

# Our Struggles and God's Love

## Jonah 4

### Leader Discussion guide

#### Illustrations Used:

- As we have looked at this book, who do you identify with the most: Ninevites, Jonah, or God?
- Everyone loves (is nice) to someone. Lk 6:32
- Augustine – “Incurvatus in se” = curved in on self.
- Prodigal Son – we love the story. The Father rises and goes out to him. There is another brother: Older Brother.

#### Comprehension Questions:

1. Summarize the book so far. Read Jonah 4.
2. Jonah struggled with a lack of love.
  - a. What verses do we see Jonah's lack of love?
  - b. Who did he not love? Why?
3. Jonah struggled with anger.
  - a. Why was Jonah displeased exceedingly?
  - b. How did Jonah act in his anger?
  - c. What did God do when Jonah was angry?
4. Jonah struggled with self-centeredness.
  - a. What verses do we see Jonah's self-centeredness?
  - b. What did Augustine mean when he wrote: “Incurvatus in se” = curved in on self?
  - c. How does God compare a plant to a great city? What is God's point?
5. What are the main themes of Jonah? What do we learn about people? What do we learn about God?

#### Application Questions:

1. What character do you identify with most in the Book of Jonah? Ninevites, Jonah, or God? In what ways are you like that character?
2. In Jonah's anger, God did not just tell him to: Stop It! Stop being angry. Why do you think God asked him questions? What implications does this have for us as we help others?
3. Jonah's struggle is often our struggle. We may love people who are like us, people who like us. But we find it hard to love people who are different than us. People who don't like us, or who make our life harder. Let's assume we all struggle with this to some degree. How do we fight against this struggle?
4. This is a good question to ask, when we are angry “Is it right for me to be angry?” Anger exposes our heart. How does anger expose our hearts?
  - a. What makes you happy? This reveals our heart. How?
5. Of the three struggles, (lack of love, anger, self-centeredness) which do you think God is calling you to grow in today? How does this show up in your life? What does growth look like?
6. What does the story of the Prodigal Son communicate about God's Love? Where do you see God's love in Jonah? Where do you see God's love in your life?
  - a. Do you ever struggle to believe that God loves you?

## Extended Outline:

**Illus:** As we have looked at this book, who do you identify with the most: Ninevites, Jonah, or God?

I think God intends for most of us to identify with Jonah. He is a prophet and a believer in God. In Chapter 4, as one author puts it: "Jonah shows himself to be a man still in human skin, prone to wander and sin, inclined to give in to anger, despair, and self-justification in spite of his transformation in the fish." In other words, he is a lot like us. God wants this story to serve as a mirror, exposing our hearts. And God wants us to see His tender mercy towards struggling people.

### 1. Struggle with a lack of love.

- a. 4:1 – Jonah is displeased because Nineveh wasn't destroyed.
- b. 4:2 – Tells us why he didn't go to Nineveh in the first place.
  - i. Jonah understands God's love. – this is a quotation from Exodus 34. Jonah has the right theology, but not the right character.
  - ii. **App:** Knowledge doesn't = maturity. Right doctrine doesn't = Christ-likeness. We can understand God's love in our head, but not have God's love in our heart.
- c. Jonah may have seemed like a pretty loving guy in Israel.
  - i. **Illus:** Everyone loves (is nice) to someone. Lk 6:32, "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you; even sinners do that."
- d. Jonah lacked love for people who were different than him.
  - i. **Exp:** Nineveh: capital of Assyria. Enemy of Israel. Different language, culture, and religion. Treated Israel badly.
  - ii. So he didn't want good for Nineveh.
- e. **App:** Jonah's struggle is often our struggle. We may love people who are like us, people who like us. But we find it hard to love people who are different than us. People who don't like us, or who make our life harder.
  - i. This lack of love for those who are different, keeps us from crossing cultures / language barriers / oceans. It keeps us from crossing the street. Or even across the room at church. To love someone.
- f. **App:** Is there someone you don't love? That you don't want good for?

### 2. Struggle with anger.

- a. V1- He was angry. Displeased exceedingly. Why?
  - i. He is angry that things are going well for others. Been there?
  - ii. He is displeased at the way God has handled things. Been there?
  - iii. He is unhappy with his circumstances. Been there?
  - iv. He is not content with the job God has given him, Been there?
- b. V3 – If he can't have what he wants, life is meaningless.
- c. V4 – God asks him a question: "Do you do well to be angry?"
  - i. Notice he doesn't just say, "Don't be angry." God is not after mere external conformity. He wants Jonah to see what is in his heart.
  - ii. **App:** This is a good question to ask, when we are angry "Is it right for me to be angry?" Anger exposes our heart.
- d. V5 – Jonah doesn't respond. He builds a booth and watched Nineveh.

### 3. Struggle with self-centeredness

- a. Well, Jonah doesn't want to talk, so God takes another approach.
  - i. Verses 6 – The vine makes him happy. His own personal comfort.
    1. **App:** What makes you happy? This reveals our heart.

- ii. Look what makes him sad: Verse 7-8 – loss of shade. Hot east wind.
- b. V9 – God asks “Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?”
  - i. Jonah: Yes, I am right! App: We all tend to justify our anger.
- b. Illus: Augustine – “Incurvatus in se” = curved in on self.
  - i. App: We are made to live outwardly. Loving and loving others. But we all have this tendency to be curved in on self.
- c. V10 God says, “what about this great city?” He is trying to set Jonah free from his self-centeredness and lack of love.

**4. The main thing we are supposed to see in Jonah 4 and the book is God’s love.**

- a. V2: quote from Exodus 34. God is indeed gracious and merciful.
- b. God is showing Jonah that His grace is not limited to just him & his people.
  - i. V10 – He cares about Nineveh, the great city, 120,000 people.
  - ii. App: God’s love is not limited to outwardly moral and religious people. God’s grace is not just for America or our friends or our race. In fact, Christians must reject all forms of racism and hatred and must work to root it out of our hearts, whether it be overt white supremacy, or the silent valuing of my group over others.
    - 1. Because all people are made in the image of God and therefore have inherent value and dignity.
    - 2. Because Jesus died to save people from every nation, and tribe, and language.
  - iii. See Rev 5:9 - This is the heart of missions.
- c. God isn’t just gracious and merciful to all nations. God loves individuals who struggle with a lack of love, with anger, with self-centeredness. People like Jonah, people like me, and you.
  - i. We have a hard time admitting some of these things, even to ourselves. Afraid what people would think. What God thinks.
  - ii. See how God moved toward Jonah in love.
- d. **Illus:** Prodigal Son – we love the story. The Father rises and goes out to him. There is another brother: Older Brother.
  - i. Read Luke 15:25-32.
  - ii. He stays outside. He is angry (Lk. 15:28), The Father goes out to him; the son is self-centered (v29), lacking love (v30).
  - iii. V32 – But just like with Jonah, the Father calls him, just as he called Jonah to come in and join the party. To enjoy and rest in God’s grace
- e. **App:** If you are sitting there with a lack of love, angry, turned in on yourself. This is your God. He loves you. Come in and join the party.