

Group Study Guide

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH MERRITT ISLAND

It's Not Enough to Know God's Heart

Jonah 4:1-11

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Main Point

As the people of Nineveh are praising God for His mercy and grace, Jonah is miserably watching on the side of a hill. He has totally missed the point of his mission to Nineveh. So, God reminds him that people matter to God and should matter to us.

Getting Started

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

How do you typically react when you don't get your way?

*What percentage of what you did last week do you think will matter for eternity?
Why?*

Most of us devote our time and resources to what we consider important. But how much of ourselves and our resources do we invest in matters of eternal significance? What does this say about the condition of our hearts?

Observation

Read Jonah 4:1-3.

What emotions does verse 1 say Jonah experienced? Why do you think he felt that way?

In what ways do self-centered attitudes keep us from joining God in His mission?

*Is it possible for us to be obedient to God and have a bad attitude at the same time?
Why or why not?*

Which of the aspects of God's character in verse 2 is reflected most in your life?

One of the themes in the Bible is that God's people are to be imitators of Him, to demonstrate the qualities mentioned in verse 2. Unlike Jonah, we need to imitate God's character.

Read Jonah 4:4-5.

In what ways does anger make Jonah self-destructive? How does it do the same to us?

How do we see Jonah's anger making him vindictive toward the Ninevites?

How do we know Jonah does not have a heart for others? How is he hurting himself?

Read Jonah 4:6-11.

The word appointed appears at several key points in Jonah's story. God provided a great fish (1:17), a vine (4:6), a worm (4:7), and a scorching east wind (4:8). God wanted to teach Jonah a lesson. Jonah's comfort from the vine was short-lived, for at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the vine so that it withered (v. 7). The vine was present one day and gone the next.

What lesson did God teach Jonah through the vine? How did Jonah receive God's message?

In what way do the comforts of life that we enjoy prevent us from being what God wants us to be and do what God wants us to do?

Unfortunately, many believers become more concerned with their own comfort than they do with lost persons. These believers devote their time and their resources to what they consider to be important to them. They give little thought and devote little, if any, of their time, energy, and resources to things that will matter for eternity.

How does "pettiness" get in the way of our relationship with God?

What role did the plant and worm have in Jonah's anger? How does this demonstrate Jonah's pettiness?

The plant was not the issue. The issue was Nineveh. In verse 11, God addressed the heart of the matter. Jonah was concerned about a plant. God was concerned about people. Jonah neither had created nor nurtured the plant. Yet God had created and nurtured the Ninevites. Should He not care for them?

Why did Jonah show a lack of repentance? When are we most prone to show a lack of repentance to God?

How would you answer God's question in verse 11?

Would you prefer that the Book of Jonah have a different ending? Why or why not? How would you finish this book of the Bible?

The Book of Jonah ends abruptly. Jonah was confronted with a question that we also face: Will I have a heart for lost people as God does, or will I have a heart for lost people as Jonah did? The obvious answer to the question is that God's concern for Nineveh was consistent with His character. Since God cared for the Ninevites, so should Jonah. That Jonah even relayed or recorded the events of this book, which were humiliating and embarrassing to him, suggests that he was brought to conviction and repentance by God's word. Jonah's silence at the end of the book implies his quiet acceptance.

Application

Identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to our lives.

Our concerns and pursuits in life often are nothing more than a shade-giving vine. They might grant some brief, temporary pleasure, but when compared to the countless people who desperately need the grace of God, our concerns are worthless. As we learn to love people as God loves them, our personal dreams must be overwhelmed by a God of grace.

How can we focus on seeing the world the way God sees it? Ask God to fill you with His wisdom – the capacity to see life from His perspective. Only then, can we truly love people the way He wants us to love them.

Is there any anger you've been harboring toward God? Confess that to Him and ask Him to renew the spirit of your mind. How can our group pray for you and encourage you this week?

How can we turn from any selfishness, self-righteousness, anger, and bitterness that may try to creep in our lives? What does it practically look like to turn from those things and turn toward God?

Prayer

Pray that God would cleanse our hearts of whatever it is that keeps us from letting Him use us in the way He has chosen and that our story would be different from Jonah's and would be characterized by hearts that are open to God's leading. Ask God to give you a divine love for people that leads you to action.

Commentary

4:1. Jonah's message to the Ninevites was from God, but his attitude was not. God's graciousness on the Ninevites made Jonah angry. The prophet did not share God's love for the Ninevites and did not want to see them spared. He became upset when he realized that the people of Nineveh had repented. He considered the Ninevite revival a great calamity. Rather than being pleased that the Ninevites had turned to God, Jonah burned with anger.

4:2. Jonah prayed to the Lord. We do not know how often Jonah prayed. At least we know that Jonah prayed during crises, when he needed God's help or when he was upset with God. Jonah recalled the time when he was running from God before he went to Nineveh. He told the Lord that he realized then the compassionate nature of the Lord. This awareness of God's character had prompted the prophet's attempt to run from God. Jonah identified five key aspects of God's character. First, God is merciful or "gracious." The term communicates the Lord's attitude toward those who are

undeserving. Second, God is compassionate; God understands our suffering and our needs. Third, God is slow to become angry. God is patient and forbearing with sinners. He gives us second chances just as He did with the rebellious Jonah. Fourth, God has faithful love. The Hebrew word refers to God's loyal, steadfast love in His covenant relationship with His people. Fifth, God relents from sending disaster. Ironically, Jonah did not use this description in praise of God but in anger against Him.

4:3-4. Jonah was so upset with the turn of events in Nineveh that he wanted to die. Jonah could see no reason to keep on living. He felt he would be better off dead than alive. Some other biblical figures expressed similar thoughts. For example, Elijah felt desperate when Jezebel threatened to take his life. He had defended God against the pagan prophets at Mount Carmel but afterward he became a fugitive. He wanted to die (1 Kings 19:4). The Lord responded to Jonah's outburst with a question. Throughout this story God had dealt patiently with His rebellious prophet. God did not scold him here; rather, He asked Jonah if it was right for him to be angry. Rather than telling Jonah directly that he was selfish or disobedient, God asked a probing question.

4:5. We do not know if Jonah answered God's question. No answer is recorded. Jonah went outside Nineveh to see what would happen to the city. Jonah knew revival had broken out in the pagan city. Perhaps he wondered if God might still punish the Ninevites. Although Jonah knew how loving and compassionate God is, maybe he still hoped that his message of judgment would come to pass. Jonah built a shelter, probably a temporary hut or booth, to provide shade. The prophet's main concern was to find some relief from the sun's heat. He cared much more about relief from the heat than about the eternal destiny of an entire city.

4:6-7. God graciously appointed a plant to give Jonah more shade. The word appointed appears at several key points in Jonah's story. God had "appointed" a large fish to swallow Jonah (1:17). Jonah was happy for the further protection from the sun. Before Jonah could enjoy his shelter and the plant too long, God appointed a worm that destroyed the plant. God was trying to teach Jonah a lesson with this plant and its short life.

4:8-9. Jonah had been concerned about the bright sun and the heat. God, however, next appointed a scorching east wind to add to Jonah's discomfort. Again, Jonah wanted to die. Previously the prophet had expressed a desire to die because Nineveh was escaping divine judgment. At this point Jonah wanted to die because of the physical discomfort he was experiencing. Again, God responded to Jonah's concern with a question. Rather than telling Jonah directly that he was selfish, God probed his motivation with a question. Was Jonah right to be so upset about the dying plant? Jonah's quick response was a resounding, "Yes."

4:10. After Jonah's angry outburst, God responded to him with a direct statement and another question. God noted that Jonah had cared about the plant. Jonah had done nothing to bring the plant into existence yet he wanted the shade it provided. Jonah

apparently had no concern for the city of Nineveh. The prophet had reluctantly obeyed God's command to preach in Nineveh but had no real concern for the Ninevites' spiritual well-being. Jonah's concern was focused on his physical condition.

4:11. The Book of Jonah ends with a question from God. God questioned Jonah about His concern for the great city of Nineveh. The obvious answer is that God does care about the Ninevites. God created all people and He loves all people. God's concern for Nineveh is a case study, a small sample, of His concern for all people. The obvious answer to God's question is that His concern for Nineveh is consistent with His character. Since God cared for the Ninevites, so should Jonah.