

Sometimes Jesus Flips Tables

Small Group Guide

"All Leaves, No Fruit" | Mark 11:11-25

BEFORE YOU MEET

Encourage group members to read Mark 11:11-25 and reflect on this question before gathering: *What does it look like when something appears alive and fruitful on the outside but is hollow on the inside?*

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- 1. Jesus was zealous for anything bearing God's name to reflect God's heart and bear God's fruit.** The temple was full of religious activity and impressive in appearance, but it had drifted far from its intended purpose. Jesus responded not with indifference but with intentional, calculated action.
 - 2. The temple was always meant to be a place where those who were far off could draw near to God.** From Solomon's dedicatory prayer in 1 Kings 8 to Isaiah's prophecy in Isaiah 56, the invitation to the nations was never an afterthought. It was the plan from the beginning.
 - 3. Religious activity can never substitute for genuine fruit.** The fruit God was looking for was faith expressed in prayer and grace extended to others. These grow naturally from a life rooted in relationship with God, not from going through the motions.
 - 4. As the church, we are now the temple.** Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 3 that God's people collectively are where the Holy Spirit dwells. The responsibility the temple once carried now rests on us as the gathered body of Christ.
 - 5. Unforgiveness and bitterness can block others from encountering God through us.** Just as the religious activity in the temple courts stood in the way of Gentiles having a genuine encounter with God, our lack of grace can do the same to those around us today.
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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Opening (Choose One)

- Have you ever been drawn to something that looked promising from a distance but was disappointing up close? What was that experience like?
 - When you first started attending church, what were you hoping to encounter? Did you find it?
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Digging In

1. The sermon described a "Markan Sandwich," where the story of the fig tree frames the story of the temple cleansing. What do the two stories have in common? Why do you think Mark structured the account this way?
 2. Jesus did not act impulsively. Mark 11:11 tells us he surveyed the temple the evening before and returned the next day. What does that tell you about the nature of his anger and his actions?
 3. The temple courts were filled with legitimate, necessary religious activity. The money changers and animal sellers served a real purpose in the sacrificial system. So what exactly was Jesus objecting to? What had gone wrong?
 4. Solomon's prayer in 1 Kings 8 specifically asked God to hear the prayers of foreigners who came to the temple because of his name. How does knowing that history change the way you read Jesus' response in Mark 11?
 5. The sermon pointed out that many Gentile pilgrims may have traveled great distances to encounter the God of Israel, only to walk away thinking that a series of transactions was what encountering God looked like. How does that image sit with you? Does it challenge you in any way?
 6. Jesus quotes two passages back to back in verse 17. He references Isaiah 56, which is about God welcoming the foreigner, and Jeremiah 7, which is about people using religious practice as cover for rebellion. Why do you think he paired those two passages together?
 7. After the disciples notice the withered fig tree, Jesus immediately begins talking about faith, prayer, and forgiveness in verses 22 through 25. Why do you think those topics follow directly from what just happened? How are they connected?
 8. The sermon offered two warnings: beware of settling for anything less than an encounter with God, and beware of standing in the way of someone else encountering God. Which of those two warnings feels more personally relevant to you right now, and why?
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Going Deeper

9. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 3 that God's people are collectively his temple and that the Holy Spirit dwells in them. What does it mean practically for your church community to take that seriously? What changes if you actually believe that?
 10. The sermon made this observation: "If grace is what brought us near, grace should be what others encounter in us and through us." Where in your life is it hardest to be a conduit of grace rather than a barrier to it?
 11. Jesus connects forgiveness directly to fruitfulness in verses 24 and 25. Is there a relationship in your life where unforgiveness might be limiting the fruit God wants to produce in and through you?
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PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

This Week, Choose One:

- **Examine your own worship.** Before your next Sunday gathering, take five minutes to ask God to help you come with genuine expectation rather than habit. Write down one specific thing you want to bring to him.
 - **Identify a possible "table" that needs overturning.** Is there an area of your spiritual life that has the appearance of faith but has drifted from a real relationship with God? Name it honestly and bring it to him in prayer.
 - **Take a step toward forgiveness.** Think of one person toward whom you are carrying resentment, bitterness, or unforgiveness. You do not have to resolve everything at once. Ask God for the courage to take one step, whether that is a prayer, a conversation, or simply a decision of the will.
 - **Consider who you might be blocking.** Think about the people in your life who are far from God. Is there anything in the way you live, speak, or treat others that might make it harder for them to see Jesus clearly? Ask a trusted friend to help you answer that honestly.
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CLOSING REFLECTION

The sermon closed with this question worth sitting with as a group:

What do others encounter when they draw near to me? Are they encountering the fruit that Jesus talks about, or are they encountering something else?

Close your time together in prayer. Invite group members to pray specifically for one person in their life who is far from God, asking that your community would be the kind of place where that person could draw near and encounter the real grace of Jesus.

