



eLesson 018

Text: Jonah 4:1-11

Subject: Running ahead of God

Jonah – Part 4

Lost zeal. Jonah ran ahead of God ... ahead toward his own agenda that did not include the salvation of Nineveh. Jonah did deliver God's message in chapter 3 ... but chapter 4 shows that in his heart he desired the *judgment* of rather than the *salvation* of Nineveh. Even after God disciplined him into obedience as described in chapters 1-3, Jonah's heart revealed his own agenda rather than God's agenda. Many years ago, I worked with a group of young couples. We were highly committed to evangelism. We all lived and breathed for one thing ... to bring people to Jesus. There was much hard work, persistent prayer, and great joy over each person that came to repentance. Since that time, some of those couples have lost their zeal for evangelism. One of the couples told me that they moved on from witnessing to more mature Christian service. They said that evangelism was for the younger years in Christian work ... but they had grown up. Today they still do some evangelism ... very little. It is no longer their primary or even secondary ministry. They are wrong. Unfortunately, their love for lost people faded over the years. In chapter four, Jonah had a similar problem ... no zeal for lost people.

In step with God. Jonah delivered God's message in God's time in God's place. Jonah became one of the most effective evangelists of all time. Everyone in the great city of Nineveh believed in God ... everyone. If there is joy in the presence of the angels over one sinner who repents, then how much joy was there when over 500,000 repented that day in Nineveh? What a wonderful, joyous day that was in Heaven as it was in Nineveh ... but not in Jonah's heart. Why was he so greatly displeased, angry, and wishing to die? He should have been filled with joy. *"But it greatly displeased Jonah, and he became angry."* 4:1. Jonah knew that God had spared Nineveh. He complained to God, *"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 Thou art a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity. Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for death is better to me than life."* 4:2-3. At least he complained to God ... not just about God. The words *greatly displeased* in 4:1 could be paraphrased as *intensely grieved to the point of trembling* ... and *angry* could be paraphrased as having a *hot, burning anger*. Jonah was a mix of intense grief and burning anger. Why did Jonah react that way? Why wasn't he bubbling over with joy? Jonah gave his own explanation about that to God, *I knew this would happen ... that's why I ran away ... I knew You would be gracious, merciful, slow to anger, and overflowing in love ... I knew You wouldn't destroy them ... so please, just kill me,* (my paraphrase of 4:2-3). Jonah's explanation sounds more like good reasons for obedience than for disobedience. Would you turn down an opportunity to present a Gospel invitation to more than 500,000 people because you were sure they would all believe in Jesus? No! Would you run away from that assignment? No! Nevertheless, Jonah ran away. Moreover, after he finally delivered the message, he became angry because God had compassionately spared the Ninevites. God asked Jonah, *"Do you have good reason to be angry?"* 4:4. Jonah's response, if he gave one, is not given to us in the Bible.

Our understanding his reasons for anger and grief is important.

A heart problem. Some people think that Jonah was angry because he thought he looked bad ... predicting judgment that did not come. I do not believe that is the reason. All the people of Nineveh turned to God. Do you think anyone in Nineveh criticized Jonah because his God was compassionate? I do not think so. Jonah's real problem was in his heart. Jonah should have had great joy in seeing the Ninevites turn to God ... instead he grieved. He should have been relieved rather than angry. It should have been one of the best days in his life ... but he wanted to die. Jonah did not love the lost people of Nineveh. Moreover, he did not love them after they had repented either. Why? Some have suggested that this Jewish prophet was a bigot who was disappointed because these Gentile enemies of Israel had turned to God at a low time in Israel's history. However, the text does not tell us that. We do not know why Jonah did not love them ... but we do know that he did not. Jonah's heart was not right. He did not love the lost.

In the suburbs. Jonah went out into the eastern suburbs of Nineveh. He made a temporary shelter and sat there waiting to see what would happen in the city. The forty days were over. He already knew that God would not destroy Nineveh. That is what made him so angry. What was he waiting to see? We do not know. Jonah did not know that God's school of discipline was about to open for him in those suburbs. Jonah would be the only student ... privately tutored by God with the visual aids of a plant, a worm, the sun, and a scorching east wind. Jonah's homemade shelter did not provide adequate shade. God appointed a plant to grow up over him. God gave Jonah something good ... the plant for more shade. Jonah was extremely happy about the plant. Then God sent a worm to kill the plant, a scorching east wind, and the intense burning sun. God had given him something good, the plant for shade, for just one purpose. Why? To take it away! What do you think of that? What would you think if God did that to you? What if He gave you something good only for the purpose of taking it away? Why would God do that to Jonah, to you, or to me? God would do that because He loves His children and therefore disciplines them. He gave Jonah something good so that He could take it away. He took that good thing away so that He could give him something even better. What was the better thing that God wanted to give to Jonah? God wanted to give Jonah a love for lost people. God appointed a worm to kill that plant ... and a scorching east wind to intensify Jonah's suffering. The sun beat down on Jonah's head so that he became faint and begged to die, saying, "*Death is better to me than life.*" 4:8. God asked, "*Do you have good reason to be angry about the plant?*" 4:9. How would you have answered that question? Jonah responded, "*I have good reason to be angry, even to death.*" 4:9. Doesn't Jonah's anger about the plant seem foolish? However, what are the things that make you and me angry? Is our anger righteous ... or unrighteous? The things that make us angry are a measure of our walk with God. In addition, what gives us joy? Do earthly things give us more joy than heavenly things? Jonah was extremely happy about the plant. What things make us extremely happy? What does this reveal about our walk with God?

An abrupt ending. God's response to Jonah, this little book's abrupt ending, gives us a big lesson. The Lord said, "*You had compassion on the plant for which you did not work, and which you did not cause to grow, which came up overnight and perished overnight. And 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?*" 4:10-11. Jonah worked just one day to bring Nineveh to repentance ... but he did nothing to make the plant grow. The plant was temporary. Jonah was extremely happy about the temporary plant. However, the eternal results in Nineveh gave him no joy. Which is more important to us ... the temporary things of our world or the eternal things of God? The big lesson in this chapter is that we should have compassion for lost people. We should love them. A well-known New Testament verse should come to mind when you read God's response to Jonah, "*And should I not have compassion on Nineveh, the great city...?*" 4:11. That New Testament verse is, "*For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.*" John 3:16. God loves lost people. Do we? God has compassion for your lost friends, neighbors, and relatives. God loves them. Do you?

A personal illustration. To get the full impact of the following true story, you must know that *Yoo-hoo* is the name of a cold, chocolate drink. In addition, remember that an Old Testament name for God is, *YHWH* ... sometimes written *Yahweh*. Many years ago, I ate lunch with a Christian worker in a fast-food restaurant. He was a seminary graduate and former pastor who was working in a ministry of evangelism. We had hoped for a table for two ... but an empty table for four was our only option. We sat facing each other. About two minutes later, a man sat next to me. He was obnoxious and loud ... punctuating his empty talk with profanity ... and smoking one cigarette after another. Each time he exhaled the cigarette smoke, he turned his head to blow it across our food instead of his own. Was this an inconvenient intrusion ... or was it a God-sent opportunity? I asked a few leading questions. Soon the man asked, "What do you do for work?" I explained to him that we told people about Jesus. His immediate response was condescending and blasphemous. He blurted out, "I am not into that New Testament God ... I'm into the Old Testament one ... you know ... what's His name? ... Yoo-hoo, that's it, that's His name, Yoo-hoo." That should deeply offend you. It should also break your heart that he was so very lost. My Christian friend turned red in anger. His tight lips were quivering in rage. I thought he might climb over the table to attack the man. Fortunately, he did not. Unfortunately, the stranger quickly excused himself before I could get to the Gospel. It was a lost opportunity. My friend looked up as the man walked away ... and said emphatically, "I don't care that people like that are going to Hell!" Does that shock you? It should. It should shock and offend you that any Christian would feel that way. There is a lesson for us in this. Let's forget that Christian worker and focus on us. Do we really care that people are going to Hell? Or do our actions, or lack of actions, reveal a heart that says, "I just don't care that my friends, neighbors, and family are going to Hell"? Do you love the lost? God does. Jesus does. Jesus said of Himself, "*For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.*" Luke 19:10. Are we like Jesus? Are we seeking the lost? Do you have God's heart for lost people? Are you actively helping people find Jesus?

The little book filled with big lessons. Are you in chapter one ... running away from your commission to tell people about Jesus? Are you like the sailors, desperately needing God to save you from the storms of life ... needing to put your faith in the Savior? (If so, then immediately visit www.911GOD.org) Or are you in chapter two ... trying to pray your way back to God under His hand of discipline? Are you in chapter three ... seeing God do great things while you are serving Him with a cold heart? Or are you in chapter four ... needing to learn to love lost people? Before leaving this four-lesson study of the book of Jonah, you should read the 48 verses one more time. Pray that your loving Father will discipline you where you need reproof and correction. Jonah is the story of repentance and second chances. God gives second chances. Is God giving you another chance to walk with Him in righteousness? Take it!



Study Questions Answers at end of lesson.

1. From what verse does the population estimate of 500,000 for Nineveh come ... and how?
2. What were Jonah's emotional responses to Nineveh's conversion ... and what did he want God to do?

3. What was Jonah's explanation of his emotional responses?

4. Was Jonah's explanation of that more fitting of a reason to run from Nineveh or to run to Nineveh?

5. Did Jonah love the lost people of Nineveh?

6. What visual aids did God use in the suburbs to discipline Jonah?

7. How did Jonah react to the death of the plant and the scorching heat?

8. Why did the Holy Spirit abruptly end the book of Jonah with God's statement of compassion for the lost people of the evil city of Nineveh?

9. What New Testament verse similarly states God's compassion for lost people?



Personal Reflection No answers provided for these questions.

1. Be brutally honest ... do you have zeal for bringing lost people to Jesus?

2. Why do you think that so many Christians lose their zeal for evangelism?

3. Jonah openly communicated to God ... telling Him of his anger and displeasure. Do you communicate that openly with God? Should you?

4. How has God been disciplining you? Has He given something to you, only to take it away? What? How did you react?

5. How have you responded to His discipline in the past ... in the present?

6. What makes you angry? What should make you angry?

7. What gives you joy? What should give you joy?

8. What would God need to do to you to re-enflame your zeal for the lost?

9. Who are the Ninevites in your world? Be specific with names.

10. What are you going to do to deliver God's message to them?

11. Which chapter of Jonah best describes your present spiritual life?

12. Who do you think wrote the book of Jonah? The Holy Spirit and _____.

13. What changes are you going to make because of the book of Jonah?

Note: I would really like to hear from you about this study through Jonah. What has it meant to you? How has it changed you? Please send an e-mail to me at John@eLessons.org. And for practical training in evangelism, check out www.MyDisciplemaker.org Level 2 Disciplemaking 2 (or click here <http://www.mydisciplemaker.org/courses.html>).

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Answers to Study Questions

1. From what verse does the population estimate of 500,000 for Nineveh come ... and how? **From verse 4:11 ... if there were 120,000 young children (not knowing their right hand from their left), there could be a population of 500,000.**
2. What were Jonah's emotional responses to Nineveh's conversion ... and what did he want God to do? **He was displeased and angry ... he wanted God to take his life.**
3. What was Jonah's explanation of his emotional responses? **He said that He knew, before he left for Tarshish, that God was gracious, compassionate, slow to anger, and full of lovingkindness ... and that He would relent.**
4. Was Jonah's explanation of that more fitting of a reason to run from Nineveh or to run to Nineveh? **To run to Nineveh.**
5. Did Jonah love the lost people of Nineveh? **No.**
6. What visual aids did God use in the suburbs to discipline Jonah? **A plant, a worm, a scorching east wind, and the hot sun.**
7. How did Jonah react to the death of the plant and the scorching heat? **He was angry and wanted to die.**
8. Why did the Holy Spirit abruptly end the book of Jonah with God's statement of compassion for the lost people of the evil city of Nineveh? **To emphasize His love for them.**
9. What New Testament verse similarly states God's compassion for lost people? **John 3:16.**

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