

Week 13

Bible Passage

Luke 13:1–9, 31–35 (Lent 2)



Time Runs Out

Desired Outcomes

1. To study Jesus' teaching about the necessity of repentance and God's patience, and learn about his sorrow over an unrepentant Jerusalem.
2. To consider our own need for repentance and God's deep desire that we come to God.
3. To respond positively to God's invitation and encourage others to do the same.

Session Key Verse

"If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down." —Luke 13:9

Sneak Peek

Jesus encouraged people to repent rather than perish, taught about God's patience, and lamented those who resist his call.

Optional Material

- A fig "expert," or pertinent research beforehand
- Some figs to share
- A cell phone, computer, or tablet with Internet access
- *For free digital resources to enhance this lesson, go to <https://www.warnerpress.org/life-mosaic-resources>.*

1 *Get Acquainted*



Last week, you talked about neighbors and whom Jesus meant when he said to love our neighbors as ourselves. Talk about how this discussion came into play in your own life during the past week. Maybe you saw a story on social media or in the news describing someone as a “good Samaritan.” Maybe someone was a good neighbor to you, or you had the opportunity to show grace, mercy, and love to someone else.

If you made a commitment last week to take a particular action to love a neighbor as yourself, tell the rest of the group about it. **How did it go? How did it feel? How did the other person respond? Is this something you would do again? Why or why not? If it went poorly, were you discouraged or did it inspire you to keep trying?** Within your group, encourage one another to be persistent in your actions as good neighbors.

Treating others with grace, mercy, and love is a part of what it means to be a neighbor. Today, you will talk about Jesus’ desire that both we and our neighbors find life through him and live in relationship with him.

2 *Discover*



Read and discuss [Luke 13:1–9 and 31–35](#). The commentary sections can be used to generate dialogue, or for study prior to your meeting.

Luke 13:1–5

Commentary

Jesus seized on two calamities that may have been subjects of recent conversation around the local watering hole—an instance of state-sanctioned terror and a random accident. Both saw people snuffed out with little warning and for no clearly apparent reason. Both kinds of events lead us to realize how precarious our existence is. Jesus implied that the victims did nothing wrong, nothing that caused their demise. Life is volatile.

Jesus implied that we must not equate tragedy with divine punishment. Sin does not make atrocities come; they just come. Life's fragility gives it urgency. Those who have survived the hazards of the universe and human society should not mistake their good experiences as evidence of God's special blessing.

When Jesus said, twice, "unless you repent, you will all perish" as the others did, he did not promise that the godless will be struck by an asteroid. He referred to death in an eschatological sense, a destruction of one's soul. He emphasized the suddenness with which this death comes. Just as Pilate's and the tower's victims did not enjoy the luxury of choosing the time of their demise, likewise the unrepentant will suddenly find they have delayed too long and lost themselves.¹

Questions

- **Is sin the cause of all suffering? Is it the cause of some suffering?** Explain.
- **Is there a difference between the role of sin and suffering for individuals and for nations?** Explain.
- **What does it mean to repent?**

Luke 13:6–9

Commentary

This parable reinforces ideas from the first part of the passage. A cultivated yet unproductive tree may continue to live even without bearing fruit, only because it has been granted additional time to do what it is supposed to do. Unless it begins to bear fruit (an image of repentance, according to Luke 3:8), the result will be its just and swift destruction. The parable warns against false reassurance. Just because you have not been cut down, do not presume that you are bearing fruit.



1. Adapted from "Commentary on Luke 13:1–9," accessed August 9, 2016, https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=530.

Patience and mercy temporarily keep judgment at bay. The role of the gardener offers a crucial characterization of this patience and mercy. The tree has not been left to its own devices; everything possible is being done to get it to act as it should. Correspondingly, God does not leave people to their own resources but encourages their repentance.²

Questions

- **Why did it matter that there was no fruit on this tree? How was it “wasting soil”?**
- **Why do you think the gardener appealed for one more year?**
- **How does the story relate to the “repent or perish” message from verses 1–5? Whom might we be in this parable?**

Luke 13:31–35

Commentary



Whatever the purposes of the Pharisees and Herod here, Jesus used the threat to make clear the nature of his upcoming death as a part of his mission. Jesus was going to die, but it would have nothing to do with the threat of Herod. Jesus’ death was in continuity with the rest of his ministry. “Today,” “tomorrow,” and “the third day” were all about establishing the kingdom of God.

This passage calls us to experience Jesus’ cross by considering whether our lives lead appropriately to that cross. Can we make sense of our lives as a part of the establishment of God’s kingdom in our world? Or are we frightened from our mission by the threats of earthly rulers? How have we resisted God’s messages and kingdom? On the other hand, how have we recognized God’s messages and kingdom, and how can we continue to do so?³

2. Ibid.

3. Adapted from “Commentary on Luke 13:31–35,” accessed August 9, 2016, https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1575.

Questions

- This passage is sometimes titled “The Lament over Jerusalem.” **What is a “lament”?**
- **Why would these Pharisees warn Jesus about Herod’s intentions? Why didn’t Jesus flee in the face of this danger?**
- Jesus said that “on the third day” he would finish his work (v 32). **What do you notice about this phrase that Jesus’ original listeners might not have noticed?**
- **Did Jesus literally mean that “it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem” (v 33)? If not, what did he mean?**
- Jesus compared himself to a hen. **What picture comes to your mind when you read this description? What was Jesus trying to convey?**

3 Experience



Option 1

If possible, invite a gardener or farmer to speak to your group. **What techniques and products are used to help plants grow and bear fruit? What risks must be accounted for in the process of helping plants grow? Is there a difference in growing flowers and growing food? What insight does this information lend to your understanding of the Parable of the Barren Fig Tree?** If such a guest is not available, do some Internet research beforehand on gardening, focused on the questions above.

Regardless of how your information is obtained and shared, you might bring some figs for group members to share and sample.

Option 2

Have someone in the group Google the word *lament* on a cell phone, computer, or tablet. Discuss what you learn about the term. Have someone else look up “lament in the Bible.” Find some other scriptural examples of laments. **What do they have in common? How do they compare to Jesus’ lament here?**

Have someone in the group read Luke 11:34–35 aloud, in dramatic fashion as Jesus might have spoken it. **How does a “lament” sound? What emotions would Jesus have been expressing here? What specifically was Jesus lamenting?**

4 Apply



Record your responses to the following questions, then share them with a partner or with the entire group as you are willing:

- **Do you like figs? Have you ever tasted one?**

- **What sort of “fig tree” are you in this season of your life? Are you bearing fruit, with roots deep in the good soil God has provided? Or are you using the soil without much to show for it? What would “bearing fruit” look like for you?**



- **Can you think of a time in your life when you were like an abundant fig tree, heavy with fresh figs? Describe it. Can you think of a time when you were bare, like the tree in this parable? Describe it. What made the difference between the barren time and the fruitful time?**

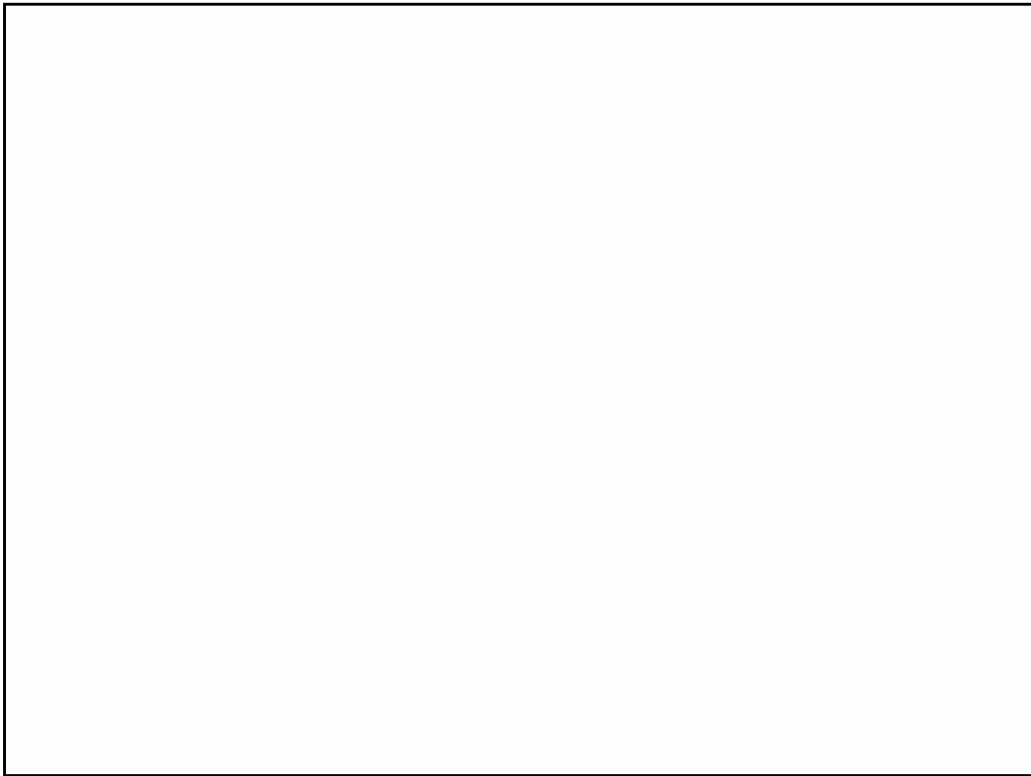
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- **How has God shown patience with you in the past? How has God invested in you to bring about an abundant harvest in your life? What sort of spiritual harvest do you anticipate in your life a year from now?**
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5 Conclude



God loves us, and God is patient. God gives us time and opportunity for repentance, but there is a limit. In the bigger picture, mercy triumphs over judgment. God's patience is a powerful expression of God's love and grace. But we should not misunderstand that grace as casual indulgence or indifference.

Spend some time in quiet prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to show you what your life would look like as a fig tree in the center of God's vineyard. Take a few moments to sketch out the tree you see in your mind. It doesn't have to be a fig tree specifically—just any sort of tree with fruit. **How full is your tree? How tall? What does the fruit look like—healthy and fresh or brown and withered?** Write some words around your tree, your thoughts and feelings about what you see—gratitude, remorse, joy, sadness, or something else. **What could be added to the tree of your life that would help you be fruitful?** Write those things around the base of your tree like the fertilizer of the parable:



You might consider cutting out this picture and tucking it in your Bible for future contemplation.

Daily Bible Readings Week 13	<i>Sunday</i> Luke 13:1–9, 31–35 <i>Time Runs Out</i>	<i>Monday</i> Luke 13:10–17 <i>Jesus Heals a Woman</i>	<i>Tuesday</i> Luke 13:18–30 <i>Kingdom Parables</i>
	<i>Wednesday</i> Luke 14:1–6 <i>Jesus Heals a Man</i>	<i>Thursday</i> Luke 14:7–14 <i>A Wedding Banquet</i>	<i>Friday</i> Luke 14:15–24 <i>A Great Dinner</i>
			<i>Saturday</i> Luke 14:25–35 <i>The Cost of Discipleship</i>