

GOING DEEP WITH JONAH

“So, how did you get the idea for *The Jonah Complex*?”

Although several people encouraged me to write a sequel to *Mirror Images*, it wasn't anything I ever intended to do—until I was sitting in church one Sunday, listening to a sermon based on the first chapter of Jonah. The pastor used the familiar story of Jonah and the whale as an example of God's sovereignty. Although Jonah refused God's first command to go to Ninevah, He used extraordinary measures to make sure Jonah eventually did what he was told. The simple verses that spoke to me that morning were Jonah 3:1-2, “Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying, ‘Arise, go to Ninevah ...’”

God didn't give up on Jonah despite his disobedience and reluctance. He spoke to Jonah a second time, giving him a second opportunity to respond, a second chance to live out his destiny. The germ of a story rooted—one with a theme clearly in mind before there was a single character, plot, or word written. God is a God of second chances. He doesn't leave us mired in past mistakes or sins. He calls to us over and over, giving us a second chance to be forgiven, to heal, to start anew. To be redeemed.

I needed a bright but flawed protagonist mired in the pain of her past—a perfectionist who didn't believe in second chances—and a playful way to tie his or her story to the Jonah of the Bible. I remember reading about something called the Jonah Complex in a psychology class and started to research. I learned the phrase was coined by eminent psychologist, Abraham Maslow, to describe an abnormal aversion to self-actualization (doing or becoming one's best) out of fear of failure.

I was immediately struck by several ironies in Maslow's use of the Biblical character to describe this condition. First, Jonah of the Bible had exactly the opposite problem—his initial refusal to evangelize Ninevah was not out of fear of failure but out of fear of success—he hated the Ninevites and didn't want them to be saved. And second, rather than self-actualizing, Jonah had to die to Self to become all God wanted him to be.

In a way, Maslow's secular take on Jonah's complex not only gave me the title for the book but protagonist Bai Donovan's profession, the ultimate truth learned in her story arc, and the opening line of the novel. I like that the title, *The Jonah Complex*, a term commonly associated with secular psychology, alludes to the Biblical story of a man who gets a second chance to achieve his full potential—but only by dying to self and discovering God's will for his life.