

MARK

READ ALOUD: MARK 11:12-33

Pursue

Synopsis & Context:

In our text this week, Mark 11:12-33, Jesus uses a fig tree as a tangible parable to display Israel's spiritual state and point his disciples to the true means of bearing good spiritual fruit in season. The author does this by sandwiching Jesus's righteous anger in the temple with his cursing of a fig tree.

Some context the disciples would have considered as they watched this unfold is that throughout the Old Testament, Israel was depicted as the planting, vineyard, or tree of God. Several times in the OT, God inspects Israel for "first figs" of spiritual fruit but finds none, and God curses them to remain barren and exiled. But God promised to replant Israel and bring about good fruit (Ezek. 36:8). It is with this backdrop that Jesus finds the fig tree "in leaf" but bearing no fruit as it should.

Jesus then enters the temple, the center of Israel's spiritual life, and finds *leaves* - much is taking place in the temple - but yet no true spiritual fruit, *first figs*. In fact, there are some preying on, extorting, and manipulating others for personal gain. In righteous anger, Jesus expels the people from the temple, saying, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a den of robbers."

Jesus and the disciples leave to find the fig tree that Jesus had cursed withered away, and he begins to teach them about prayer. The disciples will be the future caretakers of God's new temple, his new vineyard. That new tree will bear fruit by the work of God alone, but they will be instruments in that work of God. Jesus is showing and teaching these men that the true source of power as they work should be reliance on God through prayer.

- These verses serve as a warning for us as individuals and as a church that it is possible to be showing signs of spiritual life ("in leaf") and yet be withered at the root and bearing no fruit ("first figs"). We can busy ourselves with the work of ministry life outwardly and yet inwardly, bear no fruit in our relationship with God.
 - **Take time as a group to discuss your relationship with God. How is it today? Where are you sensing His leading? Are you experiencing what feels like silence? How are you hoping to grow in your relationship with Him?**
 - **Can you think of a time when you experienced this gap?**
 - If you are walking through this right now, there is no condemnation for you if you are in Christ. Share with your group and ask for encouragement and help.
- Jesus emphasizes the importance of prayer for his disciples for this fruit-bearing work. Prayer is an expression of faith and dependency. Often, when our prayer life is struggling, it is a good indicator light on the dashboard of our hearts that something is going on.
 - **Take time as a group to discuss your prayer life. How has it been going? What does it look like? What prayers have you seen answered recently? What prayers are you longing to see God answer?**

Practice

Rejoice with One Another

(SPECIAL NOTE: If your group has children in it who are not in a separate place, this practice may need to look slightly different, or you may need to have them do it as homework. If you do have group members do this as homework, follow up next week and have them share.)

Knowing that we don't earn God's vinedresser care BY bearing good fruit but instead bear good fruit BY God's vinedresser care, take time as a group to pray and consider in what ways God might be calling you to cultivate good soil. To do this, we need to listen to the Holy Spirit. We often know how to talk to God, but it can be a harder thing to quiet our minds and hearts and listen.

- Take 5-10 minutes, and ask group members to sit in silence. Before they begin:
 - Encourage them to thank God for making a way for right relationship with Him and for the gift of the Holy Spirit.
 - Encourage them to express their desire to more bear fruit in their relationship with God.
 - Encourage them first to ask the Holy Spirit to speak to them during this time.
 - If they are reminded of scripture, encourage them to read and pray through it.
 - If they sense a prompting of the Holy Spirit towards conviction, encouragement, etc. Have them jot it down so they don't forget.
- End by inviting group members to share anything they are comfortable sharing. If there are steps God is calling them to, help them consider how the group can encourage and help them in those next steps.

Proclaim

Spend time as a group praying for the missionary you have a partnership with. Ask God to:

- Work powerfully in them to bear good fruit in their relationship with Him.
- Increase their desire for and enjoyment of their prayer life.