jonah as he sank into the stormy waters? (A great fish.)**

**-Do you think he was afraid? (...)**

**-Would you be? (Absolutely!)**

**-In life, sometimes our "protection" from the Lord in the midst of the storm can seem more like a punishment or hardship. It can feel very scary. But, when we are able to come through the storm and look back, we are able to see more clearly the hand of God using those hard situations to protect us or move us in the direction He has intended for us. We call these "Protecting Storms".**

**-Let's read together verse #7 to see how Jonah responded while in the belly of this fish (this "Protecting Storm"), not knowing what was going to happen to him. He had been in the fish for 3 days and 3 nights when he said this, let's read it: (Jonah 2:2 "He said: 'In my distress I called to the LORD, and He answered me. From the depths of the grave I called for help, and You listened to my cry.'")**

**-Here he is in this fish, not knowing if it was going to take him into the depths of the sea, and yet he was able to clearly say "Lord, in my distress You answered me. You listened to my cry!" This is really hard but what do you think caused him to be able to say this in the belly of the fish? (Once he got into the state of a humble heart before the Lord, he began to accept what God had for him, realizing that He was Jonah's protector. He realized that no matter what, the Lord had a plan for him and He was going to accomplish it. He had faith in God's provision and not his own opinion. )**

**-Do you believe this for yourself as well? (...)**

**-Do you believe that God has a plan for you and the circumstances that you find yourself in? (...)**

**-Do you believe your circumstances and the way you respond can be an act of worship to the Lord? An act of worship because you are fully trusting and relying on Him and Him alone? (...)**

**-We need to remember this, God looks at us at all times with love, wanting us to be in obedient fellowship with Him, so He may do a good work in our hearts and in our lives. Let's not be afraid of the storms. There is a saying that says "When you get to the end of yourself, you get to the beginning of God!" Let's get to the end of our selves and truly rest and trust in God.**

## “LIFE’S STORMS” VERSE SHEET

1. **Jonah 1:3** “But Jonah *ran away from the LORD* and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish *to flee from the LORD*. “
2. **Psalm 139:7-12** “Where can I go from Your Spirit? Where can I flee from Your presence? If I go up to the heavens, You are there; if I make my bed in the depths, You are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, *even there Your hand will guide me, Your right hand will hold me fast*. If I say, “Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me, even the darkness will not be dark to You; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to You.”
3. **Jonah 1:4** “Then the LORD sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up.”
4. **Heb. 12:6** “Because the Lord disciplines those He loves, and He punishes everyone He accepts as a son.”
5. **Jonah 1:12** “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.”
6. **Jonah 1:13-16** “Instead, the men did their best to row back to land. But they could not, for the sea grew even wilder than before. 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.” Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm. At this *the men greatly feared the Lord, and they offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows to him*.”
7. **Jonah 2:2** “He said: ‘In my distress I called to the LORD, and he answered me. From the depths of the grave I called for help, and you listened to my cry.’”