

Series: **OFF-TRACK - September 6, 2009**

**ANGRY WITH GOD**  
**Jonah 4**

1. One of the questions I ask couples who are planning to get married is, **What are you like when you're angry?** So, what **are** you like? What makes you angry? Go ahead—shout it out—with some **feeling!**
  - Just three days into our honeymoon, I found out what makes Lori angry. She politely asked me to shake out the rug by the door. My memorable three word answer was, **That's your job!** It's humiliating to even **tell** you that!
  - We get angry for a lot of reasons; one of them is pain. Another reason is fear. And another reason is frustration. What one do you think Lori felt? Probably all three—as she looked forward to life with someone like me!
  - What that incident revealed to **me** was this flow of selfishness and narcissism that runs under the surface of life. My life. And when things don't go as I expect to go, when someone doesn't move so I can pass, when I get frustrated or blocked or diminished—and my comfort gets interrupted—well, I get angry. Don't act shocked—**you** get angry, too.
  - And sometimes we get angry with God. In the middle of our fear—or pain—we think, "You could **stop** this in an instant—but you're not cooperating!" Or we're doing something that's **very** important to us—and we get stopped, slowed down, or hindered for no apparent reason. And we get angry. Sometimes angry with God. And when the pain or the frustration is deep and ongoing—our anger smolders under the surface of our lives. And just about anything can fuel it—or make it erupt.
    - a. Now. Why would we get angry at God? At the core, we believe that God is fair and reasonable—and therefore, what He does or **allows** should seem fair and reasonable, right? And when we don't see the point of what's happening—or it seems off-the-charts **unfair**—we get angry.
    - b. Mass confession. Has anyone here ever thought, prayed, muttered...or yelled at God, **That's not FAIR!** Or, **I don't understand!** If you have—then you can relate to most of the people who have followed and worshiped God over the past thousands of years. And you'll be able to relate to how Jonah—this prophet we've been studying—felt.
2. Today we're going to talk about the last act in this four-part drama. In Act 1, Jonah defects. God says go East to Nineveh, Jonah goes West—until his drama grinds to a halt in a massive storm. In Act 2, Jonah finally hits bottom. Literally. But God hears his prayer, sends a great fish to pick him up and deliver him back to shore. In Act 3, Jonah carries God's message of impending judgment to Nineveh. To his complete surprise, **everyone** repents—even the king—and out of compassion, God spares them. And that's where this quirky story takes **another** strange twist.

But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry. 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. Now, LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live." But the LORD replied, "Is it right for you to be angry?" Jonah went 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. (Jonah 4:1-5 TNIV)

- a. Is anyone familiar with the term, **dissonance**? In music, it's when two or more notes are played together—that **shouldn't** be played together. It kind of throws you off balance—until it gets **resolved**.

-This whole story would've created dissonance—or that funky, off-balance feeling, for the Israelites who originally heard this story. A prophet—the mouth piece for God—refuses to do what God asks him to. It's the ungodly in this story who pray and show respect for God—not the prophet. It's **Jonah** who causes the storm—and jeopardizes everyone's life. It's **Jonah**, the prophet, who has to get thrown overboard.

-When Jonah finally repents and gets barfed in the right direction, it becomes pretty clear that he doesn't want to go where God tells him for one basic reason. He **hates** the Ninevites! He preaches—but doesn't want them to repent! He just wants them to **BURN**. Cause, see, in **his** opinion, that would be the **fair** thing for God to do—given the misery they've caused.

- b. It's interesting, when Jonah talks about God being a "**gracious and compassionate God**" he's quoting from a passage **every** Israelite knew like we know the words to "Happy Birthday." It was God's first revelation of Himself to the Israelites. But Jonah leaves out a word. Know which one it was?

**"The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth. (Exodus 34:6 NASV)**

-But Jonah deliberately leaves the word **truth** out of his quote. This was a slam on God. "Yeah, you're loving and compassionate—but what about **truth**, Lord! You told me you were going to obliterate them. I believed you—and told them—and now I look like a fool! I hated them—and I thought **You** hated them, too! I **knew you'd do this to me!**

- c. Even been in a conversation with someone—trying to resolve an issue—and they do a Hollywood exit on you? You know, make some cutting remark--about your style, who your Mama is, or your character—and then immediately turn, stalk off and slam the door? Has anyone here ever experienced that? Has anyone here ever **done** that?

-God asks Jonah if he has any **right** to be angry. And Jonah does a Hollywood exit—and stalks off to the **East** of the city. And he waits under his shelter like a

vulture in a tree. And the tension—the **dissonance**—mounts. People listening would think, “Wow! I don’t **like** this feeling! What’s God going to do about it?”

3. This strange story gets even weirder. God uses a very interesting object lesson to get Jonah’s attention.

**Then the LORD God provided a gourd and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the gourd. But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the gourd so that it withered. 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." But God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the gourd?" "It is," he said. "And I'm so angry I wish I were dead." (Jonah 4:6-9 TNIV)**

- a. **Very** strange. God **provides** some shade. God **provides** a worm that looks at the plant and says, “Mmmm! Supper!” It chomps the stalk of the plant. And then God **provides** a scorching East wind—and the sun wilts the plant and blazes down on Jonah—to the point where he wants to die. See, in the Bible, **shade** is a symbol of God’s protection—of being delivered from evil. That’s why Jonah is so happy when the plant grows—and so **furious** when it wilts. At first he thinks, **Yes! Nineveh is goin’ DOWN! I have the shade, not them!** -When the worm has the plant for dinner, that’s the straw the put the camel in a full body cast! When God says, “Jonah—whoa! Does it make sense for you to be so ticked off about a stupid plant?” “Yes! Go ahead, O mighty Smiter—smite me!”
- b. God has a better plan than killing his prophet. He speaks to Him about his hardened heart and twisted priorities.

**But the LORD said, "You have been concerned about this gourd, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. And should I not have concern for the great city 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?" (Jonah 4:10-11 TNIV)**

-Here’s the astounding truth of this story. God needed to save **Jonah**. You know, the prophet. The one whose calling is to tell **other** people to get **their** act together! Jonah needed to be saved from his hatred. Like us, maybe, he needed to be saved from being more concerned about his own comfort and his own pride—than 120,000 people. Jonah needed to be saved from his twisted idea about God’s love. That it’s conditional--like ours. And this story ends in dissonance. We don’t know what Jonah does.

- c. Turns out—this is a story about God. This is a story about his mercy—about how He has to save pagan sailors, ruthless oppressors—**and** the very religious. -What we see is that God’s love and compassion is huge—incredibly broad! Life on this planet is not a war flick—or a political contest. God doesn’t love the

Democrats and hate the Republicans. God doesn't even hate the dictators and love the Prime Ministers! And God doesn't love the poor and hate the rich, or love the weak and hate the strong. God doesn't go along with any of our categories. We tend to think that **our** enemies are **God's** enemies. Author Ann LaMott says,

**You can tell you have made God in your image when it turns out that He hates all the same people you do! Ann LaMott**

-The climax of this story is when Jonah insists that he has **every** right to be angry. Angry enough to die! And God then points out to him, "Jonah—I have shown grace to you—spared your life when you flipped me off for the good life. You called I spared you! Why is it that you love it and want to call me Savior when I show **you** grace—but you pull a tantrum when I show others grace?"

-The Lord's final confrontation points out that Jonah shows **more** concern over a plant that shades his head—that he had **nothing** to do with—than the 120,000 people who live in spiritual cluelessness—whose souls are on the line. God says—"And many **cattle** too!" God treasures **all** He has made!

-The irony in God's question about Jonah's right to be angry is that love **saves** life, **spares** life—love **wins**. See, sometimes when we love deeply—it makes us angry; angry at what is hurting someone we love. Angry at injustice toward those we love. But anger motivated by selfishness and self-righteousness and hatred kills—even when it feels so **powerful—and righteous!** God says, "Better figure out **why** you're angry, because it can kill off all that's good—compassion, patience, grace and joy."

4. This story, simply called **Jonah**—is a story about God and His mission in this world. And because we are a part of that mission, it has **huge** implications for this community. For how we live, how we treat others—and for how live out that mission everyday.

-But the first issue I want to talk about is a very personal one. It's about being angry with God. Angry at God is where Jonah found himself—and it's where I have sometimes found myself. In fact, you'd be surprised how many people who really do love and obey God—find themselves upset with Him. Moses got angry with God for sticking him with a bunch of stubborn, griping people. Job got angry with God because he lost everything—and God wouldn't tell him **why?**

-Mass confession. Has anyone here ever been angry with God for any reason—raise your hands high. Why?

- a. I think we sometimes get angry with God because we don't understand what He allows—or does—and we're in pain. It feels **very** unfair. The Psalms, which are mainly written prayers often express a **lot** of disappointment and frustration. They ask, "Where **are** you God? This doesn't make sense! Why are you so far away when I need you? Show up!"

-Psalm 73 presents this sentiment in its purest form. The author says,

**Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart. But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. (Psalm 73:1-3 TNIV)**

-The author looks back and forth—at *his* experience—and at the experience of a person who’s wealthy, influential—and evil. He says, “I feel like I’m struggling **every single day!** Are they struggling? No! They’re living like fat cats—and everyone comes to *them* for advice. **It’s not fair!**

- b. The reason’s for getting angry with God are almost too many to mention:  
\*We get angry with God when someone we love suffers—and God has the power to stop it, but chooses not to.

\*We get angry with God when it appears like He blows off our timeframe. We get impatient, then frustrated—and then lose hope and slip into bitterness. And that is **especially** present in a drive-through, microwave, IM world like ours.

\*Sometimes we get angry when we ask God for something that seems good and logical—like companionship; like the solving of a problem; like healing. We think, “God—you **say** you love me and care, answer prayer—so **why does it feel like you’re ignoring me?**

- c. Jonah was angry at God for a reason I think we can all relate to. God wasn’t **like** him and didn’t share the same opinions on who the good guys and bad guys were—and who deserved mercy and compassion and who didn’t. Jonah thought, “**Surely** God, who’s compassionate and just, would hate and judge the Ninevites who have so brutally slaughtered people over the years!” But God didn’t.

-What was worse was that Jonah now had to go back to Israel and face his neighbors—and tell them that his message had spared the scariest people on the planet! He thought he and God agreed on so very **many** things—including politics! And he was wrong. And **man** was he angry!

-To get some perspective on this—Nazi Germany wreaked incredible havoc and annihilated 6 million Jews in 10 years. Assyria’s genocide lasted over 200 **years**. To top it off, about 37 years after Jonah’s visit, they attacked Israel—and the people, including Jonah’s friends and family--vaporized. **Why?** I don’t know.

- d. We can totally relate to this, can’t we? There is a part of us that gets disgusted with others—or hurt by others—or afraid of others. They don’t like us either. And we have some very strong opinions about what ought to happen to them! “May the fleas from a thousand camels infest your bed! May the bird of paradise fly up your nose!” And we want God and **all** our friends to **agree** with our assessment of those people. And it makes us **furious** when they seem to

be doing just **fine!** And we're angry with God because He won't nuke them—and with others because they aren't as mad as we are!

-To see our enemies doing well when we aren't—to see God apparently **blessing** those who hurt us—to see God leaving our pain and questions unresolved creates **dissonance**--this off-key, disharmonic feeling that makes us want to hold our ears and yell. In fact, let's try that right now! Maybe we'd better not...

- e. In my opinion, the Jonah does right in this last act of the story is he **talks** to God honestly about his frustration and his anger and his disappointment. That's what people in a relationship **do**. Jonah is childish and off-base—but he's **honest**. And God likes **honest** better than silence. Most people do.

-If you're angry with God—frustrated—hurt—disappointed—don't give him the silent treatment; you know, "I'm not going to **talk** to you until you do what **I** want!" **Talk** to Him! That's what God's people have always done.

-See, it's not like your anger and hurt and frustration will be this big surprise to God. "Oh my **word!** I had no idea you felt like that!" This is called **honesty**—and it's part of any good relationship.

5. And that brings us to the next part of what needs to happen. You have to listen. Some people see themselves as quite honest. "I just tell people what I think and get it out of my system!" What they **actually** do is give others the seagull treatment; they fly in, make a bunch of noise, crap all over them—then leave. Does that **help** the relationship? No. That **destroys** relationships.

-Jesus died on a cross to establish a **relationship** with God—which involves both **talking** and **listening**. We **desperately** need to listen. That's our only hope for growth—that's our only hope for dealing with the anger and finding peace. See, our tantrums may intimidate people into doing what **we** want—for a while. When we pull a tantrum with God, he waits—then says, "Are you done?" To stew in our anger is to stay alienated—and to drift.

- a. Our most **basic** problem in getting angry with God is thinking that what He does should either make perfect sense—or He should explain it to us. Lori often says something I love: **God is God—and He doesn't owe me an explanation for anything!**

-See, our problem is our limitation. God sees everything from beginning to end in every life in every sphere of existence—before history, during history—and after history. Everything! Does anyone here have that kind of perspective? We see life in little tiny slices. Snapshots.

-Imagine a single photo of surgeons wearing masks doing by-pass surgery on a man—chest carved open, blood everywhere. To a surgeon's eyes, they're saving someone's life—wearing masks so they don't infect him. To a 10 year

old from the 1800's—they're murderers wearing masks so no one can ID them. Same picture—**very** different perspectives.

-God himself puts it like this:

**"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."**  
(Isaiah 55:8-9 NIV)

-When we're hurt and angry—that's hard to hear.

6. Since Jonah **wasn't** listening when God asked him if he had a right to be angry—God staged this little three-act play with the plant, the worm, and the sun and wind. The **irony** of this drama hits me between the eyes.

-For the very first time in this whole story—Jonah is tickled pink. **Very** happy; **very** pleased with how life is going. And his happiness is related directly to his physical comfort—extra shade for **him** as he sits waiting for 120,000 people to get fried!

-And it's very easy for me—and maybe you—to get all pious and spiritual and cluck our tongues and say, "**Jonah. Really! I'm so disappointed in you. How could you be so calloused; so obsessed with your own comfort and well-being? And you call yourself a man of God!**"

- a. The thing we are confronted with here in this story is our pre-occupation—our obsession—with our own comfort, safety and convenience. Is it true or not that we are ecstatic when life is going well—and we feel safe and comfortable—and that we get angry with God when our comfort is interrupted?

-Quick question: Has anyone here ever, in your life, put your own comfort ahead of what God wants you do to—and calls you to do? I have—and I'll bet you have to.

- b. Every day our world blasts us with the message that our comfort, our healthcare, our safety, security, prosperity and pleasure is our inalienable **right!** It's all a lie—but we **like** it! And we can get to the point where we think God **owes** us a comfortable, happy, prosperous life. And if He doesn't give it to us? Well, then we have every right to defect and do **whatever** we want to get it.

-The problem with a life like that is that it can anesthetize us to the pain and suffering and plight of others. Like Jonah, we can be **perfectly happy** to sit under the shade of our little plant, sipping drinks with little umbrellas in them—waiting for God to just nuke the people we think are responsible for the world's problems.

-I don't want to get into some allegorical interpretation of this story—but sometimes God has to wake us up; send the worm after our comfort plant. Because, see, if He doesn't—we'll doze our lives away. And God offers us

something way better. Love—even love and compassion for our enemies. And a partnership with Him that brings life and joy and meaning.

-Here's the deal—and this is taught all through the Bible; If you **pursue** comfort as an end, it will elude you. It will always be a nicer car, a bigger home, more insurance, more exotic vacations, more money in the bank. The quest is **endless**. But if we will join Jesus in loving God and giving our lives away—we find something **far** deeper. Joy—and **meaning!**

- c. The Revelation of John paints an incredible picture of a day when we will rest; when there will be no more suffering and God will wipe every tear from our eyes. If you try to create that now by buying into this immense comfort machine our culture offers—you will **waste** your life! Our role as Jesus' followers in this world is to love God with **everything** we have, all we are or ever could be—and then love others as we love ourselves.

-And there are some questions we have about how God ought to do things that will have to wait to be answered. The Bible calls this...**faith**. We live **by** faith. And sometimes that's not easy!

7. The hard thing about this story is that it's left resolved. God makes his love and concern for 120,000 lost people very clear. In fact, his love extends even to the **many** cattle! But there's only a question mark over Jonah.

-The story is a very clear window into **who matters to God!** And it shows that His grace and compassion extends to the most extreme people—even people who have spent their lives torturing, killing and raping others. So, let me ask you the question—just so we're clear: **Who matters to God**. And the answer is...everyone. What's the answer—I didn't quite hear it...**everyone!** You have never locked eyes with anyone—anywhere—who doesn't **deeply** matter to God.

- a. God's plan is to **transform** our hearts. To change us from people who love ourselves and our egos and reputations and **our** kind of people—to people who love as **He** loves. And that is a **massive** task—because that's not what comes naturally. At least, not to me.

-People matter to God. All of them. The woman from Thailand who takes a bus from downtown to bust tables at Swiss Chalet. God is **crazy** about her—and longs for her. He watches people who come to her table—and thinks, "I wonder if they'll see her for who she is to me? I wonder if they'll treat her with generosity and kindness—talk to her. She has dreams and hopes—I wonder if they'll even think about that?"

-People matter to God. All of them. The ones who try to wash your windshield. The ones who laugh and talk loud as they walk down your street and throw pop cans on your lawn. He loves liberal people—and conservative people. Rich people, poor people, in-between people. Hispanics, Caucasians, Asian, East Indian—immigrants from Africa and South America. Depressed people, drunk people, gay people, straight people—everyone.

-And when even **one** of them is separated from God—it drives Him crazy. And that’s why Jesus came and gave his life on a cross. It **cost** God to forgive—but Jesus’ death and resurrection made it possible for **anyone** to come home. People who’ve wasted their lives—and religious, moral people who can be smug, self-righteous—and quite self-centered! Jesus came to create a community where **nobody** is an outsider—no matter who they are or what they’ve done.

- b. The strange thing about this story is that we are left with **dissonance**. The issue between Jonah and God remains unresolved. **That’s** annoying, isn’t it? We’d love to read, “When Jonah realized how filled with hate and prejudice he was—his heart broke! He sobbed, “Oh God, I’ve been such a fool! How could I be so smug and so superior and so resentful? How could I care more for a stupid plant—for my own comfort—than for real, live people with eternal souls? I’ve learned my lesson, God. I will give my life for those nations without a ray of hope or light!” Ta da—big orchestra crescendo, and a moving song as the credits roll!

-Doesn’t happen. The story ends with Jonah just sitting there—sulking. Why would a writer end a story like that?

- c. Any of you ever heard of a story called the Prodigal Son? We’re going to take a fresh look at it next week. Jesus told it. There are three characters; a loving father; a younger rebellious son—who runs away and blows half the inheritance in wild living—and ends up repenting and being reconciled with his Father. But story is really about his older brother—the **fine, upstanding exemplary** son—whose heart is full of bitterness and resentment.

-If you compare the stories—the loving Father would be like God in this story. The younger rebellious son would be like—Nineveh in this story. And the older, arrogant brother who is contemptuous of his younger brother and is bitterly angry with his Dad for his extravagant forgiveness would be...Jonah.

-It’s funny; Jesus ends his story the same way as this book. The other brother is sitting outside the party—angry, sulking. And the Father comes outside and tries to persuade him to join the party. He says, “You know—you’ve always been with me, but this younger brother of yours was dead—and is now alive. He was lost, but now he’s found!” Know how the older brother responds? We don’t know! **Dissonance!**

- d. There’s a story that the great composer, Bach, was trying to sleep one night—while his wife was playing the harpsichord downstairs. She kept playing this unresolved chord—and the dissonance was driving him nuts! He couldn’t sleep! So he went downstairs, resolved the chord—and then went back to bed and slept!

-Jesus didn’t leave us with unresolved tension at the end of his story because He couldn’t think up a good ending. Great artists know that when you leave things unresolved—people can’t rest—they’ve got to keep working it out. And **they** finish the story.

-So. How will you finish the story? If you're angry with God—will you **stay** angry? If your comfort has become more important than God's mission—will that change....or not? If **everyone** matters to God—how will that change how I treat them? How you treat them? See, it's **our** story now.