



# Sermon-Based Small Group Leader Notes

For the week of February 5, 2012 (week 4 of 10)

## Introduction

### Topic

Sermon Title: "Living Beyond Resentment"

Sermon Series: *Flow* (week 4 of 7)

Scripture: Colossians 3:8-10

Sermon by: Dr. Tom Harrington

### Goals for This Gathering

1. Explore how staying in the Flow of the Spirit can help us respond correctly in anger and resentment
2. To discuss the homework
3. To pray together

### Prayer

- Take prayer requests and praises
- Pray for all Small Groups meeting at Northwest and in homes
- Pray for the spiritual growth of your group
- Pray that the Holy Spirit convicts you of areas of needed growth and provides the strength to change

## Getting Started

**Note to Leader:** This week we will conclude our study of Jonah by diving into Chapter 4.

In the **Getting Started** section this week we refer back to the point in Pastor Harrington's sermon where he discussed Cognitive Incapacitation, that state in which anger causes our brain to disconnect rational thought from instantaneous "response" and we are cognitively unable to control our response. It is in this state that we make poor choices, for example, road rage, flying off the handle, losing it, etc.

**Question 1:** Have you ever experienced "Cognitive Incapacitation"? What are some scenarios in which you might find yourself in this "fight or flight" state?

The amygdala is the part of the brain that fosters strong emotion and immediate reaction vs. the cerebral cortex, which is the "thinking/rational" part of the brain.

Answers will be personal but may include things like, when we are tired, when we are busy, when the object of our anger knows exactly how to "push our buttons". Etc.

## Into the Bible

The group will read Jonah chapter 4.

**Question 2:** Would you say that in this chapter Jonah is experiencing a moment of "Cognitive Incapacitation" and that his rational thought process is out of control?

*We expect that people would answer in the affirmative since Jonah seems to be "yelling" at God for being gracious and merciful. On the other hand, people might answer "no," since throughout the book, this response is consistent with Jonah's pattern of thinking and reacting. In other words, he has fits or acts out in rebellion to God's direction numerous times.*

**Question 3:** Why do you think Jonah is so resentful about God's change of heart toward the people of Nineveh and his decision to forego their destruction?

Jonah resented God's merciful handling of the Ninevites. His prejudice toward this people group and his personal pride were evident in his bitter response. They were not God's chosen people; in fact they were heathens, and so in Jonah's opinion they deserved to die. He did not want them to repent and change their evil ways. He wanted them dead. In contrast to the Ninevites, who regarded the forty days as a door of hope and repented, Jonah regarded the forty days as an unnecessary waste of time. If Nineveh was to be overturned, why not do it immediately? In Jonah's mind all non-Jewish people were incapable of being saved, because they were not God's chosen people.

If we contrast the Ninevites' immediate response to Jonah's prophetic message, with the Israelites' hard-hearted response to God's redemptive message delivered through numerous prophets, it seems natural that Jonah should have been embarrassed that his own people — God's beloved nation — did not respond with anything like the immediate repentance we see here from the Ninevites.

**Optional Question:** Do you think the people of Nineveh may have been aware of who Jonah was and may have had knowledge of his prior "Fish Experience?" Why or why not?

This is possible. Reports of Jonah's miraculous fish experience probably preceded him to Nineveh. It is generally believed that acid from the fish's stomach would have bleached Jonah's face, thus validating Jonah's "in the gut" experience, therefore providing visible evidence to the people of Nineveh as to God's power.

#### Question 4: How does God respond to Jonah's anger (vv. 4, 6–9)?

Jonah's determination to see them die was not right, and the Lord wanted Jonah to see his sin. So, the Lord arranged the course of events to teach a lesson on true compassion. He caused a broad-leafed vine to sprout and spread over Jonah's shelter. Before dawn the Lord prepared a worm to chew on the roots of the vine, causing it to wither. Next the Lord directed the east wind to blow on Jonah, causing great discomfort. Jonah's self-centered love for personal comfort was vividly revealed.

The Lord contrasts this selfish **concern** with the Lord's concern for people, even wicked people. Here was a great city filled with people that had never received instruction in moral principles and holy practices of dealing with each other. They had a multitude of children who had no hope of hearing the truth about the living God unless a Hebrew taught them.

NOTE: Scripture reports that there were 120,000 persons who could not discern between their right hand and their left — indicating that there were 120,000 children between the ages of 3–4 who would perish — but the total population of Nineveh was believed to be 600,000 persons.

Bible commentator Matthew Henry has the following to say about Jonah's reaction:

Jonah had **so little control of himself** that he voiced his anger and displeasure; he had **no rule over his own spirit**, and as a result he opens himself to temptations and snares.

**The Bible is pretty clear about how we are expected to deal with anger. Let's take a look at some passages and clarify God's instruction for dealing with anger.**

Ecclesiastes 7:9: "Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit, for anger resides in the lap of fools" (NIV1984).

James 1:19-20: "My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires" (NIV).

Ephesians 4:31: "Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice" (NIV).

Psalms 37:8: "Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret—it leads only to evil" (NIV).

1 Timothy 2:8: "Therefore I want the men everywhere to pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or disputing" (NIV).

Romans 12:19: "Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord" (NIV).

#### Question 5: What unhealthy ways of managing anger do these verses imply?

*We are quick to anger, don't take the time to think before we act and speak, etc. We seek to "get back at" others and to get revenge. We can hold bitterness in our hearts. We might move past verbal assault to physical violence.*

#### Question 6: If the fruit of the Spirit is the sign of God's indwelling presence, what changes would you realize in your patterns of resentment and anger if the Holy Spirit were allowed to flow more freely through you?

In respect to Jonah, we can conclude that Jonah was not allowing the Holy Spirit to guide many of his responses. When we walk in the Spirit the love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control that we will see blossoming in our lives will completely overshadow any need for anger, other than anger against sin.

#### Question 7: How does God feel about us allowing our anger to lead us towards revenge?

God knows how anger and the desire for revenge can eat away at our souls for years to come. We are directed to let him worry about taking revenge and to fill ourselves with the Spirit's fruit of forbearance, which, according to the Encarta dictionary means: 1) *Patience, tolerance, or self-control, especially in not responding to provocation*; 2) *The fact of deliberately not doing or saying something when you could do or say*; and 3) *not exercising a legal right, especially of not insisting on payment of a debt at the due date but giving the debtor more time to pay*.

### Digging Deeper

- The questions in this section prompt life application.
- Allow your group to answer these more personal questions as they feel comfortable. Newer groups or established groups with several new members might find less responding initially.

We have all experienced anger and resentment at one time or another. You've probably experienced both "quick heat" anger that flashes and dies and "slow burn" anger that never seems to completely die but flares up over and over again. Or, perhaps you struggle with resentment that gnaws away at your contentment and joy.

#### Question 8: What steps can we take to stay in the flow of the spirit and manage both types of anger or patterns of resentment?

These will be personal answers but I imagine answers like: *take time to breathe, take a moment to pray or to step*

*away, and allow the time needed to be controlled by the spirit rather than the amygdala. Take time to look around and count our blessings and at what the Lord has provided us. Having an outside focus rather than a more self-centered inside focus also helps.*

**Question 9: What does this story about Jonah's anger and God's response teach us about our role in managing anger and resentment? What does it teach us about God's role in helping us deal with these emotions?**

**Question 10: If we seek to dwell in the flow of the spirit, how might we better fulfill our role?**

There will be numerous responses – something along the lines of: *We focus on him and developing our relationship with him and he'll be responsible for anger and judgment against sin. If we are flowing in the Spirit, the fruit of that "flow" will be love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control – none of which easily reside in the same heart as anger. We need to follow God's lead and show mercy, love and forgiveness while leaving the righteous anger and revenge in his hands.*

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## **Prayer Requests and Closing Prayer**

Close with prayer, praying for each other and for God's wisdom and power in allowing God his proper role as Lord over every part of our lives.