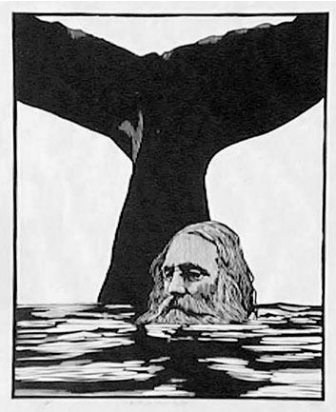


Jonah 4
"The Pity Party"

By Kent Crockett
www.makinglifecount.net

Here's a snapshot of the book of Jonah.
In Jonah 1, he's the **prodigal** prophet—running from God
In Jonah 2, he's the **praying** prophet—crying out to God
In Jonah 3, he's the **preaching** prophet—speaking for God
In Jonah 4, he's the **pouting** prophet—complaining to God.

After Jonah ran away from God's call, the Lord gave him a second chance to do his assignment. This time he goes to Nineveh in Assyria, walks up and down the streets preaching God's judgment, and the entire city repents. The king puts on sackcloth and tells the entire city to fast to stop God's judgment, and the Lord calls off the calamity. Jonah got a second chance to do God's will, but he was furious that the Lord would give the Ninevites another chance. He failed to see his own hypocrisy in the situation.

When God didn't destroy Nineveh, Jonah decided to throw a pity party.

> **Jonah 3:10** When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them and He did not do it.

In response to Jonah's preaching, the entire city of 600,000 people turns to God. The whole city—the king, all the people, and even the animals wore sack cloth and fasted. This touched the heart of God—but it didn't touch Jonah's heart. He actually got mad at God and decides to pout.

> **Jonah 4:1** But it greatly displeased Jonah, and he became angry.

When God turned **from** anger, Jonah turned **to** anger. Jonah was angry with God because He showed mercy on Nineveh instead of destroying them. Jonah wasn't into the mercy thing, you know. He said, "Lord, I preached a really good sermon on how you were going to bring judgment. And then, you don't do what you said you would do. Do you understand how humiliated that makes me feel?"

The Hebrew word for "angry" literally means "furious." Jonah was burning with anger for two reasons. He's mad at the Ninevites and he's mad at God.

First, he thinks the Ninevites deserve judgment because they are evil. Amazingly, this prophet of God didn't want these people to repent!

Second, Jonah is embarrassed because what he said didn't come to pass. He spent forty days telling them God would destroy them and when He doesn't, he looks like a false prophet. And this makes him really mad at God.

Do you understand what causes anger? We get angry because someone is doing something we don't want them to do, or they are not doing something we want them to do. In other words, someone is not meeting our expectations. In this case, God was not meeting Jonah's expectations and this is why he's upset.

If you have ever been angry with God, it's probably because you wanted Him to do something but He didn't obey your wishes. If He hasn't answered our prayers by

our designated deadline, we get angry. Who does He think He is, anyway? We think, "If I could just have 5 minutes to govern the universe, I could show God a thing or two about how to fix this place!"

Anger is like a time bomb ready to go off. Melvin McDonald was World War II vet who kept a hand grenade on the mantle in his house as a souvenir. When his nephew saw it, he suggested that he dispose of it. Melvin wasn't sure if it was safe to throw away, so he took it to police headquarters in his city. He said, "I've got a grenade" as he took it out of a brown paper bag and set it on the desk.

Immediately the policeman called the bomb squad and the building was evacuated. When the bomb squad came, they found that it was still primed with explosives and its fuse was still intact. McDonald apologized for causing the commotion. He said, "I have had it in my house all these years but I didn't know it could still explode."

The anger inside us is like a hand grenade ready to detonate in two different ways. Anger can **explode** through lashing out at others, which can destroy the relationship. But anger can also **implode** inside us if we keep it stuffed.

Repressing our anger is like setting a trash can full of paper on fire and sticking it in a closet. It doesn't solve our problem but only hides it. Repressed anger results in ulcers and depression. It's self-destruction. The way to get rid of it is the same way Melvin McDonald did—he gave it to a higher authority. We can dispose of anger by surrendering it to God and letting Him take it away.

> **Jonah 4:2** He prayed to the Lord and said, "Please Lord, was not this what I said while I was still in my own country? Therefore in order to forestall this I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity."

Jonah says, "I knew it! You are a merciful God, you are slow to anger, and you abound in mercy. I knew you'd forgive them. How dare you?"

> **Jonah 4:3-4** "Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for death is better to me than life." And the Lord said, **"Do you have good reason to be angry?"**

Jonah says, "God, you're being too nice to them. You should have wiped out every one of them. Lord, if that's the way it's going to be, just go ahead and kill me." Ironically in chapter 2 Jonah prayed to live, but now he prays to die.

Robert G. Ingersoll was an atheist who delivered lectures against Jesus Christ and the Bible, and he always drew large crowds. One night he told the crowd, "I'll give God a chance to prove that He exists and is almighty. I challenge Him to strike me dead within 5 minutes!"

At the end of the allotted time, the atheist said, "You see? There is no God. I am still very much alive."

After the lecture, a Christian in the audience said, "Well, Mr. Ingersoll, you certainly proved something tonight. You just proved that God doesn't take His orders from an atheist!"

That's true. God is not taking orders from anyone, even from His prophet Jonah. Jonah says, "Strike me dead" and God says, "No, I'm not going to do it. But Jonah, do you have a really good reason for being angry?"

> **Jonah 4:5** Then Jonah went out from the city and sat east of it. There he made a shelter for himself and sat under it in the shade until he could see what would happen in the city.

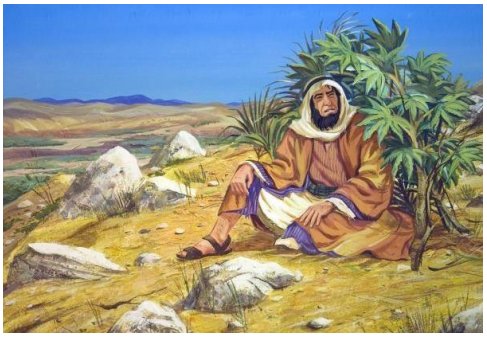
Jonah goes to the east side and builds himself a little hut overlooking the city. You can just see him pouting and feeling sorry for himself. (Pouting is one of the games people play at pity parties.)

Pouting is feeling sorry for yourself. Of course, everyone should be sensitive enough to know that you're suffering worse than every other person on the planet. And you expect them to know your feelings have been hurt and you need some sympathy. You want others to reach out to you, but if they ask, "Is anything wrong?" you cross your arms and stick out your bottom lip. You look the other way, change your tone of voice and say, "No, no, I'm fine. *Nothing's wrong*!" You're pouting and you want everyone to know it.

Jonah is pouting and upset because he still expects God to destroy them. Jonah's thinking, "Just give them a little time and they'll turn back to their old ways. You'll see. Then, God, you have my permission to blow them off the map." Jonah couldn't wait to see that mushroom cloud forming over Nineveh after God sends fire and brimstone.

Jonah needed an attitude adjustment, so God sets up a little experiment to teach him a lesson.

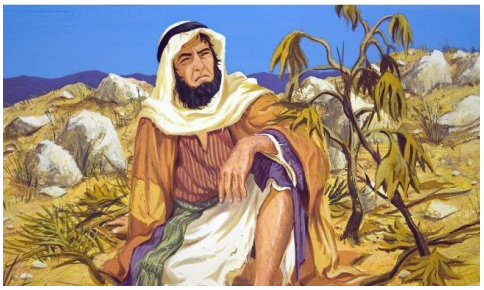
> **Jonah 4:6** So the Lord God appointed a plant and it grew up over Jonah to be a shade over his head to deliver him from his discomfort. And Jonah was extremely happy about the plant.



In chapter 1 God appointed a whale to swallow Jonah. Now He appoints a plant grow up and give him shade. Jonah is absolutely delighted over the shade plant because it protects him from the heat from the sun. <u>This is the only time in the entire book that Jonah is happy</u> about anything and it has to do with his own personal comfort.

We're a lot like Jonah, aren't we? We get really excited about things that really don't matter. And we're not that excited about things that really *do* matter.

> **Jonah 4:7** But God appointed a worm when dawn came the next day and it attacked the plant and it withered.



Now God sends a worm to destroy the plant. Can you see the humor in the situation? First God appoints a huge whale to swallow him, and now He appoints a tiny worm to take away his shelter. When the plant withers, Jonah gets depressed. (Depression plays another part in every pity party.)

> **Jonah 4:8** When the sun came up God appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on Jonah's head so that he became faint and begged with all his soul to die, saying, "Death is better to me than life."

God appointed a scorching wind to blow out the last candle on his pity party cake. This is the fourth thing God appointed in the book. This shows that God has control over large animals like whales, small animals like worms, plants and even the wind.

Jonah loses his plant and so now he just gives up on life. He says, "It's better to die than to live." When we get depressed, we lose our will to live. That's not good.

Bible teacher Michael Wells tells a story about two sisters who grew up in a depressing, miserable home. When they grew up, one sister left home and decided she would never return there. Because she didn't go back there, she never got depressed after that.

The other sister left but always kept returning home. And every time she entered the home, she got depressed again. She got depressed because she kept going back to the place of depression.

Michael said that for years he was depressed and had suicidal thoughts. But then he decided to leave that place of depression in his mind and not go back there. He prayed, "Lord, I'm leaving this place of depression and suicidal thoughts. Jesus, I give you that place and ask you to destroy it so I can no longer return there." Michael said when did that his depression left.

Occasionally the thought comes telling him to get depressed again, but he says, "No, I'm not going there because that place is destroyed." He never gets depressed because he doesn't go there in his mind. The way to get out of depression is to quit thinking depressing thoughts and to start praising God instead.

> **Jonah 4:9-11** Then God said to Jonah, "Do you have good reason to be angry about the plant?" And he said, "I have good reason to be angry, even to death." Then the Lord said, "You had compassion on the plant for which you did not work and which you did not cause to grow, which came up overnight and perished overnight. Should I not have compassion on Nineveh, the great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know the difference between their right and left hand, as well as many animals?"

Nineveh had about 600,000 people. The 120,000 were infants and small children—too little to know the difference between their right and left hand. God tells Jonah, "I know you don't like these people because of their cruelty but there are 120,000 innocent children I've spared. You care more about that plant than all those people!

If you've been throwing a pity party, it's time to call an end to it and move on with your life.