

INTERVARSITY BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

Jonah 4:1-11 NIV, The Leafy Plant (60 minutes)

WELCOME (7 minutes)

Icebreaker: Think of a time when you felt stuck in your current situation. What three words would you have used to describe how you felt?

We are studying the Bible together because we want to grow in our love for Jesus through Scripture and because we want to grow in our witness to Jesus through Scripture.

Let's pray and ask God to help us as we study today's passage together...

GROUP NORMS (3 minutes)

Let's remember our group norms as we study together today:

1. Use "I" statements (speak for yourself, not for everyone)
2. Avoid judgmental statements (no shame or blame)
3. Allow space for everyone to share if they choose
4. Practice active listening and give advice only if invited to do so
5. What we share here stays here (confidentiality)

INTRODUCE the Scripture Text (3 minutes)

Like we talked about during our first study, God had sent Jonah to Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian Empire, during a time when Israel's relationship with God was like an intense rollercoaster. There were times of great faithfulness and times of terrible idolatry (worshipping other gods). There were seasons their faith was so weak that they adopted any god that looked appealing, whoever the neighboring nations were worshipping. In an attempt to avoid worshipping foreign gods, the people of Israel had developed a hatred for foreign nations. However, what God had really wanted from the beginning was to bless Israel and make them a blessing to all the other peoples of the earth (which God told Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3).

This fear and hatred was likely at the root of Jonah's resistance to bringing God's message to Nineveh. After chapter 3, as we saw Nineveh turn away from evil and toward God, we were left wondering how their repentance would affect Jonah.

SEE the Scripture Text (10 minutes)

Let's read the passage and talk about what we see.

- Who are the characters? How are they connected?
- What is happening? When? Where?
- Which words are being repeated?
- Is the author comparing or contrasting anything?
- Would you like to point out anything else you notice?

Jonah 4:1-11 NIV –

But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry. 2 He prayed to the Lord, “Isn’t this what I said, Lord, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. 3 Now, Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live.”

4 But the Lord replied, “Is it right for you to be angry?”

5 Jonah had gone out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city. 6 Then the Lord God provided a leafy plant and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the plant. 7 But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the plant so that it withered. 8 When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah’s head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, and said, “It would be better for me to die than to live.”

9 But God said to Jonah, “Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?”

“It is,” he said. “And I’m so angry I wish I were dead.”

10 But the Lord said, “You have been concerned about this plant, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. 11 And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left—and also many animals?”

DISCOVER the Scripture Text (25 minutes)

Let’s discuss a few questions that will help us discover and understand the text.

1. Describe the emotional journey Jonah is on. What is this like for him?
2. Why does God provide the leafy plant to comfort Jonah but then sent the worm and the wind, which take away that comfort?
3. God wanted Nineveh to turn toward him, and they did. What does God seem to want from Jonah?
4. Think about how the book of Jonah might have functioned in the life of ancient Israel. How might the ancient Jewish readers of this book have reacted to a story in which Jonah, the Jewish prophet, harbors hatred toward people, while the hated enemies of God’s people are quick to repent and receive God’s forgiveness?
5. If we could communicate the core message of this text in just one sentence, what would it be? What do we sense God is communicating through this passage?

RESPOND to the Scripture Text (10 minutes)

Jonah wanted Nineveh to get the punishment they deserved, but God is full of love and mercy so he gave Nineveh (and Jonah!) a second chance.

Nineveh is soft-hearted toward God and Jonah is hard-hearted toward God. Nineveh repents and turns toward God while Jonah turns away. The people of Nineveh weren't sure if God would have mercy on them, but they repented anyway. Jonah was sure God would have mercy, and God's mercy made him angry. Look at these two – a city devoted to wickedness and a prophet without love. God loves them both and wants to deliver and comfort both.

God's desire to forgive evildoers (including us) is bigger than our fears, anger, and complaints.

Let's discern together how we can respond to what God is saying. We will answer one option from below, whichever seems most relevant to our group's discussion of the text.

- A. Who are your enemies? How do you feel about God showing mercy toward them, too?
- B. Who is God calling us to love and reach out to (though they are hard to love)? Pray together for each person.
- C. How might your own selfish desire for comfort be getting in the way of God's invitation in your life? What invitation are you sensing from God now?
- D. How are you experiencing God's interruption and relentless presence in your own life? How are you responding?

CLOSE (2 minutes)

Let's pray and thank God for our time in Scripture together...

Tips for leading the group discussion (and more tips are available at howto.bible):

- *Participate but keep your comments short to make space for others.*
- *Silence is okay. Encourage further discussion by saying "What else?" instead of commenting on every response.*



this material and more can be found at tiny.cc/biblestudyguides

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