

Small Group Guide: Jonah Chapter 4

"The Unanswered Question"

Opening Prayer (2-3 minutes)

Begin by praying for open hearts and minds as you discuss God's grace, mercy, and sovereignty.

Ice Breaker (5-10 minutes)

Question: Share about a time when you were angry about something that, looking back, seems trivial or when your perspective changed with time.

Key Scripture

Jonah 4:1-11 (Read aloud together)

Sermon Summary

Jonah's anger at God's mercy toward Nineveh reveals a heart struggle we all face: wanting grace for ourselves but judgment for others. God patiently teaches Jonah through appointed circumstances—a plant, a worm, and a wind—demonstrating that His curriculum never stops. The book ends with an unanswered question that each of us must answer: Will we embrace God's compassion for all people, even those we think don't deserve it?

Discussion Questions

Understanding Jonah's Heart (15-20 minutes)

1. **Why was Jonah angry when Nineveh repented?** What does his anger reveal about his understanding of God's character versus his personal preferences?
2. **Read Jonah 4:2.** Jonah quoted Scripture accurately but with the wrong heart attitude. How is it possible to know theology perfectly but apply it poorly? Can you think of examples from your own life?
3. **Compare Jonah to the older brother in Luke 15:11-32.** What similarities do you see? How does self-righteousness blind us to God's work in others' lives?

God's Patient Teaching (15-20 minutes)

4. **God appointed four things in this chapter: a plant, a worm, a wind, and a question.** What was God trying to teach Jonah through each? How do you see God using similar "appointments" in your life?
5. **The sermon mentioned that "the worm and the wind are not punishment—they are curriculum."** How does this change the way you view difficulties or disappointments in your life?
6. **Jonah was happy about the plant but miserable when it died (v. 6-8).** What temporary comforts do we sometimes value more than God's purposes? How can we hold blessings with open hands?

Personal Application (15-20 minutes)

7. **"Who is your Nineveh?"** Is there a person or group of people you struggle to extend grace toward? What makes it difficult?
8. **God asked Jonah twice: "Do you have a good reason to be angry?" (v. 4, 9).** When have you needed to ask yourself this question? What helps you move from anger to surrender?
9. **The book ends without telling us Jonah's answer.** Why do you think the author left it open-ended? How does this make the story more personally challenging?
10. **Romans 5:8 says Christ died for us "while we were yet sinners."** How should remembering our own need for grace affect how we view others who need that same grace?

Key Takeaways

✓ **You cannot outrun God's sovereignty** - He will accomplish His purposes whether we cooperate willingly or reluctantly

✓ **God's grace is sufficient even when we don't understand His ways** - His mercy toward others doesn't diminish His love for us

✓ **Discipline is curriculum, not punishment** - God teaches us through both blessings and difficulties

✓ **We all received grace we didn't deserve** - This should make us generous, not stingy, with grace toward others

✓ **The question remains unanswered for each of us** - Will we embrace God's compassion for all people?

Practical Applications

This Week's Challenge:

Choose ONE of the following to put into practice:

Option 1: The Grace List

- Write down 3-5 ways God has shown you grace you didn't deserve
- Identify one person you've been withholding grace from
- Pray daily for that person and ask God to soften your heart toward them

Option 2: Examine Your Anger

- When you feel angry this week, pause and ask: "Do I have a good reason to be angry?"
- Journal about what your anger reveals about your expectations or sense of fairness
- Bring those feelings to God in prayer, asking for His perspective

Option 3: Build with Gold

- Reflect on 1 Corinthians 3:10-15 about building on Christ's foundation
- Identify one area where you're building with "wood, hay, and stubble" (temporary, self-focused)

- Take one concrete step to build with "gold, silver, and precious stones" (eternal, God-focused) instead

Option 4: Extend Unexpected Mercy

- Identify someone who has wronged you or let you down repeatedly
- Do one act of kindness for them this week without expecting anything in return
- Reflect on how it feels to give grace when it's not "deserved"

Memory Verse

Jonah 4:11 - "Should I not have compassion on Nineveh, the great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know the difference between their right and left hand, as well as many animals?"

Looking Ahead

Next week, we'll explore what we build on the foundation of Christ. Consider throughout the week: What legacy are you building? What will last when everything else burns away?

Closing Prayer (5 minutes)

Prayer Focus:

- Confess areas where we've been like Jonah—angry at God's grace toward others
- Thank God for His patience with us and His relentless pursuit
- Ask for hearts that reflect God's compassion
- Pray for the upcoming VBS and car show ministries mentioned in the sermon
- Lift up those struggling with illness and the McBride family as they transition

Additional Resources

For Further Study:

- Read the book of Nahum to see God's eventual judgment on Nineveh
- Study Exodus 34:6-7 (the passage Jonah quoted) in its full context
- Reflect on the parable of the unmerciful servant (Matthew 18:21-35)

Recommended Reading:

- "The Prodigal Prophet" by Tim Keller
- "Man Overboard" by Sinclair Ferguson (referenced in sermon)

Remember: The goal isn't to have all the answers, but to wrestle honestly with God's question to each of us. Let the unanswered ending of Jonah become your answered beginning.