

## **"Desperation"**

1996 Stephen King Novel Desperation. **IMAGE 1** A fictional town in Nevada named Desperation...A place where God and evil forces collide. In this #1 Bestseller, 4 people begin to understand their separation from God They realize that their road has led them to Desperation

### **IMAGE 2**

In Desperation they begin to understand the impact of evil forces and their need for God. It is through a revelation from God in a prayer trance, that they are guided to get out of Desperation. Now the book has some theological problems and I don't recommend it for that purpose But it made me start wondering as we have been unpacking Jonah. That our flight from God always leads us to Desperation ...When you or I run from God our destination is not really Tarshish.....it is Desperation.

Jonah was instructed by God to go to Nineveh...but instead He ran to Tarshish. As soon as Jonah made his first step away from God, he was taking the exit to Desperation. Our run from God always eventually leads us to desperation

Our lesson today can be summed in in this sentence.... God allows desperation to bring transformation

Jonah we will see reaches his most desperate moment. He makes a very small turn to God His heart is not yet right and he still has a lot to learn, but he makes a sincere move toward God and God meets him there

Jonah will teach us another truth...The road to transformation goes through Desperation. Once Jonah chose to run from God his road to transformation....the lesson God had for him....had to go through Desperation.

Perhaps you are thinking right now about the times in your life where you found yourself in desperation...It is there that you and I become laser focused on God. Once we reach desperation we can focus on nothing else.

It is in Desperation where God finally gets Jonah's undivided attention and ours too. We are going to visit this experience in Jonah's life in Chapter 2. But before we get there, I need to do just a bit of perspective so that we can understand what is happening in Jonah's story.

The problem with Jonah's story is that to those of us who love logical flow, this second chapter is out of order. We are going to read in this chapter that Jonah is praising God for meeting him in desperation and then just one chapter later Jonah is rebelling again.

Praising God from inside the belly of the fish. Thanking God for delivering him....before he is delivered. Claiming to have turned back and surrendered to God...yet not doing it in Chapter 3&4. How can this be?

Jonah does something in this book that is common to Jewish writers. As you are telling a story you can stop at anytime and praise God for the outcome. Even before you finish the story. This drives our time sequenced Western Minds a bit crazy.

Jonah looks back at his time in Desperation and can't help but interject praise. He begins by telling us what happened...Chapter 1 is a logical flow all the way to the stomach of the great fish.

But once Jonah starts thinking about how desperate he was....how he cried out to God for help....and how God answered him...He couldn't help but stop and praise God for the outcome. That is essentially Chapter 2. Let's look at it.

Jonah 2:1–10 (ESV) 1 Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish, 2 saying, “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. 3 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.

4 Then I said, ‘I am driven away from your sight; yet I shall again look upon your holy temple.’ 5 The waters closed in over me to take my life; the deep surrounded me; weeds were wrapped about my head 6 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. 7 When my life was fainting away, I remembered the Lord, and my prayer came to you, into your holy temple. 8 Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love. 9 But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay. Salvation belongs to the Lord!”

10 And the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land.

Can I just say from the start that I am very thankful for that last verse...Jonah was vomited up on dry land...I am so glad God included that truth. Because there are only 2 ways to get out of the belly of a fish.....We serve a gracious God.

Jonah is looking back at the time he spent inside 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.” Note the pronoun change...I called and He answered me....I cried and YOU heard my voice. Jonah was fleeing from the presence of the Lord, and God took him to Desperation...Jonah cried out to Him....but the response was from You. God had not forgotten Jonah.

Jonah continues...I shall look again upon your holy temple...Jonah describes going down....covered in seaweed...entangled in the bottom of the ocean. He realizes that God rescued him and brought him up. He is at the moment of death and he cried out to God....His prayer made it to the Holy Temple

Remember in week one we talked about how Jonah was running away from All Things God....His people, His nation, and His Temple. The Temple was the place where God dwelt. Where prayers are heard...Where people went to encounter God. In Jonah's desperate moment....He realizes that the place he is running from is the place he needs the most

It is in desperation where we realize that we are desperate for God

Jonah had made a vow. The vow of one who has accepted the call of Prophet on his life. He remembered his vow...and then Jonah teaches us the key lesson of the entire book....

Drum roll please.....**Salvation belongs to the Lord.**

God reminding Jonah....Salvation is mine to give. I give to whom I choose. I gave it to you. If I choose to give it to the Ninevites and Assyrians that is none of your business. It is a gift and it is mine alone to give. You don't earn it...you receive it. So in his greatest moment of Desperation Jonah finally becomes teachable for the lesson God intended from the beginning.

We are truly stubborn people. That is why we find ourselves in desperation so often. We run from God....things go pretty well at first...but then we reach the limitations of what we know to do.

Because we are not being led by the Spirit of God we are left to try to figure out what we should do ourselves. The Spirit of God always tells us to go back and obey. But our flesh, our mind, always lies to us and tells us that we got this. Sort of like that storm we talked about that just has to hit land.

By the time we wake up in our run from God we look around and realize that we are in desperation.

When we get to the end of all that we can do.... When we exhaust all of our options..... We end up in Desperation That place where something supernatural must happen Because all that is natural has failed us There are lessons we can only learn in Desperation

Let me share with you ten truths that you discover in Desperation.

### 1. Desperation is a place of clarity

When we arrive in Desperation we are often surprised to be there. We often didn't see it coming. It was like everything was great and then all of the sudden....it falls apart. Often it is not until we arrive in Desperation that we finally see our situation clearly. There is something about desperate moments that make us finally realize what is really most important

I've been reading lately about the Titanic. **Image 3** There was such a shift in emotion on that ship. This was the ship that they joked even God could not sink....They put their faith in man...at the time it was the pinnacle of Man's Accomplishments.

A modern day Tower of Babel. This was a ship that man built and then man taunted God with it. **Image 4** This ship was an idol for them. It had amazing technology, power, luxury, opulence...Yes it was a great ship

Started out as a party...having a good time. The best alcohol, best food, best china, best service ...so many options to choose from. Each one...seemed so important at the time.....should we... lounge by the pool **IMAGE 5** or head to the bar? Stroll on the deck **Image 6** or finish that novel. What are we going to wear to the crystal dining room? How much bling to show off? What would be the seating arrangements at dinner? **Image 7** Where to go to best be seen. How can we best impress others on this maiden voyage? Little did they know that none of these things mattered....they were moments away from arriving in Desperation.

I have thought a lot about the men who stood on that deck and watched their wives and children descend beyond the rail in those lifeboats and sang **Nearer My God to Thee**. How in that moment...nothing else mattered....except the people they loved. In those desperate moments, matters of the heart come front and center.

In a similar way, our run from God to Tarshish seems like a fun joyride. We pursue our pleasures and run from God. At first we think that we have everything under control. Sin always seems pleasurable to us...it makes sense to us...it seems right to us...it is fun...that is why we do it...that is why we are drawn to it.

But we can't see the future consequences. We are only in the moment. The Spirit of God tries to direct us but we either don't listen or don't yet have His guidance. Once God directs us to obey Him. We are going to learn the lesson that He has planned for us. He is going to transform us. The only question is whether or not we are going to force God to take us to Desperation in order to get our attention and make us teachable.

God pursues us in our rebellion all the way to Desperation. We only get there because He loves us. It is His love that leads us there. In Desperation...reality hits like an iceberg. Your iceberg could be selfishness, drugs, arrogance, pornography, materialism, pride...And that leads us to my second truth about Desperation.

## 2. Desperation is that place where consequences collide with your reality

All of what seemed important was no longer important. Gone were decisions about status, personal pleasure and selfish desires. Immediately desperation clarifies need. You immediately know what you need. You also know that what you need...you don't have In that moment....God gives you the opportunity to cry out to Him to be saved

Jonah 2:7 (ESV) 7 When my life was fainting away, I remembered the Lord, and my prayer came to you, into your holy temple.

Is that where you are today? One minute you are making decisions that promise pleasure. You are dancing and dining in the grand ball room partying like it is 1999...living the life...doing whatever you desire....Your pleasure and needs above anything or anyone else. Worshiping yourself...your accomplishments...showing off your bling....boasting about your position at the table of honor...and not realizing you are on the Titanic

Maybe that moment came to you. Not like Jonah wrapped up in seaweed at the bottom of the ocean

But when your spouse, hurt by unfaithfulness, stares in disbelief and pain. Or maybe it was sitting in an empty house....with a half filled closet....without the frenzied noises of your children.....Maybe it was the moment when your children look in your eyes and ask Why? Maybe for you it was vomiting in a jail cell trying to stop shaking and trying to figure out what happened after you left the bar Or the realization that what you thought was private was now all over the news and social media. Desperation definitely clarifies your situation and it is a place where consequences sink your reality.

### 3. Desperation is that place where false Gods are destroyed by God.

God uses Desperation to teach all of us that He will tolerate no false idols. Desperation peels away every false idol in your life.

Everything that you have put your faith and trust in begins to fail you. Your money....your social status....those you know who are important..... The drink or drug that use to bring good times...Your health....your image....your importance..all of it is scattered in the wasteland around Desperation like road kill.

None of those survive in Desperation...they are systematically and completely destroyed. Every false idol is removed so that you can realize that...the Only thing in the world that we truly need is Jesus. The only thing that we can put our trust in is Jesus

Look at what Jonah realizes about his moment in Desperation.

Jonah 2:8 (ESV) 8 Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love.

Desperation removes everything that keeps us from clearly seeing Jesus

### 4. Desperation is that place where our will is broken by God's Will .

Some of us come to Desperation like a wild stallion. **IMAGE**  
Untamed ...angry....obstinate....mean spirited....unloved....damaged  
from life's trials....Our resistance and rebellion is strong. We are  
ready to hurt anyone who comes near us because we have so much  
hurt inside. No one can tell us what to do....we would rather die  
than change But regardless of how you get to Desperation or how  
rebellious you are God loves you too much to leave you that way.

He lovingly creates situations that break down your resistance and  
reveals to you and me things we did not want to see. Much like  
taming a stallion....there is a point of surrender...God brings us to a  
decision point

#### **5. Desperation Clarifies our Options**

It is interesting how clearly we finally see things when we reach our  
moment of greatest Desperation.

How we respond to that moment is our choice. Jonah ran from the  
presence of God..the temple....But desperation clarified for him his  
need. From Desperation, Jonah looked to the place where God  
dwells. "Yet I shall look again upon your holy temple" There is only  
one way out of desperation. Complete and total surrender of to  
Jesus. Not knowledge about Jesus. Not just making Jesus your  
Savior. You and I get to move past Desperation only when we fully  
surrender to Jesus as our Lord.

#### **6. Desperation demands a decision.**

That is why Jesus brought us here. The sign may as well say...  
"Welcome to Desperation...your rebellion drove you here...God's  
love Guided you here...This is the place where your idols die....your  
resistance is broken and total surrender to Jesus is the only way out"

All of us who are on this journey with Jesus will make return trips to Desperation. The process of dying to our flesh often involves this journey. The whole process of spiritual maturity is to learn how to reach the place God wants to take us...without having to take a detour here. The more we learn to obey God at the start, the less time we have to detour to Desperation along the way.

Jonah was a prophet of God, but still with a huge prejudice problem. I am not even sure that he was aware of it. Sometimes we are blind to the ugliness in our hearts and God has to be show it to us. Other times we know and hoped God would not notice....You know...That area of your life that you haven't allowed Jesus to address....The topic that you skip when you are on your knees or in the Word. The area that needs healing but you refuse to expose in the light of God's truth. When God wants to shine a light on your secrets...and you run for darkness...He will eventually bring you to Desperation

**Mark 4:22 (ESV) 22 For nothing is hidden except to be made manifest; nor is anything secret except to come to light.**

Because like Jonah...you have a lesson to learn You are running in this area.... God lovingly pursues you.... God will reveal to you and others....what you have been hiding God wants you to acknowledge it....and then surrender it. The only way out of Desperation is surrender to Jesus. Clear situation...clear solution...clear response

But the road out of Desperation is where the real journey starts. Leaving desperation behind... Jesus takes us on the journey to Transformation

## **7. Desperation Clarifies our Future**

When you and I are most desperate we long to go back and change the moments of our lives. It becomes so clear what we should have done.

You become more aware of each moment. Your fears of the future or your regrets of the past begin to fade away. The past is past...The future is becoming clearer..

As you grow stronger walking in the Spirit You begin to see everything differently The truth of the Word of God begins to penetrate those areas that you have walled off and God wants to transform. It is as if the Holy Spirit tells you....I have a lesson for you. I am going to transform you and you will be changed. Do you want to go ahead and surrender this area of your life to what I want to do right now? Or do you want me to take you to desperation first?

If you can't surrender your carnal desires to my Lordship....There is a place called Desperation...where I can clarify your situation I can clarify your need I can clarify your action And clarify the future Do you want to surrender now? or Later?

Eventually after enough trips to desperation, you begin to see every event in your life as an opportunity to learn and change

**8. Desperation is a place where gratitude grows and compassion is cultivated.**

We take the road into Desperation stubborn and entitled...but the road out of Desperation is one we take thankful and blessed.

On April 14, 1912 there were 2228 people on the Titanic. After that horrible and desperate night only 710 survived. Do you think those 710 faced their future differently because of that experience? Do you think they appreciated the little things that so often the rest of us miss?

Often desperate circumstances allow you to develop a sense of gratitude. You face the future differently because each day is a gift. Look at what Jonah said after his time in Desperation.

Jonah 2:9 (ESV) 9 But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay. Salvation belongs to the Lord!"

There is something about needing to be comforted that prepares us to comfort others. God calls this compassion

It is hard to have compassion on someone else until you have needed comfort yourself. We go through Desperation and ask God why am I here and what Good could possibly come from this?

Then a day comes along when God places us in the path of someone who is going through exactly what we went through. It is in that moment that we realize that the lesson of Desperation has given us the gift of compassion. It is often by helping others in their desperation that we find true healing for ourselves.

By helping others..... You find healing for yourself And a purpose for your pain Desperation clarifies everything Which leads us to our last truth today.

God allows desperation to bring transformation

#### 9. Only God can lead you out of Desperation.

The story of Jonah is often seen too superficially. We think we know the story. Jonah ran...Jonah almost drowned....Jonah ended up in a fish...Jonah surrendered...and because of Jonah's obedience...God rescued Him. But that is not this story at all.

In the belly of the fish...when Jonah cried out for God's help....He hadn't learned his lesson at all. He was still in rebellion when God rescued him. We are going to see in Jonah Chapters 3 and 4 that Jonah was still full of hate for the Assyrians long after he was thankfully vomited up on the shore.

He obeyed God and headed to Nineveh Like a mad child stomping up the stairs to go clean their room. Obedient yes...happy heart not yet. He is going to obey God in order to leave Desperation, but the full lesson is learned throughout the journey.

In fact, I don't think Jonah FEELS like obeying God at all....but nonetheless he is going to obey. Have you been there? Maybe your marriage was crashing and everything in you wanted to run, but God said...stay.You didn't feel like it ...but you obeyed.

Maybe you were planning revenge on someone who hurt you deeply but God said...forgive. You didn't feel like it but you obeyed. Maybe you were about to step off into an adulterous relationship but God said...turn around and run back to your spouse. You didn't feel like it But you ran nonetheless

God didn't lead Jonah out of Desperation because he had learned the lesson...God didn't lead him out of Desperation because he had fully confessed his sin or racism....God lead Jonah out of Desperation for one reason and one reason only. Jonah's heart moved away from Tarshish and took a step toward God.

All God needed from Jonah to rescue him was for him to make some move toward Nineveh. One baby step of obedience toward God and He does the rest

Is God asking you to take a step? God has areas in your life that He wants to transform. You likely know what it is..Your finances...Maybe a relationship. Someone you must forgive so bitterness doesn't destroy you. Perhaps lust....or anger....or greed....or envy. One move of the heart and you learn the last key point about Desperation.

**10. The road out of Desperation always takes you to Transformation.**

God's original intent in His sovereign will was to take you and me to Transformation. That is the final destination of every lesson from God. God was determined to transform Jonah's heart regarding his hate for the Assyrians. Jonah's racism was gone the moment God decided to begin the lesson. The only issue is how long will this lesson take and what will be required along the way.

When God says to you and me...Rise and Go...we are going to be transformed.

Yes Lord takes us directly to Transformation....

No Lord requires a stop in Desperation along the way.

I want to close with this homework assignment this week. King David prayed...

**Psalm 139:23–24 (ESV)**

**23 Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! 24 And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!**

Do you have the guts to really pray that prayer? Knowing that whatever God reveals...must be changed? We all have areas of our lives that God wants to change. And when God reveals it to us...He only asks us one question....

We are going on a journey to Transformation, do you want to stop by Desperation along the way? I love you enough to do either. Let's Pray.