

Strengthens

SESSION 7

Mark 9:17-29

Memory Verse: Mark 9:4

Jesus strengthens our faith in Him.

When we receive the gift of salvation that only Jesus can offer, we begin a life-long journey with Him. In our walk with Him, we recognize the need for stronger faith. Instinctively, we'd rather Jesus pour stronger faith into us like a truck pours cement into a house's foundation. But, in reality, our faith only gets stronger when it's stretched like a muscle. Of course, that strain can be painful, but God uses it to create a faith that's resilient.

In Mark's account of Jesus's encounter with a father whose boy was possessed by an unclean spirit, we have an example of how Jesus strengthens faith by working through "stretching" circumstances. As you study the passage, have an honest conversation with God about your areas of unbelief. Ask Him to stretch you—even when it hurts—so you can become more like Him.



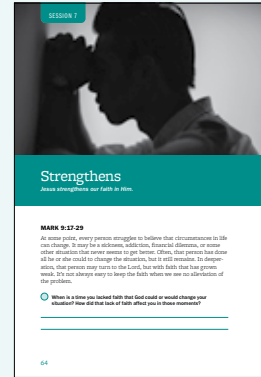
Weekly Podcast: Group Leader Training

Scan here to gain insights about this week's study on Apple podcasts, Stitcher, Spotify, Google Podcasts, or at goExploreTheBible.com/adults-training.



At some point, every person struggles to believe that circumstances in life can change. It may be a sickness, addiction, financial dilemma, or some other situation that never seems to get better. Often, that person has done all he or she could to change the situation, but it still remains. In desperation, that person may turn to the Lord, but with a faith that has grown weak. It's not always easy to keep the faith when we see no alleviation of the problem. (PSG, p. 64)

**When is a time you lacked faith that God could or would change your situation?
How did that lack of faith affect you in those moments?**



Understand the Context (Mark 9:14-50)

Mark's record of Jesus's healing of a blind man (8:22-26) marks a shift from presenting Him as miracle worker to a renewed focus on Him as a teaching Messiah. Mark picked up Jesus's story with Him traveling with His disciples in the region around Caesarea Philippi. Instead of one city, Caesarea Philippi was actually a collection of small villages about 25 miles north of the Sea of Galilee. These towns were built to honor Caesar Augustus, but Herod's son, Philip, added his own name to avoid confusion with the Caesarea located along the Mediterranean coast.

Outside Caesarea Philippi, Jesus questioned His disciples about who they believed Him to be. In his Gospel account, Matthew provided more detail, including the common rumors about Jesus and the divine inspiration of the disciples' response through Peter (Matt. 16:13-20). However, both writers emphasized Jesus as the Messiah (Mark 8:29).

Mark also revealed a gap in the disciples' understanding of what being the Messiah actually meant. Building on Peter's confession, Jesus taught them about His impending death and resurrection. Uncomfortable with the idea of a suffering Savior, Peter actually rebuked Jesus—who, in turn, rebuked the disciples for being more concerned with man-made ideas and interpretations than divine truth (8:31-38). Jesus also wanted to show them that suffering was their destiny just as it was His.

In chapter 9, Mark shared Jesus's transfiguration, one of the most explicit statements of His divinity recorded in Scripture. By pointing to Moses and

Elijah, Mark indicated that the entirety of the law and the prophets were completed in Christ (9:2-13). Luke stated as much in His Gospel when the risen Savior interpreted the Messiah's role using the law and prophets while talking with a pair of mourning disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:25-27).

Mark interrupted this teaching block with another example of Jesus's mastery over the spiritual realm. Coming down from the transfiguration, Jesus healed a boy oppressed by a demon (Mark 9:14-29). The disciples had been unable to provide relief for the boy and his father, but Jesus demonstrated His own power and authority in casting out the evil spirit.

The chapter closes with Jesus sharing in-depth teaching about the end times and warnings about hell (9:30-50). Slowly, Mark was moving his audience from the meat of Jesus's earthly ministry toward Jerusalem, where His work would culminate in His crucifixion and resurrection.

Read Mark 9:17-29. How do you see faith lacking, and what was the outcome? How do you see faith exercised, and what was the outcome?



PRIOR TO THE SESSION: Research the life of Corrie Ten Boom.

INTRODUCE: Share a brief summary of Corrie Ten Boom's life, emphasizing her faith during her imprisonment in a Nazi concentration camp. Ask: **What do you think kept Corrie going during that difficult season? How do you think she avoided losing hope?**

OVERVIEW: Read First Thoughts on page 64 of the PSG. Allow a few volunteers to briefly share how faith has helped them through difficult seasons of life. Be prepared to share your own story as well. Ask: **When is a time you lacked faith that God could or would change your situation? How did that lack of faith affect you in those moments?** (PSG, p. 64)

TRANSITION: *In today's session, we're going to examine how Jesus strengthens our faith in Him.*

NOTES

Group Activity Option

Music

Play the song "Walk by Faith" by Jeremy Camp and invite the group to meditate on the lyrics. As they listen, lead them to think about what it means to walk by faith each day. Share that this will be an important part of this session. Also, play the song again as a closing prayer after the session. Encourage adults to trust God's work in their lives this week.

The Challenge (Mark 9:17-20)

17 Someone from the crowd answered him, “Teacher, I brought my son to you. He has a spirit that makes him unable to speak. **18** Whenever it seizes him, it throws him down, and he foams at the mouth, grinds his teeth, and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive it out, but they couldn’t.” **19** He replied to them, “You unbelieving generation, how long will I be with you? How long must I put up with you? Bring him to me.” **20** So they brought the boy to him. When the spirit saw him, it immediately threw the boy into convulsions. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth.

(v. 17) Teacher: The term shows the man’s respect for Jesus as an expert in the things of God. While it is not necessarily a statement of loyalty or surrender, it does acknowledge the man’s belief that Jesus had been sent by God and could heal his son.

(v. 17) A spirit that makes him unable to speak: During the course of Jesus’s earthly ministry, demons were very active. Their interactions with humanity brought harm and destruction. In the New Testament, many illnesses are also associated with demonic activity. It is important to note that not all physical illnesses or disabilities are caused by demons; however, we know that evil spirits can cause them in some cases.

In the context of this passage, the boy had been inflicted by a demon who was causing frightening physical issues. In verse 17, the boy’s father said the spirit left him mute. Jesus later stated that the spirit also caused deafness (v. 25).

physical. The demon was the source of the ailment. In addition to the symptoms mentioned here, the father later told Jesus that the spirit had tried to kill the boy more than once (v. 22). It is not hard to understand why this man felt such desperation.

(v. 18) Drive it out: The boy’s father had asked the disciples to exorcise the demon. This request was perfectly acceptable since Jesus had already given them the power to heal and cast out demons (Mark 6:7), and the disciples had shown their ability to use this God-given authority successfully. But, for some reason, the disciples were unable to deal effectively with this demon.

(v. 19) Unbelieving generation: After hearing the father’s story and his request, Jesus rebuked this **unbelieving generation**. Although a crowd would have been present, Jesus most likely directed His comment toward His disciples. He had given them the authority and power to do these things in His name, but they had failed miserably in this case. Their faith had faltered in a crucial moment, giving rise to Jesus’s disappointment and frustration.

(v. 19) How long will I be with you?: Jesus had seen the disciples blow it before, but His movement toward the cross meant His time with them was running short. He had taught them things that they didn’t seem to grasp and had given them the power that they failed to use. They needed to take His instructions seriously and begin to understand what His mission was about. Still, even though His disciples were still a work in progress, Jesus displayed His own power to act where they had failed.

(v. 20) The spirit saw him: When the evil spirit saw Jesus, it knew and recognized Him for who He was. In response, the demon attempted to initiate a “show-down” between its own power and the power of Jesus. The spirit quickly threw the helpless boy to the ground with the kind of **convulsions** described in verse 18.

Key Concept

Angels and Demons

While God’s angels serve Him and His purposes in the world, demons oppose His work. These fallen angels had rebelled against God along with Satan. Both angels and demons are physical beings (though usually invisible) and display intellect and knowledge (though limited). Demons are further restricted by God’s power (Job 1:12; 2:6). While it might be tempting to look past the Bible’s limited information on angels and demons, believers should resist basing their beliefs on philosophical theories or popular portrayals of the supernatural.

(v. 18) Seizes him: The Greek wording implies violence or aggression, such as capturing or arresting someone. The boy’s symptoms were very similar to someone who has epilepsy, but Mark made it clear that the boy’s issues were primarily spiritual rather than

EXPLORE Mark 9:17-20



APPLICATION POINT: Believers can confidently approach Jesus with life’s challenges.

CONTEXTUALIZE: Use **Pack Item 10** (Chart: *Miracles of Jesus’s Authority*) to discuss how Jesus revealed His authority through miracles. Use Understand the Context (PSG, p. 65) to explain demon possession and exorcisms in the first century.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Mark 9:17-20. Emphasize that not all physical illnesses are the result of demons.

DISCUSS: Encourage adults to read the information for verses 17-20 (PSG, pp. 66-67) to discover Jesus’s reaction to the father’s dilemma. Ask: **Why couldn’t His disciples heal the boy?** Remind adults that the disciples had already demonstrated the ability to exorcise demons and heal diseases (Mark 6:13).

EXPLAIN: *The disciples’ lack of faith kept them from healing the boy. They may have been going through the motions of ritual or depending on their own abilities. Whatever the case, the demon could tell the difference between the power exercised by the disciples and the power of Christ’s presence.*

ASK: **What was the reaction of the demon upon seeing Jesus?** Invite a volunteer to read James 2:19 and talk about how it applies to this passage.

REFLECT: Encourage adults to consider how they rely on their own strength—and how that affects their ministry.

MIRACLE	REFERENCE	REMARKS
1. Healing the blind man	Mark 8:1-10	Physical blindness was healed
2. Healing the deaf man	Mark 7:31-37	Physical deafness was healed
3. Healing the mute man	Mark 3:1-6	Physical muteness was healed
4. Healing the man with the withered hand	Mark 3:1-6	Physical disability was healed
5. Healing the man with the leprosy	Mark 1:40-45	Physical leprosy was healed
6. Healing the man with the fever	Mark 9:17-20	Physical illness was healed
7. Healing the man with the demon	Mark 9:17-20	Physical illness was healed
8. Healing the man with the demon	Mark 9:17-20	Physical illness was healed
9. Healing the man with the demon	Mark 9:17-20	Physical illness was healed
10. Healing the man with the demon	Mark 9:17-20	Physical illness was healed

Group Activity Option

Case Study

Encourage adults to get into groups of three or four. Give each group this case study: *You’ve been invited to a town hall meeting with the president. He is seeking your input on an issue important to your city and state. What are some things you need to do to prepare for this meeting?* After a few minutes, allow the groups to report on their conversations. Point out that preparation always increases confidence, even in the presence of an important person. Talk about how confident the father may have been in Mark 9:17-20 and how he might have prepared to meet Jesus. Remind adults that we can confidently approach Jesus with our needs.

The Admission (Mark 9:21-24)

21 “How long has this been happening to him?” Jesus asked his father. “From childhood,” he said. **22** “And many times it has thrown him into fire or 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? Everything is possible for the one who believes.” **24** Immediately the father of the boy cried out, “I do believe; help my unbelief!”

(v. 21) How long: Jesus asked the father **how long** this demonic oppression had been going on and found out the boy had been suffering since **childhood**. As the omniscient God, Jesus knew the answer before He asked the question, but He was working to draw out the father’s faith. He also was preparing the crowd for what they were about to see.

(v. 22) Destroy him: The Greek word could also be rendered “loss” or “ruin.” It is the same root used by Jesus to contrast those who will find their lives and those who forfeit their lives (Mark 8:35). Throughout Scripture, human interaction with demons leads to pain and suffering. This aligns with the true nature of Satan. As Jesus stated in John’s Gospel, the enemy only desires to steal, kill, and destroy (John 10:10).

(vv. 22-23) If you can: The words that the father spoke in desperation were repeated by Jesus as a mild rebuke. The father’s original statement suggested that his personal faith had been shaken by the disciples’ inability to exorcise the demon earlier in the day. He may have assumed that Jesus was also limited in His authority over such a powerful evil spirit. He also may have questioned Jesus’s willingness to help him after calling out the group’s general lack of faith.

However, Jesus responded to the father’s doubts by challenging the father’s faith. The man needed to put his complete trust in Jesus and His ability to do what only God can do.

(v. 23) Everything is possible: Faith in God’s power has no limits. Things that seem beyond the reach and comprehension of humanity are where God’s power makes the impossible possible. But Jesus also emphasized that faith/belief is part of the equation. Just as He could do no miracles in Nazareth because of the people’s lack of faith (Mark 6:5-6), He would not be able to help the man unless he completely trusted Jesus.

(v. 24) Help my unbelief: The father quickly composed himself and reaffirmed his belief in Jesus. In essence, he asked Jesus to replace his **unbelief** with renewed faith. In a sense, he wanted Jesus to fill in the gaps where his faith was a little thin.

This is a common problem today as we try to live out our faith each day. As believers, we face a constant tension between the amount of faith we have and the doubts that whittle away at our confidence. Yet, the more we exercise our belief in Jesus, the stronger our faith becomes. To mature in our faith, we must learn to lean into God’s power to overcome our doubts. That means admitting our weaknesses and asking Him to give us what we lack—just as the father did.

God doesn’t expect us to have a perfect faith. He understands that we may have doubts at times, but He also calls us to bring our doubts to Him. He will accept us just as we are and work through our weaknesses (2 Cor. 12:9). As He does, we mature in our faith and learn to trust Him more.

Key Cross Reference

Faith and God’s Love

With his words, the boy’s father acknowledged that he struggled with unbelief. At the same time, he reached out to Jesus and begged for a stronger faith. When you have moments of fear and doubt, do you turn toward God or shy away from Him? If you are keeping some things in your life from God, whether it be doubts, fears, or something else, take the step now to bring them to your heavenly Father.

One great step to take in that direction is to dig into Scripture and recall what God says about you and His love for you. As you continue to wrestle with the truths of this session, read and meditate on Romans 8:31-38. Use the space below to make a list of all the things that may try to separate us from God’s love. Circle two or three that seem most real to your life. Then, spend time in prayer, thanking God that nothing could ever separate you from His love.

EXPLORE Mark 9:21-24



APPLICATION POINT: Believers must admit their shortcomings when it comes to faith and trust Jesus to help them mature.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Mark 9:21-24.

SHARE: Write this question on the board: *When have you felt most desperate?* Allow a few volunteers to share. Encourage the group to put themselves in the father's place and discuss why he might have felt desperate.

ASK: **To what extent was the father transparent with Jesus? Why is it important to be completely honest with God about our struggles?**

HIGHLIGHT: Acknowledge the tension that believers often feel between doubt and faith. Remind the group that this tension is a normal part of maturing spiritually and becoming more like Jesus.

EXPLAIN: Use information from verses 21-24 (PSG, pp. 67-69) to talk about the father's confession. *In one sense, it seems like a contradiction, but most of us can relate to what he was saying. While a part of us wants to trust God, another part is always holding out on Him. Thankfully, God understands that, as well. He wants to use our honesty in those moments to teach us more about Him and to deepen our faith in Him.*

NOTES

Group Activity Option

Bible Skill

Lead the group to complete the Bible Skill activity (PSG, p. 69). Give each adult an index card and encourage them to write Mark 9:24 along with the words, "Help my unbelief!" Challenge them to carry the card with them throughout the week and to reflect on the verse several times a day. Say: *When a moment of doubt or uncertainty arises, write a word or two that describes it on the other side of the card and pray for God's help to have faith in that moment.*

The Demonstration (Mark 9:25-29)

25 When Jesus saw that a crowd was quickly gathering, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, “You mute and deaf spirit, I command you: Come out of him and never enter him again.” **26** Then it came out, shrieking and throwing him into terrible convulsions. The boy became like a corpse, so that many said, “He’s dead.” **27** But Jesus, taking him by the hand, raised him, and he stood up. **28** After he had gone into the house, his disciples asked him privately, “Why couldn’t we drive it out?” **29** And he told them, “This kind can come out by nothing but prayer.”

(v. 25) A crowd was quickly gathering: Realizing that the crowd was swelling to even greater numbers than when He had arrived, Jesus took swift action to help the boy and his father before things got out of hand. In doing so, He remained true to His approach. He wanted to avoid any misunderstanding about His messianic purpose. Exorcisms served to validate His messianic role and His message of God’s kingdom. If the crowd didn’t listen to what He said or somehow interpreted it wrong, the possibility of seeing Him as Messiah would be completely lost on them.

Key Doctrine

Salvation

Salvation involves the redemption of the whole man, and is offered freely to all who accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, who by His own blood obtained eternal redemption for the believer. (See Luke 4:18-19; 18:15-17.)

(v. 25) Rebuked: The Greek word involves a censure or warning suitable for the situation. In context, Jesus was exerting His divine authority as God the Son over the evil spirit. Apparently, the disciples had failed to rely on God’s authority when they failed to exorcise the spirit.

(v. 25) Mute and deaf spirit: Jesus directly addressed the evil spirit and gave it two specific commands: **Come out . . . and never enter him again.** Jesus’s power was greater than the power of the spirit inside the boy. As a result, the spirit had no choice but to leave the boy. God’s power will always be greater than any demonic spirit. His power is greater than any power rooted in the world (1 John 4:4).

(v. 26) He’s dead: The demon’s final attack involved sending the boy into one more violent convulsion, complete with shrieks and seizures. As the crowd considered the young man’s unresponsive state, they

assumed the demon had killed him. If so, the evil spirit would have been the ultimate victor of this encounter. But Jesus reached down, took the boy’s hand, and helped him to his feet. The Messiah left no doubt about His power and authority over the supernatural.

(v. 28) Privately: Jesus often tried to move His disciples away from the crowds for teaching opportunities. This time, the disciples came to Him. They had failed in their attempts to help the man. Wisely, they turned to Jesus for an explanation and direction.

(vv. 28-29) Why couldn’t we: The disciples plainly asked Jesus the question that was on their minds. They wanted to know why they were not able to cast out the demon. Jesus’s words emphasized the importance of **prayer** and complete reliance on God’s authority in spiritual warfare.

The disciples may have fallen victim to their own success and been caught in the trap of depending on their own power instead of God’s power. They assumed their past successes were enough to guarantee success in this case. But believers can’t just rest on the past. We need to nurture an ongoing relationship with the Father through Jesus. We need a daily connection with God if we’re going to tackle each new challenge that comes our way.

Key Truth

Power of Prayer

As you reflect on Mark 9:28-29, evaluate the connection between spending time with the Lord in prayer and trusting Him to work through you. Ask yourself: **Is prayer a consistent part of my daily life?** If not, consider what you should do to make this spiritual discipline a priority in your life. Take the first steps in nurturing a vibrant, intimate prayer life with God.



APPLICATION POINT: Believers can see God's power demonstrated through their prayers.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Mark 9:25-29.

COMPARE: On the board, draw two columns and label them *Disciples* and *Jesus*. List the outcomes of the disciples' and Jesus's attempts to heal the boy.

ASK: **In this passage, how do you see faith lacking, and what was the outcome? How do you see faith exercised, and what was the outcome?**

ANALYZE: Examine Jesus's response to the disciples concerning their failure to drive out the demon. Discuss the role of prayer in relation to God's work. Encourage the group to share their thoughts about the relationship between consistent prayer and stronger faith. Point out that it's hard to grow in our faith if we don't stay connected to the One who gives us faith and serves as the foundation of our faith.

TRANSITION: *The emphasis in this passage is not on our ability to have faith, but on God's ability to strengthen our faith through our dependence on Him. As we wrap up this session, think about what dependence looks like in your life and how you can become more dependent on God to use you to help others.*

NOTES

Group Activity Option

Object Lesson

Display several decorative crosses. Ask: **Why do Christians frequently display crosses?** Emphasize that symbols of faith can serve as reminders of the power of God in our lives. Remind adults that the symbols do not have power in themselves. Say: *Our symbols need action that maintains our strong connection with Christ.* Encourage adults to consider the role of prayer in the disciples' inability to cast out the demon. Discuss how they may have traded symbolism or ritual for the power of connection with Jesus.

CHALLENGE

SUMMARIZE: Review these points from Apply the Text on page 72 of the Personal Study Guide:

- *Believers can confidently approach Jesus with life's challenges.*
- *Believers must admit their shortcomings when it comes to faith and trust Jesus to help them mature.*
- *Believers can see God's power demonstrated through their prayers.*

DISCUSS: Lead the group to discuss the first question set under Apply the Text (PSG, p. 72). Identify ways individuals and churches can work as agents of light in a dark world.

CHALLENGE: Draw attention to the second question set under Apply the Text (PSG, p. 72). Give each adult an index card and a pencil. Instruct them to draw a cross on one side of the card. Direct the group to write on the cross ways that they tend to depend on themselves instead of depending on God's power. Encourage the group to spend time talking to God about those areas of self-dependence this week.

PRAY: Close in prayer asking for God's help to strengthen our faith even when we are tempted toward unbelief.

After the Session

Reinforce the session by examining your own life to determine areas in which you are tempted to depend on your own strength rather than trusting God's power. Consider what you might need to surrender to God so you can depend on Him fully. Contact the group through email or text reminding them of the importance of depending on God during life's doubts and uncertainties.

LEADER EXTRAS



For free bonus introduction and application ideas that connect to a current news event, go to goExploreTheBible.com/LeaderExtras.

EXPLORE  THE BIBLE.