

# Manteca Presbyterian Church

275 N. Main St., Manteca, CA 95336

209-239-3159

[www.mantecapc.org](http://www.mantecapc.org)

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## Depression

Larry Thorson

### Jonah 4:1-11

*But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry. 2 He prayed to the Lord, "Isn't this what I said, Lord, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. 3 Now, Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live." 4 But the Lord replied, "Is it right for you to be angry?"*

*5 Jonah had gone out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city. 6 Then the Lord God provided a leafy plant and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the plant. 7 But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the plant so that it withered. 8 When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah's head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, and said, "It would be better for me to die than to live."*

*9 But God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?"*

*"It is," he said. "And I'm so angry I wish I were dead."*

*10 But the Lord said, "You have been concerned about this plant, though you did*

*not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. 11 And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left—and also many animals?”*

New International Version

Have you ever struggled with depression? I have and it's not pleasant. I think most people struggle with it from time to time. We know Jonah did and in the final chapter of Jonah we find him depressed. In fact that's where the book of Jonah leaves him. Maybe we can find some encouragement in his experience.

So what brought on Jonah's depression? Well, God told him to preach repentance to the evil city of Nineveh so they could avoid God destroying them and they actually repented. Now, if my sermons could have that kind of impact I'd be pretty excited. But then I haven't lost family members in a holocaust as Jonah probably did in Nineveh. When we pick up the story in Jonah 4:1 Jonah has learned that the evil Ninevites had avoided judgement by repenting. We read: *But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry.*

Anger, as you probably know, is an emotion we feel just like joy or sadness or anxiety. It's actually one of the emotions most displayed by our Creator God in the Scriptures. So if you think about it, as humans made in the image of God, to be angry actually displays some of the image of God.

Anger in itself is not necessarily wrong. We need to be angry about injustices. Where anger is wrong is when it's misdirected. Let's say a man becomes so filled with anger because he can't control his wife he slaps her until she's bruised. We would all agree that's misdirected anger. Maybe he feels he's losing control of everything else in his life like his job and his health so he takes it out on his wife in inappropriate ways. But in that case he's misdiagnosing anger with fear and incorrectly directing it toward an easy target, his wife. The jails are filled with misdirected anger.

*But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry.*

To Jonah, God relenting against destroying Nineveh seemed like an injustice. For the family who lost four daughters in a limoscene accident in New York last summer because of the negligence of the limoscene company, the owner of that company going free would seem very, very wrong to them. Who can blame them? In that case their anger isn't wrong, it's justified. But it's what they do with the anger in the years to come that will determine their mental and spiritual health.

In Jonah 4:3 we read what Jonah wants to do with his anger: *Now, Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live.*

What's really being expressed by Jonah? He was turning his inward on himself. Another word for anger turned inward is depression. As I said earlier most people suffer some version of it because we don't know what to do with our anger. We have to find healthy outlets for our anger.

Richard and Maurine Kanka were happily living in a small town in New Jersey with their three children when on July 29, 1994 their daughter Megan was lured into a neighbor's house to see a non-existent puppy. There she was raped and murdered by her abductor, Jesse Timmendequas. Timmendequas had just recently been released from prison after his second conviction on sexual offenses against children. Searches for the girl turned up nothing.

The local police quickly focused on three known sex offenders living across the street from the missing girl. Police released two of the suspects when they verified where they were and Timmendequas became the main suspect. After obtaining a search warrant, detectives searched his trash where they found a piece of Megan's clothing. Timmendequas was questioned again and after several hours told police *"She's in the park."* When police then asked if she was still alive Timmendequas said *"No, she's dead. I put a plastic bag over her head."*

Megan's parents were outraged to find they were living across the street from a convicted child sex offender. Two days after her murder, they started the "Megan Nichole Kanka Foundation". The mission of that foundation is to identify the location of convicted child sex offenders in every community. But Maurine Kanka, Megan's mother wasn't finished. She then began pushing for laws disclosing the need to notify residents of the presence of convicted sex offenders in their communities. New Jersey then became the first state to pass a "Megan's law." But they still didn't quit. The Kankas continuing efforts resulted in President Clinton signing the federal version of "Megan's Law" where the locations of sex offenders have to be made public.

Richard and Maurine Kanka could have turned their anger inward and suffered another loss, maybe the demise of their family. But they took their anger and brought something good out of their child's death. Today they're much healthier for having done so and children in America are a lot safer. It's our choice as to what we're going to do with our anger.

Back to Jonah, the Lord responds to Jonah's anger in 4:4: *But the Lord replied, "Is it right for you to be angry?"*

Good question. "Was it right for Jonah to be angry?" Let's turn that question around. "Would it have been wrong for Jonah not to be angry?" Think about this, if Jonah was a holocaust survivor (and the Assyrian king did many of the atrocities to the Jews of Jonah's day that Hitler did) would it be wrong for Jonah if he hadn't been angry? Of course, it would be wrong. When we see atrocities being committed against any of God's creation, people, animals, or the environment, we should be angry. To not be angry means we've given up caring for anyone other than ourselves. That's the true highway leading to depression

Was it right for Jonah to be angry that the Assyrians repented and avoided God's destruction? The answer to that question is found in the next strange, little story Jonah tells starting in verse 5.

*5 Jonah had gone out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city.*

This would have taken place sometime after he finished preaching his message of warning to the people. It was kind of like taking a ringside seat at an implosion of an old building. He sat down to see what God was going to do. Would he see his dream fulfilled of his arch enemies burning at the hand of God or would God really give them what Jonah considered an unwarranted second chance?

*6 Then the Lord God provided a leafy plant and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the plant. 7 But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the plant so that it withered.*

This leafy plant translated in Hebrew refers to a castor bean plant that grows to about twelve feet in height quickly. But it's also a naturally short-lived plant. And it's not the kind of plant you want in your garden because it's notorious for producing highly potent poisonous seeds.

*8 When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah's head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, and said, "It would be better for me to die than to live."*

What Jonah was going through just sounds like torture. First Jonah is miserable because of what he has to do for God, warn his enemies to repent. Then he has to watch them be pardoned. The little pleasure he was getting was shade from a poisonous tree. Now even that's taken away when God sends a scorching east wind, killing the plant and leaving him with no shade and causing him to get dehydrated. I can just imagine he's feeling miserable emotionally, physically and I'm sure spiritually. It's like his god has abandoned him. Ever feel like that?

So let's get this straight. Jonah probably actually died in the belly of a whale, was resurrected to new life as Jesus once referenced so that he could do what he most dreaded doing. Life is just not fair. Ever feel like that? Ever feel like God has it out for you? At this point Jonah has a lot of anger and doesn't know what to do with it. When that happens, we either strike out against innocent people in inappropriate ways or we turn the anger inward where depression takes over and we take it out on ourselves. Obviously Jonah was choosing the later option.

*9 But God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?" "It is," he said. "And I'm so angry I wish I were dead."*

Let's turn that question around like we did with God's first question. Is it wrong for Jonah to not care what happened to a poisonous weed plant? But what he's actually angry about is really not the plant. The plant for him was only a tool to make him comfortable while he sulked. But the plant dying was kind of like the straw that broke the camel's back. Under normal circumstances, he couldn't have cared less about that useless weed growing over his seat. But with everything else going wrong for him this was the tipping point.

*10 But the Lord said, "You have been concerned about this plant, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight."*

The message Jonah was hearing is he was concerned with something he had no investment in, a wild, poisonous plant. He didn't till the soil for it. He didn't plant the seeds. He never watered it or groomed it or gave it any care. He had no personal investment in that plant and yet he was so upset about it dying that he wanted to die.

God said in verse 11 *And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left—and also many animals?”*

If Jonah could have had that much care for an almost useless, poisonous plant, what about God’s concern for people he had an investment in? That was God’s point. Anger misdirected causes us to do ridiculous things like getting depressed over the death of a poisonous weed. Think about the insanity of that. Think about the insanity of things we’ve gotten mad over and which has divided us from people we shouldn’t be divided from and further which has divided us from God whom we should never be divided from.

Let’s call it misdirected anger. And that’s where the book of Jonah ends. There’s no bow tied neatly on top of this package. It doesn’t give advice about what Jonah should or should not do. It doesn’t end with Jonah being condemned or of Jonah repenting. It ends with misdirected anger.

Is that where you want your story to end? I’m going to make three suggestions when you don’t know what to do with you anger. The first thing is to identify any unresolved anger you might have. You’re made in the image of God so you’re going to have some anger. Realize that it doesn’t make you a better person by denying that you have anger.

The second suggestion is to try and identify what you’re angry about. Did someone wrong you? Like the Assyrians did to the Jews of Jonah’s day or maybe something lesser? It doesn’t matter, anger is anger. Are you angry with the political climate in Washington or Sacramento? Are you angry with God? Why? Did God really have something to do with your issue? Identify what you’re angry about.

The third suggestion is to take a positive action to counter what hurt you. For example if a friend or a relative cut you out of their life and you

confronted them but they didn't change, counter what they did by finding someone who's lonely and befriending them.

Eventually the people of Nineveh returned to their ruthless, godless ways and God finally allowed them to be destroyed. Jonah would have been happy but I assume he was long gone by then. They were so destroyed that it wasn't until the 1840's that the whereabouts of that great city was rediscovered, long buried under sand and dirt near Mosul, Iraq.

God looks on tragedies like the holocaust and is saddened and angered by it. But God decided at some point to direct his anger by doing something positive. That's why God became a man in the form of Jesus Christ. He took all the abuse that has ever been placed on humans, that of being falsely tried and convicted as a criminal. He allowed himself to be placed on a criminal's execution cross and be wrongly executed. Think about all the anger in the world being poured on Jesus and how that must have swelled within the man Jesus. Jesus died with that anger because only God had the capability of overcoming the damage misdirected anger causes. When Jesus was resurrected, all of that anger was overcome so it no longer had to control us, there was a way out of it.

If unresolved anger ever controls us, Jesus is not in control. There's no way we can live the Jesus Creed of loving the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and our neighbor as our self with unresolved anger. Living the Jesus Creed will help redirect anger to bring about positive change. That's when we know Jesus has regained control of our lives. It's that simple. What are you going to do with your anger?

# **IF YOU'D LIKE TO KNOW HOW TO GET STARTED IN FAITH**

**1. Recognize that everyone has sinned and fallen short of God's ideal**  
**Romans 3:23-24**

**2. Know that the wages or payment for sinning is death**  
**Romans 6:23**

**3. But God loved us so much that He sent His only Son to die for us**  
**Romans 5:8**

**4. It is our responsibility to accept Jesus Christ as our Savior and allow  
Him to become the master of our life**  
**Romans 10:13**

**Invite Jesus into your heart by praying something like the prayer below...**

*"Dear Lord Jesus, in many ways I have sinned against you. I am sorry and want to turn from my sinful ways. I invite you to come into my heart and begin to make me like yourself. I commit my life wholeheartedly to you now. Thank you for saving me."*