

Luke 21

Hardships: Purpose & Response

Study Summary and Learning Objectives

In this study we will be looking at sections of Luke 21 and dialoguing about hardships we face in life, their Gospel purpose, and our responses to them.

Objectives:

- Examine our natural responses to hardships and learn how to address them from a Gospel-centered perspective.
- To see a few of the ways in which hardship can have Gospel purpose.

Steps to Prepare (For Leaders)

- We'll be focusing on some excerpts from Luke 21. Please read the entire chapter prior to leading this study.
- We've included reading outside of Luke in this study that's not printed on the handout. Make sure you have Bibles around/devices for people to read.
- Think through a few times when you've experienced hardship in your life and how God used those experiences.

Questions for Discussion

Pray for your time together as a group.

Leader's Note: We will be using a general term, "hardship," in this discussion rather than the more common, "suffering." We hope that by doing this, it will help re-orient people's perspective on the concept rather than just thinking about things traditionally associated with that term.

Read Out Loud: In this study we're going to talk about hardship as part of our journey as believers. The passage we'll study references the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem, among other things, that may be interpreted in vastly different ways. Hope's leadership holds a variety of opinions on what the end times (AKA eschatology) may actually mean and look like, but are unanimous that Jesus will come back! If you're interested in knowing more, check out Hope's Statement of Faith and Elder Statement of Faith.

Leader's Note: <http://www.hopecc.com/what-were-about/>;
<http://www.old.hopecc.com/Images/pdfs/SOF.pdf>



What are some examples of hardship that you've seen occurring today, either in the world or your own life?

Possible Answers: Natural disasters, physical sickness, evils done against one another (e.g.: murder, rape, etc.), abandonment, mental illness, anxiety, unemployment, etc.

Leader's Note: Please ensure that all hardships are viewed equally. We do not want someone to feel that their example (especially if it's from their own life) is in any way less of a "big deal" by comparing it to someone else's.

Read Out Loud: Luke 21:5-19, 34-38 (NIV)

⁵ Some of his disciples were remarking about how the temple was adorned with beautiful stones and with gifts dedicated to God. But Jesus said, ⁶ "As for what you see here, the time will come when not one stone will be left on another; every one of them will be thrown down."

⁷ "Teacher," they asked, "when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are about to take place?"

⁸ He replied: "Watch out that you are not deceived. For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am he,' and, 'The time is near.' Do not follow them. ⁹ When you hear of wars and uprisings, do not be frightened. These things must happen first, but the end will not come right away."

¹⁰ Then he said to them: "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. ¹¹ There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven.

¹² "But before all this, they will seize you and persecute you. They will hand you over to synagogues and put you in prison, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name. ¹³ And so you will bear testimony to me. ¹⁴ But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. ¹⁵ For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict. ¹⁶ You will be betrayed even by parents, brothers and sisters, relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death. ¹⁷ Everyone will hate you because of me. ¹⁸ But not a hair of your head will perish. ¹⁹ Stand firm, and you will win life.

...

³⁴ "Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap. ³⁵ For it will come on all those who live on the face of the whole earth. ³⁶ Be always

Temple Destruction

Commentators present numerous opinions regarding Jesus' reference (vs. 6) here to the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. Whether or not He may have been speaking to a later, "end-times" destruction is not something we will delve into here. What we can know is that the temple in Jerusalem during the time of Jesus had been reconstructed by Herod the Great. "Pilgrims pouring into the city...could not help but be impressed, even overwhelmed, by its sheer size and magnificence" (*New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Gospel of Luke*, 733). The temple was completely destroyed during the Jewish Revolt and war with the Romans in A.D. 70., depriving them of the visible centerpiece of their faith.

on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man.”

³⁷ Each day Jesus was teaching at the temple, and each evening he went out to spend the night on the hill called the Mount of Olives, ³⁸ and all the people came early in the morning to hear him at the temple.

? Looking at the passage, what are some types of hardships that Jesus lists? Do any of these surprise you? Why or why not?

Possible Answers: Destruction, wars, natural disasters, fearful events, persecution, imprisonment, betrayal, death, being hated, etc.

Because of the LORD's great
love we are not consumed,
for his compassions never
fail.
They are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.
~Lamentations 3:22-23

? How have you seen people respond, either well or poorly, to encountering hardships in their life?

Possible Answers: Withdrawing from community, doing nothing, getting angry, retaliating, fear, shame, turning to the Lord, processing experiences with Gospel-friends, reading the Bible.

? How do those responses line up with the ones Jesus provides (vv. 34-36)?

Possible Answers: We're cautioned to not turn to things the world would deem as appropriate responses (e.g. filled with anxiety, drinking in excess, etc.), but to rest in knowing God is present in our hardships, has purpose for them, and that we also will one day be with Jesus.

? In this passage (vs. 37) and others in the Gospels (e.g. Luke 22:39-44, John 7:53), we see Jesus leaving the crowds behind and going to the Mount of Olives. Why do you think He did this? What can we learn from His example?

Possible Answers: Jesus knew that He had to take care of His physical self as well as spiritual. He needed time to commune directly with His Father and recharge. This also gave Him more private time with His disciples, especially after challenging encounters.

We can learn that even in the midst of being a faithful Christ-follower, there are times when we need to rest and more intentionally seek the Lord. Spending time with the Lord changes our perspective on hardship and equips us to face it from a place of spiritual "fullness."

? Jesus teaches in verses 13-19 that the hardships we encounter as believers have purpose. How have you seen God use your hard experiences for His glory?

Possible Answers: Answers will vary based on experiences, but some people may have found that their hard experiences have enabled them to better speak into others' lives who are struggling, created

greater vulnerability/honesty about their spiritual journey, taught them greater dependence on the Lord, etc.

Leader's Note: Depending on how much time you have, it may be beneficial to split into smaller groups for this next portion to read the passages and report out to the whole group.

? Let's take a look at a few more passages. What can we learn about the purpose of hardship from them, as well as from our main passage today?

Read: Romans 5:1-5, Acts 5:27-42 (esp. 40-41), 1 Peter 4:12-19, 2 Corinthians 1:6-7

Possible Answers: Bear witness to the Gospel, the Holy Spirit can work through you and your words, opportunity to stand firm/endure, way to experience growth, greater intimacy with Christ, so that we can minister to others who are enduring hardships.

From John Piper: *"In suffering we come to hope more fully in God and put less confidence in the things of this world."*
(desiringGod.com/sermons)

? Ultimately, we do not need to be afraid of hardship because of our relationship with Christ. How does this reality impact the way we respond when we face difficult things?

Possible Answers: It helps us maintain an eternal perspective, which can be helpful when feeling overwhelmed by the daily struggle. We know that Christ also suffered many things and understands our hardships. His presence and example brings peace, comfort, and purpose so we don't need to walk in fear of hard things. We can respond with joy instead of fear.

? What does it look like for us to prepare to encounter hardship as part of being a follower of Christ?

Possible Answers: Like Paul, having a heart-attitude that counts all things as "loss" (Phil. 3:8) when gaining Christ, remembering the hardship is a part of the Christian journey, having a realistic perspective.

For Discussion and Application

? What is your usual coping mechanism when faced with hardship, and how can your response be altered to better align with the Gospel?

? How are you following Jesus' "Mount of Olives" example in the midst of hardship?