

Mental



✔ Prepare in Advance

Facilitator: In advance of the session:

- Provide a whiteboard and markers (or suitable substitute)
- Review today’s scripture text and the session activities to help better facilitate the discussion.
- Have the *Bible Background Video* ready to view.

✔ Explore

Ask the following introductory questions to the group.

- What tragedies can you recall that have occurred in the last few years? List these on the board.
- How has our society tried to explain the occurrence of these tragedies? List these reasons as well – global warming and societal “sins” are two examples.
- Have someone read Luke 3:1-9 out loud and show the *Bible Background Video*.

✔ Dealing with Tragedy

Use the following questions to encourage discussion.

- Why do you think human beings need to “make sense” out of tragedies? How do we do this with large-scale tragedies? How do we do it with personal tragedies?
- Why do you think blame and guilt figure so prominently into those explanations?
- Does Jesus say that these tragedies are completely unrelated to blame and guilt? Look closely...
- What is Jesus’ message to those who would try to assign blame and guilt for bad things that have happened?
- What kind of repentance is Jesus calling for?
- Let’s consider an awkward comparison: In response to tragedy, Jesus says “repent,” but so do groups like Westboro Baptist Church. What’s the difference?
- When we respond to tragedies in the future – especially to those who are not believers – how can our responses be more like Jesus’ and less like Westboro’s?

✔ The Fig Tree

- Though Jesus doesn’t explain his parable we tend to regard it as a symbol of God’s patience with human

sin. How do you respond to the fig tree parable? In what ways do you feel like the owner is being unfair? Justified?

- How are these stories (about tragedies and fig trees) related? In what ways might tragedies be a good way to “test for fruitfulness?”
- In what ways do tragedies provide an opportunity for “fruit” – spiritual nourishment and growth?

✔ Closing

God, give your people wisdom in times that are filled with tragedy. May we be grace-filled as we speak of and to those who are affected. May we be mercy-filled as we speak of those at fault. Give us insight into our own sinfulness, and courage to repent!

By Jon Parks

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