What to Ask God When Doubting
Mark 9:14-29

ETS: The man asked Jesus to help him in his unbelief
ESS: We need to ask God for strength when we face crisis that challenge our belief
OSS: I want people to turn to Christ when doubting
PQ: Is your Faith Focused on Jesus?
UW: Wobbly

ME

This word "Wobbly" became popular in the 1990 Gulf War when British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher told United States President George H.W. Bush, "This is no time to go wobbly, George."

- The phrase: "He went wobbly" is used to describe someone who becomes unsteady, indecisive, or loses their resolve, particularly under pressure.
    - British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher challenged President Bush not to waver under pressure.

An interesting thing has been occurring in the UK.

- UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer has been cited for **multiple policy reversals** under pressure from party rebels and public opinion.
    - In 2025, reports highlighted five instances where Starmer "**caved**" on policies, including **tax hikes and welfare cuts**, ahead of potential rebellions within the Labour Party. These U-turns were attributed to his efforts to maintain party unity and public support, reflecting wavering under political pressure.

WE

Do you remember the phrase "Weebles Wobbles but they don't fall down?

- If not, it was a a popular slogan touting egg-shaped toys popular in the 1970's.
    - These toys (including a farm set complete with a purple cow) are weighted at the larger end, so even when pushed all the way over onto their sides, they quickly spring back up when released.

We've been talking about DOUBT

- Doubt is natural—Everyone struggles with doubt
    - Doubt about our abilities

- Doubt about our future

Sometimes, we even struggle with doubts about God!

These doubts can cause us to go “WOBBLY”!

This morning, I want to look at something that can cause us to go “Wobbly” in our faith.

<u>What should we do when we go “Wobbly” in our faith?</u>

GOD

Mark 9:14 “When they came to the disciples, they saw a large crowd around them and scribes disputing with them.

Background:

Location**: Caesarea Philippi -**25 miles north of the Sea of Galilee

- Caesarea Philippi was near the base of **Mount Hermon**
- **Caesarea Philippi** is in the northern part of the **Old Testament region** of **Bashan**

- **Bashan** was known as the "place of the serpent,"
  - Who is the "serpent" in Scripture? **Satan**
    - **Bashan** is associated in Scripture with the **Rephaim** (**Gen 14:5**) [1] who were descendants of the Nephilim who were the angel/human half-breeds responsible for bringing such a high degree of evil into the world that God destroyed the world with the flood
- **Bashan** was often referred to **negatively spiritually**

This area was RIFE with **satanic-inspired religions**

- The Old Testament towns **Baal**-gad (Josh 11:17; 12:7; 13:5) and **Baal**-Hermon
- In **the Old Testament**, the Jews were constantly drawn away from Yahweh to **worship Baal**

The region of **Caesarea Philippi** had always been the seat of PAGAN worship!

- Caesarea Philippi was near the base of **Mount Hermon**

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[1] M. Sashi Jamir, "Bashan," ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

- Although NOT scripture, the Book of **1 Enoch 6:1-6**, was well-known in Jesus' day and according to that book, the fallen angels came down on **Mount Hermon.**

<u>What happened in **Caesarea Philippi!?**</u>

- Jesus asked His disciples, "Who do you say I am"
- Jesus announces **God's plan of the cross**
  - What: Jesus will be "killed" and "raised the third day"
  - WHO: Chief priest, scribes, and elders
    - This is likey the 1st time Satan hears God's plan!
- Jesus announces that He is going to create the **CHURCH**!
  - States that the "Gates of Hades" cannot overcome it!

PHYSICALLY, while the **surrounding area was beautiful** and they were in a **new city built** by **Herod Philip**, SPIRITUALLY, they were in the **HEART** of where satanic activity had been radiating out!

- Jesus is BOLDLY walking into **Satanic territory** and taking the fight to Satan!
- Jesus is ANNOUNCING God's plan!

- REMINDER: Everything may look great physically, yet spiritually things are dark!

Jesus takes Peter, James and John up "on a high mountain"

- I believe that "high mountain" was **Mount Hermon**
  - Mount Hermon Is **9,230** feet high
  - The next highest mountain in Israel is Ebal at 3,084
    - **Mt. Hermon is 3x higher** than the second-highest mountain!
- Mount Hermon is part of a **ridge of mountains** that runs through **Gilead, Ammon, Moab, and Edom.**
  - You may recognize that Edom, Ammon, and Moab are enemies of the Jewish people through the OT period.
    - There was often tension and issues with the people of Gilead too!

Mt. Hermon, was the place where…

- The Jews believed fallen angels descended to earth to cohabit with human women, creating the **Nephilim**
- **Satan** tempted Jesus by offering Him "all the kingdoms of the world"

On Mt. Hermon, Jesus' glory is revealed as He was praying

- His face glowed
- His clothes turned dazzling white
    - Jesus revealed to his inner circle of disciples and Satan that He was more than a man—He was *"God in the flesh!"*
- **Elijah and Moses** appeared and were conversing with Jesus.
    - They are discussing with Jesus His **mission of the cross.**

According **to Luke's account**, they **spent the night** on the mountain.

Jesus and His inner circle (Peter, James, and John) are returning from the mountain…

Mark 9:14 "When they came to the disciples, they saw a large crowd around them and scribes disputing with them.

- A "large crowd" is gathered around the other 9 disciples
- Religious leaders **disputing** with the **9 disciples** left behind

Mark 9:15 "When the whole crowd saw him [Jesus], they were amazed and ran to greet him.

- It appears they were not expecting Jesus to show up at this time!

Mark 9:16 He asked them [the disciples], "What are you arguing with them about?"

Mark 9:17-18 "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."

Remember, this area, Caesarea Philippi, was RIFE with **satanic-inspired religions**

- **Caesarea Philippi** is in the northern part of the **Old Testament region** of **Bashan**
  - **Bashan** was known as the "place of the serpent,"

The demon inside this boy is trying to **destroy him**

- The demon "throws him down,
  - he foams at the mouth,
  - grinds his teeth, and

    - becomes rigid
- **Vs. 22** "And many times it has thrown him into fire or water to destroy him"
- **Vs. 25,** Jesus calls the spirit "mute and deaf" so it appears that the boy cannot speak or hear as a result of this possession.

Demon possession is not a sickness or insanity, it is an attempt to **destroy a person** created in the image of God.

Notice, the man said "I brought my son to you" **(V. 17)** and then I asked your disciples to drive it out, but they couldn't." **(v. 18)**

- The man apparently heard Jesus was in town
- Took his son to see Jesus, BUT Jesus wasn't there (Because he was on the Mountain)
    - So, asked the **disciples** to cast out the demon.

<u>Why did this man think the **disciples** could cast out the demon?</u>

- They probably told him they could take care of the problem!
    - Earlier, Jesus sent out the 12 disciples in pairs and gave them authority over unclean spirits (Mark 6:7)

- **Mark 6:12-13** "So they went out and preached that people should repent. 13 They drove out many demons, anointed many sick people with oil and healed them."

The disciples, who had been able to previously cast out demons, "Could not" cast this demon out.

<u>How do you think this man felt?</u>

- Disheartened
- Hopeless
- Confused because the disciples couldn't help
- Afraid that he'd never get help from Jesus

This father's hope has been CRUSHED

- Each time the disciples think they have cast out the demon, the boy is thrown to the ground and goes into convulsions.

When Jesus hears about the problem, He is moved with **frustration**!

Mark 9:19 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."

- Problem: The disciples thought they could cast out the demon themselves without appealing to God for help!
    - They were spiritually unprepared for the task
        - They approached the situation like it was a material problem, but casting out a demon is a spiritual issue.

Jesus' frustration shows!

- Less than **24 hours before**, Peter, James, and John failed to understand Jesus' prophecy about His death and resurrection when He revealed His glory on the mountain.
- Once again, Jesus was frustrated by their **lack of faith**. Just like He was when…
    - They woke Jesus up during the storm
    - They couldn't believe He could walk on water
    - They were worried about having something to eat

Jesus' **rhetorical questions** further reflect Jesus' continued distress over His disciples

- They just don't seem to get it!
    - They still don't understand what it means to ACT in Faith

- They still don't understand the POWER and NECCESITY of PRAYER.

Not only was the man experiencing disappointment, but the disciples were probably experiencing disappoint too!

- Why hadn't they been able to cast out the demon?
- Why hadn't thinks worked the way they had previously?

Mark 9:20 "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."

- The unclean spirit in the boy is upset that Jesus has arrived
  - It is trying to harm the boy as much as it can as a act of rebellion against Jesus

Notice that Jesus isn't ALARMED or AFRAID!

- As the boy is rolling around on the ground and foaming at the mouth, Jesus turns to the father and asks **Mark 9:21-22a** "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."

- This boy has had this condition for years ("since childhood")
  - The demon has attempted to kill him many times!

The father then asks a question that ADDS to Jesus' frustration: **Mark 9:212b** "*But if you can do anything*, have compassion on us and help us."

Series: Week #1: Why Do we Doubt?

- Fear Fuels Doubt
- Faulty Focus Fuels Doubt

Why Do We Doubt?
Disappointment With Church Leaders

The **disciple's inability** to drive out the demon **shook the father's** faith in Jesus' ability.

This last week televangelist Jimmy Swaggart passed away.

Jimmy Swaggart was a Pentecostal powerhouse!

- He was one of the most well-known televangelists in America.
- Swaggart held crusades in Argentina, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras,

Jamaica, Liberia, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Russia, and South Africa.

- He founded Jimmy Swaggart Ministries
- He founded the Jimmy Swaggart Bible College.
- He was the senior pastor of the Family Worship Center in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.
- He wrote about 50 Christian books offered through his ministry.
- He sold over 15 million records worldwide as a gospel artist and he also received one Grammy Awards nomination.

Despite all the accomplishments of Jimmy Swaggart, most of us remember the 1988 scandal when he was accused of soliciting a prostitute.

- You may remember Jimmy Swaggart's "**I have sinned**" speech on live television where he tearfully spoke to his congregation, family and TV audience.

My **formative years** were spent in a independent Baptist mega-church.

- Although we shouldn't have, we tended to place the pastors on a pedestal
    - In the mid-1980s it was discovered that our Associate Pastor, who had served the church since 1958, had been carrying on an affair with the Pastor's secretary.

Many years ago, there was a locally **famous preacher** in Alabama.

- I also attended several conferences at the church
- When he came to the church there were only 35 people, but it had grown to over 2,000 people
    - It had a modern-facility and all the trappings of a "Successful" church
- Occasionally, we would make the 1 ½ hour trip to Birmingham to attend special services at the mega-church
    - At one of those services, our son made a profession of faith
        - We met the pastor afterwards and talked to him.

A few years later, Pastor Ousley "**preached the house down**" at the Alabama State Convention Annual meeting.

- A few days after the convention news broke that he had been involve in a 21-year affair with their babysitter when she was 17 years old.

I felt like I had been hit by a TRUCK!

- I was so **disappointed**!
    - I had put this man on a **pedestal**.

In the last few years, numerous Nationally knowns pastors/teachers, and Christian leaders have been forced to resign their ministries.

- Robert Morris: Founder of Gateway Church in Southlake, Texas,
- Ravi Zacharias: Late apologist and founder of Ravi Zacharias International Ministries (RZIM),
- Carl Lentz: Former lead pastor of Hillsong Church NYC,
- Ted Haggard: Former president of the National Association of Evangelicals and pastor of New Life Church,
- Bill Hybels: Founder of Willow Creek Community Church

Sadly, the list goes on and on..

When a Christian leader fails, it can shake our faith!

- Many people "walk away" from the faith in the wake of many of these scandals.

I was listening to a podcast about the Rise and Fall of Mars Hill—a mega church in Seattle.

- The pastor was accused of harsh leadership practices and other issues.
    - As a result, the church folded and many of its campus churches became independent church.

What got me, was the number of former staff members who had left the faith as a result of the scandal.

Disappointment With Church Leaders Can Fuel Doubt!

Jesus responds to the man's doubt in **Mark 9:23** "Jesus said to him, "'If you can'? Everything is possible for the one who believes."

- Jesus is saying, "It's not a question of whether *can* I do it, but *will* you believe, for *everything is possible for him who believes*." [2]
- The father must decide "Do I trust Jesus to heal my son?"
- "Do I believe Jesus CAN heal my son"?

The father must decide if he is going to allow his shaken faith, due the disciples' failures, shake his faith in Jesus.

What should you do Ask God When facing doubt?
I Believe, Help My Unbelief

Mark 9:24 "Immediately the father of the boy cried out, "I do believe; help my unbelief!"

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[2] R. Kent Hughes, *Mark: Jesus, Servant and Savior*, vol. 2, Preaching the Word (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1989), 25.

Christians leaders will disappoint you!

- It may not always be a scandal
    - It could be the decisions your pastor makes
    - It could be the direction of a missionary agency you support
    - It could be the direction of the Southern Baptist Convention

We have all seen Christian leaders fail and fall

- Admittedly, their failures and decisions can shake our faith

REMEMBER, Jesus is NOT an ordinary man

- Jesus walked on this earth and never sinned
- Jesus went to the cross out of His love for humanity
- Jesus DID NOT and WILL NOT fail!
    - God cannot sin

When you struggle with doubt because of disappointment, DO NOT FOCUS on the failed Christian leader, but **turn your focus on Christ**!

- **WE follow Christ**, not a pastor, teacher, or Christian organization.
    - Our **faith is in Christ**, not a pastor, teacher, or Christian organization.

If you focus on the actions of others, including prominent Christian leaders, you will always be **disappointed**.

The father was disappointed in the disciples' failure to free his son from the demon and he allowed that to shake his faith in Jesus!

However, when Jesus challenged his doubt, the man proclaimed ""I do believe" but he also admitted that he was struggling: "help my unbelief!"

This man's faith was trembling, imperfect, **but real**!

- A faith which **declares itself publicly**, and at the same time recognizes its **weaknesses** and **pleads for help**, *is a real faith*[3]

There are two questions we must answer:

- Do we believe God can do anything?
- Do we believe that he will do what he has promised to do?
    - The father believed in Jesus and his promise—and it happened.[4]

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[3] R. Kent Hughes, *Mark: Jesus, Servant and Savior*, vol. 2, Preaching the Word (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1989), 26.

[4] R. Kent Hughes, *Mark: Jesus, Servant and Savior*, vol. 2, Preaching the Word (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1989), 26.

What should you do Ask God When facing doubt?

I Believe, Help My Unbelief

Knowing that "Everything is possible for the one who believes" does not mean God will do whatever you want because our "wants" are not always for our best.

- God may not heal a loved one the way you "**Want**" because He is **going to use the illness** to **draw you and others closer** to Him.
    - Or, He will how you handle the illness as an example for those who are "**weaker**" **in the faith.**
- On the other hand, God may choose to **completely heal** you from an **illness** because it will be the **catalyst** for **someone coming to Christ.**

We have to TRUST God knowing that Everything is possible for the one who believes" while at the same time being submitted to His will.

- *When we are submitted to God's will*, we can praise Him for whatever He choose to do because we know that it is ultimately for our best.

In this story, Jesus healed the boy: **Mark 9:25-26** 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.”

Jesus healed the boy!

- 1) WHY? Because his father needed to learn **NOT to allow disappointment** with other followers of Christ to shake his faith in Christ.
    - The father needed to learn to keep **his eyes focused on Jesus**
    - The father needed to learn to keep **Christ as the center** of his faith.
    - The father needed to learn **NOT to allows** others to **shake** his faith!

Jesus healed the boy!

- 2) WHY? Because the **disciples** need to be **challenged**.

Mark 9:28-29 “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.”

The **disciples needed to learn** that the gift they had received for driving out demons was NOT under **their own control** and it couldn't be exercised at will.

- Thus, *they did not think to pray when the father brought his son to them!*
    - They forgot that there had to be **radical dependence** if God's power was to course through their lives.
        - *Jesus was teaching them that the faith which brings power is a faith that prays*.[5]

YOU

PQ: Are You Praying for Help in the Midst of Your Doubt?

- If the failure of others has shaken your faith, you need to focus your faith on Jesus!
    - Don't allow the failures of other believers, Christian leaders, etc. **shake** your **faith**!

[5] R. Kent Hughes, *Mark: Jesus, Servant and Savior*, vol. 2, Preaching the Word (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1989), 27.