

Lent

CONNECTING FAITH AND LIFE

stories where heaven and earth meet

Adult Small Group/Study Guide
The Fig Tree | Week of February 28

KEY POINT

Suffering is not always caused by our sin, but everyone should repent. Rather than using our energy in playing a “blame game” after a disaster, followers of Jesus can take the opportunity to reconnect themselves with God. Jesus himself will suffer, not because of God’s judgement, but in order to show God’s love.

SCRIPTURE

Luke 13:1-9, 31-35
(Psalm 122)

OPENING PRAYER

Good and gracious God, as we come together to study your Word and have fellowship with one another, turn our hearts toward you and help us to orient our lives toward your kingdom. Without you, this is impossible, but with you all things are possible. We pray in the name of your Son Jesus Christ. Amen.

READ

Luke 13:1-9, 31-35

ABOUT THE STORY

The Jewish people in Jesus’ day faced two stark realities: first, good people suffered for apparently no reason and second, their nation was ruled over and oppressed by the Roman Empire.

In order to make sense of this, it was common for people to believe that suffering was caused by God’s judgment. Likewise, many Jewish people believed that it was time to start a violent revolution against the Romans, in order to free God’s people. When people come to Jesus to tell him about Galileans who had been killed by Pontius Pilate, they were probably wondering what these particular Galileans had done to deserve it. They also were hoping to see what Jesus thought about the Romans and their oppressive actions.

Instead of blaming those who suffer, or calling for a revolution, Jesus says that it is time to repent. The Greek word *metanoia* (“repent”) means to have a change of mind. In Scripture, “to repent” goes beyond this simple definition to mean a total re-orientation in the way a person or a group of people thinks and lives. The Old Testament prophets often call for Israel’s repentance both as individuals and as a nation (Joel 2:12-13 and Hosea 9:10). The “good news” of Jesus is the message that the Messiah must suffer and rise from the dead on the third day and that “repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed...” (Luke 24:47). Jesus teaches with a parable about a fig tree. Israel has been described as a fig tree before (Hosea 9:10) and Jesus warns that if Israel does not bear fruit, it will also be “cut down.” There is still hope in this parable, however, because the gardener wishes to continue tending to it, hoping for fruit.

History sadly confirms Jesus’ stark warning: approximately forty years after his ministry, some Jewish people will indeed revolt against Rome (66-70 CE). The carnage and suffering will be overwhelming as cities are razed and the temple in Jerusalem is destroyed.



Some Pharisees also warn that Herod, the ruler of Galilee, wants to kill Jesus (he has already killed John the Baptist). This warning will not stop Jesus' ministry. He knows the risks and he is already aware of what awaits him in a city that kills prophets and stones those who are sent to it. Like the gardener in the parable, he will not give up on the fig tree.

SHARE

- As a group, discuss moments in your lives when you “came to your senses” and knew that you needed to make a change in some aspect of your life. These situations do not need to be “sinful.” What does it take to get your attention? What did you do to change your life and behavior?
- As in Jesus' time, people today struggle with suffering that seems to occur for no reason. Often disasters are attributed to God's judgment because it is the only way to “make sense” of the situation. Jesus says that disasters are opportunities to repent, or turn back to God. He is prepared to go to Jerusalem and suffer himself, even though he has done nothing to deserve death. Do people in your group have personal examples of “good people” who have faced unexplained suffering? Why do you think this happens?
- What sort of things could be the “manure” in our lives that help us grow?

PRAY

Have a volunteer read the first three verses of Psalm 1, one at a time, with time for responses.

Psalm 1:1—Response: Good and Gracious God help us to turn to you.

Psalm 1:2—Response: Good and Gracious God, help us to turn to you.

Psalm 1:3—Response: Good and Gracious God, help us to turn to you.

As we leave this time and space, O Lord, guide us in a life of repentance as we follow your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

BLESS

Mark one another with the sign of the cross on your hand and say, “God be with you this week. Amen.”

FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION AT HOME:

- Find the “St. Francis Prayer” in an online search. This prayer begins “Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace...” Carry this prayer with you throughout the week as you orient your life around God.
- Choose one action or habit that distracts your walk with Christ and deliberately “repent” from it in the coming week (gossiping, complaining, etc.).