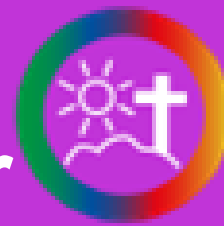




Faith Adventures for Children Together



*Committed to URC Children Together:
enabling everyone to grow more like Jesus
together in the home, church and beyond.*

For guidance on the purpose of the resource and how to use it as a launch pad for your engagement with children and families, please use this link:
<https://urc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/FACT-how-to-sheet.pdf>

Luke 13: 6-9: Parable of the fig tree

If we are God's gardeners, we have to put in time, effort and give special attention to help God's creation flourish.

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Introduction: What would be helpful to know in my planning?

Fig trees are a common sight in the Holy Land to this day. They are native to many countries in the Middle East and provide an important source of food. The fig tree is very symbolic in Israel representing health, prosperity and independence – so to cut down a fig tree would be a big decision for an owner to take.

They can often look as though they are dead because they don't have a visible blossom (unlike, for example, apple and pear trees). The blossoms are actually inside the fruit itself.

The parable we are looking at today follows on from the opening verses of Luke 13 which deals with some difficult issues. We are looking at it as a standalone story but you may wish to familiarise yourself with what has come before so that you can engage in conversation if anyone wants to talk about context.

In this session we will be focussing on the idea that not everything comes easily. God gave us the world, but expects us to look after it. Sometimes we have to work at things to get them right – the more work we put in, often the better the result. But we note that the story doesn't say that the fig tree will get lots more chances – it is given just one more chance to prove its value, with the gardener paying it special attention.



Potential Trigger warning: If we look at this story in the context of relationships and friendships – they are often worth putting a bit of work into (as the gardener did with the fig tree) but, if something is beyond repair, it is better to just accept that. The owner of the vineyard was prepared to give the fig tree another chance because it might prove to be useful – if a friendship or a relationship is not useful to everyone involved, it may be best to cut your losses.

Together

How do I help my group to come together and get started with the theme?

Gathering prayer

Jesus, our friend

(use alternate index fingers to point and tap the middle of opposite palms)

Be with us today

(two hands, palms up in front of you, move up and down twice)

As we share together,

(two hands, palms up in front of you, move one forward and one back and alternate twice)

Pray together,

(hands together, palm against palm, as though praying)

Play together,

(hands to each side, palms up, make two small circles outwards)

And get to know you better,

(point up with one hand)

As children together in your family

(one hand out, palm down in front of you, move it sideways and up in three 'steps' as though to indicate children of three different heights)

AMEN

(Two thumbs up, and bring fists slowly together to meet in front of you)

OR

Thank you, God, for bringing us together today.

Help us to grow closer to you in all we do.

Help us to speak and to listen, to learn and to grow together,

Adventuring together with you wherever we may go.

Amen



In-person game

Rob the nest

This is a good run around game to play to introduce the idea of taking from the environment and keeping aware of where there is a need.

Divide your group into small groups of 2 to 4 players. You can have up to 4 teams.

Place a pile of balls or similar in the middle of the play area.

Create 4 home bases in corners of the play area, about 5 – 10 meters from the centre.

On the starter whistle all teams run, one person at a time into the middle to get a ball and return it to their team area.

When there are no more balls left in the middle, players may take from another 'nest' or team area.

Each team can have someone whose job it is to protect their pile of balls by trying to tag players who are stealing balls. If tagged, a player must put the ball back where they took it from and return to their group.

Only one player should be away from the nest at any point.

At the end of a set time, play finishes and the winning team is the one with the most balls.

Harvest game

This is a fun farming theme game to play outdoors on grass (the bigger the space the better). It works well with larger groups but could be fun for as few as 8 people.

You will need a bag of coloured sweets e.g. like starburst.

Scatter the sweets far and wide and randomly on the grass area.

Put the group into smaller teams, each team has a nominated farmer.

Each team chooses which animal they will be and what colour sweet is their food. For example, a Cow for the green sweets, a Cockerel for the red, a Dog for blue, and so on.

The farmer in each team needs to collect all their herd's coloured sweets, only a farmer can collect sweets but only when their cattle has shown them where to find it.

The animals run off to find their food (sweets) when they find it, they stand over it and make their animal noise loudly. This tells the farmer to come running to collect the sweets.

This continues till all the food is collected or the time runs out.

Its loud and lots of fun, especially when some sweets all fall together in the same spot meaning lots of animals are standing in one spot all making their noises.



Experience

For this story we recommend using The Living Bible

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+13%3A6-9&version=TLB>

Where can I find the story online?

Under fives: Storybook Corner: The Fig Tree by Kids Gracepoint -

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TnikhkrGsiE>

Over fives: The parable of the fig tree: Summary and meaning by The Religion Teacher

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X_3lhVZy_84

Songs to support the story

Under fives: The fig tree song (Mary Zitnik Music) -

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=evM5IZ_OxA8

Over fives: Though the fig tree - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kTSbA_4W548

Explore

Ideas and activities to explore this week's Bible passage together

A way to explore the story

The fig tree - a reflective story

Materials required:

- A blue circle of fabric
- Small dark red oval of fabric
- String
- Some green and brown branch shapes and green leaf shapes, or actual twigs and leaves
- Thought bubble shapes, fig shapes, star shapes, water droplet shapes, heart shapes (cut these out of felt or similar fabric, or sugar paper)
- Two figures – you could use small play figures, pipe-cleaner figures, Godly Play people

Come let's share a story,

Let's share a story that Jesus told. *(Use a beckoning gesture)*

(Lay out a piece of blue coloured fabric)

This is the story of a fig tree. *(Lay a small oval of dark red fabric)*

It started with growing its roots down, down, down.... *(Add in some string to create roots)*

Then a shoot came up, up, up... *(Lay out some green branches to represent shoots)*



It grew bigger and wider. *(Begin to add in more small branch shapes, and leaf shapes to create a tree)*

But no fruit came. *(Do a sweeping gesture with you hand to represent no fruit)*

This tree so full of hopes and dreams and possibilities. *(Add in some thought bubble shapes, question marks and exclamation marks around the tree)*

But no fruit came. *(Do a sweeping gesture with you hand to represent no fruit)*

This tree was so full, of all that it could be. *(Add in some shapes of figs into the thought bubble shapes)*

But no fruit came. *(Do a sweeping gesture with you hand to represent no fruit)*

A person came along and said, "Chop it down it's no use!" *(Walk in a figure to represent the person, and do a chopping gesture)*

And another person came and said, "Give it some time." *(Walk in another figure and point to your wrist as if you have a watch on)*

Give it some special attention. *(Add some stars around the tree shape)*

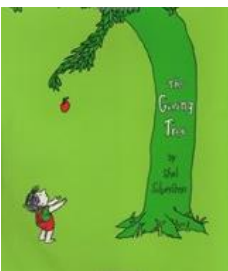
Feed it, prune it, water it, love it. *(Move around some branches and leaves and add in some water droplets, hearts)*

And see what it can become... *(Sit back and gaze at the cloth)*

I wonder.....

Modern parables

Jesus used stories to help people understand the things of God, even though they weren't necessarily overtly Christian stories. Lots of children's books can be used in a similar way as a conversation starter on the week's theme. Examples are shared here but you may think of others too.



"The Giving Tree" by Shel Silverstein
Read by Animated Children's Books <https://youtu.be/XFQZfeHq9wo>

Talking together: How might we talk about the story together?

- Which parts of creation/nature do you think need most special attention, and what could we be doing?
- Every element of a parable has a meaning. In this one, who is the gardener, who or what is the fig tree, and what is the parable saying to you?
- Sometimes change needs patience – why do we do "no-mow May"? How long does it take to see things grow? Are there places e.g. at school, where we can't go when things are growing?



Wondering together: suggested questions to use during activities

- Is there anything you keep trying to remind other people to do to care for the environment, or do you just give up?
- I wonder what would make you sad if it wasn't there any more?

What's in the box (for under fives)

Use the special box or bag and sing "What's in the box/bag? What's in the box/bag? Let's see, let's see, what's in the box/bag" (to the tune of The Farmer's in the Dell). You could tap the top of the box twice after the word 'box'. Pull out the things one by one and then let the children play with them, talking about the theme or the story in simple terms.

This week's box could include:

- Sticks – there aren't any leaves or fruit, I wonder what might grow on this twig
- Clock or watch – sometimes we have to wait for things, the gardener waited for the tree, we have to wait sometimes for our food or for our birthday
- Plastic spade or trowel – the gardener dug around the tree to look after it, this is how we dig...
- Fig roll biscuits (check allergies and dietary needs and watch for choking) – taste and smell what fig is like
- Fruits – a selection of different fruits. God gives us lots of different fruits to enjoy. Thank you God.
- A set of play people to act out the story or random shapes/bits you can move around to make pictures from the story as you tell it (e.g. stones, felt, twigs etc)

Express

Praying together: how can you involve the children actively in prayer?

Prayer tree

Gather a large branch or twig that is dry and without leaves.

Plant it in a tub so that it is secure.

Invite the group to write or draw their prayers onto paper leaves or blossom and add it to the tree as an AMEN.

The tree will burst to life with their colourful prayers.

You can provide the paper leaves and flowers or your group might like to cut out their own designs, depending on age and ability.

Leave your prayer tree somewhere, where it could be added to over the Harvest/creationtide period, your wider church family or community might appreciate the opportunity to use it too.

Spoken prayer

Agree with your group appropriate actions for **Praise, Sorry, Please** and **Thank You** and use them at the appropriate places. Your group might think of other things about which you wish



to offer praise and thanks to God, or say sorry to God and ask for God's help. The prayer below is just an example.

Creator God, you have given us a wonderful world in which to live

*We **praise** you for your wonderful world*

Creator God, we know that we must work hard to keep your world as beautiful as you intended

*We are **sorry** for when we are too lazy or too busy to work on your creation*

Creator God, we ask that you give us the courage and the energy to make a difference in this world

***Please** help us to do what needs to be done*

Creator God, we are grateful that you have given us all that we need

***Thank you**, God, for everything*

Responding together

Here are some suggested crafts and activities, and there is a colouring sheet at the end of this resource. You could also use small play toys and/or have a basket of resources available so children can choose their own way to respond. [See here for more suggestions.](#)

With an online group, plan whether to deliver any resources in advance or how you will encourage them to use what they've got to hand in their response.

However you do it, it is good for the adults to engage in the response too, and all chat together.

Discuss as a group the parts of your local area that need a little bit of TLC or an area that needs a little action to make it better. It might be a tree that keeps being climbed and damaged as a result. It might be an area which is known for attracting litter. It might be a wall that keeps being vandalized.

The group could then choose one or more of the areas to tackle together.

The idea is to create a solution, something to encourage others to "put things right" or "make things better". It might be writing to their MP or council to ask for a bin to be put in an area where there is a lot of rubbish. It could be a poster that is placed to make people think, making these as creative as possible. One way of doing this is to do a little craftivism. See here for ideas and examples: https://bit.ly/Craftivism_ideas. It's simply using your crafty creative skills to make people think. So rather than a poster saying not to drop litter, it might be a poster made from recycled materials saying the same message, or a speech bubble tied to the tree with string saying "Please don't climb on me – it's hurting my branches", or an embroidered mini banner with your message on.

It's important that the children take the lead on what matters to them in the local area and that the leaders simply encourage them to think about what they want to do about it in a creative way.

Beans in a bag



You will need:

- Bean seeds
- A plastic sandwich bag
- Some kitchen towel or paper tissue
- Lolly sticks
- Double sided tape

Put two damp, folded paper towels or tissues into the food bag. Carefully place two or three beans in the middle of the bag. Create a frame by sticking lolly sticks with double sided tape to the outside of the bag.



Sellotape the bag onto a window so that it gets the light and warmth it needs to grow. Keep a check on the bag to ensure the paper does not dry out and add some water as needed to keep the paper damp.

Wait patiently and within a week you will see something happening.

Over the next few weeks, you will begin to have a bean growing in the bag. Look at the roots and the shoots and think about what the beans need to make them grow. I wonder what do you need to help you grow in faith?

Just as the fig tree needed care and attention, as your seed is growing it needs lots of care and attention too. As it grows and for it to flourish, it will need to be potted into a plant pot with good soil and watered regularly.

Everyday with Jesus – Walking the Way

What could we do this week to carry on what we've learned? Maybe members of the group could come up with a suggestion. If not, get them to choose from these two challenges:

- Find out a little more about the way that climate change affects the harvest in countries like Nicaragua and what farmers are doing to help improve their crop – you could look at https://bit.ly/Go_with-Greta_to_Nicaragua
 - Could you find a patch of ground to weed and care for and maybe plant a bulb ready for spring? You'll have to wait for it to grow.
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We hope you enjoyed exploring the story from **Luke** with us.

Please let us know what you liked or what you would find useful by emailing lorrainewebb@urc.org.uk

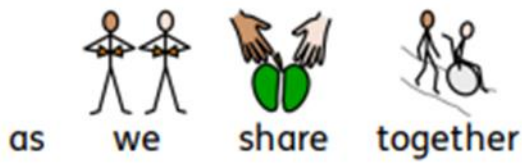
Why not have a look at next week's resource on **Revelation**



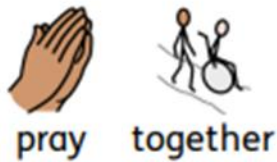
Jesus our friend,



be with us today



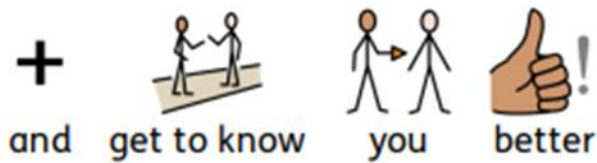
as we share together



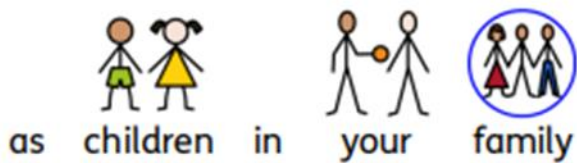
pray together



play together



and get to know you better



as children in your family



Amen



Right middle finger touches centre of other palm, repeat with left hand



Alternate hands back and forth





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