

Angry at God?

Jonah 4:1-11 New American Standard Bible

But it greatly displeased **Jonah**, and he **became angry**.² Then he prayed to the Lord and said, “Please Lord, was this not what I said when I was still in my own country? Therefore in anticipation of this I fled to Tarshish, since I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in mercy, and One who relents of disaster.”³ So now, Lord, please take my life from me, for **death is better to me than life.**”⁴ But the Lord said, **“Do you have a good reason to be angry?”**

⁵ Then Jonah left the city and sat down east of it. There he made a shelter for himself and sat under it in the shade, until he could see what would happen in the city. ⁶ So the Lord God designated a plant, and it grew up over Jonah to be a shade over his head, to relieve him of his discomfort. And Jonah was overjoyed about the plant. ⁷ But God designated a worm when dawn came the next day, and it attacked the plant and it withered. ⁸ And when the sun came up God designated a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on Jonah’s head so that he became faint, and he begged with all his soul to die, saying, **“Death is better to me than life!”**

⁹ But God said to Jonah, **“Do you have a good reason to be angry about the plant?”** And he said, **“I have good reason to be angry, even to the point of death!”**¹⁰ Then the Lord said, “You had compassion on the plant, for which you did not work and which you did not cause to grow, which came up overnight and perished overnight. ¹¹ Should I not also have compassion on Nineveh, the great city in which there are more than 120,000 people, who do not know the difference between their right hand and their left, as well as many animals?”

Introduction

Background of Jonah’s story: God commanded Jonah to go to Nineveh, the enemy of Israel, and proclaim the message of judgment. Jonah disobeyed and ran away from God to Tarshish (Spain) the opposite direction of Nineveh. On his way to Tarshish, on the sea, God had a big fish swallow Jonah and spit him out to dry land three days later. Jonah went to Nineveh and preached God’s message. The king and all the people in Nineveh including animals fasted and humbled themselves before God and God changed His plan and did not destroy them. With that, Jonah was extremely unhappy. Then, his dialogue with God begins in today’s text.

“Anger at God”—article written by Julie Exline - Case Western Reserve University Psychologist. (<http://pagingdrgupta.blogs.cnn.com/2011/01/10/anger-at-god-common-even-among-atheists/>)

Her findings on anger with God are as follows:

- Atheists and agnostics reported more anger at God during their lifetimes than believers.
- Anger is found among the bereaved at the death of loved ones.
- More religious people are less likely to feel angry at God and more likely to see his intentions as well-meaning.
- The younger tend to be angrier at God than the older (E.g. rejection from preferred colleges and sports injuries). One possible reason is age—the previous generations were taught not to question God, whereas younger people today don't have any qualms about it.
- Longstanding negative emotions lead to ailments, both mental and physical.

This morning, we will ponder unhealthy and healthy ways to handle our anger with God.

Content

Definition:

- *Anger: the strong feeling that you have when something has happened that you think is bad and unfair* (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary). My own: when someone or something violates your convictions, you get angry.
- Anger at God: anger directed at God's actions or no-actions.

Common Experience

We all get angry with God from time to time.

- Personal example: For years I thanked God for letting my brother survive from his motorcycle accident. 20 years later, I found myself wishing my brother dead because he brought my extended family so much trouble and heartache (his disability drove him to drinking to ease his pain that culminated in the loss of job and divorce). Upset with God's insufficient action on my brother (that He didn't make him 100% normal) I complained to Him. He spoke to me saying, "Child, it is very hard to please you. Which one do you want for your brother, to live or to die?" After that, I got ashamed of my own contradiction and repented.

Consider Jonah

In today's text, we see Jonah really upset with God. He was so angry with God that he wanted to end his life. Not just once, but twice, he said to God, "Death is better to me than

life!” (v. 3, 8). His anger with God resulted from his lop-sided view and shallow understanding of divine patience and mercy. God’s mercy, for instance, is all right and always welcome if it is only meant for him and his beloved country. It is never OK if it is granted to the Ninevites, the enemy of Israel! Everlasting is God’s mercy for him, yet not even a second to his enemies! Jonah totally misunderstood God’s unlimited and unfathomable mercy and kindness. It is for all. Not just for him. Not just for his loved ones. But, for all people: for Jews and Gentiles! Even for the enemies! He was so upset with such God and His mercy that he begged God to take him home. Twice!

By the way, in his dialogue with God, Jonah crossed the line. He totally forgot who he was and whom he was talking to. He was arrogant. He was ignorant. He was rude. He didn’t realize whom he was dealing with. In him, I see myself doing the same thing. Often times we forget who we are and with whom we talk. Let us not forget. In our dialogue with God, we are not dealing with another human being. We are making the case before the Creator. We are the clay. He is the Potter. We must be humble and ever grateful for His mercy and patience that tolerates our ignorance, arrogance and foolishness in times of our frustration and anger with Him.

Unhealthy ways of expressing our anger with God

- Cain, the brother of Abel (angry at God, lashed out his anger against his own brother and murdered him)—wrong, destructive way of expressing anger.
- Job’s wife (angry at God and lashed out her anger and cursed God)—again, she got wrong expectations of God based on bad theology: *we’ve been good, therefore, God should never allow anything bad to us.*
- Jonah was angry at God because God showed His mercy to the Ninevites the undeserving. He really wanted God to punish and destroy the enemy of Israel, not to spare them! He tried to impose on God his own standards of justice and mercy.

Healthy Ways to Handle Anger with God

Be grounded in the Scriptures. Know God and His ways. In the Bible. The best and the soundest way to handle anger with God is to have your understanding of God grounded in the Scriptures. Do not figure out God and His character and ways (who He is, what He does, what He approves and disapproves) in your own imagination. Do not dictate Him what He should do or not do according to your convictions. By the way, bad theology often stems from personal feelings and wishes, limited experiences, or misguided theology. E.g. Some teachings out there, in the name of God, promise you a healthy/wealthy life. Always! Really? What does the Bible say about it? In the Bible, God never promises such a trouble-free life.

To no one. Not even to Jesus. He promises, rather, to be with us always, in times of adversity and in times of prosperity. E.g. **When** (not **if**, kc) *you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they will not overflow you. When* (not **if**, kc) *you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched, Nor will the flame burn you* (Isaiah 43:2). Any teaching that promises you a trouble-free life is false. Be grounded in God's Word. Because false theology leads to false understanding and false understanding of God triggers anger at God.

Next, **be humble** before God in your anger to Him. God is gracious enough to allow us to express our anger at Him. Freely. And as often as we need. Yet, when you do it, do so in sincerity and humility. Not in arrogance or insolence. He is kind enough to listen to our frustration and anger. However, remember who you are and whom you are talking to. You are a creature and God is the Creator.

Finally, **trust in Him** and His good will that God makes all things beautiful in His time (Romans 8:28). Acknowledge your limited understanding of God and His plan. E.g. Something that we considered bad turned out later to be a true blessing. Remember we don't see the whole picture. God does.

Conclusion

Let me conclude my message with the story of Joseph. In his teens, Joseph was sold into slavery by his own brothers. For the next 10+ years, he suffered as a slave often worked in a dungeon in Egypt. Later, God turned his suffering into victory by elevating him into prime minister of the Egyptian kingdom, second-in-command. Joseph, looking back at his life, could've stayed in bitterness and anger with God and against his brothers. Instead, he saw the hands of God in his suffering that prepared the future for his family—a positive way of handling anger with God.

When he finally encountered with his brothers in Egypt, he could've gotten revenge on them. Instead, he said to them, *"Please come closer to me."* *And they came closer. And he said, "I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold to Egypt."* ⁵ *Now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for **God sent me ahead of you to save lives.*** ⁶ *For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are still five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvesting.* ⁷ *So **God sent me ahead of you** to ensure for you a remnant on the earth, and to keep you alive by a great deliverance.* ⁸ *Now, therefore, **it was not you who sent me here, but God;** and He has made me a father to Pharaoh and lord of all his household, and ruler over all the land of Egypt* (Genesis 45:4-8). Three times, Joseph

reminded his brothers of God's providence in his suffering that helped him not to get angry with God. Amen.