

Mid-Course Corrections 'Getting Off Course' 3-6-11

God is always in the restoration business. He is always seeking ways to heal us, to mend our brokenness, to bring us off crooked paths and back on straight and solid paths. It is a good thing too because we, as men and women, have proven that we are professionals, experts, at getting off course.

Let's see how easy it is to get off course...(stand up close your eyes and point toward North—open your eyes and look around)

From the beginning, when God said, "Adam you can eat from any tree but that one.", then both Adam and Eve ate anyway, God knew that his time spent on this planet was going to be about restoration, helping people who have gotten off course to get back on course.

It is find to talk about winning our city, region, nation and the world for Christ, but sometimes we have to get personal

In this series I want us to take a look at a guy who became famous for getting off course and let's see if we can learn anything from him.

Here is basically what happen: (Run video clip) God told Jonah to go to Ninevah, a city 550 miles almost straight east of Israel, and save that nation by warning them of his divine judgment. Instead Jonah hopped a boat headed to Tarshish a city on the other side of the Med. Sea, some 2500 miles in the opposite direction.

God's Course vs. Our Course

Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me." But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord Jonah 1:1-3a

So this is how we are introduced to Jonah. In fact, this was a man who could hear the Lord. The plan God put in front of him was very clear. Get up, go to Niveveh and call out against it. From that point, after having been shown God's course, Jonah chose his own course.

Think about this with me, if it is that easy for a man to get off course that knows how to hear God's voice, then how much easier for a man or woman who has never known the Lord.

It reminds me of the passage in Isa.

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord. Isaiah 55:8

It tells me that the path to Christ-likeness is not just one decision and then you are there. It is a life-long process, in which peoples thoughts and ways steadily get transformed. It is filled with detours and wrong ways and dead-ends. All of them however, were known by God and allowed by God to bring us to places in our lives where we can say "I need a Mid-Course Correction" But in order to understand our own personal need for a mid-course correction we need to understand the realities of being off course.

The Realities of Being Off Course

I have listed 4 here today. Chapter 1 serves as a reality check that we can learn from Jonah
The first reality when we have chosen our own course

1. We Pay the Fare.

“He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare and went on board, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord.”

Jonah 1:3b

Not only did Jonah get off course from the direction that God was calling him to, he PAID to do it. God had called Jonah in this direction → and Jonah paid to get on a ship headed in this direction ←.

How often, if we just stop and think about it, do we not only get off course but we actually paid the tab to do it.

1. People who chose to gossip and talk behind others backs and then wonder why no one trusts them with any significant issues.
2. Mothers or Fathers who drink and remain emotionally distant from their families then wonder why their sons and daughters don't want to be around them when they are older.
3. Teenagers blow school off as a waste of time then wonder why minimum wage is the best they can do

One of the realities of getting off course is that we have to come face to face with the fact that we are the ones who actually chose to be in the position we find ourselves. When this happens to us and we come to that spiritual realization we agree with the scripture Romans 3:23

“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

Romans 3:23

We have all gotten off course, we have all lost our way, whether intentionally like Jonah in this story or by simply doing nothing. So many of us have just let ourselves drift away from what we know God has been calling us to. The first reality of 'Getting Off Course' is that we have to come face to face with the fact that we chose it., sometimes it is groups, sometimes it's churches or communities or nations, and sometimes it is simply you or me.

The second reality is about the storms that come our way when we get off course.

2. Storms Reveal our Alliances.

Jonah has paid to be on this ship headed across the Med. Sea and it says:

“But the Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship threatened to break up. Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried out to his god.” *Jonah 1:4-5a*

Can you picture this with me. The storm hits this ship and suddenly it is every man for himself. Each person in the group begins to cling to that which is most familiar. It happens to all of us, when storms hit, whether marriages, or families or even churches we all tend to show what and who we are in alliance with:

1. If your god is Alcohol, and a storm hits your marriage, then down to the bar you will go.

2. If the computer is your god, and your parents start fighting, then you bury yourself in video games.

3. If scripture is your god and bad stuff starts happening in your church, then you will go find your most familiar verses and use them to prove your point.

Gods come in all shapes and sizes and these men on this boat started calling on their gods and it showed who they were allied with.

When God gave the 10 commandments to Moses the first thing he said was “You shall have no other gods before me.” This is not easy, and it is one more reason why as a church we must be in unity, to help each other with this.

A third reality about getting off course is that:

3. Our Coping Skills are Unveiled.

‘But Jonah had gone down into the inner part (below deck) of the ship and had lain down and was fast asleep. So the captain came and said to him, "What do you mean, you sleeper? Arise, call out to your god! Perhaps the god will give a thought to us, that we may not perish."’ Jonah 1:5c-6

When it is smooth sailing, everybody is up on deck, soaking in the sun. But when we get off course or we encounter rough waters we find out how each person deals with things. Now remember we are specifically looking at Jonah and Jonah went *into the inner part of the ship* another version says he “went below deck”. Have you ever seen a person go “below deck” in their life.. It is a tough sight to witness.

(Dan’s moment of ministry & life meltdown)

There tends to be 1 of 3 general reasons why people come to a place where they are out of commission:

1. Dead-end: this is where life falls apart as a result of consistent bad choices that brings their journey to a screeching halt.

2. Deep Disappointment: this happens when a person looks at their life and comes to the conclusion that they have fallen short of what they thought would happen.

3. Holy Discontent: this is the person who is living with the fact that they know God has more in store for their life, but they just cannot put their finger on what it is, or what to do about it. They would say “off course” yeah, but they simply don’t know what to do about it.

Jonah is experiencing one or more of these reasons and furthermore it said he had *‘laid down and was fast asleep’*. He choose the way of denial, he decided to become totally unaware of his environment, as if he was the only one that mattered and that his choices would not affect anyone

else. How many of us know people who right in the season when they need to be most alert, most focused, they simply checked out.

1. They lay down on the couch & start **watching TV or eating or shopping**

These are normal activities, but when a person's life is not on course these activities are unveiled as the unhealthy coping mechanisms that they are. They keep us from addressing the real issues in our lives. Sleeping, was a normal activity, all of us would agree with that. But sleeping at this particular time shows us something much deeper about Jonah. He was not addressing his real calling in life.

In these times we need 'Captains' to call us out. People that we have in our lives that can speak truth to us. I read a line in a book, one time it said. "He spoke words that went straight to my heart and thrived there." In Jonah's case it was the captain of the ship, who started the ball rolling to Jonah's turn around.

But there is a 4th reality as well

4. A Price has to be Paid.

A price has to be paid for us being off course. Scripture says:

"So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea". Jonah 1:15

There came a moment, for Jonah, when he realized that he needed to pay for his mistake. Verse 12 says He admitted, It's me, it's my fault." This is an amazing moment in a person's life, when they just stop running away or trying to do enough good things to atone for themselves, or they just stop trying to blame everyone else and they simply say, "I'm the one who is wrong. I'm the problem" And we stand before God and whoever else and say, "I am willing to accept the consequences."

It is then in that moment that we turn to God and we receive a fuller understanding of Romans 6:23

*"For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."
Romans 6:23*

And we realize that God stepped into that whole picture and, in terms of eternity, let his Son be thrown overboard instead of us. Let his Son take the penalty for us being off course.

So with our eternity secure because of what Christ did for us, we can face each risky change without fear, we can surrender, we can take our own blame and make the needed changes.

Each of us was born with an internal compass that points us toward true north and we also know when we are off course, I want to invite you in this next season to look at your compass, your God relationship, the purpose for which God placed you on this planet, and if you are off course, to admit it, and to say, “With everything in me, whatever the mid-course correction I need to make, I want to get back on course.

Let's pray