

## God's Compassion, Our Compassion

### *Jonah 4*

**Introduction:** Do you have any enemies? Is someone out to get you or standing in the way of what you believe God wants you to do? Maybe there is someone who hurt you deeply at some time in the past. Maybe there is a whole category of people that you don't particularly like - people of another nationality, another world religion, or of another political persuasion from you. How easy it is to feel justified in disliking our enemies, but Jesus tells us, "*Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you*" (Matt. 5:44). Jonah had great antagonism toward his "enemies" (the Ninevites), but as we see in Jonah 4, God wouldn't "let it go" in relation to loving his enemies. God forced Jonah to come face to face with the fact that he didn't love his enemies and in doing so God brings us face to face with the question of whether or not we will "love our enemies."

**Opening Question:** Have you had any enemies in the past? Any now?

### Read Jonah 4

1. What displeased Jonah (4:1)? Why?
2. What is revealed about Jonah's real reason for resisting God's call in chapter one?
3. What is revealed about God's character in this chapter?
4. How would you contrast what Jonah cared about with what God cared about?

Steve said:

The strategy of author of the book Jonah is rather ingenious. We are drawn into the plot of Jonah's life and we find ourselves thinking, "It sure would have been better and easier for Jonah if he had obeyed God in the first place. He was foolish to try to forestall the grace that God wanted to show the people (and animals) of Nineveh. Jonah should have accepted that God wanted him to be an instrument of blessing in the lives of his enemies."

If we're not careful we find ourselves thinking, "God, am I just like Jonah? Is it true that I would hate for You to shower Your compassion on my enemies? God, is it possible that I have more compassion for my garden or my house or my car than for people for whom Christ died? God, is it possible that you want *me* to be an instrument of blessing in the lives of *my* enemies? Would You would put me in a submission hold and make me miserable until I begin to look at people the way You do? God, am I just like Jonah?"

5. Do you, in any way, sense that you are like Jonah? Do you relate to how he feels in this chapter in any way?

6. Is there anyone that you refuse to show compassion to (or at least for whom compassion is hard to show)?

Steve said:

As the book of Jonah suggests, it is very likely that God wants you to be an instrument of blessing in the lives of your enemies (see 1 Peter 3:8ff). You probably understand your enemy's sins and fears and weaknesses better than about anybody else; you've experienced your enemy's insecurities firsthand (that's probably why they're your enemies). It's possible that your compassion toward that person will speak louder than that of anybody else. You're the **last** person they'd expect to be patient and kind to them. Even if you have to say some hard things to them, you can do so in love; you don't have to be mean and insulting. In other words, like Jonah coming from Israel and speaking to Nineveh, you are in a unique position to demonstrate the gospel to your enemies.

Are you willing to love your enemies? If you're not there yet, are you willing to be willing? Are you willing to put yourself in a position to let God make you into a person who loves his/her enemies? The kingdom of God advances when we love our enemies.

7. Read 1 Peter 3:8-17. What perspectives does this give on how we should interact with our enemies?
8. Are you willing to love your enemies or would you say that there is some work that God needs to do in your heart to make you willing?
9. In what practical ways can you be a blessing to your enemies?