



## Mark 9:14-29

# A Father's Growing Faith

Fatherhood is under assault all across America.

Every study on the state of the American family tells the same story. Families and parenting over the last twenty-five years have followed a radical departure from human history. The result is indescribable damage to our culture and the future of our society.

Leading humanistic authorities on child rearing tell us that "fatherhood is unimportant." Since fatherhood is gender-based, they say it is no longer needed, and can therefore be altered at will.

They claim men in general are part of the social problem in the world. They see the transformation of society being accomplished only as the gender role is changed. They have created a "new father for a new age." The only problem is the new father does not exist. He is a father without gender roles. They do not want a father image. Do away with him; get rid of him. Make fatherlessness the norm.

Instead of a father let a boy friend, male friend or extended member of the family occasionally act as a father substitute and only when needed.

A good father is not perfect. He simply loves his wife and his children. He understands gender roles and the important role played by a father in the family. He is responsible for his family.

When we talk about the Fatherhood of God many people don't have the faintest idea how to identify with a healthy, wholesome father. The only thing they can relate to their mother's new boy friend or a substitute father.

You are an endangered species if you are taking your responsibilities as a father seriously. You are becoming rare, indeed.

In the Gospel of Mark chapter nine, we encounter Jesus and a desperate father. He is a good father, and we will assume from the context a spiritual leader in the home, a role model, and provider for his family. He takes his responsibilities seriously. He loves his son, and he is a father who is hurting. He is a man with a son in a hopeless situation.

As we watch Jesus reaching out to this hurting father it is important for us to keep in mind what is happening to Christ. The time of the encounter with a desperate father is the day after the transfiguration of Jesus. He along with Peter, James and John descend from the summit of the mountain into the plain below. They left the radiant light of the transfiguration experience to go into the shadows of shame and confusion below.

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On that occasion Peter, James and John witnessed Jesus, Moses and Elijah talking about the coming death and resurrection of Jesus. "And He was transfigured before them; and His garments became radiant and exceedingly white, as no launderer on earth can whiten them" (Mark 9:2-3). The very divine, inner nature that had been hidden in His fleshly body was expressed before them in that same body. The normal outward expression of our Lord in His humiliation was that of a man acquainted with grief, the frail human weakness of man and aware of the brokenness of mankind. All of a sudden that outward expression was changed. Out of His inmost being shone the dazzling glory of the essence of deity which He possessed co-eternally with the Father and the Spirit. The radiance of His glory suddenly shone through His humanity and through His clothing. Matthew tells us, "His face did shine." This outpouring of glory came from within as the Lord of glory. It was like the light of sunshine on pure gold, or the flash of a large carat pure diamond. The Shekinah glory cloud overshadowed them, like in the days of Moses in the Tabernacle on the mercy seat. A voice came from the cloud saying, "This is My beloved Son, listen to Him!" (v. 7). It is from that experience we see Jesus with the three disciples coming into the mainstream of humanity with its desperate suffering.

### **DOUBLE DESPAIR OF THE DESPERATE (9:14-18)**

Jesus came back to the nine disciples whom He had left in the valley. There was a "large crowd around then, and some scribes arguing with them" (v. 14). It was a rowdy scene. The scribes were squabbling with the disciples. From the context they were probably ridiculing and harassing the disciples for their failure to cast out a demon from a boy. They had tried to heal a boy and had failed. No doubt the scribes were delighting in the failure and were taunting them. With the gathering crowd watching, the scribes were making the best of the opportunity to criticize and belittle their Master. The scribes seized the opportunity to put down the Savior. They judged Jesus by judging His disciples. They still do.

"And immediately, when the entire crowd saw Him, they were amazed, and began running up to greet Him" (v. 15).

The people saw Jesus and were astonished at seeing Him. His presence caught them by surprise. They were completely amazed. I really don't think it was the radiance of the transfiguration lingering on Him because He had sternly warned Peter, James and John not to mention a word of it until after Jesus rose from the dead (v. 9).

Imagine the feeling rushing through the veins of the disciples: confused, glad, ashamed, delighted to see Him, betrayed, failure, questioning, and desperation.

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Jesus asked them, "What are you discussing with them? (v. 16).

I believe they were all amazed because of the sudden appearance of Jesus just at the time when He was most needed by His disciples and a hurting father. It came as a shock that He should suddenly appear at a time when the disciples had just miserably failed to help in a desperately cruel situation. Not only are the disciples humiliated, but also the desperate father is driven further into despair. The scribes are cheering. Suddenly, Jesus appears almost out of nowhere when He is not expected, yet He is needed and His name is being profaned. His timing is always perfect.

Perhaps from the tone of His voice they sensed His authority and the crowd fell silent.

In the midst of the crowd the agonizing voice of a severely hurting father seizes the opportunity and answered Jesus. Perhaps he thinks there is one last chance. I am the reason for the commotion. He says, "Teacher, I brought You my son, possessed with a spirit which makes him mute; and whenever it seizes him, it dashes him to the ground and he foams at the mouth, and grinds his teeth, and stiffens out. And I told Your disciples to cast it out, and they can not do it" (vv. 17-18).

It is a cry of desperation. Perhaps, maybe You can do something Your disciples can't do.

This terrible situation was more than an epileptic deaf-mute child. This was not a case of simple epilepsy. An unclean spirit brought on this inhumane condition. The boy was demon-possessed. It was a far more complicated case because the forces of evil were turned against him.

The evil spirit "dashes him to the ground" (v. 17). The idea is to take hold of him as to take possession of him. The evil spirit makes the boy its own possession. It seizes the boy and pulls him down. And when it has the boy down on the ground it causes convulsions. The boy gnashes his teeth, shrills with a loud cry, and is left in a motionless stupor.

The child probably had scars from where he had fallen into the fire.

The disciples were powerless in this situation. The scribes were probably gloating over the disciple's failure. Ever wonder how many times this father had cried out to God for help? Doesn't your heart go out to the child and his father?

You can hear the father's strong appeal echoing in the crowd, "Help us at once." Wuest expands the father's words forcefully, "But if you are able to do anything, help us at once, having had compassion upon us."

How would your faith respond in this kind of situation?

## **DARKNESS OF DOUBTING (19-24)**

In verse nineteen Jesus responds to everyone in earshot. "O unbelieving generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring him to Me!"

Everyone present lacked faith that takes possession of demons. The father of the child, the disciples of Jesus and the scribes were all faithless.

Jesus wholly trusted in the heavenly Father, why couldn't His disciples trust Him? It was painful for Him to have to "put up with" all of them. Were they hopeless? Could He dare trust the future of the kingdom of God into their hands? He was preparing them for His soon departure. If they could not take possession of one demon in a child, how could they take the kingdom of God to all the ends of the earth and conquer demons worldwide? Everything depended upon them. Not only do we see the anguish of the father, but also the anguish of Jesus as He sees the faithless condition of His followers.

I think the demon saw the situation and tried to take advantage of it. In a fierce expression of His contempt for Jesus the demon took possession of the boy. "Immediately the spirit threw him into a convulsion, and falling to the ground, he began rolling about and foaming at the mouth" (v. 20).

Mark well the attitude of the demon toward the presence of Jesus. "When he saw Him [Jesus] immediately the spirit threw him [the boy] into a convulsion . . ." The evil spirit tried to kill the boy right in the front of the Creator. The convulsion occurred at the very moment when the demon saw Jesus. The demon "grievously" convulsed the boy.

This had been going on ever since he was a child (v. 21). "And it has often thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him" (v. 22).

The intense, tender love of the father for his son can be heard in his one last plea. "But if You can do anything, take pity on us and help us!" (v. 22).

The response of Jesus is equally as intense. "The question is not whether *I* am able but whether *you* believe," is a good paraphrase by Hendriksen. Jesus places a strong emphasis on faith on this occasion.

"If you can! All things are possible to him who believes" (v. 23). It is a play on words in the original. "If you can (*dunai*), all things can be (*dunata*) possible to those who believe." As to your "if you can," "All things are possible to him who believes."

Matthew shares with us a little more of the evidence. He quotes Jesus when He was with all of the disciples privately. "Because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you shall say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it shall move; and nothing shall be impossible to you" (Matthew 17:20). They have faith less than a grain. It only takes a grain of faith.

I hear a lot of people in our day trying to work up the faith with loud shouting and screaming as if God is deaf and they have to wake Him up. Faith of a grain of mustard seed is simple trust in the living One.

What was the response of the father? Verse twenty-four, "Immediately the boy's father cried out and began saying, 'I do believe; help me in my unbelief.'"

It is an inarticulate, "eager, fear-stricken cry" of faith.

"Help" is *boetheo* meaning "to run to the cry" of someone in danger. We hear the cry of a small child and we drop everything and run in the direction of the crying. He asked for continuous help for his unbelief. "Be all the time helping my unbelief." It was an instant response to the demand of Jesus for full trust in Him. "I am believing. Be constantly helping my weak faith." Hendriksen translates, "Continue moment by moment and day by day to come to my aid, so that I may overcome my unbelief."

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Thank God for the compassion of Jesus. He doesn't just sweep the man aside saying you are faithless. I cannot help you. Jesus first met the spiritual need of the father by bringing him to a focused faith.

## **DELIVERANCE FROM A DEMON'S ATTACK**

Privacy, even in such a delicate situation, was impossible. The crowd, probably hearing the cries of the father and son, converged on a single point, perhaps from several directions. No one wanted to miss out on a miracle.

Jesus "rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, 'You deaf and dumb spirit, I command you come out of him and do not enter him again'" (v. 25). The idea is come out of him and stay out. Do not enter him again.

The command of Jesus to the demon is sharp and firm. Jesus commanded him to come out and stay out. How beautiful is the cleansing of Jesus.

"And after crying out and throwing him into terrible convulsions, it came out; and the boy became so much like a corpse that most of them said, 'he is dead!'" (v. 26). Swete observes, "The convulsions were violent and prolonged, and when they ceased, the sufferer's strength was exhausted; a collapse followed; he lay motionless and pallid as a corpse." The boy resembled a dead body flat on the ground.

It must have been a frightening scene. The demon uses the boy's vocal organs to let out a loud shriek. The boy on the ground is convulsing terribly with muscle spasms, and then becomes rigid as if dead.

"Jesus took him by the hand and raised him; and he got up" (v. 27). He was instantly and completely cured.

Like the disciples we often ask, "Why can't we do that?" Jesus still responds the same way, "This kind cannot come out by anything but prayer" (v. 29). We are powerless because we are prayerless. We can't cast out demons, and move impossible mountains because we don't get alone with Him long enough to know Him and do business in His presence. We are faithless because we don't know Him in an intimate love relationship. The relationship must come first. God cannot use us until He has prepared us spiritually. Only when He has us in an intimate love relationship with Him can He invite us to join Him in what He is doing in a hurting world.

The word "fasting" does not appear in the two best manuscripts. It was probably added by scribes later to explain the disciple's failure. Their failure, however, was due to their prayerlessness. They were powerless because they were prayerless. Nothing but prayer will overcome the most difficult of circumstances.

I am amazed once again how Jesus dealt with this man. Jesus took him from fear, frustration, despair, doubt, and faltering faith to a place of trust. He cried out, "Help me, if you can." In his face to face encounter with Jesus his faith began to come alive, "I believe, help my unbelief. Take away my doubts and fill me with unquestioning faith in You." Jesus still takes us where we are in our spiritual life and brings us to an intimate love relationship with Him.

## **Some Abiding Principles**

### **When we have a grain of faith we can move mountains.**

We can accomplish great things as individuals and as a congregation if we keep our faith focused on Christ. Do you face overwhelming difficulties? Has God placed a challenge before you that is like a huge mountain looming over you? Jesus pictures a mountain being uprooted or pulverized. If you put your faith in Christ

looming over you? Jesus pictures a mountain being uprooted or pulverized. If you put your faith in Christ even the most difficult task or problem can be accomplished. Upon what or whom is your faith focused? It only takes a grain, like a tiny mustard seed, so keep it focused on Christ.

### **When we play around with demons we become just like them, unclean.**

Demons will never repent. They are foul, unclean, impure, sinful and guilty. There is nothing good in demons. Absolutely nothing! This is not an area in which you want to experiment. We become like those with whom we associate. You play with the devil and you will become like him. You mess around with filth and corruption and it will rub off on you. Don't think you can play around with the forces of evil and get away with it. You can't. It will take control of you. It will possess you. The only thing that cleanses from corruption is the power and the blood of Jesus. If you walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. . . . If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:7, 9).

### **When there is little faith there is little praying.**

When there is a wealth of genuine, persevering faith, there is also passionate, unrelenting prayer of a righteous person. If Jesus came back today, would He be appalled by our lack of faith and prayerlessness, or would He be delighted with our faithful trust in Him?

Jesus gave the son back to the father whole. This is His goal with each of us. One day Christ will present us perfect (whole, mature, complete) in the presence of His Father (Rom. 8:29; Col. 1:28; Phil. 3:21; 2 Cor. 3:18).

Think with me for one moment about some impossibility you are facing today. What is that huge mountain you face? Do you approach it with an attitude of hopelessness? If you approach it with an attitude of hopelessness you make it hopeless. When you bring the LORD God into the picture it all changes. Will you ask Jesus to come along side and give you His strength to move that mountain? Remember faith talks. Lord you can do it! Lord you are always doing the impossible. Here I am. I believe You can and will make the difference. I hand this marriage over to you. Lord here is my son, my daughter, my situation at work. Lord I give my mountain over to You. I want your perfect will for my life. Lord you can do it. I know you can. I have never been disappointed in you. Lord take away my doubts and fears and help me grow in your grace.

Would you like to know more on how to have an intimate, personal relationship with Jesus Christ? Go to [Free Gift for You](#).

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