

## **Life Group Study Guide- May 6<sup>th</sup> – Jonah Chapter 4**

### ***“Withering Roots or Intentional Investments?”***

I have never had what some would call a “green thumb.” It seems that if left in my care most plants will wither and die. Stephen and I recently experienced a “parent fail” regarding one such plant.

Tyler entered an Arbor Day contest at school and received a post-card that he was to be the recipient of an award. I took the post-card, emailed Stephen about the date, and placed it somewhere among the stack of papers on my desk. The day came and we both just forgot about it. The next morning at work one of the teachers at Mountain View said to Tyler and I, “We missed you guys at the award's ceremony yesterday. **Tyler-** you got first place. I have your certificate and tree for you.” I just stared at her. I then made the connection from tree to Arbor Day and realized what happened. Tyler is our most laid-back child and said, “It's okay mom. We can't do everything.” I agreed with him however, it bothered me all week that we missed his moment to accept his award. I have a feeling every time I look at that tree I am going to be a little bitter and may pout just like we find Jonah doing in today's chapter. It started me thinking about roots and about the importance of establishing those so early with our children, grandchildren, nieces, nephews, cousins ----anyone that you have the privilege of investing in.

- What is important to you?
- What are you **intentional** about teaching your children?

I love that word intentional. It means “done on purpose, deliberate.” Intentional acts of investment will develop roots that will be what sustains those under your sphere of influence for days, months, and years to come. In my role as a counselor I hear students talk about what I call the “constant comparison.” That critical sense that someone has more than you. More friends. More likes. More followers. More money.

As followers of Christ our standards should be different - In Christ we are regulated to think differently. Before you read Jonah Chapter 4, I want you to ask yourselves the following questions.

- **What if** you thought in terms of the eternal?

- **What if** you thought in terms of jewels in your crown you have yet to receive?
- **What if** in terms of followers - you focus on how you are doing with following after Christ instead of who is following after you?
- **What if** - you thought of those that will be in Heaven one day because of your testimony & investment in others instead of your monetary investments? Investments in people not money.
- **What if** - you let your guard down & instead of pretending to be perfect you actually admit to being flawed?

### Read Jonah Chapter 4

Honestly, I think it is hard to read this chapter of Jonah. He went from crying out to God in the belly of a fish to being angry and pouting because God had mercy on the people of Nineveh. The Assyrian people were repenting and calling out to God. Everywhere Jonah looked folks were turning to the Lord and he could not stand it.

It seems that Jonah is going in reverse. *"Jonah went out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, at in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city"* (Jonah 4:5). Jonah left. Don't miss this. He survived the belly of a fish, cried out in repentance to The Lord, walked to Nineveh, preached a sermon directly from God, and now that people are actually responding to his message in masses, he leaves to go outside of the city.

Here again, how often are you and I just like Jonah? When you find that God doesn't answer how you think He should? When He doesn't breathe fire and bring wrath when you would?

God provided a vine to provide shade for Jonah to "...ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the vine. But at dawn the next God provided a worm, which chewed the vine that withered" (Jonah 4: 6-7).

I want you to focus in on the word **wither** for a moment. According to google, the definition of wither is to "become dry, to shrivel up, and/or to lose vitality, force, or freshness."

It made me think about the roots on that tree that Tyler won. They have to go deep into the ground for that tree to sustain life. A superficial planting will not work.

In closing, think about the roots that you are putting down in your family right now. How deep are they going? Are you teaching your children how to study God's Word? Are you teaching them to pray? Ruth McWhite said Sunday night that, "We all need to be taught how to pray." This is so true. If the only roots that you are planting are ones that are leading to those constant comparisons, the spiritual life of the next generation will shrivel. It will be devoid of life and vitality.

Someone will always have more of something. Something will always not seem fair as how Jonah felt in this passage today. I am thankful that I serve a God of compassion. A God who sees past my faults and failures and continues to relinquish His mercy and grace on me.

### **Challenges for This Week:**

- Spend some time thanking The Lord for His favor. We are not deserving of his continued and constant grace.
- Stay focused on what is most important- things that are eternal and not temporary. **Make a list of "spiritual investments" you would like to teach your children and be intentional about it.** It will never happen by accident.
- Ask God to show you **WHO** you need to minister to "...who cannot tell their right hand from their left..." (Jonah 4:11).

Your life here is temporary, a fleeting thought. James 4:14, *"Why you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes."*

**You need to be intentional about planting roots that will long outlast you.**