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~ **The Disobedient Sons** ~

You can learn much more about this story by doing these three things:

1. Read Matthew 21:18-32.
2. Discover key cultural and historical insights.
3. Answer the reflective questions.

1. Read the text of the story.

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Matthew 21:18-32 NASB	Matthew 21:18-32 NLT
<p>¹⁸ Now in the morning, when He was returning to the city, He became hungry. ¹⁹ Seeing a lone fig tree by the road, He came to it and found nothing on it except leaves only; and He *said to it, “No longer shall there ever be <i>any</i> fruit from you.” And at once the fig tree withered.</p> <p>²⁰ Seeing <i>this</i>, the disciples were amazed and asked, “How did the fig tree wither <i>all</i> at once?” ²¹ And Jesus answered and said to them, “Truly I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and cast into the sea,’ it will happen. ²² And all things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive.”</p> <p>²³ When He entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to Him while He was teaching, and said, “By what authority are You doing these things, and who gave You this authority?” ²⁴ Jesus said to them, “I will also ask you one thing, which if you tell Me, I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. ²⁵ The baptism of John was from what <i>source</i>, from heaven or from men?” And they <i>began</i> reasoning among themselves, saying, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ He will say to us, ‘Then why did you not believe him?’ ²⁶ But if we say, ‘From men,’ we fear the people; for they all regard John as a prophet.” ²⁷ And answering Jesus, they said, “We do not know.” He also said to them, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.</p> <p>²⁸ “But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, ‘Son, go work today in the vineyard.’ ²⁹ And he answered, ‘I will not’; but</p>	<p>¹⁸ In the morning, as Jesus was returning to Jerusalem, he was hungry, ¹⁹ and he noticed a fig tree beside the road. He went over to see if there were any figs, but there were only leaves. Then he said to it, “May you never bear fruit again!” And immediately the fig tree withered up.</p> <p>²⁰ The disciples were amazed when they saw this and asked, “How did the fig tree wither so quickly?”</p> <p>²¹ Then Jesus told them, “I tell you the truth, if you have faith and don’t doubt, you can do things like this and much more. You can even say to this mountain, ‘May you be lifted up and thrown into the sea,’ and it will happen. ²² You can pray for anything, and if you have faith, you will receive it.”</p> <p>²³ When Jesus returned to the Temple and began teaching, the leading priests and elders came up to him. They demanded, “By what authority are you doing all these things? Who gave you the right?”</p> <p>²⁴ “I’ll tell you by what authority I do these things if you answer one question,” Jesus replied. ²⁵ “Did John’s authority to baptize come from heaven, or was it merely human?”</p> <p>They talked it over among themselves. “If we say it was from heaven, he will ask us why we didn’t believe John. ²⁶ But if we say it was merely human, we’ll be mobbed because the people believe John was a prophet.” ²⁷ So they finally replied, “We don’t know.”</p> <p>And Jesus responded, “Then I won’t tell you by what</p>

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<p>afterward he regretted it and went. ³⁰The man came to the second and said the same thing; and he answered, 'I will, sir'; but he did not go.³¹ Which of the two did the will of his father?" They *said, "The first." Jesus *said to them, "Truly I say to you that the tax collectors and prostitutes will get into the kingdom of God before you. ³²For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him; but the tax collectors and prostitutes did believe him; and you, seeing <i>this</i>, did not even feel remorse afterward so as to believe him.</p>	<p>authority I do these things.</p> <p>²⁸ "But what do you think about this? A man with two sons told the older boy, 'Son, go out and work in the vineyard today.' ²⁹The son answered, 'No, I won't go,' but later he changed his mind and went anyway. ³⁰ Then the father told the other son, 'You go,' and he said, 'Yes, sir, I will.' But he didn't go.</p> <p>³¹ "Which of the two obeyed his father?"</p> <p>They replied, "The first."</p> <p>Then Jesus explained his meaning: "I tell you the truth, corrupt tax collectors and prostitutes will get into the Kingdom of God before you do. ³² For John the Baptist came and showed you the right way to live, but you didn't believe him, while tax collectors and prostitutes did. And even when you saw this happening, you refused to believe him and repent of your sins.</p>
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2. Discover key cultural and historical insights

- In antiquity, speaking to plants and trees was considered normal and effective. Ancient agricultural handbooks. Malina, 196-97
- Mark, unlike the other Gospels, "frames the incident in the Temple with the cursing of the fig tree so that the two episodes comment on each other. Seen in light of the fig tree episode, the Temple incident is not so much a cleansing as a symbolic destruction. Because it has been unfruitful like the fig tree, the Temple itself will be withered away to its very roots." Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels, 817.
- Chief Priests – "Found more than sixty times in the Gospels and Acts, *archiereis* is typically translated "chief Priests." In the Gospel they appear as a group in opposition to Jesus (Luke 19:47;20:19; 22:2,4,52; 23:4-5, 10, 13; 24:20). Josephus also speaks of 'chief priests'... but neither the Gospels nor Josephus provide much information more specific about their identity. Schrenk, followed by many others, holds that they are 'an established college with oversight of the cultus, control of the temple, administration of the temple treasure, and supervision of priestly discipline". According to the Gospel they were members of the Sanhedrin (Mk 14:53; Luke 22:66). The chief priests were centered in Jerusalem, the socio-religious and economic center of Palestine, and the Gospels consistently refer to them in this local (Mt. 2:4; 16:21; 20:18; 21:15; 23, 45). Together with the high priest, they would have been the bearers of significant power and privilege within the Judaism of Jesus' day." 635-36.
- The elders were Jewish men who exercised jurisdiction over Jewish civil and religious life. They decided which type of disciplinary action to take against rebels, controlled synagogue worship,

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and enforced the laws of the land. The members of the Sanhedrin, the highest ruling body in Israel were called elders., Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospel, 202

Answer these reflective questions.

Jesus showed that one of the lessons from the cursing of the fig tree was to have faith in God. He said,

“Have faith in God. Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and cast into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says is going to happen, it will be granted him. Therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they will be granted you.”

What major lessons does this statement teach you about prayer and faith?

After Jesus told his disciples to believe and pray, he then spoke to them about forgiving others. Why was this so important to Jesus? How would an unforgiving attitude towards others hinder our prayer and faith?

The chief priests and elders were not honest with Jesus about the authority of John. Because of this, Jesus refused to answer their question about where his authority came from. Does this have any lesson for us about being completely honest with God about what we truly think and believe?

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As you look at your life, which son in the story are you most like? Are you like the first son who disobeyed and then repented? Or, are you like the second son who said he would obey, but then did not obey his father? How can we become obedient children of God?
