**The Heart of God**

Jonah 4:8-11

We saw back in Jonah one that fulfilling our calling involves three critical steps:

**Discover your Calling:**

1. Hear God’s Voice
2. Know God’s Heart
3. Obey God’s Call

Jonah had no problem hearing God’s voice, but he did not obey God’s call because he did not know and love and trust God’s heart. I wonder if our challenge is often the same. ***We struggle to obey because we are not in tune with the heart of God.***

This is how it works in all of **our relationships**, isn’t it?

* Kids, you know your ***Mom’s heart***, don’t you? You want to eat that candy bar before dinner but you know your Mom wants you to eat healthy and to enjoy the good meal she has prepared for you.
* And you know your ***Dad’s heart***. You want to zone out into your video game but you know you haven’t done your chores - your room is a mess, you haven’t finished your homework and the trash is overflowing.
* Guys, you know your ***wife’s heart***. You are tempted to work late, again, but you know that it means so much to her when you are on time and when you pay attention to her. So you leave work early, pick up some flowers and a card - even though it’s not a birthday or anniversary; you just know she needs some affection today.
* Ladies, you know your ***husband’s heart.*** He’s been stressed at work, pushing hard day after day. You have a long list of things that need to be done around the house and you’re plenty stressed too. But you warmly welcome him when he comes home, you listen to how his day went even though the details don’t mean much to you, and you make him that meal he loves (and yes, that’s a metaphor).
* If you’ve worked at the same place for any length of time, you know your ***boss’s heart***, don’t you? You become familiar with his expectations and policies. You know that if you can get ahead of that deadline and really prepare that presentation well it will help him look good to his boss.

When I was a teenager I worked at Bible Camp and I remember one of the **camp leaders named Ted**. He would see one of us sitting around, doing nothing and he would say, “Anderson, how well would you say you know me? ***Would you say you know about a third of me?*** From that third of me that you do know, do you think I want you sitting around doing nothing while the rest of us are working hard in this hot sun?” I loved that question. And no matter who he was talking to it was always a third. He never gave anyone the possibility of knowing more than a third of him.

I think that’s **how God feels** as we go through this series on calling. He looks at each of us in love and says, “Anderson, how well would you say you know me? Would you say you know about a third of me? From that third of me that you do know, do you think I want you sitting around doing nothing while my people all over the world are sufffering and dying, laboring to bring the gospel where it has not yet been heard, fighting evil and violence, working to love hurting children and teenagers…”

Jonah was sitting out on a hill, looking down on the city of Nineveh. God gave him a plant for shade and the misguided prophet was ***inordinately thrilled by that little plant.*** Ah, shade. We can relate to that here in Florida, can’t we?

***God sent the plant to comfort Jonah.*** But then God sent the worm to kill the plant, intentinoally to disrupt Jonah’s comfort and get his attention. Then God sent a blistering wind ***to distress Jonah and reveal what was in his heart***. When the plant died Jonah wailed, “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.’” Jonah 4:9

Don’t you love the patience and persistence of God in this book? Jonah doesn’t seem to make any progress at all. He is the same rebellious, grumpy old stickler at the end of the book that he was at the beginning. **But God pursues him** with questions and twice in chapter four asks, ***“Do you do well to be angry?”***

Jonah set sail to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord, precisely ***because he worried that God would forgive*** the pagan, idolatrous Assyrian sinners in Nineveh. And, of course, that’s exactly what God did when he saw the whole city repent in sackcloth and ashes. And seeing this citywide revival, this unprecedented response to his feeble preaching ministry, the prophet didn’t celebrate an effective tent meeting, he got depressed and suicidal, complaining bitterly to God as if he was the most abused and neglected person on the planet.

“Do you do well to be angry?” Jonah stepped right in to **the whirlpool of worldliness**, loving the things of this world more than God. And when he lost those things it crushed him - his house, his home, his job, his plans, his comforts, his desires - even his little shade plant. So we saw last week how God set up ***three divine appointements*** to move Jonah from worldliness to worship - the plant, the worm, the wind.

***How has God been stirring your heart?*** How has He been working in you? God is always calling us to make this shift. And we’ll see this again today.

What we **Lament** reveals what we **Love:**

* Lost **Comfort** and security

“And the Lord said, ‘You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow…’” Jonah 4:10

When his little shade plant died and Jonah wanted to die, it really wasn’t about the plant, was it? ***That little plant served as a symbol for Jonah of all that he had lost*** - every comfort, every security, every little piece of HOME.

How devastated we are when we lose something reveals how much we loved it.

Whenever you lose something important to you, it is normal to be sad. ***But the sign that you’ve lost an idol is that you’re not just sad, you’re devastated.***

* Losing ***your job*** is a sad and stressful situation - but it shouldn’t be devastating.
* Losing ***your house*** in a fire or flood would be tragic - but in the end, these are just things.
* Even losing **a loved one** to death - yes, it will be sad and your life will never be the same - but if JESUS is your life and your heart and your joy, then even losing a spouse or a child should not shake you to your very core.

And those are big ones. Sometimes we get worked up over **little things**, like Jonah with his little plant:

* A car accident or medical bill that hurts our monthly budget.
* A friend says something unkind or forgets your birthday.
* You throw out your back picking up a case of water or something - you’re not quite sure how you did it, but you are sure that your lower back hurts like crazy sometimes, making it hard to sleep and a pain to stand up…

***What we LAMENT reveals what we LOVE.***

Now, it’s ok to lament. ***It’s healthy to grieve*** - to express your sadness over things that you have lost. Terri Johnson leads a helpful study called “living with the losses of life,” that identifies not only the primary losses, but the secondary losses that extend from those primary losses. If your child dies, you not only have to grieve the death of that child but everything that would have happened had the child grown up - graduations, a wedding, children, visits, vacations… An injury not only introduces pain to your body but it prevents you from doing things you enjoy - it might cost you a trip you’ve been planning for years.

Jonah lost his little plant - but more than that he lost his home, his comfort, his family and friends.

What we **Lament** reveals what we **Love:**

* Lost **Dreams** and plans

“Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it.” Jonah 3:2

Jonah was the prophet to the King of Israel! He was happy and healthy and fruitful doing his thing in Gath-Hepher. But then God had to mess it all up by sending him off to a foreign land - and, of all places, to ASSYRIA!

This assignment not only took Jonah away from what was comfortable and familiar, but ***away from everything he had planned for his life***. He had a reputation to consider. He had dreams and plans for his career and retirement. There’s no mention of a family, but in all likelihood, given the culture of those days, Jonah had a wife and children and - by this time - probably grandchildren!

***Can you relate to Jonah?*** Has your call to ministry disrupted some of your plans and dreams? Has God called you away from your comfort and security? Sometimes it’s just a long weekend you had planned and suddenly the in-laws show up; or a neighbor needs help with something; or a friend needs someone to watch her kids.

Disrupted dreams and plans could be on a large scale with career and family or it can be on a small scale with a football game or date night you had scheduled. The heart check for us today is to look at the degree to which we lament over different things. If some disappointed expectation really crushed you, it’s good to ask the question - WHY.

***Jonah felt he had lost everything*** - his comfort and security, his dreams and plans and:

What we **Lament** reveals what we **Love:**

* Lost desires for **Justice**

“And he called out, ‘Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.’” Jonah 3:4

There’s a good chance ***Jonah knew people*** - had family members - who had been brutally killed by Assyrians. The Assyrians were developing a reputation for being the great, terrifying kingdom in the region - and they did it by not just killing those who opposed them but by peeling off their flesh and stringing up the bodies for others to see. The way the Romans used crucifixion was the way the Assyrians used gruesome body-mangling and display.

Jonah wanted Nineveh to be overthrown. He did not want those wicked Assyrians to be forgiven. He wanted to see them suffer and wail and be vaporized by God.

***You may feel that way about someone right now.*** Someone who hurt you as a child; or a former spouse; a parent or sibling; a difficult boss; an impossible co-worker; someone who bypassed you at work and kicked out the ladder of advancement from under you…

It is healthy and normal to be sad about pain, suffering and loss. That’s an essential part of the healing process to express your grief over what you have been through - to share that with one or two close friends, to process it in prayer to the Lord.

***But there is a point at which a wound needs to start to heal.*** We tell our kids this when they skin their knee - stop picking at the scab. Stop scratching it. You’re just going to make it bleed again. If you continue to lament an old pain, an old sadness - it may be that you are holding on to that suffering as an idol in your heart. You have come to be defined by it. You are letting it control you - instead of surrendering it to the Lord.

That’s certainly how it was for Jonah. He was furious that God showed mercy to Nineveh. He wanted justice, vengeance, punishment for his enemies. That anger consumed him.

Do you remember **the Count of Monte Cristo**? One of those classic stories of pain, loss and vengeance. Edmond Dantes was young and in love - scheduled to marry his betrothed as soon as he could afford it. But he was betrayed by a man on his ship, convicted of a crime he did not commit and sent away to a distant fortress prison. After years locked up in which he pretty much became Batman and Daredevil combined, Dantes managed to escape and went back to find his fiancee and his father. Turned out his father had died in abject poverty and his fiancee had been forced to marry another, also because she had no money and no options.

So Dantes became the Count of Monte Cristo - and set out to get justice, feeling very much like the righteous agent of God. For hundreds of pages you read about the Count, the Count, the Count. He anticipates every move of his enemies, he boxes them in to traps that perfectly mete out the justice they deserve - the punishments always very nicely fit their crimes against him.

But there is this powerful moment when ***the Count is talking with his former fiancee*** - planning to crush her husband - and Mercedes says, “Edmond.” It’s a striking moment because he wasn’t sure she even knew it was him - and because you, the reader, and Dantes himself didn’t really relate to that personal name anymore. He had become the Count of Monte Cristo - the angel of justice.

The compassionate, ***pleading voice of his beloved*** gets his attention and changes his path.

This is exactly what God did for Jonah. He had created an identity for himself as The Prophet, The Prophet, The Prophet. He didn’t think of himself as Jonah the son of Amittai, he was the Prophet from Gath-Hepher. He was the angel of God’s justice to the nations.

***But God pursued him and said, “JONAH.”***

And I believe God is doing the same thing for us today. He is pursuing you and speaking YOUR NAME. Maybe you’ve come to see yourself as the Mom, or the Dad; the Lawyer or the Business leader; the Teacher; the Nurse; the mechanic; the PASTOR.

***But God says, “Dave.” or “Terri.”*** (Those two names cover half the church.) He sees your pain. He knows what you have lost - the comfort and security; the dreams and plans; the desires for justice. But He calls your name to remind you that none of that defines you - your roles and titles, your pain and losses - none of that gives you value; none of those things should shape your identity. He calls you by name to show you His love for you as your Creator, your Savior, your Master and Lord.

What we lament reveals what we love. Now let’s look at what God laments.

What God **Laments** because of His unfailing **Love**:

* The **Confusion** of lost people

“More than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left…” Jonah 4:11

Jonah was furious that his little plant wilted. God asked him, “Do you do well to be angry for the plant?” and he immediately answered, “Yes, I have every right to be angry!”

Jonah didn’t plant the seed to grow the plant. He didn’t labor to make the plant grow. It simply sprang up overnight and then died the next night.

God was trying to give Jonah perspective - He was trying to show Jonah His heart. What a contrast! Jonah loved that little plant. ***But God loved this city full of people.***

**And God loved them not because they were so DESERVING** - but precisely because they were so UNDESERVING. They were LOST. They couldn’t tell left from right, up from down, right from wrong.

***Aren’t you glad God has a heart for lost people?*** After all, that is what you and I once were! Maybe you’ve been a Christian for a long time so you can’t remember what it was like to be in this condition. But some of you are newer to the Jesus party - so you do remember.

* You didn’t know the Bible, so ***truth came from Hollywood***! That’s where you learned about love and justice, right and wrong.
* ***You didn’t have great role models***, so you followed the big personalities in your school, your workplace or neighborhood. That’s where you learned what was important and worth living for: money, power, status, success, relationships.
* You didn’t know Jesus, so ***you had to rely on yourself***. You learned early on you couldn’t fully trust other people, so you were stuck doing everything you could for yourself, by yourself. And that is a very stressful, high pressure way to live.

Lost people are just that - they are lost! If they knew which way to go, and how to escape their predicament they wouldn’t be lost. Listen to how the Bible describes people who do not know Jesus.



**Jesus is the LIGHT.** Apart from Jesus, people walk in darkness - they cannot see! And the devil, the father of lies, blinds them, deceiving them and distracting them.

**Jesus is the SHEPHERD.** People are lost sheep. They wander off and get trapped. Like weak, helpless sheep, people get stuck and need someone to save them.

**Jesus is the REDEEMER.** He paid the price to set us free from sin and death. He didn’t pay the ransom to the devil, He gave His life in payment to God the Father - to satisfy the requirements of justice. But for those who have not called on Jesus for this forgiveness and freedom, they remain in bondage to their own selfish desires.

**And Jesus is the RISEN ONE.** He alone has triumphed over death and the grave. Apart from Jesus people are spiritually dead. This is why you have to be BORN AGAIN. Just as you were born once physically and God breathed life into you body, so you must be born again spiritual so God can breathe life into your eternal spirit. Apart from that work - called regeneration - people are dead. And dead people are generally quite bad at things like decision-making, initiative and change. They need to be called to life, like Lazarus when Jesus called the dead man out of the tomb.

***Do you feel God’s heart for lost people?*** We lament our little pains and struggles in this dark and broken world. But God laments the terrible and helpless condition of people apart from Jesus. They truly are like sheep without a shepherd; like toddlers without a teacher, wandering onto Dale Mabry Highway. Like if there was a coup at Carrollwood Day school down the street and the 3 year olds got out.

If you saw **a preschooler wandering into traffic**, without an adult in sight, wouldn’t you immediately pull over to remove that child from danger and help them get back to a responsible adult?

One of the amazing things about Florida is how quickly ***people stop for a TURTLE***. I see this at least once a month - somebody stops to pick up a wayward turtle or tortoise and carry them off a busy street and back into the underbrush or aim them back toward a pond.

If we pity a lost animal, how much more should we have compassion for lost people who don’t know their right hand from their left?

What God **Laments** because of His unfailing **Love**:

* The **Corruption** in a lost city

“Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.” Jonah 1:2

***What prompted God to send Jonah to Nineveh?*** It was God’s compassion for lost people who are so confused they don’t even know they are lost; and for the evil and wickedness that grows and spirals in a place filled with lost and hurting people. The evil in this city was seen by God and it moved His heart.

* Violence in homes - broken marriages; abused women and children.
* Violence in the streets - theft, attacks, killings.
* Injustice in the courts - corrupt leaders who take bribes and ignore the evils around them.
* Evil at all levels - from the poorest citizen to the king - everyone consumed with their own desires.

**Romans 1 shows how sin creates a whirlpool** that sucks people down into increasing corruption and immorality. The more people choose to reject God and His will, the more God gives them over to their sinful desires, and the more a society begins to degrade until evil and violence are everywhere.

This is what happened in the ***days of Noah***, when violence spread everywhere.

This is what happened in the ***days of Lot***, when immorality spread to every part of Sodom and Gomorrah.

This is what happened in the ***days of the Judges*** in Israel, when everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

This is what is **happening today** - exactly as Jesus said it would. He said the final judgment will come on people as a total shock, just as the flood did in Noah’s day. People will just be going about their lives, not realizing that God’s wrath is about to fall on them in all-consuming fire.

People are trapped in a powerful current that is drawing them to their death. I’ve never been in **a rip current**, but a friend of mine nearly lost his son to one. He went down to the panhandle from KY for spring break. He was watching his 10 year old son playing in the waves and suddenly the boy was 100 yards out and zipping further every second. He raced out after his son but couldn’t match the power of the current.

Thankfully, as this desperate father watched his son running out of strength and starting to go under, a surfer saw what was happening and raced over to save the boy. My friend said he very nearly had to be rescued himself.

**This is the spiritual reality for everyone outside of Christ**. They are lost in their own hearts and they are trapped in a whirlpool they cannot escape. They need a SAVIOR. And the worst part is they do not know it. They have a terminal disease of which they are not aware.

This is why God has such compassion for sinners and for cities. ***Sin grows and spreads, it corrupts and destroys.*** God looked down at Nineveh and the Assyrian Empire - and knew that one day justice would come for that arrogant and wicked nation. But God’s heart BROKE over this reality. God does not want anyone to die and suffer under His wrath. He is not a cruel, vengeful God - He is gracious and compassionate; slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. God is patient, giving people time to repent.

Do we know God’s heart for Tampa Bay?

* ***9 children are removed from their homes*** due to abuse or neglect EVERY DAY in the Tampa Bay region. (See <https://www.adoorofhope.com/>) Around 800 children are in need of a foster family pretty much all the time.
* Tampa is the #4 or #5 worst city for ***human trafficking*** in the U.S. We are known in the region for our “clubs” and attractions.
* Tampa has one of the highest ***homeless populations*** in the country, with around 16,000 in the region - estimates say over 20% of those are children under 18.
* In 2020 Tampa Bay lost 30 people every week to an ***overdose*** of opiods like fentanyl.

Those are just four of the issues that break God’s heart when He looks down on our city.

The question is, ***do these realities break our hearts?*** That’s the final point today - the third thing God laments:

What God **Laments** because of His unfailing **Love**:

* The **Complacency** of His servants

“You pity the plant, for which you did not labor…” Jonah 4:10

While an unprecedented revival was spreading throughout Nineveh, ***Jonah was having a temper tantrum*** up on a hill outside of the city. He did not care about the results of his assignment, had no interest in following up on his message of coming judgment. He was angry that God had shown mercy to the Ninevites and he was furious that his little plant had died.

Jonah’s fussing was like ***a toddler who finds a block tower built by a child*** who has gone on to play with something else. The little boy settles down to play with the tower and the teacher’s cart rolls by causing just enough vibration to knock the tower down. We’ve all seen a toddler launch into an all out wail as if the entire world has literally just come to an end. The best is when they give themselves away by glancing around to see if anyone is watching. That’s when you realize it’s a big act - they are performing to win a price. And if you’re not careful, the performance will be successful and you’ll give them what they want.

When our boys were small our rule was ***“fussers get nothing.”*** We don’t want to hear your temper tantrum, so you can go to your room and get that out of your system and when you’re done we can talk about what happened. **You can’t control WHEN a child has a tantrum, but when they are still portable you can control WHERE said tantrum takes place.**

Now we’ve gotten into some **parenting wisdom**. But that is what God was doing with Jonah. Our loving Father is sitting down with us and looking at the block tower that has fallen down. “Do you do well to be angry?”

Yes, we pout - we have every right to be furious!

Well, says the Lord, maybe if you look around you’ll see there are some bigger things going on than your little block tower. But if you need to sit here and cry for a few minutes that is just fine. I can wait.

I think this is one of the things that most grieves the heart of God today: the complacency of His people. We have grown so comfortable and content - as C.S. Lewis would say - ***making mud pies in the driveway because we can’t conceive of a holiday at sea.*** We have been so captured by the selfish, worldly currents of the day, and the lies of the devil that keep us locked in our fears instead of deployed on God’s mission.

***We lament our lost comforts, our lost dreams, our lost desires for justice.*** God is a loving Father, and He meets us in our pain. But He does not want us to live there. He is calling us to get up from our dead plants outside of town and to go back into Nineveh where there are thousands of people in need of love and light. He is ***like my camp counselor, Ted***, asking us all today - “How well would you say you know me? Would you say you know about a third of me? From that third of me that you do know, do you think I want you sitting there doing nothing while the rest of us slave away in the hot sun?”

***Whom has the Lord placed on your heart today?*** As we talked about lost people who are confused, blind and enslaved to sin - who came to mind? As we reflected on the brokenness and evil in our city, who did you think of?

The first step is to PRAY for that person. Pray for their heart. Pray for the Lord to work. Pray for an opportunity to love and listen to them; to serve them. Share with your community group or D-Group who you are praying for. Pray together.

And get after it. Let’s not be like Jonah sitting and sulking. Let’s be like Jesus who came to seek and save the lost. He did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life away. Broken, hurting people are all around us if we will just open our eyes and be available to bring the love of Jesus to them.

Let’s pray.