



Strengthens

Jesus strengthens our faith in Him.

MARK 9:17-29

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 faith that has grown weak. It's not always easy to keep the faith when we see no alleviation of the problem.

- 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

In the first century, the destructive work of demons not only was recognized as a reality, but people resorted to different ways to combat the work of demons. In the ancient Greek document *Magical Papyri*, exorcisms were thought to be accomplished by a person's faithfulness to a prescribed incantation. Perhaps those in this week's Bible passage had said the right things and done the right things, yet their loved ones still were afflicted by evil. They gave no thought to Jesus's authority over the demonic, only to their faithfulness to the cultural practices of the day.

Others in Jesus's day thought the power of the demonic could be overcome by doing the right things. In the writings of Josephus, the story is told of Eleazar, who had a special ring he put in the nose of the demon-possessed, subduing them from the forces that oppressed them. Perhaps the man in the Gospel story had tried both incantations and ritualistic actions, but neither relieved his son. Thus, he brought the child to Jesus.

The Gospels record four long stories of Jesus's dealing with demon-possessed people (Mark 1:21-28; 5:1-20; 7:24-30; 9:14-29). They also contain some brief encounters (Matt. 9:32-34; 12:22), and a number of teachings of Jesus related to dealing with demons (Mark 1:32-34,39; 3:7-12). In those instances, Jesus did not have a set form of incantation or specific actions. He dealt with each of the situations individually. The common characteristic of all these encounters is that Jesus has ultimate authority over all evil forces. He wanted His followers to know that, through prayer, they did not have to become helpless victims to the forces of darkness.



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?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

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.

VERSES 17-18

Jesus, Peter, James and John, fresh off of the events of the transfiguration (Mark 9:2-13), encountered a large crowd of people who were gathered to talk with His disciples. By this time, Jesus had already walked on water (6:45-52), fed the four thousand with seven loaves and a few small fish (8:1-10), and performed healings and exorcisms. Such encounters with the power of Christ had left some debating their presuppositions and encouraged others to flock to Him with the hope of getting relief from their troubles. The scribes (9:14) were experts in the law, and they were disputing with the disciples about the things they had seen and encountered.

Someone unnamed issued a challenge to Jesus. He brought his *son* to Jesus in hopes He would be able to bring healing to his child. He addressed Jesus with a term of respect—*Teacher*—and identified the problem as *a spirit that makes him unable to speak*. Apparently, he was both mute and deaf (9:25). Certainly, not all physical illness or disabilities are the result of demon possession, but in this particular case, the connection between physical sickness and demonic possession was real. This father was perceptive to understand what was happening in his child’s life, and he was bold in putting forth his son to be healed by Jesus.


The father described the effects of the demon possession on his son. The spirit would seize him, then it would throw him to the ground and cause him to grind *his teeth* and become *rigid*. Certainly these effects (as well as the ones in verses 20 and 22) would be common among those who had epilepsy, but there was a deeper issue than merely a physical sickness. Though not all sicknesses are the result of a spiritual battle, some physical conditions are a reflection of the inner turmoil faced by those who are battling evil within.

The man had asked Jesus's **disciples to drive it out, but they couldn't**. This is surprising because Jesus had commissioned His disciples to drive out demons (3:15; 6:7). He sent them out for this reason, and they reported success upon their return to Jesus (see 6:13). Past spiritual victories do not replace the need to continually learn new lessons about what it means to walk in faith. The disciples failed in this moment because their faith was weak.

VERSES 19-20

For the third time in a short period of time, Jesus was amazed at the unbelief of those around Him (8:12,38). He called them an **unbelieving generation** and called for the boy to be brought to Him.

As **they brought the boy** to Jesus, the spirit **saw** Jesus and began to manifest the seizures that had plagued the child. It **threw the boy into convulsions** and caused him to fall to the ground. There the boy **rolled around** helplessly and was **foaming at the mouth**. The reaction of the demonic spirit to Jesus was a common one in Mark's Gospel (1:25-26; 5:7-8). Though others in the circle struggled to believe in Jesus's authority, the demonic spirits had no such trouble. Their days of troubling the child were coming to a close.

 Why might people discredit the power of Jesus when others have failed them?

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!”

VERSES 21-22

Jesus knew the boy's seizures and convulsions were a result of demonic activity, not simply a medical issue. He asked, “**How long has this been happening to him?**” As the Son of God, Jesus surely knew the answer to this question, but the question highlighted the length of time the child had endured such suffering. The child had faced such trying times since

childhood. Jesus’s question could also have deepened the father’s sense of desperation found in verse 22. Those who need Jesus’s involvement in their lives must come to an admission of that need.

The boy’s father revealed that this affliction had almost been fatal. The presence of the demon in the child had caused him to throw himself **into fire or water to destroy him.** Jesus would later say, “A thief comes only to steal and kill and to destroy. I have come so that they may have life and have it in abundance” (John 10:10). Though Satan appeared to have won the victory in this child’s life, the admission of need by the father would lead to his child’s deliverance. The father asked for Jesus to heal his child based on His **compassion.** The father’s faith in Jesus’s power was not as strong as the leper’s in Mark 1:40, who only questioned whether Jesus was willing to heal him. However, the father’s faith in Jesus’s *compassion* was stronger. He could not see any scenario where Jesus would look at His child and refuse to heal him.

“Those who need Jesus’s involvement in their lives must come to an admission of that need.”

VERSE 23

Jesus picked up on the father’s reluctance to believe by repeating his words, **If you can.** Did the father really believe that healing could take place in his child? Divine ability was not the problem; lack of faith was the issue. Jesus stated a remarkable thought in this verse—**Everything is possible for the one who believes.** This thought would reappear in Mark 10:27, where Jesus was teaching about riches and entering the kingdom of God. He would say the same thing to the disciples as they questioned the cursing of the fig tree in Mark 11:24. Faith was a requirement for those Jesus healed. That is not to say that everyone who does not receive healing lacks the amount of faith needed for Jesus to heal. Jesus was emphasizing the presence of faith, not the amount of faith. Did the father have faith that Jesus could heal the child?

VERSE 24

The child’s father knew he had faith, but he questioned whether he had enough faith. He expressed an honest assessment of the situation—**“I do believe; help my unbelief!”** The father admitted the poverty of his faith. Jesus had said the poor in spirit would see the kingdom of God (Matt. 5:3). Jesus would not act in response to the man’s working up of faith in his own life, but according to the riches of His grace. The man had

weak faith but was asking a gracious and compassionate Savior to deliver his child from a long-time enslavement to the enemy. He admitted his weakness, and that admission drove Jesus to the man rather than away from him. Often we think that if we were honest with Jesus, He would not want to be with us, but in fact it is the opposite. The more honest we are with Him, the more we experience His compassion and grace toward us. Admitting one's need is a quality of a maturing faith.

○ **How can a person believe in Jesus and yet lack belief at the same time?**

○ **How does expressing faith in Jesus open the door for a deeper faith?**

BIBLE SKILL: *Memorize a Bible verse and apply it to a real-life situation.*

Memorize Mark 9:24 in your preferred Bible translation. Then write the verse in your own words. Finally, write a couple of sentences stating how this verse can help you to overcome the obstacles that challenge your faith.

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.”

VERSE 25

Jesus identified that the reason the child did not talk or hear was that he had a ***mute and deaf spirit***. The spirit affected both his speech and hearing. It had resisted the attempts of the disciples to cast it out but could offer no such resistance to Jesus. He issued a ***command*** that the demon had no choice but to obey. The command of Jesus carried authority over all the forces of darkness.

Only on this occasion did Jesus include the statement, ***never enter him again***, after an exorcism. This emphasized the permanence of the cure. Jesus delivered this child so completely that He also accompanied it with a “No Trespassing” sign.

“Jesus delivered this child so completely that He also accompanied it with a ‘No Trespassing’ sign.”

VERSES 26-27

The evil spirit obeyed the command of Jesus in a way that was visible to all who were surrounding the child. As it left the child, it caused ***shrieking*** and ***convulsions*** as it threw the boy to the ground. He lay there causing some to think that he had died. Taking him by the hand, Jesus ***raised him***. The motif of resurrection was present in the healing miracle, foreshadowing Jesus’s own resurrection.

DID YOU KNOW?

The Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) record six accounts of Jesus casting out demons (none are recorded in John’s Gospel): (1) Mark 1:21-28 (Luke 4:31-37); (2) Mark 5:1-20 (Matt. 8:28-34; Luke 8:26-39); (3) Mark 7:24-30 (Matt. 15:21-28); (4) Mark 9:14-29 (Matt. 17:14-21; Luke 9:37-43); (5) Matthew 9:32-34; and (6) Matthew 12:22-24 (Luke 11:14).

Had the demon quietly left, those witnessing the exorcism would have had no proof of deliverance or foreshadowing of the resurrection. Some commentators believe that the child actually died, and this story is similar to the raising of Jairus's daughter in Mark 5:36-43. However, the phrasing, **like a corpse**, may mean that the child merely fell and looked like a corpse on the ground until Jesus raised him to a new life.

VERSES 28-29

No doubt the miracle Jesus performed left the crowd amazed at what they had witnessed. However, it left His disciples confused. They waited to ask Him a question **privately**. They wanted to know why they couldn't **drive it out**. They had experienced success in driving out demons earlier (Mark 6:13), but this time they were unable to bring relief to the child. It was common for Jesus to withdraw in private to instruct His disciples (7:17; 9:33; 10:10). Their failings were better discussed in private than in front of the crowds. A private rebuke is more effective than public humiliation.

The Lord's answer to their question is interesting—**This kind can come out by nothing but prayer**. The kind of demon they faced was apparently a strong and resistant evil being. In their own power and authority, they could not cast this demon from the child. They only could do so as they prayed and sought the power of Jesus. He previously had indicated the importance of faith, but faith alone was not enough in this case. They needed to prepare themselves spiritually through prayer for this battle. Strong faith and consistent prayer was needed for this child to receive help.

 **What role does prayer play in developing faith in Jesus?**

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.)

APPLY THE TEXT

- + 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 as a group ways they see people under the attack of Satan today. Why is it important to identify his work and admit the need for Christ's help? What role does your church and your group have in pushing back the works of darkness in your community and in the individuals who have been afflicted by the enemy?

○ If you were the father in this story, what would you have done differently? What would you have done the same? Why do you think it was important for the disciples to admit their own limitations and rely on the power of prayer? In what ways are you currently depending on yourself when you should be depending upon the power of Christ?

PRAYER NEEDS
