

The Gospel of Luke, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 18: Repentance and the Kingdom of God

Luke 13:1–35

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Doctrinally, this lesson stands on three pillars that the teacher must hold up clearly. First, the universal and urgent necessity of repentance: Jesus twice tells the crowd that without repentance they will all perish (vv. 3, 5), which means repentance is not advice for the especially wicked but a command for everyone, and the time to obey it is now. Second, the nature of the kingdom of God, pictured as a mustard seed and leaven (vv. 18–21), which grows from tiny beginnings into something vast and pervasive. This is the present, spreading reign of Christ through His church, not a future earthly political empire, and the teacher should use it to guard against premillennial expectations of a coming earthly kingdom. Third, and heaviest, the narrow door (vv. 22–30), which teaches that salvation comes only through Christ, that we must strive to enter, that not all will be saved, and that the door will one day be shut.

The teacher must hold two truths together that our culture wants to separate. On one side stands God's gracious patience, the gardener pleading for one more year for the barren tree, the Lord who does not wish that any should perish. On the other side stands the reality of judgment, the tower that fell, the door that closes, the house left forsaken. A faithful lesson refuses to soften either one. God is patient precisely because judgment is real, and His patience is meant to lead us to repentance, not to lull us into delay. Resist both the error of universalism, which assumes everyone is saved in the end, and the error of presumption, which assumes that being near Jesus or vaguely religious is the same as belonging to Him.

At the same time, this chapter aims to do more than correct error. It aims to form humble, awake, fruit-bearing hearts. Jesus' warnings are the warnings of a physician and a weeping Savior, not a cold judge. Let students feel both the urgency and the tenderness. Send them home sobered by the closed door, but also drawn by the open one, by the gardener's mercy, by the Lord who sees the bent-over woman and the city He longs to gather. The goal is not anxiety but repentance, and repentance that issues in the steady fruit of a changed life lived under the present reign of Christ.

Question 1

Student Question:

Jesus responds to the news of the murdered Galileans and the fallen tower of Siloam by twice declaring, "Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish" (vv. 3, 5). What does this teach about the universal and urgent necessity of repentance, and why does Jesus refuse to let His hearers treat sin and judgment as someone else's problem?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Open the lesson where Jesus opens it, with the news that breaks into the conversation. Some report that Pilate has slaughtered Galileans while they were offering sacrifice (v. 1), an atrocity that mingled human blood with the blood of the offerings. The assumption hanging in the air is the old one of Job's friends, that calamity is the measure of guilt, that the victims must have been especially sinful to suffer so. Jesus confronts that assumption head on: "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? No, I tell you" (vv. 2-3).

Then Jesus does something His hearers did not expect. He turns the news into a mirror. Twice He says, "Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish" (vv. 3, 5), and He reinforces it with a second tragedy, the eighteen killed when the tower in Siloam fell (v. 4). The repetition is deliberate and emphatic. Jesus is teaching that the real question is never why those people perished, but whether we are ready to stand before God ourselves. Repentance is not a special requirement for notorious sinners. It is the universal need of every human heart.

Help the class feel the urgency without distorting it. Jesus is not threatening arbitrary wrath. He is stating a truth as solid as gravity: sin separates us from God, and apart from repentance that separation ends in perishing. The two tragedies, one a deliberate act of cruelty and one a sudden accident, between them cover every way a person might die unprepared. Death can come by malice or by misfortune, and neither waits for us to get around to repentance. The time to turn is now.

Define repentance carefully for the class, because the word is often shrunk to mean mere regret. Biblical repentance is a change of mind that produces a change of life, a turning away from sin and toward God. It is the same repentance Peter called for at Pentecost, where the convicted crowd was told to repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of their sins (Acts 2:38), and the same that Paul preached when he declared that God now commands all people everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30). It is not optional, and it is not for someone else.

Land the point pastorally. The crowd wanted to discuss other people's tragedies at a safe distance. Jesus would not allow it, because He loved them too much to let them stand outside the door congratulating themselves. The most loving thing He could say was, in effect, this is about you. Help your students hear it the same way, not as a club but as a hand reaching to pull them to safety while there is still time.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The universal necessity of repentance for every person, not only for the especially wicked (Luke 13:3, 5; Romans 3:23)
- Repentance as a change of mind and life, a turning from sin to God, not mere regret (Acts 2:38; Acts 17:30; 2 Corinthians 7:10)

- The urgency of repentance, since death and judgment can come at any moment and do not wait for our convenience (Hebrews 9:27)
- The refusal to measure guilt by calamity, against the assumption that suffering proves special sin (John 9:1-3)
- God's warnings as expressions of His love, meant to lead us to safety rather than to instill mere fear (2 Peter 3:9)

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Jesus turn a question about other people's tragedy into a warning about His hearers' own need to repent?
- How would you explain biblical repentance to someone who thinks it means only feeling sorry?
- What does it mean to live as though the door is open now rather than assuming there will always be more time?

Question 2

Student Question:

Jesus dismantles the assumption that the victims of these tragedies were "worse sinners" than everyone else (vv. 2, 4), pressing each person to look inward instead. When you hear of someone else's failure, suffering, or downfall, what is your honest first reaction, and what would it look like to let that news send you to examine your own heart before God?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the first self-examining question, and it grows directly out of Jesus' refusal to let the crowd point fingers. The instinct Jesus confronts is universal and ancient. When we hear of another person's downfall, sin, suffering, or shame, something in us reaches for the comfortable distance of comparison. At least I am not like that. They must have done something to deserve it. Jesus dismantles this in two short verses, and the teacher should help students feel how thoroughly He does so.

Be honest with the class about why we do this. Comparison is a way of managing our own fear. If the people who suffered were worse than we are, then we are safe, and we do not have to examine ourselves. But Jesus closes that exit. He will not let anyone treat tragedy as evidence of their own righteousness. The proper response to hearing of another's fall is never relief that we are better, but a sober look at our own hearts and a renewed turning to God.

Guide the group toward specific honesty. Ask them to think of the last time they heard a piece of bad news about someone, a moral failure, a marriage falling apart, a public disgrace, an illness. What was the genuine first movement of the heart? Was it compassion and self-examination, or a quiet satisfaction, a curiosity, a sense of superiority? Naming the real reaction is the beginning of repentance.

Point toward the better way. The person who has truly heard Jesus in this passage hears every report of another's trouble as a summons to check his own footing, to give thanks for the patience that has spared him, and to pray both for the one who fell and for himself. Self-examination, not comparison, is the fruit Jesus is cultivating here.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The danger of self-justifying comparison that uses others' failures to excuse self-examination (Luke 18:9–14)
- The call to examine ourselves before God rather than measuring ourselves against others (2 Corinthians 13:5)
- Compassion rather than superiority as the right response to another's suffering or sin (Galatians 6:1)
- Humility that recognizes we stand only by God's mercy and patience (1 Corinthians 10:12)

Discussion Prompts

- What is your honest first reaction when you hear of someone else's failure or downfall?
- How does comparison function as a way of avoiding self-examination?
- What would it look like this week to let bad news about others drive you to examine your own heart?

Question 3

Student Question:

In the parable of the barren fig tree, the owner is ready to cut it down, but the gardener pleads for one more year of digging and fertilizing before judgment falls (vv. 6–9). What does this parable reveal about how God holds together His patience and His judgment, and what does it teach about the purpose of the time and mercy He extends to us?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The parable of the barren fig tree (vv. 6–9) is the perfect companion to the call to repent, because it shows the patience that gives repentance its room. A man plants a fig tree in his vineyard and comes looking for fruit, finding none for three years. His verdict is reasonable: "Cut it down. Why should it use up the ground?" (v. 7). The tree is taking up space and giving nothing back, and judgment is fully deserved.

But then the vinedresser intervenes with a plea that captures the heart of God's patience: "Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and put on manure. Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down" (vv. 8–9). Notice what the gardener does and does not do. He does not deny the tree's barrenness or pretend judgment is unjust. He buys time, and he works the soil, intending that the time should produce fruit. This is mercy with a purpose, not mercy that excuses fruitlessness forever.

Teach the class to hold God's patience and God's judgment together, because this is where many go wrong. Some hear only the patience and conclude that judgment will never really come, that the axe is an empty threat. Others hear only the judgment and live in fear, missing the extraordinary grace of the extra year. The parable insists on both. The axe is real, and the door of mercy is genuinely open. Peter says it plainly: the Lord is patient toward us, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance (2 Peter 3:9).

Press the purpose of the patience. The extra year is not given so the tree can go on being barren in peace. It is given so that the tree might finally bear fruit. God's kindness, Paul says, is meant to lead us to repentance (Romans 2:4). The mercy that delays judgment is mercy aimed at change. When we mistake God's patience for indifference, or treat the delay as permission to keep postponing, we abuse the very grace that was meant to save us.

Bring it home with hope and warning together. Every person in the room is, in some sense, living in a year the gardener bought for them. The right response is not anxiety but fruitfulness, to let the digging and the fertilizing do their work, to bear the fruit of repentance now rather than presuming on a kindness that will not last forever.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's patience as real mercy that delays judgment to give room for repentance (2 Peter 3:9; Romans 2:4)
- The certainty of judgment held together with the genuineness of God's patience, neither one canceling the other
- The purpose of God's patience, which is to produce the fruit of repentance and not to excuse continued barrenness (Luke 3:8-9)
- The danger of presuming on God's kindness and mistaking delay for indifference (Ecclesiastes 8:11)
- Fruit-bearing as the expected evidence of a life that has truly received God's mercy (John 15:1-8)

Discussion Prompts

- How does this parable hold together God's patience and God's coming judgment?
- What is the difference between resting in God's mercy and presuming on it?
- What fruit might God be waiting to see in the year He has given you?

Question 4

Student Question:

The woman had been bent over and unable to straighten herself for eighteen years, and Jesus saw her, called her over, and set her free, declaring her "a daughter of Abraham" whom Satan had bound (vv. 11-16). Where in your own life have you grown so used to a burden that you no

longer expect to be free of it, and what does it stir in you that Jesus notices and moves toward the person everyone else overlooks?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Move now to the bent-over woman (vv. 10–17), and let the class see the tenderness of Jesus before turning to the controversy. For eighteen years this woman had been bent double, unable to straighten herself, carrying a burden that bowed her body and surely her spirit (v. 11). She has not come asking for anything. She is simply there, in the synagogue, on the Sabbath. And Jesus sees her. That single detail is worth dwelling on. In a crowd, He notices the one everyone else has stopped noticing.

Jesus calls her over and declares her freed, laying His hands on her so that immediately she stands up straight and glorifies God (vv. 12–13). Then He gives her a name that lifts her higher than any posture: “a daughter of Abraham” whom Satan had bound for eighteen long years (v. 16). She is not a problem or an interruption. She is a daughter of the covenant, beloved, and her long bondage is exactly the kind of thing the Sabbath was made to relieve.

This is a self-examining question, so guide students gently toward their own bent places. Ask them to consider the burdens they have carried so long that they have stopped expecting freedom, the patterns of sin, fear, shame, bitterness, or grief that have become so familiar they feel permanent. The woman did not even ask, perhaps because eighteen years had taught her not to hope. Jesus moved toward her anyway. There are burdens in every life that we have quietly filed under never going to change.

Let the wonder of being seen do its work. Many people feel invisible, overlooked in their suffering, certain that no one notices the weight they carry. This passage tells them that the Lord sees, that He moves toward the overlooked, and that no bondage is too old or too settled for Him to address. The same Jesus who saw the bent woman sees the one who feels bent and unseen today.

Close by connecting freedom to worship. The moment she was loosed, she glorified God (v. 13). Real deliverance produces praise. As students consider their own burdens, invite them to bring them honestly to the Lord who notices, and to expect that the One who set a daughter of Abraham free still sets His people free.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Christ’s compassion for the overlooked and the suffering, seeing those whom others ignore (Luke 19:10; Matthew 9:36)
- The dignity Jesus confers, naming the woman a daughter of Abraham rather than a problem (Galatians 3:28–29)
- Christ’s power and authority over the bondage of Satan and the brokenness of the body (Acts 10:38; 1 John 3:8)

- Worship and praise as the natural fruit of deliverance (Luke 13:13; Psalm 103:1–5)

Discussion Prompts

- What burden have you carried so long that you no longer expect to be free of it?
- What does it stir in you that Jesus sees and moves toward the person everyone overlooks?
- How does genuine deliverance lead to genuine worship?

Question 5

Student Question:

Jesus compares the kingdom of God to a tiny mustard seed that grows into a tree and to a little leaven that works through the whole batch of dough (vv. 18–21). What do these images teach about the nature and growth of the kingdom Jesus came to establish, and how do they correct the idea that the kingdom is a future earthly empire rather than the present, spreading reign of Christ through His church?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is a central doctrinal question, and the teacher should handle the kingdom images with both joy and precision. Right after the synagogue scene, Jesus asks what the kingdom of God is like and answers with two pictures. It is like a grain of mustard seed, the smallest of seeds, that a man planted and it grew into a tree where the birds nested (vv. 18–19). And it is like leaven that a woman hid in three measures of flour until it was all leavened (vv. 20–21). Both images make the same point from two angles: the kingdom begins almost imperceptibly small and grows into something large and pervasive.

Teach what these images affirm. The kingdom of God does not arrive with the noise and spectacle of a conquering army. It starts small, with a Galilean teacher and a handful of disciples, with a seed in the ground and leaven hidden in dough, and it spreads quietly and unstoppably through the world. The mustard seed becomes a tree; the leaven works through the whole batch. This is exactly how the gospel has spread, beginning with the church at Pentecost and growing across the earth, transforming from within rather than conquering from without.

Now address the error these images correct, because this is where the teacher must be clear. Many today expect the kingdom of God to be a future earthly political empire, a thousand-year reign Christ will set up after some future return. But Jesus describes the kingdom as something already growing in His hearers' midst, a present reality like a seed already planted and leaven already at work. The kingdom is not waiting in the future. It came with Jesus' ministry and was established when the church began at Pentecost. Daniel foretold that the God of heaven would set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed (Daniel 2:44), and Jesus announced that this kingdom was at hand (Mark 1:14–15), promising that some standing there would see it come with power (Mark 9:1).

Tie this to the present reign of Christ. Paul tells the Colossians that God has already delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of His beloved Son (Colossians 1:13). That is past tense and present reality, not future hope. Christ reigns now, seated at the right hand of the Father, ruling over His church, and the kingdom continues to grow as the gospel spreads and lives are transformed. We do not wait for the kingdom to begin on earth someday. We live in it now.

Bring it home with both humility and hope. The mustard seed teaches us not to despise small beginnings, our own small faithfulness, a single conversation, one congregation, one obedient life. The leaven teaches us that the kingdom works from the inside out, changing hearts and then households and then communities. We are citizens of a kingdom that, though it began as the smallest seed, will fill the earth and never be destroyed.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The kingdom of God as a present, growing reality begun in Jesus' ministry and established at Pentecost, not a future earthly empire (Mark 1:14–15; Mark 9:1; Acts 2)
- Christ's present reign from the right hand of the Father over His church (Colossians 1:13; Acts 2:29–36)
- The everlasting kingdom prophesied by Daniel, which shall never be destroyed (Daniel 2:44)
- The kingdom's growth from small, humble beginnings into something vast and pervasive (Luke 13:18–21)
- The gospel's transforming power working from within, like leaven through dough, rather than by external political force
- A clear rejection of premillennial expectation of a future thousand-year earthly reign

Discussion Prompts

- How do the mustard seed and the leaven describe the way the kingdom of God actually grows?
- What does it mean that the kingdom is a present reality we live in now, rather than a future earthly empire?
- How should the truth that Christ reigns now shape the way you live and serve this week?

Question 6

Student Question:

The synagogue ruler was indignant that Jesus healed on the Sabbath, and Jesus exposed the hypocrisy of those who would untie an ox to give it water but begrudge a suffering woman her freedom (vv. 14–16). Where are you tempted to care more about keeping up religious appearances or rules than about the actual good of hurting people, and how does Jesus' rebuke challenge the way you practice your faith?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Return to the synagogue scene, this time fixing attention on the ruler's reaction. When Jesus heals the bent woman, the synagogue ruler is indignant, and rather than confront Jesus directly he scolds the crowd: "There are six days in which work ought to be done. Come on those days and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day" (v. 14). Here is a man so committed to his rule that he is annoyed that a woman has been set free on the wrong day. The teacher should let the strangeness of that land. A miracle has just happened, and his chief concern is the calendar.

Jesus exposes the hypocrisy with a single, devastating comparison. "You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger and lead it away to water it?" (v. 15). Every one of them would loose an animal on the Sabbath to meet its need. "And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?" (v. 16). They valued their livestock's comfort over a suffering woman's freedom and called it faithfulness. The whole crowd was put to shame, while the people rejoiced (v. 17).

This is a self-examining question, so help students see the same temptation in themselves. The danger is not in caring about how we practice our faith; the danger is in letting the appearance and machinery of religion crowd out love for actual people. We can be more troubled by someone breaking an expectation than by someone breaking under a burden. We can prefer the tidy rule to the messy person.

Press toward honest, specific reflection. Where do we care more about looking right than doing good? Where have we let our preferences about how things are done blind us to a hurting brother or sister? It is worth asking whether our religion makes us more compassionate or merely more critical, more eager to help or more eager to correct.

Point to the heart of the matter. Jesus is not abolishing reverence or order; He is insisting that the law of God was always meant to serve love, not to be weaponized against it. The Sabbath, rightly understood, was a gift, and a day of rest is no place to begrudge a daughter of Abraham her freedom. Let students examine whether their practice of faith looks more like Jesus' joy over the woman or the ruler's indignation over the day.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The danger of hypocrisy that prizes religious appearance over love for people (Matthew 23:23-24)
- Mercy and the good of people as God's intent, never to be crowded out by rules wrongly applied (Hosea 6:6; Mark 2:27)
- The exposure of hearts that value convenience or appearance over a suffering person's need (1 John 3:17-18)
- True faith expressed in compassion and good works, not merely in criticism and correction (James 1:27)

Discussion Prompts

- Where are you tempted to care more about appearances or rules than about hurting people?
- How does Jesus' rebuke of the synagogue ruler challenge the way you practice your faith?
- Does your religion make you more compassionate or more critical, and how would others answer that about you?

Question 7

Student Question:

When someone asks, "Lord, will those who are saved be few?" Jesus does not answer the speculation but redirects it to a command: "Strive to enter through the narrow door" (vv. 23-24). What does it tell us about the way of salvation that Jesus turns a question about numbers into a personal summons to effort and entry, and what does "strive" mean for the way we respond to the gospel?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

As Jesus journeys toward Jerusalem (v. 22), someone asks the kind of question we still ask: "Lord, will those who are saved be few?" (v. 23). It is a speculative question, the sort that keeps us safely in the realm of theory. Notice that Jesus does not answer it on its own terms. He does not give a number or settle the debate about how many. Instead He turns the spotlight from the crowd to the individual: "Strive to enter through the narrow door" (v. 24). The teacher should highlight this redirection, because it reveals how Jesus handles our curiosity. He turns abstract questions about others into a personal summons.

Examine the word strive. The Greek word behind it is the language of struggle and effort, the root from which we get our word agonize. It pictures an athlete straining toward the goal. This does not mean we earn salvation, for salvation is God's gift through Christ. But it does mean salvation is not casual, automatic, or a matter of drifting. There is a door, it is narrow, and entering it requires that we actually respond, turning from sin and coming to Christ on His terms. The gospel call is a real call that demands a real answer.

Connect this to the New Testament pattern of response. To enter through the narrow door is to respond to the gospel as God has appointed: to hear and believe in Jesus as Lord and Christ, to repent of sin, to confess Him, and to be baptized into Him for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3-4; Galatians 3:26-27). The narrowness of the door is not arbitrary cruelty. It is simply that there is one way, Christ Himself, and we come His way or not at all. The effort Jesus commands is the effort of taking the call seriously enough to obey it.

Guard against two errors as you teach. On one side is the casual presumption that thinks entering the kingdom requires nothing, that we can drift in. On the other is the anxious works-righteousness that thinks we must earn our way through by sheer effort. The narrow door is entered by grace through an obedient faith that genuinely strives, that takes Christ at His word

and does what He says, while resting in His finished work. The striving is the striving of one who is in earnest, not one who is trying to buy a place.

Bring it home. The person who asked the question wanted to discuss salvation as a topic. Jesus made it a matter of personal urgency. Help your students hear the redirection as grace. The most important question is not how many will be saved, but whether you yourself are striving to enter while the door stands open.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Salvation as a real summons requiring a genuine response, not a casual or automatic outcome (Luke 13:24; Philippians 2:12)
- The narrow door as Christ Himself, the one way of salvation (John 14:6; Acts 4:12)
- The New Testament pattern of response: faith, repentance, confession, and baptism into Christ for forgiveness (Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3–4; Galatians 3:26–27)
- Salvation by grace through an obedient faith, against both casual presumption and works-righteousness (Ephesians 2:8–10; James 2:17)
- Jesus' way of turning speculative questions into personal, urgent self-examination

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Jesus turn a question about how many are saved into a command to strive to enter?
- What does it mean to strive to enter without falling into the idea that we earn our salvation?
- How does a person actually respond to the gospel and enter through the narrow door?

Question 8

Student Question:

Jesus warns that many “will seek to enter and will not be able” once the master of the house has shut the door, and that some who ate and drank in His presence will hear, “I do not know where you come from” (vv. 25–27). What does it do to your sense of security to know that nearness to Jesus is not the same as belonging to Him, and how does this passage examine whether you are truly entering through the door or merely standing near it?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question presses on the most unsettling part of the passage, the people who expected to be inside and were not. Jesus describes a moment when the master of the house has risen and shut the door, and those left outside knock and plead, “Lord, open to us” (v. 25). Their appeal is striking: “We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets” (v. 26). They had proximity. They had been near Jesus, in the same towns, at the same tables, hearing the same

teaching. And yet the answer is, “I do not know where you come from. Depart from me, all you workers of evil” (v. 27).

The teacher must let this examine the class, because it strikes at a comfortable assumption many carry. Nearness to Jesus is not the same as belonging to Him. It is possible to be close to the things of God, to attend, to listen, to be familiar with the teaching, even to feel at home in religious settings, and still not to have truly entered through the door. These people were not strangers to Jesus’ ministry. They were spectators of it who never became disciples in it.

This is a self-examining question, so guide students to test their own standing honestly. Ask the searching questions gently. Is my relationship with Christ one of genuine belonging, marked by obedience and a transformed life, or merely one of familiarity and proximity? Have I entered the door, or am I standing near it, assured by my churchgoing, my heritage, my knowledge, while never having truly surrendered to Christ as Lord? It is a question worth sitting with rather than answering quickly.

Be pastoral but do not blunt the edge. The point is not to rob faithful disciples of their assurance, for genuine faith expressed in obedience has every right to rest in Christ. The point is to expose false assurance, the kind built on association rather than surrender. The danger is real precisely because it is so easy to mistake the one for the other.

End by pointing to the open door. The sober warning is not the last word. The door is still open today. The very fact that we can hear this warning means we are not yet on the wrong side of a shut door. The right response is not despair but to make sure, to enter genuinely, to move from standing near Jesus to truly belonging to Him while there is still time.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The difference between nearness to Jesus and genuine belonging to Him (Matthew 7:21–23)
- The danger of false assurance built on association, heritage, or familiarity rather than obedient discipleship (Luke 6:46)
- Genuine faith evidenced by a transformed and obedient life, not mere proximity to religion (James 2:14–17)
- The seriousness of the shut door and the reality that some who expect entry will be refused
- The present open door and the call to make our entry sure while there is time (2 Peter 1:10–11)

Discussion Prompts

- What is the difference between being near Jesus and truly belonging to Him?
- How can a person tell whether their assurance rests on real surrender or merely on familiarity?
- What would it look like for you to make sure you have truly entered the door rather than only standing near it?

Question 9

Student Question:

Jesus says, “Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able” (v. 24), and then describes a door that is finally shut, people from east and west who recline at the feast while others are cast out, and a startling reversal in which “some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last” (v. 30). What does this whole passage teach about how a person is saved, about the reality that not all will be saved, and about why the time to respond to Christ is now, before the door is shut?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal question of the lesson, and the teacher should give it the most weight and care. Gather the whole narrow-door passage together (vv. 22–30) and let it teach its full message about salvation. Jesus commands, “Strive to enter through the narrow door,” and then gives the sobering reason: “For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able” (v. 24). Here are three truths the teacher must hold together: there is a way of salvation, that way is narrow, and not everyone who casually wishes to be saved will be saved.

First, teach how a person is saved according to this passage and the whole New Testament. The door is narrow because there is one way, and that way is Christ. Salvation comes only through Him, and we enter on His terms, not our own. This is the consistent New Testament pattern: hearing the gospel, believing in Jesus as Lord and Christ, repenting of sin, confessing Him, and being baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of sins, then living a faithful life as His disciple (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16; Romans 6:3–4; Galatians 3:26–27). The narrowness is not God being stingy. It is the simple truth that there is one Savior and one way home.

Second, teach plainly that not all will be saved, because this passage forbids both universalism and presumption. Jesus speaks of a door that is shut, of people cast out who weep and gnash their teeth while they see Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the prophets in the kingdom (v. 28). This directly contradicts the comfortable modern idea that everyone is ultimately saved regardless of their response to Christ. The Bible does not teach that. The door closes. Judgment is real. To pretend otherwise is to flatter people on their way past the open door.

Third, teach the surprising reversal and the warning it carries. People will come “from east and west, and from north and south,” and recline at the feast in the kingdom (v. 29), while some who assumed they were secure are shut out. “Some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last” (v. 30). The insiders who presume on their privilege may find themselves outside, while outsiders who respond in faith are welcomed in. No heritage, no nearness, no assumed standing guarantees entry. Only genuine response to Christ does. This is the great reversal of the kingdom, and it should humble the confident and encourage the seeking.

Fourth, hold together what this chapter has held together all along, God's gracious patience and the reality of judgment, and then lift the students' eyes to Christ Himself. The same chapter that warns of the shut door also gives us the gardener pleading for one more year. God is patient, not wishing that any should perish (2 Peter 3:9), and that very patience is why the door still stands open now. But patience is not permanence. The door that is open today will one day be shut, and no amount of knocking will open it then. This is why the time to respond is now, not tomorrow, not someday, not when it is convenient, but now, while the gardener is still digging and the door still stands open. This passage is not meant to leave anyone in terror but to move everyone to enter, for Christ is Himself the door. The most loving thing Jesus can tell us is that there is a door, that it is open, and that we must come in while we can. Urge your students, and let them urge those they love, to strive to enter now while the patience of God still holds the door open.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Salvation only through Christ, the one narrow door, on His appointed terms (John 14:6; Acts 4:12)
- The New Testament plan of salvation: faith, repentance, confession, and baptism into Christ for forgiveness, followed by faithful living (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16; Romans 6:3–4)
- The reality that not all will be saved, against universalism, since the door is finally shut and some are cast out (Luke 13:25–28; Matthew 25:41–46)
- The warning against presumption, since nearness, heritage, and assumed standing do not guarantee salvation (Luke 13:30; Matthew 3:9)
- God's gracious patience held together with the certainty of judgment, neither one canceling the other (2 Peter 3:9; Hebrews 9:27)
- The urgency of responding now, before the open door is shut (2 Corinthians 6:2; Hebrews 3:15)

Discussion Prompts

- How does this passage describe the one way a person is saved, and why is the door called narrow?
- Why must we reject both the idea that everyone is saved and the idea that nearness to religion guarantees salvation?
- Why does Jesus make responding to Him a matter of urgency rather than something we can put off?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across the whole chapter, from the call to repent, to the barren tree given one more year, to the bent woman lifted up, to the mustard seed and leaven, to the narrow door, to Jesus weeping over Jerusalem with its house left forsaken (vv. 34–35). Name one specific way you

sense Jesus forming you through these verses. What is the single truth from Luke 13:1–35 that you most need to carry into this coming week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Use this final question to gather the whole chapter and turn it toward response. The passage ends with Pharisees warning Jesus that Herod wants to kill Him (v. 31). Jesus is undeterred, calling Herod “that fox” and declaring that He will finish His course on His own terms, for it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem (vv. 32–33). And then comes one of the most tender moments in all the Gospels, as Jesus laments over the city: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!” (v. 34). The warning and the weeping belong together. The same Jesus who speaks of the shut door longs to gather His people and grieves when they refuse.

Let the lament shape how students hear the whole chapter. Jerusalem’s house is left to it forsaken (v. 35) not because God wanted it that way, but because the city was unwilling to come to the One who longed to gather it. Here is the heart behind every warning in the chapter. The urgency of repentance, the patience of the gardener, the open door, all of it flows from a Savior who genuinely desires to save and grieves when people will not come. This guards us from hearing the chapter as cold threat. It is the appeal of a brokenhearted Lord.

Resist the urge to add new content here. The aim is integration and response. Give students room to name what God has actually stirred in them across the whole chapter, whether it is conviction to repent of something specific, gratitude for the extra year of patience, hope that the Lord who lifted the bent woman will lift their burden, confidence in the growing kingdom they belong to, or sober resolve to make sure they have truly entered the door.

Press gently toward specificity. A vague intention to take repentance more seriously rarely changes a life. Ask each person to name one concrete truth from Luke 13 and one concrete response they will carry into the week, whether it is a sin to turn from, a burden to bring to Christ, or a conversation to have with someone still standing outside the door.

Close by lifting eyes to the gathering Savior. The chapter that warns most sharply also weeps most tenderly. Let the final word be the open arms of the One who longs to gather His people, and the invitation to come willingly while the door still stands open and the hen still calls her brood.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Integration of the chapter’s themes: the urgency of repentance, God’s patience, Christ’s compassion, the growing kingdom, and the narrow door
- Christ’s genuine desire to gather and save, and His grief over those who will not come (Luke 13:34; 2 Peter 3:9)

- The reality that judgment falls where people are unwilling to come to Christ, not because God withholds mercy (Luke 13:35; John 5:40)
- The transforming purpose of God's word, which aims at repentance and changed lives, not merely informed minds (James 1:22)
- Personal response and obedience as the goal of studying this passage

Discussion Prompts

- How does Jesus' lament over Jerusalem reveal the heart behind every warning in this chapter?
- What single truth from Luke 13 do you most need to carry into this week?
- What is one concrete way you will respond, whether a sin to turn from, a burden to bring to Christ, or a person to invite through the door?