

BELONG

Starter Questions: What's something that bothers you way more than it probably should? Ask your students if they would like to share their highs and lows from the week.

Become Challenge Check-In: Ask students how they allowed God to use them in their circle of impact this week. Celebrate any wins. How did they demonstrate their heart for Jesus to those around them?

BELIEVE

Scripture: Jonah 4

Main Idea: God cares about people we might reject.

Focus Question: How should God's heart for people shape mine?

Context:

Jonah was a prophet God sent to Nineveh, an important city in Assyria. The Assyrians were enemies of Israel and were known for their violence and wickedness. Jonah initially ran from God's command, but after God rescued him, Jonah went to Nineveh and delivered God's warning. The people of Nineveh believed God, turned from their evil ways, and God relented from the judgment He had warned them about. Jonah 4 reveals Jonah's response and brings the book to an unexpected ending.

Summary:

Instead of celebrating Nineveh's repentance, Jonah became angry. He admitted that he had run from God because he knew God was gracious, compassionate, slow to anger, and faithful in love. Jonah did not want Nineveh to receive that mercy.

God confronted Jonah's anger and used a plant to expose the difference between Jonah's priorities and His own. Jonah cared deeply about losing a plant that had made him comfortable, while God cared about the people of an entire city. The book ends with God asking Jonah a question about His compassion for Nineveh, leaving Jonah, and us, to consider whether our hearts reflect God's heart for people.

Read Jonah 4:1–4 • What Jonah Wanted

→ **Bible Study Tip:** Pay attention to strong emotions. When a passage tells you someone is extremely angry, joyful, afraid, or sad, ask what caused that response. It can reveal what matters to that person.

- What made Jonah so angry about what God had done? (*Jonah knew God was gracious and compassionate and that God might show mercy if Nineveh repented. Jonah had not wanted that to happen. His anger reveals that his problem was not misunderstanding God's character. He did not want these people to experience God's compassion.*)
- Look closely at how Jonah describes God in verse 2. What is surprising about Jonah being angry about these qualities? (*Everything Jonah says about God is good. God is gracious, compassionate, slow to anger, and faithful in love. Jonah had experienced God's mercy himself, but he resented God showing mercy to Nineveh.*)

Read Jonah 4:5–9 • What Jonah Cared About

→ **Bible Study Tip:** Look for repeated words, ideas, or reactions. Repetition can help you recognize what the writer wants you to notice.

- Compare Jonah's reactions to the plant and to Nineveh. What do his reactions reveal about what mattered to him? *(Jonah was delighted when the plant benefited him and furious when it died. But when God spared an entire city of people, Jonah was angry. His reactions expose how much his own desires and comfort were shaping what he cared about.)*
- If someone watched what made you happiest, angriest, or most upset this week, what might they conclude matters most to you? *(Answers will vary. Encourage students to think about what gets the biggest reaction from them. Our reactions can sometimes reveal what we value, what we fear losing, or what we believe we need to be happy.)*

Read Jonah 4:10–11 • What God Cared About

- What contrast does God make between Jonah's concern for the plant and His concern for Nineveh? *(Jonah cared about a plant he had not created or caused to grow, largely because of what it did for him. God cared about an entire city filled with people He had made. God was showing Jonah how different his concern was from God's concern for the people of Nineveh.)*

→ **Bible Study Tip:** Notice how a passage ends. The final words of a story can point you toward what the writer wants you to keep thinking about. Jonah is unusual because the entire book ends with God asking a question.

- Why do you think Jonah ends without telling us how Jonah answered God's question? *(The unanswered question turns the attention toward the reader. We are left to consider whether we will share Jonah's attitude toward people or allow God's compassion to shape our own hearts.)*

Read Luke 6:35–36 • New Testament Connection

- How does Jesus' teaching here challenge the way Jonah viewed the Ninevites? *(Jesus calls His followers to reflect God's character by showing mercy, even toward people who may not treat them well. Jonah wanted God's mercy for himself but struggled with God extending compassion to his enemies.)*

Reflect

- Who are you most tempted to write off, avoid, or decide isn't worth caring about? What makes it difficult for you to show that person compassion? *(Answers will vary. Remind students that compassion does not require staying in an unsafe or unhealthy situation.)*
- How could God's heart for that person shape the way you respond to them? *(Students might pray for them, show kindness, refuse to join in rejecting them, or hope for their repentance. Compassion does not mean ignoring sin or hurt. It means no one is beyond God's concern or mercy.)*

BECOME

Circle of Impact Challenge:

This week, think about someone in your circle who is easy to overlook, avoid, or write off. Ask God to help you see that person the way He does. Then take one intentional step this week to show that person you care. You might include them, encourage them, listen to them, serve them, or pray specifically for them.

Showing compassion does not mean ignoring sin, pretending hurt didn't happen, or putting yourself in an unsafe situation. It means refusing to decide that someone is beyond God's concern or mercy.