

4

Caring for Our Enemies

Jonah 1—4

A white college student visited South Africa on a Fulbright Scholarship. While there, she became active in the movement to end apartheid. On the night before she was to leave, she offered to drive some black friends back to their township. They warned her it was too dangerous, but she went. She was shot by blacks who were angry at all whites. As a part of processing their grief, her parents decided to travel to South Africa to meet her killers. After spending time in South Africa, they began to understand the problems facing that country. Over time, they decided to use their own money to start a business that would help the economic situation. They hired the young men who had killed their daughter.

GROUP DISCUSSION. If God were to call you to bring good news to people, what person or group of people do you most fervently hope you will not be asked to minister to? Why?

PERSONAL REFLECTION. Have you ever felt hatred toward a person or group of people? If so, what effect did that hatred have on you inwardly?

In the book of Jonah, the prophet was asked to preach to Israel's greatest enemy: the hated Assyrians. Jonah's response, and the way God dealt with him, helps us see our enemies in a new light. *Read Jonah 1.*

1. The Lord commanded Jonah to preach to Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian empire (1:1-2), and Jonah ran in the opposite direction (1:3). What things might have caused Jonah to despise and/or fear Nineveh?

2. What were the consequences of Jonah's attempt to escape God's will (1:4-17)?

3. *Read Jonah 2.* How did Jonah describe his experience?

What descriptions speak most vividly to you?

4. *Read Jonah 3.* Why did Jonah finally go to Nineveh (3:1-3)?

5. What effect do you think Jonah's experience with the fish had on his preaching?

6. How should God's mercy to us affect our willingness to talk to our enemies about Jesus Christ?

7. What is surprising about the response of the people of Nineveh (3:5-9)?

8. *Read Jonah 4.* What was Jonah's reaction when the Lord spared Nineveh (4:1-3)?

9. In light of Jonah's reaction, what must he have felt as he was preaching to Nineveh?

10. How did God use the plant to show Jonah that he should have had compassion for Nineveh (4:5-11)?

11. Describe at least two situations in the world where people would be tempted to reason like Jonah.

12. Are there groups of people that you are tempted to write off as Jonah did with Nineveh? Why?

Pray for the people you mentioned in questions 11 and 12. Try to see these people as God sees them, remembering that just as God's compassion extended to Nineveh, it extends to whoever you have called to mind.

Now or Later

Spend some time thinking about current examples of long-standing hatred—in Lebanon, the Middle East, Ireland and so on. Look for current news articles on these situations. How does this hatred contribute to the problems? What could stop the circular nature of mistrust the groups or countries feel toward each other?