

Unexpected Confrontation

September 27, 2020



Daily Devotionals Introduction

As you read about Jesus in the Gospels, you might see some things that perhaps you weren't expecting. For this 13-week series, we'll open the Book of Mark together and study the life of Jesus—The Unexpected King. During this series, we will gain a better understanding of who Jesus is and what it really means to be his disciple.

As an individual or as a family, use these daily devotionals and reflection questions to connect with Jesus each day this week.

Each day, there will be a thought stemming from our Scripture passage along with 2-3 questions. Our hope is that as we journey together through the book of Mark, we'll be able to come out the other side knowing more about the life of Jesus.

Be sure to prayerfully consider each day's truth, passages, and each of the questions. If you are a part of a life group, let these devotionals stir your thinking and be the foundation for your group conversation.

Our prayer is that these devotionals, questions, and reflections will help you love God, love people, and make disciples.

Day 1

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the definition of hangry is, “bad-tempered or irritable as a result of hunger.”

This word has sometimes come to mind as I’ve read **Mark 11** and have seen a hungry Jesus looking for figs on a tree and then cursing it once He didn’t find any fruit. “Jesus, maybe you should work on that displaced aggression,” I wonder to myself.

Do you ever read about something Jesus said or did and think, “Wait...what?”

- Why spit in the dirt and rub mud on the blind man’s eyes to heal his sight (**John 9**)?
- Just when the crowds following you are at their largest, why tell people they need to eat your flesh and drink your blood to have any part of you (**John 6:53**)?

Have you been confused by something that Jesus did or said? How about times in your own life that caused you to question (sickness, death of a loved one, loss of a job, etc.)? Take a few moments to identify those things.

Jesus is ok with questions. Confusion doesn’t bother Him. He’s infinite; He’s way beyond anything we can understand or imagine, so how could we fully understand all He does or says? Check out how God reminds Job of this in **Job 38**.

In fact, after teaching people that He is the bread of life—that people must eat His flesh and drink His blood—and seeing that the people were not just confused but even angry, Jesus answered their confusion. **Read John 6:60-65.**

What does this reply from Jesus teach you about your own confusion and how it might open a door for his Spirit?

What if our questions caused us to marvel at God’s vastness? What if our confusion led us to deeper worship? What if, instead of being afraid of looking inept in front of Jesus, we turned to Him and reacted the way Peter did, saying, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that You are the Holy One of God.”

As you go through this week, think about those areas of confusion you listed before. Hold them, unashamed, out to Jesus. Let Him, through His Spirit, open your eyes and your heart to greater worship of the God who is beyond us.

Day 2

Enough with the talk of confusion, let's dig into some figs. They were a big deal in Israel. They're right up there with grapes and olives. Imagine how important corn or soybeans are to Indiana. Same.

Israel is often compared to God's vineyard, tree, planting: through the Old Testament and in some of Jesus' parables. And the comparison is clear; God provides life and fruit for His people. With that in mind, let's look at a horticultural reenactment of the history of Israel.

Isaiah 27:6

Hosea 9:10

Micah 7:1

Hosea 10:1-3

Blessing, straying, judgment: all told through the presence (or absence) of fruit. It's no coincidence that Jesus cursing a fig tree was recorded as a bookend to Jesus clearing out the temple and confronting the leaders of Israel. People had turned from the one who sustains them and had built something false for themselves. And that false identity became more important to them than God.

List some of the ways in Scripture you can see where people allowed false things (traditions, rules, systems) to replace God.

When it comes to Jesus clearing out the temple and His confrontation with the leaders, He was tearing down those false powers. The Jews believed the temple is where heaven met earth, and they had made the whole temple system to be their identity.

What happens when we become proud of the thing we built, yet neglect the reason we built it? It goes from true to false, from real to artificial. Artificial plants might look good, but they don't produce fruit. Jesus loves the people He created too much to allow them to let lesser things take God's place.

Judgment is real, and it comes from a just and loving God who takes sin seriously because when we live false lives, we are separated from Him.

How often do you think about God's judgment? How comfortable with it are you?

Do these confrontations of Jesus change your ideas about Him?

Jesus cursed the temple system and Israel itself because of what its people embodied. What are we embodying ourselves that are either contributing to or detracting from our health?

Day 3

Let's go one step further with the fig tree. Maybe you've recently heard George Washington singing about the security and prosperity he expects to find after retiring by quoting **Micah 4:5**, "Everyone will sit under their own vine and under their own fig tree, and no one will make them afraid..."

Not only does this show up in Micah, it shows up first of all in the historical account of Solomon's reign. Read **1 Kings 4:20-28**. In Israel's most prosperous times, the fig tree was a symbol of blessing, of God's favor.

Back to our cursed tree in Mark...Jesus found a beautiful tree in full bloom but it was without fruit. Kinda sounds like it was projecting fullness and prosperity—an image of God's favor—but was missing any real substance. Leaves can put on a show, but a lack of fruit is a serious matter.

Sound familiar? Speaking for myself, it hits a little too close to home. It becomes very easy to become pre-occupied with the sizzle instead of the steak. To spend our energy propping up our image rather than being nourished by God in a way that makes our lives fruitful.

Today, you're invited to a practice of self-examination and confession so that you can get these things out in the open with Jesus. Remember, this is an invitation; it's not meant to induce shame. It's an honest assessment of the fruit and leaves of your own life in front of the one who already fully understands your arboreal health. Feel free to do one or all of these.

1. Imagine yourself surrounded by the love of God. Ask Him to help you see yourself as He sees you. Remember He sees you absolutely and with love. As an act of prayer, write down the areas where you've made your own image or desires more important than God's desires and His glory. Also as an act of prayer, tear up that list and get rid of it as a visual reminder that who you are is not defined by past mistakes.
2. Ask for light to pierce your defenses, then ask yourself, "Who have I injured recently through thoughtlessness, neglect, anger, and so on?" As the Spirit brings people to mind, confess your feelings to God, ask Him to forgive you, and do what's needed to restore the relationship.
3. Imagine the kind of person you would like to become in your old age. Look at your life now and assess whether the way you live now is preparing you to become this person. Confess where you need to change. Ask God and your community of faith for help.

Day 4

For more perspective on the cursed fig tree and how it applies to us, we're going to another spot in scripture where Jesus interacted with a barren fig tree. This time, He told a story about one.

Using a centuries-old practice called Imaginative Prayer, let's look inside this short parable to see what Jesus might have been teaching and how it might provide clarity.

During this practice, you'll read the story four times, paying particular attention to different things each time. After each time, spend a few minutes to digest through praying, journaling, etc.

Luke 13:6-9

Before reading, take a few breaths to settle yourself, imagining sitting in God's presence in this act of prayer. Understand that there are no right or wrong answers. You're not digging into context but allowing your God-given imagination and the Spirit to reveal the scripture in a new light.

First reading

Listen to the parable itself (not necessarily the events surrounding Jesus' telling of it) for the broad themes: where and when does it take place, who is there, what happens? Take a few moments to reflect.

Second reading

Listen for more details: who are the major players, who else is there, what are they doing, how do they interact, what is the setting like, what time of day is it, what is the mood, the atmosphere? Reflect for a few moments.

Third reading

Notice more detail and begin to feel yourself in that place, in that story. Who are you or what are you (you may be an inanimate object, an animal, another tree in the vineyard; you may be a person or thing that is not specially mentioned in the printed story, but that you sense as you hear it read)? What are you doing, thinking, feeling or what is being done to or with you if you are inanimate? What are the sounds, the smells, and the other details about the location that you notice? What are the emotions and the undertones that you notice? Spend a little extra time reflecting on this.

Fourth reading

Experience the story as the person or object that you are in the story. When you finish reading, let the story continue to unfold within you—in your imagination, mind, and heart—as the person/object you are. Conclude your time with a few more minutes of prayer.

- **What is your response to all you experienced?**
- **What are you noticing from your response?**
- **What are God's invitations from this story for you?**

Day 5

Hopefully, yesterday's reading was very encouraging to you as you saw a tender, patient gardener doing all he can to restore what he loves.

Now let's go one step further as we learn from Jesus how to make certain we keep bearing fruit. Just a few days after cursing the fig tree, Jesus taught us about another tree (or vine, more accurately).

Read **John 15:1-8**.

How does Jesus' depiction of the vine compare and contrast with the fig tree?

I wonder if the picture of that withered fig tree popped into the disciples' minds as Jesus spoke. I wonder if they made the connection from a tree that looked full of life to a vine that was life...and how He shares that life with anyone who follows Him.

The long and short of the cursed fig tree and the vine is this: keep your eyes on the vine and let the fruit grow naturally.

- **In what areas of your life have you seen the fruit of God growing? How can you make yourself available to God's watering and fertilizing that fruit?**
- **What is God wanting to prune that you're still holding onto?**
- **How can the pictures of the withered fig tree and the living vine help you in the weeks and years to come as you keep your eye on the vine and let the fruit grow naturally?**

Sources:

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