

THE BOOK *of* JONAH

Good Shepherd

Sermon-Based Study Guide

Jonah 1-4, Luke 15:11-32 | May 31, 2026

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I. Introduction to this Study

Jonah ends outside the city, angry that God showed mercy to Nineveh. Luke 15 ends outside the feast, with the older brother angry that the father welcomed his lost son home.

Both stories show us that there is more than one way to run from God. Some run through obvious rebellion, like Jonah fleeing to Tarshish or the younger son leaving home. Others stay close to religious obedience but remain far from God's heart, like Jonah after Nineveh repents or the older brother outside the party.

As we move from Jonah into the parables of Jesus, this study invites us to ask: Do we want God Himself, or only the things we hope God will give us?

II. Connecting with One Another

When you were growing up, were you more likely to be the rule-follower, the rule-breaker, or somewhere in between?

III. Study the Text

Read Jonah 1:1–3 and Luke 15:11–16

- What do Jonah and the younger son each do when they are confronted with the father's will?
- In what ways are they both trying to control their own lives?
- The younger son wants the father's inheritance without the father himself. How does Jonah show a similar desire to receive God's calling or identity without submitting to God's heart?
- What are some ways people today might want the gifts of God without wanting God Himself?
- Jonah goes "down" repeatedly in the story: down to Joppa, down into the ship, down into sleep, down into the sea, and down into the fish. What does this physical descent reveal about his spiritual condition?
- The younger son also descends into ruin, eventually ending up among the pigs. What do these two stories show us about where rebellion leads?
- Why do you think sin often feels like freedom at first, but eventually becomes a kind of slavery?

Read Jonah 2:1–10 and Luke 15:17–24

- What brings Jonah and the younger son to the end of themselves?



- What do their prayers or confessions reveal about their need for mercy?
- The younger son plans to return as a hired servant, hoping to earn his way back. Why is it significant that the father interrupts that plan and restores him as a son?
- Jonah says, "Salvation belongs to the Lord." How does that connect with the father's response to the younger son?
- Why do we often feel more comfortable trying to earn our way back to God than simply receiving grace?
- What is humbling about being restored by mercy instead of merit?

Read Jonah 3:10–4:4 and Luke 15:25–32

- What makes the older brother angry when the younger son comes home?
- How are Jonah and the older brother similar?
- Why is it possible to obey God outwardly and still resist Him inwardly?
- Why is the older brother's kind of lostness harder to recognize?
- How can obedience become a way of trying to control God?
- Where do you see Jonah acting like the older brother?

Read Jonah 4:5–11 and Luke 15:28–32

- Where is Jonah at the end of the book? Where is the older brother at the end of the parable?
- What does God do for Jonah? What does the father do for the older brother?
- Why do you think both stories end without telling us how the angry person responds?

IV. Reflect and Respond

- Do you tend to relate more to the younger son, who runs from God through obvious rebellion, or the older son, who stays close but becomes resentful? Why?
- Have you ever obeyed God but felt angry about what obedience cost you? What did that reveal?
- What would it look like this week to "come into the feast" and rejoice in the mercy of God, even when that mercy reaches people you would not have chosen?

V. Prayer

Spend time in prayer together:

- Thank God for His mercy toward people who run from Him.
- Confess the ways we try to control God through rebellion or religious performance.
- Ask God to reveal any resentment, superiority, or anger that keeps us outside the joy of His mercy.
- Pray for a heart that rejoices when lost people come home.
- Ask Jesus to make us more like Him: willing to seek the lost, welcome sinners, and share the Father's joy.

