

Three Years Without Bearing Fruit

For a mature fig tree to go three years without bearing fruit is a long time – too long. A fruit tree (whether it's an apple, pear, cherry or fig) that does not produce fruit for three years should be cut down and another planted. Waiting any longer is a waste of time.



We often find the image of a fruit tree in the Bible. A sterile tree or one that produces poor quality fruit is one metaphor used for the people of Israel who had abandoned the Lord's law and fallen into idolatry. For these reasons God would judge it severely and order it cut down and burned - threatening words and dire consequences.

In the passage today, Luke uses harsh words of judgment and punishment. *Unless you repent, you will perish.* But Luke goes beyond punishment and reminds us of God's patience and mercy. Instead of destroying the sterile tree, the gardener said to the owner: *Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.*

Human trees are not like the fruit tree in the Gospel. It is necessary to have infinitely more patience with them. Children spend long years at school and may feel that they are wasting their time. Yet when they are discouraged, parents keep on encouraging them and it often happens that they grasp concepts, make connections, and produce good results. Conjugal love may seem barely to simmer for a time. But some years later, it reawakens and is renewed. In the New Testament, a thief, a prisoner, and a prostitute were never excluded from God's mercy. The opportunity was always present to change and produce good results.

God is patient with us. During this season of mercy and taking our cue from God's example, we can use this time to forgive and focus on new beginnings.

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