



grow groups



## Week 4: Our Selfishness and God's Challenge

### Jonah 4:1-11

#### GOAL:

Let God free us from our attitude of entitlement and replace it with one of gratitude and love

#### CHECKLIST

- ☐ Prepare for the meeting by praying for yourself and your group (feel free to use the prayer below) and reading through this Leader's Guide.
- ☐ Go over the November Grow Group schedule, including Cornerstone Family Sunday and Thanksgiving week
- ☐ Encourage your group to participate in the Growth Guide devotions during the week.
- ☐ Spend time in breakout groups applying today's discussion and praying for each other.
- ☐ Close by giving the group any final words and a blessing.
- ☐ Take attendance in Planning Center, including guests/new members.

#### PREPARING THROUGH PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, I truly believe that "every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows." But I confess that sometimes, I think that the good things in my life are a result of my own efforts rather than your grace. This can lead me to a whole host of unholy attitudes, including entitlement, resentment, and selfishness. Please set me free from the distorted line of thinking that tells me I am owed anything, and help me practice gratitude, recognizing all of life as a gift. In the light of this gratitude, let me live with love and compassion for others, fueled by an ever-deepening understanding and experience of the grace and mercy you have given me. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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*And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. Hebrews 10:24-25*

## CONNECT (15-20 minutes)

As your meeting begins, allow group members to visit and catch up informally. After a few moments, lead the group through the following connecting activities:

**Group Connection:** Discuss the upcoming schedule for your Grow Group, including Cornerstone Family Sunday (Sunday AM groups meet at 9:30am, worship at 11:00, lunch at 12:00) and Thanksgiving week (no groups from 11/21-27)

**Relational Connection:** In this section, spend time catching up relationally. You might want to use an icebreaker question or share “highs and lows.”

**Spiritual Connection:** Ask your group the following two questions:

- Where have you seen God at work this week?
- In what specific areas do you need God to work this week?

*This is an opportunity to praise God for the good things happening and to ask for his help in our challenges. Our natural tendency will be to focus on our circumstances, and that’s ok. But this can also be related to our spiritual lives as well!*

## PRAY (5-10 minutes)

This week, we’ll continue with the new wrinkle we added to the Intercession section last week. For each thing the group prays for, invite them to add a “so that…” phrase to the end of each request.

For example, you might say, “Lord, please give Joe and Amy wisdom in how best to love their teenager *so that* they can be a reflection of your love and wisdom to their family.” Or, “God, please help Blake with his job search *so that* he can provide for his family and make an impact for you in his workplace.” Adding a phrase like this can help us focus not just on our immediate needs, but also on God’s purposes for us.

As a reminder, here are the three sections:

**Praise:** Spend some time praising God for who he is (his character)

**Thanksgiving:** Spend some time thanking God for the things he has done - in our personal lives, in the church, and throughout history

**Intercession:** Spend the last part of your prayer time lifting up the needs of the group, adding the “so that” phrases to each request.

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## DISCUSS (40-50 minutes)

- What was one thing from the Growth Guide devotions or this week's sermon that challenged you, encouraged you, or made you think?
- Today we're asking God to perform a "spiritual examination" on us to help us see the areas where we can grow. As we talk about Jonah 4, we'll be looking at Jonah's thoughts and emotions and how they help us understand our own. Start by reading Jonah 4:1-3. What do you think is going on in Jonah's head and heart that makes him think it would be better for him to die than to live to see the Ninevites be given mercy? How might we slip into this kind of thinking? How can we avoid it?

**Leader's Note:** As we'll see throughout this chapter, Jonah is a bit dramatic! But don't let his exaggerated emotional responses keep the group from relating to what's happening in his heart. When Jonah sees that the Ninevites have repented and that God has shown them mercy, the truth spills out: this is why he didn't want to go to Ninevah in the first place! The bottom line is that he doesn't think the Ninevites "deserve" God's mercy, and apparently he would rather die than live in a world where "bad people" are forgiven rather than punished. Like a child constantly tattling on others and crying out "that's not fair!" Jonah is trying to fight for his own version of justice. Which, coincidentally, ignores his own sins and magnifies the sins of others.

We've talked about this a bit in previous weeks, so you don't have to spend a ton of time here, but the point is that we can fall into this inconsistent type of thinking ourselves...constantly fixating on the offenses of others while excusing our own. This is an example of a cognitive bias known as the "fundamental attribution error," which is the tendency to attribute another's negative actions to their character or personality, while attributing your own negative actions to external circumstances outside your control. For an interesting article about this phenomenon, **[click here](#)**.

It's interesting that the secular article I (John) linked to above lists gratitude as the antidote for this kind of thinking. In other words, if you practice being grateful for other people, you'll strengthen your empathy muscles and show them more mercy. From a Christian perspective, gratitude is even more powerful: not only are we thankful for the good parts of the people in our lives, we are grateful for the grace that the Lord has shown us. And as we focus on this gratitude, it puts us in position to celebrate the grace given to others rather than resent it.

- Read Jonah 4:4. Why do you think God asks Jonah this specific question? What might he be wanting Jonah to realize?

**Leader's Note:** God could have just given Jonah a lecture. But instead, he asked him a question. Part of our human nature is that when we discover something on our own, it tends to make a bigger impact than if someone else tells us that same thing. God is giving Jonah the gift of self-discovery. He wants him to examine his motives and really understand why he is angry about the mercy shown to the Ninevites. As he gets to the bottom of this anger, he will see that it's rooted in pride, judgmentalism, and even hypocrisy.

- Read Jonah 4:5-8. Again, Jonah decides it would be better for him to die than to live. Why is he so upset this time? Now read verse 9. What do you think is behind God's question here? What might he be wanting Jonah to realize?

**Leader's Note:** Like I said...Jonah is dramatic! In this section, he reminds me of a teenager complaining to their parents as they work in the yard together: "It's so hot out here I want to die!!" The interesting thing about this part of the passage is that Jonah isn't just sad or disappointed that the plant died and left him baking in the sun. That would be a normal and totally understandable response. But Jonah wasn't sad...he was angry.

To me, this reveals a sense of entitlement on Jonah's part. He has become accustomed to the comfort the plant provides, and now he thinks he deserves to have the shade. And when it's taken away, it isn't just a disappointment – it's an injustice.

This is the attitude that God is trying to help Jonah see in himself. As he goes on to say in verse 10, Jonah didn't tend the plant or make it grow, but he still thought he deserved to have it. There is a clear parallel here to the way Jonah is viewing the Ninevites. He himself has received God's mercy as a gift...he didn't do anything to deserve it. But when the Ninevites are given mercy, he's fixated on the injustice of it all. God wants him to see that all of it...the shade of the plant and the mercy of God...is a gift that we don't deserve. And gifts are to be celebrated, not hoarded.

- Why do you think we become so easily upset when the positive circumstances in our lives are "taken away" from us? Can you think of any times where you have been "angry about the plant?" What do you think was going on behind the scenes in your heart that led to this?

**Leader's Note:** This is where we get personal! We are some of the most physically and materially blessed people in the history of the world. But somehow, we take what should be viewed as a gift and turn it into something that the universe "owes us." So when it is taken away, we aren't just sad...we are angry at the injustice of it all. (For a humorous video clip talking about this tendency from a secular perspective, [click here](#))

This happens to all of us regularly. For me, it happens most often when I feel like someone has treated me unfairly or said something about me that doesn't paint me in the most positive light. Instead of recognizing that I am a sinner saved by grace, I fixate on the injustice. I've been experiencing "the plant" of people's love and affirmation, but I can easily begin to think that people "owe" it to me rather than receiving it as a gift.

*Help the group unpack this sense of entitlement – where it comes from (pride) and where it leads (hypocrisy and judgementalism). Their examples may be different from mine, but it's something we all experience!*

- If you were to rewrite Jonah 4 with Jonah responding to his situation in a God-honoring way, what do you think it would look like?

**Leader's Note:** *This can be a fun exercise in imagination for the group. A few possibilities:*

- *Instead of being judgmental about the Ninevites, Jonah would be amazed by and thankful for their repentance.*
  - *Instead of resenting the grace that God showed them, he would marvel at it and be thankful.*
  - *Instead of feeling self-righteous, Jonah would feel convicted about the ways that he had sinned against God, and would be grateful for the forgiveness he had received.*
  - *Instead of leaving the Ninevites after preaching to them, he might have stayed to celebrate with them and would have experienced the joy of their new lives and their gratitude to him for introducing them to God.*
  - *When the plant grew up to shade Jonah, he would have recognized it as a gift from God and thanked him for it.*
  - *When the plant withered, he would have echoed the words of Job 1:21 – “The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised.”*
  - *And all of these things would have resulted in Jonah experiencing more of the goodness and joy of living in God's will.*
- Read Jonah 4:10-11 and Luke 15:25-32 (the end of the story of the Prodigal Son). What do Jonah and the older brother have in common? What is the message that God (in Jonah 4) and the father (in Luke 15) are trying to get across? How does our understanding (or lack of understanding) of the mercy that we have been shown impact the way we respond to others?

**Leader's Note:** *There are major parallels between these two stories! Jonah is a great example of the “older brother” mentality. Both Jonah and the older brother think that they are owed something, and they both resent the grace that is extended to people who they don't think deserve it. In both stories, God/the father is trying to help Jonah/the older brother see that grace is something to be celebrated, not something to be hoarded. He wants them (and us!) to see that the gifts he has given them aren't given because they earned it or deserved it...they're given because of his love!*

*At the heart of the resentment that Jonah and the older brother are holding onto is a fundamental lack of understanding of the mercy that they have received. They believe that God/the father owes them something – payment for services rendered – when in reality, they themselves are the recipients of undeserved mercy and grace! When we recognize that everything we’ve received is a gift we could have never earned, we are able to live open-handedly and celebrate anytime anyone receives grace.*

## BREAKOUT GROUPS (5-10 minutes)

After (or as) people move into their breakout groups, invite each group to discuss these questions and pray together:

*How is God speaking to you through today’s conversation? What steps might the Spirit be inviting you to take? (confess an attitude of entitlement, thank God for his mercy, extend grace to others)*

## CLOSING

After the groups are finished, call everyone back together for a brief closing. During this time, give any final thoughts you need to share and close with a brief word of blessing.

**Blessing:** (feel free to use this blessing, substitute your own, or just close with a prayer)

*This week, may you, being rooted and established in love, have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and may the experience of that love fill you with gratitude, love, and grace.*