



**MAIN IDEA:** Freeing Our Heart From Our Biases

## CONNECT - HOW DOES THIS TOPIC RELATE TO US?

Choose 1 or 2 questions to get your discussion started.

1. When you were a child, how did you usually express your anger?
2. Describe a time in your life when you saw someone get rewarded a gift you did not think they deserved? How did that experience make you feel?

## ENGAGE - WHAT DOES THE BIBLE TEACH US?

Choose 1 or 2 questions to get your discussion started.

Read the following two passages considering the idea that mercy, when driven by our biases, falls short of God's purposes and our calling.

*The word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and cry against it, for their wickedness has come up before Me." But Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord...*

**- Jonah 1:1-2**

*Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and proclaim to it the proclamation which I am going to tell you." So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the Lord...*

*Then the people of Nineveh believed in God; and they called a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least of them...*

*When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it... But it greatly displeased Jonah and he became angry.*

**- Jonah 3:1-3, 5, 10; 4:1**

**Thoughts to consider:** In Hebrew, "greatly displeased" is the word *rah*, and it carries the connotation of an evil that works against God's purposes. In addition, "angry," which is the word "*charah*," means to burn, to become incensed, or indignant. Lastly, Nineveh was a city that Jonah had some negative history with (2 Kings 14.23-27; 15.29) which, in Jonah's mind, only substantiated his disdain.

1. When considering the circumstances undergirding the relationship between Jonah and Nineveh, how does your perspective on God's calling to Jonah change? Can you gain more empathy for Jonah considering the challenged relationship.
2. Share a time when you, like Jonah, became angry at God and depressed over what seemed like an unjust situation? How did you get over these feelings and how long did it take? How do you resolve your angry with God?

*He prayed to the Lord and said, "Please Lord, was not this what I said while I was still in my own country? Therefore in order to forestall this I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in loving kindness, and one who relents concerning calamity. Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for death is better to me than life."*

**- Jonah 4:2-3**

1. What does Jonah's prayer reveal about the character of God?
2. Which do you think was Jonah's biggest problem: anger, pride, selfishness, depression, prejudice, or something else? Which of these issues do you struggle with personally?
3. How does God's mercy on Nineveh reveal the wickedness of Jonah's heart? In what ways should the act of God's mercy, in spite of Jonah's hard heart, inform our own calling as followers of Jesus?

*Jesus said, "You're looking for proof, but you're looking for the wrong kind. All you want is something to titillate your curiosity, satisfy your lust for miracles. The only proof you're going to get is what looks like the absence of proof: Jonah-evidence. Like Jonah, three days and nights in the fish's belly, the Son of Man will be gone three days and nights in a deep grave..."*

*"On Judgment Day, the Ninevites will stand up and give evidence that will condemn this generation, because when Jonah preached to them they changed their lives. A far greater preacher than Jonah is here, and you squabble about 'proofs.'*

**- Matthew 12:38-42**

Famed author Anne Lamott once quoted a priest friend who said, **"You can safely assume you've created God in your own image when it turns out that God hates all the same people as you do."**

1. When reflecting on Jesus' words to the Pharisees, how does he invert the Jonah story to present his rebuke?
2. How do Jesus' words and the perceptions of Anne Lamott's priest friend connect? What, if any, warnings can be found within these connections?
3. At its basic level, what we learn from Jonah's story is that life is not about us. Only God has the right to judge others (or a nation) and the power to control outcomes. How was Jonah's anger related to his trying to be God, concerning Nineveh? How was he judging and trying to control the outcome?

*Go ahead and be angry. You do well to be angry—but don't use your anger as fuel for revenge. And don't stay angry. Don't go to bed angry. Don't give the Devil that kind of foothold in your life...Make a clean break with all cutting, backbiting, profane talk. Be gentle with one another, sensitive. Forgive one another as quickly and thoroughly as God in Christ forgave you.*

**- Ephesians 4:26-27; 31-3**

As the Apostle Paul points out, anger in itself is not a bad thing. While we wait for the full restoration of God's kingdom, there are sure to be acts of evil that ignite our anger. The trick, the challenge, is to not allow our anger to become a weapon our enemy can use to consume our lives and deform our hearts.

## APPLY - HOW CAN THIS CHANGE OUR LIVES?

---

1. Like Jonah, we all want to receive God's forgiveness, but we are not always willing to give forgiveness. To whom are you unwilling to extend God's grace and forgiveness?
2. What can result when we hold on to anger, even when it seems justified?
3. Why do we struggle with giving forgiveness more than receiving forgiveness? What are some reasons (or excuses) we use for not forgiving? How do we benefit from forgiving?

## ACTION STEP – HOW CAN THIS CHANGE OUR LIVES?

---

Identify one step that you can take to increase your awareness of the presence of God.

## PRAYER

---

Invite everyone in the group to spend a couple minutes in silence to think about the presence of God in our lives, despite our circumstances. In what ways does this ignite your heart for more? Once again, close your time together by praying the "Serenity Prayer," by Reinhold Niebuhur :

*God, give us grace to accept with serenity  
the things that cannot be changed,  
Courage to change the things  
which should be changed,  
and the Wisdom to distinguish  
the one from the other.*

*Living one day at a time,  
Enjoying one moment at a time,  
Accepting hardship as a pathway to peace,  
Taking, as Jesus did,  
This sinful world as it is,  
Not as we would have it,  
Trusting that You will make all things right,  
If we surrender to Your will,  
So that we may be reasonably happy in this life,  
And supremely happy with You forever in the next.*

*Amen.*

