

LifeWay Bible Studies for Life Series for October 4: The warrior hero

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Christians face monumental challenges in striving to live the Christian life in this evil world. Discipleship is an epic adventure and the ultimate challenge. These lessons reveal how Jesus lived in constant tension with many religious and social challenges and provides clear examples for believers who strive against the world's challenges.

Many of Jesus' strivings related to the people of Israel who had become unfruitful and failed to reach God's intentions. Jesus also opposed religious practices that had replaced true worship with efforts to reach material gain and personal position. Jesus taught that people could live the Christian life and produce Christian fruit only by the power of God that comes through prayer.

A hero is he or she who actively performs an act or acts of striking bravery or shows an admirable quality such as courage or strength in the process of a struggle or conflict. A warrior is one who engages in these struggles. Martin Luther King was a warrior hero in the effort to eliminate racism and poverty in America.

In a greater way, Jesus served as a warrior hero in the struggle to bring honor and glory to God and to reach God's will. Following his example allows Christians to meet the challenges of living victoriously in spite of the obstacles.

Strenuously resisting fruitlessness (Mark 11:12-14; 20-21)

Jesus heroically sought to call Israel back from useless activities that were making them fruitless. God created Israel to bring forth fruit by becoming a blessing to all people (Genesis 12:1-3). In spite of the many opportunities and privileges, Israel had become tragically fruitless. The Lord used a symbolic action related to the fig tree to show the danger of fruitlessness.

The fig tree usually produced leaves before the fruit came. Mark says it was not the season for figs, a statement not in other Gospels. Mark might have been confused, but inspiration would have ensured he did not write his confusion in Scripture. Probably Mark was pointing out that this was a symbolic action and that Israel was not producing fruit and at the time Jesus came to the tree and to Israel, both were fruitless.

The fig tree often was associated with Israel (Jeremiah 8:13; Nahum 3:12; Hosea 9:10). Jesus did not act from anger or desire for punishing. He seized the moment to teach. Perhaps he recalled the words of Micah 7:1-6 where the Lord was seeking fruit from his people who were failing to produce it. Jesus indicated he was seeking fruit from his people and fruitless on their part is sin. God expects lasting fruit from his people (John 15:16).

The next morning, when Peter (v. 21) pointed out the withered tree, Jesus pointed to the way of fruit bearing, faith in God (vv. 22-23). Every believer must constantly monitor his or her life for any failure of fruitbearing. God expects fruit in terms of proper living, showing the results of the Spirit and witnessing to the lost. We must trust Christ to empower us and use our sincere efforts to produce much fruit.

Striving constantly against worldly distractions (Mark 11:15-19)

In his act of expelling the money changers and sellers of sacrifices, Jesus was establishing authentic worship free from worldly distractions. The priests participated in the gains from the selling of sacrifices. The sellers were far more concerned with profit than worship or service. Jesus had

cleared the temple of such people and practices during his first Passover visit (John 2:13-22), but the practice has returned. He rejects insincere worship and improper practices. Jesus mentioned “sellers of doves” to show that some of these false providers of sacrifices were oppressing the poor who would be those purchasing doves.

God’s intent had been that the temple would be a place of prayer for all nations (Isaiah 56:7). These merchants who were captivated by opportunities for monetary gain were distracted by their greed. They turned the house of prayer into a den of thieves, the place where thieves retreated to hide their wrongdoing. Cleansing the temple was a symbolic act to show Jesus requires his followers to avoid the worldly and material distractions that can interfere with true worship.

The lures of material matters—fame, position, pleasure—often distract people from true worship or effective service. Jesus resisted these barriers to worship and service. His followers should become warriors in the struggle to avoid all that detracts from or brings discredit to God.

Engaging in the conflicts through the power of faith (Mark 11:22-25)

Jesus used the two acts, the dying tree and his cleansing of the temple, to teach about faith and prayer. “Have faith in God,” carried the meaning of constantly trusting God and living in dependence on him. Mountains, to Jews, signified things strong and immovable. Such problems can be overcome through faith and prayer.

Jesus did not, however, teach that if we pray hard enough and believe deeply enough that God is obligated to answer our prayers. Prayer is not to get man’s desires done in heaven but to assure God’s will is done on earth. Jesus also shows true prayer includes the virtue of forgiveness. We do not earn God’s answers by our faith or our forgiveness. Faith and forgiveness

are but evidences of our hearts. Faith and forgiveness open the doors for God's blessings upon us.

To be fruitful and victorious over worldly distractions, we must seek God's power through faith and prayer.