

To Believe or Not to Believe

By Mary Kane

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Before we begin today's study, please pray and ask the Father to forgive you of any sin upon your heart and fill you afresh with His Holy Spirit. Now, please read Mark 9:14-29:

“And when He came to the disciples, He saw a great multitude around them, and scribes disputing with them. Immediately, when they saw Him, all the people were greatly amazed, and running to Him, greeted Him. And He asked the scribes, “What are you discussing with them?” Then one of the crowd answered and said, “Teacher, I brought You my son, who has a mute spirit. And wherever it seizes him, it throws him down; he foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth, and becomes rigid. So I spoke to Your disciples, that they should cast it out, but they could not.”

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

So He asked his father, “How long has this been happening to him?” And he said, “From childhood. And often he has thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him. But if You can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.”

Jesus said to him, “If you can believe, all things *are* possible to him who believes.”

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

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

Please name all the people who are a part of this account from Mark 9.

What was the matter with the man’s son?

He had a mute spirit. In this case, the word *mute* does not apply to the spirit that possessed the boy. As we see in verse 26, when the spirit left the boy that it “cried out.” The spirit was not mute but caused the boy to become mute.

According to verses 20, 22 and 25, how else did the spirit affect the boy?

How long had the boy suffered with this evil spirit?

Why do you think Jesus asked the father how long the boy had this problem?

I think Jesus wanted everyone in the crowd to realize the circumstances involved with this situation. The Word Biblical Commentary states that Jesus asked this question to show the seriousness of the boy's condition, and that in all probability other exorcists had tried to cast out this demon and had failed. Therefore, the power of God over evil would be glorified.

Please read verse 22 again. What does the father ask of Jesus in verse 22?

He asks Jesus, "If *you can do anything*, have compassion on *us* and help *us*" (emphasis mine). It struck me as I read this that perhaps the father was asking for spiritual healing for *both* of them, from the spirit of muteness and the spirit of doubt. Jesus answered the father, "If *you can believe*, all things are possible to him who believes" (emphasis mine).

The condition on which the boy's healing rests is whether or not the father has the *ability* to believe—to have faith that God can heal. The Greek word used for *belief* in this sentence is *pisteuo* which translates: to be persuaded of, to have confidence in, to credit, to believe. Is belief possible for the father? Is it possible for the boy? Is it possible for *us* to have the ability to believe? To answer those questions please look up the following verse.

Please write Romans 12:3 in the space below:

The Greek word used for the word *faith* in Romans 12:3 is the same Greek word used for *believe* in Mark 9:23. *Faith* and *belief* are often used interchangeably pending on the translation but they are derived from the same Greek word *pistis*. The answer to our question, "Is it possible for us to believe?" is an emphatic "Yes." God has given to each person a measure of faith. And if our faith is the size of a mustard seed it is enough to move a mountain (Matthew 17:20)! Do you see the discrepancy in size? Mustard Seed Faith conquers Mountainous Problem. We don't have to drum up enough faith to match the size of our problem... just an iota of faith will do. And that

we do not have to conjure up ourselves—it is a gift from God. The question is not “Do we have enough faith,” but will we choose to act on our faith.

There is a connection then between acting on faith and God manifesting His power. I’m not alluding to manipulating God to act on our part. Neither am I implying that if you aren’t healed from a sickness or an affliction it is because of a lack of faith. But according to the Word of God there is a connection between faith and the manifestation of God’s power. Please read the following verses.

According to Matthew 9:27-29, why did Jesus heal the blind men?

Jesus healed them because they had faith in Him. Jamieson, Faussett and Brown make an important point in that they did not receive a cure proportioned to their faith, but they received healing as part of the benefit of having faith (“Receive this cure as granted to your faith”). Now please read Mark 6:3-6.

According to Mark 6:3-6, why didn’t Jesus do a mighty work in Nazareth?

The end of verse 3 supplies the answer; they were “offended” at Him. One of the meanings behind the original Greek word *offend* is to *distrust* and desert one in which we should trust and obey (emphasis mine). Again, we see reference to the concept of *trust/faith/belief* and a connection to whether or not Jesus would act. Please remember that Jesus is God and that He can do whatever He pleases regardless of our faith and lack thereof.

Now please read Mark 5:25-34.

Why did Jesus say that the woman was healed (verse 34)?

It was her faith; not faith in her faith but faith in her God. The faith that God gave her to believe in Him made her well.

Now let us take a deep look into the *faith/belief* that God has given us that so profoundly affects our lives and the lives of those around us. As mentioned above, the transliteration for *believe* is *pisteuo*. Please consider the following definitions from Blue Letter Bible for *pisteuo* and its root words *pistis* and *peitho*.

- 1. To think to be true, to be persuaded of, to credit, place confidence in:** I think it is amazing that God is working to *persuade* us to trust in Him. He could just leave us to what we so deserve, but instead He works to persuade us to trust in Him. Amazing.
- 2. To trust in Jesus or God as able and willing to aid either in obtaining or in doing something or answering prayer: saving faith.** God is not only able but He is *willing* to save us and answer our prayers. He is faithful and worthy of our trust.
- 3. To entrust a thing to one.** God works to persuade us to entrust Him with our lives, our children, our ministries, our broken hearts, our hopes and our dreams.
- 4. To believe one's words; to induce one to believe by one's words.** God is truth so we can have faith in His Word...after all He is the way, the truth and the life.
- 5. To commit one's self trustfully to the name.** The Bible states that, "...there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." We must trust in the power of Jesus name to save, redeem and renew our heart, mind, body and soul.
- 6. Used in connection with the relationship between believing and miracle working.** God is pleased when we exercise our faith because without faith it is impossible to please God. Belief + Faith = God's miraculous power working in our lives. Faith bridges the gap between belief and the loosing of the power of God.
- 7. To listen to, obey, yield to, comply with.** Faith is always accompanied with action. It is also interesting to note that the root word (*pisteuo*) from which *faith* is derived is a primary verb, proving that faith requires action. If we have faith in something it will affect our actions; we will obey it, yield to it. The object of our faith will have authority in our lives.

Now that we have a better understanding of *faith* please go back and read Mark 9:14-24.

What amazing request does the father make of Jesus in verse 24?

This honest, heartfelt request from the boy's father has brought encouragement, freedom and hope to my soul on many occasions. Just because a Christian struggles with unbelief does not mean that he or she isn't a believer (I'm praying that someone will be freed up by this) or that they are losing their faith in Christ. In my experience, a sudden outcropping of doubt has been a tool that God has used to call me to a greater level of belief and faith. I have emerge from my struggles with doubt with a stronger faith. As the Complete Word Study Dictionary points out, our faith should not be understood as one holding on to God constantly lest he loose his grip and fall, but it is Jesus our Savior who holds us firmly and NO ONE can snatch us away. Amen.

Please read the following advice from Charles Spurgeon about what to do with our doubts (I updated this text for ease of reading):

"If you have anything that perplexes you, the simplest plan will not be to try to solve the difficulty but to seek direction from heaven concerning it. If you at this moment have some doubt that is troubling you, your wisest plan will not be to combat the doubt, but to come to Christ just as you are and refer the doubt to Him. Remember how men act when they are concerned with a lawsuit; if they are wise, they do not undertake the case themselves. They know our familiar proverb, "He who is his own lawyer has a fool for a client"; so they take their case to someone who is able to deal with it, and leave it with him."ⁱ

Please write your reaction to the above quote:

Now, please turn your attention back to our text for today.

Consider for a moment the father in this passage of Scripture. According to the father's example, and Mr. Spurgeon's advice, what should we do when we experience an issue or a season of doubt?

We should take it straight to Jesus. The NKJV states that, "*Immediately* the father of the child cried out..." The Greek word used for *immediately* is *eutheos* which means "straightway, forthwith." *Eutheos* is derived from *euthys* which means "immediately, sincere, upright, true, level." From these definitions we can infer that the father did not delay to unburden his heart with the truth in his heart. Notice how soon he found relief; Jesus dealt with his situation immediately. What if the father had waited? What if he waited to go to Jesus until he had all his feelings in check and worked on resolving his faith issue? His son may have missed his healing or at least endured more oppression and pain. Because the father didn't want his son to miss his healing, in front of a crowd of witnesses, the father humbles himself and admits his lack. Have we caused others to suffer because of our lack of faith? On the other hand, have others found healing because of our faith?

Please go back and read Mark 9:24-25.

Does anything seem to be missing from these two verses?

I thought to myself as I was studying this passage of scripture for this study, "Why didn't Jesus answer the father's request?" And as I was pondering this question I realized Jesus did answer the father's plea— He just didn't answer it with *words*. Jesus answered the father's impassioned request with action. He healed his son before his very eyes. What better way to heal the man of his unbelief and grow his faith? God is brilliant.

Like the father in this story all of us will experience feelings or seasons of doubt from time to time. Some times the Holy Spirit reveals little pockets of doubt in my heart on a day-to-day basis. The first time I experienced a season of doubt, it was very unsettling. Thankfully, like

the Israelites in the desert, God led me through this Red Sea and I emerged victorious—and you can too!

Below is a guide of what to do when you experience a time or season of doubt.

Season of Doubt Survival Guide:

- 1. Take it to Jesus immediately.** Don't try to figure it out or fix it on your own. Tell Him all about your doubt and ask Him to specifically lead you to Scriptures, counsel and biblical resources that will address your issue.
- 2. Spend more time with God.** Don't invest your time in learning about doubt—invest your time in learning more about God. "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God." The more Scripture you put in your heart the more your faith will grow.
- 3. Don't entertain your doubts.** Remember, every thought that comes to your mind does not necessarily originate with you; Satan loves to tempt us with doubtful thoughts. When a doubtful thoughts come to your mind, reject those thoughts; silence them by speaking and meditating on Scripture. Refocus your mind on Christ and His truth. "You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in You."
- 4. Continue to act on faith.** Make decisions based on faith and truth not doubts. Keep having your quiet time, praying, attending church and serving. Don't wait until you "feel better." Remember, right feelings follow right actions. The Bible states that "even the demons believe and tremble." Belief alone is not enough; we must act on our belief. Fight the good fight, and keep the faith!

- 5. Share your struggle with a mentor.** The book of Ecclesiastes says, "A cord of three strands is not easily broken." The strands represent God, yourself and someone who will stand with you. Ask your mentor to pray and counsel you during this time of need.
- 6. Ask for prayer.** This point is similar to point 5 above. Enlist others to hold you up in prayer at this time. Get together with a small group of believers and pray together.
- 7. Pray and fast.** First, pray for yourself! Combine your prayers with scriptures that concern your area of doubt. Second, fast. When I need a spiritual breakthrough, I fast. Sometimes I'll fast from one meal for one day or I'll fast from desserts for several weeks. You may even fast from tv, social media, meat etc. The possibilities are endless. During this time of fasting spend more time in prayer.

Do the above steps as long as needed. God will deliver you. Remember, He does not call us to have faith in our faith (at times our faith can seem so weak); He calls us to have faith in Him.

In closing, Mark 9:14-29 has much to say to modern day believers. Please reflect on the following:

We are like the boy; needing spiritual healing that can only come from Christ.

*We are like the father; believing yet struggling within our beliefs.
We are like the scribes; looking askance at a faith that calls us to trust too much.*

We are like the crowd; hanging back from Jesus in fear of being different.

*We are like the disciples; losing our focus in the busyness of ministry.
And Jesus had healing for all of them...
Jesus has healing for all of us.*

"But to you who fear My name The Sun of Righteousness shall arise
With healing in His wings."
Malachi 4:2

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ⁱ C.H. Spurgeon, "Sweet Stimulants for the Fainting Soul," Bible Bulletin Board,
<http://www.biblebb.com/files/spurgeon/2798.htm>.