



LC STUDY GUIDE
On the Road Series
 The Passage: Luke 13:6-9
 Week 2 (Feb 28-Mar 5)

Intro: Welcome back for the second week of our LC Lenten Study in the "On the Road" series. We will continue to journey through the Gospel of Luke—reading, processing, and gleaning from the parables Jesus told as he made his way to Jerusalem and eventually, to the cross.

Today we want to look at the Parable of the Fig Tree. Here we find two men and a fig tree that refuses to produce figs. One man wants to chop it down and the other wants to save it. As with all parables, we see one thing at first, then more later. Most importantly, we're looking for the many different ways we can find ourselves in the parable.

Luke 13:6-9

6 Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree growing in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it but did not find any. **7** So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, '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?'

8 "'Sir,' the man replied, 'leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. **9** If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.'"

Context: The parable of the fig tree is brief but has a few layers of context. Let's explore some of it together.

One layer is the contextual theme of violence and hostility in the Gospel of Luke. Earlier in Luke (9:51-56), when Jesus and his followers are looking for a place to stay, it's the Samaritans who tell them they are not welcome. James and John ask if they should call down fire from heaven to destroy them. Consistent with this passage, Jesus rebukes them and leads them to another village.

Later (Luke 11:15), Jesus is accused of being on the side of the devil despite his casting out demons, his miracles, and his teachings on love and compassion. The Samaritans had their own understanding of God and religion and Jesus did not fit their rubric.

Then in the verses preceding the fig tree parable (13:1-5), Jesus is told about a tragic story for the death of the eighteen Galileans when the tower of Siloam collapsed on them while they were worshipping. The mention of it being Pilate's responsibility alludes to the tension in

Jerusalem and the possible civic neglect of the governor.

From Jesus' response, we see the tellers of the tragic account are accusing the Galileans of being sinful. Jewish thought assumed that such punishment, though tragic, was a result of their sinfulness. Jesus corrects them in verse 3-5 and tells them this parable.

Jesus' wants us to see that people are consistently yelling, "Cut it down!" "Kill it!" "Let's get rid of this!" "If it dies, it deserved to." There is no patience for the things that take time.

And ultimately, within two weeks of giving this parable, the crowds will be yelling, "Crucify Him!"

It's also important to note where Jesus is standing when he tells this parable. He's in Samaria heading to Jerusalem. Before he gets to the violence waiting for Him, he points back to the history of Samaria. Its land contains a history in which the convenient thing to do was to kill and make another use of the land.

○ – There are two characters in this parable: the vineyard owner and the vineyard manager. From the brief context, how do you perceive their personalities? We can see a bit of ourselves in each person. What traits do you relate to?

○ – What is the fig tree that is not producing figs a metaphor for? There are a few possibilities; list as many as you can.
(Metaphor for faith, metaphor for whatever is obstructing our patience, metaphor for our expectations, metaphor for efficiency, metaphor for Israel which we will see later.)

I – The vineyard manager could have simply obeyed the owner and cut down the tree. After all, it's not his vineyard, it's not his tree. But why is saving the fig tree the point of the parable and what does Jesus want us to learn from it?

"Internationally and historically, killing is the predominant method of choice to make the world a better place. It is the easiest, quickest, and most efficient way by far to clear the ground for someone or something with more promise. 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?"

Tell it Slant, Eugene Peterson (p. 69)

I – Despite its awkwardness in social conversation, we cannot ignore the importance of manure as a fertilizer. What else does manure represent in this parable?
(The discernment that gives life, a substance that most do not want to handle, working manure reminds us of our humility, working with manure demands we must be patient with the results.)

A – We must also see this parable as a call to give and receive grace in light of spiritual death. The fig tree reminds us of the words of Isaiah 5:1-7. The fig tree deserves to perish but there is the call for another year of grace. We can see ourselves in different parts of parable, as the owner, as the manager, and perhaps as the fig tree.

A – Throughout life we learn that we cannot save everything and that there is a time to cut the tree down. How does going to the extreme of attempting to save everything also miss the point of the parable?

A – For the sake of exercise, let's use the fig tree as a metaphor for faith, and the temptation that if my faith does not produce results, I should cut it down and put something else in its place. Jesus wants us to save our faith, so how do we cultivate its health?

Leaders, the discussion might be over by now, but if it feels right perhaps one more question. (If not, close with the central point).

A – Considering all the different metaphors, what are the "fig trees" in your life that might need more patience and grace?

Central Point – Jesus wants our first instinct to be to save rather than kill, to fertilize rather than cut down, to respond with patience rather than violence, to exercise grace whenever possible.

- a. Please note that not all these questions are to be asked in a single meeting. Take some time to prayerfully discern what will serve your LC the best. Select and reword the questions that best fit your voice and your Life Community group.
- b. Complement these questions with "process questions" (what else? what more? what do others think?)
- c. When you ask questions, give people ample time to think and respond. Wait. Take your time; don't rush people but encourage participation. Avoid answering your own questions!
- d. Application: Pace the study to conclude with difference-making application.
- e. Secondary texts—use other texts sparingly, even if they are relevant. Such texts will push you into "teaching" rather than facilitating, causing people to feel distracted or de-powered.