

# The Book of Jonah

## Session 5: Jonah 4:1–9

### SESSION GOALS

Every session has a point—what each participant should walk away from the discussion knowing, feeling, and doing.

**Main Idea:** As recipients of God’s mercy, we can eagerly sacrifice our comforts to share his mercy with others.

**Head Change:** To know that God’s mercy is for everyone, not just for us.

**Heart Change:** To feel convicted when we choose comfort over concern for others.

**Life Change:** To let go of the comforts that keep us from engaging people with God’s Word.

### OPEN

**Describe a time when you did something wrong as a kid and experienced consequences for it. Did you receive the punishment you deserved? What did that feel like? How do you think it would have felt if you hadn’t been punished accordingly?**

When we’ve erred in some way, whether intentionally or not, mercy is often the last thing we expect to receive. But when mercy is extended, it can leave a lasting imprint. However, sometimes we’re more prone to receive mercy than we are to give it. And that’s what we see in Jonah 4.

In this session, as we learn more about Jonah’s motives, David will help us see how much like Jonah we really are. Like Jonah, we welcome God’s mercy in our lives. But we often find the task of sharing God’s mercy a bit too uncomfortable and inconvenient. David will encourage us to extend the same mercy to others that we’ve received from God.

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**READ**

Read Jonah 4:1–9.

**WATCH**

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in David Platt’s teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions.

**Why did Jonah not want to go to Nineveh?**

**What question does God ask Jonah twice in this passage?**

**To expose Jonah’s heart, what comfort did God take away from Jonah?**

Show Session 5: *Jonah 4:1–9* (11 minutes).

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**DISCUSS**

So far in the book of Jonah, we've seen God addressing Jonah and Jonah praying to God from the belly of a fish. But in chapter 4, we see dialogue between God and Jonah for the first time. And their conversation helps us to see what's going on in Jonah's heart.

*Note: For a reading exercise covering the book of Jonah, see **Go Deeper Section 1** at the end of this study.*

Read Jonah 4:1–4.

After God relented from the disaster he had threatened Nineveh with (Jonah 3:10), Jonah was furious. He was displeased with God and the grace he'd shown the Ninevites. **Has there ever been a time when you were displeased with God? Or, even mad at him? Why were you upset? How did you behave toward God during that time? How did God respond to you?**

David said that Jonah's outburst is even more shocking in the original language. It's not just that he was displeased and furious, he viewed God's dealing with Nineveh as evil. **Why do you think Jonah would call God's actions evil? How would you expect God to respond to Jonah's contempt?**

In verses 2–3, Jonah prays. He tells God why he fled to Tarshish—because he knew that God is “gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in faithful love, and one who relents from sending disaster.” Clearly, these are all good character traits. But Jonah isn't keen on the idea that God would act in Nineveh's favor. **What does Jonah's prayer communicate about his contempt for Nineveh? Have you ever felt contempt for someone? How did your contempt manifest itself?**

Looking at Jonah's prayer, it's important to note that his theology (his thoughts and words about God) was spot-on. He articulated God's character accurately: God is gracious and compassionate, he is slow to anger and abounding in faithful love, and he does relent from sending disaster. The problem was not Jonah's theology, it was his application of his theology. **What can go wrong when we misapply good theology? Have you ever applied your theology in an inappropriate or misguided**

Horizontal lines for writing.



Jonah didn't answer God's question. Instead, he left Nineveh, headed east, and built himself a shelter overlooking the city so he could have a front-row seat to watch Nineveh's destruction. He was eager for the city's downfall. In this instance, Jonah was guilty of the sin of gloating by hoping for the Ninevites' misfortune with pleasure. **What does Jonah's gloating reveal about the state of his heart? Is gloating something that you have ever struggled with? If so, how so?**

***Note:** For a deeper look at the sin of gloating, see **Go Deeper Section 3** at the end of this study.*

In verse 6, "God appointed a plant" to grow up and provide shade for him "to rescue him from his trouble." God gave Jonah comfort, and Jonah was happy. Comforts aren't bad things, of course, but we can become inordinately reliant on them, as Jonah did. **Which of your comforts are you most addicted to? Do they ever keep you from obeying God? How do you think you'd respond if those comforts were removed?**

In the very next verse, God took Jonah's newfound comfort away. He also sent a "scorching east wind" and a beating sun that withered Jonah's strength. And once again Jonah cried out, "It's better for me to die than to live" (v. 8). For good reason or not, Jonah is in the pit of despair. **What's your reaction to Jonah's behavior here? Do you see any of yourself in him? If so, how so?**

As David pointed out, God didn't give up on Jonah. He invited Jonah to see the foolishness of his heart by repeating in verse 9 the question he asked in verse 4: "Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?" And Jonah answered, "Yes!" Jonah believed it was more important for him to be comfortable than for Nineveh to be saved. Jonah's self-centeredness is on full display. **In what ways is being attached to our comforts self-centered? What can we do to overcome any self-centeredness in ourselves?**

While the book of Jonah doesn't end there, David halted his teaching at this point in the story so we could stop and consider how we sometimes look a lot like Jonah. We are often more than happy to receive God's mercy ourselves yet resistant to share it with others. **What similarities do you see between yourself and Jonah? In what ways have you viewed people the way Jonah did in this passage?**





**Bible offers? Is this a habit you can see yourself doing from time to time? Why, or why not?**

2. *Good theology requires love.*

Everyone is a theologian. From the most insolent atheist to the most faithful Christian, and everyone in between, we all have reasoned thoughts and words about God—that’s theology! However, the fact that we’re all theologians doesn’t mean we’re all good theologians.

**Have you ever thought of yourself as a theologian? In your mind, what do you think makes a good theologian? What are the criteria?**

Like us, Jonah was a theologian. And in some ways, he was a good one—he said true things about God. But his theology lacked a critical component, which led him woefully astray in applying his theology. Read Jonah 3:10–4:2.

**What did Jonah say about God that was true? Where does Jonah’s theology start to go wrong? What would you say is lacking in Jonah’s theology?**

On paper, Jonah’s theology was sound. Yet, his theology lacked one thing—and that one thing spoiled all of it. If we skip forward to the New Testament book of 1 Corinthians, the apostle Paul shows us what can undermine our theology: a lack of love. Read 1 Corinthians 13:1–3.

Without love, our words from and about God—our theology—and our good works for God—the application of our theology—are useless and worthless. And maybe even counterproductive. **How does a lack of love bear false witness about God? To what degree can a loveless theology lead others away from God and not to him?**

Good Christian theology is anchored in the love of God and love of neighbor (Matthew 22:34–40), and it is consistent with Paul’s description of love in the book of 1 Corinthians. Read 1 Corinthians 13:4–8.

Theology that is inconsistent with what we read in this passage is sub-Christian, lacking, and incomplete. And while none of us embodies this list perfectly, we should all strive to exercise and apply our theology according to its criteria. **What might a theology that is patient, kind,**

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**humble, etc. practically look like? How do you think this kind of theology would be received by others?**

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**What could you do to ensure your theology, and the application of your theology, are thoroughly anchored in love?**

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3. *Gloating: A Proverb and a Prayer*

After Jonah expressed his frustration with God, he abandoned his mission and set up camp on a piece of land in view of Nineveh. Seething, he sat waiting and watching for the city’s destruction. He was contemplating their misfortune “with malignant pleasure”—he was gloating.

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Jonah’s gloating didn’t come in response to Nineveh’s fall but in hopes of it. He was hoping the city would stumble in its repentance so he could rejoice over its fall. **For what reasons is Jonah’s heart toward Nineveh problematic?**

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Gloating might not be a word we hear too often, but it’s an issue that’s as prevalent now as it’s ever been. And the Bible has something to say about it. Read Proverbs 24:17–18.

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A heart that gloats is a heart that enjoys seeing an enemy’s downfall. But this passage shows that God often uses a person’s gloating to keep destruction from happening. Rather than watching their enemies fall, gloaters see God may turn his wrath away from their enemies. **For what reasons does gloating displease God? How does God show his disapproval of our gloating?**

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Gloating is a sin. That is clear. And while we can recognize it as a sin, and try with all our might to avoid it, we may still struggle to overcome it. **In what ways are you prone to gloat? How can we work to overcome the sin of gloating?**

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If you struggle with the sin of gloating, consider praying this prayer inspired by Proverbs 24:17–18.

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Father,

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rightnowmedia  
Forgive me for the gloating that resides in my heart,  
And the times when I fail to resist it.

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Give me strength, that I might not gloat when my enemies  
fall,  
Nor rejoice when they stumble.  
For I was once your enemy, yet you turned your wrath  
away from me.  
Turn your wrath away from them, too,  
Because of the mercy offered to them in Christ.  
Empower me by your Spirit to seek their good,  
And to rejoice when you take pleasure in showing them  
mercy.  
Give me grace when I stumble, oh God.

Amen.