

Love God + know the Bible better:

Read the passage cited above, and try to answer the questions below before your group meets. 2. *Leader note: Please review the brief instructions for leaders at the bottom.*

The Study

Thesis: God gives us opportunities to reflect on his grace towards us through revealing our sin, preparing blessings and trails, and having compassion for lost people.

Context:

- Outside of his book, we learn in 2 Kings 14:23-29 that Jonah was a prophet to the northern kingdom of Israel during the reign of King Jeroboam II, who was a successful military leader but a wicked man. Jonah's ministry involved accurately prophesying that Israel would take back many of its territories that the surrounding nations had conquered. We learn in the passage that God granted them victory over their enemies not because of their righteousness or strength but because He had compassion for them.

- We see in Jonah's book instances of pride, entitlement, and self righteousness apart from God that were probably heightened by his success in his ministry to Israel. One could argue that God is drawing out these character flaws out of Jonah through countless opportunities to reflect on His unmerited graciousness.

1) God Reveals the Heart [1-4]

Jonah's problem of anger [1]

Immediately after Nineveh repents and God relents of his judgement on the city, we discover that Jonah is angry. The irony that a prophet of God is thoroughly enraged by the fact that he was instrumental in one of the greatest revivals in biblical or recorded history is actually quite funny. This is one of the many reasons why biblical scholars classify Jonah as a satire; and yet the events are 100% real, as Jesus confirmed specifically regarding Jonah throughout the gospels.

Jonah faults God for being gracious [2-3]

These verses are proof that prayer in and of itself is not always a godly action; in this case, Jonah accuses God of being gracious by quoting a version of how God revealed himself to Moses in Exodus 34:6-7. The irony is that what makes God so worthy of praise and adoration is exactly what is causing Jonah to be enraged: his mercy, patience, and grace towards people.

We also discover here for the first time in the book *why* Jonah went in the opposite direction of Nineveh as fast as he possibly could; it was an attempt to "forestall" God (NASB translation).

Jonah gives us many indicators throughout this book that he is a biblically knowledgeable person through his conversation with the sailors, his prayer for salvation in the big fish, and even in his confession that he could only try to stall God's will on the assumption that God would accomplish his purposes regardless of Jonah. Perhaps Jonah was trying (unsuccessfully) to die in an attempt to get God to call someone else to the task.

Jonah's prayer for death is not uncommon in the Bible; Elijah [1 Kings 19:4], Jeremiah [Jeremiah 20:8], and Job [6:8-9] all pleaded to God for their deaths; the difference, though, was that Jonah arguably had the worst reason for his despair: he was mad that thousands of people believed God and repented.

God Uncovers Jonah's Anger [4]

God's reply to what is one of the most shameless and boldfaced prayers in the Scriptures is nothing short of glorious: "Do you have the right to be angry?" God could have simply asked Jonah *why* he was angry (even though God knew), but instead he gets to Jonah's heart: his entitlement. Jonah believed that he had the *right* to be angry. This shows that most if not all unrighteous anger is really an issue of entitlement and self-perceived rights.

2) God prepares blessings and trials [5-8]

Jonah Hopes for Wrath [5]

Rather than answer God's question, Jonah instead leaves the city and makes a shelter for himself to Nineveh's east. We aren't given an explicit reason as to why, but perhaps it was in the selfish hope that the Ninevites would return to their wickedness and incur God's wrath. If this is the case, Jonah would die of old age before seeing this happen; Nineveh does eventually experience God's wrath and is wiped out as a result of their pride, but that would not happen until after Jonah's time.

God delivers Jonah from misery [6]

Although he clearly did not deserve it, Jonah is blessed by God with a temporary comfort (emphasis on *temporary*) from what was probably the heat of the desert in Nineveh's surrounding area, located in modern day Iraq. The Hebrew word for this plant that only appears in this chapter and is probably what we refer to as a castor oil plant; this is effectively a weed with no special meaning to Jonah other than the fact that it gave him shade. Nevertheless, Jonah is "exceedingly happy" (NASB); this phrase is used in Scripture to describe the joy of a woman who conceives after being barren her whole life. However, he does not seem to give God thanks for it, further pointing to Jonah's perceived entitlement.

God provokes Jonah [7-8]

Only once Jonah was exceedingly happy for this plant did God bring about the end of Jonah's deliverance from misery. All it took was a worm and a wind for Jonah to become even more distraught than he was before, this time not even *praying* but instead *wishing* for his own death.

3) God Has Compassion

Jonah shows his pride [9]

Again God asks Jonah: "It is right for you to be angry about the plant?" The first time God asked this in [4], He left the question open ended; this time he questions Jonah specifically regarding the plant. Jonah is compelled to reply this time, unlike the last time, and reaffirms his right to be angry to death. Jonah has just shown his cards: he is entitled to his unrighteous anger.

God diagnoses Jonah's anger [10]

God exposes Jonah's anger for what it really is: misplaced compassion. Jonah had pity for an inanimate object whose only value to Jonah was that it provided him shade; yet Jonah has nothing but prejudice and bigotry towards the Ninevites. The irony here is that a God's prophet loved a desert shrub more than a city of over 120,000 human beings who are made in God's image.

God loves the lost [11]

Jonah said it himself in the first part of this chapter: God is gracious, slow to anger, and merciful. So God asks Jonah the question: Shouldn't I be compassionate towards Nineveh? A city full of people whom God loves and desires to have a relationship with? Of course he does. And of course Jonah should, being a prophet of God whose job it is to be an ambassador for God.

Let us not make the same mistake of holding onto our pride while having more compassion for things than people.

Study Guide Qs:

Q1: Have you ever considered that anger is connected to entitlement? Can you think of any examples from your own life?

Q2: Can you think of a time when you were truly miserable? Why do you think God allowed it?

Q3: Why would God deliver Jonah from misery just to make him even more miserable than before? Why does he do the same with us?

Q4: Why was Jonah able to declare God's love for others but not love for others like God? How do we avoid this?

"Digging Deeper"

Here is an animated overview of the book of Jonah:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dLlabZc0O4c>

Here is a longer overview of Jonah that goes deeper:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9MOW9VHhQPQ>

Love your neighbor *outside* the group better:

1. Who would like to share how they sought to befriend or build relationships with their neighbors where they live, work, study, or play this past week?
2. Are there some needs that can provide us an opportunity to love our neighbor outside the group?
3. Here is a neighboring idea(s) for us to consider for the week(s) ahead:

Pray and ask God to help you connect via audio, video, or text with a neighbor you haven't seen in person for too long.

Love your neighbor *inside* the group better:

1. Are there some needs in our group that can provide us an opportunity to love our neighbor within the group? 2. What might we do about that need to help?

Prayer [Loving God and Neighbors better]:

Close the NG meeting with a time of group prayer. Encourage each participant to pray, but don't force anyone to pray. Encourage the group to keep their prayers brief so that each person can pray.

Leader Notes:

1. **Seek to involve as many group participants as possible.** A good group discussion time allows people to get to know the passage and one another better.
2. **Feel free to pre-select the discussion questions that you want to focus on** in case there isn't enough time to answer them all.
3. **The "Digging Deeper" section provides some optional or alternative study and discussion activities.** As a group leader, you can choose to focus on the "Digging Deeper" section, include part of that section in your group meeting, or not use it at all. Try to give the group sufficient notice so they can be prepared for the meeting.

4. Every time you meet consider asking:

a. What about this passage is particularly exciting, challenging, or confusing? If a leader is uncertain about a question of doctrine or theology don't hesitate to follow-up with your coach during the week. Then revisit the issue(s) when the group gathers next time.