

# BIBLE TEACHING AND WORSHIP GUIDE



## FOR THE HOME-BASED CHURCH

Produced Weekly

*The Unfruitful Fig Tree:  
Recognizing the Need to Repent*  
Luke 13:1-9

Copy this sheet for the Gathering Time, Bible Study, and Worship Experience leaders for the next meeting of the church.

## Leaders' Responsibilities:

**Important:** Each person who will be leading one of the three parts of a session during a Unit of sessions needs to have access to the "Basic Information for Leading the Unit of Study". That information is often provided at the beginning of that Unit of sessions. The weekly session "Background" located in the Teacher Preparation is much more specific to that day's study.

1. **The Gathering Time Leader** will gather all of the people together and help them prepare their minds and hearts for a wonderful worship experience before God. His/her responsibility is to introduce the congregation to the theme (content) and the Scripture that will be central to their worship experience for the day.
2. **The Bible Study Leader** will then help the people understand what the Scriptures have to say and teach us about the content of the study for the day. He/she will guide the people to make a general application of the study (ie: How does this Bible study apply to people today?)
3. **The Worship Time Leader** has the responsibility to use the theme and Scriptures to guide the congregation to make personal commitments to God's will for each one in regard to the study for the day. He/she will use others to lead in the music, taking the offering, ministry moment comments, and other activities and parts of the **Worship Time** that can aid in participatory worship.

## Prior to this Coming Session:

### **Gathering Time Leader:**

Prepare an interest center using figs or pictures of figs, gardening tools and pictures or magazines.

### **Bible Study Leader:**

### **Worship Time Leader:**

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*The Unfruitful Fig Tree: Recognizing the Need to Repent – 10-29-05-en*

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Ask three people of differing ages to read the three Scriptures which are given at the end of the Sharing Time. Give the material to them ahead of time and ask them to read with emphasis and meaning. Make the copies from the final page of this session.

### **Music Sources:**

**Grace Alone**, *The Worship Hymnal*, #112; CCLI #2335524

**I Have Decided to Follow Jesus**, *The Worship Hymnal*, #434; CCLI #5077724 or 2151540

**Just As I Am**, *The Worship Hymnal*, #435; CCLI # 23206 Public Domain

# 1

Copy this section for the Gathering Time leader.

**Gathering Time:** (Suggested time: 15 minutes)

## ***The Unfruitful Fig Tree: Recognizing the Need to Repent***

### **Focal Text**

Luke 13:1-9

### **Background Text**

Luke 13:1-9

### **Main Idea**

Jesus calls people to accept God's gracious offer of repentance while they still have the opportunity.

### **Question to Explore**

In the light of God's grace, do we really need to repent?

### **Teaching Aim**

To lead adults to relate to God's grace and God's demand for repentance in their lives.

### **First thoughts:**

Sing **Grace Alone**.

Make a focal interest center using a bowl of figs, pictures of figs and fig trees, gardening supplies or magazines.

Today we will examine an interesting story in Luke 13 called *The Unfruitful Fig Tree*. Although figs are not an ordinary part of the North American diet, they are staples in the Mediterranean and Mid Eastern diet. Certainly, in Biblical times, this easy to transport, healthy food was familiar to everyone. Jesus used a well-known part of every day life to teach an important Biblical truth. Does that truth have meaning for us today?

### **Closing the Gathering Time:**

Take time at this point to mention items of prayer concern for the church, announcements of ministry or activities, and anything else that needs to be shared with or by the congregation. Pray for these needs. Remember to praise God in prayer.

Break time! Take five minutes between sessions. Encourage children to use the washroom so that they won't need to leave during the Bible Study time.

Distribute youth/adult Bible study outlines or paper for note-taking, if available.

Also hand out the activity sheets for preschool and younger children to use during Bible Study and/or worship.

# 2

Copy this section for the Bible Study leader.

**Note to the Bible Study Leader:** Suggested teaching time for the Bible study should be about 35 minutes. Use the “Teacher Preparation” for your personal study during the week before the session. Use the “Bible Study Plan” for the actual session.

## Teacher Preparation

### *The Unfruitful Fig Tree: Recognizing the Need to Repent*

#### **Focal Text**

Luke 13:1-9

#### **Background Text**

Luke 13:1-9

#### **Main Idea**

Jesus calls people to accept God’s gracious offer of repentance while they still have the opportunity.

#### **Question to Explore**

In the light of God’s grace, do we really need to repent?

#### **Teaching Aim**

To lead adults to relate to God’s grace and God’s demand for repentance in their lives.

#### **Introduction to your personal study:**

I have tried for a few years to plant shrubs in a certain part of my garden every time without success. They may last through the spring and summer but when winter comes they die. The result is that I have no choice but to take them out and throw them away. I also have a lilac bush, which in the early spring this year looked dead but I decided to leave it a while longer and give it more time. I dug around it and loosened up the hard soil and put some compost around it. Now I find the tree is flourishing. When we plant something we do so expecting it to grow. As we look at the parable of the fruitless fig tree we will see that the gardener was concerned about this tree.

## Background:

Please ask for and read the information contained in the “**Basic Information for Leading the Unit of Study**”, found at the beginning of this Unit. Whoever downloaded this session for you should have that material for you, as well.

In the previous lesson we were encouraged to be responsible and to realise that there is more to life than hoarding our possessions. We should be storing up treasure in heaven. We also considered that we do not need to worry about what we eat or wear – that God will take care of all these things. Now Jesus moves on to talk about the need to be ready. (Luke 12:35-40) “**Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning.**” We are going to see the need to get right with God. Jesus talks about the servants being ready at all times for the return of the master. They had no idea when that would be. “**You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him**” (verse 40).

## Focusing on the Meaning:

Luke 13:1. Jesus had previously been talking about being able to interpret the weather. We can look at the sky and determine whether or not it will rain and yet he says in verse 56 of chapter 12 “**How is it that you don’t know how to interpret this present time?**” Bookstores and websites abound with information about how to interpret “this present time”. Churches strive to understand modern events and trends in order to be able to be relevant. Just as in Jesus’ time, this is a difficult task.

In Luke 12: 57-50, Jesus goes on to instruct the people not to judge each other lest they be judged. This is a current admonition. We are constantly judging others. Indeed, we must make judgements in order to avoid being caught up in unwise schemes or doctrinally unsound practices. In this passage Jesus refers to a critical spirit of judgment, not to the discernment which we must constantly practice. It is this critical, judgmental spirit that is addressed in Chapter 13.

We find in Chapter 13:1 that some who were present just had to tell Jesus about a horrific injustice that had been done to some Galileans. Jewish belief was that bad things happen to those who have sinned and if it were really bad then it must have been great sin. Some Galileans had gone up to Jerusalem to sacrifice (Jerusalem being the only place for sacrifice) and in some way had caused serious trouble with Pilate. We should remember that the Jews and Galileans were under Roman rule at this time and were in rebellion over this. This seems to be an insurrection that is not recorded and it would appear that these folk took great pleasure informing Jesus of what they had heard. The words “**whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices**” refers to the animal sacrifice and the fact that they were slain as they worshiped and offered sacrifices. One would think that a safe place would be in the house of God worshipping

him but that wasn't the case. Because the Jews believed that good people succeeded and the wicked did not, they would assume that these Galileans had sinned greatly.

Verse 2 Jesus answers the question with a question as he often did. ***“Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way?”*** Yes, that is what they would have thought, and they wanted this concept justified.

Verse 3 goes on to report that Jesus emphatically says, ***“I tell you, no!”*** He goes on to turn this around and challenge his listeners that unless they repent they also will perish. This judgement which came upon the Galileans would come upon them also if there was not a change of heart. It isn't the degree of sin that leads to separation from God, although some sin does have greater consequences on earth, but the fact that ***“all have sinned”*** Romans 3:23.

Verse 4 Jesus refers to the tower which fell in Siloam and killed 18 people. Were they greater sinners? No. Twice Jesus says the same thing in verse 3 and verse 5 ***“But unless you repent, you too will all perish”***. If we want to emphasize something we say it more than once and this is what Jesus did. Whether we die by the hand of a tyrant or by a tower falling on us or we die peacefully in bed with family around us, unless we have repented we will perish. The fact is that we all deserve to perish.

The Parable of the Unfruitful Fig Tree begins in verse 6. This man had a vineyard in which a fig tree was planted. Fig trees commonly grew by the wayside and so this particular tree had the advantage of better soil and good care. When a person plants a garden or a tree they expect to see the fruit of that planting. They go regularly to see if there is any growth. Jesus says that this is what the owner did but when he went he found no fruit on the tree. Now this man owned the tree and it was his right to gather the fruit of it. Finding none, it was his right to cut it down because it was taking up valuable space in the soil which could be put to better use.

Verse 7 Notice that the owner of the vineyard had been coming for three years to look for fruit which was a long enough trial for the fig tree. He was not in a hurry but was patient, giving the slow growing tree a chance to bear fruit. Giving instructions to the gardener, he tells him to cut down the tree.

Verse 8-9 Here we find a plea from the one who tends the vineyard. ***“Sir,” the man replied, “leave it alone for one more year, and I’ll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.”*** The gardener did not ask that the tree never be cut down but just to be given another chance to dig around it and fertilize and see if it would bear fruit. 2 Peter 3:9 says. ***“The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”***

## Your Goal as the Leader of this Bible Study:



Jesus is here talking to Jews who knew the one true God. They knew the scriptures and were waiting for the coming Messiah. The problem was that they just didn't seem to see. They could tell whether or not it would rain but many of them didn't see who Jesus was. Although Jesus was talking to Jews the message was for Jews and Gentiles alike. **"All have sinned"** Romans 3:23. We are all on level ground when it comes to the matter of repentance and salvation. What we must understand from this scripture is that we need to Get Right with God. God is gracious and merciful and it is not his will that any should perish but that all should repent. People have the impression that they have time but as we look at Luke 12:40 **"...the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."** It is imperative that people understand that repentance is necessary. Jesus died on the cross that we might have eternal life. John 3:16 (KJV) **"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."** God wants to see the fruit of a repentant heart and the work of Christ in the lives of people.

"The main point of the parable, however, is clear; the need for timely repentance. And this point is equally applicable to individuals today as it was for the nation of Israel" (Longenecker, R. N, Ed. *The Challenge of Jesus' Parables*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2000, p. 171).

### **For Personal Reflection:**

**What have I learned from this study?**

**What personal experience does this lesson bring to mind?**

**What is one action I will take this week to apply this Scripture passage to my life?**

## **Bible Study Plan** (Suggested time: 35 minutes)

### ***The Unfruitful Fig Tree: Recognizing the Need to Repent***

Regroup the church after the Gathering Time and break by singing a chorus that young children can relate to—or another praise chorus if your congregation does not have children. Children who go to their own Bible teaching session should stay with the group until after this song. Have the preschoolers and children accompany the hymn with rhythm sticks, maracas, bells, etc.

**Begin by helping the group locate the Focal Text in their Bibles. Also, share with them the Main Idea to be learned from the Scriptures, and the Questions to be Explored by the group.**

#### **Focal Text**

Luke 13:1-9

#### **Background Text**

Luke 13:1-9

#### **Main Idea**

Jesus calls people to accept God's gracious offer of repentance while they still have the opportunity.

#### **Question to Explore**

In the light of God's grace, do we really need to repent?

#### **Teaching Aim**

To lead adults to relate to God's grace and God's demand for repentance in their lives.

#### **Connect with Life:**

People often have the idea that if you live a good life and do the best that you can that you are not a sinner. Sinners are people who do really wicked things.

Have the group discuss this concept of sin and sinners.

**Note to the leader** You may have people in the group who have no Christian background and do not understand what is being said. You may need to explain what

sin is. Sin is falling short of God's standard. The illustration of the arrow which falls short of the target would help in the explanation.

### **Guide the Study:**

Have someone read Luke 12:40 and discuss the need to be ready. Ask what this means.

Request someone else to read Luke 12:57-59 and talk about judging others. This will lead into the lesson.

Now have another person read Luke 13:1-9. You may like to have this read in two different versions.

Have the group discuss the question to explore which is, "in the light of God's grace do we really need to repent"?

Ask what the phrase "to repent" means. They may give different answers such as:

To be sorry and wish we hadn't done something.

To regret.

To change one's mind.

To completely turn around.

Help the group to realise that to repent of sin is necessary.

Tell them: Wishing that we hadn't done something is not enough. Being sorry we got caught is not enough.

Have them see that repentance means to change.

Comment: We must stop doing the sins that we used to do.

In the light of verse 1-4 have the group discuss what was common belief that there are degrees of sin.

Discuss the attitude of those informing Jesus of the insurrection.

Ask: How does that relate to us today? (Pride, "Better than thou" attitude, "I'm not such a sinner as they must have been").

Have someone read Romans 3:23.

Ask why Jesus was strongly opposed to this concept that the Galileans must have been great sinners?

Tell the parable of the unfruitful fig tree.

Discuss the points. a) The owner b) the gardener, and c) the fig tree.

Reflect on the attitudes of the owner and the gardener.

a) The owner was patient.

For three years he came looking for fruit.  
It was his right to expect fruit.  
It was his right to cut down the tree.

b) The gardener was persistent.

He cared about his work and he wanted to see growth.  
He spoke up and asked that he have another chance to work with the tree.

### **Encourage Application:**

If you have two or more youth, this is the time to give them the **Youth!!! Take Ten** page and allow them to move away from the adults and apply the lesson by and for themselves.

Have someone read:

2 Peter 3:9 ***"The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."***

**Note to leader:** If you have people in your group who may not have accepted Christ as their personal Saviour give them the opportunity to speak with someone at the end of your study. Explain that Jesus Christ is coming again and we do not know the day or the time when that will be. When Christ comes again or we die before that, there is no more opportunity to repent. We need to be ready. It is important that we **get right with God.**

Have the group understand that although God is a loving God he demands that we confess that we are sinners and repent of that sin. Have the group read again John 3:16 and emphasize that Christ died on the cross for our sin.

If you have two or more youth, this is the time to give them the **Youth!!! Take Ten** page and allow them to move away from the adults and apply the lesson by and for themselves.

**Take a five minute break to separate the Bible Study and Worship Time.** Children may need to use the washroom again before worship.

# Youth!!! Take Ten

## Bible Study Application for Youth

You may wish to move away from the adults for the final five to ten minutes of the Bible study and help each other as youth to apply the lesson to your own needs.

### ***The Unfruitful Fig Tree: Recognizing the Need to Repent*** Luke 13:1-9

A youth will lead the following activity and comments. No adults need to be present. If possible, teens should take turns in leading the application time.

#### **Cared For or Cut Down?**

Luke 13:1-9 would be an excellent monologue if one of you would choose to prepare it to present during the worship time.

Or, use your computer to research information about the importance of figs in the Mediterranean and Mid-Eastern diet. Answer the questions: "Why would the landowner be concerned about one tree which did not produce fruit? Why wouldn't the landowner leave the tree as a shade tree?" (He might not have had much land. Water was scarce; he would not want to water a tree which did not bear fruit to eat. Irrigation was probably needed for trees and vines to survive.)

If you live in a country where figs are not a part of your diet, buy a small package at the grocery store and give them a try. Or if you are not that brave, try Fig Newton cookies!

**Worship Time** (Suggested time: 30 minutes)***The Unfruitful Fig Tree:  
Recognizing the Need to Repent***  
**Luke 13:1-9****Beginning the Service:**

Sing **I Have Decided to Follow Jesus and Just As I Am**

**Offering:****Praying for the World:**

Laila lies motionless in the sweltering heat of a remote medical clinic poised at the edge of the Sahara Desert. Black flies swarm the young mother's face, feasting on the yellow infection that oozes from her eyes. An IV impales one of her arms; the other drapes limply over her swollen belly.

Six-and-a-half months pregnant, Laila is suffering from a severe case of measles. Though she is likely to recover, the disease is a virtual death sentence for her baby.

A nurse practitioner watches over her and caresses the woman's arm and tries to reassure her mother and husband who wait anxiously by her side. A simple vaccination would have prevented this tragedy, but the nurse knows the situation is now beyond medicine's reach. She closes her eyes and silently asks God for a miracle – and the opportunity to explain why she came to this far away place to help. She prays for the opportunity to tell this family about the love of God.

**Sharing Guide:**

**This sharing guide is written to assist the person who directs the worship time to reemphasize the teaching for the day and help guide the congregation to respond to God's call and will for their lives in regard to the scripture studied. The leader**

may choose to follow the guide closely. Or, he or she may wish to only use it to give direction and a concept for preparing an original message. The leader is free to choose other ways to communicate and share the concepts presented here.

## **Gift of God – A Living Hope** **Ephesians 2:8-10, 1 Peter 1:3**

***“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not of works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”*** Ephesians 2:8-10

***“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”*** 1 Peter 1:3

Developmental psychologists, Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg, studied moral reasoning expressed by children. Young children often felt that the seriousness of a moral failure was determined by the consequences of that action. A child who broke several glasses while trying to help his mother by putting away the dishes had done a more serious transgression than the child who broke one glass in a defiant act. Later, children and adults become more concerned about the intentions behind a wrongdoing. Assessing the wrong involves understanding the motive of the person. Thus, first degree murder is that murder which was deliberately planned.

Young children also feel that the wrong doing has within it the consequence. Parents sometimes reinforce this feeling by saying, “Remember, God is watching everything you do.” The hope that this will keep children from making wrong choices is made less valid by the fact that children learn to believe that if a wrong action has no consequence, it was ok to do it.

In the passage in Luke 13 which we have studied, we hear the people expressing the same kind of moral reasoning that very young children may express. The amount of wrong is measured by the amount of damage done. This is paired with the concept of people getting what they deserved. If something bad happens, it is because sin exists in their life. But nowhere is it more clearly denied than by Jesus in Chapter 13 of Luke. ***“Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. Jesus answered, ‘Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? I tell you, no!’”***

Jesus then went ahead to say, ***“But unless you repent, you too will all perish.”***

When Jesus calls for repentance he is forcing us to face our actions – the actual act of wrongdoing and the motivation behind that act. Repentance then requires us to change



our actions and change our desire to continue in those actions. Jesus always asked for behaviour which went beyond the mere avoidance of punishment or fulfillment of the law. He asked that we change our minds about our sin and see it for the estrangement it causes from God Himself.

For this to happen, there must be an inner change and that change is a gift of God. It is not something that we can bring about by our own good intentions. It is a result of accepting the sacrifice of Jesus by His death on the cross. Then, within us, there exists a living hope.

The parable of the fig tree contains two messages for us. There is the warning to repent now. The fig tree had had sufficient time to bear fruit and the owner was ready to cut it down. The gardener asked for the opportunity to dig around the tree and fertilize it with the promise that if it did not bear fruit in the following year, it should be cut down.

This parable speaks to us about God's patience with us – his desire that all come to repentance. At the same time, we are aware that His patience will not last forever. We may die unexpectedly as did the Galileans or the eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them. Or we may simply come to the end of our life and discover that the choice we were unwilling to make during our life, we can no longer make because of mental incapacity or a hardened heart. In any case, our lives will eventually end. Repentance is for the here and now.

A second teaching of the parable speaks of God's displeasure with any who ignore or waste the resources He provides. All of us need to be fruitful. This truth is seen in the passage in Ephesians 2. ***“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”***

The Ephesians passage clearly explains that our salvation comes to us by faith, not by the good works we do. But it immediately stresses that we are created to do good works. In fact, God prepared good works for us to do in advance, that is, since the beginning of time. The tasks prepared for us will not be done by somebody else.

Jesus always compressed teaching upon teaching in his words to the people. In the short verses of Luke 13:1-9, he emphasizes that unless we repent, we will perish. Then he goes ahead to stress the limited time we may have for repentance and for good works. The owner of the vineyard declares, ***“For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?”***

In only a few sentences Jesus has confronted us with two major life issues – the most important two major life issues. Have you repented of your sin? What will you do with the life which has been given you?

### **Call to Commitment:**

Salvation is a gift of God. It is a living hope we have because of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Living a faithful life of service is our gift to God.

Ask your group to make commitments appropriate for them.

### **Concluding the Service:**

**Have three readers conclude the service with the Scriptures which have been considered in the Sharing Time. Ask them to read with emphasis and meaning. Conclude with the written prayer or a personal prayer.**

#### **Reader 1**

**Jesus answered. "...But unless you repent, you too will all perish."**

#### **Reader 2**

**"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not of works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." Ephesians 2:8-10**

#### **Reader 3**

**Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. 1 Peter 1:3**

### **Prayer of commitment:**

**Lord, we repent of our sin. We ask forgiveness for the things we have done – large and small – which grieve your heart and alienate us from you.**

**We thank you for your grace. We acknowledge that our salvation is a gift of God. We thank you for the living hope which sustains us in the difficulties of life. We ask that we may live lives of service which honor you. Amen**

Copy for those who will conclude the Worship Time.

**Reader 1**

**Jesus answered. "...But unless you repent, you too will all perish."**

**Reader 2**

**"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not of works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."  
Ephesians 2:8-10**

**Reader 3**

**Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. 1 Peter 1:3**

(The Worship Leader will read this.)

***Prayer of commitment:***

**Lord, we repent of our sin. We ask forgiveness for the things we have done – large and small – which grieve your heart and alienate us from you.**

**We thank you for your grace. We acknowledge that our salvation is a gift of God. We thank you for the living hope which sustains us in the difficulties of life. We ask that we may live lives of service which honour you. Amen**