

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from God's Pursuit

Intervention Technique or PIT, Jesus Christ our Savior, amen.

Have you ever heard of a common police tactic for ending car chases called the Pursuit Intervention Technique or PIT maneuver? It's a technique where the police vehicle bumps the rear of the bad guy's car and forces him to spin out. The police then use their own vehicles to block the bad guy's car so they effectively end the chase. Here's a short video to show you what I'm talking about... (Show Video clip)

An increasing number of law enforcement agencies across the country are using the PIT maneuver as a way to bring car chases to safe conclusions. Using this tactic, an officer in pursuit uses their vehicle as a weapon to force a fleeing car to abruptly swivel sideways, thus going into a spin resulting in a loss of control by the driver. If this maneuver is initiated in an area where property and citizens are not at risk, it is a safe alternative to chasing a suspect into populated areas.

It might be unpleasant to use this as a metaphor for our relationship with God, but, in fact, it is a very common one, not only in the Bible, but in literature. In the Bible one common metaphor for God's people is they are always running. They're often described as running away from God who, is usually depicted as wooing or chasing them. Think about the story of Jonah. Jonah is perhaps the best

example. God's hand is upon him, telling him exactly what God wants him to do.

Jonah isn't comfortable with what God has in mind, and he tries to sneak away.

He takes a compartment in the steerage of a ship hoping to hide out. You know the story... God sends a bad storm and Jonah is identified as the cause of the storm so the crew throws him overboard where he's swallowed up by a large fish. God's PIT maneuver in this case is the great fish God used to swallow Jonah. Game over. After three days, the leviathan, irritated by the large lump in its stomach, spits Jonah onto a beach where he lies prostrate and in complete surrender to the will of God.

The psalmist David writes, "Where shall I go from your spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence?" (Psalm 139:7). In my own case, I was told by my mother from the time of my earliest memories that she had bargained with God for a son. I was to be dedicated to serve God and to go into ministry. I've told you my story before, so I'll make it brief. I ran away from that calling as long and as far as I could go. We ended up in Alaska where I was hiding out from God's claim on my life. In my case God's PIT maneuver consisted of an extremely bad assignment. I was working 16 hours a day, 7 days a week and was neither satisfied nor appreciated by the powers and authorities of the Air Force leadership. In the depths of my worst assignment in my Air Force career, God executed his PIT maneuver on me and spun me around, out of control until I finally realized God

was pursuing me out of great love and grace. It wasn't to punish me for all those years of running away from His calling, but to once again reissue that call. This time I listened and like Jonah, fell prostrate in surrender.

It's weird. Sometimes we mortals believe we can outrun and outmaneuver God. Many people experience what I did while I was hiding from God in Alaska. God always keeps after us. God is as persistent as a hunting dog on the trail of its prey. A good hunting dog will not give up, but keep on the chase, constantly getting closer and closer. God's like that. God keeps after us no matter how far or fast we run away. God is always calling us to come and follow. Unfortunately we keep on running and hiding, until God uses some significant event in our lives to perform God's Pursuit Intervention Technique to get our attention and move us back onto the path God intends for all His Children.

Let's review this analogy... When the police engage a suspect in a car chase, they hope first that the vehicle will run out of gas. God hopes we'll get tired of running away and just stop in our tracks and return to Him. Failing that, the police hope the suspect will have a change of heart. The suspects who flee clearly understand the law takes a dim view of their behavior. We also feel God's righteous anger when we sin and run. It's called our conscience. It's that little voice in your head that says you're guilty, stop and face the music... Next, the police officers in pursuit might try to get roadblocks into place. Failing that,

officers may throw spike strips across the road. God tries to get our attention in every possible way and uses our family, our friends and even sometimes total strangers to help you see the error of your ways. When all means have been exhausted, the chief of police will authorize the PIT maneuver. The officer's car now becomes the tool bringing the suspect's surrender. The patrol car makes contact with the suspect's rear fender and then pushes it sideways, sending the vehicle into a spin and causing a loss of control. Then, surrounded with no place to go, the runner emerges from the car with hands in the air, and then is usually told to kneel, and then may be asked to lie prostrate, whereupon he is cuffed and taken into custody. This patience and reluctance by law enforcement is mirrored in the way God handles us during the chase. God is relentless, but unhurried. God is patient with us yet passionate for us.

God begins by giving human beings free reign in the created world. Unfortunately, our rebellion is obvious and odious. God provides in writing what humans should have known in their hearts: the "law." The running continues... God pursues... God sends adversity, obstacles, defeats, wars and pestilence and still — after momentary repentance — the resistance and fleeing continues... God sends prophets to be His voice in the world, to remove any ambiguity we may have about God's love and aspirations for us. Through the prophets, God reminds us that — by all rights — God is the one who should be running away from our

mess... It's the people who should be chasing after God who, in turn, would be justified in washing his hands of the whole affair.

Our second reading from Romans chapter 5 explains how the PIT maneuver works. The tool or vehicle is the cross. After providing the law, sending the prophets and exposing the people of God to disciplinary adversity, which failed to curb rebellion and disobedience, God uses the cross as a battering tool to send us spiraling into submission, hands in the air, on our knees and prostrate before him in complete surrender. Of course, like all metaphors, this one breaks down because, unlike the police, God is not going to force us to get out of the car, hands in the air, kneel and surrender. Although God's not going to force us to surrender, Paul explains why surrender is our best option. In this letter to the Church in Rome he's already reminded us that "God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us" (v. 8).

These verses from our second reading this morning, although theologically dense, explain how God through Jesus Christ exercised a PIT maneuver on humans determined to go their own way. The cross nudges us out of control, tips us out of our comfort zone, knocks us silly and sideways, and does it all with sacrificial love.

Today is the first Sunday of Lent. If we're ever going to start anew, there's no better time than now. Perhaps we should stop running. Perhaps we should reverse direction, and instead of driving the wrong way against traffic, turn our lives around and go in the right way with Jesus. If we don't sense the cross as an intervention technique, perhaps God has other ones that will bring us to attention. Either way, today is a good day to put our hands up in surrender. Today is a good day to get down on our knees. This is the meaning of the cross: There can be no more running away and here's the good news, when we stop running and return to God we're met by God's open arms, God's lavish grace, and God's best celebration.

May God, who loves you more than we deserve, relentlessly chase you and persistently continue to offer you grace and mercy. As you meditate on God's infinite love for you, may the Cross of Christ be the perfect tool for God to execute God's Pursuit Intervention Technique on your life. May you come to realize the breadth and depth of God's love for you so you will return to the Lord and surrender your life to him, not in handcuffs or chains, but out of gratitude for God's unfailing love all for you. Amen.