

TODAY

A Catholic Journey Through the Gospel of Luke

SESSION 8

Fear Not, Little Flock

Luke 12–13

Barns, ravens, girded loins, a fig tree on probation, and the narrow door

Leader Preparation Guide

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim: Participants discover that let your loins be girded and your lamps burning is Passover posture, Israel dressed for departure in Exodus 12, and that Jesus answers the question will those who are saved be few not with a number but with an imperative: strive. Along the way, 12:47–48 quietly hands them a biblical root of the Church's teaching that guilt is measured by knowledge, the principle behind its distinction between grave and lesser sin.

Catholic Touchstone: Providence and poverty of heart against the rich fool's soliloquy; the vigilance of servants who wait in Passover dress; degrees of culpability (CCC 1854–1864) straight from the master's returning; and the narrow door held together with the Father's good pleasure to give the kingdom, severity and tenderness in one Gospel breath.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Luke 12 opens with crowds trampling one another while Jesus warns his disciples about hypocrisy, the leaven of the Pharisees, and about the only fear worth having: not those who kill the body, but the One with authority beyond death. Yet the same breath counts sparrows and numbers the hairs of your head. Lukan spirituality holds those two wires together, holy fear and granular tenderness, and tonight's title verse is their junction: fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

The rich fool (12:13–21) is triggered by an inheritance dispute Jesus declines to arbitrate, warning instead against all covetousness. The parable's engine is its pronouns: the man converses entirely with himself about what is entirely his, my crops, my barns, my grain, my soul, a soliloquy with no thou in it, neither God nor neighbor. He is not condemned for the harvest but for the horizon: laying up treasure for himself, not rich toward God. St. Basil's homily on this parable is one of the patristic era's thunderclaps on wealth, and your group should hear its argument: the barns were already full before he built bigger ones, and the storehouses he needed were standing ready all along, the mouths of the hungry. The ravens and lilies teaching that follows (12:22–34) is not naive economics but reordered anxiety: your Father knows that you need them; seek his kingdom, and these things shall be yours as well. Sell your possessions, give alms, purses that do not grow old. Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also: the heart follows the treasure, not the other way around, which makes almsgiving a cardiology.

Watchfulness (12:35–48) opens with tonight's live discovery: let your loins be girded and your lamps burning. Send the group to Exodus 12:11 and let them find Israel eating the first Passover in exactly that posture, belt fastened, sandals on, staff in hand, dressed for the Exodus, ready to move the moment God says move. Jesus is dressing his disciples for a departure; whose departure, the exodos of 9:31 has already whispered. Then the astonishing reversal of 12:37: the master on his return will gird himself and serve the watching servants, a promise that walks into the upper room of Session 13. Peter asks whether the parable is for the Twelve or for all, and the answer, the faithful and wise steward set over the household, lands on leaders first. And then 12:47–48: the servant who knew his master's will and did not act shall receive a severe beating, but the one who did not know shall receive a light one. Right there, in

red letters, punishment is proportioned to knowledge. The verse does not by itself define mortal and venial sin; the Church's full distinction requires grave matter, full knowledge, and deliberate consent (CCC 1857-1862), and Scripture's classic text is 1 John 5:16-17. But Jesus himself here grades culpability by what the servant knew, and that principle is one of the hinges on which the distinction turns. Tonight's steelman lives in this neighborhood. The strong Protestant claim of assurance, the truly saved cannot finally be lost, and its once-saved-always-saved popularization deserve full-strength presentation: eternal life is a gift, not a wage, and no one snatches the sheep from the Father's hand. Then press with tonight's own texts: servants can stop watching; a steward can turn to beating the servants and be assigned a place with the unfaithful; the door is narrow and some who ate and drank in his presence hear I do not know where you come from. The Catholic position is not anxiety but vigilant confidence: sure of God's fidelity, unpresuming about our own, working out salvation in fear and trembling while the Father delights to give the kingdom.

Luke 13 turns to repentance with the news cycle of the day: Pilate's massacre of Galileans, the tower of Siloam's eighteen dead. Jesus refuses the crowd's arithmetic (worse sinners, worse deaths) and universalizes the warning: unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. The barren fig tree follows, planted in a vineyard, three fruitless years, and a gardener who begs one more: let it alone, sir, this year also, till I dig about it and put on manure. Judgment delayed is not judgment canceled; it is mercy purchasing time, and the gardener is spending himself to buy it. The bent woman freed on the sabbath (a daughter of Abraham, loosed from a bond of eighteen years) enrages a synagogue ruler and delights the crowd; mustard seed and leaven promise a kingdom that grows from imperceptible beginnings. Then someone asks the theology-class question, Lord, will those who are saved be few?, and Jesus answers the crowd in the second person: strive (agonizesthe, the athlete's agony) to enter by the narrow door. He will not publish attendance figures; he issues an entrance summons, and the guest list he does reveal runs east and west, north and south, to the table of the patriarchs, while some who presumed proximity (we ate and drank in your presence) stand outside. Some are last who will be first. The chapter closes with the lament that aches: O Jerusalem, Jerusalem... how often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not. The city's house is forsaken, and they will not see him until they say blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, words we will hear taken up at the gates in Session 12.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Ecc1 2:1-11 with Ps 39:6 Vanity of stored abundance: whose will these things be? → **Lk 12:16-21**

Ex 12:11 Passover posture: loins girded, sandals on, ready for the Exodus → **Lk 12:35**

Job 38:41 with Ps 147:9 Who provides for the raven? → **Lk 12:24**

Isa 5:1-7 The vineyard of the Lord and its fruitless planting → **Lk 13:6-9**

Isa 25:6-8 (previewed) The feast of all peoples on the mountain → **Lk 13:29**

Ps 118:26 Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord → **Lk 13:35**

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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St. Basil the Great (*Homily on Luke 12:18, I Will Tear Down My Barns*)

Basil cross-examines the rich fool with terrifying courtesy: the man had storehouses already, the bellies of the poor, and called the surplus his own when it was only passing through his hands. The bread you hold back belongs to the hungry, Basil preaches, the cloak in your chest to the naked, the silver in the ground to the needy; we are stewards arraigned for hoarding what was issued for distribution.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Gregory the Great (*Forty Gospel Homilies, Homily 31*)

On the barren fig tree, Gregory hears the three years as the long patience of God and the gardener's plea as intercession still holding back the axe. The digging about the roots he reads as the humbling of the soul, and the manure, distasteful as it is, as the remembrance of our sins laid around our roots: what shames us, offered in penance, becomes the very fertilizer of fruit. But he will not let the parable comfort procrastination: the reprieve is a year, not an amnesty.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Cyril of Alexandria (*Commentary on Luke, on the narrow door*)

Cyril notes that the Lord, asked for statistics, answered with a summons: the question whether few are saved profits nothing, but the striving profits everything. The door is narrow, he says, not because God grudges entrance but because pride, luxury, and the bulk of our self-importance do not fit through it; the door admits whoever will stoop, and the striving is the stooping.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

CCC 1854–1864 Mortal and venial sin: gravity, knowledge, consent; the distinction tonight's 12:47–48 roots in Jesus' own words.

CCC 305 Filial trust in providence: the Father who feeds the birds and knows our needs.

CCC 2544–2547 Poverty of heart: abandonment to providence, freedom from anxiety about tomorrow.

CCC 1036 The Church's urgency about the narrow door: warnings that summon our freedom, not forecasts that cancel hope.

CCC 1431–1439 Interior repentance: the conversion tonight's tower and fig tree demand.

THREAD WATCH

Passover posture (plants tonight, resolves Session 13): The Exodus 12:11 discovery dresses the disciples for a departure. Do not say the words Last Supper; just leave the belt fastened.

The master who serves (plants tonight, resolves Session 13): 12:37, he will gird himself and have them sit at table, and he will come and serve them. Read it once, slowly, and move on. It detonates in the upper room: I am among you as one who serves (22:27).

Blessed is he who comes (plants tonight, resolves Session 12): 13:35 ends on Ps 118:26. The crowd takes up this very acclamation at the gates in Session 12, with Luke adding one word, the King; let the group discover the echo then.

The banquet from east and west (plants tonight, develops Session 9): 13:29's table of the patriarchs sets up next week's banquet parables and the Isaiah 25 discovery.

Journey (ambient): 13:33, it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem. The road knows where it is going.

SESSION GOALS

1. Read the rich fool by his pronouns and let St. Basil's stewardship argument land with its full patristic weight.
2. Reorder anxiety with ravens, lilies, and the little flock: providence as the ground of generosity.
3. Run the Exodus 12:11 discovery: watchfulness as Passover posture, and bank the master-who-serves promise for Session 13.
4. Work the assurance steelman honestly, and find in 12:47–48 the scriptural root of the mortal-venial distinction.
5. Hold severity and tenderness together: the narrow door, the striving, and the hen who would gather her brood.

Time Note (75–90 minutes)

Two dense chapters; triage in advance. If pressed, take the bent woman and the mustard seed and leaven (13:10–21) as one sentence of leader framing, and let the Siloam material live inside Q5's setup. Never cut Q3 (the Exodus discovery), Q4 (the steelman), or Q6 (narrow door and the lament); and do not let Q1 swallow the evening, however lively the money conversation gets.

Discussion Guide

OPENING PRAYER

Leader: *Father, you feed the ravens and clothe the grass, and it is your good pleasure to give us the kingdom. Loosen tonight whatever we are hoarding, fasten our belts for wherever you send us, and keep our lamps burning. Teach us to fear nothing but losing you, and to strive for the door your Son holds open. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

WIN: OPENING QUESTIONS (10 MIN)

W1. What is something you keep stockpiling, physically or digitally, that you honestly do not need more of? What is the stockpile promising you?

W2. Have you ever been packed and ready before news that changed everything, a call, a move, a diagnosis, a birth? What did readiness feel like compared to being caught flat?

BUILD: INTO THE TEXT (50–60 MIN)

HOW TO LEAD THIS SECTION

Money talk gets personal fast; let it, but keep it charitable and keep it moving. The Exodus discovery at Q3 needs its full ten minutes, and the steelman at Q4 needs your calmest, most generous voice: some of your group grew up on assurance, and the goal is light, not victory.

1. Read Luke 12:13–21. Count the possessive pronouns in the rich man's speech, and notice who he is talking to. What exactly is he condemned for, and what does rich toward God mean? Bring in St. Basil's argument from the Voices box: where does Basil say the man's grain should have gone?

Leader: *My crops, my barns, my grain, my soul; a soliloquy. Not condemned for the harvest but for the horizon.*
Basil: *the storehouses that stood ready were the mouths of the hungry.*

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The man's speech is a hall of mirrors: my crops, my barns, my grain, my goods, my soul, and his only conversation partner is himself. God's verdict word, fool, is the psalmist's word for the one who lives as if there were no God, and the sentence exposes the tense of his whole life: this night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be? He is not condemned for a good harvest but for a closed loop, laying up treasure for himself instead of being rich toward God, and St. Basil names what rich toward God looks like in grain: the surplus was issued for distribution, the bread belongs to the hungry it could feed, and bigger barns are a way of burying what was meant to circulate. Wealth in Luke is never neutral storage; it is either seed or sepulcher.

2. Read Luke 12:22–34. Ravens and lilies: what is the actual argument against anxiety here, and what is the anxiety replaced with? Land on verses 32–34: what does the Father delight to do, and which direction does verse 34 say the heart follows?

Leader: *The argument is a fortiori: if God feeds ravens and dresses grass, how much more you. Anxiety is replaced by seeking the kingdom. And treasure leads, heart follows.*

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The argument runs from lesser to greater: ravens neither sow nor reap and are fed; lilies neither toil nor spin and outdress Solomon; and you are of more value than the birds. Anxiety adds not a cubit and ignores a Father who knows that you need these things. The cure is not pretending needs away but reordering the seeking: seek his kingdom, and these things shall be yours as well. Then the sentence this session is named for: fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom, the whole Gospel's tenderness in one line, immediately followed by sell, give alms, make purses that do not grow old. Verse 34 explains the sequence: where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. The heart is a follower; it goes where the treasure went. Almsgiving is how a disciple relocates his own heart.

3. Live discovery: Read Luke 12:35–40: let your loins be girded and your lamps burning. That dress code is a quotation of a posture. Find Exodus 12:11 and read how Israel was commanded to eat the first Passover. What is Jesus dressing his disciples for? And then read 12:37 slowly: what does this master do that no master in the ancient world would do?

Leader: *The find: belt fastened, sandals on, staff in hand, eaten in haste, it is the Lord's Passover. Ready for the Exodus. Then 12:37: the returning master girds himself and serves the servants. Bank it; say only that this promise has an appointment.*

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Exodus 12:11 is the source: Israel ate the first Passover dressed to leave, loins girded, sandals on, staff in hand, in haste, because redemption was minutes away and God's people do not meet it in pajamas. Jesus dresses his disciples in Passover posture: a departure is coming, the *exodos* the mountain spoke of, and watchfulness is not nervous scanning but packed readiness. Then verse 37 breaks every social rule in the ancient world: the master on his return will gird himself and have them sit at table, and he will come and serve them. Masters do not wait on slaves; this one will. File the promise carefully. Five chapters from now, on Passover night, someone at a table will say I am among you as one who serves, and this verse will stand up and take a bow.

4. Steelman chain: Read Luke 12:41–48. The strongest Protestant doctrine of assurance argues: salvation is God's gift and God's grip, the saved cannot finally be lost, and teaching otherwise breeds anxious works-religion. State that case at full strength, with its best texts (no one shall snatch them out of my Father's hand). Then prosecute it against tonight's parable: what happens to the steward who stops watching, and what do verses 47–48 establish about how God measures guilt?

Leader: *Honor the steelman; assurance guards real truths (grace, God's fidelity, no snatching). Expect the strong reply that the fallen steward was never truly saved and that warnings are God's means of preserving the elect; grant its coherence, then note that Luke presents the steward as one set over the household, and that the never-truly-saved move makes present assurance unknowable in practice. Then press: the steward set over the household can be assigned a place with the unfaithful, and 12:47–48 grades punishment by knowledge, the principle the mortal-venial distinction presupposes. CCC 1857–1862.*

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Give assurance its due: salvation is unmerited gift, the Father's grip is real, and no thief snatches sheep from his hand. Its strongest defenders add two moves: the warnings themselves are the very means God uses to keep the elect persevering, and a steward who turns to beating the servants never truly belonged to Christ at all; they went out from us because they were not of us (1 John 2:19). State both moves fairly. Then answer them from tonight's text: Luke will not let this steward be an outsider. He is the answer to Peter's question about the Twelve, the faithful and wise steward set over the household, warned precisely as one of the Lord's own officers. And if every apparent falling away only proves the person was never saved, assurance quietly changes its subject: no one can be certain now that his present faith is the persevering kind, which is the very certainty the doctrine promised. What the steelman cannot survive is tonight's steward: set over the household, he says my master is delayed, beats the servants, gets drunk, and is assigned his portion with the unfaithful. The sheep cannot be snatched, but Luke keeps showing they can walk: watching can stop, lamps can gutter, stewards can turn. The Catholic reading is vigilant confidence, certain of God's fidelity without presuming on our own perseverance, which is why the Church prays for final perseverance as a grace rather than claiming it as a possession. And verses 47–48 quietly hand us a whole moral theology: the servant who knew his master's will and did not act receives the severe beating; the one who did not know, the light one. Culpability is proportioned to knowledge, from the Lord's own lips. This verse does not by itself spell out the Church's three conditions for mortal sin, grave matter, full knowledge, and deliberate consent (CCC 1857-1862), but it establishes the principle they presuppose: God measures guilt by what we knew and willed, not by the act alone. To whom much is given, of him will much be required is not a threat to the little flock; it is the syllabus for its stewards.

DIG DEEPER: REPENT OR PERISH: READING THE NEWS WITH JESUS

Told about Galileans butchered by Pilate, Jesus rejects the crowd's math twice: do you think they were worse sinners? No. The tower of Siloam's eighteen were not worse offenders either. He forbids the spectator's theology that reads other people's catastrophes as other people's verdicts, and he re-aims the data: unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. Tragedy in Luke is not a window for judging the dead; it is a mirror and an alarm clock for the living, and the fig tree's gardener is already digging around your roots to buy you the year.

5. Read Luke 13:1–9. What question is the crowd really asking about the massacre and the tower, and how does Jesus redirect it? Then the fig tree: who is speaking for the tree, what does the reprieve cost him, and how long is it?

***Leader:** The crowd wants a theology of other people's disasters; Jesus hands them a deadline of their own. The gardener intercedes and does the dirty work himself; the reprieve is a year, not an amnesty. Gregory's homily in the Voices box supplies the manure image.*

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The crowd is doing what crowds do with catastrophe: converting victims into worse sinners so the survivors can feel safe. Jesus cancels the calculation, no, I tell you, and turns the alarm toward the

audience: unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. Then mercy gets a parable: three fruitless years, an owner with an axe, and a gardener who pleads let it alone, sir, this year also, and pays for the delay in his own sweat, digging and dunging. St. Gregory the Great heard in the manure the memory of our own sins, laid around the roots in penance until shame becomes fertilizer. The reprieve is real and it is dated: judgment delayed is mercy spending itself to buy fruit, not a verdict overturned. Every one of us is living in the gardener's extra year; the only question the parable leaves open is what grows in it.

6. Read Luke 13:22–35. Someone asks: will those who are saved be few? Look carefully at what Jesus does and does not answer. Who ends up inside the door, from where, and who is shocked to be outside? Then read the lament of 13:34–35: what image does Jesus choose for himself, and what does Jesus say they must say before they will see him again?

***Leader:** He refuses the statistic and issues the imperative: strive. The table fills from east and west; the shocked outsiders had proximity (we ate and drank in your presence) without discipleship. The hen and her brood; and Ps 118:26 as the condition, which the group will hear shouted in Session 12.*

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Asked for a number, Jesus answers in the second person plural: strive, *agōnizesthe*, the athlete's agony, to enter by the narrow door. St. Cyril's comment stands: the door is narrow not because God grudges entrance but because our swollen self-importance does not fit; the striving is the stooping.

The guest list he does reveal runs from east and west, north and south to recline with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the outsiders' thread now seated at the patriarchs' own table, while some with every proximity credential, we ate and drank in your presence, hear I do not know where you come from. Presumption, not weakness, is the parable's target. And then severity turns its face and shows tenderness underneath: O Jerusalem... how often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not. The narrow door and the open wings belong to the same Lord. The lament ends on a condition and a countdown, you will not see me until you say blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, and in Session 12 we will stand at the city gates and hear a crowd shout this very acclamation, with Luke's telling addition: Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord.

SEND: TAKING IT OUT (10 MIN)

S1. If God audited your barns this week, your accounts, closets, and calendar, what would he find stored that was issued for distribution? Name one surplus you could put back in circulation before we meet again.

S2. Girded loins and burning lamps: what in your spiritual life have you filed under someday that watchfulness would move to today?

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

- Give one thing away this week that costs you something to release, money, time, or a possession you like. Let your heart follow the treasure.

- Make a concrete plan for Confession if it has been a while; tonight's fig tree is about the gift of time, and 12:47–48 is about not presuming on what we know.
- Before next session, read Luke 14:1–15:32: banquets, the cost of discipleship, and three parables about lost things, one of them the most famous story Jesus ever told.

Scripture memory: **Luke 12:32**, *Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.* (RSV2CE)

CLOSING PRAYER

Leader: *Father, your Son called us a little flock and promised us the kingdom. Empty our barns of what belongs to the hungry, gird us for the departure you are preparing, and lead us stooping through the narrow door. Gather us, Lord, as a hen gathers her brood, and do not let us be unwilling. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Leader Reference Card: Session 8

Every passage used tonight, in order of appearance. Exodus 12:11 is the load-bearing bookmark; Psalm 118:26 gets planted for Session 12.

Passage Used for

Luke 12:13–21 Q1: the rich fool; St. Basil

Luke 12:22–34 Q2: ravens, lilies, little flock, treasure and heart

Luke 12:35–40 Q3: girded loins and burning lamps

Exodus 12:11 Q3 live discovery: Passover posture

Luke 12:37 Q3: the master who serves (bank for Session 13)

Luke 12:41–48 Q4 steelman: the steward; degrees of culpability

Luke 13:1–9 Q5: Siloam and the fig tree

Luke 13:22–30 Q6: the narrow door; east and west

Luke 13:31–35 Q6: the hen and the brood; Ps 118:26 planted

Psalm 118:26 Q6: the condition, shouted in Session 12

CCC 1854–1864, 305, 2544–2547, 1036, 1431–1439 Catechism Connection

Next week: Luke 14–15: the banquets and the lost things, including the prodigal son. Bookmark Isaiah 25:6–8; the group should discover for themselves whose feast every banquet parable has been previewing.