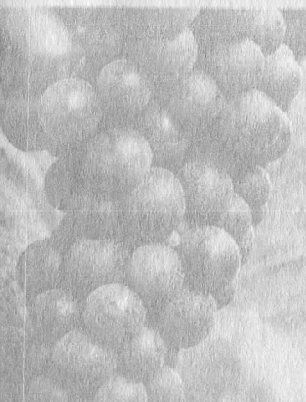


LESSON NINE

FAITH TO OVERCOME

“If you can?” said Jesus. “Everything is possible for one who believes.” Immediately the boy’s father exclaimed, “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!”

MARK 9:23-24



REFLECTION

The little boy stands on the stairs, leaning toward his father's outstretched hands a couple of feet away. He will have to leap in order to be held. He sees and knows his Dad, but the height is scary. He trusts, but now he has to put trust into action. Think of a time when you fully trusted someone to do something. Why did you have faith in that person? What was the outcome of the situation?

SITUATION

Mountaintops are wonderful, but you have to come down. Jesus and his three closest disciples were on the Mount of Transfiguration, where Jesus revealed his glory and briefly interacted with two of the giants of Old Testament days: Moses and Elijah. Peter, James, and John heard God the Father's voice affirm Jesus as his Son. But they had to leave that spiritual high and return to the crowds and face faith-testing complications of life.

OBSERVATION

Read Mark 9:14-29 from the New International Version or the New King James Version.

NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION

¹⁴ When they came to the other disciples, they saw a large crowd around them and the teachers of the law arguing with them. ¹⁵ As soon as all the people saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with wonder and ran to greet him.

¹⁶ "What are you arguing with them about?" he asked.

¹⁷ A man in the crowd answered, "Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech. ¹⁸ Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not."

¹⁹ "You unbelieving generation," Jesus replied, "how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me."

²⁰ So they brought him. When the spirit saw Jesus, it immediately threw the boy into a convulsion. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth.

²¹ Jesus asked the boy's father, "How long has he been like this?"

"From childhood," he answered. ²² "It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us."

²³ "If you can?" said Jesus. "Everything is possible for one who believes."

²⁴ Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"

²⁵ When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, he rebuked the impure spirit. "You deaf and mute spirit," he said, "I command you, come out of him and never enter him again."

²⁶ The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out. The boy looked so much like a corpse that many said, "He's dead." ²⁷ But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up.

²⁸ After Jesus had gone indoors, his disciples asked him privately, "Why couldn't we drive it out?"

²⁹ He replied, "This kind can come out only by prayer."

NEW KING JAMES VERSION

¹⁴ And when He came to the disciples, He saw a great multitude around them, and scribes disputing with them. ¹⁵ Immediately, when they saw Him, all the people were greatly amazed, and running to Him, greeted Him. ¹⁶ And He asked the scribes, "What are you discussing with them?"

¹⁷ Then one of the crowd answered and said, "Teacher, I brought You my son, who has a mute spirit. ¹⁸ And wherever it seizes him, it throws him down; he foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth, and becomes rigid. So I spoke to Your disciples, that they should cast it out, but they could not."

¹⁹ He answered him and said, "O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him to Me." ²⁰ Then they brought him to Him. And when he saw Him, immediately the spirit convulsed him, and he fell on the ground and wallowed, foaming at the mouth.

²¹ So He asked his father, "How long has this been happening to him?"

And he said, "From childhood. ²² And often he has thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him. But if You can do anything, have compassion on us and help us."

²³ Jesus said to him, "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes."

²⁴ Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!"

²⁵ When Jesus saw that the people came running together, He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it: "Deaf and dumb spirit, I command you, come out of him and enter him no more!" ²⁶ Then the spirit cried out, convulsed him greatly, and came out of him. And he became as one dead, so that many said, "He is dead." ²⁷ But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose.

²⁸ And when He had come into the house, His disciples asked Him privately, "Why could we not cast it out?"

²⁹ So He said to them, "This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting."

EXPLORATION

1. What does this story tell us about Jesus' authority over other spirits?

2. How do you think the father in this story felt after so many years of caring for his son?

3. Why were the disciples unable to heal the boy?

4. What do you think Jesus meant when he said "everything is possible for one who believes"?

5. How did the father react to this statement? How would you describe his faith in Jesus?

6. Which character in this story can you identify with the most?

INSPIRATION

Most of our prayer lives could use a tune-up. Some prayer lives lack consistency. They're either a desert or an oasis. Long, arid, dry spells interrupted by brief plunges into the waters of communion. We go days

or weeks without consistent prayer, but then something happens—we hear a sermon, read a book, experience a tragedy—something leads us to pray, so we dive in. We submerge ourselves in prayer and leave refreshed and renewed. But as the journey resumes, our prayers don't.

Others of us need sincerity. Our prayers are a bit hollow, memorized, and rigid. More liturgy than life. And though they are daily, they are dull.

Still others lack, well, honesty. We honestly wonder if prayer makes a difference. Why on earth would God in heaven want to talk to me? If God knows all, who am I to tell him anything? If God controls all, who am I to do anything?

If you struggle with prayer, I've got just the guy for you. Don't worry, he's not a monastic saint. He's not a calloused-kneed apostle. Nor is he a prophet whose middle name is meditation. He's not a too-holy-to-be-you reminder of how far you need to go in prayer. He's just the opposite. A parent with a sick son in need of a miracle. The father's prayer isn't much, but the answer is, and the result reminds us: The power is not in the prayer; it's in the one who hears it.

He prayed out of desperation. His son, his only son, was demon-possessed. Not only was he a deaf mute and an epileptic, he was also possessed by an evil spirit. Ever since the boy was young, the demon had thrown him into fires and water.

What a challenge! He couldn't leave his son alone for a minute. Who knew when the next attack would come? The father had to remain on call, on alert twenty-four hours a day. He was desperate and tired, and his prayer reflects both.

"If you can do anything for him, please have pity on us and help us."

Listen to that prayer. Does it sound courageous? Confident? Strong? Hardly . . .

He said *if*. The Greek is even more emphatic. The tense implies doubt. It's as if the man were saying, "This one's probably out of your league, but if you can . . ."

More meek than might. More timid than towering. More like a crippled lamb coming to a shepherd than a proud lion roaring in the

jungle. If his prayer sounds like yours, then don't be discouraged, for that's where prayer begins.

It begins as a yearning. An honest appeal. Ordinary people staring at Mount Everest. No pretense. No boasting. No posturing. Just prayer. Feeble prayer, but prayer nonetheless. (From *He Still Moves Stones* by Max Lucado.)

REACTION

7. What kind of faith does Jesus require of us?

8. When or where has your faith recently been challenged?

9. How have these challenges helped you to deepen your faith in God?

10. How does Jesus' promise that "everything is possible for one who believes" (verse 23) help to strengthen your faith?

11. In what ways does the father's plea, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!" (verse 24) resonate with your prayers?

12. How can you encourage others who are lacking faith?

LIFE LESSONS

The outcome of this miracle in which Jesus healed the boy possessed by an impure spirit indicates why so many of us have difficulty seeing God work. The father's plea expressed a beautiful combination of bold faith and honesty. He acknowledged the need to trust but recognized his weakness. He admitted he needed help and that he also needed help to believe. The disciples were concerned over why they hadn't been able to do what Jesus did. Jesus' answer conveys the point that it's never about what we accomplish but about what God accomplishes in us and through us. The disciples wanted more confidence in their own power, but Jesus told them to focus on tapping into God's power through prayer and fasting.

DEVOTION

Father, we cherish your promises to take care of your children. And yet we often come to you with muddled ideas, uncertain of your will. Thank you, Father, for the assurance that our imperfect prayers cannot hinder your incredible power. Teach us to continually have faith in you so that we truly believe in our hearts that "everything is possible" when we believe in you.

JOURNALING

What are some promises from Scripture that you can memorize to strengthen your faith? How will you memorize them?

FOR FURTHER READING

To complete the book of Mark during this twelve-part study, read Mark 9:1–50. For more Bible passages about trusting God, read Genesis 18:1–14; Matthew 8:5–13; 9:27–31; Luke 11:9–10; 12:22–34.