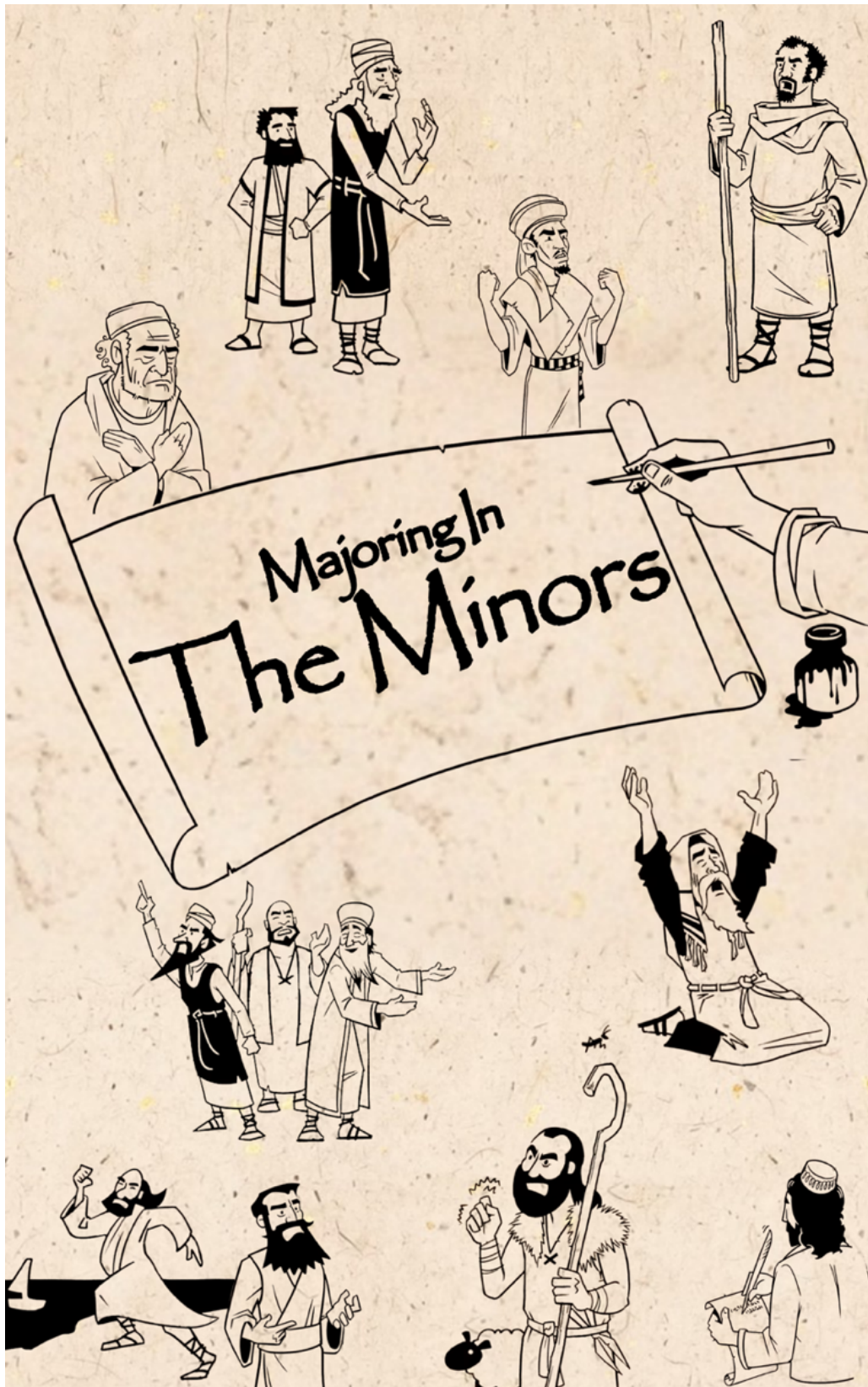




Major Lessons from the Minor Prophets

Week 1: Hosea and Amos
Week 2: Micah and Nahum
Week 3: Zephaniah & Habakkuk
Week 4: Joel & Obadiah
Week 5: Haggai & Zechariah
Week 6: Malachi (and Jonah - he was in our last series)

Please visit <https://cumc.me/minors> for the videos.

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Hosea

We can read all of Hosea as we think about what major ideas we can take from the minor prophets. If you're not up for the whole book, right now, read through Hosea 1:1-9, 2:8-23, 3:1-5, 4:1-6, 6:1-6, 11:1-11, and 14:1-9 to get a sense of what this minor prophet is all about.

Major Lessons

God's covenant love pursues us even when we're unfaithful

God is "the faithful husband" and Israel is "the adulterous wife" chasing after other gods (and other nations). Yet God keeps pursuing them. God showed them how that looks and feels to God with the example of Hosea and Gomer's relationship and family.

Knowing God doesn't happen by simply sitting in a pew

In Israel, in Hosea's day, worship is a performance, covenant rules are regularly broken, injustice is everywhere, and the nation is counting on alliances with regional superpowers rather than on God. All of these are symptoms of a missing, authentic relationship with God

There are real consequences to our choices, but there is also hope

The consequences of Israel's rebellion, like defeat and exile, are real, yet God's father-heart and healing love always desire to bring the Israelites back to being a people who connect with God, receive God's love, and can be a blessing to the whole world. A future king from David's line is even part of God's plan despite Israel's wandering ways.

What major lesson did you get?

Discussion Questions

1. Gomer abandons Hosea and is eventually sold into slavery. Yet Hosea is told not only to go get her, but to love her again. What does this say about us and our turning away from God, about who God is even though we turn away, about how God sees and thinks about us and our leaving, and ultimately about the relationship between us and God?

2. How is “knowing about God” different from “knowing God”? How might that play out in our lives?

3. God expects justice to be done and has compassion for those who are in need of justice. God doesn't favor those who practice injustice, yet God offers compassion to them too. What does this tell us about God and about how we should be with each other?

4. How do we squander the things God has given us, on our “other loves”? What might it be like if we would change that?

5. Is wandering away from God something that you wrestle with? Something that could be healed? Something that you need to have willpower over? Just part of life? Something that people make up? How do you think about it in your life?

6. Billy Graham said that you can tell what someone believes by looking at their checkbook. How does your checkbook (or calendar or social media or whatever) communicate your loves and beliefs to others?

Amos

Watch the video and read Amos or focus on just these passages to get a good overview of the major ideas from this minor prophet: Amos 1:1-6, 2:6-16, 3:1-7, 5:18-24, 6:1-7, 8:1-100, 9:11-15.

Major Lessons

With great privilege comes great responsibility

God condemns the nations, circling in, with Israel in the crosshairs. God's people, who were rescued from Egypt's injustice, are now living in privilege and practicing injustice themselves, and God's not happy about it.

Real worship produces results

God hates religious performance because it's possible to go through the motions of religion and yet not know God at all. True worship is accompanied by evidence outside of the worship space. Authentic worship should result in justice and righteousness flowing like a river.

Judgment is coming, but hope is too

The "Day of the Lord" is coming and it's going to be bad. Yet, at the end of the book, the prophet says that God will restore David's "tent" and God will include all nations into God's family. There is hope even in the face of judgement!

What major lesson did you get?

Discussion Questions

1. God knows us and so God punishes us, Amos writes. What does that tell us about God and about our relationship with God?

2. For three sins ... even for four ... is repeated quite often in the opening chapters. Three is a special number biblically, for example, God is frequently referred to as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Calling out three and then four is a poetic way of emphasizing the one more. The straw that broke the camel's back. In this case, it seems to be the sin that makes God decide that it's time to put injustice to a stop. If you look around today, where do you say "that's one step over the line" or "that's just too much"?

3. Why does God hate the people's religious rituals that God told them to do? What does that tell us about God's priorities and about our relationships to God and to one another?

4. Is there a place or person or situation where what you say you believe doesn't match your actions? What might that suggest?

5. We don't like to talk about judgement, and when we do, we think it's something that's going to happen to other people. How might Amos help us think about our choices and God's feelings about those choices?

6. Hope doesn't stop judgement. Yet hope lasts longer than judgement. How do you hold on to hope even when you're suffering for the decisions you've made?

Micah

Let's watch the video and read Micah. If you're not up for reading the whole book now, then let's focus on these passages: Micah 2:1-2, 3:1-12, 4:1-4, 5:2-5, 6:6-8, 7:7-20. They'll help us major in this minor.

Major Lessons

A leader's earthly decisions have divine consequences

The decision of Israel's and Judah's leaders and prophets to allow injustice and corruption will have consequences for both nations, as the Assyrians and Babylonians will be God's vessels of judgement.

There is a perfect king coming (Messiah)

There's hope for a shepherd / king to come to Jerusalem (and born in Bethlehem) so that God's original promises are fulfilled.

There is judgement, but there is always hope

God's people are to be the instruments of God's justice and compassion. God has made this abundantly clear to God's people. And so there is to be judgement. But also there's hope for the future when God's people will again be God's instruments of compassion and justice.

What major lesson did you get?

Discussion Questions

1. What does this message of judgement and yet hope tell us about God's character, who God is, who we are, and what God wants from us? Does Micah tell us different things than Amos, or bring out different nuances?

2. Where might we want to pay something to hear a good word from God rather than a true word (considering that today, we might pay with our attention, our money, or something else)?

3. How does this message of hope for a future king help Israel in Micah's day? What might it say about God's outlook on today versus tomorrow?

4. How might Micah's words impact us when choosing, promoting, or electing leaders in our lives.

5. God chooses divine action to resolve injustice in Genesis, yet here Micah tells us that people are to be the delivery mechanism of both judgement and justice. What does this tell us about God today, and about God throughout history?

6. Why don't we listen to God and follow through on our responsibilities that God has made known to us and that God desires us to do?

Nahum

This is a short book, and you should read it all, either before or after watching the video. A word of warning, this book has been misused in the past when people cast themselves in the role of the remnant, and their societal, political, cultural, or other "enemies" as Nineveh. Remember, this book was written to a powerless, helpless, victimized people. Be very careful if you feel like you want to label someone as "Nineveh."

Major Lessons

God is always involved in human history.

God is engaged actively with human activity on earth. God is always on the side of the innocent and against those who seize and maintain power through violence and injustice.

God is slow to anger, but also God's justice is unstoppable.

Nahum echoes the Torah and other prophets in describing how God is patient and slow to anger. At the same time, God will orchestrate the downfall of corruption, violence, and injustice, and that process is inevitable. Nineveh and Assyria are an example of this in Nahum.

God's judgement is good news for the oppressed.

God is looking out for God's people who are living God's way. God's judgement may be terrible, but it will set them free from the earthly power that is holding them captive.

What major lesson did you get?

Discussion Questions

1. How can God be both slow to anger and also guarantee that evil will not endure?

2. How can we stay close to God's heart in times when unfairness, injustice, and evil are winning in our lives or our communities?

3. What does Nahum's gloomy poetry tell us about God's character, who God is, and what's ultimately important to God?

4. Where do you see our society and government (local, state, federal) behaving like Nineveh, and where is it behaving like the remnant of God's people? What should we do about it?

5. How does God's judgement being good news for some and very bad news for others help us think about the choices we make and which side we want to be on?

6. How can you, our church, and our community take advice from this poetry about God, Nineveh, Assyria, and God's remnant, as we think about what we should be doing and what choices we should be making today?

Zephaniah

Zephaniah is a short book, so perhaps we can read it all to hear what major lessons this minor prophet has for us. Just a heads up, this book is small but has some big imagery.

Major Lessons

Jerusalem is in the line of fire for a reason

God's people and their leaders have gone far away from the way God is calling them to live, and God says they continue to be unrepentant. The people's evil and disobedience will be dealt with.

The surrounding nations are also in the fire

Through some pretty intense poetic images, we come to understand that God will not just deal with Jerusalem and Judah's evil, but with all the evil in the surrounding nations and the whole world, hoping that Judah will see and repent.

The fire has a purpose and a hope

God's desire is to purify humanity so that everyone serves God together, all are included, none are taken advantage of, and all can celebrate God. And even better, everyone will be sung over by God, together as one united people, participating in God's joy.

What major lesson did you get?

Discussion Questions

1. We see two sides of God's nature again in Zephaniah. How do you hold these potentially contradictory images of God in your mind at once? How does that make you feel?

2. It's sometimes hard to see our own sin, but during our communion liturgy, part of our prayer is ... we have broken your law, we have rebelled against your love, we have not loved our neighbors, and we have not heard the cry of the needy. How might Zephaniah include you in his poetic prophecy?

3. Some of Zephaniah's writing is very much "end of the world" type stuff. Yet the world didn't end when Babylon conquered Jerusalem. What does this tell us about how far God will go to get our attention?

4. Do you think about how to be part of the “humble who seek the Lord” or think that you’re safe? Did you notice how Zephaniah is similar to other prophets in saying that true worship leaves evidence in the other parts of your life?

5. If you make it to the end of this short book, you’ll read about God rejoicing over renewed humanity with song. What does this tell us about God’s character and our relationship with God?

6. God is seen gathering the poor, the lame, and the outcast, in celebration. How might we join in that celebration today?

Habakkuk

Unlike other minor prophets we've seen, Habakkuk is not pronouncing judgement. Instead he's talking with God. Habakkuk is worth reading in its entirety either before or after you watch the video.

Major Lessons

Lament is a good way to talk to God

Habakkuk pours out his troubles to God, asking how long before God acts to stop the people's injustice, and complaining that God is going to use Babylon who is even worse than Israel's corrupt leaders. And God answers!

All nations eventually become Babylon

Any nation that gains power, wealth, or status eventually comes to worship or idolize those things rather than honoring God. The nation's wellbeing becomes the people's god, and they make moral compromises as a result.

The righteous live by faithfulness

This is a core idea of the Scriptures, though it's not often stated this clearly. For people who are made right with God, their whole life will be driven by, and evidence of, their faith in God. Paul opens his letter to the Romans by quoting Habakkuk 2:4.

What major lesson did you get?

Discussion Questions

1. Is Habakkuk losing faith in God in his lament, or expressing his faith? What do God's responses tell us about God?

2. Have you ever taken your laments directly to God with raw emotion like Habakkuk? If so, how did it feel? If not, why not?

3. The righteous will live by faithfulness (or by their faith) sounds different than simply doing the right thing or following all of God's rules, but is it? And if so, how?

4. If an acquaintance were to look at your financial accounts, your calendar, and your browser history, what would they say you live by?

5. Chapter 3 is a stylized retelling of the Exodus from Egypt. What does Habakkuk's telling of the story tell us about God's character and what's important to God?

6. At the very end of Habakkuk's short book, he praises God not just in the midst of hardship, but in the face of starvation. Who needs to hear this in your circle of influence?

Joel

Joel was a prophet who drew on other prophets as he wrote his small book. Let's read the whole book either before or after watching the video to see what major ideas this minor prophet brings to us.

Major Lessons

God is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow

Humanity's experience with God in the past points to what our future with God will be like. God rescued, and we can count on God to rescue again. God confronted evil and we can count on God to confront evil again. God made a perfect creation, and we can count on God to restore that creation. Regardless of how lost our situation may seem.

Repentance must be a genuine change, not a show

You can shout about how you are repenting and tear your garments in anguish, but that's not what God wants. God wants a renewed heart that is actually different rather than a show of repentance from a person who won't turn and do the things God calls us to.

Judgement is hard yet hopeful

Like some of the other prophets, Joel points to a day in the future when God will restore all of creation, and the judgement and elimination of evil (both in the world and in us) is the beginning of this new creation. There will be judgement, but there is also hope, because there will be renewal.

What major lesson did you get?

Discussion Questions

1. As Joel points out, “the Day of the Lord” was something pointed at God’s enemies. Why would God point the Day of the Lord at God’s own people then and now?

2. God can use a tragedy to help us see the truth. Sometimes we need to take a long look in the mirror, confront our sin, and repent. How have you come closer to God through hardship?

3. Ten different times in Scripture God gets a very similar description to the one he gets in Joel 2:13. The video mentions that Joel is quoting Exodus 34:6-7. What does this tell us about who God is, what’s important to God, and how that might impact our relationship with God?

4. Have you had an experience where your repentance was only your “garments” and not your heart?

5. Joel looks to God’s past rescues and sees the shadow of a rescue not only of God’s people but of all of creation. What does this tell us about what God wants us to do today?

6. Peter pointed to Joel’s prophecy on the day of Pentecost. How have you experienced the pouring out of God’s Spirit in your life of faith?

Obadiah

The book of Obadiah is only 21 verses long. Let's take a minute and read it all and then think through what major things this minor prophet has for us.

Major Lessons

Edom's pride will lead to their downfall

Edom and Israel have fought since the time of their ancestors Esau and Jacob. Yet Edom's pride and abuse during the Babylonian invasion will definitely be punished.

Edom's pride points to everyone's pride

But Edom's pride is just an example of the pride that we all fall victim to. People of all nations take advantage of their neighbors, and as they have done to others, so God will do to them.

God has a plan for renewal

Though the language is sometimes hard to understand, there are glimmers of hope for restoration in the form of a Godly Kingdom that will come after God's day of judgement.

What major lesson did you get?

Discussion Questions

1. Why does God take this betrayal between neighbors (who descended from brothers) so seriously? What does this say about God? About us?

2. Though we don't like to think about it, we all have either taken advantage of our neighbors or stood by while someone else did - at least in a way that God doesn't accept, even if our culture says it's OK. We allow people to lose their homes, sue our neighbors when we experience loss, and benefit in many other ways to the detriment of our neighbors. Why do we do this?

3. Like other prophets Obadiah sees God using a small thing as an example of a pervasive problem. What does this tell us about how God sees our actions? Our sins?

4. How has a small misstep snowballed into a big problem in your life? And/or how has a small, virtuous step spiraled outward into a blessing in your life?

5. Why is God so against human pride anyway?

6. What would your world look like if human pride was replaced with God's love?

Haggai

Haggai is two short chapters with some big messages for the people of his day and for us too. Let's read the whole book and watch the video and then think about what God's still saying to us today through this minor prophet.

Major Lessons

Human choices and actions really matter to God

Our priorities, what actions we take (or don't take), and even our attitudes are maybe even more important to God than they are to us. God is calling us to lives of faithful obedience rather than self-dependence and self-importance.

God works through our obedience

God is calling us to obey God's teachings. This is because God uses our faithful obedience to work out God's will for the world, and when we're disobedient, the consequences are bad for us, everyone around us, and all of creation.

Our repentance and humility are necessary parts of God's plan for us

When we turn toward God, we turn toward God's will and purposes and blessings. When we don't, we ultimately turn away from all those things, even if our choice seems good to us at that moment.

What major lesson did you get?

Discussion Questions

1. Back before the first temple was built, God told David that God didn't need a house (2 Samuel 7:5-7). Yet now, the temple is important. What does God's word about the importance of rebuilding the temple tell us about our relationship with God?

2. What project of yours is diverting your time and resources from living out God's call on your life?

3. What does God's concern for human short-term actions through Haggai's prophecy suggest about God's long-term purpose?

4. Has there been a time in your life where something that seemed disappointingly small actually turned out to be more than enough?

5. People who don't repent of injustice can't build God's ministry, even if they are very talented and look like they are doing all the right things. Why do the attitudes of our heart matter more to God than the quality of our work?

6. Have you ever built something with "unclean hands"? What happened?

Zechariah

Haggai and Zechariah are writing at the same time, but the books are very different.

Zechariah is an adventure to read, so this time, it may be best to watch the video first. Then take some time and read the whole book, or if time doesn't allow, try a sample of the major ideas from this minor prophet: Zechariah 1:1-6, 3:1-10, 4:1-7, 7:8-14, 8:1-8, 9:9-10, 12:10-14, 13:7-9

Major Lessons

We should learn from the mistakes of our ancestors

We like to celebrate the heroes of the faith in Hebrews 11-12, but those folks and others in the past can also teach us what not to do. Zechariah points to the folks who disobeyed God and the earlier prophets and ended up in exile.

The coming of God's Kingdom depends on our faithfulness

God expects God's people to be ready and practicing justice and faithfulness before the Messiah comes. Zechariah gives us some ideas about what that might look like. Might we also hear that God expects us to make the world ready before the Messiah returns?

God has a future full of hope planned and it involves us

From the coming of Jesus to the eventual restoration of creation and Jesus' return, God has a plan. But God refuses to force this plan to happen without human involvement. Our faithfulness is part of God's blueprint for God's planned future.

What major lesson did you get?

Discussion Questions

1. God wants leaders to depend on God's Spirit. What does that say about God's plans?

2. In your life, do you tend to make plans based on what you think is best, or how God's Spirit directs you? Why?

3. Zechariah makes the disturbing turn from people asking when God's Kingdom will come to asking them (and us) whether or not they are ready and qualified to live in that Kingdom. What does this focus tell us about God? About us? About our relationship?

4. How much do you think about whether or not your life reflects God's Kingdom? What could you change this week to make your life more Kingdom-shaped?

5. On this side of the cross, we may take a humble king who comes as a rejected shepherd for granted. But think about the images Zechariah draws with his words. What do these images say about God's way of providing rescue and redemption? What do they tell us about God's character?

6. Who in your life needs to hear that salvation comes from a humble source through a repentant heart, not from a show of force or a big personal effort to get things right? How can you best pass that message on?

Malachi

Malachi is the last book in the Old Testament and offers a unique setting plus some major lessons from this minor prophet. We should probably read the whole book, either before or after the video.

Major Lessons

We are by nature hard-hearted

Egypt couldn't. The judges and the kings couldn't. Even defeat, capture and forced relocation for several generations couldn't cause the Israelites to soften their hearts toward God. Is there any hope for us?

God still calls us and God will also come to earth

Even though we are hard-hearted, God continues to hear our arguments and cries. God loves us though we seem to do nothing worthy of God's love, and we direct our love to other gods and selfish pursuits. Yet God will come to earth, sending a messenger ahead to prepare God's people.

There is hope for the faithful

As other prophets did, so Malachi predicts trouble for those who are unfaithful to God. And like other prophets, Malachi holds out hope for those who remain faithful. In fact, he gives a beautiful description of how joyous God's judgement and return will be for those few who still follow God.

What major lesson did you get?

Discussion Questions

1. Humans are cynical and God, who doesn't need to even listen to them, hears and engages with their arguments. What does this tell us about who God is and how God thinks about humans?

2. Have you ever felt cynical about God or the problem of evil in the world? Did you try to argue with God about it?

3. What do God's concern about the quality of our offerings and God's view on how the priests accept sub-standard gifts say about God's character and priorities? What other things might God value far more than we realize?

4. Through Malachi, God calls us to return in concrete terms, our wealth, worship, and wedlock. Which of these is toughest for you to do God's way? Why? Which is easiest? Why?

5. The Day of the Lord is a common theme among the prophets, as is hope for those who are truly faithful to God. Why does God need to set a "Day"? What does the fact that God will set foot on earth say about who God is and who we are in relation to God?

6. The idea of a "Scroll of Remembrance" is interesting. What do you do to help you remember who God is and what God has done in your life?

Jonah

Jonah is our bonus minor prophet because we already talked about him in our last series. Yet there are still some majors to be gained from this minor. The story is short and a fun read, so let's read it all before we watch the video,

Major Lessons

God loves

God loves Jonah's enemies and is determined to forgive them, which should make us question whether we are ready to forgive our enemies. It should also make us glad that God loves God's enemies (aka sinners like us) and is determined to forgive us too.

God's plans can't be stopped

Through the satire and absurdity of everyone doing the opposite of what is expected, God makes this point clear. Even if humans are dedicated to stopping God's plans, we have no chance.

Our rebellion is ridiculous

In reading this critical satire of one of God's prophets, we get to see exactly how bizarre our rebellion looks to God. We are fine with God showing us mercy, but not showing mercy to those people. We turn our back on the best way of life just because God calls us to live that way. We cut off our nose to spite our face. We are so hard-hearted and hard-headed, that it's laughable.

What major lesson did you get?

Discussion Questions

1. What does it say about God and about our relationship to God that the people who have no idea who God is are the ones seeking God, while the one who is supposed to know God is napping?

2. Have you ever felt God nudging you in one direction and ignored that call and gone a different direction? Why? What happened?

3. In the other minor prophets, we get lots of God's words chastising God's people. In Jonah, get to hear God questioning the prophet. What does this suggest about God and how God sees relationships with people?

4. In your life, who are those people who you just don't like, don't respect, and would not be upset if they got knocked down a peg or two? Why do you feel this way? What should you do about it?

5. How does God's caring for Nineveh's people and cows change your view of God's love and care for the broken world we live in?

6. Is there something in your life that you care far more about than your enemies' well-being? How about your neighbors' well-being?

At Crestwood United Methodist Church, we're spending a year working our way through the entire Bible because we know that the Bible is my story, your story, and our story, all wrapped up in God's story of amazing grace.

And spending a year is a good step toward building a life that lives God's story every day!



To find more resources or learn more, visit...

<https://crestwoodmethodist.com/one-story>

...or stop by on Sunday morning!