

This experience with the plant shines a spotlight on the self-interest that lies at the heart of Jonah's response to God's mercy towards Nineveh. It seems that Jonah is only ok with the mercy and forgiveness of God when it's directed towards him and his people.

The book of Jonah closes without telling us how Jonah ultimately responds. It invites us to reflect on our response to God's radical mercy and desire to forgive and restore all who would come to him. Unlike Jonah, we know about Jesus, and just how far he was willing to go (all the way to the cross!) so that we could know God's mercy and forgiveness in our own lives – and so that his loving invitation to a fresh start could be offered to all people. Spend some time jotting down, and sharing, any favourite passages from the New Testament, including stories Jesus told, that highlight that this is what Jesus is all about:

What are some ways that we might demonstrate the same kind of mercy and forgiveness that God shows us in Jesus, to others?

Can you think of something that God may want you to do differently this week, as you reflect on the wonder and challenge of God's desire to show mercy and forgiveness to all who would turn to him? You may like to share your thoughts with each other before closing in prayer.



JONAH

God's Merciful Steadfast Love Growth Group Study Guide

02 October 2022

Jonah 4:1-11

Series Overview:

Jonah is the central character in the Book of Jonah, in which God commands him to go to the city of Nineveh to prophesy against it for their great wickedness against him. However, Jonah instead attempts to run from God by going in the opposite direction and sailing towards Tarshish. The main message from this book is God's merciful, steadfast love. Jonah was a prophet, and even though he had let God down in numerous ways, he was still forgiven because God showed him unlimited love and compassion. Through the five weeks of this sermon series, our prayer is that we, as imperfect people may also experience God's amazing mercy and love, not through our obedience, but through God's grace in Christ.

Where are we up to?

The context for this final chapter in the book of Jonah is that after running in the opposite direction, a terrible storm and some time in the belly of a big fish (yuck!), Jonah in chapter 3 has finally obeyed God and preached God's imminent judgment to the people of Nineveh. Last week we saw they responded immediately, wholeheartedly and by changing their ways. As a result, God "...relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened" (3:10b).

Amazing! That kind of repentance leading to the forgiveness of God on such a grand scale is the kind of moment that any preacher would dream of seeing! Right?

Well, maybe not always.

Read Jonah 4:1. How does Jonah feel about this turn of events? What thoughts do you have about why he may feel this way?

Can you think of any possible examples where you may struggle to be pleased to hear about someone repenting and experiencing the forgiveness and mercy of God?

In Jonah's case, the Ninevites were reckless, violent and bloodthirsty – enemies of his people. Not long after these events Tiglath-pileser III came to power and re-established Assyria as a major power and adopted a policy towards nations who opposed Assyria of total conquest, deportation of the people and establishment of Assyrian provinces under an Assyrian administration. This is exactly what happened to Jonah's homeland, the northern kingdom of Israel, in 722BC.

Read Jonah 4:2. If we weren't sure why Jonah tried to avoid obeying God back in chapter 1, it's now made very clear. What is it about the character and ways of God that was so upsetting for Jonah?

Jonah knew that everything about his relationship with God (and that of his people, the nation of Israel) was dependent on God's steadfast love and mercy. He'd even had a recent reminder of this as we saw in chapter 2.

Spend some time jotting down and sharing other examples from the Old Testament, that show that God's way with his people has always been about mercy (and not about them being particularly 'good'):

If Jonah knew all this, then what do you think was behind his deep anger and sense that it was not ok for the Ninevites to experience this same mercy and forgiveness?

What challenges are there for us in this?

Read Jonah 4:3-11. Jonah was so angry he would prefer to die than to see the Ninevites experience the same mercy that he had experienced.

What are the 3 things God 'provides' in vv6-8?

Why do you think this upset Jonah so much?

What do you think is God's point in vv10-11?