

Need and Purpose

But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry. . . . 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, "Do you have a right to be angry about the vine?" "I do," he said. "I am angry enough to die." But the LORD said, "You have been concerned about this vine, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city?"
--Jonah 4:1, 8-11

A friend of mine, who has spent time in the middle east, once told me about the "scorching east winds" like the one God "provided" to work with the hot sun and give Jonah heat stroke. He said those winds are so hot that they feel like that moment when you open an oven and that puff of hot air hits your face, except they make you feel like that oven air is surrounding you constantly.

I tell you that, because I want you to recognize that Jonah's need here was very real. Jonah wasn't just complaining that it was a little too hot for comfort. Jonah was truly suffering from the unbearable heat, by God's own intention. Because now that Nineveh had repented, God still had a lesson to teach Jonah -- a lesson He had been trying to teach him since this book began. An all-important lesson He might be trying to teach you and me.

That lesson is simply this: Don't ever let your need take your eyes off your purpose.

Jonah truly needed to be relieved from the intense heat of the blazing desert sun and scorching wind. So God provided Him that relief, in the form of shade from a gourd, with full intention of taking it away again. Because Jonah's need was distracting him from seeing his purpose.

God had called Jonah to be His prophet, and to accomplish an enormous evangelistic effort. The salvation of several hundred thousand people was Jonah's purpose. But Jonah didn't see how great an opportunity had been given him by God. He only saw his own needs. He only saw a gourd that he had taken no part in making. A gourd that was only intended by God to live for a day and die. The spiritually reborn Ninevites, who had responded to his preaching and would now live forever, were invisible to him.

How easy it can be for us to do the same. God calls us and wants to use us to accomplish great things with an eternal purpose. But we fail to see God's eternal purpose for our lives because our relationship with Him is limited to our asking Him to meet our needs for comfort and joy. Until suddenly, with grace that is truly amazing, God chooses to remove some of what has kept us comfortable so that He can refocus our attention on the right things.

Jonah's life, by God's anointing, had a wonderful, eternally significant purpose that should have brought him great joy. But Jonah's need was taking his eyes off his purpose, so he missed the joy the Lord intended him to have.

Maybe you can identify with Jonah. Maybe there's something you really need, and God isn't providing it, at least not yet, not now. Don't let an unmet need distract you from

the glorious wonder of being in the hands of God as His servant to be used for His glory. If you want to be content in the Christian life, never let your need take your eyes off your purpose.

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