



## RELENTING

Last Week, we read how God told the prophet, Jonah, to go to Nineveh to, “*call out against it*” (Jonah 1:2). Jonah fled, aiming to go as far away as possible. God had other plans. Jonah sunk down, down, down to the point of death. Only then did he repent and surrender to God’s plan.

After the big fish vomited Jonah out on dry land (Jonah 2:10), he picked himself up—probably brushing off fish guts and seaweed—and headed for Nineveh. Remember, the Ninevites were brutal to their enemies. And Jonah wasn’t coming to preach grace and forgiveness. His message was judgement. However, in Jonah 3, when the king heard Jonah’s message, he ordered the entire kingdom to repent.

Jonah 3:10 says, “*When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it.*” Our passage today picks up after Jonah headed out of the city—*exceedingly angry*. Jonah was so angry he asked God to take his life from him. Why? The answer will surprise you.

JONAH 4:2, 5–11

<sup>2</sup> And he prayed to the Lord and said, “O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster.

<sup>5</sup> Jonah went out of the city and sat to the east of the city and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, till he should see what would become of the city. <sup>6</sup> Now the LORD God appointed a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be a shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort. So Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the plant.

<sup>7</sup> But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant, so that it withered.

<sup>8</sup> When the sun rose, God appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint. And he asked that he might die and said, “It is better for me to die than to live.” <sup>9</sup> But God said to Jonah, “Do you do well to be angry for the plant?” And he said, “Yes, I do well to be angry, angry enough to die.” <sup>10</sup> And the LORD said, “You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night. <sup>11</sup> And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?”

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

God’s work in you shouldn’t stay with you. In Christ, your impact on others can echo into eternity. Sometimes when you share the gospel, you’re there when a person comes to faith in Jesus Christ. You see the light in their eyes literally change. Most other times, you’re just planting a seed you hope bears fruit.

Scan the QR-code for an incredible story of faithfully planting seeds. You just never know how God will use it.



## DISCUSSION

How does your attitude on obedience change when you really believe the person has your best interest in mind?

1. What attributes of God did Jonah fear the Ninevites would experience? (2)

2. What three things did God “appoint” while Jonah sat? (6-8)

3. What did Jonah “pity” versus that which God took “pity?” (10-11)

4. What does gaining and losing the plant reveal about Jonah’s heart and how did that compare with God’s heart?

5. Does your heart look more like Jonah’s (self-focused) or more like God’s (other’s-focused) and why?

Is God challenging you to share your faith with a friend? Who has God laid on your heart? If you need help or encouragement in sharing, talk to your coach today.

ICEBREAKER

OBSERVATION

INTERPRETATION

APPLICATION



## STUDY NOTES

### FURTHER, LONGER, MORE

It has often been said, “Sin will take you further than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay, and cost more than you want to pay.” Some of you reading this totally understand Jonah’s anger. You might not have shared Jonah’s reasons, but you know the feeling: red-hot-anger. In fact, the Hebrew word used for anger in Jonah 4 also means “hot,” or like “kindling a fire.” The cost of anger is high. It’s never a first emotion, it’s always a response to something else. Most often, like Jonah, that type of anger isn’t righteous. And acting on that anger can lead you into even greater trouble (see Proverbs 29:11).

But why was Jonah so angry? Jonah responded to the Lord, saying, **“O LORD, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster.”** Jonah’s reason for fleeing wasn’t fear, it was that God might show mercy. Jonah was afraid God would save the Ninevites (Assyrians)—or at least that he wouldn’t bring the wrath he’d promised.

### THE RELUCTANT MUST FACE GOD’S TRUTH

In his red-hot-anger, ***Jonah went out of the city and sat to the east of the city and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, till he should see what would become of the city.*** Jonah’s “booth” was little more than twigs twisted together. It provided little comfort in a shade-less area. However, this word, and even the act of making a “booth,” should have reminded Jonah of the structures God commanded Israel to make every year to commemorate God’s delivering Israel from slavery in Egypt (Leviticus 23:40–42).

Jonah had built something intended as a national reminder of God’s grace, mercy, and abounding steadfast love. Here he sat, uncomfortable, angry beyond measure for God showing those same attributes to anyone else.

God is indeed slow to anger and provided Jonah with an object lesson instead of smiting him for his selfishness. ***The LORD God appointed a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be a shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort. So Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the plant.*** God provided shade and

rest that the “hot” prophet may cool off—both literally and emotionally.

***When dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant, so that it withered. As the sun rose and beat down on the head of Jonah, his hot anger returned. God again asked, “Do you do well to be angry for the plant?” And he said, “Yes, I do well to be angry, angry enough to die.” And the LORD exposed Jonah’s heart saying, “You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night. And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?”***

### HOPE LIVES FOR THE RELUCANT

God had called Israel as a kingdom of priests (Exodus 19:6). They were to bless the whole world by proclaiming the excellencies of God. Instead, sin reigned and they turned inward. Instead, they thought that the work God had done *in and through* them was *only for* them. Jonah was a prophet, the best and brightest Israel had to offer. Look at his attitude toward God’s compassion on the Ninevites. Consider that his attitude represents the hard-heartedness of the entire nation.

Jonah cared more about a plant that provided slight comfort than he did for anyone outside of Israel. He figured they didn’t deserve God’s mercy because of their sin. What he misunderstood is that *he* didn’t deserve God’s mercy either.

God’s very heartbeat is restoration. Israel, with Jonah as the representative, failed to understand, align, and exemplify God’s heart for the world. Notice, though, that we don’t know how the story ends. We *don’t know* Jonah’s response. What we *do know* is that Jonah shared his story. Many parts of the story were only known to Jonah. Perhaps, the fact that we have this book means that he got it and wanted to pass this lesson along to others.

Don’t miss the lesson. God may have done a work in you for salvation, for spiritual growth, and spiritual gifting. However, although you may benefit from God’s work in your life, it isn’t meant to stop with you. In 1 Peter 2:9, Peter tells Christians, ***“you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”*** It’s not about you, it’s about Him! If God has moved in your life at all, proclaim it.