



## Introduction

Over the past few months I have been listening to a weekly radio broadcast out of the UK. Its primary purpose is to promote dialogue between people holding opposing beliefs about some of this generation's hottest social and spiritual issues. Typically, the program invites two experts in a specific field of study to give the best arguments they have for the beliefs that they adhere to. The two specialists usually duke it out in a very civil and respectful exchange of ideals mediated by a very good moderator. Almost always the debates are between Christians and, atheists, agnostics or skeptics. I have found it interesting that most of the atheists who present their positions on the program did not start their journey as atheists. Most, I have perceived, started out being raised in religious homes, many attending theological seminaries and being involved in active ministry. But for one reason or another, they have become atheists, agnostics or indifferent to the Christian faith. And, among those who have lost their faith, the majority seem to stumble over God's slowness to deal with pain and suffering, and His inaction in punishing evil and violence. I think this is a trend that we are seeing in our culture over the last 50 years. It is an effective cultural tool that Satan exploits. It will probably become even more common in the future.

One program hosted two individuals, whose fathers are very well-known preachers in the USA among evangelicals. They were Bart Campolo, son of Tony Campolo, and, Sean McDowell, son of Josh McDowell. Both boys grew up under strong and active Christian ministries. Both became active servants of God in their own ministries. But, while Sean eventually embraced the faith and continued on in the work of apologetics that his father started, Bart left the faith of his father and became an atheist. Much of what Bart said in his reasoning for running away from God, and becoming indifferent to God, sounded a lot like Jonah. Feelings played a huge role in his abandonment of God. He did not like what he saw God doing (or not doing). He became angry. He became rebellious and eventually he became indifferent. What Bart Campolo did, and what we learn about Jonah today, is what many who are disillusioned with God often do. So, let us spend the rest of our time today focusing on what happens to God when He falls into the hands of angry sinners.

**Jonah was angry, but not at things or even people. No, he was mad at God.**

Jonah chapter 4 carries on where Jonah chapter 3 left off.



Jonah 3:10-4:1

When God saw what they [Nineveh] did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened.  
4:1 But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry.

Jonah 3:10

10 When God saw what they [Nineveh] did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened. Jonah 4:1 But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry.

What we see in the beginning of chapter 4 is God in the hands of an angry sinner. Jonah, the saint behaving like the sinner, is ticked off with God. In Jonah's mind God should not have acted in the way He did towards Nineveh.

The first verse of chapter 4 reveals to us what anger looks like. Anger is not just pushing and shoving or biting and screaming. Anger is an attitude which is hidden deep down in the soul. That's why we have to ask ourselves: how do we know when we are angry with God? If all anger manifested itself in misbehaviour, it would be easier to diagnose at the outset. But it isn't. I'm sure that a more comprehensive list of anger could be developed, but verse one and two supply us with two indicators of anger with God.

#### **Indicator #1:**

We are angry with God whenever we consider God's actions to be wrong.

Whenever we are willing to look at God's righteousness and declare him to be unrighteous, then we are angry with God. A more literal translation of verse one might read like this: *This was absolutely disgusting to Jonah, and he became angry.* (Stuart, D. (2002). Vol. 31: Word Biblical Commentary : Hosea-Jonah. Word Biblical Commentary (498). Dallas: Word, Incorporated.) Another translation goes like this: *What God did was evil to Jonah - a really great evil.*

Jonah was livid with God. The word "anger" expresses the idea of "flaming." He was on fire. This issue was consuming Jonah. What nerve did God have sparing those heathen Ninevites? Now you may think that Jonah had a twisted mind to think that way, but there are large segments of our population who are burning angry with God over a lot less, not just over his mercy and kindness, but over his inactivity in supplying their "felt needs." They see God supplying the wants and wishes of the undeserving, but they themselves are still needy - and they think they deserve God's attention. They are like the eldest son in the story of the prodigal son in Luke 15. The eldest son watched as the youngest and rebellious son was welcomed back as a member of the family and the father's lavish love was poured out upon him. The eldest son was ticked. He became angry as well.

When we consider God the Father's will to be wrong, that is an evidence of anger.

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Jonah 4:2a

He prayed to the LORD, "O LORD, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. ...

**Indicator #2:** We are angry with God when our prayers become self-justifying rather than seeking God's guidance and will.

Jonah 4:2a He prayed to the LORD, "O LORD, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish.

...

This is exactly what I said would happen when I was in my OWN country. See! I was right to run away! Do we find ourselves trying to convince God that our will is the right way? When prayer is not about seeking God's mercy, and, is primarily about persuading God to take our advice, it is self-justifying prayer. It is an indicator of our anger with God.

Now let's look at what was unsaid in Jonah's prayer. Let's read between the lines. I didn't like You and what You did back there. I am really disappointed in You now that it has happened. "God, I'm right and You're wrong." Jonah feels empowered to give God a piece of his mind.

Who would have the audacity to treat God like that?

Before you answer that, take a look at the world around you. There are huge segments of society that are judging God. It is especially true about the western world - those who have benefitted most from the rich provisions of God's creation. They are the ones angriest with God. It is no surprise that in the book of Jonah, no one had experienced more of the rich provisions of God's creation than Jonah Himself. Yet he cries the loudest about the unfairness of God in it all.

Check out your heart. Do you see Jonah in yourself? Is that the way you've been treating God?

When the hands of an angry sinner get hold of God, what is the outcome? Does God need to fear? What does the angry sinner discover about God when he starts to rant and rave, rebel and resist God? I think he discovers the two truths that Jonah discovered about God.

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Jonah 4:2a

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**Truth #1: God does not cater to the pleasures of sinners.**

The sinner's pleasure and God's pleasure are on a collision course. They are not mutually compatible. God does, in fact, meet the sinner's needs. God always does whatever is required to bring the

sinner back to a place where God can redeem him and bless him. But God does not provide the pleasures required to satisfy the sinful heart. If He does, then it is judgment disguised as pleasure and will bring the sinner one more step closer to experiencing the unpleasurableness of sin (see Romans 1:18-28). God functions to fulfill and perform his own good pleasure. Everything God does, for a sinner or for a saint, is intended to make available to them the marvelous riches of his nature and his grace. In God's nature are all the riches required for you to please God and to find the kind of pleasure that is everlasting.

## **Truth #2: God's own good pleasure never contradicts his nature (Jonah 4:2b)**

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Jonah 4:2

He prayed to the LORD, "O LORD, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee 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."

Jonah 4:2

2 . . . I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.

Only a person with a twisted sense of justice could say something like this about God with a straight face. It shows the state of his soul. He is self-righteous to the core. He quotes the verse that God spoke about Himself when God was giving the children of Israel a second chance after worshiping the golden calf. His thought must have been this: God! You should only spare those who deserve to be spared, like me who disobeyed you, like Israel who worshiped the golden calf, like my country who God prospered despite their wickedness (2 Kings 14:25)! But those Ninevites - they don't deserve it.

Let's take a look at God's nature. Everything God does has its source in His nature. These verses are what drives God. If you have ever doubted God and his motives, think about how He is wired.

### **Trait #1: He is wired to be gracious.**

Gracious has the idea of granting a favour. One dictionary describes the word as hearing the cry of a person who has had to declare bankruptcy. God is motivated to help such a person.

### **Trait #2: He is wired to be compassionate.**

This ... refers to deep love (usually of a "superior" for an "inferior") rooted in some "natural" bond. (Harris, R. L., Harris, R. L., Archer, G. L., & Waltke, B. K. (1999). *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (electronic ed.) (841). Chicago: Moody Press.) God again is described as one who is in a position to help the underdog. He is one who reaches out to those who do not measure up to his own stature and importance, but places his affections on them anyhow.

### **Trait #3: He is wired to be slow to anger / patient.**

Again the meaning of the word expresses God's hesitancy to judge. Anger is the appropriate response, but he breathes deeply and long before he expresses his anger. It underscores the measured response God makes before he acts. He does this not only with saints such as Jonah. We have seen in this book that this is the way he treats sinners like Nineveh as well.

**Trait #4: He is wired to be firmly loyal**

(abounding in love). The idea here is usually expressed as kindness. However it most likely is a reference to his loyalty to those with whom he has a covenant relationship.

**Trait #5: He is wired to choose not to destroy (when there is an alternative to consider).**

If He can extend comfort, he will. His nature is unchangeable, but his punishments do change. God is free to decide punishment based on his good pleasure. Whatever punishment he decides is justifiable because no one God judges is worthy of being spared. Everyone of them is worthy of destruction.

This revelation of who God is is far different than what one would naturally think. Jonah knew all these truths about God, but they did not control his life - they did not modify his behaviour. If our beliefs do not affect our behaviour, then there is something wrong with us, not with God. Instead of letting his beliefs modify his behaviour, Jonah spent his time attempting **to modify God's behaviour**. The truth is that God cannot be manipulated to be someone different than his nature dictates. Jonah tried. But God resisted.

When we cannot find pleasure, or worse, we refuse to find pleasure in what God brings to us, what happens to us?

Jonah 4:3

3 Now, O LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live."

We lose purpose and motivation to live. "My death is better than life."

What's wrong with looking at life this way? When the self-interests of a person take priority over the glory of God, we find ourselves living in defiance against God, being depressed about life or taking a self-destructive outlook on death. Jonah wanted death as an escape from God. Death, however, is not an escape from God. Death is an encounter with God (Hebrews 9:27). For those who know Him, a closer encounter with his love; for those who have refused him, a closer encounter with his judgment.

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Jonah 4:3

Now, O LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live."

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Jonah 4:4-5

**4 But the LORD replied,  
"Have you any right to be  
angry?"**

What did God think about being picked up in human hands and being mistreated by an angry sinner like Jonah?

Jonah 4:4-5

4 But the LORD replied, "Have you any right to be angry?"

God asks: Does it make you feel any better to be angry? Do you have a good reason to be angry? Jonah walks out on God. **Isn't it silly to think that the God who reigns over all creation would feel compelled to change his decision to spare Niveveh based on a pouting prophet's temper tantrum?** But, of course, God still wants something to do with him. God will pursue him. Jonah must be one of the most bankrupt people we meet in Scripture. God will go on to show Jonah God's side of the story. He will try to convince Jonah that His way is the best way. We will finish the book of Jonah next week and hopefully see God's point of view and why it brings God such pleasure.

In the meantime let me end with a review of today's teaching from God's word.

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How is much of our day to day living is lived with the attitude of Jonah?

- v.1 "God! You did me wrong!"
- v.2 "God! If You cared about my feelings, You would never have let this happen!"
- v.3 "God! I don't want to become like You! If that's the kind of God You are, I want nothing to do with You!"
- v.4 "God! Get lost!"

### **How much of our day to day living is lived with the attitude of Jonah?**

If I could condense the rationality behind Jonah's anger concisely, it would go like this:

- v.1 - "God! You did me wrong!"
- v.2 - "God! If You cared about my feelings, You would never have let this happen!"
- v.3 - "God! I don't want to become like You! If that's the kind of God You are, I want nothing to do with You!"
- v.4 - "God! Get lost!"

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What kind of effect will this pity-party have on the believer?

- Jonah's Demand: It's all about me! (4:1-2a)
- God's Response: No! It's all about Me! (2b)
- Jonah's Defiance: Well I want it to be about me! (3)
- God's Reprimand: Is that the way it should be? Is that what life is all about -- you? (4)
- Jonah's Deception: Yes!

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Jonah's Demand: It's all about me! (4:1-2a)

God's Response: No! Look deeper and longer: It's all about **Me**! (2b)

Jonah's Defiance: Well I want it to be about me! (3)

God's Reprimand: Is that the way it should be? Is that what life is all about? you? (4)

Jonah's Deception: Yes!

Unfortunately, whether saint, like Jonah, or sinner, so many have failed in this point. Our lives are lived with the same attitude as Jonah.



What kind of effect will this pity-party have on the believer?

- If you look at the book that your life is writing, what chapter titles do you find written? Do they go something like:  
Chapter 1 - defensiveness.  
Chapter 2 - defiance.  
Chapter 3 - despair.  
Chapter 4 - disillusionment
- Is there a chapter in your life that is entitled: "devotion"?

If you look at the book that your life is writing, what chapter titles do you find written? Do they go something like: Chapter 1 – defensiveness. Chapter 2 - defiance. Chapter 3 - despair. Chapter 4 - disillusionment.

Your autobiography does not need to be titled: Larry Nutbrown and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Life.

Consider this: Is there a chapter in your life story that is entitled: "devotion"?

Bart Campolo, in his reflections on his life, decided to devote himself to his "feelings." I think that's exactly what Jonah did. And the more they devoted themselves to their feelings, the farther they wanted to distance themselves from God.

**Recently I heard a wise piece of advice. Someone said, "feelings make lousy leaders, but they make excellent windows" into the soul.**

Jonah let his feelings be the leader. It led him to anger, resentment, despair and abandonment. He should have let his feelings be a window – and then looked through it to see what was inside of him. If he had, he would have seen a heart of idolatry. His anger revealed that he could not love what God loved because he considered something more important than God and God's will. He considered God's rights to be inferior to his need for vengeance, his love of country and family, and, his insistence on his own rights. He insisted that God succumb to his own wants rather than to surrender to the wisdom and mercy of God.

By insisting on his own rights, by making an idol of his own feelings, anger became entrenched in Jonah, and Jonah's voice in favour of God transformed into a grudge against God. Jonah expresses that grudge in verse 5.

Jonah 4:5

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.

It was as though his grudge was trying to force God to choose between Jonah or Nineveh. And if God decided to choose Nineveh, he couldn't have Jonah. Verse 3 makes it clear.



Jonah 4:5

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Jonah 4:3

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Christians are still choosing to walk away from God today for all the same reasons Jonah did. Be careful how you process your feelings. They can so easily transform themselves into idols.

On the other hand, if you allow devotion to God's truth, and, if you pursue with all your heart the things God loves, you will be drawn ever so closer to experience His compassion and appreciate his character.

There is a God who by His very nature is gracious, compassionate, patient and kind, who is looking for a way to help you avoid disaster and judgment. He is a God who takes great pleasure in helping bankrupt and beaten up people to become re-created and healthy.

What Jonah is on the brink of discovering about God is something that every angry sinner who tries to man handle God will have to learn. "God is good, but He's not tame." (C.S. Lewis) You can get as angry as you want against God, but you are not going to change God, you will only discover the depths of your foolish depravity. That will be the subject of next week's message.

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When you and I are tempted to become angry with God, what should we do?

**1. Remember God is beautiful, he is good and what the Bible says about Him will always come to pass.**

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When you and I are tempted to become angry with God, what should we do?

**2. Stop investing in your feelings and start drawing from your faith account.**  
**3. Appreciate and learn from the times that God's compassion has saved your skin in the past.**

2. Stop investing in your feelings and start drawing from your faith account.

If you keep living by your feelings, your feelings will cast a dark shadow over everything else faith has accomplished in your life. You will find yourself, as Jonah did, lecturing God on what He should be like.

3. Appreciate and learn from the times that God's compassion has saved your skin in the past. It's probably only in your eyes that you think of yourself as better than Nineveh. See yourself through God's eyes and the cross of Jesus. If God had to take such drastic measures to save you by sending His only Son, then maybe you have a higher opinion of yourself than you ought to have. The cross tells us that we are no more worthy than Nineveh.





When you and I are tempted to become angry with God, what should we do?

4. If God's behaviour really upsets you so much, Jonah's experience tells us to wait. God probably has more to say which will bring clarity to your doubts.

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We will pursue this thought in next week's message.

#### COMMUNION SERVICE:

Is it right for any of us to be angry? God will explain His behaviour to Jonah in the remaining verses of chapter 4, but before we go there, we must pause and look at our own lives lest we become angry and stay angry against God.

One of the means that God gives us to pause is the communion table. Here God sets before us symbolically, in the bread and in the wine, the greatest demonstration of his grace, his patience, his love and his reluctance to make the sinner pay the price of sin himself or herself. The bread that we will soon eat represents the person, and specifically, the body of the Lord Jesus. God knew that we would never achieve the point of perfection that was required to make us immune to condemnation. God in His grace provided an undeserved and powerful substitute for our sin. His name was Jesus. Jesus gave himself as our sacrifice. God, who would have been just to immediately execute punishment against us for our sin, let the sins pile up. He was slow to anger. He was hesitant to judge sin prematurely. I am guessing and I have never kept count, but let's estimate my sin in a very favourable light at only 10 sins a day. Before I came to know Christ, that number was much higher. After a lifetime of 10 sins/day over the space of a seventy year life span, a very conservative estimate of my sin would be 255000 infractions against how God had instructed me to live. There would not be a lawyer in this world who could plead my case. That makes me a chronic and serial sinner. But God had a plan. He is slow to anger and was patient enough to wait until his Spirit had the opportunity to teach my heart to love what God loved - His Son, and persuade me to put my trust in the sacrifice Jesus made for me rather than in my own attempts to somehow convince God I was not to blame for my ¼ of a million sins which were an insult to God. This is what the bread represents for me – an overwhelmingly gracious God, an unfailing love for disobedient and desperate sinners, and a kind-heartedness that would go to almost any extreme to justify the unjustifiable – to the point of providing his own worthy Son to take the punishment for the unworthy world.

On the flip side of the sacrifice of Jesus is the covenant God makes with us because of Jesus. This is represented by the wine or the cup. His shed blood, sealed for us the promise that God would equip us through Jesus with everything good for doing His will. Jesus' blood serves to remind us of the unfailing love he has for sinners who surrender themselves to trust in Jesus' sacrifice and abide in Him. It also reminds us that what we have awaiting us in Christ is not calamity, but compassion – not condemnation, but transformation. A ¼ of a million sins and a nature, by default unable to please God, exchanged for the perfection of Jesus. That is a huge calamity to be removed from us. Jesus took our place. He received the punishment. In Jesus, God is justified in withholding the punishment toward the sinner and He proved that he was righteous by not letting the sin go unpunished. God reminds us in Romans 3:25-26 that ...

God did this to show that in the past he was right to be patient and forgive sinners. This also shows that God is right when he accepts people who have faith in Jesus.

For this reason it is such dangerous territory to hang on to our anger against God. We know that everything will not go the way we want it to in our lives. However, we need to appreciate the incredible humility and unfailing love of the Son of God who makes our past sin history and makes our future guaranteed free of punishment and full of promise.

So as we take the bread and the cup, we remember Jesus. I am going to invite our servers to the front. They will distribute the bread and the cup at the same time. While they are distributing the elements, please take the time to pause and reflect upon the extravagant benevolence of God towards you. If you have felt anger or resentment against God, please ask forgiveness and ask for the Spirit's help to overcome such weakness of character. By doing so, your heart and minds will be prepared to partake of these elements in a worthy manner. When everyone has the bread and the juice, we will continue partake together. (distribute the elements)

Father, thank you for the time to pause and to be reminded of the fullness of your love and your commitment to save us from our sin. May this time of remembrance refocus our hearts and be a further means of discipling our hearts to a life of obedience toward You. Amen.

Let us take the bread which represents for us the body of the Lord Jesus Christ, broken for us in his death.  
Matthew 26:26-29

26 While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body." Let us eat in remembrance of Jesus, our Sacrifice and our Saviour.

Let us take the cup which represents the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, the basis for God's covenant of love with us. This covenant promises the forgiveness of our sins, full access to God, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and God's law written in our hearts.

27 Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you.  
28 This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.