

My name is Afshin Ziafat. I know it is a mouthful. It's a good Texan name right? Not really, but I grew up in Texas. I was born in Houston, but the name is actually Persian. My family is from Iran. It has been a while since I have been here at The Village. My schedule has have been crazy, but I was so excited when Matt asked me to come back. I was actually talking to Meredith, my wife, in trying to figure out when was the last time I was at The Village. So I remembered that it was when I came here almost two years ago, and I did a two part series two back to back weeks on "Godly Contentment" and "Godly Discontentment." I think I remember talking about how amazing and wide spread and just powerful the podcast of The Village is. Every time I speak at The Village, I get bombarded from all over the world. It is unbelievable how many people listen to the podcast. I've got to tell you that I made a mistake last time I was with you when I did the "Godly Contentment" talk, because I talked about my love life a little bit. I talked about how I dated Meredith for a few years, and then we broke up because I was an idiot. Then I tried to win her back and I couldn't do it, so finally I had to let go and trust God. Then God brought her back to me. Even to this day, I get bombarded with e-mails from places like the UK, from the Netherlands, from like South East Asia going, "Oh my gosh! I went through the same thing with my girlfriend. Can you talk to me?" I told Meredith that I am going to pray, fast and plead with the Lord that this is not the start of some kind of dating counseling ministry for me. I would not be good at that. My friends are going to be driving home and turn on the radio late night, and it is going to be like "You are on with Delilah and Afshin." You know it is not going to work out well at all. I learned a pretty big lesson there.

My wife and I have been going crazy traveling this past summer. We did a lot of camps, retreats, conferences and preaching in churches. One new thing that has happened since the last time I was with you is a weekly Bible study. It is a big Bible study, a huge gathering of college students at Baylor. It's like Breakaway at Texas A&M. It started at Baylor this past year, and it's called Vertical. I am the speaker for that, and we have about a 1,000 plus coming every Monday night. Actually Josh and Bleecker came and filled in once this past year and did a great job. It is an awesome ministry. So if you know anyone from Baylor, send them our way. We start tomorrow night at the Baylor Ballpark where they play baseball. Shane and Shane will be leading worship, and I will be speaking. We are really excited about that thing. Also, Meredith and I are in a unique spot, just so you know so you can pray for us. We are feeling God calling us off of the road potentially to pastor. We don't know yet exactly, but we are kind of praying through that. So, would you pray for us that would be huge. Thanks.

I'm excited to be with you tonight, and let me tell you where we are going I want you to grab your Bible and turn to the Old Testament book of Jonah. Jonah has just four chapters, but it is just packed with some incredible truth. Honestly, I wish I could walk through the whole thing with you, but I am going to camp in Jonah 4. We are going to get a running start in a little bit, but there is so much truth here that needs to be unpacked. Let me just say really quickly that Jonah has a really special place in my heart and my life because it had a huge impact in my story. I grew up in a Muslim home. My family is Muslim, and I basically became a Christian my senior year in high school when I read a New Testament. I was given a Bible in the second grade by a teacher. I Read the New Testament, came to know who Jesus was and gave my life to following Him. To make a long story short, my father disowned me and my family disowned me for being a Christian. Then they took me back in for a period of time as long as I go be a doctor and make my dad proud. He is a doctor, and I was going take over his practice. That was the plan. Then God called me in to full time ministry, and again we had a falling out. And now for a second time, our relationship has been restored again. We are praying for him and my family. They are not Christians yet, but we are still praying. So that is my story in a nutshell. During that time when my dad had

accepted the fact that I was a Christian, not fully really, but kind of thought it was a phase but I was going to be a doctor, during that time, I knew that God was calling me to do something else with my life. I was running from God's call. I was involved at The University of Texas in a Christian fraternity called BUC's (Brother's Under Christ). A guy came and spoke, and afterward I went up to talk to him. Before I said anything to him he said, "Hey what's your name?" I said, "Afshin." He said, "You are going to be an evangelist one day." Now I had been a Christian for about a year and I am like, "What is an evangelist?" He said, "You are going to travel and tell people about Jesus." So I did what anyone would do I said, "How do you know?" He goes, "God told me to tell you." So I was like, "This guy's a psycho." I don't hear that all of the time right, and so I was like, "Who is this guy?" I walked away and got in the Word and prayed and I felt God confirming it. But I was not going to my dad and say, "Not only am I a Christian, but now I am going to go into full time ministry and preach about Jesus." So I ran from God. One year after this guy spoke at the fraternity, I came back one year later and he was back to teach. I had no idea. I walked in, saw him and said, "Oh no." So I went to the corner in the room and slouched down in my chair and put my Bible up here I'm like, "I hope this guy does not remember me." Sure enough, he opens the word of God and goes, "All right men, turn to the book of Jonah. You know the story. If you don't, you will in a second." Then he starts preaching about this guy who ran from God's call in his life. Then all of a sudden, half way through, he goes, "Sort of like Afshin over there." And the entire fraternity looks over at me and I'm like "Okay, I get it." So I went and told my dad and the rest is history. So this book had a huge part in my life.

So before we read, let's bow our heads real quickly again and let me just pray for us. "Father we love You. We thank You for Your Word and we pray that Your Word would now speak to us. And as You testify of Your own Word we pray that it accomplishes the purpose for which You were sent and does not return void. We pray that our hearts would be fertile soil to receive Your Word. Prepare our hearts for your word, speak to us. Change us from the inside out. By Your Word, we love you in Christ's name we pray. Amen."

In Jonah 1 God comes to Jonah and says to him, "Go preach to Nineveh." Where is Nineveh? Nineveh is the capital of Assyria. What we need to know off the bat is that the prophet Amos is the contemporary of Jonah. So he is prophesying and preaching at the same time as Jonah, and Amos has already prophesied that Assyria, of which Nineveh is the capital, would one day come and conquer Israel. So hear how amazing this is that God is coming to Jonah and telling him, "Go and preach to Nineveh the message that I tell you." I mean these are the people that he already knows will one day will come conquer his country. Not only that, but also we know from reliefs that we have uncovered and study from that culture, that the Assyrians were gruesome people. Not to be graphic, but I am going to be graphic. They would skin their captives alive. They would dismember their captives of war. These were gruesome people. These were the terrorists of the day. They were so evil, wicked, gruesome people, and one day they will conquer Israel. This is the enemy. This is to whom Jonah is called to preach. In chapter 1, Jonah high tails it the other way. He gets on a ship and sets to Tarshish to get away from, as the Scripture says, the presence of the Lord, which is so funny. He runs to the sea to flee from the presence of God, and what we find out is that God commands the sea the storm. His running from the presence of God shows you that he himself probably knows of his guilt, that he is guilty. Because when we have guilt, it causes us to want to run from the presence of God, the very person that we ought to turn to. It is like Adam and Eve when they first sinned. What did they do? They went and hid themselves from God. That is what is happening here in Jonah. By his running, you know from the beginning that he understands what he is doing is wrong. So God appoints the storm, the sailors on the ship will throw Jonah overboard and finally God will appoint the fish. Everyone knows the fish. The fish is not God's judgment by the way; the fish is God's mercy saving Jonah from the depths of the sea. In the belly of the fish in chapter 2, Jonah makes this incredible praise of thanksgiving for God saving him. In fact look at verse 9 in Jonah 2. "But I with a voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you and what I have vowed I will pay salvation belongs to the Lord." Keep that in mind that he says that. And so finally through this fish God brings Jonah back to dry land. And most of us know that part of the story.

But then in chapter 3, Jonah goes to Nineveh. Look at this in verse 1 of Jonah 3. "Then the Lord of the word came to Jonah a second time." I love that because I have need once, twice and many times for God to come back to me, to come back to me before He finally drew me in. What I love about the Word of God is it's just full of men and women who needed a second chance, but also even the people that God used to deliver the message were broken people who ran from God and needed a second chance. I think of Abraham who didn't trust God and slept with his maid servant. He didn't trust that God would provide a son by his wife, and God came to him a second time and restored him in Genesis 17. I think of Moses who murdered a man and went to the backside of the wilderness for 40 years before God came back to him a second time. God called him to lead the people out of Egypt. You go throughout Scriptures and even the people that are used are broken people that needed a second chance. So if you are thinking, "Man, you have no idea what my background is," you are a prime candidate for God to do something great and use you to do something great in this world. And I want you to see what happens in verse 2. "'Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you.'" So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days' journey in breadth." It doesn't mean it took three days to get to Nineveh. Nineveh was such a great city that it would take three days to walk through the city and preach this message. This is what it is trying to convey. This is a huge city. Keep that in mind. Look what it says in the next verse. Verse 4, "Jonah began to go into the city and going a day's journey." That means he's gone one-third of the way through the city and he calls out, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" He preaches eight English words. In the Hebrew it is 5. Five Hebrew words he preaches. Three days journey to go through the city, and he only goes one day preaching five words. And look what happens. Verse 5, "And the people of Nineveh believed God. They called for a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them." The great amazing miracle of the story of Jonah is not the fish. That is an amazing miracle, but everyone thinks that's the greatest miracle of Jonah. The greatest amazing wow of Jonah is that Jonah went one day into this giant city preaching five words and the entire city repents. These gruesome, wicked people, they all turn to God. That is the amazing wow of Jonah, by the way. That tells me that the power of God's Word. In Romans 10:17 says, "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God." Five Hebrew words, and look what God did. And it also tells me that God he doesn't need me, doesn't need my eloquence and doesn't need my talents. Here is a guy who was running from God, and God used him. Even Jesus points to this and says, "This is the amazing story of Jonah."

By the way, in case you are wondering the historicity of Jonah, Jesus Christ himself referred to Jonah. In fact, I want you to see this really quickly. Go to Mathew 12. I want you to see what Jesus says to the religious elite of his time. Matthew 12:38, "Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying, "Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you.'" And they got Jesus by the way. We wish to see a sign. And look what he says in verse 39. "But he answered them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." He's speaking of His crucifixion, burial and resurrection. Look at this verse 41. "The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here." Jesus even refers to this and says, "Man, even the men of Nineveh repented at the preaching of Jonah with five words. And you have something greater. You have Me." In other words, "You are without excuse." So even Jesus refers to this and says "This is amazing."

Let me say one word that is very key about the message that was preached by Jonah. In verse 4 when he says, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" the word in the Hebrew which means overthrown is a double entendre. It has two meanings. It can mean to be overturned on the outside or destroyed, as in Sodom and Gomorrah, or it can mean to be overturned on the inside, to be broken or repentant. In 1 Samuel it is used when God gave Saul another heart. He literally changed him from the inside. Why is that key? Because so many people look at the story of Jonah and they think that God is just up there and doesn't really know what is going to happen or maybe that God changed His mind and He was going to destroy Nineveh and then He changed His mind. That is not what is happening here. The word is a double

entendre. It's like the English word that we have "broken." This was the message. "In forty days, Nineveh will be broken." Nineveh will be broken on the outside/destroyed or broken on the inside/repentant. And that is exactly what happened. So the message did not change. God didn't change His mind. He said in forty days this will happen. God is Sovereign over every part of this detail. God is sovereign over life. In fact, I believe God used the warning. He was sovereign over the warning to use them to turn them to repentance. It just might be that God has been sovereign over the details of your life. 2 Peter says that God is not slow to fulfill his promise but his long suffering towards us not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. God is long-suffering and it might be that He has orchestrated things in your life to draw you and woo you to Him.

So, God brings this message and they repent, and let's look at repentance before we get to chapter 4. I want you to see the repentance of the king. Go to verse 6. This is what true repentance looks like. "The word reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. And he issued a proclamation and published through Nineveh. . ." This is repentance in action. The king is sitting on the throne. What happens first? Repentance starts with God's word. First the word of God reached the king of Nineveh. Again, Romans 10:17 says, "Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the Word of God." Repentance didn't start until he heard from God. It starts with God's word. Then what happened? The second thing that happens is he rises from the throne, and he takes off his robe. That's huge, because true repentance, when you hear the word of God and God convicts you, it leads to a self-denial, a humbling yourself, of getting yourself off the throne of your life. It just like Isaiah, when he saw the glory of God, he saw the door post shaking and he heard the angels singing "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" When he saw God in the right light, he saw himself in the right light, and he said, "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips." And true repentance sees God in the right light and understand how broken we are apart from God. The next thing he does is so interesting. He covers himself with sackcloth. In those days, when they would do a fast, they would wear sackcloth. That they would wear on the outside clothing that reflected their inner-poverty their inner-brokenness. So the poor people and the beggars would wear sackcloth. So what they are doing here is going, "I'm going to put on a sackcloth to say 'God I'm not going to cover up my sin, I'm not going to dress it up and I'm not going to make any excuses for it. I'm going to call it sin!'" So make no excuses for your sin and confess. 1 John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." That word "confess" means to speak with God about your sin and make no excuse for it. "I have sinned against You, God." So repentance starts with God's word, it leads to a self denial, it leads to a confession that says, "I'm broken" and it finally calls on God. There is a proclamation at the end. Romans 10:13 says "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." There is finally this calling on God of, "God I need mercy."

This is what I think where I think the gospel gets so confused in our society these days. I don't know how many of you watch LOST, but Meredith and I watched the Jimmy Kimmel Show after the last episode. Jimmy Kimmel had the entire cast of LOST on the show. He had Matthew Fox, the lead character there, and he said, "You know it is sort of like some of most religions teach, Christianity being the foremost, that if you are good in this world, you are going to heaven, and if you are bad in this world you are going to hell." And Matthew Fox said, "Yeah sure" and everyone in the studio went, "Yeah of course that is what Christianity teaches." Meredith and I looked at each other and were like "What?" That is not the message of the gospel. It's not all right if you are good in this world you are going to go to heaven and if you are bad in this world you are going to hell. And I think the message is best I believe illustrated in Luke 18 when Jesus says this, "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.' But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will

be exalted." 1 Peter 5 says, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." The message isn't, "Be good and you will be received." I believe that Scripture says that God doesn't oppose the sinner but that God opposes the proud, those who would stand in their own righteousness. If you think you stand righteous based on anything you have done, you have missed the entire gospel. The gospel ought to call you to come to the end of yourself and say, "Have mercy on me, God. I'm broken." And God is ready to extend that mercy to you through the perfect life of his Son Jesus Christ and His shed blood on that cross for you and for me. And so this is what true repentance looks like.

So now let's get to Jonah 4 you with me yeah here we go. I want to talk to you about Jonah's unrepentant heart, I want to talk to you about God's response, I want to talk to you about God's heart and then I want to talk to you about our response. So let's look at Jonah's heart after God relented of the destruction of Nineveh. Verse 1 of Jonah 4, "But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. 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. Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live." So he talked about the king, repentance starts with God's word, he humbles himself, confesses and calls on God. Look at the opposite here. The first thing I want you to see in verse 1 is that it displeased Jonah exceedingly and he was angry. The way the Hebrew reads is, "It was evil to Jonah a great evil." So Jonah in the Hebrew is bracketed with the word evil, which is so interesting. Jonah thinks what is happening is evil, but the evil is pointing into Jonah and his heart. And so remember what the king did? He got off of the throne. Now what does Jonah do? Jonah gets on the throne and says, "God what you did was evil." He charges God with wrong with evil for what He did and not destroy Nineveh. And that is how we know he is unrepentant there, because he is playing god, he is playing judge himself. In Exodus 33 and Romans 9 both, God says, "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will show mercy to whom I show mercy." It's not up to us who receives mercy. It is up to God. By the way, I am so thankful that someone did not draw a line for me of how far God's mercy stands. So I want you to see this again in Jonah 2:9. In the belly in the fish Jonah prayed, "Salvation belongs to the Lord." He already prayed that, but now he is saying, "No it doesn't. You shouldn't have for given them mercy."

The second thing I want you to see is how he justifies his sin. In verse 2, 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." So when he ran from God and he was disobedient, God saved him and he said, "Oh thank You. I praise You for saving me." He said that on the outwardly, but now he is saying, "No, that is why I did it." He is justifying his rebellion. Remember I said the king confessed his sin and made no excuses for it. What is Jonah doing? He is making an excuse he is justifying it. "That is why I ran." I haven't even been married two years, and even in that short period of time of being married, this has already happened so many times where I have made a mistake and I go to Meredith and say, "Meredith I am so sorry. I shouldn't have done that. I shouldn't have said that." She will forgive me. And it is not five days later, but five seconds later, where she will say something or something will happen and I'll think, "Oh that is why I said it." And then I don't want to drop it. I kind of want to say, "By the way, remember when I said forgive me? Well I think that is why I said that." But as soon as I do that, all that "forgive me" goes out the window. I am the best at saying, "Meredith I am sorry but. . ." When you say "but," then the whole "I am sorry" goes out the window. So he is justifying his sin. So what in your life keeps you running from God? You know you are being disobedient in this area, maybe you're couching it, maybe you are justifying it by saying, "Man, it is because of my circumstances or because of this relationship" and you are trying to justify it. It may be a sense of entitlement. I will never forget Tiger Woods when he made his big confession. What did he say? He said that a sense of entitlement crept in that said, "I should get to do this." And he said, "I thought that I played by different rules, and I found out that I don't play by different rules than everybody else. The same rules apply to me." So I ask you, are you justifying something in your heart that you know you are running from God. So Jonah's heart I believe is still unrepentant, meaning he is not truly broken over his own sin. He says, "I knew that you were a God merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love." He is quoting Exodus 34. The very characteristics of God that saved

his rear end in the sea, he is now ticked off when those characteristics are extended to benefit somebody else. And so he is unrepentant.

And I want you to see God's response look to this in verse 4. "And the LORD said, "Do you do well to be angry?" It is so interesting to me. Many times God will ask a question to cause us to turn inwards and look at our own heart. Jesus is the ultimate example of that. Remember the woman caught in adultery? She was caught in the very act of adultery. She was brought and thrown before the teachers of the law, and they are grabbing stones to kill her. And the look at Jesus and said, "Our law says that we ought to stone her. What do You say?" And Jesus ultimately says, "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her." What does He do? He turns them inwards. "Hey how are you doing? Do you have sin in your life?" He turns them inwards. And then what do they do? The Bible says, "They went away one by one, beginning with the older ones, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him." The older I get, the more I know how much of a sinner I am and how much mercy I need in my life. So they all leave the scene so that only Jesus is left standing. He is the only one who was sinless, who had the right to stone her, and Jesus says "Where are your accusers? Does no one condemn you? Neither do I." But man Jesus just scattered that scene by saying, "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone." And God is doing the same thing here with Jonah. He is saying, "Jonah do you do well to be angry? Are you doing well? Are you justified to be angry here when someone else is receiving mercy? Look at your own heart." And so He asks a question to turn him inwards.

The second thing God does in response is He takes Jonah through a series of circumstances to show him that his heart doesn't fully belong to God. Jonah 4:5, "Jonah went out of the city and sat to the east of the city and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, till he should see what would become of the city." Now the Lord God appointed a plant and made it come up over Jonah that it might be a shade over his head to save him from his discomfort so Jonah was exceedingly glad because of the plant. But when dawn came up the next day God appointed a worm that attacked the plant so that it withered." God is sovereign over every part of these details. God appointed the storm, God appointed the fish, God appointed the plant, God appointed the worm and He is about to appoint the east wind. God is sovereign over all of these details. Let's keep reading. "When the sun rose, God appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint. And he asked that he might die and said, "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." So it is such an interesting thing. In verse 4, God asks a question, "Do you do well to be angry?" We don't get the response. In verse 5, what does Jonah do? He goes to the east of the city to see what would become of Nineveh. So here is what is happening. God says to Jonah, "Are you doing well to be angry?" Jonah comes over here looks at Nineveh as if to say, "Let me first see what You are going to do to Nineveh and then I will respond. So I am going to be responsive to You, I am going to follow you and trust you, but only if things go the way I think they ought to go." That's kind of person that says, "I want to follow Christ but only on my terms, only when things go the way I think they ought to go." And this is a flip-flop walk with God. The plant comes, and he is glad. And then the plant is taken away. By the way the plant, interestingly enough, is the only thing that is destroyed in the book of Jonah. So the plant is taken away, and Jonah freaks out and says, "Kill me. I want to die." And so it is this flip flop thing of, "I am only going to follow You when things go well." So what is interesting is the word that is used for "discomfort." Look with me at verse 6. God made a plant in verse 6 to shade over Jonah's head to save him from his discomfort. The word there that is translated "discomfort" has the root raah, which means "evil." That word is also a double entendre. It could mean an evil on the outside of circumstances that are bad, or it can mean an evil on the inside or evil in the heart. Jonah thinks his heart is fine and the problem is what is happening is out here, but God is actually using his circumstances to show him that his heart is really off and not fully His. And so many times, God takes me through circumstances to show me that that I don't fully follow him and when things go bad, I'm bailing on Him.

I used to live in Atlanta, Ga. In Atlanta there is a thing called the MARTA, which is the Mass Area Rapid Transit of Atlanta. It is the rail system. I would take it all the time to take it from the north of Atlanta where I live to the south where the airport was to fly to speak somewhere. One day I got on the MARTA because I was flying to Alaska that day. You don't want miss your flight to Alaska, right? So half way down the MARTA breaks down. To make a long story short, by the time it gets to the airport I am sprinting trying to make my flight. I get to the gate 10 minutes before the flight, and they just shut the door. I'm flashing my credentials going, "Please let me on." I have a first class ticket, and they are just looking at me going, "You are Iranian and you are 10 minutes late. You are not getting on this plane." And I am like, "Please let me on this plane." "You are not getting on this plane." And so I go, "Well then, put me on the next plane." And so she goes, "The next flight will get you there at 10:00PM." Now my original flight got there at 2:00PM. And I am speaking at 8:00. So I'm like, "You don't have anything between 2:00 and 10:00?" And she goes, "Unless you reroute through Seattle." And I go, "Well reroute me through Seattle." So she types some stuff into the computer, looks up and says, "That will cost you \$2000." I had to pay \$2,000 of my own cash because I gave my word that I would be there at 8:00 and the entire flight to Seattle. I was ticked off at God. I was like, "God You know my financial situation. Why did You let that MARTA break down? I got there early!" And my heart is hardening and I am angry with God. This is not good, and I know it. So I get to Seattle and I call my buddy and said, "Bro you have got to pray for me. My heart is hard. I'm just angry and this is not right." He says, "I am going to pray that God breaks your heart." So I am like, "Okay I am done talking to you." So, I get on the plane in Seattle to fly to Alaska, and I'm like, "Lord, forgive me." And I start opening the Word and I start flipping. This doesn't always work, but I turn to the book of Job. You don't want to read Job when you are complaining about anything in your life. The enemy walks before God. God says, "Where have you been?" The enemy says, "I have been walking through the earth." God said, "Have you considered My servant Job? There is none upright than he. He fears Me. He departs from evil." And the enemy says to God, "Does he fear You for nothing? You put a hedge of protection around him, You have blessed him and You have given him many possessions. But if You strike him, he will curse You to Your face. So he only fears You because You are blessing him right now." God says, "All right, let's test this out. You can do anything you want, just don't touch him." The enemy wipes out all of his children, he loses all of his possessions and Job tears off his clothes, falls on his face he says, "Naked I came into this world, and naked I am going to leave this world. The Lord gives, the Lord takes away but blessed be the name of the Lord." But at the end of the chapter, it says in all this Job did not sin nor did he charge God with wrong. This is the exact opposite of Jonah who got on the throne and charged God with evil for what He did. Job here is saying, "You're God I am not. If You take it away, I am still yours. Because You are the best thing I have in life." God uses these circumstances to show Jonah, "Listen your heart is off." It just might be that God has put storms in your life to show you something off in your heart to turn you back, to woo you back to Him.

So let's look at God's heart verse 10-11. Look at this with me, "And the LORD said, "You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night. And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?" That's how the book ends. It's pretty interesting, right? So, here is the thing. God has got a compassionate heart. He is compassionate for the enemy first. He is compassionate for those we might think don't deserve mercy. God's heart moves for those who are his enemies. I thank God for that. The story of Jonah should tell all of us that our heart ought to beat for those that don't deserve mercy, because that is exactly the same boat we were in.

Go back to 2 Kings really quickly with me. You have got to see this 2 Kings 14. This is very critical to the entire story of Jonah. I want you to see when God gives mercy to Israel, and you are going to see an interesting character pops up here. Look at 2 Kings 14:23 "In the fifteenth year of Amaziah the son of Joash, king of Judah, Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel, began to reign in Samaria, and he reigned forty-one years. And he did what was evil in the sight of the LORD." Now look what it says next verse 25 "He restored the border of Israel." So a man who is sinning is actually advancing the kingdom. Let's keep reading. "He restored the border of Israel. . . according to the word of the LORD, the God of Israel, which he spoke by his servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet." So hear me don't miss it. God extended mercy to

Israel when they were being rebellious and turning from Him. And he gave the message that they were going to receive mercy through the lips of Jonah. The same man who was ready to bring mercy and proclaim mercy to his people is now angry when it is extended to the enemy. I think God took him to this whole plan of bringing the plant and taking the plant away to say, "Listen if it wasn't for Me, if I am removed, you are in the same boat as them." Romans 5 says that for a while we were enemies, that we were reconciled to God by the death of his son much more now that we are reconciled shall we be saved by His life. I wasn't an innocent bystander saying, "Oh look look what they are doing to this poor Jesus." No it was my sin that put him on the cross. I was an enemy of God.

I will never forget one day I was sitting at a restaurant with my father who is Muslim and my brother who is Muslim talking about the issue of forgiveness. We are debating about how Islam talks about it and how Christianity talks about it. I said, "Dad, I can't receive the love of a Savior who says, 'Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing' and then go and demand that someone deserved my mercy." As I am saying this, my heart is pounding because I have already prayed to invite my dad to this and I said, "Dad, you know Mel Gibson just put out a new movie about Jesus?" And he goes, "Yeah, I heard." I go, "Do you want to see it?" And he says, "Sure, why not?" And he looks to my brother and says, "Do you want to see it?" And he is like, "Sure, why not?" And next thing you know, I am on my way to the movie theater with my dad who is a Muslim and my brother who is a Muslim. On our way there, my dad goes, "All right Afshin what do I need to go before the movie starts?" So I start in the Garden of Eden and I get to the garden of Gethsemane in like fifteen minutes as fast as I can. The movie starts there when Jesus is praying there in the garden. Can you imagine the scene at the end of the movie when Jesus stands up, my dad's here my brother is here, and Jesus stands up and He says, "You have heard it said, 'Love your neighbors and hate your enemies.' I say, 'Love your enemies and bless those who persecute you.'" That is message we're watching, and I am sitting in between them going "Yes!" That is the message of Christ, that you get mercy when you don't even deserve it. That should move us with compassion for people who we think are our enemy. You don't have to condone what they have done maybe, but maybe the most Christ like thing would be for you to go forgive someone who you think doesn't deserve your mercy and forgiveness. Jesus said this, "If you only love the people who love you, what more do you do than the tax collectors? If you are only going to love people who deserve your love, pat yourself on the back because you have just come up to the level of the world. But you are called to go beyond it. God loves the enemy."

Number two: God loves the spiritually blind. Look at this again. Verse 11, "should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left?" They don't know their right from their left. That is like Deuteronomy 5 and Proverbs 4 where it says "Follow the law. Do not turn to the right or to the left." God is saying to Jonah, "Jonah, these people don't know their right from their left. You have received the revelation of God. They haven't." This says to us today Church is, when people that don't know Jesus act like it, it shouldn't appall us so badly that we are not moved with compassion. We should expect them to act that way. In fact we ought to think, "Man if I didn't have Christ in my life, I would be right there with them doing the very thing they are doing." Ephesians says we were dead in our trespasses before Christ made us alive. The message again isn't that Jesus came to make me who was an okay person to into a better person. The message is that Jesus came to me when I was dead and He made me alive. I was spiritually blinded to the truth of Christ. God gave me mercy. So my heart ought to beat for those who don't know, for those who are enemies.

And then finally, God's heart beats for all of the world. And I believe the message of Jonah is, "Hey, it is not just for you, it's not just for Israel, but My heart beats for all." You say, Where do you get that?" Listen to what Ge says. He says, "You're angry about the plant for which you didn't even grow. Should not I pity 120,000 persons?" And I would add, ". . . who were made in the image of God." "Should I not pity these that I have made? It had nothing to do with this plant. I made the plant, and I made these people." So the message is that God's heart beats for all people, all races and people

who are not in our little cliques in our little clubs. Jonah had to get uncomfortable, leave his comfort zone and go to the enemy and preach God's mercy.

I believe the book of Jonah ends with a question mark for this reason: what is our response? You see God's heart? What is your response to it? Will you, will I be moved by the mercy that we have received to go now and extend that same mercy to the enemy, to the lost, to the spiritually blind and to those who maybe aren't in our little bubble. You might have to get uncomfortable. I think about Peter who is sitting on the roof top and he sees the vision in Acts 10 of the sheet coming out with all kinds of animals, and he hears the word of the Lord saying, "Peter rise up, take kill and eat." And Peter says, "I will not touch what is common and unclean." And God says to Peter, "Don't call what I have made common and unclean. I made them. I made these 120,000 people." So right then he hears a rap at the door, and a Gentile man has sent for Peter to go to Cornelius' house. He gets uncomfortable and he preached the gospel, and the gospel goes out of the gentile world. Peter had to get uncomfortable, and ultimately Jesus is our greatest example. Of Jesus, the Bible says, "Though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant." Christ left his comfort zone and came to this world to be a bond servant because he wanted you and I to receive mercy. How dare we stay in our comfort zones? This message ought to move us to say, "Let me go God, even if I have to get uncomfortable. I want to be part of Your mercy going out."

Let me close by telling you a story that came into Meredith's and my life last summer, and it really just impacted us greatly. This story is a story of a young man named BJ Higgins. I have a book here that is written about BJ's life the book is *I Would Die For You*, by Brent and Diana Higgins. In this story BJ, at the age of eight, accepted Christ at a youth meeting when he heard the gospel presented. He wasn't in the youth group, but his father was on staff and dragged him to the meeting, and he accepted Christ. At the age of ten, BJ was so passionate about this same mercy he received that he wants all his friends to know. Literally on the school bus, he would be very raw sharing his faith with his classmates. They would run to the teacher crying saying, "BJ said we are going to hell if we don't accept Jesus." So the teacher would have to pull BJ aside and say, "Let's tone down the harshness of your message." That is how raw he was. He just wanted them to know. His parents told us that he was sharing his faith online as a thirteen year old. They would say, "Get to bed." And he said, "Dad, mom, I am sharing my faith." And they were like, "What do we do with that?" I am not trying to put him on a pedestal, but he was just a kid who got it and wanted others to know this. BJ really felt like God was calling him to get uncomfortable. He felt called to go into the mission field. He felt called specifically to go to Africa, to go to Morocco specifically. He told his older sister, "We are going to go to Morocco together." Before he made it to Africa, BJ went to Peru on a mission trip. And at the age of fifteen, BJ contracted a rare disease, and after a sixmonth battle BJ died and went to be with the Lord. This book was written by his parents taking the writings of a thirteen year old in his journal. You would be shocked about what a young man was writing in his journal. Let me give you a quick little excerpt. "It's time that we as the professed Christians of America wake up from our sleep of lethargy and hypocrisy and stop only living for Christ on Sundays and Wednesdays and start acting as Christ says all of His disciples must act. (As Luke 14:27 says, "Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple") We must die to ourselves daily. We must forget our comfort zones, and our cliques of friends and go out and share the love and rescuing truth of Jesus Christ with the lost, empty, suffering, and dying people of the world all around us as Christ commanded!" I was in the Middle East when Meredith my wife bought this book. I was training over there. I came back and she handed me the book and she said, "You aren't going to believe this, turn to page 32." So I turned to page 32 and it says, "When BJ was in elementary school, he had just heard Afshin Ziafat speak and he accepted Christ." So I was the guy that preached when he accepted Christ at the age of eight. Now I travel around the country and preach and leave and never see the results sometimes. And Meredith and I were just thankful that one time God let us see the result. We got on our faces and we thanked the Lord. By the way if you think that I am boasting and am trying to take some credit for this (not that you could ever take credit for this), but this was my first outside speaking engagement ever. So you know my message was horrible. I was probably like, "Jesus loves you. . . Amen." You know what I mean. But remember that it was five Hebrew words in

Jonah. Look what God can do. His parents found us on the internet, e-mailed me and said, "You led our son to Christ." I said, "I know! I got the book!" And so they were like, "Hey we'd would love to take you to dinner. We live in Oklahoma. I'm going to be there next week." The next thing you know, we are at dinner and I am just balling crying and Meredith is just balling crying as we listen to this story of this young man.

You might say, "Why would God take the fifteen-year-old who is getting uncomfortable and getting out there telling people about Jesus?" After his funeral his parents took his ashes and went with BJ's older sister to Morocco. They went on top of the hill overlooking a Muslim village, and they spread out BJ's ashes on this hill. They prayed for that Muslim village, came home and thought nothing more of it. Guess what? Later they found out that the Muslim guide who took them to the top of the hill was so influenced by BJ's life story that he gave his life to Christ. And now that guide is now the pastor of the underground church in that Moroccan village sharing Christ. So, BJ's life literally is making an impact in northern Africa, even through his death. After that, BJ's dad is sitting on a bus in Kenya, and a Sudanese young man comes and sits down next to him. He starts sharing his faith with this young man from Sudan, and he goes, "Oh I know Jesus. I just don't have a Bible." And BJ's dad goes, "No!" Because the only Bible he had with him was the Bible that has BJ's writings in it that he preaches from. He's like, "God I'm not giving him this Bible." For 10 min he wrestles with God, "God I'm not giving this up." And God says, "Give him the Bible." So Brent Higgins gives BJ Higgins' Bible to this young Sudanese man and says, "Hey I just need to pray for you." He prays for this young man. As he prays for him, he hears God say to him, "You are praying for the next Evangelist in East Africa." After he prays for him, similar to what happened to me, he says, "You are going to be an evangelist one day." And the young man's face lights up. And then he goes, "I am just curious. How old are you young man?" "Fifteen-years-old." He has BJ's Bible, and he's preaching the gospel in Africa today. So, BJ had to get uncomfortable. He went, "I want others to know the same mercy that I know."

Maybe you've been that person who is saying, "I've been running from God." Maybe it was just a fluke thing that at the last minute you just pulled into this church for this service. Maybe you are saying, "Man, I am running from God. Man I've often thought there is no way God would receive me." The message of Christ is that God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us that we may be the righteousness of God. He took our sin on His shoulder. He offers you mercy. God demonstrates His love for us in this, that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. If you are here, it is not to jump through more hoops but it is to come to the end of yourself and say, "God I need You. I need Your mercy." If you are here today and that is you, why not call on God? Romans 10:13 says, "All who call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." Just call on Him and say, "God I need mercy. I need You." For the rest of us, it might be that we have received the mercy of God, but does that mercy move us to compassion for the enemy, maybe even someone who has wronged us, the spiritually blind and to get out of our comfort zone to reach all of the world, even in our community.

"Father we love You, we thank You again that You crossed the greatest divide, got uncomfortable, became obedient to God all of the way to the point of the death of the cross, and on that cross You paid for our sins. You gave us mercy that we would never have deserved, that we don't deserve and that we never would have received apart from You. God, may that mercy resonate and move us to act. We love You, Jesus. It is in Christ's name we pray. Amen."