

**Isa. 55:1–9**

**Ps. 63:1–8**

**1 Cor. 10:1–13**

**Luke 13:1–9**

## Being Fruitful

### Goal for the Session

*In the parable of the fig tree, adults will examine the nature of God’s mercy and seek ways to be more fruitful disciples.*

## ■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

### Focus on Luke 13:1–9

#### WHAT is important to know?

— From “Exegetical Perspective,” Leslie J. Hoppe

Three years should have been enough time for the fig tree to be productive. The logical course of action is to uproot the unproductive tree. But Jesus has the person responsible for the vineyard doing something that simply does not make sense under the circumstances, but the extravagant nature of God’s mercy is an important motif in Luke’s Gospel (e.g., 15:1–32). Still, people need to respond to God’s mercy (13:8–9). The fig tree may be given another year to demonstrate its ability to produce fruit, but if it fails to do so, it will be cut down.

#### WHERE is God in these words?

— From “Theological Perspective,” Daniel G. Deffenbaugh

The gardener pleads with the owner to grant the tree one more year of life. The owner agrees and grants the reprieve. This aspect of the story lends symbolic credence to Jesus’ emphasis on the urgency of the times, but not to be overlooked is the primary theological insight that God’s judgment is tempered by divine mercy. This is especially poignant as we look ahead toward Jerusalem, where we will be confronted with the ultimate paradox of the cross on Golgotha. Jesus’ intent in telling this story is to bring home the reality of the unfathomable nature of God.

#### SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “Pastoral Perspective,” Rodney Clapp

We live in a day when everyone wants to blame everyone else for the ills of the world. Amid the din, Jesus says, “Hold on. Think about a homely old fig tree. One that has not borne much fruit for a long time. The farm owner says, ‘Cut that damned tree down.’ His head gardener says, ‘First, let me aerate the soil around it and throw some manure on the poor thing. After that give the tree one more year, and if it does not produce, chop it to the ground’” (see Luke 13:6–9). So, just when we begin to stir up flattering, heroic images of ourselves in full battle dress, ready to wipe evil off the face of the earth, Jesus knocks us off our moral high horses. He brings us down to earth and back to ourselves, with talk of fertilizer and a scruffy tree. He says, “Ask yourself if you are like that fig tree. Are you bearing fruit or just taking up space?”

#### NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

— From “Homiletical Perspective,” Michael B. Curry

“Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered thus? I tell you, No” (Luke 13:2–3 RSV). Frankly, if God was in the business of meting out judgment and curses in relation to our sins, there probably would not be anyone left on the planet. In this text, Jesus says no to simplistic answers to deep and complex questions, no to attempts to solve deep troubles with quick fixes, and no to shallow theological thinking.

## Bearing More Fruit

*What to know about growing figs:*

- Fig trees require well-drained and fertile soil. The best soil for growing fig trees is loamy soil with plenty of organic matter. Figs also require a lot of moisture.
- Trees should be protected from cold winter winds and direct winter sunlight. Unseasonably warm temperatures can cause trees to grow. If this happens too early in the season, growing fig trees can be damaged by later freezes.
- Fig trees should be fertilized every year. Prune lightly in late winter just before growth begins.
- Harvest figs when they are fully ripe. Figs will stop ripening once they are removed from the tree.

As you explore this parable of the unfruitful fig tree, consider the following:

- In the parable, it is the gardener who pleads the case for the tree and provides the special care. In the allegory, if we are fig trees, who might be the gardener?

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- How do we make ourselves receptive to the special care the gardener can provide?

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- What might correspond to the damage cold weather, wind, or premature budding might cause to the fruit?

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- The fruit of the fig tree stops ripening when it is removed from the tree. From what is the fruit cut off when it is removed from the tree?

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- When you read this parable, what parts of the allegory seem to make sense? About what do you have questions?

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*Figs*