

How God Changes A Heart

Jonah 4:1-4

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Jonah 3:10–4:4 “When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that He had said He would do to them, and He did not do it. ¹ But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. ² 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. ³ Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.' ⁴ And the Lord said, 'Do you do well to be angry?'”

Jonah isn't just upset about what God does; he's actually angry about who God is.

Obedying the command to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength is more than mere behavior management. We can only obey this command if He makes us into a new kind of person. We have to be reborn.

“The human heart is a perpetual idol factory.” ~ John Calvin

This reality means that life here on earth will always be shadowed by struggle.

I. Don't give up

God is transforming us into the kind of people who are willing and able to obey the two great commands.

This brief look into the life of Jonah proves that no one is outside the reach of God's merciful, omnipotent hand.

II. The process God typically uses to realign our allegiance and affection toward Him.

Step 1: The process begins when we make room in our lives for something to challenge God's rightful place of holding our highest allegiance and deepest affection.

3 basic characteristics common to the idols in our lives

1. It is frighteningly easy for us to turn a good gift from God into a small “god” to replace Him.
2. It is disproportionately difficult to self-diagnose our own idols.
3. It is both easy and loving for God to expose and ruin these pitiful “gods” who would dare challenge Him for our love and loyalty.

Step one begins with something challenging God for His place as supreme in our lives, and it ends with God crushing that thing like a bug.

Step 2: We can see the moment when Jonah's idol starts to fracture because his emotions respond immediately!

Jonah 4:1 “But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry.”

Oftentimes, that flash of emotion we get as our little “god” fails us, is our first indication of misplaced affection or allegiance.

So while not every emotion is a result of misaligned love and loyalties, enough of them are that they merit some investigation.

Psalms 139:23-24 “Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my concerns. ²⁴ See if there is any offensive way in me; lead me in the everlasting way.”

It’s possible that God will use your anger, or frustration, or disappointment, or fear to expose where your heart is out of alignment with His.

Step 3: Talk to Him about our idols.

It can be scary to make yourself vulnerable and admit that you need to change, but remember who you’re talking to.

Exodus 34:5-6 “The Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. ⁶ The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, ‘The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.’”

God’s questions invite us into a longer conversation.

Jonah 4:4 “And the Lord said, ‘Do you do well to be angry?’”

The idea of a long conversation about our misplaced worship is one of the most compelling arguments for spending consistent time with God - through prayer and reading the Bible.

For both your time in prayer and your time reading the Bible, your intentions and your expectations matter. When you meet with God, whether it’s prayer or His word, your intentions (what is the goal?) and your expectations (what do you think is going to happen?) matter.

The Bible isn’t just a self-help book to give you a little inspiration and motivation to get you through your day. Nor can we treat it like a magazine or news feed - picking up some tidbits of information here and there, or maybe the occasional provocative new idea.

Hebrews 4:12 “For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”

He’s given you His spirit to help us interpret His word and also to help us in our end of the conversation.

Romans 8:26-27 “In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. ²⁷ And He who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God’s people in accordance with the will of God.”

The “long conversation” is consistently bringing our intentions and expectations back to the same purpose, day after day, as often as we can, for as long as it takes. It’s talking to God about our misplaced love and loyalty - and opening up His word anticipating He will change us.