

Running Away

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In Jonah 1, we meet the prophet Jonah. He is called to preach to the Gentiles of Ninevah because of God's coming wrath. Nineveh, the capitol of Assyria, would one day soon destroy the nation of Israel. This could not have been a request Jonah desired (imagine being asked by God to help preserve a wicked people who, if you are successful, will destroy your country!). Instead of obeying, Jonah ran away.

We might all sympathize with the desire to run away from difficult situations. Jonah is not alone in the Bible in this action. Moses ran away from Pharaoh's wrath (Exodus 2). We might say that the Prodigal son ran away from his Father's oversight (Luke 15). In the book of Philemon it is insinuated that Onesimus ran away from his master Philemon. Yet in each of these cases they all "matured" and returned to complete their tasks or face the consequences.

Today it is not uncommon for members of a local church to run away from their brethren for various reasons. Churches lose members all the time who are fleeing from difficult situations or consequences. We are not speaking about the decision to move, we are speaking about situations where God has given us the course of action we are to take, and we flee instead.

Sometimes we flee because we have problems with brethren. Maybe we are upset because of something the preacher said, or something the elders said. Maybe it was something true that caused us pain (Hebrews 12). Or perhaps it was something they or another brother did that hurt us or was wrong. In either case, Jesus has told us how we are to handle each other. We are to submit to being chastised as Christians (Hebrews 13:17). If our brother sins against us, Matthew 18:15-17 tells us how to handle it. Running away is never mentioned as an option.

Sometimes we flee because we are happy; we have problems with contentment. Scriptures tell us that we are to work to find contentment in our service to God (Philippians 4:11, 1 Timothy 6:8, Hebrews 13:5). Running away is never mentioned as an option.

Sometimes we run away because we have a problem with our behavior. Consider the prodigal sons in Luke 15:11-16. Would it be possible to suppose he left his father because he wanted to live immorally without his father's oversight? Do we sometimes "run away" because we want to sin, and do not want to "feel" the looks or judgments of the local church? We know how we should deal with sin in our lives; running away is never mentioned as an option.

Finally, sometimes we run away from the local church because we fear the consequences of our choices. Consider Onesimus in Philemon. In verse 18-20 it is suggested that perhaps Onesimus, in leaving Philemon, caused some great loss (he stole or broke something). As a runaway slave, Onesimus faced being put to death for his crimes. Yet he was told to return to his master, another Christian. Sometimes the consequences of our sins or choices are devastating. Yet running away is never mentioned as an option.

Running away seems like a solution to many. We all have at least thought of doing it. Sometimes, we face issues in the body of Christ that make us think of running away from Christ or the local church. Yet running away simply compounds the interest of errors. We need to have confidence in God that we can deal with any situation in a Godly way.