

Guidelines for Leaders:

If you aren't doing so already, encourage your people to do their own homework on the questions before your meeting.

There is more than enough material in these questions to fill up your whole discussion time. So, consider these three suggestions for group discussion:

First, choose just one of the 2 Introduction questions.

Second, choose no more than 4 or 5 of the Understanding questions.

Third, be sure to allow enough time for the Application, which is where we really seek the impact of the sermon on our daily Christian lives. The Application is also a great opportunity for group prayer.

Introduction:

1. When are you most likely to lose your temper?
2. How does your church attendance lead to conversation during the week about how your religion affects your actual life?

Understanding:

3. We know that Jesus is the living example of God's love. Yet, based on today's scripture, who would want to kill him and why? If Jesus were walking the earth today, who would want to kill him and why?
4. Read Jeremiah 8:13, where the fig trees are a symbol of the nation of Israel. How does that verse shed light on why Jesus cursed the fig tree?
5. Are religious rituals *automatically* bad? Explain.
6. Read Isaiah 1:17 about God's concern for the oppressed. Are American Christians too likely to say that the plight of the oppressed is their own fault? Explain.
7. A dad gets angry at a kid interrupting at a key moment while he is watching a football game. When confronted about this he says, "Don't blame me. After all, Jesus blew his top at the temple." Is the dad's point valid? Why?
8. What kind of barrier to Jesus might a church put up that drives someone away? What kind of barrier to Jesus might someone put up that is not the fault of the church at all? How could you talk to both kinds of people?
9. How did the temple system work? What was good and bad about it? Why was Jesus so upset about it? And what do lambs have to do with it?
10. What is the connection between the cleansing of the temple and the cursing of the fig tree?

Application:

11. In what ways have you been focusing on rituals and church activities and services—as if those were the main point...and you've forgotten that it's all about the righteousness that God wants to develop in your life? What are some steps you can take to let Jesus change your view?
12. What are some of the bad things that happen if we drift from the gospel? How can you guard against them? What are some specific good results in your life when you stick closely to the gospel?