

Waves of Mercy

Week 4: Angry at Grace

Objective: To challenge us to extend the mercy of God to those we think least deserve it.

ICEBREAKER: Think back to middle school, high school, college, or even adulthood.

- Have you ever experienced a group where it was very clear who was “in” and who was “out”?
- What made the boundary obvious?
- What did it feel like if you were on the outside?

1. Who Gets to Be “In”?

The sermon asked:

“What happens when we’re the ones holding the marker?”

Most of us know what it feels like to be excluded. But we’re not always as aware of the boundaries we draw around others.

- Why do people naturally create “us” and “them” categories?
- What kinds of boundaries do Christians sometimes draw around God’s mercy?
- Why are those boundaries often easier to see in others than in ourselves?

2. Jonah Knew Exactly What God Was Like

Jonah explains why he ran:

“I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love...”

— Jonah 4:2

Jonah didn’t misunderstand God’s character. **He understood it—and that’s why he ran.**

- What does Jonah’s prayer reveal about his real reason for running?
- Why was Jonah comfortable with God’s mercy in chapter 2 but angry about it in chapter 4?
- Are there ways we can believe the right things about God while resisting what those truths mean for other people?

3. Drawing the Boundaries of Mercy

One of the sermon’s key statements was:

“I don’t get to draw the boundaries of God’s mercy.”

- What does it mean to draw boundaries around God’s mercy?
- Why are we tempted to decide who deserves another chance and who doesn’t?
- What changes when we remember that none of us received God’s mercy because we deserved it?

4. Obedience Without God’s Heart

Jonah obeyed God’s command. He went to Nineveh and preached God’s message.

But afterward he sat outside the city hoping God would still destroy it.

The sermon observed:

“Jonah obeyed God’s command without sharing God’s heart.”

- Is it possible to do what God asks while still having the wrong heart?
- What might that look like in our relationships, service, ministry, or church?
- How do we move from merely doing what God commands to actually caring about what God cares about?

5. The Plant and the People

God provides Jonah with a plant for shade, and Jonah is **“very happy”** about it. When the plant dies, Jonah becomes furious.

Meanwhile, Jonah shows almost no concern for the thousands of people in Nineveh.

- Why do you think God used the plant to teach Jonah?
- What does Jonah’s reaction reveal about what mattered most to him?
- Why is it sometimes easier to care passionately about our own comfort than about people?

6. “I Care About That. God Cares About Them.”

Jonah cared deeply about something that benefited him.

God pointed toward Nineveh and essentially said:

“Should I not have concern for them?”

- What does God’s concern for Nineveh teach us about His heart?
- How should God’s compassion shape the way His followers see people?

- What are some things we become passionate about that can distract us from caring about people?

7. The Question God Never Answers for Us

Jonah ends without telling us how Jonah responds.

Instead, God leaves him with a question:

“Should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh?”

The sermon suggested that perhaps the story remains unfinished because **we are supposed to answer God's question with our lives.**

- Why do you think the book ends this way?
- How would you answer God's questions: “Am I allowed to love the people you don't? Forgive the people you would condemn? Pursue the people you've written off?”
- What would your life look like if your answer were genuinely “Yes”?

8. Mercy for Them

The challenge of the sermon was simple:

Identify your THEM. And move toward them with the mercy God has shown you.

- Who is outside the circle you naturally draw?
- What makes it difficult for you to desire God's mercy for that person or group?
- What is one practical step of mercy you could take toward your “them”?

Remember: mercy does not mean pretending wrong is right. It means refusing to declare someone beyond the reach of the God who showed mercy to you.

FINAL THOUGHT

Jonah loved mercy.

He loved the mercy that pursued him.

He loved the mercy that rescued him.

He loved the second chance God gave him.

He especially loved the mercy that gave him a little shade on a hot afternoon.

Jonah's problem wasn't God's mercy.

Jonah's problem was who else received it.

But the God who cared about Jonah also cared about Nineveh.

And the God who has shown mercy to us cares deeply about the people we find difficult to love.

We don't get to decide where His compassion stops.

I don't get to draw the boundaries of God's mercy.

Mercy for me must become mercy for them.

THIS WEEK – MOVE TOWARD “THEM”

The challenge this week goes one step beyond simply changing how we think.

IDENTIFY

Ask God:

“Who have I placed outside the circle?”

Who have you written off, avoided, judged, or decided needs judgment more than mercy?

REMEMBER

Remember why **you** are inside the circle.

Not because you earned your place.

Not because your failures were less serious.

You are here because Jesus showed mercy to you.

PRAY

Pray honestly:

“Father, let the mercy You have shown me change the way I see them.”

MOVE

Take **one intentional step of mercy** toward your “them.”

It might mean:

- Starting a conversation.
- Offering forgiveness.
- Serving them.
- Encouraging them.
- Inviting them to church.
- Listening instead of arguing.
- Praying sincerely for God's blessing and transforming grace in their life.

You don't have to erase every boundary overnight.

But you can take one step toward someone with the mercy God has already shown you.