

Mark 9 (Part 2) - Battling Unbelief

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All right. Mark chapter 9. We're picking it up in verse 14 so, follow along as I read, we'll read a few verses here and then stop and soak it in.

“And when they came to the disciples, they saw a great crowd around them, and scribes arguing with them. ¹⁵ And immediately all the crowd, when they saw him, were greatly amazed and ran up to him and greeted him. ¹⁶ And he asked them, “What are you arguing about with them?” ¹⁷ And someone from the crowd answered him, “Teacher, I brought my son to you, for he has a spirit that makes him mute. ¹⁸ And whenever it seizes him, it throws him down, and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid. So I asked your disciples to cast it out, and they were not able.”

¹⁹ And he answered them, “O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him to me.” ²⁰ And they brought the boy to him. And when the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth. ²¹ And Jesus asked his father, “How long has this been happening to him?” And he said, “From childhood. ²² And it has often cast him into fire and into water, to destroy him. But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.”

²³ And Jesus said to him, “‘If you can’! All things are possible for one who believes.” ²⁴ Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, “I believe; help my unbelief!” ²⁵ And when Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, 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 And after crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse, so that most of them said, “He is dead.” ²⁷ But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose. ²⁸ And when he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, “Why could we not cast it out?” ²⁹ And he said to them, “This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer.” (ESV)

I'd like you to stop there, if you would please. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, open our hearts to the ministry of Your Word and show us, Lord God, what You'd like to communicate to us in this passage. Use these

words in our time of meditation to just really fill our hearts with You. We ask it in Jesus' name, amen.

Mark is the one Gospel writer who typically is a little more abbreviated than the rest of them. We consider Mark the Reader's Digest version of the Gospel. But in this particular instance, Mark tells more about this event than either Matthew or Luke who also related, and it's particularly interesting in light of what has just transpired, which is the transfiguration.

They were up on the mountain, they meaning Jesus, He took with Him, Peter, James, John and while they were up on the mountain, of course. Suddenly, it says, that Elijah and Moses were standing there talking to Jesus, a cloud began to envelop them, and they heard the voice of the Father speaking and affirming the Son. And then they look around the next minute as the cloud dissipates, and it's just Jesus and themselves, and it's just, wow! I mean, we actually use that story to coin the phrase, a mountaintop experience because you probably heard that before.

It's like, wow, we went to retreat, or we went somewhere, and we had a mountaintop experience. And it usually means there was just a really powerful move of God that we experienced while we were there. Well, for every mountaintop experience, there's an eventual trip back to the valley. And so after this incredible experience, I mean no sooner had they descended from the mountain, and they're met with just a poignant reminder of the struggle that goes on down in the valley in this fallen world that we live in. And don't ever forget that we live in a fallen world where all kinds of rotten things happen.

And what does Jesus find when He gets there? He finds His disciples embroiled in a verbal argument with some religious leaders, some scribes there. And when He asked what the argument was all about, it tells us in verse 17 that someone from the crowd, whom we come to understand is this desperate father, speaks up and says, teacher I brought my son to you because he is tormented by a demonic spirit. And I asked that your disciples would cast it out, but they couldn't do it.

And obviously this spiritual dynamic in this boy's life. This mute spirit means that he was unable to speak. It's very possible he could not hear as well. And the father went on to explain that that there were times when the spirit would just simply take hold of the boy or seize him, is the word that is used. And he says it would throw him down and he would grind his teeth and foam at the mouth and so forth, and so Jesus responded, first of all, by saying, *"Oh faithless generation,..."*

If you read Matthew's account, He said, Matthew recorded it as, "*Oh faithless and twisted generation.*" Sounds like an interesting description of our world, right? I mean, that's life in the valley. Faithless and twisted, for the most part. And it sounds like a cry of frustration to me.

And you don't often hear Jesus getting frustrated. But this is one of those instances where He just comes down from the glory of just everything that took place on the Mount of Transfiguration immediately, plunged into this situation where there's desperate situation, this desperate need.

And the disciples are unable to do anything about it. And we see as we go on and we read the passage that Jesus is probably frustrated because He's seeing something that I'm sure He saw all the time, but something that you and I many times fail to recognize. And that is that, here on earth, we have so little faith in God. And I think that's one of the reasons He starts off by saying, "*Oh faithless generation.*" He's just, it's like, how long? How long am I going to have to hang out with you guys before you like, get it? And begin to trust Me? How long do I have to be with you?

And I mean, I get even the frustration that Jesus expresses here, even though I'm part of the problem. And seeing what the demon was doing to the boy, Jesus in verse 21 asks the father how long that he had been that way. And the father responded that from a very, very early point in the boy's childhood, he had been overtaken by this demonic spirit.

And I want you to notice what it says in verse 22, because this is interesting. The father observes that it often, it, meaning the spirit that is possessing his son, often casts him into fire or water. Notice, "*to destroy him.*" And that is a very interesting statement in light of the fact that it gives us an insight I guess, it may be a good way to say it, into the world of demonic possession.

Over and over in the Gospels, we see that whenever Jesus comes on the scene where there's a demonic presence that is invested in a human being that the demon usually freaks out and begins to beg Him not to cast him out or cast him into the abyss or whatever. And it seems very much that they don't want to come out. Demonic spirits don't want to come out. In fact, they're usually very stubborn about coming out and refusing to budge in most cases.

You would think, wouldn't you, if a demon didn't want to come out of someone, they would probably try to protect their host. I mean, if the host dies, where are they going to go? They've got to go somewhere else. Right? So if they're

stubborn about their refusal to leave that host, why would they try to destroy the very thing they want to stay in? You ever stop to think about that?

Because the father here is saying this demon often takes hold of him to destroy him. And yet there's this stubborn refusal yet of this demon to come out. And the disciples couldn't cast it out. So what exactly is going on here? Why is it that demons are stubborn in their refusal to leave where they are, and yet they are constantly trying to destroy their host? Why is that?

Very simple. That's all they can do. That's all demons can do, is destroy. They can't do anything else. They have no other m.o. Right? Do you remember when Jesus talked about this? Let me show you this passage from John 10:10. He said,

John 10:10 (ESV)

“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.”

“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. (of course, He went on to say) I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.”

But what can the enemy only do? What can the thief only do? Steal, kill and destroy. It's all he can do. Listen, demons cannot do good. They can only destroy. That is, they're locked into that sort of a situation.

And it's a sobering thought given the fact that this whole world that we're living in is operating under the power of the enemy. And that's something we have to never forget. The whole world, apart from Christ, is vulnerable to the m.o. of the enemy, because the enemy, Satan, is a prevailing influence in this world.

He is temporarily crowned the prince of the power of the air, or the prince of this world, this kingdom of man. Man thinks he's in charge. He's deluded. It's Satan who's really in charge, apart from God.

Now, you and I who've given our lives to Christ, we're living in a kingdom within a kingdom. We have been enveloped in the Kingdom of God, but we're still living out here in the kingdom of man.

But more closely to us is the Kingdom of God. But people who are not in Christ, do not have the Kingdom of God surrounding their lives, and they're

living within the kingdom of the enemy. And what is the m.o. of the kingdom of the enemy? To steal, kill, and destroy. It can do nothing else.

It's crazy when Christians become so exasperated by government people when they're not doing right or when they find corruption. And we're like, whoa, what's going on? Is anybody surprised really based on a biblical mindset of the world in which we live, this fallen world in which we live, which is under the dominion and influence of the enemy? Is anybody surprised when we look into, we scratch the surface of a government, we find corruption?

I mean are you joking? I mean, as believers, we shouldn't be so naive as to think we're going to find, we're going to uncover in the institutions of man, great righteousness. Unless these people are believers, and then the righteousness is of God anyway. And we do look for those things to improve when believers are in charge. But when unbelievers are in charge, buckle up! It's going to be a rough ride. Because the influence of the enemy is very real, very powerful.

But what does it mean in a world where mankind fights and resists the wisdom and the truth of God's Word, there is only one other power and influence that is available to him. And that is the only, again, that power is only destructive all of the time.

Now you can imagine, can't you, what this world is going to be like when Jesus comes and catches away His Bride. Imagine. No wonder they call that time the great tribulation. That's one of the reasons why the world is going to be plunged into the great tribulation after the catching away of the Bride of Christ because the influence of God, which is largely evident through the Church, is going to be withdrawn.

What did Jesus say to the believers? Not long before He went to the cross, He said, you are the light of the world. You are the salt of the earth. Now be careful that your salt doesn't lose its saltiness. Right? Because you're it. The chief functional work or method of God's infusing righteousness into this world. Into this fallen world, which is largely under the influence of the devil, is the Church.

We are that influence of God in this fallen world. So, what happens when you pull us away? And I'm not patting us on the back, like we're all that and how cool are we, but it's the influence of Christ in us through us.

We are the fragrance of Christ the Bible tells us. What happens when that fragrance is taken away? There's nothing but the stench of what the enemy

leaves behind, which is destruction! And there will be such incredible destruction during the great tribulation. Moving on.

Here in the middle of verse 22, this desperate father, you'll notice, he says, “...*if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.*” And capitalizing on what the father said at that point, Jesus says to him if, “*If you can!*” He focuses on that single word that the father, and then He comes up with this, He responds. He says, “*All things are possible for one who believes.*”

And then in this beautiful display of honesty from this distraught father, he cries out and he says, I do believe. I believe, but help me with my unbelief. And the reason I call this a display of honesty is because I believe it is, he's expressing the paradox of having faith in God and at the same time entertaining unbelief and doubt. Which I think is something that is not only very possible, I think it's something we all deal with, whether we will admit it or not, or recognize it or not.

And to some people, I think it might sound like a contradiction. They'd say, well, you either have faith in God or you're full of doubt and unbelief. Well, I think you can do both. You ever heard of that concept of being double-minded? That's a biblical concept too. And you know what? It's not just unbelievers or people who are always constantly living on the fence who are double minded. People who are walking in absolute faith in one area of their life can be walking in unbelief in another, and it's really crazy when you see it going on.

For example, I may have total faith that my sins are forgiven because of what Jesus did for me on the cross, and at the exact same time have no confidence at all that God can heal my marriage, as an example. I've seen that happen. I've seen believers talking to believers who are having marriage problems. I know that I know that I know that I'm talking to a genuine born again Christian and I'll ask them. Okay, let's get this one thing taken care of. Do you believe Jesus died on the cross for your sins? Absolutely, 100%, no problem there. I am trusting in Jesus for the forgiveness of my sins.

Alright, now, are you trusting in God for the healing of your marriage? Well, that's a tough one, Pastor. And so, what's going on here? It's the same thing this father dealing with, this paradox of faith and unbelief that can coexist. They have to be in different compartments. And that's, we do compartmentalize this sort of a thing.

I may have total faith in God that He can use me to share His love with others. You might see somebody who just has the gift of evangelism, and they go out and they share their faith with everybody and anybody who will listen.

And they have faith that God is going to use them to do powerful things in the lives of other people but at the same time, that same individual has zero confidence that God can set them free from some besetting weakness of sin in their lives. You talk to him about evangelism and they're just, their words are full of faith. Then you talk to him about that area of sin that just keeps knocking them down and they say things like, I don't know if I'll ever get a handle on that.

So, there's no faith, you see, behind door number two whereas in this other area, oh, they're just brimming with faith. But there's in fact doubt in this other area. There's unbelief that reigns in this other area.

And Peter gives us a picture of this when he asked Jesus to let him walk on the water, toward Him. Jesus was already walking on the water. Lord, if it's You, let me come to You walking on the water. All right, come. What do we see? Peter walking on the water. And then we see Peter sinking on the water. You have faith, and then you have unbelief.

These parallel streams of faith and unbelief exist in every single one of us. And it is very common. And that means that this cry of this father that we hear this father making to Jesus, when he says, I believe, but help me overcome my unbelief, is a prayer that we all ought to be praying, frankly.

It ought to be a prayer that we all pray. Lord, help me overcome my unbelief because I know there's pockets of unbelief in my life, somewhere. It happens. There is a book entitled, Hudson Taylor's Spiritual Secret. I don't know if you guys have read it, if you're into reading those kinds of biographies. It was written by, I believe, his son Howard Taylor. Some of you know who Hudson Taylor is. Went to China, spent like 50 years evangelizing the Chinese with the Gospel of Jesus.

But he tells a time before he went to China. When he was finishing a meeting. Actually, it wasn't a meeting. He would go to church during the day and then in the evening he would do what he called Gospel work, and that meant he would go house to house, talk to people, just however he could talk to them. And he would usually go to the poorest neighborhoods to bring the Gospel.

And he tells a story about 10 o'clock where he was just finishing up, a man came to him and asked him to come and pray with his wife because he believed

that she was near death and so Hudson agreed to go with the man, and as he walked along and was talking to the man, he heard a very distinct Irish brogue in the man's voice and so he asked him, why didn't you call a priest?

Just assuming the man was Catholic and of course he was, but the man said, well I did call the priest, but he wanted payment to come and pray over my wife and I didn't have any money to give him. And of course that got Hudson thinking about how much money he had. I mean, as they're walking along, and he's telling this, he's saying, that got me, he says, I put my hand in my pocket, and I realized I got one coin in my pocket. It was half a crown.

And I don't understand British currency very well, I had to look it up. But a half a crown is about an eighth of a pound. It's not much, but of course back in those days it was something. But that was all he had. I mean, that was all he had in the world, right? And he knew that he had enough to eat when he got back to his room that night, and he knew he had a little something for breakfast, but he had nothing beyond that point. He knew that.

And so, as he's walking along with this man to go to this guy's house and pray over his wife, he's sitting there pondering his situation, and he's realizing, he's thinking to himself as he's walking, wow I don't have much money.

And he said, I didn't really notice it at the time, but later on I realized that as I was walking along, all my joy was just seeping away. I just, my joy was just escaping like air out of a balloon. And he finally got to the very, very shabby residence of this man. And when he entered, he was just, he was shocked by the standard of living that he found inside this horribly dirty, dark, one-room home where he saw 4 or 5 children standing silently, clearly in the throes of starvation. And he saw the man's wife lying on the floor with a 36-hour old infant at her side.

And all the while, Hudson was thinking, man, if I just had some more money, I would gladly give it to these people. If I just, if I had something that I could spare, I would give it to them. But he went on to say, and this is a quote from the book, he said, but still, a wretched unbelief prevented me from obeying the impulse to relieve their distress at the cost of all I possessed. It's a very fancy British way of saying; I just couldn't give them what I had. I could not obey the impulse to give them everything I had to relieve their distress because I was just too worried about creating my own.

And he went on to tell how he knelt down to pray for this woman, and he began to speak words of what would otherwise be construed as faith over this woman.

And he said, I hadn't gotten a couple of words out of my mouth, and the Holy Spirit just smacked me, he said. And he said, you hypocrite. You would dare to pray a prayer of faith and belief over this woman, and you're holding tightly onto that single coin in your life, and you cannot trust me for your own life.

And he goes on to tell in this story about, he says no wonder I had absolutely no words of comfort for these people I needed to be comforted. But here's a situation where you've got this man who went on to do these amazing things and who's a very strong believer in the Lord but yet who is struggling with unbelief.

Unbelief in the camp! In his camp! Right there, where he has to sit and look at it. And eventually, as the story goes, he became so overwhelmed by the conviction of the Holy Spirit, that he reached into his pocket, and he took that half-crown, and he handed it to that poor man, and he said, here, take care of your family.

And he said, interesting thing, as soon as I did that, I was flooded once again with this most amazing joy. This most incredible warmth of joy that just flooded over my entire being. He says, I went back home that night and in the dark darkness of the night and the porous streets of the city, he said, I heard hymns everywhere in my heart.

And he says, at night I went to bed, and I slept like I've never slept before. Pretty amazing. So, what do we do when, like Hudson Taylor, we realize our faith is incomplete? We realize that there are some strongholds of doubt and unbelief that are maybe lurking somewhere that need to be dealt with.

Well, I've got a couple of just quick points that I want to give you, and those of you who take notes might want to jot these down and for the rest of you I'll put them up on the screen as well. But the first thing that we need to do is very simple, we just, we need to repent.

1. Repent

And, this is something that's so often overlooked. Doubt and unbelief, you guys, have to be dealt with in the same way we deal with lust and other sins of the flesh. You see, what often happens in our lives is we think of doubt and unbelief as something else. We think of it as normal. We know that sin is sin, but we don't often put the label of sin on doubt or unbelief. We just go, well, I'm just struggling in some areas, but I have faith in God, so we think that since I have

faith in God in one area, this doubt is probably something that I really don't need to worry that much about.

It's just like, well doesn't everybody? The fact of the matter is we need to treat it like sin, the same way you would deal with any other kind of sin in your life. And that means repent. And the repentance begins with confronting it before God for what it is. Distrust of God. My unbelief, you guys. You ready for this? My unbelief is a lack of trust in God. I'm basically saying to God, I don't trust You. I don't trust You. I have people tell me from time to time, I just have trust issues. I mean, I hear that quite a bit actually. Okay?

But you see, the way it's said, the way it's communicated, is like saying, I have blonde hair, or I have green eyes. Or I walk pigeon toed. It's just the way I was born. No, you can't repent of your eyes and your hair color, but you can repent of unbelief. You can repent of your trust issues. You can tell God, this is wrong of me. This is wrong because you've proven to me that I can trust you and yet I continue to refuse, and I repent.

And you might be surprised to see how much repentance has an amazing power to begin to break the hold that unbelief and doubt might otherwise have over your life. But it needs to begin with repentance. Secondly, and this is going to sound tremendously easy, secondly, believe.

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It sounds so simple, but do you remember when Jesus appeared to His disciples on the night, the evening of His resurrection, they were all incredible, just over the moon about this whole thing.

But you remember Thomas wasn't there and so he joins them later on and they tell him, hey, the Lord is alive He appeared to us and Tom remember Thomas? Did he say praise the Lord, I'm so thankful? No, he said if I don't see him for myself, I'm not going to believe it. And so, you guys know the story.

One week later or one week after the first appearance Thomas is now with the disciples. Jesus suddenly is standing among them, and He makes a beeline for Tom. I mean, walks right over to Tom, shows him His hands, the nail scars, tells him to put his hand, shows him His side where the spear was thrust in, and so forth, and then, here's what He said to Thomas.

This is interesting. He said, do not disbelieve but believe. Believe. Just like up on the screen there. Believe. Now to say, just believe sounds like an incredible oversimplification, doesn't it?

Because we try to make it all complex. Well, you see, there's these issues. And, and there's my childhood, and then there's these intellectual considerations related to my doubt. And I do have a college degree. And what I got along with my college degree was a healthy dose of unbelief. And now I'm working through all that, and there's all this stuff. And Jesus comes along, and He goes, don't disbelieve, just believe. And we're all like, really? That's it? Just believe?

But you know what? This is probably not going to shock you. He's right. We think it's all difficult but just believing is really more simple than we might otherwise think because it comes down to choosing. Choosing to believe. And you know what? That's something you can do because you've been given by God, freedom to choose. And you can do that. You can choose to believe. Because if you don't choose to believe, you know what you're going to choose to do? You're going to choose to tolerate unbelief and doubt.

That's what we do. We don't, we wouldn't ever admit it. We don't go around telling people, well, I actually just choose to have doubt in my mind about these things. No, we don't say that. We wouldn't begin to frame it that way, because that makes it sound like it's something else. We want to make it all complex and difficult. But that's what's happening. We are choosing not to believe, we're choosing to distrust God. See? And you can actually just choose not to tolerate those lingering doubts.

Let me show you a passage from Hebrews. This is interesting. Hebrews chapter 12 verse 1.

Hebrews 12:1 (ESV)

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight. (Notice that phrase. And then he goes on to talk about) and sin (also) which clings so closely, and (then) let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

Notice he talks about the laying aside of every weight. Believe me, doubt and unbelief is a ball and chain and a huge weight in your life when it comes to

running the race that God has laid out for you. It's huge. I mean, it's very, very difficult to run the race with all that weight, and so what the writer of Hebrews is saying or telling you and I to do is to lay it aside. Lay it aside. Right? And that's talking about the choice to believe, in the face of your doubt, to lay this thing aside.

Do you guys get the fact that there's going to be some things you're just not going to figure out in this life? Do you get that? Or have you continued to hold God to this standard of, listen, if I don't get it right here between the ears, I'm not going to believe it. If you've set that kind of a standard and you've basically exalted your brain to this level where if God doesn't appeal to the bar of your reason you're not going to believe it you're in for a lifelong disappointment because listen, when it comes to walking with God and in the Kingdom of God if you don't leave room for mystery you're sunk.

Let me tell you there's a huge amount of mystery. In fact, the more I learn about the Bible the more mystery I see there is. In other words, the more I know, the more I realize I don't know about the Kingdom of God. And if you don't leave room for some of those things you can sit and wrestle with them for a while, but then eventually if you can't resolve it, you know what you've got to do? You've got to lay it aside. You've got to say, well, you know what, God, you're going to tell me or show me those things in your own good time, and I'll just, I'll get it at some point.

Maybe it'll be in your presence, I don't know, but for right now, I can't run with that thing, because it weighs me down. I'm going to lay it aside, I just don't know. But we demand of God, listen, you're going to tell me this, before I take one more step of faith with you, wow, that's a pretty heady thing to do. But you and I instead can choose to lay it aside. And that brings us to the third thing to do when we realize we're dealing with doubts and unbelief. Up here on the screen, the third thing is obey.

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And, laying aside your doubts, do you know what that involves? It involves obeying. Because you see, God has given you and I a command in His Word. It's in Proverbs chapter 3, and you guys all know this verse. Put it on the screen for you here.

Proverbs 3:5-6 (ESV)

Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.

Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and don't lean on... (what you've figured out in your grey matter. Instead trust Him and) In all your ways acknowledge him... ”

People sit there and they think, you know what, I can't do this. I can't follow Proverbs 3:5 and 6. You know why? I've got doubts. So I can't do this. Other people might be able to, but I can't do this. You know what you're missing? You're missing the step of laying aside those doubts and trusting God anyway. You see, in your mind, you thought you had to resolve all those things before you could get to the point and you probably read verses like Proverbs 3:5 and 6 and thought, wow, I wonder who can attain to that.

Trust in the Lord with all of your heart. Oh, are you joking? When all these doubts are orbiting my brain? Yeah, you can still trust God with all of your heart. And you begin by, you take some of those mysteries that God has just not revealed, and you lay them aside. You lay aside that weight and you keep running the race. And you say, you know what, Lord, I don't know the answer to that question and that question and that question and that question. But you know what?

If I sit and hang onto these things, they're just going to weigh me down and I'm not going to be able to run the race. So, I'm going to lay those aside for right now I'm going to lay them aside. Now, if you choose to reveal those to me in this life, marvelous. But if not, I just trust that it's either not important for me to know, or you're going to do it at some time later, but that's your business. I choose to obey the command to trust in you with all of my heart. I choose to do this now, even here, in the face of these challenges to my faith.

And it's a very powerful decision we make as believers. Now, as we conclude this story of Mark, we see the Lord moving powerfully on behalf of this boy, so much so that the crowd, what did they say? They believed the boy was dead. It says that the spirit convulsed the boy so powerfully and forcefully before it left, that he was lying there like a corpse. And the crowd believed him to be dead, which is another reminder, don't believe what the crowd thinks. Right, like what you read on Facebook.

And then we're told in verse 27. *Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up and he arose* and then verse 28 It says, *“And when he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, “Why could we not cast it out?”²⁹ And He said to them, “This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer.””*

And you know by saying that Jesus is basically inferring that none of the disciples had prayed sufficiently in order to tackle this kind of a challenge. And here's what we learned from that. You ready? Lack of prayer is at the root of failure in the spirit realm. At least that's what He's telling these men. And I have to wonder how often that is true in our own lives as well.

Now here's what I can't explain, all right. I can't explain to you how a lack of prayer plays into a corresponding lack of spiritual power. I don't understand the spiritual dynamic. I don't, if you were looking at it like dominoes, I see that Jesus makes a statement. This kind only comes out by prayer. Meaning if prayer is lacking, you're going to have a problem. And then I see the other domino on the other end, which is they couldn't cast out the demon. I don't understand the dominoes in the middle.

I don't understand why a persistent sort of a prayerful mode gives a person more spiritual power. You might just say, well, Paul, isn't that just, why are you even questioning? Doesn't it just seem to make sense? Well, yes and no. I don't understand the dynamic. All I know is that it's so. All I know is that Jesus said it's so. All I know is that He told His disciples. You couldn't do this. This is a stubborn sort of a thing that you couldn't move without sufficient prayer. That's really all I know.

And by the way, when I talk about, and I think when Jesus is talking about a lack of prayer, He doesn't actually use those words, but that's the inference. He's not saying that these guys don't pray. And when I talk to you about a lack of prayer in our lives, I'm not saying that we don't pray. Because we do. We pray. But what I'm talking about is a prayer life that feels burdensome or boring or futile. And I think we can all relate to that, where we've gotten up off our knees or whatever our prayer posture might have been.

And we just feel like, did I do any good at all? Right. And so there's the, and it doesn't draw us into a constant life of prayer because we sometimes feel like we're kicking against the goads.

The takeaway from this passage, I think, here in Mark chapter 9, this second part of Mark chapter 9, is two-fold. Number one, we need to be open for God to reveal to us, like this distraught father that we read about in this passage, for

Him to reveal in us those areas of our life where unbelief exists. We need to be open. And we need to recognize, yeah, you know what, I'm a believer, I love the Lord, I'm washed in the blood of the Lamb, I'm going to heaven, but I can have unbelief. I can have pockets of serious unbelief in my life, and then we need to be willing to let the Lord expose those areas.

And what that means is, I mean, what do you do when He shows you that? Well, I think the best thing to do is just be honest with Him and admit it. Lord, thank you. You know what? Help me with my unbelief.

For me, that's coming to Him and telling him I pretty much stink at having faith sometimes, and really holding on to faith. But secondly, we need to admit that the presence of spiritual weakness in our lives is evidence of a lack of prayer. And again, it's not evidence of no prayer or prayerlessness, but it's evidence of a lack of energy and power in our prayer that is essential to finding strength in our lives to overcome those stubborn things that just won't move without a sufficiency of prayer.

And it's very important to understand too, that at the root of a lack of prayer is a lack of faith. These things come back upon each other you know. It's like a dog chasing its tail. If I don't pray, I'm not going to be built up in my faith. If I don't have faith, I'm not going to pray. And so, it ends up becoming this vicious cycle. And this is one of the reasons why we gather as the body of Christ. In case you were maybe looking for a reminder today of why do we come together as the body of Christ?

Guys, we come together to encourage one another and this is, I think, a huge part of what it means to be the body of Christ and what it means to get better from this lack of prayer and these areas of doubt and stuff in our lives is to come together as the body of Christ and encourage one another. And I hope that you are not just a consumer when you come to church. We live in a consumer society today, meaning we treat church like we treat the mall. We come to church to see what we can get out of it. Oh, there's something nice. I'm going to shop over there and then I'm going to shop over there.

Well, a lot of people use even that same language to describe church. I've had people come up to me after a service and say, hey, good to meet you, pastor. We just want to let you know we're shopping for a church. Yikes! That's a consumer mentality. Maybe what you ought to do is pray and say, Lord, is this where you want us to give our lives away? But you see, we're so caught up in that that we come to church, we sit, we leave. There are people sitting right around you today who are struggling with doubt, unbelief, and they're believers just like you

are, but they're struggling with some of those things and they're struggling with a lack of a dynamic prayer life, and they need you just as much as you need them.

Don't come to church just for what you can get out of it. Come here for what you can give. We need to be encouraging one another. The Bible says, encourage one another all the more as you see the day approaching. (Hebrews 10:35)

So when we are challenging you to fellowship with other believers, get involved in small groups, get to know other people, I know it takes you out of your comfort zone. It does for me too. I'm an introvert, as strange as that may sound. I am. And it's difficult for me to stretch out into areas of unknown where I'm uncomfortable. But I need it, because I need you.

I need you. I need your encouragement. I need you to encourage me in some of these areas where I struggle with doubts. And I know you need me and you need everybody else. We need one another. So, let's be doing more and more of that amen, as the day, as we see the day approaching.