

Leaves Without Fruit
On the Way: A Journey Through the Gospel of Mark
Gospel of Mark
July 5, 2026
Mark 9:2-29

Central Thesis: Following Jesus means leaving the mountain, walking through the valley, and trusting that the glory at the end is greater than the cross along the way.

Outline:

1. The Fig Tree: Leaves Without Fruit (vv. 12-14)
2. The Temple: A House of Prayer or a Den of Robbers? (vv. 15-19)
3. The Withered Tree: Judgment Is Real (vv. 20-21)
4. The New Way: Faith, Prayer, Forgiveness (vv. 22-25)
5. Application and Conclusion

Questions (For personal reflection and small group discussion)

1. What is the most memorable thing you've ever bought (or a restaurant you visited) because the packaging or advertising looked amazing, but the actual product was a total letdown?

2. Read Mark 11:12–25 out loud together. Mark uses a famous "sandwich technique" here : he starts with the fig tree, jumps to the temple clearing, and ends back at the withered tree. **Why do you think he links these two events so tightly? What is the common thread between them?**

Jesus says in verse 23, "Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea...'" The sermon pointed out that Jesus was looking directly at the Temple Mount. **How does knowing he was talking about the end of the old temple system change how you view this famous verse?**

3. The sermon emphasized that "leaves impress people, but fruit nourishes souls." For the temple leaders, their "leaves" were religious busyness, traditions, and financial commerce. **What do modern spiritual "leaves" look like? Where are you most tempted to prioritize looking good or staying busy over being spiritually real?**

4. The sermon shared the story of Ruth, who forgave her neighbor Fran after a literal poisoning attempt. The secret wasn't her own willpower; it was that she stood under the "waterfall of God's forgiveness" first. We read that Jesus became the "withered tree" for

us on Calvary by taking our curse so we could be welcomed back. **How does looking at Jesus' sacrifice on the cross fundamentally alter the way we look at people who have deeply hurt or betrayed us? Why is it impossible to forge true forgiveness out of raw willpower?**

5. (Optional) As a group or a church, how can we make sure we are building bridges for the "outsider" rather than letting our own comfort become a barrier?

(Optional) What is one area of your life right now where the "noise of commerce" or daily stress has drowned out the rhythm of prayer?

6. Spend two minutes in total silence. Let's quietly name one "Fran" in our life (someone we are holding a grudge against) or one area where we are hiding behind leaves.

