

# God's Loving Concern

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[ 0 : 00 ] Earlier this year you may have seen on the news that Liam Neeson, the Hollywood actor, was interviewed about his latest film called Cold Pursuit.

And in the movie Liam Neeson plays a grieving snowplow driver who seeks out revenge against the drug dealers who killed his son. And he was interviewed in the independent newspaper on his own experience of revenge because that's what the film is about.

And in it he spoke of how a female friend of his had been raped by a black man a long time ago. And he confessed that he sought to vent his anger on any black man he could find, although he never did actually do anything.

Neeson admitted that it was racism that drove him to seek out revenge. But he also admitted his shame at this vile and horrible reaction that he had way back then.

But Neeson faced trial by social media, as most people do these days, because people reacted with horror, they reacted with bewilderment, calling Neeson a racist, and insisting that there could really be no forgiveness for him for how he felt so long ago.

[ 1 : 18 ] And I'm not passing any judgment on Liam Neeson, but isn't it fascinating to observe the lack of forgiveness in our modern society?

So the shaming of Liam Neeson and even many others, even if they confess their sins, and even if they admit that what they have done is wrong, there is only condemnation for them and no room whatsoever for forgiveness.

There is no grace, no opportunity of redemption for those who failed. And it doesn't matter if the wrongdoing was a hidden attitude that's been brought to light and confessed, something that was said, an action a long time ago that's been repented of.

Our society will only write people off. And it's so ironic that in a culture which prides itself on love and of inclusion and of acceptance, has no room for those who've transgressed and offers no hope of forgiveness.

Well, the attitude that some people don't deserve to be forgiven is the attitude that we find here in Jonah chapter 4. But this attitude is never one that we see in God.

[ 2 : 39 ] Jonah was angry because God had forgiven the Ninevites, who were a wicked people. And while Jonah welcomed God's forgiveness for himself, because remember, Jonah had disobeyed God and he had run away from God, Jonah didn't want God's forgiveness for these other people.

And so at the end of the story, what God does is he gives Jonah an object lesson about what he's like, about what God himself is like. Because God, you see, offers a forgiveness that the world just can't give.

And so whether we call ourselves a Christian or not, we need to know not just what God is like, but how God has compassion that can and does forgive people, including people like you and me.

And we can see this in this sharp contrast between Jonah's selfish concern for himself, contrasted with God's loving concern for the lost. And so let's look at these three points on the back of the service sheet.

First, Jonah's selfish concern for himself. Second, God's loving concern for the lost. And then thirdly, by way of application, how God's love changes us.

[ 3 : 55 ] So first, Jonah's selfish concern for himself there in verse 5, verse 9. Jonah doesn't reply to God's question in verse 4, is it right for you to be angry?

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

So as God's prophet, Jonah should have been in the city with the people who had just repented. Because they needed to hear about God. Jonah's urban church plant had exploded into a mega church of 120,000 people.

I'd take that. We'd all take that, I'm sure. But that's what happened with Jonah. And you see Jonah's reaction? Jonah throws a tantrum. He goes away from the city and away from the people.

And he's feeling sorry for himself. And we're told that Jonah waited to see what would happen to the city. Jonah is actually hoping that God will still destroy the city and destroy the people.

[ 5 : 02 ] That's what he's, as he sits there and watches with his front row seat. That's what he's hoping will happen. Jonah couldn't bear God showing mercy to the Ninevites.

And so Jonah's selfish concern for himself is brought out in the lesson that God gives him. And we see this in verse 6 to 8. Let's read. And 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. But at dawn the next day God provided a worm which chewed the plant 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. And you see that the very fact that God is still interacting with Jonah, God hasn't given up on Jonah, shows that there's still work to be done in Jonah's heart.

Jonah's selfish concern was wrong. In fact, it was evil. Interestingly, the words translated discomfort there in verse 6 is the same word that's translated as evil elsewhere in the book of Jonah.

[ 6 : 17 ] For example, in chapter 3 verse 8 there's the word evil. And again in chapter 3 verse 10 there's the word evil. So in verse 6 of chapter 4, when we see the phrase to ease his discomfort, literally it says to deliver him from his evil.

So Jonah's evil is his anger towards God, towards the Ninevites, because God is showing the mercy. And so God needs to teach Jonah a lesson here.

And God is teaching Jonah a lesson. Just notice three times in verse 6 to verse 8 that God provided. So verse 6, God provided a plant.

Verse 7, God provided a worm. Then verse 8, God provided a wind. And it's also the same word provided that we find in chapter 1 verse 17 when God provided a fish.

And so can you see how God is using different parts of his creation, different elements, to do his work? Either to save and protect or to destroy and attack.

[ 7 : 25 ] So first of all God provided this plant to give Jonah some shade. And the plant gave Jonah comfort and it made him very happy. Next God provided a worm to attack the plant so that the plant withered and died.

And then God provided a scorching east wind and it made the sun beat down on Jonah's head. So the dead plant and the scorching wind and the blazing sun gave Jonah considerable discomfort.

He wasn't in a good place. And so Jonah's anger rises just as quickly as his body temperature does. And again, Jonah would rather die than live. And so God repeats the question that he'd asked earlier.

It's repeated again from verse 4 and then it's the same in verse 9. But God said to Jonah, is it right for you to be angry about the plant? The answer, of course, is no.

Jonah's got no right to be angry. But this time, Jonah doesn't hold back. Last time he didn't answer, this time he does. And he insists that he's got every right to be angry.

[ 8 : 30 ] Adding that he's angry enough to die. So earlier, verse 4, he wanted divine assisted suicide. But now his self-pity reaches new depths.

He's now got a death wish because the heat is making him feel faint. I'm sure it was hot. It's got to be hotter than Glasgow. Most places are hotter than Glasgow, even in the height of summer.

But here is Jonah and he can't bear to live anymore. Just because he doesn't have any shade. And that's why Jonah needed to learn this deep lesson about what he was like.

And also about what God is like. And so what God is doing here is lovingly disciplining Jonah. And he's disciplining Jonah by appointing all of these things in Jonah's life.

By providing all of these different things. It's interesting that the word providence comes from the word provide. So God's providence is the way in which God orders the circumstances of our lives.

[ 9 : 37 ] And so the fish, the plant, the worm and the wind are all the providence of God in Jonah's life. God provides Jonah with all of these things. And so Jonah was happy with some of what God provided.

And Jonah was angry with some of what God provided. But God was sending both comfort and he was sending discomfort into Jonah's life for his own good.

Because Jonah needed both. And so what we're seeing here is that God does that with our lives. He does that with you and me. He doesn't just provide us with times of security and times of comfort.

He'll also provide us with times of discomfort and times of difficulty. And so the nature and the timing and the amount will be according to what we need.

And so when God provides them, they don't come because God doesn't love us. They come because God does love us. And God has still got work to do in our hearts.

[ 10 : 44 ] And we get this principle operating in lots of different other areas in life. So prototype aircraft are tested to the extreme.

Why? Well, to make sure that when they're 30,000 feet up in the air, they can cope with the pressure. And with flying people, muscles need more resistance in order to develop strength.

And so God appoints different circumstances in our lives. Because that's how he teaches us. That's how he trains us in order to teach us what we should be.

That's what he's doing here with Jonah. God wanted Jonah to be more like him. To be concerned for what he was concerned for. And so God will appoint whatever we need in our lives because of his love for us.

So God's just given Jonah this object lesson. But now God goes on to explain the significance of it. And so that's our second point. First, Jonah's selfish concern for himself.

[ 11 : 47 ] Second, God's loving concern for the lost. Verse 10 and 11. The story of Jonah finishes by God having the final say.

So verse 10. But the Lord said, you have not been concerned about, excuse me, you have been concerned about this plant. Though you didn't attend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight.

And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than 120,000 people who cannot tell their right hand from their left. And also many animals.

So Jonah was more concerned about a plant than he was about people. He had pity for a plant that died. But he had no pity for a people who were under the judgment of God.

And so God is rebuking Jonah for his attachment to the plant. Jonah didn't plant it or make it grow. It appeared one day and it was gone the next.

[ 12 : 49 ] And so how could Jonah be far more concerned for a tiny part of God's creation, which naturally comes and goes. How could he be more concerned about that than he was about people who are eternal beings and who are made in the image of God.

Of course, Jonah's concern for the plant stems from his own self-interest. Whereas God was concerned for 120,000 in the device.

Just see how God describes the people. Their people, verse 11, who cannot tell their right hand from their left. They cannot tell their right hand from their left.

It means they're spiritually hopeless. They're clueless. They don't know right from wrong. And they don't know what to do about it.

And yet, despite their evil, God has this loving concern for them. As he does for all people. In fact, the words translated in verse 10 and verse 11 as concerned, it's a Hebrew word that means to grieve or mourn over someone or something.

[ 14 : 04 ] It means to have the kind of compassion that breaks your heart, that grieves you, and that causes you to weep. And so it's describing here the strength of God's compassion for these lost people.

So Jonah's problem is that he's grieving over a dead plant, whereas God is grieving over lost people. And isn't this the kind of compassion that was shared by Jesus too?

Just listen to Jesus' reaction to crowds of lost people in Matthew chapter 9, verse 36. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

Again, we read that Jesus had compassion. And the word compassion there is very strong. Literally, Jesus was moved in his bowels or in his guts.

It's gut-wrenching compassion. Jesus was stirred deep down inside for all the troubled and all the lost and all the helpless people. And so the compassion that stirred inside Jesus for these crowds of people echoes the compassion that God had for the people of Nineveh.

[ 15 : 19 ] And so it should challenge us to think about our reaction to large crowds of people. When we see a large crowd of people, probably the last thing that we feel is compassion.

Just think about the alcohol-fueled, violent crowds that stream out of Ibrox or Celtic Park after a football match, shouting and swearing.

God has compassion on those people. Or just think of the busy commuters coming in and out of Glasgow Queen Street at rush hour every morning and every evening.

People with no thought for God, yet God has compassion on those people. Or the crowds of people walking up and down Buchanan Street on a Saturday afternoon, spending hundreds of pounds to create the right image, how they look, what they're wearing.

God has compassion on those people. Or the crowd of people who will be at the Transmit Festival next weekend. Glasgow Green, who can dance the night away to Stormzy, George Ezra, Lewis Capaldi and many more.

- [ 16 : 22 ] God has compassion on those people. Or the weekend after, those who are going to be part of the Glasgow Mardi Gras Pride March. God has compassion on those people.
- God is concerned for all people, whoever they are, whatever they've done. And so we should never underestimate or ever limit the compassion that God has.
- And that's why we should never think of any crowd of people as being a threat. But seeing a crowd of people as being an opportunity. Because we're living right now in a mission field.
- We don't need to go abroad to do cross-cultural mission. We just need to go across the street. We can serve God in Glasgow.
- Amongst many diverse people who need to know Jesus as their Saviour. As soon as we walk out the door. Or go down the street. Or head to work.
- [ 17 : 21 ] Or study. Or hang out in the park. Or the school gate. Or the staff room. Or with a sports team. We might be the only person there to speak of Jesus Christ.
- And so what is it that stops us? It's probably not that we don't have the gifts or the training. It's probably not that we don't have the time. It's probably not that we think the culture is just so hostile that we couldn't possibly.
- It's more likely that we just don't love people enough. Just like Jonah and the Ninevites. Because just as he failed to love the lost people of Nineveh.
- So we can fail to love the lost people around us. God had to give Jonah this lesson. So that Jonah could see just how perverted his heart was. And I suspect that we're probably more like Jonah than we dare like to admit.
- But we're more concerned about ourselves. About our own well-being. About our own comfort. About our own security. About our own happiness. Than that we are about the lost people.
- [ 18 : 29 ] Who are heading for an eternity in hell. For example. I think we can sometimes be more concerned about our gardens. Than we can about our neighbours.
- Where we put more effort into cutting the grass. Frimming the hedges. Tending the flowers. Than we do into building a friendship with the neighbours next door. We can be more concerned about the comfort of our own home.
- And about people being secure in Christ. For eternity. So we'd rather spend money on the interior of our house. Than we read on gospel work.
- We can be more concerned about getting the latest iPhone. And about how we can speak clearly to people. About Jesus. We can so easily. And unconsciously.
- Have such a selfish concern. For ourselves. That we've got little concern for the lost. And so God is saying to Jonah. And he's saying to us. Can't you see what you're concerned about.
- [ 19 : 27 ] Compared to what I'm concerned about. Can you see what you grieve over. Compared to what I grieve over. See what you weep for. And see what I weep for.
- See how your love is inward facing. Whereas my love has an outward face. Towards other people. God's saying to Jonah. Jonah you care.
- Only about yourself. But I care. About people. It's interesting that God didn't save. Jonah. So that at the end of.
- Chapter two. After he'd been spat out. By the big fish. He didn't save Jonah. So Jonah could stay in the beach. And enjoy his great salvation. His great rescue of God.
- Now God sent him. To the lost people. So that they might receive. That salvation too. And so if God has saved us. He hasn't saved us.

- [ 20 : 22 ] To stay on the beach as it were. To have a nice. Cozy life. Enjoying our salvation. Which we shouldn't. But he saved us. So that he might send us out. To others. To others. We need to know. Of that salvation themselves.
- Doesn't God give Jonah. Such a devastating critique. Of his heart. And isn't it a challenge to. Your heart. And my heart. So we don't love people.
- In order to tell them. About Jesus. Rather we. Tell them about Jesus. Because. We love them. Thomas Carlyle. The poet. He wrote a poem.
- About Jonah. It's called. You Jonah. And he sums it up. The last verse. Goes like this. And Jonah stalked. To his shaded seat. And waited for God. To come around.
- To his way of thinking. And God is still waiting. For a host of Jonah's. In their comfortable houses. To come around. To his way. Of loving.
- [ 21 : 21 ] I love that. We need to not. Expect that God. Will come away. To our. Come around. To our way of thinking. About how things should be. But he wants people. To come around. His way.
- Of loving. That's why he's. Teaching Jonah. This lesson. So first. Jonah's selfish concern. For himself. Second. God's loving concern. For the lost. And then thirdly.
- And finally. How God's love. Changes us. The book of Jonah. Ends in a cliffhanger. Because we just don't know. What happened to Jonah. And yet.
- The only way. That we can know about Jonah's story. Is if Jonah told. Somebody. His story. And so if Jonah was prepared. To say to somebody else.
- Or to a group of people. What a disobedient. An angry. A self-interested. A self-pitying. A self-loving man. That he was. If he was prepared.
- [ 22 : 14 ] To be open and honest. To admit that. And surely. God was. Working. At changing. His heart. And yet. We're still never told. How Jonah responded.
- To God's question. There. In verse 11. Verse 10 and 11. And yet. The absence. Of any neat. Kind of conclusion.
- In the book of Jonah. Is deliberate. The book ends this way. Because. We've got to finish it. Ourselves. We've got to give. Our response. To the message of Jonah. In other words.
- We've got to apply. The lessons. From the story. Of Jonah. To our own hearts. And to how we live. Our own lives. Because we're forced.
- To consider. Whether we. Really. Know. The God. Of the book of Jonah. Because if we do. Then. We'll share his. Compassion. For people.
- [ 23 : 08 ] But how do we get. This compassion. Well the only answer. Is to look. At Jesus. Jesus. Is the true. And better. Jonah. Because God.
- In his love. For lost people. Like us. Did just communicate. His feelings. For us. From a distance. Rather. God. Came. Down to earth. Taking on. A human nature.
- And walking. With us. And so Jesus. Is the prophet. That Jonah. Should have been. Because when Jesus. Approached. Jerusalem. And he saw. The great city.
- He wept over it. Luke 19. Tells us. Jesus. And yet. Jesus. Didn't just. Come. To weep over us. Jesus. Came. To die for us.
- So as Jonah. Went outside the city. And took shelter. Hoping to see. People destroyed. Jesus. Went outside the city. And gave up his life. So that people. Can be saved.
- [ 24 : 04 ] God's. Love and concern. For people. Is infinitely. Greater. Than we possibly. Imagine. God's grace. Towards sinners. Is so amazing. That Jonah.
- Could hardly. Bear to live. In a world. For God. Like this. Because out of love. God. Wants. To forgive. And the reality.

Is that. We need. Forgiveness. We all need. Forgiveness. Because. We all must face. God's judgment. For our sin. And God. Doesn't just. Let people.

Off the hook. By saying. Sin doesn't matter. Evil doesn't matter. Lickiness doesn't matter. He doesn't just. Pretend to sweep it. Under the carpet. As if. All of that. Is completely. Insignificant.

He must judge it. And his way. Of judging it. Is not to. Let. Sin. Off the hook. And let. People. Off the hook. But his way.

[ 24 : 59 ] Of judging it. Is by. Putting himself. On the hook. As it were. To take the punishment. That we. Deserve. God has made. A way. Of punishing. Sin.

Without punishing. Sinners. Like us. Because as Jesus. Died on the cross. We see God's. Perfect justice. And perfect love. Collide. Together. And so God.

Can be infinitely. Just. Because all sin. Was punished. At the cross. But God. Can be infinitely. Loving. Because he. Took our sin. Upon. Himself. And that's the.

Fantastic news. Of Christianity. So when we. Repent. Or we turn. From our sin. And believe. In Jesus Christ. We're accepted. By God. Grace tells us. That we're more wicked.

Than we ever dare believe. But more loved. And accepted. Than we ever dared hope. At the very. Same time. And that's why. We can acknowledge.

[ 25 : 55 ] Our sin. And our failure. Because we know. That God loves us. Regardless. There's no point. There's no point. Pretending. With God. Because he sees us. As we are. And so if you.

Call yourself. A Christian. Then. There's lessons. In the book of Jonah. And the lessons.

Are clear. Because. We all need to. Turn back to God. We all need to. Turn from sin. And we all need to. Trust in. Jesus Christ. Christ. But. If we're a Christian.

There's a sense. In which we can. Have become more like. Jonah. Than like Jesus. Where we become. Bitter. Towards God. For the way. That our life. Has turned out.

We're. Out of self pity. We just. Settle for this. Kind of. Cozy world. Of self. Protection. Where really. We're more concerned. About me. And my life.

[ 26 : 51 ] Than we are. About those. Who don't know. Jesus Christ. And so the antidote. Is to. Hear God's word. Through the message. Of Jonah. Because as we.

Reorientate. Our love. Away from ourselves. And towards God. Then that love. Flows out. Towards. Other people. The better we know. Our loving God.

As he's revealed to us. In Jonah. And throughout the rest. Of the Bible. And the more we'll share. His heart. For the lost. Because our Lord. Who is.

Gracious. And compassionate. Slow to anger. And abiding in love. He's the Lord. Who told Jonah. To go. And in Jesus Christ. He commands us.

To go. And make disciples. Of all nations. And that's why we exist. As a church. Not just to be here. Ourselves. But to go. To those.

[ 27 : 45 ] Who know nothing of Christ. And need to hear. Of this great God. And enjoy salvation. In him. The way. And have a dream. Thank you.

Yes. No problem. I actively see on the calculation.