

An underwater scene featuring a large whale on the right and a person inside a bubble on the left. The water is a deep blue color.

JONAH

FAMILY DEVOS

God Teaches Jonah about Mercy

Scripture Passage: Jonah 4

Memory Verse: Micah 6:8

“He has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?”

For My Family:

He knew it, he just knew it. Jonah knew that God was so generous, loving, kind, and merciful, that as soon as he set foot in Nineveh and preached the message that God wanted Him to preach, God would spare the lives of the Ninevites. This is exactly why Jonah tried to run away to Tarshish in the first place. Well lo and behold, the Lord *was* merciful to the Ninevites, and now Jonah was upset. Actually, he was more than just upset. He was angry.

The Lord did not reprimand Jonah (again). Instead He asked Jonah a straightforward question: “Is it right for you to be angry?” Obviously, the answer here was no, Jonah should not have been angry, but Jonah wanted to be angry with God, so he stormed off and went and sat on a hill overlooking the city. The Lord grew up a plant to shade Jonah from the heat of the sun, and Jonah was grateful for the plant that the Lord had made him. The Lord, however, was still teaching Jonah a lesson. God also made a worm come and eat away the roots of the plant so that it withered and died. The next day, the sun beat down on Jonah and the wind blew in his face, so Jonah was even more upset and angry about the plant that had died than he was about Nineveh. The Lord asked him the same question, “Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?”

God was teaching a lesson to Jonah about Mercy. When the plant was destroyed, Jonah was so upset he wished that he was dead. God was trying to show Jonah that he should have been more concerned about the eternal fate of a hundred and twenty thousand people, than the present fate of a vine.

God made the plant, not Jonah. That means that God could do with the plant whatever He wanted. It didn't actually matter how Jonah felt about the plant; it only mattered how God did. God made the Ninevites, not Jonah. That means that God could do with the Ninevites whatever He wanted. It didn't actually matter how Jonah felt about the Ninevites, it only mattered how God did. God saw that there were 120,000 Ninevites who “didn't know their right hand from their left.” God looked at the Ninevites like children who needed to be corrected and instructed, not the bloodthirsty murderers and evildoers that Jonah saw. God loved the Ninevites, and God loves all people, everywhere. He wanted Jonah to see people the way He saw them, and to love mercy the way that He does.

There might be some things that are making you upset at the moment. Maybe you can't go places you want to go, or see people you want to see. Maybe that is making you angry. I ask the question to you, "Is it right for you to be angry?" Does the Lord look at the situation you are in now differently than you do? Right now, one of the ways that we can "do justly, love mercy and walk humbly with God" (Micah 6:8) is to stay home. We actually show love to our neighbors, our community, and all of the doctors and nurses who are working really hard on our behalf, by enduring the change to our "normal" lives. Let's try not to be like Jonah and get upset at temporary things, but instead look at things the way God does, with an eternal perspective.

Questions for Young Children:

Why was Jonah angry that God showed the Ninevites mercy?

Why was Jonah angry that his plant died?

Was it right for Jonah to be angry?

What is mercy? How can we show mercy to other people?

Questions for Teens and Pre-teens

How did God and Jonah view the Ninevites differently? What does that teach us about God?

How is getting upset about being stuck at home the same as Jonah being upset about his plant dying?

Are there any practical things that we can do to show mercy to each other in our house? What about for our neighbors? Our community?