

## Help my Unbelief<sup>1</sup>

Mark 9:14-29

**Opening:** Have you ever heard this statement: *after great spiritual highs there are often spiritual lows*? There are moments in our walk with God that we feel the presence of God, we get excited about our lives and then all of a sudden reality hits and disaster breakouts. Maybe you have had a great vacation and then come home, and all hell breaks loose. Maybe you had a spiritual victory over sin and then you fall to another temptation. Maybe you had a great moment with your family and then the next day everything is turned upside down. ***It is amazing how quickly we can move from confidence to crisis mode, especially in our faith. That which we believe so passionately today we are tempted to deny tomorrow.*** The reality is that normal, ordinary life has highs and lows; good days and bad days; ups and downs. *The question is how will we respond when things get low, bad and down?* Faith is fine in the sunshine but how is it in the rain? I found that many of my struggles in life are over my personal **doubt and unbelief issues** manifested in my *underestimation* of who Jesus is and what He can do or my *overestimation* of who I am and what I can do.

**Context:** Chapter 9 is a turning point in Mark's gospel that focuses on why Jesus came and what does it look like to follow Him. Mark moves us from the glory of Jesus on the mountain to the need for the grace in the valley. He spends a lot of time telling us what happened in the valley because it is important. Jesus was not doing just some random act of kindness. This is not just a story, but an event with a real dad, real disciples, a real son, and a real problem. **Jesus is going to take time to heal this kid to teach us about our need for faith and prayer as we follow Him. Jesus wants to move us from desperation to desperate dependence. When you are desperate for help, you must always depend only on Jesus.**

### I. Desperate for Help

- **VS. 14: When they came to the disciples:** back to life in the valley and reality: Jesus, the King of Glory, could have just stayed on them mountain, but he didn't. He had work to do. While they were on the mountain, the other 9 disciples were doing ministry in the valley. **There was a great crowd around them:** hovering around them. (Car Wreck)
- **The scribes were arguing with them:** the legal experts and the disciples were arguing over: ***How to exorcise a demon?*** Exorcism was a widespread art and career in 1<sup>st</sup> century Israel. Most of it did not work and was torture. Demonic activity was high then and there still is today. Satan and demons are real. We are at war against "spiritual wickedness." Everyone is watching the disciples fail. The scribes are criticizing and pressuring them and inciting the crowd.
- **VS. 15-16: Immediately:** The crowd sees Jesus coming and they run to Him. **What are you arguing about with them?** Jesus already knew; he wanted them to see how foolish they looked. *Do you know how foolish we look when we have religious arguments (on Twitter)?* Instead of praying and ministering, they too busy trying to win an argument.
- **VS. 17-18: Someone from the crowd: A desperate dad:** *there ain't no pain like kid pain:* you are only as happy as your unhappiest child: your kids may aggravate but you love them and would do anything for them. Matthew says he falls on his face; Luke says he begs Jesus to help his *only* son. No grown Jewish man begged unless they were desperate.
- **Chronic condition:** From Childhood: happening for years: the demon gives him epileptic seizures, renders him unable to talk, and tries to burn or drown him to kill him. Think of how exhausted this man was; he lived in daily dread and fear that he might not be there to save his son. He had great financial and relational strain. He lived in shame. Why?
- **I came to your disciples to cast it out and they were not able:** 6:13: the disciples were empowered to cast out demons. Here they were powerless. This man had prayed for years, sought out spiritual leaders and exorcists (paying a fortune) and finally goes to the disciples and they were useless. (Do people come here looking for help and find none?)
- **VS. 19: O Faithless Generation:** not unfaithful, but faithless: **How long am I to be with you?** For Jesus, he knew that his time was getting short; these disciples were to be carrying on the mission and they had no faith. **Ferguson:** *Mark vividly captures the pressures and frustrations of Christ's life in these verses. On the Mountaintop he had been faced with spiritual short-sightedness of his disciples. Here in the valley, he was confronted by their unbelief.*<sup>2</sup>
- **VS. 19-20: Bring Him to Me:** Jesus takes control: as they bring the boy to Jesus, the demon inside of him convulsed and caused him to have another episode. ***Sometimes things get worse before they get better.*** You come to Jesus expecting it to get immediately better but it gets worse because the darkness is raging against Jesus' restoration.

<sup>1</sup> **Works Consulted:** Tim Keller. *The King's Cross*. Pp. 111-122. Jason Meyer. *Mark For You*. Pp. 120-132. Joby Martin. *Transfiguration*. Message preached 9/20/2019. Kevin DeYoung. *Help My Unbelief*. Message preached September 19, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Sinclair Ferguson. *Let's Study Mark*. Pp. 68.

- **VS. 21: How long has this been happening?** Jesus isn't assessing the situation; he was entering into this dad's world: he was showing that he cared and *was drawing this man's faith out*. He allows the dad to recount how hard it has been and how long the struggle has been going on. This darkness has been over their family for years. **(Addict)**
- **If you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us:** he doesn't say if you "would" but if you "can." He probably came with hope but since Jesus' disciples couldn't do anything, he began to lose hope. He does not doubt Jesus' willingness but his ability to help. Time and constant disappointment had eroded his confidence in God. *How many times have you prayed and asked God to help you but you don't really expect Him to do anything?*
- II. **Depend Only on Him**
  - **VS. 23: Jesus said, "If you can! All things are possible for one who believes."** Jesus is calling this man to faith. Faith recognizes that there is nothing that can hold Jesus back because He is both willing and able. Faith sets no limits on the power of God to break into our lives and do the miraculous. Anything is possible because Jesus is King overall.
  - **The issue is never "if" He can:** ability is ever the issue with Jesus. There are no degrees of difficulty with God, nothing is too hard for God. It's just as easy for Him to create an entire universe and keep it going than it is watch over you when you sleep or heal you from cancer or protect you while you drive.
  - **Jesus is NOT teaching a "name it and claim" or "faith in your faith" theology:** some people teach that "if you just have enough faith, God will heal you or do this for you." Many people get disappointed when things don't happen and think that the reason why God didn't heal me or do this for me is because I didn't have enough faith.
  - **Faith is not a FORCE you possess:** it is not about the size of your faith but the object that you place your faith in that matters the most. *Faith is only as good as its object.* I can believe with all my heart is something and it still does not mean that it will happen. (UK National Championship) **Keller: It is not the strength of your faith but the object of your faith that actually saves you. Strong faith in a weak branch is fatally inferior to weak faith in a strong branch.**<sup>3</sup>
  - **VS. 24: Immediately the father cried out:** 10x in Mark: strong, emotional outburst; a desperate shout: **I believe, but help my unbelief:** honesty and humility; the most honest prayers prayed. In his heart, he believed but he also doubted. Pride keeps us from crying out like that because we don't want others to know we are struggling. Our impulse is to try harder, do better, persevere longer. But that is proud unbelief.
  - **This confession of unbelief is actually an example of belief:** this man has faith that Jesus can even help his lack of faith. He brought his doubts to Jesus. He knows he does not have what it takes to handle what he is facing. He knew that he was struggling and he needed help to overcome his unbelief. All of us have a mixture of faith and doubt.
  - **Doubt is not the opposite of faith, unbelief is:** the strongest form of faith is one that has wrestled through doubt. **Bob Conway: Doubt is directional. We can doubt towards God or we can doubt away from Him.**<sup>4</sup> (Doubt towards HIM!)
  - *I believe God that you are sovereign, but I don't know about this situation. I believe God that you are good, but I don't know if you can provide this need. I believe God that you are wise, but I don't know if I should do what you say. Jesus, I want to but I'm not there yet. I have my doubts but I don't want to doubt you anymore. I want to believe!*
  - **How does Jesus respond?** He does not tell this man, "Well, go back home, go to church, read your Bible, confess all your sins, get rid of all your doubts and once you have completely surrendered come back to me and ask me for help." Jesus does not rebuke this man, but he helps him. *This man's faith was small, but it was REAL.*
  - **VS. 25-27: Jesus rebukes the demons:** *It is I who commands you:* The demon comes out of the boy swinging. **The boy was like a corpse:** people thought the boy was dead. **But Jesus took him back they hand, lifted him up and he arose:** same words for resurrection: Jesus is the resurrection and the life. *Jesus responded to this man's tiny faith with mighty power despite the mountain of unbelief in his heart.* It's not great faith we need, but faith in a great God.
  - **VS. 28-29: Entered the house:** *The disciples debrief with Jesus:* every time they go inside, Jesus is going to teach them or correct them: **Why couldn't we get rid of that demon?** We have cast out demons before, why couldn't we do it this time. Was there something special about that demon? Was our technique wrong?
  - **This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer:** this event was an opportunity to teach the disciples the necessity of faith and prayer. They thought the issue was technique and ritual. They relied on what they did in the past and did not prayer or ask for help. The problem was that they were doing "prayerless exorcism."
  - **The dad was desperate and struggled to believe because he overestimated the power of evil and underestimated the power of Jesus. The disciples were desperate and struggled to do ministry because they underestimated the power of evil and overestimated their own power to overcome it.**

<sup>3</sup> Tim Keller. *Reason for God*. Pg. 128.

<sup>4</sup> Bobby Conway. *Doubting Towards Faith: The Journey to Confident Christianity*. Pg. 26.

- **True faith is a faith that PRAYS:** the difference between the disciples and the dad is at least the dad admitted he had a faith problem. The dad prayed even though he struggled to believe. The disciples don't pray at all because they were too proud to pray. They would rather rely on their own strength than cry out to Jesus. *This dad had more faith than the disciples. Even though he doubted, he still brought his son to Jesus. He had desperate dependence.*
- **Jesus says, "Guys, I am always just ONE prayer away from you."** Don't depend on yourself, call out to me. **Past success is no promise for future success:** *We never advance beyond our need for Jesus.*
- **Prayer is faith turned towards God:** prayer expresses our reliance on God. If we are aware of our own inadequacy to deal with the situation then we will pray. **The disciples were powerless because they were prayerless.**
- **John 15:5 I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.** A life of power and authority goes hand and hand in the life of intimacy and prayer with God. Our prayer life is an indicator to how much we really rely on God and how much we rely on ourselves.
- **Kevin DeYoung:** *If you don't pray it's because you have either very little problems or you have very little faith.... What would I do to get more faith? What would I do if I had more faith? The Answer to both of those questions is: PRAY!<sup>5</sup>*

**Application: What are you struggling to believe God with today:** kids, marriage, finances, future, sickness, sin or fear?

**Who are you most like in the story? Are you more like the disciples:** *you underestimate the power of evil and overestimate your own strength?* **Are you more like the dad:** *you overestimate the power of evil and underestimate the power of Jesus?*

**Both are faith issues. The most honest thing you can do today is pray:** *Lord, I believe, but help my unbelief.*

When you struggle to believe the best thing you can do is to continue desiring to believe and live as if you believe. The only bridge from our inadequacy and God's omnipotent power is faith.

**You say, "But I am not 100% sure. I'm not sure about Jesus."**

Do you know that we put our trust in all kinds of things every single day.

We sit in chairs. We fly in airplanes. We drive across bridges.

**We trust them even though we don't have 100% proof because we believe that those things won't collapse on us. We have seen others sit in the chair, fly in the plane and go across a bridge, so that helps us trust that we will too.**

**Faith bridge in Tanzania. (Picture/Video)** When I was in Arusha, Tanzania we were walking to a woman's house to deliver her supplies and pray with her. She lived a couple miles from the church. She and her little 4 year old son led us there. Caleb Owens, Bob Haan and myself were walking with her. We got to a bridge that went across a huge ravine about 15 feet high. As I looked at the bridge, it was old, shaky and it had a few holes in it. It didn't look very strong at all.

The next I know the woman and her little boy walked across it and then Bob Haan. Bob is not a little guy. As he walked, it shook a little. He walked around the holes in the bridge and made it over to the other side. I have an issue with heights. I was a little nervous, but I got on it and I walked across behind them. My logic was, *"If that woman and her son and Bob Haan can make it over that bridge and it can hold them up, then I will be ok."*

I did not have a 100% proof I would make it across, but I believed because if it has stood this long, and that many people have crossed it and not fallen in, then I can trust it to get across.

We have something infinitely better and more reliable than a wobbly bridge in Africa. Our bridge is better. Our bridge does not just get us across a small ravine but gets us to God. His name is Jesus. For centuries, He has proven faithful. Millions have trusted in Him and He has safely brought home. He died on the cross and rose from the dead to make a way when there is no other way. He is worth our trust even though we may doubt.

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<sup>5</sup> I got this from a statement made by Kevin DeYoung. *Help My Unbelief*. Message preached September 19, 2010.

***Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief.***