



# INTO THE BELLY OF THE WHALE

- Jonah 1 & 2

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*The sea had jeeringly kept his finite body up, but drowned the infinite of his soul. Not drowned entirely, though. Rather carried down alive to wondrous depths, where strange shapes of the un-warped primal world glided to and fro before his passive eyes; and the miser-merman, Wisdom, revealed his hoarded heaps; and among the joyous, heartless, ever-juvenile eternities, Pip saw the multitudinous, God-omnipresent, coral insects, that out of the firmament of waters heaved the colossal orbs. He saw God's foot upon the treadle of the loom, and spoke it; and therefore his shipmates called him mad. So man's insanity is heaven's sense; and wandering from all mortal reason, man comes at last to that celestial thought, which, to reason, is absurd and frantic; and weal or woe, feels then uncompromised, indifferent as his God. Herman Melville – Moby Dick*

*Others went out on the sea in ships - they were merchants on the mighty waters. They saw the works of the Lord, his wonderful deeds in the deep. For he spoke and stirred up a tempest that lifted high the waves. They mounted up to the heavens and went down to the depths - in their peril their courage melted away. They reeled and staggered like drunken men - they were at their wits' end. Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble, and he brought them out of their distress. He stilled the storm to a whisper - the waves of the sea were hushed. They were glad when it grew calm, and he guided them to their desired haven. - Psalm 107:23-3*

When I was twenty years old, I heard a voice call out to me across an infinite sea: "Follow Me." The call was so clear and compelling, I gave away everything I had at the time to live a life fully devoted to ministry. For a time, all went well. I found love and purpose. Life was good. Years, like golden grains of sand, passed uninterrupted through the hourglass of time. Then one dreadful day, the hourglass was knocked over by unclean hands. [The Day The Devil Came To Church](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DUZrgxAEYPs) (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DUZrgxAEYPs>) had come. As golden grains were denied passage, temporal time was suspended with timeless trauma. Trauma touched me and I froze in horror as leprous shame, white as a whale, spread until I could no longer feel or remember my true name. I became an outcast and lived like a fugitive lurking in the shadows of who I once was but could no longer be.

Running from my painful past, I set sail for a new world. I searched for a sea without memory - a sea where I could drown my sorrow with success. Just as I tasted the sweet wine of success, it became bitter, shallow and empty in my mouth. A holy hangover came over me. Dark clouds gathered. The wind whipped the sea into frenzy. My soul still slumbered in shame below the surface while my life above as a ship, threatened to break in two. The sea began to rage and foam at the mouth in a peculiar madness that felt more intentional than insane - as if it was acting insane on purpose to interrupt my plans, anything to wake me, even if it meant hurting me to heal me. Even if it meant killing me to wake my heart again because *true transformation happens not when something new begins but when something old ends*. The lies that lie in our wounds are often so deep and deadly; they will kill you out of kindness before they kiss you as a resurrected king or queen. Life and death are born of the same suffering womb and I was scared to death how it all might end, but avoiding death only leads to loss of life - the abundant life Christ promised.

To prevent loss of innocent life, I agreed, like Jonah, to let others throw me overboard thinking perhaps this desperate measure would quiet the disquieted sea for others. But when the time came to be thrown overboard, the faces of the people chosen to do the dreadful deed, suddenly blurred in the spray of a salty sea that made me weep. Between bitter tears, a sweet, luminous presence grew onboard. Humanity hid itself as a Holy One appeared. Fingers of fire not of flesh, "*hurled me into the deep, into the very heart of the seas.*"<sup>1</sup> The power of paradox, the "deep magic" of the sacred gospel of Jesus Christ was scandalously at work. God was using evil to defeat evil for a greater good. Immediately, the sea grew calm but my heart remained disturbed as I descended into the dark, inky sea that writes the tale only tears can tell. "*The deep surrounded me; seaweed was wrapped around my head. To the roots of the mountains I sank down.*"<sup>2</sup>

As I sank to the mountains roots deep beneath the sea, the sounds of the sea began to surround me. Crinkling, popping noises, like pings vibrating on steel, reverberated in my ears. I could hear the movements of the sea as it swooshed

and swirled through deep canyons, across vast plains of golden sand, ascending and descending ridge upon ridge of endless corral until at last its waves crashed upon white shores. And there was another sound, distinct yet not unlike the other sounds of the sea - the sound of idols being crushed and overturned like shattered shells in the pounding surf. I could not see it, but a holy hammer that suffers no other gods bedside God was crushing idols with something I least understood – Grace. Grace is like water. She descends to the deepest depths of our depravity to drown us into our deepest life - a waking dream where we learn to breath where there is no air.

Just as my lungs were about to burst for lack of air, I opened my mouth to inhale the sea only to realize something in the sea was inhaling me. A great white whale, oddly the same color of my leprous shame, swooped me up and swallowed me whole as if shame was swallowing shame until it was no more. A fleeting thought entered my mind: “Could God be the whale? Had He sent Himself to deliver me from me? Is He using even my shame and pain to lead me back to Him?” As I wondered, slipped and slid down slimy passages, salt began to pour into my open wounds. I was overcome with beautiful agony – that awfully good place where exquisite pain mingles with eternity’s pleasure. One moment I begged to die, the next to live forever as a bittersweet womb wept wonder into my wounds. The Holy One was hiding in my wound as if it were a hole in my heart only He could fill. Inside this whitewashed tomb, I somehow lost my dead religion and found something real and alive - a divine romance. Spiritual programs, formulas, numbers, places suddenly became actual people - friends with names and faces. In the belly of the whale, suffering was giving me vision to see beyond sight. I met the enemy. The enemy was I. I desperately needed to be rescued from me - from my self-hatred drowning in shame.

While my heart began to heal, see and remember, self-hatred masking itself as self-righteous pride, fell of my false face. My small dreams of shallow success were slowly and painfully digested into something as deep, unfathomable and elusive as the sea itself – significance; the thing we seek like mad Captain Ahab across seven seas though we hardly know what it is because it lives and breaths outside us as truth and myth like a great white whale whose life is mysteriously connected to our own. Our lives are intertwined together with ropes and harpoons we lash out each other until every oath is broken or fulfilled. Until we rage and can rage no more against the dark and bitter night. Until we sail the seven seas to the ends of the earth and find a new beginning in God that never ends. On this very edge of madness, miracles exist. Here the future begins to run through the past to stand exhausted and fully present in the present. And it is here that the great white whale vomited my stowaway heart upon dry land as a castaway of grace.

When you’ve paid destiny’s fare, misery becomes your message and God will command your past to throw up your present future on strange and surreal shores. Shores that make you feel like you are a bystander to your own story –

as if a larger narrative has swallowed your small story whole. There is madness and mystery in that. On one hand you are living for something larger than self. On the other, the life you once knew and idolized no longer lives. Memory, once awakened becomes the tyrant. And this tyrant reminds you of what you lost- all of it. This drives us into madness or mystery, deep regrets or a divine romance.

In the space between regret and romance, I began to understand: “*Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs.*”<sup>3</sup> Idols are not always bad things. They can be good things. Idols can be a vice or virtue but they all have one thing in common – they are lesser lovers. They cause us to love them more than God. I idolized my once seemingly perfect life. When ministry and business were going well. When the family was still together. When I still had a house to live in. Grain by grain of golden sand, I begin to realize, my life is not my own. It never was. It never will be. To believe anything else is an illusion. God knew I did not have the strength to destroy my own idols including my perfect life, so in an act of severe mercy and awful grace, heavens holy hammer did it for me. Inside my cracked idols, I found these hidden truths of grace:

- Failure can set us aside in humiliation or it can set us apart in humility that brings forth a holy mission.
- Shame pushes you to the side. God places you apart. The space in-between is grace.
- When God calls, He never hangs up.
- Silence is our shame we misinterpret as His blame.
- Failure humbles us so we can be proud of grace.
- When we do our worst, grace does her best.
- Success might impress but failing forward makes an impact.
- Pain connects us to others who are suffering to create positive change.
- Wherever we are, God’s presence is already there.

I am no longer afraid to touch the leprous, unfeeling, hidden parts of the human heart because God has healed me of the same disease: Shame. My pain and misery have become a powerful message for the masses. I can now say what Jonah said, “*You brought my life up from the pit.*” Always remember this: God often chooses His candidates from the pit as a passage to the palace. That’s worth a wild ride to “*the far side of the sea*” where a whale spits you out exactly where you were meant to be in spite of yourself for Him.

## References:

1. Jonah 2:3
2. Jonah 2:5,6a
3. Jonah 2:8
4. Jonah 2:6b

## **Further Contemplation:**

*He reached down from on high and took hold of me; he drew me out of deep waters...I am still confident of this; I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living...I will not die but live, and will proclaim what the Lord has done. The Lord has chastened me severely, but he has not given me over to death...The Lord does whatever pleases him, in the heavens and on the earth, in the seas and all their depths...Though the Lord is on high, he looks upon the lowly, but the proud he knows from afar...The Lord will fulfill his purpose for me; your love, O Lord, endures forever – do not abandon the works of your hands...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 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. For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, and your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.*

- Psalm 18:16; 27:13; 118:17,18; 135:6; 138:6,8, 139:7- 16

## **About The Author:**

Kevin DeVries is a Keynote Inspirational Speaker, Entrepreneur-Explorer, Author-Adventurer, Dutch immigrants' son and loving father of two from Grand Rapids, MI. In addition to starting and selling several companies across diverse industries, Kevin served as a Director and Consultant for several faith-based, non-profit organizations across the country. As Founder & President of [GRACE EXPLORATIONS](http://www.GraceExplorations.com) (www.GraceExplorations.com) "a spiritual guide service helping wandering and wounded hearts find home and healing in Christ", Kevin combines a business mind and a pastor's heart with an explorer's soul and a poet's pen as a passionate voice reaching the hurting hearts of women and men.

From 2009-2013, Kevin was a Lead Mountaineer for ARK SEARCH, LLC engaged in a scientific search of Noah's Ark on Mt. Ararat, Turkey. Kevin has climbed five of the seven continental summits, skied to the North Pole; expedition-kayaked all five of the Great Lakes and is a 2013 Boston Marathon Qualifier and Finisher. His lifelong goal is to complete what only a few dozen explorers have dared to dream and do: The Explorers Grand Slam – Climb the

Seven Summits and Ski to the North and South Pole. To complete the challenge, Kevin needs to climb Mt. Everest and Mt. Vinson, the tallest peaks in Asia and Antarctica respectively along with skiing to the South Pole.

Based on all his adventures across six continents in over sixty countries and nearly every state in the US, Kevin is writing an epic, 2000 page, four-book series: **Explorers Of The Lost Ark** (<https://graceexplorations.com/books/>) to fundamentally and figuratively change how people think and feel about God through The Power of True Myth. The series is the literal story of Ark exploration that fades in and out of a sprawling, poetic, dream vision reminiscent of Dante, Milton, Bunyan, MacDonald, J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis' sanctified myths as it attempts to express the unexplainable – Grace. Whether guiding climbers, ministering to men, bleeding words on paper, giving an inspirational talk or leading a faith-based journey to the ends of the earth, Kevin embraces the experience economy where imagination is ignited to distill dreams into destiny.

Kevin DeVries is your next Inspirational Speaker. His epic, unforgettable story of redemption will change your life. While climbing five of the seven continental summits, skiing to the North Pole and searching for Noah's Ark as an intrepid explorer in the award-winning film: **FINDING NOAH**, ([www.findingnoah.com](http://www.findingnoah.com)) Kevin endured divorce, bankruptcy and loss of home to reach the naked soul of man. In quiet desperation, he climbed into "thin air" where eternity's weight thins time to heal trauma where trails end and Truth begins. Kevin can guide you to this true place unknown to any map except the heart. The greatest journey is within because the greatest discovery is "Who finds you when you're looking for something else." Kevin sought the Ark and found the face of God. You'll be fascinated by what he's discovered for your own life. Be A Hero. Book Kevin To Speak @ <https://graceexplorations.com/speaking-calendar/>