

Listen Carefully to God's Questions

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[0 : 00] Why do you ask questions? You think, well, it's obvious, isn't it? Well, in most situations, we ask questions because we don't know the answer.

We want to get some certain information. If I ask you, what time is it? I want to know the time. I don't know it. Now, all questions are not seeking information, as we all well know.

If it gets about 10 or 11, 40, somebody stands up and says, do you know what time it is? They're not trying to get information.

They're trying to tell me something. That's how God asks questions. In every situation, when God asks a question in Scripture, He is not seeking information.

He knows. For an example, when God asked Adam, where are you? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?

[1 : 08] It was not a question about where was Adam literally. God knew. It was not a question about did you really do it?

God knew. In asking Cain, where is Abel, your brother? It was not because God didn't know where Cain was.

And the fact that he had killed his brother. God asked questions, not because he doesn't know the answers, but to confront us about issues in our lives that we need to deal with.

God asked Adam those questions to drive home the severity of his sin. To help him to understand that by his disobedience, Adam had broken fellowship with God.

God asked Cain that question to confront him about his sin, the first murder in creation. Commentator Peter Williams says that God's questions are meant to teach us something or to expose us, our inner self, or expose to us our inner selves when we are guilty of sin or disobedience.

[2 : 34] So whenever we read the Bible and come across God asking a question, we ought to ask ourselves, is God addressing that question to me? And if so, what am I to learn from it?

Today we're going to conclude our study in the book of Jonah by looking at three questions that God asked Jonah. Jonah chapter four, Jonah chapter four, only 11 chapters.

I want us to look at it. We looked at the first four last week, but for the benefit of those who were not here last week, or maybe if you don't know the story, in chapter three, God sent Jonah to preach to the city of Nineveh a message of judgment.

In 40 days, God was going to destroy them, that city. But they took that as a warning, and they believed God.

They turned from their sin, and they demonstrated their repentance, and God relented, it says. God chose to forgive them and not destroy them.

[3 : 46] Good news, right? Well, yes, to everyone but Jonah. Look now what happened after God was not going to kill the people of Nineveh.

4-1. But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. And he prayed to the Lord and said, O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country?

That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish, for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster.

Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live. The Lord said, do you do well to be angry?

Are you right to be angry at Jonah? Verse 5. Jonah went out of the city and sat to the east of the city and made a booth or a shelter, like a little lean-to, for himself there.

[4 : 52] He sat under it in the shade till he could see what would become of the city. Now the Lord appointed a plant and made it come up over Jonah that it might be a shade over his head to save him from his discomfort.

So Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the plant. But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the plant so that it withered.

When the sun rose, God appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint. And he asked that he might die and said, it is better for me to die than to live.

But God said to Jonah, do you do well to be angry for the plant? And he said, yes, I do well to be angry, angry enough to die.

And the Lord said, you pity the plant for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night.

[6 : 00] And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?

Jonah is asked three questions by God. And what I want us to do is look at these questions because they're the kind of questions God asks of us.

Number one, some of God's questions are designed to confront us over our sin. That's what the first question is about. Do you do well to be angry? Is it right for you to be angry of what you're angry about, Jonah?

Jonah, my gracious salvation of all these people? Well, that question was designed to confront Jonah over his unjustified anger.

That's what we looked at last week. We're not going to go into the details. If you weren't here, I want to encourage you to go online and listen to that. I had more positive feedback about that message than any I've had in a long time, so it struck a nerve.

[7 : 13] All of us. Let me rephrase that. Many of us. We have to battle anger. All of us deal with it from time to time.

But that would be a good message. The danger of anger to go back and listen to. But we, I want to just say this. We learned last week. All of us would profit from guarding against developing and expressing unjustified anger when things don't go our way.

When life's not everything we want it to be. We need to guard against just always flying off the handle. Saying things we shouldn't say.

Causing more damage than anything else. But Jonah's real problem and ours is his selfishness and self-centeredness.

See, Jonah was unhappy and angry because God had shown his grace to the people of Nineveh. And decided not to destroy them.

[8 : 25] And that was just totally contrary to what Jonah wanted. You see, he thought those people, they were Assyrians, he thought they don't deserve mercy. They're ruthless, brutal, evil, wicked people.

Some of the most barbaric people of that day. They shouldn't have the opportunity to be forgiven. And they were pagans. They were not Jews. Jonah thought that God should only be gracious to people like him.

His kind of people. Have you ever thought like that? Do you ever think me and mine are special?

Me and my family. Me and my country. Me and my race. Me and my class of people.

You see, that's what Jonah thought. Jonah certainly appreciated God's grace. When God forgave him, gave him a fresh start. But he couldn't stand the thought of God forgiving these people who they were and what they'd done.

[9 : 41] Now, you note that Jonah did not answer God's first question. And as you go on and read, evidently he didn't even think about it. Much less pray about it. He just stayed angry.

Look what he did in verse 5. He left the city. Jonah went out of the city and sat to the east of the city and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade till he should see what would become of the city.

Evidently, Jonah was hoping God would change his mind. Destroy them anyway. Or maybe these people, their repentance would be, it wouldn't last.

And so God would destroy them because they became unfaithful. Whatever the reason, after God did his great work of saving so many people, seeing change in their lives, instead of being happy about it, he's mad about it, he goes out, maybe on a hill, to look down and hope.

Maybe God will destroy this city like he destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. And I want to be here to see it. Can you imagine that heart, that lack of heart, that attitude that Jonah had?

[10 : 55] Well, in anger, he left the city and in so doing, he quit his job. See, he was God's prophet to that city. God sent him there to preach like he had.

And the way the people responded, Jonah, a normal person, a normal preacher, a normal prophet, would have just been thrilled, excited, and would have been happy to stay there and teach these people more about God because they didn't know much about him.

Teach his word. Help them to get grounded in their faith. But not Jonah. Jonah didn't like what God did.

He got mad at God and he quit. He didn't do the responsible thing that God had called him to do. Now, think about this.

Do you see anything familiar in Jonah's attitude or his actions? Do you ever see that picture of Jonah when you look in the mirror?

[11 : 57] You know, our selfishness and self-centeredness often makes us angry, doesn't it? And a lot of times when it's all about us, we don't get our way, we get angry.

But we also are miserable. We're not, we're just miserable. We're not happy. We're not content. Any normal human, not just preacher or prophet, any normal human being would be happy to know that 120,000 men, women, and children, the population of Nineveh, had been saved from destruction, but not Jonah.

Jonah hated what God loved, the people of Nineveh. Do you ever hate anyone or anything that you know God loves?

Are there some people in your life, you would have to admit, I know God loves them, but I hate them. There are some things about your life, things about people's life that you are related to, involved with.

You just actually hate it. But you know, God is pleased by it. If you do, if you hate what God loves, you better get used to being angry.

[13 : 26] You better get used to being a miserable person because God will never allow you to be right with Him, to be right in your own soul if you hate the things He loves.

If you refuse to try to find joy in the things that please God. Well, also, I want you to see that our selfishness and self-centeredness also makes us useless.

Jonah's anger led him to quit serving God and become a spectator out on the hill. I want you to understand that God doesn't call anyone to be a spectator in the game of life.

When God calls us to Himself, when He saves us, He puts His Spirit in us. He puts us in a spiritual family. And God calls us to be in the game.

Be an active participant. Be a team player for the rest of our lives, really. The New Testament clearly tells us some of the ways we need to be participating.

[14 : 43] We're to be the Lord's witnesses, Jesus said in Acts 1-8. We are to be about the disciple-making process, helping people not just to come to know Jesus, but be able to grow and mature in their faith.

We are to serve the Lord in and through His church and in our community with the gifts and talents and abilities that He's given us. A lot of you in here, you know the analogy in Scripture.

The church is like the body of Christ. And all of us are some body part, and we all need all the body parts. Are you serving the purpose that God has you in this church to do?

How are you actively involved? Never be content to sit on the bench. Never be content to be a spectator.

Think of ways. Ask God to help you to see ways that you, wherever you are in life, whatever your talents and gifts and abilities are, whatever time it is you have, serve Him.

[15 : 50] Be involved, because that's God's plan for you in some way. And when I say that, it doesn't have to be something major, like standing up here and singing.

It doesn't have to be where you're out front doing something, even every day, or even every Sunday. Let me give you an example. There was a guy when I was pastor at Utica Baptist Church in Seneca.

He was a sharp man, had a responsible job. He did one thing in our church. He did very well. He was, we didn't have any kind of titles, but he was the lead usher.

And he stood in the foyer and outside every single Sunday morning, unless he was out of town. He greeted people genuinely, wholeheartedly, got to, you know, ask their name, told them his name.

He truly made people feel like, I am so glad you're here today. It gave them the best first impression they could get of our church, just him doing that.

[16 : 56] And you say, well, how do you know that? People told me. I've never had people, I mean, over and over and over again, different people, different ages, different groups, tell me. His nickname was Bug.

And a lot of times they'd say, Bug made me feel like I'd always been here before. I've even heard somebody say, I came back because of Bug. He did one thing.

He just did it on Sunday morning. But he did it well. And God blessed it. God used it. Would you do one thing if you're not involved?

And put your heart into it and do it well? To serve God? To honor Him? To meet a need? To help us be the church that God's called us to be?

To meet a need? Some questions God asks to teach us about ourselves. But we also see that some of God's questions are designed to teach us something about God.

[18 : 05] Look at verse 9. It's very similar, but there's an addition. But God said to Jonah, Do you do well to be angry for the plant? And he said, Yes, I do well to be angry.

Angry enough to die. This question came to Jonah after his frustrating experience with the plant in verses 6 through 8.

I want us to look and think about what God teaches Jonah and us through that experience. Number one, God teaches us that He is sovereign.

He's in control. Throughout the book of Jonah, God's been in control of everything. And it is written in a way to make that very strong, clear.

For an example, we have seen in chapter 1 that God hurled a great wind at Jonah's ship. Then the Lord appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah, and he was cast into the sea.

[19 : 10] Here in chapter 4, God appointed a plant to shade Jonah. God appointed a worm that attacked the plant so that it withered.

God appointed a scorching east wind. God is really making it clear, isn't He? He's in control.

Things don't just happen. Things don't just happen for no purpose, for no reason.

God is in control. He is appointing. He is guiding. He is allowing. He is using all things for His glory and ultimately our good.

If we don't learn anything else, you need to understand when you read the book of Jonah, God's wanting everyone to know, I am sovereign God of this world.

[20 : 16] You and your life and your situation are in my hand. Trust me. He's not only a great God, He is a good God. Number two, God teaches us that He is patient.

Throughout this chapter, Jonah is angry every single time that he talks to God. He is mostly acting in a selfish, self-righteous, hard-hearted way.

He has a terrible attitude toward God, toward people, and life in general. The only time he's happy, now think about this.

The only time he's happy in this whole book is when God graciously and miraculously provided the plant to give him shade.

Now think about that. Look at verse 6. Now the Lord appointed a plant and made it come up over Jonah that it might be a shade over his head to save him from his discomfort.

[21 : 18] So Jonah was exceedingly glad. There's a big emphasis there. He's just thrilled. Happy as he can possibly be because of the plant.

Seeing what made Jonah happy is very revealing, isn't it? It shows just how far from God and God's priorities he has fallen.

But God's dealing with him very patiently. God is not giving up on him. God, you know, if you were God, wouldn't you just smack him? Wouldn't you just knock him down?

Shake him up. Call him a fool. Because he is. But God does not do any of that. God patiently listens.

And God uses this little life lesson using an insignificant plant and worm and wind and sun to teach him what he needs to teach.

[22 : 32] You know, the fact that we're here right now alive and well, able to be here this morning means that God is patient with us. If you are battling with God like Jonah.

If there's something going on in your life and you're just mad. You don't like it. You don't like what God has either done or allowed. You may not have said it to him. But you think it and he knows it.

Or maybe you're just mad because of what some people in your life either are or are not doing to you or for you. It may be that, as we've looked at this all along, it may be that you're running from something God's telling you that he wants you to do.

But you're putting it off. Trying to ignore him. Trying to get away from it. The fact that you're here, you're alive and well right now, you know God is being patient.

So thank him, number one. And then confess to him, number two. Your sin of anger. Hardheartedness.

- [23 : 45] Selfishness. Or whatever it is you're guilty of. And look to God, not in anger, but in love. Turn from your sin and tell him, confess your sin.

Come back close to him with a new commitment. Tell him that from now on, I don't want to have this kind of attitude. I want to hear you because I want to obey you.

I want to serve you. I know that's your way is the best way. Do that if that's your problem. There's one more thing that God teaches us in these verses. God teaches us that he is wise.

And in this section, he is wise in dealing with people. God used the whole plant episode to show Jonah just how petty and ridiculous he had become.

I mean, it's absurd. If it was in a movie, everybody would laugh at Jonah. But this is not a joke. Think about it.

- [24 : 50] Jonah got excited and happy about a plant miraculously coming up to give him shade. But he became angry and miserable when God saved 120,000 men, women, and children.

What kind of things make you miserable? What kind of things do you get angry about? Maybe make other people's lives miserable.

Think about this. Are they things that really matter? Are they things that truly make a difference in your life or somebody else's life?

Or are they trivial things that a week from now or a month from now, you're not even going to remember? I used to get so mad at my son Michael for keeping a pigsty room when he was a teenager.

His clothes, his books, any papers, his sports equipment was all piled up in the floor. And I'd get so mad and jump on him.

- [26 : 09] Animals don't live this way. Nobody does this. Pick this stuff up. Your mother's washed this. It's been iron. You got it laid in the floor. It went on for quite a while.

But one day, Lisa came up with a solution. Close his door. I'm serious. Let it go. If he's happy, we'll be happy.

And we did that. And just to give him a little bit of credit, when he got out on his own, he didn't do that. It was not a hill worth spilling blood on.

Lisa helped me to see that. I think situations like that and just life and the grace of God have helped me to understand. And this is hard for me to say. Everything doesn't matter.

Most of my life, everything mattered. And everything mattered to be done the way I thought it ought to be done. And I have spilt no telling how much blood on anthills.

- [27 : 23] Things that really and truly didn't matter. And I'm going to guess, if you'll be honest, you get ticked on a regular basis about things that absolutely are just as or more petty and ridiculous than what Jonah did.

We make mountains out of anthills. We make mountains out of anthills in our minds a lot of times when things don't go our way.

When we don't get our way. When we can't be in control. It's part of our fallen sinful nature. We need to learn to recognize it.

We need to learn to deal with it. And we need to ask God to give us wisdom. To know how to better respond. How to pick and choose our battles.

And to know what really is important. One final question in this passage. Now verse 11. Some of God's questions are designed to teach us something about other people.

[28 : 30] And the Lord said, You pity the plant for which you do not labor. Nor did you make it grow which came into being in a night and perished in a night. And here's the question. And should I not pity Nineveh.

That great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons. Who do not know their right hand from their left. And also much cattle. God was trying to help Jonah get a better perspective.

God was trying to get Jonah to adopt his perspective on what was going on around him. God was saying in effect, Jonah, you've allowed your anger and your prejudice to blind you to reality.

To what's really important. You're all torn up. And this shows you something about it. You're all torn up. It's like God was saying. God was saying. Over the death of a plant that gave you shade.

Insignificant nothing. But you have absolutely no compassion. For all these men and women and children. In Nineveh.

[29 : 38] Who were created in my image. God wanted Jonah to have compassion on these spiritually lost people. That's what the phrase means.

Who do not know their right hand from their left. They didn't have the advantage that Jonah and the people of Israel did. They didn't have God's word. They hadn't been taught all their lives about God and the things of God.

Now they were responsible for their evil actions. Paul tells us in Romans chapter 1 and Romans chapter 2. That God reveals enough of himself and his will to us that we innately know some of it.

And when we violate our conscience. We violate this innate God-given ability to discern general right from wrong. We are actually sinning against God.

And Paul says in Romans 1. God holds us accountable. We are without excuse. Romans 1.19 tells us. Jonah.

[30 : 38] He didn't have any compassion for these people. He didn't care about these people. Even after they repented of their sins and trusted God.

I want to go back to the time when Jonah was happy. The only time he was happy. When the plant provided him shade and made him comfortable. Here's what I want us to think. What makes me happy?

What does it take for you to be happy? Can you only be happy when you're comfortable? Satisfied? Getting your way?

Does it make you happy when you see someone else? Comfortable. Satisfied. Getting their way.

Are you ever happy to sacrifice for someone in your life to have their needs met?

[31 : 43] So that they can be comfortable. So that they can know joy. The answer to the question, what makes you happy? Says a lot about our character.

Our maturity. And our spiritual condition. The fact that Jonah was only happy when things were going his way confirms just how far he had fallen from a right relationship with God.

Let's be honest. If you have to have everything your way to be happy, then you have fallen far from God and a right relationship with him as well.

Well, did you notice that Jonah did not answer God's last question? In fact, the book ends with this question. So what did Jonah do?

How did he respond? Why does this book end this way? Is this a flaw? Well, no, it's by design. This is actually a good ending.

[32 : 52] The book of Jonah ends this way so that we can provide our own conclusion. Because in many ways, we are like Jonah. And so we've got to decide how this book will end.

Do you care about people? Do you care about people's relationship with God? Do you care about the people in your life who are not Christians? Well, how do you show it?

Do you really and truly pray for them? That God will work in their lives to save them? Have you ever just simply invited them to church?

Have you ever told them or asked them, why don't you come to church with me? Have you ever shared the gospel with any of these people? Are you willing to share the gospel with these people?

You know, the sad thing is we conclude this. Jonah was more concerned about plants than people. Are you more concerned about things than people?

[34 : 02] Well, just look at your life. What do you think about the most? Someone or something? What do you spend most of your time on or with?

How do you spend your money? Is your money going mostly to satisfy you and your accumulation of things or to meet the needs of people that you're supposed to love and care about?

What makes you truly happy? Well, God calls us as His children to wholeheartedly care more about people than things.

And He calls us to care especially about people's spiritual lives. How does the book of Jonah end? You complete it.

Your attitude and actions about people and what you are doing to lead them to a right relationship with God through Jesus Christ, that is the end of the book of Jonah for you.

[35 : 16] Let's pray together. Dear God, help us to not leave here today having written with our lives a sad or angry or just wrong with you ending to this book.

But help us, Father, like Jonah, we are so much. Help us, Father, to resolve that we will love people more than things and that we will take an interest in the spiritual condition of people around us and look to you to use us to truly impact their lives with the gospel, with our own witness and example.

Help us, Father, to write the ending to this book as people who are happy about the things you're happy and reaching out to people because we care like you do.

And in an attitude of prayer, you just do what God's telling you to do. Respond to Him in obedience. That's the goal of this whole message, every message. I'd be happy to pray with you during this time right here at the front during the next few minutes.

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[37 : 10] We want your voices to the people of this community I'll reveal how do people with this and FRED how are we or to hug what Memphis and suddenly he■