

w e e k 10 : *the one with the manure*

Scripture to Read: Luke 13:6-9

6 And he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. 7 And he said to the vinedresser, 'Look, for three years now I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down. Why should it use up the ground?' 8 And he answered him, 'Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and put on manure. 9 Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'"

Summary of Luke 13:6-9

Jesus teaches that it is because of God's marvelous generosity and patience that the unrepentant have not as yet perished.

Scripture for Memorization and Meditation

"...if it should bear fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down." [Luke 13:9]

Questions for Personal Study and/or Group Discussion

- What connections do you see between the parable in v.6-9 and Jesus' response to the news of the mass murder of the Galileans in v.1-5?
- The Old Testament sometimes likens Israel to a vineyard. Read Psalm 80:8-18, Hosea 10:1-2; Jeremiah 2:20-25; 12:10, Isaiah 5:1-7, and Ezekiel 15:1-8. See also Luke 20:9-19. What issues does the vineyard theme bring out about God's relationship with his covenant people Israel?
- Read John 15:1-11. How is this particular vineyard metaphor markedly different from the uses noted in the previous question?
- The banter between the vineyard-owner and the vinedresser is a direct commentary on Jesus' own ministry, and a further answer as to what's going to happen when gets to Jerusalem. Explain.

- What does the story about the manure tell you about God's patience in spite of the fact that people delay responding to his amazing offer of mercy in Christ? What light does 2 Peter 3:9,15 shed on this question?
- What does this passage say to church members who give no real evidence of the fruit of the faith they profess? Read 1 Peter 1:10-11 as you consider your answer.
- In addition to patience expressed in additional time, the parable shows the patience of devoted care—in other words, manure! Think of the things that God provides for your growth in grace. How does God "loosen the soil" in your life to let the fertilizer do its work?
- What is the difference between relying on God's grace and presuming on God's grace?
- What has God done lately to promote your spiritual growth? What should you do in response to his mercy? Discuss ways in which God is prompting you to bear fruit and how you can follow through.

Notes and thoughts...

Three years: This parable symbolizes Israel's last opportunity to repent before experiencing God's judgment. Three years signifies that Israel has had enough time to repent. The period of grace and opportunity is extended, but only for a limited time. The Greek construction suggests that this last attempt to fertilize will also result in failure. God's graciousness and patience should not be presumed upon.

J.C. Ryle on this passage: "There is a plain warning here to all professing Churches of Christ. If their ministers do not teach sound doctrine, and their members do not live holy lives, they are in imminent peril of destruction....They may abound in ceremonial religion. They may be covered with the leaves of forms, and services, and ordinances. But if they are destitute of the fruits of the Spirit, they are reckoned useless cumberers of the ground. Except they repent, they will be cut down." [*Expository Thoughts on Luke*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1986), 2:114-15.]

Manure? “We have just come across something that offends us, some person who is useless to us or the kingdom of God, “taking up the ground,” and we lose patience and either physically or verbally get rid of him or her. “Chop him down! Chop her down! Chop it down.” We solve kingdom problems by amputation...The Manure Story interrupts our noisy, aggressive problem-solving mission. In a quiet voice the parable says, ‘Hold on, not so fast. Wait a minute. Give me some more time. Let me put some manure on this tree.’ Manure? Manure is no quick fix. It has no immediate results—it is going to take a long time to see if it makes any difference. If it’s results that we are after, chopping down a tree is just the thing: we clear the ground and make it ready for a fresh start...Spreading manure carries none of that exhilaration. It is not dramatic work, not glamorous work, not work that gets anyone’s admiring attention. Manure is a slow solution. Still, when it comes to doing something about what is wrong in the work Jesus is best known for his fondness for the minute, the invisible, the quiet, the slow— yeast, salt, seeds, light. And manure.” [Eugene H. Peterson, *Tell It Slant: A Conversation on the Language of Jesus in His Stories and Prayers* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 69-70]

Tips for Parents with Young Children

The church meeting at your supper table. The following steps are “field-tested” ideas to help direct theological discussions between parents and their children while also building the children’s theological vocabularies so that they are increasingly familiar with biblical concepts. Remember: a brief, God-focused time together is better than a long, task-oriented time in which everyone is miserable.

Step 1. Eat with your entire family regularly.

Step 2. Mom and Dad sit next to one another to lead the family discussion.

Step 3. Open the meal by asking if there is anyone or anything to pray for.

Step 4. Someone opens in prayer and covers any requests. This task should be rotated among family members so that different people take turns learning to pray aloud.

Step 5. Discuss how everyone’s day went.

Step 6. Have a Bible in front of the parents in a translation that is age-appropriate for their reading level. Have someone (parent or child) open the Bible to the assigned text and read it aloud while everyone is eating and listening.

Step 7. A parent then announces the lesson’s “Word of the Day,” reading the corresponding definition and/or paraphrasing the meaning at an age-appropriate level.

Step 8. Use some of the discussion questions if your children are older (i.e., junior high and up) and/or the tips for young children if those are more suitable.

Step 9. Let the conversation happen naturally. Listen carefully. Let your children answer the questions. Fill in whatever they miss; lovingly and gently correct whatever they get wrong.

Step 10. If the Scriptures convict you of sin, repent as you need to your family, and share appropriately honest parts of your life story so the kids can see Jesus’ work in your life and your need for him too. This demonstrates gospel humility.

Step 11. At the end of the meal, ask the children if they have any questions for you.

The discussion questions and tips are offered to help you and your children grow in relationship with each another and with Christ. They are meant to be supportive and not constraining. Therefore, do not feel bound by any questions or pressured to follow the steps too rigidly. Follow the Spirit’s leading and don’t be a religious parent who is rigidly inflexible and who makes this time together drudgery rather than delight.

If you miss a night, or if conversation gets off track, or if your family occasionally just wants to talk about something else, don’t stress—it’s inevitable. For your children, the point is to learn what they are thinking about God, to help them know and love Jesus as God and Savior, and to teach them how to articulate and

explain their Christian faith. For parents, the point is to instruct children and each other, thereby creating a family culture in which every member freely and naturally talks about God and prays to him together. In short, the goal is that your family would open the Bible and grow in love for Jesus, one another, your church, and the world.

Finally, remember that family Bible study requires a sense of humor, so make sure to have some fun, enjoy some laughs, and build some memories.

Monday: Read Luke 13:6-9. Ask your child how he would feel if he had a big apple tree that never made any apples. If necessary, explain the comparison Jesus is making between fruit trees and our lives. If your child is old enough, talk together about how to make trees and plants way from sin.

Tuesday: Read John 15:1-5. Talk about how the relationship we have with Jesus Christ makes us able to glorify God and enjoy him.

Wednesday: Review what your children learned in Wednesday Night Connection. Spend some time together praying for FPC, its leaders, and your friends at church.

Thursday: Read Luke 13:6-9 again. Point out that the vinedresser wanted to dig around the tree and work manure (fertilizer) into the soil to see if the tree would bear fruit. The fertilizer is like the **means of grace** in our lives—those tools for Christian growth that God has given us: the reading and preaching of the Scriptures, prayer, praise, and the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Talk with you child about how each of the means of grace helps us grow as Christians.

Friday: Read Galatians 5:22-24. (If your children are older, read the broader passage, v.16-25.) This is another opportunity to talk about "fruit" as a picture of growing as a Christian.

Saturday: Quiz your children on Catechism questions or Bible memory verses they are learning. Pray that Phillip and Grant would have boldness in preaching the Word of God tomorrow. Also, pray for the Sunday School teachers and for the musicians and choir members who serve us each Sunday.

Sunday: Before you leave for church, explain to your children that their ministry at church is to welcome new children, help their Sunday School teacher, serve others, and worship God in the service. After church, discuss with your children what they learned and what you learned.