

Mark 9:14-29

Demons, Doubts, & Dependence

The Summit Church, Standalone

MPT: There is a spiritual battle raging all around us. Jesus has the power to overcome all of it, but often his power is predicated on our dependence, which is evidenced by prayer.

MPS: We are all engaged in a spiritual battle which can only be won by faith and dependence on Jesus, which is evidenced by our prayer life.

INTRODUCTION

Skydiving. Saying yes is easy. Signing up is easy. **Showing up** is easy. **Getting dressed** is easy. **Getting in the plane** is easy. **Flying up** is easy. **Jumping out...not so easy. PIC**

- The jump is where **things get real.**
- The jump is where your **faith is tested.**
- The jump is where you have to be **fully dependent on your instructor.**

In a lot of ways, that's where we are when we get to **Mark 9** (**grab your Bible**). Up to this point it's been pretty easy to follow Jesus—basically Jesus has been **healing, telling awesome stories, giving divine insight, calming storms, commissioning disciples, feeding thousands, walking on water**, and right before chapter 9 he's gone up on a Mountain with three of his best buddies, **he started glowing and showed them that he is God in the Flesh—pretty cool stuff.** So it's been pretty awesome... But what the disciples don't know is that **following Jesus is about to get a lot harder...** things are about to get real. Because where we pick up in Mark 9 the road is now leading to one place: Jerusalem and the cross.

You know, I meet a lot of folks who think that the first few years of following Jesus are the hardest—you're learning, growing, figuring things out—and what we think is that walking with Jesus gets easier as time progresses. Sure, there are plenty of ways **our faith grows stronger and we become more confident in Christ**, but **that doesn't mean it gets easier.** In fact, often the opposite is true—it's usually just about when you learn to walk besides Jesus that the spiritual life will demand more **courage**, more **energy**, more **pressing in**, more **faith**, more **dealing with your own sin**, and ultimately more **dependence on Jesus.**

In that vein, I want to share something with you from Scripture that, even after 13 years of following and chasing hard after Jesus, **I've needed to hear over and over again.**

- I've needed to hear it because **I resonate** with one of the characters in this story.
- I've needed to hear it because it's a story about **struggle**, about **faith that sometimes doubts** more than it depends, and about **questioning the power of prayer.**
- So if any of you are like me, you may need to hear this as well.

Mark 9 is a story about **demons, doubts, and dependence.**

- It's a story that shows us **we have a very real battle** we are engaged in and how **that battle is won or lost on our knees.**

Few people say things as well as **Pastor Tony Evans**: **"Prayer is the means by which God has established for God's people to invite the spiritual into the physical, and the invisible realm into the visible realm."**

What I would submit to you today based on Mark 9: **How much we experience and see God bring the invisible + spiritual realm into our**

visible + physical realm will largely be **proportionate to our dependence on him through prayer.** (REPEAT)

CONTEXT

Mark chapter 9

STAND

Jesus has just come down the mountain with his three buddies...pick me up in verse 14...

¹⁴And when they (Jesus, Peter, James, John) came to the disciples, they saw a great crowd around them, and scribes arguing with them. ¹⁵And immediately all the crowd, when they saw [Jesus], were greatly amazed and ran up to him and greeted him. ¹⁶And he asked them, "What are you arguing about with them?" ¹⁷And 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."

Couple quick things here:

First, Whenever the disciples are separated from Jesus in Mark's Gospel, they always get in trouble and experience a crisis. *We never advance beyond our need for Jesus!*

Next, basically what has happened here is that the disciples—who previously had been going around town casting out demons—have been unable to cast a demon out of this father's boy.

- And, oh man, are the scribes loving this. To put this in today's context, this is a UNC fan reveling in a Duke loss. This is a NC

State fan chirping in your ear never letting you forget the time they beat you. That's all this is.

So there's this argument going on with the disciples and the scribes, but then along comes this dad...and **he's not interested in their argument**—he's just worried about his son.

Already there's a major lesson here if I can say it this bluntly: **hurting people aren't interested in our theological arguments.**

- They couldn't care less about our **blog rants** and **social media debates** and **Twitter threads**.
- They're *hurting* and they need *help*. Hurting people want **action**, not **arguments**. (If that ain't a word for the Church today...)
- This father doesn't care about their debate, he just wants his son healed!

¹⁹And 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."

²⁰And 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. ²¹And Jesus asked his father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood. ²²And 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."

Nothing will **break you down** and **make you desperate** before God like **watching your kids hurt or suffer**.

- Luke 9 tells us this is the man's "*only child*."
- Matthew 17 says the man "*came up to Jesus, falling on his knees before him*."

- Can't you feel the **agony** and **pain** in this father's heart? His son has an **evil spirit**. And this Dad knows that if something doesn't change soon, his boy will be dead. So he pleads with Jesus...

²³ And Jesus said to him, "If you can't! 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...

- The marriage is dead...BUT JESUS
- The child is too far gone...BUT JESUS
- That person will never forgive you and the relationship is as good as dead...BUT JESUS
- Jesus has a habit of taking things that look dead and...**he 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."

Today, I want to show you that there is **strength in your struggle** (look at your neighbor and say..). Because see it's your struggle that gives you the opportunity to be more dependent on God...which is where true spiritual power comes from in the first place. So your struggles

are actually portals to the power of the Most High God. There is strength in your struggle.

PRAY

*"Make us to know your ways, O LORD;
teach us your paths.*

*Lead us in your truth and teach us,
for you are the God of our salvation..."*

WALKTHROUGH

Alright, let's look at this story of struggle which, I believe, is gonna lead us to a strength we never knew possible. First, we need to know where our struggle is coming from...look at v17: ¹⁷ **And someone from the crowd answered him, "Teacher, I brought my son to you, for he has a spirit that makes him mute.**

We're about to go to the deep end of the pool, okay? Just like this boy and his father, **we are engaged in a spiritual battle with demons.**

1) DEMONS: Spiritual Warfare

Now, when it comes to **demons** you most likely find yourself in **one of two camp**:

- 1) **Demons are absolutely everywhere**...so look out.
 - Demons are why you had a **bad day** and were **late to church** today.
 - Demons are why you've already **failed at your New Years Resolutions**.
 - They could be **beside you** in the empty seat right now (did you look?)...
 - They could be in your **boss** (amen)...

- They could be in your **spouse** (don't say amen)...
 - They could be in your **kids** (y'all know that's true)
 - i) You get the point. The point is that you think that every single little **bad, inconvenient, or annoying** thing that happens to you is because of demons.
- 2) The other view is equally harmful: **demons are absolutely nowhere**...so don't worry about it at all, because there is no such thing. *That's just fairy tale stuff made up by the religious to scare you into going to church or behaving correctly.*

Both extremes are wrong. This story of ours in Mark 9 is not a fairy tale; this isn't even a parable; this is a **real story**. I've told you this before, but **the Christian life is not a playground; it's a battleground**. And the battle you are in is a **daily, ongoing spiritual battle** with Satan and his demons who have one goal: **to destroy the image of God in men and women**. Demons are real...and they seek to **possess** and **guide** and **deceive** and **lie** because they want nothing more than to **torture and kill** those who are made in God's image.

- Y'all are like, *"What happened to all the Love God, Love Others, Love Our World stuff?"* I know. We'll get there...but **we won't ever make it there if we don't know how to fight here!**

Because, see, some of you are still skeptical that demons are even real. I understand, I do. I know the NT talk about demons is bizarre. I get it. But just **stop and consider**: *Haven't you felt, at times, that there's something dark and sinister in the world?* Something more than just **humans being self-centered**. I know I have...and I'll bet you have, too.

- Maybe it was in your life. Maybe it was in the life of someone you love. You've seen an **addiction** devastate a family. You've

felt **depression** that you just can't shake. You hear stories of people being **hurt, abused, neglected**—or maybe for you they're not just stories; **it's personal**. You turn on the news, and you hear about **violence, dissension, more violence** ... and you think, *'Is the world just darkness without any light?!*'

- Listen: We have to have an answer for evil like that.
- And the NT approach is actually incredibly insightful, cuz it allows us to call *evil* **EVIL** and still love the people around us *who might be committing evil*.
 - See, either we **believe in demons** or we **turn other people into demons**.

Satan would love nothing more than to have you deny or ignore the fact that there is a war going on. If you want to experience the **abundant life** that Jesus died to purchase for you, if you want to **walk in the power of the resurrection** and **live in victory over sin**, you're gonna have to fight! And that means you have to be aware of the battle that rages *around* you and *within* you:

- Your spiritual battle might be at home: kid, teenager, family curses, etc.
- Your spiritual battle might be in your head or heart: never feel good enough, don't think you're really forgiven, believing Satan's lies: God doesn't love you.
- Your spiritual battle might be one of the flesh: sexual desire, greed, envy, power, love of money, overworking.

Not everyone is possessed by a demon like this boy, but **we are all fighting demonic "principalities" all the time**. This is what Paul is referring to in **Ephesians 6** (NIV) when he tells us to ¹⁰**be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power**. ¹¹**Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.** ¹²**For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the**

authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

- Our fight is not against one another.
- Our fight is not against politics.
- In fact, Satan would love for you to focus on those things. One pastor said it this way: **The devil doesn't need to destroy you if he can distract you!**¹

Listen, this spirit called Satan and his demons are not some “out there in the stratosphere floating around” demons. No. **The anti-God spirit possesses the lives of those who live by the ways of this world and follow the ruler of the air.**

- Let me put that in real simple terms: **if you're not following Jesus, then you're following Satan.**
- *Whoa now, Pastor. Chill.* I don't write the mail, I'm just delivering it.

Ephesians 2:1-3, And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

If you're not following Jesus, you are a **child of wrath** who is **living by the ways of this world** and **follows the ruler of the air—Satan**. And that's terrifying—I hope it is for you, too. But as crafty as he is, let me also remind you that he is not **self-existent**, he is not **sovereign**, he is not **omnipotent**, he does not **know all**, he is not **omnipresent**, and he is on a **leash that is tied and staked down to the Cross of Christ where ultimately he was defeated once for all.**

¹ When the Devil Knocks: Week 1 - The Deceiver

Even better, let me remind you of the next seven verses of Ephesians 2—even though the bad news was bad, the good news is so much better—because **God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.**²

Yes, we are in a **battle**...but our God is **better**.

Yes, we are in a **war**...but our God is a **mighty warrior**.

Yes, we fight against **principalities and powers**...but our God is **more powerful**.

No matter what you're going through today, there is no demon too strong for Jesus Christ the Almighty.

Man, that all sounds great, doesn't it? I mean, that'll preach. We'll shout 'amen' and be full of enthusiasm in church...but what about when life gets real? What about when the proverbial stuff hits the fan? Well, **often this is where doubt creeps in**...

2) DOUBT: Flawed Faith

² Ephesians 2:4-10, ESV

If demons are what we're fighting "out there," then doubt is what we're fighting "in here." And Jesus is about to give a Master Class to this father about the **nature of true faith**.

The father says to Jesus, "Your disciples couldn't cast the demon out." Then **look at v19** 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." . . .**

Now before we go judging Jesus on what seems like a harsh response, y'all can't tell me every parent hasn't had this thought toward their kids at least once: "*O you crazy children, how long shall I suffer with you? How long do I have to go over this with you? How many times do I have to keep telling you this? How long?*"

In all seriousness, though, this is a side of Jesus we don't see a ton of, right? I mean, *is Jesus cranky in this story? Is he having a bad day? Is he exasperated and frustrated?*

- More than anything, he's outwardly lamenting. He's lamenting not the lack of **power** in his disciples and their inability to cast a demon out; he's lamenting their lack of **faith**.

So in **v22** the father responds by saying, "...**But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.**"

This simple, desperate, imperfect, prayer is **about to change everything**.

²³ **And Jesus said to him, "If you can't! All things are possible for one who believes."**

Jesus is saying, "*It's not about **my ability to help**; it's about your **willingness to believe!***"

- There are no 'ifs' about what God can do; the ifs are on our side.
- Divine *ability* is not the problem... human *unbelief* is.

Before we go any further, we need to look at what this does NOT mean. What this does NOT mean is "*If you just **believe enough and pray enough and have enough faith** then you can have w/e you want!*"

- On the flip side of that, it also doesn't mean that just because you're **sick** or **in need** or **something is wrong** in your life that it must mean you just don't have enough **faith** yet...you're just not **praying** enough...you're just not **religious** enough.

Of course Jesus is not saying that! The main point here is to describe what true faith looks like. And, with true faith, what's important is not the **strength of your faith** but rather the **strength of the object of your faith**.

- "All things are possible" not because of the **depth** of our faith, but because of the **direction** of it.

I think that phrase—"all things"—is the key here. Where else does that phrase come up often?

- Phil 4:13: "**I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.**" Paul's content in all circumstances...not "can accomplish anything I want"
- The point of Mark is not to know the **cheat code** to get God to do what you want // **cosmic vending machine**.
- Mark wrote this down so **you'd know that Jesus is the Son of God who has the authority to overcome our suffering and sin**.

At the end of the day, the most important thing for Mark is you **knowing** and **believing** and **trusting in** this man, Jesus Christ. Mark is showing us that no power resides in us to do anything of spiritual value apart from Christ. The power is in Christ!...and **the way we access that power is by faith** which, as we'll see in a moment, is demonstrated by prayer.

- “Faith is the key to God’s work and power.”³

However—and here’s the other great thing about Jesus even in the midst of our doubts—sometimes **God helps us even when our faith wavers and is flawed.**

That’s what we’re about to see in v24. Let me tell you, of all **31,102 verses** in the Bible, I might resonate most deeply with this one:

²⁴ Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, “I believe; help my unbelief!”

This man shouts a mixture of **despair** and **trust**—which, I don’t know about you, is the **same mixture that often characterizes my prayer life**—and Jesus responds **not by rebuking the man, but by rebuking the demon in his son!**

- Jesus doesn’t say, “I’m God in the flesh so **confess all your sin, get rid of all your doubt, purify your heart, spend the next 48 hours in prayer, memorize more Scripture, go all-in or go away...then come talk to me!**”
- The boy’s father says, “I’m not faithful, I have a ton of doubt, and I fall insanely short spiritually and morally. Jesus, my faith is weak. It’s incomplete. It’s partial. It’s frail. Even with all of that, though, I believe! I still trust you! I believe if you don’t

deliver my son then he won’t be delivered! So, Lord Jesus, help him in spite of me! I believe, but help my unbelief!

- **AND JESUS RESPONDS.**

I hope you are SO ENCOURAGED BY THIS: No belief is **perfect**. No belief is **pure**. Your belief may be **weak**...it may need **help**. But, like this father, you can **plead for Jesus’s pity and his power** by saying, “I believe; help my unbelief!” and he is a Savior who takes our **small, puny, flawed mustard seed of faith and he moves mountains with it.**

I was thinking about this a ton last weekend as I had one of these mixed moments of faith: **MLK/SOL/gender roles.**

- Lord, I believe; help my unbelief.

So we’re **fighting this spiritual battle**...we’re doing it with a **flawed faith**...what now? All of this leads us to the main point of this story: **dependence.** Specifically, dependence *as evidenced by prayer.*

3) DEPENDENCE: Power in Prayer

The demon has been cast out of the boy, then look at v28...

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.”

You know what I wish that said? I wish it said, “*This kind cannot be driven out by anything but **preaching.***”

- Boy, if **preaching and potlucks** could cast out demons there wouldn’t be a demon in sight of a Baptist church!

³ NIV Compact Bible Commentary, 461

Up until this possessed boy, the disciples had been doing just fine casting out demons.⁴ Their demon-casting ministry was going great...putting up big numbers. Setting records each quarter. Promotions and bonuses.

- But for some reason in this case **they were powerless**. So they ask Jesus why they couldn't perform.
- His answer: **you didn't pray about it**.

Well, Jesus, we've done it plenty of times before, you know.

- Yeah, but you didn't pray.

We know what we're doing at this point, Jesus, is that really necessary?

- Yeah, it is. Because your lack of prayer means you've gotten prideful. You've begun relying on yourselves for the power to cast out demons.

What he's telling them in this short answer is, "Don't confuse the *power* with the *source*. Don't confuse your *ability to do it* with the *dependence on the one who actually enables you and gives you power*."

Tim Keller says it this way: "The disciples are trying to exorcise a demon. But they have been trying to exorcise it *without praying*. How **arrogant**, how **clueless** they are about their inadequacy to deal with the evil and suffering of the world. **The disciples tried prayerless exorcism for the same reason that they couldn't understand why Jesus had to die—they didn't see how weak and proud they were.** They underestimated the power of evil in the world and in themselves."⁵

⁴ Mark 6:7-13

⁵ Keller, *King's Cross*, 120-121.

IOW, **they were powerless because they were prayerless.**

- Oh, Summit Family, one of my greatest fears for this church is that "success" leads us to a lack of dependence upon the very one who has given us "success" in the first place.
 - The scary thing about ministry is that we can learn to do it.
 - Success caused them to be careless in their personal spiritual walk and neglect prayer, which is the very portal to accessing God's power to overcome the demon.
 - They began to rely on their own **skills** and **technique** and **strength**.

It was never about their **technique**, it was about where they were placing their **trust**. The disciples forgot that **spiritual ability** comes through **complete dependence on God's power**, which is available to us **only through faith that is evidenced by fervent prayer**.⁶

- **Albert Tate** says "some of us spend more time pursuing our assignment than we do pursuing our Father. It's his presence that gives us the alignment we need for the assignment we pursue. Therefore, we ought to make his presence the priority!" And how do we make his presence the priority? THROUGH PRAYER.

See, this right here is *the* thing that is going to **set you apart** and determine whether you **experience the power of God** in your life: your **dependence upon God as evidenced by prayer.**

This, Church, is why I said your **strength is in your struggle**. Because what often drives us to prayer and dependence? Struggles! Hard

⁶ Believer's Study Bible

times! Desperation! **You don't need discipline to pray continuously; you need desperation.**

- I've heard it said that the early church was characterized by **uneducated men agonizing**, and today's church is characterized by **educated men organizing**.

Listen, if you're not praying about it, then you've decided **you can handle it**. Your prayerlessness screams to God and to others, *"I've got this."*

Which is why your prayer life is probably **the most accurate gauge of your faith and dependence on God**.

- Our fervency in prayer—or lack of it—is probably the best indicator of where we're placing our trust.
- That's why prayerlessness is tantamount to idolatry. It's dethroning God—his power, his authority, his ability, his sovereignty—and it's putting on the throne our **trust in** and **dependence on** our **strength**, our **technique**, and **ourselves**.

Author Marion Stroud: *"Prayer is the **voice of faith** trusting that **God knows and cares**."*

- Lord, I believe...help my unbelief.

CONCLUSION (VAMP)

You know, one of the most interesting things in this story is **the way Jesus casts this demon out**. Maybe you caught it...I sure didn't the first few times I read it.

Jesus tells them that this demon could only be cast out by prayer...but do you remember Jesus praying to cast the demon out? Did Jesus drop down to his knees, have everybody grab hands, close

his eyes, begin with "Dear God...", recite a ton of Scripture, throw out some holy hums...did he do all that (Mark probably would've included it if he did)?

- Look what it says in **v25**: **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."**
- **He never prayed**. He just did it.
- *If it can only be driven out by prayer, why didn't Jesus pray to cast it out?*

Could it be that maybe Jesus isn't so much talking about the **activity of prayer**, but rather he is pressing in on the **attitude of prayer**?

- Could it be that he doesn't want us so much focused on the **technique of prayer** as much as he does the **moment by moment dependence we should have on the Teacher, Jesus Christ**, who sits at the right hand of the throne of God praying and interceding for us 24/7?
- He didn't say "this one is cast out by *a prayer*" or by "*spending time in prayer*." He just said, "by prayer." Prayer is a **lifestyle of dependence** upon Jesus in which we seek to align our desires and will with his; it's not an **agenda to talk through with God each day and ask his blessing upon it**.

I told you I've needed to return to this truth over and over again in my years of following Jesus: on the cross, Jesus took on the full power of the demonic—the very demons which he has dominion over, he allowed to afflict him to the point of death—in order for you and I to have access to God our Father.

- Jesus looked down from the cross at those mocking him, those who had betrayed him, those who had run away from him...Jesus looked down and saw you and me with our weak and feeble faith, with our doubts and our disobedience...YET

HE STAYED ON THE CROSS. In one word he could've rebuked the entire thing and come down. But he didn't.

- Hebrews 4:14-16, ¹⁴Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. ¹⁵For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Be it **demons** or **doubt**, let us be a people of great **dependence** on the One who is sovereign over it all.

PRAY