

## “Now We See the Violence Inherent in the System”

*Jonah: Renegade Prophet, Pt 4*

We are looking at the Book of Jonah, a literary and theological treasure in four short chapters spread across four acts. Act 1 takes place on a boat, Act 2 in a fish, Acts 3 is set inside the great city of Nineveh into which God called Jonah to preach, and Act 4 takes place just outside the city where Jonah has a little talk with Jesus. Now, today, we’re going to see Jonah’s message – and I can tell you, as a pastor, I love this because it makes me sound like Billy Graham!

Remember now, this is his second chance. God said “Go”. Jonah said, “No.” The big fish said, “Really?” And Jonah said “Ok.” Which leads us to **Jonah 3:1-4**, “*Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time: 2 “Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you.” 3 Jonah obeyed the word of the Lord and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very important city—a visit required three days. 4 On the first day, Jonah started into the city. He proclaimed: “Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned.”*”

That’s the sermon – I’ll give him this, it was brief. Now, before we see their reaction, we need to understand something about his target audience. Nineveh was the capital city of Assyria, the great

emerging imperial world power. And they were one of the most violent races in the history of the world. We have loads of secular records in which their kings brag of mass beheadings and impalings and their specialty was to flay the skin off their enemies and decorate the city walls with it. Nice wall-paper!

Their penchant for violence is mentioned elsewhere in the Bible. Notably, **Nahum 3:1-3**, which was written about 140 years after Jonah and predicts Nineveh’s destruction, includes this description under the heading, “Woe To Nineveh”, “*Woe to the city of blood, full of lies, full of plunder, never without victims! The crack of whips, the clatter of wheels, galloping horses and jolting chariots! Charging cavalry, flashing swords and glittering spears! Many casualties, piles of dead, bodies without number, people stumbling over the corpses—*”.

Violence was the calling card of this nation and these people. It was a violent place. It was a violent empire. It slaughtered helpless people. And Jonah’s response to that is *anger*. He wants them *punished*. He is angry at them for their violence, and some people here certainly are going to say, “I know how he feels.” After all, archeologists believe that Nineveh would have been located around Mosel in modern day Iraq – still a lot of violence.

And yet, in one of the great twists in all of biblical narrative – in all of the stories in the Bible, there’s probably no more surprising turn than the one you see right there, which we’re going to get to in a second. Because God refuses to accept *either* the violence of Nineveh or the poisonous anger of Jonah. It’s spelled out in **verse 8**, “*Let them give up their violence.*” But Jonah doesn’t get a pass either. So let’s take a look and see what this text tells us about violence. Let’s look at the *sources* of violence, the *strategy* we should take with violence, and then lastly, the ultimate *solution* for violence.

**Ok, first of all, The surprising sources of violence.**

When I say surprising, there are two things the Bible shows us here are sources of violent behavior and action. The first probably *isn’t* surprising, but the second may be, but shouldn’t be. Now, the title of today’s message is very special to me; “*Now We See the Violence Inherent in the System.*” And if you get the reference – 10 points to house Gryffindor! If you don’t, I’m going to educate you. Let’s play this quick clip. [Python :38]. That’s from *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, written and directed by Terry Jones who passed away this week.

Violence is in fact inherent in the system of this world. Any governmental system is sustained by violence. But especially so in a pagan society like Assyria. Now when I use the word “pagan”, I’m not being pejorative, it simply speaks of the worldview of polytheism – the worship of multiple gods.

One of the questions we have to ask is, Why were *all* of those old polytheistic ancient cultures so violent? Even the best ones, even Greece and Rome - the entertainment was gladiators, and prisoners being eaten by lions, and the populace came out and cheered. Unwanted babies were dumped in gutters and fields in mass – especially girl babies. There was zero tradition in any of those ancient cultures of care for the poor at all. Why were they so violent?

Saint Augustine in his seminal book *The City of God* offers a devastating critique on polytheism and paganism. In fact, his critique was *so* devastating that after it came out – this was the early 5<sup>th</sup> Century - polytheism really wasn’t intellectually respectable for *centuries* after that. And here’s his critique. He says if there is one God, as Judaism and Christianity claim, a God who is a supreme power and supreme lawgiver over everything in the world, then that means the world is inherently – at least originally - an orderly, peaceful place. It’s been marred by sin and evil certainly, but God’s project in history is to restore it.

But Augustine says the problem with polytheism - there's no one God but *many* gods; there's no one supreme power but there are *many* powers - and therefore they all are at war with each other - you've read your Classical myths right? Which means that the nature of the universe - far from orderly and peaceful - was *essentially* chaotic and violent. It's an argument from foundations. Polytheism sees the world as inherently violent so it produces violence. And as an example, he contrasts the City of God with the earthy city - specifically the Empire of Rome. The history of Rome was not a history of seeking truth and justice, but it was one of power and subjugation.

And he was right; if polytheism is true you cannot have a just society. Because it means the world is by *nature* violent, and therefore, justice and peace are totally *unnatural*. In fact, you have no basis for justice, because since there's no one supreme lawgiver, who's to say what justice is? And before you dismiss that as the bad-old-days, you should know that almost 90 percent of the liberal arts departments in Western universities believe the same thing.

Now, they don't believe the City of God is the answer, but modernity is run by a secular trinity - Darwin, Nietzsche and Smith - sounds like a law

firm! Darwin's survival of the fittest shows that violence is the engine of evolution. Nietzsche's will to power legitimizes the violence of nation-states. And Adam Smith's invisible hand of the market has come to replace the invisible hand of God's Providence as the driving force of society.

If there is no God, there is intellectually no basis to talk about truth and justice - Superman is just wasting his time (actually Nietzsche would just say that Superman is a supreme god and so he gets to determine what is true and just through violence - he can laser you with his eyes after all!). So Augustine says polytheism - or in modern nomenclature - pluralistic relativism is a source of oppression and abuse of power and violence.

But that's not the *only* thing the Bible says here is a source of violence. Because violence is not *just* flowing out of Nineveh. The great surprise in this narrative is there's another source of violence. You see, here's Jonah, and he comes to the biggest city, the New York of its day, in a way. And he comes into Nineveh, and he says, "I want to get rid of the crime. I want to get rid of the social injustice." The word "violence" here, by the way, does not just mean physical cruelty; it also has an aspect of social injustice, of the strong hurting the weak and the rich oppressing the poor and so on.

And so Jonah comes in, and he preaches right in the streets. And he says, “I want you to give up your social injustice. I want you to give up your evil ways. I want you to give up your violence,” and they do it! Let’s read the result of his short sermon, **v.5-10**, *“The Ninevites believed God. They declared a fast, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth. 6 When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust. 7 Then he issued a proclamation in Nineveh: “By the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let any man or beast, herd or flock, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink.*

*8 But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. 9 Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish.” 10 When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened.”*

Wow! Total success. I’m telling you, every minister, every priest, every rabbi, every social worker, every counselor, every mayor, every government official - if they’re worth their salt - that’s what they want in their cities. They want to see that sort of thing. Jonah speaks and they listen. They say, “You’re right. We’re proud. We’re wicked. We’re violent. But we’re going to change.” This is the pinnacle of

Jonah’s career of course, and so you expect the book would end with 3:11, “And Jonah returned to his own land rejoicing.” But there is no Jonah 3:11!

Instead there is a **Jonah 4:1**, *“But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry.”* This is one of the most astounding verses in scripture. First of all, literally in the Hebrew it says, “He became evil with the evil he saw.” Now that’s actually a very hard thing to translate, but it basically means when he saw God refusing to be violent with the violent, he became violently angry. What does he want? What is he mad because it didn’t happen? Look at **4:5**, *“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.”* What does he want?

He’s sitting outside the city because he wants to see fireballs come down out of the sky and start smashing their buildings. He wants Sodom and Gomorrah, you know? He wants violence. He’s mad because there *wasn’t* any violence. And therefore, what the Bible is saying is something really amazing. It is true that pluralistic relativism, the idea there’s no truth and everything is chaotic, certainly leads to oppression, certainly can lead to violence, but the Bible here is unbelievably nuanced and evenhanded. It’s saying here that religion is also a source of violence.

Think about this, Jonah is violent – if he had the power to do something, he'd do it. Jonah is violent not *in spite* of the fact he's religious, not in spite of the fact he's a prophet, not in spite of the fact he's so moral. No, he's being violently angry *because* he's moral and religious. "These are the sinners. These are the heretics. These are the pagans. These are the bad people, and we're the good people. And why haven't you bombed them?"

There is a great danger in morality if it is not put into the context of the gospel of grace. We've said repeatedly in this series that moral self-justification is a real danger. To say, "The reason God loves me, the reason I can look myself in the mirror, the reason I'm an upright person, is that I'm moral and I know the truth and I believe the truth and I obey the truth. That's what makes me better than other people." The fallenness of the human heart tends to take morality and turn it into moralism. And moralism – every bit as much as secularism – creates the seeds for oppression, for abuse of power, and for violence.

This is what's happened in Jonah. Look at this prayer in **4:2**, "*He prayed to the Lord, "O Lord, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee 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. He says, "I knew it! I knew you were compassionate. I knew at the drop of a sackcloth you would relent."*

"And you know Lord, these people haven't really converted. I mean, they are calling you *Elohim* – that's a very generic name for deity. They never called you *Yahweh* - they never used the covenant name. They don't really know you, not like I do. They're just scared; maybe heartfelt but superficial. Surly you're not buying this weak-sauce conversion. For crying out loud, look at their violence, that's who they really are. And yet they shed one tear and you *relent*. You give them another chance."

Look at the last line of his prayer, **v.3**, "*Now, O Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live.*" Now, I've prayed some dark prayers on a Monday morning, but this is advanced level! "Kill me, because I don't want to live in a universe run by a loving God like you." It's hard to find a place where the Bible has more clearly unmasked the kind of wickedness that can be nurtured in the heart of a moral, religious life.

The only other place I know of is in the passion narrative of Jesus. What's the source of the violence that kills Jesus? The criminals? The bad people? The poor?" Speaking of Nietzsche, in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* he laments Jesus as kind of a naïve idealist and says, "Had he only remained in the desert and far from the good and the just!" See, it wasn't prostitutes and tax collectors that killed Jesus, it was the middle-class people, the religious people, the scribes, the teachers of the law - the good and the just!

The Bible is unbelievably nuanced and says that the seeds for violence are found in both pluralistic relativism and moralistic absolutism. And that means almost *every* kind of person in *every* kind of society and *every* kind of group has tremendous potential for oppression and cruelty and violence. Now we see the violence inherent in the system.

And one of the things that's so weird about this is that almost all of the commentators today are so simplistic compared to the Bible. Because the conservative commentators are always saying, "The problem with America is we've lost our values, and the answer to this violence is to get prayer back in schools." Overlooking the fact that religiosity and moralism is one of the great reasons why there *is* violence. But on the other hand, the secular commentators say public religion leads to violence – those no good fundamentalists - and forget that Mao and Stalin were hardly religious people. They were atheists, and they were very violent.

It's popular in the wake of 9/11 to say that fundamentalism is the problem – Christian or Muslim. Believe what you want but just don't believe it *too* much. But can I ask you about the Amish? They take their faith very seriously. The Amish are very, very conservative, they reject even modern clothes and are very patriarchal - they're fundamentalists by *every single definition* of the word, but are you really worried about Amish terrorism?

And the reason we're not afraid of Amish terrorists is their fundamental is Jesus. It's not fundamentalism that makes you hostile; it depends on what your fundamental is. And if your fundamental is moralism, or pluralism it can lead you there. But if the fundamental is the Jesus of the gospels, who says, (**Matthew 20:28**) "*the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*" If *that's* your fundamental, all that does is suck violence and hatred out of you, as we're about to see. So the sources of violence are many. And the Bible is vastly less simplistic than any of its detractors. Now, not only do we learn the surprising sources of the violence.

**Secondly, we learn the remarkable strategy we're supposed to take in the face of violence.** What does God do with Nineveh? On the one hand, God sends Jonah in with a very hard message. "Forty days, and Nineveh will be destroyed," which means a nonnegotiable demand from God. "Evil must stop. Violence must stop." There's no compromise. There's no accepting of it at all. So, on the one hand, it's very hard.

On the other hand, God *sends* Jonah – He offers them *hope*. And actually, Jonah is right, at least in the little "soliloquy". God *is* incredibly generous with His compassion. It's unlikely this really is a genuine conversion, and yet He holds back His wrath. It's a baby step in the right direction, and God relents. So you have this incredible hardness and this incredible softness. And here's what's going on.

Let me tell you the two strategies we're *not* supposed to take with wrongdoing. When someone does evil to you, when someone hurts you, abuses you, really, really does wrong to you, the one thing God does not allow is vengeance. But the other thing God does not allow is resignation. Vengeance is I pummel the wrongdoer. And my goal is not upholding justice and truth, not to do the right thing for the sake of the world; my goal is to hurt them more than they hurt me. All I'm dealing with is my hurt. That's vengeance.

On the other hand, there's resignation. Resignation goes like this: "Just let it go. Don't bring it up. Forget it. No matter what you do, it's not going to be able to undo the hurt. So just bury it." So resignation does not confront the wrongdoer or pummel the wrongdoer. Resignation just wants to have nothing to do with the wrongdoer. So you have the "pummeler" and the avoider – neither of which is an appropriate way to deal with violence.

And what's ironic is, as different as vengeance and resignation appear on the surface, you know, the "pummeler" and the avoider, they're both dealing with their own hurt in a selfish way. They're doing it by permanently *excluding* the wrongdoer, saying, "I do not want a relationship with you. I *never* want a relationship with you. I put you outside the circle of

my community permanently and forever." The avoider usually looks more controlled and less vengeful and more "Christian", but it's really not much different.

Because in both cases you're not thinking of justice, you're not thinking about the wrongdoer, you're not thinking of the world and the people that wrongdoer is going to be living with over the years; you are, in a very selfish way, simply dealing with your hurt by excluding the wrongdoer one way or the other. Now what does God say you're supposed to do if you're not to do vengeance and you're not supposed to do resignation? He calls for forgiveness.

Here's what forgiveness is. Forgiveness is dealing with and getting rid of your hate and anger before you deal with the wrongdoer. Let me tell you why that's different than both vengeance and resignation. In vengeance - the pummeler - you're dealing with your anger and hate *as* you deal with the wrongdoer. You're dealing with your anger and hate *by* dealing with the wrongdoer in the most direct and abrasive and mean and hurtful way possible.

While the resigned person - the avoider - is refusing to deal with the wrongdoer at all. The avoider is dealing with the hurt and hate and anger by *avoiding* the wrongdoer. Forgiveness is you *deal* with the hurt and anger before you deal with the wrongdoer. And *then* you go and confront. Then you go and seek justice. You seek to get them to see the truth, to see what's right. You get them, as much as possible, to *do* what's right. They may not do it, but at least, what are *you* doing? You're not operating out of a self-obsessed need to deal with your hurt and anger by the way in which you treat or refuse to treat the wrongdoer. You're *dealing* with it. By forgiving, you're actually in a place to do something about the evil.

One of the best things ever written on this is by the Croatian theologian, Miroslav Volf – I actually got to hear him lecture at my seminary a year ago. He was persecuted as a Christian under Communism and lived through the awful Serbian-Croatian war of the 90's so he's seen plenty of atrocities. He writes, "Forgiveness is not a substitute for justice. Forgiving someone does not mean you demand no change in the perpetrator and no righting of wrongs...forgiveness provides a framework in which the quest for properly understood justice can fruitfully be pursued." (*E&E*,123)

I want to tell you something. If I haven't utterly forgiven, radically forgiven, the person who has wronged me, when I go to confront them, I'm not going for their sake or for God's sake or for truth's sake or for justice's sake or for the sake of the people that person has to live with. I'm doing it for *my* sake, and I always overreach. I'm trying to hurt. I'm trying to humiliate. I'm trying to punish. I don't really want them to see the light.

Listen, it's not a question of, "Do I do justice, or do I forgive?" You're never going to do justice unless you forgive. And if you refuse to do justice, it's because you haven't forgiven. You're trying to deal with your anger and hatred by avoiding the person or pummeling the person. Do you see? And that's the reason Miroslav Volf says "If you want justice and nothing but justice, you will inevitably get injustice." (*Exclusion and Embrace*, 223) Do you know what he means by that? If there's no love in your heart, if you say, "I want justice," almost for sure what you really mean is, "Vengeance, vengeance. They killed 5,000 of our civilians; I'm going to get 50,000 of theirs." And inevitably, you go beyond justice into vengeance, and evil wins. Because you are just as self-absorbed. You've been pulled right into the cycle of violence and evil wins.



If you want justice without injustice, you have to also want love. So we've seen, the **sources** of violence...*both* paganism and moralism. The **strategy** for overcoming the violence...neither vengeance nor resignation, but forgiveness. Now, the real question is how to we do it? Because let's not pretend that this is easy. If you want more depth on forgiveness, I did a whole series on it a while back called "As We Forgive" that you can find on the website. And we need help with that. I personally think it was easier for Jesus to die on the cross than to look out at the people who were killing him and say, "Father forgive them, they don't know what they are doing."

Which is the perfect segue into the final point, **Number three, The ultimate solution for violence.** What must we *do* to become a forgiver, rather than an avoider, or a pummeler? Well, I'm going to give you a couple of practical steps, but be warned, it's not really about the steps. They'll help, but they're not enough. Because, The secret of forgiving is not so much what you *do*, but who you *are*. The secret of forgiving is having an identity that has been changed in such a way that makes it possible to do the forgiving.

See how, when Jonah spews his venom at God, God reminds him who he is – who Jonah is. In this question in **4:4**, he says, "*Do you have a right to be angry?*" Now look at the two things that question tells us. On the one hand, it tells us if you are sustained in your bitterness toward someone, it's because you think you're better than they are. You cannot stay sustained in your hatred unless you feel like you have the right...and you only have the right if you feel like, "I would never do what they did."

Now would you just think with me? Will you use a little common sense? Not even great theology; just common sense. Do you really want to look at anybody and say, "If I had come from their upbringing, if I had their family, if I had all of their circumstances, if I had all of the pressures, if I had their life, I would never have done anything like that"? Are you willing to make that claim? You must be very young. You're not speaking for me. The more I understand people's story, the less I hate anyone.

The first thing God does is He confronts Jonah, and says, "Jonah, don't you remember what the whole first part of the book was about? Don't you remember what the fish was about? It was all about the fact that *you're* a sinner saved by grace." So the first thing is if you are angry, it's because you think you have the right to, but you don't! It's a confrontation. He's showing Jonah he's a sinner. He doesn't have the *right* to be the judge.

But on the other hand, notice it's a question. Isn't this amazing? After all the stuff God has done, do you know what Jonah is saying to him? He says, "Kill me. I don't want to live in a universe with somebody like you." What does God say? Can you believe the patience of God? Can you believe the gentleness of God? How much of this is God going to put up with with Jonah? But He's doing it. Why? You ask a question to get the person to wake up, to see it for himself. Right? Which means, in spite of how sinful he is, in spite of what a racist he is, in spite of all the stuff God has done for Jonah, in spite of the fact that Jonah just continues to go on, in a sense, accusing God, angry at God...what is God doing? He's still totally committed to Jonah. He's still working with Jonah. He hasn't given up on Jonah.

And what we have right in this little question, both the content and the form; you've got a man who is ridiculously - comically almost - deeply *flawed*, and yet completely and absolutely unconditionally *loved*. That's the gospel identity. The reason Jonah has lapsed into violence is he has forgotten his gospel identity. He *had* it at the end of the prayer in the fish, but he slipped out of it. And that's the problem for all of us.

The fact is a person who is a moralist, who says, "I'm a good person, I'm better than others; that's the reason God loves me," is *incapable* of forgiving. Because you *have* to feel better than other people. But you see, unless you feel so *humbled* by God's grace you don't ever have the right to be angry, and yet so *affirmed* by God's grace you don't have the need to be angry... Because isn't one of the biggest reasons for anger the frustration of having something taken from us? You ever been robbed? Like burglarized? There's a real anger isn't there? "They *took* something from me!" Well, the same thing can happen when they "take" reputation from us, we've lost face. Something was taken from us.

But if you say, "God loves me. He has me. I'm a complete beauty..." If you have enough emotional wealth that you don't *need* to be furiously, violently angry, and if you have enough emotional humility so you really don't have the *right* to be violently angry, then you have an identity that sucks away and reduces the anger so it becomes something that's proportionate. So how do we get the emotional wealth and the emotional humility? How do you really do it? Okay, two quick things...

First, *look at Jesus*. Look at what he has done for you until it melts the anger down. It doesn't completely get rid of it, but when I look at Jesus, it melts the anger down. "When I see what he has done for me, how can I be so angry at other people who have wronged me when he has done all this for me and I've wronged him?" I mean, contrast Jonah and Jesus.

That place in chapter four when Jonah goes outside of the city that could have killed him and didn't – responded to his message even - and he's just angry with it. What a contrast with Jesus Christ in **Luke 19:41-42** as he comes for the final time to the city that *will* kill him, "*As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes."*" He's weeping over the city that's going to kill him.

Because the ultimate solution for violence is Jesus Christ on the cross, because there he took violence without paying back. He *absorbed* it. He paid the penalty for all of our violence, so when I know what he has done for me, that melts my heart out of the natural thing I would have either as a pagan or a moralist that would make me violent. The violence inherent in the system. Jesus Christ overcame violence by paying it himself.

So you look at Jesus until he melts your heart. But then secondly, you have to *do what Jesus did*. Are you a Christian? Are you a "little Christ"? That's what the word literally means. Then we have to emulate him. I want to read you something I came across this week that really captures it, I think. It's what forgiveness looks like in the real world. We'll close with this.

This guy put it this way: "Once upon a time I was engaged to a young lady who changed her mind. I forgave her, but it took me a whole year, and I had to forgive her in small sums over that whole 12 months. I paid these sums whenever I spoke to her and kept myself from rehashing the past, I paid them whenever I saw her with another man and refused self-pity and rehearsal inside for what she'd done to me, and I paid them whenever I praised her to others when I really wanted to slice away at her reputation. Those were the payments, but she never knew them. However, I never knew her payments, but I know she made them. I could tell. Forgiveness is not only a refusal to hate someone; it's choosing to love and will the good of the offender. It is painful, but wood, nails, and pain are the currency of forgiveness. It is as the ultimate wood and nails were. It leads to healing and, more, to resurrection."

Do you see what he says there? If somebody knocks over and smashes your \$50 lamp, and you say, “I forgive you,” what does that mean? It means *you* pay for it. When you forgive, you absorb the cost. But what if you can’t absorb the cost – what if it’s a lot more than a broken lamp? What if it’s a broken heart? You have to shrink the cost down by looking at what Jesus has done for you.

But there’s always still a debt. You always say, “But that person wronged me.” What do you do with the debt? You pay it yourself in little sums by refraining from thinking about it all the time and putting little pins in the person in your mind, by refraining from confronting the person in a mean way when you see him or her, refraining from slandering the person to other folks. That is eating the debt yourself. It is painful, but wood, nails, and pain are the currency of forgiveness.

You say, “Oh my, this is going to be hard.” Sure. Look at Jonah. Look at how many times God had to deal with Jonah. Look at how many times he slipped out of his gospel identity into the vengeance one. God’s still working with him. I mean, we joked about it, but do you realize how terrible Jonah’s gospel presentation is?

What is his message? “Forty days, and Nineveh will be destroyed. Period. Oh, I just sort of left out that part about repentance and forgiveness. You know, we were out of time, and I didn’t quite get to it.” Listen, I’ve preached my share of bad sermons, but that’s the worst gospel presentation in history...and God used it.

And if God can use that...He can use you with your very imperfect efforts at forgiving people. You’re constantly slipping out of your gospel identity and getting too angry. But God can still use you as a bridge builder. God can use you as an agent of reconciliation instead of violence and hostility. Absolutely. He used Jonah; He can use you. Don’t worry about it. Give yourself some time. But...stick with it. Not just for your own sake. Not just for the sake of the world. But *for Christ’s sake*...stick with it!

Let us pray...