

Study Series: Running from Mercy

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Lesson Title: “Jonah’s Resentment, God’s Restraint” (pp. 77-90)

Session 6

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The main point of this lesson is: God’s people sometimes resent His mercy toward others.

Focus on this goal: To help adults guard against resentment at God’s mercy toward others

Key Bible Passage: Jonah 4:1-4

Before the Session

Display a marker board or large piece so that all learners can see it clearly. Have a marker available. (Step 1)

During the Session

Step 1. Create Interest / Jumpstart Discussion

**Ask:** Let’s take a moment and think about some blessings from God: what are some things you enjoy and give praise to God for when you receive them? **Write** responses on the board or paper. At some point, simply **stop** the activity.

**Ask:** Do you pray these things for yourself? Do you pray these for others? How about praying them for your enemies? Would you pray these things for the evil people of the world? **Admit** that we love God’s mercy when we receive it, but we sometimes resent His mercy toward others.

Step 2. Greatly Displeased

**Invite** a volunteer to read Jonah 4:1-4 from his or her Bible. **Say:** The underlying story line of the Bible is of God’s redemption. In this story, as well as the parable of the prodigal son, we see that not everyone is happy with redemption in every situation.

**Use** the first three paragraphs of Day One (p. 77) to **draw the parallel** between the story of Jonah and the parable of the prodigal son. **Read or summarize** the Day One paragraph (p. 78) beginning with the phrase, “Nineveh was a great city,” as well as the paragraph that follows.

Step 3. Jonah’s Resentment

**Point out** that Jonah was displeased and yet prayed in his anger. **Ask:** Have you ever prayed out of the anger of your heart? What do we observe about God in His reaction to Jonah’s anger?

**Instruct** all learners to open their Bibles to Exodus 34 and **invite** a volunteer to read verses 6-7. Then **read** Jonah 4:2. **Say:** Jonah obviously knew what God had said about His character; he basically quoted the passage from Exodus. But Jonah didn’t approve of God’s mercy and grace.

**Use** Day Two content (p. 79) to **point out** that Jonah resented the people of Nineveh, their repentance, and God’s forgiveness.

Step 4. The Insanity of Racism

**Use** Day Three content (p. 81-83) to **explain** that Jonah was bitterly angry at the repentance of the Ninevites, not only because of their political animosity toward Israel, but because of a strong sense of nationality: they were enemies of Israel.

**Ask:** *Are we—Christians—guilty of nationalism and racism? How does that play out in life? How does it affect our witness and willingness to go to the ends of the world in order to tell others the gospel?*

**Read** the Day Three paragraph (p. 82) that begins with the phrase, “Another way the Bible says it . . . .” **Urge** learners to consider how nationalism and racism ruined Jonah’s heart, and consider if it’s infecting theirs, as well.

Step 5. God’s Restraint, Part 1

**Invite** some volunteers to read the verses listed in the third Day Four paragraph (p. 83; you read the first one in Step 3). For each passage, **invite** the reader or group to identify who is speaking and who the audience is.

**Say:** *God didn’t hide any of these aspects of His character; He revealed Himself to everyone with these descriptors. In the midst of despising God for His mercy, Jonah was receiving it.*

**Use** Day Four content (pp. 84-85) to **dig into** the definitions for *gracious* and *merciful*. If you know a person who exemplifies goodness or mercy, **share** how he or she points to God in those characteristics.

Step 6. God’s Restraint, Part 2

**Read** Nahum 1:3 from the opening sentences of Day Five (p. 85). **Lead** the group in discussing that God is slow to anger but great in power, and how that truth reveals His grace and mercy.

**Say:** *We know that God most certainly gets angry, but His anger never leads Him to do or say something that goes against His nature.*

**Share** a humorous account of a time when your anger led you to do something foolish. Then **observe:** *God never acts like that.*

**Read or summarize** the Day Five paragraph (p. 86) that begins with the phrase, “All Jonah did was charge God . . .” and the paragraph following it.

Step 7. Practical Application – Live Out the Lesson

**Say:** We have identified rebellion as sin, and we know pride is sin. Here we see another sin that we may have never considered before: the sin of disapproving God’s character or actions.

**Use** Day Five content (p. 87) to **point learners to** the character of God as a blessing and the identity of being a child of God as a privilege. Say: We know God’s character and goodness through His sending Jesus to us and redeeming us through His blood.

**Close with a prayer** of confession for the complaining and pride of the church and individual believers.

