

Mark 9:14-29
HELP MY UNBELIEF

The spiritual Mountain top experience is great, but we can't live there because they don't last. The ultimate mountain top experience is ours in the new heaven and the new earth.
For now, God has called us to live down here where things can get messy.

Peter, James, and John come down the mountain with Jesus and encounter an awkward mob scene. There seems to be the potential for things to get out of hand, so Jesus steps in to take over.

** REALITY CHECK – spiritual mountain top experiences are great but when you come back down you find that the world is just as menial and petty as it was before.

14 When they came *back* to the disciples, they saw a large crowd around them, and *some* scribes arguing with them. 15 Immediately, when the entire crowd saw Him, they were amazed and *began* running up to greet Him.

16 And He asked them, "What are you discussing with them?" 17 And one of the crowd answered Him, "Teacher, I brought You my son, possessed with a spirit which makes him mute; 18 and whenever it seizes him, it slams him *to the ground* and he foams *at the mouth*, and grinds his teeth and stiffens out. I told Your disciples to cast it out, and they could not *do it*."

19 And He **answered them and *said*, "O unbelieving generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring him to Me!" 20 They brought the boy to Him. When he saw Him, immediately the spirit threw him into a convulsion, and falling to the *ground*, he *began* rolling around and foaming *at the mouth*. 21 And He asked his father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood. 22 It has often thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him. But if You can do anything, take pity on us and help us!"

23 And Jesus said to him, "If You can?" All things are possible to him who believes." 24 Immediately the boy's father cried out and said, "I do believe; help my unbelief." 25 When Jesus saw that a crowd was rapidly gathering, He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "You deaf and mute spirit, I command you, come out of him and do not enter him again."

26 After crying out and throwing him into terrible convulsions, it came out; and *the boy* became so much like a corpse that most of *them* said, "He is dead!" 27 But Jesus took him by the hand and raised him; and he got up.

28 When He came into *the house*, His disciples *began* questioning Him privately, "Why could we not drive it out?" 29 And He said to them, "This kind cannot come out by anything but prayer."

Rafael



WE ALWAYS NEED JESUS v. 14-19

Jesus and his trio of friends came back to join the rest of the disciples, and they encountered a rather motley crew: The other nine disciples, Scribes, and a crowd. The scribes and the crowd are arguing.

Jesus starts playing detective to find out what is going on and it turns out that the argument centers around the inability of the nine to cast a demon out of a man's son.

You can imagine that this scene is pretty emotional. You've got scribes arguing with a crowd, a demon possessed boy and disciples who can't cast out a demon.

Note how the crowd is critical even when the disciples are trying to help, trying to get it right.

** Can you identify? This can happen in marriage, family, work, and even church. ARE YOU QUICK TO BLAME THOSE WHO DON'T GET THINGS PERFECTLY RIGHT or meet your expectations?

How might things have been different if instead of arguing, the crowd and Scribes had said, "Sir, If you are struggling, why don't we all pray to Yahweh / Adonai?" That might be good advice in our own lives.

How long have they been at this? We don't know.

What method did they try? We don't know but whatever they tried DID NOT WORK.

** EX: Have you ever tried to do something in front of a crowd and just couldn't do it? It can be stressful. EX: I was nervous just opening a wine bottle while waiting tables at Steak and Ale. (Certainly not as important as this situation with the disciples and the boy, his father, the crowd, and the scribes))

We might imagine that the crowd and THE SCRIBES were giving them a hard time and gave them an opportunity to question Jesus' own authority. They are embarrassed for themselves and for how their failure might reflect on Jesus.

** We are told that we are ambassadors of Christ and that we are to walk in a manner worthy of our calling in Christ, but it is also necessary to remember that Jesus IS BIG ENOUGH TO handle his own reputation.

The disciples are facing Critics, demons, and failure. If any of those come our way, they all remind us that we never outgrow our need for Jesus. ((The same is true in times of success – perhaps even more so.))

** APPLY...

Failure can make us bitter, or it can make Jesus more believable.

In our weakness we can lean into his strength

In our limitations we can lean into belief, i.e. faith in the power and provision of Jesus.

In our "can't", we lean into His "can".

v. 15 In our weakness we can point people to Jesus, the one who amazed the crowd just by showing up.

While the crowd may have come to see Jesus, they soon learned that he was not there. Then he does appear.

V. 19 is an interesting insight into the human dynamic of the relationship between Jesus and the disciples. The rhetorical questions capture the humanity of Jesus. He has demonstrated His power over and over and is still surrounded by those who express so much unbelief. Jesus speaks of "this generation" which includes more than just the disciples but also the crowd, the scribes, and the nation as a whole. What he sees is an external religion of rituals rather than a true heartfelt faith

Whenever the disciples are separated from Jesus, they get in trouble and experience a crisis. What a valuable lesson: we never advance beyond our need for Jesus! (Danny Akin)

** Apply

We may not think there is a takeaway for us since we probably aren't encountering many demonic situations... OR ARE WE?? Either way, there are things in our lives that we should probably be praying about but aren't.

WE NEVER OUTGROW OUR NEED TO WALK BY FAITH v. 19-27

The demonic torture of this young man has gone on since childhood and out of desperation the father brings him to Jesus. Verses 18,20,22 indicate that the condition of the boy is amplified by the destructive intent of the evil spirit. When the demon sees Jesus he throws the boy into convulsions, rolling the ground

and foaming at the mouth. THIS IS A DRAMATIC SCENE and a power encounter between the unclean spirit and Jesus.

Does the father have perfect faith? NO, but he humbly approaches Jesus imploring him to “take pity on us and help us.” Jesus cares more about the DIRECTION OF HIS FAITH, NOT THE PERFECTION OF HIS FAITH. His faith is directed toward Jesus.

** THE FATHER doesn't become an atheist – “I can't believe in a God who would allow this.”
The father recognized that his son needs help and that he needs help. We don't always realize the sense of need that can be oppressive for caregivers. The need of the one who is afflicted is obvious, but the caregivers also bear the weight of the affliction.

This father comes to find Jesus because he believes that Jesus is willing to help but he's not sure if He is capable of helping. “IF YOU CAN.”

Our faith struggles tend to fit into two categories:

Jesus is willing but not capable OR He is capable but may not be willing.

The father trusts the heart of Jesus even if he's not sure if he can deliver his son. This father's response has been echoed by so many over the years – “I do believe; help my unbelief.”

That's what we could call ‘mustard seed faith’ – it is small, but it is centered on Jesus.
My guess is that many here today have said that at some point in time. I know I have.

v. 25-27 Jesus shows pity to the boy and his father

Like rubber-neckers at an auto accident, the crowd was gathering around the father and his son. Jesus does not encourage vain curiosity, so he quickly acts to deliver the young man from the ‘deaf and mute’ spirit and then leans over to raise him up.

NOTE: :”RAISE HIM UP” is the same term used of the resurrection of Jesus in 8:31
Satanic demons come to kill and destroy, but Jesus comes to raise us to new life.

DANNY AKIN notes that there is an interesting comparison/ contrast between the Transfiguration and the scene with the boy and his father.

A MOUNTAIN TOP VS A VALLEY Moses and Elijah came down from their respective mountains and found trouble brewing down below. So does Jesus.

Kingdom OF God ON DISPLAY VS Kingdom OF SATAN

A gloriously radiant Son vs A son who is terribly afflicted by an unclean spirit

A Father affirming his son vs A father afraid for his son

Disciples terrified by the glory of Christ vs disciples defeated and confused

WE NEVER OUTGROW OUR NEED FOR PRAYER v. 28-29

The disciples had a rather embarrassing public failure. Fortunately for them there was no social media at that time.

In the after-action review, they asked, “Why couldn't we drive the demon out?” Their question betrays a sense of confidence in their own strengths and abilities.

We can understand their confusion, right?

Remember the earlier events...

Mark 6:7 And He summoned the twelve and began to send them out in pairs, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits; ,, 12 They went out and preached that *men* should repent. 13 And they were casting out many demons and were anointing with oil many sick people and healing them.

Casting out demons was already on their resume. Been there, done that.
For some reason this situation was different.
Jesus doesn't point to a quantity of prayer or the quality of prayer necessary. His point is that they had NOT prayed at all.

Remember v 19 – O unbelieving generation... The disciples weren't the only ones who hadn't prayed.

Their lack of prayer is an indication of their lack of belief or of faith. PRAYER IS THE CHIEF EXERCISE OF FAITH. Believing people pray and praying people believe. Faith activates prayer and prayer cultivates faith.

Prayer isn't a rote ritual or a pious exercise. It is an expression of faith toward God because we believe that He alone can grant what we seek.

CHRIST WORKS MIGHTILY IN AND THROUGH US BY PRAYER.

Prayer is the proper expression of rightly directed faith – Harrison Perkins.

It may be that they were approaching this current situation by trusting in their own abilities. Perhaps they were assuming that the ability to do those things came from their own authority and not from God. They were not looking to God in faith.

Jesus seems to indicate that by saying... "This kind can come out by nothing but prayer." The phrase "this kind" refers to casting out demons and all other spiritual conflicts of this nature. He is not saying some demon exorcisms require prayer, but others do not. He reminds them that they can't rely on their own strength when they are in a spiritual battle. They must pray.

EX: Peculiar People sketch Facing a difficult situation that has absorbed a lot of mental and emotional energy, one spouse says, "Maybe we should pray about it." The other responds, "Are we that desperate?"

YES!!! IS PRAYER A NORMAL RESPONSE FOR YOU AND ME?

Jesus isn't calling on some super-spiritual form of prayer. These were ordinary people of the Jewish faith who simply didn't pray. They had some measure of faith, but they didn't activate it through prayer.

You might be surprised to learn that people face all sorts of issues and expend all sorts of energy without praying. EX: marriage, family, work, etc.

Are there things you think are too small to pray about? Or too big?

Walking the path of faith doesn't demand BETTER faith or Greater faith. When you are in dire need or simple need, God wants us to trust Him by seeking Him in prayer. **The walk of faith is typically lived out with a bent and direction of prayer, not a perfection of prayer. God is not grading your prayers to determine how He will respond.**

God honors prayers that are the reflex of faith.

Maybe the disciples should have simply prayed like the father, "Lord, we believe, help our unbelief."

Leaning into prayer is a simple and obvious takeaway from this passage. It is also a key encouragement found throughout scripture. The longest book in the Bible by number of chapters is a book of prayers - Psalms

Prayer will help us when we believe but need help in our unbelief. Prayer is a means of grace that strengthens our faith.

Salvation does not rest on the strength of our faith but on the strength of our SAVIOR. So too, our prayer does not depend on the strength of our faith, but on the strength of the One to whom we pray. Jesus is still

strong even when our faith is weak. The response of Jesus was “Bring him to me.” (v.19). GUESS WHAT? THAT IS ALWAYS THE BEST RESPONSE – take our cares and concerns to Jesus.

** We look ahead to Mark 14 Peter, James, and John are called aside on another mountain – Mt. Of Olives in the Garden. Jesus tells them of his deep grief and asks them to pray. But they fell asleep. The thrill they felt coming down the mountain in Chapter 9 is gone. The holy awe and terror they had is gone.

*** APPLY We can't live based on a past experience with God.

Octavius Winslow: Personal Declension and Revival of Religion in the Soul:

There is no essential element in divine grace that can secure it from the deepest declension. We tend to deify the graces of the Spirit thinking of the faith and love in us as being omnipotent. Though they are divine in origin they have no self-sustaining power. They need constant communications of life and nourishment from Jesus. The very moment of their being left to their inherent strength is the very moment of their certain declension and decay.

Our souls need a continual refreshing from God –That is what THE TABLE is for. Jesus is still the answer.

It is a celebration, and it is an occasion for Holy Awe as we feed spiritually on the living Christ.

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1. What has been your most profitable mistake—the one from which you learned the most valuable lessons?
2. Do you tend to berate others for making mistakes or encourage them to learn from mistakes?
3. How did witnessing the transfiguration prepare the disciples for this next lesson? How did this lesson bring them down to earth from their mountaintop experience?
4. How does our failure reflect badly on Jesus in the eyes of the world? What might we say when we have failed that would mitigate the damage done to His name?

5. How does turning to Jesus with questions and doubts demonstrate at least small faith rather than no faith at all? What would no faith look like?
6. Should our daily lives be divided into things we can do on our own and things we need Jesus' help to do? Explain.
7. What did the disciples do after their failure? How can failure be made profitable?
8. How does self-sufficiency express pride, while prayer and humility express “faith, trust, and dependency”?