

BARF ON THE BEACH
Bottom Dwellers: How to Deal with Hateful People
A Study of Jonah 4:1-11

Characteristic of Completeness: Compassion

Big Idea: See from God's point of view; respond from God's plan of grace.

Related Scriptures: Psalm 139:13-16; Proverbs 25:21-22; Matthew 5:44; 18:21-33; 28:19; Luke 10:25-37; 17:4; John 3:16; Romans 3:9-26; 12:19-21; Ephesians 4:32

Introduction

1. A white policeman in South Africa named van de Broek is one of them.

Mr. van de Broek “shot an eighteen-year-old black boy and burned the body, turning it on the fire like a piece of barbecue meat in order to destroy the evidence. Eight years later van de Broek returned to the same house and seized the boy's father. The wife was forced to watch as policemen bound her husband on a woodpile, poured gasoline over his body, and ignited it.”¹

Mr. van de Broek is one of them. A hateful person. A bottom dweller. No one knows it more than the poor woman who watched her son and her husband brutally murdered by this man.

2. Jeffrey Dahmer, Ted Bundy, Charles Manson, the Oklahoma City bomber, the 9-11 terrorists, malicious gang members, child pornographers. The list of hateful people goes on. People who evoke strongly negative feelings. We intensely dislike them. Dare I say it? Perhaps we even hate them.
3. The list of hateful people is not limited to criminals who are “out there”—out of our sphere of acquaintances. The list includes everyday people closer to home, perhaps even in your home.
 - a. I had a neighbor once who used to flick his cigarettes at my dog. I didn't like that guy. He's on the list.
 - b. Perhaps you have a relative who molested you as a child. That person might be on the list.
 - c. Perhaps you have a spouse who has been unfaithful. He or she may be on the list.

¹ Philip Yancey, *Rumors of Another World: What on Earth Are We Missing?*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 223.

- d. Perhaps a person in the church has hurt you so deeply that it's hard for you to attend. Maybe that person is on the list.
- e. Perhaps your boss is such a jerk that he or she has made the list.
- f. Policemen say that domestic violence calls are among the most dreaded. At any particular time, your spouse may be at the top of your list of hateful people.
- g. And just listen to this true story. Elisabeth is married to Ted. Ted's mother is named Anne. This is a story about the mother-in-law, Anne, as told by her daughter-in-law.

After the wedding, she simply pretended I didn't exist. She came to our house unbidden while we were at work and washed our clothes, cleaned, even rearranged our cupboards. If she found my clothes hanging in Ted's side of the closet, she moved them back.

Many times, just as we were sitting down to the inexperienced results of my cooking, the door bell would ring. There'd be Anne, a four-course meal in her arms. "I've fixed my son's favorite dish—just to help you out."

When our first child was born . . . She didn't like the one-piece sleeper I bought Josh, so she purchased seven two-piece sleepers—one for each day of the week . . . "I just want to help out . . . My son works hard to support you, and this is a way I can help him."

As the boys grew older . . . She told them I didn't love them, that I wasted all their dad's money, or I wasn't taking good care of them.

To my deep humiliation, she shared her criticisms of me with other people. "I wish Ted had married you," she told a mutual friend. "You're a much better wife than Elisabeth."²

The mother-in-law is a hateful person. In this case, I'm not sure who is more odious, the mother-in-law, or her son who lets her mistreat his wife like that.

- 4. How do you deal with hateful people? How are we to respond to those who are ungodly and hurtful?
- 5. The Bible gives us some help. In our study through the little book of Jonah, we come today to a passage that involves some hateful people. They are the Ninevites. In

² Elisabeth Graham, "I Couldn't Love My Mother-In-Law," *Today's Christian Woman*, 1995.

previous studies, we have seen that the Ninevites are gruesome enemies of Israel, and therefore, enemies of Jonah, who is a prophet from Israel. I've shared with you some of the heinous acts of violence the Ninevites performed against their enemies in history.

Let me add just one more tidbit to "endear" you to these people. The Ninevites used to pierce the chins of their prisoners with a dagger, put a rope through their jaws as a leash, and put them in kennels like dogs.³ Hateful people.

You may recall that Jonah is called by God to preach to the Ninevites, to warn them that God would bring destruction upon them for their evil ways. Ultimately, Jonah does preach to them, and, as we saw last Sunday, the Ninevites do repent and believe in God! As a result, God extends His grace to them.

How does Jonah respond to God's grace extended to the Ninevites? He is upset about it. Let me show you. Our text for today is Jonah 4:1-11. In the ► first three verses of Jonah 4, we see just how upset Jonah is. It says:

^{NKJ} Jonah 4:1 But it [that is, God's grace to the repentant Ninevites] displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry. ► 2 So he prayed to the LORD, and said, "Ah, LORD, was not this what I said when I was still in my country? Therefore I fled previously to Tarshish; for I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm. ► 3 Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live!"

Why is Jonah so upset? Because he hates the Ninevites. He'd rather see them destroyed than delivered. He'd rather see them punished than pardoned. He'd rather see them sacked than saved. He's angry at God for giving them grace.

But, in ► Verse 4, God says that Jonah's perspective is not right.

^{NKJ} Jonah 4:4 Then the LORD said, "Is it right for you to be angry?"

The implied answer is clearly "no," it's not right for Jonah to be angry at God for giving grace to his enemies.

Well, what *is* the right perspective? How *should* we deal with hateful people? I think there are at least two parts to dealing with hateful people, based on Jonah, Chapter 4. And so, the ► big idea of my message this morning will be unveiled in two parts.

³ Luckenbill, *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia*, 2:319, quoted by Elliot E. Johnson, "Nahum," *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Old Testament*, eds. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, (USA: Victor Books, 1985), 1494.

I. Here's ► the first part: See from God's point of view. Look at people the way God looks at them. Find out how God feels about people. There are two parts to this perspective, just as there are two lenses to a pair of glasses.

A. First, we must recognize we're all in trouble spiritually. Every one of us has done things that are morally wrong. Every one of us falls hopelessly short of God's standard for goodness. Every one of us has acted on the basis of motives that are impure. We're all in the same boat.

Jonah is no exception. God had given him a direct order to preach to the Ninevites, and initially, he ran. He disobeyed God by hopping on a ship to run away from his assignment. His sin hurt other people. The ship was damaged, the cargo was lost, and the sailors nearly lost their lives because of the sin of Jonah.

But, by His grace, God spared Jonah. After being thrown overboard, Jonah is swallowed by a huge fish. Getting swallowed by the huge fish turned out to be Jonah's salvation. He acknowledged it, and was thankful. In ► Jonah 2:6, he says:

^{NKJ} Jonah 2:6 . . . You have brought up my life from the pit, O LORD, my God.

Only by God's grace was Jonah saved.

Nevertheless, Jonah has somehow disregarded his own sinfulness, and has developed a kind of self-righteous, double standard. It's a double standard that says, "It's okay for God to graciously forgive me when I screw up, but when other people screw up, I'd just as soon see God punish them." Lurking behind this standard is the notion that, "I deserve God's grace; they don't."

This self-righteous double standard is, in itself, evil. The Bible points this out in a fascinating play on words. Let me set this up for you. Look at God's initial command to Jonah in ► Jonah 1:2:

^{NKJ} Jonah 1:2 "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me."

In Hebrew, the language in which this was originally written, the word translated ► "wickedness" is *rah*. Like most words, it has more than one shade of meaning. The primary meaning is evil or wickedness in a moral, ethical sense. It is sin. That's the meaning in the above verse, the *rah* of Nineveh had come up before God.

But, there is a second meaning that has no necessary moral connotation. It can mean distress, displeasure, or calamity. With that in mind, let's take a look at ► Verse 1 of Chapter 4 describing Jonah's response to the repentance of the Ninevites and the grace extended to them by God:

^{NKJ} Jonah 4:1 But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry.

The same Hebrew word *rah* is used ► twice in the first phrase. Literally, it reads, “It was *rah* to Jonah with great *rah* . . .” Hebrew scholars point to this as a play on words which now ► associates the wickedness of Nineveh with Jonah.⁴ Jonah is just as guilty before God as the Ninevites by virtue of his self-righteous double standard. He’s no better.

Indeed, we’re all guilty. We’ve all harbored a self-righteous double standard at one time or another. The Bible tells us so. Listen to this loose paraphrase of Romans, ► Chapter 2 from the late theologian, Francis Schaeffer:

No person in all the world has kept the moral standards with which he has tried to bind others. ► Consequently, God says, “I will judge you upon your own moral statements (those judgments upon which you have bound and condemned others), even if they are lower than moral statements should be. Are you guilty or not guilty?” ► No one will be able to raise his voice. The whole world will stand totally condemned before God in utter justice, because they will be judged not upon what they have not known, but upon what they have known and have not kept. ► So all men must say, “Indeed I am justly condemned.”⁵

The first part of seeing from God’s point of view is to recognize we’re all in trouble spiritually. We’re all in the same boat. We’re no better than anyone else. Just perhaps better off by virtue of God’s grace extended to us in the person of Jesus Christ who died as a ransom for our sin, to become our Savior from sin.

- B. There ► is a second aspect to seeing from God’s point of view. That is to see *why* God has compassion for people—all people. And to see that we too should have compassion. Indeed, ► compassion is our Characteristic of Completeness for the week.

Actually Jonah does recognize God’s compassion. He demonstrates this in ► Jonah 4:2, when he says to God:

^{NKJ} Jonah 4:2 . . . I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm.

Nevertheless, God needs to give Jonah a lesson on *why* He is compassionate. To this end, God gives Jonah an object lesson on compassion by using a plant that He causes to grow up as a shade for Jonah, and then to wither. Listen to the object lesson beginning in ► Verse 5 of Chapter 4:

⁴ H.L. Ellison, “Jonah,” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1985), 384-385.

⁵ Francis A. Schaeffer, *Death in the City*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1969), 112-113

^{NKJ} Jonah 4:5 So Jonah went out of the city and sat on the east side of the city. There he made himself a shelter and sat under it in the shade, till he might see what would become of the city. ► 6 And the LORD God prepared a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be shade for his head to deliver him from his misery. So Jonah was very grateful for the plant. ► 7 But as morning dawned the next day God prepared a worm, and it *so* damaged the plant that it withered. ► 8 And it happened, when the sun arose, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat on Jonah's head, so that he grew faint. Then he wished death for himself, and said, "*It is* better for me to die than to live." ► 9 Then God said to Jonah, "*Is it* right for you to be angry about the plant?" And he said, "*It is* right for me to be angry, even to death!" ► 10 But the LORD said, "You have had pity on the plant for which you have not labored, nor made it grow, which came up in a night and perished in a night. ► 11 And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left—and much livestock?"

God's argument to Jonah based on this plant in Verses 10 and 11 was not very clear to me when I first read it. But upon reflection, here's my take on it. It's a comparison between ► Jonah's compassion and God's compassion. It starts with Jonah's compassion in Verse 10. In essence, God says, ► "You had compassion for a mere plant, which you did not create, which you did not sustain, which lived for just one day." Then, in Verse 11, God argues from the lesser to the greater, saying, "Therefore, how much more should I have compassion for ► a people, whom I *did* create, whom I *do* sustain, whose souls will live forever?"

God has compassion for all people, including the Ninevites because He lovingly created them in His own image. And God made all people with the same loving attention to detail. Every hateful person who has ever lived can make the same claim David did in Psalm ► 139:

^{NKJ} Psalm 139:13 For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother's womb. 14 . . . I am fearfully *and* wonderfully made; Marvelous are Your works . . . ► 15 My frame was not hidden from You, When I was made in secret, *And* skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. ► 16 Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, The days fashioned for me, When *as yet there were* none of them.

- C. So, to ► summarize where we are at this point, we have seen that in dealing with hateful people we should, as a first step, see from God's point of view. This involves recognizing we're all in trouble spiritually, and God has compassion for all people because He created them in His own image.

- II. This brings us to ► the second part of dealing with hateful people: Respond from God's plan of grace. Treat hateful people consistent with how God views them. We are to be gracious to the odious.

I want to mention a couple of ways to do this. They are among the hardest things we are called to do as Christians. I will briefly mention them, and then I'll touch on some common objections and concerns that come to mind, and then I'll give some examples of what it looks like in real life.

A. (God's plan of grace)

1. First, God's plan of grace for us is to forgive hateful people, instead of seeking revenge. We are to give grace, not get even. Romans ► 12:19-21 makes this clear. It says:

^{NAU} Romans 12:19 Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath *of God*, for it is written, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY," says the Lord. ► 20 "BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK; FOR IN SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD." 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

The idea is not that we give up on justice; rather, we give *over* justice to the only one who judges perfectly: God. Vengeance is God's job, not ours. Our job is not to rid the world of sin and sinners, but to help save sinners from the sinful world. We are to forgive, not avenge.

2. Second, ► God's plan of grace for us includes loving hateful people, instead of hating them in return. Jesus Himself makes this point in ► Matthew 5:44, when He says,

^{NKJ} Matthew 5:44 "But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you"

So, responding from God's plan of grace involves both forgiving and loving hateful people.

B. But ► this does raise some questions and objections, doesn't it?

1. Like how am I supposed to conjure up warm and friendly feelings I don't have? How am I supposed to feel good about hateful jerks?

Well, loving people doesn't mean you have to like them. It doesn't mean you have to conjure up some warm feelings. The kind of love the Bible calls for is something you do, not something you feel.

That means you value hateful people as persons created in the image of God. It means you pray for them. It means you treat them the way you would want to be treated. It means, when you have options on how to respond to them, you choose the ones that are helpful, not vengeful.

And loving hateful people includes introducing them to the grace of God, as the Lord leads. Nothing could be more helpful or loving. In essence, Jonah's role is to encourage the Ninevites to have a relationship with God so that they might experience His grace. In ► Matthew 28:19, Jesus says,

^{NKJ} Matthew 28:19 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations . . ."

"All nations" includes the hateful ones, like Nineveh. If we spent as much time communicating about the Savior as we spend complaining about the sin, the world would be a better place.

2. You ► may say, "Well, if I'm all forgiving and loving, won't I simply be giving my approval to their wrongdoing?"

No. Love does not mean we approve the sinful behavior. Jesus didn't. When Jesus encountered an adulterous woman facing her accusers who were about to stone her, He forgave her. Then ► He said,

^{NKJ} John 8:11 ". . . go and sin no more."

He didn't say, "Adultery is not that big a deal." He didn't say, "No problem." He didn't say, "Everybody does it." He said, "Stop it!" It was in the woman's best interest to do so.

3. You ► may say, "Well, if I forgive my oppressor, does that mean I'm just supposed to forget it and act like it never happened and blindly trust that person, knowing full well that he's probably going to abuse me again?"

No. Love does not mean we blindly trust everybody. To forgive is not to trust. To love is not to enable. Sometimes the most loving and helpful thing we can do for an abusive person is to blow the whistle or establish a firm boundary. We can forgive without having to trust or put ourselves in harm's way.

Jesus Himself did not trust everyone. He loved them, but He didn't always trust them. He used His head. He was wise. John ► 2:23-24 tells us:

^{NAU} John 2:23 Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name, observing His signs which He was doing. 24 But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men

So, be loving, but be wise. Don't let a child molester baby-sit your kids. Don't send an alcoholic to Circle K to pick up a six pack of Bud Light. Don't invite cannibals over for dinner. Use your head.

- C. Well, what ► would seeing from God's point of view and responding from God's plan of grace look like? Let me give you a couple of examples.
1. Remember the woman with the hateful mother-in-law named Anne? Here's how she sees from God's point of view and responds from God's plan of grace. She says:

I dreamed of the day God would give me permission to hit her, scream at her, somehow retaliate. Yet God continually said, "Love your enemies . . . do good to them that hate you . . . pray for those who spitefully use you . . ." I wanted to rip those verses out of my Bible.

Heaven knows, I had talked to Christ . . . about Anne. I had screamed my anger at her to him, shouted my bitterness, pleaded for him to take her out of my life. Yet I had never once asked him to let me see her through his eyes—as someone worth dying for.

While I doubt loving Anne will ever be easy for me, this new insight stripped me of any excuse for not loving her . . . I knew God hadn't sacrificed his Son so I might go through life hating my mother-in-law.

I began to force myself to look beyond Anne's attacks, asking God to show me the real reason for her behavior. I began to see a lonely woman who felt abandoned when too many days passed without a visit; a woman who feared aloneness as much as she feared death. I saw a confused woman, raised in staggering poverty, who didn't understand why her extravagant gifts didn't result in the return of extravagant love.

Catching these glimpses of Anne has given me tremendous compassion for her—compassion that has become the basis of my response to her.

*It takes continual prayer . . . because she hasn't changed. She's still harsh and judgmental, but the more prayer I devote to her, the less I'm affected by her attitude. Prayer hasn't changed her—but it has changed me.*⁶

2. Or how about the South African woman whose son and husband were murdered by the white policeman named van de Broek? Here's the rest of the story that shows how this woman sees from God's point of view and responds from God's plan of grace.

Nelson Mandela taught the world a lesson in grace when, after emerging from prison after twenty-seven years and being elected president of South Africa, he asked his jailor to join him on the inauguration platform. He then appointed Archbishop Desmond Tutu to head an official government panel with a daunting name, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Mandela sought to defuse the natural pattern of revenge that he had seen in so many countries where one oppressed race or tribe took control from another.

For the next two-and-a-half years, South Africans listened to reports of atrocities coming out of the TRC hearings. The rules were simple: if a white policeman or army officer voluntarily faced his accusers, confessed his crime, and fully acknowledged his guilt, he could not be tried and punished for that crime. Hard-liners grumbled about the obvious injustice of letting criminals go free, but Mandela insisted that the country needed healing even more than it needed justice.

At one hearing, a policeman named van de Broek recounted an incident when he and another officer shot an eighteen-year-old boy and burned the body, turning it on the fire like a piece of barbecue meat in order to destroy the evidence. Eight years later van de Broek returned to the same house and seized the boy's father. The wife was forced to watch as policemen bound her husband on a woodpile, poured gasoline over his body, and ignited it.

The courtroom grew hushed as the elderly woman who had lost first her son and then her husband was given a chance to respond. "What do you want from Mr. van de Broek?" the judge asked. She said she wanted van de Broek to go to the place where they burned her husband's body and gather up the dust so she could give him a decent burial. His head down, the policeman nodded agreement.

⁶ Graham.

Then she added a further request, “Mr. van de Broek took all my family away from me, and I still have a lot of love to give. Twice a month, I would like for him to come to the ghetto and spend a day with me so I can be a mother to him. And I would like Mr. van de Broek to know that he is forgiven by God, and that I forgive him too. I would like to embrace him so he can know my forgiveness is real.”

Spontaneously, some in the courtroom began singing “Amazing Grace” as the elderly woman made her way to the witness stand, but van de Broek did not hear the hymn. He had fainted, overwhelmed.⁷

That is seeing a hateful person from God’s point of view and responding with God’s plan of grace.

⁷ Yancey, 223-224.