

## Let's Go Group Studies

### Leader's Notes

1. We're providing this material to you to remove some of the stress and frustration of developing a plan to lead a specific group study. It isn't meant to replace your individual preparation to lead. Our hope is that you would use it as a guide to your engagement with the text and the Holy Spirit and allow Him to lead you as you help your study's participants to have their own relevant encounter with scripture and the Holy Spirit.
2. This plan isn't meant to constrain you to lead in any specific way. **Please do modify it to better meet the needs of your group and to honor your gifting and authentic style.** For example, when and how you pray and share prayer needs should be in a rhythm that is good for your group as long as you are praying as a group. For another, who reads and how scripture is read should fit your group and its needs as long as it is read somehow.
3. **Be authentic.** If you find yourself saying "They are asking" as in, 'I didn't write this question and I don't really understand why it is being asked.' Don't ask it. Ask something else. It is okay not to understand everything. No one understands everything. If you don't believe in what you're saying, why should anyone else believe it? One way to turn this into a positive is to admit to the group that you are struggling with figuring out a particular bit and allow someone else to contribute their God-given wisdom.
4. Some questions, especially earlier in the study, aren't meant to be a mile deep or transformative. These questions are intended to prompt the participants to notice what is there. They give the participants a way to begin to care about the specific words on the page and to begin to discuss the relevance of the scripture to their needs.
5. Portions of the plan in quotes are meant to be spoken out loud to the group as in, "Who's buried in Grant's Tomb?" You don't have to repeat the question or statement exactly as it appears. Restate it in a way that feels comfortable and natural for you.
6. Portions of the plan in *italics* are meant to be notes to you that you can use as prompts in aiding group discussion and aren't intended to be read verbatim to the group. They may not be the definitive answer but should be a good possible answer. As part of your preparation, please add to and edit the notes to fit where you intend to lead the discussion.
7. A **Follow up question** helps participants open up a little more and look a little deeper and is meant to be asked after there has been some discussion of the prior question.
8. The last two pages are the participant handout.
9. Please remember that our focus, purpose and practice is to **Love God, Love Others and Make Disciples.**

## Danger of a Dead Heart - Let's Go

- 1) Scripture: Mark 11:12-25,14:36; Matt 6:9-10, 12:33; John 15:5-8; Isaiah 56:4-7; 1 John 5:14-15
  - A. Parallel accounts- Matt 21:12-22; Luke 19:45-47
- 2) Objective: After studying the listed scripture and participating in the discussion, each person should be able to write down a prayer asking God to enable them to forgive someone specific of something specific and that will stretch them to bear good fruit for His glory.
- 3) Resources: Book of Mark, Grassmick. The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Walvoord & Zuck (BKC)
- 4) Preparation:
  - A. Pray for guidance
  - B. Review Leader's Notes and read entire lesson plan
- 5) Prayer requests & Open in prayer
- 6) Intro:
  - A. "Last time I asked you to identify one change you can make that would begin or deepen your commitment to Jesus as your sovereign king? Would anyone be willing to share if you were able to do that and tell us how you feel about the results?" *If you closed last time's study with a different question or application, substitute your closing for this one.*
  - B. Tonight, we see Jesus cursing a fig tree and driving merchants from the Court of the Gentiles on the Temple Mount. The fig tree incident can seem really out of place next to Jesus absolutely taking charge and chasing out the merchants who used the space to cheat those who came to make legitimate sacrifice. The temple leadership had taken the place that was meant to be the Gentile's closest approach to God to repent and pray and made it a place to make an extra buck and to use as a short-cut for foot traffic.
  - C. What I think we'll find is that Jesus expects Jews and Gentiles alike to bear the good fruit of a life that brings praise and not scorn to God's name.
  - D. When we are done, each of us should be able to write down a prayer asking God to enable each of us to do something that will stretch us to bear good fruit for His glory."
- 7) The study
  - A. Ask for volunteers to read Mark 11:12-14, Matt 12:33 and John 15:5-8

B. Ask everyone to complete question 1 on the handout. Allow 3-5 minutes for them to finish and then ask for volunteers to share their answers.

i) "Why is the fruit of a tree so important and why do you think Jesus made such a big deal out of a fig tree having no fruit out of its season?"

(1) *Next day, early Monday morning, after leaving Bethany for Jerusalem (cf. v. 1 a) Jesus was (lit., "became") hungry. From a distance Jesus saw a wayside fig tree in leaf, with full green foliage, and went to see if it had any fruit. But it had nothing but leaves. Mark explained that it was not the season for figs. The time of year was Passover (cf. 14:1), the middle of the month of Nisan (April). In Palestine fig trees produced crops of small edible buds in March followed by the appearance of large green leaves in early April. This early green "fruit" (buds) was common food for local peasants. (An absence of these buds despite the tree's green foliage promising their presence indicated it would bear no fruit that year.) Eventually these buds dropped off when the normal crop of figs formed and ripened in late May and June, the fig season. Thus, it was reasonable for Jesus shortly before Passover (mid-April) to expect to find something edible on that fig tree even though it was not the season for figs. (BKC)*

(2) *The fruit is the tree's mission in life. It is the identity of the tree. A tree that produces good fruit is considered a good tree, bad fruit=bad tree.*

(3) *Jesus is about to clear the temple of unrighteous activity (bad fruit). Maybe He wanted His disciples to connect the lesson of bad fruit with what is about to happen and apply that lesson to their own growth.*

C. Ask for a volunteer to read Mark 11:15-19 & Isaiah 56:4-7

D. Ask "Think about the fruitless tree. Why do you think Jesus was so angry?"

i) *This was probably Jesus' second attempt at clearing the temple (See John 2:13-17).*

ii) *The temple was to be God's place on earth. If the temple is identified directly with God, what do people think of God if His special place is a known den of thieves. Is it a fruitless tree? See the temple illustration on the second page of the handout.*

iii) *God's choice to bless Israel and give it a special place has never excluded non-Jews. Jesus was always meant to also restore the gentiles to God. (See Isa 49:6. I was going to list the places where Old Testament rules, blessings and prophecies included "foreigners" but there are 107 occurrences in the NLT. God has never forgotten the gentiles.)*

iv) *FYI, it's Monday evening.*

- E. Ask for a volunteer to read Mark 11:20-26
- F. Ask everyone to complete question 2 on the handout. Allow 3-5 minutes for them to finish and then ask for volunteers to share their answers.
- i) "What is hard to believe about verse 24 and what is easy to believe?"
- (1) *That it could be so easy to get what we want. Scripture as a whole teaches us that we must forgive others and ask according to God's will. Matt 6:9-10, Mark 14:36, John 15:7, 1 John 5:14-15.*
  - (2) *That we can't live in an unforgiving and unforgiven state and expect good things to happen.*
  - (3) *That we just have to believe. That sounds like a Disney movie.*
  - (4) *Please note that some translations omit verse 26, some put it in brackets. There is general agreement that it was added by a scribe who was trying to 'improve' the text and may have been trying to make this text agree with Matt 18:35. Mark doesn't contradict Matthew so there is no need to 'improve' the text. It is included in some translations because when the change was discovered from older, more reliable manuscripts, the verse indexing was already well-established. Fixing the verse numbering now would create chaos and likely start wars among people poorly equipped to fight them.*
- G. Ask everyone to complete question 3 on the handout. Allow 3-5 minutes for them to finish and then ask for volunteers to share their answers.
- i) "It is a big ask but try to see these events through Jesus' eyes. How would you summarize the most important thing you think Jesus wants His disciples, and you, to understand from them?" *Ideally, these answers come from the participants. Whether they get them from the study, the Sunday sermon or elsewhere, the best thing that can happen here is they are verbalized by the participants. If they struggle to answer...*
- (1) *Jesus is passionately invested in each of us producing good fruit.*
  - (2) *The fruit might change by the season, but Jesus expects us to be fruitful in and out of season.*
  - (3) *God is jealous for His good name.*
  - (4) *Jesus came to the Jews because of God's promises and love for them. He was always coming and came for the redemption of the gentiles also. It isn't two different goals but one.*

H. **Follow-up Question** “How is it important to you, or you think it might be important to you, that Jesus came to restore all of us to Himself and not just the Jews?”

- i) *He would have to be a much different God if He didn't care about the rest of us.*
- ii) *Why would I care about Him if He didn't already prove He cares about me?*
- iii) *There are any number of valid ways to answer this. Please help your participants personally connect with the fact that we, as Gentiles, are specifically included.*

I. Ask everyone to complete question 4 on the handout. Allow 3-5 minutes for them to finish and then ask for volunteers to share their answers.

- i) “Let’s take Jesus lessons on bearing fruit, prayer and faith at face value. Take a few minutes to write down a prayer asking God to enable you to forgive someone specific of something specific and that will stretch you to bear good fruit for His glory. Then ask yourself: Is this something I will believe that God has already given to me? (You won’t have to share this with the group unless you want to, but please use discretion in how much detail you share as it involves another person.)”

8) Summary:

- A. Encourage your group members to pray the prayer they developed from question 4. Plan on asking them next week about the results.
- B. Close in prayer

## Let's Go- A Savior for the Nations

Mark 11:12-25

1) Why is the fruit of a tree so important and why do you think Jesus made such a big deal out of a fig tree having no fruit out of its season?

2) What is hard to believe about verse 24 and what is easy to believe?

3) It is a big ask but try to see these events through Jesus' eyes. How would you summarize the most important thing you think Jesus wants His disciples, and you, to understand from them?

4) Let's take Jesus lessons on bearing fruit, prayer and faith at face value. Take a few minutes to write down a prayer asking God to enable you to forgive someone specific of something specific and that will stretch you to bear good fruit for His glory. Then ask yourself: Is this something I will believe that God has already given to me? (You won't have to share this with the group unless you want to, but please use discretion in how much detail you share as it involves another person.)

For next time... Read Mark 11:27-33

